The DOOM TRAIL

by ARTHUR D. HOWDEN SMITH

AUTHOR of PORTO BELLO GOLD ETC.

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CHAPTER XI—Continued

—22—

We spent two days with these people, recuperating in preparation for the stern task ahead of us. After parting with them we continued in leisurely fashion eastward, keeping well to the north of the Great Trail of the Long House and avoiding as much as possible contact with the Onondagas, Oneidas and Mohawks whose countries we traversed. Some ten days after leaving Oswego we found ourselves on the verge of that untracked domain which was roamed by the Keepers of the Doom Trail.

In order to assure that our departure would be free from the observation of spies we left our last camp after dark and in two parties, Ta-wan-ne-ars and myself going in one direction and Peter in another.

Our meeting place was a grove on the bank of a creek, one of the tributaries of the Mohawk. We reached it without observation, and lay in concealment most of the day, starting again in the late afternoon and moving warily through the forest, following no particular course, but addressing ourselves rather to the effacement of all evidence of our passage.

We discovered nothing, and the next day and many others went by with no better luck. Our provisions were exhausted, and we were compelled to live from hand to mouth upon such game as Ta-wan-ne-ars could snare or kill with his tomahawk—and certes he was wondrous proficient in both arts. But we kept on, bearing always eastward and quartering the country in every direction.

In the very midst of this deserted wilderness we came upon what we sought. We had abandoned the headwaters of the Mohawk and were following one of its middle branches, a shallow stream with pebbly, shelving banks, wading close inshore so as not to disturb the close-growing shrubbery. We all saw it simultaneously—a tattered, weather-stained fragment of canvas, caught on a snag in the current. I fished it out with my musket barrel.

"A pack-cofer," declared Peter immediately.

"And safely identified," I added, putting my finger on an unmistakable thistle in green paint with three-quarters of a letter "M" above it.

A mile farther on Ta-wan-ne-ars exclaimed and pointed upward to the trunk of a tall elm. Partly shaded by the foliage of the lower boughs a deep blaze was revealed in the bark.

We waded ashore and investigated. The underbrush was as thick as elsewhere, but presently Peter gave a heave with his bull-like shoulders and a whole section of growths, which had been laced together with vines on a backing of boughs, lifted gate-fashion. Beyond stretched a narrow alley, whose carpet of grass showed it to be seldom traveled.

"If this be not the Doom Trail 'tis worth a look none the less," I whispered.

Peter nodded, and slipped through the opening. I followed him, and Ta-wan-ne-ars brought up the rear.

Here in this hidden path the forest noises became remote. Even the birds ceased to twitter overhead, and the slightest stirring of the treetops made us drop to earth in expectancy of attack. Yet when the attack came we were taken completely by surprise. We were all of us alert, but the first warning that we were under observation was a green-feathered arrow which sang between Peter and me and buried its head in the ground.

"Don'dt fire, whatefer you do," muttered Peter as he threw himself behind the nearest trunk.

Ta-wan-ne-ars and I copied his example. I found myself on the right of the three. The others had selected standing trunks. I had chosen, perforce, a fallen giant which some forest wind had overthrown. I crawled along the trunk into the tangle of roots, and from there gained a clump of bushes growing about the hole from which it had been torn.

The green-feathered arrow had ceased quivering and I idly followed the angle of its inclination. My eyes traveled forward—and focused upon a hideous painted face which peered from a screen of sumac.

The watcher motioned behind him, and a second painted visage glided to his side. Ta-wan-ne-ars, seeking to draw their fire, thrust out the end of his scalp-lock, and the first watcher instantly drew bow and sent an arrow that grazed the trunk.

Nothing happened for a while. The Keepers waited, and Ta-wan-ne-ars and Peter remained under cover. I surveyed the situation. From the hole in which I lay a depression of the ground ran eastward past the lair of the Cahnuagas in the sumac clump. I started to crawl up it, dragging my musket after me, but before I had gone a dozen feet I was obliged to abandon the gun in order to insure that my progress should be silent.

When I was parallel with the sumac clump I sought shelter under a patch of wild blackberry bushes. Cautiously parting my screen—which was exceedingly thorny and painful—I was able to view the Keepers from the rear. They were ensconced in what was evidently a permanent sentry post. Beyond the sumacs was a low bark hut masked with boughs. At their feet were muskets. The bows they held were employed for the purpose of adding mystery to their attack.

I worked myself a little more in the rear of their position, then rose quietly and drew knife and tomahawk. I was an amateur at casting the ax, but this was no time for hesitation. I flung it with all my might, and yelled the nearest approach I could compass to the war-whoop.

