CHAPTER IX

ON THE WILDERNESS TRAIL

AND now we had our hands upon the latch, and God alone knew what was behind the gate. Toil, with a certainty, but our lives had known it. Death, perchance. But Death had been near to all of us, and his presence did not frighten. As we climbed towards the Gap, I recalled with strange aptness a quaint saying of my father's that Kaintuckee was the Garden of Eden, and that men were being justly punished with blood for their presumption.

As if to crown that judgment, the day was dark and lowering, with showers of rain from time to time. And when we spoke, — Polly Ann and I, — it was in whispers. The trace was very narrow, with Daniel Boone's blazes, two years old, upon the trees; but the way was not over steep. Cumberland Mountain was as silent and deserted as when the first man had known it.

Alas, for the vanity of human presage! We gained the top, and entered unmolested. No Eden suddenly dazzled our eye, no splendor burst upon it. Nothing told us, as we halted in our weariness, that we had reached the Promised Land. The mists weighed heavily on the evergreens of the slopes and hid the ridges, and we passed that night in cold discomfort. It was the first of many without a fire.

The next day brought us to the Cumberland, tawny and swollen from the rains, and here we had to stop to fell trees to make a raft on which to ferry over our packs. We bound the logs together with grapevines, and as we worked my imagination painted for me many a red face peering from the bushes on the farther shore. And when we got into the river and were caught and spun by the

hurrying stream, I hearkened for a shot from the farther bank. While Polly Ann and I were scrambling to get the raft landed, Tom and Weldon swam over with the horses. And so we lay the second night dolefully in the rain. But not so much as a whimper escaped from Polly Ann. I have often told her since that the sorest trial she had was the guard she kept on her tongue, — a hardship indeed for one of Irish inheritance. Many a pull had she lightened for us by a flash of humor.

The next morning the sun relented, and the wine of his dawn was wine indeed to our flagging hopes. Going down to wash at the river's brink, I heard a movement in the cane, and stood frozen and staring until a great, bearded head, black as tar, was thrust out between the stalks and looked at me with blinking red eyes. The next step revealed the hump of the beast, and the next his tasselled tail lashing his dirty brown quarters. I did not tarry longer, but ran to tell Tom. He made bold to risk a shot and light a fire, and thus we had buffalo meat for some days after.

We were still in the mountains. The trail led down the river for a bit through the worst of canebrakes, and every now and again we stopped while Tom and Weldon scouted. Once the roan mare made a dash through the brake, and, though Polly Ann burst through one way to head her off and I another, we reached the bank of Richland Creek in time to see her nose and the top of her pack above the brown water. There was nothing for it but to swim after her, which I did, and caught her quietly feeding in the cane on the other side. By great good fortune the other horse bore the powder.

"Drat you, Nancy," said Polly Ann to the mare, as she handed me my clothes, "I'd sooner carry the pack myself than be bothered with you."

"Hush," said I, "the redskins will get us."

Polly Ann regarded me scornfully as I stood bedraggled before her.

"Redskins!" she cried. "Nonsense! I reckon it's all talk about redskins."

But we had scarce caught up ere we saw Tom standing rigid with his hand raised. Before him, on a mound bared of cane, were the charred remains of a fire. The sight of them transformed Weldon. His eyes glared again, even as when we had first seen him, curses escaped under his breath, and he would have darted into the cane had not Tom seized him sternly by the shoulder. As for me, my heart hammered against my ribs, and I grew sick with listening. It was at that instant that my admiration for Tom McChesney burst bounds, and that I got some real inkling of what woodcraft might be. Stepping silently between the tree trunks, his eyes bent on the leafy loam, he found a footprint here and another there, and suddenly he went into the cane with a sign to us to remain. It seemed an age before he returned. Then he began to rake the ashes, and, suddenly bending down, seized something in them, — the broken bowl of an Indian pipe.

"Shawnees!" he said; "I reckoned so." It was at length the beseeching in Polly Ann's eyes that he answered.

"A war party — tracks three days old. They took poplar."

To take poplar was our backwoods expression for embarking in a canoe, the dugouts being fashioned from the great poplar trees.

