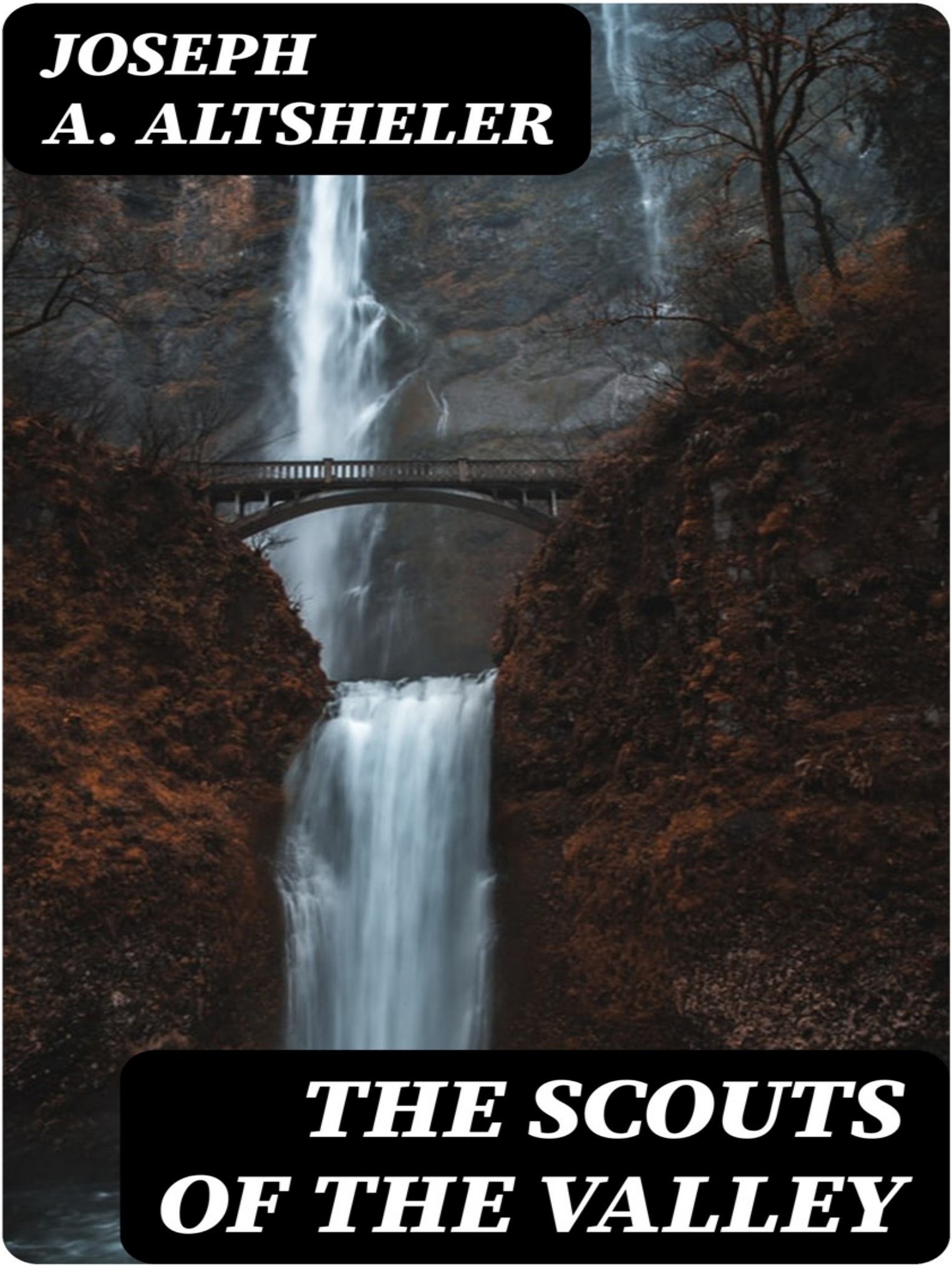
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THE SCOUTS
OF THE VALLEY

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The Scouts of the Valley

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CHAPTER I. THE LONE CANOE

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A light canoe of bark, containing a single human figure, moved swiftly up one of the twin streams that form the Ohio. The water, clear and deep, coming through rocky soil, babbled gently at the edges, where it lapped the land, but in the center the full current flowed steadily and without noise.

The thin shadows of early dusk were falling, casting a pallid tint over the world, a tint touched here and there with living fire from the sun, which was gone, though leaving burning embers behind. One glowing shaft, piercing straight through the heavy forest that clothed either bank, fell directly upon the figure in the boat, as a hidden light illuminates a great picture, while the rest is left in shadow. It was no common forest runner who sat in the middle of the red beam. Yet a boy, in nothing but years, he swung the great paddle with an ease and vigor that the strongest man in the West might have envied. His rifle, with the stock carved beautifully, and the long, slender blue barrel of the border, lay by his side. He could bring the paddle into the boat, grasp the rifle, and carry it to his shoulder with a single, continuous movement.

