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THE
FOX PATROL
ON THE RIVER.

A STORY FOR BOY SCOUTS.
C.L.GILMAN.

THE BUZZA COMPANY • MINNEAPOLIS



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CON COLVILLE



The Fox Patrol on the River

by ^{Charles} C. L. GILMAN

Pictures by L. V. MERO



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To my father and mother, the father whose exploits on the long trail have been my inspiration in woodcraft, and the mother whose loving precepts have pointed the path of daily living, I dedicate this story.

THE TRAIL-BLAZERS.

Two men looked down from that Happy Ground
Where the trails of brave men meet—
And one was cased with steel around
And one from head to feet
Wore the smoke-tanned hide of the forest deer.
The steel man gripped with mailed hand
The shaft of his ashen spear
And played with the hilt of his battle brand
As he spoke through his visor bars.
"He is mine, all mine," he said,
"My very youth, as I rode to the wars—
"By his faith and his high-held head.
"As to the weak, in kindness meek, to the strong
"As stark as any found
"To spill his blood to right a wrong
"At the girth of our Table Round."
But the buckskin man laughed a silent laugh
As he leaned on his good "Killdeer."
"His step is as mine on the Mingoes' path
"On the Old York State frontier;
"And his hand as quick to a woodsman's trick
"As mine in the days which were,
"When I found house gear in the forest thick
"Where the startled spruce birds whirr."
So the heroes quarreled, as heroes may,
While the Scout pressed on
Through the rosy dawn of his manhood's day—
And little guessed as on he pressed
He followed the track their steel had hacked
Upward, across the Great Divide.
Yet there waited to hail as "brother" the lad—
And proudly watched on the other side—
The Leatherstocking and Sir Galahad.

—C. L. G.

FOREWORD.

In writing this little story I have told, with but few embellishments, the story of an expedition of which I was a member in my boyhood days and into it I have woven characters and incidents of that happy time.

Should this tale chance to come to the hands of any of my erstwhile comrades of the wood and river, I trust that they will accept it as bringing my greetings to them across the years which have been since our trails parted.

My acknowledgements are due to Ernest Thompson Seton, chief scout of the Boy Scouts of America, from whose story, "Rolf in the Woods," the transcription of the fox's yelp which figures in one of the few purely fictional incidents of the story is taken.

To the scouts who may read this yarn—and, I trust, find it to their liking—I would say that I have striven first to entertain them with some real scouting adventures, and second, to put a few more blazes on the trail of scoutcraft, on which I wish them good hiking.

CHARLES L. GILMAN.

Minneapolis, Minn., July 30, 1911.

I.

SCOUT MEETS SCOUT.



IF Ole Sorensen had not been a good scout he would have ducked behind the clump of scrub oak beside him when the angry cries of a disturbed bluejay split the silence of the early June morning. Instead he stood stock still while the bird scolded about a thicket two hundred yards ahead of him.

His blue overalls blended with the blue shadow of the bush. His black and white striped "hickory" shirt looked little different from the numerous oak stumps which dotted the hillside. His red-tanned face and tow hair—his campaign hat had been left behind as a tell-tale bit of scout insignia—easily might be mistaken for a splash of sunlight on the dead leaves of a broken branch.

Ole was new to the game of scouting, but a dozen years spent on a farm where good stalking meant rabbit stew or even fried partridge for the family table, had taught him the first great lesson—that still things are seldom noticed in the woods.

So Ole kept on standing still. Whatever had aroused that jay bird, the watchman of the woods, was moving for the

scolding bunch of blue feathers, guessed as much as seen by his keen eyes in the early morning light, was following along the line of woods across the clearing before him toward where they ran down a joint jutting out into the river.

From the end of that point it was possible to command a clear view up stream, past the bluff on which Ole stood, almost to the grassy bank opposite Pike Island where Con Colville, patrol leader, had halted the Foxes while Ole was sent ahead to see if the way down river was clear. Other scouts had clamored for the honor, but it had fallen to Ole, because, as Con said:

“He isn’t in uniform and if they see him, maybe they’ll take him for just a farmer’s kid out looking for the cows or something.”

It was up to him to make good.

His admission to the Fox patrol—who openly boasted that they were the crack patrol of the Ojibway troop—was the first break in the long loneliness of the winter which followed when his father had sold the farm and moved to the county seat that Ole and his sister might have the advantage of city schooling.

His height—as he had been told openly—was his chief qualification—for the Foxes prided themselves on being the “huskies” of the troop.

All this flashed through his mind as he stood intent upon the noisy jay and the silent woods in front of him.

His left foot, unevenly placed upon a stone, went to sleep.

A deer fly settled upon the back of his neck and bit, and bit, and bit.

Worst of all, his nose itched.

But, conscious that even then a keen pair of eyes might be studying the place where he stood, he set his teeth and waited.

Then a sapling swayed suddenly near the river, though all the other tree tops lay quiet against the windless sky. Somebody was making his way down the steep slope to the point, catching hold of tree trunks to help him.

A cow might have bumped that sapling—no, a scout in full uniform slipped through the river's fringe of willows and stooped to pick something from the stone-strewn beach.



His quest achieved, the scout straightened cautiously and scanned the higher ground up stream.

He was too late.

Just as he stooped Ole had dived behind his bush—swatting at that tormenting fly as he did so—and was already cautiously crawling over the rise.

“Ch-ch-chrrrr.”

The bark of a gray squirrel rang from the point behind him.

“Ch-ch-chrrrr—Chrrrr—Chrrrrrr.”

It was answered from a poplar grove further inland.

“Gray squirrels in scrub oak and popple, huh,” was Ole’s reflection. “Might fool some town fellow, but not this Fox. Just the same, though, if he hadn’t had to pick up those stones to make his call I might be standing by that bush yet.”

It was the trick of rapidly hitting two stones together to imitate the call of the gray squirrel which Ole had tried many times, with varying success, in the butternut grove on his father’s farm. It recalled to memory, sometimes when a fat gray fellow had answered—to reappear later crusted with corn meal between crisp slices of bacon.

But he had other bacon to fry right then.

II.

BROUGHT TO BAY.

In the sumac thicket where Con Colville and the main body of the patrol lay hidden, Ole made his report.

“One of the Squirrel patrol is watching near the water on a point a quarter of a mile down. I heard another answer his signals from a popple grove about 400 yards inland. They are both hidden in the woods with a clearing in front of them. No one could cross this clearing without being seen.”

“Did they see you?”

“Guess not.”

“Good work—”

A low hiss from a lookout at the inland edge of the thicket cut short these welcome words of praise. Every scout wriggled to a place where, without being seen, he could see across a wide hay marsh, one of the back waters of the river during the spring freshets, to the steep sand bank beyond which marked the final limit of the river's ravages.

A scout whose flaming red hair shone like a bonfire at night even at that distance, was lowering himself inch by inch over the edge of that bank—moving so slowly that only an eye riveted upon him could tell that he moved at all. Only the near presence of hostile scouts could account for Reddy Nichols moving with so much caution. But he left nothing to guess work.

Once safe under the cover of the bank he raised the staff he



"A SCOUT WAS LOWERING
HIMSELF INCH BY INCH."





carried with both hands, holding it horizontally above his head. That, in the scout code of signals, meant "enemy in sight." Then with his back still turned on his friends, as if he were on the look-out for pursuit, he gave his staff the

series of quick up and down moves which added the word "many" to the message already sent silently to his friends three full city blocks away.

Reddy did not wait to see if his signal was noticed and answered.

"Foxes are always on the look-out"—they not only said but also believed, and this incident pretty well proved that they were not mistaken.

While Reddy was making his way in, not by a rash run from tussock to tussock of the slough, but cautiously, under cover of the willows which fringed its edge, the leader of the little party issued his orders in a low tone:

"He's found their main body all right. Sling your packs, fellows, and pick up Reddy's stuff. We may have to make a run for it."

But no pursuing party broke into sight and Reddy soon arrived to pant out his report:

"Panthers and Gophers have bank guarded up to the old Bridgeman Mill. Spotted me going out. Broke through and ran inland so they would think we might be up in the Priest woods. Shook 'em. Doubled back past slaughter house.

Old Marcus was there with Doves, Wolves and Rabbits. Has three look-outs up trees. Injuned back through their line. Fifty feet from Fatty Felix. He had his face into sandwich up to the ears—didn't hear me."

The Fox patrol was hemmed in.

Con Colville, familiar with every foot of the ground, knew exactly how well it was done. His patrol guessed it, and turned to Con for his answer to the question:

"Was Con Colville stumped at last? Must the Fox patrol confess defeat after challenging the other six patrols of the troop to bar its way from town to the swimming hole at the Big Bend, three miles down the river?"