I did not reflect then, as I have since and often, how great was the knowledge and resource Tom practised that day. Our feeling for him (Polly Ann's and mine) fell little short of worship. In company ill at ease, in the forest he became silent and masterful — an unerring woodsman, capable of meeting the Indian on his own footing. And, strangest thought of all, he and many I could name who went into Kentucky, had escaped, by a kind of strange fate, being born in the north of Ireland. This was so of Andrew Jackson himself.

The rest of the day he led us in silence down the trace, his eye alert to penetrate every corner of the forest, his hand near the trigger of his long Deckard. I followed in

"His hand near the trigger of his long Deckard."

boylike imitation, searching every thicket for alien form and color, and yearning for stature and responsibility. As for poor Weldon, he would stride for hours at a time with eyes fixed ahead, a wild figure, — ragged and fringed. And we knew that the soul within him was torn with thoughts of his dead wife and of his child in captivity. Again, when the trance left him, he was an addition to our little party not to be despised.

At dark Polly Ann and I carried the packs across a creek on a fallen tree, she taking one end and I the other. We camped there, where the loam was trampled and torn by countless herds of bison, and had only parched corn and the remains of a buffalo steak for supper, as the meal was mouldy from its wetting, and running low. When Weldon had gone a little distance up the creek to scout, Tom relented from the sternness which his vigilance imposed and came and sat down on a log beside Polly Ann and me.

"'Tis a hard journey, little girl," he said, patting her; "I reckon I done wrong to fetch you."

I can see him now, as the twilight settled down over the wilderness, his honest face red and freckled, but aglow with the tenderness it had hidden during the day, one big hand enfolding hers, and the other on my shoulder.

"Hark, Davy!" said Polly Ann, "he's fair tired of us already. Davy, take me back."

"Hush, Polly Ann," he answered, delighted at her raillery. "But I've a word to say to you. If we come on to the redskins, you and Davy make for the cane as hard as you kin kilter. Keep out of sight."

"As hard as we kin kilter!" exclaimed Polly Ann, indignantly. "I reckon not, Tom McChesney. Davy taught me to shoot long ago, afore you made up your mind to come back from Kaintuckee."

Tom chuckled. "So Davy taught you to shoot," he said, and checked himself. "He ain't such a bad one with a pistol," — and he patted me, — "but I allow ye'd better hunt kiver just the same. And if they ketch ye,

Polly Ann, just you go along and pretend to be happy, and tear off a snatch of your dress now and then, if you get a chance. It wouldn't take me but a little time to run into Harrodstown or Boone's Station from here, and fetch a party to follow ye."

Two days went by,—two days of strain in sunlight, and of watching and fitful sleep in darkness. But the Wilderness Trail was deserted. Here and there a lean-to —silent remnant of the year gone by—spoke of the little bands of emigrants which had once made their way so cheerfully to the new country. Again it was a child's doll, the rags of it beaten by the weather to a rusty hue. Every hour that we progressed seemed to justify the sagacity and boldness of Tom's plan, nor did it appear to have entered a painted skull that a white man would have the hardihood to try the trail this year. There were neither signs nor sounds save Nature's own, the hoot of the wood-owl, the distant bark of a mountain wolf, the whir of a partridge as she left her brood. At length we could stand no more the repression that silence and watching put upon us, and when a rotten bank gave way and flung Polly Ann and the sorrel mare into a creek, even Weldon smiled as we pulled her, bedraggled and laughing, from the muddy water. This was after we had ferried the Rockcastle River.

Our trace rose and fell over height and valley, until we knew that we were come to a wonderland at last. We stood one evening on a spur as the setting sun flooded the natural park below us with a crystal light and, striking a tall sycamore, turned its green to gold. We were now on the hills whence the water ran down to nourish the fat land, and I could scarce believe that the garden spot on which our eyes feasted could be the scene of the blood and suffering of which we had heard. Here at last was the fairyland of my childhood, the country beyond the Blue Wall.

