

Sam Marsden's Race For Life.

I have a very distinct memory of this story as told me when a boy by an old gentleman who was a direct descendant of the subject of it, but I have no memory of having seen any publication of it. The time seems to have been a few years before the Revolutionary war.

In the latter part of the summer Sam's older brother and a friend, who were trappers, organized an expedition for the winters work fitting out at Kaskaskia a trading post below St. Louis, and intended pushing to the headwaters of the Illinois river. They must make the trip in row boats or large canoes in order to carry the necessary trapping outfit and provisions for the winter, and this meant a long tedious journey. They took with them three men and the Boy who is the hero of this story. Sam was now in his nineteenth year. Hunting and trapping was to be his future employment and this was his first extended trip in that work although he was already acquainted with many miles of the Mississippi valley. Sam was rather slight of build but muscular and wiry of frame and had already distinguished himself both among his comrades and the Indian tribes by which his youth had been surrounded by his fleetness

A French priest had undertaken to educate Sam beginning when he was very young, but Sam developed much more taste for rustic sports than books. From this Priest Sam had learned scientific boxing with much more eagerness than letters and had become very proficient
of foot and his endurance. This was his special pride though

he had had sufficient trial in dangerous places to show him to be both brave and very discreet for his age.

^ The party of six pushed up the Mississippi into the the Illinois river and in due time selected the scene of their winters work, which is described as at the point where the river makes a great bend to the east above Peoria Lake. Here finding such signs of the fur animals as pleased them the party built a log hut for their winter lodging and prepared for their work. They had brought many things with them for barter with the Indians and were especially careful to please them those at or near Peoria Lake. They found these Indians to friendly toward them and to cement this they offered, and paid, them a price for the privilege of hunting and trapping on the northern border of what they claimed as their hunting grounds. The Indians promising in return that they should not be molested, and that they should have such aid as they might need during the winter. Fall weather held very late and they were so successful that they found it necessary to build further shelter for their pelts; and finally decided that as one of the partners was in very ill health he with one of the men should return to the post with what they could carry in their boats and come back as early as possible in the spring. This left

the two brothers and two of their comrades.

Among the buildings secret erected was the secret cave or Cairn which was not uncommon among the trappers of the time. This was a cellar which in this instance was dug into the side of a steep bushy bluff under the top of a fallen tree some half mile from the cabin. The dirt removed was carefully banked and covered with leaves and brush wood so as to destroy all signs of disturbance. This was used as a store for all extra clothing, guns, ammunition, food stores, and the most valuable pelts, and was intended to serve them for supplies in case the cabin should be raided by Indians.

The winter passed pleasantly and very successfully. Young Sam had by choice attended to the most distant traps and supplied the larder with venison, the others taking the work that required less ^{nimbleness} ~~numberness~~ of foot. When spring came the trapping ceased, and now they had a number of weeks of enforced idleness ~~before them~~ before they could expect their comrades with the boats in which they would ship their pelts to the trading post. The Indians on the river below them had been friendly and they felt no fear of their cabin being disturbed. They therefore decided to make several ~~more~~ excursions up the larger streams entering the river in the neighborhood prospecting for the enlargement of their operation another year.

Several of the

Several of these excursions had been made and now the month of May had come with its warm sunshine. The river had been free of ice for several weeks and their friends might be expected in ten or fifteen days more. They decided to make one more excursion occupying some ten days up a small river coming into the Illinois some distance above. They took such things as they needed in their simple mode of life and paddled up the river in their dugout canoes to the mouth of the stream they were to explore (this seems to have been the Vermillion river). There they secreted the canoes and proceeded on foot examining for signs of the fur animals. They had made one days journey up this stream and about sun up next morning were eating breakfast when without the least warning they were fired upon. Three of the party fell dead, Sam only escaping. He sprang to his feet holding his hands high above his head. Immediately a young Indian was at his side warding off the others and claiming the prisoner. Sam saw to his dismay that these Indians did not belong to the tribes of the Illinois river, and as they gathered about him he looked in vain for a face that he knew. In any marauding party of the tribes of the region he would expect to find friends, but none were here, but as the men gathered about to the

* As between English and French both of which Sam spoke these Indians were least likely to understand the English. This was also Sam's native tongue

