

Angus Corbly's Captivity

A Story of Early Indian Life and Adventure in the Territory
Northwest of the Ohio River.

BY A WRITER OF MARSHALL COUNTY.

(Continuation)

CHAPTER II. THE APPRENTICESHIP

And thus three awful years passed by, with scarce a ray of hope, of comfort or of sympathy, and Angus, whose health was wonderfully maintained, grew to be a strapping, handsome lad of twelve, always industrious and attentive to his duties, but wearing an air of sadness that gave his features a curiously attractive old and sober character. He was so accustomed to his daily meed of abuse and hard labor that it no longer wore upon him at first and his secret grief was unsuspected, like the life-long silent mourning of a mother for the loss of a darling child. He grew in intelligence, also, and he managed to get hold of a book occasionally and thus in a measure supplied the lack of schooling. The merchant congratulated himself on having made a profitable investment when he secured the blue-eyed, sandy-haired little Scot. Angus had come to understand that his period of service was but seven years and that at the end of that term he would be free, so he was counting the time as it sluggishly crept along, watching daily for any means of sending a letter to his home.

Being older, now and stronger, the duties of the apprentice were changed and he was put in that part of the establishment where the furs and skins were received from the traders, the season having arrived for such merchandise to come in from the wilderness. The work of opening, counting, cleaning and packing away the foul and stinking skins was disagreeable and, at first, nauseating, but there was a recompense in the fact that it brought the lad in contact with many hardy pioneers and forest rangers whose free manners and marvelous adventures excited his imagination and gave him a new field for thought. As they departed one after another, having transacted their business, and were swallowed up in that vast and mysterious solitude to the west his longing to go also became intense and he sought their company at every opportunity.

One day there came a big, bluff, hearty, good natured fellow, a trader and trapper of much renown, who took a great fancy to the bright and eager Scotch boy as they opened and inspected the packs together.

This red faced, grizzly-bearded and leather clad Sammy John, for so he was known, talked much with Angus and so friendly was he in word and manner that the boy was led, half-unconsciously, to give some account of his own life, whereat the big man slapped his thigh and swore roundly, angrily declaring that he would himself carry the boy away and give him deliverance. But to this the honest Angus objected, saying that though Mr. Floyd was cruel he had paid his money and was entitled to the apprenticeship he had bought and that it would be wrong to steal away from him.

"As you will, Sammy John, I will go with you myself and make delivery. I pray you be kind to him and I trust he will not betray your good opinion of him. Come."

"Now I thank you, Master Floyd. I will take your prices tomorrow on the merchandise I am to buy. My table may be more frugally and less regularly supplied than yours and our beds may be less soft and sometimes open to the sky, but my apprentice shall have human companionship and the sympathy of his fellow-creatures."

CHAPTER III.

INTO THE WILDERNESS.

It was but a couple of weeks after Sammy John had made his amicable bargain with Mr. Floyd for the unexpired apprenticeship of Angus that the trader and the boy passed out of Philadelphia toward the distant posts, Sammy John riding slouchily and Angus awkwardly and uncomfortably and both with light hearts. Angus had dispatched a long letter to his parents, and, O, the joy of writing it and kissing it and mailing it and dreaming of its hope of escape was ever with us

reception at the little farm! And what would the answer say, and when would it come, and how soon could the wandering son be reunited with that father and mother? A thousand new thoughts surged in the boy's mind, a thousand new emotions swelled his heart. All the happiness of which he had been deprived during the dark years of his captivity and slavery seemed to have sprung up within him at once and Sammynay John's delight was unbounded at the spectacle of the transformation.

Sammy John had taken his young friend to a lawyer acquaintance at Philadelphia and the case was fully explained and discussed with the following conclusions: either or both of Angus's parents might be dead; they might have removed to a different part of Scotland; Angus was too young to be sent out on so long a journey with so much doubt as to its outcome; it would require at least four to six months to get a reply to the letter; it would be best for Angus to remain with his protector until definite news should come; the reply should be directed to the lawyer, who should open it on its receipt and take any steps that might be immediately required, forwarding it, in the meantime, to Sammy John's post by the first opportunity. Angus believed that a reply would come speedily, if not his father himself, and that in less than a year he would be happily ensconced on the old Scotch farm, his sufferings but a memory to be related to the gaping chieftains in then neighborhood, to whom Aberdeen was the only known place away from home.

