

The Young Fur Traders

R.M. Ballantyne

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UNIFORM WITH THIS BOOK.

__THE CORAL ISLAND. MARTIN RATTLER. UNCAVA.__

[Illustration: Pierre was standing over the great kettle. " __The Young Fur Traders_]" Frontispiece

SNOWFLAKES AND SUNBEAMS; OR, THE YOUNG FUR-TRADERS

A Tale of the Far North.

BY ROBERT MICHAEL BALLANTYNE

PEEFACE.

In writing this book my desire has been to draw an exact copy of the picture which is indelibly stamped on my own memory. I have carefully avoided exaggeration in everything of importance. All the chief, and most of the minor incidents are facts. In regard to unimportant matters, I have taken the liberty of a novelist--not to colour too highly, or to invent improbabilities, but--to transpose time, place, and circumstance at pleasure; while, at the same time, I have endeavoured to convey to the reader's mind a truthful impression of the _general effect_--to use a painter's language--of the life and country of the Fur Trader.

EDINBURGH, 1856.

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CHAPTER I.

Plunges the reader into the middle of an Arctic winter; conveys him into the heart of the wildernesses of North America; and introduces him to some of the principal personages of our tale.

Snowflakes and sunbeams, heat and cold, winter and summer, alternated with their wonted regularity for fifteen years in the wild regions of the Far North. During this space of time the hero of our tale sprouted from babyhood to boyhood, passed through the usual amount of accidents, ailments, and vicissitudes incidental to those periods of life, and finally entered upon that ambiguous condition that precedes early manhood.

It was a clear, cold winter's day. The sunbeams of summer were long past, and snowflakes had fallen thickly on the banks of Red River. Charley sat on a lump of blue ice, his head drooping and his eyes bent on the snow at his feet with an expression of deep disconsolation.

Kate reclined at Charley's side, looking wistfully up in his expressive face, as if to read the thoughts that were chasing each other through his mind, like the ever-varying clouds that floated in the winter sky above. It was quite evident to the most careless observer that, whatever might be the usual temperaments of the boy and girl, their present state of mind was not joyous, but on the contrary, very sad.

"It won't do, sister Kate," said Charley. "I've tried him over and over again--I've implored, begged, and entreated him to let me go; but he won't, and I'm determined to run away, so there's an end of it!"

As Charley gave utterance to this unalterable resolution, he rose from the bit of blue ice, and taking Kate by the hand, led her over the frozen river, climbed up the bank on the opposite side--an operation of some difficulty, owing to the snow, which had been drifted so deeply during a late storm that the usual track was almost obliterated--and turning into a path that lost itself among the willows, they speedily disappeared.

As it is possible our reader may desire to know who Charley and Kate are, and the part of the world in which they dwell, we will interrupt the thread of our narrative to explain.

In the very centre of the great continent of North America, far removed from the abodes of civilised men, and about twenty miles to the south of Lake Winnipeg, exists a colony composed of Indians, Scotsmen, and French-Canadians, which is known by the name of Red River Settlement. Red River differs from most colonies in more respects than one--the chief differences being, that whereas other colonies cluster on the sea-coast, this one lies many hundreds of miles in the interior of the country, and is surrounded by a wilderness; and while other colonies, acting on the Golden Rule, export their produce in return for goods imported, this of Red River imports a large quantity, and exports nothing, or next to nothing. Not but that it might export, if it only had an outlet or a market; but being eight hundred miles removed from the sea, and five hundred miles from the nearest market, with a series of rivers, lakes, rapids, and cataracts separating from the one, and a wide sweep of treeless prairie dividing from the other, the settlers have long since come to the conclusion that they were born to consume their own produce, and so regulate the extent of their farming operations by the strength of their appetites. Of course, there are many of the necessaries, or at least the luxuries, of life which the colonists cannot grow--such as tea, coffee, sugar, coats, trousers, and shirts--and which, consequently, they procure from England, by means of the Hudson's Bay Fur Company's ships, which sail once a year from Gravesend, laden with supplies for the trade carried on with the Indians. And the bales containing these articles are conveyed in boats up the rivers, carried past the waterfalls and rapids overland on the shoulders of stalwart voyageurs, and finally landed at Red River, after a rough trip of many weeks' duration. The colony was founded in 1811, by the Earl of Selkirk, previously to which it had been a trading-post of the Fur Company. At the time of which we write, it contained about five thousand souls, and extended upwards of fifty miles along the Red and Assiniboine rivers, which streams supplied the settlers with a variety of excellent fish. The banks were clothed with fine trees; and immediately behind the settlement lay the great prairies, which extended in undulating waves--almost entirely devoid of shrub or tree--to the base of the Rocky Mountains.

Although far removed from the civilised world, and containing within its precincts much that is savage and very little that is refined, Red River is quite a populous paradise, as compared with the desolate, solitary establishments of the Hudson's Bay Fur Company. These lonely dwellings of the trader are scattered far and wide over the whole continent--north, south, east, and west. Their population generally amounts to eight or ten men--seldom to thirty. They are planted in the thick of an uninhabited desert--their next neighbours being from two to five hundred miles off--their occasional visitors, bands of wandering Indians--and the sole object of their existence being to trade the furry hides of foxes, martens, beavers, badgers, bears, buffaloes, and wolves. It will not, then, be deemed a matter of wonder that the gentlemen who have charge of these establishments, and who, perchance, may have spent ten or twenty years in them, should look upon the colony of Red River as a species of Elysium, a sort of haven of rest, in which they may lay their weary heads, and spend the remainder of their days in peaceful felicity, free from the

cares of a residence among wild beasts and wild men. Many of the retiring traders prefer casting their lot in Canada; but not a few of them _smoke_ out the remainder of their existence in this colony--especially those who, having left home as boys fifty or sixty years before, cannot reasonably expect to find the friends of their childhood where they left them, and cannot hope to remodel tastes and habits long nurtured in the backwoods so as to relish the manners and customs of civilised society.

Such an one was old Frank Kennedy, who, sixty years before the date of our story, ran away from school in Scotland; got a severe thrashing from his father for so doing; and having no mother in whose sympathising bosom he could weep out his sorrow, ran away from home, went to sea, ran away from his ship while she lay at anchor in the harbour of New York, and after leading a wandering, unsettled life for several years, during which he had been alternately a clerk, a day-labourer, a store-keeper and a village schoolmaster, he wound up by entering the service of the Hudson's Bay Company, in which he obtained an insight into savage life, a comfortable fortune, besides a half-breed wife and a large family.

Being a man of great energy and courage, and moreover possessed of a large, powerful frame, he was sent to one of the most distant posts on the Mackenzie River, as being admirably suited for the display of his powers both mental and physical. Here the small-pox broke out among the natives, and besides carrying off hundreds of these poor creatures, robbed Mr. Kennedy of all his children save two, Charles and Kate, whom we have already introduced to the reader.

About the same time the council which is annually held at Red River in spring for the purpose of arranging the affairs of the country for the ensuing year thought proper to appoint Mr. Kennedy to a still more outlandish part of the country--as near, in fact, to the North Pole as it was possible for mortal man to live--and sent him an order to proceed to his destination without loss of time. On receiving this communication, Mr. Kennedy upset his chair, stamped his foot, ground his teeth, and vowed, in the hearing of his wife and children, that sooner than obey the mandate he would see the governors and council of Rupert's Land hanged, quartered, and boiled down into tallow! Ebullitions of this kind were peculiar to Frank Kennedy, and meant _nothing_. They were simply the safety-valves to his superabundant ire, and, like safety-valves in general, made much noise but did no damage. It was well, however, on such occasions to keep out of the old fur-trader's way; for he had an irresistible propensity to hit out at whatever stood before him, especially if the object stood on a level with his own eyes and wore whiskers. On second thoughts, however, he sat down before his writing-table, took a sheet of blue ruled foolscap paper, seized a quill which he had mended six months previously, at a time when he happened to be in high good-humour, and wrote as follows:--

Letter

To the Governor and Council of Rupert's Land, Fort Paskisegun
Red River Settlement. June 15, 18--.

Gentlemen,--I have the honour to acknowledge receipt
of your favour of 26th April last, appointing me

to the charge of Peel's River, and directing me to strike out new channels of trade in that quarter. In reply, I have to state that I shall have the honour to fulfil your instructions by taking my departure in a light canoe as soon as possible. At the same time I beg humbly to submit that the state of my health is such as to render it expedient for me to retire from the service, and I herewith beg to hand in my resignation. I shall hope to be relieved early next spring.--I have the honour to be, gentlemen, your most obedient, humble servant,

F. Kennedy.

"There!" exclaimed the old gentleman, in a tone that would lead one to suppose he had signed the death-warrant, and so had irrevocably fixed the certain destruction, of the entire council--"there!" said he, rising from his chair, and sticking the quill into the ink-bottle with a dab that split it up to the feather, and so rendered it hors de combat for all time coming.

To this letter the council gave a short reply, accepting his resignation, and appointing a successor. On the following spring old Mr. Kennedy embarked his wife and children in a bark canoe, and in process of time landed them safely in Red River Settlement. Here he purchased a house with six acres of land, in which he planted a variety of useful vegetables, and built a summer-house after the fashion of a conservatory, where he was wont to solace himself for hours together with a pipe, or rather with dozens of pipes, of Canadian twist tobacco.

After this he put his two children to school. The settlement was at this time fortunate in having a most excellent academy, which was conducted by a very estimable man. Charles and Kate Kennedy, being obedient and clever, made rapid progress under his judicious management, and the only fault that he had to find with the young people was, that Kate was a little too quiet and fond of books, while Charley was a little too riotous and fond of fun.

When Charles arrived at the age of fifteen and Kate attained to fourteen years, old Mr. Kennedy went into his conservatory, locked the door, sat down on an easy chair, filled a long clay pipe with his beloved tobacco, smoked vigorously for ten minutes, and fell fast asleep. In this condition he remained until the pipe fell from his lips and broke in fragments on the floor. He then rose, filled another pipe, and sat down to meditate on the subject that had brought him to his smoking apartment. "There's my wife," said he, looking at the bowl of his pipe, as if he were addressing himself to it, "she's getting too old to be looking after everything herself (puff), and Kate's getting too old to be humbugging any longer with books: besides, she ought to be at home learning to keep house, and help her mother, and cut the baccy (puff), and that young scamp Charley should be entering the service (puff). He's clever enough now to trade beaver and bears from the red-skins; besides, he's (puff) a young rascal, and I'll be bound does nothing but lead the other boys into (puff) mischief, although, to be sure, the master does say he's the cleverest fellow in the school; but he must be

reined up a bit now. I'll clap on a double curb and martingale. I'll get him a situation in the counting-room at the fort (_puff_), where he'll have his nose held tight to the grindstone. Yes, I'll fix both their flints to-morrow;" and old Mr. Kennedy gave vent to another puff so thick and long that it seemed as if all the previous puffs had concealed themselves up to this moment within his capacious chest, and rushed out at last in one thick and long-continued stream.

By "fixing their flints" Mr. Kennedy meant to express the fact that he intended to place his children in an entirely new sphere of action, and with a view to this he ordered out his horse and cariote [Footnote: A sort of sleigh.] on the following morning, went up to the school, which was about ten miles distant from his abode, and brought his children home with him the same evening. Kate was now formally installed as housekeeper and tobacco-cutter; while Charley was told that his future destiny was to wield the quill in the service of the Hudson's Bay Company, and that he might take a week to think over it. Quiet, warm-hearted, affectionate Kate was overjoyed at the thought of being a help and comfort to her old father and mother; but reckless, joyous, good-humoured, hare-brained Charley was cast into the depths of despair at the idea of spending the livelong day, and day after day, for years it might be, on the top of a long-legged stool. In fact, poor Charley said that he "would rather become a buffalo than do it." Now this was very wrong of Charley, for, of course, he didn't _mean_ it. Indeed, it is too much a habit among little boys, ay, and among grown-up people, too, to say what they don't mean, as no doubt you are aware, dear reader, if you possess half the self-knowledge we give you credit for; and we cannot too strongly remonstrate with ourself and others against the practice--leading, as it does, to all sorts of absurd exaggerations, such as gravely asserting that we are "broiling hot" when we are simply "rather warm," or more than "half dead" with fatigue when we are merely "very tired." However, Charley _said_ that he would rather be "a buffalo than do it," and so we feel bound in honour to record the fact.

Charley and Kate were warmly attached to each other. Moreover, they had been, ever since they could walk, in the habit of mingling their little joys and sorrows in each other's bosoms; and although, as years flew past, they gradually ceased to sob in each other's arms at every little mishap, they did not cease to interchange their inmost thoughts, and to mingle their tears when occasion called them forth. They knew the power, the inexpressible sweetness, of sympathy. They understood experimentally the comfort and joy that flow from obedience to that blessed commandment to "rejoice with those that do rejoice, and weep with those that weep." It was natural, therefore, that on Mr. Kennedy announcing his decrees, Charley and Kate should hasten to some retired spot where they could commune in solitude; the effect of which communing was to reduce them to a somewhat calmer and rather happy state of mind. Charley's sorrow was blunted by sympathy with Kate's joy, and Kate's joy was subdued by sympathy with Charley's sorrow; so that, after the first effervescing burst, they settled down into a calm and comfortable state of flatness, with very red eyes and exceedingly pensive minds. We must, however, do Charley the justice to say that the red eyes applied only to Kate; for although a tear or two could without much coaxing be induced to hop over his sun-burned cheek, he had got beyond that period of life when boys are addicted to (we must give the word, though not pretty, because it is eminently expressive) _blubbing_.

A week later found Charley and his sister seated on the lump of blue ice where they were first introduced to the reader, and where Charley announced his unalterable resolve to run away, following it up with the statement that that was "the end of it." He was quite mistaken, however, for that was by no means the end of it. In fact it was only the beginning of it, as we shall see hereafter.

CHAPTER II.

The old fur-trader endeavours to "fix" his son's "flint," and finds the thing more difficult to do than he expected.

Near the centre of the colony of Red River, the stream from which the settlement derives its name is joined by another, called the Assiniboine. About five or six hundred yards from the point where this union takes place, and on the banks of the latter stream, stands the Hudson's Bay Company's trading-post, Fort Garry. It is a massive square building of stone. Four high and thick walls enclose a space of ground on which are built six or eight wooden houses, some of which are used as dwellings for the servants of the Hudson's Bay Company, and others as stores, wherein are contained the furs, the provisions which are sent annually to various parts of the country, and the goods (such as cloth, guns, powder and shot, blankets, twine, axes, knives, etc., etc.) with which the fur-trade is carried on. Although Red River is a peaceful colony, and not at all likely to be assaulted by the poor Indians, it was, nevertheless, deemed prudent by the traders to make some show of power; and so at the corners of the fort four round bastions of a very imposing appearance were built, from the embrasures of which several large black-muzzled guns protruded. No one ever conceived the idea of firing these engines of war; and, indeed, it is highly probable that such an attempt would have been attended with consequences much more dreadful to those behind than to those who might chance to be in front of the guns. Nevertheless they were imposing, and harmonised well with the flag-staff, which was the only other military symptom about the place. This latter was used on particular occasions, such as the arrival or departure of a brigade of boats, for the purpose of displaying the folds of a red flag on which were the letters H. B. C.

The fort stood, as we have said, on the banks of the Assiniboine River, on the opposite side of which the land was somewhat wooded, though not heavily, with oak, maple, poplar, aspens, and willows; while at the back of the fort the great prairie rolled out like a green sea to the horizon, and far beyond that again to the base of the Rocky mountains. The plains at this time, however, were a sheet of unbroken snow, and the river a mass of solid ice.

It was noon on the day following that on which our friend Charley had threatened rebellion, when a tall elderly man might have been seen standing at the back gate of Fort Garry, gazing wistfully out into the prairie in the direction of the lower part of the settlement. He was watching a small speck which moved rapidly over the snow in the direction of the fort.

"It's very like our friend Frank Kennedy," said he to himself (at least we presume so, for there was no one else within earshot to whom he could have said it, except the door-post, which every one knows is proverbially a deaf subject). "No man in the settlement drives so furiously. I shouldn't wonder if he ran against the corner of the new fence now. Ha! just so--there he goes!"

And truly the reckless driver did "go" just at that moment. He came up to the corner of the new fence, where the road took a rather abrupt turn, in a style that insured a capsize. In another second the spirited horse turned sharp round, the sleigh turned sharp over, and the occupant was pitched out at full length, while a black object, that might have been mistaken for his hat, rose from his side like a rocket, and, flying over him, landed on the snow several yards beyond. A faint shout was heard to float on the breeze as this catastrophe occurred, and the driver was seen to jump up and readjust himself in the cariole; while the other black object proved itself not to be a hat, by getting hastily up on a pair of legs, and scrambling back to the seat from which it had been so unceremoniously ejected.

In a few minutes more the cheerful tinkling of the merry sleigh-bells was heard, and Frank Kennedy, accompanied by his hopeful son Charles, dashed up to the gate, and pulled up with a jerk.

"Ha! Grant, my fine fellow, how are you?" exclaimed Mr. Kennedy, senior, as he disengaged himself from the heavy folds of the buffalo robe and shook the snow from his greatcoat. "Why on earth, man, don't you put up a sign-post and a board to warn travellers that you've been running out new fences and changing the road, eh?"

"Why, my good friend," said Mr. Grant, smiling, "the fence and the road are of themselves pretty conclusive proof to most men that the road is changed; and, besides, we don't often have people driving round corners at full gallop; but--"

"Hollo! Charley, you rascal," interrupted Mr. Kennedy--"here, take the mare to the stable, and don't drive her too fast. Mind, now, no going off upon the wrong road for the sake of a drive, you understand."

"All right, father," exclaimed the boy, while a bright smile lit up his features and displayed two rows of white teeth: "I'll be particularly careful," and he sprang into the light vehicle, seized the reins, and with a sharp crack of the whip dashed down the road at a hard gallop.

"He's a fine fellow that son of yours," said Mr. Grant, "and will make a first-rate fur-trader."

"Pur-trader!" exclaimed Mr. Kennedy. "Just look at him! I'll be shot if he isn't thrashing the mare as if she were made of leather." The old man's ire was rising rapidly as he heard the whip crack every now and then, and saw the mare bound madly over the snow. "And see!" he continued, "I declare he has taken the wrong turn after all."

"True," said Mr. Grant: "he'll never reach the stable by that road; he's much more likely to visit the White-horse Plains. But come, friend, it's of no use fretting, Charley will soon tire of his ride;

so come with me to my room and have a pipe before dinner."

Old Mr. Kennedy gave a short groan of despair, shook his fist at the form of his retreating son, and accompanied his friend to the house.

It must not be supposed that Frank Kennedy was very deeply offended with his son, although he did shower on him a considerable amount of abuse. On the contrary, he loved him very much. But it was the old man's nature to give way to little bursts of passion on almost every occasion in which his feelings were at all excited. These bursts, however, were like the little puffs that ripple the surface of the sea on a calm summer's day. They were over in a second, and left his good-humoured, rough, candid countenance in unruffled serenity. Charley knew this well, and loved his father tenderly, so that his conscience frequently smote him for raising his anger so often; and he over and over again promised his sister Kate to do his best to refrain from doing anything that was likely to annoy the old man in future. But, alas! Charley's resolves, like those of many other boys, were soon forgotten, and his father's equanimity was upset generally two or three times a day; but after the gust was over, the fur-trader would kiss his son, call him a "rascal," and send him off to fill and fetch his pipe.

Mr. Grant, who was in charge of Fort Garry, led the way to his smoking apartment, where the two were soon seated in front of a roaring log-fire, emulating each other in the manufacture of smoke.

"Well, Kennedy," said Mr. Grant, throwing himself back in his chair, elevating his chin, and emitting a long thin stream of white vapour from his lips, through which he gazed at his friend complacently-- "well, Kennedy, to what fortunate chance am I indebted for this visit? It is not often that we have the pleasure of seeing you here."

Mr. Kennedy created two large volumes of smoke, which, by means of a vigorous puff, he sent rolling over towards his friend, and said, "Charley."

"And what of Charley?" said Mr. Grant with a smile, for he was well aware of the boy's propensity to fun, and of the father's desire to curb it.

"The fact is," replied Kennedy, "that Charley must be broke. He's the wildest colt I ever had to tame, but I'll do it--I will--that's a fact."

If Charley's subjugation had depended on the rapidity with which the little white clouds proceeded from his sire's mouth, there is no doubt that it would have been a "fact" in a very short time, for they rushed from him with the violence of a high wind. Long habit had made the old trader and his pipe not only inseparable companions, but part and parcel of each other--so intimately connected that a change in the one was sure to produce a sympathetic change in the other. In the present instance, the little clouds rapidly increased in size and number as the old gentleman thought on the obstinacy of his "colt."

"Yes," he continued, after a moment's silence, "I've made up my mind to tame him, and I want you, Mr. Grant, to help me."

Mr. Grant looked as if he would rather not undertake to lend his aid

in a work that was evidently difficult; but being a good-natured man, he said, "And how, friend, can I assist in the operation?"

"Well, you see, Charley's a good fellow at bottom, and a clever fellow too--at least so says the schoolmaster; though I must confess, that so far as my experience goes, he's only clever at finding out excuses for not doing what I want him to. But still I'm told he's clever, and can use his pen well; and I know for certain that he can use his tongue well. So I want to get him into the service, and have him placed in a situation where he shall have to stick to his desk all day. In fact, I want to have him broken into work; for you've no notion, sir, how that boy talks about bears and buffaloes and badgers, and life in the woods among the Indians. I do believe," continued the old gentleman, waxing warm, "that he would willingly go into the woods to-morrow, if I would let him, and never show his nose in the settlement again. He's quite incorrigible. But I'll tame him yet--I will!"

Mr. Kennedy followed this up with an indignant grunt, and a puff of smoke, so thick, and propelled with such vigour, that it rolled and curled in fantastic evolutions towards the ceiling, as if it were unable to control itself with delight at the absolute certainty of Charley being tamed at last.

Mr. Grant, however, shook his head, and remained for five minutes in profound silence, during which time the two friends puffed in concert, until they began to grow quite indistinct and ghost-like in the thick atmosphere.

At last he broke silence.

"My opinion is that you're wrong, Mr. Kennedy. No doubt you know the disposition of your son better than I do; but even judging of it from what you have said, I'm quite sure that a sedentary life will ruin him."

"Ruin him! Humbug!" said Kennedy, who never failed to express his opinion at the shortest notice and in the plainest language--a fact so well known by his friends that they had got into the habit of taking no notice of it. "Humbug!" he repeated, "perfect humbug! You don't mean to tell me that the way to break him in is to let him run loose and wild whenever and wherever he pleases?"

"By no means. But you may rest assured that tying him down won't do it."

"Nonsense!" said Mr. Kennedy testily; "don't tell me. Have I not broken in young colts by the score? and don't I know that the way to fix their flints is to clap on a good strong curb?"

"If you had travelled farther south, friend," replied Mr. Grant, "you would have seen the Spaniards of Mexico break in their wild horses in a very different way; for after catching one with a lasso, a fellow gets on his back, and gives it the rein and the whip--ay, and the spur too; and before that race is over, there is no need for a curb."

"What!" exclaimed Kennedy, "and do you mean to argue from that, that I should let Charley run--and help him too? Send him off to the woods with gun and blanket, canoe and tent, all complete?" The old

gentleman puffed a furious puff, and broke into a loud sarcastic laugh.

"No, no," interrupted Mr. Grant; "I don't exactly mean that, but I think that you might give him his way for a year or so. He's a fine, active, generous fellow; and after the novelty wore off, he would be in a much better frame of mind to listen to your proposals. Besides" (and Mr. Grant smiled expressively), "Charley is somewhat like his father. He has got a will of his own; and if you do not give him his way, I very much fear that he'll--"

"What?" inquired Mr. Kennedy abruptly.

"Take it," said Mr. Grant.

The puff that burst from Mr. Kennedy's lips on hearing this would have done credit to a thirty-six pounder.

"Take it!" said he; "he'd better not."

The latter part of this speech was not in itself of a nature calculated to convey much; but the tone of the old trader's voice, the contraction of his eyebrows, and above all the overwhelming flow of cloudlets that followed, imparted to it a significance that induced the belief that Charley's taking his own way would be productive of more terrific consequences than it was in the power of the most highly imaginative man to conceive.

"There's his sister Kate, now," continued the old gentleman; "she's as gentle and biddable as a lamb. I've only to say a word, and she's off like a shot to do my bidding; and she does it with such a sweet smile too." There was a touch of pathos in the old trader's voice as he said this. He was a man of strong feeling, and as impulsive in his tenderness as in his wrath. "But that rascal Charley," he continued, "is quite different. He's obstinate as a mule. To be sure, he has a good temper; and I must say for him he never goes into the sulks, which is a comfort, for of all things in the world sulking is the most childish and contemptible. He generally does what I bid him, too. But he's always getting into scrapes of one kind or other. And during the last week, notwithstanding all I can say to him, he won't admit that the best thing for him is to get a place in your counting-room, with the prospect of rapid promotion in the service. Very odd. I can't understand it at all;" and Mr. Kennedy heaved a deep sigh.

"Did you ever explain to him the prospects that he would have in the situation you propose for him?" inquired Mr. Grant.

"Can't say I ever did."

"Did you ever point out the probable end of a life spent in the woods?"

"No."

"Nor suggest to him that the appointment to the office here would only be temporary, and to see how he got on in it?"

"Certainly not."

"Then, my dear sir, I'm not surprised that Charley rebels. You have left him to suppose that, once placed at the desk here, he is a prisoner for life. But see, there he is," said Mr. Grant, pointing as he spoke towards the subject of their conversation, who was passing the window at the moment; "let me call him, and I feel certain that he will listen to reason in a few minutes."

"Humph!" ejaculated Mr. Kennedy, "you may try."

In another minute Charley had been summoned, and was seated, cap in hand, near the door.

"Charley, my boy," began Mr. Grant, standing with his back to the fire, his feet pretty wide apart, and his coat-tails under his arms--
"Charley, my boy, your father has just been speaking of you. He is very anxious that you should enter the service of the Hudson's Bay Company; and as you are a clever boy and a good penman, we think that you would be likely to get on if placed for a year or so in our office here. I need scarcely point out to you, my boy, that in such a position you would be sure to obtain more rapid promotion than if you were placed in one of the distant outposts, where you would have very little to do, and perhaps little to eat, and no one to converse with except one or two men. Of course, we would merely place you here on trial, to see how you suited us; and if you prove steady and diligent, there is no saying how fast you might get on. Why, you might even come to fill my place in course of time. Come now, Charley, what think you of it?"

Charley's eyes had been cast on the ground while Mr. Grant was speaking. He now raised them, looked at his father, then at his interrogator, and said,--

"It is very kind of you both to be so anxious about my prospects. I thank you, indeed, very much; but I--a--"

"Don't like the desk?" said his father, in an angry tone. "Is that it, eh?"

Charley made no reply, but cast down his eyes again and smiled (Charley had a sweet smile, a peculiarly sweet, candid smile), as if he meant to say that his father had hit the nail quite on the top of the head that time, and no mistake.

"But consider," resumed Mr. Grant, "although you might probably be pleased with an outpost life at first, you would be sure to grow weary of it after the novelty wore off, and then you would wish with all your heart to be back here again. Believe me, child, a trader's life is a very hard and not often a very satisfactory one--"

"Ay," broke in the father, desirous, if possible, to help the argument, "and you'll find it a desperately wild, unsettled, roving sort of life, too, let me tell you! full of dangers both from wild beast and wild men--"

"Hush!" interrupted Mr. Grant, observing that the boy's eyes kindled when his father spoke of a wild, roving life, and wild beasts.--"Your father does not mean that life at an outpost is wild and interesting or exciting. He merely means that--a--it--"

Mr. Grant could not very well explain what it was that Mr. Kennedy meant if he did not mean that, so he turned to him for help.

"Exactly so," said that gentleman, taking a strong pull at the pipe for inspiration. "It's no ways interesting or exciting at all. It's slow, dull, and flat; a miserable sort of Robinson Crusoe life, with red Indians and starvation constantly staring you in the face--"

"Besides," said Mr. Grant, again interrupting the somewhat unfortunate efforts of his friend, who seemed to have a happy facility in sending a brilliant dash of romantic allusion across the dark side of his picture--"besides, you'll not have opportunity to amuse yourself, or to read, as you'll have no books, and you'll have to work hard with your hands oftentimes, like your men--"

"In fact," broke in the impatient father, resolved, apparently, to carry the point with a grand coup--"in fact, you'll have to rough it, as I did, when I went up the Mackenzie River district, where I was sent to establish a new post, and had to travel for weeks and weeks through a wild country, where none of us had ever been before; where we shot our own meat, caught our own fish, and built our own house--and were very near being murdered by the Indians; though, to be sure, afterwards they became the most civil fellows in the country, and brought us plenty of skins. Ay, lad, you'll repent of your obstinacy when you come to have to hunt your own dinner, as I've done many a day up the Saskatchewan, where I've had to fight with red-skins and grizzly bears and to chase the buffaloes over miles and miles of prairie on rough-going nags till my bones ached and I scarce knew whether I sat on--"

"Oh," exclaimed Charley, starting to his feet, while his eyes flashed and his chest heaved with emotion, "that's the place for me, father!-- Do, please, Mr. Grant send me there, and I'll work for you with all my might!"

Frank Kennedy was not a man to stand this unexpected miscarriage of his eloquence with equanimity. His first action was to throw his pipe at the head of his enthusiastic boy; without worse effect, however, than smashing it to atoms on the opposite wall. He then started up and rushed towards his son, who, being near the door, retreated precipitately and vanished.

"So," said Mr. Grant, not very sure whether to laugh or be angry at the result of their united efforts, "you've settled the question now, at all events."

Frank Kennedy said nothing, but filled another pipe, sat doggedly down in front of the fire, and speedily enveloped himself, and his friend, and all that the room contained, in thick, impenetrable clouds of smoke.

Meanwhile his worthy son rushed off in a state of great glee. He had often heard the voyageurs of Red River dilate on the delights of roughing it in the woods, and his heart had bounded as they spoke of dangers encountered and overcome among the rapids of the Far North, or with the bears and bison-bulls of the prairie, but never till now had he heard his father corroborate their testimony by a recital of his own actual experience; and although the old gentleman's intention was undoubtedly to damp the boy's spirit, his eloquence had exactly

the opposite effect--so that it was with a hop and a shout that he burst into the counting-room, with the occupants of which Charley was a special favourite.

CHAPTER III.

The Counting-room.

Everyone knows the general appearance of a counting-room. There are one or two peculiar features about such apartments that are quite unmistakable and very characteristic; and the counting-room at Fort Garry, although many hundred miles distant from other specimens of its race, and, from the peculiar circumstances of its position, not therefore likely to bear them much resemblance, possessed one or two features of similarity, in the shape of two large desks and several very tall stools, besides sundry ink-bottles, rulers, books, and sheets of blotting-paper. But there were other implements there, savouring strongly of the backwoods and savage life, which merit more particular notice.

The room itself was small, and lighted by two little windows, which opened into the courtyard. The entire apartment was made of wood. The floor was of unpainted fir boards. The walls were of the same material, painted blue from the floor upwards to about three feet, where the blue was unceremoniously stopped short by a stripe of bright red, above which the somewhat fanciful decorator had laid on a coat of pale yellow; and the ceiling, by way of variety, was of a deep ochre. As the occupants of Red River office were, however, addicted to the use of tobacco and tallow candles, the original colour of the ceiling had vanished entirely, and that of the walls had considerably changed.

There were three doors in the room (besides the door of entrance), each opening into another apartment, where the three clerks were wont to court the favour of Morpheus after the labours of the day. No carpets graced the floors of any of these rooms, and with the exception of the paint aforementioned, no ornament whatever broke the pleasing uniformity of the scene. This was compensated, however, to some extent by several scarlet sashes, bright-coloured shot-belts, and gay portions of winter costume peculiar to the country, which depended from sundry nails in the bedroom walls; and as the three doors always stood open, these objects, together with one or two fowling-pieces and canoe-paddles, formed quite a brilliant and highly suggestive background to the otherwise sombre picture. A large open fireplace stood in one corner of the room, devoid of a grate, and so constructed that large logs of wood might be piled up on end to any extent. And really the fires made in this manner, and in this individual fireplace, were exquisite beyond description. A wood-fire is a particularly cheerful thing. Those who have never seen one can form but a faint idea of its splendour; especially on a sharp winter night in the arctic regions, where the thermometer falls to forty degrees below zero, without inducing the inhabitants to suppose that the world has reached its conclusion. The billets are usually piled up on end, so that the flames rise and twine round them with a fierce intensity that causes them to crack and sputter cheerfully, sending

innumerable sparks of fire into the room, and throwing out a rich glow of brilliant light that warms a man even to look at it, and renders candles quite unnecessary.

The clerks who inhabited this counting-room were, like itself, peculiar. There were three--corresponding to the bedrooms. The senior was a tall, broad-shouldered, muscular man--a Scotchman--very good-humoured, yet a man whose under lip met the upper with that peculiar degree of precision that indicated the presence of other qualities besides that of good-humour. He was book-keeper and accountant, and managed the affairs intrusted to his care with the same dogged perseverance with which he would have led an expedition of discovery to the North Pole. He was thirty or thereabouts.

The second was a small man--also a Scotchman. It is curious to note how numerous Scotchmen are in the wilds of North America. This specimen was diminutive and sharp. Moreover, he played the flute--an accomplishment of which he was so proud that he ordered out from England a flute of ebony, so elaborately enriched with silver keys that one's fingers ached to behold it. This beautiful instrument, like most other instruments of a delicate nature, found the climate too much for its constitution, and, soon after the winter began, split from top to bottom. Peter Mactavish, however, was a genius by nature, and a mechanical genius by tendency; so that, instead of giving way to despair, he laboriously bound the flute together with waxed thread, which, although it could not restore it to its pristine elegance, enabled him to play with great effect sundry doleful airs, whose influence, when performed at night, usually sent his companions to sleep, or, failing this, drove them to distraction.

The third inhabitant of the office was a ruddy, smooth-chinned youth of about fourteen, who had left home seven months before, in the hope of gratifying a desire to lead a wild life, which he had entertained ever since he read "Jack the Giant Killer," and found himself most unexpectedly fastened, during the greater part of each day, to a stool. His name was Harry Somerville, and a fine, cheerful little fellow he was, full of spirits, and curiously addicted to poking and arranging the fire at least every ten minutes--a propensity which tested the forbearance of the senior clerk rather severely, and would have surprised any one not aware of poor Harry's incurable antipathy to the desk, and the yearning desire with which he longed for physical action.

Harry was busily engaged with the refractory fire when Charley, as stated at the conclusion of the last chapter, burst into the room.

"Hollo!" he exclaimed, suspending his operations for a moment, "what's up?"

"Nothing," said Charley, "but father's temper, that's all. He gave me a splendid description of his life in the woods, and then threw his pipe at me because I admired it too much."

"Ho!" exclaimed Harry, making a vigorous thrust at the fire, "then you've no chance now."

"No chance! what do you mean?"

"Only that we are to have a wolf-hunt in the plains to-morrow; and if

you've aggravated your father, he'll be taking you home to-night, that's all."

"Oh! no fear of that," said Charley, with a look that seemed to imply that there was very great fear of "that"--much more, in fact, than he was willing to admit even to himself. "My dear old father never keeps his anger long. I'm sure that he'll be all right again in half-an-hour."

"Hope so, but doubt it I do," said Harry, making another deadly poke at the fire, and returning, with a deep sigh, to his stool.

"Would you like to go with us, Charley?" said the senior clerk, laying down his pen and turning round on his chair (the senior clerk never sat on a stool) with a benign smile.

"Oh, very, very much indeed," cried Charley; "but even should father agree to stay all night at the fort, I have no horse, and I'm sure he would not let me have the mare after what I did to-day."

"Do you think he's not open to persuasion?" said the senior clerk.

"No, I'm sure he's not."

"Well, well, it don't much signify; perhaps we can mount you." (Charley's face brightened.) "Go," he continued, addressing Harry Somerville--"go, tell Tom Whyte I wish to speak to him."

Harry sprang from his stool with a suddenness and vigour that might have justified the belief that he had been fixed to it by means of a powerful spring, which had been set free with a sharp recoil, and shot him out at the door, for he disappeared in a trice. In a few minutes he returned, followed by the groom Tom Whyte.

"Tom," said the senior clerk, "do you think we could manage to mount Charley to-morrow?"

"Why, sir, I don't think as how we could. There ain't an 'oss in the stable except them wot's required and them wot's badly."

"Couldn't he have the brown pony?" suggested the senior clerk.

Tom Whyte was a cockney and an old soldier, and stood so bolt upright that it seemed quite a marvel how the words ever managed to climb up the steep ascent of his throat, and turn the corner so as to get out at his mouth. Perhaps this was the cause of his speaking on all occasions with great deliberation and slowness.

"Why, you see, sir," he replied, "the brown pony's got cut under the fetlock of the right hind leg; and I 'ad 'im down to L'Esperance the smith's, sir, to look at 'im, sir; and he says to me, says he 'That don't look well, that 'oss don't,'--and he's a knowing feller, sir, is L'Esperance though he _is_ an 'alf-breed--"

"Never mind what he said, Tom," interrupted the senior clerk; "is the pony fit for use? that's the question."

"No, sir, 'e hain't."

"And the black mare, can he not have that?"

"No, sir; Mr. Grant is to ride 'er to-morrow."

"That's unfortunate," said the senior clerk.--"I fear, Charley, that you'll need to ride behind Harry on his gray pony. It wouldn't improve his speed, to be sure, having two on his back; but then he's so like a pig in his movements at any rate, I don't think it would spoil his pace much."

"Could he not try the new horse?" he continued, turning to the groom.

"The noo 'oss, sir! he might as well try to ride a mad buffalo bull, sir. He's quite a young colt, sir, only 'alf broke--kicks like a windmill, sir, and's got an 'ead like a steam-engine; 'e couldn't 'old 'im in no'ow, sir. I 'ad 'im down to the smith 'tother day, sir, an' says 'e to me, says 'e, 'That's a screamer, that is.' 'Yes,' says I, 'that his a fact.' 'Well,' says 'e--"

"Hang the smith!" cried the senior clerk, losing all patience; "can't you answer me without so much talk? Is the horse too wild to ride?"

"Yes, sir, 'e is" said the groom, with a look of slightly offended dignity, and drawing himself up--if we may use such an expression to one who was always drawn up to such an extent that he seemed to be just balanced on his heels, and required only a gentle push to lay him flat on his back.

"Oh, I have it!" cried Peter Mactavish, who had been standing during the conversation with his back to the fire, and a short pipe in his mouth: "John Fowler, the miller, has just purchased a new pony. I'm told it's an old buffalo-runner, and I'm certain he would lend it to Charley at once."

"The very thing," said the senior clerk.--"Run, Tom; give the miller my compliments, and beg the loan of his horse for Charley Kennedy.--I think he knows you, Charley?"

The dinner-bell rang as the groom departed, and the clerks prepared for their mid-day meal.

The Senior clerk's order to "run" was a mere form of speech, intended to indicate that haste was desirable. No man imagined for a moment that Tom Whyte could, by any possibility, run. He hadn't run since he was dismissed from the army, twenty years before, for incurable drunkenness; and most of Tom's friend's entertained the belief that if he ever attempted to run he would crack all over, and go to pieces like a disintombed Egyptian mummy. Tom therefore walked off to the row of buildings inhabited by the men, where he sat down on a bench in front of his bed, and proceeded leisurely to fill his pipe.

The room in which he sat was a fair specimen of the dwellings devoted to the employes of the Hudson's Bay Company throughout the country. It was large, and low in the roof, built entirely of wood, which was unpainted; a matter, however, of no consequence, as, from long exposure to dust and tobacco smoke, the floor, walls, and ceiling had become one deep, uniform brown. The men's beds were constructed after the fashion of berths on board ship, being wooden boxes ranged in

tiers round the room. Several tables and benches were strewn miscellaneously about the floor, in the centre of which stood a large double iron stove, with the word "Carron" stamped on it. This served at once for cooking and warming the place. Numerous guns, axes, and canoe-paddles hung round the walls or were piled in corners, and the rafters sustained a miscellaneous mass of materials,

the more conspicuous among which were snow-shoes, dog-sledges, axe-handles, and nets.

Having filled and lighted his pipe, Tom Whyte thrust his hands into his deerskin mittens, and sauntered off to perform his errand.

CHAPTER IV.

A wolf-hunt in the prairies--Charley astonishes his father, and breaks in the "noo 'oss" effectually.

During the long winter that reigns in the northern regions of America, the thermometer ranges, for many months together, from zero down to 20, 30, and 40 degrees below it. In different parts of the country the intensity of the frost varies a little, but not sufficiently to make any appreciable change in one's sensation of cold. At York Fort, on the shores of Hudson's Bay, where the winter is eight months long, the spirit-of-wine (mercury being useless in so cold a climate) sometimes falls so low as 50 degrees below zero; and away in the regions of Great Bear Lake it has been known to fall considerably lower than 60 degrees below zero of Fahrenheit. Cold of such intensity, of course, produces many curious and interesting effects, which, although scarcely noticed by the inhabitants, make a strong impression upon the minds of those who visit the country for the first time. A youth goes out to walk on one of the first sharp, frosty mornings. His locks are brown and his face ruddy. In half-an-hour he returns with his face blue, his nose frost-bitten, and his locks white--the latter effect being produced by his breath congealing on his hair and breast, until both are covered with hoar-frost. Perhaps he is of a sceptical nature, prejudiced it may be, in favour of old habits and customs; so that, although told by those who ought to know that it is absolutely necessary to wear moccasins in winter, he prefers the leather boots to which he has been accustomed at home, and goes out with them accordingly. In a few minutes the feet begin to lose sensation. First the toes, as far as feeling goes, vanish; then the heels depart, and he feels the extraordinary and peculiar and altogether disagreeable sensation of one who has had his heels and toes amputated, and is walking about on his insteps. Soon, however, these also fade away, and the unhappy youth rushes frantically home on the stumps of his ankle-bones--at least so it appears to him, and so in reality it would turn out to be if he did not speedily rub the benumbed appendages into vitality again.

