

The Panther's Claw

By H. Mortimer Batten

Part III. Chap. IX.

AT breakneck speed the frail birch bark fled down the waterway more than once shaving the crags by a hair breadth, Frank's wonderful skill with the paddle saving them from a watery grave. Sam, who had scrambled to the prow, was looking ahead, trusting to luck and his partner to guide them through the dangers of the moment.

It was Sam, therefore, who saw that the rapid terminated at length in a waterfall. He turned to Frank, pointing ahead. Frank glanced up and understood. Their one chance was to land, but to land here was impossible. Their fate was sealed!

No, not yet—for as the boy glanced ahead he saw that several large boulders stood up from the surface at the brink of the fall. If they could manage to run the canoe broadside against one of these, there might be time to scramble into safety while the current held the craft stationary. At all events it was a chance—a desperate one, but their only chance.

Never before in his life had the boy pulled harder at the paddle. He had broken many a one, but the one he now used, selected and laid on one side for long journeys, would not break. He was thin, strong, and fit as an Indian and not one man in a thousand could have pulled at a paddle so hard as he pulled at that moment. He got the canoe broadside on, heading straight down towards the chosen boulder. With wonderful skill he struck the balance, so that the canoe would hold till she broke to bits.

Sam, with no paddle to wield, was ready. He leapt from the canoe and gained the rock ere she struck. But Frank was to take his chances, and, as the frail craft crashed into the boulder, he was still in a kneeling position.

The jagged teeth of the crag cut through the side of the canoe as though it were paper. In an instant she lodged there, and during that instant Frank made a leap for safety, but fell short. His forehead struck the rock, but Sam leapt to his side like a madman. He clutched the boy by the collar and held on. Next moment, with the report of a revolver shot, the canoe broke in two and vanished into the dancing cascades below.

Only Sam's great strength could now save the boy; with both hands Sam struggled to drag his partner into safety, but the boy was dazed by the fall, and unable to help himself. The current was dragging at him, and it was only by a supreme effort that Sam, at last, dragged him on to the boulder.

There they were, still side by side, safe for the moment, but hopelessly marooned on the great boulder at the very brink of the fall. Halman had timed his chance well. He knew that if the two succeeded in escaping from the landing place, they would have to make down stream, and there almost certain death awaited them.

Sam straightened himself up, and looked sad. Next moment he drew a gasp of amazement. Had they gone back to the bad old days when the white man and the red were at daggers drawn? If not, what was the meaning of this?—there, on either side of the creek, in their full war paint, but quietly awaiting their chance, was a tribe of Indian warriors!

Chap. X.

Sam did not realise what had happened, but he guessed they had fallen foul of some plot. Their guide was guilty of treachery, but for the moment there was no escaping from his clutches. They must await their chance, owning that, for the time being, they were mastered. To show fight at this moment would be the height of folly, for they were helpless to defend themselves, whereas any one of the well armed Indians on the bank could take their lives at a moment's notice. Obviously they were captives, and they might as well own it.

Looking behind him Sam saw, standing at the edge of the bay only a few paces away, their Indian guide. Over his scanty garment of the trail he had cast

a blanket, bearing the mark of his rank. This man who had deceived them was evidently a high official in the tribe into whose hands they had fallen.

Frank, in the meantime, recovered from his shock, and rose to his feet. A glance between the two was sufficient. Both realised they were helpless.

The Indians realised it, too, for after some moments a canoe was carried to the water's edge, and with a rope attached to one of the thwarts it was launched from a headland a few paces above. From this point the current carried it down to the boulder and Sam and Frank scrambled aboard. There was nothing for it but to land as best they could, even though it meant resigning themselves to the clutches of this hostile tribe.

Chap. XI.

Sam, would doubtless have fought the whole tribe, singly or en masse, had he

the council tent, and here the braves squatted in a grim but picturesque circle round them. The old, wizened chief was in the centre of the group, and Halman, still clothed in his gorgeous blanket, sat at his right hand. Behind the warriors the women, children and a multitude of dogs were scattered.

Halman opened the debate. "My brothers," he said, "I have kept my promise. I have proved to you again that I am worthy to become your chief. The old chief is lame and wizened. Behold, he is little stronger than a squaw! He has seen many, many snows. Ere long he will pass into the happy hunting ground, and I shall become your chief."

Halman seated himself. The old chief rose. "My son has spoken truly," he said. "I am old and broken, but when I pass into the long sleep I shall do so happy knowing that he is to rule you."

"Many times has Halman proved to us his cleverness and cunning," the old chief went on. "He promised us he would bring this white man, Sam by name, from the white man's city and lead him

when one brave strikes another, the brave who is struck sacrifices his manhood unless he can return blow for blow. Well, my enemy is now my prisoner. With my own hand I will slay him. But there are two of them. If we slay one and let the other go, he will return to the white man's city, and his tribesmen will come back with him and slay us all. So much is certain. Great Chief, I leave it to you to settle the question."