We went down the river that led into it, with awe, as though we were trespassers against God Himself,—as though He had made it too beautiful and too fruitful

for the toilers of this earth. And you who read this an hundred years hence may not believe the marvels of it to the pioneer, and in particular to one born and bred in the scanty, hard soil of the mountains. Nature had made it for her park,—ay, and scented it with her own perfumes. Giant trees, which had watched generations come and go, some of which mayhap had been saplings when the Norman came to England, grew in groves,—the gnarled and twisted oak, and that godsend to the settlers, the sugar-maple; the coffee tree with its drooping buds; the mulberry, the cherry, and the plum; the sassafras and the pawpaw; the poplar and the sycamore, slender maidens of the forest, garbed in daintier colors,—ay, and that resplendent brunette with the white flowers, the magnolia; and all underneath, in the green shade, enamelled banks which the birds themselves sought to rival.

At length, one afternoon, we came to the grove of wild apple trees so lovingly spoken of by emigrants as the Crab Orchard, and where formerly they had delighted to linger. The plain near by was flecked with the brown backs of feeding buffalo, but we dared not stop, and pressed on to find a camp in the forest. As we walked in the filtered sunlight we had a great fright, Polly Ann and I. Shrill, discordant cries suddenly burst from the branches above us, and a flock of strange, green birds flecked with red flew over our heads. Even Tom, intent upon the trail, turned and laughed at Polly Ann as she stood clutching me.

"Shucks," said he, "they're only paroquets."

We made our camp in a little dell where there was short green grass by the brookside and steep banks overgrown with brambles on either hand. Tom knew the place, and declared that we were within thirty miles of the station. A giant oak had blown down across the water, and, cutting out a few branches of this, we spread our blankets under it on the turf. Tethering our faithful beasts, and cutting a quantity of pea-vine for their night's food, we lay down to sleep, Tom taking the first watch.

I had the second, for Tom trusted me now, and glorying in that trust I was alert and vigilant. A shy moon peeped at me between the trees, and was fantastically reflected in the water. The creek rippled over the limestone, and an elk screamed in the forest far beyond. When at length I had called Weldon to take the third watch, I lay down with a sense of peace, soothed by the sweet odors of the night.

I awoke suddenly. I had been dreaming of Nick Temple and Temple Bow, and my father coming back to me there with a great gash in his shoulder like Weldon's. I lay for a moment dazed by the transition, staring through the gray light. Then I sat up, the soft stamping and snorting of the horses in my ears. The sorrel mare had her nose high, her tail twitching, but there was no other sound in the leafy wilderness. With a bound of returning sense I looked for Weldon. He had fallen asleep on the bank above, his body dropped across the trunk of the oak. I leaped on the trunk and made my way along it, stepping over him, until I reached and hid myself in the great roots of the tree on the bank above. The cold shiver of the dawn was in my body as I waited and listened. Should I wake Tom? The vast forest was silent, and yet in its shadowy depths my imagination drew moving forms. I hesitated.

The light grew: the boles of the trees came out, one by one, through the purple. The tangled mass down the creek took on a shade of green, and a faint breath came from the southward. The sorrel mare sniffed it, and stamped. Then silence again, — a long silence. Could it be that the cane moved in the thicket? Or had my eyes deceived me? I stared so hard that it seemed to rustle all over. Perhaps some deer were feeding there, for it was no unusual thing, when we rose in the morning, to hear the whistle of a startled doe near our camping ground. I was thoroughly frightened now, — and yet I had the speculative Scotch mind. The thicket was some one hundred and fifty yards above, and on the flooded lands at a bend. If there were Indians in it, they could not see the

sleeping forms of our party under me because of a bend in the stream. They might have seen me, though I had kept very still in the twisted roots of the oak, and now I was cramped. If Indians were there, they could determine our position well enough by the occasional stamping and snorting of the horses. And this made my fear more probable, for I had heard that horses and cattle often warned pioneers of the presence of redskins.

Another thing: if they were a small party, they would probably seek to surprise us by coming out of the cane into the creek bed above the bend, and stalk down the creek. If a large band, they would surround and overpower us. I drew the conclusion that it must be a small party — if a party at all. And I would have given a shot in the arm to be able to see over the banks of the creek. Finally I decided to awake Tom.

It was no easy matter to get down to where he was without being seen by eyes in the cane. I clung to the under branches of the oak, finally reached the shelving bank, and slid down slowly. I touched him on the shoulder. He awoke with a start, and by instinct seized the rifle lying beside him.

"What is it, Davy?" he whispered.

I told what had happened and my surmise. He glanced then at the restless horses and nodded, pointing up at the sleeping figure of Weldon, in full sight on the log. The Indians must have seen him.

