

BOY SCOUTS
OF THE
WILDCAT PATROL



WALTER P. EATON



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Boy Scouts of the Wildcat Patrol



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*THE ADVENTURES OF PEANUT
AS A YOUNG SCOUT MASTER*

By
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W. A. WILDE COMPANY
BOSTON CHICAGO

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1915

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BOY SCOUTS OF THE WILDCAT PATROL



OCT 14 1915

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No. 1.

To JOE

In memory of the Telemark Swing

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Boy Scouts of the Wildcat Patrol

CHAPTER I

PEANUT HAS A DAY-DREAM

PEANUT MORRISON was very melancholy. It was a beautiful day in spring, and the apple trees were all in bloom in the orchards, the mountains around Southmead were bright green with new foliage, the touring automobiles had begun to appear on the streets. But Peanut had no eyes for the apple blossoms. He was walking along the street toward his home, with eyes cast down on the ground. High school was out for the day, and Peanut was a Senior. In another month he would be graduated. And after that——? It was the prospect of the “after that” which made him melancholy.

Art Bruce, his particular chum, was going away to a forestry school in the autumn. Art had always been the best woodsman in the Southmead Scouts. He knew the animal tracks better than any one else, he knew where the muskrats nested, and the foxes, and where to find mink and “snow-shoe” rabbits.

He knew all the trees, and all the trails. He was never so happy as when he was in the woods, so when his father asked him what he wanted to do for a living, he replied instantly, "Be a forester." So he was going away to study in September, and after that he would get a job, no doubt out in the High Sierras, or somewhere else in the great government forests. Anyhow, Peanut wouldn't see him any more.

Then there was Lou Merritt. He was going in the fall to the State Agricultural College, to learn to be a fruit grower. Peanut, thinking back over the past, remembered how Lou had once been a sneak, but how scouting and Miss Swain, who had adopted him, between them had made a man of him. Now Miss Swain was going to send him through college.

"Good old Lou!" said Peanut to himself. He wasn't jealous of Lou, nor of Art. But he was pretty blue that he couldn't go with them. Even Frank Nichols was going away to study. He was going to a business college for a year. Of course, Rob Evarts was now a Senior in Harvard, and was going on through medical school, but that was to be expected. Rob's folks were well-to-do. When a fellow's folks have money, of course it makes a big difference, Peanut reflected. "That is," he added, "if they're the right kind of folks."

He was thinking of another classmate, Dennie

O'Brien. Dennie's father was rich, as rich as Rob's. He owned the big garage, and lots of houses, too. But Dennie was going to work in the garage. Peanut had to admit, though, that Dennie would probably rather do that than go to college.

Prattie didn't count much. He had always been fat and lazy. "The big stiff!" Peanut said aloud. Prattie would be lucky if he got through high school, let alone passing any college "exams." He'd go to work on his father's farm.

And what was Peanut himself going to do? He didn't know. He only knew that there was no chance for him to go to college. His father was a poor man, who worked by the day. There were several little brothers and sisters who ate a terrible lot and used up their shoes at a fearful rate. Peanut had heard of men earning their way through college, with the help of scholarships, but he was old enough now to realize that he had never really studied in the Southmead High School, and he knew he couldn't get a scholarship. He thought sadly of what one of his teachers had once said to him—"Morrison, it's too bad you have such a quick mind. If it were harder for you to learn, you'd learn a whole lot more." He hadn't realized what she meant at the time, but now he knew. He had always got his lessons well enough in half the study period to pass in recitation, and then he had fooled the rest of the period. Lou

Merritt had always needed the whole study period, but now Lou was going to graduate as valedictorian, and Peanut wasn't even going to read an original essay at graduation. He had been assigned a "piece" to recite.

Feeling rather shamefaced, he picked up a stone and threw it viciously at a tree across the road. As he hit the tree square in the centre, he felt a little better. His baseball arm was all right, anyhow!

But what was he going to do after graduation? He'd have to go to work, of course. His father'd make him. Besides, he didn't want to be a loafer. "Scouts aren't loafers," he thought to himself. There wasn't much a fellow could do in Southmead. He could work for the town, hauling gravel on the roads, or he could work for somebody as a gardener, or he could get a job, maybe, as a carpenter. Peanut had always liked manual training in school. He had made a bookcase and a sideboard and a table for his mother. He was good at that. Yes, if he'd got to stay in Southmead and work, he'd be a carpenter!

But that wasn't what he wanted to be, nevertheless. Art was going to be a forester, and roam in the High Sierras—mountains much higher than Washington and Lafayette! Rob was going to be a doctor, and he'd have charge some day of a big hospital! Lou was going to learn agriculture, and

some day he'd own hundreds of acres of apple orchards.

"An' I'll just stick here and shingle barn roofs!" Peanut exclaimed aloud. "Gee, I'd like to beat it somewhere and do something big!"

He thought of various big things he would like to do. One of them was to climb higher in the Himalayan Mountains than anybody had ever climbed before. Since the famous hike over the Presidentials the previous summer, Peanut had been reading all the works the public library afforded on mountain climbing. There weren't many such books in the library, to be sure, but he had read Hudson Stuck's account of the conquest of Mount McKinley in Alaska, he had read a book about the Alps, and he had pored over the pages of the Wakemans' book about the Himalayas, the highest mountains in the world.

"Oh, gee, if I could only go and see them!" he sighed, realizing the vanity of hope.

Then he fell to dreaming of a different career. No, he wouldn't be a great mountain climber, except on vacations. Every two or three years he'd take a long vacation and go climb some very high peak which had never been conquered before ("conquered" was the word the books used, and Peanut liked it; it made the mountain seem like a human antagonist you were fighting with). But in the in-

terim he would edit a great newspaper. That's it—he'd be an editor! Ever since the Southmead High School, two years before, had started *The Clarion*, which came out twice a year, and was full of "gags" on the pupils and teachers, of school news and of stories and themes written by the scholars, Peanut had found a new enthusiasm. It was to write items for the paper, and to carry the "copy" to the printer in the next town, where he loved to watch the type-setting machines, and to see the printing-press throwing off printed sheets at the back, with its almost human wooden arms. Peanut had been one of the editors in his Senior year, with Frank Nichols as business manager. It had been great fun. He had written himself about half the gags. Now he suddenly realized that what he really wanted to be was a great editor.

He began to dream. He dreamed of being a reporter first, in New York, of rushing around that great city with a note-book in his pocket and interviewing famous men or writing big stories on the front page (with huge head-lines) about fires and subway accidents. Then he would do so well that he'd be made a war correspondent, and go to Europe, and his articles would be signed! Then he'd become editor of the paper—he'd be "the whole shootin' match," and boss all the reporters and own the great printing-presses and ——

Bang! Peanut ran smack into a doll carriage, which had been left standing in the middle of the sidewalk. The carriage upset, the doll fell out, and from the yard close by Peanut heard a wail of small-girlish anguish. He realized at once that it was Mr. Rogers' little girl, and he was in front of Mr. Rogers' house, and, as he stooped to pick up the fallen carriage and restore the doll to its seat, he saw the Scout Master coming around the corner of the house.

Peanut tucked in the worsted covering over the doll, which little Marjory Rogers, still sniffing, snatched off again, and put back the other way around, tucking it in carefully about the doll's legs.

"Oo dunno how!" she cried.

"Well, well, what's the matter?" asked the Scout Master, coming up and patting the baby on the head.

"He u'set my dolly carriage!" Marjory exclaimed. "Poor Angelina fell out right on she head! Boo-hoo!"

"There, there, Angelina's all right now, she's not hurt a bit. You take her into the yard and give her some cambric tea," said Mr. Rogers.

Marjory pushed the carriage in at the gate.

"I'm sorry," said Peanut. "The carriage was standing right in the middle of the sidewalk, an' I ran into it. I was—I—well, I guess I was kind of dreaming," he laughed, rather sheepishly.

"Dreaming of what?" asked the Scout Master.

"Well, I was kind o' dreaming of—of being an editor," Peanut admitted.

"What are you going to edit?" Mr. Rogers laughed.

"Oh, a newspaper, of course!" said Peanut.

"You want to be a newspaper man, do you?" The Scout Master looked at him keenly.

"Surest thing you know!" Peanut cried. "Gee, Art's going to be a forest ranger, and Lou's going to study to grow apples—he always was nutty about growing things—and Frank's going into business—and I—I'm just going to stick around here, I guess."

"Come into the studio and talk it over," said Mr. Rogers.

He led the way around the house to his studio, which smelled of oil paints.

"Now," said he, sitting down, "why do you want to be a newspaper man?"

"Why—why, I—I just do!" said Peanut.

Both he and the Scout Master grinned. "That's not a very clear statement of your reasons, now is it?" laughed the Scout Master. "It sounds like a woman's reason."

"Well," said Peanut, hunting around in his head for words to express his feelings, "you see, I've been editing the High School *Clarion*, and it's lots o' fun, and if I was on a newspaper I'd be going around

and seeing everything and have a lot o' fun, and some day I'd be editor—maybe; and I'd like that better'n sticking around here and being a carpenter or something. Gee, it'll be a dead hole with Art gone away!"

"What mark did you get in English?" the Scout Master asked him.

Peanut shuffled his feet. "Sixty-five per cent.," he confessed.

"Do you think an editor would stand for sixty-five per cent. English from his reporters?" Mr. Rogers demanded.

"Oh, gee, I'd work harder if I was on a paper," the boy replied.

"But editors don't keep a school," the man said. "They don't want to have to teach spelling and punctuation and paragraphing. They expect you to know all those things before you come to them. Do you really think, Peanut, that you're fitted yet to be a reporter?"

Peanut shuffled his feet again and looked very solemn. "I—I suppose not," he said. "But what am I gonna do? I get through high school next month, and pa can't afford to send me to college. Dunno whether I could get into college, anyhow," he added honestly. "Couldn't I start in on a paper somewhere as—as office boy, or something, and study to be a reporter? Gee, I'd study hard!"

Mr. Rogers shook his head. "You'd have to go to a city, and office boys don't get more than three, or four, or at most five dollars a week. If you had to pay your board and car-fare out of that I'm afraid you'd find it pretty hard sledding."

"Well, what *am* I going to do?" said Peanut, his face growing still longer.

"That's what we've got to work out," said the Scout Master. "We've got to find a way so you can earn some money for the next few months, or a year, so you won't be a burden on your father, who's worked hard to put you through high school, and so you can also find time to study how to be a reporter."

"Gee, that don't sound easy to me!" the boy exclaimed.

"It *doesn't* sound easy to me," said Mr. Rogers, and Peanut colored at the correction of his grammar, "but a lot of hard nuts can be cracked if you hit 'em right. We've got to find a way to crack this one."

"Have you got an idea?" asked Peanut hopefully.

"I've got several," the Scout Master laughed, "but I'm not telling any of 'em yet. You keep your massive brain on the job, too, and come to see me again in a day or two."

"Say, my head's going to *smoke*, I'll think so hard!" Peanut cried as he went out.

He felt better, more hopeful, already. He always felt better when he had Mr. Rogers on his side. He started off down the street, trying the Scout pace—fifty running steps and fifty walking steps alternately—and whistling as he went.

“I’ll get to be a reporter, or I’ll bust!” he said to himself, and kept on running for a hundred paces, which brought him alongside of the play field, where a lot of the grade school boys were playing baseball.

CHAPTER II

PEANUT STOPS A FIGHT AND UMPIRES A BALL GAME

PEANUT stopped and watched them. They had chosen up sides and were scrapping almost as much as they were playing ball. Peanut strolled down toward the diamond to investigate.

Cop Stanley was evidently captain of one side. Cop got his name because he once said that when he grew up he was going to be town policeman. He was a fat but husky boy, who combined a great deal of good-nature with a great deal of pugnacity. He was always fighting—and always friends with the boy he fought with half an hour afterward. Being a pretty good fighter, and being naturally energetic, he was usually the leader in his crowd.

The captain of the other side was quite a different type of boy, Walter Swan, of the eighth grade. Walter was generally called "Old Hundred," because whenever the teacher asked for a choice of hymns to sing in school, he always demanded Old Hundred. Peanut liked Old Hundred. He was a thin boy, with a long, thin face, light tow-colored hair and a great many freckles. In fact, he had been called Freckles before he developed his passion for

the hymn which had now given him his new name. He was as good-natured in a way as Cop Stanley, but he didn't laugh so much, nor talk so much, nor fight so much. In fact, he didn't fight at all. He was a Scout, and liked best to go off on hikes in the woods. But when he did get mad he had a quiet glint in his light blue eyes which meant business.

He was mad now.

The game had stopped entirely, and both sides were gathered around first base, wrangling and shouting. Peanut pressed into the crowd.

"Aw, you was out, all right!" Cop Stanley was shouting. "You was out a mile! I touched yer myself, I guess I know!"

"He wasn't out, neither," cried Old Hundred. "Wa'n't I coaching right here behind first? He had his feet on the bag *hours* before the ball came."

"He didn't!"

"He did!"

"Didn't!"

"Did!"

"Well, we gave you a close one last inning, you might give us this," somebody else managed to say.

"I'll give yer a close one," Old Hundred declared, "but this wa'n't close. He was safe a mile. You gotter play fair."

"Who ain't playin' fair?" Cop Stanley demanded.

"You ain't," said Old Hundred.

"Who says I ain't?"

"I say so," said Old Hundred.

"Nobody can say things like that ter *me!*"

"Is that so? Well, somebody's sayin' it, right now," Old Hundred repeated.

"You think you can boss everything and put over a bum decision ——"

"Who says it was a bum decision?" Cop yelled.

"I say it was, and you know it!" Old Hundred answered.

The two boys were now facing each other a foot apart, and the rest were crowded around them.

"You take that back!" Cop cried.

"I won't take nothing back, when I know I'm right," Old Hundred declared.

"Then I'll ——"

"Well, go ahead and do it, then!"

Both boys now had their fists doubled up, and Cop swung for Old Hundred's face, but the other boy ducked and as Cop's arm swung over his head he suddenly made a football tackle and threw Cop heavily to the ground, and sprang on top of him.

"Soak him, Cop!"

"Give it to him, Old Hundred!"

"Give 'em room, fellers!"

"Gee, he got him in the eye!"

Both teams had forgotten their game in the ex-

citement of the fight, and they had forgotten Peanut, too.

But Peanut suddenly took a hand in the mix-up. He grabbed Old Hundred by the collar and hauled him off Cop. Then he grabbed Cop by the front of his shirt, and hauled him to his feet. Both boys struggled to get at each other, but Peanut held them apart.

"Say, if you don't quit I'll punch both of you!" he cried, and he gave both of them a shake that nearly sent them to the ground.

"What are you buttin' in for, anyhow?" Cop demanded.

"Let me at him, I tell yer!" Old Hundred cried. "He thinks he can trim anybody, does he! I'll show him!"

"Not while I'm here, you won't!" said Peanut. "Say, you poor stiffs, what did you come down here for? You came to play baseball, didn't you?"

"Sure," said the crowd.

"Well, then, why don't you play? If you're going to play ball, play ball. If you're going to fight, fight."

"We can't play ball when they cheat us, can we?" cried Old Hundred.

"Cheat nothing! Who was cheating? You was!" cried Cop.

They started at each other again, and Peanut gave

them a shove apart that sent them sprawling into their respective teams.

“See here,” he demanded, “I’ll umpire this game, and the first man that scraps gets sent to the bench, see? Now go back to your places and play that last point over again.”

“Aw, no, he was out!” cried Cop.

“He was safe!” yelled Old Hundred’s nine.

“There you go again,” said Peanut. “You see, fellers, the only fair way is to play it over. That gives both sides a chance, and I’ll decide. It don’t—doesn’t—make any difference to me who licks. I’ll be fair. Come on, now—back to your places!”

Everybody obeyed willingly except Cop and Old Hundred. They were still rather sullen. Cop had a bruise under his eye where Old Hundred had hit him, and Old Hundred had a cut on his lip. But they, too, returned, Cop to his post behind the bat and the other to the coaching line at first base. Peanut took his position behind the pitcher, and the game began.

Peanut was a good umpire. In the first place, he was a good ball player himself, which all the smaller boys knew, and he was fair, and he was good-natured, so that everybody liked him. The grade boys had not been used to playing with an umpire, and at first there was a lot of kicking over balls and strikes, but Peanut made them see that it was as fair for one

side as the other and all a part of the game, and before the next inning was over they had settled down to the real business of playing ball. The coaches yelled on the side lines, Peanut rushed from base to base to judge close decisions, he called a balk on Old Hundred, who was pitching for his side, which gave Cop an extra base, much to his delight and Old Hundred's chagrin, and by the time the game was over everybody was on good terms again, and agreed that they'd had a fine time, even Cop's team, which had lost by a narrow margin.

"Now," said Peanut to the two captains, "you always ought to shake hands after a game."

"Sure," said the fat Cop, grinning, for he was once more in the best of spirits. He put out a very dirty hand, which Old Hundred was ashamed not to take.

"That's the stuff!" cried Peanut. "And say, fellers, we ought to do something about this diamond. It's too rough. The grounders bounce any old which way. What do you say if we give it a dragging and rolling next Saturday morning, eh?"

"What we goin' to drag it with?" somebody asked.

"I'll show you, if you'll all promise to be on hand next Saturday. What do you say?"

"Sure's you know," said Cop. "My crowd'll be here."

"Then I guess mine will," retorted Old Hundred. Peanut walked up the street with the young Scout.

"Aw, why didn't yer let me lick him?" Old Hundred complained.

"'Cause that ain't— isn't—baseball," said Peanut. "I'd just as soon see him get a good trimming—he's kind o' stuck on doin' all the bossing. I did let you get him down. But fighting isn't baseball—and it's up to Scouts to play the game right."

"I—I suppose so," said Old Hundred. "But it's hard when you ain't got an umpire."

"There's something in that," Peanut admitted.

He parted from Old Hundred, and presently met Mr. Rogers walking along the road.

"Where've you been, Peanut?" the Scout Master asked.

"Gosh, I've stopped a fight and umpired a kids' baseball game, and played Scout Master for fair," said Peanut. "It's almost more fun playing Scout Master than being a Scout."

"And harder work, eh?" the Scout Master smiled.

"Well, it ain't— isn't—so easy as eating hot gingerbread, that's a fact," said Peanut. "Gee, I guess I'll go home and get some supper."

CHAPTER III

FIXING UP THE BASEBALL DIAMOND—A GOOD TURN

PEANUT did not forget his talk with Mr. Rogers, and he kept turning over plans in his head, but none of them seemed practicable. If he went to work for a carpenter when he got through high school he would have to start in as an apprentice, and he could scarcely hope to earn enough, even in a whole year, let alone a single vacation, to send himself to a college anywhere. Of course, there was caddying to be done at the golf club. He could earn a dollar a day at that, after school closed, if he had good luck. That meant six dollars a week, or not more than sixty dollars between graduation and September, when Art and Lou and Frank would be going away for higher studies. *That* wouldn't help very much! But it might, Peanut suddenly thought, be enough to pay for a course in a correspondence school. He had read of correspondence schools in advertisements in the magazines, and resolved to ask Mr. Rogers more about them.

But meanwhile there was the diamond to smooth down on Saturday morning. Peanut had jumped

into the eighth grade baseball game on an impulse, but after he had stopped the fight and got the game finished in good shape, he had realized that an older boy, if he goes about it right, can do a lot to help smaller boys, and it made him feel rather proud. He wouldn't have backed out now from his self-appointed task for anything. But he also realized that it was going to be more of a job than he had bargained for at first.

"Gee, the kids'll quit and want to begin playing before we get it half done," he said to himself. "Guess I'll have to ring in Art and some of the other big fellers."

Art didn't want to come, he wanted to go off in the woods that Saturday, but Peanut pleaded so hard that he consented. Lou was glad to come, and Frank Nichols, also. With this help, Peanut felt secure.

When Saturday morning arrived, he went to the golf club tennis courts with a wheelbarrow, and borrowed a contraption they used there to smooth the dirt courts in spring. If he hadn't borrowed this, he could easily have made one. All it consisted of was a heavy beam, eight or ten feet long, with a strip of old carpet tacked on the under side, and a rope at each end. Peanut wheeled it to the play field.

"Where are you going, Peanut?" somebody

asked him, as he trundled the barrow along the street.

"I'm taking this home to help mother make a lemon meringue pie," Peanut answered.

There was an iron hand roller at the play field already, which was supposed to be used to smooth the diamond, only the town was too poor to hire anybody to use it, and the boys and young men who played ball had always been either too careless or too lazy.

The diamond itself was all dirt. The sod had been entirely removed except in the outfield some years before, but constant playing without care had made it rough and hobbly, and it was full of stones.

When Peanut arrived with his smoother, he found Art, Lou, Frank, and about ten smaller boys already there, including Cop Stanley and Old Hundred. Old Hundred was wearing his Scout suit.

"Any of you fellers got rakes?" Peanut demanded.

Nobody had, and as he had forgotten to tell anybody to bring any, he refrained from his first impulse to call them "big stiffs." Instead, he sent the boys who lived nearest home for rakes and a shovel or two, and while they were gone he set the smoother to work, the way he had seen it used at the tennis courts.

It was really a simple operation. Art and Frank

took hold of one rope, Lou and Cop Stanley of the other, while Peanut on one side and another boy on the other held the ends of the beam down on the ground. Then those on the ropes began to drag the beam across the diamond. The carpet trailed out behind, smoothing the dirt leveled off by the beam into the hollows.

They were still at it when the rakes arrived, and Peanut sent Old Hundred to help hold the beam down, while he took a rake himself and directed the other rakers, following the drag around and still farther smoothing off hummocks, and filling up holes.

“It would be easier,” said Lou, presently, “if you fellows with rakes went *ahead* of the drag, and loosened up the ground. Then the beam would do more work.”

“Right, oh!” said Peanut. “Come on, you eighth grade!”

The ten small boys stuck to the job pretty well till the diamond was scraped, which didn't take long, as the beam covered a ten foot strip. But as soon as this was done, they wanted to begin rolling it, and then to play ball.

“No, you don't!” Peanut cried. “Nobody plays on this field to-day till the job is done right, not if I have to sit in pitcher's box with an automatic in my fist! You pick up stones, now!”

“Aw, gee, there’s ten billion stones!” wailed Cop Stanley. “It’ll take till Fourth o’ July.”

“All right, we’ll have a game on the Fourth,” said Peanut. “Come on, now, line up, the way the greenskeepers do on the golf links when they’re taking weeds out of a green.”

Each boy took his hat or cap for a basket, and Peanut lined them up across home plate, with a two foot strip for them to pick up stones from. Then they began slowly to work their way toward second base. As soon as a boy had his cap full of stones, he took the load off to one side and dumped it on a pile, and then went back to his path. By the time the line had reached second, everybody’s back was lame with stooping over, and the small boys were once more clamoring to begin play.

“Say, how do you think we can ever get this diamond fixed up if we don’t stick at it?” Peanut demanded. “I want to play as much as anybody, but we started in on this job, and let’s finish it.”

“It’ll finish me,” groaned Art. “Don’t believe I’ll ever stand up straight again.”

“Shut up,” said Peanut. “You’re as bad as the little kids.”

“Aw, why should we do it all?” Cop Stanley protested. “Jim Bailey an’ Mart Dugan an’ Bill and Dippy Jones ain’t here. They’ll be down to play, though. Why should we have to do it all?”

“There’s one for you to answer,” Lou whispered to Peanut.

“We *don’t* have to,” Peanut replied. “We just do it because we’ve got more gumption than they have. They’re big stiffs. We don’t want to be stiffs, do we? We want a good, smooth field to play on, don’t we? I guess Tom Barry or Eddie Collins couldn’t stop grounders that kept hopping crooked on stones, could they? An’ Ty Cobb wouldn’t be stealing second so often if he had to slide over a gravel bed. Come on, let’s have a real diamond! If Dippy and the rest come down to-day, we won’t let ’em play. Nobody can play to-day who ain’t—hasn’t—worked on the diamond. I tell yer—we’ll get up a nine of just us fellers who’ve fixed the field to-day, and trim the stuffin’ out of any other nine in town!”

“Hooray! I’ll pitch!” cried Old Hundred.

“I’ll catch!” cried Cop.

“Some battery!” said Peanut. “Now for the stones on the side toward first.”

Peanut had succeeded in getting the boys temporarily enthusiastic again, and they returned to the toilsome job of picking up stones. They kept at it for nearly half an hour more, though some of them were grumbling. Then Peanut realized that they were about ready to quit.

“I guess you can’t make the kids stick to the job

more'n so long," Art whispered. "Gosh, I don't blame 'em much, on this job!"

"Maybe you're right," said Peanut. "Let her go, fellers! We'll roll the diamond now, and fix the bases. Here, you Cop, take two or three of your men and start the roller going. The rest of us will get sand to slide in."

There was a sandy bank on the river close to the play field, and Peanut and Old Hundred, with shovel and wheelbarrow, set off for it. They brought a load of sand and dumped it at first base. Then two other boys set off for a second load, and so on till piles of sand had been placed by each base. Meanwhile other boys spread this sand thick along the path to the base, so a player could slide in some comfort. The sand covered up the rough ground and pebbles, and would keep off the mud when the ground was damp after a rain. By the time this was done, the boys who were dragging the roller had the diamond all rolled.

"Now, we can play!" Peanut cried, throwing down his shovel. "What'll we do, choose up?"

"You won't do much of anything, I guess. It's quarter to twelve," said Art.

"Oh, no, it can't be that late!" said Old Hundred. "Why, we only just got here."

"'Tis, though," Art declared, showing his watch. "You see, fellers, it takes time to make a good diamond."

"Everybody out in the field," said Peanut, "and I'll knock out grounders till twelve o'clock. You take the outfielders, Art, and knock out flies."

"Ain't we goin' to get a game?" said Cop.

"Sure, we want a game!" two or three others cried.

"What do you say if we fellers that fixed the diamond this morning make up a nine to play the boys that didn't show up?" Peanut suggested. "Can you get 'em for this afternoon? I'll umpire—or maybe Art will."

"Nix," said Art. "I'm going out in the woods."

"I'll umpire," said Frank.

"O. K. Then I'll be coach. Come on, you eighth grade, practice now!"

Peanut began to soak out grounders, which the infielders handled as best they could. The ball went much truer now that the diamond had been scraped and rolled. Whenever a player fumbled, Peanut made him try it over, until he stopped the ball clean and fielded it to first. Meanwhile Art was batting out flies to the outfield.

After a quarter of an hour of this, Peanut called a halt.

"Now, all back at two o'clock," he said. "You fellers decide on a name for your team, and round up the other gang. We'll show 'em a thing or two!"

"Gee, we oughtn't to let 'em play at all, when they ain't done any work!" declared Old Hundred.

"Cheer up," Peanut laughed. "We've got to play somebody, haven't we? Besides, this is a town field. We couldn't keep 'em off. And, anyhow, somebody had to fix it up. Maybe they'll help next time, when they see how much better the ball bounces."

"Well, how do you like being a Scout Master?" Art asked Peanut, as they walked up the street together for lunch.

"It ain't— isn't—so bad," Peanut replied. "In fact, it's sorter good fun. Hard work, though. I wonder if we was—were—like that when we were kids."

"'Spect so," laughed Art. "What do you s'pose the kids'll name their team?"

"Search me," said Peanut. "Some battery, Cop and Old Hundred, eh? And two days ago they were poking each other in the eye!"

"Well, so long," said Art, turning up toward his home. "Don't you wish you were coming into the woods with me this after'?"

Peanut looked a trifle sad. "Kind of wish I was," said he. "But I got to stick on this job, now I got the kids started."

He was back at the field on time after lunch, to find half the boys there ahead of him.

“ We got a name,” said Cop.

“ What is it?” Peanut asked.

“ We’re goin’ to call our team ‘The Braves,’ ” said Cop and Old Hundred, in one breath.

Peanut looked at the nine small boys and the substitute with a grin. “The Baby Braves, eh?” he laughed.

“ Hi,” yelled a boy on the other side to his teammates, “ Cop’s nine’s named the Brave Babies !”

There was a shout of derision from the other team at this announcement, and Cop made a swipe at the offender.

“ Babies, eh !” he cried. “ I’ll show yer !”

“ Well, show him on the diamond,” said Peanut. “ Come on, you Brave Babies, and get ready. Here, Cop, head or tail ?”

He tossed up a penny, and the game began. Frank Nickols umpired, and Peanut sat on the bench, coaching his side. The Braves didn’t have very much trouble in winning, as Cop and Old Hundred were the best battery among the smaller boys, and most of the others on their team, being the boys who had come down to help fix the diamond, were naturally the ones most interested in baseball.

“ Just the same,” Peanut said, after they were leading by five runs, “ you can play a whole lot better than this. If you practice up, and get the fine points of the game down cold, you could challenge

eighth grade teams from other towns. The Brave Babies might be the champions of Berkshire County, eh?"

"Hooray!" cried Old Hundred.

"Aw, cut out callin' us the Brave Babies!" said Cop.

Peanut laughed. "That name's fixed on your team for life, Cop," said he, "just as much as Cop is fixed on you."

Mr. Rogers came down to the field before the game was over, and watched the last two innings. He smiled when he saw the Brave Babies crowding around Peanut at the close, and planning for practice the next week.

"You bring a ball and glove to school Monday," Peanut was saying to Cop and Old Hundred, "and we'll go out back and have battery practice. You've got a good out and you can develop a drop, if you keep trying, Old Hundred. What you need is practice, putting 'em over the plate. You gave twelve bases on balls to-day. That would be fatal against a decent team."

"Do you think I can get a drop?" Old Hundred asked, eagerly.

"Sure you can. Practice'll do it. Don't forget—Monday noon!"

Mr. Rogers joined the group. "So you won, did you?" he said. "Peanut, these boys ought to be in

the Scouts, oughtn't they? Old Hundred is the only Scout on the nine now. Couldn't we make room for 'em, somehow?"

"Sure, we ought to," Peanut and Frank both answered. "We'd need another Scout Master, though."

"Would you like to join the Scouts, boys?" asked Mr. Rogers.

"Sure!"

"Bet yer life!"

"I would!"

"Hi, and go to the White Mountains!"

"Oh, gee, yes!" came a chorus of answers.

"Well," said the man, "I guess we'll have to try to arrange it somehow. The Scouts don't want to miss a good crowd like this, who can play ball, too. I can't take care of more meetings than we have now, but we'll have to find somebody, that's sure."

The boys scattered for their homes, and Peanut walked up the street with the Scout Master.

"The Brave Babies," he chuckled. "Say, that's some name for a nine, eh?"

"Some name is right," Mr. Rogers laughed. "How old are you, Peanut?"

"I'll be eighteen on June 30th," the boy answered.

"You will, eh? Well, come in and see me to-

morrow afternoon. I may have some ideas by then. Have you got any?"

Peanut's face fell. "Gee, I got nothing but a headache for all my brain work," he answered sadly.

"You did a good job to-day, though."

"Oh, that!" Peanut answered. "Why, that was just *fun*."

"Pretty good sort of fun when you are helping others to have a better time."

"Oh, most everything is fun for me," said Peanut, trying to laugh it off.

CHAPTER IV

MR. ROGERS HAS A SCHEME

PEANUT found Mr. Rogers in his studio the next afternoon.

“Well,” said the Scout Master at once, “do you still want to be the editor of the *New York Tribune*?”

“Sure,” Peanut answered with a grin. “’Course, I don’t insist on *The Tribune*. *The Times* would do.”

Mr. Rogers laughed, too. “It’s a long way to Tipperary,” he said. “How would you like to be a Scout Master first?”

“What do you mean, a Scout Master?” said the astonished boy.

“Just what I say. You’ll be eighteen in a month or so, now, so you’ll be old enough to be made an assistant Scout Master. I watched your ball game yesterday, and I believe you could fill the bill. Of course, it might be hard at first—small boys aren’t the easiest thing in the world to manage. You weren’t yourself, you know ——”

(Peanut grinned.)

“—— but I’m willing to take a chance on you, and so are the Scout Council. If you could help

me out for a year, say, why then you might be in shape to tackle some newspaper for a job."

"But—but I don't get you," the boy said. "Pa'll make me go to work, sure, when school's over. Guess I ought to go, too! 'Course I'll help evenings, but how about the hikes?"

"I don't mean for you to do it for nothing," said the Scout Master.

"You mean get paid for being a Scout Master?" said Peanut, perplexed. "Gee, that don't sound O. K. to me. Scouts ain't—aren't—supposed to get paid for doin' things."

"Scouts aren't, no," Mr. Rogers replied, "but a lot of Scout troops have paid Scout Masters. Now, I don't approve of paid Scout Masters myself. Not that there's anything wrong in it, any more than in paid school teachers. A Scout Master is really a kind of teacher. Only, you don't as a rule get such good men. Folks do better work for love than they do for money sometimes. But in your case it's different. If you go to work, not only will we lose your help in the Scouts, but maybe you'll lose your chance to be what you really want to be—a reporter. I believe you could make good as a newspaper man. I also believe that every month you stay in Southmead working for a carpenter or a gardener you'll be just so much farther from your chance to fit yourself for what you really want to do.

“Now, I had a meeting of the Scout Council last night, and they agreed with me. You see, I’m about the only man here in Southmead that can be a Scout Master now, because I’m an artist, and I can work when I please, or take a day off or a week off for a hike when I please. The other men can’t do that. You couldn’t do that if you were a carpenter. Next winter, with Art and Lou and Frank gone away to school, I’ll have nobody to help me. So the Scout Council are willing to take a gamble on you, Peanut, and have agreed to raise twenty-five dollars a month to pay you. That isn’t very much, of course, but it will keep you from being a drag on your father.”

“Gee, I think it’s a heap more’n I’m worth!” Peanut gasped. “I suppose I’ll study to be a reporter when I ain’t—amn’t—when I’m not scouting, eh? How about a correspondence school, Mr. Rogers? I seen—saw—an advertisement in a magazine about one that seemed to teach you anything, from being a doctor to writing a motion picture play.”

“Nothing doing,” Mr. Rogers laughed. “I’ve got a better scheme than that.”

“You have!” Peanut exclaimed. “Say, you’re some little schemer, all right!”

“Yes, how would you like to be Southmead correspondent for the *Hampton Herald*?”

“A reporter, you mean?” Peanut fairly gasped in his astonishment. “But Joe Perkins, down at the depot, is correspondent. How’ll I come in?”

“Joe is going to quit the job at the end of the summer,” the Scout Master replied. “He’s got a better place in another town, so he’s going away. Now, I happen to know the editor of the *Herald*, and told him about you, and he’s willing to give you a trial. It will be hard work for you at first, and maybe you’ll have to bring your stuff to me before you send it, to see if your grammar is O. K. But I think you can do it.”

“Oh, gee!” Peanut half whispered. “Oh, gee—a reporter!”

“There isn’t much money in it,” Mr. Rogers went on, “but if you hustle around and get a lot of items, you ought to make three or four or even five dollars a week in addition to what you get as Scout Master. That will be doing quite as well as you could expect to do working for a carpenter, and it will be training for you. Then, if you make good, if you learn to get the news and write it in good, clear English, I think maybe the *Herald* would take you on their regular staff. After that it would be up to you whether you got to New York or not.”

The Scout Master looked at Peanut sharply but kindly. Peanut was looking at the floor.

“I—I don’t know,” he said, “why you do all this

for me, Mr. Rogers. I—I guess I haven't worked much in school, or—or anywhere, to deserve it. I—I got a lot to learn. But, by Jiminy, I'm goin' to work now, and make good!"

He looked up, and the Scout Master put out his hand and shook Peanut's.

"Sure you are," said he. "I wouldn't give you the chance if I didn't think you could take it. Now, you'd better see Joe Perkins before very long and find out the ropes a bit, learn where he gets items, and that sort of thing, and begin getting items yourself and carrying them to him. Then, when you have to take the job, you'll be better prepared."

"I'll go down there now!" Peanut cried, getting up. "There's a Sunday afternoon train. He'll be at the depot. Say, Mr. Rogers, you're—you're a regular feller!"

Peanut put out his hand again. "I'm going to make good!" he added.

Then his eyes grew suspiciously moist, and he almost ran out of the studio to hide the fact.

But he hadn't gone far along the road before he began to whistle for joy. He stopped suddenly in his musical exercise, and said, aloud, "Gee, I can get a lot about the Scouts into the paper now! That'll help."

CHAPTER V

PEANUT ENROLLS HIS NEW PATROL

THE *Hampton Herald* was a daily newspaper published in Hampton, a small city not far from Southmead, and the county seat. It printed every day anywhere from two inches to half a column of items from each town in the county. Most of these items, of course, were paragraphs about people—"Mr. and Mrs. So-and-so have gone to New York for a week's visit;" "Miss Lucy What's-her-name is confined to the house by an attack of grippe," and so on. It therefore became Peanut's task to gather such personal items as these and turn them over to Joe Perkins. He soon found that daily inquiry at the post-office was one of the best ways to find out who was visiting in town. He could also gather a good deal of gossip from his schoolmates, and in wandering about the village there was usually something to pick up. It wasn't very hard to write out such items in respectable English, and presently he began to wonder where the training was going to come in.

