

Sheba Blake Publishing Corp.

A CUMBERLAND VENDETTA

John Fox, Jr.



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John Fox, Jr. asserts the moral right to be identified as the author of this work.

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About the Author

I



THE cave had been their hiding-place as children; it was a secret refuge now against hunger or darkness when they were hunting in the woods. The primitive meal was finished; ashes were raked over the red coals; the slice of bacon and the little bag of meal were hung high against the rock wall; and the two stepped from the cavern into a thicket of rhododendrons.

Parting the bushes toward the dim light, they stood on a massive shoulder of the mountain, the river girding it far below, and the afternoon shadows at their feet. Both carried guns-the tall mountaineer, a Winchester; the boy, a squirrel rifle longer than himself. Climbing about the rocky spur, they kept the same level over log and boulder and through bushy ravine to the north. In half an hour, they ran into a path that led up home from the river, and they stopped to rest on a cliff that sank in a solid black wall straight under them. The sharp edge of a steep corn-field ran near, and, stripped of blade and tassel, the stalks and hooded ears looked in the coming dusk a little like monks at prayer. In the sunlight across the river the corn stood thin and frail. Over there a drought was on it; and when drifting thistle-plumes marked the noontide of the year, each yellow stalk had withered blades and an empty sheath. Every-where a look of vague trouble lay upon the face of the mountains, and when the wind blew, the silver of the leaves showed ashen. Autumn was at hand.

There was no physical sign of kinship between the two, half-brothers though they were. The tall one was dark; the boy, a foundling, had flaxen hair,