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number of fifty or more he found they were Iroquois from the Wabash out on a Marauding expedition. The position of the boy was fearful in the extreme but his tactics were at once determined upon. He knew the Indian languages as well as his own, but his lips were to be closed to their tongue come what might. ^{here} He would seem unused to Indian ^{we} costumes. Almost immediately he was plied with questions He answered in English as if he failed to comprehend, and in English he plead in vain to be let go. * Immediately the question of his disposal came up and as he couldn't understand a word (apparently) he easily learned their plans. The older men were for dispatching him at once but the young Indian who had claimed him as his ^{prisoner} ~~prisoner~~ ~~or~~ opposed this. Finally it seemed to have been determined that this ^{young brave} man should have some say in the matter and the question was asked as what he would do with his prisoner. ~~then~~ Sam heard words that sent his blood tingling with fresh hope, for young Indian said he would take him out on the prairie give him a chance to run for his life and chase him down with his spear. This was at first objected to strongly both as boys play and on the ground that there might be other white men near.

Finally Sam was questioned by signs, which he fairly

understood.

* The Indians of the Illinois and Wabash rivers had been bitter enemies for many years and those of the Illinois had suffered fearful losses at the hands of these enemies

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understood, as to what he had been doing and how many were in his party; to which he replied by signs that there were only four, and that they were trappers. and that their hut was two suns down the river. Where the Indian tribes were ~~also~~ located was also explained by signs but not very correctly for Sam was shrewd enough to wish them to fall in with the Illinois tribes if he should be carried with them, for in that case it would be war to the knife in which this ~~small~~ ^{small} marauding party of Iriquois would have no show and he would have at least a chance of rescue. * About one third of the Indians had fire arms, the others were armed in pure Indian fashion with bows and spears. When the old Indian, who seemed to be a kind of a medicine man, had learned all he could by signs ^{the} language he seemed satisfied that they had all the party and were safe from attack the discussion of the chase on the prairie was renewed and even clamored for by the young men. To Sam this was the best thing he could hope for. He had the greatest confidence that if he were given a fair start he could outrun any of the Indians, and be able to save himself. For running was his fort and his speed and endurance ^{was} was his pride. He had scanned the young Indian who had made this proposition as closely as he could without appearing interested. The proposition of itself showed

showed the man to be proud of his own speed. He seemed to be ^{twenty two or twenty three} ~~twenty two or three~~ years old, of medium height, but strogly built, though not heavy, and looked like he might be a dangerous rival in a race. But Sam dashed this thought away as soon as it came for he had fairly beaten every man both white and red with whom he had come in contact, and in this ~~the~~ ^{scheme} he saw his one chance for life. The discussion becomae warm over the matter. The older ^{men} did not want to spend the time in mere sport.

But the young Indian, though in no sense a chief, in the party, seemed to have much influence and was seconded by the young fellows who wanted to have a hand in the chase.

Finally this plan ^{was} ~~seemed~~ ^{upon,} determined, and Sam was stripped of his clothing, his hands tied behind him and ^{the} Indians started for the prairie with Sam in charge of the medicine man and two others.

This medicine man seemed now to take an interest in his prisoner. He produced a pair of moccassins and put them on his feet and ~~after~~ ^{though} going on for a mile he cut the ~~thongs~~ that bound his hands, muttering as he did so that if the young fellow must have a chase he might as well chase a well man as a lame one. This march continued for, what seemed to Sam, an interminable distance, and finally when a half was alied, they were, as well as Sam could judge, fully five miles from the river, and on

a perfectly level prairie.