The whole country during this season is buried in snow, and the prairies of Red River present the appearance of a sea of the purest white for five or six months of the year. Impelled by hunger, troops of prairie wolves prowl round the settlement, safe from the assault of man in consequence of their light weight permitting them to

scamper away on the surface of the snow, into which man or horse, from their greater weight, would sink, so as to render pursuit either fearfully laborious or altogether impossible. In spring, however, when the first thaws begin to take place, and commence that delightful process of disruption which introduces this charming season of the year, the relative position of wolf and man is reversed. The snow becomes suddenly soft, so that the short legs of the wolf, sinking deep into it, fail to reach the solid ground below, and he is obliged to drag heavily along; while the long legs of the horse enable him to plunge through and dash aside the snow at a rate which, although not very fleet, is sufficient nevertheless to overtake the chase and give his rider a chance of shooting it. The inhabitants of Red River are not much addicted to this sport, but the gentlemen of the Hudson's Bay Service sometimes practise it; and it was to a hunt of this description that our young friend Charley Kennedy was now so anxious to go.

The morning was propitious. The sun blazed in dazzling splendour in a sky of deep unclouded blue, while the white prairie glittered as if it were a sea of diamonds rolling out in an unbroken sheet from the walls of the fort to the horizon, and on looking at which one experienced all the pleasurable feelings of being out on a calm day on the wide, wide sea, without the disagreeable consequence of being very, very sick.

The thermometer stood at 39 deg. in the shade, and "everythin_k_" as Tom Whyte emphatically expressed it, "looked like a runnin' of right away into slush." That unusual sound, the trickling of water, so inexpressibly grateful to the ears of those who dwell in frosty climes, was heard all around, as the heavy masses of snow on the housetops sent a few adventurous drops gliding down the icicles which depended from the eaves and gables; and there was a balmy softness in the air that told of coming spring. Nature, in fact, seemed to have wakened from her long nap, and was beginning to think of getting up. Like people, however, who venture to delay so long as to think about it, Nature frequently turns round and goes to sleep again in her icy cradle for a few weeks after the first awakening.

The scene in the court-yard of Fort Garry harmonised with the cheerful spirit of the morning. Tom Whyte, with that upright solemnity which constituted one of his characteristic features, was standing in the centre of a group of horses, whose energy he endeavoured to restrain with the help of a small Indian boy, to whom meanwhile he imparted a variety of useful and otherwise unattainable information.

"You see, Joseph," said he to the urchin, who gazed gravely in his face with a pair of very large and dark eyes, "ponies is often skittish. Keason why one should be, an' another not, I can't comprehend. P'r'aps it's nat'ral, p'r'aps not, but howsomediver so 'tis; an' if it's more nor above the likes o' me, Joseph, you needn't be suprised that it's somethink haltogether beyond you."

It will not surprise the reader to be told that Joseph made no reply to this speech, having a very imperfect acquaintance with the English language, especially the peculiar dialect of that tongue in which Tom Whyte was wont to express his ideas, when he had any.

He merely gave a grunt, and continued to gaze at Tom's fishy eyes,

which were about as interesting as the face to which they belonged, and _that_ might have been mistaken for almost anything.

"Yes, Joseph," he continued, "that's a fact. There's the noo brown o'ss now, _it's_ a skittish 'un. And there's Mr. Kennedy's gray mare, wot's a standin' of beside me, she ain't skittish a bit, though she's plenty of spirit, and wouldn't care hanythink for a five-barred gate. Now, wot I want to know is, wot's the reason why?"

We fear that the reason why, however interesting it might prove to naturalists, must remain a profound secret for ever; for just as the groom was about to entertain Joseph with one of his theories on the point, Charley Kennedy and Harry Somerville hastily approached.

"Ho, Tom!" exclaimed the former, "have you got the miller's pony for me?"

"Why, no, sir; 'e 'adn't got his shoes on, sir, last night--"

"Oh, bother his shoes!" said Charley, in a voice of great disappointment. "Why didn't you bring him up without shoes, man, eh?"

"Well, sir, the miller said 'e'd get 'em put on early this mornin', an' I 'xpect 'e'll be 'ere in 'alf-a-hour at farthest, sir."

"Oh, very well," replied Charley, much relieved, but still a little nettled at the bare possibility of being late.--"Come along, Harry; let's go and meet him. He'll be long enough of coming if we don't go to poke him up a bit."

"You'd better wait," called out the groom, as the boys hastened away. "If you go by the river, he'll p'r'aps come by the plains; and if you go by the plains, he'll p'r'aps come by the river."

Charley and Harry stopped and looked at each other. Then they looked at the groom, and as their eyes surveyed his solemn, cadaverous countenance, which seemed a sort of bad caricature of the long visages of the horses that stood around him, they burst into a simultaneous and prolonged laugh.

"He's a clever old lamp-post," said Harry at last: "we had better remain, Charley."

"You see," continued Tom Whyte, "the pony's 'oofs is in an 'orrible state. Last night w'en I see'd 'im I said to the miller, says I, 'John, I'll take 'im down to the smith d'rectly.' 'Very good,' said John. So I 'ad him down to the smith--"

The remainder of Tom's speech was cut short by one of those unforeseen operations of the laws of nature which are peculiar to arctic climates. During the long winter repeated falls of snow cover the housetops with white mantles upwards of a foot thick, which become gradually thicker and more consolidated as winter advances. In spring the suddenness of the thaw loosens these from the sloping roofs, and precipitates them in masses to the ground. These miniature avalanches are dangerous, people having been seriously injured and sometimes killed by them. Now it happened that a very large mass of snow, which lay on and partly depended from the roof of the house near to which the horses were standing, gave way, and just at that

critical point in Tom Whyte's speech when he "'ad 'im down to the smith," fell with a stunning crash on the back of Mr. Kennedy's gray mare. The mare was not "skittish"--by no means--according to Tom's idea, but it would have been more than an ordinary mare to have stood the sudden descent of half-a-ton of snow without some symptoms of consciousness. No sooner did it feel the blow than it sent both heels with a bang against the wooden store, by way of preliminary movement, and then rearing up with a wild snort, it sprang over Tom Whyte's head, jerked the reins from his hand, and upset him in the snow. Poor Tom never bent to anything. The military despotism under which he had been reared having substituted a touch of the cap for a bow, rendered it unnecessary to bend; prolonged drill, laziness, and rheumatism made it at last impossible. When he stood up, he did so after the manner of a pillar; when he sat down, he broke across at two points, much in the way in which a foot-rule would have done had it felt disposed to sit down; and when he fell, he came down like an overturned lamp-post. On the present occasion Tom became horizontal in a moment, and from his unfortunate propensity to fall straight, his head, reaching much farther than might have been expected, came into violent contact with the small Indian boy, who fell flat likewise, letting go the reins of the horses, which latter no sooner felt themselves free than they fled, curvetting and snorting round the court, with reins and manes flying in rare confusion.

The two boys, who could scarce stand for laughing, ran to the gates of the fort to prevent the chargers getting free, and in a short time they were again secured, although evidently much elated in spirit.

A few minutes after this Mr. Grant issued from the principal house leaning on Mr. Kennedy's arm, and followed by the senior clerk, Peter Mactavish, and one or two friends who had come to take part in the wolf-hunt. They were all armed with double or single barrelled guns or pistols, according to their several fancies. The two elderly gentlemen alone entered upon the scene without any more deadly weapons than their heavy riding-whips. Young Harry Somerville, who had been strongly advised not to take a gun lest he should shoot himself or his horse or his companions, was content to take the field with a small pocket-pistol, which he crammed to the muzzle with a compound of ball and swan-shot.

"It won't do," said Mr. Grant, in an earnest voice, to his friend, as they walked towards the horses--"it won't do to check him too abruptly, my dear sir."

It was evident that they were recurring to the subject of conversation of the previous day, and it was also evident that the father's wrath was in that very uncertain state when a word or look can throw it into violent agitation.

"Just permit me," continued Mr. Grant, "to get him sent to the Saskatchewan or Athabasca for a couple of years. By that time he'll have had enough of a rough life, and be only too glad to get a berth at headquarters. If you thwart him now, I feel convinced that he'll break through all restraint."

"Humph!" ejaculated Mr. Kennedy, with a frown--"Come here, Charley," he said, as the boy approached with a disappointed look to tell of his failure in getting a horse; "I've been talking with Mr. Grant

again about this business, and he says he can easily get you into the counting-room here for a year, so you'll make arrangements--"

The old gentleman paused. He was going to have followed his wonted course by commanding instantaneous obedience; but as his eye fell upon the honest, open, though disappointed face of his son, a gush of tenderness filled his heart. Laying his hand upon Charley's head, he said, in a kind but abrupt tone, "There now, Charley, my boy, make up your mind to give in with a good grace. It'll only be hard work for a year or two, and then plain sailing after that, Charley!"

Charley's clear blue eyes filled with tears as the accents of kindness fell upon his ear.

It is strange that men should frequently be so blind to the potent influence of kindness. Independently of the Divine authority, which assures us that "a soft answer turneth away wrath," and that "love is the fulfilling of the law," who has not, in the course of his experience, felt the overwhelming power of a truly affectionate word; not a word which possesses merely an affectionate signification, but a word spoken with a gush of tenderness, where love rolls in the tone, and beams in the eye, and revels in every wrinkle of the face? And how much more powerfully does such a word or look or tone strike home to the heart if uttered by one whose lips are not much accustomed to the formation of honeyed words or sweet sentences! Had Mr. Kennedy, senior, known more of this power, and put it more frequently to the proof, we venture to affirm that Mr. Kennedy, junior, would have allowed his "flint to be fixed" (as his father pithily expressed it) long ago.

Ere Charley could reply to the question, Mr. Grant's voice, pitched in an elevated key, interrupted them.

"Eh! what?" said that gentleman to Tom Whyte. "No horse for Charley! How's that?"

"No, sir," said Tom.

"Where's the brown pony?" said Mr. Grant, abruptly.

"Cut 'is fetlock, sir," said Tom, slowly.

"And the new horse?"

"'Tan't 'alf broke yet, sir."

"Ah! that's bad.--It wouldn't do to take an unbroken charger, Charley; for although you are a pretty good rider, you couldn't manage him, I fear. Let me see."

"Please, sir," said the groom, touching his hat, "I've borrowed the miller's pony for 'im, and 'e's sure to be 'ere in 'alf-a-hour at farthest."

"Oh, that'll do," said Mr. Grant; "you can soon overtake us. We shall ride slowly out, straight into the prairie, and Harry will remain behind to keep you company."

So saying, Mr. Grant mounted his horse and rode out at the back gate,

followed by the whole cavalcade.

"Now this is too bad!" said Charley, looking with a very perplexed air at his companion. "What's to be done?"

Harry evidently did not know what was to be done, and made no difficulty of saying so in a very sympathising tone. Moreover, he begged Charley very earnestly to take his pony, but this the other would not hear of; so they came to the conclusion that there was nothing for it but to wait as patiently as possible for the arrival of the expected horse. In the meantime Harry proposed a saunter in the field adjoining the fort. Charley assented, and the two friends walked away, leading the gray pony along with them.

To the right of Fort Garry was a small enclosure, at the extreme end of which commences a growth of willows and underwood, which gradually increases in size till it becomes a pretty thick belt of woodland, skirting up the river for many miles. Here stood the stable belonging to the establishment; and as the boys passed it, Charley suddenly conceived a strong desire to see the renowned "noo 'oss," which Tom Whyte had said was only "'alf broke;" so he turned the key, opened the door, and went in.

There was nothing very peculiar about this horse, excepting that his legs seemed rather long for his body, and upon a closer examination, there was a noticeable breadth of nostril and a latent fire in his eye, indicating a good deal of spirit, which, like Charley's own, required taming.

"Oh" said Charley, "what a splendid fellow! I say, Harry, I'll go out with him." _

"You'd better not."

"Why not?"

"Why? just because if you do Mr. Grant will be down upon you, and your father won't be very well pleased."

"Nonsense," cried Charley. "Father didn't say I wasn't to take him. I don't think he'd care much. He's not afraid of my breaking my neck. And then, Mr. Grant seemed to be only afraid of my being run off with--not of his horse being hurt. Here goes for it!" In another moment Charley had him saddled and bridled, and led him out into the yard.

"Why, I declare, he's quite quiet; just like a lamb," said Harry, in surprise.

"So he is," replied Charley. "He's a capital charger; and even if he does bolt, he can't run five hundred miles at a stretch. If I turn his head to the prairies, the Rocky Mountains are the first things that will bring him up. So let him run if he likes, I don't care a fig." And springing lightly into the saddle, he cantered out of the yard, followed by his friend.

The young horse was a well-formed, showy animal, with a good deal of bone--perhaps too much for elegance. He was of a beautiful dark brown, and carried a high head and tail, with a high-stepping gait,

that gave him a noble appearance. As Charley cantered along at a steady pace, he could discover no symptoms of the refractory spirit which had been ascribed to him.

"Let us strike out straight for the horizon now," said Harry, after they had galloped half-a-mile or so along the beaten track. "See, here are the tracks of our friends." Turning sharp round as he spoke, he leaped his pony over the heap that lined the road, and galloped away through the soft snow.

At this point the young horse began to show his evil spirit. Instead of following the other, he suddenly halted and began to back.

"Hollo, Harry!" exclaimed Charley; "hold on a bit. Here's this monster begun his tricks."

"Hit him a crack with the whip," shouted Harry.

Charley acted upon the advice, which had the effect of making the horse shake his head with a sharp snort, and back more vigorously than ever.

"There, my fine fellow, quiet now," said Charley, in a soothing tone, patting the horse's neck. "It's a comfort to know you can't go far in _that_ direction, anyhow!" he added, as he glanced over his shoulder, and saw an immense drift behind.

He was right. In a few minutes the horse backed into the snow-drift. Finding his hind-quarters imprisoned by a power that was too much even for _his_ obstinacy to overcome, he gave another snort and a heavy plunge, which almost unseated his young rider.

"Hold on fast," cried Harry, who had now come up.

"No fear," cried Charley, as he clinched his teeth and gathered the reins more firmly.--"Now for it, you young villain!" and raising his whip, he brought it down with a heavy slash on the horse's flank.

Had the snow-drift been a cannon, and the horse a bombshell, he could scarcely have sprung from it with greater velocity. One bound landed him on the road; another cleared it; and, in a second more, he stretched out at full speed--his ears flat on his neck, mane and tail flying in the wind, and the bit tight between his teeth.

"Well done," cried Harry, as he passed. "You're off now, old fellow; good-bye."

"Hurrah!" shouted Charley, in reply, leaving his cap in the snow as a parting souvenir; while, seeing that it was useless to endeavour to check his steed, he became quite wild with excitement; gave him the rein; flourished his whip; and flew over the white plains, casting up the snow in clouds behind him like a hurricane.

While this little escapade was being enacted by the boys, the hunters were riding leisurely out upon the snowy sea in search of a wolf.

Words cannot convey to you, dear reader, an adequate conception of the peculiar fascination, the exhilarating splendour of the scene by

which our hunters were surrounded. Its beauty lay not in variety of feature in the landscape, for there was none. One vast sheet of white alone met the view, bounded all round by the blue circle of the sky, and broken, in one or two places, by a patch or two of willows, which, rising on the plain, appeared like little islands in a frozen sea. It was the glittering sparkle of the snow in the bright sunshine; the dreamy haziness of the atmosphere, mingling earth and sky as in a halo of gold; the first taste, the first smell of spring after a long winter, bursting suddenly upon the senses, like the unexpected visit of a long-absent, much-loved, and almost-forgotten friend; the soft, warm feeling of the south wind, bearing on its wings the balmy influences of sunny climes, and recalling vividly the scenes, the pleasures, the bustling occupations of summer. It was this that caused the hunters' hearts to leap within them as they rode along--that induced old Mr. Kennedy to forget his years, and shout as he had been wont to do in days gone by, when he used to follow the track of the elk or hunt the wild buffalo; and it was this that made the otherwise monotonous prairies, on this particular clay, so charming.

The party had wandered about without discovering anything that bore the smallest resemblance to a wolf, for upwards of an hour; Fort Garry had fallen astern (to use a nautical phrase) until it had become a mere speck on the horizon, and vanished altogether; Peter Mactavish had twice given a false alarm, in the eagerness of his spirit, and had three times plunged his horse up to the girths in a snow-drift; the senior clerk was waxing impatient, and the horses restive, when a sudden "Hollo!" from Mr. Grant brought the whole cavalcade to a stand.

The object which drew his attention, and to which he directed the anxious eyes of his friends was a small speck, rather triangular in form, which overtopped a little willow bush not more than five or six hundred yards distant.

"There he is!" exclaimed Mr. Grant. "That's a fact," cried Mr. Kennedy; and both gentlemen, instantaneously giving a shout, bounded towards the object; not, however, before the senior clerk, who was mounted on a fleet and strong horse, had taken the lead by six yards. A moment afterwards the speck rose up and discovered itself to be a veritable wolf. Moreover, he condescended to show his teeth, and then, conceiving it probable that his enemies were too numerous for him, he turned suddenly round and fled away. For ten minutes or so the chase was kept up at full speed, and as the snow happened to be shallow at the starting-point, the wolf kept well ahead of its pursuers--indeed, distanced them a little. But soon the snow became deeper, and the wolf plunged heavily, and the horses gained considerably. Although to the eye the prairies seemed to be a uniform level, there were numerous slight undulations, in which drifts of some depth had collected. Into one of these the wolf now plunged and laboured slowly through it. But so deep was the snow that the horses almost stuck fast. A few minutes, however, brought them out, and Mr. Grant and Mr. Kennedy, who had kept close to each other during the run, pulled up for a moment on the summit of a ridge to breathe their panting steeds.

"What can that be?" exclaimed the former, pointing with his whip to a distant object which was moving rapidly over the plain.

"Eh! what--where?" said Mr. Kennedy, shading his eyes with his hand, and peering in the direction indicated. "Why, that's another wolf, isn't it? No; it runs too fast for that."

"Strange," said his friend; "what can it be?"

"If I hadn't seen every beast in the country," remarked Mr. Kennedy, "and didn't know that there are no such animals north of the equator, I should say it was a mad dromedary mounted by a ring-tailed roarer."

"It can't be surely--not possible!" exclaimed Mr. Grant. "It's not Charley on the new horse!"

Mr. Grant said this with an air of vexation that annoyed his friend a little. He would not have minded Charley's taking a horse without leave, no matter how wild it might be; but he did not at all relish the idea of making an apology for his son's misconduct, and for the moment did not exactly know what to say. As usual in such a dilemma, the old man took refuge in a towering passion, gave his steed a sharp cut with the whip, and galloped forward to meet the delinquent.

We are not acquainted with the general appearance of a "ring-tailed roarer;" in fact, we have grave doubts as to whether such an animal exists at all; but if it does, and is particularly wild, dishevelled, and fierce in deportment, there is no doubt whatever that when Mr. Kennedy applied the name to his hopeful son, the application was singularly powerful and appropriate.

Charley had had a long run since we last saw him. After describing a wide curve, in which his charger displayed a surprising aptitude for picking out the ground that was least covered with snow, he headed straight for the fort again at the same pace at which he had started. At first Charley tried every possible method to check him, but in vain; so he gave it up, resolving to enjoy the race, since he could not prevent it. The young horse seemed to be made of lightning, with bones and muscles of brass; for he bounded untiringly forward for miles, tossing his head and snorting in his wild career. But Charley was a good horseman, and did not mind that much, being quite satisfied that the horse was a horse and not a spirit, and that therefore he could not run for ever. At last he approached the party, in search of which he had originally set out. His eyes dilated and his colour heightened as he beheld the wolf running directly towards him. Fumbling hastily for the pistol which he had borrowed from his friend Harry, he drew it from his pocket, and prepared to give the animal a shot in passing. Just at that moment the wolf caught sight of this new enemy in advance, and diverged suddenly to the left, plunging into a drift in his confusion, and so enabling the senior clerk to overtake him, and send an ounce of heavy shot into his side, which turned him over quite dead. The shot, however had a double effect. At that instant Charley swept past; and his mettlesome steed swerved as it heard the loud report of the gun, thereby almost unhorsing his rider, and causing him unintentionally to discharge the conglomerate of bullets and swan-shot into the flank of Peter Mactavish's horse--fortunately at a distance which rendered the shot equivalent to a dozen very sharp and particularly stinging blows. On receiving this unexpected salute, the astonished charger reared convulsively, and fell back upon his rider, who was thereby buried

deep in the snow, not a vestige of him being left, no more than if he had never existed at all. Indeed, for a moment it seemed to be doubtful whether poor Peter did exist or not, until a sudden upheaving of the snow took place, and his dishevelled head appeared, with the eyes and mouth wide open, bearing on them an expression of mingled horror and amazement. Meanwhile the second shot acted like a spur on the young horse, which flew past Mr. Kennedy like a whirlwind.

"Stop, you young scoundrel!" he shouted, shaking his fist at Charley as he passed.

Charley was past stopping, either by inclination or ability. This sudden and unexpected accumulation of disasters was too much for him. As he passed his sire, with his brown curls streaming straight out behind, and his eyes flashing with excitement, his teeth clinched, and his horse tearing along more like an incarnate fiend than an animal, a spirit of combined recklessness, consternation, indignation, and glee took possession of him. He waved his whip wildly over his head, brought it down with a stinging cut on the horse's neck, and uttered a shout of defiance that threw completely into the shade the loudest war-whoop that was ever uttered by the brazen lungs of the wildest savage between Hudson's Bay and Oregon. Seeing and hearing this, old Mr. Kennedy wheeled about and dashed off in pursuit with much greater energy than he had displayed in chase of the wolf.

The race bid fair to be a long one, for the young horse was strong in wind and limb; and the gray mare, though decidedly not "the better horse," was much fresher than the other.

The hunters, who were now joined by Harry Somerville, did not feel it incumbent on them to follow this new chase; so they contented themselves with watching their flight towards the fort, while they followed at a more leisurely pace.

Meanwhile Charley rapidly neared Fort Garry, and now began to wonder whether the stable door was open, and if so, whether it were better for him to take his chance of getting his neck broken, or to throw himself into the next snow-drift that presented itself.

He had not to remain long in suspense. The wooden fence that enclosed the stable-yard lay before him. It was between four and five feet high, with a beaten track running along the outside, and a deep snow-drift on the other. Charley felt that the young horse had made up his mind to leap this. As he did not at the moment see that there was anything better to be done, he prepared for it. As the horse bent on his haunches to spring, he gave him a smart cut with the whip, went over like a rocket, and plunged up to the neck in the snow-drift; which brought his career to an abrupt conclusion. The sudden stoppage of the horse was one thing, but the arresting of Master Charley was another and quite a different thing. The instant his charger landed, he left the saddle like a harlequin, described an extensive curve in the air, and fell head foremost into the drift, above which his boots and three inches of his legs alone remained to tell the tale.

On witnessing this climax, Mr. Kennedy, senior, pulled up, dismounted, and ran--with an expression of some anxiety on his

countenance--to the help of his son, while Tom Whyte came out of the stable just in time to receive the "noo 'oss" as he floundered out of the snow.

"I believe," said the groom, as he surveyed the trembling charger, "that your son has broke the noo 'oss, sir, better nor I could 'ave done myself."

"I believe that my son has broken his neck," said Mr. Kennedy wrathfully. "Come here and help me to dig him out."

In a few minutes Charley was dug out, in a state of insensibility, and carried up to the fort, where he was laid on a bed, and restoratives actively applied for his recovery.

CHAPTER V.

Peter Mactavish becomes an amateur doctor; Charley promulgates his views of tilings in general to Kate; and Kate waxes sagacious.

Shortly after the catastrophe just related, Charley opened his eyes to consciousness, and aroused himself out of a prolonged fainting fit, under the combined influence of a strong constitution and the medical treatment of his friends.

Medical treatment in the wilds of North America, by the way, is very original in its character, and is founded on principles so vague that no one has ever been found capable of stating them clearly. Owing to the stubborn fact that there are no doctors in the country, men have been thrown upon their own resources, and as a natural consequence every man is a doctor. True, there are two, it may be three, real doctors in the Hudson's Bay Company's employment; but as one of these is resident on the shores of Hudson's Bay, another in Oregon, and a third in Red River Settlement, they are not considered available for every case of emergency that may chance to occur in the hundreds of little outposts, scattered far and wide over the whole continent of North America, with miles and miles of primeval wilderness between each. We do not think, therefore, that when we say there are no doctors in the country, we use a culpable amount of exaggeration.

If a man gets ill, he goes on till he gets better; and if he doesn't get better, he dies. To avert such an undesirable consummation, desperate and random efforts are made in an amateur way. The old proverb that "extremes meet" is verified. And in a land where no doctors are to be had for love or money, doctors meet you at every turn, ready to practise on everything, with anything, and all for nothing, on the shortest possible notice. As maybe supposed, the practice is novel, and not unfrequently extremely wild. Tooth-drawing is considered child's play--mere blacksmith's work; bleeding is a general remedy for everything, when all else fails; castor-oil, Epsom salts, and emetics are the three keynotes, the foundations, and the copestones of the system.

In Red River there is only one genuine doctor; and as the settlement is fully sixty miles long, he has enough to do, and cannot

always be found when wanted, so that Charley had to rest content with amateur treatment in the meantime. Peter Mactavish was the first to try his powers. He was aware that laudanum had the effect of producing sleep, and seeing that Charley looked somewhat sleepy after recovering consciousness, he thought it advisable to help out that propensity to slumber, and went to the medicine-chest, whence he extracted a small phial of tincture of rhubarb, the half of which he emptied into a wine-glass, under the impression that it was laudanum, and poured down Charley's throat! The poor boy swallowed a little, and sputtered the remainder over the bedclothes. It may be remarked here that Mactavish was a wild, happy, half-mad sort of fellow--wonderfully erudite in regard to some things, and profoundly ignorant in regard to others. Medicine, it need scarcely be added, was not his forte. Having accomplished this feat to his satisfaction, he sat down to watch by the bedside of his friend. Peter had taken this opportunity to indulge in a little private practice just after several of the other gentlemen had left the office, under the impression that Charley had better remain quiet for a short time.

"Well, Peter," whispered Mr. Kennedy, senior, putting his head in at the door (it was Harry's room in which Charley lay), "how is he now?"

"Oh! doing capitally," replied Peter, in a hoarse whisper, at the same time rising and entering the office, while he gently closed the door behind him. "I gave him a small dose of physic, which I think has done mm good. He's sleeping like a top now."

Mr. Kennedy frowned slightly, and made one or two remarks in reference to physic which were not calculated to gratify the ears of a physician.

"What did you give him?" he inquired abruptly.

"Only a little laudanum."

"_Only_ indeed! it's all trash together, and that's the worst kind of trash you could have given him. Humph!" and the old gentleman jerked his shoulders testily.

"How much did you give him?" said the senior clerk, who had entered the apartment with Harry a few minutes before.

"Not quite a wineglassful," replied Peter, somewhat subdued.

"A what!" cried the father, starting from his chair as if he had received an electric shock, and rushing into the adjoining room, up and down which he raved in a state of distraction, being utterly ignorant of what should be done under the circumstances.

Poor Harry Somerville fell rather than leaped off his stool, and dashed into the bedroom, where old Mr. Kennedy was occupied in alternately heaping unutterable abuse on the head of Peter Mactavish, and imploring him to advise what was best to be done. But Peter knew not. He could only make one or two insane proposals to roll Charley about the floor, and see if that would do him any good; while Harry suggested in desperation that he should be hung by the heels, and perhaps it would run out!

Meanwhile the senior clerk seized his hat, with the intention of

going in search of Tom Whyte, and rushed out at the door; which he had no sooner done than he found himself tightly embraced in the arms of that worthy, who happened to be entering at the moment, and who, in consequence of the sudden onset, was pinned up against the wall of the porch.

"Oh, my buzzum!" exclaimed Tom, laying his hand on his breast; "you've a'most bu'st me, sir. W'at's wrong, sir?"

"Go for the doctor, Tom, quick! run like the wind. Take the freshest horse; fly, Tom, Charley's poisoned--laudanum; quick!"

"Eavens an' 'arth!" ejaculated the groom, wheeling round, and stalking rapidly off to the stable like a pair of insane compasses, while the senior clerk returned to the bedroom, where he found Mr. Kennedy still raving, Peter Mactavish still aghast and deadly pale, and Harry Somerville staring like a maniac at his young friend, as if he expected every moment to see him explode, although, to all appearance, he was sleeping soundly, and comfortably too, notwithstanding the noise that was going on around him. Suddenly Harry's eye rested on the label of the half-empty phial, and he uttered a loud, prolonged cheer.

"It's only tincture of--"

"Wild cats and furies!" cried Mr. Kennedy, turning sharply round and seizing Harry by the collar, "why d'you kick up such a row, eh?"

"It's only tincture of rhubarb," repeated the boy, disengaging himself and holding up the phial triumphantly.

"So it is, I declare," exclaimed Mr. Kennedy, in a tone that indicated intense relief of mind; while Peter Mactavish uttered a sigh so deep that one might suppose a burden of innumerable tons weight had just been removed from his breast.

Charley had been roused from his slumbers by this last ebullition; but on being told what had caused it, he turned languidly round on his pillow and went to sleep again, while his friends departed and left him to repose.

Tom Whyte failed to find the doctor. The servant told him that her master had been suddenly called to set a broken leg that morning for a trapper who lived ten miles down the river, and on his return had found a man waiting with a horse and cariole, who carried him violently away to see his wife, who had been taken suddenly ill at a house twenty miles up the river, and so she didn't expect him back that night.

"An' where has 'e been took to?" inquired Tom.

She couldn't tell; she knew it was somewhere about the White-horse Plains, but she didn't know more than that.

"Did 'e not say w'en 'e'd be home?"

"No, he didn't."

"Oh dear!" said Tom, rubbing his long nose in great perplexity. "It's

an 'orrible case o' sudden and onexpected pison."

She was sorry for it, but couldn't help that; and thereupon, bidding him good-morning, shut the door.

Tom's wits had come to that condition which just precedes "giving it up" as hopeless, when it occurred to him that he was not far from old Mr. Kennedy's residence; so he stepped into the cariole again and drove thither. On his arrival he threw poor Mrs. Kennedy and Kate into great consternation by his exceedingly graphic, and more than slightly exaggerated, account of what had brought him in search of the doctor. At first Mrs. Kennedy resolved to go up to Fort Garry immediately, but Kate persuaded her to remain at home, by pointing out that she could herself go, and if anything very serious had occurred (which she didn't believe), Mr. Kennedy could come down for her immediately, while she (Kate) could remain to nurse her brother.

In a few minutes Kate and Tom were seated side by side in the little cariole, driving swiftly up the frozen river; and two hours later the former was seated by her brother's bedside, watching him as he slept with a look of tender affection and solicitude.

Rousing himself from his slumbers, Charley looked vacantly round the room.

"Have you slept well, darling?" inquired Kate, laying her hand lightly on his forehead.

"Slept--eh! oh yes. I've slept. I say, Kate, what a precious bump I came down on my head, to be sure!"

"Hush, Charley!" said Kate, perceiving that he was becoming energetic. "Father said you were to keep quiet--and so do I," she added, with a frown. "Shut your eyes, sir, and go to sleep."

Charley complied by shutting his eyes, and opening his mouth, and uttering a succession of deep snores.

"Now, you bad boy," said Kate, "why _won't_ you try to rest?"

"Because, Kate, dear/' said Charley, opening his eyes again--"because I feel as if I had slept a week at least; and not being one of the seven sleepers, I don't think it necessary to do more in that way just now. Besides, my sweet but particularly wicked sister, I wish just at this moment to have a talk with you."

"But are you sure it won't do you harm to talk? do you feel quite strong enough?"

"Quite: Sampson was a mere infant compared to me."

"Oh, don't talk nonsense, Charley dear, and keep your hands quiet, and don't lift the clothes with your knees in that way, else I'll go away and leave you."

"Very well, my pet; if you do, I'll get up and dress and follow you, that's all! But come, Kate, tell me first of all how it was that I got pitched off that long-legged rhinoceros, and who it was that picked me up, and why wasn't I killed, and how did I come here; for

my head is sadly confused, and I scarcely recollect anything that has happened; and before commencing your discourse, Kate, please hand me a glass of water, for my mouth is as dry as a whistle."

Kate handed him a glass of water, smoothed his pillow, brushed the curls gently off his forehead, and sat down on the bedside.

"Thank you, Kate; now go on."

"Well, you see," she began--

"Pardon me, dearest," interrupted Charley, "if you would please to look at me you would observe that my two eyes are tightly closed, so that I don't see at all."

"Well, then, you must understand--"

"Must I? Oh!--"

"That after that wicked horse leaped with you over the stable fence, you were thrown high into the air, and turning completely round, fell head foremost into the snow, and your poor head went through the top of an old cask that had been buried there all winter."

"Dear me!" ejaculated Charley; "did anyone see me, Kate?"

"Oh yes."

"Who?" asked Charley, somewhat anxiously; "not Mrs. Grant, I hope? for if she did she'd never let me hear the last of it."

"No; only our father, who was chasing you at the time," replied Kate, with a merry laugh.

"And no one else?"

"No--oh yes, by-the-by, Tom Whyte was there too."

"Oh, he's nobody. Go on."

"But tell me, Charley, why do you care about Mrs. Grant seeing you?"

"Oh! no reason at all, only she's such an abominable quiz."

We must guard the reader here against the supposition that Mrs. Grant was a quiz of the ordinary kind. She was by no means a sprightly, clever woman, rather fond of a joke than otherwise, as the term might lead you to suppose. Her corporeal frame was very large, excessively fat, and remarkably unwieldy; being an appropriate casket in which to enshrine a mind of the heaviest and most sluggish nature. She spoke little, ate largely, and slept much--the latter recreation being very frequently enjoyed in a large arm-chair of a peculiar kind. It had been a water-butt, which her ingenious husband had cut half-way down the middle, then half-way across, and in the angle thus formed fixed a bottom, which, together with the back, he padded with tow, and covered the whole with a mantle of glaring bed-curtain chintz, whose pattern alternated in stripes of sky-blue and china roses, with broken fragments of the rainbow between. Notwithstanding her excessive slowness, however, Mrs. Grant was fond of taking a firm

hold of anything or any circumstance in the character or affairs of her friends, and twitting them thereupon in a grave but persevering manner that was exceedingly irritating. No one could ever ascertain whether Mrs. Grant did this in a sly way or not, as her visage never expressed anything except unalterable good-humour. She was a good wife and an affectionate mother; had a family of ten children, and could boast of never having had more than one quarrel with her husband. This disagreement was occasioned by a rather awkward mischance. One day, not long after her last baby was born, Mrs. Grant waddled towards her tub with the intention of enjoying her accustomed siesta. A few minutes previously, her seventh child, which was just able to walk, had scrambled up into the seat and fallen fast asleep there. As has been already said, Mrs. Grant's intellect was never very bright, and at this particular time she was rather drowsy, so that she did not observe the child, and on reaching her chair, turned round preparatory to letting herself plump into it. She always plumped into her chair. Her muscles were too soft to lower her gently down into it. Invariably on reaching a certain point they ceased to act, and let her down with a crash. She had just reached this point, and her baby's hopes and prospects were on the eve of being cruelly crushed for ever, when Mr. Grant noticed the impending calamity. He had no time to warn her, for she had already passed the point at which her powers of muscular endurance terminated; so grasping the chair, he suddenly withdrew it with such force that the baby rolled off upon the floor like a hedgehog, straightened out flat, and gave vent to an outrageous roar, while its horror-struck mother came to the ground with a sound resembling the fall of an enormous sack of wool. Although the old lady could not see exactly that there was anything very blameworthy in her husband's conduct on this occasion, yet her nerves had received so severe a shock that she refused to be comforted for two entire days.

But to return from this digression. After Charley had two or three times recommended Kate (who was a little inclined to be quizzical) to proceed, she continued,--

"Well, then you were carried up here by father and Tom Whyte, and put to bed, and after a good deal of rubbing and rough treatment you were got round. Then Peter Mactavish nearly poisoned you, but fortunately he was such a goose that he did not think of reading the label of the phial, and so gave you a dose of tincture of rhubarb instead of laudanum as he had intended; and then father flew into a passion, and Tom Whyte was sent to fetch the doctor, and couldn't find him; but fortunately he found me, which was much better, I think, and brought me up here. And so here I am, and here I intend to remain."

"And so that's the end of it. Well, Kate, I'm very glad it was no worse."

"And I am very thankful," said Kate, with emphasis on the word, "that it's no worse."

"Oh, well, you know, Kate, I meant that, of course."

"But you did not say it," replied his sister earnestly.

"To be sure not," said Charley gaily; "it would be absurd to be always making solemn speeches, and things of that sort, every time one has a little accident."

"True, Charley; but when one has a very serious accident, and escapes unhurt, don't you think that _then_ it would be--"

"Oh yes, to be sure," interrupted Charley, who still strove to turn Kate from her serious frame of mind; "but sister dear, how could I possibly _say_ I was thankful with my head crammed into an old cask and my feet pointing up to the blue sky, eh?"

Kate smiled at this, and laid her hand on his arm, while she bent over the pillow and looked tenderly into his eyes.

"O my darling Charley, you are disposed to jest about it; but I cannot tell you how my heart trembled this morning when I heard from Tom Whyte of what had happened. As we drove up to the fort, I thought how terrible it would have been if you had been killed; and then the happy days we have spent together rushed into my mind, and I thought of the willow creek where we used to fish for gold eyes, and the spot in the woods where we have so often chased the little birds, and the lake in the prairies where we used to go in spring to watch the water-fowl sporting in the sunshine. When I recalled these things, Charley, and thought of you as dead, I felt as if I should die too. And when I came here and found that my fears were needless, that you were alive and safe, and almost well, I felt thankful--yes, very, very thankful--to God for sparing your life, my dear, dear Charley." And Kate laid her head on his bosom and sobbed, when she thought of what might have been, as if her very heart would break.

Charley's disposition to levity entirely vanished while his sister spoke; and twining his tough little arm round her neck, he pressed her fervently to his heart.

"Bless you, Kate," he said at length. "I am indeed thankful to God, not only for sparing my life, but for giving me such a darling sister to live for. But now, Kate, tell me, what do you think of father's determination to have me placed in the office here?"

"Indeed, I think it's very hard. Oh, I do wish _so_ much that I could do it for you," said Kate with a sigh.

"Do _what_ for me?" asked Charley.

"Why, the office work," said Kate.

"Tuts! fiddlesticks! But isn't it, now, really a _very_ hard case?"

"Indeed it is; but, then, what can you do?"

"Do?" said Charley impatiently; "run away to be sure."

"Oh, don't speak of that!" said Kate anxiously. "You know it will kill our beloved mother; and then it would grieve father very much."

"Well, father don't care much about grieving me, when he hunted me down like a wolf till I nearly broke my neck."

"Now, Charley, you must not speak so. Father loves you tenderly, although he _is_ a little rough at times. If you only heard how kindly he speaks of you to our mother when you are away, you could

not think of giving him so much pain. And then the Bible says, 'Honour thy father and thy mother, that thy days may be long in the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee;' and as God speaks in the Bible, surely we should pay attention to it!"

Charley was silent for a few seconds; then heaving a deep sigh, he said,--

"Well, I believe you're right, Kate; but then, what am I to do? If I don't run away, I must live, like poor Harry Somerville, on a long-legged stool; and if I do that, I'll--I'll--"

As Charley spoke, the door opened, and his father entered.

"Well, my boy," said he, seating himself on the bedside and taking his son's hand, "how goes it now? Head getting all right again? I fear that Kate has been talking too much to you.--Is it so, you little chatterbox?"

Mr. Kennedy parted Kate's clustering ringlets and kissed her forehead.

Charley assured his father that he was almost well, and much the better of having Kate to tend him. In fact, he felt so much revived that he said he would get up and go out for a walk.

"Had I not better tell Tom Whyte to saddle the young horse for you?" said his father, half ironically. "No, no, boy; lie still where you are to-day, and get up if you feel better to-morrow. In the meantime, I've come to say good-bye, as I intend to go home to relieve your mother's anxiety about you. I'll see you again, probably, the day after to-morrow. Hark you, boy; I've been talking your affairs over again with Mr. Grant, and we've come to the conclusion to give you a run in the woods for a time. You'll have to be ready to start early in spring with the first brigades for the north. So adieu!"

Mr. Kennedy patted him on the head, and hastily left the room.

A burning blush of shame arose on Charley's cheek as he recollected his late remarks about his father; and then, recalling the purport of his last words, he sent forth an exulting shout as he thought of the coming spring.

"Well now, Charley," said Kate, with an arch smile, "let us talk seriously over your arrangements for running away."

Charley replied by seizing the pillow and throwing it at his sister's head; but being accustomed to such eccentricities, she anticipated the movement and evaded the blow.

"Ah, Charley," cried Kate, laughing, "you mustn't let your hand get out of practice! That was a shockingly bad shot for a man thirsting to become a bear and buffalo hunter!"

"I'll make my fortune at once," cried Charley, as Kate replaced the pillow, "build a wooden castle on the shores of Great Bear Lake, take you to keep house for me, and when I'm out hunting you'll fish for whales in the lake; and we'll live there to a good old age; so good-night, Kate dear, and go to bed."

Kate laughed, gave her brother a parting kiss, and left him.

CHAPTER VI.

Spring and the voyageurs.

Winter, with its snow and its ice: winter, with its sharp winds and white drifts; winter, with its various characteristic occupations and employments, is past, and it is spring now.

The sun no longer glitters on fields of white; the woodman's axe is no longer heard hacking the oaken billets, to keep alive the roaring fires. That inexpressibly cheerful sound the merry chime of sleigh-bells, that tells more of winter than all other sounds together, is no longer heard on the bosom of Red River; for the sleighs are thrown aside as useless lumber--carts and gigs have supplanted them. The old Canadian, who used to drive the ox with its water-barrel to the ice-hole for his daily supply, has substituted a small cart with wheels for the old sleigh that used to glide so smoothly over the snow, and _grit_ so sharply on it in the more than usually frosty mornings in the days gone by. The trees have lost their white patches, and the clumps of willows, that used to look like islands in the prairie, have disappeared, as the carpeting that gave them prominence has dissolved. The aspect of everything in the isolated settlement has changed. The winter is gone, and spring--bright, beautiful, hilarious spring--has come again.

