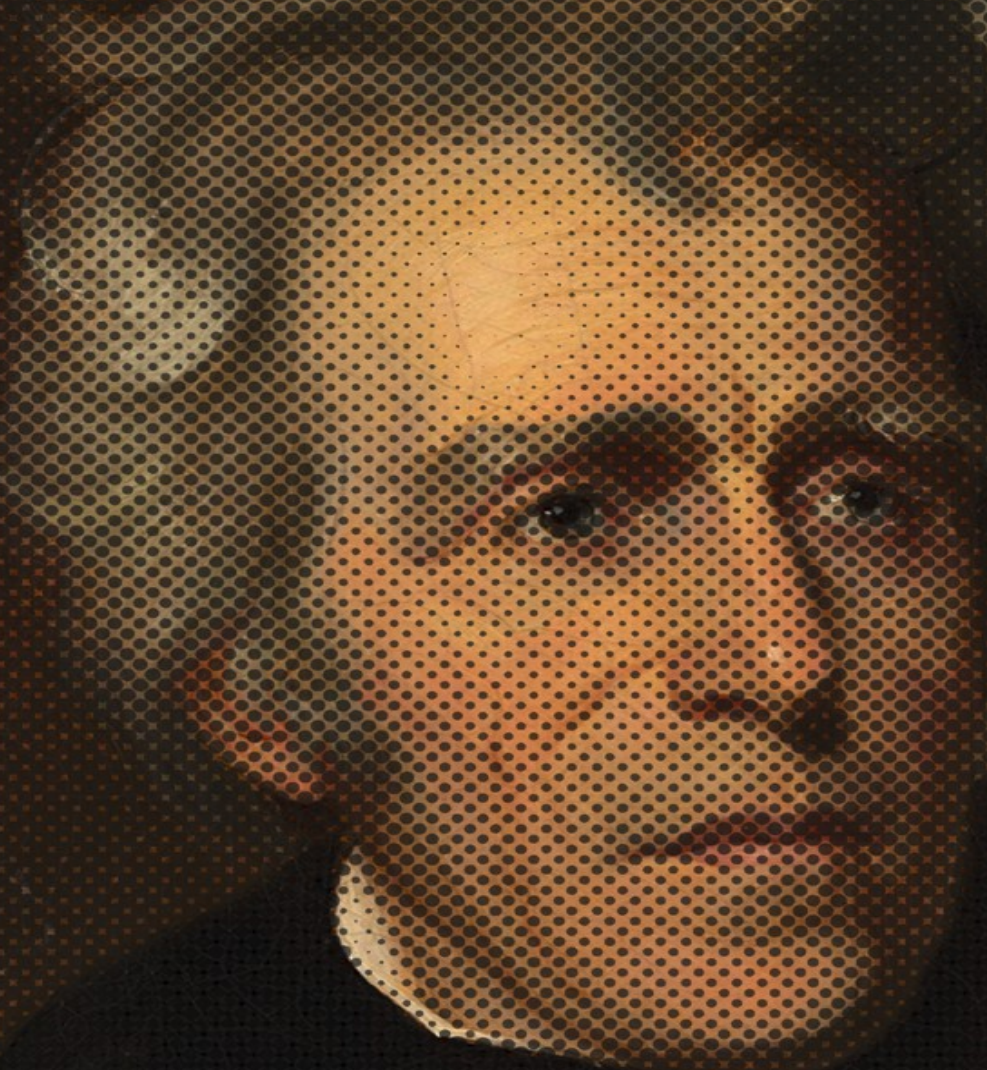


John T. McIntyre



***On the Border
with Andrew
Jackson***

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER I IN THE CREEK COUNTRY

CHAPTER II THE COMING OF TECUMSEH

CHAPTER III THE WILDERNESS TRAPPER

CHAPTER IV ATTACKED BY INDIANS

CHAPTER V THE FIGHT ON THE KNOLL

CHAPTER VI SIGHTING THE ENEMY

CHAPTER VII THE ONSLAUGHT AT FORT MIMS

CHAPTER VIII OLD HICKORY APPEARS

CHAPTER IX THE BLOW AT TALLUSHATCHEE

CHAPTER X AN INDIAN MESSENGER

CHAPTER XI CAPTURED BY THE CREEKS

CHAPTER XII A FIGHT—AND A REVOLT

CHAPTER XIII THE BEGINNING OF THE END

CHAPTER XIV THE BATTLE OF THE HORSESHOE

CHAPTER XV LIFE OF ANDREW JACKSON

JOHN T. MCINTYRE

CHAPTER I

IN THE CREEK COUNTRY

[Table of Contents](#)

“MUCH good place for camp! Heap fine water!”

