

Our Boys and Girls
BY AUNT BECKY

The Secret of the Silver Lake

By Henry Frith, Author of "Under Bayard's Banner," "For King and Queen," etc.

CHAPTER VIII.—THE BUSH FIRE—A NARROW ESCAPE—WHERE IS THE SCOUT?—THE START FOR THE "PAH."

"What do you call that?" said the Scout again, as a sudden puff of hot air came into the small clearing in the forest.

"What do you call it, Bond?" said several of the party in reply.

"Well, I call it fire, and the sooner we can get out of this place the better for our skins. If we get hemmed in we shall all be burnt."

"What is the matter, father?" whispered Stephen, as he and Ernest took each an arm of Mr. Belton and clung to him.

"I am afraid it is a forest fire. You have read of them in America and Australia. If the flames advance we may be in a fix."

"But, father, surely we can escape. No fire can possibly get through these trees," said Ernest.

"My dear boy, you do not—you cannot imagine what a bush-fire is. It devours great trees as quickly as straws, and its progress is fearfully rapid. I have never seen one, either, but I can at least picture it—and fear it."

While this little conversation was going on, the settlers and helps who had accompanied them were preparing for a start in a north-westerly direction, so as to head the fire, which was apparently burning in the north-east. But no one could tell for certain. Mr. Belton was much alarmed about Amy, for he believed she had gone off with her captors to the north-east settlements.

"Come along," said the Scout; "we have no time to lose; this place is suffocating."

The wind began to blow steadily now, and the heat consequently became greater. The men hurried along the track—no longer after the natives; they were trying to get round the great fire, though, of course, ignorant to what extent it was spreading, and whether it was increasing in front, or only at their right hand.

As Mr. Belton and the others glanced upwards through the trees they could at times perceive what they believed was smoke rolling down in their direction. The men hurried on as quickly as possible along the track, which was greatly impeded by creepers and fallen trees or logs, all quite dry and crackling—food for the fierce fire, like so many twigs in an ordinary bonfire. The boys knew that there was danger around them, but did not think how great was the peril.

The smoke became thicker and thicker. Over the tops of the trees it came in great black clouds, driven by the wind, which those in the

recesses of the bush could not feel.

"If we can reach the road, well and good," said the Scout. "We can get away faster there, and pull in front of it. But unless we turn to the left we must meet it."

"Let us turn to the left, then," said Mr. Belton.

"If so, we shall lose our trail," said his brother.

"Better do that than all lose our lives," retorted Mr. Belton. "Scout, can't you turn?"

"Yes, I could, but we shall find a very rugged country, hilly and bare; and—yes, it will be safer, the fire will die out there."

So it was determined that the party should turn round till the wind blew behind them, and then they would continue their flight. It was apparently impossible to seek for Amy in the proper direction. But poor Mr. Belton began to be afraid that his daughter was dead; burned with the natives in the terrible forest fire!

Our travellers hurried along, nearly blinded with smoke, and half-suffocated with heat. At length they reached a road, and found themselves comparatively safe.

They were in a terrible state of heat, and so dirty that they could hardly recognize each other; but the fire would not reach them along the road when they got to the end of the belt of trees. They got so far, and then sat down to wait until it was safe to continue their journey.

The coach-road had been cut through the bush, and was rather rough. As the men were wiping their foreheads, and resting, stretching their limbs and congratulating each other on their escape, a shouting and whooping were heard, then a rushing sound, mingled with cries and the galloping of horses, and the continued cracking of a whip!

"Hallo, what's the matter?" said one of the men. Ernest and Stephen jumped up, and both ran to a mound near, from which the road could be seen beyond.

"It's a coach or something, rushing at a fearful rate!" shouted the boys. "Look you, it will be down among you in a minute."

Those in the road cleared out of it, and in a few moments a coach, with a few passengers only, came tearing down the road. The driver was shouting and gesticulating; his horses seemed hardly able to stand on their feet as he tried to pull them up. The passengers were blackened and burned; the paint was in big blisters from heat; the horses were almost hairless and terribly frightened, as well as severely scorched. The coach had been caught in the fire, and very nearly destroyed.

"It has been a terrible business," said the coachman. "I thought I could get clear, and made a dash for it, but the fire came down in front and nearly cut us off. We'll do well if I push on, but the cattle can't stand. By-by!"

"He's a brave fellow!" cried Mr. Belton. "and seems a nice man."

"He's the son of an English earl," said one of the party. "He prefers the bush to his baronial halls—at present."

Stephen and Ernest were very much surprised to learn that this young nobleman should be driving a common coach in New Zealand. But many more curious things have happened in the Antipodes. They had plenty of time for reflection on this fact, for the day was waning, and the leader of the expedition advised a halt until morning. They had to consult among themselves.