By those who have never known an arctic winter, the delights of an arctic spring can never, we fear, be fully appreciated or understood. Contrast is one of its strongest elements; indeed, we might say, _the_ element which gives to all the others peculiar zest. Life in the arctic regions is like one of Turner's pictures, in which the lights are strong, the shadows deep, and the _tout ensemble_ hazy and romantic. So cold and prolonged is the winter, that the first mild breath of spring breaks on the senses like a zephyr from the plains of Paradise. Everything bursts suddenly into vigorous life, after the long, death-like sleep of Nature; as little children burst into the romping gaieties of a new day, after the deep repose of a long and tranquil night. The snow melts, the ice breaks up, and rushes in broken masses, heaving and tossing in the rising floods, that grind and whirl them into the ocean, or into those great fresh-water lakes that vie with ocean itself in magnitude and grandeur. The buds come out and the leaves appear, clothing all nature with a bright refreshing green, which derives additional brilliancy from sundry patches of snow, that fill the deep creeks and hollows everywhere, and form ephemeral fountains whose waters continue to supply a thousand rills for many a long day, until the fierce glare of the summer sun prevails at last and melts them all away.

Red River flows on now to mix its long-pent-up waters with Lake Winnipeg. Boats are seen rowing about upon its waters, as the settlers travel from place to place; and wooden canoes, made of the hollowed-out trunks of large trees, shoot across from shore to shore--these canoes being a substitute for bridges, of which there are

none, although the settlement lies on both sides of the river. Birds have now entered upon the scene, their wild cries and ceaseless flight adding to it a cheerful activity. Ground squirrels pop up out of their holes to bask their round, fat, beautifully-striped little bodies in the sun, or to gaze in admiration at the farmer, as he urges a pair of very slow-going oxen, that drag the plough at a pace which induces one to believe that the wide field may possibly be ploughed up by the end of next year. Frogs whistle in the marshy grounds so loudly that men new to the country believe they are being regaled by the songs of millions of birds. There is no mistake about their whistle. It is not merely like a whistle, but it is a whistle, shrill and continuous; and as the swamps swarm with these creatures, the song never ceases for a moment, although each individual frog creates only one little gush of music, composed of half-a-dozen trills, and then stops a moment for breath before commencing the second bar. Bull-frogs, too, though not so numerous, help to vary the sound by croaking vociferously, as if they understood the value of bass, and were glad of having an opportunity to join in the universal hum of life and joy which rises everywhere, from the river and the swamp, the forest and the prairie, to welcome back the spring.

Such was the state of things in Red River one beautiful morning in April, when a band of voyageurs lounged in scattered groups about the front gate of Fort Garry. They were as fine a set of picturesque, manly fellows as one could desire to see. Their mode of life rendered them healthy, hardy, arid good-humoured, with a strong dash of recklessness--perhaps too much of it--in some of the younger men. Being descended, generally, from French-Canadian sires and Indian mothers, they united some of the good and not a few of the bad qualities of both, mentally as well as physically--combining the light, gay-hearted spirit and full, muscular frame of the Canadian with the fierce passions and active habits of the Indian. And this wildness of disposition was not a little fostered by the nature of their usual occupations. They were employed during a great part of the year in navigating the Hudson's Bay Company's boats, laden with furs and goods, through the labyrinth of rivers and lakes that stud and intersect the whole continent, or they were engaged in pursuit of the bisons, [Footnote: These animals are always called buffaloes by American hunters and fur-traders.] which roam the prairies in vast herds.

They were dressed in the costume of the country: most of them wore light-blue cloth capotes, girded tightly round them', by scarlet or crimson worsted belts. Some of them had blue and others scarlet cloth leggings, ornamented more or less with stained porcupine quills, coloured silk, or variegated beads; while some might be seen clad in the leathern coats of winter--deer-skin dressed like chamois leather, fringed all round with little tails, and ornamented much in the same way as those already described. The heavy winter moccasins and duffel socks, which gave to their feet the appearance of being afflicted with gout, were now replaced by moccasins of a lighter and more elegant character, having no socks below, and fitting tightly to the feet like gloves. Some wore hats similar to those made of silk or beaver which are worn by ourselves in Britain, but so bedizened with scarlet cock-tail feathers, and silver cords and tassels, as to leave the original form of the head-dress a matter of great uncertainty. These hats, however, are only used on high occasions, and chiefly by the fops. Most of the men wore coarse blue cloth caps with peaks, and

not a few discarded head-pieces altogether, under the impression, apparently, that nature had supplied a covering which was in itself sufficient. These costumes varied not only in character but in quality, according to the circumstances of the wearer; some being highly ornamental and mended--evincing the felicity of the owner in the possession of a good wife--while others were soiled and torn, or but slightly ornamented. The voyageurs were collected, as we have said, in groups. Here stood a dozen of the youngest--consequently the most noisy and showily dressed--laughing loudly, gesticulating violently, and bragging tremendously. Near to them were collected a number of sterner spirits--men of middle age, with all the energy, and muscle, and bone of youth, but without its swaggering hilarity; men whose powers and nerves had been tried over and over again amid the stirring scenes of a voyageur's life; men whose heads were cool, and eyes sharp, and hands ready and powerful, in the mad whirl of boiling rapids, in the sudden attack of wild beast and hostile man, or in the unexpected approach of any danger; men who, having been well tried, needed not to boast, and who, having carried off triumphantly their respective brides many years ago, needed not to decorate their persons with the absurd finery that characterised their younger brethren. They were comparatively few in number, but they composed a sterling band, of which every man was a hero. Among them were those who occupied the high positions of bowman and steersman, and when we tell the reader that on these two men frequently hangs the safety of a boat, with all its crew and lading, it will be easily understood how needful it is that they should be men of iron nerve and strength of mind.

Boat-travelling in those regions is conducted in a way that would astonish most people who dwell in the civilised quarters of the globe. The country being intersected in all directions by great lakes and rivers, these have been adopted as the most convenient highways along which to convey the supplies and bring back the furs from outposts. Rivers in America, however, as in other parts of the world, are distinguished by sudden ebullitions and turbulent points of character, in the shape of rapids, falls, and cataracts, up and down which neither men nor boats can by any possibility go with impunity; consequently, on arriving at such obstructions, the cargoes are carried overland to navigable water above or below the falls (as the case may be), then the boats are dragged over and launched, again reloaded, and the travellers proceed. This operation is called "making a portage;" and as these portages vary from twelve yards to twelve miles in length, it may be readily conceived that a voyageur's life is not an easy one by any means.

This, however, is only one of his difficulties. Rapids occur which are not so dangerous as to make a "portage" necessary, but are sufficiently turbulent to render the descent of them perilous. In such cases, the boats, being lightened of part of their cargo, are run down, and frequently they descend with full cargoes and crews. It is then that the whole management of each boat devolves upon its bowman and steersman. The rest of the crew, or middlemen as they are called, merely sit still and look on, or give a stroke with their oars if required; while the steersman, with powerful sweeps of his heavy oar, directs the flying boat as it bounds from surge to surge like a thing of life; and the bowman stands erect in front to assist in directing his comrade at the stern, having a strong and long pole in his hands, with which, ever and anon, he violently forces the boat's head away from sunken rocks, against which it might otherwise

strike and be stove in, capsized, or seriously damaged.

Besides the groups already enumerated, there were one or two others, composed of grave, elderly men, whose wrinkled brows, gray hairs, and slow, quiet step, showed that the strength of their days was past; although their upright figures and warm brown complexions gave promise of their living to see many summers still. These were the principal steersmen and old guides--men of renown, to whom the others bowed as oracles or looked up to as fathers; men whose youth and manhood had been spent in roaming the trackless wilderness, and who were, therefore, eminently qualified to guide brigades through the length and breadth of the land; men whose power of threading their way among the perplexing intricacies of the forest had become a second nature, a kind of instinct, that was as sure of attaining its end as the instinct of the feathered tribes, which brings the swallow, after a long absence, with unerring certainty back to its former haunts again in spring.

CHAPTER VII.

The store.

At whatever establishment in the fur-trader's dominions you may chance to alight you will find a particular building which is surrounded by a halo of interest; towards which there seems to be a general leaning on the part of everybody, especially of the Indians; and with which are connected, in the minds of all, the most stirring reminiscences and pleasing associations.

This is the trading-store. It is always recognisable, if natives are in the neighbourhood, by the bevy of red men that cluster round it, awaiting the coming of the storekeeper or the trader with that stoic patience which is peculiar to Indians. It may be further recognised, by a close observer, by the soiled condition of its walls occasioned by loungers rubbing their backs perpetually against it, and the peculiar dinginess round the keyhole, caused by frequent applications of the key, which renders it conspicuous beyond all its comrades. Here is contained that which makes the red man's life enjoyable; that which causes his heart to leap, and induces him to toil for months and months together in the heat of summer and amid the frost and snow of winter; that which actually accomplishes, what music is said to achieve, the "soothing of the savage breast:" in short, here are stored up blankets, guns, powder, shot, kettles, axes, and knives; twine for nets, vermilion for war-paint, fishhooks and scalping-knives, capotes, cloth, beads, needles, and a host of miscellaneous articles, much too numerous to mention. Here, also occur periodical scenes of bustle and excitement, when bands of natives arrive from distant hunting-grounds, laden with rich furs, which are speedily transferred to the Hudson's Bay Company's stores in exchange for the goods aforementioned. And many a tough wrangle has the trader on such occasions with sharp natives, who might have graduated in Billingsgate, so close are they at a bargain. Here, too, voyageurs are supplied with an equivalent for their wages, part in advance, if they desire it (and they generally do desire it), and part at the conclusion of their long and arduous voyages.

It is to one of these stores, reader, that we wish to introduce you now, that you may witness the men of the North brigade receive their advances.

The store at Fort Garry stands on the right of the fort, as you enter by the front gate. Its interior resembles that of the other stores in the country, being only a little larger. A counter encloses a space sufficiently wide to admit a dozen men, and serves to keep back those who are more eager than the rest. Inside this counter, at the time we write of, stood our friend, Peter Mactavish, who was the presiding genius of the scene.

"Shut the door now, and lock it," said Peter, in an authoritative tone, after eight or ten young voyageurs had crushed into the space in front of the counter. "I'll not supply you with so much as an ounce of tobacco if you let in another man."

Peter needed not to repeat the command. Three or four stalwart shoulders were applied to the door, which shut with a bang like a cannon-shot, and the key was turned.

"Come now, Antoine," began the trader, "we've lots to do, and not much time to do it in, so pray look sharp."

Antoine, however, was not to be urged on so easily. He had been meditating deeply all the morning on what he should purchase. Moreover, he had a sweetheart, and of course he had to buy something for her before setting out on his travels. Besides, Antoine was six feet high, and broad shouldered, and well made, with a dark face and glossy black hair; and he entertained a notion that there were one or two points in his costume which required to be carefully rectified, ere he could consider that he had attained to perfection: so he brushed the long hair off his forehead, crossed his arms, and gazed around him.

"Come now, Antoine," said Peter, throwing a green blanket at him; "I know you want that to begin with. What's the use of thinking so long about it, eh? And that, too," he added, throwing him a blue cloth capote. "Anything else?"

"Oui, oui, monsieur," cried Antoine, as he disengaged himself from the folds of the coat which Peter had thrown over his head. "Tabac, monsieur, tabac!"

"Oh, to be sure," cried Peter. "I might have guessed that that was uppermost in your mind. Well, how much will you have?" Peter began to unwind the fragrant weed off a coil of most appalling size and thickness, which looked like a snake of endless length. "Will that do?" and he flourished about four feet of the snake before the eyes of the voyageur.

Antoine accepted the quantity, and young Harry Somerville entered the articles against him in a book.

"Anything more, Antoine?" said the trader. "Ah, some beads and silks, eh? Oho, Antoine!--By the way, Louis, have you seen Annette lately?"

Peter turned to another voyageur when he put this question, and the

voyageur gave a broad grin as he replied in the affirmative, while Antoine looked a little confused. He did not care much, however, for jesting. So, after getting one or two more articles--not forgetting half-a-dozen clay pipes, and a few yards of gaudy calico, which called forth from Peter a second reference to Annette--he bundled up his goods, and made way for another comrade.

Louis Peltier, one of the principal guides, and a man of importance therefore, now stood forward. He was probably about forty-five years of age; had a plain, olive-coloured countenance, surrounded by a mass of long jet-black hair, which he inherited, along with a pair of dark, piercing eyes, from his Indian mother; and a robust, heavy, yet active frame, which bore a strong resemblance to what his Canadian father's had been many years before. His arms, in particular, were of herculean mould, with large swelling veins and strongly-marked muscles. They seemed, in fact, just formed for the purpose of pulling the heavy sweep of an inland boat among strong rapids. His face combined an expression of stern resolution with great good-humour; and truly his countenance did not belie him, for he was known among his comrades as the most courageous and at the same time the most peaceable man in the settlement. Louis Peltier was singular in possessing the latter quality, for assuredly the half-breeds, whatever other good points they boast, cannot lay claim to very gentle or dove-like dispositions. His grey capote and blue leggings were decorated with no unusual ornaments, and the scarlet belt which encircled his massive figure was the only bit of colour he displayed.

The younger men fell respectfully into the rear as Louis stepped forward and begged pardon for coming so early in the day. "Mais, monsieur," he said, "I have to look after the boats to-day, and get them ready for a start to-morrow."

Peter Mactavish gave Louis a hearty shake of the hand before proceeding to supply his wants, which were simple and moderate, excepting in the article of tabac, in the use of which he was im-moderate, being an inveterate smoker; so that a considerable portion of the snake had to be uncoiled for his benefit.

"Fond as ever of smoking, Louis?" said Peter Mactavish, as he handed him the coil.

"Oui, monsieur--very fond," answered the guide, smelling the weed. "Ah, this is very good. I must take a good supply this voyage, because I lost the half of my roll last year;" and the guide gave a sigh as he thought of the overwhelming bereavement.

"Lost the half of it, Louis!" said Mactavish. "Why, how was that? You must have lost more than half your spirits with it!"

"Ah, oui, I lost all my spirits, and my comrade Francois at the same time!"

"Dear me!" exclaimed the clerk, bustling about the store while the guide continued to talk.

"Oui, monsieur, oui. I lost him, and my tabac, and my spirits, and very nearly my life, all in one moment!"

"Why, how came that about?" said Peter, pausing in his work, and

laying a handful of pipes on the counter.

"Ah, monsieur, it was very sad (merci, monsieur, merci; thirty pipes, if you please), and I thought at the time that I should give up my voyageur life, and remain altogether in the settlement with my old woman. Mais, monsieur, that was not possible. When I spoke of it to my old woman, she called me an old woman; and you know, monsieur, that two old women never could live together in peace for twelve months under the same roof. So here I am, you see, ready again for the voyage."

The voyageurs, who had drawn round Louis when he alluded to an anecdote which they had often heard before, but were never weary of hearing over again, laughed loudly at this sally, and urged the guide to relate the story to "monsieur" who, nothing loath to suspend his operations for a little, leaned his arms on the counter and said--

"Tell us all about it, Louis; I am anxious to know how you managed to come by so many losses all at one time."

"Bien, monsieur, I shall soon relate it, for the story is very short."

Harry Somerville, who was entering the pipes in Louis's account, had just set down the figures "30" when Louis cleared his throat to begin. Not having the mental fortitude to finish the line, he dropped his pen, sprang off his stool, which he upset in so doing, jumped up, sitting-ways, upon the counter, and gazed with breathless interest into the guide's face as he spoke.

"It was on a cold, wet afternoon," said Louis, "that we were descending the Hill River, at a part of the rapids where there is a sharp bend in the stream, and two or three great rocks that stand up in front of the water, as it plunges over a ledge, as if they were put there a purpose to catch it, and split it up into foam, or to stop the boats and canoes that try to run the rapids, and cut them up into splinters. It was an ugly place, monsieur, I can tell you; and though I've run it again and again, I always hold my breath tighter when we get to the top, and breathe freer when we get to the bottom. Well, there was a chum of mine at the bow, Francois by name, and a fine fellow he was as I ever came across. He used to sleep with me at night under the same blanket, although it was somewhat inconvenient; for being as big as myself and a stone heavier, it was all we could do to make the blanket cover us. However, he and I were great friends, and we managed it somehow. Well, he was at the bow when we took the rapids, and a first-rate bowman he made. His pole was twice as long and twice as thick as any other pole in the boat, and he twisted it about just like a fiddlestick. I remember well the night before we came to the rapids, as he was sitting by the fire, which was blazing up among the pine-branches that overhung us, he said that he wanted a good pole for the rapids next day; and with that he jumped up, laid hold of an axe, and went back into the woods a bit to get one. When he returned, he brought a young tree on his shoulder, which he began to strip of its branches, and bark. 'Louis, says he, 'this is hot work; give us a pipe.' So I rummaged about for some tobacco, but found there was none left in my bag; so I went to my kit and got out my roll, about three fathoms or so, and cutting half of it off, I went to the fire and twisted it round his neck by way of a joke, and he said he'd wear it as a necklace all night, and so he

did, too, and forgot to take it off in the morning; and when we came near the rapids I couldn't get at my bag to stow it away, so says I, 'Francois, you'll have to run with it on, for I can't stop to stow it now.' 'All right,' says he, 'go ahead;' and just as he said it, we came in sight of the first run, foaming and boiling like a kettle of robbiboo. 'Take care, lads,' I cried, and the next moment we were dashing down towards the bend in the river. As we came near to the shoot, I saw Francois standing up on the gunwale to get a better view of the rocks ahead, and every now and then giving me a signal with his hand how to steer; suddenly he gave a shout, and plunged his long pole into the water, to fend off from a rock which a swirl in the stream had concealed. For a second or two his pole bent like a willow, and we could feel the heavy boat jerk off a little with the tremendous strain, but all at once the pole broke off short with a crack, Francois' heels made a flourish in the air, and then he disappeared head foremost into the foaming water, with my tobacco coiled round his neck! As we flew past the place, one of his arms appeared, and I made a grab at it, and caught him by the sleeve; but the effort upset myself and over I went too. Fortunately, however, one of my men caught me by the foot, and held on like a vice; but the force of the current tore Francois' sleeve out of my grasp, and I was dragged into the boat again just in time to see my comrade's legs and arms going like the sails of a windmill, as he rolled over several times and disappeared. Well, we put ashore the moment we got into still water, and then five or six of us started off on foot to look for Francois. After half-an-hour's search, we found him pitched upon a flat rock in the middle of the stream like a bit of driftwood, We immediately waded out to the rock and brought him ashore, where we lighted a fire, took off all his clothes, and rubbed him till he began to show signs of life again. But you may judge, mes garcons, of my misery when I found that the coil of tobacco was gone. It had come off his neck during his struggles, and there wasn't a vestige of it left, except a bright red mark on the throat, where it had nearly strangled him. When he began to recover, he put his hand up to his neck as if feeling for something, and muttered faintly, 'The tabac.' 'Ah, morbleu!' said I, 'you may say that! Where is it?' Well, we soon brought him round, but he had swallowed so much water that it damaged his lungs, and we had to leave him at the next post we came to; and so I lost my friend too."

"Did Francois get better?" said Charley Kennedy, in a voice of great concern.

Charley had entered the store by another door, just as the guide began his story, and had listened to it unobserved with breathless interest.

"Recover! Oh oui, monsieur, he soon got well again."

"Oh, I'm so glad," cried Charley.

"But I lost him for that voyage," added the guide; "and I lost my tabac for ever."

"You must take better care of it this time, Louis," said Peter Mactavish, as he resumed his work.

"That I shall, monsieur," replied Louis, shouldering his goods and quitting the store, while a short, slim, active little Canadian took

his place.

"Now, then, Baptiste," said Mactavish, "you want a--"

"Blanket, monsieur,"

"Good. And--"

"A capote, monsieur."

"And--"

"An axe--"

"Stop, stop!" shouted Harry Somerville from his desk. "Here's an entry in Louis's account that I can't make out--30 something or other; what can it have been?"

"How often," said Mactavish, going up to him with a look of annoyance--"how often have I told you, Mr. Somerville, not to leave an entry half-finished on any account!"

"I didn't know that I left it so," said Harry, twisting his features, and scratching his head in great perplexity. "What can it have been? 30--30--not blankets, eh?" (Harry was becoming banteringly bitter.) "He couldn't have got thirty guns, could he? or thirty knives, or thirty copper kettles?"

"Perhaps it was thirty pounds of tea," suggested Charley.

"No doubt it was thirty pipes," said Peter Mactavish.

"Oh, that was it!" cried Harry, "that was it! thirty pipes, to be sure. What an ass I am!"

"And pray what is that?" said Mactavish, pointing sarcastically to an entry in the previous account--"5 yards of superfine Annette_. Really, Mr. Somerville, I wish you would pay more attention to your work and less to the conversation."

"Oh dear!" cried Harry, becoming almost hysterical under the combined effects of chagrin at making so many mistakes, and suppressed merriment at the idea of selling Annettes by the yard. "Oh, dear me--"

Harry could say no more, but stuffed his handkerchief into his mouth and turned away.

"Well, sir," said the offended Peter, "when you have laughed to your entire satisfaction, we will go on with our work, if you please."

"All right," cried Harry, suppressing his feelings with a strong effort; "what next?"

Just then a tall, raw-boned man entered the store, and rudely thrusting Baptiste aside, asked if he could get his supplies now.

"No," said Mactavish, sharply; "you'll take your turn like the rest."

The new-comer was a native of Orkney, a country from which, and the neighbouring islands, the Fur Company almost exclusively recruits its staff of labourers. These men are steady, useful servants, although inclined to be slow and lazy _at first_; but they soon get used to the country, and rapidly improve under the example of the active Canadians and half-breeds with whom they associate; some of them are the best servants the Company possess. Hugh Mathison, however, was a very bad specimen of the race, being rough and coarse in his manners, and very lazy withal. Upon receiving the trader's answer, Hugh turned sulkily on his heel and strode towards the door. Now, it happened that Baptiste's bundle lay just behind him, and on turning to leave the place, he tripped over it and stumbled, whereat the voyageurs burst into an ironical laugh (for Hugh was not a favourite).

"Confound your trash!" he cried, giving the little bundle a kick that scattered everything over the floor.

"Crapaud!" said Baptiste, between his set teeth, while his eyes flashed angrily, and he stood up before Hugh with clinched fists, "what mean you by that, eh?"

The big Scotchman held his little opponent in contempt; so that, instead of putting himself on the defensive, he leaned his back against the door, thrust his hands into his pockets, and requested to know "what that was to him."

Baptiste was not a man of many words, and this reply, coupled with the insolent sneer with which it was uttered, caused him to plant a sudden and well-directed blow on the point of Hugh's nose, which flattened it on his face, and brought the back of his head into violent contact with the door.

"Well done!" shouted the men; "bravo, Baptiste! _Regardez le nez, mes enfants!_"

"Hold!" cried Mactavish, vaulting the counter, and intercepting Hugh, as he rushed upon his antagonist; "no fighting here, you blackguards! If you want to do _that,_ go outside the fort;" and Peter, opening the door, thrust the Orkneyman out.

In the meantime, Baptiste gathered up his goods and left the store, in company with several of his friends, vowing that he would wreak his vengeance on the "gros chien" before the sun should set.

He had not long to wait, however, for just outside the gate he found Hugh, still smarting under the pain and indignity of the blow, and ready to pounce upon him like a cat on a mouse.

Baptiste instantly threw down his bundle, and prepared for battle by discarding his coat.

Every nation has its own peculiar method of fighting, and its own ideas of what is honourable and dishonourable in combat. The English, as everyone knows, have particularly stringent rules regarding the part of the body which may or may not be hit with propriety, and count it foul disgrace to strike a man when he is down, although, by some strange perversity of reasoning, they deem it right and fair to _fall_ upon him while in this helpless condition, and burst him if possible. The Scotchman has less of the science, and we are half

inclined to believe that he would go the length of kicking a fallen opponent; but on this point we are not quite positive. In regard to the style adopted by the half-breeds, however, we have no doubt. They fight any way and every way, without reference to rules at all; and really, although we may bring ourselves into contempt by admitting the fact, we think they are quite right. No doubt the best course of action is not to fight; but if a man does find it necessary to do so, surely the wisest plan is to get it over at once (as the dentist suggested to his timorous patient), and to do it in the most effectual manner.

Be this as it may, Baptiste flew at Hugh, and alighted upon him, not head first, or fist first, or feet first, or anything first, but altogether--in a heap as it were; fist, feet, knees, nails, and teeth, all taking effect at one and the same time, with a force so irresistible that the next moment they both rolled in the dust together.

For a minute or so they struggled and kicked like a couple of serpents, and then, bounding to their feet again, they began to perform a war-dance round each other, revolving their fists at the same time in, we presume, the most approved fashion. Owing to his bulk and natural laziness, which rendered jumping about like a jack-in-the-box impossible, Hugh Mathison preferred to stand on the defensive; while his lighter opponent, giving way to the natural bent of his mercurial temperament and corporeal predilections, comported himself in a manner that cannot be likened to anything mortal or immortal, human or inhuman, unless it be to an insane cat, whose veins ran wild-fire instead of blood. Or perhaps we might liken him to that ingenious piece of firework called a zigzag cracker, which explodes with unexpected and repeated suddenness, changing its position in a most perplexing manner at every crack. Baptiste, after the first onset, danced backwards with surprising lightness, glaring at his adversary the while, and rapidly revolving his fists as before mentioned; then a terrific yell was heard; his head, arms, and legs became a sort of whirling conglomerate; the spot on which he danced was suddenly vacant, and at the same moment Mathison received a bite, a scratch, a dab on the nose, and a kick on the stomach all at once. Feeling that it was impossible to plant a well-directed blow on such an assailant, he waited for the next onslaught; and the moment he saw the explosive object flying through the air towards him, he met it with a crack of his heavy fist, which, happening to take effect in the middle of the chest, drove it backwards with about as much velocity as it had approached, and poor Baptiste measured his length on the ground.

"Oh, pauvre chien!" cried the spectators, "c'est fini!" "Not yet," cried Baptiste, as he sprang with a scream to his feet again, and began his dance with redoubled energy, just as if all that had gone before was a mere sketch--a sort of playful rehearsal, as it were, of what was now to follow. At this moment Hugh stumbled over a canoe-paddle, and fell headlong into Baptiste's arms, as he was in the very act of making one of his violent descents. This unlooked-for occurrence brought them both to a sudden pause, partly from necessity and partly from surprise. Out of this state Baptiste recovered first, and taking advantage of the accident, threw Mathison heavily to the ground. He rose quickly, however, and renewed the light with freshened vigour.

Just at this moment a passionate growl was heard, and old Mr. Kennedy rushed out of the fort in a towering rage.

Now Mr. Kennedy had no reason whatever for being angry. He was only a visitor at the fort, and so had no concern in the behaviour of those connected with it. He was not even in the Company's service now, and could not, therefore, lay claim, as one of its officers, to any right to interfere with its men. But Mr. Kennedy never acted much from reason; impulse was generally his guiding-star. He had, moreover, been an absolute monarch, and a commander of men, for many years past in his capacity of fur-trader. Being, as we have said, a powerful, fiery man, he had ruled very much by means of brute force--a species of suasion, by the way, which is too common among many of the gentlemen (?) in the employment of the Hudson's Bay Company. On hearing, therefore, that the men were fighting in front of the fort, Mr. Kennedy rushed out in a towering rage.

"Oh, you precious blackguards!" he cried, running up to the combatants, while with flashing eyes he gazed first at one and then at the other, as if uncertain on which to launch his ire. "Have you no place in the world to fight but here? eh, blackguards?"

"O monsieur," said Baptiste, lowering his hands, and assuming that politeness of demeanour which seems inseparable from French blood, however much mixed with baser fluid, "I was just giving that dog a thrashing, monsieur."

"Go!" cried Mr. Kennedy in a voice of thunder, turning to Hugh, who still stood in a pugilistic attitude, with very little respect in his looks.

Hugh hesitated to obey the order; but Mr. Kennedy continued to advance, grinding his teeth and working his fingers convulsively, as if he longed to lay violent hold of the Orkneyman's swelled nose; so he retreated in his uncertainty, but still with his face to the foe. As has been already said, the Assiniboine River flows within a hundred yards of the gate of Fort Garry. The two men, in their combat, had approached pretty near to the bank, at a place where it descends somewhat precipitately into the stream. It was towards this bank that Hugh Mathison was now retreating, crab fashion, followed by Mr. Kennedy, and both of them so taken up with each other that neither perceived the fact until Hugh's heel struck against a stone just at the moment that Mr. Kennedy raised his clenched fist in a threatening attitude. The effect of this combination was to pitch the poor man head over heels down the bank, into a row of willow bushes, through which, as he rolled with great speed, he went with a loud crash, and shot head first, like a startled alligator, into the water, amid a roar of laughter from his comrades and the people belonging to the fort; most of whom, attracted by the fight, were now assembled on the banks of the river.

Mr. Kennedy's wrath vanished immediately, and he joined in the laughter; but his face instantly changed when he beheld Hugh sputtering in deep water, and heard some one say that he could not swim.

"What! can't swim?" he exclaimed, running down the bank to the edge of the water. Baptiste was before him, however. In a moment he plunged in up to the neck, stretched forth his arm, grasped Hugh by

the hair, and dragged him to the land.

CHAPTER VIII.

Farewell to Kate--Departure of the brigade--Charley becomes a voyageur.

On the following day at noon, the spot on which the late combat had taken place became the theatre of a stirring and animated scene. Fort Garry, and the space between it and the river, swarmed with voyageurs, dressed in their cleanest, newest, and most brilliant costume. The large boats for the north, six in number, lay moored to the river's bank, laden with bales of furs, and ready to start on their long voyage. Young men, who had never been on the road before, stood with animated looks watching the operations of the guides as they passed critical examination upon their boats, overhauled the oars to see that they were in good condition, or with crooked knives (a species of instrument in the use of which voyageurs and natives are very expert) polished off the top of a mast, the blade of an oar, or the handle of a tiller. Old men, who had passed their lives in similar occupations, looked on in silence--some standing with their heads bent on their bosoms, and an expression of sadness about their faces, as if the scene recalled some mournful event of their early life, or possibly reminded them of wild, joyous scenes of other days, when the blood coursed warmly in their young veins, and the strong muscles sprang lightly to obey their will; when the work they had to do was hard, and the sleep that followed it was sound--scenes and days that were now gone by for ever. Others reclined against the wooden fence, their arms crossed, their thin white hair waving gently in the breeze, and a kind smile playing on their sunburned faces, as they observed the swagger and coxcombry of the younger men, or watched the gambols of several dark-eyed little children--embryo buffalo-hunters and voyageurs--whose mothers had brought them to the fort to get a last kiss from papa, and witness the departure of the boats.

Several tender scenes were going on in out-of-the-way places--in angles of the walls and bastions, or behind the gates--between youthful couples about to be separated for a season. Interesting scenes these of pathos and pleasantry--a combination of soft glances and affectionate fervent assurances; alternate embraces (that were apparently received with reluctance, but actually with delight, and proffers of pieces of calico and beads and other trinkets (received both apparently and actually with extreme satisfaction) as souvenirs of happy days that were past), and pledges of unalterable constancy and bright hope in days that were yet to come.

A little apart from the others, a youth and a girl might be seen sauntering slowly towards the copse beyond the stable. These were Charley Kennedy and his sister Kate, who had retired from the bustling scene to take a last short walk together, ere they separated, it might be for years, perhaps for ever! Charley held Kate's hand, while her sweet little head rested on his shoulder.

"O Charley, Charley, my own dear, darling Charley, I'm quite

miserable, and you ought not to go away; it's very wrong, and I don't mind a bit what you say, I shall die if you leave me!" And Kate pressed him tightly to her heart, and sobbed in the depth of her woe. "Now, Kate, my darling, don't go on so! You know I can't help it--"

"I _don't_ know," cried Kate, interrupting him, and speaking vehemently--" I don't know, and I don't believe, and I don't care for anything at all; it's very hard-hearted of you, and wrong, and not right, and I'm just quite wretched!"

Poor Kate was undoubtedly speaking the absolute truth; for a more disconsolate and wretched look of weebegone misery was never seen on so sweet and tender and lovable a little face before. Her blue eyes swam in two lakes of pure crystal, that overflowed continually; her mouth, which was usually round, had become an elongated oval; and her nut-brown hair fell in dishevelled masses over her soft cheeks.

"O Charley," she continued, "why _won't_ you stay?"

"Listen to me, dearest Kate," said Charley, in a very husky voice. "It's too late to draw back now, even if I wished to do so; and you don't consider, darling, that I'll be back again soon. Besides, I'm a man now, Kate, and I must make my own bread. Who ever heard of a man being supported by his old father."

"Well, but can't you do that here?"

"No, don't interrupt me, Kate," said Charley, kissing her forehead; "I'm quite satisfied with _two short_ legs, and have no desire whatever to make my bread on the top of _three long_ ones. Besides, you know I can write to you."

"But you won't; you'll forget."

"No, indeed, I will not. I'll write you long letters about all that I see and do; and you shall write long letters to me about--"

"Stop, Charley," cried Kate; "I won't listen to you. I hate to think of it."

And her tears burst forth again with fresh violence. This time Charley's heart sank too. The lump in his throat all but choked him; so he was fain to lay his head upon Kate's heaving bosom, and weep along with her.

For a few minutes they remained silent, when a slight rustling in the bushes was heard. In another moment a tall, broad-shouldered, gentlemanly man, dressed in black, stood before them. Charley and Kate, on seeing this personage, arose, and wiping the tears from their eyes, gave a sad smile as they shook hands with their clergyman.

"My poor children," said Mr. Addison, affectionately, "I know well why your hearts are sad. May God bless and comfort you! I saw you enter the wood, and came to bid you farewell, Charley, my dear boy, as I shall not have another opportunity of doing so."

"O dear Mr. Addison," cried Kate, grasping his hand in both of hers, and gazing imploringly up at him through a perfect wilderness of

ringlets and tears, "do prevail upon Charley to stay at home; please do!"

Mr. Addison could scarcely help smiling at the poor girl's extreme earnestness.

"I fear, my sweet child, that it is too late now to attempt to dissuade Charley. Besides, he goes with the consent of his father; and I am inclined to think that a change of life for a short time may do him good. Come, Kate, cheer up! Charley will return to us again ere long, improved, I trust, both physically and mentally."

Kate did not cheer up, but she dried her eyes, and endeavoured to look more composed; while Mr. Addison took Charley by the hand, and, as they walked slowly through the wood, gave him much earnest advice and counsel.

The clergyman's manner was peculiar. With a large, warm, generous heart, he possessed an enthusiastic nature, a quick, brusque manner, and a loud voice, which, when his spirit was influenced by the strong emotions of pity or anxiety for the souls of his flock, sunk into a deep soft bass of the most thrilling earnestness. He belonged to the Church of England, but conducted service very much in the Presbyterian form, as being more suited to his mixed congregation. After a long conversation with Charley, he concluded by saying--

"I do not care to say much to you about being kind and obliging to all whom you may meet with during your travels, nor about the dangers to which you will be exposed by being thrown into the company of wild and reckless, perhaps very wicked, men. There is but one incentive to every good, and one safeguard against all evil, my boy, and that is the love of God. You may perhaps forget much that I have said to you; but remember this, Charley, if you would be happy in this world, and have a good hope for the next, centre your heart's affection on our blessed Lord Jesus Christ; for believe me, boy, His heart's affection is centred upon you."

As Mr. Addison spoke, a loud hello from Mr. Kennedy apprised them that their time was exhausted, and that the boats were ready to start. Charley sprang towards Kate, locked her in a long, passionate embrace, and then, forgetting Mr. Addison altogether in his haste, ran out of the wood, and hastened towards the scene of departure.

"Good-bye, Charley!" cried Harry Somerville, running up to his friend and giving him a warm grasp of the hand. "Don't forget me, Charley. I wish I were going with you, with all my heart; but I'm an unlucky dog. Good-bye." The senior clerk and Peter Mactavish had also a kindly word and a cheerful farewell for him as he hurried past.

"Good-bye, Charley, my lad!" said old Mr. Kennedy, in an excessively loud voice, as if by such means he intended to crush back some unusual but very powerful feelings that had a peculiar influence on a certain lump in his throat. "Good-bye, my lad; don't forget to write to your old--Hang it!" said the old man, brushing his coat-sleeve somewhat violently across his eyes, and turning abruptly round as Charley left him and sprang into the boat--"I say, Grant, I--I--What are you staring at, eh?" The latter part of his speech was addressed, in an angry tone, to an innocent voyageur, who happened accidentally to confront him at the moment.

"Come along, Kennedy," said Mr. Grant, interposing, and grasping his excited friend by the arm--"come with me."

"Ah, to be sure!--yes," said he, looking over his shoulder and waving a last adieu to Charley, "Good-bye, God bless you, my dear boy!--I say, Grant, come along; quick, man, and let's have a pipe--yes, let's have a pipe." Mr. Kennedy, essaying once more to crush back his rebellious feelings, strode rapidly up the bank, and entering the house, sought to overwhelm his sorrow in smoke: in which attempt he failed.

CHAPTER IX.

The voyage--The encampment--A surprise.

It was a fine sight to see the boats depart for the north. It was a thrilling, heart-stirring sight to behold these picturesque, athletic men, on receiving the word of command from their guides, spring lightly into the long, heavy boats; to see them let the oars fall into the water with a loud splash, and then, taking their seats, give way with a will, knowing that the eyes of friends and sweethearts and rivals were bent earnestly upon them. It was a splendid sight to see boat after boat shoot out from the landing-place, and cut through the calm bosom of the river, as the men bent their sturdy backs until the thick oars creaked and groaned on the gunwales and flashed in the stream, more and more vigorously at each successive stroke, until their friends on the bank, who were anxious to see the last of them, had to run faster and faster in order to keep up with them, as the rowers warmed at their work, and made the water gurgle at the bows--their bright blue and scarlet and white trappings reflected in the dark waters in broken masses of colour, streaked with long lines of shining ripples, as if they floated on a lake of liquid rainbows. And it was a glorious thing to hear the wild, plaintive song, led by one clear, sonorous voice, that rang out full and strong in the still air, while at the close of every two lines the whole brigade burst into a loud, enthusiastic chorus, that rolled far and wide over the smooth waters--telling of their approach to settlers beyond the reach of vision in advance, and floating faintly back, a last farewell, to the listening ears of fathers, mothers, wives, and sisters left behind. And it was interesting to observe how, as the rushing boats sped onwards past the cottages on shore, groups of men and women and children stood before the open doors and waved adieu, while ever and anon a solitary voice rang louder than the others in the chorus, and a pair of dark eyes grew brighter as a voyageur swept past his home, and recognised his little ones screaming farewell, and seeking to attract their _sire's_ attention by tossing their chubby arms or flourishing round their heads the bright vermilion blades of canoe-paddles. It was interesting, too, to hear the men shout as they ran a small rapid which occurs about the lower part of the settlement, and dashed in full career up to the Lower Fort--which stands about twenty miles down the river from Fort Garry--and then sped onward again with unabated energy, until they passed the Indian settlement, with its scattered wooden buildings and its small church; passed the last cottage on the bank; passed the low swampy land at the river's mouth;

and emerged at last as evening closed, upon the wide, calm, sea-like bosom of Lake Winnipeg.

Charley saw and heard all this during the whole of that long, exciting afternoon, and as he heard and saw it his heart swelled as if it would burst its prison-bars, his voice rang out wildly in the choruses, regardless alike of tune and time, and his spirit boiled within him as he quaffed the first sweet draught of a rover's life--a life in the woods, the wild, free, enchanting woods, where all appeared in _his_ eyes bright, and sunny, and green, and beautiful!

As the sun's last rays sunk in the west, and the clouds, losing their crimson hue, began gradually to fade into gray, the boats' heads were turned landward. In a few seconds they grounded on a low point, covered with small trees and bushes which stretched out into the lake. Here Louis Peltier had resolved to bivouac for the night.

"Now then, mes garcons," he exclaimed, leaping ashore, and helping to drag the boat a little way on to the beach, "vite, vite! a terre, a terre!--Take the kettle, Pierre, and let's have supper."

Pierre needed no second bidding. He grasped a large tin kettle and an axe, with which he hurried into a clump of trees. Laying down the kettle, which he had previously filled with water from the lake, he singled out a dead tree, and with three powerful blows of his axe, brought it to the ground. A few additional strokes cut it up into logs, varying from three to five feet in length, which he piled together, first placing a small bundle of dry grass and twigs beneath them, and a few splinters of wood which he cut from off one of the logs. Having accomplished this, Pierre took a flint and steel out of a gaily ornamented pouch which depended from his waist, and which went by the name of a fire-bag in consequence of its containing the implements for procuring that element. It might have been as appropriately named tobacco-box or smoking-bag, however, seeing that such things had more to do with it, if possible, than fire. Having struck a spark, which he took captive by means of a piece of tinder, he placed in the centre of a very dry handful of soft grass, and whirled it rapidly round his head, thereby producing a current of air, which blew the spark into a flame; which when applied, lighted the grass and twigs; and so, in a few minutes, a blazing fire roared up among the trees--spouted volumes of sparks into the air, like a gigantic squib, which made it quite a marvel that all the bushes in the neighbourhood were not burnt up at once--glared out red and fierce upon the rippling water, until it became, as it were, red-hot in the neighbourhood of the boats, and caused the night to become suddenly darker by contrast; the night reciprocating the compliment, as it grew later, by causing the space around the fire to glow brighter and brighter, until it became a brilliant chamber, surrounded by walls of the blackest ebony.

While Pierre was thus engaged there were at least ten voyageurs similarly occupied. Ten steels were made instrumental in creating ten sparks, which were severally captured by ten pieces of tinder, and whirled round by ten lusty arms, until ten flames were produced, and ten fires sprang up and flared wildly on the busy scene that had a few hours before been so calm, so solitary, and so peaceful, bathed in the soft beams of the setting sun.

In less than half-an-hour the several camps were completed, the

kettles boiling over the fires, the men smoking in every variety of attitude, and talking loudly. It was a cheerful scene; and so Charley thought as he reclined in his canvas tent, the opening of which faced the fire, and enabled him to see all that was going on.

Pierre was standing over the great kettle, dancing round it, and making sudden plunges with a stick into it, in the desperate effort to stir its boiling contents--desperate, because the fire was very fierce and large, and the flames seem to take a fiendish pleasure in leaping up suddenly just under Pierre's nose, thereby endangering his beard, or shooting out between his legs and licking round them at most unexpected moments, when the light wind ought to have been blowing them quite in the opposite direction; and then, as he danced round to the other side to avoid them, wheeling about and roaring viciously in his face, until it seemed as if the poor man would be roasted long before the supper was boiled. Indeed, what between the ever-changing and violent flames, the rolling smoke, the steam from the kettle, the showering sparks, and the man's own wild grimaces and violent antics, Pierre seemed to Charley like a raging demon, who danced not only round, but above, and on, and through, and in the flames, as if they were his natural element, in which he took special delight.