It was a young Cherokee brave who spoke; from the back of his wiry little sorrel horse he pointed ahead to a small stream which could be seen winding its way among the trees.

“Yes; it looks as if it had been made for a camp, Running Elk,” replied a bronzed athletic white boy. “What do you say, Frank, shall we pitch the tent there to-night?”

Frank Lawrence glanced toward the sun, which was already lowering toward the horizon.

“We might as well, Jack,” replied he. “We couldn’t go much farther, anyway.”

Jack Davis shook the rein of his black horse; and so the three rode toward the stream, which was perhaps a quarter of a mile away. It was late autumn and the year was 1812. The Muscogee country, as the state of Alabama was then called, was green with mighty forests, and in places almost untrodden by the foot of the white man; game was to be met on every hand; and the red huntsmen ranged the hills and valleys, seeking not only food, but their foes as well.

The young Cherokee warrior led a packhorse which bore upon its back provisions and camp equipment. The youthful savage was a handsome, supple fellow, attired in the picturesque dress of his nation, and carrying a bow and quiver of arrows; also a tomahawk and knife hung at his belt.

Jack Davis was about eighteen years of age; he had been born and reared upon the Tennessee border, and had the keen, hardy look which comes of facing nature in her most rugged aspects. Frank Lawrence, on the other hand, was a product of civilization; he was fresh from Richmond; and while he had little of the bronze and none of the woodcraft of the other lad, still, ounce for ounce, it would have been a cunning choice to select the one who would have endured the greater fatigue.

Both wore fringed leggings, hunting shirts and coonskin caps; from the shoulders of each hung a long rifle, powder horn and bullet pouch; in their belts were thrust broad bladed hunting knives and keen edged hatchets.

“Since we got down into this country I’ve noticed a great number of small streams much like the one ahead,” remarked Frank. “It’s as though there were a sort of network of them.”

Jack laughed.

“I noticed that, too, first time I got down this far,” replied he. “Those streams gave the redskins of this region their name. They call themselves Muscogeas; but the whites call them Creeks.”

“It seems to me I’ve heard Running Elk speak of them by another name,” said Frank, with a glance at the Cherokee.

“Oh, yes, Red Sticks,” said Jack. “They get that name from the war club they carry, which is always colored red.”

“Red Stick no good,” spoke Running Elk, calmly. “Much bad medicine. Cherokee hate ‘um.”

Both the white boys laughed at this unhesitating declaration; their nags loped easily forward over the velvet-

like sward toward the creek; they were intent only upon camp, a good supper and a comfortable rest after the long ride through the wilderness. Suddenly Running Elk reined in his sorrel horse so sharply as to throw it back upon its haunches. With a gesture of warning he threw up one hand.

“Stop!” said he.

The white boys scarcely needed the spoken warning; they had noted the young brave’s sudden stop; and their own was almost as short. They were at the top of a hill.

“What is it?” asked Frank, surprised.

But Jack Davis had no need to ask; his sharp eyes, as accustomed as an Indian’s to the signs of the forest, swept the growth of trees ahead, and at once saw the cause of Running Elk’s action.

“Look there,” said he, pointing.

Frank followed the direction of the indicating finger; from above the softly waving tops of the trees curled a slim column of smoke.

“Hello!” said he. “Some one else has camped there.”

All three drew back into the cover of a clump of beech; Jack dismounted and began to examine the ground. And as he worked over it, going from place to place like a keen-scented hound, Frank joined him.

“Any tracks?” he inquired with interest.

“I don’t see any here,” replied the young borderer. “They may have come another way.” Upon his hands and knees, taking advantage of the tall grass, fallen trees and hummocks of earth, he made his way to the right of their own trail. “Keep as close to the ground as you can,” he warned Frank, who followed him. “We don’t know who they

are, and as they are almost sure to be on the watch, we don't want to be seen until we know they're friends."

About two score yards from their original stopping place he paused.

"Injuns!" said he.

Frank looked at the signs; there were the hoof tracks of a dozen or more horses; and the broad drag of the poles in the midst of these was unmistakable.

"I suppose none but the redskins drag their camp stuff on poles at their horses' heels that way, eh?" asked he.

"No," replied Jack Davis. "But there are other signs, too. If you'll notice, they rode in single file; Injuns almost always do that and white men never, unless the trail is narrow. And look where one of the redskins dismounted! See the print of his moccasin in the dust? Only Injuns have feet shaped like that."

They made their way, in the same cautious fashion, back to the place where the young Cherokee guarded the horses.

"They're Injuns," said Jack.

Running Elk nodded; he did not seem at all surprised.

"Red Sticks," spoke he. And then: "How many?"