When the halt was called there was another long pow-wow. This was carried on at such a distance from Sam and his guard that he was unable to understand fairly what it was all about farther than that there was a number wanting to join in the chase and ~~that there was~~ trouble over the conditions, which at one time grew so angry that threats were ^{made} to kill the prisoner and end it. This threw Sam into great anxiety and several times he was on the point ^{of} to inaugurate ⁱⁿ the race himself by a desperate effort to break away from his guards. Finally after an hour of talk the chief of the party gave orders for action, and the Indians fell into two lines leaving a space some twenty feet wide between them. One end of the lines were opposite Sam and his guard and ^{they} extended back ^{from the river on} from the course they had come. In this space they placed three young Indians with spears about fifty yards away, while to Sam's surprise the young fellow who had claimed him as his prize and had proposed this chase was placed at double the distance or about one hundred yards away. All this time there had been no effort to explain to Sam the nature of the proceedings but now the medicine began a pantomime in which he instructed Sam ~~by signs~~ that the four men with spears were appointed to kill him but that he should run and save himself if he could. Sam replied by signs

Then

that he understood and now a blanket was thrown about his shoulders, and it was explained that when this was removed he could go unharmed and that he should run straight to the river and further that if he could reach the river and jump into the water he would be safe and he should go free.

Now Sam had been watching this whole proceeding intently without appearing to understand, and while he did not actually know he believed that several Indians had been left at the river to waylay him if he should by any chance elude his pursuers. Therefore he had fully made up his mind that he should not run to that point, but would take some other course as opportunity presented. Now on seeing the arrangement made he at once determined to strike the river five miles below for the river made a great bend here so that those at the left at the river would then have a longer run if the river was followed, or if they cut across they could be seen on the prairie. This was his only safety against ambush.

Finally all ready was called and his guards except the medicine man left him and joined the lines on either side. The after a few minutes suspense the blanket quickly snatched from his shoulders, and Sam shot out at an angle instead of on the course pointed out for him to run. In these first few bounds he put all the energy he was master of, for he feared treachery.

on the part of some of the Indians in the shape of a whirling
 tomahawk or a shot, and it came for a shot rang out and a ball
 whistled between his left arm and chest grazing the skin of
 both but in another moment he was out of harms way and glanc-
 ing back he saw ^{The Indians in} ~~utter~~ confusion. The man who fired was being
 belabored and his gun wrested from him, but what was more impo-
 tant, the spearman in trying to cut through the line on the side
 to which he had gone had become entangled in the crowd and de-
 layed giving him a full hundred yards the start. One only
 had fully emerged from the crowd, one of the three nearest in
 the start. Fixing his eye ^{now} on a tall tree in the wood skirtig
 the river as a mark Sam ran in a straight line for a mile or ~~mo~~
 more without looking back. Then a glance over his shoulder show-
 ed that the young spearman he had ~~just~~ seen emerging from the
 crowd ^{had lost ground} was fully a quarter mile behind with another which he
 took to be his captor ^{was} not far behind him ^{and} ~~while~~ the rest were so
 scattered in a long line in the rear. It was ~~not~~ his captor
 that most interested him and he looked again. This spearman
 struck him as running with great ease in long ^{Swinging} ~~rapid~~ strides
 carrying his spear in his left hand. He had evidently settled
 down for a long run and had in the start taken advantage of a
 leisurely pace. This was not comforting for poor Sam who had
 been forced to his highest speed in the start and he fully

realized that he was running too fast, yet his eagerness would not allow of much slackening^{ing} of his pace. On he went over the level prairie with the speed^{ing} scared deer keeping his perfectly straight line. He did not venture to look back again until he had covered half the distance. Then he saw a long line of Indians far in the rear but his captor was still very nearly maintaining his distance (of a quarter of a mile) ^{omit} ~~in the~~ rear having far outstripped all his comrades. He was still running with that long easy stride which he had noticed at first. This was far from satisfactory to poor Sam. Would he be safe if he reached the river. No this Indian would pay no heed to any promise of quarter, neither did Sam know that this promise of the medicine man was anything more than encouragement to him to run, a thing that the others knew nothing about. No his only safety was to leave the Indian indefinitely in the rear. And now for the first time Sam began to doubt his ability to do this. Fear was again added to his strain. For a short time his pace was quickened and to his horror his ^{nose} began bleeding furiously covering his chest and arms with blood. In this dilemma his self command returned to him and he slackened his pace and ran with more ease, but the bleeding continued. On he went without wavering from his straight line. Another glance backward should him that the spearman was slowly but perceptibly