His most remarkable aspect, one that the casual observer even would have noticed, was an extraordinary vitality. He created in the minds of those who saw him a feeling that he lived intensely every moment of his life. Born and-bred in the forest, he was essentially its child, a perfect physical being, trained by the utmost hardship and danger, and with every faculty, mental and physical, in complete

coordination. It is only by a singular combination of time and place, and only once in millions of chances, that Nature produces such a being.

The canoe remained a few moments in the center of the red light, and its occupant, with a slight swaying motion of the paddle, held it steady in the current, while he listened. Every feature stood out in the glow, the firm chin, the straight strong nose, the blue eyes, and the thick yellow hair. The red blue, and yellow beads on his dress of beautifully tanned deerskin flashed in the brilliant rays. He was the great picture of fact, not of fancy, a human being animated by a living, dauntless soul.

He gave the paddle a single sweep and shot from the light into the shadow. His canoe did not stop until it grazed the northern shore, where bushes and overhanging boughs made a deep shadow. It would have taken a keen eye now to have seen either the canoe or its occupant, and Henry Ware paddled slowly and without noise in the darkest heart of the shadow.

The sunlight lingered a little longer in the center of the stream. Then the red changed to pink. The pink, in its turn, faded, and the whole surface of the river was somber gray, flowing between two lines of black forest.

The coming of the darkness did not stop the boy. He swung a little farther out into the stream, where the bushes and hanging boughs would not get in his way, and continued his course with some increase of speed.

The great paddle swung swiftly through the water, and the length of stroke was amazing, but the boy's breath did not come faster, and the muscles on his arms and shoulders

rippled as if it were the play of a child. Henry was in waters unknown to him. He had nothing more than hearsay upon which to rely, and he used all the wilderness caution that he had acquired through nature and training. He called into use every faculty of his perfect physical being. His trained eyes continually pierced the darkness. At times, he stopped and listened with ears that could hear the footfall of the rabbit, but neither eye nor ear brought report of anything unusual. The river flowed with a soft, sighing sound. Now and then a wild creature stirred in the forest, and once a deer came down to the margin to drink, but this was the ordinary life of the woods, and he passed it by.

He went on, hour after hour. The river narrowed. The banks grew higher and rockier, and the water, deep and silvery under the moon, flowed in a somewhat swifter current. Henry gave a little stronger sweep to the paddle, and the speed of the canoe was maintained. He still kept within the shadow of the northern bank.

He noticed after a while that fleecy vapor was floating before the moon. The night seemed to be darkening, and a rising wind came out of the southwest. The touch of the air on, his face was damp. It was the token of rain, and he felt that it would not be delayed long.

It was no part of his plan to be caught in a storm on the Monongahela. Besides the discomfort, heavy rain and wind might sink his frail canoe, and he looked for a refuge. The river was widening again, and the banks sank down until they were but little above the water. Presently he saw a place that he knew would be suitable, a stretch of thick

bushes and weeds growing into the very edge of the water, and extending a hundred yards or more along the shore.

He pushed his canoe far into the undergrowth, and then stopped it in shelter so close that, keen as his own eyes were, he could scarcely see the main stream of the river. The water where he came to rest was not more than a foot deep, but he remained in the canoe, half reclining and wrapping closely around himself and his rifle a beautiful blanket woven of the tightest fiber.

His position, with his head resting on the edge of the canoe and his shoulder pressed against the side, was full of comfort to him, and he awaited calmly whatever might come. Here and there were little spaces among the leaves overhead, and through them he saw a moon, now almost hidden by thick and rolling vapors, and a sky that had grown dark and somber. The last timid star had ceased to twinkle, and the rising wind was wet and cold. He was glad of the blanket, and, skilled forest runner that he was, he never traveled without it. Henry remained perfectly still. The light canoe did not move beneath his weight the fraction of an inch. His upturned eyes saw the little cubes of sky that showed through the leaves grow darker and darker. The bushes about him were now bending before the wind, which blew steadily from the south, and presently drops of rain began to fall lightly on the water.

The boy, alone in the midst of all that vast wilderness, surrounded by danger in its most cruel forms, and with a black midnight sky above him, felt neither fear nor awe. Being what nature and circumstance had made him, he was conscious, instead, of a deep sense of peace and comfort.

He was at ease, in a nest for the night, and there was only the remotest possibility that the prying eye of an enemy would see him. The leaves directly over his head were so thick that they formed a canopy, and, as he heard the drops fall upon them, it was like the rain on a roof, that soothes the one beneath its shelter.

Distant lightning flared once or twice, and low thunder rolled along the southern horizon, but both soon ceased, and then a rain, not hard, but cold and persistent, began to fall, coming straight down. Henry saw that it might last all night, but he merely eased himself a little in the canoe, drew the edges of the blanket around his chin, and let his eyelids droop.