III.

HOW THE TRAP WAS SET.

Meanwhile the three reserve patrols of the scouts opposed to the Foxes had been doing a heavy job of waiting. Drawn up in the shadow of the abandoned slaughterhouse and partly concealed by the heavy growth of hemp weeds around it, they curbed their impatience as best they could while waiting for the signal which would send them to cut off that patrol as soon as their rangers should report the course it had taken.

Stretched out flat on the rickety roof of the dilapidated building, "Paddy" Fitzpatrick, crack signal-man of the troop, kept a pair of field glasses trained steadily upon the top of the lone pine of Cemetery Hill, full half a mile west of the actual scene of operations.

"Paddy's" pal and team-mate, Evan Williams, was up that tree—posted there by "Old Marcus" himself. The crafty scoutmaster, with his usual foresight, was protecting the Augusta road, which was the western boundary of the "fair" field of the game—and doing it with a single scout.

From his perch in the lone pine Evan could watch a mile and a half of the Augusta road and with so skilled a signal-man as "Paddy" to read his message could wig-wag instant information of any attempt of the Foxes to advance or retreat along it. So warned, it would be a simple matter for the three

reserve patrols to "double" across on a long slant, head off and surround the Foxes.

So much for danger to the west.

From the topmost fork of a massive butternut Charlie McGregor kept an outlook to the east, where the campaign against the Foxes gave most promise of coming to a head through the advance of the Panthers toward the river.

Still another signal-man, Dan Hanke, perched on the beam connecting the tall posts of the old slaughter-pen gate, kept look-out to the north where a flutter of red and orange from the smoke-stack of the old Bridgeman Mill told that the Gophers, following orders, had posted a scout with signal flags to give notice of any attempt of the Foxes to retreat up the river.

In the yard a small, bright fire of carefully selected dead wood needed only the addition of the green milk-weed stacked beside it to furnish dense black smoke for signalling to all the patrols of the troop at once.

It was a well made and well watched trap set to catch the Foxes.

"Signal from Panthers," called Charlie McGregor from his perch in the butternut tree, and read off aloud the message spelt out by a fluttering bandana a quarter of a mile away.

"(A) Fox ran (through) line (at) Iron (Spring) toward Priest (woods, shall we) follow?"

The leader of the Panthers wasted no words in his message but Mac's quick wit supplied those missing—the ones in parenthesis.

"Doves go down to the Priest Woods at scouts' pace," ordered the scoutmaster. "Swing off to the west to parallel

Augusta road, range through the woods and if you can't round up the Foxes, at least scare them back toward the Panthers or toward us.

"Fitzpatrick, signal Williams to look out for scouts on the Augusta road, particularly along the edge of the Priest Woods. Dan, tell that Gopher look-out what's up."

Meanwhile the cause of all this excitement had lain in a patch of nettles, with his hands pulled into his sleeves and his arms around his head, to let the Doves crash by on their errand to the northwest. The Doves, even if they hadn't been in too much of a hurry to get to the Priest Woods and catch the Foxes all by themselves to notice what they passed, would hardly have looked for a Fox in so "smart" a hiding place. When the noise of their passing had died away the lurking Fox rolled cautiously out of his cover and took up their back track.

"Likely more where they came from," he muttered as he bent low to catch the dim furrow of bent grass which marked their route. "Must, go, look, see."

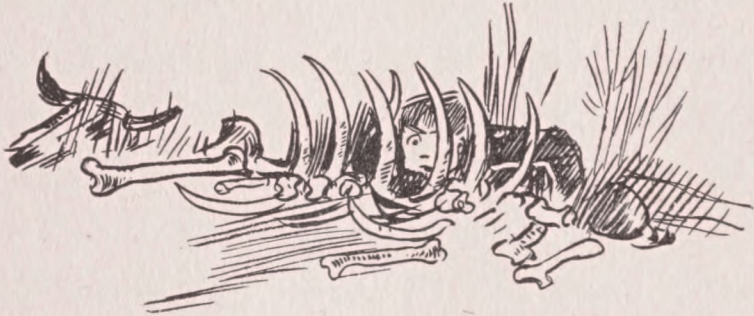
Some excuse for the Wolves and the Rabbits might be found in the fact that they were the youngest scouts in the troop and were awfully tired of standing still and doing nothing. Anyhow, they let themselves get busy whispering among themselves over what had just happened and what was going to happen next; instead of keeping their mouths shut and their eyes and ears open. Otherwise it is hardly probable that a dull, brown shadow could have moved slowly through the woods past their position and then advanced toward it from the south.

The shadow moved only when the scoutmaster was intent upon the actions of his signal-men in their lofty perches. As

quickly as he might turn to look about him the shadow always stopped dead still just an instant quicker. Finally it lay down and wriggled and at last it reached the goal it sought, the dry, dusty carcass of a cow within twenty yards of the waiting patrols.

There were many fine peep holes to be found between the gaunt ribs.

It was no sweet-scented covert that Red Nichols had found, but for that very reason it rendered him mighty safe from detection. The Wolves and Rabbits had yet to learn to what lengths of hardship, danger and discomfort the Foxes would go when bent upon outwitting their adversaries.



Chuckling inside himself, Red took careful count of the numbers and arrangements of the pursuing patrols. Listening carefully to the orders and comments of his scoutmaster he was able to get a clear idea of the way they were posted to head off the Foxes from their goal, the Big Bend swimming hole.

It was while in this concealment that Red heard the stone signal of the Squirrels repeated from sentinel to sentinel up to the main guard and Scoutmaster Peters' explanation that it

meant that the Squirrels had established a cordon of scouts three hundred yards apart reaching from the bluff to the river and between the Foxes and their goal.

This was the same cordon which Ole Sorenson had discovered in his scout down river and reported to Con Colville. He and Red between them had completely located the forces of their enemies.

With the complete plans of the "enemy" in his possession, Red's burning desire was to get away unnoticed and make his report. This was no easy task, as the excitement in the main guard caused by his own break through the line had died down and it was again on the alert.

Valuable time seemed to fly past Red as he crouched in his unsavory hiding place and wondered how he could get out of it. But a diversion was at hand.

From Cemetery Hill came the warning:

"Patrol on Augusta road, going south."

In an instant, all was excitement.

Patrol leaders called their patrols to attention and gave orders to leave all packs and equipment under guard in order that a swift run might be made to head off the Foxes. Scouts assigned to guard duty made noisy objections.

The scoutmaster, busy calling directions and messages to the signal-men had no time to check the tumult. He directed that they stick to their posts and call in the advanced parties by the pre-arranged smoke signal if anything developed suddenly in his absence.

But hardly had the order to march left the scoutmaster's lips before a second message from Cemetery Hill made him recall

it—with a muttered promise to make those fool Doves learn to keep out of sight except when on parade.

“Patrol on Augusta road are Doves returning. They signal no sign of Foxes in Priest Woods,” the message ran.

The momentary confusion caused by the imprudence of the Doves in undertaking to hasten their return by marching on the open road had served Red Nichols’ turn.

He was already far away, flat on his belly and worming his way back through the line to his comrades lurking at the river’s edge.

IV.

DRIVEN FROM COVER.



Scouting had struck Saukville the fall before, just as it had hundreds of other cities and towns throughout the country. But in Saukville it found the boys unusually ready. The town was not large and the woods and streams around it still abounded in the small game, fish, nuts and berries which tempted the general run of fellows to be scouts—in an unorganized, clumsy sort of way.

So Marcus Peters, professor of botany in the high school and superintendent of the First Church Sunday School, had excellent material to draw from, when he decided after due deliberation—Mr. Peters was long on deliberation but mighty sudden in action when he was through thinking—to raise a troop.

And the lank New Englander—suspected of spending his Saturdays inventing new and stricter forms of discipline for the week to come, instead of turning out and rooting for the school football team, and viewed with distrust as a “pious duck” by the wilder and hardier spirits because of his Sunday activities—surprised his troop.

Theirs had been no indoor training. All winter long they had faced the wind of the prairie or the deep drifts of the

woods on every Saturday. One by one the boys who had joined under the impression that scouting meant wearing a natty khaki uniform and playing soldier fell away and their places had been taken by fellows stouter of heart and of body. Following the silent partridge hunter—the secret of his Saturday disappearances had been revealed in a burst of confidence around a camp fire built in spite of a particularly nasty blizzard—was universally admitted to be “some stunt.”

Among all the husky young fellows who hailed the summer vacation as an opportunity to turn loose and do some tall scouting, there was only one “runt”—Con Colville, undersized and spectacled, but wearing the full badge of a first class scout—the first one issued in the state.