The trader and the boy were traveling, then, to the west, and they were to proceed to the edge of the hostile country and there await the little train of pack-laden horses coming more slowly behind. Being well mounted they were able to amble along at good speed. They were on a main traveled road leading through a rolling and sometimes hilly country, well watered and, as the times were then, thickly settled; where now, on practically the same road, the houses of prosperous farmers almost touch each other for miles, then they were frequently miles apart. The spring sun lighted up the spring verdure gloriously and a gentle zephyr whispered among the leaves, just strong enough to catch the thin columns of smoke ascending from the farm houses and twist them into lazy spirals high in the air. Everything spoke peace and satisfaction and the hearts of our two travelers echoed the sentiment.

"Huh!" laughed Sammy John, as they were riding at a walk up a gentle winding slope, "you should have seen Old Skinfint swallow the leek when I threatened his trade. He was as limp as a rippling rill the moment he caught my meaning and if I had asked him for his young cockatrice of a son I truly think the varlet would have been thrown into the bargain. I must say for Jim Floyd that if he is grasping he knows when to let go. There was a funny thing in that confab," continued the trader after a slight pause; "I talked English just like a school teacher. I guess you don't know that I taught school several years back in Providence colony before I went roving. Well, I had forgotten all that and the rough speech of the woods had grown into me, but when I got before that man and all my old Christianity began to bite and sizzle in me I dropped right back into decent human speech and, please God, I guess I'll keep on talking it. It makes me feel like washing up and putting on Sunday clothes. It seems to me that a clean man speaking a clean tongue is more apt to keep reputable than another. Did your mother teach you to pray?"

"Indeed did she, Mr. John, and—"

"Tut tut, lad" interrupted the older rider, "Sammy John, please you. There will be no master for you, but I am thinking that a respectful master from other people would sound well to the ear later on. Don't you ever forget how to pray; there's a power of comfort in it some times. Listen. Twenty-two years ago now my elder brother and I set our faces to the north for a summer journey to the new settlements on the Connecticut river above Massachusetts.

Leaving our home in the Providence colony we made our way prosperously and without alarm to the upper waters of the Connecticut and there we were set upon by a band of hostile Indians and hurried forthwith toward the wild mountains of the north. The

but we were closely watched and, besides, were heavy laden with the baggage of our captors. Nevertheless, feeling that each day our captivity grew more hopeless, we resolved upon a plan and fixed a time at night to make the effort. We were widely separated in our sleeping places and he was to move first and give me the signal, which at the agreed time he did and got away. But I in my haste stumbled against a fallen branch and aroused the Indians, some of whom seized and bound me while others went in pursuit of him. At day-break they found him in a hollow log; dragged him out, stripped him naked, beat, pricked him, and pushed him with the points of their knives to the camp. They fastened us to trees, our hands behind us, and danced horribly about roaring with joy and casting dirt and stones in our faces. We were convinced that our destruction was determined and called to each other to be brave."