perceptably diminishing the distance between them, and the conviction forced itself upon ^{Saw} ~~him~~ that he would be caught, still he never wavered from his pace or his straight line. Finally he was approaching the foot hills that lead down to the river bottom and he scanned these closely for ~~any~~ signs of Indians and again glanced back at his persuer. He had closed up half the distance between them. What should he do. He could gain the river but what would that avail him with the spearman at his heels, ^{With} a momentary compression of lips and a tension of muscles denoting determination he muttered to himself "I must fight that Indian" and on he sped over the prairie. But while his legs carried him with the same speed as before his mind was now busy with means of combat. He would only be caught at the last moment, but he would ~~not~~ allow the Indian to overtake him and strike him in the back, he would face his foe. But how and on and on he went. He was now ~~in~~ the foot hills that lead to the river bottom and his course brought him out on a long ridge on either side of which were hollows which deepened into sharp declivities. The Indian was now so close that he could hear his footsteps and a quick glance showed him that his steps had become as labored as his own and that he was making a desperate effort to overtake him. Another look convinced him that his persuer was as much exhausted as himself.

* Sam felt that he would rather risk this than the effort to increase his speed, for it was not probable that the Indian had attained extra skill in the art of boxing in which case he would easily be overcome.

and for a moment he thought of making the effort to increase his own pace and leave him. But this exhaustion of his enemy was even more favorable to him in a hand to hand fight provided he could in some way surprise him and elude his spear. * Suddenly

a ^l pain presented itself and acting at once he turned ~~slightly~~ from his course and ran carefully down the side of the bridge so as to strike the hollow at a point where it was particularly abrupt. He went more slowly than before and without looking

back he easily determined that the Indians foot steps were rapidly closing the distance between them—indeed that his pursuer seeing him waver from his course and run slower was making a desperate effort to overtake him and end it. Still he

kept his slow careful pace, struck the sharp hollow and rose on the opposite side just as the Indian was running down the sharpest portion of the declivity, and within thirty ^e feet of him

Without having looked back or giving any possible warning he turned suddenly and ^{sprang} ~~spang~~ toward his enemy. The Indian was

^{taken} completely ~~taken~~ off his guard. He made a desperate effort to check himself and bring his spear in position for use, but

the hill side was too steep, he lost his footing and fell heavily forward and broke the shaft of his spear in the center of its length. Before he could rise Sam was upon him and seizing the broken spear thrust it through his body and immediately fled toward the river. He reached the river at right angles with

its course, plunged in and swam across. He attempted to ascend the steep bank but fell back, he tried again and again fell back. After a more leisurely and careful ^{effort} he reached the top but now realized more perfectly his great exhaustion. Nevertheless he renewed his pace and kept his course out from the river. But where should he go. He stopped short at the thought. Immediately the thought came to him to hide himself, and remembering a great drift of logs in the river which he had seen below him while crossing, and which he had examined the day before while going up the stream, he at once retraced his steps to the river, going carefully now so as to leave no trail of his return, and soon found a point where he could spring from the bank into the water. Then he swam down to the drift ^{dove} down under it, and succeeded in getting his head above water, but still thoroughly hidden ^{and after some effort got up among the logs out of the water} from view.

While in the water swimming down to the drift he heard shouts which told him that the foremost of the Indians had found the dead body of the swiftest runner, and he had not been fixed in his position in the drift but a few minutes when a party on his trail arrived at the river. These sprang in swam across ~~and~~ quickly found his trail leaving the river and after announcing the course he had taken to ^{others} ~~others~~ who were

arriving at the river, went on in pursuit. Soon the Indians began to arrive in greater numbers and instead on swimming, came down to cross on the drift passing ^{close by} (directly over) Sam's ~~head~~ head. Many of these ^a stopped and sat down to rest on the logs while some joined the chase on the other side and finally it seemed ^{to Sam} that all of the new comers stopped on the drift.

After a considerable time had elapsed those who had gone across the river in pursuit ~~he~~ returned reporting that the trail had been lost in the woods; That they had gone out on the prairie beyond, the grass upon which had not been burned, ~~at~~ ^{and} that no trail could be found in that direction.