Ojibway troop didn't know whether to be proud of Con or not. It had plenty of fellows who could lick him, and not a few who had. He was a dub at baseball, a mere punching bag when he put on the gloves and couldn't even help the eleven raise a sweat as a scrub when the whole school turned out to help put an edge on the football team.

But the Fox patrol had no doubts.

A perplexing trick of disappearing down river daily as soon as school was out had resulted in his knowing every foot of the woods and river. Under his leadership, reluctantly accepted at first, Fox patrol had outstripped the rest. Its meals were better cooked and its packs carried more comforts with less labor after Con had taught it to discard the “regulation” for a contrivance of his own, made from a canvas grain sack. It reached given points by the easiest, which, in the woods, is seldom the shortest, way. It saw other patrols first and was

seldom seen when it didn't want to be. It held the equipment race, water boiling, trailing and stretcher-making championships of the troop.

And it was a long way from being humble or modest about it. But Con Colville and his Foxes were up against it now.

With the river at their left, a string of alert outposts—arranged by “old Marcus” himself—at their front and right ready to warn a main body well posted, to strike in any direction at their slightest move and certain to close in on them if they stood still, they might do one of three things:

Confess defeat and turn back. Go forward to certain capture. Or—let Con Colville pull them through as he had many times before.

“Follow me.”

Flat on his belly Con wiggled his way out of the thicket into a barely perceptible gully slanting toward the river. The grass, as is usual in such depressions, grew uncommonly high there and slightly screened the movement.

One by one the Foxes wormed through the willows at the river's edge—willows twisted into a dense wall and matted with brush and driftwood, brought down by the spring's high



water. One by one they tumbled over a low bank to the gravelly beach at the edge of the water. They were directly opposite the head of Pike Island.

The water willows and the thicket they had quitted, hid them from the watchers inland. The bend and bluff cut them off from the view of the "Squirrel" Ole Sorenson had seen and heard on the point down stream.

But they were still cut off. Behind and ahead were the "enemy" and in front of them the river raced and foamed through a rocky channel.

V.

A DANGEROUS PASSAGE.

Con whispered his orders.

Then he unslung his packsack and held it with his right hand. His left gripped Phil Saunders' belt. Phil, in his turn, took his pack in his right hand and clenched the fingers of his left in the waistband of Ole's overalls.

So the line was made up.



Locked together, each scout might have the support of all the rest if the current swept his feet from under him. At the rear end Reddy Nichols made things doubly secure by shifting his pack to his left hand and hooking the fingers of his right in Tom Coleman's belt, while Tom held to him with his left hand.

Wading into the raging water, which rapidly deepened to his arm pits, Con raised his pack above his head with his right hand to keep his grub and blanket dry. Each of the others did likewise as he reached deep water.

So, with the rapid pushing against them and treacherous

rocks rolling beneath their feet, the Foxes fought their way across the channel.

Once a heavy log, escaped from the "drive" in the main river, threatened their line. But Reddy, trusting to Tom Coleman's grip, thrust out his right hand and turned it off. Tom was pulled off his feet by the strain and the whole line sagged—but it held—and Tom got his toes against the bottom again.

Prudently refusing a landing on the near shore of the island where the marks of their wet scramble up a clay bank might betray their hiding place, Con led his line past the head of the island and down the outer shore, where they were completely hidden from any watchers on the main land.

"Safe, by heck, but shut up like bugs in a bottle," exclaimed Reddy. "Say, Con, do we stay here all day? We promised to break through to the Bend by noon or wash dishes for the whole troop."

"Aw shucks, if your rusty roof didn't heat your think tank, you'd tumble that they'll think we've slipped past and beat it down river to catch us. Time they get wise and turn back we'll be down to the brickyard woods. Plenty of room to slip by six troops let alone six patrols there. We've done that before. 'Bout time to get into our aeroplane and submarine back to shore, ain't it?" suggested Phil.

But Con, to whom about half of this was addressed, was sitting silent on a log with his feet, shoes and all, trailing in the water—after the ford what did a little wetness more or less matter?

Polishing his spectacles on a dry corner of the bandana he wore around his neck Con turned to Coleman.

“Tom,” he said, “suppose you mooch over to where you can watch the main shore. If they send a scout down to look for us, ‘kaw’ once. Plenty crows around here and an extra ‘kaw’ won’t tell ‘em much.”

“Supposin’ a real crow hollers,” said Matt Gilmor. “What then?”

“Take a chance on that,” Con responded. “If there was any crows on this island, they left when we came and there won’t any more stop off while we’re around.”

“If they plant a party opposite us, Tom, ‘kaw’ twice. If they start to cross let out three and come to us.”

Tom slipped away on his mission. For a little ways he walked upright but kept large trees between himself and the shore. Then, as he reached the central ridge of the island he dropped on all fours and crawled. Finally, snake fashion, he slipped out of sight.



VI.

THE CIRCLE CLOSES IN.

With a map of the country spread out on the ground before him Scoutmaster Peters pointed out to the leaders of the three patrols with him the situation as he saw it from the reports of his advance parties.

"Here we are," he said, pointing to the rough drawing of a cow's skull which indicated the position of the slaughter house.

"The Panthers are spread out along the bluffs north and south between us and the river. The Gophers are up at the mill and close the gap between the left of the Panthers and the river.

"We are in close touch with the right of the Panthers' line and the Squirrels have drawn a cordon from our position east to the river.

"The Doves report that the Foxes are not in the Priest Woods to the northwest of us and I doubt if they could have gotten by to the west of the Panthers' line without either hitting us or being seen by Williams from Cemetery Hill while crossing the cleared ground running west from these woods to the Augusta road.

"Unless the Foxes had already gotten past when Jim Bartlett strung his line of Squirrels they must be boxed up with the Panthers west of them, the Squirrels south of them, the Gophers north of them and the river east of them."

The three patrol leaders bent closer over the map—a printed one with additional details sketched in by the troop, which had thoroughly explored that part of the country.

“It sure looks as if Con Colville is jugged at last,” chuckled Johnny Boswell, leader of the Wolves.

“Collie” Pappenfus, leaning on a staff decorated with the pennon of the Doves, was doubtful.

“How about the Fox who got away toward the Priest Woods?” he asked.

“Huh, Louis Kaiser told me that it was Red Nichols when I scouted down to him,” said Joe Bennett of the Rabbits. “It’s a lead pipe cinch if Red let Kaiser and his gang see him run to the Priest Woods, it was because he was going the other way.

“Remember how when we tried this game last time Con sent Phil Saunders to draw the whole bunch off up to Wawa Pond while the rest of the Foxes waded across Sioux River through the rapids and got away clean.

“Take it from me, kid, any place you think you see the Foxes is the place where they aint.”

“Which is considerably more true than grammatical,” said the scoutmaster. “Hullo, Charlie seems to be taking down a message.”

Sure enough, a roughly written transcription fluttered down from the big butternut. It read:

“Think Foxes between us and river. Send one patrol to strengthen our line and will sweep forward and round them up. Kaiser, No. 1, Panthers.”

Inactivity was beginning to tell on the spirits of all the main guard, even on the usually steady scoutmaster. It seemed dis-

astrous to sit still while the Foxes might be worming through some gap in a line which could be made tighter by making it shorter.

“Signal the Panthers to begin an advance to the river in fifteen minutes,” called Mr. Peters.

“Meanwhile,” he said, turning to his patrol leaders, “we will leave our signal men here and hike down to the river, relieving the Squirrels as we go and letting them go ahead and help the Panthers rake the country.”

The order to hike on was received with a hardly suppressed cheer.

Packs were slung, belts were tightened and belt axes settled squarely on the left hip where they would not be an incumbrance in running, if running were required. Leaving their lookouts posted, the three patrols started east.

Bartlett, leader of the Squirrels, out of breath with running, met them before they had gone five hundred yards.

“Somebody is in the thicket opposite Pike Island,” he panted. “I crawled to the edge of the woods and looked north. There is a south wind but I saw the tops of some of the bushes in the thicket sway east and west.”



This confirmed the suspicion already strong in the scout-

master's mind and he gave hasty orders for the Squirrels to swing in at the right of the forward movement the Panthers were about to begin and explained that he, with the three reserve patrols, would block the escape of the Foxes down river when they were driven from cover.

"Three patrols should be enough to stop them dead if they try to play football and buck the line," he said.

Bartlett dashed away to call up his patrol and the reserve hurried toward the river.

It was a beautiful closing in, accurately executed.