The chief rose, and addressed himself to Frank Ward, with Halman as interpreter. "Ask him," said Old Chief, "if he will swear secrecy if we spare his life?"

Halman put the question in broken but dignified English.

"Tell Old Chief," answered the boy "that if he destroys my partner I will most assuredly bring the whole white city to wipe out your miserable teepees. They will leave neither tent nor arrow. Your very dogs will be destroyed and your squaws will be driven homeless into the woods."

"Tell Old Chief," the boy pursued "that if he kills me he will be guilty of an unpardonable act. The white man's God will not forgive him and he himself knows the power of the white man's God—how he brings victory wherever the white man treads. I have spoken."

Halman mumbled the story to Old Chief. He told him, if the boy lived, a terrible vengeance would come upon the tribe by the hand of the white man, and how, if the boy was killed, the white man's God would avenge his death. Thus Old Chief found himself between two fires. "My children," he said, "we have reason to think that the white man's God keeps good guard over his people. Behold how the white man flourishes wherever he goes! Behold how he delivered these two children from the racing waters, in which many an Indian has perished. The white man's God is a God to be feared. What say you Halman?"

"I say this," answered Halman, with savage vehemence, "that the white man's God is at war with the Indian at all times. Why then should we fear to incur his wrath? Wherever the white man goes, death, sickness and sorrow break out among the children of our race. The red man melts away like the snow of the Love Moon when the white man penetrates into his land, and since the great white God is already our foe, why should we turn from him like frightened wolves? Let us be brave, my children and fear not the clever tongues of these, our prisoners. I with my own hand will take the life of him they call Sam. Let vengeance be upon me. The boy who is with him, we will turn away into the woods, that he may perish by the wolves. I have spoken."

"Spoken have you!" repeated Frank savagely. "Listen here, my friend. If you kill my partner vengeance will fall upon you as sure as night follows day."

"Let it fall," answered the Indian, unmoved. "I am not afraid."

The boy thrust his hand under his shirt. He drew out the polished panther claw, and handed it to Halman. The Indian gave a start, then stared into the boy's face.

"It was you who took me from the snow?" he asked. "It was you who gave up your bed that I might sleep in comfort?"

"It was," answered Frank Ward.

Chap. XII.

For some moments Halman was silent, as though deeply moved. He rose to his feet at length. "My brothers," he said, "we must not kill this pale face boy, who is so wonderfully skilled with the paddle. Behold it, was he who saved me! Therefore will I give him my own canoe and caribou meat and fish in plenty to take him back to the white man's city. I will give him my Winchester rifle, for to him I owe my life!"

"A curse be upon your canoe and your Winchester rifle!" stormed the boy. "All I ask is the life of my partner. If he perishes here I shall live on for but one thing—to avenge his death. I will kill you, Halman, ere two snows are fallen, if you kill him. Rest assured. I have spoken."

Halman smiled "I am not afraid," he answered simply, then he gave some secret sign, and instantly four brawny braves seized Sam by the arms and legs, holding him helpless.

"No good, boy," said Sam, with a faint laugh. "I'm done. I am only reaping what I have sown. It is the old story



Official announcement has been made that the Duke of Devonshire will succeed the Duke of Connaught as Governor-General of Canada. The appointment has given great gratification in official circles. The Duke of Devonshire is known as one of England's richest peers and is an intimate friend of King George. The Duke is in his forty-ninth year, owns an estate of about 168 acres, and is said to be very democratic. The Duchess of Devonshire is said to be Queen Mary's closest friend and is well known to many Canadians.

been alone, but since he had his partner with him, this was obviously no time for hot headed action. The Indians were determined men, and, unlike their brothers of civilized areas, they were by no means easily frightened. Whatever their plan was, it would need wisdom to escape from their clutches.

Immediately Sam and Frank were landed, grimy hands were laid upon them, and they were led up the forest clearing to a group of teepees. Halman had bragged that ere two snows were passed Sam Ravenstone would be lead a captive into the village. He had spoken truly. By his scheming and activity he had led the white man into the heart of this isolated region, and now Sam and Frank were utterly at his mercy. It was unfortunate that, even as Frank did not recognize Halman, Halman did not recognize him, and the Indians were in no mood to show mercy to either of them.

The two were led to the entrance of

into our teepees a prisoner. Behold he has fulfilled his promise. By many waters and many forests he has brought his enemy. Surely there must be some magic in Halman's dealings! His wisdom is beyond our comprehension, for we know the white man to be wise and powerful. Yet Halman has proved himself wiser and stronger than these strangers who have invaded our land."

A general groan of approval went round. Several braves slapped Halman's brawny shoulders. A little child ran up to him and gave him a feather from the hand of the chief. Solemnly Halman stuck it in his hair.

"My brothers," he said, slowly rising, "this is no time for singing my praises. We have stern work before us. This white man, Sam by name, has done me a grievous wrong, about which you all know. He struck me and left me on the trail. He meant to kill me, but the god's have willed that I shall kill him. That is well, for it is a law of our tribe that