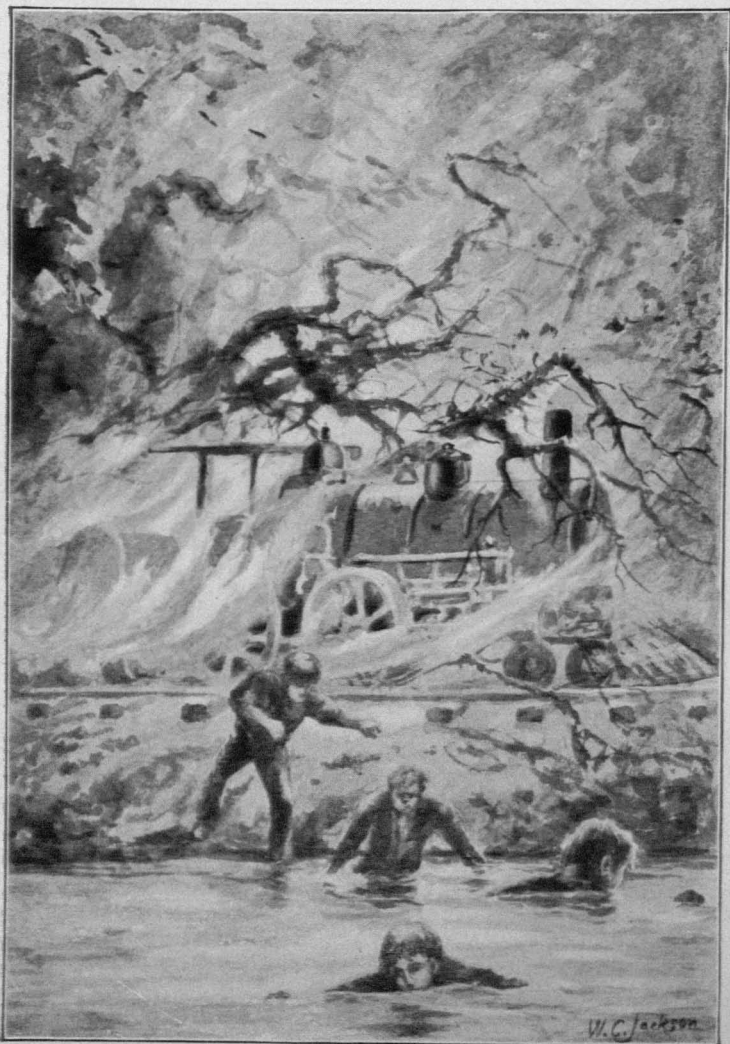


FOUR BOYS



EDWARD S. ELLIS



A Dash for the Lake.

FOUR BOYS

OR

THE STORY OF A FOREST FIRE

BY

EDWARD S. ELLIS

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"WYOMING" SERIES, ETC.

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CONTENTS.

CHAPTER	PAGE
I.—A GOLD WATCH AND CHAIN,	5
II.—THE AWARD,	14
III.—AN EXPLOSION,	23
IV.—THE MESSENGER OF MERCY,	33
V.—FACE TO FACE.	42
VI.—A WARM INTERVIEW.	51
VII.—THE DECISION,	65
VIII.—A REQUEST,	75
IX.—JOHNNY JUMPUP,	87
X.—A CHANGE OF DESTINATION,	99
XI.—THE BACK TRACK,	108
XII.—A NIGHT JOURNEY,	119
XIII.—WHO CAN IT BE?	130
XIV.—THE TEST OF COURAGE,	139
XV.—WHAT HAS HE BEEN DOING?	148
XVI.—LIKE A HOUSE AFIRE,	162
XVII.—SMOKE AND FIRE,	176
XVIII.—"GOOD-BY," DARAK,	190
XIX.—NUMBER 17'S RUN FOR LIFE,	201
XX.—PARTNERS IN PERIL,	217
XXI.—PARTNERS IN SAFETY,	235
XXII.—ALL'S WELL THAT ENDS WELL,	248

FOUR BOYS.

CHAPTER I.

A GOLD WATCH AND CHAIN.

DARAK EDWARDS was mad "clean through." Like all youths who live to reach the age of seventeen years, he had his share of provocations, trials, and exasperating incidents, but never had his soul been so stirred and wrought up by anger as on this day in early summer, when he discovered that he had been the victim of one of the meanest tricks of which human ingenuity is capable.

And I am quite sure that you will agree with me that if ever a young man was justified in giving way to boiling indignation, Darak Edwards was that same young man. Let me explain the whole matter.

Darak's father was one of the pioneers of Minnesota, having just settled there previous to the frightful Sioux outbreak of 1862. His house was

burned, and his eldest son and a sister lost their lives in that cyclone of Little Crow's wrath, while the parent had a narrow escape himself. But the years passed and Mr. Edwards became a prosperous farmer, with one daughter and a son, the bright, athletic, high-principled Darak, who has a prominent part to play in the incidents which follow.

The first class attending the Wunkako Academy was composed of four boys, whose ages did not vary to the extent of a single year. The town of Wunkako numbered less than three thousand inhabitants, but it was thriving and prosperous, and the academy, under the charge of Professor Maillard, was an excellent institution, whose graduates were fitted to enter college or assume responsible situations in business.

Darak lived a mile from the town, in the direction of Dead Man's Lake, while the other members of the upper class had their homes in Wunkako, but the walk was nothing to such a sturdy lad as Darak, who boasted that no weather could be too severe to keep him at home.

The other three members of the graduating class were Jack Patterson, of rather delicate physique, a fine singer and player on the violin;

Nathan Adolphus Baldwin, always called "Nate," full of amusing anecdote and running over with good nature; and David C. Seymour, a big sturdy fellow, the eldest of the four.

His taste ran in the direction of electrical science and he possessed much general information, but he was sly. Of the four, his countenance was the most open and honest looking, and yet in his case appearances were deceptive. Those who were associated with him long enough found him lacking in integrity, honesty, and truthfulness. He was ambitious, and loved to gain the advantage over any one, and cared little by what means it was done.

Two facts regarding young Seymour must be borne in mind. He was a capital penman, but totally lacking in literary skill. He abominated the writing of compositions, and would have failed totally but for the aid willingly and secretly given by Darak.

The other two classmates were excellent at that work, and it was an open question with Professor Maillard which of the four was the most skilful, since Seymour maintained a high standard because of the help given him without his instructor's knowledge.

Old Mr. Fetterman, who had been a professor in Yale and had become wealthy, took a deep interest in the academy. He refused all office and would not allow the institution to be named in his honor, although he had endowed it and made it many liberal gifts.

He was a frequent and welcome visitor to the school, and became much interested in the graduating class. This was shown by his offer of a superb gold watch and chain, for the one who produced the best composition on the subject, "Our Country."

As may be supposed, this offer caused a flutter of excitement, not only among the four boys immediately concerned, but on the part of the parents, other pupils, and indeed throughout the town. The watch and chain were displayed in the window of the chief jewelry establishment, with a placard stating that it was to be given to the member of the graduating class producing the best composition, whose merits were to be passed upon by Professors Fetterman and Maillard.

Now, to avoid all appearance of partiality, matters were so arranged that neither of the two gentlemen should know the name of the writer of each composition, until after the award was made. It

would seem that it was easy to adjust this, and the judges took every pains to keep the secret hidden from themselves as well as from others.

It was required that each composition should be written on the same pattern of paper, several sheets of which were furnished each boy, and folded precisely alike. When ready, they were to be handed to Miss Peters, without any mark or signature which would betray the author.

She would place a figure on the back of each production as it was given to her, and then opposite the same figure in her memorandum book, write the corresponding figure and the name of the writer of the composition. This memorandum would be handed to Professor Fetterman when he made the award known.

It will be seen that one person alone would know the secret of authorship, but then Miss Peters was a woman who could be trusted, and the arrangement was commended by every one interested in the matter.

The four lads were put on their honor to ask and accept no aid from any one in completing their task, for which two weeks were allowed.

And now began the most earnest and serious work upon which those four young men had ever

been engaged. The theme, one of the noblest that could occupy the minds of American boys, filled their brains. The prize was a valuable one, but the honor of winning it was of itself an incentive sufficient to stir the nature of each lad to its utmost depths.

I will not dwell on the hours of thought and labor bestowed on the work by the youths, each of whom, with perhaps the exception of Seymour, was hopeful of success. He knew his own deficiencies, and, at the close of the first week said to Darak Edwards, as they walked up the street together:

“I don’t suppose there’s any show for me, Darak.”

“You mustn’t feel that way, but make up your mind to do your best.

“But my best will be nothing beside you and the rest of the fellows.”

“There’s no saying; it seems to me that when one looks back over the history of our country, and calls to mind how our forefathers suffered, what they went through during the Revolution to win our independence, what has been done in the way of discovery, invention, and science, and then compares the United States of to-day with what it

was a hundred years ago, why, his heart must overflow, and he can't help being eloquent."

"That's the way it is with me, but then I don't know how to put my ideas on paper. I say, Darak," added Seymour, lowering his voice; "can't you give me a pointer or two? I'm chuck full of the kind of thoughts you speak of, but can't get them in the shape I want; there's the trouble."

"I would be very glad to help you, Dave, as you know I have done before, but you know, too, that we are on our honor in this thing. I haven't asked father or mother to help me, nor would I allow any one else to do so."

"Well, I suppose you are right, but it strikes me you are drawing it rather fine. When will you hand in your composition?"

"I think I shall have it finished next Monday. I have it in shape, and have only to copy it."

"I wish I had half the chance you have," remarked Seymour lugubriously, as he bade his friend good day and turned into the path leading to his home.

Jack Patterson and Nate Baldwin gave Miss Peters their productions one week in advance of the limit, while Darak Edwards and Seymour

brought theirs to the academy on the following Monday morning.

The two boys sat beside each other, and Darak was generous enough to say:

"I have no doubt, Dave, that you have a good composition, and if you win I'll shake hands with you over it."

"Oh, pshaw! what's the use of talking? It will be one of you three fellows, and most likely you. They look just alike, don't they?" added Seymour with a smile, reaching out and taking the paper of his friend, and comparing it with his own.

"Yes; no one can tell them apart from the outside."

"But what a difference when you open them!"

"You are altogether too modest. Who knows but that you are one of those persons who require a great occasion or theme to rouse them, and that you have found it in 'Our Country'?"

At this juncture Miss Peters appeared at the side of the desk and asked in her pleasant voice:

"Have you your compositions ready?"

"Yes, ma'am," replied Seymour, passing the one in his hand to the lady, while Darak did the same.

"I wish I could give you both success," she said, as she placed the figure "3" on one and "4" on the other. Then she did the same in her memorandum-book, with Darak's name opposite the "4" and that of Dave next to the "3."

"*That* completes my part of this business," she added, closing the book and placing it in her desk with the compositions, all four of which were handed to Professor Maillard the same afternoon.

CHAPTER II.

THE AWARD.

IF Wunkako Academy keeps on its foundations for a round hundred years to come, it will never be the scene of so dramatic an episode as the one which took place within its walls on the last Friday in June, 1894.

The large assembly hall was crowded to the doors and the aisles were filled with seats, all occupied, while a bank of deeply interested spectators filled every foot of available space at the rear. It looked indeed as if the whole town would have been present, had it been possible to provide room for them.

On the large platform were the parents of the graduating class, the board of trustees, the principal and his assistants, and the honored guests. The chair in the centre was naturally given to Professor Fetterman, whose many benefactions to the institution entitled him to that distinction.

On the right of the wealthy and elderly gentle-

man sat the four boys of the graduating class, their flushed faces showing the high tension to which their nerves were strung. The moment had come when it was to be made known who was the winner of the gold watch and chain offered by Professor Fetterman, for until now the secret was locked in the breast of the bright Miss Peters, the teacher of elocution.

At the crucial moment, Professor Maillard stepped to the edge of the platform.

“Ladies and gentlemen,” said he, “before making the announcement for which I know you are all waiting, a few words are necessary. You have learned from the statements already made that the four young men who have just been graduated have all, without exception, reached a higher standard than has ever been attained by any previous class during the twelve years of the existence of this academy. It is a pleasure to add that the marking to which Messrs. Patterson, Baldwin, Seymour, and Edwards have been subjected has been of the most rigid nature, and I need not say that not the slightest favoritism has been shown to any one of them.

“The four compositions, offered as contestants for the handsome prize given by the best friend

this academy has ever had, Professor Fetterman [applause], have been read with the utmost care by the professor and myself. All possess great merit, for what American youth, when given the subject 'Our Country' as his theme, can fail to become eloquent with voice and pen?

"It is proper to say, however, that one of the four is of such marked merit that there was not an instant's hesitation in the minds of the professor and myself as to the winner of the prize. I would be proud to be the author of that production. It is worthy of preservation, and I shall insist that, inasmuch as it becomes the property of the institution, it shall be embalmed in print.

"Miss Peters will now read the composition to which I refer, after which she will announce the name of the winner, who will step forward and receive the award from the hands of the generous donor. No one besides Miss Peters knows the secret; that is, I do not think any person knows it. If she has told it to any one, I ask him or her now to make it known in order that she be properly disciplined."

We all know how prone every school-teacher is to be humorous. It is a weakness of the profes-

sion, and this was one of Professor Maillard's witticisms.

He waited with so grave a countenance that there were a number of smiles and titters in different parts of the hall, but no other response. Then the professor delivered his most crushing burst of humor:

"I am glad to know that there is *one* lady in our country that is able to keep a secret. Miss Peters will now read the composition to which the prize has been awarded."

The professor bowed and resumed his seat. Piquant, bright-faced Miss Peters stepped forward, rosy and blushing, paper in hand, and acknowledged the applause with which she was received.

Instantly the room became like the tomb, for no one wished to lose a word of the wonderful production.

It should be said that Miss Peters was a model elocutionist, and deserved her popularity. She was a graduate of one of the finest schools of instruction in the country, and it was a treat to hear her read anything, in her clear, musical voice.

That particular composition certainly possessed merit of the highest order.

It glowed with a patriotic fervor which thrilled the audience, and caused them to break out in frequent applause. Their eyes wandered from face to face of the four graduates in the effort to detect who was the author, but no one fully succeeded in the attempt.

It was easily seen, however, who two of the unsuccessful ones were. With the close of the first sentence, Jack Patterson and Nate Baldwin knew they were "not in it," as the common expression goes.

They looked at each other, smiled, and shook their heads. Neither had held very strong hope, and it was a relief to learn of a certainty where they stood. They were magnanimous enough to enjoy the reading without any envy of the successful one.

"It's Darak," whispered Nate.

"Dave looks as if he might be the lucky one," whispered Jack in return. "I never thought he was as good as Darak in this line, but there's no saying."

This whispering was out of order and the boys said no more. They did not wish to lose a word of the splendid essay which held the hundreds spellbound.

And who shall describe the thrill that quivered through the heart of Darak Edwards and almost stopped its beating when Miss Peters completed the first sentence? It had a familiar sound to him, but he held his emotions in abeyance until he heard more.

"It may be an accidental resemblance," was his fear—"no, that's mine sure—it's *all* mine! *I'm the winner!*"

There could be no mistake about it. One of the hardest things in the world for an orator or a writer to do is to commit to memory his own composition. Joseph Jefferson, who carries volumes of others' in his mind, never feels certain of his own compositions of a thousand words and does not trust himself, but reads from the manuscript.

Darak Edwards had striven to commit his composition to memory, but could not do it. Every word, however, had that familiarity that he instantly recognized on its utterance by another. When Miss Peters began a sentence he ran ahead of it and knew the last word on the first page and the first on the succeeding page. Not a particle of doubt lingered in his mind.

A serene, grateful happiness glowed through

the being of the young man. While the composition was not very long, it gave him plenty of time in which to do a deal of thinking.

He felt sorry for his three classmates, and, as he looked furtively from one face to another, he asked himself what he could do to temper the disappointment which must already be gnawing in their hearts. He meant to be unusually generous toward them and take them on a hunting and fishing expedition to Dead Man's Lake and the mountains beyond. He would do still more when he could plan it.

Then he strove to look unconcerned, or rather philosophical. This was for the benefit of his father and mother, sitting on the other side of the platform, and for the audience, many of whose glances he met as he looked over the mass of expectant faces.

But there was one picture which grew more vivid every second, for in a brief while he would have to step forward amid the tumultuous applause and accept the superb present from the hands of Professor Fetterman.

Could he do it becomingly? Would he not stumble over a chair or fall off the platform? What a figure he would cut, and how true it is

that there is but a half-step between the sublime and the ridiculous!

No; he would brace up and bear his honors meekly, for what is more despicable than a conceited person? He would not forget for one moment that his triumph meant the defeat of his three friends.

But Miss Peters was approaching the end of the composition. Darak knew from the words which were falling from her lips that only a few more sentences remained. The culmination, the crowning victory of all was at hand!

The peroration was admirable and wrought up the hearers to such a pitch that they broke into applause, which continued several minutes after the reading was finished.

"It must be good," reflected Darak, when he noted the effect, and he felt as if he would like to seize a musket and go out and shoot the first man that uttered a disparaging word against the flag of our country; "I was afraid I overdid it when I wrote that, but I didn't. Ah, it's coming now!"

Miss Peters remained standing, a faint smile on her face, waiting for the tumult to subside before making her announcement. Gradually the uproar ended and every one hung on the words about to

fall from her lips. She had the good taste not to keep them waiting nor to indulge in any attempt to exploit herself. It was not *she* in whom the people were interested, but in her secret.

“My friends,” said she, “it is my pleasure to inform you that the author of the brilliant composition which it has just been my privilege to read is David Seymour!”

CHAPTER III.

AN EXPLOSION.

It seemed as if the applause which followed Miss Peters' announcement would literally "raise the roof." A goodly number of young men had been saving up several original signals, shouts, yells, or whatever they may be called, and now emitted them with the energy of a locomotive whistle.

Not until the venerable Professor Fetterman rose to his feet and held up his hand as a request for quiet, did the tremendous turmoil subside.

When this had taken place, the happy, smiling old gentleman nodded and called out:

"Thanks! I was afraid that Edison would have to invent some new kind of a brake to enable you to shut off in time."

There it was again. Old as was the professor, he must have his little joke, for he could not forget the training of years.

"I may add that the applause which you have given was well deserved. Any young man who

can write a composition like the one you have just heard read deserves the applause even of the Senate of the United States. Mr. Seymour, please stand up."

The youth, half a head taller than any of his classmates, rose to his feet, and the applause broke out again.

"You will agree with me that he is an unusually handsome lad," added the facetious professor; "who can look upon those bright blue eyes, that golden hair, that Romanesque nose, those fine, big, solid teeth which he is so fond of displaying, and not see a manly, high-minded lad of whom his parents, this community, and the country itself should feel proud? Mr. Seymour, it gives me great pleasure to hand you this token which you have fully earned. When the noble, patriotic sentiments which you have placed on paper shall enthuse all our American boys, when the proudest expression that a young man can utter will be to say, 'I am an American,' when this country, is permeated through and through by that exalted spirit of patriotism which radiates from every line of your composition, then shall it be safe, not only from the world without, but from all dissension that may arise within."

And what all this time of Darak Edwards?

He had braced himself up for the most trying ordeal of all—that of walking the few paces forward to the centre of the platform to receive the award from Professor Fetterman, when Miss Peters made her announcement that Dave Seymour was the winner.

A crushing blow on the head would not have stunned him more. There was one moment when he was in peril of falling in a faint from his chair. Could it be that he had heard aright? Was it not all a dream? What could it mean?

The thunderous applause seemed miles away, like the roar of a cyclone among the distant arches of the forest. The hundreds of faces grew misty and indistinct, and it was as if the earth was sinking from under his feet.

He saw Dave Seymour walk calmly out to the middle of the platform, and heard in a dim, confused way the words of Professor Fetterman. Then his whole nature revolted, for he understood it all.

He recalled that little episode on the previous Monday, when he handed his composition to Seymour for a minute's inspection. In that brief interval the miscreant had juggled the two papers,

and passed his own to Darak, unnoticed by the latter, who handed it to Miss Peters as that which he had written.

She placed the figure "4" on the back, and then wrote his name opposite the same number in her memorandum-book.

The dazed, bewildered feeling that held Darak nerveless and mute for the few moments was succeeded by a tempest of indignation, and a feeling of outrage which made him wish to leap at the audacious Seymour with the fury of a tiger.

Professor Fetterman had just finished his complimentary words, and held the dazzling watch and chain in his hand, about to pass it to Seymour, when Darak sprang to his feet, his face pale and his whole being tremulous with emotion. He strode two steps forward, and stood beside his classmate, who did not seem to see him.

Professor Fetterman and those on the platform surveyed him with astonishment. Among the audience one of the spectators voiced the sentiments of nearly all:

"Poor fellow! he's so disappointed that he's completely upset."

"Professor Fetterman," said Darak, in a quiv-

ering voice, "I wrote that composition which Miss Peters just read!"

It was now the turn of every one else to become dazed and bewildered. The silence was profound. No one spoke or stirred. The suspense was painful.

Professor Fetterman was the first to recover himself.

"My dear young man," he said pityingly, "surely you must be mistaken."

"I am *not* mistaken; I wrote every word of that composition, and Dave Seymour knows it; *don't you?*" he asked, turning his flashing eyes upon his fellow-pupil.

All seemed to feel that an explanation was due from the young man who was charged with one of the meanest of tricks.

"All that I know," was the unblushing response, "is that I wrote the composition myself and handed it to Miss Peters last Monday morning."

Professor Maillard had turned to his assistant on his right.

"Can it be that you made a mistake?"

She had her memorandum-book out and scrutinized it through her eyeglasses.

"No; when Dave handed me his paper I placed

the figure '3' on the back and wrote his name opposite that figure in my book. Darak's figure was '4'; there, you can see for yourself."

The professor glanced at the book and saw that she was correct.

When Darak heard Seymour's denial, he lost his self-control.

"You know you are lying! You changed the papers without my noticing it. You never were able to write a decent composition without my aid, and asked me to help you write this one; you ought to be shot for doing what you have done."

The situation was inexpressibly painful. The worst of it all was that, with the exception of less than a dozen persons in the room, no one believed what Darak asserted, but looked upon him as completely beside himself, through disappointment. Many felt sympathetic, but the majority condemned him unreservedly and showed it by hisses and their words:

"Sit down! Don't kick because you ain't as smart as Seymour! You're making a baby of yourself!"

Darak's parents were hardly less indignant than he. They knew that *that* boy would not tell a falsehood to save his life, but what could they do?

Jennie Edwards was in tears.

"What a shame to treat Darak that way! I think Dave Seymour is the meanest person I ever knew and I'll never speak to him again; so there!"

Professor Maillard showed more presence of mind than any one. He sprang to his feet and gently took the arm of the savage Darak.

"Sit down and control yourself, Darak. There has been some dreadful error here, but you know me well enough to be assured that I will see justice done you."

"The only justice you can do me is to believe what I say!"

"I never doubted your word, my dear boy, nor do I know that Dave is telling me a falsehood—"

"But I know it, and so does he!"

Darak was furious and shook off the affectionate grasp of his teacher, but, as he looked unflinchingly at him, he caught the eye of his father just beyond. The parent motioned for him to do as his principal requested. The boy had never refused to obey his father, and he knew the meaning of the gesture.

"I beg your pardon, professor; I only ask that justice be done to me and *him*."

This was uttered in a respectful voice, and the outraged lad stepped back to his seat. His face was aflame, and in his breast raged a greater tempest than had ever had place there during all his life.

A glance over the audience told him that among them all with the exception of his own folks, he did not see one who did not look upon him as a despicable, unmanly bumpkin, who was so jealous of the success of a rival that he did not hesitate to disgrace himself forever in the eyes of all who knew him.

"I'll expose that wretch if it takes fifty years!" muttered Darak, compressing his lips and shaking his head.

Jack Patterson touched his elbow, and he turned fiercely on him.

"What do you want?"

"Keep cool, old fellow; what's the use of getting excited?"

"Professor Maillard has said there is some mistake," added Nate Baldwin, who, while he felt sorry for Darak, condemned what he had done; "*we* didn't kick."

"Because you hadn't any reason to kick! Suppose you had written that composition, and that sneak stole it from you—how would you feel?"

"I should kick too, but I wouldn't make an exhibition of myself."

Darak angrily turned his back on his friends. He would not trust himself to speak with them.

Meanwhile, Professor Maillard had something to say to the audience.

"My friends, no one can feel more distressed over what has occurred than Professor Fetterman and myself. That some painful blunder has been committed is evident to all. Darak Edwards would not assert what he has asserted unless he believed he had good cause, while I am equally sure that Dave Seymour would not knowingly commit the fraud with which he is charged."

It occurred to several listeners that if young Seymour perpetrated the trick at all he must have done so knowingly.

"Since, as I have said, some mistake has been made, Professor Fetterman, I am sure, will consent that the awarding of the prize shall be deferred until this matter can be investigated."

Professor Maillard turned toward the venerable gentleman, who had sat down, and he nodded his acquiescence.

"You will, therefore, consider yourselves dis-

missed. The exercises with which we intended to close will be omitted."

And now that I have told what it was that made Darak Edwards mad "clean through," do you not agree with me that he had full justification for his anger?

CHAPTER IV.

THE MESSENGER OF MERCY.

Now, it would seem that it was one of the easiest things in the world to get at the truth about the prize composition. In the first place, there was the handwriting, which ought to have been an infallible guide, and yet it looked as if fate itself had interfered to protect the guilty.

You will remember that Dave Seymour was noted for his skill in penmanship. For amusement he often imitated the writing of his classmates, and once, when the class was required to hand in as a part of their drill in arithmetic an original promissory note, he attached the signature of Professor Maillard, and did it so skilfully that the principal said he would not have dared to disown it at the bank. He warned Seymour against the dangerous amusement.

In writing his composition, Seymour made a wonderfully close imitation of the hand of Darak Edwards. The refusal of the latter to help him

angered Seymour, and he determined to retaliate if the chance offered. His crime, therefore, had the meanness of premeditation.

But the strangest fact of all, and that which damaged Darak more than anything conceivable, was what he did himself. He allowed no one, not even his sister or his parents, to see his composition, after completing it. He was afraid they might suggest some changes, which his fine sense of honor told him would be a violation of the pledge all four had given. Worse than all, Darak had disguised his hand.

In adopting this singular course, he was actuated by two motives. He felt confident, while aglow with the feeling his own words produced, that he had a good chance of winning, and his change of style in writing was a boyish attempt to prevent his identity being discovered until the last minute. The greatest cause, however, was his labored effort to make his writing unusually legible. His hand was only ordinary, and, when he made the final copy he enlarged the letters, and rounded them more carefully than ever before. While this made the script very plain, it made it at the same time different from his usual hand.

Thus, singular as it may seem, the *prima facie*

evidence as regards handwriting was in favor of Seymour. The composition credited to Darak Edwards looked as if it had been written by him, while the peculiarity in the writing credited to Seymour was naturally attributed to his fondness for displaying his skill.

At first thought, Darak believed he had strong proof in the pencilled notes and original drafts which he had prepared. They would show his data and many of the sentences and expressions of the work read aloud by Miss Peters.

But Mr. Edwards shook his head.

"They will not give you any help, my son, for those who disbelieve you will say you wrote them after the composition had been awarded the prize. I could have done the same, as could others, for a number of the sentences were so beautiful and striking that they linger in one's memory."

"Let them demand that Seymour should show *his data*."