In fact, the whole game was played in a way possible only to a troop which knew scouting thoroughly and was trained to follow the directions of a master mind without any attempt to add to or improve them.

The Ojibway troop had learned the important lesson of co-operation and it was working all together to bring its full strength against the seven scouts of the Fox patrol.

The trap had been sprung, its jaws were closing and it was up to Con Colville and his patrol to make a quick jump if they were not to be caught.

VII.

THE CROW CALLS.

Con still sat on his log, looking out over the river. Singly and in bunches the great brown logs, cut in the pineries to the north, floated past on their way to the waiting saws of the mills to the south. Some grazed the shore. Some stranded to make work for the "driving crew" which herded the noble tree stems to the mills as cattle are herded to the slaughter.

Still the logs slid past—on their way down river. Down river toward the Big Bend, the Big Bend the goal of the patrol's endeavor.

"If we had corked boots"—a "cork" in river talk is a steel spike three-quarters of an inch long and sharp as a needle—"like the rivermen," said Ole, whose father and uncle still told around the winter fire about the days when, fresh over from the sea, they had found work and made a start in the logging shanties and on the drive, "we might get on logs and ride them down to the Bend past all their guards."

The idea had come.

"We can make a raft," said Con.

The scouts started from where they sat and dripped in moody silence. The despaired-of victory was now in sight.

"Kaw-aw-aw."

It was Tom Coleman's signal. The opposing scouts had crossed the bottom land to the hiding place in the thicket they had just abandoned.

Reddy Nichols whipped out his hunter's hatchet from its scabbard over his left hip and sprang towards a birch sapling crying, "Here's a pole to push it with."

Phil Saunders tripped him and the two rolled over and over in a "bear rattle."

"Cut out the wood carving business, you chump," Phil hissed into Red's ear. "Want to give the whole graft away?"

Red saw reason in this suggestion. Perhaps Phil's knee in the middle of his chest helped him to understand.

"Might be a little more polite about giving your advice," he grunted as Phil released him and both turned to the shore where Ole and Matt were holding together in the slack water behind a little point, the logs which Eddie Austin and Con, shoulder deep in water, were capturing and towing in.

"Get busy, you two," called Con in a low voice. "Gather up all the twine you can find in our packs and buckle all our belts together to make one long strap."

The strap was made by the time four logs of medium girth but extra length were corralled side by side. But even tying on the three neckties to be found on the patrol did not make it long enough to encircle the four logs once.

"Pity some of you fellows are so afraid of being dolled up that you can't wear neckties," complained Con, whose advice on this point had been persistently ignored.

"What's the matter with using this grape vine," asked Eddie Austin, trailing half a dozen yards of the wild rope with the leaves still on it behind him.

"Too stiff to tie," objected Matt.

Raft making was at a standstill. Four logs at least were

needed to support seven scouts. There was barely enough "rope" to lash together two.

"Kaw-aw-aw—Kaw-aw-aw."

From his hidden lookout Tom Coleman had seen the Panthers and Squirrels advance across the bottom land and take up a systematic study of the traces left by the Foxes. The broken brush and trampled grass in the thicket were quickly noted. The main force halted squarely opposite the island—nine of them. Their four best trailers were hard at work. It was a matter of but a few moments until they would discover the matted grass which showed where the Foxes had crawled from the thicket to the shore and then—well, sooner or later—probably sooner—they would learn or guess that their prey was on the island.

"Let's hitch the two inside logs together with our belts and ties and lash on one at each side with grape vine," suggested Reddy.

Something more easily suggested than done. It was Ole who finally hit upon the scheme of tying the line to one end of a long stick and so shoving it through the water under the logs.

At last the two inner logs were buckled together with belts at one end and tied up with neckties and doubled twine at the other. The two outside logs were fastened, even less securely, with wild grape vine, which broke at every attempt to knot it until that was abandoned and the loose ends simply twisted around the part tight against the logs. The whole raft was moored to the shore by a stout piece of vine made fast to the belts buckled around the two inner logs.

VIII.

CON DOES SOME JOLLYING.

So the Foxes waited with everything, save the poles, in readiness for setting out on their raft.

Counting on Tom Coleman to give them prompt warning they figured they could get safely away upon the river if hard pressed—and they still had hopes that the patrol on the shore opposite them would wander off on a false scent without invading the island upon which they had taken refuge.

But just as Con and his patrol were congratulating themselves on the security of their position, a new peril threatened them.

Straight across the river toward them came a batteau—the big but graceful craft handed down to the modern river man by his predecessor, the French Canadian voyageur.

The mode of propelling this historic craft is unlike those with which the average modern boatman is familiar.

Its sides are flat instead of rounded and slope in an obtuse angle to the keel. Thus each side of the long boat gives good footing to a man shod with the “corked boots” worn by all log drivers. By setting the steel-shod end of his pike pole against the bottom, and running along the side of the batteau from stem to stern the boatman can drive his craft where he pleases.

And this batteau, with three pike poles at work on each side, was coming on at a great rate of speed. Thanks to the method of propulsion it was not carried down stream by the current, as a row boat would have been. It is this virtue of the batteau which endears it to the men who herd the log drives.

Coming straight from the east bank to the island it was invisible to the watchers on the west shore.

But it was the crew of this boat which caused the Foxes uneasiness.



Clad principally in red underwear, with shaggy hair stringing down over unshaven faces from beneath their battered slouch hats, they presented a wild and barbarous appearance which was not belied by the frequent and hearty volleys of profanity with which they greeted the chances of navigation, good and bad.

Wild and lawless, the men of the river were justly regarded with fear by the boys of Saukville. They were mighty prompt to avenge the slightest offense against their comfort or dignity by sousing the offender in the river. Nor can it be said that the past dealings of the Saukville boys with the rivermen had been such as to warrant any severe criticism of their

hostile attitude. Many a time had a batteau load of log drivers or a solitary boom runner been assailed by a volley of bark, stones and clods from the bridge crossing the river below the town—an attack rendered more galling by the taunts and abuse of the boys making it.

Small wonder that the rivermen regarded all Saukville boys as their natural enemies and less wonder that the boys, whether guilty or not, considered it the best policy to keep beyond the reach of the brawny hands which wielded the pike pole and cant hook on the drive.

At the best neither Con nor his comrades saw how the approaching interview could be passed off without such disturbance as would call the lurking scouts of their opponents to their hiding place.

It was a time for soft words and quiet diplomacy.

Raising his left hand and motioning his followers to keep silence whatever happened, Con ran down to the water's edge in time to help haul the sloping prow of the batteau up on the shingley beach.

His prompt politeness seemed to dash the wits of the burly foreman, who was first to spring from the boat.

“And what divvilmint is it that ye young scallywags will be after now,” spoke the giant as he stepped shoreward regardless of the water which wetted him to the knees. “What should the likes of yees be after stealin’ the company’s logs, though it is little ye young river rats care whose or what is the stuff ye lay your thievin’ hands on.”

Con smiled serenely through this outburst and replied: “It is true enough that we had no chance to tell you we were

borrowing your logs, but there is a gang after us on the main shore which gave us no time to hunt you up. We had to be more prompt than polite in taking what we needed.

"I'm much obliged to you for coming across to us since we could not go over to you and now you are here I will ask you for the loan of these logs and twenty or thirty feet of rope as well if you happen to have it handy."

That the boy should not only confess the "borrowing" of the logs but ask for a rope to tie them up with as well seemed to strike the sense of humor of the riverman, for a good natured laugh lifted the ends of his sunburned mustache and made a lot of kindly wrinkles around his keen blue eyes.

"Aw, souse the young pups and turn loose the logs," called a tough looking member of the gang from the boat. He sprang ashore and advanced angrily toward the Foxes, who promptly ranged themselves in a close body and picked up rocks ready to repel an attack.

"Souse the young pups. It's the very gang that roosted on the bridge and threw rocks at me all yesterday afternoon when I was out on the boom sorting logs," he went on.

"Souse 'em," came the cry from the boat.

Things looked black for the Foxes. With their pursuers on the bank behind and this rough crew in front they were cornered.

"Somebody will be getting hurt if any sousing is done," said Con, his jaw setting and his lips pulling back from his teeth in the grin with which he was accustomed to take and give punishment when the gloves were going in the school basement at recess.

“This bunch didn’t throw any rocks at you, and you know it. But it will heave a few in about two seconds if you don’t back up. What’s more, we’ve only got to whistle to bring up a dozen more from behind and yell to call on twenty more from behind them.”

The big foreman slowly winked at Con.

“All I’ve got to say,” went on the patrol leader, “is that you’re a mighty bum bunch of sports if you make us do it and spoil our chances of getting by the bunch behind us and down river.”