The rain was now seeping through the leafy canopy of green, but he did not care. It could not penetrate the close fiber of the blanket, and the fur cap drawn far down on his head met the blanket. Only his face was uncovered, and when a cold drop fell upon it, it was to him, hardened by forest life, cool and pleasant to the touch.

Although the eyelids still drooped, he did not yet feel the tendency to sleep. It was merely a deep, luxurious rest, with the body completely relaxed, but with the senses alert. The wind ceased to blow, and the rain came down straight with an even beat that was not unmusical. No other sound was heard in the forest, as the ripple of the river at the edges was merged into it. Henry began to feel the desire for sleep by and by, and, laying the paddle across the boat in such a way that it sheltered his face, he closed his eyes. In five minutes he would have been sleeping as soundly as a man in a warm bed under a roof, but with a quick motion he

suddenly put the paddle aside and raised himself a little in the canoe, while one hand slipped down under the folds of the blanket to the hammer of his rifle.

His ear had told him in time that there was a new sound on the river. He heard it faintly above the even beat of the rain, a soft sound, long and sighing, but regular. He listened, and then he knew it. It was made by oars, many of them swung in unison, keeping admirable time.

Henry did not yet feel fear, although it must be a long boat full of Indian warriors, as it was not likely, that anybody else would be abroad upon these waters at such a time. He made no attempt to move. Where he lay it was black as the darkest cave, and his cool judgment told him that there was no need of flight.

The regular rhythmic beat of the oars came nearer, and presently as he looked through the covert of leaves the dusky outline of a great war canoe came into view. It contained at least twenty warriors, of what tribe he could not tell, but they were wet, and they looked cold and miserable. Soon they were opposite him, and he saw the outline of every figure. Scalp locks drooped in the rain, and he knew that the warriors, hardy as they might be, were suffering.

Henry expected to see the long boat pass on, but it was turned toward a shelving bank fifty or sixty yards below, and they beached it there. Then all sprang out, drew it up on the land, and, after turning it over, propped it up at an angle. When this was done they sat under it in a close group, sheltered from the rain. They were using their great canoe as a roof, after the habit of Shawnees and Wyandots.

The boy watched them for a long time through one of the little openings in the bushes, and he believed that they would remain as they were all night, but presently he saw a movement among them, and a little flash of light. He understood it. They were trying to kindle a fire-with flint and steel, under the shelter of the boat. He continued to watch them 'lazily and without alarm.

Their fire, if they succeeded in making it, would cast no light upon him in the dense covert, but they would be outlined against the flame, and he could see them better, well enough, perhaps, to tell to what tribe they belonged.

He watched under his lowered eyelids while the warriors, gathered in a close group to make a shelter from stray puffs of wind, strove with flint and steel. Sparks sprang up and went out, but Henry at last saw a little blaze rise and cling to life. Then, fed with tinder and bark, it grew under the roof made by the boat until it was ruddy and strong. The boat was tilted farther back, and the fire, continuing to grow, crackled cheerfully, while the flames leaped higher.

By a curious transfer of the senses, Henry, as he lay in the thick blackness felt the influence of the fire, also. Its warmth was upon his face, and it was pleasing to see the red and yellow light victorious against the sodden background of the rain and dripping forest. The figures of the warriors passed and repassed before the fire, and the boy in the boat moved suddenly. His body was not shifted more than an inch, but his surprise was great.

A warrior stood between him and the fire, outlined perfectly against the red light. It was a splendid figure, young, much beyond the average height, the erect and

noble head crowned with the defiant scalplock, the strong, slightly curved nose and the massive chin cut as clearly as if they had been carved in copper. The man who had laid aside a wet blanket was bare now to the waist, and Henry could see the powerful muscles play on chest and shoulders as he moved.

The boy knew him. It was Timmendiquas, the great White Lightning of the Wyandots, the youngest, but the boldest and ablest of all the Western chiefs. Henry's pulses leaped a little at the sight of his old foe and almost friend. As always, he felt admiration at the sight of the young chief. It was not likely that he would ever behold such another magnificent specimen of savage manhood.

The presence of Timmendiquas so far east was also full of significance. The great fleet under Adam Colfax, and with Henry and his comrades in the van, had reached Pittsburgh at last. Thence the arms, ammunition, and other supplies were started on the overland journey for the American army, but the five lingered before beginning the return to Kentucky. A rumor came that the Indian alliance was spreading along the entire frontier, both west and north. It was said that Timmendiquas, stung to fiery energy by his defeats, was coming east to form a league with the Iroquois, the famous Six Nations. These warlike tribes were friendly with the Wyandots, and the league would be a formidable danger to the Colonies, the full strength of which was absorbed already in the great war.