Quite close to the tent the massive form of Louis the guide lay extended, his back supported by the stump of a tree, his eyes blinking sleepily at the blaze, and his beloved pipe hanging from his lips, while wreaths of smoke encircled his head. Louis's day's work was done. Few could do a better; and when his work was over, Louis always acted on the belief that his position and his years entitled him to rest, and took things very easy in consequence.

Six of the boat's crew sat in a semicircle beside the guide and fronting the fire, each paying particular attention to his pipe, and talking between the puffs to anyone who chose to listen.

Suddenly Pierre vanished into the smoke and flames altogether, whence in another moment he issued, bearing in his hand the large tin kettle, which he deposited triumphantly at the feet of his comrades.

"Now, then," cried Pierre.

It was unnecessary to have said even that much by way of invitation. Voyageurs do not require to have their food pressed upon them after a hard day's work. Indeed it was as much as they could do to refrain from laying violent hands on the kettle long before their worthy cook considered its contents sufficiently done.

Charley sat in company with Mr. Park--a chief factor, on his way to Norway House. Gibault, one of the men who acted as their servant, had placed a kettle of hot tea before them, which, with several slices of buffalo tongue, a lump of pemmican, and some hard biscuit and butter, formed their evening meal. Indeed, we may add that these viands, during a great part of the voyage, constituted their every meal. In fact, they had no variety in their fare, except a wild duck or two now and then, and a goose when they chanced to shoot one.

Charley sipped a pannikin of tea as he reclined on his blanket, and being somewhat fatigued in consequence of his exertions and excitement during the day, said nothing. Mr. Park, for the same

reasons, besides being naturally taciturn, was equally mute, so they both enjoyed in silence the spectacle of the men eating their supper. And it was a sight worth seeing.

Their food consisted of robbiboo, a compound of flour, pemmican, and water, boiled to the consistency of very thick soup. Though not a species of food that would satisfy the fastidious taste of an epicure, robbiboo is, nevertheless, very wholesome, exceedingly nutritious, and withal palatable. Pemmican, its principal component, is made of buffalo flesh, which fully equals (some think greatly excels) beef. The recipe for making it is as follows:-First, kill your buffalo--a matter of considerable difficulty, by the way, as doing so requires you to travel to the buffalo-grounds, to arm yourself with a gun, and mount a horse, on which you have to gallop, perhaps, several miles over rough ground and among badger-holes at the imminent risk of breaking your neck. Then you have to run up alongside of a buffalo and put a ball through his heart, which, apart from the murderous nature of the action, is a difficult thing to do. But we will suppose that you have killed your buffalo. Then you must skin him; then cut him up, and slice the flesh into layers, which must be dried in the sun. At this stage of the process you have produced a substance which in the fur countries goes by the name of dried meat, and is largely used as an article of food. As its name implies, it is very dry, and it is also very tough, and very undesirable if one can manage to procure anything better. But to proceed. Having thus prepared dried meat, lay a quantity of it on a flat stone, and take another stone, with which pound it into shreds. You must then take the animal's hide, while it is yet new, and make bags of it about two feet and a half long by a foot and a half broad. Into this put the pounded meat loosely. Melt the fat of your buffalo over a fire, and when quite liquid pour it into the bag until full; mix the contents well together; sew the whole up before it cools, and you have a bag of pemmican of about ninety pounds weight. This forms the chief food of the voyageur, in consequence of its being the largest possible quantity of sustenance compressed into the smallest possible space, and in an extremely convenient, portable shape. It will keep fresh for years, and has been much used, in consequence, by the heroes of arctic discovery, in their perilous journeys along the shores of the frozen sea.

The voyageurs used no plate. Men who travel in these countries become independent of many things that are supposed to be necessary here. They sat in a circle round the kettle, each man armed with a large wooden or pewter spoon, with which he ladled the robbiboo down his capacious throat, in a style that not only caused Charley to laugh, but afterwards threw him into a deep reverie on the powers of appetite in general, and the strength of voyageur stomachs in particular.

At first the keen edge of appetite induced the men to eat in silence; but as the contents of the kettle began to get low, their tongues loosened, and at last, when the kettles were emptied and the pipes filled, fresh logs thrown on the fires, and their limbs stretched out around them, the babel of English, French, and Indian that arose was quite overwhelming. The middle-aged men told long stories of what they had done; the young men boasted of what they meant to do; while the more aged smiled, nodded, smoked their pipes, put in a word or two as occasion offered, and listened. While they conversed the quick ears of one of the men of Charley's camp detected some unusual

sound.

"Hist!" said he, turning his head aside slightly, in a listening attitude, while his comrades suddenly ceased their noisy laugh.

"Do ducks travel in canoes hereabouts?" said the man, after a moment's silence; "for, if not, there's someone about to pay us a visit. I would wager my best gun that I hear the stroke of paddles."

"If your ears had been sharper, Francois, you might have heard them some time ago," said the guide, shaking the ashes out of his pipe and refilling it for the third time.

"Ah, Louis, I do not pretend to such sharp ears as you possess, nor to such sharp wit either. But who do you think can be en route so late?"

"That my wit does not enable me to divine," said Louis; "but if you have any faith in the sharpness of your eyes, I would recommend you to go to the beach and see, as the best and shortest way of finding out."

By this time the men had risen, and were peering out into the gloom in the direction whence the sound came, while one or two sauntered down to the margin of the lake to meet the new-comers.

"Who can it be, I wonder?" said Charley, who had left the tent, and was now standing beside the guide.

"Difficult to say, monsieur. Perhaps Injins, though I thought there were none here just now. But I'm not surprised that we've attracted something to us. Livin' creeturs always come nat'rally to the light, and there's plenty of fire on the point to-night."

"Rather more than enough," replied Charley, abruptly, as a slight motion of wind sent the flames curling round his head and singed off his eye-lashes. "Why, Louis, it's my firm belief that if I ever get to the end of this journey, I'll not have a hair left on my head."

Louis smiled.

"O monsieur, you will learn to observe things before you have been long in the wilderness. If you will edge round to leeward of the fire, you can't expect it to respect you."

Just at this moment a loud hurrah rang through the copse, and Harry Somerville sprang over the fire into the arms of Charley, who received him with a hug and a look of unutterable amazement.

"Charley, my boy!"

"Harry Somerville, I declare!"

For at least five minutes Charley could not recover his composure sufficiently to declare anything else, but stood with open mouth and eyes, and elevated eyebrows, looking at his young friend, who capered and danced round the fire in a manner that threw the cook's performances in that line quite into the shade, while he continued all the time to shout fragments of sentences that were quite

unintelligible to anyone. It was evident that Harry was in a state of immense delight at something unknown save to himself, but which, in the course of a few minutes, was revealed to his wondering friends.

"Charley, I'm going! hurrah!" and he leaped about in a manner that induced Charley to say he would not only be going but very soon gone, if he did not keep further away from the fire.

"Yes, Charley, I'm going with you! I upset the stool, tilted the ink-bottle over the invoice-book, sent the poker almost through the back of the fireplace, and smashed Tom Whyte's best whip on the back of the 'noo 'oss' as I galloped him over the plains for the last time: all for joy, because I'm going with you, Charley, my darling!"

Here Harry suddenly threw his arms round his friend's neck, meditating an embrace. As both boys were rather fond of using their muscles violently, the embrace degenerated into a wrestle, which caused them to threaten complete destruction to the fire as they staggered in front of it, and ended in their tumbling against the tent and nearly breaking its poles and fastenings, to the horror and indignation of Mr. Park, who was smoking his pipe within, quietly waiting till Harry's superabundant glee was over, that he might get an explanation of his unexpected arrival among them.

"Ah, they will be good voyageurs!" cried one of the men, as he looked on at this scene.

"Oui, oui! good boys, active lads," replied the others, laughing. The two boys rose hastily.

"Yes," cried Harry, breathless, but still excited, "I'm going all the way, and a great deal farther. I'm going to hunt buffaloes in the Saskatchewan, and grizzly bears in the--the--in fact everywhere! I'm going down the Mackenzie River--I'm going mad, I believe;" and Harry gave another caper and another shout, and tossed his cap high into the air. Having been recklessly tossed, it came down into the fire. When it went in, it was dark blue; but when Harry dashed into the flames in consternation to save it, it came out of a rich brown colour.

"Now, youngster," said Mr. Park, "when you've done capering, I should like to ask you one or two questions. What brought you here?"

"A canoe," said Harry, inclined to be impudent.

"Oh, and pray for what purpose have you come here?"

"These are my credentials," handing him a letter.

Mr. Park opened the note and read.

"Ah! oh! Saskatchewan--hum--yes--outpost--wild boy--just so--keep him at it--ay, fit for nothing else. So," said Mr. Park, folding the paper, "I find that Mr. Grant has sent you to take the place of a young gentleman we expected to pick up at Norway House, but who is required elsewhere; and that he wishes you to see a good deal of rough life--to be made a trader of, in fact. Is that your desire?"

"That's the very ticket!" replied Harry, scarcely able to restrain

his delight at the prospect.

"Well, then, you had better get supper and turn in, for you'll have to begin your new life by rising at three o'clock to-morrow morning. Have you got a tent?"

"Yes," said Harry, pointing to his canoe, which had been brought to the fire and turned bottom up by the two Indians to whom it belonged, and who were reclining under its shelter enjoying their pipes, and watching with looks of great gravity the doings of Harry and his friend.

"_That_ will return whence it came to-morrow. Have you no other?"

"Oh yes," said Harry, pointing to the overhanging branches of a willow close at hand, "lots more."

Mr. Park smiled grimly, and, turning on his heel, re-entered the tent and continued his pipe, while Harry flung himself down beside Charley under the bark canoe.

This species of "tent" is, however, by no means a perfect one. An Indian canoe is seldom three feet broad--frequently much narrower--so that it only affords shelter for the body as far down as the waist, leaving the extremities exposed. True, one _may_ double up as nearly as possible into half one's length, but this is not a desirable position to maintain throughout an entire night. Sometimes, when the weather is _very_ bad, an additional protection is procured by leaning several poles against the bottom of the canoe, on the weather side, in such a way as to slope considerably over the front; and over these are spread pieces of birch bark or branches and moss, so as to form a screen, which is an admirable shelter. But this involves too much time and labour to be adopted during a voyage, and is only done when the travellers are under the necessity of remaining for some time in one place.

The canoe in which Harry arrived was a pretty large one, and looked so comfortable when arranged for the night that Charley resolved to abandon his own tent and Mr. Park's society, and sleep with his friend.

"I'll sleep with you, Harry, my boy," said he, after Harry had explained to him in detail the cause of his being sent away from Red River; which was no other than that a young gentleman, as Mr. Park said, who _was_ to have gone, had been ordered elsewhere.

"That's right, Charley; spread out our blankets, while I get some supper, like a good fellow." Harry went in search of the kettle while his friend prepared their bed. First, he examined the ground on which the canoe lay, and found that the two Indians had already taken possession of the only level places under it. "Humph!" he ejaculated, half inclined to rouse them up, but immediately dismissed the idea as unworthy of a voyageur. Besides, Charley was an amiable, unselfish fellow, and would rather have lain on the top of a dozen stumps than have made himself comfortable at the expense of anyone else.

He paused a moment to consider. On one side was a hollow "that" (as he soliloquised to himself) "would break the back of a buffalo." On the other side were a dozen little stumps surrounding three very

prominent ones, that threatened destruction to the ribs of anyone who should venture to lie there. But Charley did not pause to consider long. Seizing his axe, he laid about him vigorously with the head of it, and in a few seconds destroyed all the stumps, which he carefully collected, and, along with some loose moss and twigs, put into the hollow, and so filled it up. Having improved things thus far, he rose and strode out of the circle of light into the wood. In a few minutes he reappeared, bearing a young spruce fir tree on his shoulder, which with the axe he stripped of its branches. These branches were flat in form, and elastic--admirably adapted for making a bed on; and when Charley spread them out under the canoe in a pile of about four inches in depth by four feet broad and six feet long, the stumps and the hollow were overwhelmed altogether. He then ran to Mr. Park's tent, and fetched thence a small flat bundle covered with oilcloth and tied with a rope. Opening this, he tossed out its contents, which were two large and very thick blankets--one green, the other white; a particularly minute feather pillow, a pair of moccasins, a broken comb, and a bit of soap. Then he opened a similar bundle containing Harry's bed, which he likewise tossed out; and then kneeling down, he spread the two white blankets on the top of the branches, the two green blankets above these, and the two pillows at the top, as far under the shelter of the canoe as he could push them. Having completed the whole in a manner that would have done credit to a chambermaid, he continued to sit on his knees, with his hands in his pockets, smiling complacently, and saying, "Capital--first-rate!"

"Here we are, Charley. Have a second supper--do!"

Harry placed the smoking kettle by the head of the bed, and squatting down beside it, began to eat as only a boy can eat who has had nothing since breakfast.

Charley attacked the kettle too--as he said, "out of sympathy," although he "wasn't hungry a bit." And really, for a man who was not hungry, and had supped half-an-hour before, the appetite of sympathy was wonderfully strong.

But Harry's powers of endurance were now exhausted. He had spent a long day of excessive fatigue and excitement, and having wound it up with a heavy supper, sleep began to assail him with a fell ferocity that nothing could resist. He yawned once or twice, and sat on the bed blinking unmeaningly at the fire, as if he had something to say to it which he could not recollect just then. He nodded violently, much to his own surprise, once or twice, and began to address remarks to the kettle instead of to his friend. "I say, Charley, this won't do. I'm off to bed!" and suiting the action to the word, he took off his coat and placed it on his pillow. He then removed his moccasins, which were wet, and put on a dry pair; and this being all that is ever done in the way of preparation before going to bed in the woods, he lay down and pulled the green blankets over him.

Before doing so, however, Harry leaned his head on his hands and prayed. This was the one link left of the chain of habit with which he had left home. Until the period of his departure for the wild scenes of the Northwest, Harry had lived in a quiet, happy home in the West Highlands of Scotland, where he had been surrounded by the benign influences of a family the members of which were united by the sweet bonds of Christian love--bonds which were strengthened by the additional tie of amiability of disposition. From childhood he had

been accustomed to the routine of a pious and well-regulated household, where the Bible was perused and spoken of with an interest that indicated a genuine hungering and thirsting after righteousness, and where the name of JESUS sounded often and sweetly on the ear. Under such training, Harry, though naturally of a wild, volatile disposition, was deeply and irresistibly impressed with a reverence for sacred things, which, now that he was thousands of miles away from his peaceful home, clung to him with the force of old habit and association, despite the jeers of comrades and the evil influences and ungodliness by which he was surrounded. It is true that he was not altogether unhurt by the withering indifference to God that he beheld on all sides. Deep impression is not renewal of heart. But early training in the path of Christian love saved him many a deadly fall. It guarded him from many of the grosser sins, into which other boys, who had merely broken away from the _restraints_ of home too easily fell. It twined round him--as the ivy encircles the oak--with a soft, tender, but powerful grasp, that held him back when he was tempted to dash aside all restraint; and held him up when, in the weakness of human nature, he was about to fall. It exerted its benign sway over him in the silence of night, when his thoughts reverted to home, and during his waking hours, when he wandered from scene to scene in the wide wilderness; and in after years, when sin prevailed, and intercourse with rough men had worn off much of at least the superficial amiability of his character, and to some extent blunted the finer feelings of his nature, it clung faintly to him still, in the memory of his mother's gentle look and tender voice, and never forsook him altogether. Home had a blessed and powerful influence on Harry. May God bless such homes, where the ruling power is _love!_ God bless and multiply such homes in the earth! Were there more of them there would be fewer heart-broken mothers to weep over the memory of the blooming, manly boys they sent away to foreign climes--with trembling hearts but high hopes--and never saw them more. They were vessels launched upon the troubled sea of time, with stout timbers, firm masts, and gallant sails--with all that was necessary above and below, from stem to stern, for battling with the billows of adverse fortune, for stemming the tide of opposition, for riding the storms of persecution, or bounding with a press of canvas before the gales of prosperity; but without the rudder--without the guiding principle that renders the great power of plank and sail and mast available; with which the vessel moves obedient to the owner's will, without which it drifts about with every current, and sails along with every shifting wind that blows. Yes, may the best blessings of prosperity and peace rest on such families, whose bread, cast continually on the waters, returns to them after many days.

After Harry had lain down, Charley, who did not feel inclined for repose, sauntered to the margin of the lake, and sat down upon a rock.

It was a beautiful, calm evening. The moon shone faintly through a mass of heavy clouds, casting a pale light on the waters of Lake Winnipeg, which stretched, without a ripple, out to the distant horizon. The great fresh-water lakes of America bear a strong resemblance to the sea. In storms the waves rise mountains high, and break with heavy, sullen roar upon a beach composed in many places of sand and pebbles; while they are so large that one not only looks out to a straight horizon, but may even sail _out of sight of land_ altogether.

As Charley sat resting his head on his hand, and listening to the soft hiss that the ripples made upon the beach, he felt all the solemnising influence that steals irresistibly over the mind as we sit on a still night gazing out upon the moonlit sea. His thoughts were sad; for he thought of Kate, and his mother and father, and the home he was now leaving. He remembered all that he had ever done to injure or annoy the dear ones he was leaving; and it is strange how much alive our consciences become when we are unexpectedly or suddenly removed from those with whom we have lived and held daily intercourse. How bitterly we reproach ourselves for harsh words, unkind actions; and how intensely we long for one word more with them, one fervent embrace, to prove at once that all we have ever said or done was not meant ill, and, at any rate, is deeply, sincerely repented of now! As Charley looked up into the starry sky, his mind recurred to the parting words of Mr. Addison. With uplifted hands and a full heart, he prayed that God would bless, for Jesus' sake, the beloved ones in Red River, but especially Kate; for whether he prayed or meditated, Charley's thoughts always ended with Kate.

A black cloud passed across the moon, and reminded him that but a few hours of the night remained; so hastening up to the camp again, he lay gently down beside his friend, and drew the green blanket over him.

In the camp all was silent. The men had chosen their several beds according to fancy, under the shadow of a bush or tree. The fires had burned low--so low that it was with difficulty Charley, as he lay, could discern the recumbent forms of the men, whose presence was indicated by the deep, soft, regular breathing of tired but, healthy constitutions. Sometimes a stray moonbeam shot through the leaves and branches, and cast a ghost-like, flickering light over the scene, which ever and anon was rendered more mysterious by a red flare of the fire as an ember fell, blazed up for an instant, and left all shrouded in greater darkness than before.

At first Charley continued his sad thoughts, staring all the while at the red embers of the expiring fire; but soon his eyes began to blink, and the stumps of trees began to assume the form of voyageurs, and voyageurs to look like stumps of trees. Then a moonbeam darted in, and Mr. Addison stood on the other side of the fire. At this sight Charley started, and Mr. Addison disappeared, while the boy smiled to think how he had been dreaming while only half asleep. Then Kate appeared, and seemed to smile on him; but another ember fell, and another red flame sprang up, and put her to flight too. Then a low sigh of wind rustled through the branches, and Charley felt sure that he saw Kate again coming through the woods, singing the low, soft tune that she was so fond of singing, because it was his own favourite air. But soon the air ceased; the fire faded away; so did the trees, and the sleeping voyageurs; Kate last of all dissolved, and Charley sank into a deep, untroubled slumber.

CHAPTER X.

Varieties, vexations, and vicissitudes.

Life is checkered--there is no doubt about that; whatever doubts a man may entertain upon other subjects, he can have none upon this, we feel quite certain. In fact, so true is it that we would not for a moment have drawn the reader's attention to it here, were it not that our experience of life in the backwoods corroborates the truth; and truth, however well corroborated, is none the worse of getting a little additional testimony now and then in this sceptical generation.

Life is checkered, then, undoubtedly. And life in the backwoods strengthens the proverb, for it is a peculiarly striking and remarkable specimen of life's variegated character.

There is a difference between sailing smoothly along the shores of Lake Winnipeg with favouring breezes, and being tossed on its surging billows by the howling of a nor'-west wind, that threatens destruction to the boat, or forces it to seek shelter on the shore. This difference is one of the checkered scenes of which we write, and one that was experienced by the brigade more than once during its passage across the lake.

Since we are dealing in truisms, it may not, perhaps, be out of place here to say that going to bed at night is not by any means getting up in the morning; at least so several of our friends found to be the case when the deep sonorous voice of Louis Peltier sounded through the camp on the following morning, just as a very faint, scarcely perceptible, light tinged the eastern sky.

"Leve, leve, leve!" he cried, "leve, leve, mes enfants!"

Some of Louis's infants replied to the summons in a way that would have done credit to a harlequin. One or two active little Canadians, on hearing the cry of the awful word leve, rose to their feet with a quick bound, as if they had been keeping up an appearance of sleep as a sort of practical joke all night, on purpose to be ready to leap as the first sound fell from the guide's lips. Others lay still, in the same attitude in which they had fallen asleep, having made up their minds, apparently, to lie there in spite of all the guides in the world. Not a few got slowly into the sitting position, their hair dishevelled, their caps awry, their eyes alternately winking very hard and staring awfully in the vain effort to keep open, and their whole physiognomy wearing an expression of blank stupidity that is peculiar to man when engaged in that struggle which occurs each morning as he endeavours to disconnect and shake off the entanglement of nightly dreams and the realities of the breaking day. Throughout the whole camp there was a low, muffled sound, as of men moving lazily, with broken whispers and disjointed sentences uttered in very deep, hoarse tones, mingled with confused, unearthly noises, which, upon consideration, sounded like prolonged yawns. Gradually these sounds increased, for the guide's leve is inexorable, and the voyageur's fate inevitable.

"Oh dear!--yei a--a--ow" (yawning); "hang your leve!"

"Oui, vraiment--yei a-a----ow--morbleu!"

"Eh, what's that? Oh, misere!"

"Tare an' ages!" (from an Irishman), "an' I had only got to slaape

yit! but--yei a--a----ow!"

French and Irish yawns are very similar, the only difference being, that whereas the Frenchman finishes the yawn resignedly, and springs to his legs, the Irishman finishes it with an energetic gasp, as if he were hurling it remonstratively into the face of Fate, turns round again and shuts his eyes doggedly--a piece of bravado which he knows is useless and of very short duration.

"Leve! leve!! leve!!!" There was no mistake this time in the tones of Louis's voice. "Embark, embark! vite, vite!"

The subdued sounds of rousing broke into a loud buzz of active preparation, as the men busied themselves in bundling up blankets, carrying down camp-kettles to the lake, launching the boats, kicking up lazy comrades, stumbling over and swearing at fallen trees which were not visible in the cold, uncertain light of the early dawn, searching hopelessly, among a tangled conglomeration of leaves and broken branches and crushed herbage, for lost pipes and missing tobacco-pouches.

"Hollo!" exclaimed Harry Somerville, starting suddenly from his sleeping posture, and unintentionally cramming his elbow into Charley's mouth, "I declare they're all up and nearly ready to start."

"That's no reason," replied Charley, "why you should knock out all my front teeth, is it?"

Just then Mr. Park issued from his tent, dressed and ready to step into his boat. He first gave a glance round the camp to see that all the men were moving, then he looked up through the trees to ascertain the present state and, if possible, the future prospects of the weather. Having come to a satisfactory conclusion on that head, he drew forth his pipe and began to fill it, when his eye fell on the two boys, who were still sitting up in their lairs, and staring idiotically at the place where the fire had been, as if the white ashes, half-burned logs, and bits of charcoal were a sight of the most novel and interesting character, that filled them with intense amazement.

Mr. Park could scarce forbear smiling.

"Hollo, youngsters, precious voyageurs _you'll_ make, to be sure, if this is the way you're going to begin. Don't you see that the things are all aboard, and we'll be ready to start in five minutes, and you sitting there with your neckcloths off?"

Mr. Park gave a slight sneer when he spoke of _neckcloths_, as if he thought, in the first place, that they were quite superfluous portions of attire, and in the second place, that having once put them on, the taking of them off at night was a piece of effeminacy altogether unworthy of a Nor'-wester.

Charley and Harry needed no second rebuke. It flashed instantly upon them that sleeping comfortably under their blankets when the men were bustling about the camp was extremely inconsistent with the heroic resolves of the previous day. They sprang up, rolled their blankets in the oil-cloths, which they fastened tightly with ropes; tied the

neckcloths, held in such contempt by Mr. Park, in a twinkling; threw on their coats, and in less than five minutes were ready to embark. They then found that they might have done things more leisurely, as the crews had not yet got all their traps on board; so they began to look around them, and discovered that each had omitted to pack up a blanket.

Very much crestfallen at their stupidity, they proceeded to untie the bundles again, when it became apparent to the eyes of Charley that his friend had put on his capote inside out; which had a peculiarly ragged and grotesque effect. These mistakes were soon rectified, and shouldering their beds, they carried them down to the boat and tossed them in. Meanwhile Mr. Park, who had been watching the movements of the boys with a peculiar smile, that filled them with confusion, went round the different camps to see that nothing was left behind. The men were all in their places with oars ready, and the boats floating on the calm water, a yard or two from shore, with the exception of the guide's boat, the stern of which still rested on the sand awaiting Mr. Park.

"Who does this belong to?" shouted that gentleman, holding up a cloth cap, part of which was of a mottled brown and part deep blue.

Harry instantly tore the covering from his head, and discovered that among his numerous mistakes he had put on the head-dress of one of the Indians who had brought him to the camp. To do him justice the cap was not unlike his own, excepting that it was a little more mottled and dirty in colour, besides being decorated with a gaudy but very much crushed and broken feather.

"You had better change with our friend here, I think," said Mr. Park, grinning from ear to ear, as he tossed the cap to its owner, while Harry handed the other to the Indian, amid the laughter of the crew.

"Never mind, boy," added Mr. Park, in an encouraging tone, "you'll make a voyageur yet.--Now then, lads, give way;" and with a nod to the Indians, who stood on the shore watching their departure, the trader sprang into the boat and took his place beside the two boys.

"Ho! sing, mes garçons," cried the guide, seizing the massive sweep and directing the boat out to sea.

At this part of the lake there occurs a deep bay or inlet, to save rounding which travellers usually strike straight across from point to point, making what is called in voyageur parlance a traverse. These traverses are subjects of considerable anxiety and frequently of delay to travellers, being sometimes of considerable extent, varying from four to five, and in such immense seas as Lake Superior, to fourteen miles. With boats, indeed, there is little to fear, as the inland craft of the fur-traders can stand a heavy sea, and often ride out a pretty severe storm; but it is far otherwise with the bark canoes that are often used in travelling. These frail craft can stand very little sea--their frames being made of thin flat slips of wood and sheets of bark, not more than a quarter of an inch thick, which are sewed together with the fibrous roots of the pine (called by the natives wattape), and rendered water-tight by means of melted gum. Although light and buoyant, therefore, and extremely useful in a country where portages are numerous, they require very tender usage; and when a traverse has to be made, the guides have always a grave

consultation, with some of the most sagacious among the men, as to the probability of the wind rising or falling--consultations which are more or less marked by anxiety and tediousness in proportion to the length of the traverse, the state of the weather and the courage or timidity of the guides.

On the present occasion there was no consultation, as has been already seen. The traverse was a short one, the morning fine, and the boats good. A warm glow began to overspread the horizon, giving promise of a splendid day, as the numerous oars dipped with a splash and a loud hiss into the water, and sent the boats leaping forth upon the white wave.

"Sing, sing!" cried the guide again, and clearing his throat, he began the beautiful quick-tuned canoe-song "Rose Blanche," to which the men chorused with such power of lungs that a family of plovers, which up to that time had stood in mute astonishment on a sandy point, tumbled precipitately into the water, from which they rose with a shrill, inexpressibly wild, plaintive cry, and fled screaming away to a more secure refuge among the reeds and sedges of a swamp. A number of ducks too, awakened by the unwonted sound, shot suddenly out from the concealment of their night's bivouac with erect heads and startled looks, sputtered heavily over the surface of their liquid bed, and rising into the air, flew in a wide circuit, with whistling wings, away from the scene of so much uproar and confusion.

The rough voices of the men grew softer and softer as the two Indians listened to the song of their departing friends, mellowing down and becoming more harmonious and more plaintive as the distance increased, and the boats grew smaller and smaller, until they were lost in the blaze of light that now bathed both water and sky in the eastern horizon, and began rapidly to climb the zenith, while the sweet tones became less and less audible as they floated faintly across the still water, and melted at last into the deep silence of the wilderness.

The two Indians still stood with downcast heads and listening ears, as if they loved the last echo of the dying music, while their grave, statue-like forms added to rather than detracted from, the solitude of the deserted scene.

CHAPTER XI.

Charley and Harry begin their sporting career without much success--Whisky-john catching.

The place in the boats usually allotted to gentlemen in the Company's service while travelling is the stern. Here the lading is so arranged as to form a pretty level hollow, where the flat bundles containing their blankets are placed, and a couch is thus formed that rivals Eastern effeminacy in luxuriance. There are occasions, however, when this couch is converted into a bed, not of thorns exactly, but of corners; and really it would be hard to say which of the two is the more disagreeable. Should the men be careless in arranging the cargo, the inevitable consequence is that "monsieur" will find the leg of an

iron stove, the sharp edge of a keg, or the corner of a wooden box occupying the place where his ribs should be. So common, however, is this occurrence that the clerks usually superintend the arrangements themselves, and so secure comfort.

On a couch, then, of this kind Charley and Harry now found themselves constrained to sit all morning--sometimes asleep, occasionally awake, and always earnestly desiring that it was time to put ashore for breakfast, as they had now travelled for four hours without halt, except twice for about five minutes, to let the men light their pipes.

"Charley," said Harry Somerville to his friend, who sat beside him, "it strikes me that we are to have no breakfast at all to-day. Here have I been holding my breath and tightening my belt, until I feel much more like a spider or a wasp than a--a--"

"_Man_, Harry; out with it at once, don't be afraid," said Charley.

"Well, no, I wasn't going to have said _that_ exactly, but I was going to have said a voyageur, only I recollected our doings this morning, and hesitated to take the name until I had won it."

"It's well that you entertain so modest an opinion of yourself," said Mr. Park, who still smoked his pipe as if he were impressed with the idea that to stop for a moment would produce instant death. "I may tell you for your comfort, youngster, that we shan't breakfast till we reach yonder point."

The shores of Lake Winnipeg are flat and low, and the point indicated by Mr. Park lay directly in the light of the sun, which now shone with such splendour in the cloudless sky, and flashed on the polished water, that it was with difficulty they could look towards the point of land.

"Where is it?" asked Charley, shading his eyes with his hand; "I cannot make out anything at all."

"Try again, my boy; there's nothing like practice."

"Ah yes! I make it out now; a faint shadow just under the sun. Is that it?"

"Ay, and we'll break our fast _there_."

"I would like very much to break your head _here_," thought Charley, but he did not say it, as, besides being likely to produce unpleasant consequences, he felt that such a speech to an elderly gentleman would be highly improper; and Charley had _some_ respect for gray hairs for their own sake, whether the owner of them was a good man or a goose.

"What shall we do, Harry? If I had only thought of keeping out a book."

"I know what _I_ shall do," said Harry, with a resolute air: "I'll go and shoot!"

"Shoot!" cried Charley. "You don't mean to say that you're going to

waste your powder and shot by firing at the clouds! for unless you take them, I see nothing else here."

"That's because you don't use your eyes," retorted Harry. "Will you just look at yonder rock ahead of us, and tell me what you see?"

Charley looked earnestly at the rock, which to a cursory glance seemed as if composed of whiter stone on the top. "Gulls, I declare!" shouted Charley, at the same time jumping up in haste.

Just then one of the gulls, probably a scout sent out to watch the approaching enemy, wheeled in a circle overhead. The two youths dragged their guns from beneath the thwarts of the boat, and rummaged about in great anxiety for shot-belts and powder-horns. At last they were found; and having loaded, they sat on the edge of the boat, looking out for game with as much--ay, with more intense interest than a Blackfoot Indian would have watched for a fat buffalo cow.

"There he goes," said Harry; "take the first shot, Charley."

"Where? where is it?"

"Right ahead. Look out!"

As Harry spoke, a small white gull, with bright-red legs and beak, flew over the boat so close to them that, as the guide remarked, "he could see it wink!" Charley's equanimity, already pretty well disturbed, was entirely upset at the suddenness of the bird's appearance; for he had been gazing intently at the rock when his friend's exclamation drew his attention in time to see the gull within about four feet of his head. With a sudden "Oh!" Charley threw forward his gun, took a short, wavering aim, and blew the cock-tail feather out of Baptiste's hat; while the gull sailed tranquilly away, as much as to say, "If that's all you can do, there's no need for me to hurry!"

"Confound the boy!" cried Mr. Park. "You'll be the death of someone yet; I'm convinced of that."

"Parbleu! you may say that, c'est vrai," remarked the voyageur with a rueful gaze at his hat, which, besides having its ornamental feather shattered, was sadly cut up about the crown.

The poor lad's face became much redder than the legs or beak of the gull as he sat down in confusion, which he sought to hide by busily reloading his gun; while the men indulged in a somewhat witty and sarcastic criticism of his powers of shooting, remarking, in flattering terms, on the precision of the shot that blew Baptiste's feather into atoms, and declaring that if every shot he fired was as truly aimed, he would certainly be the best in the country.

Baptiste also came in for a share of their repartee. "It serves you right," said the guide, laughing, "for wearing such things on the voyage. You should put away such foppery till you return to the settlement, where there are girls to admire you." (Baptiste had continued to wear the tall hat, ornamented with gold cords and tassels, with which he had left Red River).

"Ah!" cried another, pulling vigorously at his oar, "I fear that

Marie won't look at you, now that all your beauty's gone."

"'Tis not quite gone," said a third; "there's all the brim and half a tassel left, besides the wreck of the remainder."

"Oh, I can lend you a few fragments," retorted Baptiste, endeavouring to parry some of the thrusts. "They would improve you vastly."

"No, no, friend; gather them up and replace them: they will look more picturesque and becoming now. I believe if you had worn them much longer all the men in the boat would have fallen in love with you."

"By St. Patrick," said Mike Brady, an Irishman who sat at the oar immediately behind the unfortunate Canadian, "there's more than enough o' rubbish scattered over mysilf nor would do to stuff a fither-bed with."

As Mike spoke, he collected the fragments of feathers and ribbons with which the unlucky shot had strewn him, and placed them slyly on the top of the dilapidated hat, which Baptiste, after clearing away the wreck, had replaced on his head.

"It's very purty," said Mike, as the action was received by the crew with a shout of merriment.

Baptiste was waxing wrathful under this fire, when the general attention was drawn again towards Charley and his friend, who, having now got close to the rock, had quite forgotten their mishap in the excitement of expectation.

This excitement in the shooting of such small game might perhaps surprise our readers, did we not acquaint them with the fact that neither of the boys had, up to that time, enjoyed much opportunity of shooting. It is true that Harry had once or twice borrowed the fowling-piece of the senior clerk, and had sallied forth with a beating heart to pursue the grouse which are found in the belt of woodland skirting the Assiniboine River near to Fort Garry. But these expeditions were of rare occurrence, and they had not sufficed to rub off much of the bounding excitement with which he loaded and fired at anything and everything that came within range of his gun. Charley, on the other hand, had never fired a shot before, except out of an old horse-pistol; having up to this period been busily engaged at school, except during the holidays, which he always spent in the society of his sister Kate, whose tastes were not such as were likely to induce him to take up the gun, even if he had possessed such a weapon. Just before leaving Red River, his father presented him with his own gun, remarking, as he did so, with a sigh, that his day was past now; and adding that the gun was a good one for shot or ball, and if he (Charley) brought down half as much game with it as he (Mr. Kennedy) had brought down in the course of his life, he might consider himself a crack shot undoubtedly.

It was not surprising, therefore, that the two friends went nearly mad with excitement when the whole flock of gulls rose into the air like a white cloud, and sailed in endless circles and gyrations above and around their heads--flying so close at times that they might almost have been caught by the hand. Neither was it surprising that innumerable shots were fired, by both sportsmen, without a single bird being a whit the worse for it, or themselves much the better;

the energetic efforts made to hit being rendered abortive by the very eagerness which caused them to miss. And this was the less extraordinary, too, when it is remembered that Harry in his haste loaded several times without shot, and Charley rendered the right barrel of his gun *_hors de combat_* at last, by ramming down a charge of shot and omitting powder altogether, whereby he snapped and primed, and snapped and primed again, till he grew desperate, and then suspicious of the true cause, which he finally rectified with much difficulty.

Frequently the gulls flew straight over the heads of the youths-- which produced peculiar consequences, as in such cases they took aim while the birds were approaching; but being somewhat slow at taking aim, the gulls were almost perpendicularly above them ere they were ready to shoot, so that they were obliged to fire hastily in *_hope_*, feeling that they were losing their balance, or give up the chance altogether.

Mr. Park sat grimly in his place all the while, enjoying the scene, and smoking.

"Now then, Charley," said he, "take that fellow."

"Which? where? Oh, if I could only get one!" said Charley, looking up eagerly at the screaming birds, at which he had been staring so long, in their varying and crossing flight, that his sight had become hopelessly unsteady.

"There! Look sharp; fire away!"

Bang went Charley's piece, as he spoke, at a gull which flew straight towards him, but so rapidly that it was directly above his head; indeed, he was leaning a little backwards at the moment, which caused him to miss again, while the recoil of the gun brought matters to a climax, by toppling him over into Mr. Park's lap, thereby smashing that gentleman's pipe to atoms. The fall accidentally exploded the second barrel, causing the butt to strike Charley in the pit of his stomach--as if to ram him well home into Mr. Park's open arms--and hitting with a stray shot a gull that was sailing high up in the sky in fancied security. It fell with a fluttering crash into the boat while the men were laughing at the accident.

"Didn't I say so?" cried Mr. Park, wrathfully, as he pitched Charley out of his lap, and spat out the remnants of his broken pipe.

Fortunately for all parties, at this moment the boat approached a spot on which the guide had resolved to land for breakfast; and seeing the unpleasant predicament into which poor Charley had fallen, he assumed the strong tones of command with which guides are frequently gifted, and called out,--

"Ho, ho! a terre! a terre! to land! to land! Breakfast, my boys; breakfast!"--at the same time sweeping the boat's head shoreward, and running into a rocky bay, whose margin was fringed by a growth of small trees. Here, in a few minutes, they were joined by the other boats of the brigade, which had kept within sight of each other nearly the whole morning.

While travelling through the wilds of North America in boats,

voyageurs always make a point of landing to breakfast. Dinner is a meal with which they are unacquainted, at least on the voyage, and luncheon is likewise unknown. If a man feels hungry during the day, the pemmican-bag and its contents are there; he may pause in his work at any time, for a minute, to seize the axe and cut off a lump, which he may devour as he best can; but there is no going ashore--no resting for dinner. Two great meals are recognised, and the time allotted to their preparation and consumption held inviolable--breakfast and supper: the first varying between the hours of seven and nine in the morning; the second about sunset, at which time travellers usually encamp for the night. Of the two meals it would be difficult to say which is more agreeable. For our own part, we prefer the former. It is the meal to which a man addresses himself with peculiar gusto, especially if he has been astir three or four hours previously in the open air. It is the time of day, too, when the spirits are freshest and highest, animated by the prospect of the work, the difficulties, the pleasures, or the adventures of the day that has begun; and cheered by that cool, clear buoyancy of Nature which belongs exclusively to the happy morning hours, and has led poets in all ages to compare these hours to the first sweet months of spring or the early years of childhood.

Voyageurs, not less than poets, have felt the exhilarating influence of the young day, although they have lacked the power to tell it in sounding numbers; but where words were wanting, the sparkling eye, the beaming countenance, the light step, and hearty laugh, were more powerful exponents of the feelings within. Poet, and painter too, might have spent a profitable hour on the shores of that great sequestered lake, and as they watched the picturesque groups--clustering round the blazing fires, preparing their morning meal, smoking their pipes, examining and repairing the boats, or suning their stalwart limbs in wild, careless attitudes upon the greensward--might have found a subject worthy the most brilliant effusions of the pen, or the most graphic touches of the pencil.

An hour sufficed for breakfast. While it was preparing, the two friends sauntered into the forest in search of game, in which they were unsuccessful; in fact, with the exception of the gulls before mentioned, there was not a feather to be seen--save, always, one or two whisky-johns.

Whisky-johns are the most impudent, puffy, conceited little birds that exist. Not much larger in reality than sparrows, they nevertheless manage to swell out their feathers to such an extent that they appear to be as large as magpies, which they further resemble in their plumage. Go where you will in the woods of Rupert's Land, the instant that you light a fire two or three whisky-johns come down and sit beside you, on a branch, it may be, or on the ground, and generally so near that you cannot but wonder at their recklessness. There is a species of impudence which seems to be specially attached to little birds. In them it reaches the highest pitch of perfection. A bold, swelling, arrogant effrontery--a sort of stark, staring, self-complacent, comfortable, and yet innocent impertinence, which is at once irritating and amusing, aggravating and attractive, and which is exhibited in the greatest intensity in the whisky-john. He will jump down almost under your nose, and seize a fragment of biscuit or pemmican. He will go right into the pemmican-bag, when you are but a few paces off, and pilfer, as it were, at the fountain-head. Or if these resources are closed against

him, he will sit on a twig, within an inch of your head, and look at you as only a whisky-john _can_ look.

"I'll catch one of these rascals," said Harry, as he saw them jump unceremoniously into and out of the pemmican-bag.

Going down to the boat, Harry hid himself under the tarpaulin, leaving a hole open near to the mouth of the bag. He had not remained more than a few minutes in this concealment when one of the birds flew down, and alighted on the edge of the boat. After a glance round to see that all was right, it jumped into the bag. A moment after, Harry, darting his hand through the aperture, grasped him round the neck and secured him. Poor whisky-john screamed and pecked ferociously, while Harry brought him in triumph to his friend; but so unremittingly did the bird scream that its captor was fain at last to let him off, the more especially as the cook came up at the moment and announced that breakfast was ready.

CHAPTER XII.

The storm.

Two days after the events of the last chapter, the brigade was making one of the traverses which have already been noticed as of frequent occurrence in the great lakes. The morning was calm and sultry. A deep stillness pervaded Nature, which tended to produce a corresponding quiescence in the mind, and to fill it with those indescribably solemn feelings that frequently arise before a thunderstorm. Dark, lurid clouds hung overhead in gigantic masses, piled above each other like the battlements of a dark fortress, from whose ragged embrasures the artillery of heaven was about to play.