“And what have ye done that all that gang should be chasing ye?” questioned the big foreman.

“Done nothing. It’s a game. We’re boy scouts and we said we would get through the rest of our troop, forty of them, and down to the Big Bend by noon or wash the dishes for the whole bunch.

“And we’d have done it if you fellows hadn’t come butting in. We can’t run away from you because the others are laying for us all along the west shore and if we have to fight, the noise will give the whole snap away.

“We were going fine before you came along.”

“A sportin’ proposition is it?” said the leader of the rivermen. “Well, it’s poor sport to be driving nails in logs on their way to the mills. Sometime next year a band saw will hit one of those nails and bust and maybe hit a man or two—and then ye’ll all be murderers with your sport.”

“Well, if that’s all that’s troubling you, rest easy,” said Con. “There’s not a nail in that raft—and we’ll turn the logs loose soon as we make our get away on them.”

This speech mollified the river boss and the appeal to their sporting blood reached the men in the batteau.

“Aw, let thuh kids have ’em.”

“Shure, Pat, don’t spoil the game of hide and seek.”

“Somebody’ll do as much fer you thuh next time you lick a cop and have to make a quick get-away.”

These and similar expressions from the log drivers showed that the tide had turned. But the sorter who had been pelted while working on the boom still demanded revenge.

“Well, if you’se guys is turnin’ me down,” he snarled, “I’ll just swing in and beat up the young rips myself.”

He stepped forward. So did the foreman.

“Av it’s fight you’re after, Mike Kelly, take a man and not a boy,” he said. “It’s sivin long days since I felt meat with my fists and if you’re wistful for a scrap, here’s Pat Callahan.

“Put up now, or shut up and get back into the canoe, fer we’re goin’ back to our side of the river. Will ye walk or do ye want to be dragged out?”

Evidently the foreman had a reputation, for the man addressed as Mike, stepped sullenly back into the boat.

“Go on where glory waits ye, my young game cocks,” said the foreman, pushing off. “And if anybody tries to take thim logs frum under ye on the river say that ye’re taking thim down special fer Paddy-the-Bird an’ he’s promised to make over thuh face av any wan what bothers ye.”

Straight back the way it came, went the batteau and Con watched it go with a sigh of relief.

“It sure pays to be polite,” said Phil Saunders as he turned to make the mooring of the raft more secure.

IX.

EDDIE LOSES HIS HAT.

Red Nichols, always the foremost, nearly wrecked the raft climbing upon it. The outer log which he mounted sank beneath his weight and the grape vine tie at one end broke.

"If we had poles to lay cross-wise and sit on, then we'd press down all the logs alike," said Eddie, but Con was loath to give the word to use hatchets to cut the needed poles lest the noise of chopping betray their position.

Meanwhile, on the main bank, this dilemma was being settled.

Tom, from his ambush, watched the hostile scouts trace out the trail to the water. Then he caught a word now and then as the scouting party argued whether or not the Foxes had waded across or merely walked in the water down stream to hide their tracks. This last idea seemed about to prevail when the scout of the Squirrel patrol, whom Ole Sorenson had discovered, joined the party. Grown tired of waiting at his post down stream he had crept up cautiously until he saw the Panthers and joined them.

He was positive that the hunted Foxes had not gone down river.

The scout of the Panther patrol whose shape and habits had given him the nickname of "Fatty Felix" was positive that the Foxes had crossed. To prove it possible he started over himself. Lacking the support which the Foxes had given each

other he stumbled on a stone and was swept off his feet by the current.

Despite his fat, or perhaps because of it, for fat folks float easily, Fatty was a good scout in the water and managed to make land, some hundred yards down stream and come dripping back to find his theory discredited by his failure to cross.

The hunters sat down to talk it over.

On the far side of the island the hunted searched for poles which might be had without chopping but found only a few of the nine they needed—seven short ones for seats and two long ones to push with.

Heated with his work, despite his immersion in the river, Eddie Austin pushed back his hat to wipe the sweat from his forehead. This loosened the back strap which held it and the up-stream wind to which Eddie turned his face for coolness did the rest.

A jerk, a snatch that missed, and it was in the water floating down river.

“Ding bust the luck, and it was a new one, too,” said Eddie.

But there was more in the mishap than the loss of a new hat.

From the main shores the Foxes heard the ring of hatchets. The discomfited Fatty, looking gloomily down stream, had seen Eddie’s hat—an unmistakable scout hat—float into sight past the lower end of the island.

“Kaw-aw—Kaw-aw—Kaw-aw-aw,” signaled Tom, then, casting caution to the winds, broke from cover and ran headlong back to join his friends.

“Cut those poles—All aboard—Cast loose the raft,” shouted Con Colville.

Lucky it was for the hard pressed Foxes that their opponents didn't know Con's simple scheme for holding up against rapid water. Instead they stopped to cut a couple of long poles to each of which half a dozen scouts might hold for mutual support against the rushing current.

With the old woodsmen's trick of seizing and bending a sapling with the left hand and striking it on the tense side with the hatchet it rarely took the Foxes more than two strokes to fell a sapling as thick as a scout's wrist.

Con's teaching, backed by their own experience, had taught them that every scout must carry a hatchet—and that a dull hatchet was no hatchet at all.



Fast as their pursuers worked on their fording poles, the Foxes worked faster. As by magic, seven heavy poles were cut, trimmed and flung across the raft. Two sixteen-foot pushing poles were added.

Tom Coleman burst through the bushes just as the Panthers and Squirrels rounded the head of the island.

He splashed through the water to the already moving raft as they shouted at the Foxes.

The raft, moving slowly at first, was quickly caught by the current and swept down stream just as the flying fleet of the

pursuing patrols kicked up the litter of leaves and branches left where the Foxes had trimmed their poles at the water's edge.

"All off to the Big Bend," yelled Reddy Nichols to the disappointed crew and "All off to the Big Bend," yelled the whole patrol as their raft slid past the bluff where the reserve body of their opponents stood helpless and watched their escape.

X.

REDDY GETS EVEN.



“You win, Foxes,” came the hail of their scoutmaster across the water and they caught the glint of the morning sun on his bald pate as he swung his hat to lead three generous cheers for the victorious patrol.

While they looked they caught the flash of their troop banner swung to and fro in the quarter circles of the wig-wag code. Matt Gilmor, “signal sharp” of the Foxes, waved back with his hat the 22.22 which meant “I understand, I’m on the job” and called off the letters as they came for Phil, who scratched them with his knife on a barked log.

“P-a-s-s b-e-n-d f-i-n-d i-s-l-a-n-d s-u-m-m-e-r c-a-m-p r-e-p-o-r-t t-o-m-o-r-r-o-w P-e-t-e-r-s.”

Straining their eyes, the scouts on the bluff saw Matt’s hat swing once left, once right, and left, right, left, right—which spelled “O. K.”

Their dash for liberty had become a voyage of exploration. Meager as their orders were, they understood. It was the plan of the troop to establish a camp on one of the wilder and more

remote of the many islands which dotted the river, but none of those in reach of their Saturday hikes had pleased them. The Foxes, with their raft and two days' time could go further and, perhaps, find better.

Meanwhile, rest on the raft was pleasant after the hard labor and excitement of making their break through the line. With the sun to dry their clothes, and the wind to cool their faces and unexplored country ahead of them, taking life easy was to their liking.

On either hand the river banks flowed past—at least it looked that way to the scouts half-dozing on their raft. They would not reach new country until they passed the Big Bend and yet this familiar ground looked new from their new viewpoint.

The outer sides of islands, before only dimly seen from across the river, gave up their secrets. Their approach, silent, or rather marked only by the immemorial sound of the river, brought them close to shy woods and water creatures. Turtles basking by dozens on rocks and dead-heads drowsed on oblivious to human scrutiny. They saw a squirrel swimming serenely from one to another of the close chain of islands.

A crested kingfisher, as if for their diversion, shot straight from a blasted branch into the river to re-appear in an instant with a gleaming minnow struggling in his beak. Only a great gray crane, fishing in the shallows along a line of piling which kept the driven logs out of the back channel behind the islands, took sullen fright and flopped slowly away.

At the head of the raft Ole, who had a radical aptness for mathematics, was expounding in low tones to Con, who con-

fessed himself "so doggone original he could add 7 and 4 and get 13," the mysteries of the binomial theorem, which had been Con's undoing in the final examinations of the school year.

It was a great opportunity to think—and Reddy was making the best of it. His thoughts harked back to the clash when Phil had kept him from premature use of his hatchet by sitting on his chest. And Phil's back as he sat hunched up like a toad just ahead of him, gave point to his thoughts. His balance, as he squatted on his cross pole was exceedingly delicate—and with Reddy to think, even a little, meant to act a whole lot.

