

# UNCLE TOM ANDY BILL

## XI. Wyandotte Makes His Appearance Once More

By CHARLES MAJOR

Drawings by P. V. E. Ivory

BALSER and I spent the following winter also in our cabin," said Uncle Tom Andy Bill, "and we had another fine lot of furs, which we took to Cincinnati just as soon as the road was good. We received only one hundred and twenty dollars for them; but that was a great sum in those days. It looked small to us, however, because we had always in mind the dream of Wyandotte's treasure. We had settled on one fact: The five chests could not possibly contain less than five thousand dollars, and that sum would make us rich.

"We had discussed the treasure so often, and had talked about it so much between ourselves, that we felt it was already ours, and that with a little patience we should possess it. We had never mentioned the treasure even to the folks at home. I confess that I did tell Mab about it; but the secret was as safe with her as it was with me, and she was very proud to feel that she was the only one save Balser and I that knew about it. Of course, Balser didn't know that I had told Mab.

"I can't explain why we felt so sure of getting the treasure; but this I know, that we never doubted, even for one moment, that the gold would one day be ours.

"On the road to Cincinnati we were received as heroes at the inns and taverns, and were pointed out to strangers as the boys that had broken up the Wolf gang two years before. We could have stopped at any tavern along the road without paying a cent for our meals and lodgings; but we loved to camp out. We took our time going and returning, and slept under the wagon every pleasant night.

THE first evening out of Cincinnati on our way home, we camped on the banks of a small river—I think it was Whitewater. Camping near us was an old man with a six-ox team and an enormous schooner wagon. A schooner wagon bed was built high at each end like the old fashioned ships in which Columbus crossed the sea, and would hold nearly as much as one could store in a small ship.

"When we reached Whitewater, we found the old man trying to corral his oxen. An ox is a very stupid brute, and when a fact once penetrates to his brain, it takes complete possession of him. If he realizes that his master has lost control of him, he is the most stubborn, aggravating four-footed creature that breathes. The old man's oxen had broken loose, and he was in trouble. After we had unhitched and had fed our horses, we hurried to our neighbor's assistance and soon every ox was knee-haltered and reduced to submission.

"Much obliged," said the old man. "My Indian ran away this noon, and I'm lame, as you see. These fool oxen seem to know that I can't manage them alone. I'd had a powerful hard time if you boys hadn't come to my help. Thank ye a heap. Like as not ye'll be here in the morning, and mebbe I as kin git ye to help me yoke up. The oxen are powerful fine critters; but they haven't been worked for two months, and they're feelin' their oats. Before two months, and they know I'm alone. Reckon they won't be so frisky by the time they git to Fort Chicago."

"Where is Fort Chicago?" asked Balser.

"It's way up on the lakes," answered the old man. "I can't tell ye where it is 'zactly, except that it's in Illinois and on the lake. I 'low it'll take me two months to git thar with this load, even if the roads keep good. If the roads git bad, Lord only knows when I'll git thar! I'm haulin' this load o' goods fer the Astor Fur Company; so it's all right if I git thar by winter, to have the goods thar in time fer the trappers."

"We invited the old man to eat supper with us, and he was delighted with our fare. He had nothing to eat but boiled beans and salt pork, and he said he was so tired of it that he dreaded the approach of meal time. His appetite was nothing like mine, or he would have welcomed meal time though he had nothing but beans.

"Next morning we helped our neighbor yoke up, and when we were about to leave him, he said:

"I thank ye, boys, fer helpin' me. I hain't got a piece o' money to my name or I'd pay ye."

"We wouldn't think of taking a cent," said Balser; "but if you have no money, how will you manage to travel so far?"

"I carry my grub in the wagon," said he, "and camp out, rain or shine. If I have to buy anything, I trade goods fer it if I kin. If I can't trade, I go without. If there's anything I've got in the wagon that ye want, I'll give it to ye, and welcome. Like as not, now, ye'd like to have a little powder?"

"We want nothing," I answered.

"How are you going to get along by yourself with the oxen?" asked Balser.

"Lord only knows; I don't," the old man re-



It Took Us Nearly a Week to Get to Blue River.

plied. "Mebbe I'll be able to find a man along the road to go with me in place of the one that run away; but it ain't likely. Fort Chicago is so far, and men don't know nothin' 'bout the Fur Company; so they don't want to risk workin' fer nothin', and findin' themselves broke so far away from home at the end o' their job."

BALSER and I loved the Gipsy life along the road, and after consulting together we agreed to offer the old fellow our help. Balser told me to speak to him; so before we started, I said:

"We'll stay with you till you reach Blue River, and maybe you can find a man there that will go the rest of the way."

"I can't pay ye, boys, 'cept in goods," said the old man, "and it would be mighty poor pay, for the company only 'lows three bits a day fer help fer this wagon, and that'll be mighty little fer sech fine boys as ye be."

