

4 The Shadow of a Great Rock

throats of men who passed restlessly back and forth, here and there, the light of the low fires making them appear as mere vast, burly Shapes. Over all, dominating every separate sound, swelled a deep-toned, resonant murmur—the voice of the spirit of the multitude. Now and then a child cried fretfully; sometimes a girl or a woman sang a fragment of a tune; there were unnumbered sounds in the crowded human camp, and countless others that were borne in from the enfolding night. Yet deeper, stronger than these was the one great voice; inarticulate yet vibrant with meaning, crying the unfathomable passion of a new exodus to a new Promised Land.

The Boltwood store, standing near the centre of the town, was a favourite gathering-place for the crowd. It was a long, one-roomed building, its walls made of hewn logs chinked with mud, its low roof of poles sagging under the weight of sod and earth piled atop. Against the side walls, on rough shelves resting upon