"About ten—with packhorses, and lodge poles."

This latter statement seemed to attract the young warrior's attention. His keen eyes went in the direction of the curling column of smoke as it was lifted above the tree tops.

"Not hunters," said he. "Party from long way off."

"What makes you think that, Running Elk?" asked Frank.

"Hunters no carry tepee; pack meat on horses' backs."

From their concealment behind the clump of beeches, the three watched the ascending smoke for some little time; then as the sun sank below the line of forest and the shadows began to gather, Jack said:

“Well, it looks as though we couldn’t venture down to the creek, at this point, anyhow; so, if we’re going to have any supper, we’d best be looking for another camping place.”

Remounting, they headed away to the west; darkness came upon them as they reached a narrow ravine. Here they built a small fire, carefully masked so as not to be observed by a chance prowler; some small game, shot during the afternoon, was roasted upon their ramrods, with flour cakes baked upon the gray coals. While they ate, Frank looked soberly at Jack.

“I suppose we’ve been very fortunate in not coming upon any roving Indian bands before now,” said he.

Jack nodded.

“We slid through this whole Creek region as quietly as you please,” said he. “Never had to stop for anything except to kill a bit of meat now and then, and get a little sleep.”

“Well, now that we have run into a lot of reds,” said Frank, “I can’t help blaming myself for dragging you away down here and getting you into danger.”

Jack, as he polished a bone to which some scraps of meat still clung, grinned good-humoredly.

“Danger!” said he. “Why, the Injuns haven’t seen us; and a sight of the smoke from their camp-fire won’t do us any harm.”

The young Virginian also grinned at this; but he resumed, soberly enough:

“Our coming on this band so unexpectedly has made me think. Here we are, away in the heart of this wilderness; there’s possibly not a white man nearer than Fort Mims, and that’s fifty miles away. Of course, we’re armed and our horses are good ones; but, if we were attacked by a party of Creeks of any size, we’d stand a poor chance.”

“We’re taking the regular chance of the border,” said Jack. “No more, no less.”

“I know that; and as it’s a kind of a desperate one, now that I get to thinking about it, it worries me. Not that I care very much for myself,” hastily. “It’s not that; for it’s my affair, and it’s only right that I should meet any of the dangers connected with it. But neither you nor Running Elk are concerned, except through friendly interest in me; and, still, your danger is as great as mine.”

Jack listened to this with attention; but that he did not regard the situation with the same seriousness as his friend was evident by the twinkle in his gray eye.

“Well, seeing that this little expedition of yours is not any different from the hunting trips which Running Elk and myself take now and then, we’re not as ready as you are for the things that are likely to pop out on us suddenly. Richmond’s not like this border-land of ours; and the inconveniences, such as hostile redskins, panthers and other such varmints, are not so big to us as they might look to some one not used to them.” He wiped his mouth upon the sleeve of his hunting shirt and sat comfortably back against a tree. “So don’t worry about us, old boy; this is nothing new to Running Elk and me; just the day’s work, you

might say; and if we weren't down here with you, we'd be somewhere else, just as dangerous, on our own account."

"Well," said Frank, "it's very good of you to look at it that way, Jack, and I hope we'll come through the trip without any great danger. But just the same I don't mind admitting that I'll be pretty well satisfied when it's over."

"As such things go," said Jack, "you ought to be somewhere near the neighborhood of that old French land grant you're looking for. If my calculations are right, inside a day or so you ought to have it located."

"Let us hope so," said Frank, fervently. "Then my trouble will be over."

But in the dim glow of the masked camp-fire Jack's face looked somewhat dubious.

"Fact is," said he, "I think your father made a little mistake when he took that old French grant in payment for a big debt."

"I hope not," said Frank, anxiously. "For it's about all he has now; if it doesn't turn out fortunately, things will go very badly with him."

"It's not so much that I doubt the value of the grant," said Jack. "But the Creeks claim this whole region; and it would be a hard thing to make good a claim of white ownership, no matter how small the tract. The whole tribe'd be down on you like a landslide before you'd know it."

"But the government would back me up. The grant is a perfectly honest one; the land was once purchased from the Indians by the French government, which granted it to the man who transferred it to my father. Upon the United States purchasing the control of this territory from Napoleon a few

years ago, our government recognized all legitimate claims of this sort; so there should be no real trouble.”

“Maybe not in the courts; but, as I said before, the Creeks will be sure to have a word or two to say.”

As the young Tennessean spoke, Running Elk, who was reclining upon the ground beside the fire, lifted his head. From across the stillness of the night there came a dull, throbbing sound.

“War drum!” said the Cherokee; and the hands of all three reached for their weapons.