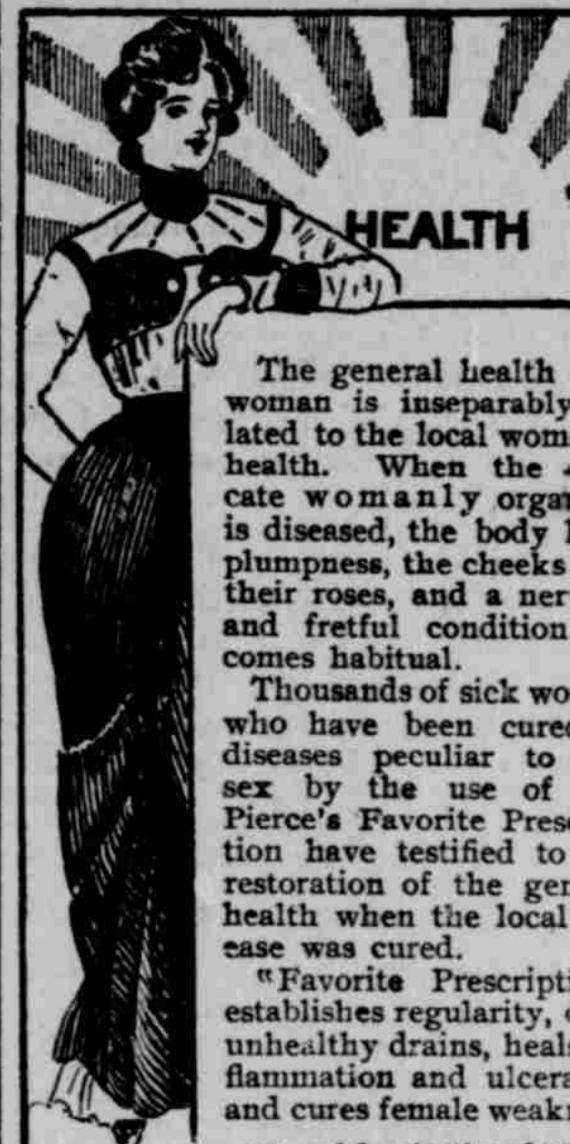
Angus was quivering with emotion and Sammy John paused for a moment before continuing his narration.

"The savages next brought a parcel of dry branches, broken in suitable lengths, and piled them under and about us, examining and tightening our fastenings meanwhile. They brought a blazing twig from the camp fire and kindled the heaping pile about my brother. Our heads were immovably bound so that we faced, each the other, and laughing fiends held my eyes open with their fingers while others ran about the fire and with poles heaped it up or pulled it away so as to prolong the suffering of the miserable victim. They laughed and shouted in their devilish delight and ever and anon would one run up to him and cut collops of flesh out of his naked limbs, which they threw dripping with blood into his face. I saw all of this and saw him die. Then, though I had not prayed for many years, I turned my thoughts to my Maker and silently plead that He would open a way for my deliverance or that He would take my brother's soul and mine to Him. As I prayed in the agony of my spirit my muscles swelled and with a mighty effort I burst the bark withes that held me and they fell at my feet. The whole band of naked savages had at that moment gathered close to the burned and mutilated corpse and I fled from the horrid scene with a speed as miraculously given as the strength that freed me. I outran the yelling hordes of pursuers and still ran on after I knew the last one had desisted, nor did I stop until I fell exhausted in the current of a little stream. Without food or arms and in an unfamiliar region far removed from any civilized habitation, my plight was sore indeed, but I pressed on and on to the south and finally found succor. Since then I have never ceased to pray and it has calmed and cleared my mind in many a sore strait and delivered me from many a temptation."

After this recital the man remained silent for a long time nor did the boy interrupt his meditation, for his own heart was filled with sympathy and his eyes were suffused with tears. Continuing their ride the hunter after a while broke the silence and, after talking pleasant commonplaces for a short time, discussed seriously his plans for the future. He had been profoundly stirred by the inhuman treatment to which the boy had been subjected and it had exercised a sobering influence upon him, determining him to abandon his roving life in the Indian country and to return to the home of his youth for the purpose of engaging in business and leading a civilized life. He was at the middle age and felt that he could be a more useful citizen than he had been, though his rugged honesty and strong common sense gave him a commanding position on the frontier and his pious and humane disposition so moulded his views of the Indian question, as to win for him the universal friendship of all the tribes.

It was his determination, then, as he unfolded to Angus, to carry through the business of the year for which he was already prepared, then to close out his interests in the west and remove to Providence, or some other eastern city of promise, to conclude his days. If circumstances could be so shaped as to leave Angus with him he greatly desired it to be so, but in the event that the boy could be restored to his parents he would do all he could to reach that happy issue. Angus said seriously and earnestly that his dearest hope was to enter his own

(TO BE CONTINUED.)



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