"They cannot well do that, since it was not one of the conditions of the contest. He might claim, too, that he had destroyed them."

"What can be done, father?" asked the discouraged lad on his return home that evening after the striking incident at the academy.

"Well, it is hard to say at present, but I have no more doubt that the truth will become known than I have that the sun will rise to-morrow. Professor Fetterman and Professor Maillard also are anxious to get at the bottom of the affair, and they will find some way to do it."

"I have thought of going to Dave and making an appeal to him," remarked Mrs. Edwards; "it seems to me that he cannot sleep with this on his conscience."

"I hope you won't try that," said Darak, "for he will only laugh at you."

"Have you said anything to him since this afternoon at the academy?" asked the father.

"Catch me speaking to him! If he knows what is well for him, he won't try to speak to me either," replied Darak, who was still angry over the outrage.

They were sitting on the front piazza, and the bright moon lit up the earth almost as if the sun was shining. In front the broad highway wound its course to Wunkako, a mile distant, and beyond the road stretched the undulating, fertile fields whose productions have made Minnesota celebrated everywhere. It was a picture of rare beauty and loveliness, and had been enjoyed many

a time by the little family, who found a soothing influence in the quiet attractiveness of the scene.

But all were now stirred too deeply by emotion to notice that which until then had never lost its charm for them. The parents and sister, the latter less than two years younger than Darak, pitied him from the bottom of their hearts.

"Only to think, too," added the boy after a minute of bitter silence, "that the only reputation Seymour ever won in writing compositions has been on what I did for him. He tried it without my help once or twice, and made such a failure that he always came to me afterward. I never told any one, and you may be sure *he* never did."

"Cheer up, my son," said the mother; "it will all come right in the end."

There seemed no element lacking in the bitter cup the youth had pressed to his lips, for he soon broke out again:

"There weren't five people in the audience that believed me. Even Professor Maillard said he was as sure Seymour wouldn't do what he has done as he was that I would not make a charge I believed untrue."

"You forget," remarked the father, "that no one could be suspected of so base a deception.

You would not have believed it possible of Seymour until this afternoon."

At this juncture Jennie silently passed into the house. No one noticed or thought anything of the action, so natural of itself, but the girl had a scheme in her mind. It may not have been a wise one, but it was creditable to the goodness of her heart.

Reaching the rear of her home, she went by a circuitous course to the highway, vaulting as lightly as a fawn over the low fence. There she paused a moment, looking in the direction of the house and listening.

"I won't be gone long, and hope to get back before they miss me. I *must* do it."

She had resolved to go to Wunkako to see Dave Seymour. She was sure that she could make him so ashamed of himself that he would hasten to offer full reparation for the grievous injury he had done her brother.

She was well aware that her father and mother would have refused her permission, especially since night had fallen, to make the journey, but she felt no personal fear, and her love for her brother led her to brave their displeasure.

Certain that her absence had not been noticed,

or at least that no one held a suspicion of her purpose, she now set out at a rapid walk in the direction of the town, her heart full of the scheme of doing good to all concerned.

I have said that nothing like personal fear came to her, though a mile walk to Wunkako and back again, over a country road, after the sun had set, might well cause an older person than she to hesitate. But the journey had often been made by her father and Darak alone, and once, when her mother arrived unexpectedly on the train from St. Paul, she did the same, and that, too, when there was no moon, and it was quite dark.

"Then what should I be afraid of?" she asked herself. "There used to be Indians in these parts, and they killed my brother and aunty, but that was long before I was born, and now there's nothing to fear."

The road was hard and smooth, and, though it was June, the night was cool and pleasant.

"Suppose I do see a tramp or some evil man, I can outrun him. I had a race with Darak the other day, and beat him fairly, and he tried real hard. I know he fell down and stopped to tie his shoe, but that didn't make any difference—gracious!"

For the first time since leaving home a thrill of fear passed through the pretty figure, for her bright eyes did not deceive her when the form of a man loomed to view in the highway a short distance ahead. She would have seen him much sooner in the strong moonlight had he not been hidden by a sharp turn in the road.

Jennie stopped short, intending to turn about and run back, but she checked herself in the act, when she recalled that she had already covered three-fourths of the way to town. Besides, Dave Seymour lived on the outskirts nearest her, so that the remaining walk was a brief one.

It would be a pity to give up the scheme she had in mind, and which she could not believe would fail.

She thought she reached a wise conclusion when she decided to walk so slowly that the stranger would soon pass from sight, and she could finish her journey without risk of meeting him.

"There is no reason why he should look around, and, if he does, I will stop, so he will take me for a post or stump."

But Jennie was in the middle of the highway where stumps and trees are not in the habit of having a place. If the fellow should turn his

head, as if it must be admitted many persons are in the habit of doing under similar circumstances, and as Jennie herself had done fully a score of times since leaving home, he would hardly mistake her for an inanimate object.

In the soft summer night, she became aware of one thing: the stranger was smoking a cigarette. The unpleasant odor was unmistakable, but it rather relieved her, because she did not think a wandering vagrant would indulge in that habit, though such things are on record.

"I am not far from town," she reflected, "and he wouldn't dare be rude to me, for if I couldn't outrun him, I would scream."

One thing puzzled her. Although she slackened her pace, so that it appeared as if she was barely stealing her way forward, the distance between the two remained about the same. From some cause he was walking very slowly. Why should he do that?

"I'll fix it," she muttered resolutely; "I'll stand still."

And so she did, with her gaze fixed upon the man, who became terrifying when she discovered that he had faced about and was coming toward her.

CHAPTER V.

FACE TO FACE.

JENNIE EDWARDS was indeed startled by the discovery that the man, instead of going in the same direction with her, or standing still, had turned about and was approaching. She saw the gleam of the cigarette, and noticed that he was moving fast.

But she had no intention of remaining rooted to the spot. She whirled about, meaning to speed up the highway like a frightend dove.

At that instant the man broke into laughter and called:

“Why, Jennie, what are you afraid of? Don’t you know me?”

Could it be possible, she asked herself? Surely that was the voice of Dave Seymour, the very one of all others whom she wished to meet. She stopped short, hesitating and undecided, through fear of a mistake.

“It is I, your old friend Dave,” was the reassur-

ing hail of the young man, who was now quite near.

She walked toward him, all her timidity gone.

"I was sauntering up the road to-night to smoke and meditate," he added, "when I happened to look around and see you. I knew you at a second glance; but, Jennie, what are you doing so far from home at this hour of the night?"

"I was on my way to see *you*," was the firm response, as she stepped closer and looked up bravely in his eyes.

"Well, now, that's a greater compliment than I deserve. I hardly expected to be so honored. I will escort you home."

"No, you won't," she interposed resolutely, "until I say what I have to say. When I am done, it will depend on you whether I ever speak to you again."

"I am sure that I hope no such penalty will be visited upon my head."

The young man flipped the ashes from his cigarette and lit another. He never seemed in lighter or gayer mood, but it was all assumed.

He needed no one to tell him of the storm that was raging in the breast of pretty Jennie Edwards,

and of the outburst that would come within the next minute.

"Dave Seymour, you ought to be ashamed of yourself!"

She shook her curly head almost against his face, and stamped her foot. She had thought over what she would say when confronting him, and had schooled herself to act the part of a lady, but she had something of her brother's nature, and found it hard to restrain her indignation within becoming bounds.

"Now, Jennie, I won't pretend to be ignorant of what you mean," said Seymour, laying aside his flippant manner; "it is natural that you and all your folks should be wrought up. I am sorry, but tell me how *I* am to blame."

"How *you* are to blame?" she repeated scornfully; "a pretty thing to say! Suppose you had killed a person—would you ask how you are to blame?"

"There might be a person killed by me without my being blamable, but there hasn't been, so let's keep to the question. I assure you I am sorry for Darak."

"Why weren't you sorry for him before you stole his composition——"

"There!" he broke in sternly. "I didn't steal his composition."

"You did!"

"How can you know that I did?"

"Because he says so."

"And I say I didn't."

"But my brother would never tell a falsehood."

"Which is saying that I would. Thanks! How do you know he would not tell a falsehood, under certain conditions, such, for instance, as the chance of winning a gold watch and chain?"

Nothing could be more exasperating than Seymour's manner. Jennie was so overpowered with anger that she felt she must scream, and she would if some sort of break did not come very soon.

The young man had greatly the advantage so long as he retained his coolness, and saw it.

"I admire your faith in your brother," he added, "because he is the only brother—such as he is—that you have, but I beg to remind you that if any of my little brothers and sisters, or my father and mother, were called upon to decide between Darak and me, they would all say that it was I who wouldn't tell a lie to save my neck, and that

Darak would do so whenever he saw anything to gain by it."

"I would like to hear any one say that about *my* Darak," said the sister, in tones so awful that they ought to have smitten Dave Seymour to the earth, but they did not produce any visible effect.

The two had moved to the side of the road, and were standing close to the fence, their relative positions so shifted that each was facing toward home.

"Jennie, you are as excitable as Darak."

"Who wouldn't be excited when served as you served him?"

"You forget that it is I who should be angry and revengeful."

"What about?"

"Was ever a person so grossly insulted as I was this afternoon by Darak? He stood up before nearly the whole town, and accused me of stealing, lying, and of playing the most contemptible trick one being can play another."

"And what he said is true, too, and you know it."

"Begging your pardon, I don't know any such thing. I repeat what I said at the time, that the composition which Miss Peters read, and which

was awarded the prize, was composed and written, every word of it, by myself."

The girl drew in a deep inspiration with an expression of horror on her face.

"How dare you? I never heard of such wickedness. Oh, Dave Seymour, what do you think of yourself?"

"I think I am a very much abused and persecuted individual. If justice were done, I would be wearing that fine gold watch and chain instead of going without it, and being accused as I was by Darak to-day."

"You know you never had sense enough to write a decent composition; Darak had to help you every time."

"You must have heard that from him," sneered Seymour. "I don't suppose he told you anything about the help I often gave him, not only in composition, but in many other studies. He didn't say anything of *that*, did he?"

"No, because there wasn't anything to say. He knows more in a minute than you will ever know in all your life."

"Evidently Miss Jennie holds a higher opinion of her model brother than she does of me. But will you be good enough to tell me what I can do for you?"

By this time Jennie Edwards had regained a part of her self-control. The figure of her brother standing up in front of the multitude and denouncing this young man was ever before her. She could never forget it to her dying day, but she saw that in some respects he had made a mistake. He repelled sympathy by his violence, and she was losing ground by the abuse which she heaped upon the person before her.

She was indignant enough to fly at him, but her manner now changed. With a poise of which a much older person might have been proud, she said:

“Dave I came to you, without the knowledge of any one, believing that when I appealed to you you would listen.”

“So I will, Jennie.”

“But I mean listen and do what is right.”

“I will do that also; I am always anxious to follow the Golden Rule.”

“Then you will own that it was Darak’s composition which won the prize—that you forgot yourself in the excitement of the moment and did not understand what it all meant until it was over.”

She paused and looked yearningly in the face of the young man, who had flung away his cigarette,

and who stared down in her countenance with an expression of ardent admiration. No one could question the beauty of Jennie Edwards, and the comely face, with the jaunty hat thrown back, took on a more witching loveliness under the magic touch of the fleecy moonlight.

Seymour did admire the pretty girl, but not to the extent of sacrificing himself for the sake of her brother. The fact that he had committed the crime, even though he should make tardy restitution, could never win her respect, and Seymour had too much worldly wisdom to deceive himself.

"Jennie," said he, in the most persuasive voice he could assume, "you are too young to understand this matter——"

"What is there hard to understand about it?" she broke in. "It was Darak's composition which Miss Peters read——"

"Has she said so?"

"Not that I know of, but it is the fact. Why not own up that you changed the two papers, and handed her Darak's without knowing it?"

"That would not be true."

"But, Dave, I won't ask you to say that you did it on purpose; that would be too hard on you."

He deliberately lighted another cigarette, blew

several puffs from between his lips, and said with a light laugh:

"You will persist in misunderstanding me. Now, if you will get Miss Peters to say I changed the compositions, because she could not fail to see it, since she stood at the side of the desk, why I may consider your request. Does Darak hold any such silly idea as has entered your pretty head?"

"No; he said any one would be a fool to appeal to you."

"And yet you have done so."

"Because he was angry, and didn't know what he said."

"Which was the case this afternoon. Now let me give you a little advice. Instead of wasting your arguments on me, persuade him to apologize for the injustice he did me. No one outside of his own family believes a word of what he said."

"Well," sighed Jennie Edwards, "I am sorry I came to you, but let me warn you that it won't be safe for you and Darak to meet alone."

"I should be very glad to meet and settle the matter with him at this moment."

"Very well; we'll settle it then!" exclaimed Darak Edwards, striding forward from the moonlight behind Seymour.

CHAPTER VI.

A WARM INTERVIEW.

THE gloomy conversation of the Edwards family, on the porch of their home, was going on in its fitful way, when Darak suddenly looked around and asked:

“What’s become of Jennie?”

“She went in the house some time ago. What do you wish with her?” answered and asked his mother.

Without replying, the youth stepped within the door and pronounced the name of his sister three or four times, gradually raising his voice, and listening a suitable interval for her response. There being none, he was certain she was not at home.

“Do you know what I think?” he asked, coming out on the porch with an impatient manner.

“No; what is it?” asked his father.

“She is on her way to Wunkako, and has gone a goodly part of the distance by this time.”

"Why would she go there at this time of the night?"

"To see that Seymour."

"What causes you to suspect that?" asked his father, who, as well as the mother, was inclined to believe Darak was right.

"I noticed that when mother spoke of appealing to Seymour, Jennie started, as if strongly impressed. It's just like the impulsive girl."

"I shall be very much displeased if she has done a thing like that without permission."

"So shall I, for Seymour will insult her, I think. I had better go after her," added Darak, putting on his hat and stepping off the porch.

"Do, and make all the haste you can."

Reaching the highway, the young man struck off at a rapid pace toward town. He was confident that his sister was ahead of him, and equally confident that her errand was an appeal to that abominated Seymour. He was intensely sorry, but he could not feel angry with her, because she was too dear to him.

Besides, the reflection of the crowning outrage which he had suffered overshadowed all other causes of irritation.

That Darak was correct in his surmise the reader

already knows. He was surprised to come upon the two talking in the highway, and wondered what brought the meeting about.

They were so earnest that, in the stillness of the night, he overheard a good deal of what passed, while yet some distance away.

Seymour's back was toward him, but Jennie recognized her brother in the bright moonlight, when quite a way off, as he angrily approached.

The arrival of the youth was at a dramatic crisis, for he was in that mood that he was ready to tackle a giant, and the words of his enemy poured oil on the flame that had been burning for hours.

At this stirring moment, Jennie illustrated once more the kinship of tragedy and comedy by her words to Seymour:

"I told you I hoped you and Darak would not meet, but you have, and now the best thing you can do is to run home as fast as you can."

Darak turned sternly toward his sister:

"Jennie, leave at once; don't stop on the way, for mother and father are waiting for you, and the longer you wait the worse it will be."

"Gracious! then I won't wait," and the frightened girl sped up the highway as fast as her light feet could carry her.

Dave Seymour remained standing in the middle of the road, his hands in the pockets of his light coat, his hat shoved back from his forehead, while he puffed a cigarette with the abandon of a veteran. Outwardly, he was not disturbed by a ripple of excitement, and though he knew a quarrel was inevitable, he had no fear of the indignant youth in front of him.

Why should he fear him? Seymour was nearly a year the elder, half a head taller, and certainly weighed twenty or thirty pounds more than Darak. What doubt could there be of the issue if a bout should take place between them?

The two faced each other for a moment or two in silence. Then between the puffs of his cigarette, Seymour said:

"Well, Darak, Jennie and I have had a rather warm interview, and now I am ready for you. It's a waste of time for us to talk, but I'm willing to hear what you have to say."

"We are alone," replied Darak, glancing around, "so there is no need of any such falsehoods as I am sure you uttered to her, for you and I know the truth."

"Well?"

"Last Monday morning, when I loaned you my

composition for a few seconds, you succeeded in mixing it up with yours, so that mine was handed to Miss Peters as your own."

"You are correct," was the unblushing response.

"You did it on purpose, and with the deliberate intention of cheating me out of the prize offered by Professor Fetterman."

"I would hardly put it in that way, since there was no certainty that you would win the prize."

"You believed I would; at least you said so."

"Yes, that was my belief."

"And you did rob me of what I earned."

"It looks that way. You ought to have had your eyes open, Darak, and prevented me from outwitting you."

"I did not believe it possible that you, that any one, could be guilty of so base a trick."

"I have heard my father say that a man must hustle in these times to get along, and—well, I hustled."

"Do you mean to stick to what you have said and done?"

"Do you suppose I would run the risk of winning, only to throw the prize away after I had won it? I am not quite a fool."

"No, but you are a scoundrel, and I will expose you to the world."

"You tried that this afternoon, and succeeded in making your father, mother, and sister believe you: they are all, and the utmost you can do is to awaken the sympathy of a few who think your chagrin was so deep that you couldn't help making an exhibition of yourself. You are welcome to their pity, and, if it's any comfort, you can have mine."

"At present you may be right, but, sooner or later, the truth will come to light and you will regret to your dying day what you have done."

"Pah! I've heard old women preach before. I'll take the chances."

"Well, I have nothing more to say to you, except to repeat that you are the meanest miscreant in or out of jail."

"You have said something like that once already. I warn you not to say it again," remarked Seymour, who, despite his forced calmness, was deeply angered.

"And I do say it again."

"And you must take back your words, or I'll give you the biggest trouncing of your life."

"I apologize for speaking the truth? Never. Dave Seymour, you are not fit to associate with

decent people. Many a man was hanged who was better than you. You are the meanest, most contemptible——”

Seymour for the first time now lost control of himself. It is humiliating perhaps for a young man to know his own baseness, but he cannot bear to be reminded too often of it.

While the words were in the mouth of Darak Edwards, his enemy snatched his hands from his pockets, clenched them, and rushed at the other.

Darak was expecting it. Indeed, he hoped the fellow would attack him, for it seemed that every nerve in his body was aching for it.

What if Seymour was larger and older and possibly stronger? All the more glory in defeating him.

Darak was much quicker of movement, and easily dodged the terrific blow aimed at his face, and delivered one straight from the shoulder, which landed with full force on the mouth of the other, sending him backward and almost to the ground before he could recover his balance. His hat fell in the roadway, but, paying no attention to it, he again rushed at the younger lad with unrestrainable fury.

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A half-hour later, Darak Edwards opened the gate leading to his own home, and stepped upon the porch, where his sister and parents were awaiting him. He seemed to be cool and there was no noticeable disarrangement of his clothing, nor did his face show the first traces of his furious encounter with Seymour.

"I reproved Jennie," said the mother mildly, "and she has asked forgiveness for her action, which, if hasty, was well meant."

"Did you come straight home, Jennie, when I told you to do so?" asked her brother.

"Yes, you know I didn't want father and mother to be kept waiting, and I ran nearly every step of the way."

"Then you didn't hear anything that was said by Seymour or me?"

"Of course not; how could I?"

"I am glad you had a talk with him," remarked the father. "What did he have to say?"

"When he found we were alone, he didn't pretend to deny anything. He thought he had played a cute trick, and was proud of it."

"And what did *you* say, Darak?"

"Well, I let him know what I thought of his conduct and of him. Of course he didn't

fancy that much, which suited me all the better."

"I am sure it was quite a relief to you," observed the mother, placing her hand on the head of her boy, for whom she felt an unutterable sympathy and affection.

"Yes; when we parted I am sure I felt better than he did."

"Of course. Such a person may bluster, but he cannot hush the voice of conscience, and he must feel poignant pain when alone with it."

"I am satisfied that Seymour does feel pains even at this moment," replied Darak, whose words had a significance which neither of his parents suspected.

"Your interview was a warm one, I'll warrant," observed Mr. Edwards.

"Seymour won't deny that it was."

"That being so, try to rest content until the truth comes to light."

"I'll try," was the dubious response of Darak.

Dave Seymour had not quite so far to walk as Darak Edwards. He opened the gate softly, hoping to get to his room unnoticed, but to his dismay he observed his father seated on the porch.

The young man had prepared for this contin-

gency and was ready for the questions and observations which he knew would follow his appearance.

Two of his teeth were loosened, each eye was swollen and would be surrounded by puffed black circles in the morning, his piccadilly collar was gone, his nose was nearly double its usual size, his coat was torn, and the front of his shirt-bosom was stained crimson in a number of places.

"Good gracious, my son, what is the matter?" exclaimed the startled parent, as he noted all this in the moonlight, before the young man took a seat near him.

"Hab a burty tough time, faber," replied the youth, whose lips were so protruding that he could not enunciate clearly; "stobbed a runaway horse."

"You risked your life!"

"Bebber beliebe I did; heard some women screaming and saw the horse coming down the road full tilt; grabbed him by the bridle; tried to shake me off; hung on; hit me with his knees and hoofs, but I wouldn't let go; got burty well battered up, faber."

"I should say so! you look as if you had been through a threshing-machine."

"Feel that way, too, faber; think I'll hab to lie abed for a few days."

"My dear boy, I am proud of you; I shudder to think of what you passed through."

"So do, I faber; wouldn't do it again for a thouband gold watches, but I'm glad I sabled the libes of those women and children."

"Who were they?"

"Strangers to me; I didn't ask much, they were so grabeful; got to be a bore, so I hurried off."

"I repeat I am proud of you, Dave; I wish the whole town could have seen the noble act on your part."

"I don't," was the truthful comment of the youth, who was edging around on his chair so as to get a comfortable position.

"Why not?"

"It would hab been embarrassing to me; let's say no more about it."

"He's the most modest boy I ever knew," remarked Mr. Seymour to his wife, after they had withdrawn to their room; "he doesn't wish us to tell any one, but, all the same, I intend to give Mr. Vernon the whole particulars. I won't say anything to Dave, but he will be surprised when he reads it in the *Herald of Freedom*."

Darak Edwards and Dave Seymour agreed upon

one point: they alone knew what was uttered by themselves, and what took place at that memorable "interview" in the middle of the highway, a quarter of a mile from Wunkako, on that cool night in the month of June, 1894.

And yet both were mistaken. It so happened that a young man, carrying a violin-box in one hand, was on his way to a friend's house to spend the evening, and climbed the fence a little distance from Seymour and Edwards, for the purpose of cutting across-lots. He was between them and Wunkako, so he saw nothing of Jennie Edwards hurrying homeward.

The angry voices attracted his attention, and, instead of pursuing his way, he walked in the direction of the disputants, who would have noticed him but for their absorption with each other.

The violinist took his place in the shadow of a tree not twenty feet away, and with the exception of the few opening words, heard everything that passed between the two.

Not only that, but he witnessed the bout at arms.

"That confession of Seymour is astounding," was the spectator's reflection; "I never could have believed that story from any one else's lips; I

won't forget it. And now he intends to trounce Darak for expressing his mind. It's a shame."

The burning question with the eavesdropper was as to his own duty in the proceedings. He was of so slight and delicate build that he was no match for either of the youths.

"If I interfere, they will both turn on me, and knock me into the middle of next week. Maybe Darak can hold his own. I'll wait till I see how it is coming out. Then if he needs my help, I'll bang Seymour over the head with my violin-box, and likely enough will shatter it to fragments—that is, my violin-box. I'm willing to do that much for my country, though it may injure the fiddle. I'll wait and see."

A few minutes later the spectator heaved a sigh.

"My violin and box are saved!"

This young man kept in the shadow of the tree, which stood near enough to the scene of the conflict for him to observe every phase of the fierce battle, and it is sufficient to say that he was astonished and gratified at the outcome.

Waiting until Darak had disappeared in the direction of his home and Seymour had limped off toward town, the spectator stepped to the fence and leaned one elbow thoughtfully upon it.

"Now, if prize-fighting were a respectable profession, which it can never be, Darak Edwards could make his fortune at it. Bless me! I would rather tackle a Kansas cyclone than to try to do what Seymour attempted. I don't believe he will be able to leave his bed for a week. What mistakes some folks do make!"

This was the ludicrous side of the hostile meeting, but what a background of serious drama lay beyond!

The young man had been present at the graduating exercises of the academy the preceding afternoon, and, like nearly every one, found it impossible to believe the amazing charges made by Darak Edwards, but now he knew they were true, for Dave Seymour himself had admitted it.

And what was the duty of the young man in the premises?

It was a serious question, but could he afford to remain idle and suffer this outrage, this burning wrong, this unspeakable injustice, to prevail?

"I must do it,—and yet," he added, "I will try to save Seymour."

But how could that be done? He thought he had a plan.

CHAPTER VII.

THE DECISION.

IF Professors Maillard and Fetterman were far less demonstrative in their emotion, it was not because they did not feel as deeply as Darak Edwards. They were inexpressibly shocked by the occurrence of the afternoon, and each resolved to learn the truth, no matter at what cost of time, patience, and money.

No slight incident ever so stirred the town of Wunkako. It has already been said that the majority disbelieved the charge of young Edwards, though more than was at first suspected said there must be some mystery at the bottom of the affair which would show a foundation for the fearful accusation of the disappointed young man.

The *Herald of Freedom*, as a faithful expositor of public sentiment, took neutral ground, and announced that, in justice to the highly respected young men and their families, the editor would await further developments before expressing an opinion.

The professors held a long interview that afternoon, at which Miss Peters was present. Most of the ground gone over among them has already been cleared for the reader.

The matter of handwriting was against Darak, and Miss Peters had not observed any action on the part of Seymour which could suggest a juggling of the compositions. She really could give no assistance at all in the investigation,—seeing which she withdrew.

Then, as to the character of the young men implicated, Professor Maillard was unable to add anything of moment. The deportment of both had been uniformly good, and he could not call to mind a single instance in which he suspected either of deception.

“I have always believed both to be truthful. I make it my duty to study the character and disposition of those under my charge. While I know of no severe test to which Darak and Dave have been subjected, my faith in each is about the same. The mystery is beyond my solving.”

“You have specimens of the handwriting of Seymour and Edwards?”

“Any number of them.”

“Let me have a few at your convenience.”

"I can give them to you now; I have a half-dozen compositions from each member of my graduating class in my desk," said Professor Maillard.

The meeting was in the office of the principal, who quickly placed several productions that were unquestionably those of Seymour and the same number written by young Edwards in the hands of his venerable friend.

"That is sufficient; these will settle the question."

"May I ask what you intend to do with them?"

"I will send half to a writing-expert in New York and the other half to an equally skilful expert in Boston. I will give them a month to make a microscopic examination; that is, after I have done something of the kind myself."

Professor Maillard sorted out the different papers, marking each so that his friend would have the utmost help in his task.

"In the mean time," added Professor Fetterman, as they rose to go, "if there are any inquiries made, as will probably be the case, we will answer that the investigation set on foot requires considerable time, and that when we make our decision known there will be no possibility of mistake."

Professor Fetterman carried out his intentions

in spirit and letter. In the first place he spent several days in his own library in a painstaking comparison of the script of the papers in his hands. His wife, herself an educated and cultured woman, gave great aid.

The conclusion reached by both was that Dave Seymour was the author of the composition to which the prize had been awarded, and that as a consequence Darak Edwards had made a baseless charge against his competitor.

But this decision was not final, nor was it communicated to any one. The compositions devoted to "Our Country" occupied four pages each. Two of these pages were placed with the same number of productions written by Darak Edwards (the authorship being undisputed) and sent to the expert in Boston, accompanied by a liberal fee, with the request to determine whether the three papers were written by the same person, or whether another was the author of the partial composition.