But the report was a new call of battle to Henry, Shif'less Sol, and the others. The return to Kentucky was postponed. They could be of greater service here, and they plunged into

the great woods to the north and, east to see what might be stirring among the warriors.

Now Henry, as he looked at Timmendiquas, knew that report had told the truth. The great chief would not be on the fringe of the Iroquois country, if he did not have such a plan, and he had the energy and ability to carry it through. Henry shuddered at the thought of the tomahawk flashing along every mile of a frontier so vast, and defended so thinly. He was glad in every fiber that he and his comrades had remained to hang upon the Indian hordes, and be heralds of their marches. In the forest a warning usually meant the saving of life.

The rain ceased after a while, although water dripped from the trees everywhere. But the big fire made an area of dry earth about it, and the warriors replaced the long boat in the water. Then all but four or five of them lay beside the coals and went to sleep. Timmendiquas was one of those who remained awake, and Henry saw that he was in deep thought. He walked back and forth much like a white man, and now and then he folded his hands behind his back, looking toward the earth, but not seeing it. Henry could guess what was in his mind. He would draw forth the full power of the Six Nations, league them with the Indians of the great valley, and hurl them all in one mass upon the frontier. He was planning now the means to the end.

The chief, in his little walks back and forth, came close to the edge of the bushes in which Henry lay, It was not at all probable that he would conclude to search among them, but some accident, a chance, might happen, and Henry began to feel a little alarm. Certainly, the coming of the day would

make his refuge insecure, and he resolved to slip away while it was yet light.

The boy rose a little in the boat, slowly and with the utmost caution, because the slightest sound out of the common might arouse Timmendiquas to the knowledge of a hostile presence. The canoe must make no plash in the water. Gradually he unwrapped the blanket and tied it in a folded square at his back. Then he took thought a few moments. The forest was so silent now that he did not believe he could push the canoe through the bushes without being heard. He would leave it there for use another day and go on foot through the woods to his comrades.

Slowly he put one foot down the side until it rested on the bottom, and then he remained still. The chief had paused in his restless walk back and forth. Could it be possible that he had heard so slight a sound as that of a human foot sinking softly into the water? Henry waited with his rifle ready. If necessary he would fire, and then dart away among the bushes.

Five or six intense moments passed, and the chief resumed his restless pacing. If he had heard, he had passed it by as nothing, and Henry raised the other foot out of the canoe. He was as delicate in his movement as a surgeon mending the human eye, and he had full cause, as not eye alone, but life as well, depended upon his success. Both feet now rested upon the muddy bottom, and he stood there clear of the boat.

The chief did not stop again, and as the fire had burned higher, his features were disclosed more plainly in his restless walk back and forth before the flames. Henry took a

final look at the lofty features, contracted now into a frown, then began to wade among the bushes, pushing his way softly. This was the most delicate and difficult task of all. The water must not be allowed to plash around him nor the bushes to rustle as he passed. Forward he went a yard, then two, five, ten, and his feet were about to rest upon solid earth, when a stick submerged in the mud broke under his moccasin with a snap singularly loud in the silence of the night.

Henry sprang at once upon dry land, whence he cast back a single swift glance. He saw the chief standing rigid and gazing in the direction from which the sound had come. Other warriors were just behind him, following his look, aware that there was an unexpected presence in the forest, and resolved to know its nature.

Henry ran northward. So confident was he in his powers and the protecting darkness of the night that he sent back a sharp cry, piercing and defiant, a cry of a quality that could come only from a white throat. The warriors would know it, and he intended for them to know it. Then, holding his rifle almost parallel with his body, he darted swiftly away through the black spaces of the forest. But an answering cry came to his, the Indian yell taking up his challenge, and saying that the night would not check pursuit.

Henry maintained his swift pace for a long time, choosing the more open places that he might make no noise among the bushes and leaves. Now and then water dripped in his face, and his moccasins were wet from the long grass, but his body was warm and dry, and he felt little weariness. The clouds were now all gone, and the stars sprang out, dancing

in a sky of dusky blue. Trained eyes could see far in the forest despite the night, and Henry felt that he must be wary. He recalled the skill and tenacity of Timmendiquas. A fugitive could scarcely be trailed in the darkness, but the great chief would spread out his forces like a fan and follow.

He had been running perhaps three hours when he concluded to stop in a thicket, where he lay down on the damp grass, and rested with his head under his arm.

His breath had been coming a little faster, but his heart now resumed its regular beat. Then he heard a soft sound, that of footsteps. He thought at first that some wild animal was prowling near, but second thought convinced him that human beings had come. Gazing through the thicket, he saw an Indian warrior walking among the trees, looking searchingly about him as if he were a scout. Another, coming from a different direction, approached him, and Henry felt sure that they were of the party of Timmendiquas. They had followed him in some manner, perhaps by chance, and it behooved Mm now to lie close.