"Don't you worry about the training," Mr. Rogers told him. "We'll pull off some longer stories for

you to write up yet! If we don't, it's up to you as a good newspaper man to find 'em for yourself."

"I might blow up the bank, or something," said Peanut. "That would make a good story."

"Yes, and then you could write a piece about how it feels to be put in jail," laughed Art, who was present.

As soon as high school graduation had been held late in June, Peanut was made an Assistant Scout Master, and proudly received his certificate from the National Headquarters, which he pinned on the wall of his chamber, and his red badge, which went on the sleeve of his Scout jacket, close to the left shoulder.

"Art is a sort of unofficial Assistant Scout Master," said Mr. Rogers, "and he'll help you all he can this summer, I'm sure, won't you, Art?"

"Sure's you know," said Art.

"Now, what is the first thing you are going to do?"

"Well, I thought I'd make a patrol of the Brave Babies," Peanut replied. "Old Hundred's a Scout already, and he can be transferred into that patrol, and help as patrol leader, maybe. The rest aren't Scouts, but they'd like to be. They've hung together as a ball team pretty well, and cleaned up a couple of nines already."

"Good," said Mr. Rogers. "Get 'em around to the Scout House and begin."

Peanut, with his Assistant Scout Master's badge (the first class Scout badge reproduced in red) fastened proudly at the top of his left sleeve in his khaki Scout coat, rallied his Brave Babies the following evening. Eight of them appeared at the Scout House, including Old Hundred. The ninth boy's father wouldn't let him join, because he had a silly idea that the Boy Scouts of America is a military organization. Mr. Rogers was there, too, and Art, Lou and Frank, who all took a hand in helping.

"Now, Babies, the first thing you've got to do is to learn the Scout law, sign, salute and significance of the badge," said Peanut.

"I thought the first thing we done was to have a name," said Cop. "Gee, we don't wanter be called the Brave Baby Patrol!"

"Well, you ain't—you're not—a patrol yet," said Peanut. "You've got to be enrolled as Scouts before you get a name, see? Now, listen, you fellers, and I'll read you the Scout law first. You want to listen to this, too, because it tells you what it means to be a Scout. Now, are you ready?"

Peanut then read, as impressively as he could, the Scout law. Perhaps some of the readers of this book are not Scouts, and do not know that law, so we will repeat it here. Of course, all Scouts know it! A Scout who had forgotten it wouldn't be a very good Scout!

1. *A Scout is trustworthy.*

A Scout's honor is to be trusted. If he were to violate his honor by telling a lie, or by cheating, or by not doing exactly a given task, when trusted on his honor, he may be directed to hand over his Scout badge.

2. *A Scout is loyal.*

He is loyal to all to whom loyalty is due: his Scout leader, his home, and parents and country.

3. *A Scout is helpful.*

He must be prepared at any time to save life, help injured persons, and share the home duties. He must *do at least one good turn to somebody every day.*

4. *A Scout is friendly.*

He is a friend to all and a brother to every other Scout.

5. *A Scout is courteous.*

He is polite to all, especially to women, children, old people, and the weak and helpless. *He must not take pay for being helpful or courteous.*

6. *A Scout is kind.*

He is a friend to animals. He will not kill nor hurt any living creature needlessly, but will strive to save and protect all harmless life.

7. *A Scout is obedient.*

He obeys his parents, Scout Master, patrol leader, and all other duly constituted authorities.

8. *A Scout is cheerful.*

He smiles whenever he can. His obedience to

orders is prompt and cheery. He never shirks nor grumbles at hardships.

9. *A Scout is thrifty.*

He does not wantonly destroy property. He works faithfully, wastes nothing, and makes the best use of his opportunities. He saves his money so that he may pay his own way, be generous to those in need, and helpful to worthy objects.

He may work for pay but must not receive tips for courtesies or good turns.

10. *A Scout is brave.*

He has the courage to face danger in spite of fear, and has to stand up for the right against the coaxings of friends or the jeers or threats of enemies, and defeat does not down him.

11. *A Scout is clean.*

He keeps clean in body and thought, stands for clean speech, clean sport, clean habits, and travels with a clean crowd.

12. *A Scout is reverent.*

He is reverent toward God. He is faithful in his religious duties and respects the convictions of others in matters of custom and religion.

“Say, have we gotter remember all that?” Cop demanded, when Peanut had finished.

“Remember it? You’ve got to *live* it,” Peanut answered. “’Specially number four—‘A Scout is friendly.’ No more scraps between you and Old Hundred!”

All the new candidates laughed at this, and Peanut went on to explain the Scout sign and salute.

“Now, you all salute Mr. Rogers first,” said he. “He’s Scout Master. His orders go above everybody’s, and you always salute him when you meet him anywhere. Line up and salute!”

The recruits lined up, and saluted the Scout Master, who saluted gravely in return.

“Now, salute me!” cried Peanut.

They saluted him.

“More snap in it!” Peanut urged. “See, this way!”

He clicked his heels together, and brought his three fingers up to his cap rim with a snap, standing very straight. “Try it again,” he said. “Stand up straight, now! Ah, that’s better!”

The significance of the badge was next explained, and Mr. Rogers then took a hand and told about the composition of the American flag.

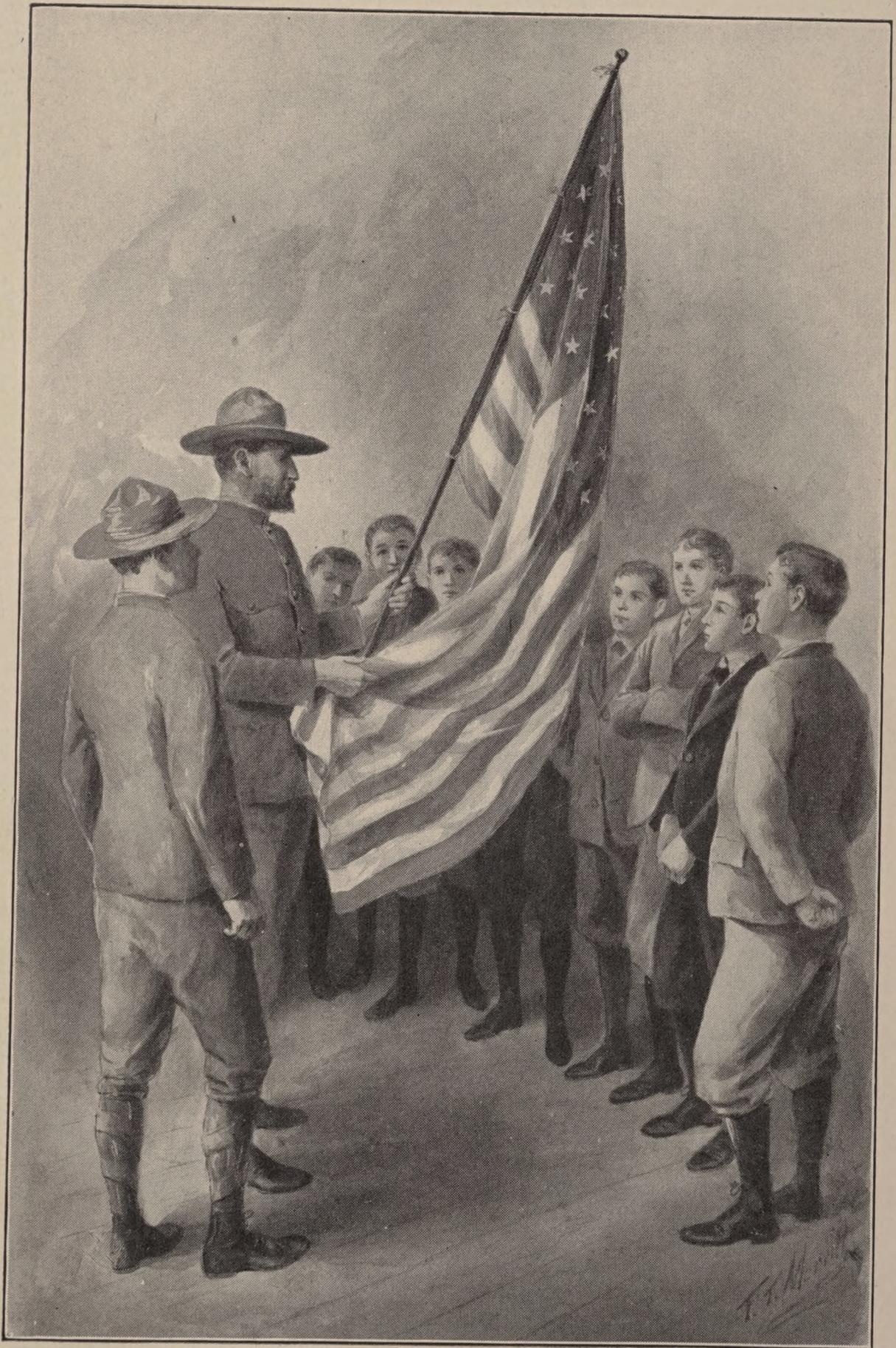
“Now, for the knots,” said Peanut.

“Knots?” asked two or three of the new boys. “What are knots for?”

“To hold things together, usually,” Peanut answered. “What did you think they were for, to eat?”

Mr. Rogers touched him on the shoulder. “That’s not the way to talk,” he whispered.

Peanut colored. “You’re right,” he said. “I forgot they were green kids.”



"We Scouts all have to know how to tie certain knots," he explained to the boys, "because when you are in the woods, or on a boat, or most anywhere, it's mighty useful, no, necessary knowledge. You have to tie a boat fast, for instance, but you gotter tie it so you can *untie* it easily when you want it. Come on, now, and we'll learn."

He took two boys, Art took two, and Frank and Lou each a couple, and for half an hour they practiced bowlines, halter hitches, timber hitches, and several more knots.

Then Peanut clapped his hands for attention.

"Now, you fellows, you each get a manual," said he, "and you take it home and study what we've been over to-night. Then you come back here day after to-morrow evening and bring a quarter each for your book, and take an examination. Better practice up on those knots at home, too! All that pass will take the Scout oath, and be enrolled as tenderfeet. Then we'll see about changing the name, eh, Cop?"

"What are we goin' to do now?" somebody asked.

"Well, we might have a drill, I guess," Peanut answered.

"Aw, no, let's play hide-and-seek," said Cop. "There's some dandy places around here to hide in, and it's good and dark."

"And you don't want to be called a Brave Baby!"

Peanut answered scornfully. "We ain't—aren't—here to play baby's games. We're here to become Scouts. We gotter have some drill to set us up, so we can march right and—and all that. Come on now—setting up exercises first."

He stood the boys up in two rows, each boy far enough from the next so that their fingers didn't touch when they held their arms straight out on either side, and then he put them through a series of setting up exercises. Art, Lou, Frank and Mr. Rogers stood up, too, in front of the boys, facing them, and went through the exercises which Peanut led.

One of the exercises was to put the palms of the hands together in front, arms straight out, and then swing the arms as far back as possible, coming up on the toes each time. Another was to put the hands up over the head, and then bend forward, without bending the knees, until the finger tips, if possible, touched the floor. This was repeated ten times, and was followed by groans and back twistings among the recruits.

"That'll take the kinks out of your backs and put a couple of inches onto your height, if you do it every morning when you get up," Peanut told them. "Come on, now, I'll show you another one."

Putting his hands on his hips, Peanut squatted down till he sat on his heels, and then stood up

again. "See that?" said he. "Now everybody do it with me ten times."

He squatted and rose, squatted and rose, steadily and rather rapidly, ten times. At the ninth time one or two of the boys lost their balance and tumbled over. After the tenth time Mr. Rogers, whose face was a bit flushed with the exertion, said, "Well, that's about enough for me. I'm not as young as you fellows."

"Ho," cried Cop, "that's nothin'! I could do it all night."

"You could, could you?" said Peanut, facing on him. "Well, you stand out in front of me, and we'll try it. Come on!"

Cop looked a little sheepish, but he didn't dare refuse, after his boast, so he and Peanut faced each other, and Peanut set the pace. He set a good one, too. He was slim, and Cop was stout, and it was easier for him to squat. Down and up, down and up, down and up he went, five times more, ten times, fifteen times. Cop was getting red in the face, and fast losing his wind. But Peanut kept remorselessly on. Twenty times, twenty-five times, thirty times.

"Thirty-one, thirty-two, thirty-three, thirty-four," counted Old Hundred, aloud. "Thirty ——"

But before he finished that count, Cop flopped. The muscles of his thighs simply collapsed, and he fell down in a heap.

"You could keep it up all night, could you?" said Peanut. "We've been doing it about five minutes, I guess. It don't—doesn't pay to boast, Cop. That's one of the things you learn when you're a Scout."

Cop got up, rubbing his weary legs, and looked sheepish.

"Well, I got Cop's goat, anyway," Peanut said to Mr. Rogers, after the meeting broke up. "How did it go?"

"It went first rate," the Scout Master answered. "Only you must be careful not to hurt the feelings of some of the boys. You must remember that some of them aren't so quick as you are, and all of 'em are younger. It takes a lot of patience to be a Scout Master."

"I s'pose patience is one of the things a feller's got to learn, if he's going to be a reporter," Peanut mused.

"If he's going to be anything," Mr. Rogers answered.

Two evenings later the Brave Babies came back for their test. They had all worked hard, even Cop, over the knots, and they were familiar with the other requirements.

"You'd better give them the oath," said Peanut to Mr. Rogers. "You're the Big Chief."

The new patrol lined up, and each boy held up his

right hand, thumb on the little finger tip, and the other three fingers raised (the Scout sign), and solemnly took the Scout oath.

On my honor I will do my best :

1. To do my duty to God and my country, and to obey the Scout law ;
2. To help other people at all times ;
3. To keep myself physically strong, mentally awake, and morally straight.

“Now,” said Mr. Rogers shaking hands with each boy, “I welcome you as tenderfeet of the new Southmead patrol. Your special Scout Master will be Bobbie Morrison, and you will obey him.”

“Hello, Brave Babies,” cried Peanut. “Welcome to our city !”

He, too, shook hands with each new Scout.

“Now, don't we get a name ?” said Cop.

“All right, what'll we call this patrol? Got any ideas ?” Peanut replied.

“Might call it the Brave Patrol,” Jimmy Gerson suggested. He was the smallest boy of the eight, and played short stop.

“Can't, Jimmy,” said Mr. Rogers. “We have to name our patrols after some animal.”

“The Wildcats !” cried Old Hundred. “That sounds scrappy, all right !”

“Hooray !” came a chorus.

"Eats 'em alive, eh?" laughed Peanut. "All those in favor of the Wildcat Patrol say 'Aye.'"

"Aye!" came a chorus from eight throats, so loud that Mr. Rogers said it sounded more like wildcats than boys.

"Just the same, you can call yourselves wildcats all you like, but other folks are going to call you Brave Babies still," laughed Peanut. "That name's too good to lose."

"Aw, forget it!" wailed Cop.

"Now what are we goin' to do?" demanded Jimmy Gerson. "Don't we have to learn to signal, and cook—and things like that?"

"You bet you do," said Peanut. "You fellows have all got to pass the second class Scout test before the summer is over, or my name's Dennis. Come on, we'll have some signal drill to-night."

He got out the flags, and told the new patrol how he and Rob had signaled from the top of Mount Jefferson to the top of Mount Adams the summer before, and brought help for an injured woman.

"You see, it ain't—isn't—just in war signaling comes in handy," he said. "Be prepared—that's the Scout motto. If you know signaling, you can tie two handkerchiefs on two sticks, and talk as far as you can see 'em."

The new patrol then took their manuals, opened at the page showing the semaphore signal code, and

began to practice. They got as far as E that evening. Peanut made sure that each of the eight boys had mastered the first five letters.

"Now, you can rig up some flags at home, and practice the rest all you want to," said he. "The first tenderfoot that learns the whole alphabet gets a—a ——"

"A what?" said Cop.

"Well, I'm trying to think. He'll be assistant patrol leader, and serve when Old Hundred's not on the job. Now, Cop, how'd you like some setting up exercises before we quit for the night?"

"I ain't sufferin' for 'em," said Cop, with a grin.

"Still, I think we'll have some. None of you fellers stand up straight enough."

Peanut put the new patrol through ten minutes of setting up drill before he sent them home.

"Ball game Saturday," said he, "and the first hike Monday. Meet here at eight-thirty Monday morning, and get measured for Scout suits. You want to bring grub for the hike, too, and hatchets. You'll all need packs and a lot of things, but we can't wait till they come before we do some Scout work. If a couple of you bring hatchets Monday it will be enough, but everybody bring something to cook for lunch."

"How'll we cook it?" Cop asked.

Peanut started to say, "On a cake of ice," but

he recalled Mr. Rogers' warning in time. "You can cook a lamb chop on a forked stick," he answered, "or potatoes in the coals. If you bring bacon, you'll have to bring a fry pan, too. Anybody that wants tea bring a tin cup, and a kettle to boil water in—and some tea leaves might be useful."

("Couldn't resist that crack," he whispered to Mr. Rogers, who had been watching all the evening without saying a word.)

Mr. Rogers smiled. "I guess that didn't hurt anybody," he said. "It's going fine now, Peanut. Your trouble is going to come in three or four weeks, after the novelty wears off, and you've got to find ways to keep 'em interested. Keep your brains working."

"You bet I will," the boy answered. "I'm goin' to earn my twenty-five dollars a month, or—or give it back."

"That's the spirit," said the Scout Master patting him on the back.

CHAPTER VI

THE FIRST TENDERFOOT HIKE

WHEN Peanut and Art reached the Scout House Monday morning they found most of the Wildcat Patrol already there, with a varied assortment of grub and cooking utensils. Cop was so comical that neither of the older boys could help tipping back his head and shouting with laughter.

In the first place, he had a carpenter's shingle hatchet tied to his belt on the right side by a piece of string. On the other side was tied a large iron frying-pan, which was so long that it couldn't be fastened by the handle without hitting his heels, so Cop had wound string around the pan part, and bound that tightly to his side. The handle stuck down like a sword scabbard. One pocket of his coat was bulging out, and Peanut, giving it a thump, discovered that it contained a whole jar of bacon. In one hand Cop had a long rake handle, sharpened at the end, for a staff, and in the other a paper package, which he said contained a loaf of bread.

"Say, do you think we are going to stay a week, and set up housekeeping?" Peanut laughed.

“Well, I wanted enough to eat,” Cop declared. “A feller can’t hike all day on nothin’.”

“A lot of hiking you could do with that sheet iron factory tied to you,” Peanut replied. “Gee, you fellers have got to get the proper kits pretty quick, if we’re going to do any real hiking. What have you got there, Jimmy?”

Little Jimmy Gerson, the tiny short stop, picked up a black iron kettle, which had been on the ground beside him. “You said bring a kettle if we wanted tea,” he answered, cheerfully. “I got the tea, too—and sugar!” He fished in his pockets, bringing out two large sandwiches, wrapped in paper, two potatoes, and then a small pasteboard box. “Tea and sugar in there,” said he.

Peanut laughed again, and picked up the iron kettle. “It weighs about five pounds,” he said to Art. “Show ’em your kit.”

Art slung off his pack, and opened it, while the tenderfeet gathered around. He took out first a small aluminum pot, for boiling water, and opened it, showing inside a piece of steak, a potato, two slices of bread, a package of sweet chocolate and a little tea and four lumps of sugar in a small cotton sack. Then he took out an aluminum plate, a knife, fork and spoon, and a small, light frying-pan, with a detachable handle. Finally he brought forth his folding wire grill for cooking meat, joined it, and showed

how it stood over a fire. Out of the pocket of his pack he produced a piece of soap and a small towel.

"You always feel better if you get a good wash before a meal," he explained.

Then he brought from the pockets of his Scout coat a compass, a water-proof match safe and a folding drinking cup, and, taking off his coat, showed his sheath hatchet fastened to his belt.

"Now, that's something like an outfit," said Peanut. "I've got about the same thing in my pack. One of the first things you fellers have got to do is to save up and get kits. It's no fun hiking when you have to carry 'round a whole hardware store, like Cop! You leave your kettle behind, Jimmy. Art's and mine will be enough. Cop, take off that boiler factory effect!"

"Aw, can I keep the hatchet?"

"Yes, you can keep that."

"It isn't sheathed," Art cautioned. "If we go over Bald Face Mountain he might get a fall or something, and cut himself. You and I have hatchets—that's enough."

"Right, oh," Peanut replied. "Off with the axe, Cop!"

"Aw, can't I carry *nothin'*?" Cop complained.

"Well, you've got a meat market in your pocket and a bake shop in your hand. What more do you want?"

"That ain't nothin'," said Cop.

"So you thought about the setting up exercise," Peanut retorted.

Old Hundred and the rest shouted at this, and Cop was silent.

Peanut now inspected the footwear of the new patrol. Eddie Reynolds and Pete Perkins both had on sneakers.

"No good," said Peanut, shaking his head. "They might be all right if we stuck to the roads and fields, but if we go over Bald Face you'll cut the soles all to pieces on the rocks. Anyhow, sneaker soles aren't stout enough to keep your feet right on a long hike. Go back home, both of you, and get on your stoutest shoes—put on your winter water-proof boots if you've got 'em. Hustle, now—we'll be getting measured for Scout suits while you're gone. Beat it!"

Eddie and Pete started off on the run, and Peanut took the measurements of the other boys while they were gone, including hat size.

"Hope the uniforms'll be here before the next hike," he said. "You're a pretty looking squad now, you are!"

He lined them up with a laugh. One boy had a straw hat on, one had a red cap, another had a blue, another a brown, another a gray. Cop wore a pair of baseball trousers, too large for him, the gift of an older brother.

"Never mind," said Art, "we'll have 'em looking like West Point on parade before the summer is over."

As soon as Eddie and Pete came back, Peanut gave the order to march. He lined them up two by two, with Old Hundred as patrol leader, marching with Cop at the front. The two Scout Masters (for Peanut insisted that Art was now really a Scout Master, too) marched at one side.

"Come on, now, you Wildcats, keep step!" Peanut cried. "One, two, three—march! *Left—left—left*—what's the matter with your feet, Cop; don't you know your left from your right? Get into step! That's better. *Left—left—left.*"

The patrol reached the road. "Column right—march!" commanded Old Hundred. They wheeled to the right, and tramped down the village street.

"Say, we orter have a band!" piped Jimmy, who because he was so small marched in the rear with Skinny Buxton.

"Whistle, then," said Peanut.

Everybody began to whistle "It's a long way to Tipperary," and to this tune the patrol marched on.

At the next corner two other boys were standing, members of the nine which the new patrol had played that first Saturday after they had rolled the diamond.

"Hi, look at the new Scouts," one of them shouted.

“Brave Babies! Brave Babies!” he taunted, and the other took up the cry, too.

Cop started out of the rank, as if to make for the two on the corner. “Come on, let’s show ’em!” he cried.

Peanut sprang forward. “Get back in the column!” he commanded. “You obey orders! Nobody gave any command to break ranks.”

“Aw, let’s give those guys a trimming!” said Cop.

“You’ll get a trimming if you don’t get back there, and keep step,” said Peanut. “What do you care what they say?”

“Babies! Babies!” came the taunt from the corner again.

“Aw, just let me at ’em once!” Cop pleaded.

“If you didn’t mind it, they wouldn’t say anything,” Art laughed.

Cop grumbled, but he marched on. Soon they were out of the village, on the open country road, and here Peanut gave orders to break ranks.

“Now’d be a good time to see if we can all pass test number five for second class Scouts,” he said.

“Tell ’em what it is, Old Hundred.”

“I know!” piped Jimmy.

“Well, if you know so much, you tell.”

“It’s fifty steps dog trot, and then fifty steps walking, an’ then fifty steps dog trot, an’ so on, an’ you have to do a mile in twelve minutes.”

“Correct,” said Peanut. “Got on your pedometer, Art?”

“Yes,” Art answered. “But I don’t need it. It’s exactly a mile from the next house to the crossroad. I’ve paced it off more’n once.”

“Good, we’ll start at the next house, then.”

A moment later Peanut gave the command, Art consulted his watch, and the patrol started up the road on the dog trot, one, two, three paces, and so on up to fifty. Then, panting a little, they settled down to a walk again. After fifty walking steps, the dog trot was resumed. When they had thus alternated a few times, it became evident that some of the boys could go much faster than the others.

“You go ahead with the fast ones,” said Art, who wasn’t much of a runner, “and I’ll take the others. Stop at the crossroads.”

Peanut, Old Hundred, Spike Morrissey, and little Jimmy Gerson, who, in spite of his size (or his lack of size), seemed to be able to keep up without losing his wind, were soon far ahead of the rest of the party, who trailed along behind, with Cop Stanley clutching at the jar of bacon in his coat pocket to keep it from slapping against his side, and puffing and panting while the sweat ran down his forehead.

Presently Art saw the party ahead stop at the crossroad. He looked at his watch. “They did the mile in ten and a quarter minutes,” he said.

"Come on, fellers, we've got to hit it up to get there under twelve!"

"I'm g-goin' ter throw away this j-jar o' bacon!" puffed Cop.

"Don't you dare!" cried Art. "I'm expecting to eat some of that myself! Besides, a Scout never throws away his provisions except in a desperate emergency. Stick it out!"

"A-all r-right," Cop answered, trying to clutch the jar with his hand so the weight would not pull on his shoulder.

This second detachment made the crossroads in a shade under the required twelve minutes, but they had to hit up the pace on the last few hundred feet, and all of them dropped panting on the ground.

"Wow! But I'm out of condition," said Art. "Too much school and too little exercise, I guess. I'm as slow as—as Cop."

"Aw, Cop's too fat to run," laughed Old Hundred.

"W-w-wait till I get m-my b-breath, and I'll show you!" Cop replied.

"Anyhow, all eight tenderfeet passed the test," cried Peanut. "That's the main point. That's just so much gained toward becoming second class Scouts. We'll rest a minute, and when we start up I'll show you all the Indian lope-walk. It beats the Scout pace for speed and distance."

"Say, what do you think we are, Marathon runners?" laughed Art.

"Aw, cut it out! It's too hot!" said Cop, who had got his breath back by now.

"I'll learn it—bet *I* can do it!" piped up Jimmy Gerson.

"You're all right, Jimmy," said Peanut. "You haven't got lungs; the Lord built you around a pair of bellows. You and I'll do the Indian lope, eh?"

"Me, too," said Spike Morrisey and Old Hundred, in one breath.

Art turned to the other boys and laughed. "We'll let the split rails go ahead, and we'll follow after in comfort," he said.

"Well, I bet I could do their old Indian lope if I didn't have this bacon jar," declared Cop.

"I'll carry it for you," said little Jimmy, with a perfectly solemn face.

The laugh was on Cop, and he had to grin himself.

"Naw, it's too heavy for you, Jimmy," he said, getting out as best he could.

When the patrol moved on, with recovered wind, Peanut showed them the Indian loping walk, and everybody, even Cop, tried it for a short distance. This walk is hard to describe. It is half-way between the old-fashioned heel and toe walk, which probably few boys who read this book have ever seen—it was dropped from the list of events in track meets many

years ago—and an ordinary dog trot. In the first place, you bend your knees a little, and then, crouching over your feet, as it were, you put out one foot not very far ahead, setting down the heel and rocking forward upon the toe. That swings out the other foot, and you repeat. The steps are much shorter than in the dog trot, and one foot is always on the ground, as in the old heel and toe walking. But the motion is much easier and smoother than in the old-fashioned walk. A good, strong boy or man can, with practice, make a mile in eight minutes or less this way, and at a ten minute rate you can keep up the pace for quite a distance. The Indians, they say, used to keep it up for fifty or sixty miles a day.

But the Wildcat Patrol, following Peanut down the road toward Bald Face Mountain, very soon found that it can't be done without practice, because walking with the knees bent very quickly tires the back leg muscles which aren't trained for this step. One by one the boys dropped into a natural walk and fell behind, till only Peanut, Old Hundred and little Jimmy were left. Finally Old Hundred, with a laugh, quit too, and began to rub his legs behind his knees. Peanut and Jimmy kept on.

"You been practicing this!" the little fellow panted.

"Sure," said Peanut.

"I ain't—takes practice—makes my legs ache."

“ Mine, too.”

Neither boy was prepared to give in. Jimmy's forehead and face were covered with perspiration. He was getting very short breathed. But he stuck to Peanut's heels.

Finally the young Scout Master looked around at him, and saw how tired he was. “ I don't believe he'd give in if it was killing him,” thought Peanut, “ the plucky little tad ! ”

The older boy stopped short. “ That's enough for me,” he exclaimed.

“ Well, I'd 'a' kept on ! ” panted Jimmy.

“ I bet you would,” said Peanut. “ You're going to be a regular Scout.”

Jimmy flushed with pleasure, and wiped his hot face.

“ Maybe Cop can lick me with his fists, but he can't with his legs,” said he.

“ Cop's a great fighter with his face,” laughed Peanut. “ We'll take some of that out of him before we get through.”

The two Scouts were surprised, on looking back, to see how far ahead of the others the Indian lope walk had carried them in a very few minutes. “ It certainly does get you over the ground ! ” said Peanut.

They waited till the rest came up, and then they all struck off across the fields toward the white cliffs

of Bald Face Mountain, which rose up sharply out of the woods a half a mile or so away.

"Say, are we goin' up those cliffs?" Cop demanded.

"Not to-day," Peanut replied. "You fellers have got to learn more about climbing before we tackle them. Don't you know there's a path up?"

"I've heard there was," said Cop.

"*Heard?* Didn't you ever climb Bald Face?"

Cop shook his head.

"Well, I'll be switched," said Art. "A mountain right here two or three miles from the post-office, and you never went up it!"

"Neither did I," said Eddie Reynolds.

"Nor I."

"Nor me."

"Nor me," came from other boys.

"I've been up!" piped Jimmy. "Me an' my father went up after arbutus last spring. The path goes zigzagging up there to the right."

"You're a regular Scout, Jimmy," said Peanut again. "Gee, the rest of you ginks sure need the Scouts to show you a thing or two! Think of never climbing a mountain right in your own front yard!"

Cop was looking at the cliffs, which were growing nearer now, and seemingly growing higher, too.

"Say," he demanded, "you mean to say we are ever goin' to climb right straight up those cliffs?"

"Maybe, when we've had some practice," laughed Peanut. "These aren't much, are they, Art?"

"I should say not," Art replied. "You ought to see the head wall of Huntington Ravine on Mount Washington. Why, it's five times as high as those cliffs!"

"Whew—excuse me!" said Cop.

"Besides, if we climb here, we'll go roped together, the way they do in the Alps," said Peanut. "Then if one man slips, the others hold him."

"Good-night!" said Spike Morrissey. "Cop would either break the rope or pull us all off."

"Shut up," said Cop, "or I'll ——"

"You'll get a setting up drill right now, if you're not careful," Peanut warned.

Cop immediately assumed a less belligerent attitude.

They had been climbing steadily as they talked, across a high pasture, and now they entered the woods by an old logging road, which turned off nearly parallel to the face of the cliffs, which were only dimly seen through the trees, and followed a brook up a sharp incline. After five minutes of walking, the road emerged into an open space, directly under the cliffs, and they had at last a close and unobstructed view. The whole patrol paused, and several of the boys drew a long breath. Only Art and Peanut had ever been up in the big mountains,

and to the rest these white limestone cliffs, though only two or three hundred feet high, looked very high indeed now that they stood under their shadow.

At the foot of the cliffs directly above them was a huge pile of broken rock, hurled down from above by the frosts of ages. This pile sloped up rather gradually perhaps thirty or forty feet. Then the cliff began, perpendicular in places, in other places sloping a little, with ledges where stunted spruces were growing, and cracks, seams and gullies running up and down its face.

"There's a good lead to the first ledge, Art," Peanut said, pointing to a gully which rose at an angle from the top of the rock pile to a shelf where an evergreen perched.

"Yes," Art replied, "and there seems to be another lead going on to the next ledge. Gee, I bet we could climb that cliff, easy!"

"Come on, let's try!" cried little Jimmy, shaking with excitement.

"Wow, I'd like to!" answered Peanut, looking longingly at the frowning wall of rock.

"Hold your horses," Art cautioned. "We've got a troop of tenderfeet to look after."

"You're right," said Peanut. "Some day, though ——"

"I wouldn't risk it unless Mr. Rogers was along," Art answered.

Jimmy hung back as the rest of the troop started up the path.

"Say!" he called. "This would make a dandy place for a hut. Golly, you could put a hut up on one of those ledges, an' hide it behind a spruce, an' I'll bet *nobody* could find you."

The rest of the boys looked back at the cliff again.

"That's so," said Art. "I'll bet there are caves in those cliffs, too. Might make a hut in a cave."

"How are you goin' to get to your old hut?" Cop demanded.

"Have a rope ladder," cried Jimmy. "Golly, wouldn't that be fun!"

"Well, how would you hide your hut if you had a rope ladder hangin' down? An' if you had to have a rope ladder to get to your hut, how'd you get to it in the first place to fasten the top of the ladder?" Cop spoke scornfully, and poor little Jimmy was at a loss for a reply.

"That's easy," said Art. "You could climb up to a ledge *above* the one where you were going to build, and then drop down to it on a rope, and lower your ladder, hiding it when you weren't around in some crack in the rocks."

"Sure, that's the way you could do it!" said Jimmy. "Let's try."

"Sure, let's try!" cried two or three of the other tenderfeet.

"Where's your rope?" laughed Peanut. "No, sir, we don't break our necks to-day, not while I'm boss. Besides, how'd you get your rope down, after you'd slid down it to your hut?"

This was more than even Art could answer.

They walked on up the logging road, beside the brook, which splashed and gurgled over its steep, rocky bed. Art was silent. He was evidently thinking.

"Say," he presently cried, "I've got an idea!"

"Come across, before it hurts you," said Peanut.

"What Jimmy said suggested it to me," Art went on. "It's to invent a kind of game called hut hunting. We could divide up in parties of two—that would make five parties—and each pair would build a hut somewhere on this mountain. We'd have to decide just how much of the mountain we could use, 'cause it would be too hard if we used all of it. It goes way over into the next town on the other side. Then, after we got the huts built each team would try to find the other teams' huts. The hut that got found last would win, of course. Maybe the rest would have to cook a dinner for the winning team, or something."

"Say, Art, how'd you do it?" cried Peanut.

"That's a real idea!"

"You bet it is," several of the other Scouts exclaimed.

"How'd we tell who found whose hut?" asked Old Hundred.

"Couldn't each team have a special sign, and put it on each hut they found with a piece of chalk?" Skinny Buxton suggested.

"Good—and the date under it," said Art. "The team that got its marks on the most huts might get in on the dinner, too."

"Can we come out and sleep all night in our huts?" cried Jimmy. "Wow! that would be fun!"

"Sure," said Peanut. "The day the hunting is to begin we'll all come ready to spend the night. We'll live two days on the mountain and Mr. Rogers can come the second day and be judge!"

"Oh, let's begin now!" cried Jimmy, dancing up and down with excitement.

"Nix," said Peanut. "You've all got to get your equipment first, and have some lessons in cooking and tracking. There isn't a one of you yet, except Old Hundred, that knows how to spend a night outdoors."

The troop moved on up the trail, each boy thinking more of huts than anything else, and keeping his eye peeled for possible sites. Presently the trail turned out of the logging road, sharp to the left, and headed straight for the top of the mountain. It was a short but breathless scramble through the trees to the saddle between the two summits of the

mountain. Once on this saddle, the trail again turned to the left, and climbed up over broken rock to the top of the cliffs the Scouts had seen from below. At this point each boy, with a shout, started forward on his own hook, in an effort to be the first to reach the peak. It became a race between Peanut and Jimmy, and Peanut was sorely tempted to win it, as he knew he could. But he knew how proud the little fellow would be, so he pretended to trip and fall just short of the last rocks, and Jimmy, with a cry of triumph, sprang ahead and waved his cap triumphantly on the topmost crag.

Here, on the rocky peak, there was nothing but a few blueberry bushes and a stunted spruce or two. The mountain sloped away rather gradually on the side toward the next town, but on the side toward Southmead it was everywhere very steep, and right under the Scouts' feet, of course, it dropped away with almost terrifying abruptness down the face of the cliffs to the woods below. Peanut kept the boys from going too near the edge.

Far below them they could see the field they had crossed, and then the road, looking like a winding white ribbon. A motor car was going along it now.

"Say, this must be the way the land looks to an aviator," somebody exclaimed.

"Sure," said Peanut. "If you were a French air

scout, you could fly over and drop a bomb on that motor car, which contains a German general."

"You'd want to be flying about four thousand feet higher than this before you tried it," said Art, "or you'd get a bullet in you."

"Look, I can see the Congregational church steeple just as plain!" cried Jimmy.

