

In the Days of Poor Richard

By IRVING BACHELLER

AMERICA IN THE MAKING

Irving Bachelier, in his new novel, "In the Days of Poor Richard," has written a story of America in the making—the United States in the days of the American Revolution. It is a story with a double appeal. One is to the reader in search of an exciting love story in it, applied with adventure and fighting. This is the love-making of Jack Irons, a young frontiersman, and Margaret Hare, the daughter of an English colonel. The other appeal is to the good American who is interested in his country's history. Franklin is the dominating character of the story and his great Americanism—of which the Americans know—should know—he was human, engaging and lovable beyond the measure of most of the great men of his day. And there were giants in those days not the least of whom was Franklin. The reader gets a vivid glimpse of historic moments of the American struggle—Washington, Hamilton, Adams, Jefferson and the rest, as well as the factors in the drama of nation-making as Andre and Benedict Arnold. It ends with a fine picture of Poor Richard in his last days uttering those homely philosophic sayings of both historic and classic.

CHAPTER I

The Horse Valley Adventure.

"The first time I saw the boy, Jack Irons, he was about nine years old. I was in Sir William Johnson's camp of magnificent Mohawk warriors at Albany. Jack was so active and successful in the games, between the red boys and the white, that the Indians called him 'Boiling Water.' His laugh and trellis spirit reminded me of a mountain brook. There was no lad, near his age, who could run so fast, or jump so far, or shoot so well with the bow or the rifle. I carried him on my back to his home, he urging me on as if I had been a battle horse and when we were come to the house, he ran about doing his chores. I helped him, and our work accomplished, we went down to the river for a swim, and to my surprise, I found him a well-laughed fish. We became friends and I thought of him, the words 'Happy Face' have come to me. I think a better nickname than 'Boiling Water,' although there was much propriety in the latter. I knew that his energy given to labor would produce much merriment and when I left him, I repeated the words which my father had often quoted in my hearing:—

"Seat upon a man diligent in his calling." He shall stand before kings." This glimpse of Jack Irons, Jr., familiarly known as Jack Irons, is from a letter of Benjamin Franklin to his wife.

Nothing further is recorded of his boyhood until, about eight years later, what was known as the "Horse Valley Adventure" occurred. A full account of it follows with due regard for background and color:—

"It was the season of the great moon," said old Solomon Binkus, great moon, and he leaned over the campfire and flicked a coal out of the ashes with his forefinger and chuckled it up to his pipe bowl. In the army he was known as 'old Solomon Binkus,' not by reason of his age, for he was only about thirty-eight, but as a mark of deference. Those who loved him in the bush but a faith in his wisdom that was childlike. "I had had my feet in a pair of slippers walking the white sea a fortnight," he went on. "The dry water were six feet on the level, or maybe more, and some of the waves up to the tree-tops, no body was no but this ere ol' Mianer Jane (his wife) the hull trip to the Svegache country. Got along my way, as if it seemed as if the wind were a-tryin' fer to rub it out of the slate. It were a pesky wind; that kept a-cuttin' me an' whittlin' in the briars on my face an' crackin' my coat-tails. I were tiousome—how to keep my nose an' tides from gettin'—believe."

At this point, Solomon Binkus paused to give his words a chance to "sink in." The silence which followed was broken only by the crack of burning logs and the sound of the night wind in the tall pines above the gorge. Before Mr. Binkus resumed his narrative, which, one might know by the tilt of his head and the flick of his wide open, right eye, would soon have the historian seize the opportunity of finishing his introduction. He had been the best scout in the army of Sir Jeffrey Amherst. As a small boy he had been captured by the Senecas and held in the tribe a year and two months. Early in the French and Indian war he had been caught by "Algonquins and tied to a tree and tortured by hatchet throws until rescued by a French captain. After that his opinion of Indians had been, probably, a bit colored by prejudice. Still, later he had been a burly man in a white coat, and in his young manhood, one of those who had escaped the infamous massacre at Fort Wil-

liam Henry when English forces, having been captured and disarmed, were turned loose and set upon by the savages. He was a tall, heavy, broad-shouldered, homely-faced man of thirty-eight with a Roman nose and a prominent chin underscored by a short sandy throat beard. Some of the adventures had put their marks upon his weathered face, shaven generally once a week above the chin. The top of his left ear was missing. There was a long scar upon his forehead. These were like the notches on the neck of his rifle. They were a sign of the stories of adventure to be found in that wary, watchful brain of his.