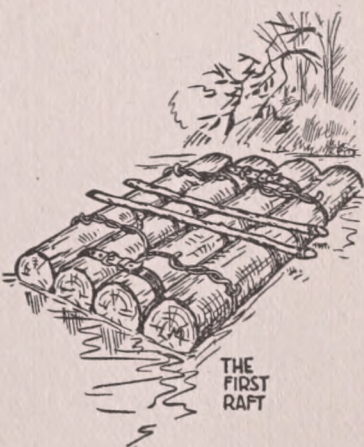
To silently slip the end of one of the long push poles under the end of the stick on which Phil sat and give a mighty upward wrench was the work of a moment.

Suddenly upset, Phil toppled over and splashed into the river.

His yell of surprise roused the sleepy scouts to a common peril. Red's mighty wrench had burst the forward fastening of the outer log which had been the fulcrum of his lever.

Already it was opening out like the stick of a fan and straining at its rear lashing. The raft threatened to go to pieces in mid-river.

There was little danger of drowning to the scouts who swam well and had the logs of the raft to cling to, but the loss of their blankets and grub with a night and a day in the open before them would be a serious matter.



Reddy himself saved Phil's pack while Matt Gilmor dug his fingers into the rough bark of the escaping log and slowly drew it back to place, where its broken lashing was patched up with a strip torn from the tail of Ole's "hickory" shirt.

Vowing vengeance, Phil managed to climb aboard, still further straining their flimsy craft.

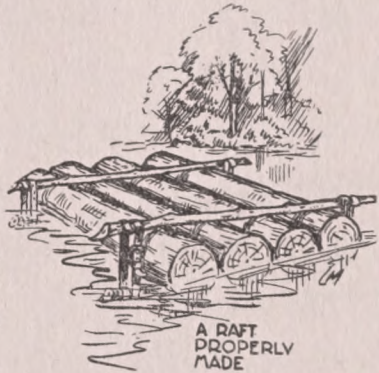
"It's up to us to reorganize the whole blame shooting match or be shipwrecked," said Con, "then we'll turn in and court-martial that red-topped comedian."

XI.

A SUCCESSFUL SHIPWRECK.

The trouble with the raft built by the Foxes was this, that the logs of which it was made were merely tied up so they floated side by side. So long as the weight of the crew was evenly distributed among them, all was well, but the moment one log got an extra burden it sank lower than the others, straining dangerously at its lashings.

In later days they learned a better way, which was to thrust one stout pole across under the logs and lay another across on top of them parallel to it. The ends of these two poles, projecting beyond the logs at either side were joined by a belt twisted about each to keep it from slipping off and then tightly buckled. Six belts were enough to secure three pairs of poles.



A raft so built, they found, not only held together but was also so rigid that when one sat or stood even on the outer log it did not sink alone but the others sank with it.

But this system, though they doped it out while engaged in "reorganization," did not help them in this predicament.

As a first precaution, each scout stripped to his hat and shirt. This not only prepared him for swimming in case of a break up of the raft but also insured the safety of his clothes and pack,

which he fastened to one or the other of the two inner logs, which were lashed together with belts and seemed pretty certain to stay together even if the outer logs broke loose.

Then they set about making the lashings more secure.

But work as they would with the scant material at hand they found that the moving about on the raft necessary to do the work strained a fastening in one place while they were fixing one in another.

Engrossed in these labors they passed the Big Bend.

They were now upon a portion of the river new to them.

The islands ceased along the west shore of the river, the one from which they had embarked. It ceased to be wooded. Instead, beyond a clay bank, pock-marked with the burrows of bankswallows, they saw flat fields of sickly looking grain.

But 600 yards away, across the river, was a line of lofty elm and maple trees growing in thick bushes, which indicated unused land to their experienced eyes. Frequent gaps in the line, giving glimpses of water and of high wooded bluffs beyond told them that they had reached a new and wilder set of islands.

Setting to work with their push poles they tried to shove their raft across the river. But the water was so deep, that their poles hardly reached bottom and gave no chance to push. They also discovered that the current had a whole lot more to say about the movement of their raft than they, since the logs which composed it were nine-tenths under water.

Their efforts with the poles still further weakened their wobbly craft.

"Aw, get out and push," said Mat, giving a particularly vicious shove on his pole. It broke and he went overboard head

first. Swimming alongside he threw one arm over the outer log and began to paddle with the other.

The suggestion was good. Soon all seven of the Foxes were doing likewise, three on each side and Con ahead, the grape vine mooring line gripped in his teeth, and striking out with both arms.

Lightened of its burden, the raft rode higher in the water. The current had less grip upon it. Slowly the scouts had their will with their craft, but for every foot they gained toward the east shore the stream carried them ten feet south.

"Last island," yelled Eddie Austin, when they were still fifty yards from the shore. Raising himself for a moment he had glimpsed the clear river less than a quarter of a mile beyond.

Unfortunately for the Foxes they had now reached the main current of the river, which here set strongly against the east bank. They were further unfortunate in that the current had cut a deep channel close to the steep bank of the island for which they were aimed, so that where they had hoped to be able to set their feet on the bottom they still had to swim.

Twenty yards to gain, and the end of the island in sight.

This is what a lunge out of the water gave Con Colville a chance to see.

Seizing the one last desperate chance to make a landing, he ceased tugging at the rope in his teeth and, instead, swam toward shore as far as it would let him go.

Just as the "painter" tightened with a jerk, at right angles to the raft now, his feet touched bottom.

Braced back at an angle of forty-five degrees and back paddling with both arms he tried to stop the raft.

His bare heels were bruised as they scraped along the pebbly bottom, his breath came in gasps—but he checked the raft.

Slowly, under a strain on the rope which seemed to Con about to pull his jaw from its sockets, the raft turned around, head up stream, and swung in toward the shore until the scouts swimming with it, also had their heels on the bottom.

Then the chain of belts around the inner logs, to which the mooring rope was tied, broke.

The raft split up and Con, falling backwards, went to the bottom.

XII.

TOO COURTEOUS TO BE A HERO.

With the water up to their shoulders, the scouts of the Fox patrol brought the fragments of their shattered raft against the bank.

Thanks to their foresight in tying their clothes and packs to the logs, nothing was lost and little was wet.

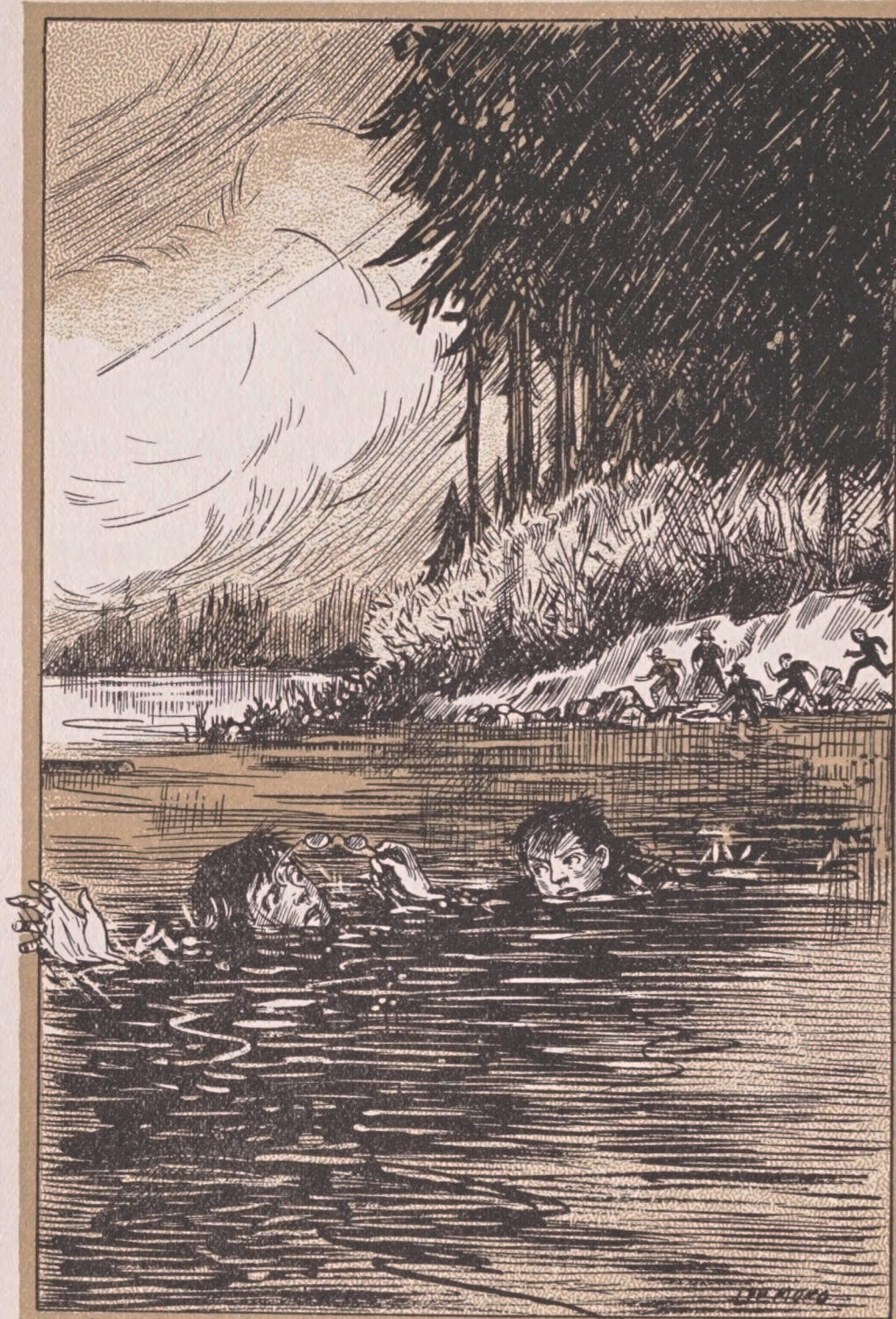
It was but the work of a moment to toss their belongings ashore, release the logs which had served them so well and turn to see a strange sight.

