

Dear Aunt Becky:

I thought I would write you another letter. Yesterday my aunt went to Somerville to see her sister's baby baptized, and that makes thirty-nine grandchildren for my grandma and grandpa. Washington's birthday I had a week's vacation, and so I don't have an Easter vacation. A Sunday-school teacher died here Saturday. She was my first teacher. I had her from the first class to the sixth or seventh class, and she was teaching a class ahead of me before she died. I am in the sixth class in Sunday School. Her funeral was to-day, and there were twenty-three hacks at it. I think I will close now, so good by from your loving nephew,

C. S.

Hudson, Mass., March 25.

Dear Aunt Becky:

I saw my letter in the paper two or three weeks ago, and I thought I would write again. The snow is nearly all gone around here, and it is beginning to look like spring. Well, spring is welcome this year, after the long cold winter we had. Next Sunday is Easter, and it will be beautiful to be in church. I have been going to school regular since the first of March. I like going to school real well, but sometimes the roads are very bad in the winter in the country, but they are all right now except being muddy. I saw two letters in the paper last week, and I hope all the cousins will make up when the fine weather comes and send a lot of letters to make everything bright.

Your loving niece,  
MARY A. C.

Vine, March 26th.

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A little wound, a little ache, a little blistered thumb to take with touch of love and make it well. These things require a mother's spell. Ah, sweet the progress of the skill. That science brings unto the ill! Vast range of methods new and fine. But when our little ones repine, The mother is the very best. Of doctors into service pressed! Sunshine and air and mother's spell Of helping little lads get well. And helping little lasses, too— Here are three remedies that do So much more, often than the grave, Billed hands that tried so hard to save, For Dr. Mother, don't you know, Gives something more than skill— Gives so Much of herself; gives, oh, so much Of love's sweet alchemy of touch. Upon a little wardroom bed A little curl encircled head, A little slender hand and pale, A little lonesome, homesick wall, Loved nursing, best of skill and care; But, oh, behold the wonder there, When Dr. Mother, bearing sun From where the wilding roses run, Leans down, with hungering love and kiss— There is no medicine like this! In little child heart's hour of woe Pain, ache, or life wound's throb and throes The Dr. Mother knows so well The weaving of love's wonder spell— Just what the little heart requires, Just how to cool the fever fires; Just how much tenderness and cheer Will calm the little doubt and fear. How much of tenderness will ease— Alone she knows such arts as these!— Baltimore Sun.



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## 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 IV.—Continued.

He attempted to get up; but Stephen pushed him backwards and ran away in the darkness, whistling to Ernest, who quickly hid himself. The bushranger soon recovered himself, however, and staggered to his feet. Then he tried to rouse his companion, and became terribly angry when he found that his pistol and the guns had been taken away. He kicked his associate until he woke, and then the other man was in a fearful rage. He said terrible things and rushed up the bank, searching for the boys. But they had hidden themselves in a tree, which they quickly climbed in the dark, and the bushrangers could not see them.

The guns had been left in the fern, but the lads knew the men would not find them very easily. The bushrangers looked about, and at length began to quarrel. After a while they drew their knives and fought. The boys could not help seeing something of the struggle, and stabbed each other. They then clasped each other, and went tumbling round and round, trying to throw each other down, and panting like wild beasts. At last one man caught his foot in a root-hole, and fell with a fearful thud on the ground, his adversary on top of him. There they lay, and did not move.

"Slide down, Ernie; now is our time to get away," said Stephen. "Mind the pistols; they may go off. Down with you!"

"But where can we go?" said Ernie. "The men will track us, and kill us."

"Go? Anywhere! Go on! quick, silly! If they catch us here, they will kill us all the sooner. So jump down!"

Ernest slid down the tree, holding on carefully, and reached the ground in safety. Stephen followed. The fire was nearly out, the bushrangers did not move; they had fallen very heavily, and were stunned by their tumble. The boys only waited to pick up the rifles before they turned to the dark recesses of the forest in fear and trembling, for they felt very weak and ill after the excitement and pain.

"There is some meat, I can see. I will have it," cried Ernest. "I am too hungry to do anything more." He quickly possessed himself of the remains of the bushrangers' supper, and was turning away to join Stephen, when the call of the wood-pigeon was distinctly heard—three times!