Precisely the same course was taken with the work of Seymour, which was forwarded to a celebrated New York expert.

Professor Fetterman was the personal friend of both gentlemen, and made a special request that

they would make their examination as perfect as possible—a request which was faithfully obeyed on the part of each.

“They will be certain to arrive at the truth,” he remarked to his wife, “and, however painful it may be, I shall abide by it.”

The work of the experts took longer than was anticipated. The Boston man was engaged on another case in court, where his feelings were so harrowed by the cross-examination of one of the counsel that he was obliged to spend a week at Bar Harbor, until he would recover his mental equilibrium sufficiently to undertake any new work.

The gentleman in New York was spending his vacation with his family at Avon-by-the-Sea, but would take up the task at the earliest possible moment. Thus it happened that the work was not completed until the closing days of August, when, by a rather curious coincidence, the two reports reached Wunkako in the same mail.

Professor Fetterman recognized the handwriting on each bulky envelope, and, without opening them, walked down the street to the house of Professor Maillard, who welcomed him in his library.

“At last,” said the elderly gentleman, “the vexed question is settled. I told Mrs. Fetterman that,

whatever the decision, I would accept it as final. It may be painful, but it must be acquiesced in, nevertheless."

"It must be painful, no matter what decision it reaches," gravely remarked the principal of the academy. "It is rather singular that neither Edwards nor Seymour has called or communicated with me about the matter.

"Nor have they done so with me. I commend their good taste in *that* respect, whatever it may be otherwise."

Taking up a pair of scissors, Professor Fetterman carefully cut off the end of the Boston envelope, so as not to disturb the contents. Drawing out the different documents, he extracted the report of the expert, and, adjusting his glasses, read:

"In compliance with your request, I have devoted a great deal of time to a careful comparison of the specimens of handwriting you were kind enough to forward me. I have spent a longer time than I anticipated, since you desired that no possible error should be made.

"It gives me pleasure to assure you that no mistake *has been made*. I subjected the three specimens to a painstaking comparison, in which the magnifying-glass was frequently employed and every known test called into requisition. I have

made a summary of my work on the accompanying sheet, where you will see that, under the glass, I have compared in the most minute manner the formation of every letter of the alphabet that occurs in the body of the different papers. I refer you to that report, adding that the conclusion reached by me, and which, I may be pardoned for repeating, you may accept as correct beyond all question, is that two persons were concerned in the penmanship. The two complete compositions were written by one hand, but another penned the production of which you sent me only a portion.

“Very respectfully,

“H. WATSON.”

“Just what I expected!” remarked Professor Fetterman, with a sigh; “it agrees with the conclusion of my wife and myself. I need not hesitate any longer. Bless me! what a young villain that Darak Edwards is!”

“You have not read the other report,” gently suggested his host.

“I declare I forgot that in my agitation,” replied his visitor, taking up the second large envelope and cutting off the end. “But it is hardly necessary. Ah, Mr. MacDowell has taken the pains to have his report typewritten. Here it is:

“Remembering your request that I should do my

best and leave, if possible, no room for error, I have given my undivided attention to the task you courteously submitted to me. Six separate and distinct tests—all that are known—have been used upon the three specimens which you placed in my hands.

“My decision is this: The two complete compositions of course were written by the same hand; but the third and incomplete production was written by another.

“Of course we are all liable to err, and I won't deny that I have been mistaken in my conclusions, but this case is so simple that I am willing to stake my reputation upon the decision which I have given.

“With great respect,

“JNO. T. MACDOWELL.”

Despite the gravity of the matter, Professor Maillard laughed.

“We ought to have known it. Each man is as confident as the other, and yet one must be wrong, for their conclusions are radically opposed. Who shall decide when doctors disagree?”

“It makes my perplexity greater than ever,” said the distressed guest. “I have equal confidence in both; why couldn't they agree?” he added querulously.

“They are honest, for it was not, as is often the

case in court, an object with either to earn his fee by deciding in a certain way. I am inclined to think MacDowell is right."

"That implies that Darak Edwards is the real winner of the prize? It is contrary to the decision of Mrs. Fetterman and myself, but I might agree with you, had not MacDowell thrown in that element of doubt."

"To what do you refer?"

"He doesn't deny that he has made mistakes and may be wrong in this instance."

"If questioned, Watson would say the same thing. No weight should be given to that statement, which is creditable to MacDowell's frankness."

"Well, Maillard, what do you think?"

"I am not yet quite ready to express an opinion. Let the matter lie over a week or less. There is no hurry."

The caller bade his friend good-evening and walked home. He held a long consultation with his wife and once more they were in accord. It was that MacDowell was wrong and Watson was right.

"Young Seymour has honestly won the prize and I shall send it to him to-morrow. I will prepare the note now."

And he did. Sitting at his desk, Professor Fetterman wrote, sealed, and addressed the following:

“David C. Seymour:

MY DEAR SIR:—After an investigation, prolonged much longer than I anticipated, but which was necessary, I have reached the conclusion that the prize for the best composition on the subject, ‘Our Country’ was honestly won by you. None can regret the distressing occurrence on graduation day more than I, but it is a pleasure to know that almost without exception the belief is general that you suffered a most grievous wrong, for which you are entitled to the respectful sympathy of all.

“I beg at this late day to forward you the watch and chain, with my best wishes for your future success and happiness.

“Very respectfully,

“ALONZO H. FETTERMAN.”

This letter, I say, was sealed and addressed, but it never reached Dave Seymour because of a startling incident which occurred the same evening.

CHAPTER VIII.

A REQUEST.

PROFESSOR FETTERMAN sat alone in his library, after his wife had retired, meditating over one of the most troublesome experiences of his life.

He thought he had settled the question of the winner of the prize, and it was with a feeling of profound relief that he sealed and addressed the letter to Dave Seymour, making known his decision. A grain of doubt, however, remained.

"It was a mistake ever to have offered the prize, but there's no use in regretting that now. I have made my decision, and yet, if it is wrong, I shall only intensify one of the foulest pieces of injustice conceivable. The discovery of the truth later could not repair the suffering I would have caused the innocent one.

"What dolts these experts in handwriting are!" he exclaimed, glad to fix upon some one he could blame. "I selected the two most famous, and gave them what ought to have been one of the sim-

plest of cases, but they couldn't agree. I don't wonder that the lawyers roast those experts when they have the chance. They deserve it—hello!"

The doorbell tinkled at that moment, and the servant announced that Jack Patterson asked to see Professor Fetterman, if not inconvenient.

"I am glad he called; show him in."

Jack was a favorite with the professor, who had been charmed many times by his excellent violin-playing, and admired the quaint wit and brightness of the young man.

He rose and took his hand as he entered the library.

"I was hoping you had brought your instrument with you," he remarked with a smile as he waved Jack to a seat.

"I wouldn't presume that far," replied the caller; "I have too much respect for my friends."

"Ah, if I possessed your skill, I would spend half my time with the king of instruments."

"Thanks, but you flatter me; a person who knows as little as I about the violin should wait until he has practised a good many years in private; but if you are so easily pleased, I shall be glad to bring it around and have Mrs. Fetterman accompany with the piano."

"It will delight us both—but, Jack, is there anything I can do for you?" asked the old gentleman, well aware that some unusual cause had brought the youth to his home at that late hour.

Jack's handsome countenance instantly took on a troubled look. He gazed thoughtfully at the floor and wrinkled his forehead.

"It has been in my mind for two weeks to make this call, professor, but I couldn't quite bring myself to the point. I have lain awake nights, have dreamed, and still kept away, until to-night I could do so no longer."

"Don't hesitate, my dear boy, to speak freely; I have been an instructor for many years, and take great interest in young men like you."

"Every one who knows you knows that; if it were not so, I should not be here. Professor," he added, looking up abruptly, "may I ask you whether you have decided to whom the gold watch and chain are to be awarded?"

The other hesitated a moment.

"Propriety would seem to require that the winner should be the first person to learn the fact, but since you feel so deeply in the matter, I will answer you. Let me read you something."

Professor Fetterman took the letter from the table

near him, broke the seal, and read aloud the words he had addressed to Dave Seymour.

"How does that suit you?" he asked, removing his glasses and looking across the table at Jack, who had hardly breathed during the reading.

"I am about to ask you a great favor, professor," said he in a low voice.

"What is that?"

"It is that you will not send that letter for a brief while to come."

"I would be disposed to grant your request, if you gave me a good reason for doing so. Don't you think the prize belongs to Dave Seymour?"

Jack again looked down at the floor. You will understand that nothing was easier for him than to settle the question then and there.

He had heard Dave Seymour confess to Darak Edwards that an outrageous fraud had been committed, and that the composition to which was awarded the prize was the work solely of Edwards.

This testimony, added to Darak's own insistence, would have ended all dispute, and, in the face of it, Seymour would not dare to show his face in his native town.

But, as I have intimated, Jack wished to save his classmate from such mortal humiliation. He

believed that, if Dave could be brought to the point of wishing to right the wrong, a comparatively easy way would open for him, though Jack was unable as yet to figure out such a way.

He had approached Dave several times and hinted his views, but never had told him that he knew of his confession. That was the screw which he reserved to be twisted at the last moment.

As the days and weeks passed without a settlement of the question, his dread was great that a wrong decision would be made, after which, of course, restitution would become tenfold more difficult.

That was why he called upon Professor Fetterman when he was alone at this late hour in his library.

He would have been glad to make a confidant of the old gentleman, but he was in doubt.

"Professor, do you believe I would try to deceive you?"

"I have no reason to think so; you have the reputation of being a truthful and honorable young man."

"All that I can say is that if you send that letter to Dave Seymour you will be sure to regret it."

"Satisfy me of this and I will promise you that it shall not be sent."

"At present I cannot give my reason."

"Suppose that I change the address to Darak Edwards?"

"Not yet, please."

"One or the other should have received the prize long ago; do you know the name of the young man?"

Jack looked fixedly into the pleasant face before him, and pronounced the single word:

"Yes."

"Then I beg to say that I can understand no reason why you come to me, with such a declaration, and refuse to tell me the name of him who has suffered this injustice."

There was a reproof in the words and voice which cut deeply, but it only confirmed Jack in his belief that it would be fatal to his plan to let the old gentleman into his secret.

"I will not deny that my course seems singular, but the delay has already continued so long that a week more will do no harm; that is all I ask."

"And if I choose to refuse?"

"You have the liberty to do as you think proper, but," added Jack, rising to his feet, hat in hand,

“if you send the letter to-night or before the end of a week, I repeat you will regret it. Good-night.”

A trained diplomat could not have managed this business better than Jack Patterson. He had said just enough, and not too much, and, above all, he said it in the right way, and then departed without giving the old gentleman a chance to probe too deep.

Jack declared that he knew the all-important truth for which the professor had groped so long, but possessed an all-sufficient reason for not making it known at present. He had respectfully protested against a letter being sent to either Darak or Dave for a week to come, and had uttered the very warning which would have the most effect upon the sensitive mind of Professor Fetterman.

That such was the fact was proved by what followed. The man sat for a long time, sunk in his low chair and in deep thought.

Then, rousing himself, he picked up the open letter and reread it, after which he twisted it into the form of a lamp-lighter, struck a match, and applied the blaze.

When it was burning he flung it into the open grate, and watched it slowly become ashes.

"I'll wait the week he asks for and then rid myself of the whole business."

And then he went to bed, to toss and dream about the one thing that had tormented him for weeks.

Meanwhile, Jack Patterson was walking homeward with a brisk step, for the feeling was strong within him that he had won a promising victory over Professor Fetterman.

"He won't do anything for a week and I'll bring things to a focus before that time is up. I'll let Dave know that he must do what is right, or I will put the screws to him. Not many would be as merciful as I—well, I declare!"

In front of his own house, he saw a person come down the walk and pass out of the gate.

One glance in the gaslight (for there was no moon) showed that his caller was Darak Edwards, who recognized him at the same moment.

They warmly shook hands, for each was fond of the other.

"It isn't so very late, Darak; come back with me."

"I'm obliged, but it isn't worth while; I only wanted to see you for a minute."

"What's up?"

"How would you like to go fishing up at Dead Man's Lake?"

"It would suit me to a dot."

"Can you go next Monday?"

"I know of nothing to prevent; I'll have to talk with father, but he is quite certain to give his consent."

"That's good; I saw Nate a half-hour ago and he says I may count him in. That will make a jolly party, especially if we can get Johnny Jump-up. I'll try to see him to-morrow; if he'll join, we'll take a few days or maybe a week in the woods, and perhaps visit Lost Island."

"I don't know, Darak, about going too far into the woods; you know how dry the season has been, and a good many forest fires are raging."

"We won't be in any danger, so long as we are within reach of water; but we'll talk about that later. Good-night."

Jack Patterson entered his own home, and was about to pass up-stairs when some one called him from the reception-room.

"Hello, old fellow, you ought to keep better hours."

"Why, Dave, I'm glad to see you," replied Jack, taking the hand of young Seymour and

seating himself beside him. "Sorry I kept you waiting."

"I haven't been here long. Have you any engagement for next week?"

"I just had an invitation to spend several days fishing and hunting."

"Where?"

"Up on Dead Man's Lake, and in that neighborhood."

"Why, that's just what I wanted you to do with me."

"I would be delighted, if I hadn't partly accepted the other invitation."

"Why can't we all go together? Who is the other person?"

"Darak Edwards; I hardly suppose you would care to go with each other," remarked Jack, with a smile.

"I rather guess not. If he wished me, I don't think I could stand him. Will you and he go alone?"

"I believe he expects Nate; in fact, he has his promise."

"That will make three, which will be a good company."

"He has hope of getting Johnny Jumpup."

"He will miss it there, for I have engaged him."

"When did you see him?"

"This forenoon. He was in town. Did you meet him?"

"No; I have been at home nearly all day."

"He was pretty full when I ran against him, but not too much so to navigate. When I offered him a dollar to act as guide, he was glad to take the chance. He didn't go home until it was dark, and then he had all he could do to travel, by taking the whole road, but the half-breed knows all there is to know about fishing and hunting, for he must be forty years old, and he has done nothing else all his life."

The boys talked for some minutes longer, both apparently in the best of spirits, and yet there was a subject in the mind of each, hardly absent indeed for a moment, which they wished to talk about, and yet they hesitated, because neither knew precisely how to bring it forward.

Jack Patterson had hinted so many times to Dave Seymour about that memorable occurrence on graduation day, that Dave began to suspect he knew more than he had admitted. He could not understand how such a thing could be, but he longed to question his classmate, and make certain

whether such was the fact, but he didn't know how to go about it, through fear of revealing more than he wished.

Had the chat between the boys taken place anywhere else, Jack Patterson would have told the other what he heard and saw on the night of the fistic encounter between him and Darak Edwards, and he would have notified Dave that he must take steps to right the wrong or he would expose him.

But Jack felt that this would be taking a mean advantage of Dave, when he was in one sense his guest. He was hopeful that Dave would open the way to the subject; but he did not, and finally rose to go, with an expression of regret that they were not to be companions on their excursion.

"I'll manage to meet him up there," thought Jack, as he climbed the stairs, "and I'll bring things to a focus."

Little did the young man dream of the manner in which this prophecy was to be fulfilled.

CHAPTER IX.

JOHNNY JUMPUP.

FROM the few words already given, you have gained some idea of the personality of the individual bearing the odd name of Johnny Jumpup.

He was a half-breed Sioux Indian, who lived by himself, in a cabin on Lost Island, at the northern extremity of the sheet of water called Dead Man's Lake. He was one of those mongrels, often seen on the fringe of civilization, whose nature seems to have been degraded by such contact, and who, while retaining many of the peculiarities of the American race, still display enough of its vicious tendencies and of the vices of the Caucasian to cause distrust among the majority of those with whom they come in contact.

The father of Johnny Jumpup was the notorious Rattling Runner, one of the worst miscreants that took part in the Minnesota massacres of 1862. He and thirty-seven others were tried by military commission at Mankato, and, having been found

guilty of the most atrocious crimes, were executed by order of President Lincoln, in the latter part of February, 1863. A strange fact was that, of this number, the rope which sustained Rattling Runner was the only one that broke.

I have no intention of dwelling upon that awful episode in the history of the young State of Minnesota, except so far as it directly concerns the incidents of this story. Rattling Runner led the band which slew the eldest son and the sister of Mr. Edwards. A number of fugitives took refuge on a small island in the upper part of Dead Man's Lake when hard pressed by the Sioux, and there every one of them was massacred. The fact that the little party all lost their lives on that spot caused it to be known afterward as Lost Island, while the body of water gave up its odd Indian title for that by which it is still known.

How the half-breed son of Rattling Runner came to be called Johnny Jumpup, I have never been able to learn. I suspect it was given to him in jest by some of the settlers, and, as is often the case, it clung to him. Had he not been a small child at the time of the Minnesota outbreak, he would have been one of the foremost offenders. He was peaceable and "civilized," because he

dared not be anything else, or rather because it paid him better to behave himself.

Dead Man's Lake lay about a dozen miles northeast of Wunkako, and was perhaps ten miles long, with a varying width of from a half-mile to three miles. Lost Island was entitled to the name only when the lake was swollen by rain. At such times, the neck of land connecting it with the main shore was submerged to the depth of a foot or two, and it became an island, comprising twelve or fifteen acres, covered with trees, dense undergrowth, and boulders and rocks. During most of the year, however, it was a peninsula.

On the upper end of Lost Island, as I have stated, Johnny Jumpup made his home. He had lived there for a long time in a cabin composed of logs, stones, bark, and the branches of trees. So far as known, he never had a companion, not even a dog. The hunters who visited his place during their rambles were treated so surlily that they rarely went a second time.

One fact must be admitted: the half-breed possessed wonderful skill as a sportsman. His traps, all made by himself, were far more effective than any contrivance of the white man's ingenuity, and he was an unerring marksman. When others

declared it useless to fish in the clear waters of the lake, because the fish would not bite, Johnny Jumpup was busy drawing the plump inhabitants from below the surface, and it may be said that he never came home empty-handed from a hunt.

A peculiarity of the fellow was that, although he inherited a fine rifle from his father, he very rarely made use of it. He had a hickory bow as long as himself, in the handling of which he was such an expert that he really needed no firearms. He pronounced the bow and arrow superior to the best Winchester, because, while the bow was just as accurate, its twanging did not frighten the game when he launched the deadly arrow.

It was easy for him to live. He brought enough peltries into Wunkako every spring to buy him tobacco and whiskey for months, and he consumed enormous quantities of both. The woods and lake furnished him abundant food, and gave him the means of purchasing anything else his fancy craved. The matter of clothing was simple. He might be considered the residuary legatee of the cast-off garments of a number of leading families in Wunkako. He occasionally acted as guide and helper for those persons, who, besides paying him a money fee, donated clothing and headgear, with

the result that Johnny Jumpup's appearance was often overwhelming in its picturesqueness, as was the case on the morning he assumed his duties as companion and director of Dave Seymour, during his excursion to Dead Man's Lake.

The half-breed was fond of strong drink. If he failed to show himself in Wunkako for several weeks, it was because he had a supply of the fiery stuff at his cabin. When that was exhausted, he visited the town with his jug, which was sure to be partly emptied before he reached his island home. When under the influence of liquor, he was morose, reserved, and dangerous, as more than one person learned when they attempted to have sport with him. If he came to Wunkako without gun or bow, he was certain to have his knife, which he was ready to use upon slight provocation. But, if he was not molested, he molested no one.

By following the highway which led by the home of Darak Edwards, a person could reach an arm of the lake, which was crossed by a substantial bridge. On the Monday morning appointed, Jack Patterson and Nate Baldwin walked to the house of Darak, carrying their guns and fishing-tackle. There the three entered a wagon, which

Mr. Edwards drove to the bridge, when he bade them good-by, wished them a jolly time, and returned to his farm.

Descending the bank to the edge of the water, which at that point was only a few rods in width, though quite deep, the three youths shoved a boat from the shingle into the water, stowed away their belongings, and then followed. There were generally several boats lying at this point or near, some of them belonging to people in Wunkako, and others to persons living near the lake. Johnny Jumpup owned two craft, but they were usually on the island, except when he came to the bridge on his way to town.

The morning was one of the loveliest of early autumn. A gentle breeze was blowing directly down the arm of water toward the lake, so that, after hoisting the small sail, there was no call for any one to exert himself in rowing. The temperature would have been delightful, but for a cause that has already been referred to.

The summer had been unusually warm and dry, and it was known that at different places the forests were burning. This filled the air with a haze, which at times became so dense as to be uncomfortable. The smoke spread over many square

miles of country, obscured the light of the sun, and raised the temperature to a degree that caused one to dislike exertion and to yearn for relief.

A brief sail down the water and the small boat debouched into the broad expansion which forms one of the most romantic lakes in a region noted for its beautiful sheets of water. Darak Edwards, sitting at the stern, held the tiller and the rope by which he could let out or draw in the sail, while his companions sat still and enjoyed the exhilarating pleasure to the full.

Far over to the left, quite close to shore, was another sailboat, skimming along almost on its side. Although the hour was early, there were some ahead of our young friends in the enjoyment of the place and day. Two miles to the right a third boat had lowered its sail and was at anchor. Through the glass which Jack Patterson had brought with him he saw two persons seated and fishing.

"And what is that right in front of us, coming this way?" asked Darak.

Jack, who was between the mast and the prow, swung around as if on a pivot, and pointed his glass toward Lost Island. After a moment's scrutiny he announced:

"It's a boat."

"We knew that before," answered Nate, "but who is in it?"

"If you will provide me with a glass with which I can look through a sail, I may be able to tell you, but, as it is, I cannot see anything of the person holding the tiller."

"It looks to me like Johnny Jumpup's craft," observed Darak.

"So it is; I recognize it; I suppose he is on his way to meet Dave Seymour."

The three were silent for a minute or two, when Darak remarked:

"It's rather odd that we should select the same day as he for our excursion; I hope we shall not meet."

"I suspect that Dave will take care that *that* does not occur," replied Jack, with a chuckle, which caused Darak instantly to ask:

"What do you mean by that?"

Jack lowered his glass and peered round the small mast, still smiling. He looked straight into the handsome face of the young captain and said:

"If you don't catch on to my sentence, I will analyze and parse it for you."

Darak's face flushed and he returned the steady

gaze of his friend without speaking, while Jack, still grinning, turned his head away and again lifted his glass.

"I would give this boat," reflected Darak, "to know whether he referred to that row of ours last June. I never hinted anything about it to a living person, and I'm mighty sure Seymour has kept a close mouth."

"It's Johnny Jumpup, sure enough!" exclaimed Nate Baldwin, as the two craft drew near each other.

The mongrel, although a skilful sailor, was obliged to tack, but, in doing so, his diagonal course caused him to cross the path of the other boat at a distance of about twenty yards. While doing so, he rose to his feet, saluted, and called out:

"How you like me?"

He was sober and in an unusually complacent mood, for it was a strange thing for him to do as he did. The cause was that he was provided with an outfit which he now wore in its entirety for the first time. He was so proud of it that he stood erect and allowed the frail craft to run itself for a minute or two, while his acquaintances admired him.

All three broke into unrestrainable laughter, for

it would be impossible to imagine a more comical appearance than that of Johnny Jumpup.

In the first place, he had a tall silk hat, which originally was a valuable one, and had been given to the half-breed by the owner, who became tired of it. It was of a fashionable make, and with a little brushing would have looked new. It was too large, however, for the present owner and came down to his eyebrows in front, while his ears stopped it from resting on his shoulders. His coarse black hair dangled from beneath, but a slight tap on the top of the hat would have snuffed him out like a candle extinguisher.

His coat was a blazer, with big, flaming-red stripes, and around the short neck was tied an immense handkerchief, which displayed every hue of the rainbow. The knot had worked itself under one ear. He wore no vest, but the shirt was a colored one, and the broad black sash he had exactly as it should be, for he had studied the fashion upon those who knew how to wear the article.

In the construction of the trousers, however, he had called into play considerable of his own ingenuity. At his cabin on Lost Island were half a dozen pairs, presented to him at different times. He was proud of them all, especially those that

were ultra-fashionable, and he studied for a long while how to display them to the best advantage.

His first idea was to wear two pairs at a time, but to do that he would have to draw one over the other, thus veiling its beauty. So he severed a white duck pair by ripping them through the middle of the body and leaving a half of that and one leg intact on one side, and the same on the other.

He repeated the process with his blue cheviots, and then stitched them together so that one half of each pair was white and the rest blue. The sash ought to have made suspenders unnecessary, but when he owned a yellow and a green pair he did not mean that they should lie home idle. They went through the same manipulation as the trousers and were on duty, being crossed in front and back. At the waist one of the buttons had worked off and was replaced by a wooden skewer. Somehow, too, he had looped one suspender several inches higher than the other, so that his remarkable pair of trousers, which cannot be said to have fitted him well, hung in a lop-sided fashion, and added to his comical appearance.

Johnny Jumpup, with a vague idea of the craze for imitating English fashions, had rolled the

white trousers leg to his knee, while perhaps out of deference to American independence the other flapped about his heels.

As for his shoes, he scorned to wear any except in the winter-time.

CHAPTER X.

A CHANGE OF DESTINATION.

THE three youths were convulsed with laughter. Indeed, Darak was so overcome that he fell to one side and forgot his duty with the tiller, until Johnny Jumpup shouted:

“Look out! you run into me!”

The boat had swerved so much that, had not Darak instantly roused himself and brought up the craft with a round turn, its bow would have crashed into the other with the sail. It was a close shave, and the two boats ran dangerously near each other.

“We’re all right now, Johnny,” he called.

The mongrel had dropped down on the appearance of peril and helped to avert the collision. In his energy his hat fell overboard, but he grabbed it before it floated beyond reach.

“What you think of my dress?” he asked, with a grin that reached almost to his ears.

“It is stunning,” replied Jack; “I never saw anything like it.”

"Ugh! me fix him; palefaces be mad."

"Yes," said Nate, "if we could get up a suit like that, we would make a sensation; aren't you afraid that Dave Seymour will be jealous of you?"

"Me don't care if he do," was the answer of Johnny, as he glided away, with the water dripping about his shoulders from his silk headgear.

The boys did not recover from their mirth until a half-mile separated the boats. Then they gave their attention to their own affairs.

It had been an understood thing between Jack and Nate that no reference should be made, in the presence of Darak, to the subject which was so sore to him. They had discussed it when alone, and Jack said sufficient to convince Nate that Darak was the one who had suffered the wrong. He did this in positive language and without revealing his secret.

"Keep quiet; say nothing, and it will come out all right before the snow flies. *I know it,*" were his assuring words.

Naturally they felt a sympathy for their comrade, whose manly qualities and bright mind caused every one who knew him intimately to admire and respect him.

A pathetic fact was the silence with which

Darak bore his injustice. He remained within himself, as may be said, uttering no complaint to any one. He had not visited Wunkako three times since the affair, for when he first did so, on the Fourth of July, the reception which he met and the slurs that he heard hurt him so much that he determined to keep away from his old acquaintances until the whole thing should be cleared up. His call at the houses of Nate and Jack was made in the evening, and was the first time he had trod the streets for more than a month. They knew his sensitiveness, and greatly helped matters by making frequent visits to him, all of which were cordially welcomed.