A council was held on the drift ^{close by} (directly over) Sam's hiding place in which there seemed to be but one opinion, and that was that Sam ("nimble foot" as they called him) had gone down the ~~river~~ ^{river} and would make directly for the cabin. Therefore a small party was ordered to run across the prairie on the nearest line to the Illinois river below the mouth of the stream they were on by which, owing to the bends, they could make several miles ~~or~~ shorter (for some of these Indians were acquainted with the country) and if possible get ahead of the fugitive and ^{cut} ~~put~~ him off. The rest of the party were to spread out through the woods skirting the stream and sweep down as fast as possible

But the Indians now supposed that Sam had been wounded by the rifle fired at the start for the marks of his hands on the spear shaft and on the dead Indian showed them to be covered with blood. While it was evident that the Indian had fallen while trying to stop on the steep hillside and could not have used his spear. 16

so as to rout him out of any hiding place in which he might stop. The idea that he had sought a hiding place immediately on reaching the river seemed not to have entered into their calculations.

Sam was surprised to learn from their talk that the tracks where he had killed the Indian had been closely examined and his ruse in surprising his pursuers fully made out, and that now instead of regarding him as a tenderfoot he was looked upon as an extraordinarily skillful enemy and the young men were cautioned to act with utmost care.

Sam now knew that the cabin would be the next point of attack and that it would have no defenders. It would be sacked and burned but ^{he} hoped that the secret cave would not be found. (What should he do), ^{he} decided to lie still where he was until night fall, for he feared some Indian might remain in the neighborhood. But he heard no sound that indicated the presence of any. Still he didn't leave his place until it was fully dark. Then he worked his way to the lower side of the drift and swam quietly down the river for a considerable distance. Discovering nothing to create suspicion that any of the Indians had remained behind he landed and went out into the woods. He was still irresolute as to the course he should pursue. He knew nothing of the river above, either of this stream or of the Illinois river, except a general idea from

reports of them, and did ^{know} not any of the white men, or Indians upon whom he could rely, in that direction. He expected that this band after sacking his cabin would return either by ~~the~~ this stream, or go farther up the Illinois passing its mouth. Hunger was ~~already~~ ~~was~~ already pressing him, so he decided ^{to} ~~he~~ ~~would~~ follow at once to the Illinois river and find the ^{boats} ~~boats~~ they had secreted and obtain the food left in them. He went ~~a~~ down the river cautiously and found that he was not so much the worse for his ~~wun~~ run, and his nose bleeding, as he had expected, and felt that if he had some food he would be himself again.

By daylight he had reached the place where the boats were left, but they were gone. They had been found and ^{noted} ~~approached~~ by the Indians. This was not only a great disappointment to Sam on account of the food which he ~~had~~ so much needed, but he feared that a guard might have been left to surprise him if he should approach them; for he reasoned that ~~if~~ the Indians would expect that he would take the boats or at least the food if he had come that way. Day was just dawning. Sam after watching carefully a few moments slipped noiselessly into the water and floated quietly with the current for a time and then swam to the farther side of the Illinois river without seeing or hearing anything to arouse his suspicions. He landed in a little drift on the river side and succeeded in reaching the shore without leaving a visible trail. Here he

secreted himself ~~himself~~ where he could scan the river above and about the mouth of the stream he had left and waited until the sun was well up fearing that he might have passed some party ^{who would approach him from} behind. Here he fell asleep ^{finally} and when he awoke it was past mid-day. He was wretchedly hungry and tired. But he started on down the river on the trail of his persuers. Sam was now on ground that he knew perfectly for he was within the range of his winters trapping and hunting excursions. He did not wish to approach the cabin that day. Indeed he had no expectation of finding more than the embers ~~of~~ of the cabin, and he doubted if the Indians would go much farther down the river on account of the nearness to their enemies of the Indian village at Peoria Lake. After sacking and burning the cabin they would probably return up the river, and this might be expected that afternoon or next morning. Therefore ^{he} lingered stealthily about the river on the watch for his foes, and gathering and eating certain roots, the only food obtainable at this season of the year, and very poor food it was.