"Shall we get over in time, Louis?" asked Mr. Park, as he turned to the guide, who sat holding the tiller with a firm grasp; while the men, aware of the necessity of reaching shelter ere the storm burst upon them, were bending to the oars with steady and sustained energy.

"Perhaps," replied Louis, laconically.--"Pull, lads, pull! else you'll have to sleep in wet skins to-night."

A low growl of distant thunder followed the guide's words, and the men pulled with additional energy; while the slow measured hiss of the water, and clank of oars, as they cut swiftly through the lake's clear surface, alone interrupted the dead silence that ensued.

Charley and his friend conversed in low whispers; for there is a strange power in a thunder-storm, whether raging or about to break, that overawes the heart of man,--as if Nature's God were nearer than at other times; as if He--whose voice, indeed, if listened to, speaks even in the slightest evolution of natural phenomena--were about to tread the visible earth with more than usual majesty, in the vivid glare of the lightning flash, and in the awful crash of thunder.

"I don't know how it is, but I feel more like a coward," said

Charley, "just before a thunderstorm than I think I should do in the arms of a polar bear. Do you feel queer, Harry?"

"A little," replied Harry, in a low whisper. "and yet I'm not frightened. I can scarcely tell what I feel, but I'm certain it's not fear."

"Well, I don't know," said Charley. "When father's black bull chased Kate and me in the prairies, and almost overtook us as we ran for the fence of the big field, I felt my heart leap to my mouth, and the blood rush to my cheeks, as I turned about and faced him, while Kate climbed the fence; but after she was over, I felt a wild sort of wickedness in me, as if I should like to tantalise and torment him,-- and I felt altogether different from what I feel now while I look up at these black clouds. Isn't there something quite awful in them, Harry?"

Ere Harry replied, a bright flash of lightning shot athwart the sky, followed by a loud roll of thunder, and in a moment the wind rushed, like a fiend set suddenly free, down upon the boats, tearing up the smooth surface of the water as it flew, and cutting it into gleaming white streaks. Fortunately the storm came down behind the boats, so that, after the first wild burst was over, they hoisted a small portion of their lug sails, and scudded rapidly before it.

There was still a considerable portion of the traverse to cross, and the guide cast an anxious glance over his shoulder occasionally, as the dark waves began to rise, and their crests were cut into white foam by the increasing gale. Thunder roared in continued, successive peals, as if the heavens were breaking up, while rain descended in sheets. For a time the crews continued to ply their oars; but as the wind increased, these were rendered superfluous. They were taken in, therefore, and the men sought partial shelter under the tarpaulin; while Mr. Park and the two boys were covered, excepting their heads, by an oilcloth, which was always kept at hand in rainy weather.

"What think you now, Louis?" said Mr. Park, resuming the pipe which the sudden outburst of the storm had caused him to forget. "Have we seen the worst of it?"

Louis replied abruptly in the negative, and in a few seconds shouted loudly, "Look out, lads! here comes a squall. Stand by to let go the sheet there!"

Mike Brady, happening to be near the sheet, seized hold of the rope, and prepared to let go, while the men rose, as if by instinct, and gazed anxiously at the approaching squall, which could be seen in the distance, extending along the horizon, like a bar of blackest ink, spotted with flakes of white. The guide sat with compressed lips, and motionless as a statue, guiding the boat as it bounded madly towards the land, which was now not more than half-a-mile distant.

"Let go!" shouted the guide, in a voice that was heard loud and clear above the roar of the elements.

"Ay, ay," replied the Irishman, untwisting the rope instantly, as with a sharp hiss the squall descended on the boat.

At that moment the rope became entangled round one of the oars, and

the gale burst with all its fury on the distended sail, burying the prow in the waves, which rushed inboard in a black volume, and in an instant half filled the boat.

"Let go!" roared the guide again, in a voice of thunder; while Mike struggled with awkward energy to disentangle the rope.

As he spoke, an Indian, who during the storm had been sitting beside the mast, gazing at the boiling water with a grave, contemplative aspect, sprang quickly forward, drew his knife, and with two blows (so rapidly delivered that they seemed but one) cut asunder first the sheet and then the halyards, which let the sail blow out and fall flat upon the boat. He was just in time. Another moment and the gushing water, which curled over the bow, would have filled them to the gunwale. As it was, the little vessel was so full of water that she lay like a log, while every toss of the waves sent an additional torrent into her.

"Bail for your lives, lads!" cried Mr. Park, as he sprang forward, and, seizing a tin dish, began energetically to bail out the water. Following his example, the whole crew seized whatever came first to hand in the shape of dish or kettle, and began to bail. Charley and Harry Somerville acted a vigorous part on this occasion--the one with a bark dish (which had been originally made by the natives for the purpose of holding maple sugar), the other with his cap.

For a time it seemed doubtful whether the curling waves should send most water into the boat, or the crew should bail most out of it. But the latter soon prevailed, and in a few minutes it was so far got under that three of the men were enabled to leave off bailing and reset the sail, while Louis Pettier returned to his post at the helm. At first the boat moved but slowly, owing to the weight of water in her; but as this gradually grew less, she increased her speed and neared the land.

"Well done, Redfeather," said Mr. Park, addressing the Indian as he resumed his seat; "your knife did us good service that time, my fine fellow."

Redfeather, who was the only pure native in the brigade, acknowledged the compliment with a smile.

"_Ah, oui_," replied the guide, whose features had now lost their stern expression. "These Injins are always ready enough with their knives. It's not the first time my life has been saved by the knife of a red-skin."

"Humph! bad luck to them," muttered Mike Brady; "it's not the first time that my windpipe has been pretty near spifficated by the knives o' the redskins, the murtherin' varmints."

As Mike gave vent to this malediction, the boat ran swiftly past a low rocky point, over which the surf was breaking wildly.

"Down with the sail, Mike," cried the guide, at the same time putting the helm hard up. The boat flew round, obedient to the ruling power, made one last plunge as it left the rolling surf behind, and slid gently and smoothly into still water under the lee of the point.

Here, in the snug shelter of a little bay, two of the other boats were found, with their prows already on the beach, and their crews actively employed in landing their goods, opening bales that had received damage from the water, and preparing the encampment; while ever and anon they paused a moment to watch the various boats as they flew before the gale, and one by one doubled the friendly promontory.

If there is one thing that provokes a voyageur more than another, it is being wind-bound on the shores of a large lake. Rain or sleet, heat or cold, icicles forming on the oars, or a broiling sun glaring in a cloudless sky, the stings of sand-flies, or the sharp probes of a million mosquitoes, he will bear with comparative indifference; but being detained by high wind for two, three, or four days together--lying inactively on shore, when everything else, it may be, is favourable: the sun bright, the sky blue, the air invigorating, and all but the wind propitious--is more than his philosophy can carry him through with equanimity. He grumbles at it; sometimes makes believe to laugh at it; very often, we are sorry to say, swears at it; does his best to sleep through it; but whatever he does, he does with a bad grace, because he's in a bad humour, and can't stand it.

For the next three days this was the fate of our friends. Part of the time it rained, when the whole party slept as much as was possible, and then endeavoured to sleep more than was possible, under the shelter afforded by the spreading branches of the trees. Part of the time was fair, with occasional gleams of sunshine, when the men turned out to eat and smoke and gamble round the fires; and the two friends sauntered down to a sheltered place on the shore, sunned themselves in a warm nook among the rocks, while they gazed ruefully at the foaming billows, told endless stories of what they had done in time past, and equally endless prospective adventures that they earnestly hoped should befall them in time to come.

While they were thus engaged, Redfeather, the Indian who had cut the ropes so opportunely during the storm, walked down to the shore, and sitting down on a rock not far distant, fell apparently into a reverie.

"I like that fellow," said Harry, pointing to the Indian.

"So do I. He's a sharp, active man. Had it not been for him we should have had to swim for it."

"Indeed, had it not been for him I should have had to sink for it," said Harry, with a smile, "for I can't swim."

"Ah, true, I forgot that. I wonder what the red-skin, as the guide calls him, is thinking about," added Charley in a musing tone.

"Of home, perhaps, 'sweet home,'" said Harry, with a sigh. "Do you think much of home, Charley, now that you have left it?"

Charley did not reply for a few seconds. He seemed to muse over the question.

At last he said slowly--

"Think of home? I think of little else when I am not talking with you, Harry. My dear mother is always in my thoughts, and my poor old

father. Home? ay; and darling Kate, too, is at my elbow night and day, with the tears streaming from her eyes, and her ringlets scattered over my shoulder, as I saw her the day we parted, beckoning me back again, or reproaching me for having gone away--God bless her! Yes, I often, very often, think of home, Harry."

Harry made no reply. His friend's words had directed his thoughts to a very different and far-distant scene--to another Kate, and another father and mother, who lived in a glen far away over the waters of the broad Atlantic. He thought of them as they used to be when he was one of the number, a unit in the beloved circle, whose absence would have caused a blank there. He thought of the kind voice that used to read the Word of God, and the tender kiss of his mother as they parted for the night. He thought of the dreary day when he left them all behind, and sailed away, in the midst of strangers, across the wide ocean to a strange land. He thought of them now--_without_ him--accustomed to his absence, and forgetful, perhaps, at times that he had once been there. As he thought of all this a tear rolled down his cheek, and when Charley looked up in his face, that tear-drop told plainly that he too thought sometimes of home.

"Let us ask Redfeather to tell us something about the Indians," he said at length, rousing himself. "I have no doubt he has had many adventures in his life. Shall we, Charley?"

"By all means--Ho, Redfeather; are you trying to stop the wind by looking it out of countenance?"

The Indian rose and walked towards the spot where the boys lay.

"What was Redfeather thinking about?" said Charley, adopting the somewhat pompous style of speech occasionally used by Indians. "Was he thinking of the white swan and his little ones in the prairie; or did he dream of giving his enemies a good licking the next time he meets them?"

"Redfeather has no enemies," replied the Indian. "He was thinking of the great Manito, [Footnote: God.] who made the wild winds, and the great lakes, and the forest."

"And pray, good Redfeather, what did your thoughts tell you?"

"They told me that men are very weak, and very foolish, and wicked; and that Manito is very good and patient to let them live."

"That is to say," cried Harry, who was surprised and a little nettled to hear what he called the heads of a sermon from a red-skin, "that _you_, being a man, are very weak, and very foolish, and wicked, and that Manito is very good and patient to let _you_ live?"

"Good," said the Indian calmly; "that is what I mean."

"Come, Redfeather," said Charley, laying his hand on the Indian's arm, "sit down beside us, and tell us some of your adventures. I know that you must have had plenty, and it's quite clear that we're not to get away from this place all day, so you've nothing better to do."

The Indian readily assented, and began his story in English.

Redfeather was one of the very few Indians who had acquired the power of speaking the English language. Having been, while a youth, brought much into contact with the fur-traders, and having been induced by them to enter their service for a time, he had picked up enough of English to make himself easily understood. Being engaged at a later period of life as a guide to one of the exploring parties sent out by the British Government to discover the famous North West Passage, he had learned to read and write, and had become so much accustomed to the habits and occupations of the "pale faces," that he spent more of his time, in one way or another, with them than in the society of his tribe, which dwelt in the thick woods bordering on one of the great prairies of the interior. He was about thirty years of age; had a tall, thin, but wiry and powerful frame; and was of a mild, retiring disposition. His face wore a habitually grave expression, verging towards melancholy; induced, probably, by the vicissitudes of a wild life (in which he had seen much of the rugged side of nature in men and things) acting upon a sensitive heart, and a naturally warm temperament. Redfeather, however, was by no means morose; and when seated along with his Canadian comrades round the camp fire, he listened with evidently genuine interest to their stories, and entered into the spirit of their jests. But he was always an auditor, and rarely took part in their conversations. He, was frequently consulted by the guide in matters of difficulty, and it was observed that the "red-skin's" opinion always carried much weight with it, although it was seldom given unless asked for. The men respected him much because he was a hard worker, obliging, and modest---three qualities that insure respect, whether found under a red skin or a white one.

"I shall tell you," he began, in a soft, musing tone, as if he were wandering in memories of the past--"I shall tell you how it was that I came by the name of Redfeather."

"Ah!" interrupted Charley, "I intended to ask you about that; you don't wear one."

"I did once. My father was a great warrior in his tribe," continued the Indian; "and I was but a youth when I got the name."

"My tribe was at war at the time with the Chipewyans, and one of our scouts having come in with the intelligence that a party of our enemies was in the neighbourhood, our warriors armed themselves to go in pursuit of them. I had been out once before with a war-party, but had not been successful, as the enemy's scouts gave notice of our approach in time to enable them to escape. At the time the information was brought to us, the young men of our village were amusing themselves with athletic games, and loud challenges were being given and accepted to wrestle, or race, or swim in the deep water of the river, which flowed calmly past the green bank on which our wigwams stood. On a bank near to us sat about a dozen of our women--some employed in ornamenting moccasins with coloured porcupine quills; others making rogans of bark for maple sugar, or nursing their young infants; while a few, chiefly the old women, grouped themselves together and kept up an incessant chattering, chiefly with reference to the doings of the young men.

"Apart from these stood three or four of the principal men of our tribe, smoking their pipes, and although apparently engrossed in conversation, still evidently interested in what was going forward on

the bank of the river.

"Among the young men assembled there was one of about my own age, who had taken a violent dislike to me because the most beautiful girl in all the village preferred me before him. His name was Misconna. He was a hot-tempered, cruel youth; and although I endeavoured as much as possible to keep out of his way, he sought every opportunity of picking a quarrel with me. I had just been running a race along with several other youths, and although not the winner, I had kept ahead of Misconna all the distance. He now stood leaning against a tree, burning with rage and disappointment. I was sorry for this, because I bore him no ill-will, and if it had occurred to me at the time, I would have allowed him to pass me, since I was unable to gain the race at any rate.

"Dog!" he said at length, stepping forward and confronting me, 'will you wrestle?'

"Just as he approached I had turned round to leave the place. Not wishing to have more to do with him, I pretended not to hear, and made a step or two towards the lodges. 'Dog,' he cried again, while his eyes flashed fiercely, as he grasped me by the arm, 'will you wrestle, or are you afraid? Has the brave boy's heart changed into that of a girl?'

"No, Misconna," said I. 'You know that I am not afraid; but I have no desire to quarrel with you.'

"You lie!" cried he, with a cold sneer,--'you are afraid; and see,' he added, pointing towards the women with a triumphant smile, 'the dark-eyed girl sees it and believes it too!'

"I turned to look, and there I saw Wabisca gazing on me with a look of blank amazement. I could see, also, that several of the other women, and some of my companions, shared in her surprise.

"With a burst of anger I turned round. 'No,' Misconna,' said I, 'I am not afraid, as you shall find;' and springing upon him, I grasped him round the body. He was nearly, if not quite, as strong a youth as myself; but I was burning with indignation at the insolence of his conduct before so many of the women, which gave me more than usual energy. For several minutes we swayed to and fro, each endeavouring in vain to bend the other's back; but we were too well matched for this, and sought to accomplish our purpose by taking advantage of an unguarded movement. At last such a movement occurred. My adversary made a sudden and violent attempt to throw me to the left, hoping that an inequality in the ground would favour his effort. But he was mistaken. I had seen the danger and was prepared for it, so that the instant he attempted it I threw forward my right leg, and thrust him backwards with all my might. Misconna was quick in his motions. He saw my intention--too late, indeed, to prevent it altogether, but in time to throw back his left foot and stiffen his body till it felt like a block of stone. The effort was now entirely one of endurance. We stood each with his muscles strained to the utmost, without the slightest motion. At length I felt my adversary give way a little. Slight though the motion was, it instantly removed all doubt as to who should go down. My heart gave a bound of exaltation, and with the energy which such a feeling always inspires, I put forth all my strength, threw him heavily over on his back, and fell upon him.

"A shout of applause from my comrades greeted me as I rose and left the ground; but at the same moment the attention of all was taken from myself and the baffled Misconna by the arrival of the scout, bringing us information that a party of Chipewyans were in the neighbourhood. In a moment all was bustle and preparation. An Indian war-party is soon got ready. Forty of our braves threw off the principal parts of their clothing; painted their faces with stripes of vermilion and charcoal; armed themselves with guns, bows, tomahawks and scalping knives, and in a few minutes left the camp in silence, and at a quick pace.

"One or two of the youths who had been playing on the river's bank were permitted to accompany the party, and among these were Misconna and myself. As we passed a group of women, assembled to see us depart, I observed the girl who had caused so much jealousy between us. She cast down her eyes as we came up, and as we advanced close to the group she dropped a white feather, as if by accident. Stooping hastily down, I picked it up in passing, and stuck it in an ornamented band that bound my hair. As we hurried on I heard two or three old hags laugh, and say, with a sneer, 'His hand is as white as a feather: it has never seen blood.' The next moment we were hid in the forest, and pursued our rapid course in dead silence.

"The country through which we passed was varied, extending in broken bits of open prairie, and partly covered with thick wood, yet not so thick as to offer any hindrance to our march. We walked in single file, each treading in his comrade's footsteps, while the band was headed by the scout who had brought the information. The principal chief of our tribe came next, and he was followed by the braves according to their age or influence. Misconna and I brought up the rear. The sun was just sinking as we left the belt of woodland in which our village stood, crossed over a short plain, descended a dark hollow, at the bottom of which the river flowed, and following its course for a considerable distance, turned off to the right and emerged upon a sweep of prairieland. Here the scout halted, and taking the chief and two or three braves aside, entered into earnest consultation with them.

"What they said we could not hear; but as we stood leaning on our guns in the deep shade of the forest, we could observe by their animated gestures that they differed in opinion. We saw that the scout pointed several times to the moon, which was just rising above the treetops, and then to the distant horizon: but the chief shook his head, pointed to the woods, and seemed to be much in doubt, while the whole band watched his motions in deep silence but evident interest. At length they appeared to agree. The scout took his place at the head of the line, and we resumed our march, keeping close to the margin of the wood. It was perhaps three hours after this ere we again halted to hold another consultation. This time their deliberations were shorter. In a few seconds our chief himself took the lead, and turned into the woods, through which he guided us to a small fountain which bubbled up at the root of a birch tree, where there was a smooth green spot of level ground. Here we halted, and prepared to rest for an hour, at the end of which time the moon, which now shone bright and full in the clear sky, would be nearly down, and we could resume our march. We now sat down in a circle, and taking a hasty mouthful of dried meat, stretched ourselves on the ground with our arms beside us, while our chief kept watch, leaning

against the birch tree. It seemed as if I had scarcely been asleep five minutes when I felt a light touch on my shoulder. Springing up, I found the whole party already astir, and in a few minutes more we were again hurrying onwards.

"We travelled thus until a faint light in the east told us that the day was at hand, when the scout's steps became more cautious, and he paused to examine the ground frequently. At last we came to a place where the ground sank slightly, and at a distance of a hundred yards rose again, forming a low ridge which was crowned with small bushes. Here we came to a halt, and were told that our enemies were on the other side of that ridge; that they were about twenty in number, all Chipewyan warriors, with the exception of one paleface--a trapper, and his Indian wife. The scout had learned, while lying like a snake in the grass around their camp, that this man was merely travelling with them on his way to the Rocky Mountains, and that, as they were a war-party, he intended to leave them soon. On hearing this the warriors gave a grim smile, and our chief, directing the scout to fall behind, cautiously led the way to the top of the ridge. On reaching it we saw a valley of great extent, dotted with trees and shrubs, and watered by one of the many rivers that flow into the great Saskatchewan. It was nearly dark, however, and we could only get an indistinct view of the land. Far ahead of us, on the right bank of the stream, and close to its margin, we saw the faint red light of watch fires; which caused us some surprise, for watch-fires are never lighted by a war-party so near to an enemy's country. So we could only conjecture that they were quite ignorant of our being in that part of the country; which was, indeed, not unlikely, seeing that we had shifted our camp during the summer.

"Our chief now made arrangements for the attack. We were directed to separate and approach individually as near to the camp as was possible without risk of discovery, and then, taking up an advantageous position, to await our chief's signal, which was to be the hooting of an owl. We immediately separated. My course lay along the banks of the stream, and as I strode rapidly along, listening to its low solemn murmur, which sounded clear and distinct in the stillness of a calm summer night, I could not help feeling as if it were reproaching me for the bloody work I was hastening to perform. Then the recollection of what the old woman said of me raised a desperate spirit in my heart. Remembering the white feather in my head, I grasped my gun and quickened my pace. As I neared the camp I went into the woods and climbed a low hillock to look out. I found that it still lay about five hundred yards distant, and that the greater part of the ground between it and the place where I stood was quite flat, and without cover of any kind. I therefore prepared to creep towards it, although the attempt was likely to be attended with great danger, for Chipewyans have quick ears and sharp eyes. Observing, however, that the river ran close past the camp, I determined to follow its course as before. In a few seconds more I came to a dark narrow gap where the river flowed between broken rocks, overhung by branches, and from which I could obtain a clear view of the camp within fifty yards of me. Examining the priming of my gun, I sat down on a rock to await the chief's signal.

"It was evident from the careless manner in which the fires were placed, that no enemy was supposed to be near. From my concealment I could plainly distinguish ten or fifteen of the sleeping forms of our enemies, among which the trapper was conspicuous, from his superior

bulk, and the reckless way in which his brawny arms were flung on the turf, while his right hand clutched his rifle. I could not but smile as I thought of the proud boldness of the pale-face--lying all exposed to view in the gray light of dawn while an Indian's rifle was so close at hand. One Indian kept watch, but he seemed more than half asleep. I had not sat more than a minute when my observations were interrupted by the cracking of a branch in the bushes near me. Starting up, I was about to bound into the underwood, when a figure sprang down the bank and rapidly approached me. My first impulse was to throw forward my gun, but a glance sufficed to show me that it was a woman.

"'Wah!' I exclaimed, in surprise, as she hurried forward and laid her hand on my shoulder. She was dressed partly in the costume of the Indians, but wore a shawl on her shoulders and a handkerchief on her head that showed she had been in the settlements; and from the lightness of her skin and hair, I judged at once that she was the trapper's wife, of whom I had heard the scout speak.

"'Has the light-hair got a medicine-bag, or does she speak with spirits, that she has found me so easily?'

"The girl looked anxiously up in my face as if to read my thoughts, and then said, in a low voice,--

"'No, I neither carry the medicine-bag nor hold palaver with spirits; but I do think the good Manito must have led me here. I wandered into the woods because I could not sleep, and I saw you pass. But tell me,' she added with still deeper anxiety, 'does the white-feather come alone? Does he approach _friends_ during the dark hours with a soft step like a fox?'

"Feeling the necessity of detaining her until my comrades should have time to surround the camp, I said: 'The white-feather hunts far from his lands. He sees Indians whom he does not know, and must approach with a light step. Perhaps they are enemies.'

"'Do Knisteneux hunt at night, prowling in the bed of a stream?' said the girl, still regarding me with a keen glance. 'Speak truth, stranger' (and she started suddenly back); 'in a moment I can alarm the camp with a cry, and if your tongue is forked--But I do not wish to bring enemies upon you, if they are indeed such. I am not one of them. My husband and I travel with them for a time. We do not desire to see blood. God knows,' she added in French, which seemed her native tongue, 'I have seen enough of that already.'

"As her earnest eyes looked into my face a sudden thought occurred to me. 'Go,' said I, hastily, 'tell your husband to leave the camp instantly and meet me here; and see that the Chipewyans do not observe your departure. Quick! his life and yours may depend on your speed.'

"The girl instantly comprehended my meaning. In a moment she sprang up the bank; but as she did so the loud report of a gun was heard, followed by a yell, and the war-whoop of the Knisteneux rent the air as they rushed upon the devoted camp, sending arrows and bullets before them.

"On the instant I sprang after the girl and grasped her by the arm.

'Stay, white-cheek; it is too late now. You cannot save your husband, but I think he'll save himself. I saw him dive into the bushes like a cariboo. Hide yourself here; perhaps you may escape.'

"The half-breed girl sank on a fallen tree with a deep groan, and clasped her hands convulsively before her eyes, while I bounded over the tree, intending to join my comrades in pursuing the enemy.

"As I did so a shrill cry arose behind me, and looking back, I beheld the trapper's wife prostrate on the ground, and Misconna standing over her, his spear uplifted, and a fierce frown on his dark face.

"'Hold!' I cried, rushing back and seizing his arm. 'Misconna did not come to kill women. She is not our enemy.'

"'Does the young wrestler want another wife?' he said, with a wild laugh, at the same time wrenching his arm from my gripe, and driving his spear through the fleshy part of the woman's breast and deep into the ground. A shriek rent the air as he drew it out again to repeat the thrust; but before he could do so, I struck him with the butt of my gun on the head. Staggering backwards, he fell heavily among the bushes. At this moment a second whoop rang out, and another of our band sprang from the thicket that surrounded us. Seeing no one but myself and the bleeding girl, he gave me a short glance of surprise, as if he wondered why I did not finish the work which he evidently supposed I had begun.

"'Wah!' he exclaimed; and uttering another yell plunged his spear into the woman's breast, despite my efforts to prevent him--this time with more deadly effect, as the blood spouted from the wound, while she uttered a piercing scream, and twined her arms round my legs as I stood beside her, as if imploring for mercy. Poor girl! I saw that she was past my help. The wound was evidently mortal. Already the signs of death overspread her features, and I felt that a second blow would be one of mercy; so that when the Indian stooped and passed his long knife through her heart, I made but a feeble effort to prevent it. Just as the man rose, with the warm blood dripping from his keen blade, the sharp crack of a rifle was heard, and the Indian fell dead at my feet, shot through the forehead, while the trapper bounded into the open space, his massive frame quivering, and his sunburned face distorted with rage and horror. From the other side of the brake six of our band rushed forward and levelled their guns at him. For one moment the trapper paused to cast a glance at the mangled corpse of his wife, as if to make quite sure that she was dead; and then uttering a howl of despair, he hurled his axe with a giant's force at the Knisteneux, and disappeared over the precipitous bank of the stream.

"So rapid was the action that the volley which immediately succeeded passed harmlessly over his head, while the Indians dashed forward in pursuit. At the same instant I myself was felled to the earth. The axe which the trapper had flung struck a tree in its flight, and as it glanced off the handle gave me a violent blow in passing. I fell stunned. As I did so my head alighted on the shoulder of the woman, and the last thing I felt, as my wandering senses forsook me, was her still warm blood flowing over my face and neck.

"While this scene was going on, the yells and screams of the warriors in the camp became fainter and fainter as they pursued and fled

through the woods. The whole band of Chipewyans was entirely routed, with the exception of four who escaped, and the trapper whose flight I have described; all the rest were slain, and their scalps hung at the belts of the victorious Knisteneux warriors, while only one of our party was killed.

"Not more than a few minutes after receiving the blow that stunned me, I recovered, and rising as hastily as my scattered faculties would permit me, I staggered towards the camp, where I heard the shouts of our men as they collected the arms of their enemies. As I rose, the feather which Wabisca had dropped fell from my brow, and as I picked it up to replace it, I perceived that it was red, being entirely covered with the blood of the half-breed girl.

"The place where Misconna had fallen was vacant as I passed, and I found him standing among his comrades round the camp fires, examining the guns and other articles which they had collected. He gave me a short glance of deep hatred as I passed, and turned his head hastily away. A few minutes sufficed to collect the spoils, and so rapidly had everything been done that the light of day was still faint as we silently returned on our track. We marched in the same order as before, Misconna and I bringing up the rear. As we passed near the place where the poor woman had been murdered, I felt a strong desire to return to the spot. I could not very well understand the feeling, but it lay so strong upon me that, when we reached the ridge where we first came in sight of the Chipewyan camp, I fell behind until my companions disappeared in the woods, and then ran swiftly back. Just as I was about to step beyond the circle of bushes that surrounded the spot, I saw that some one was there before me. It was a man, and as he advanced into the open space and the light fell on his face, I saw that it was the trapper. No doubt he had watched us off the ground, and then, when all was safe, returned to bury his wife. I crouched to watch him. Stepping slowly up to the body of his murdered wife, he stood beside it with his arms folded on his breast and quite motionless. His head hung down, for the heart of the white man was heavy, and I could see, as the light increased, that his brows were dark as the thunder-cloud, and the corners of his mouth twitched from a feeling that the Indian scorns to show. My heart is full of sorrow for him now" (Redfeather's voice sank as he spoke); "it was full of sorrow for him even then, when I was taught to think that pity for an enemy was unworthy of a brave. The trapper stood gazing very long. His wife was young; he could not leave her yet. At length a deep groan burst from his heart, as the waters of a great river, long held down, swell up in spring and burst the ice at last. Groan followed groan as the trapper still stood and pressed his arms on his broad breast, as if to crush the heart within. At last he slowly knelt beside her, bending more and more over the lifeless form, until he lay extended on the ground beside it, and twining his arms round the neck, he drew the cold cheek close to his, and pressed the blood-covered bosom tighter and tighter, while his form quivered with agony as he gave her a last, long embrace. Oh!" continued Redfeather, while his brow darkened, and his black eye flashed with an expression of fierceness that his young listeners had never seen before, "may the curse--" He paused. "God forgive them! How could they know better?

"At length the trapper rose hastily. The expression of his brow was still the same, but his mouth was altered. The lips were pressed tightly like those of a brave when led to torture, and there was a fierce activity in his motions as he sprang down the bank and

proceeded to dig a hole in the soft earth. For half an hour he laboured, shovelling away the earth with a large, flat stone; and carrying down the body, he buried it there, under the shadow of a willow. The trapper then shouldered his rifle and hurried away. On reaching the turn of the stream which shuts the little hollow out from view, he halted suddenly, gave one look into the prairie he was henceforth to tread alone, one short glance back, and then, raising both arms in the air, looked up into the sky, while he stretched himself to his full height. Even at that distance I could see the wild glare of his eye and the heaving of his breast. A moment after, and he was gone."

"And did you never see him again?" inquired Harry Somerville, eagerly.

"No, I never saw him more. Immediately afterwards I turned to rejoin my companions, whom I soon overtook, and entered our village along with them. I was regarded as a poor warrior, because I brought home no scalps, and ever afterwards I went by the name of Redfeather in our tribe."

"But are you still thought a poor warrior?" asked Charley, in some concern, as if he were jealous of the reputation of his new friend.

The Indian smiled. "No," he said: "our village was twice attacked afterwards, and in defending it, Redfeather took many scalps. He was made a chief!"

"Ah!" cried Charley, "I'm glad of that. And Wabisca, what came of her? Did Misconna get her?"

"She is my wife," replied Redfeather.

"Your wife! Why, I thought I heard the voyageurs call your wife the white swan."

"Wabisca is white in the language of the Knisteneux. She is beautiful in form, and my comrades call her the white swan."

Redfeather said this with an air of gratified pride. He did not, perhaps, love his wife with more fervour than he would have done had he remained with his tribe; but Redfeather had associated a great deal with the traders, and he had imbibed much of that spirit which prompts "white men" to treat their females with deference and respect--a feeling which is very foreign to an Indian's bosom. To do so was, besides, more congenial to his naturally unselfish and affectionate disposition, so that any flattering allusion to his partner was always received by him with immense gratification.

"I'll pay you a visit some day, Redfeather, if I'm sent to any place within fifty miles of your tribe," said Charley with the air of one who had fully made up his mind.

"And Misconna?" asked Harry.

"Misconna is with his tribe," replied the Indian, and a frown overspread his features as he spoke; "but Redfeather has been following in the track of his white friends; he has not seen his nation for many moons."

CHAPTER XIII.

The canoe--Ascending the rapids--The portage--Deer shooting and life in the woods.

We must now beg the patient reader to take a leap with us, not only through space, but also through time. We must pass over the events of the remainder of the journey along the shore of Lake Winnipeg. Unwilling though we are to omit anything in the history of our friends that would be likely to prove interesting, we think it wise not to run the risk of being tedious, or of dwelling too minutely on the details of scenes which recall powerfully the feelings and memories of bygone days to the writer, but may, nevertheless, appear somewhat flat to the reader.

We shall not, therefore, enlarge at present on the arrival of the boats at Norway House, which lies at the north end of the lake, nor on what was said and done by our friends and by several other young comrades whom they found there. We shall not speak of the horror of Harry Somerville, and the extreme disappointment of his friend Charley Kennedy, when the former was told that instead of hunting grizzly bears up the Saskatchewan he was condemned to the desk again at York Fort, the depot on Hudson's Bay,--a low, swampy place near the sea-shore, where the goods for the interior are annually landed and the furs shipped for England, where the greater part of the summer and much of the winter is occupied by the clerks who may be doomed to vegetate there in making up the accounts of what is termed the Northern Department, and where the brigades converge from all the wide scattered and far-distant outposts, and the ship from England--that great event of the year--arrives, keeping the place in a state of constant bustle and effervescence until autumn, when ship and brigades finally depart, leaving the residents (about thirty in number) shut up for eight long, dreary months of winter, with a tenantless wilderness around and behind them, and the wide, cold frozen sea before. This was among the first of Harry's disappointments. He suffered many afterwards, poor fellow!

Neither shall we accompany Charley up the south branch of the Saskatchewan, where his utmost expectations in the way of hunting were more than realised, and where he became so accustomed to shooting ducks and geese, and bears and buffaloes, that he could not forbear smiling when he chanced to meet with a red-legged gull, and remembered how he and his friend Harry had comported themselves when they first met with these birds on the shores of Lake Winnipeg! We shall pass over all this, and the summer, autumn, and winter too, and leap at once into the spring of the following year.

On a very bright, cheery morning of that spring a canoe might have been seen slowly ascending one of the numerous streams which meander through a richly-wooded fertile country, and mingle their waters with those of the Athabasca River, terminating their united career in a large lake of the same name. The canoe was small--one of the kind used by the natives while engaged in hunting, and capable of holding only two persons conveniently, with their baggage. To any one

unacquainted with the nature and capabilities of a northern Indian canoe, the fragile, bright orange-coloured machine that was battling with the strong current of a rapid must indeed have appeared an unsafe and insignificant craft; but a more careful study of its performances in the rapid, and of the immense quantity of miscellaneous goods and chattels which were, at a later period of the day, disgorged from its interior, would have convinced the beholder that it was in truth the most convenient and serviceable craft that could be devised for the exigencies of such a country.

True, it could only hold two men (it might have taken three at a pinch), because men, and women too, are awkward, unyielding baggage, very difficult to stow compactly; but it is otherwise with tractable goods. The canoe is exceedingly thin, so that no space is taken up or rendered useless by its own structure, and there is no end to the amount of blankets, and furs, and coats, and paddles, and tent-covers, and dogs, and babies, that can be stowed away in its capacious interior. The canoe of which we are now writing contained two persons, whose active figures were thrown alternately into every graceful attitude of manly vigour, as with poles in hand they struggled to force their light craft against the boiling stream. One was a man apparently of about forty-five years of age. He was a square-shouldered, muscular man, and from the ruggedness of his general appearance, the soiled hunting-shirt that was strapped round his waist with a party-coloured worsted belt, the leather leggings, a good deal the worse for wear, together with the quiet, self-possessed glance of his gray eye, the compressed lip and the sunburned brow, it was evident that he was a hunter, and one who had seen rough work in his day. The expression of his face was pleasing, despite a look of habitual severity which sat upon it, and a deep scar which traversed his brow from the right temple to the top of his nose. It was difficult to tell to what country he belonged. His father was a Canadian, his mother a Scotchwoman. He was born in Canada, brought up in one of the Yankee settlements on the Missouri, and had, from a mere youth, spent his life as a hunter in the wilderness. He could speak English, French, or Indian with equal ease and fluency, but it would have been hard for anyone to say which of the three was his native tongue. The younger man, who occupied the stern of the canoe, acting the part of steersman, was quite a youth, apparently about seventeen, but tall and stout beyond his years, and deeply sunburned. Indeed, were it not for this fact, the unusual quantity of hair that hung in massive curls down his neck, and the voyageur costume, we should have recognised our young friend Charley Kennedy again more easily. Had any doubts remained in our mind, the shout of his merry voice would have scattered them at once.

"Hold hard, Jacques," he cried, as the canoe trembled in the current, "one moment, till I get my pole fixed behind this rock. Now, then, shove ahead. Ah!" he exclaimed with chagrin, as the pole slipped on the treacherous bottom and the canoe whirled round.

"Mind the rock," cried the bowsman, giving an energetic thrust with his pole, that sent the light bark into an eddy formed by a large rock which rose above the turbulent waters. Here it rested while Jacques and Charley raised themselves on their knees (travellers in small canoes always sit in a kneeling position) to survey the rapid.

"It's too much for us, I fear, Mr. Charles," said Jacques, shading his brow with his horny hand. "I've paddled up it many a time alone,

but never saw the water so big as now."

"Humph! we shall have to make a portage then, I presume. Could we not give it one trial more? I think we might make a dash for the tail of that eddy, and then the stream above seems not quite so strong. Do you think so, Jacques?"

Jacques was not the man to check a daring young spirit. His motto through life had ever been, "Never venture, never win"--a sentiment which his intercourse among fur-traders had taught him to embody in the pithy expression, "Never say die;" so that, although quite satisfied that the thing was impossible, he merely replied to his companion's speech by an assenting "Ho," and pushed out again into the stream. An energetic effort enabled them to gain the tail of the eddy spoken of, when Charley's pole snapped across, and, falling heavily on the gunwale, he would have upset the little craft had not Jacques, whose wits were habitually on the qui vive, thrown his own weight at the same moment on the opposite side, and counterbalanced Charley's slip. The action saved them a ducking; but the canoe, being left to its own devices for an instant, whirled off again into the stream, and before Charley could seize a paddle to prevent it, they were floating in the still water at the foot of the rapids.

"Now isn't that a bore?" said Charley, with a comical look of disappointment at his companion.

Jacques laughed.

"It was well to try, master. I mind a young clerk who came into these parts the same year as I did, and he seldom tried anything. He couldn't abide canoes. He didn't want for courage neither; but he had a nat'ral dislike to them, I suppose, that he couldn't help, and never entered one except when he was obliged to do so. Well, one day he wounded a grizzly bear on the banks o' the Saskatchewan (mind the tail o' that rapid, Mr. Charles; we'll land t'other side o' yon rock). Well, the bear made after him, and he cut stick right away for the river, where there was a canoe hauled up on the bank. He didn't take time to put his rifle aboard, but dropped it on the gravel, crammed the canoe into the water and jumped in, almost driving his feet through its bottom as he did so, and then plumped down so suddenly, to prevent its capsizing, that he split it right across. By this time the bear was at his heels, and took the water like a duck. The poor clerk, in his hurry, swayed from side to side tryin' to prevent the canoe goin' over. But when he went to one side, he was so unused to it that he went too far, and had to jerk over to the other pretty sharp; and so he got worse and worse, until he heard the bear give a great snort beside him. Then he grabbed the paddle in desperation, but at the first dash he missed his stroke, and over he went. The current was pretty strong at the place, which was lucky for him, for it kept him down a bit, so that the bear didn't observe him for a little; and while it was pokin' away at the canoe, he was carried down stream like a log and stranded on a shallow. Jumping up he made tracks for the wood, and the bear (which had found out its mistake), after him; so he was obliged at last to take to a tree, where the beast watched him for a day and a night, till his friends, thinking that something must be wrong, sent out to look for him. (Steady, now, Mr. Charles; a little more to the right. That's it.) Now, if that young man had only ventured boldly into small canoes when he got the chance, he might have laughed at the grizzly and

killed him too."

As Jacques finished, the canoe glided into a quiet bay formed by an eddy of the rapid, where the still water was overhung with dense foliage.

"Is the portage a long one?" asked Charley, as he stepped out on the bank, and helped to unload the canoe.

"About half-a-mile," replied his companion. "We might make it shorter by poling up the last rapid; but it's stiff work, Mr. Charles, and we'll do the thing quicker and easier at one lift."

The two travellers now proceeded to make a portage. They prepared to carry their canoe and baggage overland, so as to avoid a succession of rapids and waterfalls which intercepted their further progress.

"Now, Jacques, up with it," said Charley, after the loading had been taken out and placed on the grassy bank.

The hunter stooped, and seizing the canoe by its centre bar, lifted it out of the water, placed it on his shoulders, and walked off with it into the woods. This was not accomplished by the man's superior strength. Charley could have done it quite as well; and, indeed, the strong hunter could have carried a canoe twice the size with perfect ease. Immediately afterwards Charley followed with as much of the lading as he could carry, leaving enough on the bank to form another load.

The banks of the river were steep--in some places so much so that Jacques found it a matter of no small difficulty to climb over the broken rocks with the unwieldy canoe on his back; the more so that the branches interlaced overhead so thickly as to present a strong barrier, through which the canoe had to be forced, at the risk of damaging its delicate bark covering. On reaching the comparatively level land above, however, there was more open space, and the hunter threaded his way among the tree stems more rapidly, making a detour occasionally to avoid a swamp or piece of broken ground; sometimes descending a deep gorge formed by a small tributary of the stream they were ascending, and which to an unpractised eye would have appeared almost impassable, even without the encumbrance of a canoe. But the said canoe never bore Jacques more gallantly or safely over the surges of lake or stream than did he bear it through the intricate mazes of the forest; now diving down and disappearing altogether in the umbrageous foliage of a dell; anon reappearing on the other side and scrambling up the bank on all-fours, he and the canoe together looking like some frightful yellow reptile of antediluvian proportions; and then speeding rapidly forward over a level plain until he reached a sheet of still water above the rapids. Here he deposited his burden on the grass, and halting only for a few seconds to carry a few drops of the clear water to his lips, retraced his steps to bring over the remainder of the baggage. Soon afterwards Charley made his appearance on the spot where the canoe was left, and throwing down his load, seated himself on it and surveyed the prospect. Before him lay a reach of the stream which spread out so widely as to resemble a small lake, in whose clear, still bosom were reflected the overhanging foliage of graceful willows, and here and there the bright stem of a silver birch, whose light-green leaves contrasted well with scattered groups and solitary specimens of the

spruce fir. Reeds and sedges grew in the water along the banks, rendering the junction of the land and the stream uncertain and confused. All this and a great deal more Charley noted at a glance; for the hundreds of beautiful and interesting objects in nature which take so long to describe even partially, and are feebly set forth after all even by the most graphic language, flash upon the eye in all their force and beauty, and are drunk in at once in a single glance.