Their patrol leader was swimming straight out into the river.

The explanation of his seemingly crazy conduct was simple. When the grape vine ropes, which he held in his teeth, was suddenly slacked, by the breaking up of the raft, Con tumbled backwards and went down. His spectacles were wetted and he came to the surface as blind as a bat.

In the confusion of the sudden ducking he had thought of the shore as on his right, instead of his left and was swimming away from it while expecting to make land with each next stroke.

One thing the Foxes did understand right off, and that was that Con was in great danger of drowning. They could plainly hear the sobs with which he took in breath, and see that his slow strokes barely held his head above water. The long strain of the swim across the river, and the struggle to bring the raft to shore had exhausted his strength.



'RED' SNATCHED OFF THE
ALMOST FATAL SPECTACLES.



He was plainly making a losing fight against the river and seemed dazed and deaf to their shouts of warning to turn back.

With all his heedlessness, Reddy Nichols could act quickly, and could swim.

Tearing through the water with the splashing stroke of the racer's "crawl" he was half way to the imperilled Con, before the others could act.

Now Louis Kaiser, leader of their rivals of the Panther patrol, had won the bronze and silver cross for saving life under very similar circumstances—and it did not soothe the hearts of the Foxes as much as they pretended it did to say that they would rather have no such medals than confess that any one of them was such a dub as to have to be saved.

Reddy swam with the vision of a medal to pin on his chest before him.

He reached out to grab Con by the hair and drag him in—a proceeding most humiliating to the saved though mighty effective.

Just as he did so Con, whose dulled ears had caught the splash of swimming, turned toward him.

His big spectacles were thick with water, his nostrils were distorted in an effort to take more air into his laboring lungs. His lips were blue with the dreaded water exhaustion of the swimmer.

But a grim smile twisted his blue lips over his clenched teeth.

Con Colville knew the end of his strength was near, but he would go down fighting and with that grim smile unbroken by any call for help.

The price of Red's hero medal would be Con Colville's pride.

"It ain't worth it," said Red to himself, and figuratively sank his red and bronze mark of glory in the river. Then aloud:

"Say, Con, just swam out to ask yuh if yuh think we'd better explore this island now or make camp and cook some grub first."

With the words he reached over and snatched off the almost fatal spectacles.

And the look of hope and gratitude which replaced the fighting glare in his leader's eyes meant more to him than a medal to pin on his coat.

That would have been but the outward mark of a deed easily done, of an honor gained only through the betrayal of a friend's weakness after an exhausting struggle, and of his momentary confusion.

Con's look went deeper; it placed on Reddy's heart the mark of the gentleman—letting that word have its true meaning. It was a seed planted which in after years grew to the full flower of a chivalrous manhood; brave enough to dare any danger to the utmost but too courteous to blazon that bravery to the humiliation of another.

"Well, Con, if you've finished your bath, I'll swim you a race back to shore," said Reddy, and turned inland.

Without a word Con followed him. It was a queer "race." Red might have swam circles around his opponent, who seemed barely to move. But somehow he was outstripped and, though

he made great signs of a struggle, only kept his head even with Con's shoulder, and watched for signs of sudden collapse.

When Con finally flung himself down on the narrow strip of gravel at the island's edge his face went white and his eyes rolled up, but not before he had stretched out his hand with, "Thanks, Red."

XIII.

THE SQUAW-MAN TO THE RESCUE.

CLOTHES and blankets hung drying in the sun and two small fires—fires no bigger than a scout's hat—blazed and crackled under two pots swung on the handy tea-stick, one filled with water and the pea meal which would soon be pea soup, and the other containing cocoa.



Matt Gilmor, whose housewifely accomplishments and face which would not tan, had led to his being dubbed "Marion" despite his readiness to resent the girlish implication with a mighty handy pair of fists, was mixing corn pone batter which was soon to follow the bacon, then spluttering in the pan.

The Foxes were a long ways from being slow when it came to making camp. While "Marion" set out the simple makings of a hearty meal, the others had rustled wood from a dead tree near by—no need to use hatchets for the dry, brittle wood almost came apart in their hands, and soon there was a pile of dry sticks more than ample for the cooking of the noon-day meal. Eddie and Phil had walked a little way in the woods, hatchet in hand, and their trained eye quickly recognized the necessary parts of the simple tea-stick "growing on a tree ready to pick."

So it was to a camp all made and a meal half cooked that

Con and Red came in when the former's fit of faintness had passed.

Nothing was said of Con's peril until full justice had been done to Matt's corn pone and bacon, washed down with pea soup and cocoa by seven hungry scouts. Then Con told how he had been blinded by his spectacles and how Reddy had guided and encouraged him to shore.

By this time it was the lazy part of the afternoon, the proper time to lie on one's back and watch through green branches the white clouds drift across the blue sky.

But no such relaxation was in store for the Foxes. The island upon which they had been "shipwrecked" looked to be the kind they had been sent out to find. But they decided, after a short council, that it would be well to explore it at once to make sure, so that if it were not they might seek the main shore and hike up stream in quest of a better one.

So all but Ole, part of whose incomplete initiation into the patrol it was to wash the dishes, set out by twos in different directions to explore. Ole was to wash up and pack up, making everything ready for taking the road should the expedition of investigation prove the island unsuited for a troop encampment.

His was not a pleasant task, but he went to it humming a Norse air which his parents had brought with them from across the ocean. The scout's law bade him be cheerful about his work, and, besides, he had good cause to feel that his part in the day's adventures had made good his place in the estimation of his patrol.

Sand and water at the river's edge quickly scoured the pots

and frying pans and cleaned the cups and spoons. Simply thrusting the knives and forks into the ground cleaned them. Then he turned to shift the blankets so that their wet spots might come in the sun.

As he turned to this task, a close cropped head with a shifty pair of eyes rose above the bushes behind him. The eyes made a greedy survey of the camp. Its generous grub supply, its cooking kit, its good blankets, and its solitary boy guardian all came in for quick notice.



The intruder rose to his feet and beckoned. A fellow as tough looking as himself stole forward from a gully behind him. He, too, eyed the camp greedily. He also eyed it too closely. Not watching the ground, he stepped on a dry branch which cracked beneath his weight.

Ole whirled.

One look at the rough red flannel suits both men wore was enough. He had seen such clothes before. The men who wore them were breaking stone while a man with a rifle stood

guard on a stone wall behind them. Such was the costume and such the labor of the most vicious criminals in the state penitentiary near Saukville.

“Yap-yur—yap—yap-yur—yap.”

It was the call of the fox he gave—the call of the Fox patrol—long, short, long, short—the rallying signal, a call for help to his comrades. Not for nothing had Ole listened during the long winter evenings to the yelping of the foxes which troubled the chicken coops of his father’s farm. It was an imitation to deceive a man—and to startle a fox.

It startled the vicious brutes who stood before him.

They stepped forward. So did Ole. He snatched up the long piece of a “tea set.” It was an excellent club. His fair hair almost bristling, his blue eye blazing with the light of battle, he might have been one of his ancestors who sailed the seas in King Olaf’s Long Serpent.