Johnson enjoyed his reports on account of their humor and color and he describes him in a letter to Putnam as a man who "when he is much interested, looks as if he were taking aim with his rifle." To some it seemed that one eye of Mr. Binkus was often drawing conclusions while the other was engaged with the no less important function of discovery.

His companion was young Jack Irons—a big lad of seventeen, who lived in a fertile valley some fifty miles northwest of Fort Stanwix, in Tryon county, New York. N.Y., in September, 1763, they were traveling ahead of a band of Indians bent on mischief. The latter, a few days before, had come down Lake Ontario and were out in the bush somewhere between the lake and the new settlement in Horse valley. Solomon thought that they were probably Hurons, since they, being discontented with the treaty made by the French, had again taken the war-path. This invasion, however, was a wholly unexpected bit of audacity. They had a wife and daughter of Colonel Hare, who had been spending in a few weeks with Major Duncan and his fifty-fifth regiment, at Oswego. The colonel had taken them to his family on a hunting trip in the bush. They had had two guides with them, one of whom was Solomon Binkus. The men had gone out in the



evening after moon and imprudently led the ladies in camp, where the latter had been captured, having returned, the scout knew that the only possible explanation for the absence of the ladies was Indians, although no peril could have been more unexpected. He had discovered by "the sign" that it was a large band of Senecas, and he had picked up the boy, Jack Irons, at a hunting camp on Big Deer creek, as it was then called, and the two had set out together to warn the people of the Horse valley, where Jack wanted to get help for a battle with the savages.

It will be seen by his words that Mr. Binkus was a man of imagination, but again he is talking. "I'll give him a chain of wampum an' then lead the letter from Sir Bill. It were the Six Nations more land an' fort, an' a regiment to defend 'em." "A powerful lot of Injuns turned back to Sir Bill but they was a few

over to the French. I kind of mistrust that's some of them found guile behind us. They 'speakin' to a lot o' plunder agin' horse people an' ride 'em back an' swim the river at the place o' the many islands. Well, poke down to the truth by the edge o' the drowned lands afore sunrise an' I kind o' mistrust we'll see sign."

Jack Irons was a son of the much-respected John Irons from New Hampshire, who, in the fertile valley where he had settled some years before, was breeding horses for the army and sending them down to Sir William Johnson. Hence the site of his farm had been called the Horse valley, when he passed Mr. Binkus went to the next brook and repeatedly filled his old felt hat with water and poured it on the fire. "Don't never keep no fire agoin' a fire," he whistled, as he "I'm diked out," he whistled, as he "cause ye never kin tell."

The boy was asleep on the bed of boughs. Mr. Binkus covered him with the blanket and laid down beside him and drew his coat over both. "He'll learn that it ain't no fun to be a scout," he whispered with a frown and in a moment was snoring. It was black night when he passed his companion. Solomon had been up for ten minutes and had got their rations of bread and dried venison out of his pack and brought a canteen of fresh water.

They started down the foot of the gorge then dim in the night shadows. Binkus stopped, now and then, to listen for two or three seconds and went on with long steady strides. His movements were so stealthy that the boy imitated them. He was a tall, handsome, big-framed lad with blond hair and blue eyes. They could soon see their way clearly. They had started through sloping footing in the wet grass that flung its dew into their garments from the shoulder down. Suddenly Mr. Binkus stopped. They could hear the sound of heavy feet splashing in the wet meadow. "Scart noise, runnin' this way!" the scout whispered. "I'll bet ye a pint o' powder an' a fishhook when Injuns is over east here."

It was his favorite wagger—that of a pint of powder and a fishhook. They came out upon high ground and reached the valley trail just as the sun was rising. The fog had lifted, Mr. Binkus stopped well away from the trail and listened for some minutes. He approached it slowly on his tiptoes, the boy following in a like manner. For a moment the scout stood at the edge of the trail in silence. Then, leaning low, he examined it closely and quickly raised his hand. "Hoofs o' the devil!" he whispered as he beckoned to the boy. "See that!" he went on, pointing to the grass. "They've just gone by. The grass ain't riz yit. Wait here."

He followed the trail a few rods with eyes bent upon it. Near the little run where the creek fell softly into the earth and looked lazily at the earth and then hurried back. "It's a big hand. At least forty Injuns in it an' some captives, an' the devil and Tom Walker. It's a mess which they ain't to mistake."

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