"And I can see my house, three miles off," said Eddie Reynolds.

"Say, it's fine and cool up here!" exclaimed Cop, taking off his coat with the heavy jar of bacon in the pocket, and wiping his face.

"Could you signal from here down to the road?" asked Jimmy.

"Sure," Peanut answered. "You run along back down there, and see."

Jimmy looked serious. "Would I have time before lunch?" he asked.

"You might if you jumped off the cliff," Peanut laughed. "That would get you down quick. Look, there's a man walking along the road. You could see if he waved a handkerchief, couldn't you?"

The boys agreed they could.

"Well, then, he could see us, so we could signal. Say, we must hurry up and learn signaling."

Everybody sat down on the rocks in the cool breeze, with the world spread out below them like a

map, and began to plan out how much of the mountain to use for the hut hunting game.

"There are ten of us, so there'll be five huts," said Art. "It would be too easy if we got 'em close together. I think we ought to use any part of the mountain between the fields down there and this summit ridge. We might go as far south as the end of the cliffs, and as far back toward Southmead as the big cave."

"Where's the big cave?" asked several.

"Gosh! they don't know where the cave is!" Peanut exclaimed. "We'll have to go home that way and show 'em, Art."

"Sure," Art answered. "The big cave is about half a mile north of the trail we came up by. It will make a good mark for one end of the hut territory. It's not so steep there as these cliffs, but it's pretty steep at that, and thick woods. It's going to be some job finding all five huts over such a big stretch. I guess the team who finds 'em all will earn a supper."

"The real job's going to be to get 'em built without being caught, seems to me," said Peanut.

"Well, that will depend on how smart the team is," Art answered. "We needn't set the date for hunting till a month from now, and everybody'll have time to sneak down here and work."

"Let's divide up into teams now," cried Jimmy. "I want Peanut!"

“Aw, no!” said Cop. “You ’n’ he are the fastest runners!”

“Well, we can’t run away with the hut, can we?” Peanut laughed. “We aren’t going to play tag. Jimmy’s the smallest, and I’m the Scout Master. I think that’s only a fair team.”

“Then I choose Art,” said Cop.

“No, I ought to take the next smallest,” Art answered. “I’ll team up with Skinny Buxton.”

“You and Old Hundred team up—you’re the battery,” said Peanut to Cop. “Then Spike and Albert, and Eddie and Pete. That’s a good, fair division. We’ll decide later when the hunting is going to begin. Now, for lunch, and a cooking lesson!”

The troop went down the trail again as far as the brook, and the Scout Masters set each boy to making his own fire pit out of stones. As usual with a crowd of tenderfeet, there were some queer looking pits. Art, who was an expert on fires and cooking, went around and criticized each one, showing the boys how to make them better, how to leave one end open for a draft, how to cut forks and a cross-bar of green wood to hang a kettle on, and so forth. When all the pits had been properly built, Art and Peanut gave two of the boys their sheath hatchets, and told them to cut fuel.

“You’ve got to demonstrate that you know how

to use an ax before you can be a second class Scout, you know," Art said.

Peanut watched Jimmy Gerson cutting down a small green moosewood tree.

"You're cutting all right, Jimmy," he said, "but what are you going to do with it when you have it cut?"

"I'm going to make a fire," said Jimmy.

"Well, you'll need about a gallon of kerosene to make it burn," Peanut laughed. "Got any kerosene with you?"

The little fellow looked very shamefaced.

"Dead wood—but dry, not rotten, old Scout," said Peanut, in a kindly voice, to cheer him up. "You can't burn green wood unless you have a big fire already going. Find some dead wood, and be sure it's hard wood, too, not pine. You only want a little pine for kindlings."

Jimmy set off searching, and presently called to inquire if a certain fallen log was hard wood or not.

Art went over to him. It was hemlock. "Say, you fellows surely need some lessons about trees," he said. "Mark that down, Peanut; it's one thing more we've got to study. We're going to have a busy little summer!"

When all the Scouts had shown what they could do with hatchets, and each had a pile of wood by his fire pit, Peanut ordered them all to get kindlings.

This was easy here, for there were many small pines with dead lower branches which could be broken off by hand.

"Now, lay your fires," the Scout Master ordered.

On this point neither of the older boys gave any help, and when the eight fires were laid, Art and Peanut distributed two matches apiece. "That's all you get," said Peanut. "No fire, no lunch!"

Eight boys kneeled down by their fire pits, eight matches were struck, shielded by cap or hand, and eight attempts were made to light the fires. Four of them were successful, including Old Hundred's. But he was already a second class Scout, and was only going through a review, as it were. The other four boys struck their second match, and tried again.

Cop's second match went out in a puff of wind. Jimmy got his fire lighted, and had jumped to his feet with a cry of joy, when the flame burned out the first kindlings underneath, the heavy wood collapsed, and put out the whole thing. Eddie Reynolds and Pete Perkins, however, kept their fires going.

"Well, six of you have passed," said Peanut, "but Cop and Jimmy, as far as I can see, aren't going to get any lunch."

Both boys looked glum and disappointed.

"The wind blew my bloomin' old match out, or I'd 'a' done it!" Cop complained.

"Sure," said Art. "There pretty generally is a wind outdoors. You didn't shield your match carefully enough, or let it get well going before you put it to the kindlings. What would you do if you were out alone, in the cold, with only one match to your name?"

He then proceeded to show Cop how to protect a match from the wind, and how to have his first kindlings very small and inflammable, while Peanut was showing Jimmy how to lay his fire properly, so it wouldn't collapse. On the second trial both boys got their fires going.

Art and Peanut then started their own fires, and when the coals were hot enough the cooking began. It was very simple cooking on this first day, consisting mostly of broiled chops, fried bacon, and potatoes.

Most of the boys had no idea how long it takes to bake a potato, so Art lent his frying-pan to one boy after another, and the potatoes were peeled, sliced, and fried in nice, sizzling bacon fat. The tenderfeet were still without the proper equipment of aluminum plates, forks, spoons, and so forth, and as they watched Art and Peanut draw their implements from their knapsacks and eat in comfort, all the boys agreed that about the first thing they'd do would be

to earn not only the required dollar to put in the savings-bank, but enough more to purchase simple cooking equipments.

However, everybody was hungry, and Art's tea tasted good, too, as he filled their tin cups, and the meal went off gaily.

"Now, what do we do?" said Peanut, as lunch was finished.

"Aw, we lie here and rest a while," Cop answered.

"Cop's like one of those boa-constrictors that eats ten rabbits and then goes to sleep for a week," said Old Hundred.

"If I wa'n't so full o' bacon, I'd punch your head," Cop retorted.

"Well, there's something you do before you either rest or punch his head," said Peanut. "Come on, up with you, and clean camp! Scouts never leave any mess around in the woods—or anywhere. Everybody burn up all his potato peels and paper bags, and everything."

"Now, what do we do?" the Scout Master continued, after the ground was cleaned up.

"I guess we ought to put out the fires," Jimmy suggested.

"Almost human, Jimmy; go to the head!" said Peanut. "A good Scout never leaves a fire burning behind him to set the woods going. Cop, get up and fill the kettle at the brook!"

"Aw, why should I do it?"

"'Cause you're so full of bacon. It'll help digest your dinner, and keep you awake."

Cop brought a kettle of water obediently, and other Scouts filled their dippers, and the fires were all drenched out till not an ember smoked.

"Now, we'll rest for half an hour," said the Scout Master.

Cop immediately rolled over, and closed his eyes. But the others lay on the cool moss and talked, each team in the hut contest keeping together and conversing in whispers about their plans. They kept together when the start was made for home, with Peanut and Jimmy in the lead. Everybody was looking constantly to right and left for possible hiding places for the huts.

They followed the old logging road northward about half-way up the side of the mountain for perhaps a half mile, and then Peanut, consulting with Art, struck back up the slope again, without any path, pushing and scrambling up a very steep incline, through tough laurel bushes and thick forest. It was hard work, and nobody talked very much.

Presently they came flat up against a perpendicular ledge of rock, fifteen or twenty feet high.

"Here we are," said Art. "The cave's up there, just over this ledge."

"The cave is, yes, but we're not," Peanut laughed.

"I'm stumped. I've always got to the cave from above."

"Well, we can go along under this ledge till we find a place where we can get up," said Art.

"Gee, I know a better way than that," Old Hundred put in. "Cut down one of these trees and let it fall against the top of the ledge for a ladder."

This suggestion was hailed with delight, and a small tree, growing within four feet of the base of the ledge, was selected. When it fell, it hit the top of the ledge and rested there, making a pole ladder. One by one the boys shinned up it.

On top of the ledge, they found themselves on a shelf of rock, facing another ledge, but one composed of broken fragments and not perpendicular. One of these fragments, however, projected out from the rest, and underneath it was a small hole, four or five feet across and about as many feet tall.

"There's the cave," said Art. "Wait till I make a torch."

He looked for a birch tree but there was none in sight, so he picked out a dead hemlock, chopped off a long strip of the bark, and after some effort succeeded in lighting it. Then he stooped and entered the hole. The rest followed him. Inside it was cold and damp, but the Scouts found a sort of chamber in which they could stand upright—indeed, they couldn't touch the roof. This room went back for ten or fifteen feet.

"I bet there are bears in here!" cried Jimmy.

"Guess there were once, all right," said Art. "But I don't see any signs of 'em now."

He swept the blazing bark near the ground, and examined the floor of the cave. "No bones!" he laughed.

"This would be a good place for a hut, all right," somebody suggested.

"Not if you want to hide it," Art answered. "This is the first place everybody'll look in. Now, let's go back to the logging road, blazing trees as we go."

"What do we want to blaze trees for?" asked Jimmy, as the boys one by one slid down the ladder.

"So we can have a northern boundary to the hut area," Art replied. "No fair building a hut north of the line of blazes, or south of the end of the cliffs we saw this morning, or west of the summit of the mountain."

He and Peanut took out their hatchets, and the Scouts took turns in blazing trees as they plunged down toward the logging road. When the road was reached they made a big blaze on a tree beside it, to show the boundary plainly, and headed homeward, tramping into the village street a good deal more dusty and tired than when they had left in the morning.

CHAPTER VII

PEANUT AND JIMMY CLIMB A CLIFF AND FIND A CAVE

THREE weeks from the date of the first hike was finally selected as the day when the hut hunting was to begin. It was agreed that the marking of huts shouldn't commence till four in the afternoon. Everybody would spend the night in the huts, and the hunt would continue till some time the next day. On the second day, everybody was to meet at the spot where the first lunch had been cooked, with Mr. Rogers, the head Scout Master, make a trip from there to each hut, and then a dinner would be cooked at the hut of the winner, the winners not to have to provide any of the food, or do any of the cooking.

During those three weeks the Wildcat Patrol did not entirely neglect Scout work. Mr. Rogers, Peanut and others gave them lessons every Monday night in signaling and drill. But it must be admitted that even Peanut, the leader, was so excited over the hut game that little else was thought of. To be sure, all the boys were caddying at the golf club

part of the day, or otherwise working to earn money to buy the proper camp equipments. As fast as they brought the money in to Peanut, he took it to Mr. Rogers, and after one dollar had been deposited to the account of each boy in the savings-bank, there was a great poring over catalogues to see the prices of sheath hatchets, and nests of kettles, and fry pans and folding broilers and aluminum plates and folding cups. In building the huts, of course, hatchets were the most important things, and these were ordered first. But before the three weeks were up, most of the boys had other equipment beside to put in their Scout packs, which had now arrived along with the khaki uniforms and leather puttees. The Southmead Scouts all adopted leather puttees as part of their uniforms, for most of their hiking was in thick woods, often amid laurel brake, where such protection is almost essential.

Of course each of the five teams had to build its hut unknown to the other four. Although the stretch of woods and cliffs on the mountain where they could work was almost a mile long and half a mile wide, it wasn't easy to get in there without being detected, and still harder to cut down a tree or nail boards without the sound betraying you.

As we cannot very well follow the building operations of all five teams at once, we'll begin with Peanut and little Jimmy, and tell what they did.

First of all, they held a meeting the very next day after the hike, and planned out their campaign.

“The main thing is to find the place for the hut,” said Peanut. “We can build it in a day, after we decide where to put it. If we build it too soon, there’s just so much more chance of detection. What we’ll do is to find the place for it, and then carry in boards one at a time or so, and hide them. Then we’ll build it only a day or two before the hunting begins.”

“Hooray, when’ll we begin looking for a place?” cried Jimmy.

“Can you get up early?” asked Peanut.

“Sure.”

“Well, we’ll start before daylight to-morrow. Drink a glass of milk and eat a couple of crackers before you meet me, and bring one good board under your arm. Let’s see, meet me in front of the post-office at half-past three. Got a bike?”

“I can borrow dad’s.”

“O. K. That’ll save time.”

The world was still almost dark the next morning when Peanut and Jimmy rode down the road on wheels, each with a board under his arm. The sun was just reddening the east when they reached the crossroads, left their wheels in the bushes, and started across the dew soaked pasture toward the white cliffs of the mountain. It was dark in the woods,

but when they reached the clearing under the cliffs the sun had risen, making the great limestone walls all pink with its light.

“Now the first thing is to hide our boards,” said Peanut. “Come on!”

He started climbing over the pile of loose stones at the foot of the cliff. After ten minutes of scrambling, the two boys found a place where one large stone rested in such a way on top of the other stones that they could slip the boards in underneath, quite out of sight.

“Say, I dunno whether I can remember this place again,” said Jimmy, as the boards disappeared.

“Let’s take some bearings,” said Peanut. “Look, it’s right in a line between that old dead chestnut in the woods and the crooked spruce there on the first edge of the cliff. Now, we’ll explore the cliff.”

The boys climbed down from the rock pile, and turned southward, moving along through the dew soaked bushes, wet to the waists, directly under the cliff wall. They kept their eyes on the great wall of rocks above them.

“What we want to find if we can,” Peanut said, “is a place where a hut wouldn’t show from below at all, and that would look as if there couldn’t be anything there. If there was only a cave up there some place!”

They walked under the cliffs for nearly a quarter

of a mile without seeing anything which offered any hope. In some places, what ledges there were on the cliff wall were absolutely inaccessible from below. In other places, even where there was a lead up to them, the two boys could see that they afforded no chance to hide a hut. It would be plainly seen even from the road.

But finally they came to a place where the cliffs began to grow less high. They were south of the summit of the mountain now, and the land was falling away a little. In one place an easy lead, made by a deep gully in the rocks, led up to a wide ledge, on which several small spruces were clinging.

"Let's go up there and see what we can find," said Peanut.

Then he sprang a surprise on Jimmy. He opened his coat and showed thirty feet of new clothes-line wrapped around his body. Unwinding this, he tied one end under Jimmy's armpits, and left the other end tied to himself.

"Some Alpine climbers, eh?" said he.

"You bet!" said Jimmy, who was game for the adventure.

Both boys had on heavy shoes. In Peanut's shoes were heavy hobnails. He now took from his pocket some extra nails and a tiny implement like a skate key.

"Got these from the golf club pro last night," said

he. "You've got to have 'em for this kind of work."

The nails were screwed into Jimmy's boots with the key, and the two started up the gully, Peanut leading. They had about thirty feet to go, or the height of an ordinary house. The angle of ascent was close to 90°, but there were plenty of cracks and jagged pieces of rock to use for footing.

"Test everything with one foot before you lift your whole weight from the other. Same with your hands!" Peanut called back. "And don't look down. Keep looking up. Don't start till I'm near the top."

"I get yer," said Jimmy, from below.

In a very few minutes Peanut was on the ledge, and turned to help Jimmy along by pulling gently on the rope.

"Here we are!" he cried, as Jimmy scrambled out of the gully.

They stood on an almost level ledge of rock about six feet wide, which was covered with a thin layer of soil and moss. The evergreens growing in the sparse soil were, however, sturdy and thick, though no taller than bushes.

"Gosh," said Jimmy, "trees'll grow most anywhere!"

The ledge ran around a bend in the cliff ahead, and the boys followed it, treading cautiously.

“We don’t want to slip on this moss,” Peanut warned, “and we don’t want to tear it up and leave tracks, either. Art can follow a track like an Indian.”

Around the bend they found that the ledge stopped short some thirty feet ahead, but just before it stopped, hidden completely from the view below by a couple of evergreens, was a tiny cave mouth, not more than two feet square.

“Quick, let’s see how big it is inside!” Peanut shouted.

Jimmy dove in like a rabbit, and disappeared completely from sight. A moment later he crawled back. “Got anything for a torch?” he said.

Peanut felt in his pockets. He had a box of matches, but he had forgotten any materials for a torch. Finally they found a dead bough on one of the evergreens, and both boys crawled into the cave with it.

Inside, after running along level for about six feet, the tunnel seemed suddenly to ascend.

“Seems to me I can see light up there,” said Peanut, before he struck a match. Then he lit the dead bough. By the sudden flare, the Scouts saw that the tunnel turned sharply upward, and standing erect in the narrow space and holding the blazing bough above them they could see that it went on for ten feet or more, and then seemed to widen out.

But before they could see much more, the bough was burnt up. Matches had little effect. They tried to climb the damp, slippery tunnel in the dark, but it was no use. There was nothing to get hold of.

“Well, we’ll have to come again with a lantern,” said Peanut. “I’ll bet there’s something doing up there. We can’t work any more to-day, though.”

They crawled back to the ledge and he looked at his watch. “Gee, after six o’clock!” he cried. “We must get down before we are seen.”

When they reached the edge of the lead again, and looked down, Jimmy turned a bit pale. It didn’t look so easy to get down as it had to climb up.

“Golly, I dunno whether I can make it,” he said.

“You *gotter* make it, unless you want to starve,” Peanut answered. “You go first, and I’ll keep hold of the rope. Then it doesn’t matter if you do fall. Take it easy now, and keep cool.”

Jimmy crept gingerly out over the edge, and Peanut played out the rope, which was just long enough to reach the bottom. Then he untied it from his own waist, threw it over, and started down the gully himself.

Once on the ground the boys walked away from the cliff a bit, where they could see around the corner to the spot where they knew the cave mouth to be. The mouth was quite invisible from below, but not far above it they saw that the face of the cliff was not

smooth. The rock went up from the ledge twenty feet or so, and then stopped. There didn't seem to be a second ledge, but the main cliff rose up from behind and below the outer wall.

"There's a kind of a pocket in there, I bet," cried Peanut. "That tunnel we were in is really a big crack in the rock, and if we follow it up we'll come into a cave or even into an open place, in behind the big rock above the ledge. Gee, how can we get up that slippery place?"

"We could bring a ladder," Jimmy suggested.

"We couldn't get a ladder round the bend in the tunnel," said Peanut. "I got it! We can take in boards, nail cleats on 'em, and then nail the boards together till they make a ladder!"

"Hooray, when'll we do it?"

"Day after to-morrow—at the same time."

"You're on!"

The boys reached their bicycles, and were riding home, when they met Eddie Reynolds and Pete Perkins, also on wheels, with the handles of hatchets sticking down under their coats, riding in the opposite direction.

"Hi, fellers, where you going?" said Jimmy.

"About where you've been, I guess," said Eddie.

"What time did you get up?"

"In time to beat you," Jimmy replied.

"Rats!" said Peanut, when the others had passed.

“They’re onto us now! We ought to have started home sooner.”

Two mornings later, however, when Peanut and Jimmy again set out, they met nobody on the road, and reached the spot where they had hidden their first boards undiscovered. With these boards, and two more they had brought, they hurried at once to the lead up to the ledge. Peanut climbed first, with the rope, and Jimmy tied on the boards, which Peanut hauled up, hauling Jimmy up after them. They took the boards to the mouth of the cave, and nailed cleats on them. Then Peanut took his collapsible camp lantern from his pocket, put it together, stuck in the candle, lighted it, and they crawled into the tunnel, pulling the boards in after them. Standing one board up in the tunnel where it turned and began to rise like the flue of a chimney, Peanut nailed the next board to the end of it, and the two thus made a ladder about ten feet long. Up this Peanut went, carrying the lantern.

As he reached the top, he gave a cry. “Hooray, come on up, Jimmy, and bring one of those other boards!”

When Jimmy was close behind him, Peanut moved forward. The board ladder had reached the top of the flue. The tunnel now went on nearly level, for four or five feet. Then Peanut suddenly stopped. In front of him was a yawning hole! He held out

the lantern. The gap was only four feet wide. The tunnel continued on the farther side.

"Give me that board, and go down and bring up the other one," he commanded.

The two boards were put across for a bridge, one on top of the other to give greater strength.

"Now, be awful careful here!" Peanut cautioned. "This is a bad place." He tested the bridge, and crept cautiously across it, holding the lantern for Jimmy to follow.

"We've got to bring up a strong plank for this place," said he. "Can't take any chances."

They went on in the tunnel, which almost immediately gave a sharp twist—and emerged in full daylight!

Both boys sprang out of the hole with a cry of surprise. They were in a pocket in the cliff. Above them the wall went up nearly a hundred feet, as smooth and unclimbable as the side of a house. At the top it hung out, like the eaves of a house, so nobody could see this pocket from the summit of the mountain. On the other side, the cliff also went up six or eight feet, shutting out their view of the land below them. The floor of the pocket was filled with loose boulders and rock fragments which had fallen down from above. Altogether, the pocket was about eight feet wide and ran for twenty or thirty feet along the cliff side.

"Well, I'll be jiggered!" Peanut exclaimed. "If ever a place was hidden from everything but the birds, this is!"

"Are we going to build a hut here?" asked Jimmy.

"Are we? Is the sun going to set to-night? Nobody can find this place in ten thousand years, if we don't get caught going up the lead. Let's see what we'll want."

"Why not make a stone hut?" Jimmy suggested.

"Say, you've got almost human intelligence," cried the leader. "That'll save a heap of hauling. We can bring just enough boards for the roof."

"I got a big piece of tin from the old hen-house," said Jimmy. "That would be easier 'n boards."

"Say, Jimmy, I'm glad you're my partner," Peanut laughed. "Let's see where we can build her."

"Let's begin now."

Peanut looked at his watch. "Five o'clock. We can stay half an hour in safety, maybe. Wish we had a spy-glass. Shin up the side, and see if anybody's on the road."

Jimmy climbed up the other side of the pocket and peeped over.

"Golly, I can see down on the ledge, and out over the woods, and the road clear back most to Southmead," he cried. "Nothing doing."

The two Scouts found a big, flat rock, six feet

square, lodged in the pocket, and on this they started to build their hut. The wall of the cliff was the back wall of the hut. The front would be open, like a lean-to, with the fire built against the outer wall of the pocket, throwing all the heat back into the shelter. Thus they had only to build the two side walls, and there were enough broken fragments of stone in the pocket to build a dozen such walls. In half an hour they had made a good beginning.

“Now, for home and breakfast,” said Peanut. “The next thing is to get that tin out here. I guess maybe we’d better use boards, though; they’d be easier to carry. We could bring a few at a time, and hide ’em somewhere down below.”

This morning they struck off on the crossroad and made a long detour returning to town. They met nobody.

In the next week, by three trips before sunrise, they managed to get a piece of plank for the bridge and five boards hidden in the rocks at the base of the cliff. They didn’t risk another climb up the lead, for Peanut felt sure that Art was on the job building a hut somewhere, and like as not he might have come out the day before with his new sleeping bag and spent the night on the mountain. It was never safe to count on being up before Art!

“Now we’ve got to get hemlock boughs up there to sleep on—that rock’s a pretty hard floor,” said Pea-

nut. "And we've got to get up fire-wood. We can haul that up in a basket."

"If we knew just the line, we could cut a whole dead tree down on top of the cliff, and let it fall over into the pocket," Jimmy suggested.

"Say, that's an idea, too!" cried Peanut. "It would be kind of con—conspicuous, though."

"We could cut it near the edge and if anybody, saw we could say it fell the wrong way."

The two boys walked away from the cliff and looked up. It was just sunrise, and the cliff was pink. They could follow a seam in the rock up from the pocket to a point almost at the top, but they couldn't see any dead, or even live tree, over the cliff cornice, to fix a bearing by up there.

"One of us'll have to go up on top, and the other stay down here and signal when he's directly over that rock seam, I guess," said Peanut.

"I'll go," Jimmy replied.

"All right, here's the hatchet. When I move my handkerchief to the left, you go left, when I move it to the right, you go right. When I wave it up and down, you stop, and heave some dead wood over at that point. Be careful, now, you don't get too near the edge yourself! Gee, I guess I'd better go."

"No, let me go!"

Peanut shook his head. "No. I'm Scout Master.

If anything happened to you, I'd be to blame. I'm going. You signal with your handkerchief. Better get under cover till you see me on top, in case Art is prowling around, and stand in bushes to signal, so I can see you, but folks lower down can't."

Peanut started off for the trail to the summit, and Jimmy waited in some bushes two hundred yards out from the face of the cliff. He waited half an hour, then an hour, till his neck was sore and stiff from watching the summit so far above him. He wondered what had happened to Peanut. It oughtn't to have taken him more than half an hour to reach the summit, and five or ten minutes more to climb down the southern ridge to the point over the cave. Jimmy was getting ready to go after him, when he saw a flutter of white on the top of the cliff, and the head and shoulders of Peanut peering over. Peanut was a long way short of the top of the seam which led up from the pocket, so Jimmy signaled to the left. When Peanut had gone far enough, he made the sign to stop. Then the figure above the ledge disappeared, and a few minutes later a big dead limb seemed mysteriously to slide off the cornice and come tumbling down through the air. It dove directly into the pocket where their hut was—and vanished. Peanut's head appeared over the ledge, and once more Jimmy signaled O. K. There followed two more big dead branches, a small stump,

and finally the whole trunk of a small tree. Then no more came.

Fifteen minutes later Peanut, breathless, rejoined his team mate.

“Did they go in?” he asked.

“You bet, every one.”

“Hooray, we’ve got fire-wood for a week—a lead pipe!”

“Why were you so long getting up?” called Jimmy. “Gee, I began to get scared.”

“Come on and I’ll show you,” Peanut answered.

“No, first we’ll have some breakfast.”

CHAPTER VIII

PEANUT AND JIMMY BUILD THEIR HUT

EACH boy had brought some bacon and bread in his pocket, and they now made a small fire near the brook, toasted the bacon on sticks, and washed it down with cold mountain water. That hasty meal over, Peanut led the way up the logging road. At the point where the path to the summit branched off, he paused.

“See anything?” he asked.

Jimmy looked all around carefully, and shook his head. “Nothing but the places where we built our first fires,” he answered.

“You’re no Indian yet,” said Peanut. “Look across the brook and up that steep bank on the farther side.”

Jimmy looked as directed. “A tree cut down!” he exclaimed.

Peanut nodded. “Somebody got careless and cut too near the path,” said he. “I followed the trail. That’s why it took me so long.”

“What did you find, a hut?”

For answer, Peanut led the way across the brook.

The tree, a small evergreen, had not been trimmed on the spot. Whoever had cut it down had dragged it off, and the two Scouts could follow the trail by the broken underbrush and the scratched moss and leaves.

"Art never did a thing like that," said Peanut. "He's too foxy. Bet he'll have a hut 'most as hard to find as ours."

"Bet it won't be quite so hard," cried Jimmy. "Bet *nobody* finds ours."

"I dunno," said Peanut. "If we could climb that lead, Art could."

The trail they were following led over the steep bank beyond the brook, and into a tangle of big, mossy, fern-covered boulders, which were piled up in confusion and almost hidden in places by a thick growth of hemlock and spruce. Peanut put his finger on his lips now, and they stole forward on tip-toe, passing around two or three boulders till they saw ahead a stand of young spruce, twenty feet tall, so thick together that they made a solid wall. Both boys stopped and listened intently. "It's in there—in the spruces," Peanut whispered. "Don't believe they are there, but they might be. We don't want to be caught 'round here, or they'll move it."

"Lemme have one look!" pleaded Jimmy.

"Hurry, then!"

Jimmy stole forward, and crept under the low

branches of the evergreens. He came back a minute later.

"Pretty soft," he said. "They got an oil stove in there, so's not to make any smoke, I guess! And blankets all rolled up, and boughs for beds, and just a roof on four poles. Gee, they don't need any side walls with those trees. Whose is it, do you guess?"

"Dunno. Might be Eddie and Pete. Let's get away quick."

The two Scouts sneaked off the way they had come. "There's one we've found," said they.

"When are we goin' to build ours?" said Jimmy. "We ain't got much more'n a week now."

"We've got time enough to build it," Peanut answered. "What's worrying me is, how are we going to get up enough boughs to make bunks on that hard rock?"

"Why don't we bring an old mattress?" Jimmy suggested.

"Some haul to get it up there!"

"We might throw that over the cliff, too."

"You want to lug it to the top of the mountain?"

Peanut laughed. "Excuse me!"

"We might chuck boughs over the top."

"Would take all day, 'most, to cut enough up there, and we'd be caught at it. Say, I know! What's the matter with me! I'm a punk Scout, I am!"

"What is it?" asked Jimmy.

"We'll make a double camp cot, out of heavy twine and a couple of pieces of joist! We can haul up enough boughs for that in no time. Come on, we'll get a supply of boughs cut now, and then go home for the day. I got my work for the *Herald* to do. Then you meet me to-night at nine o'clock, at my house. Have a blanket roll, and your sweater, and grub for three meals, and a piece of joist at least six feet long. We'll make a night of it in the woods, and get an early start to-morrow."

"Hooray!" cried Jimmy. "A night in the woods! I never slept out in my life!"

They cut two great armfuls of hemlock boughs and hid them under some bushes close to the foot of their lead, and then hurried toward their bicycles. As they crossed the pasture, they heard the sound of an ax somewhere on the mountainside behind them.

"Gee," said Peanut, "somebody else is on the job. We got to go easy to-night. I've been trying to find out what Art's up to, but he's mum as a clam."

That night, when Jimmy arrived at Peanut's house, with his beam, his blanket, and his pack, he found Peanut's father hitching up a team.

"Dad's going to drive us down, by the back road, and come into the mountain road below our hut," said Peanut. "There'll be less chance of getting

spotted. We can carry everything we need for the hut this trip."

Peanut's father surveyed the beams and blankets and balls of heavy twine and camp kettles, water pail, nails and hatchets and the long piece of rope the boys dumped into the cart by lantern light. "Were you boys goin' to lug all that on your backs, eh?" he asked.

"Sure," said Jimmy, who was about half the length of the joist he had brought.

"Say, if you *had* to work as hard as that, you'd think you were dead," said Mr. Morrison.

It took them some time to make the back road detour, and it was nearly ten o'clock when the team stopped at a point half a mile south of the pasture where the boys usually cut across to the cliffs. The road here was close to the south end of the mountain, where the rocks were only about fifty feet high. The boys got out and removed all their stuff from the wagon, carrying it by lantern light into the woods till they found a sheltered spot under some small hemlocks, where the ground was soft with dry needles and the wind didn't penetrate. Peanut's father bade them good-night, and drove off. They didn't attempt to make a fire in this spot—there was too much danger of igniting the trees. They simply rolled up in their blankets, right on the ground, and went to sleep.

Jimmy was awake before daylight. Not being used to sleeping out, he was stiff and cold. He huddled closer in his blanket, and tried to get into an easy position, and waited as patiently as he could till it was light. Then he woke Peanut.

The two Scouts crept out of their cover, and Peanut made a fire while Jimmy went with the pail for water. There was a well-known spring close to the main road not far away. When he came back Peanut already had bacon cooking, and was scrambling two eggs in Jimmy's fry pan. They made tea, and enjoyed a fragrant and hearty breakfast. Then they began hauling their stuff a quarter of a mile to the foot of the lead, no easy job through the dew-soaked and pathless bushes.

It was considerably past sun-up when they got everything to the spot, including the boards previously hidden in the bushes, and the bundles of hemlock boughs. Peanut went up the lead, hauling the rope, and Jimmy stayed below to tie on the stuff. Boards, pail, joists, boughs, were all finally hauled to the ledge, Jimmy admitting that the timber hitch knot he had learned to tie was a vast aid in the process. Then he fastened the rope under his own arms, and with Peanut taking up the slack as he mounted, Jimmy climbed the lead.

All the equipment was now taken along the ledge to the mouth of the tunnel, and Peanut lit his camp

lantern and two other candles beside, placing the lantern up where the bridge crossed the crevasse, and the candles at the bend below, so they could see to work. Then he climbed the ladder with the rope and once more the stuff was hauled up the tunnel to the bridge, passed across that, and finally brought into the pocket.

By the time it was all there, the sun was so high that the low east wall of the pocket was no protection. The rays beat down upon the two boys, and worse than that, they hit the great wall of the cliff, and seemed to bounce back.

"Say, this place is going to be hot all right!" Peanut sighed. "Gee, I'm sweating now."

"Me, too," said Jimmy. "But we can always crawl into the tunnel."

"We'll get the roof on the hut, for shade, the first thing we do."

The side walls had already been built up about two feet, with large blocks of stone. They now tugged and pulled at other blocks, and made the walls about five feet high.

"That's enough," said Peanut. "Now we'll lay the boards across the top."

That was a simple matter. As the wall sloped back a little like a lean-to, all they had to do was to overlap the boards an inch, to shed the rain, and weight them down with a few stones. The hut was built!

Both boys dove in under the refreshing shade, and wiped their faces.

"Whew! Guess you could cook eggs on these rocks without a fire," said Jimmy.

"It's the fire that's worrying me," said Peanut. "The smoke's going to show by day, and the light by night, plain's your hat."

"We'll have to get an oil stove, like that other hut," Jimmy suggested.

"I'll get some solid alcohol," Peanut replied. "We can use that till after the hunting is over. Then we can use this wood we threw over from the top. Gosh! It don't—doesn't—need much cutting up, after that fall!"

He and Jimmy surveyed anew the big dead branches Peanut had hove over the top of the precipice. They lay at the bottom of the pocket, smashed into a thousand pieces.

"Now, for our bunk!" said the leader.

They took the two pieces of joist, drove nails on the back side of the rear one, every two inches, propped them up on stones eight inches from the floor, and fastened the ends with heavy stones in the walls of the hut, one at the back, the other at the front.

"Hold on!" Peanut suddenly exclaimed, as he was hammering in a nail to the front joist, "that makes a lot of noise. S'pose you shin up and take a squint at the landscape, Jimmy."

Jimmy scrambled up the outer wall of the pocket, and immediately came tumbling down again.

“Sh!” he cautioned, in an excited whisper. “Art and Skinny are coming! In a minute they’ll be right down below there. Gee, they almost saw me!”

“What were they doing?” Peanut asked.

“I couldn’t tell—didn’t stay long enough. Think they were looking at the cliff, though.”

“Quick, let’s get down to the mouth of the tunnel. We can stay in the dark there and listen. Can’t hear anything up here. Go softly, now, down the ladder!”

The two boys crawled into the tunnel, crossed the plank bridge by the light of the lantern, and descended the ladder in the dark. Crawling to the mouth of the tunnel, where they were screened from view by the little fir trees on the ledge, so long as they didn’t stand upright, they listened intently.

Sure enough, they could hear Art and Skinny talking, somewhere below. Peanut wriggled forward on his stomach till he could peep over. He saw Art and his companion standing thirty or forty feet away from the base of the cliff, at the outer edge of the rock pile, looking up apparently right into Peanut’s face. But he knew they didn’t see him.

Art had evidently been examining the ground. "Somebody has been along here this morning, that's sure," he was saying to Skinny.

"Maybe they're up on that ledge," Skinny replied.

Peanut saw Art shake his head. "No," said the foxy Art, "you can see from here that there's no chance to hide a hut there. Those little fir trees aren't more'n four feet high. The ledge is bare as a bone."

"Might be a cave," Skinny suggested.

Both Peanut and Jimmy held their breath waiting for Art's reply.

"Well, if there was a cave big enough to put a hut in, we could see it from here," said he.

Jimmy punched Peanut's leg in joy.

"We might climb up and have a look," Skinny again suggested, and again Peanut and Jimmy held their breaths.

"What's the use?" said Art. "It's thirty feet up that lead, and we haven't got any rope with us. It's back in our hut. What's the use risking our necks when we can see from here?"

The two boys on the ground moved on along the base of the cliff, and Peanut wriggled backward into the dark mouth of the tunnel.

"Gee, that was a close squeak!" said he. "What if they'd started up?"

"We could pull up the ladder, so they couldn't climb the tunnel," Jimmy suggested.

"They'd see our tracks on the ledge, though. One thing we've learned, anyhow. They've got a rope in their hut. They must be on the cliff somewhere, too. What surprises me is that Art didn't follow our tracks to the base of the lead. Lucky for us it's all stone down at the foot, and we haven't made a path. And old Art thinks he's so foxy, too!"

The boys climbed back to the pocket, and Peanut sent Jimmy up on the outer wall as a lookout, handing him up two stones, which Jimmy placed on top of the wall so he could peep between them without showing his head. Then, when he gave word that the coast was clear below, Peanut quickly drove nails into the front joist, two inches apart, nearly up to the heads, not on the top of the joist, but the front face.