But Charley noted several objects floating on the water which we have not yet mentioned. These were five gray geese feeding among the rocks at a considerable distance off, and all unconscious of the presence of a human foe in their remote domains. The travellers had trusted very much to their guns and nets for food, having only a small quantity of pemmican in reserve, lest these should fail--an event which was not at all likely, as the country through which they passed was teeming with wild-fowl of all kinds, besides deer. These latter, however, were only shot when they came inadvertently within rifle range, as our voyageurs had a definite object in view, and could not afford to devote much of their time to the chase.

During the day previous to that on which we have introduced them to our readers, Charley and his companion had been so much occupied in navigating their frail bark among a succession of rapids, that they had not attended to the replenishing of their larder, so that the geese which now showed themselves were looked upon by Charley with a longing eye. Unfortunately they were feeding on the opposite side of the river, and out of shot. But Charley was a hunter now, and knew how to overcome slight difficulties. He first cut down a pretty large and leafy branch of a tree, and placed it in the bow of the canoe in such a way as to hang down before it and form a perfect screen, through the interstices of which he could see the geese, while they could only see, what was to them no novelty, the branch of a tree floating down the stream. Having gently launched the canoe, Charley was soon close to the unsuspecting birds, from among which he selected one that appeared to be unusually complacent and self-satisfied, concluding at once, with an amount of wisdom that bespoke him a true philosopher, that such must as a matter of course be the fattest.

"Bang" went the gun, and immediately the sleek goose turned round upon its back and stretched out its feet towards the sky, waving them once or twice as if bidding adieu to its friends. The others thereupon took to flight, with such a deal of sputter and noise as made it quite apparent that their astonishment was unfeigned. Bang went the gun again, and down fell a second goose.

"Ha!" exclaimed Jacques, throwing down the remainder of the cargo as Charley landed with his booty, "that's well. I was just thinking as I comed across that we should have to take to pemmican to-night."

"Well, Jacques, and if we had, I'm sure an old hunter like you, who have roughed it so often, need not complain," said Charley, smiling.

"As to that, master," replied Jacques, "I've roughed it often enough; and when it does come to a clear fix, I can eat my shoes without grumblin' as well as any man. But, you see, fresh meat is better than dried meat when it's to be had; and so I'm glad to see that you've been lucky, Mr. Charles."

"To say truth, so am I; and these fellows are delightfully plump. But you spoke of eating your shoes, Jacques. When were you reduced to that direful extremity?"

Jacques finished reloading the canoe while they conversed, and the two were seated in their places, and quietly but swiftly ascending the stream again, ere the hunter replied.

"You've heerd of Sir John Franklin, I s'pose?" he inquired, after a minute's consideration.

"Yes, often."

"An' p'r'aps you've heerd tell of his first trip of discovery along the shores of the Polar Sea?"

"Do you refer to the time when he was nearly starved to death, and when poor Hood was shot by the Indian?"

"The same," said Jacques.

"Oh, yes; I know all about that. Were you with them?" inquired Charley, in great surprise.

"Why, no--not exactly _on_ the trip; but I was sent in winter with provisions to them--and much need they had of them, poor fellows! I found them tearing away at some old parchment skins that had lain under the snow all winter, and that an Injin's dog would ha' turned up his nose at--and they don't turn up their snouts at many things, I can tell ye. Well, after we had left all our provisions with them, we started for the fort again, just keepin' as much as would drive off starvation; for, you see, we thought that surely we would git something on the road. But neither hoof nor feather did we see all the way (I was travellin' with an Injin), and our grub was soon done, though we saved it up, and only took a mouthful or two the last three days. At last it was done, and we was pretty well used up, and the fort two days ahead of us. So says I to my comrade--who had been looking at me for some time as if he thought that a cut off my shoulder wouldn't be a bad thing--says I, 'Nipitabo, I'm afeard the shoes must go for it now;' so with that I pulls out a pair o' deerskin moccasins. 'They looks tender,' said I, trying to be cheerful. 'Wah!' said the Injin; and then I held them over the fire till they was done black, and Nipitabo ate one, and I ate the tother, with a lump o' snow to wash it down!"

"It must have been rather dry eating," said Charley, laughing.

"Rayther; but it was better than the Injin's leather breeches, which we took in hand next day. They was _uncommon_ tough, and very dirty, havin' been worn about a year and a half. Hows'ever, they kept us up; an' as we only ate the legs, he had the benefit o' the stump to arrive with at the fort next day."

"What's yon ahead?" exclaimed Charley, pausing as he spoke, and shading his eyes with his hand.

"It's uncommon like trees," said Jacques. "It's likely a tree that's been tumbled across the river; and from its appearance, I think we'll

have to cut through it."

"Cut through it!" exclaimed Charley; "if my sight is worth a gun-flint, we'll have to cut through a dozen trees."

Charley was right. The river ahead of them became rapidly narrower; and either from the looseness of the surrounding soil, or the passing of a whirlwind, dozens of trees had been upset, and lay right across the narrow stream in terrible confusion. What made the thing worse was that the banks on either side, which were low and flat, were covered with such a dense thicket down to the water's edge, that the idea of making a portage to overcome the barrier seemed altogether hopeless.

"Here's a pretty business, to be sure!" cried Charley, in great disgust.

"Never say die, Mister Charles," replied Jacques, taking up the axe from the bottom of the canoe; "it's quite clear that cuttin' through the trees is easier than cuttin' through the bushes, so here goes."

For fully three hours the travellers were engaged in cutting their way up the encumbered stream, during which time they did not advance three miles; and it was evening ere they broke down the last barrier and paddled out into a sheet of clear water again.

"That'll prepare us for the geese, Jacques," said Charley, as he wiped the perspiration from his brow; "there's nothing like warm work for whetting the appetite, and making one sleep soundly."

"That's true," replied the hunter, resuming his paddle. "I often wonder how them white-faced fellows in the settlements manage to keep body and soul together--a-sittin', as they do, all day in the house, and a-lyin' all night in a feather bed. For my part, rather than live as they do, I would cut my way up streams like them we've just passed every day and all day, and sleep on top of a flat rock o' nights, under the blue sky, all my life through."

With this decided expression of his sentiments, the stout hunter steered the canoe up alongside of a huge flat rock, as if he were bent on giving a practical illustration of the latter part of his speech then and there.

"We'd better camp now, Mister Charles; there's a portage o' two miles here, and it'll take us till sundown to get the canoe and things over."

"Be it so," said Charley, landing. "Is there a good place at the other end to camp on?"

"First-rate. It's smooth as a blanket on the turf, and a clear spring bubbling at the root of a wide tree that would keep off the rain if it was to come down like water-spouts."

The spot on which the travellers encamped that evening overlooked one of those scenes in which vast extent, and rich, soft variety of natural objects, were united with much that was grand and savage. It filled the mind with the calm satisfaction that is experienced when one gazes on the wide lawns studded with noble trees; the spreading

fields of waving grain that mingle with stream and copse, rock and dell, vineyard and garden, of the cultivated lands of civilized men; while it produced that exulting throb of freedom which stirs man's heart to its centre, when he casts a first glance over miles and miles of broad lands that are yet unowned, unclaimed; that yet lie in the unmutated beauty with which the beneficent Creator originally clothed them--far away from the well-known scenes of man's checkered history; entirely devoid of those ancient monuments of man's power and skill that carry the mind back with feelings of awe to bygone ages, yet stamped with evidences of an antiquity more ancient still in the wild primeval forests, and the noble trees that have sprouted, and spread, and towered in their strength for centuries--trees that have fallen at their posts, while others took their place, and rose and fell as they did, like long-lived sentinels whose duty it was to keep perpetual guard over the vast solitudes of the great American Wilderness.

The fire was lighted, and the canoe turned bottom up in front of it, under the branches of a spreading tree which stood on an eminence, whence was obtained a bird's-eye view of the noble scene. It was a flat valley, on either side of which rose two ranges of hills, which were clothed to the top with trees of various kinds, the plain of the valley itself being dotted with clumps of wood, among which the fresh green foliage of the plane tree and the silver-stemmed birch were conspicuous, giving an airy lightness to the scene and enhancing the picturesque effect of the dark pines. A small stream could be traced winding out and in among clumps of willows, reflecting their drooping boughs and the more sombre branches of the spruce fir and the straight larch, with which in many places its banks were shaded. Here and there were stretches of clearer ground where the green herbage of spring gave to it a lawn-like appearance, and the whole magnificent scene was bounded by blue hills that became fainter as they receded from the eye and mingled at last with the horizon. The sun had just set, and a rich glow of red bathed the whole scene, which was further enlivened by flocks of wild-fowls and herds of reindeer.

These last soon drew Charley's attention from the contemplation of the scenery, and observing a deer feeding in an open space, towards which he could approach without coming between it and the wind, he ran for his gun and hurried into the woods while Jacques busied himself in arranging their blankets under the upturned canoe, and in preparing supper.

Charley discovered soon after starting, what all hunters discover sooner or later--namely, that appearances are deceitful; for he no sooner reached the foot of the hill than he found, between him and the lawn-like country, an almost impenetrable thicket of underwood. Our young hero, however, was of that disposition which sticks at nothing, and instead of taking time to search for an opening, he took a race and sprang into the middle of it, in hopes of forcing his way through. His hopes were not disappointed. He got through--quite through--and alighted up to the armpits in a swamp, to the infinite consternation of a flock of teal ducks that were slumbering peacefully there with their heads under their wings, and had evidently gone to bed for the night. Fortunately he held his gun above the water and kept his balance, so that he was able to proceed with a dry charge, though with an uncommonly wet skin. Half-an-hour brought Charley within range, and watching patiently until the animal presented his side towards the place of his concealment, he fired and

shot it through the heart.

"Well done, Mister Charles," exclaimed Jacques, as the former staggered into camp with the reindeer on his shoulders. "A fat doe, too."

"Ay," said Charley; "but she has cost me a wet skin. So pray, Jacques, rouse up the fire, and let's have supper as soon as you can."

Jacques speedily skinned the deer, cut a couple of steaks from its flank, and placing them on wooden spikes, stuck them up to roast, while his young friend put on a dry shirt, and hung his coat before the blaze. The goose which had been shot earlier in the day was also plucked, split open, impaled in the same manner as the steaks, and set up to roast. By this time the shadows of night had deepened, and ere long all was shrouded in gloom, except the circle of ruddy light around the camp fire, in the centre of which Jacques and Charley sat, with the canoe at their backs, knives in their hands, and the two spits, on the top of which smoked their ample supper, planted in the ground before them.

One by one the stars went out, until none were visible except the bright, beautiful morning star, as it rose higher and higher in the eastern sky. One by one the owls and the wolves, ill-omened birds and beasts of night, retired to rest in the dark recesses of the forest. Little by little, the gray dawn overspread the sky, and paled the lustre of the morning star, until it faded away altogether; and then Jacques awoke with a start, and throwing out his arm, brought it accidentally into violent contact with Charley's nose.

This caused Charley to awake, not only with a start, but also with a roar, which brought them both suddenly into a sitting posture, in which they continued for some time in a state between sleeping and waking, their faces meanwhile expressive of mingled imbecility and extreme surprise. Bursting into a simultaneous laugh, which degenerated into a loud yawn, they sprang up, launched and reloaded their canoe, and resumed their journey.

CHAPTER XIV.

The Indian camp--The new outpost--Charley sent on a mission to the Indians.

In the councils of the fur-traders, on the spring previous to that about which we are now writing, it had been decided to extend their operations a little in the lands that lie in central America, to the north of the Saskatchewan River; and in furtherance of that object, it had been intimated to the chief trader in charge of the district that an expedition should be set on foot, having for its object the examination of a territory into which they had not yet penetrated, and the establishment of an outpost therein. It was, furthermore, ordered that operations should be commenced at once, and that the choice of men to carry out the end in view was graciously left to the chief trader's well-known sagacity.

Upon receiving this communication, the chief trader selected a gentleman named Mr. Whyte to lead the party; gave him a clerk and five men, provided him with a boat and a large supply of goods necessary for trade, implements requisite for building an establishment, and sent him off with a hearty shake of the hand and a recommendation to "go and prosper."

Charles Kennedy spent part of the previous year at Rocky Mountain House, where he had shown so much energy in conducting the trade, especially what he called the "rough and tumble" part of it, that he was selected as the clerk to accompany Mr. Whyte to his new ground. After proceeding up many rivers, whose waters had seldom borne the craft of white men, and across innumerable lakes, the party reached a spot that presented so inviting an aspect that it was resolved to pitch their tent there for a time, and, if things in the way of trade and provision looked favourable, establish themselves altogether. The place was situated on the margin of a large lake, whose shores were covered with the most luxuriant verdure, and whose waters teemed with the finest fish, while the air was alive with wild-fowl, and the woods swarming with game. Here Mr. Whyte rested awhile; and having found everything to his satisfaction, he took his axe, selected a green lawn that commanded an extensive view of the lake, and going up to a tall larch, struck the steel into it, and thus put the first touch to an establishment which afterwards went by the name of Stoney Creek.

A solitary Indian, whom they had met with on the way to their new home, had informed them that a large band of Knisteneux had lately migrated to a river about four days' journey beyond the lake at which they halted; and when the new fort was just beginning to spring up, our friend Charley and the interpreter, Jacques Caradoc, were ordered by Mr. Whyte to make a canoe, and then, embarking in it, to proceed to the Indian camp, to inform the natives of their rare good luck in having a band of white men come to settle near their lands to trade with them. The interpreter and Charley soon found birch bark, pine roots for sewing it, and gum for plastering the seams, wherewith they constructed the light machine whose progress we have partly traced in the last chapter, and which, on the following day at sunset, carried them to their journey's end.

From some remarks made by the Indian who gave them information of the camp, Charley gathered that it was the tribe to which Redfeather belonged, and furthermore that Redfeather himself was there at the time; so that it was with feelings of no little interest that he saw the tops of the yellow tents embedded among the green trees, and soon afterwards beheld them and their picturesque owners reflected in the clear river, on whose banks the natives crowded to witness the arrival of the white men.

Upon the greensward, and under the umbrageous shade of the forest trees, the tents were pitched to the number of perhaps eighteen or twenty, and the whole population, of whom very few were absent on the present occasion, might number a hundred--men, women, and children. They were dressed in habiliments formed chiefly of materials procured by themselves in the chase, but ornamented with cloth, beads, and silk thread, which showed that they had had intercourse with the fur-traders before now. The men wore leggings of deerskin, which reached more than half-way up the thigh, and were fastened to a leathern

girdle strapped round the waist. A loose tunic or hunting-shirt of the same material covered the figure from the shoulders almost to the knees, and was confined round the middle by a belt--in some cases of worsted, in others of leather gaily ornamented with quills. Caps of various indescribable shapes, and made chiefly of skin, with the animal's tail left on by way of ornament, covered their heads, and moccasins for the feet completed their costume. These last may be simply described as leather mittens for the feet, without fingers, or rather toes. They were gaudily ornamented, as was almost every portion of costume, with porcupines' quills dyed with brilliant colours, and worked into fanciful, and in many cases extremely elegant, figures and designs; for North American Indians oftentimes display an amount of taste in the harmonious arrangement of colour that would astonish those who fancy that education is absolutely necessary to the just appreciation of the beautiful.

The women attired themselves in leggings and coats differing little from those of the men, except that the latter were longer, the sleeves detached from the body, and fastened on separately; while on their heads they wore caps, which hung down and covered their backs to the waist. These caps were of the simplest construction, being pieces of cloth cut into an oblong shape, and sewed together at one end. They were, however, richly ornamented with silk-work and beads.

On landing, Charley and Jacques walked up to a tall, good-looking Indian, whom they judged from his demeanour, and the somewhat deferential regard paid to him by the others, to be one of the chief men of the little community.

"Ho! what cheer?" said Jacques, taking him by the hand after the manner of Europeans, and accosting him with the phrase used by the fur-traders to the natives. The Indian returned the compliment in kind, and led the visitors to his tent, where he spread a buffalo robe for them on the ground, and begged them to be seated. A repast of dried meat and reindeer-tongues was then served, to which our friends did ample justice; while the women and children satisfied their curiosity by peering at them through chinks and holes in the tent. When they had finished, several of the principal men assembled, and the chief who had entertained them made a speech, to the effect that he was much gratified by the honour done to his people by the visit of his white brothers; that he hoped they would continue long at the camp to enjoy their hospitality; and that he would be glad to know what had brought them so far into the country of the red men.

During the course of this speech the chief made eloquent allusion to all the good qualities supposed to belong to white men in general, and (he had no doubt) to the two white men before him in particular. He also boasted considerably of the prowess and bravery of himself and his tribe, launched a few sarcastic hits at his enemies, and wound up with a poetical hope that his guests might live for ever in these beautiful plains of bliss, where the sun never sets, and nothing goes wrong anywhere, and everything goes right at all times, and where, especially, the deer are outrageously fat, and always come out on purpose to be shot! During the course of these remarks his comrades signified their hearty concurrence to his sentiments, by giving vent to sundry low-toned "hums!" and "has!" and "wahs!" and "hos!" according to circumstances. After it was over Jacques rose, and addressing them in their own language, said,--

"My Indian brethren are great. They are brave, and their fame has travelled far. Their deeds are known even so far as where the Great Salt Lake beats on the shore where the sun rises. They are not women, and when their enemies hear the sound of their name they grow pale; their hearts become like those of the reindeer. My brethren are famous, too, in the use of the snow-shoe, the snare, and the gun. The fur-traders know that they must build large stores when they come into their lands. They bring up much goods, because the young men are active, and require much. The silver fox and the marten are no longer safe when their traps and snares are set. Yes, they are good hunters: and we have now come to live among you" (Jacques changed his style as he came nearer to the point), "to trade with you, and to save you the trouble of making long journeys with your skins. A few days' distance from your wigwams we have pitched our tents. Our young men are even now felling the trees to build a house. Our nets are set, our hunters are prowling in the woods, our goods are ready, and my young master and I have come to smoke the pipe of friendship with you, and to invite you to come to trade with us."

Having delivered this oration, Jacques sat down amid deep silence. Other speeches, of a highly satisfactory character, were then made, after which "the house adjourned," and the visitors, opening one of their packages, distributed a variety of presents to the delighted natives.

Several times during the course of these proceedings, Charley's eyes wandered among the faces of his entertainers, in the hope of seeing Redfeather among them, but without success; and he began to fear that his friend was not with the tribe.

"I say, Jacques," he said, as they left the tent, "ask whether a chief called Redfeather is here. I knew him of old, and half expected to find him at this place."

The Indian to whom Jacques put the question replied that Redfeather was with them, but that he had gone out on a hunting expedition that morning, and might be absent a day or two.

"Ah!" exclaimed Charley, "I'm glad he's here. Come, now, let us take a walk in the wood; these good people stare at us as if we were ghosts." And taking Jacques's arm, he led him beyond the circuit of the camp, turned into a path which, winding among the thick underwood, speedily screened them from view, and led them into a sequestered glade, through which a rivulet trickled along its course, almost hid from view by the dense foliage and long grasses that overhung it.

"What a delightful place to live in!" said Charley. "Do you ever think of building a hut in such a spot as this, Jacques, and settling down altogether?" Charley's thoughts reverted to his sister Kate when he said this.

"Why, no," replied Jacques, in a pensive tone, as if the question had aroused some sorrowful recollections; "I can't say that I'd like to settle here now. There was a time when I thought nothin' could be better than to squat in the woods with one or two jolly comrades, and--"(Jacques sighed); "but times is changed now, master, and so is my mind. My chums are most of them dead or gone one way or other. No; I shouldn't care to squat alone."

Charley thought of the hut _without_ Kate, and it seemed so desolate and dreary a dwelling, notwithstanding its beautiful situation, that he agreed with his companion that to "squat" _alone_ would never do at all.

"No, man was not made to live alone," continued Jacques, pursuing the subject; "even the Injins draw together. I never knew but one as didn't like his fellows, and he's gone now, poor fellow. He cut his foot with an axe one day, while fellin' a tree. It was a bad cut; and havin' nobody to look after him, he half bled and half starved to death."

"By the way, Jacques," said Charley, stepping over the clear brook, and following the track which led up the opposite bank, "what did you say to those red-skins? You made them a most eloquent speech apparently."

"Why, as to that, I can't boast much of its eloquence, but I think it was clear enough. I told them that they were a great nation; for you see, Mr. Charles, the red men are just like the white in their fondness for butter; so I gave them some to begin with, though, for the matter o' that, I'm not overly fond o' givin' butter to any man, red or white. But I holds that it's as well always to fall in with the ways and customs o' the people a man happens to be among, so long as them ways and customs a'n't contrary to what's right. It makes them feel more kindly to you, and don't raise any onnecessary ill-will. However, the Knisteneux _are_ a brave race; and when I told them that the hearts of their enemies trembled when they heard of them, I told nothing but the truth; for the Chipewyans are a miserable set, and not much given to fighting."

"Your principles on that point won't stand much sifting, I fear," replied Charley: "according to your own showing, you would fall into the Chipewyan's way of glorifying themselves on account of their bravery, if you chanced to be dwelling among them, and yet you say they are not brave. That would not be sticking to truth, Jacques, would it?"

"Well," replied Jacques with a smile, "perhaps not exactly, but I'm sure there could be small harm in helping the miserable objects to boast sometimes, for they've little else than boasting to comfort them."

"And yet, Jacques, I cannot help feeling that truth is a grand, a glorious thing, that should not be trifled with even in small matters."

Jacques opened his eyes a little. "Then do you think, master, that a man should _never_ tell a lie, no matter what fix he may be in?"

"I think not, Jacques."

The hunter paused a few minutes, and looked as if an unusual train of ideas had been raised in his mind by the turn their conversation had taken. Jacques was a man of no religion, and little morality, beyond what flowed from a naturally kind, candid disposition, and entertained the belief that the _end_, if a good one, always justifies the _means_--a doctrine which, had it been clearly exposed

to him in all its bearings and results, would have been spurned by his straightforward nature with the indignant contempt that it merits.

"Mr. Charles," he said at length, "I once travelled across the plains to the head waters of the Missouri with a party of six trappers. One night we came to a part of the plains which was very much broken up with wood here and there, and bein' a good place for water we camped. While the other lads were gettin' ready the supper, I started off to look for a deer, as we had been unlucky that day--we had shot nothin'. Well, about three miles from the camp I came upon a band o' somewhere about thirty Sioux (ill-looking, sneaking dogs they are, too!), and before I could whistle they rushed upon me, took away my rifle and hunting-knife, and were dancing round me like so many devils. At last a big black-lookin' thief stepped forward, and said in the Cree language, 'White men seldom travel through this country alone; where are your comrades?' Now, thought I, here's a nice fix! If I pretend not to understand, they'll send out parties in all directions, and as sure as fate they'll find my companions in half-an-hour, and butcher them in cold blood (for, you see, we did not expect to find Sioux, or indeed any Injins, in them parts); so I made believe to be very narvous, and tried to tremble all over and look pale. Did you ever try to look pale and frighttened, Mr. Charles?"

"I can't say that I ever did," said Charley, laughing.

"You can't think how troublesome it is," continued Jacques, with a look of earnest simplicity. "I shook and trembled pretty well, but the more I tried to grow pale, the more I grew red in the face, and when I thought of the six broad-shouldered, raw-boned lads in the camp, and how easy they would have made these jumping villains fly like chaff if they only knew the fix I was in, I gave a frown that had well-nigh showed I was shamming. Hows'ever, what with shakin' a little more and givin' one or two most awful groans, I managed to deceive them. Then I said I was hunter to a party of white men that were travellin' from Red River to St. Louis, with all their goods, and wives, and children, and that they were away in the plains about a league off.

"The big chap looked very hard into my face when I said this, to see if I was telling the truth; and I tried to make my teeth chatter, but it wouldn't do, so I took to groanin' very bad instead. But them Sioux are such awful liars nat'rally that they couldn't understand the signs of truth, even if they saw them. 'Whitefaced coward,' said he to me, 'tell me in what direction your people are.' At this I made believe not to understand; but the big chap flourished his knife before my face, called me a dog, and told me to point out the direction. I looked as simple as I could and said I would rather not. At this they laughed loudly and then gave a yell, and said if I didn't show them the direction they would roast me alive. So I pointed towards apart of the plains pretty wide o' the spot where our camp was. 'Now lead us to them,' said the big chap, givin' me a shove with the butt of his gun; 'an' if you have told lies--'he gave the handle of his scalpin'-knife a slap, as much as to say he'd tickle up my liver with it. Well, away we went in silence, me thinkin' all the time how I was to get out o' the scrape. I led them pretty close past our camp, hopin' that the lads would hear us. I didn't dare to yell out, as that would have showed them there was somebody within hearin', and they would have made short work of me. Just as we came

near the place where my companions lay, a prairie wolf sprang out from under a bush where it had been sleepin', so I gave a loud hurrah, and shied my cap at it. Giving a loud growl, the big Injin hit me over the head with his fist, and told me to keep silence. In a few minutes I heard the low, distant howl of a wolf. I recognised the voice of one of my comrades, and knew that they had seen us, and would be on our track soon. Watchin' my opportunity, and walkin' for a good bit as if I was awful tired--all but done up--to throw them off their guard, I suddenly tripped up the big chap as he was stepping over a small brook, and dived in among the bushes. In a moment a dozen bullets tore up the bark on the trees about me, and an arrow passed through my hair. The clump of wood into which I had dived was about half-a-mile long; and as I could run well (I've found in my experience that white men are more than a match for red-skins at their own work), I was almost out of range by the time I was forced to quit the cover and take to the plain. When the blackguards got out of the cover, too, and saw me cuttin' ahead like a deer, they gave a yell of disappointment, and sent another shower of arrows and bullets after me, some of which came nearer than was pleasant. I then headed for our camp with the whole pack screechin' at my heels. 'Yell away, you stupid sinners,' thought I; 'some of you shall pay for your music.' At that moment an arrow grazed my shoulder, and looking over it, I saw that the black fellow I had pitched into the water was far ahead of the rest, strainin' after me like mad, and every now and then stopping to try an arrow on me; so I kept a look-out, and when I saw him stop to draw, I stopped too, and dodged, so the arrows passed me, and then we took to our heels again. In this way I ran for dear life till I came up to the cover. As I came close up I saw our six fellows crouchin' in the bushes, and one o' them takin' aim almost straight for my face. 'Your day's come at last,' thought I, looking over my shoulder at the big Injin, who was drawing his bow again. Just then there was a sharp crack heard; a bullet whistled past my ear, and the big fellow fell like a stone, while my comrade stood coolly up to reload his rifle. The Injins, on seein' this, pulled up in a moment; and our lads stepping forward, delivered a volley that made three more o' them bite the dust. There would have been six in that fix, but, somehow or other, three of us pitched upon the same man, who was afterwards found with a bullet in each eye, and one through his heart. They didn't wait for more, but turned about and bolted like the wind. Now, Mr. Charles, if I had told the truth that time, we would have been all killed; and if I had simply said nothin' to their questions, they would have sent out to scour the country, and have found out the camp for sartin, so that the only way to escape was by tellin' them a heap o' downright lies."

Charley looked very much perplexed at this.

"You have indeed placed me in a difficulty. I know not what I would have done. I don't know even what I ought to do under these circumstances. Difficulties may perplex me, and the force of circumstances might tempt me to do what I believed to be wrong. I am a sinner, Jacques, like other mortals, I know; but one thing I am quite sure of--namely, that when men speak it should always be truth and never falsehood."

Jacques looked perplexed too. He was strongly impressed with the necessity of telling falsehoods in the circumstances in which he had been placed, as just related, while at the same time he felt deeply the grandeur and the power of Charley's last remark.

"I should have been under the sod _now_," said he, "if I had not told a lie _then_. Is it better to die than to speak falsehood?"

"Some men have thought so," replied Charley. "I acknowledge the difficulty of _your_ case and of all similar cases. I don't know what should be done, but I have read of a minister of the gospel whose people were very wicked and would not attend to his instructions, although they could not but respect himself, he was so consistent and Christianlike in his conduct. Persecution arose in the country where he lived, and men and women were cruelly murdered because of their religious belief. For a long time he was left unmolested, but one day a band of soldiers came to his house, and asked him whether he was a Papist or a Protestant (Papist, Jacques, being a man who has sold his liberty in religious matters to the Pope, and a Protestant being one who protests against such an ineffably silly and unmanly state of slavery). Well, his people urged the good old man to say he was a Papist, telling him that he would then be spared to live among them, and preach the true faith for many years perhaps. Now, if there was one thing that this old man would have toiled for and died for, it was that his people should become true Christians--and he told them so; 'but,' he added, 'I will not tell a lie to accomplish that end, my children--no, not even to save my life.' So he told the soldiers that he was a Protestant, and immediately they carried him away, and he was soon afterwards burned to death."

"Well," said Jacques, "_he_ didn't gain much by sticking to the truth, I think."

"I'm not so sure of _that_. The story goes on to say that he _rejoiced_ that he had done so, and wouldn't draw back even when he was in the flames. But the point lies here, Jacques: so deep an impression did the old man's conduct make on his people, that from that day forward they were noted for their Christian life and conduct. They brought up their children with a deeper reverence for the truth than they would otherwise have done, always bearing in affectionate remembrance, and holding up to them as an example, the unflinching truthfulness of the good old man who was burned in the year of the terrible persecutions; and at last their influence and example had such an effect that the Protestant religion spread like wild-fire, far and wide around them, so that the very thing was accomplished for which the old pastor said he would have died--accomplished, too, very much in consequence of his death, and in a way and to an extent that very likely would not have been the case had he lived and preached among them for a hundred years."

"I don't understand it, nohow," said Jacques; "it seems to me right both ways and wrong both ways, and all upside down every how."

Charley smiled. "Your remark is about as clear as my head on the subject, Jacques; but I still remain convinced that truth is _right_ and that falsehood is _wrong_, and that we should stick to the first through thick and thin."

"I s'pose," remarked the hunter, who had walked along in deep cogitation, for the last five minutes, and had apparently come to some conclusion of profound depth and sagacity--"I s'pose that it's all human natur'; that some men takes to preachin' as Injins take to huntin', and that to understand sich things requires them to begin

young,' and risk their lives in it, as I would in followin' up a grizzly she-bear with cubs."

"Yonder is an illustration of one part of your remark. They begin _young_ enough, anyhow," said Charley, pointing as he spoke to an opening in the bushes, where a particularly small Indian boy stood in the act of discharging an arrow.

The two men halted to watch his movements. According to a common custom among juvenile Indians during the warm months of the year, he was dressed in _nothing_ save a mere rag tied round his waist. His body was very brown, extremely round, fat, and wonderfully diminutive, while his little legs and arms were disproportionately small. He was so young as to be barely able to walk, and yet there he stood, his black eyes glittering with excitement, his tiny bow bent to its utmost, and a blunt-headed arrow about to be discharged at a squirrel, whose flight had been suddenly arrested by the unexpected apparition of Charley and Jacques. As he stood there for a single instant, perfectly motionless, he might have been mistaken for a grotesque statue of an Indian cupid. Taking advantage of the squirrel's pause the child let fly the arrow, hit it exactly on the point of the nose, and turned it over, dead--a consummation which he greeted with a rapid succession of frightful yells.

"Cleverly done, my lad; you're a chip of the old block, I see," said Jacques, patting the child's head as he passed, and retraced his steps, with Charley, to the Indian camp.

CHAPTER XV.

The feast--Charley makes his first speech in public, and meets with an old friend--An evening in the grass.

Savages, not less than civilized men, are fond of a good dinner. In saying this, we do not expect our reader to be overwhelmed with astonishment. He might have guessed as much; but when we state that savages, upon particular occasions, eat six dinners in one, and make it a point of honour to do so, we apprehend that we have thrown a slightly new light on an old subject. Doubtless there are men in civilised society who would do likewise if they could; but they cannot, fortunately, as great gastronomic powers are dependent on severe, healthful, and prolonged physical exertion. Therefore it is that in England we find men capable only of eating about two dinners at once, and suffering a good deal for it afterwards; while in the backwoods we see men consume a week's dinners in one, without any evil consequences following the act.

The feast which was given by the Knisteneux in honour of the visit of our two friends was provided on a more moderate scale than usual, in order to accommodate the capacities of the "white men;" three days' allowance being cooked for each man. (Women are never admitted to the public feasts.) On the day preceding the ceremony, Charley and Jacques had received cards of invitation from the principal chief in the shape of two quills; similar invites being issued at the same time to all the braves. Jacques being accustomed to the doings of the

Indians, and aware of the fact that whatever was provided for each man must be eaten before he quitted the scene of operations, advised Charley to eat no breakfast, and to take a good walk as a preparative. Charley had strong faith, however, in his digestive powers, and felt much inclined, when morning came, to satisfy the cravings of his appetite as usual; but Jacques drew such a graphic picture of the work that lay before him, that he forbore to urge the matter, and went off to walk with a light step, and an uncomfortable feeling of vacuity about the region of the stomach.

About noon, the chiefs and braves assembled in an open enclosure situated in an exposed place on the banks of the river, where the proceedings were watched by the women, children, and dogs. The oldest chief sat himself down on the turf at one end of the enclosure, with Jacques Caradoc on his right hand, and next to him Charley Kennedy, who had ornamented himself with a blue stripe painted down the middle of his nose, and a red bar across his chin. Charley's propensity for fun had led him thus to decorate his face, in spite of his companion's remonstrances,--urging, by way of excuse, that worthy's former argument, "that it was well to fall in with the ways o' the people a man happened to be among, so long as these ways and customs were not contrary to what was right." Now Charley was sure there was nothing wrong in his painting his nose sky blue, if he thought fit.

Jacques thought it was absurd, and entertained the opinion that it would be more dignified to leave his face "its nat'ral colour."

Charley didn't agree with him at all. He thought it would be paying the Indians a high compliment to follow their customs as far as possible, and said that, after all, his blue nose would not be very conspicuous, as he (Jacques) had told him that he would "look blue" at any rate when he saw the quantity of deer's meat he should have to devour.

Jacques laughed at this, but suggested that the bar across his chin was red. Whereupon Charley said that he could easily neutralise that by putting a green star under each eye; and then uttered a fervent wish that his friend Harry Somerville could only see him in that guise. Finding him incorrigible, Jacques, who, notwithstanding his remonstrances, was more than half imbued with Charley's spirit, gave in, and accompanied him to the feast, himself decorated with the additional ornament of a red night-cap, to whose crown was attached a tuft of white feathers.

A fire burned in the centre of the enclosure, round which the Indians seated themselves according to seniority, and with deep solemnity; for it is a trait in the Indian's character that all his ceremonies are performed with extreme gravity. Each man brought a dish or platter, and a wooden spoon.

The old chief, whose hair was very gray, and his face covered with old wounds and scars, received either in war or in hunting, having seated himself, allowed a few minutes to elapse in silence, during which the company sat motionless, gazing at their plates as if they half expected them to become converted into beefsteaks. While they were seated thus, another party of Indians, who had been absent on a hunting expedition, strode rapidly but noiselessly into the enclosure, and seated themselves in the circle. One of these passed close to Charley, and in doing so stooped, took his hand, and pressed

it. Charley looked up in surprise, and beheld the face of his old friend Redfeather, gazing at him with an expression in which were mingled affection, surprise, and amusement at the peculiar alteration in his visage.

"Redfeather!" exclaimed Charlie, in delight, half rising, but the Indian pressed him down.

"You must not rise," he whispered, and giving his hand another squeeze, passed round the circle, and took his place directly opposite.

Having continued motionless for five minutes with becoming gravity, the company began operations by proceeding to smoke out of the sacred stem--a ceremony which precedes--all occasions of importance, and is conducted as follows:--The sacred stem is placed on two forked sticks to prevent its touching the ground, as that would be considered a great evil. A stone pipe is then filled with tobacco, by an attendant specially appointed to that office, and affixed to the stem, which is presented to the principal chief. That individual, with a gravity and hauteur that is unsurpassed in the annals of pomposity, receives the pipe in both hands, blows a puff to the east (probably in consequence of its being the quarter whence the sun rises), and thereafter pays a similar mark of attention to the other three points. He then raises the pipe above his head, points and balances it in various directions (for what reason and with what end in view is best known to himself), and replaces it again on the forks. The company meanwhile observe his proceedings with sedate interest, evidently imbued with the idea that they are deriving from the ceremony a vast amount of edification--an idea which is helped out, doubtless, by the appearance of the women and children, who surround the enclosure, and gaze at the proceedings with looks of awe-struck seriousness that is quite solemnizing to behold.

The chief then makes a speech relative to the circumstance which has called them together; and which is always more or less interlarded with boastful reference to his own deeds, past, present, and prospective, eulogistic remarks on those of his forefathers, and a general condemnation of all other Indian tribes whatever. These speeches are usually delivered with great animation, and contain much poetic allusion to the objects of nature that surround the homes of the savage. The speech being finished, the chief sits down amid a universal "Ho!" uttered by the company with an emphatic prolongation of the last letter--this syllable being the Indian substitute, we presume, for "rapturous applause."

The chief who officiated on the present occasion, having accomplished the opening ceremonies thus far, sat down; while the pipe-bearer presented the sacred stem to the members of the company in succession, each of whom drew a few whiffs and mumbled a few words.

"Do as you see the red-skins, Mr. Charles," whispered Jacques, while the pipe was going round.

"That's impossible," replied Charley, in a tone that could not be heard except by his friend. "I couldn't make a face of hideous solemnity like that black thief opposite if I was to try ever so hard."

"Don't let them think you're laughing at them," returned the hunter; "they would be ill-pleased if they thought so."

"I'll try," said Charley, "but it is hard work, Jacques, to keep from laughing; I feel like a high-pressure steam-engine already. There's a woman standing out there with a little brown baby on her back; she has quite fascinated me; I can't keep my eyes off her, and if she goes on contorting her visage much longer, I feel that I shall give way."

"Hush!"

At this moment the pipe was presented to Charley, who put it to his lips, drew three whiffs, and returned it with a bland smile to the bearer.

The smile was a very sweet one, for that was a peculiar trait in the native urbanity of Charley's disposition, and it would have gone far in civilized society to prepossess strangers in his favour; but it lowered him considerably in the estimation of his red friends, who entertained a wholesome feeling of contempt for any appearance of levity on high occasions. But Charley's face was of that agreeable stamp that, though gentle and bland when lighted up with a smile, is particularly masculine and manly in expression when in repose, and the frown that knit his brows when he observed the bad impression he had given almost reinstated him in their esteem. But his popularity became great, and the admiration of his swarthy friends greater, when he rose and made an eloquent speech in English, which Jacques translated into the Indian language.

He told them, in reply to the chief's oration (wherein that warrior had complimented his pale-faced brothers on their numerous good qualities), that he was delighted and proud to meet with his Indian friends; that the object of his mission was to acquaint them with the fact that a new trading-fort was established not far off, by himself and his comrades, for their special benefit and behoof; that the stores were full of goods which he hoped they would soon obtain possession of, in exchange for furs; that he had travelled a great distance on purpose to see their land and ascertain its capabilities in the way of fur-bearing animals and game; that he had not been disappointed in his expectations, as he had found the animals to be as numerous as bees, the fish plentiful in the rivers and lakes, and the country at large a perfect paradise. He proceeded to tell them further that he expected they would justify the report he had heard of them, that they were a brave nation and good hunters, by bringing in large quantities of furs.

Being strongly urged by Jacques to compliment them, on their various good qualities, Charley launched out into an extravagantly poetic vein, said that he had heard (but he hoped to have many opportunities of seeing it proved) that there was no nation under the sun equal to them in bravery, activity, and perseverance; that he had heard of men in olden times who made it their profession to fight with wild bulls for the amusement of their friends, but he had no doubt whatever their courage would be made conspicuous in the way of fighting wild bears and buffaloes, not for the amusement but the benefit of their wives and children (he might have added of the Hudson's Bay Company, but he didn't, supposing that that was self-evident, probably). He complimented them on the way in which they had conducted themselves

in war in times past, comparing their stealthy approach to enemies' camps to the insidious snake that glides among the bushes, and darts unexpectedly on its prey; said that their eyes were sharp to follow the war-trail through the forest or over the dry sward of the prairie; their aim with gun or bow true and sure as the flight of the goose when it leaves the lands of the sun, and points its beak to the icy regions of the north; their war-whoops loud as the thunders of the cataract; and their sudden onset like the lightning flash that darts from the sky and scatters the stout oak in splinters on the plain.

At this point Jacques expressed his satisfaction at the style in which his young friend was progressing.

"That's your sort, Mr. Charles. Don't spare the butter; lay it on thick. You've not said too much yet, for they are a brave race, that's a fact, as I've good reason to know."

Jacques, however, did not feel quite so well satisfied when Charley went on to tell them that although bravery in war was an admirable thing, war itself was a thing not at all to be desired, and should only be undertaken in case of necessity. He especially pointed out that there was not much glory to be earned in fighting against the Chipewyans, who, everybody knew, were a poor, timid set of people, whom they ought rather to pity than to destroy; and recommended them to devote themselves more to the chase than they had done in times past, and less to the prosecution of war in time to come.

All this, and a great deal more, did Charley say, in a manner, and with a rapidity of utterance, that surprised himself, when he considered the fact that he had never ventured into the field of public speaking before. All this, and a great deal more--a very great deal more--did Jacques Caradoc interpret to the admiring Indians, who listened with the utmost gravity and profound attention, greeting the close with a very emphatic "Ho!"

Jacques's translation was by no means perfect. Many of the flights into which Charley ventured, especially in regard to the manners and customs of the savages of ancient Greece and Rome, were quite incomprehensible to the worthy backwoodsman; but he invariably proceeded when Charley halted, giving a flight of his own when at a loss, varying and modifying when he thought it advisable, and altering, adding, or cutting off as he pleased.

Several other chiefs addressed the assembly, and then dinner, if we may so call it, was served. In Charley's case it was breakfast; to the Indians it was breakfast, dinner, and supper in one. It consisted of a large platter of dried meat, reindeer tongues (considered a great delicacy), and marrow-bones.

Notwithstanding the graphic power with which Jacques had prepared his young companion for this meal, Charley's heart sank when he beheld the mountain of boiled meat that was placed before him. He was ravenously hungry, it is true, but it was patent to his perception at a glance that no powers of gormandizing of which he was capable could enable him to consume the mass in the course of one day.

Jacques observed his consternation, and was not a little entertained by it, although his face wore an expression of profound gravity while

he proceeded to attack his own dish, which was equal to that of his friend.

Before commencing, a small portion of meat was thrown into the fire as a sacrifice to the Great Master of Life.

"How they do eat, to be sure!" whispered Charley to Jacques, after he had glanced in wonder at the circle of men who were devouring their food with the most extraordinary rapidity.