A third warrior joined them and they began to examine the ground. Henry realized that it was much lighter. Keen eyes under such a starry sky could see much, and they might strike his trail. The fear quickly became fact. One of the warriors, uttering a short cry, raised his head and beckoned to the others. He had seen broken twigs or trampled grass, and Henry, knowing that it was no time to hesitate, sprang from his covert. Two of the warriors caught a glimpse of his dusky figure and fired, the bullets cutting the leaves close to his head, but Henry ran so fast that he was lost to view in an instant.

The boy was conscious that his position contained many elements of danger. He was about to have another example of the tenacity and resource of the great young chief of the Wyandots, and he felt a certain anger. He, did not wish to be disturbed in his plans, he wished to rejoin his comrades and move farther east toward the chosen lands of the Six Nations; instead, he must spend precious moments running for his life.

Henry did not now flee toward the camp of his friends. He was too wise, too unselfish, to bring a horde down upon them, and he curved away in a course that would take him to the south of them. He glanced up and saw that the heavens were lightening yet more. A thin gray color like a mist was appearing in the east. It was the herald of day, and now the Indians would be able to find his trail. But Henry was not afraid. His anger over the loss of time quickly passed, and he ran swiftly on, the fall of his moccasins making scarcely any noise as he passed.

It was no unusual incident. Thousands of such pursuits occurred in the border life of our country, and were lost to the chronicler. For generations they were almost a part of the daily life of the frontier, but the present, while not out of the common in itself, had, uncommon phases. It was the most splendid type of white life in all the wilderness that fled, and the finest type of red life that followed.

It was impossible for Henry to feel anger or hate toward Timmendiquas. In his place he would have done what he was doing. It was hard to give up these great woods and beautiful lakes and rivers, and the wild life that wild men lived and loved. There was so much chivalry in the boy's

nature that he could think of all these things while he fled to escape the tomahawk or the stake.

Up came the sun. The gray light turned to silver, and then to red and blazing gold. A long, swelling note, the triumphant cry of the pursuing warriors, rose behind him. Henry turned his head for one look. He saw a group of them poised for a moment on the crest of a low hill and outlined against the broad flame in the east. He saw their scalp locks, the rifles in their hands, and their bare chests shining bronze in the glow. Once more he sent back his defiant cry, now in answer to theirs, and then, calling upon his reserves of strength and endurance, fled with a speed that none of the warriors had ever seen surpassed.

Henry's flight lasted all that day, and he used every device to evade the pursuit, swinging by vines, walking along fallen logs, and wading in brooks. He did not see the warriors again, but instinct warned him that they were yet following. At long intervals he would rest for a quarter of an hour or so among the bushes, and at noon he ate a little of the venison that he always carried. Three hours later he came to the river again, and swimming it he turned on his course, but kept to the southern side. When the twilight was falling once more he sat still in dense covert for a long time. He neither saw nor heard a sign of human presence, and he was sure now that the pursuit had failed. Without an effort he dismissed it from his mind, ate a little more of the venison, and made his bed for the night.

The whole day had been bright, with a light wind blowing, and the forest was dry once more. As far as Henry could see it circled away on every side, a solid dark green,

the leaves of oak and beech, maple and elm making a soft, sighing sound as they waved gently in the wind. It told Henry of nothing but peace. He had eluded the pursuit, hence it was no more. This was a great, friendly forest, ready to shelter him, to soothe him, and to receive him into its arms for peaceful sleep.

He found a place among thick trees where the leaves of last year lay deep upon the ground. He drew up enough of them for a soft bed, because now and for the moment he was a forest sybarite. He was wise enough to take his ease when he found it, knowing that it would pay his body to relax.

He lay down upon the leaves, placed the rifle by his side, and spread the blanket over himself and the weapon. The twilight was gone, and the night, dark and without stars, as he wished to see it, rolled up, fold after fold, covering and hiding everything. He looked a little while at a breadth of inky sky showing through the leaves, and then, free from trouble or fear, he fell asleep.

CHAPTER II. THE MYSTERIOUS HAND

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Henry slept until a rosy light, filtering through the leaves, fell upon his face. Then he sprang up, folded the blanket once more upon his back, and looked about him. Nothing had come in the night to disturb him, no enemy was near, and the morning sun was bright and beautiful. The venison was exhausted, but he bathed his face in the brook and resumed his journey, traveling with a long, swift stride that carried him at great speed.

The boy was making for a definite point, one that he knew well, although nearly all the rest of this wilderness was strange to him. The country here was rougher than it usually is in the great valley to the west, and as he advanced it became yet more broken, range after range of steep, stony hills, with fertile but narrow little valleys between. He went on without hesitation for at least two hours, and then stopping under a great oak he uttered a long, whining cry, much like the howl of a wolf.

It was not a loud note, but it was singularly penetrating, carrying far through the forest. A sound like an echo came back, but Henry knew that instead of an echo it was a reply to his own signal. Then he advanced boldly and swiftly and came to the edge of a snug little valley set deep among rocks and trees like a bowl. He stopped behind the great trunk of a beech, and looked into the valley with a smile of approval.