The tomahawk struck one of the Keepers with the flat of its blade, felling him. The other savage turned quickly and loosed his arrow at me, aiming wide in his confusion. He stooped for his musket, but I was on him with my knife and he was forced to leap back and meet me on even terms. Ta-wan-ne-ars and Peter came running between the trees, whooping encouragement.

They arrived in the nick of time, for the Cahnuaga I had tried to tomahawk was on his feet, ready to shoot me as I dodged the knifeblade of his

mate. The Seneca brained this man with the butt of his gun, and Peter methodically tripped my adversary and helped me pinion him.

Ta-wan-ne-ars paused long enough to remove what was left of the scalp of his victim, then crossed to us and set his bloody knife to the throat of the survivor.

"Is it to be torture or a quick death, Cahnuaga dog?" he demanded.

The red eyes of the Keeper glared at him. "Death," the man spat, and strove to gnaw at the hands which held him.

"Then speak truly. Who travels Doom Trail today?"

"Nobody. We watch always."

Ta-wan-ne-ars pricked him slightly.

"You watch always," assented the Seneca. "Yes. And who comes?"

A shout echoed through the forest aisles. The red eyes of the Cahnuaga flared exultantly. His mouth opened.

"Yaaa-aaaa-aaa-ah—"

Ta-wan-ne-ars drove his point home, and the scream ended in an awful bubbling gasp.

The shout was repeated.

The crashing of branches sounded as some heavy body ran along the Doom Trail.

"Did you hear that screech?" shouted a rough voice.

"Yaas, Red, me hear him. He bery much like feller feel somet'ing he not like."

Peter nudged me, and Ta-wan-ne-ars seized the bow and quiver of one of the dead Keepers. We crouched beside the bodies behind the sumac screen. My gun was still where I had left it in the gully by which I had approached the lair of the watchers. In its stead I selected the musket of the man the Seneca had just knifed.

A third voice was raised—in the Cahnuaga dialect, which was a corruption of the Iroquois speech and perfectly understandable to my comrades.

"Qua, O Keepers who watch," shouted the third speaker. "We acquaint you that we approach. We have with us the Red One and the Black One."

We remained quiet, but Peter possessed himself of the gun of the second Cahnuaga and placed it where he could reach it as soon as his own piece was discharged.

They were approaching over the trail which forked into the one we had followed from the stream with the pebbly banks. And at this point apparently they came to the junction of the two branches.

The Indian who had shouted before repeated his hail.

"Them Keepers done gone away, Red," declared Tom. "Mebbe some Maquas (hostile term for Mohawks) come dis way. The Keepers chase 'em out o' hyuh."

"—! I'm agoin' to find out," returned Bolling.

He trotted out of the mouth of the trail into the open space on the brink of the muskrat swamp.

"Nobody here," he called back after a casual look around. "Guess the Keepers got after somebody—or else the lazy dogs have turned in for a sleep. I'll find out later for sure. Now you rustle them packs up, and I'll get the dugout ready."

He dragged a canoe hollowed from a tree trunk from its hiding place in a bed of reeds, and produced two paddles from the prostrate trunk of a hollow tree. But we paid scant attention to him. Our eyes were fastened upon the odd procession which emerged from the trail in obedience to his summons.

First walked the negro Tom, a huge pack bowing his enormous shoulders. After the negro, in single file, came eight Cahnuagas, each with a large pack braced on a ga-ne-ko-na-ah, or burden frame. They carried their muskets in their hands.

"We've got to hurry if we're goin' to get everything ferried over the swamp tonight," grumbled Bolling. "Waall, what's bitin' you?"

This question was addressed to a Cahnuaga who, in unslinging his burden frame, had chanced to see the arrow in the ground which the Keepers had shot in their first attempt to bait us.

The Cahnuaga pointed silently to the green-feathered shaft.

"By —!" swore Bolling with a start. "D'ye see that, Tom? Something's happened here."

Bolling glanced about him uneasily.

"The Keepers have gone, that's sure," he announced. "What most likely happened was some party broke in here, and the Keepers chased 'em."

He chuckled wickedly.

"Ain't no blood nor nothin' around, so it 'pears likely the Keepers got the jump on 'em."

Ta-wan-ne-ars, who had been occupied in extracting arrows from a quiver and setting them in a row before him with points lightly thrust into the ground, now notched a shaft.

"Shall we begin, brothers?" he whispered. "Hold your fire until I run out of arrows."

"Ja," agreed Peter. "Budt do not shoot Red Jack or der nigger. We will safe them if we can."

"You can take on the negro," I spoke up. "Leave Bolling to me."

Peter looked doubtful.