"Why, you must know," replied Jacques, "that it's considered a point of honour to get it over soon, and the man that is done first gets most credit. But it's hard work" (he sighed, and paused a little to breathe), "and I've not got half through yet."

"It's quite plain that I must lose credit with them, then, if it depends on my eating that. Tell me, Jacques, is there no way of escape? Must I sit here till it is all consumed?"

"No doubt of it. Every bit that has been cooked must be crammed down our throats somehow or other." Charley heaved a deep sigh, and made another desperate attack on a large steak, while the Indians around him made considerable progress in reducing their respective mountains.

Several times Charley and Redfeather exchanged glances as they paused in their labours.

"I say, Jacques," said Charley, pulling up once more, "how do you get on? Pretty well stuffed by this time, I should imagine?"

"Oh no! I've a good deal o' room yet."

"I give in. Credit or disgrace, it's all one. I'll not make a pig of myself for any red-skin in the land."

Jacques smiled.

"See," continued Charley, "there's a fellow opposite who has devoured as much as would have served me for three days. I don't know whether it's imagination or not, but I do verily believe that he's blacker in the face than when we sat down!"

"Very likely," replied Jacques, wiping his lips, "Now I've done."

"Done! you have left at least a third of your supply."

"True, and I may as well tell you for your comfort that there is one way of escape open to you. It is a custom among these fellows, that when any one cannot gulp his share o' the prog, he may get help from any of his friends that can cram it down their throats; and as there are always such fellows among these Injins, they seldom have any difficulty."

"A most convenient practice," replied Charley, "I'll adopt it at once."

Charley turned to his next neighbour with the intent to beg of him to eat his remnant of the feast.

"Bless my heart, Jacques, I've no chance with the fellow on my left hand; he's stuffed quite full already, and is not quite done with his own share."

"Never fear," replied his friend, looking at the individual in question, who was languidly lifting a marrowbone to his lips; "he'll do it easy. I knows the gauge o' them chaps, and for all his sleepy looks just now he's game for a lot more."

"Impossible," replied Charley, looking in despair at his unfinished viands and then at the Indian. A glance round the circle seemed further to convince him that if he did not eat it himself there were none of the party likely to do so.

"You'll have to give him a good lump o' tobacco to do it, though; he won't undertake so much for a trifle, I can tell you." Jacques chuckled as he said this, and handed his own portion over to another Indian, who readily undertook to finish it for him.

"He'll burst; I feel certain of that," said Charley, with a deep sigh, as he surveyed his friend on the left.

At last he took courage to propose the thing to him, and just as the man finished the last morsel of his own repast, Charley placed his own plate before him, with a look that seemed to say, "Eat it, my friend, _if you can._"

The Indian, much to his surprise, immediately commenced to it, and in less than half-an-hour the whole was disposed of.

During this scene of gluttony, one of the chiefs entertained the assembly with a wild and most unmusical chant, to which he beat time on a sort of tambourine, while the women outside the enclosure beat a similar accompaniment.

"I say, master," whispered Jacques, "it seems to my observation that the fellow you call Redfeather eats less than any Injin I ever saw. He has got a comrade to eat more than half his share; now that's strange."

"It won't appear strange, Jacques, when I tell you that Redfeather has lived much more among white men than Indians during the last ten years; and although voyageurs eat an enormous quantity of food, they don't make it a point of honour, as these fellows seem to do, to eat much more than enough. Besides, Redfeather is a very different man from those around him; he has been partially educated by the missionaries on Playgreen Lake, and I think has a strong leaning towards them."

While they were thus conversing in whispers, Redfeather rose, and holding forth his hand, delivered himself of the following oration:--

"The time has come for Redfeather to speak. He has kept silence for many moons now, but his heart has been full of words. It is too full; he must speak now. Redfeather has fought with his tribe, and has been accounted a brave, and one who loves his people. This is true. He _does_ love, even more than they can understand. His friends know that he has never feared to face danger and death in their defence,

and that, if it were necessary, he would do so still. But Redfeather is going to leave his people now. His heart is heavy at the thought. Perhaps many moons will come and go, many snows may fall and melt away, before he sees his people again; and it is this that makes him full of sorrow, it is this that makes his head to droop like the branches of the weeping willow."

Redfeather paused at this point, but not a sound escaped from the listening circle: the Indians were evidently taken by surprise at this abrupt announcement. He proceeded:--

"When Redfeather travelled not long since with the white men, he met with a pale-face who came from the other side of the Great Salt Lake towards the rising sun. This man was called by some of the people a missionary. He spoke wonderful things in the ear of Redfeather. He told him of things about the Great Spirit which he did not know before, and he asked Redfeather to go and help him to speak to the Indians about these strange things. Redfeather would not go. He loved his people too much, and he thought that the words of the missionary seemed foolishness. But he has thought much about it since. He does not understand the strange things that were told to him, and he has tried to forget them, but he cannot. He can get no rest. He hears strange sounds in the breeze that shakes the pine. He thinks that there are voices in the waterfall; the rivers seem to speak, Redfeather's spirit is vexed. The Great Spirit, perhaps, is talking to him. He has resolved to go to the dwelling of the missionary and stay with him."

The Indian paused again, but still no sound escaped from his comrades. Dropping his voice to a soft plaintive tone, he continued--

"But Redfeather loves his kindred. He desires very much that they should hear the things that the missionary said. He spoke of the happy hunting grounds to which the spirits of our fathers have gone, and said that we required a guide to lead us there; that there was but one guide, whose name, he said, was Jesus. Redfeather would stay and hunt with his people, but his spirit is troubled; he cannot rest; he must go!"

Redfeather sat down, and a long silence ensued. His words had evidently taken the whole party by surprise, although not a countenance there showed the smallest symptom of astonishment, except that of Charley Kennedy, whose intercourse with Indians had not yet been so great as to have taught him to conceal his feelings.

At length the old chief rose, and after complimenting Redfeather on his bravery in general, and admitting that he had shown much love to his people on all occasions, went into the subject of his quitting them at some length. He reminded him that there were evil spirits as well as good; that it was not for him to say which kind had been troubling him, but that he ought to consider well before he went to live altogether with pale-faces. Several other speeches were made, some to the same effect, and others applauding his resolve. These latter had, perhaps, some idea that his bringing the pale-faced missionary among them would gratify their taste for the marvellous--a taste that is pretty strong in all uneducated minds.

One man, however, was particularly urgent in endeavouring to dissuade him from his purpose. He was a tall, low-browed man; muscular and

well built, but possessed of a most villainous expression of countenance. From a remark that fell from one of the company, Charley discovered that his name was Misconna, and so learned, to his surprise, that he was the very Indian mentioned by Redfeather as the man who had been his rival for the hand of Wabisca, and who had so cruelly killed the wife of the poor trapper the night on which the Chipewyan camp was attacked, and the people slaughtered.

What reason Misconna had for objecting so strongly to Redfeather's leaving the community no one could tell, although some of those who knew his unforgiving nature suspected that he still entertained the hope of being able, some day or other, to wreak his vengeance on his old rival. But whatever was his object, he failed in moving Redfeather's resolution; and it was at last admitted by the whole party that Redfeather was a "wise chief;" that he knew best what ought to be done under the circumstances, and it was hoped that his promised visit, in company with the missionary, would not be delayed many moons.

That night, in the deep shadow of the trees, by the brook that murmured near the Indian camp, while the stars twinkled through the branches overhead, Charley introduced Redfeather to his friend Jacques Caradoc, and a friendship was struck up between the bold hunter and the red man that grew and strengthened as each successive day made them acquainted with their respective good qualities. In the same place, and with the same stars looking down upon them, it was further agreed that Redfeather should accompany his new friends, taking his wife along with him in another canoe, as far as their several routes led them in the same direction, which was about four or five days' journey; and that while the one party diverged towards the fort at Stoney Creek, the other should pursue its course to the missionary station on the shores of Lake Winnipeg.

But there was a snake in the grass there that they little suspected. Misconna had crept through the bushes after them, with a degree of caution that might have baffled their vigilance, even had they suspected treason in a friendly camp. He lay listening intently to all their plans, and when they returned to their camp, he rose out from among the bushes, like a dark spirit of evil, clutched the handle of his scalping-knife, and gave utterance to a malicious growl; then, walking hastily after them, his dusky figure was soon concealed among the trees.

CHAPTER XVI.

The return--Narrow escape--A murderous attempt, which fails--And a discovery.

All nature was joyous and brilliant, and bright and beautiful. Morning was still very young--about an hour old. Sounds of the most cheerful, light-hearted character floated over the waters and echoed through the woods, as birds and beasts hurried to and fro with all the bustling energy that betokened preparation and search for breakfast. Fish leaped in the pools with a rapidity that brought forcibly to mind that wise saying, "The more hurry, the less speed;"

for they appeared constantly to miss their mark, although they jumped twice their own length out of the water in the effort.

Ducks and geese sprang from their liquid beds with an amazing amount of unnecessary sputter, as if they had awakened to the sudden consciousness of being late for breakfast, then alighted in the water again with a _squash,_ on finding (probably) that it was too early for that meal, but, observing other flocks passing and re-passing on noisy wing, took to flight again, unable, apparently, to restrain their feelings of delight at the freshness of the morning air, the brightness of the rising sun, and the sweet perfume of the dewy verdure, as the mists cleared away over the tree-tops and lost themselves in the blue sky. Everything seemed instinct not only with life, but with a large amount of superabundant energy. Earth, air, sky, animal, vegetable, and mineral, solid and liquid, all were either actually in a state of lively exulting motion, or had a peculiarly sprightly look about them, as if nature had just burst out of prison _en masse_, and gone raving mad with joy.

Such was the delectable state of things the morning on which two canoes darted from the camp of the Knisteneux, amid many expressions of goodwill. One canoe contained our two friends, Charley and Jacques; the other, Redfeather and his wife Wabisca.

A few strokes of the paddle shot them out into the stream, which carried them rapidly away from the scene of their late festivities. In five minutes they swept round a point which shut them out from view, and they were swiftly descending those rapid rivers that had cost Charley and Jacques so much labour to ascend.

"Look out for rocks ahead, Mr. Charles," cried Jacques, as he steered the light bark into the middle of a rapid, which they had avoided when ascending by making a portage. "Keep well to the left of yon swirl. _Parbleu_, if we touch the rock _there_ it'll be all over with us."

"All right," was Charley's laconic reply. And so it proved, for their canoe, after getting fairly into the run of the rapid, was evidently under the complete command of its expert crew, and darted forward amid the foaming waters like a thing instinct with life. Now it careered and plunged over the waves where the rough bed of the stream made them more than usually turbulent. Anon it flew with increased rapidity through a narrow gap where the compressed water was smooth and black, but deep and powerful, rendering great care necessary to prevent the canoe's frail sides from being dashed on the rocks. Then it met a curling wave, into which it plunged like an impetuous charger, and was checked for a moment by its own violence. Presently an eddy threw the canoe a little out of its course, disconcerting Charley's intention of _shaving_ a rock, which lay in their track, so that he slightly grazed it in passing.

"Ah, Mr. Charles," said Jacques, shaking his head, "that was not well done; an inch more would have sent us down the rapids like drowned cats."

"True," replied Charley, somewhat crestfallen; "but you see the other inch was not lost, so we're not much the worse for it."

"Well, after all, it was a ticklish bit, and I should have guessed

that your experience was not up to it quite. I've seen many a man in my day who wouldn't ha' done it _half_ so slick, an' yet ha' thought no small beer of himself; so you needn't be ashamed, Mr. Charles. But Wabisca beats you for all that," continued the hunter, glancing hastily over his shoulder at Redfeather, who followed closely in their wake, he and his modest-looking wife guiding their little craft through the dangerous passages with the utmost _sangfroid_ and precision.

"We've about run them all now," said Jacques, as they paddled over a sheet of still water which intervened between the rapid they had just descended and another which thundered about a hundred yards in advance.

"I was so engrossed with the one we have just come down," said Charley, "that I quite forgot this one."

"Quite right, Mr. Charles," said Jacques, in an approving tone, "quite right. I holds that a man should always attend to what he's at, an' to nothin' else. I've lived long in the woods now, and the fact becomes more and more sartin every day. I've know'd chaps, now, as timersome as settlement girls, that were always in such a mortal funk about what _was_ to happen, or _might_ happen, that they were never fit for anything that _did_ happen; always lookin' ahead, and never around them. Of course, I don't mean that a man shouldn't look ahead at all, but their great mistake was that they looked out too far ahead, and always kep' their eyes nailed there, just as if they had the fixin' o' everything, an' Providence had nothin' to do with it at all. I mind a Canadian o' that sort that travelled in company with me once. We were goin' just as we are now, Mr. Charles, two canoes of us; him and a comrade in one, and me and a comrade in t'other. One night we got to a lot o' rapids that came one after another for the matter o' three miles or thereabouts. They were all easy ones, however, except the last; but it _was_ a tickler, with a sharp turn o' the land that hid it from sight until ye were right into it, with a foamin' current, and a range o' ragged rocks that stood straight in front o' ye, like the teeth of a cross-cut saw. It was easy enough, however, if a man _knew_ it, and was a cool hand. Well, the _pauvre_ Canadian was in a terrible takin' about this shoot long afore he came to it. He had run it often enough in boats where he was one of a half-dozen men, and had nothin' to do but look on; but he had never _steered_ down it before. When he came to the top o' the rapids, his mind was so filled with this shoot that he couldn't attend to nothin', and scraped agin' a dozen rocks in almost smooth water, so that when he got a little more than half-way down, the canoe was as rickety as if it had just come off a six months' cruise. At last we came to the big rapid, and after we'd run down our canoe I climbed the bank to see them do it. Down they came, the poor Canadian white as a sheet, and his comrade, who was brave enough, but knew nothin' about light craft, not very comfortable. At first he could see nothin' for the point, but in another moment round they went, end on, for the big rocks. The Canadian gave a great yell when he saw them, and plunged at the paddle till I thought he'd have capsized altogether. They ran it well enough, straight between the rocks (more by good luck than good guidance), and sloped down to the smooth water below; but the canoe had got such a battering in the rapids above, where an Injin baby could have steered it in safety, that the last plunge shook it all to pieces. It opened up, and lay down flat on the water, while the two men fell right through the bottom, screechin'

like mad, and rolling about among shreds o' birch bark!"

While Jacques was thus descanting philosophically on his experience in time past, they had approached the head of the second rapid, and in accordance with the principles just enunciated, the stout backwoodsman gave his undivided attention to the work before him. The rapid was short and deep, so that little care was required in descending it, excepting at one point, where the stream rushed impetuously between two rocks about six yards asunder. Here it was requisite to keep the canoe as much in the middle of the stream as possible.

Just as they began to feel the drag of the water, Redfeather was heard to shout in a loud warning tone, which caused Jacques and Charley to back their paddles hurriedly.

"What can the Injin mean, I wonder?" said Jacques, in a perplexed tone. "He don't look like a man that would stop us at the top of a strong rapid for nothin'."

"It's too late to do that now, whatever is his reason," said Charley, as he and his companion struggled in vain to paddle up stream.

"It's no use, Mr. Charles; we must run it now--the current's too strong to make head against; besides, I do think the man has only seen a bear, or something o' that sort, for I see he's ashore, and jumpin' among the bushes like a cariboo."

Saying this, they turned the canoe's head down stream again, and allowed it to drift, merely retarding its progress a little with the paddles.

Suddenly Jacques uttered a sharp exclamation. "_Mon Dieu!_" said he, "it's plain enough now. Look there!"

Jacques pointed as he spoke to the narrows to which they were now approaching with tremendous speed, which increased every instant. A heavy tree lay directly across the stream, reaching from rock to rock, and placed in such a way that it was impossible for a canoe to descend without being dashed in pieces against it. This was the more curious that no trees grew in the immediate vicinity, so that this one must have been designedly conveyed there.

"There has been foul work here," said Jacques, in a deep tone. "We must dive, Mr. Charles; there's no chance any way else, and _that's_ but a poor one."

This was true. The rocks on each side rose almost perpendicularly out of the water, so that it was utterly impossible to run ashore, and the only way of escape, as Jacques said, was by diving under the tree, a thing involving great risk, as the stream immediately below was broken by rocks, against which it dashed in foam, and through which the chances of steering one's way in safety by means of swimming were very slender indeed.

Charley made no reply, but with tightly-compressed lips, and a look of stern resolution on his brow, threw off his coat, and hastily tied his belt tightly round his waist. The canoe was now sweeping forward with lightning speed; in a few minutes it would be dashed to pieces.

At that moment a shout was heard in the woods, and Redfeather darting out, rushed over the ledge of rock on which one end of the tree rested, seized the trunk in his arms, and exerting all his strength, hurled it over into the river. In doing so he stumbled, and ere he could recover himself a branch caught him under the arm as the tree fell over, and dragged him into the boiling stream. This accident was probably the means of saving his life, for just as he fell the loud report of a gun rang through the woods, and a bullet passed through his cap. For a second or two both man and tree were lost in the foam, while the canoe dashed past in safety. The next instant Wabisca passed the narrows in her small craft, and steered for the tree. Redfeather, who had risen and sunk several times, saw her as she passed, and making a violent effort, he caught hold of the gunwale, and was carried down in safety.

"I'll tell you what it is," said Jacques, as the party stood on a rock promontory after the events just narrated: "I would give a dollar to have that fellow's nose and the sights o' my rifle in a line at any distance short of two hundred yards."

"It was Misconna," said Redfeather. "I did not see him, but there's not another man in the tribe that could do that."

"I'm thankful we escaped, Jacques. I never felt so near death before, and had it not been for the timely aid of our friend here, it strikes me that our wild life would have come to an abrupt close.--God bless you, Redfeather," said Charley, taking the Indian's hand in both of his and kissing it.

Charley's ebullition of feeling was natural. He had not yet become used to the dangers of the wilderness so as to treat them with indifference. Jacques, on the other hand, had risked his life so often that escape from danger was treated very much as a matter of course, and called forth little expression of feeling. Still, it must not be inferred from this that his nature had become callous. The backwoodsman's frame was hard and unyielding as iron, but his heart was as soft still as it was on the day on which he first donned the hunting-shirt, and there was much more of tenderness than met the eye in the squeeze that he gave Redfeather's hand on landing.

As the four travellers encircled the fire that night, under the leafy branches of the forest, and smoked their pipes in concert, while Wabisca busied herself in clearing away the remnants of their evening meal, they waxed communicative, and stories, pathetic, comic, and tragic, followed each other in rapid succession.

"Now, Redfeather," said Charley, while Jacques rose and went down to the luggage to get more tobacco, "tell Jacques about the way in which you got your name. I am sure he will feel deeply interested in that story--at least I am certain that Harry Somerville and I did when you told it to us the day we were wind-bound on Lake Winnipeg."

Redfeather made no reply for a few seconds. "Will Mr. Charles speak for me?" he said at length. "His tongue is smooth and quick."

"A doubtful kind of compliment," said Charley, laughing; "but I will, if you don't wish to tell it yourself."

"And don't mention names. Do not let him know that you speak of me or my friends," said the Indian, in a low whisper, as Jacques returned and sat down by the fire again.

Charley gave him a glance of surprise; but being prevented from asking questions, he nodded in reply, and proceeded to relate to his friend the story that has been recounted in a previous chapter. Redfeather leaned back against a tree, and appeared to listen intently.

Charley's powers of description were by no means inconsiderable, and the backwoodsman's face assumed a look of good-humoured attention as the story proceeded. But when the narrator went on to tell of the meditated attack and the midnight march, his interest was aroused, the pipe which he had been smoking was allowed to go out, and he gazed at his young friend with the most earnest attention. It was evident that the hunter's spirit entered with deep sympathy into such scenes; and when Charley described the attack, and the death of the trapper's wife, Jacques seemed unable to restrain his feelings. He leaned his elbows on his knees, buried his face in his hands, and groaned aloud.

"Mr. Charles," he said, in a deep voice, when the story was ended, "there are two men I would like to meet with in this world before I die. One is the young Injin who tried to save that girl's life, the other is the cowardly villain that took it. I don't mean the one who finished the bloody work: my rifle sent his accursed spirit to its own place--"

"_Your_ rifle!" cried Charley, in amazement.

"Ay, mine! It was _my_ wife who was butchered by these savage dogs on that dark night. Oh, what avails the strength o' that right arm!" said Jacques, bitterly, as he lifted up his clenched fist; "it was powerless to save _her_ --the sweet girl who left her home and people to follow me, a rough hunter, through the lonesome wilderness!"

He covered his face again, and groaned in agony of spirit, while his whole frame quivered with emotion.

Jacques remained silent, and his sympathising friends refrained from intruding on a sorrow which they felt they had no power to relieve.

At length he spoke. "Yes," said he, "I would give much to meet with the man who tried to save her. I saw him do it twice; but the devils about him were too eager to be balked of their prey."

Charley and the Indian exchanged glances. "That Indian's name," said the former, "was _Redfeather!_"

"What!" exclaimed the trapper, jumping to his feet, and grasping Redfeather, who had also risen, by the two shoulders, stared wildly in his face; "was it _you_ that did it?"

Redfeather smiled, and held out his hand, which the other took and wrung with an energy that would have extorted a cry of pain from any one but an Indian. Then, dropping it suddenly and clinching his hands, he exclaimed,--

"I said that I would like to meet the villain who killed her--yes, I said it in passion, when your words had roused all my old feelings again; but I am thankful--I bless God that I did not know this sooner--that you did not tell me of it when I was at the camp, for I verily believe that I would not only have fixed _him_, but half the warriors o' your tribe too, before they had settled _me!_"

It need scarcely be added that the friendship which already subsisted between Jacques and Redfeather was now doubly cemented; nor will it create surprise when we say that the former, in the fulness of his heart, and from sheer inability to find adequate outlets for the expression of his feelings, offered Redfeather in succession all the articles of value he possessed, even to the much-loved rifle, and was seriously annoyed at their not being accepted. At last he finished off by assuring the Indian that he might look out for him soon at the missionary settlement, where he meant to stay with him evermore in the capacity of hunter, fisherman, and jack-of-all-trades to the whole clan.

CHAPTER XVII.

The scene changes--Bachelor's Hall--A practical joke and its consequences--A snow-shoe walk at night in the forest.

Leaving Charley to pursue his adventurous career among the Indians, we will introduce our reader to a new scene, and follow for a time the fortunes of our friend Harry Somerville. It will be remembered that we left him labouring under severe disappointment at the idea of having to spend a year, it might be many years, at the depot, and being condemned to the desk, instead of realising his fond dreams of bear-hunting and deer-stalking in the woods and prairies.

It was now the autumn of Harry's second year at York Fort. This period of the year happens to be the busiest at the depot, in consequence of the preparation of the annual accounts for transmission to England, in the solitary ship which visits this lonely spot once a year; so that Harry was tied to his desk all day and the greater part of the night too, so that his spirits fell infinitely below zero, and he began to look on himself as the most miserable of mortals. His spirits rose, however, with amazing rapidity after the ship went away, and the "young gentlemen," as the clerks were styled _en masse_, were permitted to run wild in the swamps and woods for the three weeks succeeding that event. During this glimpse of sunshine they recruited their exhausted frames by paddling about all day in Indian canoes, or wandering through the marshes, sleeping at nights in tents or under the pine trees, and spreading dismay among the feathered tribes, of which there were immense numbers of all kinds. After this they returned to their regular work at the desk; but as this was not so severe as in summer, and was further lightened by Wednesdays and Saturdays being devoted entirely to recreation, Harry began to look on things in a less gloomy aspect, and at length regained his wonted cheerful spirits.

Autumn passed away. The ducks and geese took their departure to more genial climes. The swamps froze up and became solid. Snow fell in

great abundance, covering every vestige of vegetable nature, except the dark fir trees, that only helped to render the scenery more dreary, and winter settled down upon the land. Within the pickets of York Fort, the thirty or forty souls who lived there were actively employed in cutting their firewood, putting in double window-frames to keep out the severe cold, cutting tracks in the snow from one house to another, and otherwise preparing for a winter of eight months' duration, as cold as that of Nova Zembla, and in the course of which the only new faces they had any chance of seeing were those of the two men who conveyed the annual winter packet of letters from the next station. Outside of the fort, all was a wide, waste wilderness for thousands of miles around. Deathlike stillness and solitude reigned everywhere, except when a covey of ptarmigan whirred like large snowflakes athwart the sky, or an arctic fox prowled stealthily through the woods in search of prey.

As if in opposition to the gloom and stillness and solitude outside, the interior of the clerks' house presented a striking contrast of ruddy warmth, cheerful sounds, and bustling activity.

It was evening; but although the sun had set, there was still sufficient daylight to render candles unnecessary, though not enough to prevent a bright glare from the stove in the centre of the hall taking full effect in the darkening chamber, and making it glow with fiery red. Harry Somerville sat in front, and full in the blaze of this stove, resting after the labours of the day; his arms crossed on his breast, his head a little to one side, as if in deep contemplation, as he gazed earnestly into the fire, and his chair tilted on its hind legs so as to balance with such nicety that a feather's weight additional outside its centre of gravity would have upset it. He had divested himself of his coat--a practice that prevailed among the young gentlemen when at home, as being free-and-easy as well as convenient. The doctor, a tall, broad-shouldered man, with red hair and whiskers, paced the room sedately, with a long pipe depending from his lips, which he removed occasionally to address a few remarks to the accountant, a stout, heavy man of about thirty, with a voice like a Stentor, eyes sharp and active as those of a ferret, and a tongue that moved with twice the ordinary amount of lingual rapidity. The doctor's remarks seemed to be particularly humorous, if one might judge from the peals of laughter with which they were received by the accountant, who stood with his back to the stove in such a position that, while it warmed him from his heels to his waist, he enjoyed the additional benefit of the pipe or chimney, which rose upwards, parallel with his spine, and, taking a sudden bend near the roof, passed over his head--thus producing a genial and equable warmth from top to toe.

"Yes," said the doctor, "I left him hotly following up a rabbit-track, in the firm belief that it was that of a silver fox."

"And did you not undeceive the greenhorn?" cried the accountant, with another shout of laughter.

"Not I," replied the doctor. "I merely recommended him to keep his eye on the sun, lest he should lose his way, and hastened home; for it just occurred to me that I had forgotten to visit Louis Blanc, who cut his foot with an axe yesterday, and whose wound required redressing, so I left the poor youth to learn from experience."

"Pray, who did you leave to that delightful fate?" asked Mr. Wilson, issuing from his bedroom, and approaching the stove.

Mr. Wilson was a middle-aged, good-humoured, active man, who filled the onerous offices of superintendent of the men, trader of furs, seller of goods to the Indians, and general factotum.

"Our friend Hamilton," answered the doctor, in reply to his question. "I think he is, without exception, the most egregious nincompoop I ever saw. Just as I passed the long swamp on my way home, I met him crashing through the bushes in hot pursuit of a rabbit, the track of which he mistook for a fox. Poor fellow! He had been out since breakfast, and only shot a brace of ptarmigan, although they are as thick as bees and quite tame. 'But then, do you see,' said he, in excuse, 'I'm so very shortsighted! Would you believe it, I've blown fifteen lumps of snow to atoms, in the belief that they were ptarmigan!' and then he rushed off again."

"No doubt," said Mr. Wilson, smiling, "the lad is very green, but he's a good fellow for all that."

"I'll answer for that," said the accountant; "I found him over at the men's houses this morning doing your work for you, doctor."

"How so?" inquired the disciple of AEsculapius.

"Attending to your wounded man, Louis Blanc, to be sure; and he seemed to speak to him as wisely as if he had walked the hospitals, and regularly passed for an M.D."

"Indeed!" said the doctor, with a mischievous grin. "Then I must pay him off for interfering with my patients."

"Ah, doctor, you're too fond of practical jokes. You never let slip an opportunity of 'paying off' your friends for something or other. It's a bad habit. Practical jokes are very bad things--shockingly bad," said Mr. Wilson, as he put on his fur cap, and wound a thick shawl round his throat, preparatory to leaving the room.

As Mr. Wilson gave utterance to this opinion, he passed Harry Somerville, who was still staring at the fire in deep mental abstraction, and, as he did so, gave his tilted chair a very slight push backwards with his finger--an action which caused Harry to toss up his legs, grasp convulsively with both hands at empty air, and fall with a loud noise and an angry yell to the ground, while his persecutor vanished from the scene.

"O you outrageous villain!" cried Harry, shaking his fist at the door, as he slowly gathered himself up; "I might have expected that."

"Quite so," said the doctor; "you might. It was very neatly done, undoubtedly. Wilson deserves credit for the way in which it was executed."

"He deserves to be executed for doing it at all," replied Harry, rubbing his elbow as he resumed his seat.

"Any bark knocked off?" inquired the accountant, as he took a piece of glowing charcoal from the stove wherewith to light his pipe. "Try

a whiff, Harry. It's good for such things. Bruises, sores, contusions, sprains, rheumatic affections of the back and loins, carbuncles and earache--there's nothing that smoking won't cure; eh, doctor?"

"Certainly. If applied inwardly, there's nothing so good for digestion when one doesn't require tonics--Try it, Harry; it will do you good, I assure you."

"No, thank you," replied Harry; "I'll leave that to you and the chimney. I don't wish to make a soot-bag of my mouth. But tell me, doctor, what do you mean to do with that lump of snow there?"

Harry pointed to a mass of snow, of about two feet square, which lay on the floor beside the door. It had been placed there by the doctor some time previously.

"Do with it? Have patience, my friend, and you shall see. It is a little surprise I have in store for Hamilton."

As he spoke, the door opened, and a short, square-built man rushed into the room, with a pistol in one hand and a bright little bullet in the other.

"Hollo, skipper!" cried Harry, "what's the row?"

"All right," cried the skipper; "here it is at last, solid as the fluke of an anchor. Toss me the powder-flask Harry; look sharp, else it'll melt."

A powder-flask was immediately produced, from which the skipper hastily charged the pistol, and rammed down the shining bullet.

"Now then," said he, "look out for squalls. Clear the decks there."

And rushing to the door, he flung it open, took a steady aim at something outside, and fired.

"Is the man mad?" said the accountant, as with a look of amazement he beheld the skipper spring through the doorway, and immediately return bearing in his arms a large piece of fir plank.

"Not quite mad yet," he said, in reply, "but I've sent a ball of quicksilver through an inch plank, and that's not a thing to be done every day--even here, although it is cold enough sometimes to freeze up one's very ideas."

"Dear me," interrupted Harry Somerville, looking as if a new thought had struck him, "that must be it! I've no doubt that poor Hamilton's ideas are frozen, which accounts for the total absence of any indication of his possessing such things."

"I observed," continued the skipper, not noticing the interruption, "that the glass was down at 45 degrees below zero this morning, and put out a bullet-mould full of mercury, and you see the result." As he spoke he held up the perforated plank in triumph.

The skipper was a strange mixture of qualities. To a wild, off-hand, sailor-like hilarity of disposition in hours of leisure, he united a

grave, stern energy of character while employed in the performance of his duties. Duty was always paramount with him. A smile could scarcely be extracted from him while it was in the course of performance. But the instant his work was done a new spirit seemed to take possession of the man. Fun, mischief of any kind, no matter how childish, he entered into with the greatest delight and enthusiasm. Among other peculiarities, he had become deeply imbued with a thirst for scientific knowledge, ever since he had acquired, with infinite labour, the small modicum of science necessary to navigation; and his doings in pursuit of statistical information relative to the weather, and the phenomena of nature generally, were very peculiar, and in some cases outrageous. His transaction with the quicksilver was in consequence of an eager desire to see that metal frozen (an effect which takes place when the spirit-of-wine thermometer falls to 39 degrees below zero of Fahrenheit), and a wish to be able to boast of having actually fired a mercurial bullet through an inch plank. Having made a careful note of the fact, with all the relative circumstances attending it, in a very much blotted book, which he denominated his scientific log, the worthy skipper threw off his coat, drew a chair to the stove, and prepared to regale himself with a pipe. As he glanced slowly round the room while thus engaged, his eye fell on the mass of snow before alluded to. On being informed by the doctor for what it was intended, he laid down his pipe and rose hastily from his chair.

"You've not a moment to lose," said he. "As I came in at the gate just now, I saw Hamilton coming down the river on the ice, and he must be almost arrived now."

"Up with it then," cried the doctor, seizing the snow, and lifting it to the top of the door." Hand me those bits of stick, Harry; quick, man, stir your stumps.--Now then, skipper, fix them in so, while I hold this up."

The skipper lent willing and effective aid, so that in a few minutes the snow was placed in such a position that upon the opening of the door it must inevitably fall on the head of the first person who should enter the room.

"So," said the skipper, "that's rigged up in what I call ship-shape fashion."

"True," remarked the doctor, eyeing the arrangement with a look of approval; "it will do, I think, admirably."

"Don't you think, skipper," said Harry Somerville gravely, as he resumed his seat in front of the fire, "that it would be worth while to make a careful and minute entry in your private log of the manner in which it was put up, to be afterwards followed by an account of its effect? You might write an essay on it now, and call it the extraordinary effects of a fall of snow in latitude so and so, eh? What think you of it?"

The skipper vouchsafed no reply, but made a significant gesture with his fist, which caused Harry to put himself in a posture of defence.

At this moment footsteps were heard on the wooden platform in front of the building.

Instantly all became silence and expectation in the hall as the result of the practical joke was about to be realised. Just then another step was heard on the platform, and it became evident that two persons were approaching the door.

"Hope it'll be the right man," said the skipper, with a look savouring slightly of anxiety.

As he spoke the door opened, and a foot crossed the threshold; the next instant the miniature avalanche descended on the head and shoulders of a man, who reeled forward from the weight of the blow, and, covered from head to foot with snow, fell to the ground amid shouts of laughter.

With a convulsive stamp and shake, the prostrate figure sprang up and confronted the party. Had the cast-iron stove suddenly burst into atoms, and blown the roof off the house, it could scarcely have created greater consternation than that which filled the merry jesters when they beheld the visage of Mr. Rogan, the superintendent of the fort, red with passion and fringed with snow.

"So," said he, stamping violently with his foot, partly from anger, and partly with a view of shaking off the unexpected covering, which stuck all over his dress in little patches, producing a somewhat piebald effect,--"so you are pleased to jest, gentlemen. Pray, who placed that piece of snow over the door?" Mr. Rogan glared fiercely round upon the culprits, who stood speechless before him.

For a moment he stood silent, as if uncertain how to act; then turning short on his heel, he strode quickly out of the room, nearly overturning Mr. Hamilton, who at the same instant entered it, carrying his gun and snowshoes under his arm.

"Dear me, what has happened?" he exclaimed, in a peculiarly gentle tone of voice, at the same time regarding the snow and the horror-stricken circle with a look of intense surprise.

"You see what has happened," replied Harry Somerville, who was the first to recover his composure; "I presume you intended to ask, 'What has caused it to happen?' Perhaps the skipper will explain; it's beyond me, quite."

Thus appealed to, that worthy cleared his throat, and said,--

"Why, you see, Mr. Hamilton, a great phenomenon of meteorology has happened. We were all standing, you must know, at the open door, taking a squint at the weather, when our attention was attracted by a curious object that appeared in the sky, and seemed to be coming down at the rate of ten knots an hour, right end-on for the house. I had just time to cry, 'Clear out, lads,' when it came slap in through the doorway, and smashed to shivers there, where you see the fragments. In fact, it's a wonderful aerolite, and Mr. Rogan has just gone out with a lot of the bits in his pocket, to make a careful examination of them, and draw up a report for the Geological Society in London. I shouldn't wonder if he were to send off an express to-night; and maybe you will have to convey the news to headquarters, so you'd better go and see him about it soon."

Soft although Mr. Hamilton was supposed to be, he was not quite

prepared to give credit to this explanation; but being of a peaceful disposition, and altogether unaccustomed to retort, he merely smiled his disbelief, as he proceeded to lay aside his fowling-piece, and divest himself of the voluminous out-of-door trappings with which he was clad. Mr. Hamilton was a tall, slender youth, of about nineteen. He had come out by the ship in autumn, and was spending his first winter at York Fort. Up to the period of his entering the Hudson's Bay Company's service, he had never been more than twenty miles from home, and having mingled little with the world, was somewhat unsophisticated, besides being by nature gentle and unassuming.

Soon after this the man who acted as cook, waiter, and butler to the mess, entered, and said that Mr. Rogan desired to see the accountant immediately.

"Who am I to say did it?" enquired that gentleman, as he rose to obey the summons.

"Wouldn't it be a disinterested piece of kindness if you were to say it was yourself?" suggested the doctor.

"Perhaps it would, but I won't," replied the accountant, as he made his exit.

In about half-an-hour Mr. Rogan and the accountant re-entered the apartment. The former had quite regained his composure. He was naturally amiable; which happy disposition was indicated by a habitually cheerful look and smile.

"Now, gentlemen," said he, "I find that this practical joke was not intended for me, and therefore look upon it as an unlucky accident; but I cannot too strongly express my dislike to practical jokes of all kinds. I have seen great evil, and some bloodshed, result from practical jokes; and I think that, being a sufferer in consequence of your fondness for them, I have a right to beg that you will abstain from such doings in future--at least from such jokes as involve risk to those who do not choose to enter into them."

Having given vent to this speech, Mr. Rogan left his volatile friends to digest it at their leisure.

"Serves us right," said the skipper, pacing up and down the room in a repentant frame of mind, with his thumbs hooked into the arm-holes of his vest.

The doctor said nothing, but breathed hard and smoked vigorously.

While we admit most thoroughly with Mr. Rogan that practical jokes are exceedingly bad, and productive frequently of far more evil than fun, we feel it our duty, as a faithful delineator of manners, customs, and character in these regions, to urge in palliation of the offence committed by the young gentlemen at York Fort, that they had really about as few amusements and sources of excitement as fall to the lot of any class of men. They were entirely dependent on their own unaided exertions, during eight or nine months of the year, for amusement or recreation of any kind. Their books were few in number, and soon read through. The desolate wilderness around afforded no incidents to form subjects of conversation further than the events of a day's shooting, which, being nearly similar every day, soon lost

all interest. No newspapers came to tell of the doings of the busy world from which they were shut out, and nothing occurred to vary the dull routine of their life; so that it is not matter for wonder that they were driven to seek for relaxation and excitement occasionally in most outrageous and unnatural ways, and to indulge now and then in the perpetration of a practical joke.

For some time after the rebuke administered by Mr. Rogan, silence reigned in _Bachelor's Hall_, as the clerks' house was termed. But at length symptoms of _ennui_ began to be displayed. The doctor yawned and lay down on his bed to enjoy an American newspaper about twelve months old. Harry Somerville sat down to reread a volume of Franklin's travels in the polar regions, which he had perused twice already. Mr. Hamilton busied himself in cleaning his fowling-piece; while the skipper conversed with Mr. Wilson, who was engaged in his room in adjusting an ivory head to a walking-stick. Mr. Wilson was a jack-of-all-trades, who could make shift, one way or other, to do _anything_. The accountant paced the uncarpeted floor in deep contemplation.

At length he paused, and looked at Harry Somerville for some time.

"What say you to a walk through the woods to North River, Harry?"

"Ready," cried Harry, tossing down the book with a look of contempt-- "ready for anything."

"Will _you_ come, Hamilton?" added the accountant. Hamilton looked up in surprise.

"You don't mean, surely, to take so long a walk in the dark, do you? It is snowing, too, very heavily, and I think you said that North River was five miles off, did you not?"

"Of course I mean to walk in the dark," replied the accountant, "unless you can extemporize an artificial light for the occasion, or prevail on the moon to come out for my special benefit. As to snowing and a short tramp of five miles, why, the sooner you get to think of such things as _trifles_ the better, if you hope to be fit for anything in this country."

"I _don't_ think much of them," replied Hamilton, softly and with a slight smile; "I only meant that such a walk was not very _attractive_ so late in the evening."

"Attractive!" shouted Harry Somerville from his bedroom, where he was equipping himself for the walk; "what can be more attractive than a sharp run of ten miles through the woods on a cool night to visit your traps, with the prospect of a silver fox or a wolf at the end of it, and an extra sound sleep as the result? Come, man, don't be soft; get ready, and go along with us."

"Besides," added the accountant, "I don't mean to come back to-night. To-morrow, you know, is a holiday, so we can camp out in the snow after visiting the traps, have our supper, and start early in the morning to search for ptarmigan."

"Well, I will go," said Hamilton, after this account of the pleasures that were to be expected; "I am exceedingly anxious to learn to shoot

birds on the wing."

"Bless me! have you not learned that yet!" asked the doctor, in affected surprise, as he sauntered out of his bedroom to relight his pipe.

The various bedrooms in the clerks' house were ranged round the hall, having doors that opened directly into it, so that conversation carried on in a loud voice was heard in all the rooms at once, and was not infrequently sustained in elevated tones from different apartments, when the occupants were lounging, as they often did of an evening, in their beds.

"No," said Hamilton, in reply to the doctor's question, "I have not learned yet, although there were a great many grouse in the part of Scotland where I was brought up. But my aunt, with whom I lived, was so fearful of my shooting either myself or someone else, and had such an aversion to firearms, that I determined to make her mind easy, by promising that I would never use them so long as I remained under her roof."

"Quite right; very dutiful and proper," said the doctor, with a grave, patronising air.

"Perhaps you'll fall in with more fox tracks of the same sort as the one you gave chase to this morning," shouted the skipper, from Wilson's room.

"Oh! there's hundreds of them out there," said the accountant; "so let's off at once."

The trio now proceeded to equip themselves for the walk. Their costumes were peculiar, and merit description. As they were similar in the chief points, it will suffice to describe that of our friend Harry.

On his head he wore a fur-cap made of otter-skin, with a flap on each side to cover the ears, the frost being so intense in these climates that without some such protection they would inevitably freeze and fall off.