Tom picked up the spare rifle.

"Davy," said he, "you stay here beside Polly Ann, behind the oak. You kin shoot with a rest; but don't shoot," said he, earnestly, "for God's sake don't shoot unless you're sure to kill."

I nodded. For a moment he looked at the face of Polly Ann, sleeping peacefully, and the fierce light faded from his eyes. He brushed her on the cheek and she awoke and smiled at him, trustfully, lovingly. He put his finger to his lips.

"Stay with Davy," he said. Turning to me, he added: "When you wake Weldon, wake him easy. So." He

put his hand in mine, and gradually tightened it. "Wake him that way, and he won't jump."

Polly Ann asked no questions. She looked at Tom, and her soul was in her face. She seized the pistol from the blanket. Then we watched him creeping down the creek on his belly, close to the bank. Next we moved behind the fallen tree, and I put my hand in Weldon's. He woke with a sigh, started, but we drew him down behind the log. Presently he climbed cautiously up the bank and took station in the muddy roots of the tree. Then we waited, watching Tom with a prayer in our hearts. Those who have not felt it know not the fearfulness of waiting for an Indian attack.

At last Tom reached the bend in the bank, beside some red-bud bushes, and there he stayed. A level shaft of light shot through the forest. The birds, twittering, awoke. A great hawk soared high in the blue over our heads. An hour passed. I had sighted the rifle among the yellow leaves of the fallen oak an hundred times. But Polly Ann looked not once to the right or left. Her eyes and her prayers followed the form of her husband.

Then, like the cracking of a great drover's whip, a shot rang out in the stillness, and my hands tightened over the rifle-stock. A piece of bark struck me in the face, and a dead leaf fluttered to the ground. Almost instantly there was another shot, and a blue wisp of smoke rose from the red-bud bushes, where Tom was. The horses whinnied, there was a rustle in the cane, and silence. Weldon bent over.

"My God!" he whispered hoarsely, "he hit one. Tom hit one."

I felt Polly Ann's hand on my face.

"Davy dear," she said, "are ye hurt?"

"No," said I, dazed, and wondering why Weldon had not been shot long ago as he slumbered. I was burning to climb the bank and ask him whether he had seen the Indian fall.

Again there was silence, — a silence even more awful than before. The sun crept higher, the magic of his rays

turning the creek from black to crystal, and the birds began to sing again. And still there was no sign of the treacherous enemy that lurked about us. Could Tom get back? I glanced at Polly Ann. The same question was written in her yearning eyes, staring at the spot where the gray of his hunting shirt showed through the bushes at the bend. Suddenly her hand tightened on mine. The hunting shirt was gone!

After that, in the intervals when my terror left me, I tried to speculate upon the plan of the savages. Their own numbers could not be great, and yet they must have known from our trace how few we were. Scanning the ground, I noted that the forest was fairly clean of undergrowth on both sides of us. Below, the stream ran straight, but there were growths of cane and briers. Looking up, I saw Weldon faced about. It was the obvious move.

But where had Tom gone?

Next my eye was caught by a little run fringed with bushes that curved around the cane near the bend. I traced its course, unconsciously, bit by bit, until it reached the edge of a bank not fifty feet away.

All at once my breath left me. Through the tangle of bramble stems at the mouth of the run, above naked brown shoulders there glared at me, hideously streaked with red, a face. Had my fancy lied? I stared again until my eyes were blurred, now tortured by doubt, now so completely convinced that my fingers almost released the trigger, — for I had thrown the sights into line over the tree. I know not to this day whether I shot from determination or nervousness. My shoulder bruised by the kick, the smoke like a veil before my face, it was some moments ere I knew that the air was full of whistling bullets; and then the gun was torn from my hands, and I saw Polly Ann ramming in a new charge.

"The pistol, Davy," she cried.

One torture was over, another on. Crack after crack sounded from the forest — from here and there and everywhere, it seemed — and with a song that like a hurtling

insect ran the scale of notes, the bullets buried themselves in the trunk of our oak with a chug. Once in a while I heard Weldon's answering shot, but I remembered my promise to Tom not to waste powder unless I were sure. The agony was the breathing space we had while they crept nearer. Then we thought of Tom, and I dared not glance at Polly Ann for fear that the sight of her face would unnerve me.