The boat had glided over the lake for a greater part of the distance, and Lost Island was looming on their right, when Darak made a singular remark:

“Boys, I propose that we don’t do any fishing in the lake.”

Both looked wonderingly at him.

“I am afraid that if we spend two or three days here, we shall meet Johnny and Dave Seymour. It is best we should not do so, at least that I should not meet them. The half-breed is unusually jovial to-day, but he is likely to more

than make it up by his moroseness. He and Dave will be up to some mischief."

Now, a part of Jack Patterson's cherished plan was that before this excursion ended he should hold the all-important interview with Dave Seymour. He could not carry out the praiseworthy scheme he had in mind without such meeting.

Unwilling to give any hint of what was in his mind, he asked:

"What do you suggest, Darak?"

"That we sail to the other end of this water, and then walk to Little Dead Man's Lake and do our fishing and hunting in that neighborhood."

"Whew!" whistled Nate; "it is two miles beyond the railroad, and that is three miles from the lake."

"You know there is an old cabin there which we can use to sleep in, and the fishing and hunting are as good as we can find here."

"But think of the walk through the smoke and heat," suggested Jack.

"We'll enjoy the rest all the more."

"All right; I'm agreeable, if Nate is."

"We are the guests of Darak," was the response of Nate.

"I will not insist upon it, if you feel that way,

but I am sure there will be trouble if we stay here. That half-breed is a treacherous fellow, and when he has been drinking Dave can persuade him to do anything he wishes."

"I hadn't thought of that," said Jack, who secretly resolved that, with only a few miles separating them, he would contrive in some way to have a private meeting with Seymour. "I agree with Darak."

"What do you say, Nate?"

"I'm suited."

"Then it's a go," remarked Darak with an air of relief, as they sped past Lost Island, of which they were abreast. "It is quite a tramp to Little Dead Man's Lake, but we ought not to mind it. We can reach it by noon, eat our lunch, and then see what there is to fish or hunt for."

Strange that not one of the three gave expression to another fear that was in their thoughts. There had been a visible increase of the yellowish-white smoke which all commented upon when setting out from the opposite end of the lake.

Darak made no reference to it, because of his fear that it would bring about a change of plan and lead them to stay at the larger body of water,

while the others refrained from doing so through sympathy for him.

A few minutes later, the prow of the boat lightly touched the shore, and the sail, which had been lowered while they were some distance away, was carefully stowed in the bottom of the craft, which was then pulled well up the bank, where there was no danger of its drifting off, and they gathered their traps for the wearisome tramp.

Besides their guns and fishing-tackle, they had a blanket apiece, their lunch, and a few extras, which made the walk anything but a light one.

At high water the two lakes were connected by a stream, through which the boat might have been urged and under the slight trestlework of the railway to the other body of water, which at such times covered two or three acres; but the long drought had almost dried up the stream. In some places it was entirely bare, with here and there a stagnant pool of no earthly use to them.

The entire distance was through the woods, where at times the undergrowth was so dense that they were forced to make considerable detours. When the increasing heat of the day and the universal prevalence of the smoke are remembered, it will be understood that by the time they reached

the railway-trestle, they were glad to sit down and take a long rest.

"I don't think we'll do any hunting or fishing to-day," remarked Nate Baldwin, removing his hat and mopping his forehead; "I'm pretty near tuckered out."

"If I had known of all this I wouldn't have urged you to make the change," said Darak, with a regretful expression.

"Never mind; it's a good deal farther to the big lake than to the small one, and won't we sleep sound to-night!"

"Helloa! there's the train."

The rapidly increasing roar showed that it was approaching at a fast rate from the east on its way to Wunkako. The boys stood up as it drew near, for there is always something in the passage of a railway-train under full speed which quickens the pulse and stirs the blood. The engineer saw them when a little way off, and saluted with a toot of his whistle.

"That's Number 17," said Darak, "and Matt Marsh is the engineer."

The man who held the throttle was an old acquaintance of the boys, and especially of Darak, whom he was quick to recognize. He waved his

hand to them, and, while thundering past, leaned far out of his cab and shouted something, accompanied by an excited gesture. But the din of his engine drowned his words.

"Have you any idea of what he said?" asked Darak of his companions.

"No; I couldn't catch a word," replied Nate.

"I guess it was some jesting remark to you, Darak," suggested Jake.

"He was too earnest for that; he ought to have known that we couldn't hear him."

"Perhaps he believed we would gather his meaning from his looks and motions."

"He pointed toward the big lake and shook his head."

"I guess he wanted to tell us where we would find the best fishing," said Darak, "and meant to show us we were making a blunder in going away from it. Matt is a great fisherman himself and has taken many fish from the big and little lakes, so he ought to know that one is about as good as the other."

"Well, boys, let's tramp ahead, for we shall never get to the old cabin by sitting here."

So they gathered up their loads and were off again. Despite their fatigue, they were in buoy-

ant spirits, much more so than they would have been had they caught the warning words of Matt Marsh, the engineer, which were:

“Get out of here as soon as you can, for the woods are all on fire!”

CHAPTER XI.

THE BACK TRACK.

IT was high noon when three tired, hot, and disgusted youths arrived at the cabin standing on the shore of Little Dead Man's Lake. With cool weather or with lighter burdens they would not have minded a thing like that, but everything joined to weary them to the last degree.

Had the circumstances been different, they would have found compensation in the refuge itself, for the cabin was not only substantial but in good condition. It had been erected some twenty odd years before by one of the pioneers of that section, who builded well, for he expected that it would probably serve as a defence against the fierce Winnebagoes or Sioux, who occasionally made raids through that part of the State.

The roof was intact and the sides were strong. The window panes had vanished long before under the pounding of the elements, but the windows were so strait that not one of the youths could

have forced his way through them. Therefore, no red man had ever performed the feat.

The building was simply a hollow shell, consisting of one large apartment, without any upper story. The heavy door had fallen to the floor because of the rusting of the hinges, but it could still be made to serve its purpose by lifting it up and leaning it against the sides of the opening.

But why do that? The youths had expected to sleep in the open woods or rest under some shelving rock or fallen trees, with only their blankets for a covering, and now they had a far better shelter than either. The floor was hard, smooth earth, so dry that it served as well as planking. By spreading their blankets upon it, the weary fellows could sleep as well as in their own cots at home.

All this was good, and I repeat, had they found other things as they expected they would have been grateful; but a woeful disappointment met them when they emerged from the forest and halted on the edge of Little Dead Man's Lake, for no lake was there.

There was not even a marsh. What had once been the bottom of the sheet of water was as dry as a powder-horn. When Nate Baldwin stepped upon it and kicked his foot along the surface, the

dust arose as if from the summer highway. Some of the deeper portions were damp, but the mud had curled up into millions of little chips, while myriads of fish had shrivelled to white, needle-like skeletons. It was a place of desolation and death. Not a sign of a living thing was visible.

"Boys," said Darak, with a grim smile, "I'll take it as a favor if each of you will kick me out of sight. I am the *fin-de-siècle* champion idiot; you can't find my equal anywhere."

"We were about as stupid as you in coming here," said Nate, "for if we had objected, you would not have insisted."

"But it was I that conceived the scheme, and made the proposition."

"And we who accepted it. After all, I don't see that any harm has been done. We can stay here over-night and then go back to the big lake."

"That's what we'll do; let's pay the cabin a visit."

They did so, finding it as I have described. They flung down their loads and set their guns inside, while they came out and sat on the ground in front, where it sloped away to the bed of the lake.

"There isn't a drop of water fit to drink within miles of us," added Darak.

"The people who once lived here must have had a well," suggested Jack.

"What need of it, when the lake was at hand?"

Nevertheless, the trio made search, but without discovering any water. Each was so thirsty that they would have set out on their return but for the possession of a bottle of milk, which Darak's mother had put up with his lunch and which more than once he had been on the point of throwing away. It contained about a pint, of which all partook sparingly, reserving the rest until in greater need of it.

"Fellows," said Jack, some time later, "you think it's best to wait till morning before going back to the lake?"

"Of course," replied Nate; "I haven't enough ambition to aim and fire at a deer or a bear if he should halt fifty feet away."

"And that's how I feel," added Darak; "I'm mighty sorry I brought you to this place, but since we came, let's stay till we are thoroughly rested."

"I suppose I ought to be as tired as either of you," said Jack, "but, if you have no objection, I will go back to the lake this afternoon."

The two looked at him in surprise.

"Don't imagine that I wish to desert you; I would much prefer to remain here, for I shall miss your company and my action may not strike you favorably. But I have a private reason which I will explain in the course of a week or so. Meanwhile, I beg that you will ask me no questions."

Not the faintest suspicion of the real explanation entered the mind of Nate Baldwin. He merely said:

"You always were queer in your fancies, Jack; I'm willing to wait as long as you can wish, but I'm sorry you didn't bring your fiddle along."

"Yes; it's a pity we hadn't a few more things to carry," growled Jack.

But Darak Edwards turned a sharp look upon his friend, who pretended to be interested in something on the other side of the bed of the lake.

Darak had not forgotten that peculiar remark of Jack when they were in the boat, and that there was a connection between it and the scheme in his head he did not doubt, though he couldn't fathom it.

"I don't know what he has in mind," he reflected, "and I won't interfere."

"I will not go," said Jack, after waiting for a minute, "if you have any feeling about it."

"Me! I assure you, I have none. Nate and I will be sorry to lose your company for the night, but we know you wouldn't propose what you have without reason, and we should be ungenerous to object or to seek to pry into your motives."

"That was nicely said and I thank you both. I won't start yet awhile."

The reader has suspected the reason of Jack Patterson for thus parting company with his friends, when he could offer no suitable explanation without revealing his secret. He dreaded that a meeting between Darak Edwards and Dave Seymour would take place before he could see the latter alone. He feared that this meeting would result in such serious trouble that he would be powerless to carry out his scheme. From a few words dropped by Darak, it was evident that his wound rankled so deeply that he was likely to do something desperate. He and Seymour, therefore, must be kept apart until after the latter learned the true situation.

Jack's plan was to make his way back to the lake and hunt up Seymour. It would not be hard to find him, for quite likely he would spend the night with the half-breed on Lost Island. When they were alone, he would tell him everything

and give him the choice of making reparation voluntarily or being exposed, as Jack had firmly resolved should be the case.

Lolling upon the earth, and talking the aimless nothings which come to three rugged lads who have little else to do, was so delightful that Jack lingered longer than he intended. When he rose to start, Nate observed:

"I'm mighty glad of one thing."

"What's that?"

"The woods are not so full of smoke as when we came."

There was no denying this and all were relieved.

"We would be in a bad fix if the fire reached us before we got back to the lake. Had the smoke or heat increased," said Darak, "I would have insisted that we leave at once, no matter how worn-out we might be."

With the help of his friends, Jack shouldered his blanket and such luggage as he carried on his back, including his jointed rod, so that all he had to take in his hand was his repeating-rifle. He hardly expected to find any use for this, but he did not mean to be caught at disadvantage. Besides, there was no other way of getting it to the lakeside.

"It will be dark when I reach there," he mused, after plunging into the woods and losing sight of his friends; "but that need make no difference. I can't lose my way, for I will keep near the bed of the stream which sometimes connects the two bodies of water. That will bring me out right."

At the railway-trestle, which was hardly a dozen feet high, he listened for the western-bound train, but, hearing nothing of it, pushed on. The days were growing short, and he had not gone half the distance when the gathering gloom showed that night was at hand. This obscurity was not caused by the vapor which had hovered over the country for several days, for, as all know who have seen it, there is a marked difference in their appearance.

Jack recalled that about half-way between the cabin and the lake the bed of the stream was so dry that it formed a good footpath. The three had made use of it, wishing they could have it all the way, because it was so easy to travel.

So Jack turned it to account, and while the shadows thickened he progressed quite rapidly toward Dead Man's Lake. There would be no moon until after midnight, and with so much smoke in the sky and among the shadows of the wood, it could have been of little help had it been

at the full. Accordingly, he improved the minutes and progressed faster than at any time since starting on his return.

He gave expression to the thought that had been in his mind a number of times.

“It’s curious that we haven’t seen a sign of any wild animal since we left home. There are plenty of them in the woods and the drought ought to bring them to the lake for water——”

As if in answer to this fancy, a low growl in front and on his left caused Jack to halt abruptly and peer ahead in the gloom.

“That means something,” he muttered, holding his rifle ready for instant use.

He was not kept waiting. The growl was repeated, and then came a crashing and tearing of the undergrowth and the largest bear he had ever seen swung into the dry bed of the stream, hardly a dozen rods in front.

Under the belief that he was about to be attacked, Jack brought his rifle to his shoulder and waited for him to come a little closer before “pumping him full of lead.” But to his astonishment he discovered that the animal was walking away, and consequently in the same direction with himself.

The grim humor of the situation struck the youth.

"I wonder whether he has any scheme in mind which takes him to the lake to meet some person. It can't be Seymour, for the two could not have any doings in common. I have no objections, so long as he travels at a brisk gait."

It was not probable that this curious procedure would continue long. The bear ought to have scented the danger behind him, but he continued to act for some minutes as if he knew nothing of it. He kept up the same moderate lumbering gait, while Jack cautiously followed, taking care to increase rather than diminish the space between them.

It was hard to keep exact trace of bruin, for the darkness was increasing and the undergrowth which overhung the bed of the brook so shrouded him that only now and then could the shaggy back be discerned undulating like the heaving sea at night.

Once it vanished, and, uncertain what it meant, Jack stopped and then cautiously tiptoed forward. To his consternation, he saw the beast rear on his haunches when barely twelve feet from him. He came up in the gloom as if emerging

from a cavern in the earth. Something had alarmed him.

Again Jack levelled his weapon, but the action of the bear indicated that, while he had scented danger, it was not from the rear, where Jack stood with pointed rifle, but from the front.

CHAPTER XII.

A NIGHT JOURNEY.

JACK was waiting to make sure of his aim, when there was a bright flash from the gloom beyond the bear, and the crack of a rifle sounded through the woods. Some one had fired from a point hardly a rod beyond.

This brought Jack himself in direct range, and his escape from death was narrow. The bullet which crashed through the skull of the huge animal sped on down the bed of the stream and missed the forehead of the youth by only a few inches.

Whoever the man was on the other side of the bear, he understood his business, for his shot was almost instantly fatal. The brute sagged heavily downward, made several sweeps with his paws, and then became still: he was dead.

Jack's first impulse was to hail the stranger who had appeared so unexpectedly, but it is natural to distrust any one whom we approach in the dark,

in a lonely place. He therefore stepped aside from the bed of the brook, and, moving softly among the trees, where it was impossible for any one to see him, awaited what was to follow.

He expected to hear the man speak, while the latter was examining the carcass as best he could in the gloom, or strike a match to view it, but he did neither, and, in the oppressive hush, Jack heard him walking over the depressed portion of the wood. He was going toward the dry lake and the cabin where Nate and Darak were probably asleep.

The gloom prevented Jack from seeing the outlines of the form which passed in front of him, at a distance of not more than three or four feet. It would seem that there ought to have been no cause for misgiving, but the lips of the youth remained mute. He could lose nothing by holding his peace and perhaps might gain a great deal.

But hardly had the stranger passed, when Jack stepped back into the path and crouched low, with his gaze fixed on the other. The youth was striving to bring the man against the sky, where no vegetation interposed, and he succeeded.

The head and shoulders could be seen, but nothing more. So far as Jack was able to judge, the

stranger was either bareheaded or wore a small cap. His gun must have been in a trailing position, for it was invisible.

Jack was certain he had stepped back from the undergrowth without making the least sound, but he erred, for the other showed that he heard something suspicious. He stopped abruptly and listened, the head turning from side to side, as if seeking to locate the danger.

Jack did not stir and scarcely breathed. He peered intently into the gloom, and wished that he had stayed where he was until the man passed beyond hearing.

The latter must have decided that the cause which alarmed him was slight, for while the youth was watching the shadowy head and shoulders they vanished. The fellow had resumed his walk, his feet giving out no more noise than the shadow of a cloud gliding over the surface of the lake.

"He's a hunter," mused Jack, "and if he had worn a plug-hat and used a bow and arrow, instead of a rifle, I would have known who he is."

The darkness was now so profound that the young man decided to keep between the banks of

the dry stream until he reached the lake. He would have to wet his feet and ankles, for he had not forgotten the stagnant pools passed on his tramp during the afternoon; but that was a small matter as against safety. This course would avert all possibility of going wrong, while a sudden turn in the bed of the stream might throw him out so completely that when he tried to come back to it he would go wholly astray and be forced to wait until daylight.

He picked his way round the bulky carcass and then splashed into a pool, in which he sank almost to his knees, and he had hardly emerged when he entered another, more extensive though not so deep.

"This is where we didn't walk this afternoon," he muttered, graduating his progress more carefully, "but where I have to promenade now."

He suffered intensely from thirst. He had left the partially filled bottle of milk with Darak and Nate, and he felt as if he would give every thing he owned or expected ever to own for one good draught of cold, invigorating water. But he had come a long way and must be in the vicinity of the lake, where he could quench his thirst. Though that was unusually low, the water was

comparatively cool and good, and how eagerly he would quaff of it!

But as he tramped onward, he was sure he could not wait. Why not drink from one of the pools through which he was continually splashing? Ordinarily the water was not inviting, but it had grown irresistibly attractive, and he decided to take a swallow or two, enough to relieve his torture, the like of which he had never before experienced.

So it was that when he stepped into another pool he halted. Not wishing to "go it blind," he drew his match-safe from his pocket and struck a light. The pool was several yards long, a foot or two wide, and looked deep and clear. Still holding the little twist of flame over his head, he kneeled down, intending to apply his lips and take one good long swallow.

In the act of doing so he was startled by a buzzing whirr on his right, the terrible meaning of which he knew on the instant. By the tiny illumination he saw an enormous rattler, in the act of coiling for a strike. Dropping the match, Jack leaped backward with an exclamation over his narrow escape. He did not remain in the bed of the stream, but plunged among the trees and

fought his way for several rods, before daring to halt. Then he paused with a rapidly beating heart and listened.

All was still. It was not to be supposed that the serpent had followed him, for the *Crotalus* species rarely does that. It had probably remained in coil and was waiting for him to come within striking distance.

"Thank heaven that I stopped to drink," was Jack's fervent thought; "if I hadn't, I would have stepped on it. What a pity I can't kill it."

The fact that he had met the deadly reptile in the bed of the stream was no assurance that others were not in the wood, and he stepped softly, listening intently for the dreaded warning which, once heard, is never to be forgotten. The brushing of a limb against his knee caused a quick recoil, but he found a little comfort in the belief that, at his cautious pace, he was sure to receive timely notice of peril.

But Jack had run into another danger, which he sought to avoid from the first. He had abandoned his only infallible guide, and now, among the trees, where his vision was useless, he could not know the real course he was following. Certain, however, that he had flanked the partic-

ular rattler which had given him the shock, he set out to return to the natural footpath, along which he meant to continue with a caution that would avert a repetition of his frightful experience.

Five, ten, fifteen minutes were passed in this guarded work, when he paused. He ought to have reached the path long before, but was still among the trees.

“This is a go! I have lost my way and more than likely have wandered deeper into the wood. If so, I shall have to make a night of it.”

It was out of his power to think of any way to help himself. Every one is aware of the impossibility of maintaining a straight course, or of keeping the points of the compass, when lost in a forest. He recalled the words of a veteran settler with whom he once spent several days in hunting:

“There’s no need of a compass, for I have three sure ways of finding out all the points and they never fail. In the first place, three-fourths of the moss on trees grows on the north side; the heaviest boughs on spruce trees are always on the south side, and the topmost twig of every uninjured hemlock tips to the east. You just remember these things and you’ll never get lost.”

All this was excellent counsel, but such knowledge is useless when the sun is not shining. No Leatherstocking, Kenton, Boone, or Deerfoot can teach one how to locate himself in the depth of the forest, when no sun, moon, or stars are visible.

The hardest thing, however, for a person to do, when caught in that predicament, is to remain motionless. The impulse to grope and continue the search is almost irresistible, even when one knows the chances are that he will involve himself the more inextricably.

Jack was tired enough to sink to the earth and sleep till morning or far beyond, but he could not force himself do so. He had been scared away when about to swallow the needed draught of water, and now that he had recovered from the shock, his thirst was more tormenting than ever. He was seriously alarmed by the thought that he would have to wait till the morrow before obtaining water.

A half-hour more he groped among the trees, catching his feet in running vines, recoiling at the gentle prick of a briar under the belief for the instant that it was the sting of a snake, bumping against the trunks in spite of the hand which he kept extended in front of him, and several times

stumbling to his knees, until at last he was utterly worn out.

How often our most brilliant expectations are followed by the bitterest disappointment! He and his two friends had set out that morning overflowing with anticipation, and now two persons could not have been more miserable than they, or rather than one, for it was impossible to think of Nate and Darak being in such a wretched plight as he had been ever since leaving the bed of the stream.

A faint but increasing roar came through the woods, broken in upon by the distant sound of a steam-whistle. A railway-train was thundering through the forest, and Jack listened as if to the voice of a friend. Amid the tumult sounded a short, quick deepening of the sound, which he translated aright.

"That is made by the cars rattling over the trestle. I didn't think it was in that direction."

It seemed to come from Dead Man's Lake, but the young man had enough sense to know that the mistake was his own. He had mixed the points of the compass and was now unexpectedly set right.

Like a sensible person, he lost no time in turning his knowledge to account. First he shifted his

position, so that his back was toward the trestle-work, when it followed that he faced the lake, though such might not have been the case had he wandered very far from the dried-up stream; but conceding, what he was certain was true, that he was at no great distance from the path which had served him so well, he was sure of reaching the water at some point, if he could maintain anything like a direct course.

“I have heard that a person in my situation cannot prevent himself travelling in a circle, which I suppose is because he is right or left handed and one leg is stronger than the other; but I believe I can do it.”

Under this impulse, he kept up his groping until he had gone a considerable distance. It would have been vastly helpful if another train had been due, but none was likely to pass over the road before morning, too late to aid him.

The time came, however, when the wanderer gave up trying to find his way out of the forest. Striking a match, he saw by his watch that it was nearly eleven o'clock. He had travelled many miles, and now decided to lie down and commit himself to the keeping of Providence.

During all this wandering to and fro, he had

heard nothing of serpents or wild animals, and did not believe there was any danger of molestation. He might have started a fire, but he could not stay awake ten minutes to keep it going, and he, therefore, gave up any such intention; but while holding the tiny match over his head and peering into the gloom, he saw the reflection of water. He wonderingly advanced a few steps. Could he believe his eyes? He stood on the shore of Dead Man's Lake.

With an expression of thankfulness, he knelt down and took a "long and solemn draught," which was more delicious, soul-reviving to him than had ever been a quaff from crystal mountain-spring. Then he rose to his feet with a sigh of happiness and stared into the gloom. As he did so, he made the discovery that he was not alone.

CHAPTER XIII.

WHO CAN IT BE?

THOROUGHLY to enjoy repose one must be thoroughly tired. Have you ever been so wearied from walking that you could not rest? If that happens again, recline on your back and elevate your feet. The sensation will be delightful, and is accounted for by the fact that the blood which has accumulated in the lower extremities is thus helped to diffuse itself equally through the system. I have tested the remedy, which was given to me by an old Indian, and found it work to a charm. You are welcome to it.

The three youths who lolled on the ground in front of the hunter's cabin by the shore of the dried lake managed to find support for their feet, and enjoyed it so much that, as I have related, Jack Patterson lingered longer than he intended. Had he not done so, he would have escaped the stirring experiences which followed.

After his departure, Nate and Darak felt too in-

dolent to do anything. They soon found comfort in a sitting posture, and, with hardly any other change, watched the afternoon draw to a close.

The lessening of the vapor which had so oppressed them at first, the perceptible improvement in the temperature, and the delicious sense of rest almost justified the remark of Darak that it was worth all the discomfort to enjoy the experience that followed.

"I have heard that an old scout during the Revolution once told General Washington that if he wanted to have a real good night's rest he must sit up for two nights; but I don't think I shall ever yearn for another walk from Dead Man's Lake to this place, unless it may be in the winter-time, when we can use snow-shoes."

"Darak, are you aware that we haven't a mouthful of lunch left? I have been investigating and know whereof I affirm."

"I wouldn't care for that, if we had a supply of water. I don't imagine that there is more than two or three quarts of milk."

"Hardly; now, as we shall not be able to quench our thirst this side of the lake, unless from some of those repelling pools in the bed of the stream, the question is, when shall we abolish that milk?"

It won't keep sweet much longer, and, as I estimate it, there is about enough to moisten our lips, if we are economical in its use."

"Let's get it out of the way now? What's the use of keeping it on hand when we know we have it and we want it so bad?"

"Eminently wise and sensible words, and, since it is your property, of course you will step inside our country residence and bring it forth."

"I'll be hanged if I will!" responded Darak, to whom the indisposition to move overcame his desire for water, or at least he pretended that it did. "You have claimed to be my guest, and therefore it would be gross discourtesy not to allow you to imbibe before me."

"I'll cheerfully waive that point."

"But I won't!"

"Let's toss up," proposed Darak.

"How?"

"Take your knife from your pocket, open the blade, fling it in the air, and if the point is turned down stream, why I am to bring out the milk; if it points any other way, you are to assume the contract."

"Think of the baseness of your proposal! Consider the work you are trying to heap upon me.

I am not only to draw out my knife, but to open the blade and toss it in the air; I decline to be imposed upon."

"There's nothing mean about me," remarked Darak, shoving his hand in his pocket and bringing out a half-dollar.

"Now, if heads show, you are to bring out the milk; if tails, then I am to sit still and see you produce the documents."

"All right; go ahead," replied Nate, too indifferent to grasp the conditions of the wager—"hold on! that isn't fair!"

"Too late; it's tails; I hold my place; begone and bring out the wine, thou caitiff."

"It may be all right, but when I am not so tired I would like to discuss the conditions of that proposition which you submitted. I think there is something lop-sided about them."

"They were accepted, however, by you; your protest comes too late; you are nonsuited, thrown out of court, so to speak."

Nate made a great ado of climbing to his feet, and his gait was that of a man of four-score when he tottered through the door and began fumbling around the traps and bundles inside.

"Ah!" he exclaimed; "there is much more of

the precious fluid than erstwhile I fancied, and now cool, how delicious! It gives me new life."

This was followed by a sound as of water gurgling into one's mouth and down his throat, continued so long that Darak shouted:

"Leave some for me! What are you doing?"

"My, my! I didn't know that ice-cold milk could taste so good. Talk of the nectar of the gods! Or the 'moss-covered bucket, dripping with coolness,'—it isn't in it with this. I fain would imbibe again."

And the gurgling was louder than before.

Darak bounded to his feet and dashed through the door. There stood the rascal with the bottle uncorked in his hand.

"The laugh is on me," said Darak; "I was sure you wouldn't leave a drop."

"There doesn't seem to be much more than that as it is," remarked Nate, holding the bottle up to the light. "Oh, for the magic of Heller, who could bring enough fluid out of this to float the *City of Paris* or the *Lucania*."

Stepping outside, the two emptied the bottle, dividing the contents as equally as possible. Nate's turn came last, and he held the bottom of the bottle turned toward the sky with the mouth

between his lips, and squeezed and patted it as if he would urge it to give up more when none was left.

The drink was welcome, though it seemed only to aggravate the thirst which had been consuming the two for hours.