Then Jimmy climbed down, and they strung their heavy cord from these nails and over the top of the rear joist to the nails on the back of that, like the strings one way in a tennis racket, laid their hemlock boughs across, and then wove the cord in and out the other way, so that finally, when the ball of twine was all used up, they had a regular bedspring of cord and hemlock.

When the bunk was completed, they drove the

nails still farther in, to be out of the way, and folded up their blankets neatly, stowing them at the rear. Then they built a good, big fireplace against the outer wall of the pocket, facing the front of the lean-to, stacked up the fire-wood in a neat pile, and finally made themselves a table out of a flat rock placed on two other stones. Finally, after taking out enough food for a hasty lunch and putting it in their pockets, they stowed all extra grub in the kettles and put the kettles and other camp equipment in the mouth of the tunnel, where it would be out of the sun and rain alike.

"There, she's done!" cried Peanut. "Now, we want to get out of here, and not come back till the last night. We don't want to leave any tracks. If anybody finds this hut, I'll—I'll eat my shirt!"

"Me, too," said Jimmy.

The partners took a final look around their hut, slipped down the tunnel, peered cautiously out from under the screen of the evergreens, and seeing that the coast was clear, went to the edge of the lead. Peanut fastened the rope under Jimmy's arms, lowered him down, and followed himself. Then he coiled the rope up, and fastened the coil to his belt, like a cowboy's lasso.

"Now, what are we going to do?" asked Jimmy.

"Get a drink!" said Peanut.

CHAPTER IX

PEANUT AND JIMMY FIND ANOTHER HUT

THERE were only four days left before the day for completing the huts, when the hunt officially began, and Peanut and Jimmy resolved that they'd find Art's hut, if they didn't discover another one.

"It can't be the hut we've found already," said Peanut, "'cause Art wouldn't cut down a tree where it showed that way. Besides, he and Skinny wouldn't need a rope in *that* shack. No, they must be up on the cliffs some place."

"Let's eat lunch, and go hunt," said Jimmy.

They were sitting by the brook as they talked, having drunk a quart of water apiece, after their morning in the dry, sun-baked pocket. They made a small fire and fried some bacon on sticks, and also cooked a lamb chop apiece. Then they doused the fire and set off again toward the sharp wall of the mountain, leaving the path and pushing their way through the thick woods.

"Keep your eye peeled for signs of cutting," cautioned Peanut, "or for any other tracks."

"Gee, this is fun!" said Jimmy.

They hadn't gone far before they suddenly heard the blows of an axe, not very far off, to the right, close to the mountain wall, but at a point at least a quarter of a mile nearer Southmead than their own hut. In fact, it was not far beyond the regular foot-path up the saddle. Going as softly as they possibly could through the undergrowth the pair soon stalked up on the sound.

"They're making so much noise themselves that they won't hear us," Peanut whispered.

The two boys crossed the path, and plunged into a tough stand of mountain laurel beyond. The chopping was evidently not far on the other side of this laurel brake. It was hard work getting through, but they contrived to do it, thanks to their leather puttees, and on the other side began almost to creep through some thick, low hemlocks. Peering cautiously between the last branches, Peanut and Jimmy saw Old Hundred and Cop, with hatchets, taking down and trimming some small hard woods, which grew in a thick stand at this point. They already had a half dozen poles on the ground, and were busily working at two more.

"Let's lie low here and see what they do," whispered Peanut.

"Sure," Jimmy replied.

Cop and his partner were talking. The boys in the cover could hear all they said.

"Gee," Cop was remarking, "bet nobody finds *our* hut!"

"Have to go some," Old Hundred agreed. "Nobody's seen us come into the woods, either. I don't believe Peanut and Jimmy have begun to build yet. I haven't seen a sign of 'em. Art has, though. He and Skinny were out all last night. Skinny's brother told me so."

"You got to watch Art, he's a good one," said Old Hundred. "Gee, he knows the woods! Come on, we got enough poles now. Let's cut some boughs for a bunk."

Suddenly the two boys turned directly toward the spot where Peanut and Jimmy were crouched hiding, and before the watchers could wiggle out of sight, they were upon them. Peanut dropped on his stomach, and could probably have squirmed out of sight into the thickest part of the trees, but before he could lay a hand on Jimmy the little fellow had started to run. Of course, he made a great noise, and Cop and Old Hundred sprang after him.

Peanut got up and called Jimmy back.

"So nobody has seen you, eh?" he laughed at the astonished Cop and Old Hundred.

"How long you been there?" they demanded.

"Oh, about an hour, maybe," said Peanut.

"Well, you dunno where our hut is, anyhow," said Cop.

"We might stick around and follow you," Peanut suggested.

"Two can stick around as well as one," retorted Old Hundred, sitting down. "We don't have to go till you go."

Peanut laughed. "Come on, Jimmy," he said, "they got us there. Besides, it ain't— isn't—fair to hold anybody up."

"Aw, they'll just go off a ways, and hide again," said Cop.

"Don't judge everybody by yourself, Cop," Peanut replied. "We'll really go away—honor bright. But we give you fair warning that we'll come back and follow your trail if we can. That's according to rules, all right. It's up to you to hide your trail."

"Guess you can't follow a trail much in these woods," said Cop, scornfully.

"That's up to you," said Peanut, moving on.

He and Jimmy crossed the area of hard woods, where Cop and Old Hundred had been chopping, and entered evergreen again.

"We'll give 'em a couple of hours to get their poles moved," Peanut said, "and then we'll follow 'em. Don't forget where the place was. We've got one hut located, and another half spotted now. That leaves only two to find, one of 'em Art's. Gee! I'd give a million dollars to find where Art's is!"

The words were scarcely out of his mouth when

they heard a distant crashing in the undergrowth. Peanut put his hand on Jimmy's shoulder, and shoved him to the ground, dropping at the same time himself. They waited, watching the woods intently, and a second later they heard the distant murmur of voices. Another second, and a little farther down the mountain they saw Art and Skinny, descending evidently from the steep mountainside to the north, back toward the main path.

"They've come down from the general region of the big cave," Peanut whispered. "S'pose they've built up there? Wouldn't be in the cave, of course, because everybody knows that place. But there may be another cave up there some place."

"Let's go see," said Jimmy.

When the others were safely out of ear-shot they got up and headed for the big cave, skirting the base of the steep ascent which on this side of the summit path was not a precipice, as on the other side, but merely great steps of stone ledges, covered with trees, ferns and moss. They came presently on the line of blazes marking the northern boundary of the hut area, and knew that the big cave was above them. They climbed to the tree ladder at the base of the cave ledge, shinned it, took one cursory glance into the empty cave, and began to search south along the steep mountain ledges for other caves, or any sign of a hut.

"We've got to travel back along the cliffs," said Peanut. "Must be somewhere here. Keep your eye peeled for tracks."

It was hard work traveling over the mossy ledges, with fallen trees obstructing the way, and they found no sign of a hut, or any other cave where it could be hidden, either, or even any tracks.

"Well, let's go back and track Cop and Old Hundred," Peanut finally said, giving it up.

They descended from the ledges, and were soon down in the stand of hard wood, where Cop and Old Hundred had been cutting.

"It's a pipe that they went out of this clearing on the opposite side from where their hut is, to throw us off the scent," Peanut remarked. "Now, let's go right around the circle, and see if we can pick up their tracks. They must have carried the poles on their shoulders, so look out for broken branches, or bruised twigs about the height of your chin."

The two boys circled the stand once without any success. Old Hundred and Cop had gone out with great care, evidently. But the second time around, working a little farther away from the center into the heavy woods, Jimmy gave a cry, and pointed to a dead pine tree twig broken off, where somebody had evidently squeezed through. Just beyond two dead twigs on the ground were freshly broken where somebody had stepped.

The track was pointing directly toward the regular path up the mountain.

“Foxy Scouts,” said Peanut. “I bet they used the path!”

Two or three other signs did, in fact, take the trail to the path.

“Now, did they go up or down?” said Jimmy.

“You go down, and I’ll go up,” Peanut answered, reassuring himself that they hadn’t crossed the path. “No, we’ll both go up, first. It ain’t— isn’t—likely they’d go down to build a hut—too much danger of meeting somebody. Come on—keep your eye peeled!”

Not far up the path they came upon a bit of hemlock branch. “Hello!” the leader exclaimed, “they’re dropping some of their bedding! We’re on the trail!”

A little farther up they found another bit of hemlock, and not far beyond that Jimmy, whose eyes were becoming accustomed to the signs of a trail, detected a broken branch beside the path, to the right. Both Scouts turned in at this point. Not six feet off the path still another bit of hemlock had dropped.

“They turned off here, for sure,” said Peanut. “Good work, Jimmy. The hut’s off in this direction, and not much farther up the mountain, or they wouldn’t have turned off so soon. Go easy

now, so they won't hear us. Better whisper from now on."

A few steps farther they picked up another sign—a bit of underbush broken by a boot, and came to a natural ledge, with a drop on one side, and a steep lift on the other.

"They must have gone along this," said Peanut, softly. "Anyhow, they couldn't climb to the next ledge without scarring the moss."

The two boys walked on for one hundred feet or more, and then Jimmy pointed in excited silence to the upper side of the ledge. Peanut looked, and sure enough there were several marks on the moss, where boot heels had scraped it off. Both pursuers followed the tracks up the sharp incline of rocks, going silently and cautiously. They found themselves on a second ledge, a wide one, and in front of them was a huge boulder, as large as a small barn, which apparently had slid down the mountain this far and stopped.

Creeping around this boulder, they came suddenly upon the beginnings of the hut—a pole lean-to, built facing the back side of the boulder, with the steep mountain wall behind. The spot was hidden from above by some overhanging hemlocks, and of course hidden from in front by the boulder. Old Hundred and Cop had departed, but their hatchets and a box of nails were carefully hidden in a crack in the rock.

“Pretty neat!” said Peanut. “Say, we’re going to have about five good huts on this old mountain, all right! Come on away quick now. They might be coming back. Not a word about finding this, Jimmy, mind that!”

“You bet,” Jimmy replied. “Say, we’re some trackers, though. S’pose I went a mile in twenty-five minutes?”

“Not a mile, but I guess you could. Home for us now, though. I’ve got some newspaper items to write up.”

It was getting late in the day, and the two Scouts struck back into the path and headed directly down the mountain. As they emerged into the pasture at the foot, they came suddenly upon Art and Skinny, who had evidently been walking more slowly ahead of them.

Each team eyed the other, and then burst out laughing.

“Well,” said Art, “got your hut all done?”

“Sure,” said Peanut. “Can bunk there any time now. Got yours done?”

“Ho, we slept in ours last night!” said Skinny. “Bet you’ll never find it.”

“Bet you’ll never find ours,” Jimmy retorted.

“Find any others?” Art asked.

“Gee, we ——” Jimmy began, but Peanut cut in on him.

"We're not telling all we know," said he.

"Well, there's nothing to prevent our walking home together," Art laughed. "Having a good time, Jimmy?"

"The best I ever had!" Jimmy replied, with enthusiasm.

CHAPTER X

JIMMY EMULATES SHERLOCK HOLMES

THE following morning Peanut and Jimmy started out once more, but this time they took a different path.

“We’ve found two huts already, and we know where our own is,” said Peanut. “So there are only two left to find. One’s Art’s, and the other is either Eddie and Pete’s, or else Spike and Albert’s. Now, Art’s is going to be the hard one to find. You remember he said something about having a rope. I bet it’s way up on the cliffs some place. Let’s start on top of the mountain.”

“I bet it is, too,” Jimmy agreed.

Accordingly they left Southmead by a different road, approached the mountain from the north, and after a steep walk of three miles up the pastures of High Farm, reached the northern end of the summit ridge. Here a very dim and much overgrown trail led along the spine toward the high southern peak over the cliffs. On their left was hut country. On their right nobody was allowed to build. They kept their eyes to the left, as soon as they had

passed the trail down to the big cave, when the hut area began. The mountainside grew more and more precipitous as they went along, and they kept stopping and peering over the edge, but no sign of a hut did they see, nor any sign of tracks, either. They reached the saddle presently, where the regular path came up the mountain, and started up the steep, rocky trail to the high south peak, over the big cliffs. So many people had been up and down this that tracking was impossible, but Peanut suddenly gave a little cry, and stooping down picked up a button.

"Scout button!" said Jimmy.

"Sure thing. Wouldn't have come off, either, if there hadn't been a strain on it. Somebody's been lugging stuff up here!"

They went on cautiously, keeping their eyes wide open, and peering over the face of the cliff at every ledge. Still there was no hut visible. They went down on the south side of the peak, beyond the top of the cliff over their own hut, without finding anything.

"Guess it's a fake scent," Peanut confessed. "Somebody has been up here though, that's sure."

"I got an idea," said Jimmy. "You'll laugh, maybe, but still I'd like to have a look."

"What's the idea?"

"To look in the big cave again, really carefully ;

we just peeped in before, you know, the first day. Art said nobody'd build in there 'cause everybody'd look there first thing. Well, that would keep anybody from looking, maybe. They'd all think there wouldn't be any hut there."

"Worth trying," said Peanut. "Maybe old Foxy said that on purpose."

The two Scouts hurried back along the summit trail till they came to the trail down to the cave. Here they descended very cautiously, speaking in whispers—and suddenly stopped short in amazement. Right under their feet the dead leaves appeared to be smoking!

Both boys dropped quickly and silently to the ground, and crawled to the smoke. It was coming up, a thin stream of it, apparently through the dead leaves and mould; but when they got there they saw that it was really coming through a crack in the rocks which lay just under the leaf mould, so hidden that you didn't see them.

"The cave must run way back in here," Peanut whispered. "It's another fifty feet ahead and down over the next drop to the entrance. I never knew it was so big."

"Sh!" cautioned Jimmy, who had his ear to the crack, and was holding his handkerchief over his nose to keep from sneezing.

"I can hear 'em talking," he said. "It's Spike

and Albert—not Art. Spike just said, ‘Does she draw all right?’ ”

“What did Albert say?” Peanut asked, but before Jimmy could reply, they both heard a subdued but unmistakable sneeze under the ground.

“I guess she don’t draw!” Peanut whispered.

Then they heard a rattle right under their faces, and the smoke suddenly came up thicker.

“Hello!” Peanut exclaimed. “They’ve got a stovepipe down in there! Tell you what, we might hide where we can see the mouth of the cave, and watch till they go out. Then we can go in and see their shack. We’ve got ’em all spotted now except Art and Skinny’s!”

The two boys crept as softly as they could forward to the top of the ledge over the cave mouth, and then crept along some distance away, where they could see the mouth, and wiggled in under some laurel bushes. Here they lay for more than an hour, waiting for the occupants to come out. Once or twice Spike or Albert came to the mouth of the cave, but they didn’t show any signs of departing, and the others were too far away to hear what they said. Finally, however, just as Peanut and Jimmy were deciding that they couldn’t stay still much longer, the two boys came out of the cave, each with a couple of pails, as if going for water, and slid down the tree ladder.

Peanut and Jimmy let them get well out of sight, and then they made a dash for the entrance. Inside, they could see no signs of a hut. They lit matches, and looked all about, but the place was apparently empty!

“Gee, this is strange!” said Jimmy.

Peanut, however, ran out and got some strips of dry bark. Lighting one of these, the Scouts discovered at the very back of the cave a slab of loose stone. Giving this a pull, it fell away, disclosing a hole underneath like the passage into their own pocket. Jimmy crawled in while Peanut held a blazing piece of bark.

“It’s only four or five feet long,” came back Jimmy’s voice. “Pass me in a piece of bark.”

“Gee!” he exclaimed, “here’s a second cave in here, an’ they’ve got blankets an’ a bunk of hemlock boughs, an’ an old iron stove with a stovepipe in it to carry off the smoke, an’ a box of candles, an’ a lot o’ grub, an’—my bark’s burned out.”

Jimmy wiggled back, feet first.

“Well, what do you know about that!” said Peanut. “If they hadn’t lighted the fire, we’d never have found it.”

“Wouldn’t have anyhow, if I hadn’t thought about looking,” said Jimmy, proudly.

“Right, O, Mr. Sherlock Holmes,” laughed Peanut. “Now, quick, let’s put the stone back, and

beat it, before they come back. We gotter find Art's hut now."

The Scouts pushed back the stone, slid down the tree ladder outside, and started away through the woods. "If we meet Spike and Albert coming back, it'll worry 'em a bit," they said, and kept on the same track that the others had taken.

But they didn't meet them till they reached the brook. Here, however, the two were seated, with no signs of pails, eating lunch.

"Hello, fellers," said Jimmy.

"Hello, yourself. Found any huts yet?" said Spike.

"You found any?"

"Ain't saying."

"Same here."

Peanut and Jimmy sat down with the other two and cooked their lunch, also. Before the meal was over, both teams had admitted that they hadn't yet found Art's hut, and there was much speculation as to where it was.

"We covered all the top of the cliffs this morning," said Peanut.

"And we've been all through the lower woods for two days," said Spike.

"Look, there's Art now!" Jimmy suddenly exclaimed, pointing down the ravine of the brook.

Sure enough, there he was—calmly fishing up the

stream! He saw them a moment later, and came toward them. He had two nice trout.

“For supper,” said he, holding them out. “Skinny and I are living well in our hut. How are you getting on?”

“I’ll find your bloomin’ old hut, or eat my hat!” said Peanut.

“Put on plenty of salt and pepper,” Art laughed, going back to the brook again.

The two parties separated presently, and Jimmy and the Scout Master beat the thick woods along the lower slopes of the mountain, below the cliffs, all that afternoon, but in vain. No sign of Art’s hut could they see.

“Well, he’s not found ours, either, that’s sure!” said Peanut.

CHAPTER XI

TAGGING THE HUTS

THE next day Peanut called a meeting of the Wildcat Patrol, to draw up final rules for the contest, which was to begin at four o'clock the following afternoon. Each team got four pasteboard tags, the kind you tie on express bundles.

"You put one of these with your name and the hour on every hut you find," said Peanut. "But you can't put one on before four o'clock to-morrow afternoon. Everybody's got to cook supper in his own hut, between six o'clock and eight, and breakfast the next morning between five o'clock and eight. At ten o'clock, sharp, we'll all meet at the place where we had our first cooking tests, and Mr. Rogers'll be there to judge."

"When can we go out to the woods?" asked Spike.

"Oh, any old time ——" Peanut began.

But Art interrupted him. "Wait a minute," he said, "why not make it harder? Let's say everybody has got to leave his own house at two o'clock to-morrow afternoon, and nobody can go down to the mountain between now and then."

"Aw, our hut's not finished yet!" said Cop.

"Well, then, you can finish it to-morrow morning, if you want, but you've got to be back in the village at noon, and not start out again till two o'clock," Art replied. "If we all start at two, there'll be some tall scouting to get into our huts without getting caught. What do you say, Peanut?"

"Right, O!" the young Scout Master answered. "Good idea. On your honor as Scouts, now, fellows—everybody's got to be at home for lunch to-morrow, and nobody is to start for the mountain till two o'clock sharp—and then you can go by any old route you please—take an aeroplane if you want to."

The next morning Peanut worked at his newspaper items, going around town on his bicycle to various places and picking up news. He told Jimmy to begin the day like a good Scout, by helping his mother beat some rugs.

"We should worry," he laughed. "We've got our hut all ready, except carrying in fresh grub."

"But how are we goin' to get up the lead to cook supper without being seen?" asked Jimmy. "That's what's worrying me. We got to cook supper between six and eight, and it don't get dark before 'most eight o'clock."

"We'll just have to take a chance," said Peanut. "We'll wait till after seven, when everybody'll be trying to get to *their* huts, and make a dash for it."

At two o'clock that afternoon Peanut joined Jimmy at the post-office. Each boy was wearing his pack, with fresh provisions for three meals, and Peanut showed his team mate four cans of solid alcohol which he had just bought, to cook with, so no light nor smoke would be made.

"We can set a can between two stones, and put the kettle over it," he said, "or the frying-pan."

As he was stowing them back in his pack, Mr. Rogers appeared.

"Hello," said he, "may I walk down to the Happy Hunting Grounds with you? Think I'll see if I can find any of those huts this afternoon."

"If you find Art's, tell us where it is," cried Jimmy.

Mr. Rogers smiled. "Shall I tell Art where yours is?" he asked.

Jimmy grinned in his turn. "Guess you can't find *ours!*" he said.

"How are we going in, Peanut?" Mr. Rogers asked.

"Straight down the road," the boy answered. "Everybody else will be sneaking in by back trails. We might's well take it easy. Jimmy and I have got 'em all spotted except Art's."

They walked toward the mountain at a comfortable pace, and about three o'clock found themselves at the foot of the cliffs, without having seen a sign of any of the other Scouts.

"We've got an hour before tagging time, to find Art's hut in," said Peanut to his partner. "Let's hide our packs under some rocks here, and get down to business."

"Where's your hut?" asked Mr. Rogers.

"Ha!" Peanut exclaimed, "that's up to you! So long. We're going to leave you now."

"So long," the Scout Master replied. "If I find your hut, do I get a prize?"

"A couple of 'em," Peanut laughed.

He and Jimmy hid their packs, and started off into the woods along the brook. "There's one place we haven't hunted in yet," Peanut was saying, "and that's in the woods over across the brook, close to the pasture at the foot of the mountain. You and I, Cop and Old Hundred, and Spike and Albert, have all built on the steep part, and Eddie and Pete are pretty close to the foot here; but there's a big section of woods by the pasture which we cross from the road, where foxy old Art might be."

"Spike and Albert said they'd looked there," said Jimmy, "and why would they need a rope?"

"Well, maybe we can see things Spike and Albert can't," Peanut answered. He was going to add, "Perhaps they were double crossing us, anyhow," but refrained. "'A Scout's word is to be trusted,'" he thought, and bit his lip in anger at himself for his momentary suspicion. Instead, he added,

“Maybe they had the rope to get to the other huts with.”

Crossing the brook rapidly, and keeping as much in cover as they could, the two Scouts descended the slope back down the mountain, through the heavy woods, till they were at the fence by the pasture at the foot. Then they walked north as far as the boundaries of the hut area, returned by a different line, and went south, across the trail, to the end of the cliffs. They not only saw no hut and met no other Scouts, but they found no tracks, and no place where it seemed possible to conceal a hut. The trees here were mostly big fellows, and the ground pretty open under them.

Peanut looked at his watch. “It’s nearly four,” he said. “We’ll have to give it up for now, and start tagging. Let’s make for the cave first, and tag that at four o’clock sharp, and then hustle down to Cop’s, and then to Eddie and Pete’s.”

They turned back up the trail, scrambled up the tree ladder to the cave, which was empty, rolled away the stone, and by the light of a match tied a tag on the leg of the rusty old stove inside the inner cave. Then they slid down the ladder again triumphantly, and started along the side of the mountain toward Cop and Old Hundred’s hut. They had been to it only once, and then they approached it, you will remember, from the other side. Now they

walked a long distance, along what they thought was the right line, without spotting it.

"It was hidden behind a big boulder, don't you remember?" said Jimmy.

"Yes, I remember, all right—but where's the boulder?" Peanut answered. "Gee, they got it hidden better'n we thought!"

Eventually they had to go on to the path up to the summit, and take the direction they had followed when they first discovered the hut. They came to the ledge and the boulder at last, this way, only to sneak 'round the boulder, and fall squarely into the arms of Art and Skinny, whose tag was already on the hut.

"Beat you to it!" cried Art and his partner.

"Well, we beat you to Spike and Albert's, anyhow," said Jimmy, hiding his disappointment.

"This is a good hut," Art remarked, pointing to the lean-to Cop and Old Hundred had built of poles thatched with hemlock boughs, facing the back side of the boulder, so that all the heat from the fireplace was thrown back into the shelter; and as the mountain rose steeply right behind the hut, it was thus protected on both sides from the wind.

"It's like the Appalachian Club shelters in the White Mountains," said Peanut. "It's a dandy, all right. Old Hundred's a great Scout, and Cop must have worked, too!"

Jimmy now tied their tag on the upright pole of the hut, just below Art and Skinny's tag, and the two parties separated. Peanut and Jimmy watched Art and his team mate ascend the mountain, and then they ran down in the other direction toward the brook.

They crossed the brook, and hurried toward the thick stand of hemlock which hid the hut of Eddie and Pete. Crawling in under the low boughs, with their tag all ready, again they saw that Art and Skinny had been ahead of them!

"You can't beat Art," Peanut exclaimed. "Wouldn't surprise me a bit if we found his tag on *our* hut."

"Oh, no!" wailed Jimmy. "Let's find his hut, anyhow!"

They hunted the mountain and studied the face of the cliffs for the next hour and a half, two or three times dropping down into hiding behind a rock or log when they saw other teams wandering, like them, through the woods. But, unfortunately, they didn't see Art and Skinny again. "If we could only see them, and follow 'em!" Peanut exclaimed. Finally it began to grow darker.

"We've got to beat it up the lead and get supper pretty quick," Peanut said at last. "Come on. We'll have to fill our pails at the spring, way down below."

They got their packs out of hiding, and walking south well past their hut, filled their kettles and then sneaked carefully back. Peanut went up the lead first and lowered the rope to haul up the water. Then he hauled up Jimmy, and the two hurried into their cave mouth as fast as they could, confident that they hadn't been seen. Once in the cave, they felt safe. They lighted the candles, which were still in the tunnel, climbed their ladder, carried the two precious kettles of water gingerly across the plank, and emerged into the pocket, where their hut stood, with not a tag on it!

"Hurray, I knew they wouldn't find it!" cried Jimmy.

"They won't now, unless somebody saw us come up to-night," said Peanut. "Go up and take a look."

Jimmy scrambled up to the top of the outer ledge and peeped over. "Nothing doing, far as I can see," he reported. "It's getting dark in the woods."

Peanut now put a can of the solid alcohol in the fire pit, and laid two stones across in such a way that the flame could come up between. Then he stood half a kettle of water over it to boil for tea, and over another can he proceeded to cook first bacon and then a flap-jack for supper. Meanwhile Jimmy set dishes on their flat stone "table," lighted the camp lantern inside the shelter, so the light could

not reflect up on the cliffs, and spread the blankets out to air.

There was no smoke to rise and betray them from the alcohol, nor enough light to be visible from below on the face of the cliff. They made a good supper, and then cleaned the dishes as best they could with some pieces of paper, for they hadn't been able to bring up enough water to wash them in, fixed the blankets side by side on their bunk, and began to talk of turning in.

"Let's climb up and have a peep first," said Peanut.

"Couldn't we go down and hunt a bit for Art's hut?" Jimmy suggested. "Might see a light, or something."

"Nix," the Scout Master replied, "we're not taking any chances in that lead to-night. You may like to fall down thirty feet and land in a rock pile, but excuse me!"

But they climbed up their outer rampart, by the light of the camp lantern, and peered over the top into the dark, silent forest. Half a mile away they could see the head lights of a motor moving along the highroad. Very faintly they heard the town clock back in the village strike nine. But that was all they saw, and all they heard.

"One thing's sure," said Peanut, as they climbed down, "Art and Skinny have found a cave some-

where on this mountain, as well hidden as ours is, and we've got to find out where it is before ten o'clock to-morrow! Let's get a sleep on it."

"That's me," said Jimmy, kicking off his boots, and preparing to roll up in his blanket.

"Jimmy! you've forgotten something," the young Scout Master said.

"What?" asked Jimmy.

"Your teeth," said Peanut. "A good Scout don't—doesn't—go to bed without brushing his teeth."

Jimmy got up sleepily and brushed his teeth, having to borrow Peanut's paste, for he had forgotten to bring any. Then the two boys lay down side by side, and were soon sound asleep.

CHAPTER XII

THE END OF THE HUT HUNT

THEY were awakened about four-thirty by what seemed like a loud drumming close to them, and they both sprang up and out of the shelter. A huge osprey was sailing away, up the face of the cliff. Evidently he had come down into the pocket, and been startled by their presence, beating back suddenly with his huge wings.

“My, what a shot!” Peanut exclaimed, pretending to take aim.

“Looks as big as an eagle,” said Jimmy. “Sure it ain’t?”

“No, it’s a big fish-hawk, all right. Bet it lives up on this mountain. Well, we might as well stay up now, and have breakfast. Can’t cook it till five, though.”

They got everything ready, and at five sharp began to boil their eggs and brew their tea. At five-thirty they stacked up camp neatly, for Mr. Rogers’ inspection, took a peep over the rampart to see if the coast was clear, went down the tunnel and crawled cautiously out on the ledge, again making sure nobody was in sight. Then Peanut lowered Jimmy

down the lead, and climbed down after him, hiding the rope under a stone at the base.

"Now for Art's hut!" he cried.

"Gee, it's harder'n finding a golf ball in the long grass!" said Jimmy, who had been a caddy.

Through the dew soaked bushes they pushed, up and down the mountainside, under the cliffs which they scanned till they knew every stone and ledge—in vain. They met other parties two or three times; once they met Art and Skinny.

"Didn't see your tag on *our* hut," said the latter.

"Well, your tag isn't very prominent on ours," Jimmy retorted.

"Where is your old hut, anyhow?" whispered Art to Peanut.

"I'd tell you if it wasn't for disappointing Jimmy," Peanut whispered back—"over the left."

"No use following them," he said to Jimmy as Art and Skinny departed. "They won't go back to their hut now."

"They might," said Jimmy. "Let's try, anyhow."

Art and his partner had gone up the mountain so Peanut and Jimmy started after them, and as soon as they were in sight began to stalk behind trees, following as far behind and as quietly as they could. But they hadn't gone far before Art looked back, laughed, and shouted, "No use, our hut isn't this way. Try down by the path."

"Rats, he's wise," said Jimmy. "Guess we're stumped."

"Looks that way. Well, he's stumped, too," Peanut answered. "It's nearly ten now. Let's go back and wait for Mr. Rogers."

They found Cop and Old Hundred already at the rendezvous by the brook.

"Gosh, everybody's found our hut!" said Cop. "Didn't think anybody would."

"How many you found?" asked Jimmy.

"Eddie and Pete's—that's all. Found that by trailing them yesterday afternoon. We saw 'em come down to the brook for water, and sneaked after 'em. Good hut, too. How many you found?"

"All except Art's," said Jimmy proudly.

"You have!" cried Cop. "Gosh, how'd you do it?"

Pete and Eddie now came up. They reported finding Cop and Old Hundred's hut—and that was all. Along came Spike and Albert a moment later. They had found Cop and Old Hundred's, and Pete and Eddie's.

Jimmy danced up and down with joy. "Nobody's found ours! Nobody's found ours!" he shouted.

"Not unless Art's found it since we left," said Peanut.

Just at that moment Art appeared, with Mr. Rogers

and Skinny, down the path from the top of the mountain.

“Hello, boys, who’s won?” said the Scout Master. “I found these two still hunting, up on top, and brought ’em along.”

“We’ve found four,” said Jimmy.

“So’ve we,” cried Skinny.

“Whose huts aren’t found?” asked Mr. Rogers.

“Ours!” cried Jimmy.

“And ours!” echoed Skinny.

“Aw, well, you two had the big fellers to help yer,” said Cop.

“You’re right, Cop,” Mr. Rogers laughed. “Those two teams had the advantage. But let’s make a tour to all the huts now. Let’s start with the one with the largest number of tags on it.”

“That’s ours,” said Cop, disgustedly. “We didn’t think anybody’d find it!”

He led the way up the path, turned off to the ledge below the boulder, and then over the ledge and around the big rock. Mr. Rogers inspected the hut and surroundings.

“Well,” he said, “it isn’t so very well hidden, Cop, you can see that, because anybody coming around the boulder runs smack into it, and the ledge out there is mossy and takes boot tracks easily ——”

“That’s how we found it,” exclaimed Jimmy and Skinny both in a breath.

“——but it’s a mighty good, practical hut,” Mr. Rogers went on. “It deserves to stay up for the Scouts to use. You get good heat inside the lean-to, and perfect protection from wind and cold. Next?”

The next was Eddie and Pete’s, with three tags. Mr. Rogers crawled in under the hemlocks and inspected this. “Well hidden,” he said, “but not a practical hut, because it would be smoky with a wood-fire, and a fire is dangerous, too, in here, so close to these dry needles and dead twigs.”

The next hut was Spike and Albert’s in the cave.

“Oh, gee, we never thought to look *there*,” said Cop, “’cause we thought nobody would build in a place everybody knew about.”

“That’s why we built there,” laughed Albert.

“Yes, an’ we wouldn’t have looked if I hadn’t suggested it,” piped up Jimmy, proudly.

“We only looked on a chance,” Art put in. “Then I saw tracks on the floor, and lit a birch bark torch, and found the stone.”

“It sounds mysterious,” the Scout Master laughed, as they climbed the tree ladder to the cave mouth.

Albert went ahead, rolled back the stone, crawled through the tunnel, and lighted up the inner cave. Then the rest followed. They could barely all get inside, and Mr. Rogers couldn’t stand upright. The walls of this inner cave were damp, and so were the blankets when the Scout Master felt of them. It

smelled smoky still, from the breakfast fire, and very earthy.

"A wonderful place to hide in, if you have to," said Mr. Rogers, "but a bad place for a regular Scout hut. It's full of damp and rheumatism, and not half full enough of fresh air. Well, whose hut is next?"

"Toss a coin," Art suggested. "Heads, Jimmy's is next."

It fell heads, so the party set off with Jimmy in the lead.

"I sure will be glad to know where yours is," said Art to Peanut.

"Ditto," said Peanut.

They went down the mountain again, along the face of the cliff, and suddenly Jimmy dove to the lead, and fished the rope out from under the rock.

"Here, you let me go first!" Peanut ordered. "No risks for you!"

"Aw, I can do it!"

"No—safety first!" and Peanut went up the lead, and threw back the end of the rope to the rest, who climbed up one by one.

"Golly!" Art cried, "and to think we stood under this ledge and decided there couldn't be a hut anywhere up here!"

"I know you did," Peanut laughed. "We heard you."

“Well, *I* wanted to climb up and see!” cried Skinny.

“Yes, that’s a fact,” Art admitted. “It’s my fault we were fooled. But it seemed pretty risky for a mighty small chance.”

“It *is* pretty risky,” said Mr. Rogers, who was waiting his turn to go up the lead. “I don’t think Peanut did right to build here—and I can’t see yet where the hut can be. I don’t see any cave up there.”

“Come on up and you will,” answered Peanut, throwing the rope end down. “It was safe enough, honest, Mr. Rogers, ’cause I always pulled Jimmy up myself by the rope, and lowered him, too.”

When all the party was on the ledge, Jimmy led the way around to the small cave mouth, hidden by the tiny hemlock, crawled in and lit the candles, and then the rest followed up the ladder and into the pocket of the cliff, where the hut was. It was a complete surprise to everybody, for everybody, like Art and Skinny, had walked along the base and decided there was no possible chance for a hut up there. Nobody but Peanut and Jimmy had climbed to the ledge, to discover the hidden cave mouth.

“Well, this is a remarkable place for a hut, all right,” said the Scout Master, “and it’s quite a hut—stone walls, and strung mattress, and all the com-

forts of home half-way up a precipice! Still, I bet it's hot in here in the daytime, with the sun beating down on the cliff, and it's a long haul for water, and it's a mighty dangerous climb getting here. It's not much good for a real camping place."

Jimmy looked disappointed, but Peanut answered, "You're right. The game was to hide, though, not to make an ideal camp."

"I understand that," Mr. Rogers said, "and for the purposes of this game, you certainly did well. Now for Art and Skinny's!"

The party descended the tunnel again, Peanut and Jimmy bringing their blankets and packs, and Peanut and Art lowered the rest down the lead before descending themselves. Then they all set off, with Skinny in the lead, to Art's hut.

Skinny made directly for the main path up the mountain but turned *down* as soon as he reached it, and walked rapidly toward the open pasture and the road.

"Here, where you going?" Cop said. "We ain't going home yet!"

It began to look as if they were, though, for Skinny kept right on till he was within fifty or a hundred feet of the pasture, which marked the extreme boundary of the hut area. Then he stopped by the path.

"Here's ours," he said.

"Where?" came a chorus of voices, including Mr. Rogers'.

"Here!" laughed Art.

"Aw, quit your kiddin'!"

"Say, what do you think we are?"

"What yer givin' us?"

"Come off, come off! Play the game fair!"

The chorus was more indignant this time.

"We're playing the game fair," Art laughed.

"Aren't we, Skinny?"

"Sure's you're alive," said Skinny. "The hut's here."

The boys began to look around. They were standing beside a huge old chestnut tree, which rose without a branch for twenty feet, and then flung great limbs out in all directions, even the limbs being as big as an ordinary tree. They all looked up in this tree, but saw nothing unusual.

Peanut, however, stepped away from the path, into a stand of hemlocks, the nearest about ten feet distant.