"We cannot possibly go through the bush to-night," said Mr. Manton. "Let us remain here. What do you say, Scout?"

"We cannot possibly go through the bush for several days," replied Scout quietly. "The fire will smoulder and may break out again. We must try another route. Let us rest here for a while, as the white Rangitira says, and then start when the moon is up round yonder hills, to reach the mountain near which the Maori 'pah' is situated."

As the Scout's experience was great, he was permitted to act as he suggested, and the party, having set a watch, lay down in a safe position to try to rest. But when they arose, at two o'clock in the morning, to continue their journey,



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ing—for he was out of breath. "Let me come in, and give me a drink of water. I'm more than half dead."

They quickly supplied his wants, and after a deep draught he continued—

"I hurried off in the early part of the night, as perhaps you know, so that I might reach the camp of my people, and find missy. But the bush was burning and smouldering, so I had to go up the gullies and cross the hills round yonder. After a while I reached the encampment—"

"And my daughter?" cried Mr. Belton. "Did you find her? Is she well?"

"I didn't find her," replied the Scout, "because the Maoris have gone on amid the hills to their 'pah' with missy, whom they evidently intend to retain with them."

"Do they?" muttered Stephen.

"Well, Scout?"

"Well, when I found they had quit, I went some distance on the truck, and discovered their line towards the 'pah.' Then I began to think it time to return, and I would have been here by sunrise, perhaps, had I not lost my way; the fire has altered everything, and all the old marks are burned away; paths hidden, and so on. I dare say you fancied that I had deserted you?"

"Some of us did," replied Mr. Belton candidly; but no one confessed to the fact of his private suspicions. The Scout looked round quietly on the men, and said nothing. Mr. Belton continued—

"What do you propose, Bond?"

"You must come on at once, and we will try to gain admittance to the 'pah.' If not, then we must attack it, and so release missy—there ain't another way."

"Perhaps the natives will give her up," suggested Mr. Manton.

The Scout shook his head. "No," he said. "They have found the White Queen, who will, they believe, enrich their tribe, and perhaps restore their ancient fame. You men who understand Maoris know how superstitious they are. We must persuade them somehow. But the first thing to be done is to leave here and find the 'pah.'"

"What is a 'pah'?" asked Ernest.

"Is it a town?"

"No, a fortified village," replied his father: "a place hedged or fenced around. Don't you remember reading of your cousin Fred's battle, the storming of the Maori 'pan,' a few years ago?"

"Now, boys, dinner is ready; and then we shall start once again. Here comes the Scout," said Mr. Belton.

The whole party had dinner, and then prepared for the march. After a fatiguing journey the Scout led them round hills, and when he had gained an elevation, he said—

"Yonder is the 'pah'—in the valley, see?"

"Yes; and what is that shining there—like a plate?"

"That?" replied the Scout. "Oh, that is the end of the Silver Lake, alongside which is the Mysterious Cavern. Come, let us go on."

The men and boys followed, wondering what would happen to them next. But nothing occurred till next day, when a very important step was taken, as will be told in the next chapter.

(To be continued.)

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do me a favor if you would not send that man again to report my sermons. The editor apologized and promised to comply with the Archbishop's request, but added that the reporter was one of the best on his staff and a member of the Catholic Church, and he could not understand how he had come to misquote the Archbishop.

"What is his name?" inquired the Archbishop.

"Kilpatrick," responded the editor.

"Well, he came pretty near doing it," said Archbishop Ryan, as he moved on.

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This letter was sent a short time ago to a schoolteacher by an anxious parent:

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Killed Patrick.

Bishop Broderick tells a good story of Archbishop Patrick Ryan of Philadelphia.

"Once every month Archbishop Ryan preaches in one of the Catholic churches of Philadelphia," said Bishop Broderick. "His sermons always attract large congregations, and the Philadelphia newspapers report them rather fully. One of the papers has been in the custom of sending a particular young man to make a report of the Archbishop's sermon, and the young man had always written a report that was accurate and pleasing to the Archbishop. Some time ago this young man was sick, or off duty, and the city editor of his paper assigned another reporter to cover the sermon. He wrote a long story of the sermon, but it was full of inaccuracies and attributed to Archbishop Ryan expressions that were nothing less than heretical. The Archbishop was still thinking of it the next day when he met the editor of the paper on the street. The Archbishop hailed him, and naturally he referred to the report of his sermon.

"You didn't send the same young man to report my sermon that you usually do," said the Archbishop.

"No, he was not available," replied the editor.

"Well, your new man has got me into a peck of trouble," said the Archbishop. "He has me uttering the rankest heresies. You would

able pain. Hol- removes the and soo what saved.