The afternoon was drawing to a close, and they seated themselves on the ground, using the side of the cabin for a back-rest.

"Ah, ha! there's a sympathetic creature," remarked Nate, pointing across the lake, where, to the astonishment of both, they saw a noble-looking buck that had come down to the bank and stood staring at them, as if trying to decide to what species of animals they belonged. "He knows we are hungry, and offers himself for our evening meal."

"He is not a very wise deer, for he seeks a drink where there is none."

"He may have expected us to divide the milk with him. Little does the innocent creature suspect the selfishness of man. Darak, if you will be good enough to bring out your gun, and take aim, why, I'll help by pulling the trigger; that is, if you will come over by me: *that* is a part of the bargain."

"Hold him where he is till I have a chance," whispered Darak, springing to his feet, running into the cabin, and instantly reappearing, rifle in hand.

But the buck had seen enough. The abrupt action of one of the youths scared him, and, whirling about, he was off like a flash.

"I did all I could to persuade him that it was his duty to stand there, where he offered so fair a mark, until you could pink him, but he doesn't seem to agree with me."

"Too bad," remarked the disappointed Darak.

"It is easy enough to fix it," said Nate.

"How?"

"Dash across the lake—there's no water to drown you—and into the woods after him; I am sure that if you will run eight or ten miles, as hard as you can, you will tire him out, for he is in want of water. Then cut the choicest steaks from him and bring them here like a good fellow, and I will reward you by cooking them; that is, if you gather the wood and start the fire."

Darak gave his companion a reproving look and replaced his gun in the cabin.

By the time night had fully come, the youths had recovered from their excessive fatigue and

were not averse to a little exertion. They tramped for some distance along the dry bed of the lake, but there was nothing attractive in that, and they soon returned to the cabin.

"I don't think we are in danger of being disturbed by wild animals," remarked Darak, "but we may as well make all the preparation we can."

By their joint efforts, the massive door was lifted up on end and tipped against the sides of the opening. A loose piece of planking which they had noticed was propped against it, so that it was quite secure. There were no crevices at the sides or top through which a cat could force itself, and the most powerful man could not push the door backward, provided the prop did not slip from its place.

There was no call to kindle a fire, and Darak and Nate stretched themselves out on their blankets, which were spread in one corner. They talked for a while, but soon sank into slumber.

From some cause, Nate grew restless as the time passed. While half-asleep, he shifted his posture several times, but still his slumber was broken. Finally he awoke, and, lying on his side, listened to the regular breathing of Darak.

“Lucky fellow!” he thought; “I don’t understand what keeps me awake.”

As he lay, his face was turned toward the door. It was invisible in the gloom, but there was just enough light outside to trace the contour of the two narrow windows. His senses were strung to the highest point, else he would not have been so quick to make the alarming discovery that some animal or person was at work with the door. It seemed to the youth that whoever or whatever it was, he was exerting all his strength to push the door inward, so as to allow him to follow it.

“I believe it is a person,” thought Nate; “and who can he be?”

CHAPTER XIV.

THE TEST OF COURAGE.

THE proof that he was not alone on the margin of Dead Man's Lake was so positive that Jack Patterson had no room for mistaking it. He had risen to his feet, after his refreshing draught of water, when some one hailed him:

"Helloa, is that you, Jumpup?"

Jack identified the voice as that of Dave Seymour, and, yielding to an impulse which he himself hardly understood, he replied, imitating the tones of the mongrel as best he could:

"You no think I come, eh?"

"Of course, for we were to meet here; but I didn't suppose you had time to get back: what's the news?"

While the words were in his mouth, Dave was advancing toward Jack, who did not dare retreat. Seeing, too, that the comedy must quickly end, he broke into laughter.

"That's the first time I was ever taken for a half-breed Sioux."

"Well, I'll be shot!" exclaimed the amazed Seymour; "is it you, Jack?"

"I have a suspicion that it is; I didn't see you at all, while it is no wonder that you should think me Jumpup, if you were expecting him."

"Well, I was and I wasn't. You remember I told you the other night that I had engaged him to go with me on this excursion?"

"Yes; we met him this morning on his way up the lake to join you."

"So he told me; fine suit that of his."

"Never saw its equal."

"I made him go home and change it for a proper one; he is now in the right kind of a hunting-outfit; we sailed over to this side of the lake and he went off on a little excursion of his own; I didn't care about the tramp in the woods and was waiting for him; when I heard some one moving, I naturally took him for Jumpup."

"Then he didn't wear his silk hat to-night."

"I rather think not; he is too anxious to save it for state occasions."

"Did he take his bow and arrows with him?"

"You know Johnny Jumpup now and then makes use of his rifle; he laid aside his old-fashioned weapons and took his gun on this little hunt-

He said he knew where to find a herd of deer, and he wanted a big buck that he has been after for some time."

Jack Patterson had heard enough. The man who shot the bear in the bed of the stream and then pressed on in the direction of the dry lake was the mongrel Johnny Jumpup. Seymour was trying to mislead him.

"But, Jack, what does this mean? Are you here alone?"

"Yes; I left Darak and Nate at the cabin several miles off; they will stay there till morning."

"You haven't quarrelled with them?"

"No; I came all the way to this place to see you."

"To see me!" repeated the other; "what can I do for you?"

"Are we certain to be alone for a half-hour or so?"

"Well, there's the chance of Johnny turning up any time, though I don't expect him for several hours. We'll go down the shore of the lake a little way. Follow me, off here to the right."

Seymour walked a hundred yards or more and then sat down on the sloping bank, with the dark, gloomy forest behind them, and the smooth, un-

ruffled lake at their feet. No human being was near, and they were free to say what came into their heads without fear of its reaching other ears.

Jack took his seat within arm's length of Dick, who may have dimly suspected what was coming, though he could not have dreamed of it all.

It was the opportunity which Jack had long sought, and he meant that it should not slip by unimproved. He intended, too, to waste no words.

"You remember, Dave, what took place on graduation day, last June, at the academy?"

"I don't think I shall ever forget that, or," he added, after a brief pause, "the injury Darak Edwards did me. I haven't yet received that prize."

Jack ignored the last words.

"It has been in my mind many times to make an appeal to you."

"Make an appeal to me!" repeated Dave, turning his amazed face toward the other; "I don't understand what you mean."

"Dave, I am sorry for you," continued Jack feelingly; "you are in a bad situation, but I hope we can find some way out without too much humiliation for you."

Jack knew that his companion was staring at him through the gloom, and was prepared for his angry response:

"There are some things I won't stand even from you; I warn you to be careful of what you say; we are alone, and I can—kill you if you go too far."

Jack Patterson showed moral as well as physical courage, for he went on without hesitation:

"I know who wrote the composition that was awarded the prize."

"So do I; *I* wrote it."

"No; Darak Edwards wrote it, and on the Monday morning previous to graduation you substituted it for your own and handed it to Miss Peters, who credited you with the authorship."

"It's a lie and you know it. Have you come here to insult me? You must take back those words, or, by heaven, I will make you!"

The indignant Seymour rose threateningly to his feet.

"Keep cool and hear me through; when I am done, you may get as angry as you please and do whatever you choose; *I know that Darak wrote it.*"

"You know it? Yes: as others know it—from

his own lying lips. You can't find any other person that says so."

"You are mistaken. I heard another person say the same thing—one, too, whose word on that subject you will not question."

"Who was that?"

"*You!*"

Dave Seymour stood towering over the slight figure which looked calmly up at him through the gloom.

"*Me!* Are you crazy?"

"If you will sit down I will explain."

"I will not sit down."

"Very well; I will rise, too, though I am not so tall as you."

And standing upright before the infuriated Seymour, Jack Patterson said:

"On the night after the occurrence, you and Darak met on the road between Wunkako and his house. Now, it was not he who told me this; he has never hinted it to me, and I do not believe he has referred to that meeting to a living person. I stood under the tree, just over the fence, and heard every word that passed between you, excepting the opening sentences. I saw your furious fight and saw how badly he punished you.

I heard you admit to him that you did change the compositions, and you forgot yourself so far as to gloat over it and tell him that he was not smart in allowing you to outwit him, that a person must hustle to get along in these times, and more to the same effect. I heard all this, Dave, and you can never know how inexpressibly I was shocked."

Dave Seymour stood a minute rigid and speechless. Then he staggered back a single pace and dropped down. Jack did the same, and, without waiting for him to speak, sought to drive home the arrow:

"You were carried away by the excitement during the afternoon, and, having gone so far, of course saw no way of remedying matters; but let us put our heads together and figure out some plan; I am sure Darak will meet you half-way."

He paused for some response, but there was none. He could hear Seymour breathing hard and fast, and knew that his whole being was quivering with excitement.

"Suppose you send a note to Professor Fetterman and say you have found out there was a mistake, and request him to forward the prize to Darak. Probably he will want some more explanation, but he will not fail to do as you ask,

and you can refuse to add anything to what you have written."

This was all that Jack could say, and he determined not to utter a word until his companion had spoken.

"Jack," he asked in a husky undertone, "have you ever told what you have just said to any one?"

"No, and never shall unless——"

"Unless what?"

"What's the use of my saying that which came into my mind, since it is a contingency that can never occur?"

"But I insist upon hearing what you started to say."

"I was about to declare that I would never reveal the secret unless you refused to do justice to Darak. But you will do him justice, won't you, Dave?"

Striving to repress his passion, the young man now replied more fully:

"Admitting what you have said, do you not see that I would be eternally disgraced if I did as you wish? I would never dare show my face in Wun-kako again."

"But what of Darak? What of your duty? What of your God?"

"Enough; none of that to me. There is nothing on earth that could persuade me to make such a fool of myself. Don't say anything more; you are wasting words; you might have saved yourself all this trouble. You ask me if I will confess that Darak Edwards should receive the prize, and I answer now and for all time, no, *no*, NO!"

"Very well; then I shall compel you to do so."

"Compel me! How?"

"I shall tell the whole truth to the world. At present it is a question of veracity between you and him; *my* testimony will settle it with every one forever."

"*And you will expose me!*" muttered Dave Seymour, beside himself with fury, as he reached out and gripped the arm of Jack Patterson like a vise; "you shall never leave this spot until you give your pledge that you will not open your lips to a soul."

"And that, Dave Seymour, I shall never do! I defy you!"

CHAPTER XV.

WHAT HAS HE BEEN DOING?

No one could have shown higher courage than Jack Patterson, when he defied the infuriated Dave Seymour. He knew that physically he was no match for the fellow, who could crush him to the earth as if he were an eggshell under his feet, but he cared nothing for that. He was ready to die before pledging himself to close his lips when duty told him to speak.

Now, Dave Seymour had done as mean a thing as can be conceived, and he was ready to do anything else that was despicable, but do not suspect for an instant that he was a murderer. That was an appalling depth which he had not reached, nor can it be conceived that anything could induce him to make the descent. He was angry enough at Jack to slay him, but he had no thought of doing so. Possibly he would not have mourned if some fatal accident had overtaken his companion, nor would he have cared had some other hand smote

him, but he was not ready himself to play the awful rôle.

But Dave was indulging in "bluff," as it is called, and was ready to go to any length in hypocrisy and deception.

Standing a moment as if debating the matter, he asked:

"Jack, have you had supper?"

The question almost lifted Patterson off his feet, for it was accompanied by a total cessation of Dave's threatening manner. His fists dropped at his sides and his hands entered the pockets of his coat. His voice sounded natural, and any one coming upon the spot at that moment would never have dreamed that an unpleasant word had passed between the two. A trait of Jack was the quickness with which he "caught on" to a situation like this. With hardly a second's hesitation, he answered:

"I'm hungry enough to eat a pair of boots."

"Come with me and I'll fix you."

Jack was a-hungered, for he had been a long time without food, and, though he was distrustful of Dave, he followed him without hesitation.

Seymour did not have his gun with him, from which Jack decided that his camp or headquarters

was not far off. His guide led the way over the neck of earth, now far above the surface of the lake, which connected Lost Island and the mainland.

"Jumpup isn't fond of company," he explained, dropping back beside Jack, "but I've arranged that I'm to sleep at his residence while I'm away from home. He kicked a little, but I gave him an extra dollar and a flask of red-eye that fetched him."

"You don't think he is there now? I prefer not to meet him, Dave," said Jack, whose distrust of the mongrel was far greater than of his companion.

"You forget that I told you he had gone off on an excursion of his own."

"But you are expecting him back?"

"I don't believe he will show up for an hour or more; if he does, you needn't mind him; he won't disturb you, at any rate not while I'm with you."

It was a short walk to the old cabin occupied by Johnny Jumpup, the half-breed. A light shining among the trees guided the two to the spot, and Jack was partly prepared for what awaited him. He had seen the outside of the structure, but had never crossed the threshold, as he did now directly on the heels of Dave Seymour.

The light was diffused by a lamp suspended from the middle of the ceiling, which ceiling consisted of large limbs of trees, covered with sod, leaves, dirt, and grass. The interior was filled with peltries, some cured and dried to the point of crackling when they were stirred, bows and arrows, knives, clothing, and bric-à-brac so plentiful that it isn't worth a description. The whole thing formed a jumble such as you would have expected to find in the home of the mongrel.

At one end was a rough stone fireplace, where, despite the warmth of the night, a heap of embers was still aglow. The odor of broiling fish filled the air, and several of them, crisped and browned to perfection, lay on the ground near the fire, wrapped in large leaves.

Dave unwrapped two of these and handed them to Jack. They were seated on the ground and nothing in the nature of knife or fork was visible. It made no difference, for they had come into this section prepared to rough it.

"I've had supper," said Dave, "but I'll keep you company."

Truly, hunger is the best sauce, and the meal which Jack Patterson made in this primitive fashion was one of the most enjoyable of his life.

But he ate faster than a regard for the laws of hygiene would have permitted. He was uneasy and anxious to get away from the place before the return of the half-breed.

Young, active, and rugged, the rest which he had gained, and the mental agitation of the last half-hour, acted as tonics to his system. The wearied feeling was gone, and he was impatient to carry out his resolution to return to Nate Baldwin and Darak Edwards without waiting for the morrow. The night was far along, and it was doubtful whether he could reach the old cabin before daylight, but he felt he *must* to so.

There was no doubt in his mind as to the identity of the man whom he met in the bed of the stream and who shot the black bear. It was Jump-up, and he was on his way to the cabin by the bed of the smaller body of water.

What was his errand? It meant no good; of that Jack was convinced, and the feeling that his presence and help were needed to thwart the ends of the miscreant made it hard to restrain his impatience.

"I assure you, Dave, that I appreciate your kindness; I don't believe in the whole State of Minnesota you could find a person hungrier than I

was a little while ago, but I feel now as if I shall need no food for a week to come. I have drank enough water, too, to last as long."

"I'm glad of that, and now we may as well lie down, for you must be tired."

"I thank you again, but I am going back to the boys to-night."

"Why, it is all of five miles, and you can't find your way in the darkness."

"It does look foolish, I'll admit, but I'm worried."

"What about?"

"There are more forest fires than Nate and Darak suspect," said Jack, treading close to a fiction, "and they may be in a bad fix."

"But water is near them."

"Little Dead Man's Lake is as dry as a bone; they would have to make a run of five miles to reach water that would be any protection. I'll have to go to them, Dave."

"But they ought to know their danger as well as you."

"They ought to, but I don't believe they do."

It was hard to discuss the question without being obliged to tell an untruth or else to say that his solicitude was not because of the forest fires but

resulted from his distrust of the Sioux half-breed. So Jack moved through the door of the cabin, as if the discussion was ended.

Dave Seymour accompanied him along the neck of land, where the vegetable growth was slight, after which the shore of the lake was followed to where the communication existed at times with the smaller body of water. As they walked they talked.

"Now Jack," said Seymour, as if the matter was of indifferent interest to him; "we may as well have an understanding about that little thing we were talking about."

"That's what I want, Dave," kindly replied Jack.

"I believe you said you would give me a week in which to fix it."

"I will be glad to do so, if you need it. How long do you expect to be in this neighborhood with Jumpup?"

"I did mean to pass the week here, but now I shan't stay more than a day or two; like enough I'll go home to-morrow. How is it with you fellows?"

"We thought of spending a week also, if we found things pleasant, but the air is so full of

smoke and it is so hot and dry that we are likely to go back by Wednesday or Thursday at the latest."

"You won't make any move before, say, Saturday night? This is Monday, you know."

"No; it's Tuesday; midnight passed some time ago. I'll promise to say nothing to any one before Saturday night. I will except Darak and Nate, for I may want to prepare Darak for what is coming."

"All right; I'll leave it in your hands. Good-night and good luck to you."

Now Dave Seymour may have thought he was deceiving Jack Patterson, but, if so, he made a great error.

"He has no more intention of owning up and telling Professor Fetterman to turn over the watch and chain to Darak than he has of making a journey to the moon. He's up to some mischief, though what it is I can't imagine."

Still he could not help theorizing.

"If Dave intended to do the right thing, he would have asked me to advise him as to the best way of doing it. He never said a word about it. I am more surprised by that than by his sudden change of front when he threatened me. One

minute," thought Jack, with a grim smile, "he told me I should not leave the spot until I gave him the pledge not to expose him, and his next remark was to ask whether I had had supper, and when I told him I hadn't he fed me.

"That was because he found he couldn't scare me. He hasn't the nerve to attack a person with purpose to do him mortal injury, but he means to plan something for Jumpup, and what it is is more than I can guess, but I believe Nate and Darak just now are in more danger than I."

You have learned enough to know that the task of returning to the cabin in the woods was one that could not be viewed with pleasure, even if Jack's elastic frame had fully rallied from its fatigue. To reach the spot, he must stick to the bed of the stream which he had used before. In that bed he narrowly escaped a rattlesnake and an encounter with the man whom he dreaded above all others. The same thing was likely to occur again, with more disastrous consequences. And yet the young man did not hesitate in his task.

He feared the rattlers. Those reptiles are addicted to gliding about at night, and he might step upon one before he could leap out of its way. To guard against this danger, he tried an artifice.

Before turning into the bed of the stream, he left behind him all his luggage except his gun and blanket. They were deposited at the base of a tree where they could be readily found on his return, and where no one was likely to disturb them. He wrapped the blanket so loosely around his shoulders that the lower folds flapped about his ankles, being held just high enough to avoid tripping him. With this as a shield it would probably receive the sting of any rattler that struck at him.

But it was only one of the precautions taken against the venomous reptiles. He walked slowly, keeping the blanket in motion, and made considerable ado, too slight of itself to be heard afar, but enough to rouse the ire of any serpent within a few yards of him.

Advancing thus with all his senses alert, it would seem that he ought not to be in any peril from the most malignant rattler that might be gliding through the wood. He had no misgivings about bears, wolves, or any wild beasts that might be abroad.

But there was one danger which he feared above all others. That was Jumpup the half-breed.

"I may be unjustly suspicious, but some evil

will follow his visit to the dry lake. He means to do harm to the boys; he thinks we are together, and I believe he would slay us all if he got the chance.

“Put a wicked man in the woods at night, miles from any town or dwelling, and he will act out his nature. That’s the way it is with Jumpup, and I hope he and I won’t meet.”

Affected by these fears, and under the necessity of proceeding cautiously, Jack was not likely to rejoin his friends before daylight and perhaps not until after sun-up. But he had set out to do a brave thing and did not shrink.

So far as possible, Jack calculated about where the spot was that had been the scene of his stirring experiences earlier in the evening. His encounter with the rattler had taken place comparatively near Dead Man’s Lake, and he soon passed that point. The probability was that he had so frightened the reptile that it made as much haste to get out of the path as he did.

“I can’t be far from where Jumpup shot the bear. He left it lying in the middle of the bed of the brook and I must look out—confound it!”

Jack’s calculations were remarkably exact, for at that moment he struck the carcass of the brute

and almost turned a somersault over it before he could check himself. Groping around for his hat, which had been knocked off, and climbing to his feet, he muttered:

"I guess I am all here, and there's no doubt about that bear being dead, and there wouldn't have been any doubt about my neck being broken if the place hadn't been soft where I struck my head."

Take it all in all, however, he was making good progress and was pleased with what he had done. The railway-trestle was not far off, and when that was reached more than half the distance would have been passed.

The fear of meeting Jumpup was constantly with him. Dave Seymour two hours before was awaiting the return of the half-breed. He was sure to keep to the bed of the stream, and, with his skill in woodcraft, was likely to discover Jack before the latter could learn of the other's approach. This undoubtedly would have been the case, had not the youth been looking for the half-breed and the latter not expecting to encounter him.

Once more Jack heard the faint but increasing roar, whose meaning he well knew. It was an engine or a train of cars passing over the railway

which he must cross before rejoining his friends. He knew of no train due before morning, so the night must be well over, or this was an engine running "extra."

He hastened his step to catch sight of it, for it would lighten the loneliness which had oppressed him so long.

He was too far off to get as close as he wished, but he drew quite near and caught the glow of the headlight, as it swept round a curve and thundered over the trestle. It was coming from the direction of Wunkako, and consisted of an engine without any cars. This was shown by the light, which, although thrown in front of the engine, was partly diffused around it.

The scene was interesting, but another caught the attention of Jack Patterson, which he would not have observed but for the headlight of the locomotive.

Between him and the trestle stood a man, his figure clearly outlined for the moment. He was in the bed of the stream and was picking his way toward Dead Man's Lake, when the noise of the engine caused him to stop and look backward. Thus he stood as motionless as a statue. He was without any covering for his long black hair,

which dangled about his shoulders; his frame was stout and robust; he was barefooted, with ragged trousers and vest, and held a rifle in his right hand.

"That's luck!" mused Jack, stepping softly from the bed of the stream into the thick undergrowth at the side; "if it hadn't been for the engine, he would have discovered me before I knew anything of him."

Crouching in the shelter, where the gloom was impenetrable, the youth was able to follow the progress of the half-breed, even though he could not catch the first outline of his figure. There was no call for Jumpup using any special care, but a man's training shows at all times. The soft, sliding *tip, tip* of his bare feet, sometimes on the damp and again on the dry earth, could be noted as he drew near. Jack knew when he was opposite and when he had passed. A faint rippling of water told that he had stepped into one of the little pools which were here and there in the bed of the brook, and then he could be heard no more.

"He will soon join Dave now, but *what has he been doing?*"

CHAPTER XVI.

LIKE A HOUSE AFIRE.

It was a startling awakening for Nate Baldwin, or rather it was an alarming discovery he made after lying awake for a long time. Some person or animal was at work at the door, held in place by the prop he and Darak Edwards had set against it before lying down for the night.

Nate softly rose to his feet and tiptoed across the room. He put his hand against the structure, like a physician testing the pulse of his patient. As he did so, he distinctly felt it yield the fraction of an inch, showing that a heavy pressure was exerted from the outside.

He passed his hand over the piece of planking leaning against the door, with the lower end set on the ground. It showed no sliding, or yielding, so far as he could determine, and he instinctively pushed downward on the primitive bolt, as if to prevent its giving away.

No need of that: it was so firm that a Hercules could not have forced an entrance.

All his senses were alert, and he tried to peep through the slight crevice at one side of the structure. The gloom was too deep and his view too obstructed to perceive anything.

"I wonder whether it is a man or wild animal. If an animal, he would make more noise; there would be scratching or growling or both."

He did not forget the narrow windows, on either side of the door. Moving with the same noiseless step to one of these, he thrust his head into the opening, but a difficulty checked him. The windows were cut through the thickness of the logs composing the walls of the cabin, and their straitness prevented his shoving his head and shoulders far enough outward to perceive anything, unless directly in front of the window. Nothing there enlightened him.

He returned to the door and listened. All was profoundly still. When he once more rested his hand on the inner side of the structure, not the slightest yielding could be noted. He stood several minutes without removing his hand and intently listening. There was no change.

"He has gone away," was Nate's conclusion; "he found he couldn't get in and left."

Nevertheless, the youth waited until tired of

standing. Then he went back and lay down beside Darak, who was still breathing softly and regularly. His was the restful sleep of health and weariness.

"I wish I could do the same," mused Nate, stretching out beside him and drawing the corner of the blanket over his lower limbs.

"I wonder whether he will come back; probably he is some tramp that has drifted into this part of the world; anyhow, he can't molest us."

Nate had doubled the upper portion of his blanket so as to serve him for a pillow, and he now lay with his back toward his friend and facing the door and the two windows in the front of the building.

There was a slight degree of light in the atmosphere on the outside, for, as will be remembered, no trees were near the cabin. This enabled him to see the outlines of the oblong openings, while everything else was in impenetrable gloom.

Nate was sure that after this disturbance he would lie awake until daylight, but he was mistaken. As the minutes passed, a gentle drowsiness began stealing over him, and ere long he was hovering on the borderland of unconsciousness.

It is at such times that one's nerves are at an

exquisitely sensitive point, when sights and sounds are noted which pass unheeded if one is fully awake.

Gradually he became aware that the window on the right of the door was not of the same contour as at first. Instead of being an upright parallelogram like its mate, the base was assuming a convex form, which became more pronounced as the minutes passed. Then the window was shortened in length; the base began rising toward the middle, as if it had been rounded and some one was shoving it upward.

Like a flash the explanation came to him, and he sat upright.

A man was on the outside of the window, slowly rising to the upright posture and striving to peer into the interior. It was the crown of his head which Nate had first seen, and which, as it almost imperceptibly ascended, gave the peculiar appearance that perplexed him.

"Well, I'll be shot if that doesn't beat everything!" thought Nate, who once more flung the blanket off his lower limbs and rose to his feet; "if that fellow is so anxious to learn whether anyone is in here, I'll inform him."

He knew where he had leaned his gun in the

corner of the room, and he stole thither. His intention was not to fire at the stranger, but to thrust the muzzle through the opening and jab him in the face. After that, the intruder could have no doubt that the cabin was occupied.

But Nate must have made a slight noise in taking hold of his weapon, for he was disappointed, upon reaching the window, to find no head there. The framework had the same outline as before, and, when he gave a quick shove of the weapon, the muzzle encountered only vacancy: the man had vanished.

Possibly he was not frightened away, for he must have learned that no eyes except those of an owl could help him to penetrate the gloom.

The youth held his position for some minutes, thinking the other might come back, but he did not, and finally Nate returned his rifle to its place, and again lay down beside his friend, who was still resting peacefully.

Reflection convinced the youth that the visitor was not a tramp, for those nuisances do not wander so far from towns and settlements. They could expect to obtain neither plunder nor alms where no persons lived and cultivated the ground, though it was possible that one of their number

had ventured into this section in the belief that he would come upon human dwellings.

"There's one thing certain," said Nate to himself, as he assumed the prone position; "I don't sleep any more this night."

Ten minutes later he was dreaming of his home and friends.

Indeed, so soundly did he slumber that he was not awakened by that which roused Darak Edwards.

The latter was breathing regularly, when he was seized with a fit of coughing. His eyes and throat were smarting, and it was difficult to breathe. He sat upright and stared around in the gloom. It was a minute or two before he recalled his situation. Then, when he had mastered his cough, he reached over and shook Nate by the shoulder.

"Wake up, old fellow, and tell me what is the matter!"

Nate immediately rose to the sitting position and attempted to speak, but his words were checked by the spell of coughing which seized him.

The room was full of smoke; crackling sounds were heard around them, and a crimson glow showed through the windows.

"My gracious!" exclaimed Nate, coming to his

feet with a bound; "we're surrounded by fire! We shall be burned alive!"

"I don't see why we need be," responded Darak, leaping across the apartment.