These hemlocks were perhaps thirty feet tall, and grew very close together. At the base, however, you could see between them, for they were not so young as those in which Pete and Eddie had built, and the lower branches had died out. There was plainly no hut there. But Peanut went in among them, and looked sharply around. Suddenly he

gave a yell, and began to climb. The rest rushed after him, into the little group of evergreens, and looked up. There was the hut!

The hemlocks, thick at the top, had grown up on either side of a huge lower limb of the big chestnut, and that limb formed a fork, like a letter Y laid flat, in the midst of them. Across this fork Art and Skinny had laid boards, and on this platform built their hut. It was absolutely concealed from all points of view except that from directly underneath, by the tops of the hemlocks, which formed a hedge all around it, and nobody had thought of going among the hemlocks, because you could see from outside there was no hut among them on the ground—and it had not occurred to anybody to look elsewhere than on the ground!

Peanut by now had climbed a hemlock, an easy task, for it had limbs every foot or two, to the platform, and Jimmy was close behind him.

“Two at a time,” Art cautioned. “I don’t know if the platform’ll hold more.”

Each team took its turn examining the hut, and Mr. Rogers examined it, too, of course. The platform had three sides of boards, about three feet high, and it was roofed with a piece of waterproof canvas, which could be raised in fair weather. The hut was really like a big packing box with one end knocked out. It was just big enough for the two

boys to stretch out and sleep in. Like Peanut and Jimmy, Art and Skinny had cooked with solid alcohol. Of course, they couldn't have made a wood-fire, anyway. They slept on a rubber camp mattress which Art had recently bought. This he blew up at night with a bicycle pump, and by day deflated and folded up.

"Well, that's some hut!" Peanut exclaimed, in admiration. "Foxy old Art! See, fellers, Art and Skinny put their hut not more'n twenty feet off the path we all use, and not more'n a hundred feet from the very entrance. Guess they reckoned we wouldn't begin hunting quite so soon."

"That's just what we reckoned," Art laughed.

"But how'd you get the stuff—boards and things—in without getting caught?" somebody asked.

Again Art laughed. "That was the easiest part," he answered. "We waited till you were all in on the mountain, and then, being way down here, there was nobody to catch us! We put the hut together with screws, so's to make no noise. We've sat up there a dozen times and watched you fellows coming out, almost right under us. We could push a hemlock branch away and get a peep through."

"Well, there's one other thing I don't see," Old Hundred said. "And that's why you didn't make more marks on these hemlocks, going up and down so much."

Again Art laughed. "That's easy," he answered. "We always took off our boots before we went up, and our stocking feet didn't bruise the bark on the limbs."

"Well," said Mr. Rogers, "in some ways this is the cleverest hut of all, because Art and Skinny didn't depend on a secret cave to hide it in, but managed to fool all of you by hiding it right over your heads at the very entrance of the woods. It's light and airy, too. But you couldn't stand up in it in wet weather. With the canvas roof on, you'd have to lie down. And you can't build a fire in it to keep warm, and you have to haul all your water up a tree. Do you know, boys, even though Art and Skinny, and Peanut and Jimmy Gerson, have tied for first place in the game, whose hut I think is the best one?"

"Whose?" they all asked.

"The hut that everybody found—Cop and Old Hundred's. It was last in this game, but it is first in practical usefulness as a woodsman's shelter. So I'm going to suggest that we go back there for dinner."

Cop and Old Hundred were almost as much pleased at this as though they had won the game. The whole patrol adjourned now to their hut, for it was nearly one o'clock, and while the two winning teams and the Scout Master lolled back on the

ground, the three losing teams had to cook dinner for everybody.

“Pretty soft,” said Art, “eh, Peanut?”

“Yes,” Peanut answered, “it’s a great nuisance having to cook for yourself. I always like to have good servants.”

“Now, Cop, be sure you get my bacon fried good and crisp,” said Jimmy. “If you don’t, I’ll fire you.”

“I’ll punch your head,” retorted Cop.

“Want some setting up exercises, Cop?” Peanut cautioned, and Cop, with a grunt, bent hastily over the fire again.

Art didn’t stay long on the ground, however. The new patrol were not yet skilful cooks, and he couldn’t help taking a hand and showing them how to do things. Pete and Eddie had half a dozen eggs left (they had brought a dozen the night before, in a parcels post egg box), and Art helped them make two delicious omelets, in two pans. These omelets, with bacon, some chops, fried potatoes, tea and coffee, bread and fruit, composed the meal. And it was a good one. There wasn’t much left to clear away when the ten hungry boys and one hungry man got through.

“Well, sir,” cried Peanut, as the dishes were washed and the waste burnt up, “the great hut hunt is over! What are we going to do next?”

"Gee, I'd like to do this all over again!" Jimmy exclaimed.

"Bet nobody would find our hut *next* time!" said Cop.

"Nor ours!" said Pete.

"Well, boys, you've got the huts now," said Mr. Rogers, "and pretty good ones they all are, at least to hide in. I want you to promise, though, to be very careful about fires. It's part of our job as Scouts never to start forest fires. In fact, we ought to be on the watch always to prevent forest fires. You've got places where you can come and camp any time you want to. But there are other things for Scouts to do beside building huts. I think, Peanut, every Scout here ought to make a map now of this mountainside, showing the paths, contour intervals, and location of the huts. Suppose you show 'em a government survey map of this region, and explain what a contour interval is, and then next week we'll meet and go over everybody's map. You know, boys, a Scout who couldn't make a map wouldn't be much use in an army, would he? You've had your fun. Now for the work of putting it on paper—call it making a map of a good time!"

"That's a funny idea—making a map of a good time," said Albert. "It's sure been a good time, all right!"

The Scouts now rolled up their blankets, packed

up their knapsacks, and set out for home, talking over the excitements of the game as they went.

But Mr. Rogers, in the lead, was talking in a lower tone to Peanut and Art.

“It was a fine game, and taught ’em a lot about woodcraft,” he was saying, “but we mustn’t forget other things. Better get in Rob to teach first aid—he’s back on his vacation now ; and keep up on your signaling. And what are you doing to encourage the Brave Babies to do a good turn every day?”

“Well,” said Peanut, “I made Jimmy help his mother beat carpets yesterday morning. He didn’t want to a bit !”

“That’s something,” Mr. Rogers admitted, with a grin. “No, on second thought, that is a great deal !”

CHAPTER XIII

SOME REAL SCOUT WORK—MAP MAKING, FIRST AID, AND LESSONS IN FORESTRY

“A MAP of a good time,” Jimmy was repeating, as he toiled over his map of Bald Face Mountain. “That’s a funny idea. Say, maps never meant much to me before—just kind o’ pink and green things labeled *Asia*.”

“Oh, maps are easy,” Albert answered. “I like maps. Bet I could pass the first class test for map making right now.”

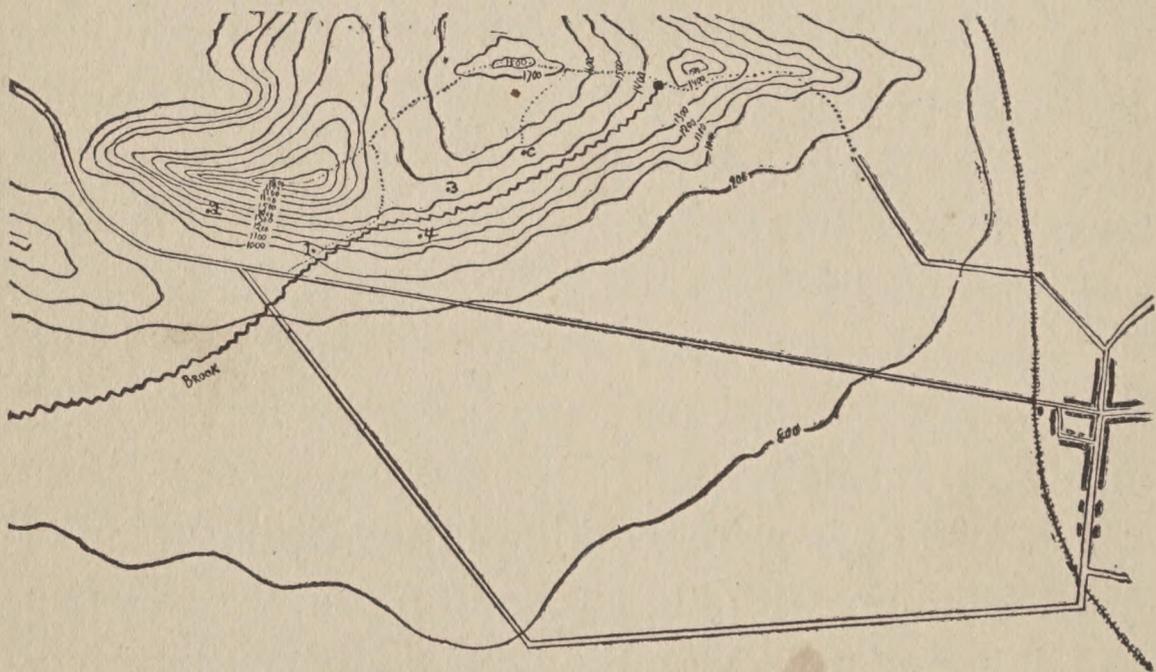
The two boys were working in the sitting-room of Albert’s home, with big sheets of paper, pencils, pen and ink, and rulers on the table, and also, for guidance, a United States Geological Survey map of Southmead and vicinity spread out. It was raining hard outside.

“Wish I could trace this old government map,” Jimmy finally exclaimed. “I can’t get all these contour intervals in right.”

“Wouldn’t be fair to trace it,” said Albert. “Besides, our maps would be too small if we did. Don’t try to put in all the contour lines. There’s a line for

every twenty feet in the government map. I'm just putting in the hundred foot lines. That only makes ten lines for the whole mountain, from the base to the top, 'cause it's 900 feet above sea level at the base."

Jimmy looked at the other's map presently, and sighed. "Oh, gee, wish I could draw like that!"



BALDFACE MT. SCALE, 1 INCH = 1 MILE

— ROADS ——— RAIL-ROAD ——— BROOK
 FOOT TRAIL ——— VILLAGE STREET

C = BIG CAVE 3 = COP'S HUT
 1 = ART'S HUT 4 = PETE'S HUT
 2 = PEANUT'S HUT

CONTOUR INTERVAL 100 FEET.

ALBERT'S MAP OF BALD FACE MOUNTAIN

he exclaimed. "Wow, but you're a neat drawer! Bet you have the best map!"

"Bet I do, too," said Albert.

"You're not stuck on yourself, or anything, are you?" laughed Jimmy.

As a matter of fact, when the maps were brought

in to the Scout meeting the next evening Mr. Rogers, after carefully looking at them all, declared that Albert's was the best.

"There's only one thing wrong in it, so far as I can see," said he. "You've made the brook flow on the dead level for nearly a mile."

Albert looked. "That's a fact," he replied. "The brook wasn't on the government map at all. I had to put it in. I got the head water spring in the right place, and it crosses the road at the right place, but I've got it flowing between the 1300 and 1400 foot contour lines too far, haven't I?"

"Yes," the Scout Master replied. "I fancy it crosses the 1300 foot line about half-way down. It would take pretty careful surveying with instruments even I don't know how to use, to determine just where. But the main point is, boys, that anybody could take Albert's map, start out from Southmead with it, and find the paths to the top of the mountain as well as the Cave and perhaps the huts—that is, they could find the huts if they were real smart Scouts. The map shows where the mountain is steepest, too, though really, to show a precipice, Albert's contour lines ought to be closer together."

"I was afraid of blotting 'em if I got 'em closer," Albert confessed.

"Well, the map's a good one, and you ought to hang it up on the wall of the Scout House, I think,"

Mr. Rogers continued. "Suppose you always put the *best* map of any hike you take up on the walls, eh? That'll be kind of a prize—a reward of merit."

"Say, let's begin taking the first class Scout test, where you have to make a seven mile trip and draw a map of it!" cried Albert, elated by his success.

"Whoa!" laughed Peanut. "You're getting ahead of the game a bit, old top. Rob Evarts is coming next time, for first aid work. We've got to get the second class tests passed first. One thing at a time!"

Rob Evarts, who had been one of the Scouts in the first patrol organized in Southmead, and who had been on all the long hikes, to Deerfield, to the Dismal Swamp, and to the White Mountains, had been graduated from Harvard at the same time Peanut and Art and Lou got through high school, for he was three years older than they were; and now he had reached home for his summer vacation, before entering the medical school in the autumn. Rob had always been the prize pupil in first aid, and he had gladly consented to help Peanut out with the new patrol.

"Only let's have our lessons on the field," he said, "not in the hot Scout House. Let's go down where your huts are. I want to see the huts, anyhow."

For the next two or three weeks, therefore, the Wildcat Patrol had a meeting every Tuesday after-

noon at the hut area, and Rob gave instruction in first aid right on the field. Each hut team, also, had to learn how to make a stretcher with poles, cut on the spot, and their coats or sweaters, and then they had to carry another boy either up or down the mountain for half a mile, without spilling or jolting him.

After each lesson in first aid came signal practice. As soon as the Scouts had all learned the alphabet, Cop and Old Hundred and Pete and Eddie climbed to the south peak, over the cliffs, while the other two teams went out into the fields beyond the woods at the base. Peanut gave the teams on the summit certain sentences to signal, without telling the other teams what they were, so that he was able to see if the boys below read them right. Then the boys below signaled sentences, and those on top had to repeat them.

Art and sometimes Lou, Frank and Mr. Rogers would come down to the hut area for supper, and a camp-fire in the evening, at Cop and Old Hundred's hut, which the whole patrol was enlarging till it would hold six or eight sleepers instead of two. The hut in the big cave was too dark and damp and stuffy for real comfort, and Art and Skinny's hut in the tree wasn't really practical, while Peanut and Jimmy's hut, though Jimmy almost cried at the idea of abandoning it, couldn't be reached after dark on

account of the danger in climbing the lead. Of course Peanut, as Scout Master, had to be with the Scouts for the camp-fire. Finally, Eddie and Pete's hut under the hemlocks, though they often slept in it, was too dangerous a place, Mr. Rogers said, to have a fire in. He ordered pointblank that they weren't to cook in under those low hemlocks, with so many dry, dead twigs. Therefore it became necessary to enlarge Cop and Old Hundred's hut, or else build a new one at some other place, and there didn't seem to be a better place. When the job was finally done, the hut was a pole lean-to, thatched with bark from a big dead birch tree, and also with hemlock boughs, and with a soft floor of boughs, so thick that it made a glorious mattress. The big fire against the boulder threw back its heat in under the shelter when the night chill crept down the mountain, and the Wildcat Patrol had a shelter as cozy and tight for summer use as those of the Appalachian Club in the White Mountains.

In the morning, after a bath in the brook a quarter of a mile below on the mountainside, and breakfast, Peanut each week assigned one Scout to the task of fixing the laterine trench, with a little shovel, and two more to the task of cleaning camp and airing the bedding. He never allowed the camp to be left any way but shipshape. As soon as the morning cleaning up was done, the patrol had a lesson

from Art or Lou in telling the different kinds of trees. Some of the boys, at first, did not even know which were hard wood and which soft—which makes quite a difference when you are building a fire to cook over.

“We got to learn ten species, to pass the first class test,” said Jimmy. “S’pose there are ten kinds here on the mountain?”

Art laughed. “Ten, eh?” he said. “Well, you just take a piece of paper, and put down all the kinds you see!”

They stood still in their tracks and looked about, first of all. Close beside them were white pine, hemlock, red spruce and a cedar or two.

“There are four; put ’em down,” said Art to Jimmy. “Now, how would you tell the difference between a young spruce and a hemlock if you were describing it on your test?”

Jimmy examined both trees carefully, but appeared to hesitate.

“See,” Art helped him, “the needles of the hemlock are not so stiff, and they lie out flat on the stem, while the stiff needles of the spruce stand out all around the stem, making a round formation. Now what’s this one?”

The Scouts looked at a young tree Art was pointing to. “Spruce,” they all declared, all except Old Hundred, who knew the trees well. He laughed,

"Gee, they don't know a fir balsam!" he exclaimed.

Art pointed out that the balsam has a richer, darker foliage than the spruce when young, and showed them the three little buds at the tips of each stem, which is an identifying mark. "But smell it; that's the best way to tell," he added.

"Wow! what a bunk those boughs would make!" Jimmy cried. "Sleeping on perfume, all right, that would be! Why don't we get some?"

"Because there are so few balsams on this mountain," Art said. "We don't want to hurt any of 'em. There are five trees now, Jimmy."

They moved along, and in a hard wood area they found birch, chestnut, hickory, oak, ash, beech, three kinds of maple, sumach and moose-wood. That made sixteen. By the brook they found alder, another variety of oak, a sycamore, and tamaracks. That made twenty. Later they came upon some Scotch pine, which Art said must have been sown by birds, because the only other Scotch pine in town he knew about were big ones planted artificially in some of the grounds back in the village. That made twenty-one. Before the lesson was over, Jimmy had twenty-nine trees on his list, all growing between the road at the base and the summit of the mountain.

"You see," Art said, "if you really use your eyes in the woods, you can learn a lot of things. Remem-

ber that oak, maple, ash and hickory make the best fire coals to cook with. Chestnut snaps. Hickory and ash make the best staffs or poles for mountain climbing, pole vaulting, stretchers, or trapeze bars. Ash makes the best bows."

"Gee, we'll be first class Scouts before we're second class," chuckled Jimmy.

"There's one second class test we haven't worked up yet, though," said Peanut, suddenly. "Guess we all forgot it. That's tracking. Next week we must have tracking trials."

At noon the boys went home, as usual, leaving their blankets folded and hanging over a rope stretched along under the roof of the lean-to, and their cooking pots and so forth neatly stacked in a corner.

On Friday afternoons there was baseball practice, and on Saturday morning each week a ball game, often with teams from neighboring towns. Playing together each week, with practice under Peanut's direction, always playing with an umpire who called balls and strikes, the Brave Babies (as the other boys still called them) rapidly developed a team that won nearly all the games it played. There is a lot of science in baseball, a lot of team play required. You can't just throw nine players together, who haven't been drilled into acting in harmony, and win. Moreover, having balls and strikes called on him all

the time made Old Hundred much more careful and steady in his pitching. When a team came from the next town that hadn't been used to playing with an umpire, the Brave Babies used to get half a dozen, or even more, bases on balls, while Old Hundred wouldn't give one. Then, too, Frank Nichols, Peanut, and others of the bigger Scouts used to pitch against the Brave Babies in practice, and after the smaller boys had learned to stand up and hit this swift pitching, they could land on the pitching of visitors their own size like Ty Cobb.

"After all," Peanut declared, "there's only one way to learn to play any old game, and that's to practice against a man who's better'n you are. It makes you work hard all the time, and you're always learning."

CHAPTER XIV

THE TRACKING TEST

THE week after the lesson in trees, the patrol went down to its camp for a tracking test. They all wore their Scout uniforms, and Frank, Lou, Art and Rob went along, too. They had now drilled and marched together enough so that they could keep step automatically. They made a good showing marching through the village, and none of the other boys taunted them from the corners any more. Each Scout had his pack on his shoulders, his sheath hatchet at his belt, and a long, fairly slender, but tough ash staff, neatly sandpapered, in his hand. They found these staffs of great use in getting up and down the steepest parts of the mountain.

Mr. Rogers came out to his gate as they passed and saluted, and once Peanut heard a man on the sidewalk say to another, "Well, those Scouts step off as if they meant business. They're out of mischief, too. Better thing for 'em than loafing 'round the streets!"—and Peanut turned red with pleasure, for he suddenly felt as if he was earning his twenty-five dollars a month, and doing something that really helped in the world.

When they reached the hut, plans were at once made for the tracking. The patrol was divided into three of the original hut teams, with Jimmy and Skinny doubling up for the fourth. Peanut, Lou, Frank and Rob Evarts each put on baseball shoes with spikes, to make tracks with, and each put on a pedometer, so he could see when he had gone a mile. Each team of Scouts was to follow one of these leaders, starting three minutes behind them. At the end of a mile the leaders were to stop, and if the Scouts got up to them in twenty-five minutes after the time of starting, they had passed the test. Art remained behind to start the Scouts off, and to follow along with Skinny and Jimmy, the two smallest, who had to double up into a new team, because, of course, Art and Peanut were not in this game.

“Now,” said Peanut, “we’ll make all kinds of tracks, with our feet, by breaking down bushes, by going through pine where we’ll snap off dead twigs, and so on. You’ve got to keep your eyes open sharp. We’ll not try to throw you off the scent very hard—that wouldn’t be fair; but each of us, in the mile, will try just once or twice to bluff you. Are you ready? Come on then, leaders!”

The four trail makers started off. Peanut went up the mountain, Rob went off along the ledge southward. The other two descended,

"Come back here when it's over," Peanut called back over his shoulder.

Three minutes later Art gave the signal to follow, and away the Scouts went, eyes to the ground and bushes. Jimmy and Skinny were to follow Peanut, and with Art at their heels they started up the mountain. Art, of course, did not coach them—in fact, he didn't need to, for both Jimmy and his companion had keen eyes and knew how to use them. They rushed at once for the spot where Peanut had disappeared behind a big rock, and then began to search.

"Here!" cried Jimmy, "here's a mark of the spike!"

"Here it is again!" Skinny answered, springing ahead.

"Look, there they go up that slope!" cried Jimmy.

Sure enough, Peanut had climbed a steep slope of rock which was covered with a thin layer of moss, and the spikes had torn up a plain trail. The pursuers rushed up to the top, and stopped baffled for a moment, for the tracks ceased in a mass of pine needles in which the spikes seemed to make no mark. But Jimmy suddenly gave a yell, and pointed up the mountain again. There, not far on, the end of a low pine branch had been broken off, so that it dangled. They ran to it, and followed up the slope by means of branches broken here and there, till they came again to a rocky place, where

occasional tearing up of the moss by Peanut's spikes gave them the track. Thus they reached the top of the mountain, and by the last sign, a broken blueberry bush, made sure that Peanut had stepped up upon a big, flat, bare rock ledge, at least fifty feet long and twenty wide.

"Wow!" said Jimmy. "Where'd he go now? Couldn't make any tracks on this rock!"

Art said nothing, but waited to see what the Scouts would do. They did the wise thing, at Skinny's suggestion. One went around the rock on one side, the other in the opposite direction, not on the ledge itself, but just below the edge. They met on the far side, quite baffled, for not a track had they seen.

"What shall we do?" asked Jimmy. "Gee, we're losing time!"

Art shook his head. "That's your job," he answered.

"I know!" exclaimed Skinny. "I bet he *jumped* off the edge somewhere as far as he could. Let's go 'round again, farther out."

This time Jimmy found, with a yell, the tracks where Peanut had landed—two heel marks in some soft ground, at least ten feet off the edge.

"Took a running jump," Art laughed.

They followed the way the feet pointed, and picked up the trail by broken bushes. Peanut had

soon struck into the regular path along the summit, where his spikes turned up the fresh earth in the bare spots, and though it would be sometimes ten feet between tracks, the pursuers followed rapidly—till all of a sudden there were no more tracks ahead!

“He’s turned off, and we’ve missed it—rats!” cried Jimmy. “Come back; you look left, I’ll look right.”

Ten feet back on the trail, at the last spike mark, they began to search the ground and trees on either side, going farther and farther away from the path. Nearly fifteen feet away, on Skinny’s side, was another spike mark in some moss, and then a broken branch.

“Hooray! Got it again!” called Skinny. “But we’ve lost a lot o’ time.”

From now on, down slope through the woods, they picked up the trail with some ease, for Peanut had been crashing down through laurel and small evergreen, and breaking twigs as he went.

“Say,” Jimmy remarked, “seems to me he’s doubling back toward the hut.”

Sure enough he was, for a few minutes later they came to a slope of mossy rock again, where Peanut had evidently simply sat down and slid, and it led to the end of the very ledge where the big boulder stood.

"Bet he got the seat of his pants green there," laughed Skinny, as he, too, sat down and slid.

At the bottom of this slide, however, they lost the tracks entirely, and it took several precious moments before Jimmy picked up a spike mark in some black mould, nearly twenty feet away. It was on the hut side. They ran ahead, and there, sitting in the hut, was Peanut!

"Have we done it?" both boys cried.

Art looked at his watch. "Easy," said he; "in twenty-one minutes—four minutes to spare."

"Good work," said the Scout Master.

"Hooray!" said the Scouts.

"But how'd you manage to make it just a mile back to the hut?" Art asked.

"Didn't," Peanut laughed. "It was exactly a mile to the top of where I slid. But I tacked on the rest for good measure. I didn't mean to slide, either—my foot slipped. Bet the seat of my pants is nice and green with moss!"

"You're no rolling stone, if you gather moss, anyhow," laughed Art, a joke that Skinny didn't see the point to, though Jimmy did.

One by one the other teams came back now, and all of them had passed the test.

"Say, we've passed all the second class tests now, except knowing the sixteen principal points of the compass, haven't we?" Pete asked.

"Guess you have, that's a fact," Peanut answered. "Won't take any time to learn the compass points. Here, each of you take 'em down, and then memorize 'em. Next week we'll have Mr. Rogers 'round, and somebody else from the Council, and you can all make fires and cook for 'em, and show 'em what you know about first aid, and the rest of it. Then you'll get your second class badges."

"Hooray!" cried Jimmy, beginning the points of the compass, which Peanut had already taught him. "North, north-by-east, nor'-nor'-east, nor'east-by-north, northeast; northeast-by-east, east-nor'east, east-by-north, east; east-by-south ——"

"Hold on!" cried Art. "You're boxing the compass, Jimmy. That's all thirty-two points, not sixteen."

"Well, if I know thirty-two, I know sixteen, don't I?" Jimmy retorted; "east-sou'east, sou'east-by-east, sou'east; sou'east-by-south ——"

"Choke him!" Peanut commanded—and Jimmy's voice was suddenly hushed under a pile of boys.

"Well," said Peanut, as they hiked home, "you'll all be second class Scouts next week. Then for the first class tests! Gee, if I could get you all first class Scouts before the summer is over, that would be going some!"

CHAPTER XV

THE SCOUTS TURN DETECTIVES IN EARNEST

BUT the second class tests were not held the following week. Before the time came, something else happened.

Nearly all of the woods and cliffs of Bald Face Mountain where the boys had built their huts were owned by one man, a rich man who had a big summer place near Southmead. It was he who had given the Scouts permission to have their camp on his land, because, he said, he knew Scouts were careful and honest, and wouldn't set any fires. The land was posted with trespass signs, and nobody except the Scouts was permitted to light fires on it.

But on the Monday afternoon following the tracking, Peanut got a telephone message from Mr. Rogers to come right over to his house, as fast as he could. He jumped on his wheel, and four minutes later stood in the room with the head Scout Master and Mr. Parsons, the owner of the land, who was looking very stern and angry.

“This is Robert Morrison, the assistant Scout

Master, Mr. Parsons," said Mr. Rogers. "You had better ask him to explain."

"Explain what?" said Peanut, turning a little pale and growing uncomfortable, though he couldn't imagine what the Scouts had done wrong.

"Have you boys been digging up my ferns?" asked Mr. Parsons.

"Digging up ferns? Of course not!" the boy exclaimed. "What would we dig up ferns for?"

"I don't know," the man replied. "I only know that I took a walk over the mountain this morning, and came upon several places where the ferns had been pulled up—great quantities of them. Sometimes they had been broken off—sometimes yanked out by the roots. You know it's strictly against the law to pick ferns on another man's property. One of the reasons I bought the Bald Face woods was to preserve the beautiful flora in them."

"Well, the Scouts haven't pulled any ferns," Peanut replied, hotly. "We've been careful as can be. Art wouldn't even let the kids use balsam boughs for a bunk, because he said there were so few balsams in the woods. Why do you accuse us?"

"I'm not accusing you," Mr. Parsons said, more mildly. "I was pretty mad at the loss of my ferns, though, and as I knew you boys had been in there a lot lately I came here first. Perhaps I was hasty. I admit you Scouts have never violated my confidence

before. Well, if it wasn't you chaps, there's a job for you, to find out who *did* do it. If you catch the culprits, I'll give you a reward."

"We'll find out, all right, but we don't take rewards in the Scouts," said Peanut. "Whereabouts were the ferns that had been pulled?"

"Near the head of the brook, almost at the top of the mountain," the man answered. "I went over on the other side of the top, too, and found the thieves had been at work over there, also. That land belongs to somebody in the next town. Well, you chaps report to me when you find out anything."

"Yes, sir," Peanut answered.

When he had gone, Peanut broke loose. "Why'd he accuse us?" he demanded. "Called us as good as thieves, that's what he did!"

"Steady, steady," said Mr. Rogers. "He's a quick-tempered man, and very much attached to the ferns and wild flowers in his woods. You must make allowances for him. Besides, he took it back handsomely, and it isn't everybody would let a lot of boys loose in his woods with axes and matches, I can tell you."

"I s'pose not. Who do you guess *did* swipe his old ferns?"

"I don't know," the Scout Master answered, "but I have a shrewd idea that there's a story in it for the *Herald*, if you can land it."

Peanut pricked up his ears. "A *real* story, do you mean—front page?"

"Shouldn't wonder," Mr. Rogers laughed. "You see, I read only the other day of a case not so very far from here, where a band of men were arrested for fern picking. It seems they had been going into the woods at night, and picking very early in the morning, before folks were around, and then taking out great crates of ferns which they shipped to the florists in New York from some station far enough away not to attract suspicion. Have you ever seen any strangers on Bald Face?"

"Nary a one," Peanut answered. "But we haven't seen any signs of fern picking, either."

"Well," said Mr. Rogers, "it's evidently just begun. I guess we'd better round up as many of the patrol as we can and go down there to-night, and camp on the job."

"Hooray! you going too?"

"Yes, I think I'd better be along for this. To tell the truth, I don't like the looks of it. Fern pickers are usually foreigners, and they don't always mind pulling a knife or a gun."

"Say, this *will* make a story!" Peanut cried, as he got on his wheel and started off to round up the patrol.

As this was an extra meeting, and unexpected, he could only get Cop, Old Hundred, Jimmy and Art. All the other boys had something to do for their

parents which kept them at home, much to their disgust. Traveling light, with provisions for two meals, and their blankets, this party set off, toward the end of the afternoon. They didn't approach the mountain by the usual way—the path under Art's hut—but took the longer trail up the northern shoulder and along the summit ridge.

When they reached the depression where the brook rose, Mr. Rogers suggested, as it was still light, that some of the party go down on the west side, and some on the east, to see how much damage had really been done.

“Meet before dark at the camp,” he said.

Peanut, Art and Jimmy descended on the west side, out of the hut area into the woods which sloped down to the town of Bentford, while Mr. Rogers, Cop and Old Hundred took the brook bed.

The first party had not advanced far before they saw plentiful signs of fern picking. In one place, a huge, flat boulder, the top of which had been covered with a thin deposit of leaf mould and moss in which a bed of ferns had grown up, was practically stripped bare. Examining around its base, Art pointed out where heel marks were plainly visible in some of the black mould which had been dragged down.

“Gee, those are men's feet, all right,” he said.
“About number elevens, I guess!”

"Look," said Jimmy, "they've taken the ferns, roots and all."

"I s'pose it's easier to pull 'em up than to pick 'em, and they probably stay fresh longer," Art answered. "I don't blame Mr. Parsons for getting mad."

They went on a little farther down the mountain, finding more evidences of ruthless destruction of the finest ferns, and then, as twilight was coming on, they pushed back to the summit, and scrambled down to the camp.

Before they dropped over the last ledge, however, they heard angry voices, and when they reached the lean-to Cop, Old Hundred and Mr. Rogers were standing before it, the two boys talking excitedly.

"What's the trouble?" Peanut asked.

"What ain't?" cried Cop. "Gee whiz, somebody's been here and swiped the two old blankets we left hanging inside for emergencies, an' used all the kettles and things, and swiped the fryin'-pan, and ——"

"But they didn't find the hatchet," Old Hundred cut in. "That was hidden under the hemlock boughs."

"Who do you suppose did it?" Art exclaimed.

"I'd like to catch him!" muttered Peanut.

"Do you suppose it was any fellers who aren't Scouts?" Jimmy suggested.

"Aw, they wouldn't be so mean," Old Hundred said. "They might rough-house the hut, for fun, but they wouldn't *swipe* things."

"The fern pickers!" Peanut exclaimed. "I'll bet it was them—I mean they!"

"Just what I've been thinking all along," said the Scout Master. "Well, going without our supper won't help matters. Let's eat now, and talk it over later."

They made a fire, having to chop a fresh supply of wood, for whoever had been at the hut had used up the pile which had been stacked beside the lean-to. After supper, by the firelight, they sat and laid their plans.

"Say, if it was the fern thieves who stole the blankets," said Peanut, "why won't they come here again to-night? And if they hear us here, they'll be scared off, won't they? Maybe we ought to go somewhere else to spend the night."

"I want to air a theory of mine," Art put in. "You know, yesterday was Sunday, and people don't have to work on Sunday. From the fact that the picking evidently began over on the Bentford side, and worked up and over the ridge, I dope it out that the pickers came up from Bentford. From the fact that our hut wasn't bothered or the ferns on this side picked, till yesterday, I think they've just got through with that other side, and came up over

Saturday night or Sunday, and wandering 'round the mountain stumbled on this hut. Now, there are a lot of foreigners, Polacks and so on, who work in the mills in Bentford. Sunday'd be the only day they'd have. They could get away Saturday afternoon, and cart out their bundles of ferns Sunday night, after dark, and be back at work at seven o'clock Monday morning. I'll bet the hole in a doughnut against the inside of a lead pipe that we won't find anybody on the mountain to-morrow morning."

"Some Sherlock Holmes you are!" said Peanut. "But maybe they're regular fern thieves, who just go around the country on this job."

"Maybe," Art answered. "But I'm betting you, just the same."

"I'm inclined to think there's something in what Art says," Mr. Rogers remarked. "We'll see in the morning. If they are traveling pickers, as Peanut suggests, they'll be on the job to-morrow, to get this spot cleared as soon as possible and move on to the next town. I guess we'll post sentinels to-night, to listen and find out if anybody approaches camp. We'd better get the fire out and the camp still as quick as we can. You take the first watch—two hours—and then wake Cop, and he'll wake Jimmy after two hours, and Jimmy wake Old Hundred and Old Hundred wake Peanut, and at three o'clock, Peanut, you wake the whole camp."

The boys curled up in their blankets in the lean-to, Art put out the fire, and in five minutes the dark woods were silent, the camp was silent, and Art, stealing around to the front side of the big boulder, sat down with his back to a tree and listened to the whisper of the night wind in the evergreens overhead, till he heard the far-off village clock toll ten. Then he softly roused Cop.

"Nothin' doing," he whispered, as he crawled into Cop's place in the lean-to. "Don't you go to sleep on watch, though."

At three o'clock Peanut roused the whole camp. Nothing had happened in the night. After a hasty breakfast, cooked by the firelight, they set off toward the head of the brook.

"Now, remember," said Mr. Rogers, "we are detectives, not policemen. It's our job to see these thieves at work, so we can witness what they've done, and then, without letting them see us, to follow them and see where they go."

"Ain't we goin' to pinch 'em?" Cop demanded.

"You may be a Cop in name, but not yet in fact," the Scout Master laughed. "We've not got any authority to arrest 'em. All our job is, is to find out who they are."

"Aw, I thought we were goin' to pinch 'em!" Cop sighed.

But though they reached the head of the brook

before sunrise, and scoured the whole region for two hours in parties, even descending on the west side of the mountain, no pickers did they see.

"'Fraid Art's right," said Peanut.

"I'm afraid he is, too," said Mr. Rogers. "Well, the best we can do is to go home now, and be on the job again Saturday night. Then we'll find out."

They descended by the regular path, under Art's hut. Just below the hut, on the edge of the pasture, Art, who was ahead and keeping his usual sharp lookout, uttered an exclamation. The rest ran up. He was pointing to a spot, close to the path, where a team had stood. There were the dim marks of wheels, the place where the horse had pawed the ground, and on the ground where the wagon had stood the withered tips and broken leaves of many ferns.

"Hooray! a clew!" cried Peanut. "They carted their ferns off from here in a team!"

"Marvelous, Mr. Holmes, marvelous!" Art laughed. "How'd you ever guess it?"

They tracked the team down through the pasture to the road, which at this point had no houses on it for half a mile or more in either direction. The team had evidently turned south, away from Southmead.

"We'll have to bring bikes, and trail 'em," said Art, briefly.

On Saturday afternoon, the same Scouts were rounded up again, with Skinny and Pete and Albert in addition. Four of the boys—Peanut, Jimmy, Old Hundred and Albert—had bicycles, which they brought along, and hid in the bushes back from the road, close to the spot where the fern pickers' wagon had emerged into the highway. Then the whole party, instead of going up to the regular camp, went southward, to the woods below the cliff where Peanut and Jimmy's hut had been.

"We'll be far enough away here so the pickers, if they're at the camp again, won't see or hear us," the Scout Master said.