Then a longing to kill seized me, a longing so strange and fierce that I could scarce be still. I know now that it comes in battle to all men, and with intensity to the hunted, and it explained to me more clearly what followed. I fairly prayed for the sight of a painted form, and time after time my fancy tricked me into the notion that I had one. And even as I searched the brambles at the top of the run a puff of smoke rose out of them, a bullet burying itself in the roots near Weldon, who fired in return. I say that I have some notion of what possessed the man, for he was crazed with passion at fighting the race which had so cruelly wronged him. Horror-struck, I saw him swing down from the bank, splash through the water with raised tomahawk, and gain the top of the run. In less time than it takes me to write these words he had dragged a hideous, naked warrior out of the brambles, and with an avalanche of crumbling earth they slid into the waters of the creek. Polly Ann and I stared transfixed at the fearful fight that followed, nor can I give any adequate description of it. Weldon had struck through the brambles, but the savage had taken the blow on his gun-barrel and broken the handle of the tomahawk, and it was man to man as they rolled in the shallow water, locked in a death embrace. Neither might reach for his knife, neither was able to hold the other down, Weldon's curses surcharged with hatred, the Indian straining silently save for a gasp or a guttural note, the white a bearded madman, the savage a devil with a glistening, paint-streaked body, his features now agonized as his muscles strained and cracked, now lighted with a diabolical joy. But the pent-up rage of months gave the white man strength.

Polly Ann and I were powerless for fear of shooting Weldon, and gazed absorbed at the fiendish scene with eyes not to be withdrawn. The tree-trunk shook. A long, bronze arm reached out from above, and a painted face glowered at us from the very roots where Weldon had lain. That moment I took to be my last, and in it I seemed to taste all eternity. I heard but faintly a noise beyond. It was the shock of the heavy Indian falling on Polly Ann and me as we cowered under the trunk, and even then there was an instant that we stood gazing at him as at a worm writhing in the clay. It was she who fired the pistol and made the great hole in his head, and so he twitched and died. After that a confusion of shots, war-whoops, a vision of two naked forms flying from tree to tree towards the cane, and then — God be praised — Tom's voice shouting: —

"Polly Ann! Polly Ann!"

Before she had reached the top of the bank Tom had her in his arms, and a dozen tall gray figures leaped the six feet into the stream and stopped. My own eyes turned with theirs to see the body of poor Weldon lying face downward in the water. But beyond it a tragedy awaited me. Defiant, immovable, save for the heaving of his naked chest, the savage who had killed him stood erect with folded arms facing us. The smoke cleared away from a gleaming rifle-barrel, and the brave staggered and fell and died as silent as he stood, his feathers making ripples in the stream. It was cold-blooded, if you like, but war in those days was to the death, and knew no mercy. The tall backwoodsman who had shot him waded across the stream, and in the twinkling of an eye seized the scalp-lock and ran it round with his knife, holding up the bleeding trophy with a shout. Staggering to my feet, I stretched myself, but I had been cramped so long that I tottered and would have fallen had not Tom's hand steadied me.

"Davy!" he cried. "Thank God, little Davy! the varmints didn't get ye."

"And you, Tom?" I answered, looking up at him, bewildered with happiness.

"They was nearer than I suspicioned when I went off," he said, and looked at me curiously. "Drat the little deevil," he said affectionately, and his voice trembled, "he took care of Polly Ann, I'll warrant."

He carried me to the top of the bank, where we were surrounded by the whole band of backwoodsmen.

"That he did!" cried Polly Ann, "and fetched a redskin yonder as clean as you could have done it, Tom."

"The little deevil!" exclaimed Tom again.

I looked up, burning with this praise from Tom (for I had never thought of praise nor of anything save his happiness and Polly Ann's). I looked up, and my eyes were caught and held with a strange fascination by fearless blue ones that gazed down into them. I give you but a poor description of the owner of these blue eyes, for personal magnetism springs not from one feature or another. He was a young man, — perhaps five and twenty as I now know age, — woodsman-clad, square-built, sun-reddened. His hair might have been orange in one light and sand-colored in another. With a boy's sense of such things I knew that the other woodsmen were waiting for him to speak, for they glanced at him expectantly.