Unquestionably the cabin was in flames, but they were not in the situation of persons caught in the tops of a tenement-house or high building, with their means of escape cut off. They were on the ground floor and needed no tall ladders and gallant firemen to rescue them.

The smoke was so suffocatingly dense that, despite the yellow glow in the apartment, they could not see the door, nor in their confusion recall where to search for it, but the space was so circumscribed that they were sure speedily to stumble upon it.

"Where is the door?" shouted Nate; "can you tell, Darak?"

"No; what's become of it? Helloa!"

In his desperate groping and dashing to and fro, Darak struck the prop with his foot and knocked it out of place. Down went the heavy door with a crash, and the way to the outer world was open.

One bound and the youths were on the outside, gasping for breath and half-blinded, but safe. They ran a rod or two until beyond the intolerable

heat radiated by the burning cabin, when they paused and looked around.

The first impression of both was that the building had caught from the blazing forest, but one glance showed this to be impossible. The structure, as has been made clear, stood on the border of Little Dead Man's Lake, and the family that had originally occupied it had cleared off the land at the sides and the rear, so that the space was free of trees and with but slight undergrowth for an area of more than an acre.

While this might not have been sufficient to protect it in the case of a general forest conflagration, fanned by a strong wind, it would have done so ordinarily. But the fact that the woods were not ablaze anywhere in sight showed that the cabin could not have been ignited except by an incendiary.

While the boys were contemplating the bonfire, Nate told what he saw and heard earlier in the evening.

"He's the man!" exclaimed Darak; "what a pity that you didn't get a chance to shoot him!"

"I didn't get a chance even to see him, except that glimpse of his head at the window, but I couldn't have shot him on suspicion, and you

could hardly expect him to tell me what he intended doing."

"Why in the mischief did he wish to rout us out in that way? Why couldn't he have let us alone?"

"I give it up, but—Oh, Darak!" called Nate, throwing up his hands; "how came we to forget it?"

"Forget what?"

"Our guns and traps are inside the cabin!"

"Whew!" exclaimed Darak; "can't we do something to save them?"

He ran toward the cabin, but within several yards was compelled to shield his face and hurriedly retreat.

"No use; it's too bad. Both our guns, our fishing-reels, our blankets, and," he added grimly, "the bottle which held the milk—all are gone."

"Well, it can't be helped; we were so near strangling that we had no time to think of anything except saving ourselves."

The log structure was like tinder-wood. When the blaze was fairly started, it burned fiercely and could not have been saved by a drenching shower. It was now on fire in every part, and the interior must have been a flaming oven, sufficient to melt

iron. Everything belonging to the youths was destroyed beyond possible saving. A half-hour from the time the burning began, the cabin was a pile of glowing embers, whose heat drove the two farther away than before.

When nothing more was to be observed, Darak said:

"Well, this hunting and fishing excursion is about the worst failure that I have ever known. We never ought to have come here, but, coming here, we should have left as Jack did yesterday afternoon. I wonder what the time is."

Their watches told them that it was a little past five o'clock. The sky showed the approach of day.

"There is only one thing to do, and that's to go home," added Darak.

"And make another start, or, better yet, to stay there."

"We shall find Jack by the lake and we might as well leave; I have had more than enough of this section of the country."

The two faced toward the bed of the stream which had served them as a pathway, but had hardly reached it when Jack Patterson met them.

The parties cordially greeted each other and Nate told all he knew about the burning of the building, adding:

"I know what pests tramps are, but that's the worst I ever heard of any one of them doing."

"The tramp that did that work for you was Johnny Jumpup, the Sioux half-breed," remarked Jack Patterson, compressing his lips.

The looks of his friends caused him to tell about meeting the mongrel the preceding night, and of seeing him only a little while before, when the engine was passing over the trestlework.

"In the first case he was on his way to pay you a visit, and in the second he was going home after having paid that visit."

The story told by Jack left no doubt of the identity of the incendiary. As to his reason for the crime, all were equally ignorant.

Jack felt that the whole situation could not be understood unless he related everything. So, finding a place where they could rest in comparative comfort, he gave the particulars of his interview with Dave Seymour, omitting, so far as he could remember, not a single word that passed between them.

It was an amazing revelation to his listeners.

Darak Edwards had never suspected until that hour that there was any human witness to the meeting between him and Seymour on the night succeeding the graduating exercises at the academy. Nate had never dreamed such a thing possible.

"And so you did him up, Darak?" he said admiringly; "I didn't believe it could be done."

"I never had an easier job," replied Darak, his eyes kindling at the remembrance; "he is so slow and awkward that he hardly touched me,—but, after all, I don't like to think of it. I wouldn't have laid out the scamp if he hadn't attacked me. I never liked fighting, though I won't deny that it gave me more pleasure to punish that bully than to win a dozen victories. The remembrance of what he had done that day nerved my arm and made me feel that I could have mastered a dozen like him."

"Why, Jack," said Nate reproachfully, "your testimony at any time would have cleared up the whole mystery about the compositions."

"Of course it would."

"Why did you hold it back? The scoundrel deserved no mercy."

"I know that too, but, boys, suppose Dave can

be got to confess and do what he ought to have done long ago, how much better that will be!"

"I don't see it in that light," said Nate, who could not feel any emotion except contempt and detestation for the one who had so deeply wronged Darak.

"I was on the point ten, fifteen, yes, twenty times of going to Professor Maillard or Professor Fetterman and telling him the truth. Twice I walked to the gate of Professor Fetterman, but something caused me to turn away. My fear was that if Dave was exposed by me, he would be ruined forever, but if he could be persuaded to take the right step himself he might be saved. It was consideration for Dave himself."

"Faugh!" was the impatient exclamation of Nate; "that sort of namby-pamby sentimentality is wasted on the like of Dave Seymour. It's such stuff that makes more criminals than any other cause in the world."

"You are unjust, Nate; I did call on Professor Fetterman and secure his promise that he would not award the prize for a week to come. I have notified Dave that if he does not come forward in that time and fix it, I shall expose him, and so I will, and he knows it."

“More than two months have passed, and during all that period, nine-tenths of the people in Wunkako have looked upon Darak as one of the worst liars and tricksters that ever trod this footstool, and you, Jack, could have set the matter right long ago, and did not. You failed in your duty.”

Darak, who had been silently listening, though plainly agitated by what was said, now interposed:

“Jack did right, as he always does. His motives were the highest that could actuate any one. His course may result in deeper good than you believe, but if it does not, no harm will come to me on that account. Now that I see the coming humiliation of Dave Seymour I can feel pity for him. I would not stand in his shoes for the gift of the whole State of Minnesota.”

CHAPTER XVII.

SMOKE AND FIRE.

THE three boys rose to their feet early the next morning to resume their journey toward Dead Man's Lake, five miles distant.

"Jack," said Nate, stepping in front of his friend and raising his finger impressively, "I wish to ask you a question."

"I am listening."

"Do you believe that Dave Seymour intends to do what he said he would—that is, to come forward and make this matter right, without your taking any part in the affair?"

Jack hesitated a moment, and replied with an odd smile:

"I am sure it will be made all right."

"That's dodging the question; answer me truly."

"I beg you will not force me."

"Which is another way of saying you don't believe he has any such purpose."

"Ask me the question, Nate," said Darak.

"Consider it asked."

"I answer *yes*," was the firm response.

"There is less than a week now. If Dave does so I will apologize; if he doesn't, we'll say no more about it."

"Boys," said Jack, who now wished the matter dropped, "it looks to me as if the heat and smoke are increasing."

"You are right. We can't get out of this neighborhood too soon. Remember," added Darak, "that we have a long road to travel, if the woods are really on fire around us."

For the first time since entering that part of the country, the three felt a thrill of alarm. There had been forest fires in the Northwest before, and lives had been lost.

It is hard to conceive of a more awful fate than that of having one's escape cut off, while the surrounding woods are ablaze.

A yellowish, lurid vapor drifted from somewhere, no one could say whence—and almost strangled them. They bent their heads and coughed, and Jack had to sit down until he could overcome his distress.

As soon as he regained his feet, he led the way

along the bed of the stream, which had become familiar to him, the others following at his heels.

No one spoke, for there was nothing to say. It was the time for action.

A hundred yards farther and the smoke became so thick that they paused in consternation.

"I believe we are cut off," said Jack, turning his white face toward them.

"It does look so," replied Darak; "which way shall we turn?"

"It's of no use turning back; if there was any water there, we could plunge into it."

"It may be better off to the right or left," suggested Nate.

But the flitting gaze saw no hope anywhere. It was dense, suffocating smoke everywhere.

The wind blew strongly, and in whichever direction the fire was travelling, it must be going fast.

"Why can't we lie down in the middle of the bed of the lake?" asked Jack. "The flames cannot reach within rods of us if we take our places there, and if they approach on one side we can hug the other."

There seemed a grain of hope in the plan, and the three turned about, but Darak, who was now

in the lead, had not gone a hundred feet when he stopped.

"It won't do, fellows. With this wind, the blaze will sweep right across the bare space and shrivel us up in a few minutes."

"But we can't do anything else," urged Nate, showing evidence of panic; "we shall be burned to death if we stand here."

Thus entreated, Darak broke into a lope, which ended sooner than before.

"What's the matter now?"

For answer he pointed ahead. The woods were ablaze in front.

It was certain death to advance farther in that direction.

"The smoke has lifted a little behind us!" called Jack. "There are no flames there."

He made a break as he spoke, and the others almost climbed over him.

He had uttered the truth. There was a noticeable lifting of the clouds immediately in their front, and for the first time in some minutes they breathed with comparative freedom.

With each rod passed their hopes revived. They did not dare think of the miles of wood intervening between them and the lake. All

they did was to improve the blessed respite given them.

The prayer of each was that the fire was now behind them and travelling in a different direction. If that were the fact, they had a good chance of making the haven upon which everything depended.

Jack Patterson kept the lead, but Nate, who was next, almost stepped on his heels, and Darak would have stumbled over him had he paused or slackened his gait.

As they pressed forward, each sought to penetrate the murky pall. It was in front, behind, above, on either hand, and even under their feet.

They splashed through the pools, then over the dry clay or sand, leaping fallen trees, limbs, and débris that had gradually gathered in the stream and were left by its drying up.

Once Jack thought he heard the whirr of a rattler on his left, but he did not so much as glance in that direction, and his companions heard it not. The only thought was to get forward.

"I believe it's all right!" Jack shouted, when a still greater clearing of the atmosphere was observable in front. "We'll soon be out of it altogether."

"Thank God!" was the fervent exclamation of Nate, who now pressed up beside the leader and would have passed him had he been able.

But the cooler-headed Darak was not ready to believe they were yet "out of the woods." The erratic course of the wind was likely to show much clearer spaces, but these were apt to be succeeded by impenetrable smoke and flame.

"It's a long, long way to the lake," he muttered, "and I wish—we were there."

He did not believe it possible the journey could be made, and he was trying to think of something else that offered hope.

It could not be far to the railway. Trains seemed to have been passing back and forth, with something of their usual regularity, and while it was folly to expect that any one of them would be met, or, if this happened, that it would halt to pick them up, yet it seemed that the track, after all, might open the way that he believed was closed in the direction of Dead Man's Lake.

The railway, as it wound westward toward Wunkako, approached within a few rods of the water at a point about two miles from the trestle-work.

This was only two-thirds of the distance re-

quired to reach the lake by following the bed of the stream, and they would make far better progress along the ties than over the winding path, with its obstructions of fallen trees, limbs, and occasional rocks and pools of water.

The fearful fact in the situation was that no one knew where the fiery column had its greatest strength. The direction of the wind indicated its course, but that was of little help.

It had reached a point between them and the lake, but the precise character of the flames of which they caught a glimpse must remain unknown until the knowledge could do them no good.

"We have gone more than a mile," was Darak's thought; "I am sure of that, and the prospect of reaching the railway is fair, but who can tell what lies beyond?"

Jack Patterson changed his lope to a rapid walk. He could have maintained a faster gait, but it was hard work when respiration was so difficult, while the obstacles in their path were passed more easily at a slower pace.

The faces of all were red and streaming with perspiration. The heat was frightful, and it seemed to be greater than before, although there

was no noticeable increase in the density of the smoke in front. The feeling may have been due to their severe exertion.

Darak was now at the front, that seeming to be his right place, although at times the three advanced abreast.

"Boys," said he, pausing for a moment, "try to keep your mouths shut, and breathe through your noses."

"It would be a good thing if a fellow could get along without breathing at all," said Jack, indulging his waggish inclination even in that dreadful moment.

While they were walking more moderately, Darak added:

"We can never reach the lake."

"Then we shall be burned up."

"I don't mean that, though there's no telling what's coming until it gets here; but you know three miles are left after crossing the railway."

"It may be clearer on the other side," suggested Nate.

"It isn't likely. I think we ought to strain every nerve to get to the track, and then turn toward Wunkako."

"Why?" asked Jack.

"Two miles off, the track curves close to the lake. If we can get to that point, we shall be safe."

"That is, we are going to try for the lake by another route."

"That's it exactly."

"A good idea. Lead on a little faster, for the smoke is growing worse."

Everything seemed to commend Darak's plan, except one fact of which he did not speak.

Common sense would say that in their desperate haste they should take the shortest course to the water, especially when it was free from all obstruction, and could be travelled more readily, but the great danger was that if they encountered the flames anywhere along the railway, they would be without the slightest protection. Nothing could save them from the awful force of the furnace blast, which at times ran through the woods and over the prairie with the speed of a race-horse.

So long as they stayed in the depressed bed of the brook, they did not seem wholly defenceless. But there was no help for it, and the three sorely beset fugitives scrambled onward, dreading each minute to find escape wholly shut off in every direction.

A fallen tree lay diagonally across their path. Darak leaped it so energetically that the others fell behind, and he once more led.

There was no mistake about it: the smoke was increasing in volume. They were drawing nearer the flames.

The chances were a hundred to one against their ever reaching Dead Man's Lake, and overwhelmingly against their getting as far as the railway.

Something stung Darak's hand like the prick of a needle. He glanced down, thinking some reptile had struck him.

It was not that, but an attack more fearfully significant: it was a spark of fire that had dropped from somewhere.

All doubt now was gone! the flames were upon them.

Darak did not speak, for it could do no good. The next moment a burning flake drifted across his cheek.

The wind was blowing from the east, which was straight across their path, except when the brook temporarily took another course.

There could be no question that the flames were in front, and therefore between them and the railway, which was now their destination.

Were they too fierce to be passed? If so, all three were doomed.

Darak strove to retain his presence of mind. It cannot be said, except in a figurative sense, that he remained cool.

"Will we never reach the track?" was the bitter cry that came to his lips, when it seemed that they had gone too far already. Had it been possible, he would have believed they had crossed the railway without seeing it.

But there could be no mistaking the course, since the brook which they were following passed under the track.

Darak stopped, for through the billowy smoke he saw long fiery serpents darting to and fro with lightning-like swiftness. He could not mistake what they were.

"What's up now?" was the superfluous question of Jack Patterson, for he and Nate wondered why the halt was not made several minutes before.

"It's no use," he said, pointing toward the lake.

"Shall we stand here and die?" asked Jack, compressing his lips, while Nate shuddered and was silent.

"While there's life there's hope; I won't give up yet."

"But what can we do?" was the natural query, for the other two had come to look upon Darak as their leader.

"It may be that the fire in front will spend itself before overcoming us—that is, that it will burn itself out on one side."

This seemed to be holding out hope where there was none. Darak's idea was that the flames had burned over the timber on their left and were now entering the sections on their right in the direction of Wunkako—that is, they were going with the wind from the east to the west, but making slight advance toward the north, which was the course they would have to take to reach Little Dead Man's Lake behind them.

The hope was unwarranted since it will be remembered he had seen the fire to the north; in fact it was that which turned back the little party from seeking refuge in the dry bed of the lake.

"Boys," said he, after a brief silence, "if I am right we shall find space clear enough to allow us to breathe off there to the left."

"Let's hunt for it, then," said Nate, hardly able to restrain himself from rushing away in a panic.

"It may be that a path will open in front; while you're off there a few yards I will go forward as

far as I can. If you see any chance, boys, yell as loud as you can for me, and I'll do the same if I run against any hope here."

Had there been a few minutes for calm thought, the youths would not have separated in this manner, but Darak had hardly made the suggestion when it was acted upon, and he was left alone.

It is at such times that the imperilled person turns to the only One who can deliver him. There had not been a minute from the bursting of the appalling danger that every one of the youths had not called upon God to save him, but it will be noted that while making the appeal their exertion was not relaxed for an instant.

"God helps them that help themselves."

Darak Edwards held his ground for a minute after his companions had passed out of sight on his left, his attention centered on the billows of smoke in front, in the faint, wild hope that a path would open through them.

As if to teach him the folly of this hope a blacker, thicker, and more suffocating mass, amid which the red tongues flashed, rushed down upon him.

He stepped back several paces, holding one arm across his face to shut out the heat and vapor. It

was hard to breathe, and for one instant he believed the end had come.

In the act of leaping out of the bed of the brook to follow Nate and Jack, he was thrilled to note the retreat of the smoke. It recoiled before him and the relief was marked.

He instantly advanced again, pushing slightly beyond the point where he was standing when he was driven back.

The relief continued and he pressed on. There was a clearing of the blinding, smothering vapor so striking that he was on the point of shouting to Nate and Jack to join him, but he thought it prudent to wait a little longer.

Suddenly through the smoke or rather within it, something assumed shape. It was the form of a person, with his head bent, as a man will incline it when fighting against a beating storm, and he was working his way toward Darak. The two must meet in a few minutes if nothing interposed.

Something did interpose. Fire, smoke, and heat rushed between, as if to keep the two apart, and the straining eyes of Darak Edwards searched the gloom in vain for the person whose appearance was so startling that at the first glance he believed it was not reality.

CHAPTER XVIII.

"GOOD-BY, DARAK."

NATE BALDWIN and Jack Patterson were so blinded and confused that it may be said their actions were instinctive rather than governed by reason.

Hastily clambering out of the bed of the stream to the left, with Jack again in front, they made a wide circuit through the undergrowth and trees, in the effort to get behind the flames that were rushing westward.

The circuit was wider than they expected to make it, and when they faced southward again they were still checked by the conflagration, which appeared to be all around them.

"Is there any chance?" panted Nate beside his companion, both having stopped.

"If it isn't in front it isn't anywhere," was the answer.

When leaving the brook, Jack had flung away his gun, so as to be free of impediment. It will

be remembered that the others had lost everything except that which they wore.

“Then there is none——”

Without waiting for anything more, Jack made a break, straight toward the crackling undergrowth in front, and Nate followed.

The forests were so dry on those opening days in September, 1894, that everything was fuel for the flames. Trees, limbs, undergrowth, leaves, grass—all were as greedily devoured as if they were so much shavings.

Lo! a wonderful fact. Jack ran only two or three rods when he found comparative safety for a few minutes, at least. The fury of the fire had spent itself. The rolling flames were to the westward on the other side of the brook.

The undergrowth had been pretty well burned out, though the ground was blisteringly hot; the white ashes were flying like snowflakes; limbs were falling in a mass of crimson embers; trunks were aglow; the smoke was stifling, and the heat broiling.

But there were no rushing flames, though the roar from the woods was like that of the ocean in a storm.

Nate gripped Jack's arm.

"Look!" he exclaimed.

Through the whirling vapor, as it partly lifted in front, they discovered a locomotive backing slowly westward along the track.

They had reached the railway at last, and that which they saw was Number 17, with Matt Marsh as engineer. He had no cars, and was returning to Wunkako.

The wires between that town and the stations to the east had been burned, and he was sent out to learn what he could about the conflagration which had been raging to the eastward for several days.

He had gone as far as he dared, and was now returning. There being no way of shifting his engine about, he had to back to Wunkako, a dangerous necessity, as he was liable to be derailed by a very slight obstruction.

The locomotive was going slowly, because the trestlework was on fire, and Matt could not be certain whether it would bear the weight of his engine. He therefore approached it with great caution.

Nate and Jack shouted as they ran forward.

Matt was on the other side of the cab, with his head out of the window, watching the trestle and the progress of the engine. The fireman was do-

ing the same on the side next to the boys, who were so near that he heard their shouts above the roar of the conflagration.

He looked wonderingly at them, and then turned his head and shouted something to Marsh, who slowed down so that his engine was barely moving when he came to the trestle. He was too busy just then to heed anything else.

While Number 17 was creeping along, the engineer and fireman let themselves down the steps, descended the bank, and trotted around the blazing woodwork, so as to meet the engine on the other side.

Their artifice was a simple one, and guaranteed their lives. If they remained on the locomotive, and the structure gave way under its weight, they must go down, too, with the chances a thousand to one in favor of being instantly killed.

Accordingly, they allowed the engine to go over alone, its speed being so slight that nothing was easier than to climb into the cab again on the other side.

As they ran, Matt turned to the boys and motioned them to do the same. They obeyed and were near him when he clambered into the cab,

where he instantly shut off steam, reversed, and brought the locomotive to a standstill.

Meanwhile, Nate and Jack did not forget the imperilled Darak. They shouted repeatedly at the top of their voices, whistled, and tried in every way to draw his attention.

They were sure of doing so, for the distance to the point where they had left him was not far.

"Why didn't you chaps do what I told you yesterday?" demanded Matt Marsh, who now had opportunity to speak to them, they having climbed into the cab after him and the fireman.

"What's that?"

"I shouted to you to get out of here as quick as you could, for the woods around you were on fire."

"We knew you called something to us," replied Nate, "but the train made such a racket that we couldn't catch a syllable of what it was."

"Where's Darak Edwards?"

"We parted near here to hunt for a route through the fire to the railway; we were closer to it than we knew, and got here just in time to see you; we agreed to call to him if we found our way out and that's what we have been doing."

"If he doesn't show up in a few minutes, it will

be all over with him; I guess I can give you a little help.”

Jerking down the oblong iron ring over his head, Matt sent out several resounding shrieks from the whistle, which penetrated a number of miles in all directions.

He repeated the signal a dozen times at brief intervals. If the power of hearing remained with Darak Edwards, he could not have shut out the sounds, even by thrusting his fingers into his ears.

“That’ll fetch him if he’s alive.”

The hearts of the two youths almost stopped throbbing at the awful fear which passed through them.

They forgot what they had suffered, they felt not the heat and strangling smoke, they heeded not that they were still in peril: all they thought of was Darak, the brave, manly fellow, who had tried to lead them to safety, and who, they dreaded with unspeakable dread, had perished while doing so.

The engine stood only a few feet to the westward of the trestle, which was now so far consumed that it must have given way under the weight of an ordinary passenger-car. It was a wonder that it did not go down with Number 17.

The course of the dry brook therefore could be readily followed with the eye, as it wound off in the woods to the northward.

In that direction were burning undergrowth, branches, trees, and eddying leaves. If Darak should make a dash, his garments must catch fire and he would be fatally harmed, even if he could reach the railway.

He knew the course taken by Jack and Nate, and, hearing their shouts, would know, too, that good fortune had attended them. He would follow in their footsteps. So they looked to see him emerge from the same point, where the flames had mostly spent themselves.

"Why doesn't he come? Why doesn't he come?" was the despairing cry that quivered on the lips of both youths. "Can it be he has gone down? No, no, it cannot—it must not be!"

Matt Marsh was a warm friend of the missing Darak and would go to any length to aid him, but he could not shut his eyes to the fact that every minute he held Number 17 increased the peril of the four persons upon it, and that he had but to hold her a brief while longer to shut out all hope.

The fire was travelling westward, which was the course he must take to reach safety. It was ahead

of him, and he meant to overhaul and pass it, though there was the chance that he could linger in the rear. But if so, the probabilities were that a change in the course of the wind would sweep it directly across the track.

The heat would warp the rails beyond use and hold Number 17 in its red-hot grasp until every one on board was shrivelled to a crisp.

Matt Marsh had a wife and children. Nate and Jack had brothers, sisters, and parents. The grim engineer knew his duty. It was to these, rather than to the one lad, but he was ready to go to the furthest extremity for Darak Edwards.

“I like him better than any boy I ever knew,” was the thought of the engineer; “and there isn’t anything possible that I wouldn’t do for him, but this thing is going to be impossible mighty soon.”

He resorted to the whistle again, and sent the white steam shooting upward against the edges of the bell-metal with a fierceness that was enough to split one’s ears. It was as if Number 17 were crying out in agony for the dead to come back to life.

Matt tried it no more, for the signal was useless.

He pushed over the reversing-rod, and “linked it up” close to the perpendicular, in the position

held when the speed was nearly at the highest point. This could not be done when drawing a train until fairly under way, but with nothing but the engine itself the short stroke was effective from the first, and would send the engine forward at a bound.

All that was needed was a slight jerk of the throttle lever, and the engineer was ready to give that, but he lingered yet a few seconds.

Jack, Nate, and the fireman had their heads close together, and were peering out of the cab window. Matt came up behind them and looked over their shoulders.

But he looked elsewhere, too, and compressed his lips as he did so.

The eyes of the three were fixed upon the point where the youths had emerged just in time to save themselves. It was there that Darak would appear, if he appeared at all.

The seconds seemed minutes, and hope sank.

"There he is!—Oh, no!"

It was Jack who uttered the cry. A huge limb, eaten to the yielding-point, dropped from the blackened trunk of an oak, the heaviest end plunging downward and, striking the blackened ground like a spear hurled by a giant, toppled over in so

grotesque a manner that it suggested a human figure staggering forward; but the illusion vanished while it was forming.

Gazing eastward beyond the burning trestle, the rails could not be followed for more than a hundred yards before the smoke shut them from sight. It was the same to the westward in the direction of Wunkako.

Toward Dead Man's Lake all was smoke, through which the glow of the flame and embers could be caught here and there, and it was much the same on the other side of the railway.

That which caused the chief misgiving on the part of Matt Marsh was a piece of woods which, for fully a quarter of a mile, grew close to the rails—so close indeed that at brief intervals laborers went over the road in a handcar to chop away the limbs and saplings that threatened to obtrude themselves in the way of the cars.

Now, if the wind should turn so as to direct the fire toward this piece of forest, and Number 17 should linger until it was fairly aflame, the engine would have to run a gauntlet as perilous as that of a captive sent staggering down a double line of a thousand Sioux warriors.

This it was which caused Matt Marsh's great

fear, and which made him blame himself, while he yet hesitated to give to the polished lever the twitch which meant the abandonment of Darak Edwards.

Still the youth did not appear, and the engineer finally said, with his head just above the three:

"I will wait one minute more and not a second longer. Val, you'd better throw in a little coal."

Without a word the fireman turned and opened the door of the furnace. The coal had burned low, not much being needed. He flung in a couple of shovelfuls and then banged the door shut again.

Nate and Jack cast a despairing look at the engineer, but did not speak. He felt almost as bad as they, but knew his duty.

The minute was up, the lever was jerked backward, and Number 17 bounded toward Wunkako like a wounded deer which hears the baying of the hounds at her heels.

CHAPTER XIX.

NUMBER 17'S RUN FOR LIFE.

BEAR in mind that Number 17 was running backward.

This was frightfully perilous in more than one respect. It will be perceived that a slight obstruction was sufficient to derail it, whereas, if such obstruction was struck by the pilot, it would be flung aside.

Again, an engineer can close the front of his cab, so as to shut out the wind created by the engine's own motion, or against the rain or snow. While going forward, there is little to be feared from the rear, since the engine runs away from it.