After supper he assigned Peanut, Art, Jimmy and Old Hundred to stalk up to the camp in the dark, and see if it was occupied. The rest begged to go, but he wouldn't allow it.

"No, the more there are, the greater the danger of being heard," he said. "If the thieves guess we are around they'll get scared. Our whole success lies in never letting them see us."

The rest, disappointed, sat down around the campfire, while the four boys assigned to the stalking job disappeared into the dark.

They reached the path up the mountain with considerable difficulty, recognizing it chiefly by the feeling of smoothness under their feet, and then climbed till they thought they had come to the spot where

they ought to turn off to the right. They now had several hundred yards to go along the rough, steep ledges before coming to the big boulder, and it was hard, in the dark, to keep from making a noise, breaking dead sticks, twigs and so forth. But they crept on as silently as they could, and presently heard voices out of the darkness ahead and above them.

“They’re up there!” whispered Art. “We are too low on the mountain. Come on, now—easy.”

They soon reached the lower side of the big boulder, and could easily hear voices from behind it.

“Peanut, you and Jimmy go ’round to the right, keeping well back into the woods so they can’t see you,” Art whispered. “Old Hundred, you crawl ’round to the left. Go twenty feet on back into the woods, or the firelight’ll hit your face and give you away. I’ll crawl up and around over their heads. Hear all you can, and get a look at their faces. When you hear a screech-owl whistle, back toward the path, all come to it, and join me at the path. Softly, now—mind, no noise, and don’t let the firelight hit you!”

The four Scouts separated into the pitch black woods, and began to stalk around the boulder. Jimmy followed Peanut, who went along the lower ledge some distance, and then climbed up to the next one, on which the boulder stood. They could

now see the glint of firelight through the trees, and crept toward it, soon dropping to their hands and knees and crawling under the low branches of the hemlocks. Advancing in this way, they got within fifteen feet of the camp, and lay on their stomachs, their faces screened by a tiny seedling evergreen through which they peeped.

They could now see a bright fire burning in their fire pit against the boulder, and on it a pot boiling, while three men sat on the edge of the lean-to, talking. One of the men got up and looked in the pot, and they saw his face. He was very evidently a foreigner.

"Gosh, I wish I knew what language they were talking!" whispered Peanut. "He looks like a Pole."

They listened intently, but not a word of English did the three men speak. The two boys managed to get a good look at all their faces, however.

Then, from some distance off, came the soft, melancholy whistle of a screech-owl—*Whoo-oo-oo-oo-oo-oo-oo*. The men pricked up their ears and listened intently. It came again, and one of them laughed and said something in the strange language, whereat the other two paid no more attention.

"Good old Art, he can fool 'em," Peanut whispered.

He and Jimmy wormed their way back noiselessly

to the ledge below, and crept along the edge under the boulder, and so back toward the path, guided now and then by Art's whistle. They found him and Old Hundred waiting.

"Well, did you understand what they were talking about?" Art asked.

"Sure!" said Peanut. "Didn't we, Jimmy?"

"Sure," said Jimmy, "every word."

The four Scouts reported at camp, and it was a long time before the excitement of the news permitted anybody to get to sleep.

CHAPTER XVI

CAUGHT WITH THE GOODS

IT was Art, as usual, who roused camp in the morning. After a hurried wash and breakfast, the day's campaign was planned out; and the Scouts assigned to their posts.

Pete and Albert were assigned to the summit ridge of the mountain.

"Your job is to patrol the ridge," said Mr. Rogers, "and see that the men don't cross it and go down on the other side without somebody following them. You must be very careful not to let them see you, though, under any circumstances. If they cross the ridge toward Bentford, follow 'em, and keep 'em shadowed, if you have to trail 'em till to-morrow morning. Our job is to find out who they are and where they live. Take some stuff you can eat without a fire. We'll all have to go hungry for the next fifteen hours, I guess—or more."

Skinny and Cop were assigned to the patrol of the pasture at the base of the mountain, with headquarters in Skinny's hut in the tree.

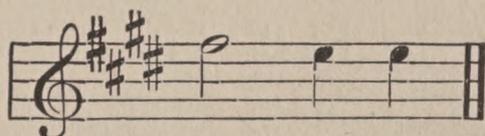
"Your job is to see that the men don't slip away

on that side," said the Scout Master, "and also to watch for any team that may drive up to the entrance of the path. If they start off in the team without any of the rest of us appearing behind, you take two of the bicycles, and follow 'em, at a distance, so they won't suspect you. Don't let 'em see you come out of the woods behind 'em."

That left Art, Peanut, Jimmy, Old Hundred and the Scout Master himself to do the actual stalking.

"Now, everybody—a final word," Mr. Rogers said. "First, we want a signal. Let's take the chickadees' spring song—that's easy to imitate. When you hear this once it means, Watch out! When you hear it twice it means, Go toward the sound."

And he imitated the whistle —



"In the second place," he continued, "don't *under any circumstances*, if you should get caught watching these men, let yourselves be drawn into a row with them. If you get caught, just pretend you were out for a hike, and keep on walking. We are only detectives, not policemen. We mustn't let them suspect. But *don't get caught*."

The Scouts now separated toward their posts.

Art, Peanut and Jimmy were to go up by the bed of the brook, as cautiously as possible, to see if the men were picking down from the top. Mr. Rogers himself and Old Hundred were to go directly to the camp, and stalk the thieves. If the fern pickers didn't go to the brook, but to some other point, Old Hundred could sneak away and round up the other party, while Mr. Rogers watched.

The woods were still dark, though the cliff wall was already turning pink with the flush of coming sunrise, as the four parties moved away through the dew-soaked bushes, having first hidden their blankets under some thick laurel.

Cop and Skinny turned speedily down toward the entrance to the path. The Scout Master and Old Hundred kept on up for a way with Pete and Albert. Peanut, Art and Jimmy turned at once into the little ravine of the brook, and disappeared. Good-byes and cautions were spoken in whispers.

It was no easy matter toiling up the ravine of the brook, which in places was very steep, and blocked with fallen trees. But it afforded good cover, and it was on the rocky sides of this ravine that the largest and handsomest ferns grew. The three toiled upward in silence, very cautiously poking their heads over the top of each fresh shelf and taking a long look up-stream before they climbed to a new advance. They had been ascending for

twenty minutes or more, diagonally up the side of the mountain, and the sun had risen, making the woods much lighter and illuminating the tops of the trees above their heads, when suddenly Art whispered "Sh!" and stopped in his tracks.

The others listened. Off to the left, in the direction of the camp, and slightly below them on the mountain now, they heard voices, very faintly. The voices seemed to grow nearer.

"Quick!" Art said. "Get up the bank to the right, and hide!"

The three Scouts scrambled up the bank of the ravine, on the side down the slope, and hid under a low, thick, young hemlock clump.

The voices grew nearer. They could now hear the crack of dead twigs and the swish of bushes as somebody trod through them. A moment or two later, across the ravine, they saw the three men of last night, laughing and chattering in their strange tongue, going up the mountain evidently toward the point on the brook where they had stopped the Sunday before. Each man had four large baskets, suspended across his shoulders on a pole, two on each side.

"We're going to get the goods on 'em all right!" whispered Peanut.

"Gee, come on! they'll be out o' sight!" said Jimmy, half springing up.

Art pulled him down. "You'll get caught if you're not careful," he cautioned.

The Scouts lay still for several minutes longer, till the men were out of sight and almost out of hearing. Then, as they were rising to follow, Art detected, across the ravine, the forms of Old Hundred and Mr. Rogers, silently following on the trail of the pickers.

He whistled the chickadee call once, very softly, and waved his hand. The others saw him and waved back, signaling for him to keep on that side of the brook. So he and Peanut and Jimmy followed up-stream on that side, going ever more cautiously now, for they soon began to hear the voices plainly again.

Finally they realized that the pickers were within twenty-five or thirty yards, and they dropped on their hands and knees, and crept up behind the cover of a big rock and some low laurel bushes, and peeped down into the ravine of the brook. At this point both banks of the brook, and the steep sides of the ravine, were a mass of lovely ferns, which the three men were systematically and ruthlessly breaking off or pulling up, whichever was easier. They then laid the ferns, carefully, flat on the bottoms of their baskets, pressing them gently down. In this way, the boys realized, they could gather many hundreds of ferns.

Art beckoned the other two back from their vantage point, to a place where he could whisper in safety.

"There's no use of all three of us watching," he said, "and more risk. We'll take turns one at a time. I'll take first watch. The others can wait down here, out of sight. We've caught 'em at their dirty work now, and all we've got to do is to trail 'em."

"Gee, I wish there was some way to save the ferns," said Peanut. "They'll have all the brook stripped before the day's over."

"I wish so, too," sighed Art. "But I guess there isn't."

He went back to the lookout, and Peanut and Jimmy lay down in the woods below, and waited. It was not very exciting, and the hour seemed ages before Art called Peanut to the watch.

Peanut found the pickers had moved some little way down-stream now, stripping the banks as they went. He looked for some sign of Mr. Rogers and Old Hundred across the ravine, but couldn't see hide nor hair of them, though he felt sure they were there. He noticed the pickers were getting their baskets full, and wondered what they would do then. He didn't have long to wonder. They stopped picking presently, and took out some sacks from the bushes, into which they very carefully transferred the ferns from their baskets. Then they began picking again!

“Gosh,” sighed Peanut, “what a slaughter! If there was only some way to stop them!”

His hour was almost up. The sun was now high in the heavens, the woods bright. It was after seven o'clock. But they still had a whole day to pick in. They could strip the entire brook bed.

Peanut went back angrily to send Jimmy up to watch.

Jimmy had been gone nearly an hour, and Peanut and Art were half dozing in the shadow, stretched out on the pine needles, when suddenly they heard, not far below them, evidently in the ravine of the brook, a loud, cheerful whistle. It wasn't the whistle of the pickers. It was a familiar whistle, a tune Mr. Rogers liked.

“It's Mr. Rogers!” both boys exclaimed. “What's he doing that for?”

Springing to their feet, they stalked the sound. Jimmy was still shadowing the pickers. They could barely see the soles of his boots, sticking out under a laurel bush. They went on down, till the whistling was opposite them, and peeped into the ravine. There were Mr. Rogers and Old Hundred, talking, whistling, singing, and taking a bath in a pool of the brook!

“Wow! it's cold! brrr!” Old Hundred was yelling at the top of his lungs.

“What on earth are they doing?” Peanut whispered. “Let's go down and ask 'em.”

Art restrained him. "Wait a minute," he said. "They've got some reason for it, you may be sure. We don't want to risk being seen by the pickers."

He gave the chickadee call once, and when the two bathers looked in his direction, he waved a hand out of the bushes and whispered, loud enough to be heard, "What are you doing?"

Mr. Rogers climbed out of the brook on their side, whistling carelessly, and when he was near them suddenly said, in a low tone, "Get on your job! We're out for a morning walk. We're going to have lunch here, too. Then they can't pick any more ferns in this brook. 'It's a long way to Tipperary,' " he began to sing again, and splashed back into the pool.

"Say! he's done what I wished we could do!" exclaimed Peanut, in admiration. "He's saving the ferns!"

The two Scouts crept back to Jimmy, and peeped over at the pickers. There they were, all three of them, fishing! They had strings tied to green poles, evidently just cut. There was no sign of a basket or a sack!

Jimmy crept back out of ear-shot with Peanut, and whispered excitedly, "Soon's they heard Mr. Rogers and Old Hundred singing and splashing, they just hid those baskets under some bushes, and cut their poles, and went to fishin'. One of 'em had bait in a

can in his coat pocket. Gee, I know where the baskets are, though! One of 'em sneaked down to see who was making the noise, and came back and said something in that language they talk."

"If Mr. Rogers and Old Hundred stay there, the thieves'll go off somewhere else and pick, probably," Peanut reflected. "We've got to shadow 'em close, now."

It was evident, after an hour or two, that Mr. Rogers and Old Hundred didn't intend to go away. Sounds of their whistling continued. The three pickers grew restless, but kept up their bluff of fishing. Finally, after a muttered conference, they went to the bushes where their sacks were hidden, each took one basket, and they moved away from the brook straight up the mountain.

"Quick, Jimmy!" said Peanut. "Go tell Mr. Rogers and Old Hundred. Art and I'll follow 'em. We'll cross the brook behind 'em right here, and break twigs for a trail as we go, about face high."

Jimmy went down, and the other two stalked behind the pickers, keeping them always just in sight or ear-shot. The thieves went up the steep side of the mountain a little way, and after searching around for boulders with nice ferns on them, began to pick. Art and Peanut concealed themselves in bushes not far off, and watched.

Fifteen minutes later, they heard down the slope

the cheery whistle of the Scout Master and Old Hundred's voice. The two were continuing their morning walk! The thieves, with angry mutterings in their strange language, hastily hid their baskets, got out pipes, and sitting down under the trees pretended to be idly smoking. Peanut and Art almost laughed out loud.

Old Hundred and the Scout Master went by some way to the left, so the men could not see their faces at all, but only vaguely catch a hint of their bodies, and hear their gay talk and whistling. They went on up the mountain a little way, but not out of ear-shot, and then they evidently stopped, and began to chop a tree, for the blows of the axe could be plainly heard.

The three thieves, very much disgusted, got up, looked craftily around, got their baskets out of hiding, and moved on along the mountain.

Jimmy, who had by now caught up with Art and Peanut, once more went up to inform the Scout Master, and Peanut and Art stalked the thieves, again making a trail for the others to follow.

In this way they broke up another picking, and the disgusted thieves finally returned to their original point at the brook, and after making sure (to their own satisfaction) that at last nobody was around, they got their lunch out from their hidden baskets, and ate, while Peanut, Art and Jimmy, who had had

no lunch, looked hungrily on, for it was now after one o'clock.

About half-past two, just as they had started to pick again, fresh voices were heard. This time real walkers were passing—some people from the village out for a stroll over the old wood road which came up near the brook bed. The thieves had to hide their baskets once more.

“Say,” Peanut chuckled, “they certainly are having a bad day of it!”

It was almost an hour later that they started in once more, but only two of them this time. The third one put on his coat and started down the mountain.

“After him, Jimmy, and see where he goes,” said Art. “He’s probably going to get a team. Take a wheel if he goes out by the regular path.”

The other two pickers worked down the brook a way, uninterrupted, for Mr. Rogers and Old Hundred had evidently decided not to risk any more disturbances.

Presently the two Scouts heard a chickadee call twice, not far off, and going to it found the Scout Master.

“I’ve sent Old Hundred on a bike to the village for Hardy, the policeman,” he said. “I saw you sent Jimmy to trail the third man. They’re going to take their swag out in a team, no doubt, as they did before. We’ll have the policeman hidden at the foot

of the path, and follow the team to find out where they sell the ferns, and then pinch 'em. Now, boys, back on the job. Take turns watching, and get a cold bite to eat if you can."

"I got a pocket full of raisins, I'm all right," said Art.

"Me, too," said Peanut.

The two pickers, before six o'clock, returned to their sacks, and loaded down with them, and the full baskets beside, started the descent of the mountain. The boys, weary with the long vigil of watching in silence, and Mr. Rogers, who joined them, started in pursuit. They went directly down the slope, without using the path, till they got nearly to the pasture, and then skirted along the woods toward the end of the path. Here they deposited their loads, and sat down to wait.

Peanut stalked around them to the foot of the trees which hid the hut, and whistled once, softly. Skinny and Cop descended.

"We saw Jimmy stalking a man out," they said. "He's not come back. Old Hundred has, though. He and the cop are hidden just back up the path, behind the second big rock. They left word to tell you, if we saw you."

"Good," said Peanut. "We're ready now!"

They didn't have long to wait. It was just growing dusk as a one horse team, with the third man

seated in the old covered delivery wagon, turned in from the road across the pasture, and stopped near the entrance to the woods. The man gave a low, peculiar whistle, which was answered by the other two. They emerged from the woods, and began to unpack the ferns carefully, and lay them into two large wooden crates which they took out of the wagon. When the crates were full, they nailed on the covers and hoisted them back into the wagon.

Meanwhile, just up the path in the heavy shadow of the woods, the policeman waited, and in the shadows, too, along the pasture, were the Scouts, even Jimmy, who had returned behind the man in the team, left his wheel by the road, and sneaked across the pasture far enough north to escape detection.

“He got the team in Bentford,” Jimmy whispered. “I got the stable spotted.”

Not a sound betrayed the watchers. The three men worked in perfect unconsciousness, and no doubt were telling each other in their strange language how lucky they were!

Then they all climbed into the wagon, and drove off toward the road.

When they were well away from the woods, Peanut started after them, walking rapidly, to make sure which way they turned. As it was a covered wagon, they could not see him. The rest waited, for greater

caution, till the wagon had reached the highway. Then they dashed after.

“They turned south,” Peanut said, as the rest came up. “Quick, wheels!”

CHAPTER XVII

THE ROUND UP

THE policeman, Peanut, Jimmy and Old Hundred snatched their wheels out of the bushes, and saying good-bye to Mr. Rogers, Art, Cop and Skinny, started off in pursuit.

“Wish we were going!” sighed Cop.

“I *am* going,” cried Skinny. “Here’s Albert’s wheel!”

“Aw, no, let *me* have it. You can’t reach the pedals!” cried Cop.

“No, *I’m* goin’ to have it!”

“No, *I am*. I’m bigger, ain’t I, Mr. Rogers?”

“When it comes to that, I’m bigger than either of you,” said Art.

The two had grabbed the wheel, and were struggling to get on it.

“You’re neither of you going to have it,” the Scout Master said. “There are enough following now. Remember, Albert and Pete are still on top of the mountain. We’ve got to go up and get them. Come on, it’s almost dark now. It wouldn’t be fair to leave ’em there all night.”

So they started back toward the mountain and in

the woods began to shout for Albert and Pete to come down, finally making themselves heard when they had reached a point half-way up. The six returned to Southmead, and gathered at Mr. Rogers' house to await the news.

Meanwhile the policeman, Peanut, Old Hundred and Jimmy were riding down the road behind the wagon, which they very soon caught. The horse was old, the load heavy, and though the drivers whipped the poor beast unmercifully, the riders had an easy time keeping up. "In fact," said Jimmy, "it would be easier to ride faster."

But they kept several hundred feet in the rear, and the boys told Hardy all about the day's adventures, and exactly what they had seen.

"Well, we've got witnesses enough to make a case that'll put 'em in the jug for fair!" Hardy said. "Some detectives, you kids are! All we need now is to know where they ship the stuff."

The road soon began to descend a long hill, really the southern shoulder of Bald Face, and came to a fork, one branch leading to Bentford, the other further south to the small station of Twin Falls, down the railroad about five miles. The team kept on this road.

"Gee! five miles more!" sighed Old Hundred. "And us with no supper!"

It was dark now, and they rode in closer to the

team, and stopped talking. After three-quarters of an hour, the team drove up to the small station by the railroad track, the men backed it to the platform, and unloaded the crates.

Nobody was about but the station agent, who was waiting for the evening train.

"Hello, boys," he said to the three men. "Same place?"

The men grunted yes. The Scouts, who had dismounted and were waiting in the dark close by, could hear plainly.

"Well, wait a minute, and I'll write the labels for you. But where do you boys get this stuff, anyhow? Dig it up in the woods?"

The three shook their heads.

"You don't? Well, where do you get it? Say, I don't wholly like the looks of this, though I s'pose it's none of my business."

Suddenly there was a flash of nickel in the light of the platform lamp. Hardy, the policeman, stood beside the four men, his revolver in his hand. Behind him were the three Scouts.

"Neither do I like the looks of it!" he said. "That's why these three are under arrest."

The three thieves jumped at the sight of him, and one of them, with a yell, made a dash for liberty. The station agent whipped a gun out of his hip pocket like a flash, but he didn't need it. Peanut

and Old Hundred had thrown themselves at the man's knees with a football tackle, and brought him crashing down. Before he could even struggle around to hit at them, the station agent stood over him, with the revolver barrel gleaming, while Hardy covered the other two.

The policeman quickly clapped handcuffs on all three. Then he demanded if there were motors to be had. The station agent telephoned to the village for two cars, which quickly came. The boys, with their wheels, were put into one, the prisoners, with Hardy, got into the other. In half an hour they pulled up in front of the Southmead lockup, and five minutes later Mr. Rogers, Art, Pete, Albert, Skinny and Cop had arrived on the scene. Hardy took down the names and addresses of the men, who could barely speak English. As Art had predicted from the first, they were mill hands from Bentford.

Before the questioning was over, a crowd of people had gathered outside the lockup, and when the policeman and the boys came out, a chorus of voices demanded to know all about it.

"Don't ask me, ask those Scouts. They really did the job," said Hardy. "I take off my hat to 'em."

"Well, ask me to-morrow, then," said Peanut. "I'm going home to get some supper—and then ——"

"Then what?" somebody asked.

“Then I got to write it up for the paper,” Peanut answered.

He tried to speak calmly, but he couldn't. All day he had been thinking what a story it would make—thinking, and not saying a word, even to Mr. Rogers. Now the time had come, the thieves had been caught and arrested, the story was ripe. It was his chance—a real, front page story!

He leaped on his wheel, and dashed for home.

CHAPTER XVIII

PEANUT WRITES HIS FIRST STORY

AS soon as he reached his house, Peanut cried out for supper—"With coffee, Ma, and make it strong! I got to keep awake!" While he ate, he told his family the adventures of the day, and as soon as he had finished the meal, he retired to his room, with a pen and plenty of paper, and sat down to write his story for the *Herald*.

First he stacked up the paper in front of him. Then he opened his ink-well and took a good look at the pen to see if it was all right. Then he wrote his name at the top of the first sheet. Then—he scratched his head. How was he going to begin? He got up and went down-stairs, hunting out a copy of a New York paper. He looked through that till he found a story about some men who had been arrested for burglary. It began, "Yesterday afternoon, two men, giving their names as ——"

Here Peanut threw down the paper in disgust. He had forgotten all about the names of *his* three thieves! Hardy, the officer, had taken them down, but Peanut, in his excitement, had forgotten all about recording them in his note-book!

"Gee, I'm a swell reporter, *I* am," he muttered, angrily, jumping up again, and rushing for his wheel.

He rode back to the village, which was quiet now. The drug stores were just closing. But he found Hardy, who was really a night policeman, for in the quiet little town of Southmead no officer was kept on patrol in the daytime. Hardy took him over to the station house, and let him copy the names down from the official report.

"I shall take 'em over to the court in Hampton Tuesday, by the way," said he. "You boys will all have to go along as witnesses. Nine o'clock car. Get your Scouts there, won't you?"

Peanut hurried back to his house, and began again.

"Yesterday evening" (he began it "yesterday" because the report would not be printed till Monday) "three men giving their names as ———, ———, ———," [we cannot repeat the names in this book, because it wouldn't be fair to the men, who have since become honest citizens] "and their residence as Bentford, where they are employed in the mills, were arrested by Policeman Hardy of Southmead, at the little railroad station of Twin Falls, for stealing ferns from the woods on Bald Face Mountain, owned by Mr. Thomas Parsons. They will be taken to the court at Hampton on Tuesday morning."

Peanut read this over. It seemed pretty tame,

but it was the way the New York papers began, anyhow.

Then he stared at his paper. What should he write next? Something about the Scouts, of course! "This'll help the whole Scout movement," he said to himself. "It'll show folks what we are good for!"

"The arrests were made as a result of the work of the Wildcat Patrol of the Boy Scouts of Southmead," he continued his story, "under the direction of Mr. L. H. Rogers, Scout Master. Mr. Parsons, the owner of the woods, discovered a week ago that somebody had been stealing ferns in his woods, pulling a lot of them up by the roots. He told the Scouts about it, and they went out and camped on the mountain last Monday, but didn't catch anybody.

"Then they decided that the picking was probably done on a Sunday, so last Saturday night a party of eight, including Mr. Rogers, the Scout Master, and two assistant Scout Masters, went again and camped on the mountain. In the evening they stalked up to a hut where they suspected the pickers were spending the night, and saw them there. Then before sunrise Sunday, they divided into parties to patrol the whole east side of the mountain so nobody could escape, and shadowed the pickers all day."

Here Peanut paused, and went back over what he had written.

"I'd like to put in Art's name," he said to him-

self, "but if I did that, I'd have to put in mine. Don't like that. Looks as if I was blowing my own horn."

He finally decided that he'd rather leave Art's name out than look as if he were trying to get his own name into print, and went on with his story.

It was midnight when he had it finished. Everybody had gone to bed. He couldn't show it to Mr. Rogers, of course. But he wasn't sorry for that. He wanted to write this story all himself, to see if he could do it well enough to get it printed. Putting the sheets into a big envelope, he addressed it and once more rode down to the village, to drop it in the post-office box so it would catch the early morning train. The village was quite dark now. Not a soul was about. Peanut rode home, and crept to bed as quietly as he could so as not to wake any of his family. He was so sleepy that he almost dropped asleep taking off his shoes. But he managed to get in between the sheets before his eyes quite closed.

The next morning his mother did not wake him for breakfast, and when he opened his eyes and looked at his clock, he was astounded to see that it was after nine!

"Gee whiz!" said he, landing on the rug four feet from his bed.

Down-stairs he found a message waiting from Mr.

Rogers, to come over to the studio at ten o'clock. When he got there, Mr. Parsons and the boys who had been on the expedition the day before were already on hand.

The man shook hands with them all around.

"I did you boys a grave injustice a week ago," he said. "I thought at first you were the ones that rooted up my ferns. You know, we grown-up fellows who've forgotten that we were once boys, too, usually do blame the youngsters when there is mischief done. But I guess Boy Scouts learn to keep out of mischief, and I owe you all an apology, and the heartiest thanks and congratulations for the fine work you did yesterday."

"Thank you, sir," said Peanut, speaking for the rest. "Scouts always try to be helpful."

"Well, you've been helpful not only to me, but to everybody that owns woods or loves woods," said the man. "Catching these men has not only saved my ferns, but it has saved a lot of ferns in other woods around here, for when the story is printed it will warn other owners to look out for fern thieves. Now, boys, I want to make some kind of a present to you, to show my gratitude."

"Oh, no!" said Peanut. "We don't take any presents for doing a good turn. That's the Scout law."

"I don't mean money," Mr. Parsons replied. "I

wouldn't dream of offering to pay you for what you've done, any more than I'd dream of asking you to pay me for the use of my woods for your huts. We are just helping each other. But I want to give you something as a souvenir of this occasion, so you'll all remember it longer. Couldn't I give you a flag for your club-house, or something like that?"

"A patrol banner!" whispered Jimmy.

"Well, sir," said Peanut, "a patrol banner would be very nice. We need one. A pennant of white, with the head of a wildcat on it, and the words, 'Southmead Troop, Boy Scouts of America.' I guess we could accept that, couldn't we, Mr. Rogers?"

"I guess you could," the Scout Master answered. "I think it would be fine."

"You shall have it!" said Mr. Parsons.

"And now, fellows," said Peanut, turning to the Scouts, "what do you say if we make Mr. Parsons an honorary member of our patrol? He's let us use his woods. Guess he's done more for us than most people would. Think of the fun we've had in those woods!"

"You bet!"

"I move Mr. Parsons be an honorary member."

"Second the motion."

"Three cheers for Mr. Parsons!"

"Those in favor?" said Peanut.

There was a chorus of "Ayes!"

"It's a vote!" said Peanut.

"Don't I have to ride a goat?" Mr. Parsons asked.

"I guess not," Peanut laughed. "You're an honorary."

"Make him do setting up exercises," said Cop, whereat everybody laughed.

The Hampton *Herald* reached Southmead at three-thirty in the afternoon. Peanut was so excited that he could hardly eat any luncheon and long before train time he was at the drug store, where the papers were sold, waiting. He snatched a copy as soon as the clerk undid the bundle, and retired into a corner of the store to look at it. He didn't, somehow, want anybody near him when he read his first big story in print. He felt hot and then cold all over.

There was his story, on the front page! It had a big head-line over it, too.

Boy Scouts Catch Thieves

**Three Fern Pickers Arrested in South-
mead Through Efforts of Local
Troop.**

Were Stealing on Estate of Thomas Parsons.

Peanut went hot when he saw this heading. He felt pin pricks of pride up and down his spine.

Then he began to read what he had written, underneath the head-lines—and went cold instead. It *wasn't* what he had written. Instead of beginning as he had begun, with the names of the thieves, the story in the paper began quite differently.

“Why employ the Pinkertons, or call in William J. Burns?” it began. “Down in Southmead they have a troop of Boy Scouts who combine the acuteness of Sherlock Holmes with the woodcraft of the Mohawk Indians, and last Saturday they went out on the war-path on Bald Face Mountain, and by last evening had succeeded in rounding up three fern pickers who have been devastating the woods there, and will appear against them in the local court tomorrow.”

Peanut felt uncomfortable. It wasn't alone because his story had been changed; but also because this opening sentence seemed to him a little too flattering, almost as if the writer was poking a bit of fun at the Scouts.

“Anyhow, it's rubbing it in!” he muttered.

Then he read on. The rest of the story was much more as he had written it, only there was a lot put in about Mr. Parsons, and a lot more about Mr. Rogers, with a list of some of his pictures. The whole story took up a column. Peanut folded the paper and went to the Scout Master's house.

Mr. Rogers read it carefully, and listened to Peanut's account of how he had first written it.

"Well," said he, "it's really easy to understand why they changed your introduction. It all comes down to the question of what *news* is. News is what interests the readers of a paper. The things that interest them most are the newsiest, and get on the front page. Now, it isn't very unusual for thieves to get arrested, but it *is* unusual for a troop of Boy Scouts to make the capture. The public would hardly glance at a mere story of a policeman arresting some fern pickers. But if they saw that a lot of boys played Sherlock Holmes and did the trick, they'd sit up and take notice. That's why the editor changed your story."

"I can see that now," Peanut replied. "Still, sounds kind of as if he was guying us a bit—all that Sherlock Holmes stuff."

Mr. Rogers smiled. "Your troop are pretty young boys, you know," said he, "and the editor is a grown man. Grown-ups have a way of patronizing boys a bit. On the whole, I think they altered your story remarkably little, for a first story. You ought to feel flattered."

"Well, if you say so, I'm all puffed up!" Peanut laughed, and ran home to show the paper to his mother.

CHAPTER XIX

THE SCOUTS TAKE A TRIP TO COURT AND LEARN HOW HARD IT IS TO BE A JUDGE

THE next day all the Scouts who had taken part in the expedition, with Mr. Rogers, were taken to Hampton with Mr. Parsons, in his two automobiles. It was a new adventure to appear in court. In fact, none of them had ever been in a court before. The case was heard at eleven o'clock. They filed into the court room very solemnly. The three prisoners sat at one side, facing the judge behind his bench. Hardy and a court officer stood beside them. There were two or three reporters in the room, and a young lawyer from Bentford, who had come up to defend the thieves, and their priest from Bentford, and the wife and two little children of one of the men. The wife was weeping. The two little children clung to her skirts, and looked like scared, timid little birds.

Hardy was the first witness. He told of making the arrest. Then Mr. Rogers was sworn in, and he told what had happened, and identified the prisoners as the three men they had watched pick ferns. The

prosecuting attorney then called Peanut, who, with his knees trembling, took the witness chair, told his name and age, swore to tell the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth, and then, like Mr. Rogers, was asked to tell what had happened, and to identify the prisoners.

Art was sworn in next, and went through the same proceeding.

The judge then spoke. "You needn't call any more witnesses," he said to the county's attorney; "that is sufficient."

"Oh, dear, I wanted to testify!" whispered Jimmy.

"Me, too," said Cop.

The lawyer for the defense then had his turn. He called the priest, who testified to the ignorance of these foreigners regarding American laws, and told of their needy families dependent on them.

"Ignorance of the law is not an excuse for violating it," said the judge, severely, "and the fact that these men hid their baskets when they heard the witnesses coming shows that they knew they were doing wrong."

But that did not solve the problem of the wives and children, and though the men had entered a plea of guilty, their lawyer pleaded for clemency on the grounds of the suffering which would follow if the men had to go to jail for long terms. As he talked, the wife in court could not restrain her weeping, and

the two little ragged children clung to her, and began to cry, also.

This was too much for Jimmy. He, also, began to get misty around the eyes, and presently two large tears ran out and down his cheeks. He swallowed them, with a gulp.

"Gosh, I hope the judge lets 'em go this time!" he whispered.

"Almost hope so myself," said Peanut. "It's pretty tough on their families."

Mr. Parsons, who was sitting with the boys, overheard these remarks, and spoke to the judge himself.

"The chief depredations were committed on my land," he said, "and these boys were instrumental in making the capture. They appear to be greatly touched by the misery a long sentence would bring to the families of the accused. If your honor should see fit, with due regard to a just administration of the law, to extend some clemency on this occasion, I should be satisfied and I think the effect on these young citizens-to-be might be good."

"Some speech!" whispered Art to Peanut.

The judge looked sharply at the Scouts.

"Boys," said he, "these three men have broken the laws of the Commonwealth. They have committed a grave offense. I can send them to jail. If I do that, their families will suffer, and they will be branded with the jail mark thereafter. If I don't

do it, it may encourage other men to steal. I want you to realize the predicament a judge is sometimes in."

He spoke very gravely, and the Scouts were sober. Then he reflected silently for some moments, and finally sentenced the three men to pay a fine of fifty dollars each, which was a great deal of money for them, and freed them in the parole of their priest.

This was the last case for the morning session, and the judge called the Scouts into his chamber, where he shook hands with them all.

"I'm—I'm glad you let 'em go!" said little Jimmy. "I—I 'most cried when I saw the two kids."

"You *did* cry, Jimmy!" said Cop.

"A judge often wants to cry," the judge said, "but up on his bench he can't. I hope you boys will take away this lesson—that when you do a wrong thing, it isn't you alone who suffer, but innocent people besides. When those men stole, they ran the risk of making their innocent children the children of jail birds, and taking the bread out of their mouths, instead of putting it in. Will you remember that, boys?"

"Yes, sir," they answered.

The judge patted Jimmy on the head as the Scouts filed out.

"You wouldn't make a very good judge," said he.

"You're too tender-hearted. But I like tender-hearted boys. Don't you ever be ashamed of crying when you see misery or unhappiness."

He patted his head once more, and once more Jimmy's eyes were wet, as he left the chamber.

"Well," said Mr. Parsons, as they drove home, "let's hope those men got their lesson, and will behave now."

"Oh, gosh!" cried Cop, "we never got back what they swiped from the hut!"

"I guess we don't want those two old blankets back, after they've used 'em," laughed Peanut.

"The judge ought to have fined 'em a bath," said Art. "That would have been an awful punishment for them."

"Let's go swimming this after'!" exclaimed Jimmy, and everybody laughed.

CHAPTER XX

PEANUT BECOMES A VOLUNTEER

PEANUT got five dollars for his story of the capture of the fern pickers, and at the same time he was made regular Southmead correspondent of the *Hampton Herald*, for Joe Perkins left town that week to go to his new job. It was now Peanut's task every day to gather local items and send them up on the evening train, for use the next day. If anything of interest happened the next morning, or if there was something in the evening which had to be "covered," he telephoned the news before noon, and a reporter in the *Herald* office wrote it out and put it in the paper. The more items Peanut got printed, the more money he made, for he was paid "on space," as they say in newspaper offices—that is, he got so much a column.

Southmead was a small town, and it wasn't once a year that a good story like the fern robbery "broke loose" (again to use a newspaper phrase). Most of the items Peanut gathered were records of who was visiting in town, or who was sick, or what meetings were going to be held. They were just paragraphs,

and if he could get enough to fill a quarter of a column a day he was lucky. As he was paid \$5 a column and there were six issues of the paper a week, it is easy to see that his wages were somewhere between \$5 and \$7.50 each Saturday night, when the check came. That made just about the same a month as the Scout Council was paying him.

But Peanut, living at home with his parents, found \$50 a month a good deal of money. He paid some board, so he would not be a drag upon his family, he bought his own clothes, and he began to put a dollar each week into the savings bank. He already had his two dollars in the bank, deposited when he became a first class Scout, and starting with this as a beginning, he began to see the fund mounting—slowly, to be sure, but still growing—money that was his, that he had earned, and that some day he could use to help him get his start as a real newspaper man.

Between gathering and writing his items for the *Herald*, coaching the Brave Babies' baseball team, and holding at least one Scout meeting and taking one hike a week, he was kept pretty busy. The Wildcats were not yet second class Scouts, in spite of all their adventures, so the first thing he did next was to get Mr. Rogers and one or two members of the Scout Council to the Scout House, and hold the second class tests.

These tests weren't really much more than a formality, for all the Wildcats had done the tracking and Scout pace already, and Mr. Rogers could testify to their ability to use knives and hatchets. They all built their fires, however, for the Council to see, and cooked the meat and potatoes without ordinary kitchen utensils, and demonstrated elementary first aid, and signaling.

