

from lot number 12 to 21 in the first concession of East Oxford. East and west, several miles of bush intervened before the nearest settlement was reached. Two or three miles south, in East Oxford, along what was afterwards, and is now known as the Old Stage Road, there were two or three settlers. The township of Blandford, lying north of the Governor's Road, had not yet been opened for settlement, and in that direction the bush was in fact interminable, or terminated only with the continent.

There were, however two or three "squatters" settled on the Crown lands on the north side of the road. One of these was named Wilcy or Wiltse. He had built a little log house just on a line with the road on lot No. 17, nearly in front of the present residence of R. H. Burtch, Esq., around which he had a clearing of four or five acres surrounded by a *prunk* fence. Wilcy was not a thrifty man. He was poor, but that circumstance gave him very little trouble. He was more content to sit in the shade whittling out an axe handle or peeling a splint broom, than engaging in any earnest work. His wife was industrious and scheming, and managed, without much assistance from her lord, to keep the wolf from the door, or to make his visits brief. There was a numerous family of children, ranging from 12 or 14 years down to infancy; but it will not be necessary to mention any of them except the two eldest boys Henry and Fred. The former at the time our story commences might be about 10, and the latter 8 years of age. The children were not well trained, and passionate encounters among them were not infrequent. The following is an instance.

The two boys had been set to hoe corn in the little field near the house, when an angry dispute arose between them, during which Fred raised his hoe and aimed a fearful blow at the head of his brother. By a quick motion the latter avoided the fatal consequence that might have followed had the blow fallen where it had been aimed. He however received a glancing stroke from the edge of the instrument, laying open an ugly wound of some three inches in length commencing near the roots of the hair above the right eye, and sloping downward towards the ear. The wound, though ghastly, was not deep, and was soon healed, but it left an unsightly scar, to conceal which he was in the habit of allowing the hair on that side of his forehead to drop down almost to his eye.

The reason for mentioning this circumstance, which occurred some three months before the actual commencement of our story will appear in the sequel.

The Wilcys, poor as they were, kept a cow, and indeed any one, in those days who could procure a cow, could keep her without expense. A good sized maple or elm tree or two felled each day, during winter furnished sufficient forage, to at least, keep her alive, and as soon as the snow was melted in spring the wild leeks sprang up in great abundance, which though they imparted an abominable flavor to the milk and butter, were devoured with greediness and were very nutritious. Two or three weeks later, another wild plant, by the settlers called cow-cabbage, appeared, which grew as abundantly, and was as nutritious as clover in well cultivated meadows, so that by June the cattle were fattened, fit for the shambles. Later, in the season, how-

ever, the cow-cabbage disappeared, and cattle were obliged to wander much further through the forest in order to obtain supplies. On this account, each cow, or at least, one in each herd was furnished with a bell, which, in mild weather might be heard for a mile or more through the forest.

Well, it was a pleasant afternoon in the end of September—it was nearly sunset and the cow had not come home. The mother and the boys were out in the little field listening for the bell. They thought they heard it: Indeed the sound was very distinct; the direction was pointed out and Henry was despatched to drive her in. His entire wardrobe consisted of a pair of home-made linen trousers, a shirt of the same material and a straw hat, but as he had worn them continuously all summer, they were already "worn for wear." It was supposed he would be back in half an hour, and so uneasiness was felt on his account. But the half hour passed—the sun set—darkness came on but Henry did not return. The alarm was spread. The nearest neighbours were assembled—guns were fired; bright fires were lighted not only in the field, but also far into the woods. But all in vain. Morning came, but brought no intelligence of the lost boy. Early in the day nearly every adult in the settlement, was on the spot, to renew the search. Dividing into couples, and taking different directions, the woods were thoroughly scoured for miles around; but in vain. The different parties returned at night, but neither the boy nor any trace of him had been discovered.

During the day the news of the calamity had spread to surrounding settlements and several brave and generous men had hastened forward to lend their aid. Among them was a man by the name of Decew. He was a person of some consequence. He had held an Ensign's commission in the Militia during the late war, and had, it was said, done good service at Lundy's Lane. Besides, he wore a broad cloth coat, an article seldom seen among us in those days. He was generally addressed as Captain Decew, and his opinions were likely to be listened to with respect. Captain Decew met the returned searchers and the fresh arrivals, (a company amounting to perhaps 50 or more) ready to undergo, or sacrifice everything possible to rescue the unfortunate boy. He told them that he knew a man who could direct them to find the lost boy dead or alive. He had formed his acquaintance on the lines during the war, and had known him since. That this man, whose name was Conrad House, who resided at or near the river Credit, had a magic stone, which under his eye in the dark became luminous and revealed to him any object he might wish to discover; and he earnestly advised that House should be sent for. The more intelligent among them scouted the proposition as the height of superstition; and folly, nevertheless there was not wanting a sufficient number, always fond of the marvellous to support it. Decew offered himself as the messenger; a subscription was raised to defray the expense, and he set off the same hour. By riding night and day and getting a fresh horse on the way he was able to produce his magician on the spot on the fourth day.

The search, however, had been going on. During the three intervening days the woods had been carefully searched for many miles

around but not a trace of the wanderer had been found.

When House arrived on the ground he demanded to be shown the spot from which the boy had started on his unfortunate expedition. Taking his stand here, he placed his magic stone in the crown of his hat, and covering this with his face so as to exclude the light he soon pretended that he was making discoveries, and finally, that he had found the boy. He was lying, he said beside a log or fallen tree; was still alive but very weak. He pretended to describe the course to be pursued for his recovery, but showed no disposition to accompany the party himself. But his employers were by no means prepared to excuse him, but insisted on his being himself the guide of the party. Compelled to submit he set off, in company with some dozen strong men, well supplied with provisions and warm garments for the boy, together with the means of providing a strong seat or bed for bringing him home. Proceeding in a northerly direction for two or three miles they came to the river, a branch of the Thames, which, though not a large stream, flows between very high banks. This was a topographical feature quite unexpected to House, and was quite absent from his previous description of the course to be pursued. He admitted at once that he was on the wrong track, and again had recourse to his stone, and after a long gaze into the crown of his hat he said he discovered the boy's bed, or the place by the log where he had before seen him lying, but he no longer occupied it, nor could he trace him further. He had either been devoured by wolves, or had fallen into a pond or lake which he saw at a small distance and it was in vain to seek further. And so this impudent impostor was dismissed with the disgust of the greater part, but not all; for there were some so weak and superstitious as still to believe in his extraordinary powers and these sent him away, not empty handed. The greater part now gave up in despair and returned to their homes, though, to their credit be it spoken, several small parties of sturdy hunters and woodsmen continued the search for 3 or 4 days longer in the feeble and constantly diminishing hope that they might still find the poor lad and possibly save his life. But all in vain, and here ends the first part of our story. The remainder will soon be told.

Twelve or fourteen years passed away and poor Henry had, by the great majority been entirely forgotten. The deep interminable forest through which our pioneers had conducted their diligent and persistent, though unsuccessful search had been invaded in every part by enterprising settlers. Nearly every lot had its clearing and on not a few substantial farm buildings had been erected. Wilcy *per se* was dead. The family had removed from their old residence, but still remained in the neighbourhood. Fred had grown up to manhood and felt a desire to see the world and strike perhaps upon a new mode of life. Michigan at that time was attracting a great tide of immigration from the surrounding states and provinces, and Fred turned his eyes in that direction. With a pack slung upon his back and a stout stick in his hand, in the month of September, say in '32 he set off for the west. Crossing the river at Detroit he took his night's lodging