Four human figures were seated around a fire of smoldering coals that gave forth no smoke. They appeared

to be absorbed in some very pleasant task, and a faint odor that came to Henry's nostrils filled him with agreeable anticipations. He stepped forward boldly and called:

“Jim, save that piece for me!”

Long Jim Hart halted in mid-air the large slice of venison that he had toasted on a stick. Paul Cotter sprang joyfully to his feet, Silent Tom Ross merely looked up, but Shif'less Sol said:

“Thought Henry would be here in time for breakfast.”

Henry walked down in the valley, and the shiftless one regarded him keenly.

“I should judge, Henry Ware, that you've been hevin' a foot race,” he drawled.

“And why do you think that?” asked Henry.

“I kin see where the briars hev been rakin' across your leggins. Reckon that wouldn't happen, 'less you was in a pow'ful hurry.”

“You're right,” said Henry. “Now, Jim, you've been holding that venison in the air long enough. Give it to me, and after I've eaten it I'll tell you all that I've been doing, and all that's been done to me.”

Long Jim handed him the slice. Henry took a comfortable seat in the circle before the coals, and ate with all the appetite of a powerful human creature whose food had been more than scanty for at least two days.

“Take another piece,” said Long Jim, observing him with approval. “Take two pieces, take three, take the whole deer. I always like to see a hungry man eat. It gives him sech satisfaction that I git a kind uv taste uv it myself.”

Henry did not offer a word 'of explanation until his breakfast was over. Then lie leaned back, sighing twice with deep content, and said:

“Boys, I've got a lot to tell.”

Shif'less Sol moved into an easier position on the leaves.

“I guess it has somethin' to do with them scratches on your leggins.”

“It has,” continued Henry with emphasis, “and I want to say to you boys that I've seen Timmendiquas, the great White Lightning of the Wyandots.”

“Timmendiquas!” exclaimed the others together.

“No less a man than he,” resumed Henry. “I've looked upon his very face, I've seen him in camp with warriors, and I've had the honor of being pursued by him and his men more hours than I can tell. That's why you see those briar scratches on my leggins, Sol.”

“Then we cannot doubt that he is here to stir the Six Nations to continued war,” said Paul Cotter, “and he will succeed. He is a mighty chief, and his fire and eloquence will make them take up the hatchet. I'm glad that we've come. We delayed a league once between the Shawnees and the Miamis; I don't think we can stop this one, but we may get some people out of the way before the blow falls.”

“Who are these Six Nations, whose name sounds so pow'ful big up here?” asked Long Jim.

“Their name is as big as it sounds,” replied Henry. “They are the Onondagas, the Mohawks, Oneidas, Senecas, Cayugas, and Tuscaroras. They used to be the Five Nations, but the Tuscaroras came up from the south and fought against them so bravely that they were adopted into the

league, as a new and friendly tribe. The Onondagas, so I've heard, formed the league a long, long time ago, and their head chief is the grand sachem or high priest of them all, but the head chief of the Mohawks is the leading war chief."

"I've heard," said Paul, "that the Wyandots are kinsmen of all these tribes, and on that account they will listen with all the more friendliness to Timmendiquas."

"Seems to me," said Tom Ross, "that we've got a most tre-men-je-ous big job ahead."

"Then," said Henry, "we must make a most tremendous big effort."

"That's so," agreed all.

After that they spoke little. The last coals were covered up, and the remainder of the food was put in their pouches. Then they sat on the leaves, and every one meditated until such time as he might have something worth saying. Henry's thoughts traveled on a wide course, but they always came back to one point. They had heard much at Pittsburgh of a famous Mohawk chief called Thayendanegea, but most often known to the Americans as Brant. He was young, able, and filled with intense animosity against the white people, who encroached, every year, more and more upon the Indian hunting grounds. His was a soul full kin to that of Timmendiquas, and if the two met it meant a great council and a greater endeavor for the undoing of the white man. What more likely than that they intended to meet?

"All of you have heard of Thayendanegea, the Mohawk?" said Henry.

They nodded.

“It's my opinion that Timmendiquas is on the way to meet him. I remember hearing a hunter say at Pittsburgh that about a hundred miles to the east of this point was a Long House or Council House of the Six Nations. Timmendiquas is sure to go there, and we must go, too. We must find out where they intend to strike. What do you say?”

“We go there!” exclaimed four voices together.

Seldom has a council of war been followed by action so promptly.

As Henry spoke the last word he rose, and the others rose with him. Saying no more, he led toward the east, and the others followed him, also saying no more. Separately every one of them was strong, brave, and resourceful, but when the five were together they felt that they had the skill and strength of twenty. The long rest at Pittsburgh had restored them after the dangers and hardship of their great voyage from New Orleans.