With an angry oath the bigger of the two convicts drew a knife.

Ole’s club came down and he recoiled, nursing a tingling wrist.

His more cautious companion picked up a heavy rock. The thug who had tasted Ole’s club did likewise. Against such weapons Ole stood no chance.

‘Now, beat it,’ said the convict, and drew back his arm to hurl the jagged stone. Instead Ole sprang forward with a Berserk yell, determined to close in and use his club despite the odds.

The threatening stone dropped, and the convict raised his other arm.



"OLE'S CLUB
CAME DOWN."



“That’s right, put both of ’em up, yew red-backed, crop-haired murdering son of a chicken thief. You, too, you dog-faced cross between a bedbug an’ uh yaller pup—and keep ’em up er I’ll shoot yuh so full of holes yer mangey hides won’t hold yer thirst fer whisky and so full of lead ye kaint rise on the jedgement day.”

XIV.

“I WUZ LOOKIN’ FER A FOX.”

“I wuz a lookin’ fer a fox und didn’t figger on ketchin’ tew sich coyotes,” said Ole’s deliverer.

Ole sat down suddenly. The battle fever had died out and left him deathly sick. The bravest people are usually the most scared—they differ from cowards in that they are scared either before or after a fight, while cowards are brave except when there is need to be.

Ole hadn’t had time to be scared before the encounter, but he was making up for it now.

“That’s right, sonney, shake all ye want tew. I mind before Bull Run I was so plumb frightened I lost all my appetite for breakfast and forgot all about thuh hard tack I swiped offen Bud Smithers.

“But,” and the old man’s smile grew broader, “if I did leave my appetite on thuh field o’ battle I brung off tew bullets und uh Confedrit ossifer’s sword.”

He was a wizzened-up, little, old man, scarcely as tall as his old muzzle-loading double-barreled gun. His form was bent, but the beady black eyes which twinkled out between his tangled gray hair and bushy gray beard were keen and he held his long, heavy gun without a quiver.

“Wuz lookin’ fer uh fox I heer’d yelp. But these here pair is wuth mor’n uh fox pelt. They pay \$25 a piece fer ’em at



the 'formatory. I'll jest walk 'em up an' let Gwendolin tie 'em. Yew foller along, sonney, when yer laigs gits more sartin."

The exploring party had come in before Ole's badly frightened legs would let him move north along the other shore of the island on the path taken by the old man and his two captives. There were many explanations to be made and many excited words to be spoken.

Before they left camp, Con called a patrol meeting. It was recorded, both in English and picture writing, on the birch bark tablet procured to record the minutes of the meeting that:

"Tenderfoot Ole Sorenson, having shown distinguished courage in protecting the property of the patrol at the risk of his life, and having otherwise proven himself a good scout and a true comrade, was this day admitted to full membership in the Fox patrol of the Ojibway troop, with distinction, and as a further mark thereof shall be entitled, though not a second-class scout, to wear in his belt a sheath knife. The same being that which he knocked from the hand of a murderous assailant."

This done, the patrol started, full of curiosity, on the trail of Ole's strange deliverer.

To their surprise it led them to a birch-bark wigwam pitched just out of sight of the river. A savory fish stew was cooking in a big kettle over an open fire. Above it bent a round, fat woman, with a broad red smile showing around the corn cob pipe which was seasoned to the color of her broad, brown face.

Ole's timely friend sat at ease on a log with his moccasined feet stretched out in front of him. Further back in the woods

the two escaped criminals sat, each tightly bound to a tree and with a thick stick thrust cross-wise into his mouth and secured there with a cord bound around the back of his head.

“These here robins,” said the strange man, explaining the last thing first,” carried on and cursed so awful that Gwendolyn couldn’t stand it so she jest gave ’em somethin’ tew chew on.

GWENDOLYN



“Gwendolyn is particular that a’way. Sensitive like; when we wuz fust married she kicked on bein’ call her ‘Jibway name, which signifies ‘She bites a skunk,’ an’ made maw an’ sis pick out a fancy white one frum thuh Dee-lean-he-ate-er.

“My name’s Harmond, an’ this is Missis Harmond, an’ who may you young fellers be?”

Con tried to explain what scouts were, and how they got

there. The old man and the squaw, for she was a full-blood Ojibway, understood part of it and chuckled over the boys' escape on the raft and their shipwreck on the river. The old man had much to say but his wife confined herself to the "Ugh" and "Wah" of the Indian.

Finally Con introduced himself and his patrol by name.

"Land sakes," said Mrs. Harmond, "you ain't Mrs. Capt. Colville's son Sam's boy, are you? Your grandmaw and I was great friends. Many's the time I've attended a Ladies' Aid meeting to her house. Used to ride your paw on my lap an' tell him stories of the Indians. Since we built the church at Campbell's Cross Roads I have sort of dropped away from my old friends in town. But you and your friends is certainly welcome."

XV.

CAMP FIRE YARNS.

When the Ojibway woman thus declared herself you could have knocked Con and the Foxes into slumberland with the proverbial feather.

But it all came out in the camp fire talk between the time the scouts had done justice to the wondrous supper dished out by their hostess, and when Mr. Harmond knocked the last coal from his pipe and put it away as a sign that it was "blanket time."

The Harmonds were the owners of a fine farm as well as of the island, which had been left in its wild state as a "sorter playground for 'Gwendolyn' ". As old age came on Mrs. Harmond felt more and more a hankering for the life of her race and so, for many summers, their big farmhouse was left in care of hired help and the farm in charge of a sturdy grandson, while the old Indian woman and her husband went back to the simple life of the redman.

Wedded to the soldier whose mother and sister she had saved from massacre while he was absent at the front, the Ojibway woman, with the adaptability of her sex, had become like her white neighbors, and might even now mingle as she pleased in the church and older society of the town.

Made welcome by its owners, the Ojibway troop spent a glorious month in camp on the island discovered by the Foxes. Not the least best part of it was the lore of woodcraft and

Indian story taught them by their host and hostess, who were almost nightly callers at their camp fire.

It was then that Eddie Austin and Phil Sanders captured the half-fox pup which became the pet and mascot of the Fox patrol; that Reddy Nichols won his hero medal without shaming another scout to do it, and Scoutmaster Marcus Peters collected the material for his book on "The Medewa Rites of the Ancient Ojibways," which won him more than one degree from the universities.

But these are all stories which belong to the future.

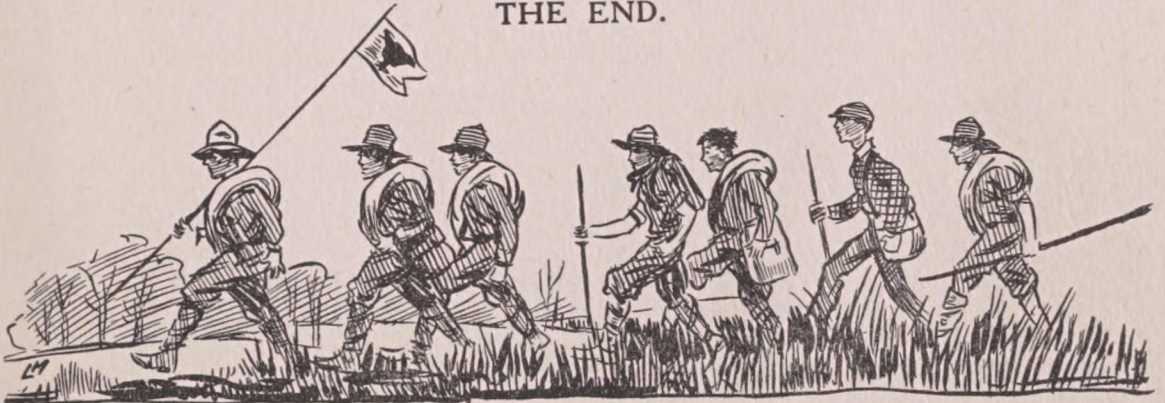
Let us take leave of the Foxes now, as did Mr. and Mrs. Harmond, setting out for home along a winding country road, singing lustily:

"Turn your voices loose, scouts,
Let's sing a hiking song,
Sing it 'till the woods resound
Cheerfully and strong,
Sing it 'till our hearts grow light
To speed our feet along
As we go hiking 'cross country."

And then, faintly borne from the distance—

"Zing-boom, zing-boom, the bold boy scouts are we,
Zing-boom, zing-boom, our life is gay and free,
So we shout our chorus over wood and hill and lea—
As we go hiking 'cross country."

THE END.



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