"I tell you, we don't want pay!" said I.

"Well, then, I'll thank ye a heap more than three bits a day," said our new friend.

"We undertook a bigger job than we had supposed, for the oxen moved like snails compared to our horses, and we frequently had to wait half a day for the old man to overtake us; but we were in no hurry, and enjoyed loitering along the road, talking about the treasure and camping out. The weather was beautiful and the road was fine; but it took us nearly a week to get to Blue River.

"Before we reached home we had learned to like the old man, and when he unyoked one evening on the banks of the river, we were sorry to part from him.

"We came down from home early next morning and tried to find a man to go with him; but after asking every idle fellow in the village of Blue River, we returned to our friend and told him that we had failed.

"I didn't 'low ye could find one," said the old man. "It's hard to git anyone to work fer the Fur Company 'cept Indians and halfbreeds. The fellow that run away from me was a halfbreed. His father was a Frenchman and his mother was a Wyandotte."

"Balser and I sprang to our feet at the word 'Wyandotte' and asked in chorus, 'Where did you find him?'"

"I think he come from a tribe of Indians that spent the winter out west o' Fort Chicago somewhere. They say there's a bunch o' Wyandottes among them,—the last o' the tribe,—and I'm told that the old Wyandotte chief is their chief."

"Perhaps you think that Balser and I were not excited," Balser said.

"Tom Andy Bill, I want to speak to you!" We went off to a little distance, and he continued, "Here's our chance! Let's go with the old man."

"Don't say a word," said I, which meant, "I'm agreed."

"Then we went back to the old man, and I acted as spokesman:

"You stay here till to-morrow, and maybe we'll go with you."

"If ye will, I'll try to git the company to double the wages," he answered, "and they will pay you in cash when you git to Fort Chicago."

BALSER and I hurried home and told our folks that we had an opportunity to go to Fort Chicago as helpers with the old man at good wages, and after considerable discussion during the evening they

partially consented, though our mothers did so very reluctantly.

"Next morning Balser came down, and while we were talking over the proposition with father and mother, Mab didn't once take her eyes off me. When it was settled that we were to go, she left the room and went out to the back porch. In a moment or two I followed, and found her crying.

"Are you crying, Mab?" I asked.

"N-o-o," she answered, turning her face from me.

"I'll not go if you want me to stay," I said, hoping in my heart she would ask me not to go.

"No, no, Tom Andy Bill!" she replied, turning toward me, careless of her tears. "You must go. You must not think of me. I would not stand in your way for a moment, and I know I am very foolish to cry. But Nan and Betty and Sue are crying, and I don't see why I can't cry too."

"There is this difference, Mab," I answered. "Your tears hurt me, burn me, and I would not cause you one moment's grief for anything in the world."

"Yes, I know, Tom Andy Bill. You are always thinking of my happiness, and I'll not cry any more. I'll—I'll—I'll be glad that so good a chance has come to you. I'm not crying now. But she was crying though she tried to laugh.

"Soon my sisters came out to the porch, and—and—well, the widespread misery I was creating might have been considered a luxury by some boys, for all my sisters were sweet, beautiful girls, and Mab was without a peer; but their tears made me suffer.

"It's all off, girls, it's all off! I'll not go a step!" said I, tossing my hands in the air.

"But then came a chorus of protests and tears, and a shower of kisses,—kisses from all save Mab,—and I said I would go if they insisted on it. My sisters soon stopped crying; but Mab could not stop, and Nan—good, tender, motherly Nan!—put her arm about her and told her not to cry, that Tom Andy Bill would be home again before long.

"Mab answered between her sobs, 'Yes, I know he'll be back. I'm foolish; but—I feel—something tells me—that I'll never see him again, and—and—Oh, I'm so ashamed of myself; but I can't help it, Nan, I can't help it!'"

"Balser was waiting for me at the gate; so my sisters kissed me again, and I saw Nan motion to Betty and Sue to leave. When they had gone into the house, Nan kissed me and took Mab by the hand, saying, 'Tom Andy Bill is your brother too, Mab.' Then she led her to me and hurried into the house; and—and— Well, I—I can't tell you about that—

BALSER and I found the old man waiting for us, and he was overjoyed when we said we would go with him.

"At Cincinnati we had purchased two fine saddles with enormous saddle bags. We had also bought two beautiful short barrel, smooth bore guns in which we could use either a large bullet or bird shot. We each took a vast store of ammunition, a fine woolen blanket, a new buckskin suit, and an extra pair of boots. We rode a pair of fine horses, and in fact had an outfit good enough for any dandy traveler.

"It was the first week in May when we started. We did not reach Fort Chicago till the last week in June, and that was considered a record breaking trip. Chicago at that time consisted of a few houses