They carried in horn and pouch ample supplies of powder and bullet, and they did not fear any task.

Their journey continued through hilly country, clothed in heavy forest, but often without undergrowth. They avoided the open spaces, preferring to be seen of men, who were sure to be red men, as little as possible. Their caution was well taken. They saw Indian signs, once a feather that had fallen from a scalp lock, once footprints, and once the bone of a deer recently thrown away by him who had eaten the meat from it. The country seemed to be as wild as that of Kentucky. Small settlements, so they had heard, were scattered at great distances through the forest, but they

saw none. There was no cabin smoke, no trail of the plow, just the woods and the hills and the clear streams. Buffalo had never reached this region, but deer were abundant, and they risked a shot to replenish their supplies.

They camped the second night of their march on a little peninsula at the confluence of two creeks, with the deep woods everywhere. Henry judged that they were well within the western range of the Six Nations, and they cooked their deer meat over a smothered fire, nothing more than a few coals among the leaves. When supper was over they arranged soft places for themselves and their blankets, all except Long Jim, whose turn it was to scout among the woods for a possible foe.

“Don't be gone long, Jim,” said Henry as he composed himself in a comfortable position. “A circle of a half mile about us will do.”

“I'll not be gone more'n an hour,” said Long Jim, picking up his rifle confidently, and flitting away among the woods.

“Not likely he'll see anything,” said Shif'less Sol, “but I'd shorely like to know what White Lightning is about. He must be terrible stirred up by them beatin's he got down on the Ohio, an' they say that Mohawk, Thayendanegea is a whoppin' big chief, too. They'll shorely make a heap of trouble.”

“But both of them are far from here just now,” said Henry, “and we won't bother about either.”

He was lying on some leaves at the foot of a tree with his arm under his head and his blanket over his body. He had a remarkable capacity for dismissing trouble or apprehension, and just then he was enjoying great physical and mental

peace. He looked through half closed eyes at his comrades, who also were enjoying repose, and his fancy could reproduce Long Jim in the forest, slipping from tree to tree and bush to bush, and finding no menace.

“Feels good, doesn't it, Henry?” said the shiftless one. “I like a clean, bold country like this. No more plowin' around in swamps for me.”

“Yes,” said Henry sleepily, “it's a good country.”

The hour slipped smoothly by, and Paul said:

“Time for Long Jim to be back.”

“Jim don't do things by halves,” said the shiftless one. “Guess he's beatin' up every squar' inch o' the bushes. He'll be here soon.”

A quarter of an hour passed, and Long Jim did not return; a half hour, and no sign of him. Henry cast off the blanket and stood up. The night was not very dark and he could see some distance, but he did not see their comrade.

“I wonder why he's so slow,” he said with a faint trace of anxiety.

“He'll be 'long directly,” said Tom Ross with confidence.

Another quarter of an hour, and no Long Jim. Henry sent forth the low penetrating cry of the wolf that they used so often as a signal.

“He cannot fail to hear that,” he said, “and he'll answer.”

No answer came. The four looked at one another in alarm. Long Jim had been gone nearly two hours, and he was long overdue. His failure to reply to the signal indicated either that something ominous had happened or that—he had gone much farther than they meant for him to go.

The others had risen to their feet, also, and they stood a little while in silence.

“What do you think it means?” asked Paul.

“It must be all right,” said Shif'less Sol. “Mebbe Jim has lost the camp.”

Henry shook his head.

“It isn't that,” he said. “Jim is too good a woodsman for such a mistake. I don't want to look on the black side, boys, but I think something has happened to Jim.”

“Suppose you an' me go an' look for him,” said Shif'less Sol, “while Paul and Tom stay here an' keep house.”

“We'd better do it,” said Henry. “Come, Sol.”

The two, rifles in the hollows of their arms, disappeared in the darkness, while Tom and Paul withdrew into the deepest shadow of the trees and waited.

Henry and the shiftless one pursued an anxious quest, going about the camp in a great circle and then in another yet greater. They did not find Jim, and the dusk was so great that they saw no evidences of his trail. Long Jim had disappeared as completely as if he had left the earth for another planet. When they felt that they must abandon the search for the time, Henry and Shif'less Sol looked at each other in a dismay that the dusk could not hide.

“Mebbe be saw some kind uv a sign, an' has followed it,” said the shiftless one hopefully. “If anything looked mysterious an' troublesome, Jim would want to hunt it down.”

“I hope so,” said Henry, “but we've got to go back to the camp now and report failure. Perhaps he'll show up to-morrow, but I don't like it, Sol, I don't like it!”

“No more do I,” said Shif'less Sol. “'Tain't like Jim not to come back, ef he could. Mebbe he'll drop in afore day, anyhow.”

They returned to the camp, and two inquiring figures rose up out of the darkness.

“You ain't seen him?” said Tom, noting that but two figures had returned.