"It's Scout!" exclaimed Stephen. Then he whistled loudly, as directed, and plunged into the bush in the direction of the kuku's call, followed by Ernest—both delighted to meet Scout.

At that moment the bushranger who had fallen on his companion rose, and hearing the lads running, rushed after them as fast as his unsteady steps would permit. He was quickly overtaking them, when something dashed off of the covert close at hand, and held him fast!

CHAPTER V.—SAVED BY SCOUT.  
—TIT FOR TAT—A PERILOUS MARCH.

What was it? Who was it? The bushranger was greatly surprised, and struggled to get free, but he could not. He was rather upset by his fall, and was not so strong after his struggle with the other man.

The man who thus captured him was our friend the Scout, who had followed the trail of the two boys, and had most fortunately come up with them in the very nick of time.

"So there you are," cried Scout as he saw the lads approaching. They had come pretty close before he recognized them. "Now help me to bind this fellow. It's no use your fighting," continued the Scout coolly. "You don't escape me, Murty. I know you, you see—and I have a debt to pay. Yes, lads, bind his legs."

The bushranger felt that his life was in the Scout's hands, and he did not attempt any resistance while the boys bound him.

"Now," said the White-Maori, as he called himself, "let me hear how you have only got into mischief instead of escaping as I told you—"

Stephen and Ernest looked surprised and replied—  
"We did escape, and went southward, as you told us; and—but how is Amy?"

"And you have been walking round and round this bush! Why, you are not five miles from the encampment—just an hour's quiet walking; you have been nearly 24 hours wandering about! I found your trail, and crossed it many a time. It is very fortunate for you that I saw the gleam of the fire and heard the pistol shot. Now tell me your adventures," said the Scout.

The boys told him, and he was very angry.

"I wonder you are not dead," he remarked. "Missy is quite well, and is properly treated in the camp. As for this ruffian, we will deal with him and his companions as soon as possible."

"You'd better let me alone," growled the bushranger. "If not, you'll be sorry."

"Why should we be sorry?" asked the Scout; "you ought to be shot. No one knows that better than yourself!"

"Perhaps I ought, but many other people deserve it more. We can't all be respectable, Mister Jacob Bond; you were not always an honest man but you served the British well, and you have your pardon in your pocket."

"There's truth in what you say," replied the Scout, "but I've changed my life; you have not. Own up now tell the truth, and perhaps we won't hurt you this time. Who is with you?"

"Dennis Mahon," replied Murty (Murtagh) Farrell.

"A nice pair of you! Where are you bound for now?"

"For Saddleback—the new settlement."

"Saddleback! why, that is Uncle Manton's place," cried Stephen. "We want to find it too."

"What for?" cried the captive uneasily.

"Because our uncle has settled there, and—"

"Never you mind, Murty—you will stay here—yes, you will. Mind what you are about; you will stay here. You take this revolver, young fellow," continued Scout to Stephen.

"I am going to leave him here for a day or two while we find your uncle's station, and return for Miss Amy."

"You're not going to leave me to starve?" cried the man.

"No, you won't starve in a couple of days; but I'll bale you up here to this young kauri sapling," replied the Scout, as he bound the robber to the tree. "You'll be safe here."

"There," he said, when he had finished, "let us go and see after his friend. He may be injured."

They found the other man lying by the fire, still insensible. The Scout turned him over; he was lifeless, apparently.

"Poor fellow!" cried the boys. "Is he really dead, Scout?" They had forgotten hunger and thirst in their excitement, but this painful sight shocked them, and cooled their ardor.

"I am almost afraid he is," was the reply. "I'm sorry; but he was a bad man. We can't help him now. Let us go on as fast as we can, and bring assistance. He must be buried and the other man arrested."

"We cannot go any further to-night," said Stephen. "I can hardly drag myself along as it is; and Ernest is quite exhausted. Look!"

The Scout turned. Ernest was lying extended by the creek. He had had a long draught of water, and was nearly asleep.

"Then we must camp here," replied the Scout. "We will make a fire and eat something. I have provisions. It's very dark, isn't it?"

Stephen felt much better when he had had a drink of water, and some meat, which the friendly Scout produced from his wallet. "Now," said Stephen to his friend, "tell me how you became a Maori?"