A heavy canvas screen is generally at the command of the engineer, for extremely cold weather. This he suspends at the back of the cab, and it adds much to his comfort.

It might have served a good purpose in the present crisis, had Matt Marsh provided himself with it before starting, but he did not do so. If he

had had it with him, it is doubtful whether he would have buckled it in place, since it was likely to interfere with his movements.

The tender and cab, therefore, were open, and without the means of excluding the simoon which streamed over the tender like the breath of an oven "seven times heated."

It was necessary for Matt to keep a lookout in front of his tender, unprovided as it was with any contrivance to hurl impediments from the track. Had the air been clear, he would have sped along at the rate of fifty or sixty miles an hour; but it was like running backward at night with only a lantern on the rear of the tender. He must hold the locomotive under control.

Val Katzner, the fireman, and Jack and Nate seated themselves on the left of the cab, where the upright board at the back partly shut out the fiery gale. Matt held his side alone, for he could allow no one to hamper his action.

Seated there, he shoved his head just far enough out of the open window to allow his eyes to peer over the edge and see, so far as they were visible, the rails as they swept under the tender.

It was a terrific trial of endurance, and he drew his cap down as far as he could without obscuring

his field of vision. But he had done the same thing when the blasts of our Minnesota winters cut like millions of needles.

He knew he would pay for all this, but he thought of that little cottage a few miles away, of the wife and prattling children who were looking longingly for his return and—well, he did not mean to die, if he could help it.

Then, too, he had three lives in the cab largely dependent upon his coolness and judgment, and besides, what railway engineer hesitates when duty calls?

Number 17 quickly struck a pace of about twenty miles an hour. Another twitch of the lever would have speedily doubled it, but prudence forbade.

The wisdom of this course showed itself before they had gone half a mile.

Matt was seen to shut off steam, throw the reversing-rod forward, and carefully admit the vapor again into the cylinders.

He could make no use of the sand in the box over the boiler, for the curving pipes which guided the particles down on the rails were in front of the forward drivers. The engine must stop itself.

And it did so under his masterly control, the

wheels never once losing their effectiveness by slipping, as they would have done had he let too much steam into the cylinders, but turning "reluctantly," until finally the wonderful piece of mechanism came to a standstill within a rod of a smoking branch that lay diagonally across the rails.

Val Katzner, with his hands protected by thick mittens, slipped from the cab before the wheels had stopped turning. Running to where the limb lay, he seized one end in his powerful grip, and, with some effort, swung it to one side, so as to leave the track clear. Within the following minute he climbed back into the cab.

During this little incident, not one of the four spoke. Nate and Jack were suffering greatly from heat and smoke, and felt certain that greater suffering was before them; but all this was as nothing when compared with their thoughts of Darak Edwards, whom they had been forced to abandon to his fate.

Their lips were mute, but what tongue shall tell the anguish of their hearts?

The locality which Matt Marsh dreaded above all others was yet a considerable way off, and he speedily struck the same pace as before. There

was risk even in this, for at many places the rolling smoke obscured the view, so that he could not have checked the engine had its gait been reduced one-half.

But some risk had to be taken, and the wise engineer assumes it unhesitatingly when necessity calls.

Suddenly Val Katzner leaped from his seat into the open space in the tender which was left by the consumption of part of the coal. Fortunately only a few bushels remained, and there was considerable space protected by the elevation at the rear, which broke the force of the hurricane of heat and smoke that was again sweeping into the cab.

It was not the fireman's purpose, however, simply to screen himself. He had grasped a bucket, which he filled from the nozzle projecting from the tank, near the steps leading down from the cab, and set it in front of the coal, where the jolting of the engine spilled half of it.

Then he crouched low, and, with a grim smile, glanced from Matt to the boys on the other side, who did not understand what he meant. Matt Marsh did not notice the action.

Jack Patterson and Nate Baldwin sat close to each other, feeling that they were in the hands of

Providence, and could only pray that He would not forget them.

Suddenly again Matt shut off, flung over the reversing-rod, and let the steam into the cylinder. This time he was a little flustered, for the huge drivers spun around like lightning, but quickly became tractable under his manipulation, and gripped and resisted as before.

"Look out!" he shouted, drawing his head within the cab. "We're going off the track!"

Another branch, smaller than the first, was seen through the smoke, lying in the worst position possible—that is, almost parallel with the outer rail, and with one end lapping the track, which here curved slightly.

The peril was that the limb was likely to cause an insidious rising of the first outer wheel which struck it, while the centrifugal force would carry it outside the rail, the flange on the inner wheels becoming ineffective for the time.

While it was not likely that the heavy driving-wheels would do the same, since the obstruction would be mashed to pulp before they reached it, yet with the tender slewed around, banging sideways, and the engine ramming it, serious consequences were likely to follow.

"Let's jump off!" called Nate Baldwin, slipping from his seat, followed by Jack, but the voice of Matt Marsh rang out like a trumpet:

"Don't do that! Stay where you are!"

Whether a person riding in the cab of an engine going at high or even moderate speed is wise in leaping off to escape an accident, is a question which can never be answered until after the accident occurs. It is sometimes best to jump, but perhaps oftener it is safer to remain on the engine.

So far as I have been able to learn, the majority of engineers advise that such an individual should keep his seat.

Matt Marsh was an engineer who never deserted his post except under rare circumstances, which had occurred only twice in his career of fifteen years. He did not intend to leave his engine now, nor would he permit any of the three with him to do so.

It proved the right thing this time, for the flange which first struck the branch shaved it off as if with a broadaxe, and Number 17 continued her course without a perceptible jar, seeing which Matt shifted the reversing-rod, and the rapidly increasing puffs showed that Number 17 was fast striking her pace again.

"It was a mighty lucky go," reflected the engineer, "and wouldn't happen in a score of times."

Thus far, and for a little while after, there was slight change in their environment. The smoke was on every hand—it seemed to lift perhaps for a brief while, but the view was shortened in all directions.

There was a good deal of forest, but it stood some way from the track, which was elevated eight or ten feet above the immediately surrounding country. Had Number 17 taken this plunge it would have been bad for those on board, but then she didn't take the plunge.

The discomfort of those in the cab was almost intolerable. Jack and Nate held their breath as long as they could, so as to keep the stinging, burning air out of their lungs; they filtered the smoke by inhaling it through their coat-sleeves; they rubbed their eyes and made them hurt more; they tried in vain to fan the vapor from their faces; they gasped and felt that if this thing did not soon end they would die of strangulation.

And the heat! It is hard to think of a wind without a soothing coolness upon its wings, but fancy the outward rush of the gaseous air that quivers over a mass of glowing coals, and you will

have an idea of the fiery breeze that dashed into the cab of Number 17 while backing toward Wunkako.

All the metal-work was blistering to the touch. Even the woodwork was unbearably hot, and the paint and varnish curled up and peeled off. It seemed as if the whole framework was about to burst into flame. Val Katzner gave forceful expression to his feelings when he muttered:

"If this gets much worse, I'll open the furnace door and crawl in and be comfortable."

Every one had buttoned his coat and drawn it as far up about the shoulders as he could, while the hat was pulled low down. In addition, Matt's hands were protected by heavy buckskin gloves.

Jack and Nate were crouching as low as they could, in a sort of half-daze, when they were startled almost out of their senses by the descent of a lot of water upon their heads and shoulders.

They started up and stared around them, not knowing what it meant. There stood the grinning Val Katzner, who had emptied the bucket over them.

In answer to their wondering looks, he pointed at the back of Jack's coat.

"You were afire," said Nate; "we would have been ablaze in a minute more."

"I wish he would keep on flinging water over us; it gave me a shock, but it feels mighty good."

The fireman quickly refilled the bucket and held it ready for the next emergency.

Amid the smoke which poured over the tender were hundreds of minute sparks, like so many malignant fireflies hunting a chance for mischief. Several of them, after whirling about in the cab, darted at the engineer, who hastily pinched his clothing in several places.

But the watchful Val had seen Matt's danger, and he now gave him a dousing, which not only extinguished the incipient flames, but through drenching the garments made them a coat of mail until the moisture should be dried out.

There was an abundance of water in the tank, and when the fireman noticed the steaming garments of the engineer rapidly drying he splashed more over him, immediately doing the same with the boys.

He was so well protected that he motioned for Nate and Jack to join him, and they did so, all three crouching as low as they could near the spot where the tender was coupled to the engine, and

where, there being no coal, they found much protection from the hurricane of smoke and heat rushing over the rear.

Matt could not keep his head out of the cab all the time. The fierce rush made it unbearable.

He took a furtive peep, and then, when unable to stand it longer, drew in his head and let Number 17 "go it blind" for a short distance; but such practice is so repugnant to a railway engineer that he peeped out sooner than was good for him.

When the three were huddled in the lower part of the tender, their view was so shut off that the engineer was watched closer than ever, though the youths rested their eyes a good deal.

Val Katzner was on the alert and about to give Matt another dousing, when it became evident that the engineer had discovered something on the track, for he reversed again and the engine rapidly lost its speed.

With this slackening the wind lessened. All three cautiously rose and peeped out to see whether they were about to run another chance of being derailed.

But this time the cause was a different and an astonishing one. Through the whirling smoke the dim figure of a man was observed standing,

not between the rails, but at one side, as if waiting to be picked up, and it was for that purpose that Matt Marsh shut off steam and brought the engine to a stop.

"It's Johnny Jumpup!" was the amazed exclamation of Jack Patterson. "How came he to be so far from home?"

"I guess he walked," was the reply of the fireman.

The mongrel was in scant, ragged attire, with his gun in hand, and stared at the engine and its occupants, as if wondering why they had stopped. He was near the pilot, as motionless as a statue, and seemingly dazed or indifferent to his danger.

Matt Marsh leaned out of the cab and called:

"Hurry up and get aboard, Johnny!"

But he did not move or speak.

"Come!" added Jack Patterson; "we're going to make a run for it; you can never get through alone. There's not a minute to lose!"

The half-breed now shook his head and answered:

"Me no go with you."

"Why not?"

"Stay here—not afraid of fire."

"But it is your only chance."

He shook his head several times.

"He not afraid of fire—me stay here—go on—leave Jumpup alone."

"You're a blamed fool!" called Matt. "You won't have another chance like this. I ask you for the last time."

But again the half-breed shook his head, not stirring another muscle of his body. He had made up his mind and nothing could change it.

As if to emphasize the words of the engineer, a blazing twig at that moment eddied through the smoke-laden atmosphere and fluttered down at his feet.

He and all the rest saw it, but nothing in his manner showed that he was disturbed to the least degree. The trunk of an oak could not have been more rigid than he.

As he stood, the weight of his body rested on his right leg, the other being bent at the knee. He was barefooted as usual; he had on a pair of trousers, fringed at the bottom, a sash was around his waist, and he wore a ragged hickory shirt, but that was all the covering about him, his head being bare, with the coarse black hair hanging loosely about his shoulders.

There was an unconscious grace and a certain

majesty in his pose. The broad, repellant countenance was darkened by a scowl and an ugliness of expression which at any other time would have made Matt Marsh think twice before inviting him to ride in the cab with him.

As it was he did not propose to waste any time on him.

He scarcely waited a second with his hand on the throttle, after his last call. The mongrel made no stir or sign, and the engineer gently pulled the lever.

Number 17 resumed her flight as before.

But all peered out through the window at the front of the cab, as long as they could see the singular being. He was quickly hidden from view in the thick atmosphere, and the last glimpse of him showed no change of position.

His black, serpent-like eyes were fixed upon the receding engine until he could see it no more.

"That's the last of Johnny Jumpup," said Jack Patterson, as he and Nate and the fireman stooped down again in the tender.

"An Indian is a queer being," remarked Val Katzner; "that one will stand there like a tree, with the flames raging around, and then topple over when the life has been burnt out of him."

Matt Marsh gave no further thought to the half-breed, for he was now approaching the crisis of his desperate race for life.

The woods began approaching the track, and only a few hundred yards ahead came close to it. One searching, penetrating look told him that it was as he had dreaded: the forest was burning on both sides, and in front of them was a vast sea of flame, raging so fiercely that it showed the fire had just reached the place, and was greedily feeding on the fresh fuel.

In the race between it and Number 17 the engine had been beaten, not because the fire could run faster, but because Number 17 dared not run as fast as she could.

Matt reflected that, though there might be burning débris on the rails, there had not been time for them to be twisted by the heat. He made his decision on the instant.

He linked the engine up to the highest notch, and admitted a full head of steam into the cylinders.

That meant that Number 17 was going to leap to the greatest speed of which she was capable. It would be fully a mile a minute.

It was taking appalling chances, for no matter

what might be on the track it was impossible to stop. She would plunge headlong to safety or—destruction.

If she left the rails it would be to dash among the blazing trees on one side or the other, where, if the four were not instantly killed, they would be quickly consumed by the resistless heat. It was do or die.

Having put on full steam, Matt sprang from his seat and joined the three crouching forms in the bottom of the tender. He could no longer maintain an outlook, and it would have done no good had he been able to do so.

“Now, boys,” said he grimly, “it will all be over inside of five minutes.”

Every sting of the flame seemed to lash Number 17 to a higher burst of speed, as if she had become frenzied, and was madly trying to escape her tormenters. Her pace was tremendous.

She bounded from side to side with a violence that made Nate and Jack certain more than once that she had left the rails, and was leaping over the ties, soon to crash headlong down the bank.

CHAPTER XX.

PARTNERS IN PERIL.

NUMBER 17 was bounding over the heated rails as if she herself were fleeing for life. The flames were all around her, and the smoke was suffocating.

Had not the engineer, fireman, Nate Baldwin, and Jack Patterson lain flat on the floor of the tender, or had the awful ordeal been continued ten minutes longer, assuredly all would have perished. It was all like a wild, horrible vision of sleep, that began and ended quickly, though it seemed to last for hours.

Suddenly Matt Marsh crept over the scorching floor, and, partly rising to his feet, hurriedly shut off steam, admitting it as before after the reversing-rod was shifted.

He held his breath during the instant thus occupied, and then crawled back to his friends.

No one opened his mouth to speak, but all knew what his action meant. They had passed through

the heart of the burning woods, and were nearing Dead Man's Lake.

Just as the wheels were ceasing to revolve, Matt rose upright and threw the machinery out of gear. All were able to breathe more freely.

"Now for the lake, and run like all creation!" he shouted, leaping from the cab, with the others close behind him.

The distance was short, and the next minute the four plunged into the cooling, grateful waters.

Meanwhile, as will be remembered, Darak Edwards was carefully threading his way down the bed of the stream, after having been driven back by the smoke and fire of the burning forest, when he caught the dim outlines of a person coming toward him.

The individual had his head bent, and was advancing laboriously, as one does in the teeth of a blizzard. The smoke which had been swept aside rolled around him a moment later and shut him from sight, though he and Darak were not twenty yards apart.

"He's in the same boat with me, and I don't see what we can do to help each other—hello, there he is again!"

The effect of the wind was erratic, and while

the words were in Darak's mouth the smoke lifted and showed him his man. He was trying to press on, but staggered like a drunken person, and groped blindly.

No wonder, for it is almost beyond comprehension that he and Darak had escaped strangulation thus far. It is singular that they did not become delirious, as horses often do when surrounded by fire, and rush headlong into the flames.

"He is falling—he is overcome—he is close to death!"

Providence favored him, for at that moment the air became clearer than at any time before. The stranger was suffering because of the immediate past, rather than the present.

Darak dashed toward him, the path now being comparatively clear. The other had rallied and reeled forward once more, lunging against Darak, who caught him in his arms, barely in time to save him from going down.

"Brace up, Dave! there's a chance for us yet!" shouted the rescuer.

The sound of the voice roused Seymour, who, steadying himself, gasped:

"Isn't this awful, Darak? What will become of us? I can't breathe."

"It's mighty bad, but there's a rock back here that may shelter us."

Darak had noticed it the moment before he saw Dave Seymour, and would have investigated the place, but for his wish to help his old enemy.

This refuge, of which he would never have thought but for his desperate peril, was simply a mass of stone jutting out into the stream connecting the two lakes. At the base, however, was a gap which ran back several feet under the rock. This opening was not in the stone itself, but was the space between it and the bed of the brook.

It should be said that the rock projected from the bank into the current, which had worn away the earth until the mass of stone was partly undermined.

All around was dry earth. Darak's hope was that by creeping under the rock he could escape the heat and fury of the flames, and the hope did not seem unreasonable.

He would have called to Jack and Nate to return, had he not discovered Seymour in dire extremity. For the brief seconds he forgot everything else.

"I'm afraid I'm used up, Darak," gasped Dave, who was making a brave effort to keep his feet,

but could not have done so except for the help of his companion.

"No, you're not; it's only a few steps."

Darak was leading and half dragging Seymour, when the latter collapsed and went down like a log, almost pulling the other off his feet.

"No use, Darak; I'm done for; let me alone and look out for yourself. I'm sorry for what I did about that composition," added Seymour in a faint voice; "and I wish I could live long enough to set it right, but Jack Patterson understands it all—he'll fix it for you. Darak, will you forgive me?"

"Of course I will, but leave that for some other time. Make an effort, won't you?"

"What's the use?" asked Seymour, putting forth a weak attempt and then giving up.

He even tried to push away the friendly hand.

"I have swallowed so much smoke that it will kill me, anyway; try to save yourself; let me alone."

Seymour was in despair, and determined to die where he was.

But Darak would not have it that way. Seeing that his companion would give no help, he stooped over and grasped the collar of his coat with both hands.

Then he hurriedly backed a number of paces, dragging Dave after him, to the gap under the huge rock upon which he had fixed his last hopes.

Next he shoved the head of the helpless one under the stone, as he would have run an ear of corn into a shelter. Then he seized his feet and swung them around, after which Darak nestled down beside him.

"Get over on your own side of the bed!" he called, giving the other a violent nudge with his elbow. "I haven't half enough room."

In truth, the younger lay hardly beneath the outer edge of the rock. Seymour had sunk into a kind of stupor, but the sharp thrust of Darak's elbow roused him, as it was meant to do.

From the mouth of this half-cavern the rock sloped downward as it receded, passing into the ground, where evidently an immense mass of stone lay.

Darak wished to get a little farther from the outer air, and there was room for it provided Dave worked farther backward, which he proceeded to do.

When had he burrowed as far as he could and Darak had followed him, some two or three feet of rock projected over the latter. No combustibles

could reach him and it looked as if he were safe, provided he could withstand the heat and smoke.

It was at this juncture that the hallooming of Jack Patterson and Nate Baldwin, in a dull, muffled way, reached Darak's ears.

"What does that mean?" asked Dave, beginning to show an interest in his surroundings now that hope was renewed in his heart.

Darak explained, adding:

"I'm glad it's all right with them; they must have caught sight of the railway and will expect me to follow them."

"Shall we do so?"

"I rather think not. I prefer these quarters, though we can't tell for a while whether they will be of any help. There they go again!"

Darak listened a few minutes to the calling of his friends, who he knew were alarmed for him.

"I must answer," he said to Dave, beginning to edge his way to the outer air; "they may try to find me, which will never do."

As soon as he was free from the overhanging rock, Darak rose to his feet, but before he could emit a shout dropped as if shot.

A shaft of superheated air impinged against his face with a force that overcame him. One inhala-

tion of the flaming atmosphere would have been fatal.

The conflagration was raging all around him. His only hope was to cower under the rock that had been found so providentially, and await the will of Heaven.

"That's the closest call yet," he exclaimed, nestling to the side of his companion. "We're in a blazing furnace."

"Let us dig under the rock and get farther back; it may be the very thing needed."

Seymour began using his fingers upon the soil, which was so soft that it readily yielded, but Darak checked him.

"I wouldn't do that, Dave; I'm afraid it isn't safe."

"It seems to me that it is the only thing that is safe."

"You may undermine the rock and make it topple over on us."

"Gracious! I didn't think of that; it would be better to prop it up."

"It doesn't need that; we'll crowd back as far as we can, and it isn't likely to fall after having stood so many years."

With the renewal of hope and the prospect of

escape, the spirits of the boys rose to an exuberant point.

What seemed to them a marvellous condition of things now became apparent, and yet it was the most natural of facts, as both saw after a few minutes' reflection.

When a fireman is fighting his way into a burning building he strives to keep as near the floor as he can, so as to escape the choking smoke, which must rise in the ordinary atmosphere.

Darak and Dave had their mouths as close to the ground as they could get them, and the relief was astonishing. They breathed more freely than for hours. It may be said that they had no trouble at all in this respect.

There was the whole vault of heaven to receive the smoke, which continually streamed upward. Had it been confined in an apartment and continually fed, it would have penetrated every crevice and corner, but since none of the smoke generated began at a lower point than where they crouched, it would have had to violate the law of gravity to descend and seek them out.

It must not be supposed that the air which they breathed was pure. It was far otherwise, but it may be described as the least impure of any which

they had been forced to inhale for hours, and the blessed contrast made it seem all they could ask and much more than they could expect.

True, it was oppressively hot, but they were used to that.

The shrieking of an engine's whistle now pierced the hot smoke. Darak was quick to catch its meaning.

"By George! those fellows are in luck. They have been picked up by a railway-train, and the engineer is calling for me."

"Do you want to go?"

"I'm not yearning to do so and I can't answer the call. I'm glad that they have got out of this purgatory, and I wish I could relieve their anxiety by letting them know I'm all right, but I see no way to do it."

The whistling soon ceased, and Matt Marsh, with Nate and Jack, started to run the fiery gauntlet to safety.

Dave reached up and pressed his hand against the dark mass of stone.

"What's that for?" asked Darak.

"I think it's getting warm; suppose it becomes red-hot."

"Then *we'll* become red-hot, too," replied

Darak, who felt no more misgiving on that point than his companion.

"Suppose, too, that some animal or rattler wants to share these quarters with us?"

"We'll notify him that this house is rented and he will have to try next door. Wasn't it providential that I struck this rock at the moment it was needed? We passed plenty on our way here, but never thought of making any use of them. I don't remember seeing any such opening as this. Dave, how came you to be near here?"

"I had set out to meet you."

"And you did meet me," Darak instantly said; "it was lucky for both of us. I tell you, Dave, there's a providence in everything."

Now here comes a point that is not clear in my mind, and I don't suppose it ever will be. Dave Seymour had just declared he was on his way to meet Darak Edwards: the question arises as to why he set out to find the young man whom he had so deeply wronged.

The facts as they have been obtained are that some time after Jack Patterson parted with Seymour, on the shore of Dead Man's Lake, and started to join his friends near the dried bed of the smaller sheet of water, he was followed by Sey-

mour, who besides was looking for Jumpup, the half-breed.

These two met near the railway-trestle and held a long talk, the result of which was a quarrel. Jumpup, understanding the peril which threatened both, insisted upon the youth going with him by the shortest route to the lake. Seymour refused, and they parted company.

Dave must have expected to meet all the boys. Of these three, Darak is the only one who believes it was his intention to make a clean breast of the matter and consult with them as to the best course to take to right the wrong.

Jack and Nate cannot give the young man credit for so chivalrous a resolution, but at the same time they confess their inability to fathom the real motive which prompted him to take the risk.

No one has ever thought that Dave Seymour meditated any personal harm to Darak. He had been guilty of an inexpressibly mean thing, but was incapable of a grave crime, and probably never intended to do more than frighten, or at the most chastise Darak.

Seymour's reply to Darak's question trod so close to the momentous issue that he quickly branched away from it. Darak, like all manly

boys, hated a "scene," and to him there was no earthly reason why either should so much as hint about that occurrence at the academy more than two months before.

As Darak viewed it, his companion was resolved to do the right thing, and he meant to leave him with his conscience, certain that it would all be well. Hence his care to avoid treading upon the dangerous ground.

As I have said, the two had suffered a great deal and were in a nervous, feverish condition of body, but, as compared with their situation a brief while before, they were immeasurably more comfortable and could not keep down their feelings.

"I tell you, Darak, this rock is getting warm," added Dave, again pressing his hand against it in different places.

Darak did the same and gravely said:

"It does feel warm, but don't you think it would be a good deal more wonderful if it felt like an iceberg?"

"Who's talking about an iceberg?"

"Both of us; it can't be denied that it is warm, which it must have been ever since summer began. Now, if we come round here about Christmas, when the snow is eight or ten feet deep, and find

it still warm, why *that* will be something worth talking about."

"Very well, I'll keep the date in mind; but, Darak, if it becomes uncomfortable for you, I will change places; I'm farther from the entrance."

"Thank you; these quarters are not so cramped. I have room here to do some kicking, which is more than you can do."

There was little to choose between the two positions, separated as they were by only a few inches of space. Dave had worked as far back as he could, so that the enormous mass of stone was like a mountainous blanket, pressing almost upon his chest.

He had to edge a little way out, as he now did, when he turned upon his side for relief. Darak was not thus hampered.

In their quarters they could look out upon the bed of the stream and see a little of the wood and undergrowth on the other side. It was all ablaze, the flash of the fire showing now and then through the heavy smoke.

The crackling of the flames, the roar of the wind-swept fire, and the agonizing shriek of some wild or domestic animal overtaken by the consuming element were continually in their ears.

The rock under which they had taken refuge was on the left of the stream, as one proceeded toward Dead Man's Lake; the wood was burning there with resistless fierceness. It was possible that if a lot of embers fell upon the surface of the stone, or if it were exposed for a long time to the beating of the blaze, it might become quite hot, but hardly to the extent of imperilling the two who crouched beneath it.

"How long do you suppose we shall have to stay here?" asked Seymour.

"It strikes me that it will be wise to remain until it is safe to go out."

"I'm inclined to think you are right, but it is yet early in the day, and these flames are borne so fast by the wind that they will soon pass beyond this point."

"If the rock turns red—which I never knew a rock to do—we should better stay here until it resumes its natural color, which isn't likely to be the case for several days. But, Dave, without keeping up this sorry jesting, I would say that it seems to me we ought to be able to reach the railway in the course of a few hours. When we do that, it will be easy enough travelling to the lake."

Darak would have felt less impatience had he been more selfish, but he knew that Jack and Nate

believed he had perished in the flames. He was anxious to relieve their anguish as soon as he could.

But still more to be dreaded was the fact that they would carry the news of his fate to his parents and his sister Jennie. The young man was ready to assume any hardship or risk to avert so grievous a mistake as that.

For a time the air in front of the cavern was filled with eddying sparks, some of which were twigs and branches of considerable size. These grew less and finally ceased. The main force of the conflagration had gone by.

Still the atmosphere was so superheated that no move was made for a couple of hours. Then Darak ventured timidly to creep out.

The air was pulsating with fervent heat, and, giving a single gasp, he hastily crept back beside Seymour.

"We'll have to wait a while; I wonder how long it takes several solid miles of atmosphere to cool off after it has risen to about five hundred degrees Fahrenheit."

"You are getting mighty tender, Darak."

"I do feel as if I had been browned to a turn."

"You are not browned but rare, from the redness of your face. Let me try it next time."

"I'm willing you shall try it now if you wish."

They waited for an hour or two, when Dave Seymour claimed the privilege of venturing to stand outside the cavern.

Darak had to do some turning about and twisting to make room for him to pass, but succeeded at last in rising to his feet.

Darak retained a prone posture, but closely watched his companion, confident that he would make a sudden break for cover, but he did not.

He compressed his lips and winced when he caught the first force of the heat, but bravely kept his feet. Then he took two or three cautious steps forward.