Proceeding in this way he had ~~only~~ covered only about half the distance at night fall. He had no longer any expectation of meeting the Indians returning before morning. He was too impatient to remain long waiting, so continued his march in the same stealthy ^{manner} ~~manner~~ fearing now that he might come upon

He then ^{drove} clothed himself and lay down to sleep, But he was ill at ease and could not sleep. He selected a piece of smoked venison

began 19

parties of the Indians bivouacked for the night. It came on to rain but this was rather welcome than otherwise because his feet made less noise in the wet than in the dry leaves. He went on to within a half a mile of the cabin, and waited for daylight and then crept stealthily near enough to discover that a little smoke was still ascending from the spot. He waited until it was lighter and satisfied himself that the Indians were not in the immediate vicinity neighborhood. He then by a circuitous rout found his way to the secret cellar and to his joy found it unmolested. He entered, selected the best of the two rifles, saw that it was in good order, (loaded it and selected ammunition) and then made a breakfast of smoked venison. He took his rifle and ammunition, and went out without other definite purpose than ~~that~~ to be in the fresh air where he could better see and hear what was going on in the neighborhood. He expected the Indians were near, or would be during the day. He wandered along the top of of the ridge for some distance and finding a dry spot about the root of a large tree in which he would be well secluded he sat down to await developments.

In this position he fell asleep from which he was awakened by a call not far away. The call was soon repeated and ~~there~~ through the ^rbush wood he saw an Indian in the hollow below who was trying to attract the attention of some one farther up the

hollow. There was a grassy open strip along this little ravine and a party of six Indians were seen ~~soon~~ coming down. As ~~to~~ they approached the one ~~the one~~ who had called ~~he~~ told them that the whole body were assembling on the other side of the river for an immediate start, and it was evident from some of ~~to~~ the talk Sam could not fully hear that the Indians had become alarmed and a hasty retreat had been ordered. This could be nothing else than discovery by the Indians on the river below.

The party went hastily down the ravine toward the river and Sam starting up from his hiding place found the sun was nearly down in the west. He had slept all day. He felt fresh and what was more he felt that he was now the hunter instead of being hunted, for the Indians on the river below were his friends and it must be ^{by} ~~of~~ them that the marauders were alarmed.

He would join them in an attack.

(Acting ^{on} this he dogged the Indians to the river and)

He watched the party ^{the river} cross with another that came from a different quarter. He soon saw that there was to be no delay in the retreat, and further that the Indians had conveyed the pelts from the cabin ^{making} over the river and were hastily tying them into suitable packages for carrying. Finally as many as could be managed ^{were} placed in the two canoes they had captured and a man to paddle each started up the river. Before it was dark all of the Indians were on the move up the river. After

satisfying himself that all were gone-Sam waited expecting the attacking party. He waited until late at night but none came. He slept but little and was awake before the dawn and started cautiously down to the river to reconnoiter; but almost immediately saw the bent body of an Indian between him and the reflected sky-light from the water, and soon made out several of them. Watching them closely and following up their movements he became satisfied that they were a scouting party of ~~his~~ ^{his} friends trying to locate their enemy. Stealthily approaching very near them in Indian fashion he suddenly rose up speaking in a low tone as he did so. He was recognized at once and quickly told his story and of the sudden retreat of the Indians the night before. He then learned that a hunting party of the Peoria Indians had discovered the presence of the Iriquois the day the cabin was burned and gave the alarm at their village the same night. The next morning three hundred warriors were on their way to attack them and that last night their ^oscouts had reported the enemy as going into camp (if such it could be called) on the opposite bank of the river from where they were standing and that they were then trying to so locate them that they might surround and surprise them. The ~~main~~ ^{main} force of the Indians were then a mile or so below on the other side of the river waiting their report, ^{This} which was quickly sent, and the pursuit organized with

Sam conducting a squad of the advance scouts. Two days afterwards the party of the Iriquois were surprised not far from where Sam's comrades had been killed, about half of them ^{slain} killed and the pelts together with about half of the guns of the party captured. In this pursuit and fight Sam distinguished himself for his skill and daring.

When these pelts were returned to the Indians' village and the story of Sam's capture and race for life and of his coolness, judgement, and heroism in the present and final fight, the Old Chief wished to adopt him as one of his braves, but as Sam said he had friends down the river to whom he must return the chief said ^{Sam} ~~he~~ should take one half the pelts and his braves the other half, and that a sufficient number of them should go with him to the trading post to help Sam with his share and dispose of their own. This pleased Sam and immediately preparations began for his departure.