In another week they all received their second class badges.

But in another week, too, school was about to open again, for September had come, and Peanut's hopes of making the patrol first class Scouts before vacation was over were dashed.

More than that, Art was going away to the forestry school, Lou was going to the Agricultural College, Rob to medical school, and Frank to study business. Peanut was bereft of his best friends, and his helpers in the Scout work. He would miss Art especially, for Art was not only his most intimate chum, but the real woodsman of the Scout troop.

The Wildcats were all second class Scouts now, and most of them were nearly ready to take their first class tests. A little more work in advanced first aid, which Dr. Henderson could teach, some practice in judging weight, height, size, etc., and they could take the tests. Peanut decided to work for that end. Now that school had begun, and Art wasn't here to

help him, he was rather at a loss how to keep the boys interested. It was easy with Jimmy, but some of the others began to show signs of flagging attendance at the Scout meetings.

This time the tests were made one by one. On the first Saturday after school began they all went to the swimming hole, and swam fifty yards. On the second Saturday they hiked out on a wide field and all but Cop and Pete were able to signal sixteen words a minute. The other Scouts laughed at the two who failed so much that the following week Cop and Pete, who had practiced in the meantime, also passed.

A week or two later, divided into teams of two, the patrol made trips of seven miles from the village, and return, writing out a description and drawing a rough road map.

Meantime Dr. Henderson was giving instruction one evening a week in advanced first aid, and every time the patrol was out in the woods, Peanut made everybody practice in judging the height of trees, the width of pastures, and so on. The way the trees was measured was as follows. A small mirror would be placed on the ground, at a point where a Scout could stand perfectly erect, and, looking down into the mirror, could just see the tip-top of the tree. Then, with a tape, the others would measure the distances from the trunk of the tree to the mirror, from

the mirror to the Scout's feet, and from the ground to his eyes. This gave the following ratio, if, say, the mirror was eighty feet from the trunk, four feet from the Scout's feet, and his eyes were five feet from the ground:—

$$5 : 4 :: x : 80$$

That is, the tree would be a hundred feet high.

Once, by the bank of a small river, the boys tried an interesting experiment. First they guessed at the width, and then at the height of a tree on the bank, and after estimating the width at thirty feet and the tree at thirty-five, cut it down to see if it would span across for a bridge. It fell at least eight feet short!

Peanut laughed. "There's nothing fools you so much as the width of a stream of water," he said. "That's because you see so much length to the river that it don't—doesn't—look wide, I suppose. But there's a way to measure rivers. It tells in the Scout Manual. Let's try it."

They tried both the methods of triangulation described in the Manual, and Peanut also tried to tell them why these methods gave the result—but he found that a good deal harder than he wished it were.

"Gee, I guess I didn't study geometry as carefully as I ought to have!" he thought to himself.

Thus the tests went on, till all the Wildcats had passed every test except that of bringing in a recruit

drilled as a tenderfoot. In spite of everything that Peanut could do, in spite of all his urging, half the patrol either couldn't or wouldn't enlist a smaller boy and drill him as a tenderfoot.

"Aw, they don't wanter come into the Scouts now!" said Cop. "I tried three or four. They'll come next summer, all right, when we're goin' campin', or something. But they think there's nothin' doin' in the winter."

"You mean you're too lazy to get out and rustle 'em in!" Peanut exclaimed, angrily.

"No, I ain't too lazy, either!" said Cop. "Pete's tried, an' he'll tell you the same thing."

"Well, *I* got a recruit," cried Jimmy. "And I want to be a first class Scout. I think it's mean we can't get eight recruits, right now, so's we could get our badges."

"So do I, Jimmy," Peanut answered. "But we don't want to enroll half a patrol, or have half the Wildcats first class, and half second. I guess we'll have to start something to show 'em that there *is* something doing in the winter."

"Wish you would," said Cop. "Gee, I'm tired of estimating distances and things like that. It's too much like arithmetic for me."

"You get tired easy, Cop," the young Scout Master exclaimed, in disgust.

The next day Peanut made a mysterious trip to

Hampton, to the *Herald* office, and a day later he called on Mr. Rogers.

"I'm not going to take any more money for being assistant Scout Master," he announced abruptly.

Mr. Rogers looked surprised. "Why not?" he asked. "Have you found a gold mine, or has your rich uncle in Brazil died and left you a coffee plantation?"

Peanut laughed. "Gee, I wish I *had* an uncle in Brazil," he said. "I'd like to take a trip up the Amazon!"

Then he grew sober again. "No, sir," he went on, "I'm not going to take any more money. I'm a frost as a Scout Master, and it ain't—*isn't*—fair."

"What do you mean, you're a frost?" Mr. Rogers asked. "The Council are very much pleased with your work."

"Well, it went all right in summer," the boy replied, "but I'm stuck now for fair. I've got all the patrol through their first class tests, all 'cept bringing in a tenderfoot drilled by themselves. Some of 'em—Jimmy Gerson, and Skinny and Old Hundred—have got boys ready, but the rest haven't. They say they can't get the kids to come in, at this time of year. Guess it's really because they aren't interested enough to go after 'em, though; and if they're not interested, that's my fault. I haven't made Scouting attractive enough—or something."

"The hardest part of Scout work, Peanut, is always to get the boys to pass this particular first class test," said Mr. Rogers. "I always found it so, myself. Boys, at a certain age, don't seem to feel much interested in younger boys. They don't try to help the younger ones. They have to grow up to your age before they begin to feel this big brother interest. You cheer up. Try to invent some good, exciting sports for winter, and I guess things will come out all right. The Council is satisfied."

"Well, *I'm* not satisfied," Peanut declared, "and I'm not going to take any more money. I never did want to take it, anyhow. It never seemed right."

"But paid Scout Masters are quite within the Scout rules," Mr. Rogers urged. "Besides, how will you pay your board at home, and buy your winter clothes?"

"Ha!" Peanut cried proudly. "I've fixed that! I went to the *Herald* office yesterday and got the West Bentford correspondent job! The man over there has left. I'll go over there every morning on the trolley, and get items, and that'll double my pay from the *Herald*. So I won't need the Scout money. Gee! I'll feel better to be a volunteer leader, like you!"

"You really will feel better? You want to do the work for nothing?"

"You bet I do!" Peanut replied.

"Well," said the Scout Master, "then you shall, and you've earned the gratitude and respect of the Council."

"And, believe me, there's going to be something doing this winter!" Peanut cried, as he went out.

Mr. Rogers walked over to the house of one of the Council, and told him about it.

"The boy wants to earn his living as other people do, by regular work, and be a volunteer Scout Master. He wants to feel he's *giving* himself to the Scout work, to the younger boys. That's what he understands by 'A Scout is loyal.' Of course, we must let him. He's winning something more precious than money—self-respect and a sense of honor and free service."

"Well," said the Council member, "that boy's what I call a real gentleman."

"I guess you're right," Mr. Rogers replied.

CHAPTER XXI

THE WILDCATS MAKE SKIS

PEANUT had an idea. Before he sprang it, he wanted to find out if it was practical. The idea was to equip the whole Wildcat Patrol with skis, of their own manufacture, build a ski jump, and hold jumping contests. Skis were practically unknown in Southmead. A good many people, including Art and Peanut himself, had snow-shoes. Snow-shoes had been worn by the Indians, before a white man ever came to Southmead. But all you can do on snow-shoes is to walk. They are merely utilitarian. (That is the word Peanut used to himself as he was planning out his scheme. He had been reading more, and studying English harder since he left school than he ever did in it!) But, on skis, you can coast and jump as well as walk on the level. Peanut had seen a motion picture of ski jumping in Norway, and it had given him his idea.

The first thing to do was to get a pair of skis, to see how they are made. And the young Scout Master decided the best way to do that was to buy a pair. He wrote at once to a sporting goods house

to find out the price. They sent him back a catalogue, and inquired how long he wanted his pair to be.

Alas! Peanut had no idea how long they ought to be, so he had to consult Mr. Rogers, after all.

But Mr. Rogers had never done any skiing, either, and didn't know.

"There must be some book that tells," he said. "I'll send off and see, and then we'll know where we're at."

In two or three days, a book came from New York—"How to Ski," it was called. It was written by an Englishman who had evidently skied in the Alps, and it was full of pictures of men on skis going over what looked like precipices, and taking jumps which seemed hundreds of feet long. (As a matter of fact, they were over a hundred. The world's record is 192 feet.)

"Golly!" said Peanut, as he looked, gasping. "And see all these diagrams of things you do on skis—the Telemark stem, the Christiania turn—whew! I didn't know there was so much to skiing. Why on snow-shoes, you just step out and walk."

They learned from the book that a ski should be long enough so that when you stand it on end, you can just reach up and touch the other end with the tips of your fingers. With this direction, Peanut measured the height to which he could reach with

his finger tips, and ordered a pair of skis, paying for them with five dollars of the money he had saved.

"I'm going to get a good pair," he said. "Might as well, while I am about it."

"It always pays to have anything good which you've got to trust your neck to," Mr. Rogers laughed.

As soon as the skis came, Peanut took them to the instructor in manual training at the school, and the two examined them together.

"Perfectly easy to make," said the instructor. "Some good, clean ash lumber, well seasoned, that's all we need."

"But how'll we turn the front ends up?"

"Steam 'em," said the instructor. "Your Scouts are in the freshman class of the high school now, aren't they?"

"Yes."

"Well, they're not in my courses any more. Only the grammar grades have manual training. But I'll be perfectly willing to stay after school a few nights and help 'em work here, if you fellows will pay for the lumber. Of course, we can't ask the town to do that."

"Of course not," said Peanut. "How much will it cost?"

"Not enough to break anybody, I guess. Less than a dollar a pair."

Peanut now took his skis and the book to a Scout meeting. It was already fast getting too late for football. Though Thanksgiving had not yet come, the ground here in the mountains was now freezing almost nightly. The Scouts were glad of some fresh interest, and as most of them had seen pictures of ski jumping, they were enthusiastic over the idea. The lumber was ordered, and with Peanut's skis for a model, everybody set to work.

First the boards were sawed into strips the width of the skis (about $2\frac{3}{4}$ inches in the narrowest part, under the foot, increasing to $3\frac{3}{4}$ inches at the bend, and 3 inches at the heel. Of course, each pair was cut to the proper length for the boy who was to use them. Then they were planed down till they were $1\frac{1}{4}$ inches thick under the foot, and much thinner at front and back (about $\frac{3}{8}$ of an inch), and balanced to tip forward the least bit, when suspended by a string at the point where the foot strap was to be. Then slits were cut through under the ball of the foot for the straps, and a groove planed on the bottom to hold the snow (like the keel of a boat, in reverse). Finally, the front ends were steamed, and then, after they were properly bent up, the two skis were vised together, back to back, with blocks under the points so that the bend would "set," and a $1\frac{3}{4}$ inch block under the feet, to give them a spring up when used.

They were left so for two or three days, and then

taken down, sandpapered smooth, varnished well, the bottoms waxed, and a piece of carriage floor rubber put under each foot. The boys made their harnesses to hold the skis on the foot out of pieces of harness and skate straps. Rake handles, with a piece of stiff leather the size and shape of a saucer fastened six inches from the end to keep the points from going into the snow too deep, were improvised ski poles.

“And now!” cried Peanut, “all we need is a good, deep snow!”

But the good, deep snow didn't come till after Christmas. There were a few flurries, and Cop and Pete almost spoiled their skis by going out on them before the snow was deep enough and so scratching the bottoms with gravel that they had to be sandpapered down again. Two days after Christmas, however, just as the winter holiday vacation was started, a snow-storm set in one afternoon, and lasted all night, and all of the next day. There were two feet of drifted snow over the fields and mountains when the boys ploughed their way to the Scout House that evening.

“Hooray!” cried Peanut. “Be at Cole's Hill after breakfast to-morrow!”

The next morning Peanut could hardly wait long enough to eat his breakfast. He was quite as eager to try his skis as any of the boys were. For days

before he had been poring over the pages of "How to Ski," and deciding what he would try to master first. He had made up his mind to begin with snow ploughing, and not to try the other things till both he and the Wildcats could do this first brake—for snow ploughing on skis is merely one method of braking, or reducing speed, when coasting downhill.

As soon as breakfast was over, he rushed to the telephone and called up the West Bentford drug store, to see if there were any additional items for the *Herald*, hurried to the Southmead stores to pick up any news that ought to go in that day, telephoned to the *Herald*, and then, rushing back home, put on an extra pair of heavy socks under his high storm boots, fastened his skis securely on his feet, and started out for Cole's Hill, which was a long pasture slope just outside of the village, where most of the coasting and tobogganing was done.

CHAPTER XXII

THE WILDCATS TRY THEIR SKIS

THE skis felt very unwieldy and clumsy on his feet as he shuffled along. He had to cross the ploughed sidewalk and the road presently, and here was a problem. First he jammed one toe into the pile thrown up by the plough and nearly fell. Then he got one ski crossed on top of the other, and in trying to lift the under foot, did tip himself over, into three feet of snow.

He started to spring to his feet—and found himself deeper in the snow than ever.

“Hello,” said he. “First thing you’ve got to learn is how to get up, I guess!”

Then he remembered what the book had said, lay on his side, brought both feet parallel, up under him as close as he could, and rolled over upon them. Then he stood up without any trouble.

When he reached the side of the main road, he saw the marks of three or four other pairs of skis.

“Can’t hide these tracks!” he thought, hurrying on. It was getting easier now. He had caught the long, gliding motion, and no longer tried to lift his feet, as you do in walking.

When he got to Cole's Hill, he found all the patrol there ahead of him. Most of them were standing still at the top of the hill, but Old Hundred and Jimmy, their skis on their shoulders, were walking back up, knee deep in snow.

"Hi!" Peanut called, "what you taking your skis off for?"

"Well, let's see you walk up without!" Old Hundred retorted.

"Ho, that's easy," said Peanut. "Tells how to do that in the book, first thing. You have to go criss-cross—tack, like a ship."

Setting his skis not straight up the hill, but pointed only slightly up, he began to climb on the transverse. Of course, while this took him up-hill, it also took him farther and farther to one side. Presently, he came to the fence.

"Now, what you going to do?" Old Hundred shouted to him.

"Turn around," said Peanut, "if I can remember how the book said to do it. The kick-around, it's called."

Standing with his weight on the foot down slope, he let the other slide far back, and then kicked forward, endeavoring to kick the ski straight up till the rear end rested in the snow. Then he would set it around, pointed the other way, drag the other ski around after it, and proceed on his way up the hill.

The eight boys on top were watching him. The first try sent him sprawling backward into the snow!

As he climbed to his feet again, he heard the Wildcats laughing.

"Is that in the book?" Old Hundred called.

But Peanut grinned good-naturedly, and tried again. This time he didn't fall, but he didn't kick the ski high enough to let the rear end catch in the snow. On the third trial he succeeded, and was soon on his way up in the opposite direction. One more kick-around, with the other foot, brought him to the top.

"Guess that's about the first thing to practice," he said. "Skis aren't much use if you have to take 'em off every time you come to a hill."

"Aw, let's slide!" cried Jimmy. "That's the fun! Gee, me 'n' Old Hundred's the only ones who've got down yet without spilling. Cop an' Pete an' Skinny ain't been down at all. They're scared stiff!"

"I ain't either scared!" said Cop. "But my skis are too slippery."

The rest set up a shout at this.

"Well, everybody down!" cried Peanut. "You can't hurt yourself in two feet of snow, if you do spill. Remember, the book says to keep one foot a little in advance of the other and the skis close together. It's easier, the book says, to run in the Telemark position."

"Oh, you and your book!" exclaimed Old Hundred. "What's the Telemark position?"

"Don't you laugh at the book," Peanut answered. "I guess the man who wrote it knows more about skiing than any of us. The Telemark position is this. I'll show you a picture of it to-night."

He thrust one foot as far out ahead as he could, and practically kneeled on the other ski.

"You see, your weight, your center of gravity, is lower in this position," he explained, "so there's less chance of falling. And, besides, if you do wobble, you can always rise a bit and get your weight shifted to the other foot—so the book says."

"Never mind the old book—let's try it!" cried Old Hundred—and started for the edge of the hill, Jimmy after him.

The rest watched them slip out over the edge, take the Telemark position, and start flying down. Jimmy got safely to the bottom, and waved his arms triumphantly as he hit the level and came up to a standing position. But half-way down the hill Old Hundred wobbled, lurched to the left, and suddenly vanished in a cloud of snow and whirling skis.

"Not so easy as it looks!" Peanut laughed.

"Me for the old flexible flyer," said Cop.

"Well, you may be a quitter, but I'm not," said Peanut. "Who's going down with me?"

Pete and Albert and Spike came forward to the

brow with him. As Peanut stood there, the ends of his skis pointing over, he had a sudden sinking sensation in the pit of his stomach. The hill certainly did look steep! But he shoved forward, and before he knew what had happened, he was going down about a mile a minute—and apparently with no control over his feet whatever. He clutched the air wildly to keep his balance. He forgot all about the Telemark position. He just stood up as well as he could—and flew. Suddenly one ski started to the right, the other to the left. He tried to bring them together again—and the next second he was buried in two feet of snow, with the skis pointing at the blue sky.

As he raised his head and shook the snow out of his eyes, he saw Pete struggling in the snow not ten feet away.

“What you doing there, Pete?” he asked.

“Got tired, and lay down to rest,” Pete laughed. “Say, I’ll do this or bust!”

“Me, too! Come on back, now, and learn the kick-around.”

“Say, where’s Spike and Albert?” Pete suddenly asked. “Thought they were coming, too. Hi, look! They got cold feet an’ never followed us!”

Jimmy had by this time reached Peanut and Pete. He, too, was trying to learn the kick-around, so he could climb back without taking off his skis. The

three of them kept on, and by dint of several trials, got the hang of the kick-around, and reached the top of the hill. Old Hundred had taken his skis off.

"Come on, Pete," cried Peanut. "Never mind those poor stiffs. Let's you and me try it again."

This time, as he went over the brow, Peanut remembered to go into the Telemark position, and so did Pete. Both of them made the run to the bottom without falling. Right behind them came Jimmy (who had mastered the first principles of balancing quicker than anybody else) and Old Hundred. All four got to the bottom safely, and Old Hundred also tried climbing up with his skis on.

"Those other guys'll never learn, just standing on top," said Jimmy. "Gee, Cop's as scared as if he was going to jump off the Bald Face cliffs! Why don't they start half-way down the hill for a beginning?"

"That's a good idea," the Scout Master replied. "Hi, fellers! Come down half-way, and begin where it's not so steep!" he called.

"How are we going to get there?" Cop shouted back.

"Take the hill on an easy grade sideways," Peanut suggested.

The five Scouts on top adopted this suggestion. They pointed their skis off to one side, and only slightly down grade, and started.

But, of course, after they once got under way, they began to go down fast enough to make stopping difficult. All five of them were headed for the far side of the pasture, and the four boys climbing the hill saw that in about a minute they would either run into the pasture fence, or else have to turn.

Of course, not one of them had the faintest idea how to turn. Cop tried to. He lifted one foot to set it around, put it down on top of the other ski—and vanished into the snow! Spike and Albert next attempted about the same thing, with the same result. Eddie and Skinny first dragged with their poles for brakes, and when they saw that wasn't going to stop them, they simply fell on purpose.

The four Scouts climbing the hill roared with laughter, as the five snow-covered forms emerged from the drifts and tried to climb back to their feet. Finally Cop gave up the effort, and lying back in the snow, kicked up his skis and unbuckled the straps.

“Skiing's a cinch, isn't it?” Peanut called out. “Guess you fellers won't laugh at the book quite so much after a while.”

Meantime, various other boys and girls had come to the hill, mostly with toboggans, for the snow was too deep for sleds, and the skis attracted great attention. One little chap, not a Scout, wanted to try a pair.

"Here, take mine!" said Cop, with a fine air of generosity.

The little fellow put them on, half-way down the hill, and slid successfully to the bottom, on the first try!

"I should think that would make you ashamed, Cop," Peanut declared. "Let a little sixth grade tadpole beat you out!"

Cop did look rather shamefaced, and demanded his skis back again.

All the Scouts now tried running from a point only half-way up the hill, where the grade was not so steep, and before the morning was over, all of them had so far mastered the art of balance that they could negotiate the slide without a spill, and about half of them ended up by running the whole slope several times.

"Now," said Peanut, as they tramped home on the level, over the drifts, "we've got to begin right away learning some of the brakes and turns. You fellows who nearly ran into the fence saw how important it is to know how to brake or turn. A good ski runner would have just turned at the fence and kept right on. This afternoon we'll all try snow ploughing."

"Aw, ain't we going to build a jump?" asked Jimmy.

"A jump? Say, what do you think we are? I

guess jumping is about the hardest thing to do on skis. We've got to learn plain running first. Wait till you can do the Telemark stem, anyhow. I'm going to plug it up in the book this noon."

"Oh, there you go with your old book again!" Old Hundred laughed.

"Laugh if you want," said Peanut. "But the laugh'll be on you if you don't learn some of the things in that book."

When afternoon came, still more toboggans were on the hill, and a crowd gathered to watch the Scouts skiing, a dozen boys begging for a chance to try the new sport. Cop was not so willing to lend his, now that he had begun to lose his timidity about using them himself!

The first brake that the Scouts tried was the snow plough. This brake will not stop you completely, unless you are going slowly down a gentle incline, but it will slow you up. Keeping the points of the skis together as you slide, the heels are gradually worked wider and wider apart, keeping the weight on the inside edge of the runners. In this way, the skis form a letter V, like a snow plough, and the softer the snow the greater the progress is retarded, unless it is so soft that the skis bury, which pushes them together and makes ploughing impossible.

But it is not half so easy to do as it sounds on paper. When you first try it, either one ski or the

other is almost sure to slide ahead, and then either the skis will cross, spilling you, or you will have to straighten the rear ski to conform with the one which has slid ahead, and go running down the hill on an angle.

Little Jimmy, who seemed to be a born skier, was the first to master the snow plough. He got so that he could do it on the lower slope of the hill, where all the patrol was practicing, and then, before most of the rest had got the hang of it, he was running down the entire hill, starting at top speed and coming into the snow plough position, which sent up a spray of snow in front of him.

One by one the others got the hang of it well enough to try the full slope, and by three o'clock Peanut decided to try the Telemark stem.

The Telemark stem is one of the most useful ski accomplishments you can possess, for it is a powerful brake which will bring you to a full stop on all but the steepest hill, if you need to stop—if, for instance, you suddenly see a stone or a wall ahead.

Peanut had been studying the book carefully, and he knew theoretically how it ought to be done. You drop into the Telemark position, kneeling or almost kneeling on one ski, with the other foot far advanced. Then keeping *all* your weight on the rear ski, you bring the forward ski around till it is exactly at right angles to the other, being very careful to keep the

bottom of it flat on the snow, so that it will slip downhill easily and not catch. Then as gradually as you wish you throw your weight forward off the rear ski upon the forward ski, at the same time edging it down till it makes a brake. If you want to stop completely, rise nearly to a standing position with *all* the weight thrown hard on the forward ski, which will bury itself in the snow and bring you up sharp.

Jimmy immediately caught on to the theory of this stemming brake, and after three or four trials he was able to do it, on the lower slopes of the hill. The others, even Peanut himself, tried and tried without very much success.

“How do you get it so easily?” Peanut demanded.

“I dunno, I can’t help it,” Jimmy answered. “I just *feel* in my legs what to do. The trouble with you fellers is that you don’t keep your weight all on your hind ski till you get the other around square. You let some weight stay on the front ski while you’re turning it, and that makes you side slip and turn—and then you spill. See, this is how it’s done.”

Away he went, sank into the Telemark position, brought his right ski round in front, and suddenly threw his weight upon it, and brought up short half-way down the hill, with a perfect cloud of snow flying up in front of him.

"Gee, that's pretty!" Old Hundred exclaimed. "I'm going to do it, if it takes the rest of the winter!"

The other eight boys kept on trying, and one by one, after innumerable spills, they got so they could finally stem and even stop, by the Telemark method. Meanwhile Jimmy, who by now felt perfect confidence, was flying down the hill and trying new stunts of his own.

One of these was to turn. He soon discovered that as he neared the bottom of the slope, where he wasn't running too fast, he could make a considerable turn by edging his skis—throwing the weight on the left edge to turn left, and vice versa, as on skates. But when he tried it on the steeper slope, where he went at full speed, he merely succeeded in getting a good spill, if he turned far enough really to alter his course much.

"Hi, Peanut," he called. "What does the old book say about turning? I want to learn to turn."

"Well," said Peanut, "there's the Christiania swing, and the Telemark turn, and the stemming turn, as I remember."

"Well, how do you do 'em?"

"Don't ask me—I haven't read up that far."

"Well, hurry up," said Jimmy. "I want to learn 'em, and get to jumping."

He kept on at his experiments, while the others

were still practicing the Telemark stem, and suddenly they heard him give a cry of triumph. "Look, look! Now watch me!" he said.

He hurried back to the very top of the hill and started down, going into the Telemark position. Part way down, while still running at full speed, he suddenly did something the rest could not see clearly, and, lo and behold! he turned in a fine, easy swoop, clear to the left, and actually ended up in a standing position with his skis pointed part way back *up* the hill again!

"Golly, that kid's a wonder!" said Peanut. "How'd you do it, Jimmy?"

Jimmy came panting back up the slope.

"Why, it's just as easy!" he said. "I don't know what that turn is, but I can do it every time now. You just start to do the Telemark stem, only you keep your weight all on the heel of the forward foot, and that starts you round, and you bring the other foot along with it—and there you are! See—it's this way."

Off he went again, and this time he turned once to the left, and then, near the bottom, to the right, making a great letter S of tracks.

Peanut and Old Hundred, who had by this time pretty well mastered the Telemark stem, now tried the turn, but the afternoon was over before they had got the hang of it so that they could do it oftener

than one time out of six. The day ended with Jimmy easily the ski champion.

That night Peanut held a Scout meeting and brought the book along, and the evening was spent poring over the pictures and reading the descriptions aloud. The pictures of the great jumps which champion ski jumpers make in the Alps quite took the Scouts' breath away. It didn't seem possible that a human being could ever keep his footing after landing from such a height in the air.

"I guess you have to be pretty good before you try jumping," sighed Old Hundred.

"Bet I could make a *little* jump now," said Jimmy. "Going to bring a snow shovel to-morrow, and build a take-off platform."

"Let's all bring shovels," said Peanut, "and build a toboggan slide. If we don't keep part of the hill for toboggans and part for skis, somebody'll be getting hurt. Besides, the toboggans, with all the foot tracks of the people climbing back, spoil the skiing."

"Aw, let 'em make their own slide," said Cop.

"That's no way for a Scout to talk," Peanut answered. "Most of 'em are girls or little kids, and it's up to us to do 'em a good turn. Besides, they probably don't know how to make a slide."

"Oh, all right," said Cop, cheerful once more. "Shovels it is."

CHAPTER XXIII

THE FIRST ATTEMPTS AT SKI JUMPING

THE next day the Scouts brought shovels to the hill, and built a toboggan slide in short order. All they had to do was to send a toboggan straight down, and then shovel up banks of snow on either side of the track. After a few more trips, the bottom of the ditch thus made was packed down hard and smooth, the banks held the toboggans from slipping out, so nobody had to steer, and there was a good path to walk up in on either side, where the snow for the banks had been shoveled away. The toboggans began to go down this slide a mile a minute, Jimmy said—anyhow, very fast.

A lot of the smaller boys looked hungrily at the Scouts' skis, so hungrily that Peanut and the rest let them have a few trials at skiing, while the Scouts tried the toboggan slide.

But the chief task for the Scouts that day was to learn the Telemark turn, and to practice some of the other turns, such as the Christiania and the stemming turn. While they were doing it, however, Jimmy went off to one side of the hill, with a snow shovel, and half-way down he built up a kind of step of

packed snow, about three feet high. When he had it finished, the rest saw him climb to the top of the hill above it, and start down.

Everybody stood stock still and watched. Even the girls and boys with toboggans stopped to watch.

Down the slope he came with a rush. Out over his step he rushed—and flew into the air. He went for at least fifteen feet in the air before his skis hit the slope again. Then they hit the snow with a whirl of white powder—and Jimmy disappeared! Only one leg, with a waving ski on the end, was visible!

“Hi, Jimmy, bet you could make a *little* jump!” somebody called, as the small figure began to extricate itself from the drift, looking like a miniature snowman.

“Come on an’ try it yourself, smarty,” said Jimmy, getting to his feet, and starting back up the hill.

The rest all hurried over. About half the other people on the hill came, too, and formed a line along the side of the jump. Peanut, Old Hundred, Spike, Pete and Albert climbed to the top with Jimmy.

“I guess if he can try it, we can,” the Scout Master said.

Down went Jimmy again, and out he sailed into the air. This time, as he landed, he went down instantly into the Telemark position, and actually contrived to keep his balance, running on to the bottom

of the hill, where he came up straight on his skis and waved both arms triumphantly.

“Come on! Next!” yelled the spectators down by the jump. “Hurry up there, Pete!”

Pete’s skis were pointed out over the brow. He was looking down at the jump. “Gosh! I don’t want to do it!” he whispered.

Albert gave him a sudden shove from behind, and he went off before he could stop himself. Two seconds later he hit the jump, and sailed out into the air. One second after that he was half buried in snow!

The spectators shouted with laughter, and yelled for somebody else to come on. Peanut started next. He felt the wind in his face. He saw the jump rushing nearer and nearer. He crouched over his skis and flew off the edge into the air. He made a tremendous effort to keep his balance when he hit the slope again, but it was of no use. He, too, dove headlong into the snow.

One by one the rest tried it, all with the same result.

Alice Harrington, a high school freshman, was one of the spectators.

“Ho,” she said, “you boys are no good at all, except Jimmy. Bet *I* could do it!”

“Come on and try, then,” said Albert. “You can take my skis!”

Alice was not to be stumped. She took the skis with a laugh, and started up the hill with them.

“Come along, Lucy, you try it, too,” she said to another girl.

Lucy looked doubtful, but Pete rushed at her, and grabbed her as she tried to run.

“Here, you take *my* skis,” he said. “Votes for women! Let’s see what the girls can do, they’re so smart!”

Alice and Lucy put on the skis at the top of the hill. Neither of them had ever had on a pair before. They became scared on the brow, and hung back, but Pete and Albert pushed them off, one after the other. Poor Lucy went first. She didn’t even get to the jump. She fell before she had gone twenty feet. But Alice kept her balance, and hit the jump at top speed. Off she flew into the air—hit the slope again—and dove headforemost into the snow!

The boys fairly howled with glee.

But the girls didn’t offer to try it again. They went back to their toboggan slide. Most of the Scouts, after a few more trials, went back to running also. Only Jimmy and Old Hundred kept at the jumping. When the afternoon was over, Jimmy could take the jump successfully about five times out of ten, and Old Hundred about three.

“I said I could do it—and I did it!” Jimmy ex-

claimed, as the patrol was hiking homeward. "Gee, it's fun!"

"Well, the rest of us aren't ready for jumping yet, I guess," said Peanut, "and neither are you, really. We've got to get more confidence. As soon as we get sure of two or three turns and all have the Telemark stem down pat, we'll go for an all-day run, with a race home. After that, maybe, we'll be ready to try jumping again."

"Hooray!" cried Jimmy. "Let's go out to the camp on Bald Face on skis!"

"Going to jump off the cliff?" asked Cop.

"An' let's cook our lunch in camp."

"An' let's *sleep* out all night. Bet we could keep warm."

"No sleeping out, I guess," laughed Peanut. "I'd just as soon try it, if we had fur sleeping bags, but we ain't—haven't—got any. We'll go to camp, and have lunch, and then go up to High Farm on the north end of the mountain and race home from the top of the pasture. The road down winds around, and the Scout who can make turns the best, at the highest speed, 'll win, all right."

"Hooray! when'll we go? To-morrow?"

"Nix," said the Scout Master. "We'll go after each one of you has demonstrated that he can stop short on Cole's Hill by the Telemark stem, and do either a Telemark turn or a Christiania swing both to

right and left, and both a down-hill and an up-hill turn, into the bargain. 'Twouldn't be safe to run down from High Farm unless we were sure of all those things. We ought to master the jump around, too."

"Gee, let's practice all day to-morrow!" said Old Hundred.

"Sure," said Pete.

CHAPTER XXIV

A SKI RUN OVER BALD FACE MOUNTAIN

THEY did practice all the next day, and all the rest of the week, in fact. Peanut had turned the book over to Jimmy, who seemed to be the natural born skier of the crowd, and he studied all the stems and turns at night, putting his skis on in the front parlor, much to his mother's consternation, and setting his feet in the different positions on the carpet, while he held the book in his hand to see that he was doing it right. Then, the next day, he would try it out on the hill, and teach the rest.

"Gee," he cried one day, "I've been reading the book on jumping, and we were all doing it wrong. No wonder we fell. We didn't do the sats right at all."

"The which?" said Cop.

"The sats," Jimmy replied with a grin. "My goodness, don't you know what the sats is?"

"No, and you didn't either, till last night," said Cop.

"You mean the sits, don't you?" Peanut laughed. "That's what most of us did when we jumped."

"The sats," Jimmy explained, "is the position

you have to take when you spring off the platform, or edge of the jump. Can't explain it now—wait till we jump again, and I'll show you, though."

After a week of hard practice, Peanut decided that the patrol could run well enough to attempt a really long, high hill. They could all snow plough, do the Telemark stem and turn (in either direction, right or left), do a stemming turn and a Christiania swing, and a jump around. To be sure, none of them did these things any too gracefully, except Jimmy, or was sure every time of bringing it off without a tumble, but they could all get along fairly well.

It was Thursday afternoon when they decided on their all day run, setting the time as the following Saturday, the last week day of vacation. That afternoon the sun was very hot, and the snow was sticky. All the Scouts had pieces of wax in their pockets, and each trip, before they took the run down the hill, they had to clean the snow off their ski runners, and wax them, to make them slip.

"Golly, I hope we don't get a thaw before Saturday!" Old Hundred sighed. "Looks bad to me."

That very evening, in fact, the weather moderated so much that a little rain fell before morning, but it grew cold again, and the rain froze, turning later to snow. The old snow underneath froze into a crust, on which the new snow, about an inch of it, fell, and when the boys came out Friday afternoon for their

final practice they found skiing a totally different proposition from the past week.

Where the new snow had stayed on the crust, it wasn't so bad. The Telemark stem, to be sure, didn't hold nearly so well, and they had to turn more frequently by the Christiania. But where the new snow had blown off the crust, as it had at one place on the hill, near the bottom, the first boys down got several rather nasty spills, breaking through the crust and scratching their hands and faces.

Jimmy, however, had by now read the book all through, and he was prepared for the emergency.

"When the going gets icy, snow plough," he said. "That spreads your feet wide apart, and you can keep your balance, and slow down your speed. See ——"

He whizzed out on the glazed crust, went into a snow plough position, and crossed with great ease.

"We got to watch for different kinds of going to-morrow," he said, "and be ready to meet the emergencies."

Saturday was a fine, clear, cold day. The eight Scouts and Peanut met at nine o'clock at the Scout House. Each had on an extra pair of heavy wool socks under his waterproof boots, pull down caps, an extra pair of thick gloves, an extra sweater strapped to his pack, and in his pack materials for

lunch, cooking kit, and a hatchet. The hatchets were carried in the packs, because if worn at the belt the handle might hurt the hip in a fall. Finally, each boy had a pair of cheap smoked spectacles, to prevent possible headaches or snow blindness from the glare.

Peanut inspected the equipment, and the Scouts took up the march, carrying their skis over their shoulders through the village, where the roads and walks were broken out. A lot of the smaller boys watched them enviously, and eagerly asked where they were going.

Once outside of the village, they put on their skis, and struck out across the fields beside the road, toward Bald Face. They made quite as good time as if they had been walking on dry ground. As the crust under the inch of new snow held them up, trail breaking was easy. When the snow is soft and deep, trail breaking is very hard, for the first man sinks in deep at every step, and everybody has to take turns at frequent intervals.

After half an hour they reached the pasture where the path went up Bald Face, and, crossing it, came to the edge of the woods, where Art and Skinny's hut was. Skinny and Art turned aside into the hemlocks to see if it was still there. It was, all right, but evidently full of snow.

From now on, transversing up the slope was

almost impossible, for they were in the woods, and had to follow the path, the skis being so long that it was very difficult to navigate them amid the underbrush. Here in the woods, too, the snow was still soft, for it had not melted under the warm sun of Thursday morning, nor had much of the later rain reached it.

The Scouts advanced up the path with considerable difficulty, using their poles constantly to keep from back slipping.

"Say, me for snow-shoes in the woods," said Peanut. "Skis weren't made for American forests. Guess the Indians knew their business."

The path grew steeper and steeper as they advanced, and finally Jimmy, who was in the lead, had to resort to side stepping.