He continued to advance with great care, and, turning part way round, beckoned to Darak to join him.

"I can stand it if you can," was the decision of the youth, who sprang up more hurriedly than the other.

Both soon discovered that they could bear the test. The ordeal grew less severe as they became accustomed to it, and they had but a short way to go to the railway which proved such a godsend to Nate Baldwin and Jack Patterson.

Once they were between the tracks, the relief was

more marked, though it must be borne in mind that there was nothing that could justify the word "comfort" which I have several times used. It was rather that one situation was less trying than the other.

Their course was obvious. It was to follow the railway to the lake, two miles away. There they could cool themselves in the waters and then return to their homes.

Possibly they might follow the railway beyond, but such a path would hardly be passable throughout its length for a day or two to come. They knew of the wood which approached close on both sides, and they did not forget that there were several similar stretches between that point and Wunkako.

Accordingly they set out to follow Number 17, which had gone that way several hours before. On the road they saw many smoking carcasses of horses, cattle, and smaller domestic animals. They dreaded lest they should come upon the remains of some one who had been less fortunate than they, and, sad to say, they were not spared this sight.

CHAPTER XXI.

PARTNERS IN SAFETY.

OH, the blessed relief, the revivifying bliss, of leaping head-first into the cool waters of the lake!

Nate Baldwin and Jack Patterson shouted as they took a long plunge, and, going downward till they felt the velvety impact with the bottom, came up, and, blowing like porpoises, dived again and again.

Matt Marsh and Val Katzner were hardly less ardent, and frolicked and revelled like boys just let out of school.

There was no time to remove their clothing, and they would not have taken the time had it been theirs. It may have made it harder to swim, but that was all the better, for they extracted more exquisite joy out of the water on that account.

When they were thoroughly cooled and somewhat exhausted, they swam to shore and sat on the bank in their dripping garments.

"This pays for what we've been through," said

Matt; "why can't we breathe in a few tanks of that water? How it would help cool one's internal arrangements!"

"We'll suffer for several days, I suppose," observed Jack Patterson; "but we have been more fortunate than hundreds of others."

"And more fortunate than poor Darak," added Nate, unable to keep back the tears that welled to his eyes. "I don't understand why he did not make a break, when we called to him."

"Maybe he didn't hear you," was the awfully suggestive reply of Val Katzner.

"Or, hearing you, wasn't able to do anything," ventured Nate. "How dreadful that when he was on the verge of safety he was overtaken by the flames!"

"How shall we tell his father and mother and sister?"

"I would rather be burnt twice as bad as I have been than carry the news to that home which he left in such high spirits yesterday morning."

"Isn't there some way, Matt, of—of getting his body?" tremblingly asked Jack Patterson.

"I have been thinking of that, but, boys, you may as well face the facts. Perhaps you'll find what is left of Darak, because you know the spot

where you left him, but the sight will be one on which his folks and you won't want to look."

"I don't doubt it, but they will never consent that he shall be left in the woods without burial. When the fire has pretty well spent itself, can't you run Number 17 back to the burned trestle, and we will help place his body on board?"

"I doubt it; Val hadn't time to draw the fires, and the engine, not taking into account the scorching she's got outside, must be burnt out. Then it's quite certain the rails have been so twisted by the heat that she can't run over them. Howsumever, I will see about it later on."

The main conflagration had swept past the upper portion of the lake, and was now raging to the westward. It left behind smoking trees, glowing embers, hot ashes, and a blistering ground, upon which it was not safe to step, even when the feet were protected by shoes. So close had the flames come to the lake that the trappings left by Jack Patterson upon parting with Dave Seymour were destroyed, and the boat itself, drawn up the bank, had a narrow escape.

From some cause, however, the flames did not cross the neck of land to Lost Island. The cabin of the half-breed was untouched by the fire.

The little party remained where they were until several hours had passed, during which Matt Marsh made several attempts to reach his engine, which, it will be remembered, stood near at hand. At length, he announced that by stepping carefully it could be done, and led the way, followed by his fireman and the boys.

A brief examination of Number 17 showed that she would never be able to turn a wheel until after a long sojourn in the repair-shop. The fire left under her boiler in the hurried flight of the engineer and fireman had "burnt her out," one of the most grievous injuries a railway locomotive can suffer; but, worse than that, she showed striking proof of the terrific temperature to which her works had been subjected.

Bars and rods had been warped out of line, and the gearing was ruined. Had the ponderous driving-wheels been forcibly turned, even for a single revolution, there would have been a grinding, wrenching, and shrieking of the tortured machinery that would have resulted in still greater injury.

All this was bad enough, but Matt pointed down the track toward the burned trestleworks. Here and there the rails were so twisted as to suggest

that they had once possessed life and had tried to writhe themselves loose.

It was the same in the other direction. Fifty feet either way would send an engine jolting over the charred ties. There would have to be a good deal of repairing over many miles before the railway could be used again.

Jack Patterson was about to make a remark, when Nate caught his arm and gasped:

"Look!"

He pointed down the track, where not fifty yards away were seen Darak Edwards and Dave Seymour coming toward them.

The two swung their hats in salutation, while Nate and Jack were so overcome that they stood motionless, staring with open mouths and suspecting that it was all some marvellous figment of fancy.

But it was a blessed reality, and within the next few minutes hands had been shaken and the whole wonderful story told.

It is not worth while to give the questions, answers, and congratulations which shot back and forth. I doubt whether any happier party ever met than that which was composed of those four boys, not forgetting Matt Marsh and Val Katzner.

And how sad the contrast with hundreds of others, caught inextricably in the grip of the forest fires which swept over so many miles of Wisconsin, Minnesota, and other portions of the West during the early days of September, 1894!

One unspeakable comfort stirred the grateful hearts of the little company; there was no reason to believe that their friends would feel undue anxiety concerning them.

The boys had set out to fish in Dead Man's Lake and to hunt in the neighborhood, and it would not be suspected that they had gone any distance from the water.

If threatened, therefore, by the flames, they would take refuge in the lake, where they were as safe as at Wunkako.

Fortunately for the peace of mind of their friends, the latter never dreamed of the truth until all danger was over.

Possibly there might be some misgiving about Matt Marsh and his fireman, when they did not return, for all knew they had set out to penetrate as far into the perilous region as they dared—so far, indeed, that it must soon become known that Number 17 could not return.

The proposal of the engineer was accepted by all parties as the best.

"You have your boat and sail," he said, addressing Darak, "which hasn't been hurt by the fire, that I s'pose couldn't find it. We'll go down to t'other end of the lake and then foot it for home. It's a long walk, but we can stand it, and we may get a lift part of the way."

"Before we do that," said Dave Seymour, "why not cross over to Lost Island and have something to eat?"

"What is there to eat in Jumpup's cabin?"

"Nothing, for Jack and I ate it all last night, but we can catch a fish or two and broil them in his fireplace."

"None of us has any lines," said Nate.

"We'll find them in the old hut; Jumpup had everything of that sort; some of you have had nothing to eat for a good while."

"A fellow feels as if he can live on water in such weather as this," said Darak; "but what do you say, Matt?"

"I rather like the plan; I'm hungry as 'get out.'"

So the boat, which had been moored near at hand, was shoved into the water, and they took

their seats, Darak acting as captain of the craft, which had about all it could carry with safety.

The abundant wind quickly wafted it across the upper portion of the lake to the point where Johnny Jumpup had made his home for many years.

"We wouldn't dare do this if the old fellow was alive," remarked Val Katzner, as Dave led the way into the strange dwelling.

"It was just like him, when he saw the flames gathering round him, to refuse your help," replied Seymour; "he and I had a quarrel, and I thought when he left me that he meant to do all he could to save himself."

"I suppose many of the Indians are fatalists," remarked Darak; "when they believe their time has come, they give up."

"Which would have been a bad way with us, Darak, or rather for me, for I did give up, and it was you that saved me."

All saw the grateful expression on Seymour's face when he uttered these words.

Nate and Jack believed that when the two were in the presence of death they had come to a full understanding, and, in accordance with a strange law of this human nature of ours, Darak and

Dave, who had detested each other until then, were now drawn together by the strongest of ties.

Matt Marsh and Val Katzner, like every one in Wunkako, knew of that dramatic episode on the last graduation day at the academy, and must have wondered at the affectionate manner of the youths, but both had too good taste to make any reference to it.

There was no fear of Nate or Jack opening their mouths on the subject.

As Dave had said, the half-breed's cabin was fully supplied with everything needed for fishing or hunting.

Now that the oppressive tension of anxiety was removed, all became conscious of a degree of hunger which was unsuspected until the reunion of the party.

Dave remained to prepare the fire, while the rest went out with hooks and lines to hunt bait and woo the fish from the lake.

They were so successful that the coals were no more than fairly ready when they returned with a full supply of plump bass that had been cleaned and prepared for the embers. It was one of the quickest and most toothsome repasts of which any member of the party had partaken in a long time.

Although many references were made to the half-breed, it must not be supposed that the self-invited guests to his dwelling were disposed to jest over his fate. Death is too solemn a thing for jest, but Jumpup had hardly a redeeming trait in his character.

"Wouldn't he be surprised if he should appear now?" said Nate Baldwin.

At that instant the half-breed did appear.

The words were in Nate's mouth, when every one of the six, who had risen to their feet and were about to leave, became aware that Johnny Jumpup was standing in the door of his own dwelling and scowling at them.

"Ugh! what do you do here, eh? Jumpup heap mad."

Had there been only one or possibly two visitors, it is likely that the mongrel would have leaped at them in his rage, but there were six, and he believed more than one of them was armed.

He was afraid to do what he was eager to do.

Matt Marsh was standing nearest to Jumpup. Reaching his hand in his pocket, he drew out a silver dollar and handed it to him.

"There, Johnny, I guess that will make it right.

Val Katzner passed a half-dollar to him, and each of the youths gave him more or the same as he filed past the fellow, who stepped back to make room for them.

Dave Seymour was last. He had not paid the half-breed any portion of the sum promised, and he now produced the five-dollar bill, which had gone safely through the forest fire.

"No!" muttered the savage, his ugly face assuming an expression of hideous ferocity; "me hate you!"

"Hate all you please," coolly replied Dave, shoving back the twist of money; "it makes no difference to me; I don't care, but it's a pity that when so many good people perished to-day *you* were spared."

And Dave, who was angry as he could be, rejoined his amazed friends on the outside, from where they quickly made their way to their boat.

On the dreadful Saturday, September 1st, 1894, when the gallant engineer Jim Root was backing his train with desperate haste from the burning ruins of Hinckley to the friendly marsh, six miles away, and when, amid smoke, fire, and heat like Hades itself, he landed every one of its hundreds of passengers at the side of the water in time to

save their lives, and barely two minutes ahead of the appalling forest fire which was racing after him, there were two persons who refused to join in the rush from the cars to the pool.

They were Chinamen, who appeared to be dazed, and were deaf to all persuasion. Several men tried to drag them forth, but they cowered under their seats and could not be dislodged. So they were abandoned, and in the first accounts published of that thrilling scene it was stated that all the passengers, although suffering terribly, were saved with the exception of the two Mongols who invited their own fate.

And yet, several days later, both of those almond-eyed travellers were seen a number of miles from ruined Hinckley, without, as far as could be noted, the smell of fire about their garments.

How they managed to escape is known only to themselves, and as yet they have not chosen to explain.

It was the same with Johnny Jumpup, the half-breed Sioux. He extricated himself from the vortex of the conflagration in some way, and, although he has been questioned a number of times, he shakes his head and refuses to make the matter clear.

When the fellow came to count over the sum received for furnishing the lines and the fire for the dinner partaken of in his cabin, no doubt he was satisfied, for he has not put in any additional claim and is not likely to do so.

"Do you know what I think?" asked Jack Patterson, after the sail was hoisted and they were skimming toward the other end of the lake.

"Dont' keep us waiting," replied Nate Baldwin; "you can't conceive the anxiety we always feel to know your thoughts."

"Johnny Jumpup is a salamander—that is, one of the fabled kind, for the genuine salamander will burn up as readily as the rest of us."

"I don't know about that," remarked Darak Edwards; "but there's one thing certain: we are the luckiest fellows in the world, and we can never thank Heaven too often for its mercies to-day."

And every heart said, "Amen."

CHAPTER XXII.

ALL'S WELL THAT ENDS WELL.

IN the opening chapter of this story, I set out with the declaration that Darak Edwards was just about as angry as he could be, and now, as I draw near the closing paragraph, I have to say that there was a certain gentleman in the same little town of Wunkako who boiled over with indignation on a certain sunny afternoon in the month of September, 1894.

That gentleman was Professor Fetterman, and again you will agree with me when I declare that he had just cause for his perturbation, for this is how it come about.

You will recall that he tried to settle the question of the authorship of the prize composition by sending specimens of the handwriting of Darak Edwards and of Dave Seymour, respectively, to two professional experts, one in Boston and the other in the city of New York.

To his disgust these reports, for which he paid a

liberal fee, were diametrically opposed to each other, and both experts were equally positive they were right.

Professor Fetterman's next move was to exchange the specimens, adding some additional ones, and sending them off again. Each expert in writing, therefore, received that which had been passed upon by the other.

Accompanying the packages were notes saying that the sender was not satisfied, and desired the work done more thoroughly.

And what do you imagine was the result? Back the reports promptly came, and expert Watson changed his ground and so did expert MacDowell.

Evidently they wished to please their employer, whereas they filled him with furious disgust.

"They are both humbugs!" was his exclamation, in which he echoed the sentiments of perhaps others; "they still disagree, and, so far as they are concerned, I am no better off than before, except that I have learned that most of such experts are egregious asses."

He flung the papers on his table and strode up and down his library, muttering things about the two gentlemen which must have made their ears

tingle, even though they were unable to hear the words.

"This brings me back to my original conclusion," he said, resuming his seat; "young Dave Seymour is entitled to the prize, and by gracious, he shall get it!"

He caught up his pen and wrote a letter similar to that which he had prepared some time before, adding his regrets that the young man had been kept out of his due so long.

The professor appended his signature and was in the act of folding the paper, when he checked himself with another exclamation:

"This confounded thing will be the death of me. I agreed with young Patterson that I would do nothing for a week—that is, I believe I did. I declare I can't remember what I did promise, but I have a feeling that I would wait a week, and it will be up this evening. However, I'll seal the letter and wait a few hours before mailing it. It's all the same, anyway—I wonder who that is."

The last remark was caused by the tinkle of his door-bell. To his astonishment, Darak Edwards and Dave Seymour entered his library a minute later and respectfully greeted him.

Hardly able to hide his surprise, he invited them

to be seated and waited for an explanation of their call.

Darak opened the interview by some commonplace remarks, for he saw that his companion, despite his utmost effort at self-control, was deeply agitated. He cleared his throat, and when about to speak, stopped and fidgeted in his seat.

The professor noticed his uneasiness, and, recalling his varied dealings with young men, tried to place him at ease.

"I am glad to learn that you had so happy an escape from the forest fire when so many others were unfortunate."

"Yes; we were fortunate indeed," replied Darak, "there was a time when Dave and I thought our last hour had come. It was pretty rough, and we, as well as Jack Patterson and Nate Baldwin, have not yet fully recovered from the effects."

It was at this point that Professor Fetterman's fine tact came into play. He put from his mind all the provocation caused by his dealings with the writing-experts and the delay and worry over the prize award. He became again the instructor of youth, kind, considerate, charitable, and only anx-

ious to help those whom Providence had brought under his influence.

He read the meaning of the call within three minutes following the entrance of the two youths into his library.

He knew they had come to confess, and one of them to make restitution: that one was *Dave Seymour*, the cause of whose uneasiness could not be mistaken. He required bracing up, and encouragement in the right course he had laid out, and the professor gave it with a skill which could not be surpassed.

There was no more delightful story-teller than he, and his long experience had given him an inexhaustible fund to draw upon.

He was ready with a number of anecdotes which fitted the case before him. He drew the conversation gradually around to the mistakes which every person is prone to make in this life, first reminding *Darak* of his blunder in going to *Little Dead Man's Lake*, when he ought to have remained within reach of the lake proper, so long as the evident danger from the burning forests threatened them.

Darak saw the drift of the conversation and admitted his fault, but he took care to make no ref-

erence to the real reason for the change in their plans.

It seemed that the professor had gone through an experience somewhat similar many years before in Massachusetts, and he related it with graphic skill. Seymour became interested and forgot for the time his own errand.

Then, in the most natural manner conceivable, the gentleman descanted upon the moral mistakes which human nature makes, and gave illustrative instances, finally dwelling upon the duty of every one, when awakened to a sense of his wrong step, to retrace it and make all the reparation in his power, assured as he is that the reward of an approving conscience brings a peace, a soothing comfort, and a blessed consolation far beyond anything which this world can afford.

Wheeling about in his chair, so as to face Seymour, and smiling encouragingly, he said:

“I know why you two young men have called on me this afternoon; the wrong done on graduation day, last June, was by you, David, and your conscience has moved you to come to me with Darak, whom you wronged, to make it right. That of course I know, and I am thankful that such is the fact.”

Dave's face became crimson and he moved uneasily again, but he was strengthened by what had been said, and did not hesitate now that the crucial point was reached.

"Yes; professor, I have called to tell you that I'm the worst fellow that ever lived."

"I hope you will not say that, for it would not be true; the first step toward doing right is to be convinced that you have done wrong; such conviction is proof of the innate goodness that to a greater or less degree exists in every human heart. If you persisted in your wrong course, then you would be wicked indeed."

"I changed the compositions, just as Darak said I did. Why, I could no more write a composition as good as his than I could fly. I felt mean about it afterward, but saw no way of setting it right, and how do you suppose he paid me?"

"I have just learned from your account of what you went through the other day in the forest fire."

"Yes—he saved my life, when he ought to have let me die!" exclaimed Seymour, in considerable agitation.

"Dave, what's the use of magnifying that thing?" protested Darak. "I happened to find a place where there was a chance for both of us, and

I was working for myself as much as for you. That's all there was about it, and you would have done as much for me or for any one."

"That doesn't make any difference, for you knew all the time what a contemptible trick I had played on you."

"We must not withhold from Darak full credit for his brave deed, but I am proud to believe that a great many American boys are equally courageous. However, let that go; the fact remains that you, too, David, are morally brave, for the step you are about to take will bring its punishment as well as its reward. It is right that it should be so. Nearly every person in Wunkako, as you are well aware, believes that you fairly won the prize."

"I know that and I am glad of it!"

"Why so?"

"It will make Darak's triumph and my punishment the greater. I am going to stay right here in Wunkako; I shan't run away, and I don't care if every man, woman, and child cuts me dead, or stones me on the street."

"It won't be anything like that," said the professor with a smile; "Americans are impulsive, but they don't go to such extremes in matters like

this: there would be too many to stone. No doubt a number will feel resentful, which is natural; for if a person does wrong he ought, as I have said, to suffer to some extent for it, even if he makes restitution."

"It will serve me right if every one turns against me."

"I shan't turn against you, nor will Professor Maillard, nor many others. On the contrary, they will respect you the more for the bravery you show in taking this step."

"It's very good in you, professor, to say all this, and you have lifted a big load from my heart. I have confessed the whole thing to my parents."

"What did your father say?"

For the first time Dave smiled.

"He wouldn't believe it at first; then he said he meant to use the strap on me in a way that I would remember for a hundred years. Finally, after mother pleaded with him, he agreed to leave it to Darak's father, and he sent to ask him what he wished him to do."

"What was Mr. Edwards' answer?"

"To throw the strap away, and he did."

"A sensible conclusion. Well, I do not see any use of delaying this business."

Professor Fetterman walked to the large iron safe in the corner of his library where he kept his valuables, and brought out the watch and chain, which he handed to Darak Edwards, who rose, bowed, and thanked him, after which he admired the prize for a few minutes and then put it out of sight in his pocket. All three were standing and the boys turned to go. The good man accompanied them to the door, where he placed his hand on Dave's head, who was as tall as himself, and with a voice of sympathetic kindness compressed a whole sermon into five words:

"It pays to do right."

For the first time in months, tears filled Dave Seymour's eyes. He attempted to answer, but could not, and with quivering lip passed outside with Darak, who came near breaking down himself.

They had hardly reached the street, when whom should they encounter but bright, merry-faced Jennie Edwards, who knew where her brother had gone, and came down to meet him. She darted a quick, inquiring glance at him, and he nodded.

Dave looked at her askance, uncertain whether she would notice him if he spoke.

But he was quickly undeceived. Her face was aglow, and she reached out her plump little hand with a smile.

“Do you know what I’m going to do, Dave?”

“Why no—that is—I can’t say—maybe——”

“That’s it!” she interrupted, as she rose on her toes and kissed him on the cheek, while a dozen wondering persons saw the action.

“Thank you, thank you,” muttered the blushing, confused Dave, “but really—that is—I don’t deserve anything like that.”

“I hope you are not offended,” said the girl, her eyes sparkling.

“Oh, no—oh, no—you couldn’t offend me, Jennie, if you did that a thousand times.”

“I guess I won’t run the risk,” she remarked, turning about and walking up the street between the two sturdy youths.

It was good that Professor Fetterman impressed upon Dave Seymour the truth that the work of restitution has its penalties as well as rewards, though the latter outweigh the former a hundredfold.

It was well said by him that a wrongdoer ought in the nature of things to suffer something in this world for his misdeeds. Dave expected it, and was not disappointed.

Having parted with Darak and his sister with the promise to spend the evening with them soon, he began his penance, which was that of making known the whole truth about the gold watch, and his experience afterward.

Such news spreads like the prairie fire, and it may be doubted whether, when nightfall came, there was an adult in Wunkako who did not know the particulars, some of them in an exaggerated form.

Several denounced Dave to his face and told him he was the monumental scoundrel of the nineteenth century. He admitted that he had been, but hoped he was not such now.

Others said it was "too bad," and he admitted that too, but added that perhaps it was not quite so bad as it might be.

Still others, who can never know the blessed effect of their words (and chief among them was the good pastor of his church), took Dave by the hand and complimented him for his high moral courage, and encouraged him to keep on in the straight and narrow path upon which he had started.

This was acting the part of the good Samaritan, and, as I have said, it reached deeper and was far

more effective in its divine influence than even Dave himself suspected.

And yet this phase of human nature was not without its tincture of comedy. Who would suspect that anything in the nature of humor would crop up in the humiliation of Dave Seymour? But it did.

Perhaps the most prominent female worker in the church Dave attended was Miss Burlock, a spinster of three-score. She was so prim, severe, and good herself that she could admit no excuse for the slightest lapse in others.

The least slip on the part of some well-meaning person was condemned by her as an almost unpardonable sin. She meant well, but she was a thorn in the side of her pastor and her friends.

It was about the middle of the afternoon that the news reached her of what had occurred in the library of Professor Fetterman.

Unfortunately, the waggish Jack Patterson was the one who called and gave her the particulars, and there can be no doubt that he said everything with deliberation.

And what an awful, grewsome story it was! Jack gave her the impression that Seymour, after stealing the composition of Darak Edwards,

formed a plot to poison him, his sister, and parents, but the supposed strychnine which he mixed with their coffee turned out to be some finely ground Mocha, which improved its flavor instead of making corpses of all the family.

The next step of Dave was to set fire to the house of the Edwards, but just as the blaze started a sudden fall of rain extinguished it—a most wonderful instance of the interposition of Providence.

Not satisfied with this fiendish work, Dave next tried to get the Edwards family to join him on a berry expedition—his scheme being to entice them to the railway track, so that all four would be run over by the Limited Express, but Matt Marsh suspected his dreadful purpose and stopped his engine just in time to allow them to get out of the way.

Jack ought to have been ashamed of himself, and he says he is; but he was adding more horrifying incidents to the career of his precious villain, when Miss Burlock sprang up, hastily tied on her bonnet, caught up her umbrella, and set out to find Dave Seymour. A few minutes later she came upon him as he was opening the gate to his own home.

She was taking long strides and swinging her

umbrella, but he heard her call and politely waited for her.

She began her attack while yet some distance away, and for a minute or two Dave was stupefied, not knowing what to make of it. By the time she had reached the end of her story, a glimmering of the truth dawned upon him, and suspicion became certainty when he chanced to glance across the street and saw Jack Patterson grinning and going through some expressive pantomime.

"Who told you all this?" interrupted Dave, with a long face.

"Mr. Jack Patterson, and only a few minutes ago; he never told a falsehood; he had a lot more to tell, but I couldn't wait, and I put on my bonnet to seek you out."

"Then he didn't let you know about that charge of powder I put under Darak's house, nor of the three shots I fired at his mother with my Winchester? He didn't speak of those, eh?"

"Mercy sakes alive!" gasped Miss Burlock, recoiling a step and throwing up her hands in horror. "You don't tell me that you——"

"No; I don't tell you; I want him to do the telling. Miss Burlock, did you ever see me mad—real, downright, boiling mad?"

"No, and I hope I never shall——"

"Let me warn you, when one of my spells comes on you must run into your house, lock all the doors and windows, and crawl under the bed. *I feel a spell coming on now!*"

With a smothered gasp, the good woman whirled about and went down the street as fast as she could walk, and when I say that, I must add that her speed was about the same as the trot of an ordinary person.

Dave shook his fist at Jack Patterson as he dodged round the corner, and went into the house, where he and his folks had the first hearty laugh they had enjoyed for many days.

But, after all, the business was a serious one to every thoughtful person, and Dave Seymour for a long time had to bear a heavy cross. But he learned to rely upon the arm of Him who never fails, and he did not falter in following the path which he had laid out for himself. The reward came from within, and repaid him a thousandfold. The motto of his life became that sentence which I trust is graven deep on the heart of every one who has read these lines: *It pays to do right.*

THE END.

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WHEN I was sixteen years old I belonged to a composition class. It was our custom to go on the recitation seat every day with clean slates, and we were allowed ten minutes to write seventy words on any subject the teacher thought suited to our capacity. One day he gave out "What a Man Would See if He Went to Greenland." My heart was in the matter, and before the ten minutes were up I had one side of my slate filled. The teacher listened to the reading of our compositions, and when they were all over he simply said: "Some of you will make your living by writing one of these days." That gave me something to ponder upon, I did not say so out loud, but I knew that my composition was as good as the best of them. By the way, there was another thing that came in my way just then. I was reading at that time one of Mayne Reid's works which I had drawn from the library, and I pondered upon it as much as I did upon what the teacher said to me. In introducing Swartboy to his readers he made use of this expression: "No visible change was observable in Swartboy's countenance." Now, it occurred to me that if a man of his education could make such a blunder as that and still write a book, I ought to be able to do it, too. I went home that very day and began a story, "The Old Guide's Narrative," which was sent to the *New York Weekly*, and came back, respectfully declined. It was written on both sides of the sheets but I didn't know that this was against the rules. Nothing abashed, I began another, and receiving some instruction from a friend of mine who was a clerk in a book store, I wrote it on only one side of the paper. But, mind you, he didn't know what I was

doing. Nobody knew it; but one day, after a hard Saturday's work—the other boys had been out skating on the brick-pond—I shyly broached the subject to my mother. I felt the need of some sympathy. She listened in amazement, and then said: "Why, do you think you could write a book like that?" That settled the matter, and from that day no one knew what I was up to until I sent the first four volumes of Gunboat Series to my father. Was it work? Well, yes; it was hard work, but each week I had the satisfaction of seeing the manuscript grow until the "Young Naturalist" was all complete.

—*Harry Castlemon in the Writer.*

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