"I am not a Maori altogether. My father was a sailor, who left his ship and settled here in the bush many years ago. He was a man of some education, but preferred a life in the forest to seafaring. He joined a Maori tribe, married a Maori wife

—a good old mother she is; you've seen her. I was born in the tribe, and have great influence amongst them. There are few of them so wild as that small tribe you saw. They will soon become civilized, as so many other tribes are; and some day you will see Maoris wearing tall hats, and Maori girls in high-heeled boots, in the cities."

"But why don't you live in the city?" inquired Stephen.

"I couldn't. I love the bush. I am not always with the tribe. I come and go as I like. Sometimes I work as a gum-digger."

"What's a gum-digger?" asked Stephen.

"Why, a man who digs gum, of course—digs it up out of the ground, or finds it in the trees. You didn't know that we dug up gum, I suppose?"

"No, indeed I did not," replied the lad. "How does it get underground?"

"You see that big tree," said the Scout, as he pointed to a fine specimen about 130 feet high, with a smooth stem on which no branches grew for a long distance. It was about fifty feet round, and has a bushy top.

"Yes, I see it," replied Stephen. "It reminds me of the toy trees children play with, only a thousand times bigger."

"Well, that's a kauri-tree—a pine-tree—and splendid timber. When one of them falls and dies, as thousands have fallen since creation, it rots away and disappears; but the gum it contains lies underneath the soil. So we diggers go and find it; we probe for it in the most likely places, and sell it up in Auckland."

"But how can you tell which way the tree fell down?" asked Stephen.

"By the hillock of earth which the roots have torn up. We have a spear, and turn up the soil. Sometimes we make money: sometimes we have not enough to pay 'tucker.'"

"Who is 'tucker'?" asked Stephen yawning, for he was tired.

The Scout laughed. "Tucker is nobody: it is the term for food," he said. "Now you have had talk enough. Go to sleep. I'll watch."

Stephen did not want to be told twice. He was terribly sleepy and tired; indeed, nothing but the invigorating air had sustained him so long after the excitement had died out. He lay down near Ernest, and soon fell asleep. The Scout waited until the lad was sound, and then went to look after the 'lifeless' bushranger, but he found that he had quietly made off! The Scout smiled to himself and took the other man a pan of water; he left him tied up to the tree—"stuck up" as he called it—to repent of his ill deeds. He did not intend to injure him, however.

When the boys again opened their eyes they found the Scout cooking something on the fire, which he had re-lighted. The food smelt, very nice, and it proved to be a wild rabbit. Stephen and Ernest got up quickly and had a plunge into the stream, after which they declared themselves quite ready for their breakfast.

"We have a good way to go," said Scout; "so eat a good meal. We shall find plenty of water on the track, so don't be alarmed. Are you ready to start? Here are your conjuring boxes."

The lads declared they were quite prepared.

"Well, then, we will carry away these rifles and hide the knives. Murty is quite well, but rather stiff, I dare say."

"Won't you let him go?" asked Ernest. "He may die!"

"Not he!" replied Scout. "Besides it will do him good to be tied up for a while. He has often tied up other people, and left them to starve unless they were rescued. We will have him put in prison presently, when he gets loose."

So they went on through the beautiful forest, "the silent bush," as it has been called, winding around the trunks of mighty trees, on which climbing plants had thickly twined, while ferns, shoulder high in places, orchids, mosses, creepers and many other beautiful products of the climate were to be seen, with here and there decaying trees as evidences of death amid so much life and beauty.

"Are there no serpents here?" asked Ernest.

"No," replied Scout. "There are no snakes in New Zealand. There are wild dogs and pigs. Perhaps we shall come across a boar."

"We saw a very queer animal the other night," said Stephen. "It was wide-chested, but stood sloping like a tiny giraffe, and had tusks."

"Oh, it's a wild pig," replied Scout. "You see them near the coast sometimes; they eat poisoned plants like the karaka, and this affects them, shrivelling up their backs."

"I am glad we saw him in time," said Stephen.

All this while the travellers were making their way along the path in

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single file: Scout first, then Ernest, then Stephen. The track was only a bridge-path, and not a good one, either. There were some deep ravines to be passed, and at the bottom of each ran a rivulet, or creek, which had to be crossed by jumping or fording.

"It will be a job to cross these creeks after rain," remarked the Scout, as he helped the boys over a rather wide stream. "The water then runs level with the bank, and if you don't know exactly the position, over you go, head first, and may never turn up again!"

"Who makes these paths into the forest?" asked Ernest, who was trotting along manfully.

(To be continued.)

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