"You had a near call, McChesney," said he, at length; "fortunate for you we were after this band, — shot some of it to pieces yesterday morning." He paused, looking at Tom with that quality of tribute which comes naturally to a leader of men. "By God," he said, "I didn't think you'd try it."

"My word is good, Colonel Clark," answered Tom, simply.

Young Colonel Clark glanced at the lithe figure of Polly Ann. He seemed a man of few words, for he did not add to his praise of Tom's achievement by complimenting her as Captain Sevier had done. In fact, he said nothing more, but leaped down the bank and strode into the water where the body of Weldon lay, and dragged it out himself. We gathered around it silently, and two great tears rolled down Polly Ann's cheeks as she parted the hair with tenderness and loosened the clenched hands.

Nor did any of the tall woodsmen speak. Poor Weldon! The tragedy of his life and death was the tragedy of Kentucky herself. They buried him by the waterside, where he had fallen.

But there was little time for mourning on the border. The burial finished, the Kentuckians splashed across the creek, and one of them, stooping with a shout at the mouth of the run, lifted out of the brambles a painted body with drooping head and feathers trailing.

"Ay, Mac," he cried, "here's a sculp for ye."

"It's Davy's," exclaimed Polly Ann from the top of the bank; "Davy shot that one."

"Hooray for Davy," cried a huge, strapping backwoodsman who stood beside her, and the others laughingly took up the shout. "Hooray for Davy. Bring him over, Cowan." The giant threw me on his shoulder as though I had been a fox, leaped down, and took the stream in two strides. I little thought how often he was to carry me in days to come, but I felt a great awe at the strength of him, as I stared into his rough features and his veined and weathered skin. He stood me down beside the Indian's body, smiled as he whipped my hunting knife from my belt, and said, "Now, Davy, take the sculp."

Nothing loath, I seized the Indian by the long scalp-lock, while my big friend guided my hand, and amid laughter and cheers I cut off my first trophy of war. Nor did I have any other feeling than fierce hatred of the race which had killed my father.

Those who have known armies in their discipline will find it difficult to understand the leadership of the border. Such leadership was granted only to those whose force and individuality compelled men to obey them. I had my first glimpse of it that day. This Colonel Clark to whom Tom delivered Mr. Robertson's letter was perchance the youngest man in the company that had rescued us, saving only a slim lad of seventeen whom I noticed and envied, and whose name was James Ray. Colonel Clark, so I was told by my friend Cowan, held that title in Kentucky by reason of his prowess.

Clark had been standing quietly on the bank while I had scalped my first redskin. Then he called Tom McChesney to him and questioned him closely about our journey, the signs we had seen, and, finally, the news in the Watauga settlements. While this was going on the others gathered round them.

"What now?" asked Cowan, when he had finished.

"Back to Harrodstown," answered the Colonel, shortly.

There was a brief silence, followed by a hoarse murmur from a thick-set man at the edge of the crowd, who shouldered his way to the centre of it.

"We set out to hunt a fight, and my pluck is to clean up. We ain't finished 'em yet."

The man had a deep, coarse voice that was a piece with his roughness.

"I reckon this band ain't a-goin' to harry the station any more, McGary," cried Cowan.

"By Job, what did we come out for? Who'll take the trail with me?"

There were some who answered him, and straightway they began to quarrel among themselves, filling the woods with a babel of voices. While I stood listening to these disputes with a boy's awe of a man's quarrel, what was my astonishment to feel a hand on my shoulder. It was Colonel Clark's, and he was not paying the least attention to the dispute.

"Davy," said he, "you look as if you could make a fire."

"Yes, sir," I answered, gasping.

"Well," said he, "make one."

I lighted a piece of punk with the flint, and, wrapping it up in some dry brush, soon had a blaze started. Looking up, I caught his eye on me again.

"Mrs. McChesney," said Colonel Clark to Polly Ann, "you look as if you could make johnny-cake. Have you any meal?"

"That I have," cried Polly Ann, "though it's fair mouldy. Davy, run and fetch it."

I ran to the pack on the sorrel mare. When I returned Mr. Clark said: —

"That seems a handy boy, Mrs. McChesney."

"Handy!" cried Polly Ann, "I reckon he's more than handy. Didn't he save my life twice on our way out here?"