“Not a trace,” replied Henry. “It's a singular thing.”

The four talked together a little while, and they were far from cheerful. Then three sought sleep, while Henry stayed on watch, sitting with his back against a tree and his rifle on his knees. All the peace and content that he had felt earlier in the evening were gone. He was oppressed by a sense of danger, mysterious and powerful. It did not seem possible that Long Jim could have gone away in such a noiseless manner, leaving no trace behind. But it was true.

He watched with both ear and eye as much for Long Jim as for an enemy. He was still hopeful that he would see the long, thin figure coming among the bushes, and then hear the old pleasant drawl. But he did not see the figure, nor did he hear the drawl.

Time passed with the usual slow step when one watches. Paul, Sol, and Tom were asleep, but Henry was never wider awake in his life. He tried to put away the feeling of mystery and danger. He assured himself that Long Jim would soon come, delayed by some trail that he had sought to solve. Nothing could have happened to a man so brave and skillful. His nerves must be growing weak when he allowed himself to be troubled so much by a delayed return.

But the new hours came, one by one, and Long Jim came with none of them. The night remained fairly light, with a good moon, but the light that it threw over the forest was gray and uncanny. Henry's feeling of mystery and danger deepened. Once he thought he heard a rustling in the thicket and, finger on the trigger of his rifle, he stole among the bushes to discover what caused it. He found nothing and, returning to his lonely watch, saw that Paul, Sol, and Tom were still sleeping soundly. But Henry was annoyed greatly by the noise, and yet more by his failure to trace its origin. After an hour's watching he looked a second time. The result was once more in vain, and he resumed his seat upon the leaves, with his back reclining against an oak. Here, despite the fact that the night was growing darker, nothing within range of a rifle shot could escape his eyes.

Nothing stirred. The noise did not come a second time from the thicket. The very silence was oppressive. There was no wind, not even a stray puff, and the bushes never rustled. Henry longed for a noise of some kind to break that terrible, oppressive silence. What he really wished to hear was the soft crunch of Long Jim's moccasins on the grass and leaves.

The night passed, the day came, and Henry awakened his comrades. Long Jim was still missing and their alarm was justified. Whatever trail lie might have struck, he would have returned in the night unless something had happened to him. Henry had vague theories, but nothing definite, and he kept them to himself. Yet they must make a change in their plans. To go on and leave Long Jim to whatever fate

might be his was unthinkable. No task could interfere with the duty of the five to one another.

“We are in one of the most dangerous of all the Indian countries,” said Henry. “We are on the fringe of the region over which the Six Nations roam, and we know that Timmendiquas and a band of the Wyandots are here also. Perhaps Miamis and Shawnees have come, too.”

“We've got to find Long Jim,” said Silent Tom briefly.

They went about their task in five minutes. Breakfast consisted of cold venison and a drink from a brook. Then they began to search the forest. They felt sure that such woodsmen as they, with the daylight to help them, would find some trace of Long Jim, but they saw none at all, although they constantly widened their circle, and again tried all their signals. Half the forenoon passed in the vain search, and then they held a council.

“I think we'd better scatter,” said Shif'less Sol, “an' meet here again when the sun marks noon.”

It was agreed, and they took careful note of the place, a little hill crowned with a thick cluster of black oaks, a landmark easy to remember. Henry turned toward the south, and the forest was so dense that in two minutes all his comrades were lost to sight. He went several miles, and his search was most rigid. He was amazed to find that the sense of mystery and danger that he attributed to the darkness of the night did not disappear wholly in the bright daylight. His spirit, usually so optimistic, was oppressed by it, and he had no belief that they would find Long Jim.

At the set time he returned to the little hill crowned with the black oaks, and as he approached it from one side he

saw Shif'less Sol coming from another. The shiftless one walked despondently. His gait was loose and shambling-a rare thing with him, and Henry knew that he, too, had failed. He realized now that he had not expected anything else. Shif'less Sol shook his head, sat down on a root and said nothing. Henry sat down, also, and the two exchanged a look of discouragement.

“The others will be here directly,” said Henry, “and perhaps Long Jim will be with one of them.”

But in his heart he knew that it would not be so, and the shiftless one knew that he had no confidence in his own words.

“If not,” said Henry, resolved to see the better side, “we'll stay anyhow until we find him. We can't spare good old Long Jim.”

Shif'less Sol did not reply, nor did Henry speak again, until lie saw the bushes moving slightly three or four hundred yards away.

“There comes Tom,” he said, after a single comprehensive glance, “and he's alone.”

Tom Ross was also a dejected figure. He looked at the two on the hill, and, seeing that the man for whom they were searching was not with them, became more dejected than before.

“Paul's our last chance,” he said, as he joined them. “He's gen'rally a lucky boy, an' mebbe it will be so with him to-day.”

“I hope so,” said Henry fervently. “He ought to be along in a few minutes.”