"He is a goodt knife-fighter," he commenced to argue; but Ta-wan-ne-ars chose that moment to open his bombardment, and the Dutchman's remonstrance went for naught.

A green arrow streaked across the grove and buried its barbed bone head in the chest of one of the Cahnuagas. The man shrieked and tore at the shaft with his hands. His companions scattered right and left. But Ta-wan-ne-ars gave them no respite. His shafts filled the air. The green arrows drove into the packs, quivered in tree trunks, pierced another unfortunate.

The Cahnuagas let off a ragged volley which whistled over our heads. Ta-wan-ne-ars discharged the last of his arrows and reached for his musket. We saw two of the Indians collapse. Peter caught up his second musket and he and Ta-wan-ne-ars shot again. 'Twas impossible to miss. Besides Bolling and Tom, only two of the enemy were left.

"Knife and hatchet for the rest," said Ta-wan-ne-ars grimly. "Are my brothers ready?"

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

"Fat, Fair and Forty" Not Much in Demand

An American woman, visiting Turkey with her three daughters, engaged an old Turk in conversation. It developed that the Turk was a broker in wives, and the woman, wishing to have some fun with him, asked, "At what value would you place my eldest daughter, supposing that she were for sale?" The Turk mentioned a sum that was flatteringly high. "And my second daughter?" the mother next inquired. A still higher price was was fixed, age of course, being the standard. The highest price of all was set for the youngest daughter, a little flapper. "And now," said the mother, "what price for me?" The Turk was no diplomat. He promptly mentioned a price that was equivalent to $1.50 in American money. The mother was furious. Never, she said, had she been so insulted. After berating the Turk, she walked haughtily away, leaving the marriage broker speechless, and probably wondering what on earth he had done to annoy her.

Blast From Kansas

New York city people are the most conceited and most ignorant people in the world. They think they know everything because they know the entrances to the subways.—Atchison Globe.

A MAN'S JOB

They sat silently for a long time; then he spoke a little nervously.

"What are you thinking about?" he asked. He knew he had to say something.

She blushed and moved uneasily in her chair.

"Never mind," she answered sharply. "It's your business to propose, not mine!"—Tit-Bits.

HARD TO BELIEVE

Nephew—Up among the snows and glaciers of Alaska, Aunt Sally, I hunted bear.

Old Aunt—I can't believe it, John you'd have gotten pneumonia and died.

Brutal!

Take now the bride of Joe Montcalm—
Her work is far from coarse.
She drained poor hub of all his "balm,"
Then asked for a divorce!

Powerful Stuff

"Is your stuff any good for rheumatics?" asked an old lady of a man selling embrocation.

"Madam, it would take the wrinkles out of corrugated iron," was the confident answer.

Horse and Horse

Judge—It seems very strange to me that you could keep on robbing that enormous corporation for so long without being caught.

Prisoner—Well, the corporation was pretty busy itself.—Life.

A Phase of Life

A schoolteacher who was fond of a little girl's prattle remarked one day: "But I seldom hear you speak of your father. Don't you love your father?"

"Of course. But he can only see me when with his lawyer."

One-Man Shop

Stephens—My uncle is one of those men who believe in singing at his work.

Durham—What's his work?

Stephens—He's an opera singer.

LOVED HER STILL

Girlie (recently scolded)—Mother do you love me still?

Mother—Yes, be quiet, dear.

Emancipation

The gentler sex is gaining ground
As ne'er it gained before:
Since Gramnaw's had her neck shaved round,
I think she's swearing more.

Not a Chance

Stout Theatrical Person (engaging room)—Window's a bit small. Wouldn't be much use to me in an emergency!

Landlady—There ain't goin' to be any sich emergency! My terms fer actors is weekly in advance!

False Pride

Bill—Yes, ma'am! He said he'd like to have my head in his business.

Jean—Hee! Haw! He makes ivory pool balls.

Noise Competition

"Nero fiddled while Rome burned," said the ready-made philosopher.

"I don't believe it," answered Senator Sorghum. "No musician with any sort of artistic self-respect would attempt a violin solo while a fire department was performing in the streets."—Washington Star.

Not Guilty

"Don't you think Badger is inclined to daily with the truth?"

"I don't think he ever touches it."

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She—"I bought this hat on your account." He—"Not my account yet! It's still your dad's."

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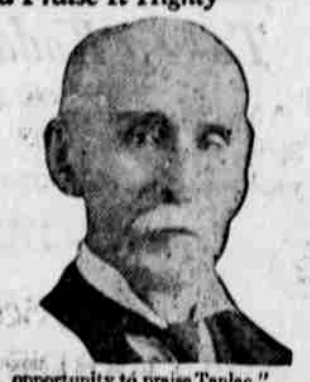

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