"And how was that?" said the Colonel.

"Run and fetch some water, Davy," said Polly Ann, and straightway launched forth into a vivid description of my exploits, as she mixed the meal. Nay, she went so far as to tell how she came by me. The young Colonel listened gravely, though with a gleam now and then in his blue eyes. Leaning on his long rifle, he paid no manner of attention to the angry voices near by, — which conduct to me was little short of the marvellous.

"Now, Davy," said he, at length, "the rest of your history."

"There is little of it, sir," I answered. "I was born in the Yadkin country, lived alone with my father, who was a Scotchman. He hated a man named Cameron, took me to Charlestown, and left me with some kin of his who had a place called Temple Bow, and went off to fight Cameron and the Cherokees." There I gulped. "He was killed at Cherokee Ford, and — and I ran away from Temple Bow, and found Polly Ann."

This time I caught something of surprise on the Colonel's face.

"By thunder, Davy," said he, "but you have a clean gift for brief narrative. Where did you learn it?"

"My father was a gentleman once, and taught me to speak and read," I answered, as I brought a flat piece of limestone for Polly Ann's baking.

"And what would you like best to be when you grow up, Davy?" he asked.

"Six feet," said I, so promptly that he laughed.

"Faith," said Polly Ann, looking at me comically, "he may be many things, but I'll warrant he'll never be that."

I have often thought since that young Mr. Clark showed much of the wisdom of the famous king of Israel on that day. Polly Ann cooked a piece of a deer which one of the woodsmen had with him, and the quarrel died

of itself when we sat down to this and the johnny-cake. By noon we had taken up the trace for Harrodstown, marching with scouts ahead and behind. Mr. Clark walked mostly alone, seemingly wrapped in thought. At times he had short talks with different men, oftenest — I noted with pride — with Tom McChesney. And more than once when he halted he called me to him, my answers to his questions seeming to amuse him. Indeed, I became a kind of pet with the backwoodsmen, Cowan often flinging me to his shoulder as he swung along. The pack was taken from the sorrel mare and divided among the party, and Polly Ann made to ride that we might move the faster.

It must have been the next afternoon, about four, that the rough stockade of Harrodstown greeted our eyes as we stole cautiously to the edge of the forest. And the sight of no roofs and spires could have been more welcome than that of these logs and cabins, broiling in the midsummer sun. At a little distance from the fort, a silent testimony of siege, the stumpy, cleared fields were overgrown with weeds, tall and rank, the corn choked. Nearer the stockade, where the keepers of the fort might venture out at times, a more orderly growth met the eye. It was young James Ray whom Colonel Clark singled to creep with our message to the gates. At six, when the smoke was rising from the stone chimneys behind the palisades, Ray came back to say that all was well. Then we went forward quickly, hands waved a welcome above the logs, the great wooden gates swung open, and at last we had reached the haven for which we had suffered so much. Mangy dogs barked at our feet, men and women ran forward joyfully to seize our hands and greet us.

And so we came to Kaintuckee.

CHAPTER X

HARRODSTOWN

THE old forts like Harrodstown and Boonesboro and Logan's at St. Asaph's have long since passed away. It is many, many years since I lived through that summer of siege in Harrodstown, the horrors of it are faded and dim, the discomforts lost to a boy thrilled with a new experience. I have read in my old age the books of travellers in Kentucky, English and French, who wrote much of squalor and strife and sin and little of those qualities that go to the conquest of an empire and the making of a people. Perchance my own pages may be colored by gratitude and love for the pioneers amongst whom I found myself, and thankfulness to God that we had reached them alive.

I know not how many had been cooped up in the little fort since the early spring, awaiting the chance to go back to their weed-choked clearings. The fort at Harrodstown was like an hundred others I have since seen, but sufficiently surprising to me then. Imagine a great parallelogram made of log cabins set end to end, their common outside wall being the wall of the fort, and loopholed. At the four corners of the parallelogram the cabins jutted out, with ports in the angle in order to give a flanking fire in case the savages reached the palisade. And then there were huge log gates with watch-towers on either side, where sentries sat day and night scanning the forest line. Within the fort was a big common dotted with forest trees, where such cattle as had been saved browsed on the scanty grass. There had been but the one scrawny horse before our arrival.