Side stepping is effective even on a very steep slope, but it is slow and rather tiresome. You set your skis parallel, at right angles to the slope and then simply side step up, one foot after the other. The patrol advanced this way for a time, till the path turned sharp up the mountain out of the old wood road, and became so narrow that there was no room to side step; the ends of the skis caught the trees and bushes on either side.

"Guess we walk," said Jimmy, taking off his skis.

Walking was hard work in two feet of snow, on a steep trail, and the boys finally reached the camp

with the perspiration standing out on their foreheads.

The hut was half buried in snow, but the roof had held. Inside, thanks to the fact that the great boulder in front made a wind break, there was very little snow, and only about a foot in the space between the hut and the boulder. Half of the Scouts quickly cleared this space, while the others went searching for dry fuel. Extra wood was stacked up ready, and a fire made to get the fireplace melted clear, and the stones hot. Then, leaving their skis behind, the patrol toiled up the remaining two hundred feet of the mountain to see the winter view.

The rocky summit above the cliffs was swept almost bare of snow by the wind, and it was very cold up there. They all put on their extra sweaters to keep warm, and their colored glasses to resist the tremendous dazzle which came from looking down on a vast expanse of snow. They were the center of a white circle, forty miles in diameter, and the air was so clear that they could almost read the clock face on the Southmead church steeple—or Cop said he could, at any rate.

After enjoying this unusual sensation of being on a mountain top in the middle of winter, they descended to the camp, melted snow for water, and cooked luncheon.

First they had piping hot soup made out of

bouillon cubes. Then they had bacon and fried potatoes and some of the boys had chops. Cop cooked a piece of steak. Jimmy had two eggs, which he had brought in a box of cotton, and scrambled them in his fry pan. They had tea to drink, bread and butter, and sweet chocolate for dessert. With a roaring fire going against the boulder, and throwing its heat back into the lean-to, the boys weren't cold at all. In fact, their faces were almost too hot. And how good the lunch tasted, after the hard climb in the clear, bracing mountain air!

"Say, I bet we could sleep in this hut, without fur sleeping bags, if we kept a fire like this going," Old Hundred declared.

"Bet we could, too," said Cop.

"Would you get up every hour all night to *keep* the fire going?" Peanut asked.

"Would if I woke," said Cop.

They rested an hour after lunch, and then came the start for home.

"The race won't begin till we get to the top of the pasture above High Farm," said Peanut. "The job's going to be to get there, though."

"We can take the mountain easiest by carrying our skis to the top," said Jimmy, "and then follow the summit path north."

Accordingly they shouldered packs and skis, and

climbed back in their morning tracks to the col between the two peaks; put on the skis at that point, and by side stepping on the steep places, got over the north peak and began the descent of two hundred feet to the upland pasture. This descent was through the woods, by a winding trail, and while not very steep, was hard to manage. Jimmy led the way, snow ploughing constantly, to keep the speed down, and almost stopping before the turns. The rest followed suit, and everybody reached the open pasture without mishap.

As they came out of the woods into the great, sloping pasture which had been cleared on the northern shoulder of Bald Face, Jimmy uttered a yell.

“Hooray!” he cried. “Here’s where the race begins! Every feller for himself, now.”

The rest lined up beside him, and looked down. Some of the Scouts whistled dubiously.

“Say, this is some hill,” said Cop. “I—I—I guess I’m getting cold feet!”

The pasture stretched down away from their feet for at least a half of a mile, and then dipped over sharply, so that they could not see anything immediately below the dip but the roof of the farmhouse and barn. Nobody lived in this house in winter. The pasture was used for a big herd of cattle in summer.

Beyond the house and barn the woods began again, but through these woods a road wound and turned, for two miles, to the Southmead valley.

“You all know where the road begins,” said Peanut. “It isn’t likely anybody’s been up it with a team since this snow, so it won’t be tracked. Remember, the man who gets home first will be the man who runs straightest and fastest, but he won’t be if he hits a tree, or falls a dozen times. We don’t want any accidents. Don’t go too fast to control yourself. Take the steepest places on the transverse, and slow up by making an *up-hill* turn before you begin the next tack. Snow plough on the road before all the turns. *And remember this—if you feel you are going to run into a tree or a rock or a fence, fall down before you get to it. See?*”

“Now, everybody can have two minutes to study out his path to the top of the road. In two minutes, when I say go, we’re off. The race is to the Scout House, and you’ve got to keep your skis on all the way. No walking when you reach the beaten road.”

The Scouts felt of their pack straps, buttoned their coats tight, set their caps hard over their ears, grasped their poles, and waited.

“Go!” said Peanut.

The nine of them went.

Jimmy, Old Hundred and Peanut ran in a bee-line for the roof of the distant barn. The others started

on a transverse, some to the right, some to the left.

“Look out for different kinds of snow!” Jimmy yelled, as he got to going.

You don't have much time to look out for anything when you are ski running down a long, steep hill. As they were running straight, while the others were taking the pasture at an easier angle, Peanut, Old Hundred and Jimmy were, it seemed to them, almost immediately on the very verge of the steep drop to the house and barn. As they rushed toward it, the house and barn disappeared below the brow, and it looked exactly as if they were about to run off the edge of a precipice.

Old Hundred dropped to the Telemark, and began to stem. This worked all right for a second, although he was going too fast to stem well—but the next second they all three struck crust, where the wind had blown the top snow off, and the Telemark didn't work at all. Another second, and Old Hundred, in his frantic efforts to stop his pace, had pitched over, breaking through the crust and stopping with a bang.

Peanut, however, before he struck the crust, had begun an up-hill Christiania swing, and he negotiated the crust without a spill, coming to a stop with his skis pointed up the slope.

But Jimmy kept right on. When he hit the crust,

he snow ploughed strongly, stopping his speed a little, and on the loose snow beyond, just at the brow of the steeper pitch, he, too, did an up-hill turn, but without coming to a stop. It merely slowed him up, while he looked at the going below, and then he did a jump around and, dropping into the Telemark position, ran straight over for the open space between the house and the barn.

Peanut turned to Old Hundred and asked if he was hurt.

"I—I don't think so," Old Hundred replied, getting to his feet.

They looked back up the hill, and had to laugh, for no less than three other Scouts, two to the right and one to the left, had fallen on the crust. The remaining two, though still upright, were just about stopped up, preparatory to running the steeper slope at slackened speed.

But when they looked down, Jimmy was already shooting between the house and the barn, headed for the road into the woods!

"Come on! We've got to catch him," cried Peanut, starting off in pursuit, almost in Jimmy's tracks.

Steep as this slope was, it was comparatively smooth running, the only trouble being to make the open bars in the fence, between the house and the barn. Running beside Jimmy's tracks, Peanut and Old Hundred succeeded without difficulty, but the

rest, taking the hill from different angles, had to do some turning and even stopping at the bottom.

Peanut was the second through, Old Hundred a few feet behind him. From this point, the road began—a road virgin of any tracks except the line of Jimmy's runners. It was a white highway between snow-laden trees and bushes, leading very steeply into the woods below.

The two boys rushed on, snow ploughing a little as they neared the woods, to avoid hitting a different kind of snow at too high a speed. It was lucky they did so, for the second they entered the shadow of the woods, the crust ceased, and the footing became quite different.

Peanut had dropped into the Telemark position, Old Hundred following suit, just as they shot under the first shadow, and as the road plunged down ahead, around a sharp turn, he was stemming furiously. The first soft snow nearly stopped him short, and right in front of him he saw the marks where Jimmy had taken a tumble!

"Hi! Jimmy took a spill when he hit the soft stuff!" he called back to Old Hundred. "Look out for the turn ahead. Maybe we'll catch him yet."

Rising into the regular running position, he estimated the distance to the turn ahead, and set off again, making the bend of the road by a Christiania swing. Ahead the road lay straight and not very

steep for two or three hundred yards, and the snow was so soft in the woods that there was little danger of running too fast. Peanut let himself go as fast as the skis would move, Old Hundred following. Behind them they heard a yell and much laughter, evidently as somebody else took a spill on hitting the soft snow.

The next bend was easy, and then followed a short but very steep descent with almost a right angle turn at the bottom. Peanut went down Telemark stemming all the way, and had himself in good control for the turn, but Old Hundred, thinking to pass the Scout Master on this stretch, came down running free, and tried, as he neared the bottom, having passed Peanut half-way down, to snow plough.

Now, when you snow plough in soft, deep snow, unless you can straddle almost to the ground, your skis sink in very deep and consequently the snow exerts such a pressure against them that they squeeze together again.

That is what Old Hundred's did. He didn't reduce his speed at all, and as he was going too fast to make the turn, he saw that in about two seconds he would land bang into the trees and bushes on the bank at the bend. There was only one thing to do, and he did it. He fell down.

Peanut went by him again, with a laugh.

“You would, would you?” he cried. “Ever hear of the hare and the tortoise?”

Before Old Hundred could get up to his feet, two of the other Scouts had caught up with him, and Peanut was out of sight ahead.

The worst of the run was now over. Though the hill and the bends continued, they were not so steep but that, in this soft snow, the boys could all negotiate them without trouble. When they reached the open fields at the bottom of the mountain they were pretty well bunched, and it became a foot race home. Spike, who had been the last one down the hill, had the best wind of the crowd, and the longest legs, and here on the level he soon passed the rest.

But though he picked up Peanut's and Jimmy's ski tracks cutting across lots toward the village, he didn't see either boy. The fields soon ended in a patch of woods, and beyond them, after a rise, came another long, easy hill, dropping down to the edge of the golf links. When he reached this hill, he saw Peanut in the far distance, running over the links as fast as he could go. Almost as far ahead of him was Jimmy.

Spike took the slope at top speed, in Peanut's tracks—and in Jimmy's tracks too, for that matter, as Peanut had trailed Jimmy.

When he had crossed the links, and reached the Southmead Main Street he saw Peanut disappear-

ing into the walk to the Scout House. When he got there, Jimmy was lying on a bench, panting but triumphant, and Peanut was fanning himself with a boxing glove.

Suddenly they heard a shouting, and running out, saw the other five in a close finish, with half a dozen other boys and men yelling encouragement. Old Hundred was leading by three or four ski lengths when the bunch reached the sidewalk, which they had to cross from the open space of unbroken snow between road and walk, where they had been traveling. Alas! Old Hundred was in too much of a hurry, his ski point caught in the drift made by the snow plough, and over he went. Before he could get up, or Skinny could change his course, Skinny had bumped into him, and fallen down also. The two boys got their skis so tangled together that neither of them could get up, and the crowd laughed at them and forgot all about watching the finish of the race between the rest, which, as a matter of fact, was won by Albert.

For the next half hour the Scout House was full of talk. Mr. Rogers had come over when he heard the yelling, and now heard all about the run. Everybody told how many falls he had, and what turns he used, and how scared he was when the first steep place suddenly loomed up and the house and barn disappeared so it looked as if you were going to run

over a precipice; and everybody patted Jimmy on the back, and asked how he did it.

Jimmy received his honors with becoming modesty.

"'Twa'n't nothin'," he said. "I just ran straight all the time, and made up-hill turns or swings at the top of every new slope, to slow down for the next run, without stopping. The only hard place was that steep pitch in the road with the sharp turn at the bottom. I had to Telemark stem down there to get around."

"I saw you did," said Peanut. "That's why *I* did it, too. Old Hundred didn't—and he had to fall at the bottom to save himself."

"So did I," confessed Spike.

"Me, too," said Albert and Pete, in chorus.

"All of which seems to prove," said Mr. Rogers, "that you have to run skis with your head as well as your feet!"

"That's right," said Peanut. "Great head, Jimmy!"

"All the same," said Cop, who had fallen at the bottom of nearly all the steep places, in his mad efforts to make the turns at too high a speed, "I'd do better if I had Jimmy's feet!"

"And I shouldn't do so well if I had your fat," retorted Jimmy. "Say, we going to begin jumping now? I want to show you fellers the proper sats."

"I guess we'll wait till Monday, Jimmy," laughed

Peanut. "I've not got wind enough to jump over a toothpick now."

So the first ski run ended, and nine tired boys went home, after one of the most exciting and exhilarating day's sport they had ever enjoyed.

CHAPTER XXV

JIMMY WINS THE CUP FOR JUMPING

JIMMY came running over to Peanut's house that very evening.

"Say!" he cried, "there are a lot of city fellers here, with skis! Men, I mean. They came up today, I just heard, for the week end, and were over on Cole's Hill all the afternoon. Guess they've got real Norwegian skis, maybe, and we oughter learn a lot from them. Let's go over and watch 'em tomorrow."

"All right," said Peanut. "Guess there's no harm in taking a walk on skis on Sunday, any more'n walking on your feet. Get some of the other Scouts."

The next afternoon, half a dozen of the patrol were at Cole's Hill to watch the strangers. But one look convinced the Scouts that they already knew more about skiing than the visitors did.

"Why, all they're doing is just running straight down!" said Jimmy, with great contempt. "Ain't a one of 'em made a single turn."

"Look at the clothes, though," said Cop. "Gee, knickerbockers and high moccasins, and purple sweaters! Some class to that!"

Jimmy couldn't be restrained. He climbed the hill, the rest following, and stood beside the men, looking curiously at their handsomely varnished skis and elaborate foot harnesses.

"Hello, son," one of the men said, in the patronizing tone city men use to country boys, "can you run skis, too? Made your own, didn't you?"

Jimmy looked at him a second in the face, and then replied, "I'll race you from here to the far corner, doing a Christiania swing to the left around the right hand side of that bush which sticks up almost at the bottom of the hill, and running to the left of the next bush, and then, after touching the fence post in the corner, coming back here."

The other men roared. "Say, Tom," they cried, "there's a dare for you! Going to take it?"

"But—but——" the first speaker stammered. "How can you get to the right of the first bush, and then to the left of the second? You'd have to turn almost up-hill."

"Sure," said Jimmy. "Why not? I'll give you a head start of fifty feet."

"Going to take him, Tom? It's a dare, you know!" the other men laughed. And one of them added, to little Jimmy, "Why don't you pick somebody your size? It isn't fair to challenge a poor little fellow like Tom."

Jimmy was too much in earnest even to grin. He

was mad clear through at the slighting reference to his home-made skis. "Are you going?" he asked.

The man laughed. "Sure," he said, and slipped over the edge.

Jimmy gave him fifty feet, and then with a swift running start, went after him. Those on top watched the race.

The man got to the first bush all right, but having only a vague idea how to turn, fell in the effort. Jimmy passed him with a perfect Christiania up-hill swing to the left, went around the other bush, and flew on to the corner. He had touched the post before the man was on his feet again, and met his opponent on the return journey. Taking the hill at the steepest grade he could without back slipping, he made two kicks around, and reached the top while the other was still struggling back up the lower slopes.

"Home-made skis are all right, when you know how to use them," he panted, out of breath.

"Guess you're stung, Tom," the other men called to their companion.

"Can all you boys do turns like that?" one of them asked.

"Not so well as Jimmy can," Peanut answered, "but we can all do 'em. We learned to steer before we did any running. You have to. This ain't— isn't—running on *this* hill. This is just a practice hill.

Yesterday we came down from the top of Bald Face Mountain on skis."

"Say, who taught you boys to ski, anyhow?" another man asked. "Are you all Norwegians?"

"We learned it out of a book," said Peanut. "There wasn't anybody to teach us, so we got the book. Jimmy, there, can jump."

"So can I, some," put in Old Hundred.

"What are you, Boy Scouts?"

"Sure!" came a chorus.

"Guess that explains it," the man said. "By the way—what's the name of that book?"

"I'd rather Jimmy taught me," laughed Tom. "He's better than a book. How do you do that swing, anyhow?"

Jimmy, having vindicated their home-made skis, was now good-natured again, and offered to show how. So, instead of learning, the boys spent the rest of the afternoon in teaching.

"And they weren't very smart pupils, either," said Peanut, as he and Jimmy parted at his gate.

The next day, when school began again, the Wildcat Patrol found themselves fairly bombarded by smaller boys with requests to get them into the Scouts, to teach them how to make skis, and to take them on all-day ski runs. Peanut had certainly "started something" when he put his patrol on skis! The whole town suddenly wanted to learn.

So, instead of its being difficult for Cop, Pete and some of the others to enlist recruits for a new patrol, the difficulty suddenly was to choose among a number of candidates. Finally each Scout selected a likely eighth grade boy, taught him the tenderfoot requirements, and brought him to the next Scout meeting. After that was done, Peanut had the satisfaction of seeing Mr. Rogers and the Council make all the Wildcat Patrol first class Scouts.

Meanwhile, the manual training instructor was besieged with requests to make skis. All the new tenderfeet, and a good many other boys in the manual training class as well, worked long hours after school for a week or more, on their skis, and a fortnight after the vacation was over there were at least fifteen new pairs practicing on Cole's Hill.

But Jimmy had not been idle in the interim. He had rebuilt the jumping platform more in conformance with the pictures in the book, and practiced the sats till he had it right. Then he taught it to the rest.

The sats is simply the action performed by the runner as his skis leave the edge of the jumping platform. Yet it is the most essential part of the whole jump. If you don't do that right, it is almost impossible not to fall when you land. The only reason Jimmy had been able to jump before was because he had instinctively done it more or less correctly, while the others hadn't.

As you are running toward the platform, you must crouch low over your skis, with the feet parallel and close together, so that your knees are well in advance of your feet. Then just at the instant when your feet are on the edge of the jump off, with the points of the skis out in the air, you spring *up* as hard as you can (not *out* on your toes as if you were broad jumping—that is fatal), but spring right up from the knees, not letting the heels lift from the skis at all, nor the lower legs shift position. If you do this right, you come into a standing position leaning way forward, on the line that your legs from feet to knees had when you were crouched down.

The reason you do this is because you do not land on the level, but on a sloping hill, *and your body has got to be at right angles to the slope when you hit*, not at right angles to the level ground. Therefore it has to be pitched forward.

It is also possible to spring straight up on the sats, and bend forward in the air, but this is harder, although it gives a slightly longer jump. The great difficulty in jumping is to spring, to do the sats, exactly at the instant when your feet are over the edge of the platform. Ninety-nine green jumpers out of a hundred spring too late at first.

The second great thing to remember is to keep both skis level, or pointed slightly down, in the air, and side by side. You should land with them to-

gether, absolutely. If one hits before the other, you'll get a certain spill. When you feel them hit, then drop like a shot to the Telemark position, and run on so till you feel balanced securely. Then come up standing, make a Christiania turn as soon as you can, and face up-hill. If you do all this properly, it will be as pretty a sight to watch as anybody could ask for.

Day by day the Wildcats got better and better at jumping from a low, easy platform, and after a couple of weeks, during which there had come six inches more of nice, soft snow, they increased the height of the platform to six feet, and on a Saturday afternoon held the first contest.

Some of the new patrol, which had now been equipped with skis, and enrolled as the Weasel Patrol, entered the contest, too, for they had been practicing, and one or two of them could really make a jump now and then. Mr. Rogers was on hand with a tape. The rules were drawn up as follows:

The measurement was taken from the base of the platform to the heavy indentation in the snow made by the ski under the foot of the jumper—the rear foot, of course, if his feet didn't hit together. Distance counted five points, style (that is, gracefulness, a good run after landing and a nice turn at the bottom) counted three points, and no fall two points.

But if a contestant took three falls in succession he was ruled out.

The jump had been built on the steepest part of the hill, half-way down, so that you hit the platform at high speed. Jimmy was the first one over. He made a fine, clean sats, and landed clean, too, flying on down the hill. The leap was thirty-six feet!

One by one the others followed. On their first try, all but Peanut and Old Hundred fell on landing, and nobody got over thirty-five feet—which was Peanut's jump. The two Weasels who were in the contest both fell three times, and were ruled out. Cop, also, got three falls, as he couldn't seem to time his sats at the high speed of the new runway. Finally only Spike, Old Hundred, Peanut and Jimmy were left, as the rest, after three jumps, had failed to reach the thirty-five feet the other four had attained.

On the next try Jimmy made his sats straight up, instead of forward, and inclined his body forward while in the air, by swinging his arms 'round and 'round. He landed a ski's length ahead of his old mark, and spun on down.

"Forty-two feet!" Mr. Rogers shouted.

The others tried it in turn. Old Hundred got nearly forty feet, but half-way down the run after landing he lost his balance and fell. Peanut got

quite forty feet, but he fell when he lit. Spike made a clean jump, but of only thirty-eight feet.

“I guess there’s no doubt who is champion ski jumper as well as runner,” said Mr. Rogers. “Come here, Jimmy.”

Jimmy drew near, as the other Scouts, including the Weasels, and a dozen or more other boys and girls, gathered around.

Mr. Rogers, much to everybody’s surprise, even Peanut’s, took a little cloth bag out of his mackinaw pocket, opened the bag, and drew from it a little silver trophy cup, four inches high, on a small wooden base.

“This is a prize for the ski championship of Southmead,” said the Scout Master. “I’ll have it engraved with your name and the length of your jump. But I want everybody to see it now. They give cups for golf and tennis at the Country Club. I guess we Scouts can have our cups, too!”

“What’s the matter with Jimmy? He’s all right!” the crowd yelled, while Jimmy, looking very embarrassed, held the little cup proudly in his hand.

“This—this—this is the best fun I ever had!” he said.

CHAPTER XXVI

THE BIG SKI RUN OF THE SEASON

FOR the next month Peanut was busier than he had ever been in his life. Every morning he had to get up early and go over to West Bentford to gather his items. Then he had to come home and gather his Southmead items. Then he had to write them down and mail them to the *Herald*, or else, if they were very important, telephone them up for the paper that same afternoon.

Then, with two patrols under his care, he had to be out, after school, at least two days in the week, and always on Saturday, for ski running, and two evenings a week there were regular Scout meetings. Of course, Peanut did his best to have the Wildcats come to the Weasel meetings, and help in the work of teaching the new boys signaling, first aid, and so forth.

“Funny,” said Jimmy, after one of these meetings, “but somehow you really don’t know anything yourself till you try to teach it. I’ve learned more first aid showing it to the Weasels than I really knew before.”

"That's right," said Peanut. "And a great thing about scouting is that there are always younger patrols coming along, so's we fellers who are first class Scouts can just step up into Scout Masters when we grow too old to be Scouts, and keep learning and helping all the time."

"I'm going to be an assistant Scout Master just like you, as soon's I am eighteen," said Jimmy, looking proudly at his friend.

The snow held that winter wonderfully. On Washington's Birthday it was still two feet deep, more having fallen to take the place of what had melted or settled down. On that day another all-day ski run was organized, this time with the Weasels in the party, also, and Mr. Rogers (who had made himself a pair of skis, to enjoy the fun with the rest, and had been practicing hard), and nearly all the Scouts from the Bear Patrol, a group of older boys whom Mr. Rogers looked after, and, finally, two Scouts from West Bentford, who had been over nearly every Saturday to learn how to ski from the Southmead patrols.

That made a party of twenty-six, all on skis, with packs on their backs, who left the Scout House at nine o'clock and in column of twos marched (if you can call it marching) up the side of the street through Southmead. It was certainly the largest party of ski runners the town, or the whole county, for that

matter, had ever seen, and men came out of their stores to watch them go past. Peanut thought to himself how it all had come from his buying the book on skiing, and getting one patrol to make skis—and he was pretty proud.

Jimmy led the way, with Peanut at his side. They were off on a good run that day. All the boys were hard now, and quite at home on skis. Over roads and fields, up hill and down, through woods and across a frozen, snow-covered pond, the leaders went, other Scouts taking turns at breaking trail, when Jimmy and Peanut grew weary. Finally, nearly ten miles from home, Peanut and Jimmy, who had planned the run in secret, went into the lead again, and entered the woods. They led the way up and up, winding by an easy grade through the trees, till they reached the top of a high hill. Here, still in the woods, they took off their skis, and ordered fires for lunch.

Half a dozen big ones were made at once, and the party cooked and ate lunch. Then, after an hour's rest, snow was shoveled on the fires, and Peanut gave orders for the start home. He and Jimmy led the way through the woods for nearly a quarter of a mile, on slowly rising ground, but difficult going, because of the undergrowth. Then, suddenly, the party burst out of the woods at the top of a great pasture which sloped down for a full mile, most of

the way pretty steep, and part way down, in fact, so steep that from the top you couldn't see at all what lay below, until the extreme bottom end came out again into view. The pasture ended at the bottom against a fence. Beyond that was a strip of woods, and beyond the woods another field sloping down still more to a frozen pond. Two miles away, beyond the pond, rose another big hill, almost a mountain.

"Southmead is beyond that second hill," said Jimmy. "The short way home is across the pond and right over the next hill. There's a long coast, like this one here, on the far side, only it's not so open. The long way home is by the road to the right of that second hill. Everybody line up. It's a race from here on!"

"I'll signal. When I say 'Go!' beat it," cried Peanut. "Take a look at the slope first."

"Jiminy crickets, take a look at it!—can't see anything but the top of it, it's so steep!" said Cop.

Peanut gave the signal like a track meet—"Get on your marks—get set—go!" and the twenty-six ski runners went over the brow.

The great majority of them took the slope at an angle, in order to go slower and be prepared for trouble beyond the steep pitch. But Peanut, Old Hundred and one or two more followed Jimmy's lead and took it direct. They all did an up-hill

swing above the brow of the steep place, picked out their going below, and kept on. This second section of the descent grew extremely rough near the bottom. A wind current had wrinkled the snow here into little hard, close packed waves, like a choppy sea, and it was only by dropping into the Telemark position as he saw what was coming that Jimmy got across without a spill. The others all fell, and as they were picking themselves up, they saw about twenty others falling, to right and left of them.

“Ding it all, there’s Jimmy getting ahead again, just because he has ski sense!” cried Peanut, hurrying on in pursuit.

Climbing a fence with skis on is no easy job. Here again Jimmy gained on the rest, simply by standing side to the fence, swinging up to a sitting position on the top rail, and heaving his legs over by one motion.

It was a rough run over the next field to the lake, with more wind-drifts on the surface, and there were more spills. Jimmy was well out on the surface of the pond (which was also wind-drifted and very rough) when most of the others reached the shore.

But, in the next two miles, Peanut, Spike, Mr. Rogers and two or three of the Bears overhauled him, for there was no more coasting, but only just a mile of level and then a mile of climbing. The

bunch reached the southern side of the next summit close together. They were all panting, breathless, and dripping with perspiration.

The slope of this second hill toward Southmead was a new problem. It wasn't one big open pasture at all, but a series of little pastures, each very steep, separated by woods, and most of them filled, besides, with big boulders or single trees. You had to steer very carefully, and thread your way down, like a canoe running rapids.

"This hill was made for Jimmy," panted Spike, as he slipped over and began to stem.

"Sure was," said Peanut, following after, and also stemming hard to avoid a big rock which loomed up right ahead.

Jimmy ran the hill at nearly twice the speed of the others. Even he didn't escape two or three falls. He had to fall twice to avoid rocks which suddenly loomed up ahead and which had been invisible from the top. But he had so much more daring and so much better command of the stems and turns that he took the patches of open ground at top speed where the rest stemmed or snow ploughed, and after half the hill was covered he had quite disappeared ahead, winding his way from one open pasture glade to another. The rest never headed him again.

Spike and Peanut raced home for second place, Peanut winning out by a couple of hundred yards,

but when they got to the house Jimmy had quite got his breath back and was sitting calmly, as if nothing had happened.

The other twenty-three straggled in one by one, nearly half an hour separating Jimmy from the last Scout in—who was Cop, dripping wet, his fat face red as in summer.

“Well, that’s real sport!” Mr. Rogers cried. “I never knew ski running was like that—so exciting and full of adventure. I thought you just got out on a hill and slid, as you would with a toboggan.”

“That’s all they do do, over in our town,” said one of the West Bentford Scouts. “Gee, it’s more fun taking a real run! Guess we’ll have our fellows doing it now, though.”

“I don’t believe *anybody* around here takes real ski runs but us, Peanut,” said the Scout Master. “Why don’t you write it up for the *Herald*?”

“Gee, that’s a good idea,” said Peanut.

Accordingly he shut himself up in his room all the next day, and wrote a piece about ski running as a winter sport, describing their two all-day runs, and putting in as much fun as he could about spills and unexpected wind-drifts. This piece, which was nearly two columns long, he sent up to the *Herald*, together with some photographs, and the very next day, which was Saturday, they printed it all, to-

gether with the pictures Mr. Rogers had taken of the big party as it was winding its way up a slope, and one of Cop, falling head first into a drift.

Peanut got ten dollars for this article. But that wasn't all he got. On Monday morning he received a letter from the editor. He opened it, read it, gasped—and ran as fast as he could for Mr. Rogers' house.

CHAPTER XXVII

PEANUT GETS HIS CHANCE

“WELL, what’s on your chest now?” Mr. Rogers asked, as Peanut burst into the studio.

“Read this!” cried Peanut, holding out the letter.

He stood over the Scout Master’s shoulder as he read.

“Pipe the way it begins!” said he—“ ‘Dear Mr. Morrison’—*Mr. Morrison*, if you please. Some class to that, what?”

Mr. Rogers read on. The letter was from the managing editor of the *Herald*. He said first that he was glad to print Peanut’s story about ski running, as it was the kind of story which interested all classes of readers, and then he went on to say that he had been watching Peanut’s work as correspondent all winter, and had noticed with pleasure its general accuracy and timeliness.

“Bouquets, what?” Peanut snickered.

Mr. Rogers read on. “As one of our reporters is

leaving us next week," the letter continued, "and as I understand your ambition is to become a regular staff reporter, I am wondering if you would care to have a try in his place. If so, come to see me at your earliest convenience."

"Well, what do you know about that?" Peanut declared, as Mr. Rogers handed the letter back.

"Pretty good," said the Scout Master. "Are you going up to see him this afternoon?"

"Well, that's what's sticking in my crop," Peanut answered, "so I came to see you. If I go to work in Hampton next week, what'll become of the Scouts? Don't seem fair, exactly. Here I've got the Wildcats going, and now still another patrol, the Weasels, and there's nobody to take my place, with Art and Lou and Frank and Rob all away, and so it's kind o' leaving you and the Scouts in the lurch. Gee whiz, I didn't expect to get a chance like this for a whole *year*, at least! I ought to stick till the Weasels are first class Scouts, anyhow, I guess."

"Don't you want to be a reporter?"

"Golly, don't I want to be! Guess I do! But I kind o' feel that I owe a duty to the Scouts, too, and to you. I'd—I'd be a pretty cheap skate if I left *you* in the lurch."

"Well, I'm glad you feel that way about it, Peanut," Mr. Rogers said. "You wouldn't be the chap I think you are if you didn't, though. But the first

thing we've got to consider now is yourself. The Scouts exist to give the boys a chance to develop their characters, to give them a better start in the world. If the Scouts have helped you get your chance to be a reporter, why, the Scouts ought to be glad of it, and send you off to Hampton with a cheer. Besides, you've done a lot for the Scouts already, and so for the town. We can transfer Jimmy over to the Weasels as patrol leader, and the Bears are growing up so fast now that I can get an assistant Scout Master from them before long, and in the meantime, maybe the new Congregational minister will help me out. He seems like a live wire. You take your chance while it's here.

‘There's a tide in the affairs of men ——’

You know the quotation—or you ought to.”

“Do you really mean it?” cried Peanut. “It's all right for me to go?”

“Go to it!” Mr. Rogers laughed. “You catch the next car—only tell your mother first.”

Peanut rushed happily out, and that afternoon he had an interview with the editor of the *Herald*. When he came back he informed Mr. Rogers that he was to start work the following Monday, and his salary was to be ten dollars a week to start with, and more if he “made good.”

“Do you think I *can* make good?” he asked.

“Gee, I’ll feel awful small and scared, up there in a real city, on a real newspaper!”

“Remember, you’re a Scout,” Mr. Rogers smiled, hitting him on the back. “Be prepared!”

CHAPTER XXVIII

PEANUT'S FAREWELL FEAST

ALL that week Peanut and his mother were busy, getting ready for his departure. His mother was sorting his clothes, mending them, making him bedding and towels. He was packing up some furniture for the room he had hired, boxing his precious books, including "How to Ski," and a book about newspaper reporting which Mr. Rogers had given him to study, and going to his final Scout meetings.

The Wildcats and Weasels were busy, too, but he didn't know it. They were preparing a surprise party at the Scout House on Saturday night—a regular farewell dinner. On Saturday afternoon, Peanut took his last ski run, on Cole's Hill. The snow was sticky, the jump had melted down, but the boys made the best of it—rather sadly, as they hated to see their leader go.

Then at six o'clock they took the surprised Peanut to the Scout House.

The gym was lighted with paper lanterns, a long table was spread with camp plates and cups, there was a big urn of coffee, there was soup heated over the stove, there were cold meat and salad and dough-

nuts and pies, given by the boys' mothers. Mr. Rogers was there, and two of the Scout Council, and both of Peanut's patrols.

After the supper was over, Old Hundred, who had been chosen as toast master, rose at his place and pounded the table for order.

"Fellow Scouts," he said, "we all know Peanut, I guess, and how he's been our Scout Master and how he's going to leave us next week and go up to Hampton to be a reporter. Guess we're all mighty sorry to see him go, and we want him to remember us, so we fellers have chipped in and got him something so he'll remember us and so's he'll know how we ap-ap-appreciate what he's done for the Scouts."

Here Old Hundred fished into his pocket and produced a package, handing it to the astonished Peanut, who opened it, and drew out a new fountain pen!

"Well—I'll—I'll—it'll be great to write stories with!" he stammered.

"Now, fellers, three long 'rahs and three Peanuts on the end!" cried Old Hundred—and the roof of the Scout House nearly lifted!

When the echoes subsided, everybody began to yell, "Speech! Speech!"

Peanut got up on his feet, very much embarrassed.

"Fellow Scouts," he began, "you've pretty nearly got my goat. I never made a speech in my life.

Nearest I ever came to it was in a high school debate, when I was alternate, and I was scared for a week that Lou Merritt was going to be sick, so I'd have to take his place. I—I—wish I could make a speech, an' tell you how pleased I am to have you fellows give me this dinner and this pen. Guess I didn't need it to remember you all by, but I'm mighty glad to have it. I'll never forget you fellows—'specially Cop's feet sticking out of the snow after a Telemark turn!"

Peanut got his second wind, during the laughter at this, and went on.

"But just because I'm going don't—doesn't—mean the Scouts stop," he said. "Mr. Rogers is the Big Boss, and even if he quit, the Scouts would go right on, because the movement is bigger'n any of the men in it. But I guess we all owe a whole lot more'n we can ever pay to Mr. Rogers, though, and I want to tell you Scouts right now that I owe more to the Scout movement and to Mr. Rogers than I could tell if I talked till to-morrow morning. Why—why—if it hadn't been for the Scouts, I guess I never would have had a chance to be a reporter! It ain't—isn't—easy to put into words, but I just kind o' lay down on my school work, same as some of you are doing now—and when I got through school I wasn't fit for much of anything.

"It was Mr. Rogers that brought me up sharp,

and it was Scout work—bossing you fellows, keeping Cop from fighting, inventing games, getting you through the tests—that really taught me how to do things right—guess Mr. Rogers would say, gave me a sense of responsibility! So I guess it's up to me to thank you, not the other way 'round.

“Guess I've talked enough now. But I just want to say that I shall miss you fellows a whole lot. I'm—I'm—I'm going to be homesick about Saturday afternoons, I bet, and I'll think how Jimmy is doing a forty foot jump, and Cop is looking for wild flowers down under the snow, and Old Hundred and the rest are teaching the Weasels how to be first class Scouts, and—and I'll just have nothing but my fountain pen to look at!”

Peanut's voice suddenly broke, and he sat down, and blinked his eyes. Some of the boys were going to cheer, but Old Hundred started singing “Old Lang Syne,” and everybody joined in. Before it was over, Peanut had to blink very hard, and little Jimmy, sitting beside him, swallowed a large tear in each corner of his mouth.

When the song was over, the Scouts again gave a yell for Peanut, and a yell for Mr. Rogers, and another for Peanut, and Jimmy walked silently home beside his friend, through the winter starlight, not trusting to speech.

Sunday night Peanut departed for his new work.

Jimmy and Mr. Rogers and his mother and father went with him to the station. The snow was melting fast. As the train disappeared up the track, and the Scout Master and Jimmy turned homeward through the slush, the boy said suddenly:

"I'm *glad* it's melting. I don't want to ski without Peanut!"

"Well, Jimmy," Mr. Rogers replied, "we'll just have to read the *Herald* every day, and see what he's doing."

"You bet I will!" said Jimmy. "I'm going to be a newspaper man, too! I'll be through high school three years from next June, and then *I'm* going to be a reporter. Peanut'll be editor then, and give me a job!"

"Let us hope so, anyway," Mr. Rogers replied, smiling softly to himself. "Anyhow, he'll be a pretty good reporter by then, and he can help you a whole lot."

"But three years is a long time," was Jimmy's last remark. "And this old town's going to be awfully lonesome!"

THE END

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