As the nose is constantly in use for the purposes of respiration, it is always left uncovered to fight with the cold as it best can; but it is a hard battle, and there is no doubt that, if it were possible, a nasal covering would be extremely pleasant. Indeed, several desperate efforts have been made to construct some sort of nose-bag, but hitherto without success, owing to the uncomfortable fact that the breath issuing from that organ immediately freezes, and converts the covering into a bag of snow or ice, which is not agreeable. Round his neck Harry wound a thick shawl of such portentous dimensions that it entirely enveloped the neck and lower part of the face; thus the entire head was, as it were, eclipsed--the eyes, the nose, and the cheek-bones alone being visible. He then threw on a coat made of deer-skin, so prepared that it bore a slight resemblance to excessively coarse chamois leather. It was somewhat in the form of a long, wide surtout, overlapping very much in front, and confined closely to the figure by means of a scarlet worsted belt instead of buttons, and was ornamented round the foot by a number of cuts, which produced a fringe of little tails. Being lined with thick

flannel, this portion of attire was rather heavy, but extremely necessary. A pair of blue cloth leggings, having a loose flap on the outside, were next drawn on over the trousers, as an additional protection to the knees. The feet, besides being portions of the body that are peculiarly susceptible of cold, had further to contend against the chafing of the lines which attach them to the snow-shoes, so that special care in their preparation for duty was necessary. First were put on a pair of blanketing or duffel socks, which were merely oblong in form, without sewing or making-up of any kind. These were wrapped round the feet, which were next thrust into a pair of made-up socks, of the same material, having ankle-pieces; above these were put another pair, without flaps for the ankles. Over all was drawn a pair of moccasins made of stout deer-skin, similar to that of the coat. Of course, the elegance of Harry's feet was entirely destroyed, and had he been met in this guise by any of his friends in the "old country," they would infallibly have come to the conclusion that he was afflicted with gout. Over his shoulders he slung a powder-horn and shot-pouch, the latter tastefully embroidered with dyed quill-work, A pair of deer-skin mittens, having a little bag for the thumb, and a large bag for the fingers, completed his costume.

While the three were making ready, with a running accompaniment of grunts and groans at refractory pieces of apparel, the night without became darker, and the snow fell thicker, so that when they issued suddenly out of their warm abode, and emerged into the sharp frosty air, which blew the snow-drift into their eyes, they felt a momentary desire to give up the project and return to their comfortable quarters.

"What a dismal-looking night it is!" said the accountant, as he led the way along the wooden platform towards the gate of the fort.

"Very!" replied Hamilton, with an involuntary shudder.

"Keep up your heart," said Harry, in a cheerful voice; "you've no notion how your mind will change on that point when you have walked a mile or so and got into a comfortable heat. I must confess, however, that a little moonshine would be an improvement," he added, on stumbling, for the third time, off the platform into the deep snow.

"It is full moon just now," said the accountant, "and I think the clouds look as if they would break soon. At any rate, I've been at North River so often that I believe I could walk out there blindfold."

As he spoke they passed the gate, and diverging to the right, proceeded, as well as the imperfect light permitted, along the footpath that led to the forest.

CHAPTER XVIII.

The walk continued--Frozen toes--An encampment in the snow.

After quitting York Fort, the three friends followed the track leading to the spot where the winter's firewood was cut. Snow was

still falling thickly, and it was with some difficulty that the accountant kept in the right direction. The night was excessively dark, while the dense fir forest, through which the narrow road ran, rendered the gloom if possible more intense.

When they had proceeded about a mile, their leader suddenly came to a stand.

"We must quit the track now," said he; "so get on your snow-shoes as fast as you can."

Hitherto they had carried their snow-shoes under their arms, as the beaten track along which they travelled rendered them unnecessary; but now, having to leave the path and pursue the remainder of their journey through deep snow, they availed themselves of those useful machines, by means of which the inhabitants of this part of North America are enabled to journey over many miles of trackless wilderness, with nearly as much ease as a sportsman can traverse the moors in autumn, and that over snow so deep that one hour's walk through it without such aids would completely exhaust the stoutest trapper, and advance him only a mile or so on his journey. In other words, to walk without snow-shoes would be utterly impossible, while to walk with them is easy and agreeable. They are not used after the manner of skates, with a sliding, but a stepping action, and their sole use is to support the wearer on the top of snow, into which without them he would sink up to the waist. When we say that they support the wearer on the top of the snow, of course we do not mean that they literally do not break the surface at all. But the depth to which they sink is comparatively trifling, and varies according to the state of the snow and the season of the year. In the woods they sink frequently about six inches, sometimes more, sometimes less, while on frozen rivers, where the snow is packed solid by the action of the wind, they sink only two or three inches, and sometimes so little as to render it preferable to walk without them altogether. Snow-shoes are made of a light, strong framework of wood, varying from three to six feet long by eighteen and twenty inches broad, tapering to a point before and behind, and turning up in front. Different tribes of Indians modify the form a little, but in all essential points they are the same. The framework is filled up with a netting of deer-skin threads, which unites lightness with great strength, and permits any snow that may chance to fall upon the netting to pass through it like a sieve.

On the present occasion the snow, having recently fallen, was soft, and the walking, consequently, what is called heavy.

"Come on," shouted the accountant, as he came to a stand for the third time within half-an-hour, to await the coming up of poor Hamilton, who, being rather awkward in snow-shoe walking even in daylight, found it nearly impossible in the dark.

"Wait a little, please," replied a faint voice in the distance; "I've got among a quantity of willows, and find it very difficult to get on. I've been down twice al--"

The sudden cessation of the voice, and a loud crash as of breaking branches, proved too clearly that our friend had accomplished his third fall.

"There he goes again," exclaimed Harry Somerville, who came up at the moment. "I've helped him up once already. We'll never get to North River at this rate. What _is_ to be done?"

"Let's see what has become of him this time, however," said the accountant, as he began to retrace his steps. "If I mistake not, he made rather a heavy plunge that time, judging from the sound."

At that moment the clouds overhead broke, and a moonbeam shot down into the forest, throwing a pale light over the cold scene. A few steps brought Harry and the accountant to the spot whence the sound had proceeded, and a loud startling laugh rang through the night air, as the latter suddenly beheld poor Hamilton struggling, with his arms, head, and shoulders stuck into the snow, his snow-shoes twisted and sticking with the heels up and awry, in a sort of rampant confusion, and his gun buried to the locks beside him. Regaining one's perpendicular after a fall in deep snow, when the feet are encumbered by a pair of long snow-shoes, is by no means an easy thing to accomplish, in consequence of the impossibility of getting hold of anything solid on which to rest the hands. The depth is so great that the outstretched arms cannot find bottom, and every successive struggle only sinks the unhappy victim deeper down. Should no assistance be near, he will soon beat the snow to a solidity that will enable him to rise, but not in a very enviable or comfortable condition.

"Give me a hand, Harry," gasped Hamilton, as he managed to twist his head upwards for a moment.

"Here you are," cried Harry, holding out his hand and endeavouring to suppress his desire to laugh; "up with you," and in another moment the poor youth was upon his legs, with every fold and crevice about his person stuffed to repletion with snow.

"Come, cheer up," cried the accountant, giving the youth a slap on the back; "there's nothing like experience--the proverb says that it even teaches fools, so you need not despair."

Hamilton smiled as he endeavoured to shake off some of his white coating.

"We'll be all right immediately," added Harry; "I see that the country ahead is more open, so the walking will be easier."

"Oh, I wish that I had not come!" said Hamilton, sorrowfully, "because I am only detaining you. But perhaps I shall do better as we get on. At any rate, I cannot go back now, as I could never find the way."

"Go back! of course not," said the accountant; "in a short time we shall get into the old woodcutters' track of last year, and although it's not beaten at all, yet it is pretty level and open, so that we shall get on famously."

"Go on, then," sighed Hamilton.

"Drive ahead," laughed Harry, and without further delay they resumed their march, which was soon rendered more cheerful as the clouds rolled away, the snow ceased to fall, and the bright full moon poured

its rays down upon their path.

For a long time they proceeded in silence, the muffled sound of the snow, as it sank beneath their regular footsteps, being the only interruption to the universal stillness around. There is something very solemnizing in a scene such as we are now describing--the calm tranquillity of the arctic night; the pure whiteness of the snowy carpet, which rendered the dark firs inky black by contrast; the clear, cold, starry sky, that glimmered behind the dark clouds, whose heavy masses, now rolling across the moon, partially obscured the landscape, and anon, passing slowly away, let a flood of light down upon the forest, which, penetrating between the thick branches, scattered the surface of the snow, as it were, with flakes of silver. Sleep has often been applied as a simile to nature in repose, but in this case death seemed more appropriate. So silent, so cold, so still was the scene, that it filled the mind with an indefinable feeling of dread, as if there was some mysterious danger near. Once or twice during their walk the three travellers paused to rest, but they spoke little, and in subdued voices, as if they feared to break the silence of the night.

"It is strange," said Harry, in a low tone, as he walked beside Hamilton, "that such a scene as this always makes me think more than usual of home."

"And yet it is natural," replied the other, "because it reminds us more forcibly than any other that we are in a foreign land--in the lonely wilderness--far away from home."

Both Harry and Hamilton had been trained in families where the Almighty was feared and loved, and where their minds had been early led to reflect upon the Creator when regarding the works of His hand: their thoughts, therefore, naturally reverted to another home, compared with which this world is indeed a cold, lonely wilderness; but on such subjects they feared to converse, partly from a dread of the ridicule of reckless companions, partly from ignorance of each other's feelings on religious matters, and although their minds were busy, their tongues were silent.

The ground over which the greater part of their path lay was a swamp, which, being now frozen, was a beautiful white plain, so that their advance was more rapid, until they approached the belt of woodland that skirts North River. Here they again encountered the heavy snow, which had been such a source of difficulty to Hamilton at setting out. He had profited by his former experience, however, and by the exercise of an excessive degree of caution managed to scramble through the woods tolerably well, emerging at last, along with his companions, on the bleak margin of what appeared to be the frozen sea.

North River, at this place, is several miles broad, and the opposite shore is so low that the snow causes it to appear but a slight undulation of the frozen bed of the river. Indeed, it would not be distinguishable at all, were it not for the willow bushes and dwarf pines, whose tops, rising above the white garb of winter, indicate that terra firma lies below.

"What a cold, desolate-looking place!" said Hamilton, as the party stood still to recover breath before taking their way over the plain

to the spot where the accountant's traps were set. "It looks much more like the frozen sea than a river."

"It can scarcely be called a river at this place," remarked the accountant, "seeing that the water hereabouts is brackish, and the tides ebb and flow a good way up. In fact, this is the extreme mouth of North River, and if you turn your eyes a little to the right, towards yonder ice-hummock in the plain, you behold the frozen sea itself."

"Where are your traps set?" inquired Harry.

"Down in the hollow, behind yon point covered with brushwood."

"Oh, we shall soon get to them then; come along," cried Harry.

Harry was mistaken, however. He had not yet learned by experience the extreme difficulty of judging of distance in the uncertain light of night--a difficulty that was increased by the ignorance of the locality, and by the gleams of moonshine that shot through the driving clouds and threw confused fantastic shadows over the plain. The point which he had at first supposed was covered with low bushes, and about a hundred yards off, proved to be clad in reality with large bushes and small trees, and lay at a distance of two miles.

"I think you have been mistaken in supposing the point so near, Harry," said Hamilton, as he trudged on beside his friend.

"A fact evident to the naked eye," replied Harry. "How do your feet stand it, eh? Beginning to lose bark yet?"

Hamilton did not feel quite sure. "I think," said he softly, "that there is a blister under the big toe of my left foot. It feels very painful."

"If you feel at all uncertain about it, you may rest assured that there is a blister. These things don't give much pain at first. I'm sorry to tell you, my dear fellow, that you'll be painfully aware of the fact to-morrow. However, don't distress yourself; it's a part of the experience that everyone goes through in this country. Besides," said Harry smiling, "we can send to the fort for medical advice."

"Don't bother the poor fellow, and hold your tongue. Harry," said the accountant, who now began to tread more cautiously as he approached the place where the traps were set.

"How many traps have you?" inquired Harry in a low tone.

"Three," replied the accountant.

"Do you know I have a very strange feeling about my heels--or rather a want of feeling," said Hamilton, smiling dubiously.

"A want of feeling! what do you mean?" cried the accountant, stopping suddenly and confronting his young friend.

"Oh, I daresay it's nothing," he exclaimed, looking as if ashamed of having spoken of it; "only I feel exactly as if both my heels were cut off, and I were walking on tip-toe!"

"Say you so? then right about wheel. Your heels are frozen, man, and you'll lose them if you don't look sharp."

"Frozen!" cried Hamilton, with a look of incredulity.

"Ay, frozen; and it's lucky you told me. I've a place up in the woods here, which I call my winter camp, where we can get you put to rights. But step out; the longer we are about it the worse for you."

Harry Somerville was at first disposed to think that the accountant jested, but seeing that he turned his back towards his traps, and made for the nearest point of the thick woods with a stride that betokened thorough sincerity, he became anxious too, and followed as fast as possible.

The place to which the accountant led his young friends was a group of fir trees which grew on a little knoll, that rose a few feet above the surrounding level country. At the foot of this hillock a small rivulet or burn ran in summer, but the only evidence of its presence now was the absence of willow bushes all along its covered narrow bed. A level tract was thus formed by nature, free from all underwood, and running inland about the distance of a mile, where it was lost in the swamp whence the stream issued. The wooded knoll or hillock lay at the mouth of this brook, and being the only elevated spot in the neighbourhood, besides having the largest trees growing on it, had been selected by the accountant as a convenient place for "camping out" on, when he visited his traps in winter, and happened to be either too late or disinclined to return home. Moreover, the spreading fir branches afforded an excellent shelter alike from wind and snow in the centre of the clump, while from the margin was obtained a partial view of the river and the sea beyond. Indeed, from this look-out there was a very fine prospect on clear winter nights of the white landscape, enlivened occasionally by groups of arctic foxes, which might be seen scampering about in sport, and gambolling among the hummocks of ice like young kittens.

"Now we shall turn up here," said the accountant, as he walked a short way up the brook before mentioned, and halted in front of what appeared to be an impenetrable mass of bushes.

"We shall have to cut our way, then," said Harry, looking to the right and left in the vain hope of discovering a place where, the bushes being less dense, they might effect an entrance into the knoll or grove.

"Not so. I have taken care to make a passage into my winter camp, although it was only a whim, after all, to make a concealed entrance, seeing that no one ever passes this way except wolves and foxes, whose noses render the use of their eyes in most cases unnecessary."

So saying, the accountant turned aside a thick branch, and disclosed a narrow track, into which he entered, followed by his two companions.

A few minutes brought them to the centre of the knoll. Here they found a clear space of about twenty feet in diameter, round which the trees circled so thickly that in daylight nothing could be seen but tree-stems as far as the eye could penetrate, while overhead the

broad flat branches of the firs, with their evergreen verdure, spread out and interlaced so thickly that very little light penetrated into the space below. Of course at night, even in moonlight, the place was pitch dark. Into this retreat the accountant led his companions, and bidding them stand still for a minute lest they should stumble into the fireplace, he proceeded to strike a light.

Those who have never travelled in the wild parts of this world can form but a faint conception of the extraordinary and sudden change that is produced, not only in the scene, but in the mind of the beholder, when a blazing fire is lighted on a dark night. Before the fire is kindled, and you stand, perhaps (as Harry and his friend did on the present occasion) shivering in the cold, the heart sinks, and sad, gloomy thoughts arise, while your eye endeavours to pierce the thick darkness, which, if it succeeds in doing so, only adds to the effect by disclosing the pallid snow, the cold, chilling beams of the moon, the wide vista of savage scenery, the awe-inspiring solitudes that tell of your isolated condition, or stir up sad memories of other and far-distant scenes. But the moment the first spark of fire sends a fitful gleam of light upwards, these thoughts and feelings take wing and vanish. The indistinct scenery is rendered utterly invisible by the red light, which attracts and rivets the eye as if by a species of fascination. The deep shadows of the woods immediately around you grow deeper and blacker as the flames leap and sparkle upwards, causing the stems of the surrounding trees, and the foliage of the overhanging branches, to stand out in bold relief, bathed in a ruddy glow, which converts the forest chamber into a snug _home-like_ place, and fills the mind with agreeable, _home-like_ feelings and meditations. It seemed as if the spirit, in the one case, were set loose and etherealized to enable it to spread itself over the plains of cold, cheerless, illimitable space, and left to dwell upon objects too wide to grasp, too indistinct to comprehend; while, in the other, it is recalled and concentrated upon matters circumscribed and congenial, things of which it has long been cognizant, and which it can appreciate and enjoy without the effort of a thought.

Some such thoughts and feelings passed rapidly through the minds of Harry and Hamilton, while the accountant struck a light and kindled a roaring fire of logs, which he had cut and arranged there on a previous occasion. In the middle of the space thus brilliantly illuminated, the snow had been cleared away till the moss was uncovered, thus leaving a hole of about ten feet in diameter. As the snow was quite four feet deep, the hole was surrounded with a pure white wall, whose height was further increased by the masses thrown out in the process of digging to nearly six feet. At one end of this space was the large fire which had just been kindled, and which, owing to the intense cold, only melted a very little of the snow in its immediate neighbourhood. At the other end lay a mass of flat pine branches, which were piled up so thickly as to form a pleasant elastic couch, the upper end being slightly raised so as to form a kind of bolster, while the lower extended almost into the fire. Indeed, the branches at the extremity were burnt quite brown, and some of them charred. Beside the bolster lay a small wooden box, a round tin kettle, an iron tea-kettle, two tin mugs, a hatchet, and a large bundle tied up in a green blanket. There were thus, as it were, two apartments, one within the other--namely, the outer one, whose walls were formed of tree-stems and thick darkness, and the ceiling of green boughs; and then the inner one, with walls of snow, that

sparkled in the firelight as if set with precious stones, and a carpet of evergreen branches.

Within this latter our three friends were soon actively employed. Poor Hamilton's moccasins were speedily removed, and his friends, going down on their knees, began to rub his feet with a degree of energy that induced him to beg for mercy.

"Mercy!" exclaimed the accountant, without pausing for an instant; "faith, it's little mercy there would be in stopping just now.--Rub away, Harry. Don't give in. They're coming right at last."

After a very severe rubbing, the heels began to show symptoms of returning vitality. They were then wrapped up in the folds of a thick blanket, and held sufficiently near to the fire to prevent any chance of the frost getting at them again.

"Now, my boy," said the accountant, as he sat down to enjoy a pipe and rest himself on a blanket, which, along with the one wrapped round Hamilton's feet, had been extracted from the green bundle before mentioned--"now, my boy, you'll have to enjoy yourself here as you best can for an hour or two, while Harry and I visit the traps. Would you like supper before we go, or shall we have it on our return?"

"Oh, I'll wait for it by all means till you return. I don't feel a bit hungry just now, and it will be much more cheerful to have it after all your work is over. Besides, I feel my feet too painful to enjoy it just now."

"My poor fellow," said Harry, whose heart smote him for having been disposed at first to treat the thing lightly, "I'm really sorry for you. Would you not like me to stay with you?"

"By no means," replied Hamilton quickly. "You can do nothing more for me, Harry; and I should be very sorry if you missed seeing the traps."

"Oh, never mind the traps. I've seen traps, and set them too, fifty times before now. I'll stop with you, old boy, I will," said Harry doggedly, while he made arrangements to settle down for the evening.

"Well, if you won't go, I will," said Hamilton coolly, as he unwound the blanket from his feet and began to pull on his socks.

"Bravo, my lad!" exclaimed the accountant, patting him approvingly on the back; "I didn't think you had half so much pluck in you. But it won't do, old fellow. You're in my castle just now, and must obey orders. You couldn't walk half-a-mile for your life; so just be pleased to pull off your socks again. Besides, I want Harry to help me to carry up my foxes, if there are any;--so get ready, sirrah!"

"Ay, ay, captain," cried Harry, with a laugh, while he sprang up and put on his snow-shoes.

"You needn't bring your gun," said the accountant, shaking the ashes from his pipe as he prepared to depart, "but you may as well shove that axe into your belt; you may want it.--Now, mind, don't roast your feet," he added, turning to Hamilton.

"Adieu!" cried Harry, with a nod and a smile, as he turned to go.
"Take care the bears don't find you out."

"No fear. Good-bye, Harry," replied Hamilton, as his two friends disappeared in the wood and left him to his solitary meditations.

CHAPTER XIX.

Shows how the accountant and Harry set their traps, and what came of it.

The moon was still up, and the sky less overcast, when our amateur trappers quitted the encampment, and, descending to the mouth of the little brook, took their way over North River in the direction of the accountant's traps. Being somewhat fatigued both in mind and body by the unusual exertions of the night, neither of them spoke for some time, but continued to walk in silence, contemplatively gazing at their long shadows.

"Did you ever trap a fox, Harry?" said the accountant at length.

"Yes, I used to set traps at Red River; but the foxes there are not numerous, and are so closely watched by the dogs that they have become suspicious. I caught but few."

"Then you know how to set a trap?"

"Oh, yes; I've set both steel and snow traps often. You've heard of old Labonte, who used to carry one of the winter packets from Red River until within a few years back?"

"Yes, I've heard of him; his name is in my ledger--at least, if you mean Pierre Labonte, who came down last fall with the brigade."

"The same. Well, he was a great friend of mine. His little cabin lay about two miles from Fort Garry, and after work was over in the office I used to go down to sit and chat with him by the fire, and many a time I have sat up half the night listening to him as he recounted his adventures. The old man never tired of relating them, and of smoking twist tobacco. Among other things, he set my mind upon trapping, by giving me an account of an expedition he made, when quite a youth, to the Rocky Mountains; so I got him to go into the woods and teach me how to set traps and snares, and I flatter myself he found me an apt pupil."

"Humph!" ejaculated the accountant; "I have no doubt you do flatter yourself. But here we are. The traps are just beyond that mound; so look out, and don't stick your feet into them."

"Hist!" exclaimed Harry, laying his hand suddenly on his companion's arm. "Do you see that?" pointing towards the place where the traps were said to be.

"You have sharp eyes, younker. I do see it, now that you point it

out. It's a fox, and caught, too, as I'm a scrivener."

"You're in luck to-night," exclaimed Harry, eagerly, "It's a _silver_ fox. I see the white tip on its tail."

"Nonsense," cried the accountant, hastening forward; "but we'll soon settle the point."

Harry proved to be right. On reaching the spot they found a beautiful black fox, caught by the fore leg in a steel trap, and gazing at them with a look of terror.

The skin of the silver fox--so called from a slight sprinkling of pure white hairs covering its otherwise jet-black body--is the most valuable fur obtained by the fur-traders, and fetches an enormous price in the British market, so much as thirty pounds sterling being frequently obtained for a single skin. The foxes vary in colour from jet black, which is the most valuable, to a light silvery hue, and are hailed as great prizes by the Indians and trappers when they are so fortunate as to catch them. They are not numerous, however, and being exceedingly wary and suspicious, are difficult to catch, it may be supposed, therefore, that our friend the accountant ran to secure his prize with some eagerness.

"Now, then, my beauty, don't shrink," he said, as the poor fox backed at his approach as far as the chain which fastened the trap to a log of wood, would permit, and then, standing at bay, showed a formidable row of teeth. That grin was its last; another moment, and the handle of the accountant's axe stretched it lifeless on the snow.

"Isn't it a beauty!" cried he, surveying the animal with a look of triumphant pleasure; and then feeling as if he had compromised his dignity a little by betraying so much glee, he added, "But come now, Harry; we must see to the other traps. It's getting late."

The others were soon visited; but no more foxes were caught. However, the accountant set them both off to see that all was right; and then readjusting one himself, told Harry to set the other, in order to clear himself of the charge of boasting.

Harry, nothing loath, went down on his knees to do so.

The steel trap used for catching foxes is of exactly the same form as the ordinary rat-trap, with this difference, that it has two springs instead of one, is considerably larger, and has no teeth, as these latter would only tend to spoil the skin. Owing to the strength of the springs, a pretty strong effort is required to set the trap, and, clumsy fellows frequently catch the tails of their coats or the ends of their belts, and not unfrequently the ends of their fingers, in their awkward attempts. Having set it without any of the above untoward accidents occurring, Harry placed it gently on a hole which he had previously scraped--placing it in such a manner that the jaws and plate, or trigger, were a hair-breadth below the level of the snow. After this he spread over it a very thin sheet of paper, observing as he did so that hay or grass was preferable; but as there was none at hand, paper would do. Over this he sprinkled snow very lightly, until every vestige of the trap was concealed from view, and the whole was made quite level with the surrounding plain, so that even the accountant himself, after he had once removed his eyes from

it, could not tell where it lay. Some chips of a frozen ptarmigan were then scattered around the spot, and a piece of wood left to mark its whereabouts. The bait is always scattered round and not on the trap, as the fox, in running from one piece to another, is almost certain to set his foot on it, and so get caught by the leg; whereas, were the bait placed upon the trap, the fox would be apt to get caught, while in the act of eating, by the snout, which, being wedge-like in form, is easily dragged out of its gripe.

"Now then, what say you to going farther out on the river, and making a snow trap for white foxes?" said the accountant. "We shall still have time to do so before the moon sets."

"Agreed," cried Harry. "Come along."

Without further parley they left the spot and stretched out towards the sea.

The snow on the river was quite hard on its surface, so that snow-shoes being unnecessary, they carried them over their shoulders, and advanced much more rapidly. It is true that their road was a good deal broken, and jagged pieces of ice protruded their sharp corners so as to render a little attention necessary in walking; but one or two severe bumps on their toes made our friends sensitively alive to these minor dangers of the way.

"There goes a pack of them!" exclaimed Harry, as a troop of white foxes scampered past, gambolling as they went, and, coming suddenly to a halt at a short distance, wheeled about and sat down on their haunches, apparently resolved to have a good look at the strangers who dared to venture into their wild domain.

"Oh, they are the most stupid brutes alive," said the accountant, as he regarded the pack with a look of contempt. "I've seen one of them sit down and look at me while I set a trap right before his eyes; and I had not got a hundred yards from the spot when a yell informed me that the gentleman's curiosity had led him to put his foot right into it."

"Indeed!" exclaimed Harry. "I had no idea that they were so tame. Certainly no other kind of fox would do that."

"No, that's certain. But these fellows have done it to me again and again. I shouldn't wonder if we got one to-night in the very same way. I'm sure, by the look of these rascals, that they would do anything of a reckless, stupid nature just now."

"Had we not better make our trap here, then? There is a point, not fifty yards off, with trees on it large enough for our purpose."

"Yes; it will do very well here. Now, then, to work. Go to the wood, Harry, and fetch a log or two, while I cut out the slabs." So saying, the accountant drew the axe which he always carried in his belt; and while Harry entered the wood and began to hew off the branch of a tree, he proceeded, as he had said, to "cut out the slabs." With the point of his knife he first of all marked out an oblong in the snow, then cut down three or four inches with the axe, and putting the handle under the cut, after the manner of a lever, detached a thick solid slab of about three inches thick, which, although not so hard

as ice, was quite hard enough for the purpose for which it was intended. He then cut two similar slabs, and a smaller one, the same in thickness and breadth, but only half the length. Having accomplished this, he raised himself to rest a little, and observed that Harry approached, staggering under a load of wood, and that the foxes were still sitting on their haunches, gazing at him with a look of deep interest.

"If I only had my gun here!" thought he. But not having it, he merely shook his fist at them, stooped down again, and resumed his work. With Harry's assistance the slabs were placed in such a way as to form a sort of box or house, having one end of it open. This was further plastered with soft snow at the joinings, and banked up in such a way that no animal could break into it easily--at least such an attempt would be so difficult as to make an entrance into the interior by the open side much more probable. When this was finished, they took the logs that Harry had cut and carried with so much difficulty from the wood, and began to lop off the smaller branches and twigs. One large log was placed across the opening of the trap, while the others were piled on one end of it so as to press it down with their weight. Three small pieces of stick were now prepared--two of them being about half a foot long, and the other about a foot. On the long piece of stick the breast of a ptarmigan was fixed as a bait, and two notches cut, the one at the end of it, the other about four or five inches further down. All was now ready to set the trap.

"Raise the log now while I place the trigger," said Harry, kneeling down in front of the door, while the accountant, as directed, lifted up the log on which the others lay so as to allow his companion to introduce the bait-stick, in such a manner as to support it, while the slightest pull on the bait would set the stick with the notches free, and thus permit the log to fall on the back of the fox, whose effort to reach the bait would necessarily place him under it.

While Harry was thus engaged, the accountant stood up and looked towards the foxes. They had approached so near in their curiosity, that he was induced to throw his axe frantically at the foremost of the pack. This set them galloping off, but they soon halted and sat down as before.

"What aggravating brutes they are, to be sure!" said Harry, with a laugh, as his companion returned with the hatchet.

"Humph! yes, but we'll be upsides with them yet. Come along into the wood, and I wager that in ten minutes we shall have one."

They immediately hurried towards the wood, but had not walked fifty paces when they were startled by a loud yell behind them.

"Dear me!" exclaimed the accountant, while he and Harry turned round with a start. "It cannot surely be possible that they have gone in already." A loud howl followed the remark, and the whole pack fled over the plain like snow-drift, and disappeared.

"Ah, that's a pity! something must have scared them to make them take wing like that. However, we'll get one to-morrow for certain; so come along, lad, let us make for the camp."

"Not so fast," replied the other; "if you hadn't pored over the big

ledger till you were blind, you would see that there is one prisoner already."

This proved to be the case. On returning to the spot they found an arctic fox in his last gasp, lying flat on the snow, with the heavy log across his back, which seemed to be broken. A slight tap on the snout with the accountant's deadly axe-handle completed its destruction.

"We're in luck to-night," cried Harry, as he kneeled again to reset the trap. "But after all these white brutes are worth very little; I fancy a hundred of their skins would not be worth the black one you got first."

"Be quick, Harry; the moon is almost down, and poor Hamilton will think that the polar bears have got hold of us."

"Ail right! Now then, step out," and glancing once more at the trap to see that all was properly arranged, the two friends once more turned their faces homewards, and travelled over the snow with rapid strides.

The moon had just set, leaving the desolate scene in deep gloom, so that they could scarcely find their way to the forest; and when they did at last reach its shelter, the night became so intensely dark that they had almost to grope their way, and would certainly have lost it altogether were it not for the accountant's thorough knowledge of the locality. To add to their discomfort, as they stumbled on, snow began to fall, and ere long a pretty steady breeze of wind drove it sharply in their faces. However, this mattered but little, as they penetrated deeper in among the trees, which proved a complete shelter both from wind and snow. An hour's march brought them to the mouth of the brook, although half that time would have been sufficient had it been daylight, and a few minutes later they had the satisfaction of hearing Hamilton's voice hailing them as they pushed aside the bushes and sprang into the cheerful light of their encampment.

"Hurrah!" shouted Harry, as he leaped into the space before the fire, and flung the two foxes at Hamilton's feet. "What do you think of that, old fellow? How are the heels? Rather sore, eh? Now for the kettle. Polly, put the kettle on; we'll all have--My eye! where's the kettle, Hamilton? have you eaten it?"

"If you compose yourself a little, Harry, and look at the fire, you'll see it boiling there."

"Man, what a chap you are for making unnecessary speeches! Couldn't you tell me to look at the fire without the preliminary piece of advice to compose myself? Besides, you talk nonsense, for I'm composed already, of blood, bones, flesh, sinews, fat, and--"

"Humbug!" interrupted the accountant. "Lend a hand to get supper, you young goose!"

"And so," continued Harry, not noticing the interruption, "I cannot be expected, nor is it necessary, to compose myself over again. But to be serious," he added, "it was very kind and considerate of you, Hammy, to put on the kettle, when your heels were in a manner

uppermost."

"Oh, it was nothing at all; my heels are much better, thank you, and it kept me from wearying."

"Poor fellow!" said the accountant, while he busied himself in preparing their evening meal, "you must be quite ravenous by this time--at least I am, which is the same thing."

Supper was soon ready. It consisted of a large kettle of tea, a lump of pemmican, a handful of broken biscuit, and three ptarmigan--all of which were produced from the small wooden box which the accountant was wont to call his camp-larder. The ptarmigan had been shot two weeks before, and carefully laid up for future use; the intense frost being a sufficient guarantee for their preservation for many months, had that been desired.

It would have done you good, reader (supposing you to be possessed of sympathetic feelings), to have witnessed those three nor'-westers enjoying their supper in the snowy camp. The fire had been replenished with logs, till it roared and crackled again, as if it were endued with a vicious spirit, and wished to set the very snow in flames. The walls shone like alabaster studded with diamonds, while the green boughs overhead and the stems around were of a deep red colour in the light of the fierce blaze. The tea-kettle hissed, fumed, and boiled over into the fire. A mass of pemmican simmered in the lid in front of it. Three pannikins of tea reposed on the green branches, their refreshing contents sending up little clouds of steam, while the ptarmigan, now split up, skewered, and roasted, were being heartily devoured by our three hungry friends.

The pleasures that fall to the lot of man are transient. Doubtless they are numerous and oft recurring; still they are transient, and so--supper came to an end.

"Now for a pipe," said the accountant, disposing his limbs at full length on a green blanket. "O thou precious weed, what should we do without thee!"

"Smoke tea, to be sure," answered Harry.

"Ah! true, it is possible to exist on a pipe of tea-leaves for a time, but only for a time. I tried it myself once, in desperation, when I ran short of tobacco on a journey, and found it execrable, but better than nothing."

"Pity we can't join you in that." remarked Harry.

"True; but perhaps since you cannot pipe, it might prove an agreeable diversification to dance."

"Thank you, I'd rather not," said Harry; "and as for Hamilton, I'm convinced that his mind is made up on the subject.--How go the heels now?"

"Thank you, pretty well," he replied, reclining his head on the pine branches, and extending his smitten members towards the fire. "I think they will be quite well in the morning."

"It is a curious thing," remarked the accountant, in a soliloquising tone, "that _soft_ fellows _never_ smoke!"

"I beg your pardon," said Harry, "I've often seen hot loaves smoke, and they're soft enough fellows, in all conscience!"

"Ah!" sighed the accountant, "that reminds me of poor Peterkin, who was _so_ soft that he went by the name of 'Butter.' Did you ever hear of what he did the summer before last with an Indian's head?"

"No, never; what was it!"

"I'll tell you the story," replied the accountant, drawing a few vigorous whiffs of smoke, to prevent his pipe going out while he spoke.

As the story in question, however, depicts a new phase of society in the woods, it deserves a chapter to itself.

CHAPTER XX.

The accountant's story.

"Spring had passed away, and York Fort was filled with all the bustle and activity of summer. Brigades came pouring in upon us with furs from the interior, and as every boat brought a C. T. or a clerk, our mess-table began to overflow.

"You've not seen the summer mess-room filled yet, Hamilton. That's a treat in store for you."

"It was pretty full last autumn, I think," suggested Hamilton, "at the time I arrived from England."

"Full! why, man, it was getting to feel quite lonely at that time. I've seen more than fifty sit down to table there, and it was worth going fifty miles to hear the row they kicked up--telling stories without end (and sometimes without foundation) about their wild doings in the interior, where every man-jack of them having spent at least eight months almost in perfect solitude, they hadn't had a chance of letting their tongues go till they came down here. But to proceed. When the ship came out in the fall, she brought a batch of new clerks, and among them was this miserable chap Peterkin, whom we soon nicknamed _Butter_. He was the softest fellow I ever knew (far worse than you, Hamilton), and he hadn't been here a week before the wild blades from the interior, who were bursting with fun and mischief, began to play off all kinds of practical jokes upon him. The very first day he sat down at the mess-table, our worthy governor (who, you are aware, detests practical jokes) played him a trick, quite unintentionally, which raised a laugh against him for many a day. You know that old Mr. Rogan is rather absent at times; well, the first day that Peterkin came to mess (it was breakfast), the old governor asked him, in a patronizing sort of way, to sit at his right hand. Accordingly down he sat, and having never, I fancy, been away from his mother's apron-string before, he seemed to feel very

uncomfortable, especially as he was regarded as a sort of novelty. The first thing he did was to capsize his plate into his lap, which set the youngsters at the lower end of the table into suppressed fits of laughter. However, he was eating the leg of a dry grouse at the time, so it didn't make much of a mess.

"Try some fish, Peterkin,' said Mr. Rogan kindly, seeing that the youth was ill at ease. 'That old grouse is tough enough to break your knife.'

"A very rough passage,' replied the youngster, whose mind was quite confused by hearing the captain of the ship, who sat next to him, giving to his next neighbour a graphic account of the voyage in a very loud key--'I mean, if you please, no, thank you,' he stammered, endeavouring to correct himself.

"Ah! a cup of tea perhaps.--Here, Anderson' (turning to the butler), 'a cup of tea to Mr. Peterkin.'

"The butler obeyed the order.

"And here, fill my cup,' said old Rogan, interrupting himself in an earnest conversation, into which he had plunged with the gentleman on his left hand. As he said this he lifted his cup to empty the slops, but without paying attention to what he was doing. As luck would have it, the slop-basin was not at hand, and Peterkin's cup _was_, so he emptied it innocently into that. Peterkin hadn't courage to arrest his hand, and when the deed was done he looked timidly round to see if the action had been observed. Nearly half the table had seen it, but they pretended ignorance of the thing so well that he thought no one had observed, and so went quietly on with his breakfast, and drank the tea! But I am wandering from my story. Well, about this time there was a young Indian who shot himself accidentally in the woods, and was brought to the fort to see if anything could be done for him. The doctor examined his wound, and found that the ball had passed through the upper part of his right arm and the middle of his right thigh, breaking the bone of the latter in its passage. It was an extraordinary shot for a man to put into himself, for it would have been next to impossible even for _another_ man to have done it, unless the Indian had been creeping on all fours. When he was able to speak, however, he explained the mystery. While running through a rough part of the wood after a wounded bird, he stumbled and fell on all fours. The gun, which he was carrying over his shoulder, holding it, as the Indians usually do, by the muzzle, flew forward, and turned right round as he fell, so that the mouth of it was presented towards him. Striking against the stem of a tree, it exploded and shot him through the arm and leg as described ere he had time to rise. A comrade carried him to his lodge, and his wife brought him in a canoe to the fort. For three or four days the doctor had hopes of him, but at last he began to sink, and died on the sixth day after his arrival. His wife and one or two friends buried him in our graveyard, which lies, as you know, on that lonely-looking point just below the powder-magazine. For several months previous to this our worthy doctor had been making strenuous efforts to get an Indian skull to send home to one of his medical friends, but without success. The Indians could not be prevailed upon to cut off the head of one of their dead countrymen for love or money, and the doctor had a dislike to the idea, I suppose, of killing one for himself; but now here was a golden opportunity. The Indian was buried near to the

fort, and his relatives had gone away to their tents again. What was to prevent his being dug up? The doctor brooded over the thing for one hour and a half (being exactly the length of time required to smoke out his large Turkey pipe), and then sauntered into Wilson's room. Wilson was busy, as usual, at some of his mechanical contrivances.

"Thrusting his hands deep into his breeches pockets, and seating himself on an old sea-chest, he began,--

"I say, Wilson, will you do me a favour?"

"That depends entirely on what the favour is," he replied, without raising his head from his work.

"I want you to help me to cut off an Indian's head!"

"Then I won't do you the favour. But pray, don't humbug me just now; I'm busy."

"No; but I'm serious, and I can't get it done without help, and I know you're an obliging fellow. Besides, the savage is dead, and has no manner of use for his head now."

"Wilson turned round with a look of intelligence on hearing this.

"Ha!" he exclaimed, "I see what you're up to; but I don't half like it. In the first place, his friends would be terribly cut up if they heard of it; and then I've no sort of aptitude for the work of a resurrectionist; and then, if it got wind, we should never hear the last of it; and then--"

"And then," interrupted the doctor, "it would be adding to the light of medical science, you unaspiring monster."

"A light," retorted Wilson, "which, in passing through some members of the medical profession, is totally absorbed, and reproduced in the shape of impenetrable darkness."

"Now, don't object, my dear fellow; you know you're going to do it, so don't coquette with me, but agree at once."

"Well, I consent, upon one condition."

"And what is that?"

"That you do not play any practical jokes on me with the head when you have got it."

"Agreed!" cried the doctor, laughing; "I give you my word of honour. Now he has been buried three days already, so we must set about it at once. Fortunately the graveyard is composed of a sandy soil, so he'll keep for some time yet."

"The two worthies then entered into a deep consultation as to how they were to set about this deed of darkness. It was arranged that Wilson should take his gun and sally forth a little before dark, as if he were bent on an hour's sport, and, not forgetting his game-bag, proceed to the graveyard, where the doctor engaged to meet him with a

couple of spades and a dark lantern. Accordingly, next evening, Mr. Wilson, true to his promise, shouldered his gun and sallied forth.

"It soon became an intensely dark night. Not a single star shone forth to illumine the track along which he stumbled. Everything around was silent and dark, and congenial with the work on which he was bent. But Wilson's heart beat a little more rapidly than usual. He is a bold enough man, as you know, but boldness goes for nothing when superstition comes into play. However, he trudged along fearlessly enough till he came to the thick woods just below the fort, into which he entered with something of a qualm. Scarcely had he set foot on the narrow track that leads to the graveyard, when he ran slap against the post that stands there, but which, in his trepidation, he had entirely forgotten. This quite upset the small amount of courage that remained, and he has since confessed that if he had not had the hope of meeting with the doctor in a few minutes, he would have turned round and fled at that moment.

"Recovering a little from this accident, he hurried forward, but with more caution, for although the night seemed as dark as could possibly be while he was crossing the open country, it became speedily evident that there were several shades of darkness which he had not yet conceived. In a few minutes he came to the creek that runs past the graveyard, and here again his nerves got another shake; for slipping his foot while in the act of commencing the descent, he fell and rolled heavily to the bottom, making noise enough in his fall to scare away all the ghosts in the country. With a palpitating heart poor Wilson gathered himself up, and searched for his gun, which fortunately had not been injured, and then commenced to climb the opposite bank, starting at every twig that snapped under his feet. On reaching the level ground again he breathed a little more freely, and hurried forward with more speed than caution. Suddenly he came into violent contact with a figure, which uttered a loud growl as Wilson reeled backwards.

"'Back, you monster,' he cried, with a hysterical yell, 'or I'll blow your brains out!'

"'It's little good that would do ye,' cried the doctor as he came forward. 'Why, you stupid, what did you take me for? You've nearly knocked out my brains as it is,' and the doctor rubbed his forehead ruefully.

"'Oh, it's you, doctor!' said Wilson, feeling as if a ton weight had been lifted off his heart; 'I verily thought it was the ghost of the poor fellow we're going to disturb. I do think you had better give it up. Mischief will come of it, you'll see.'

"'Nonsense,' cried the doctor; 'don't be a goose, but let's to work at once. Why, I've got half the thing dug up already.' So saying, he led the way to the grave, in which there was a large opening. Setting the lantern down by the side of it, the two seized their spades and began to dig as if in earnest.

"The fact is that the doctor was nearly as frightened as Wilson, and he afterwards confessed to me that it was an immense relief to him when he heard him fall down the bank of the creek, and knew by the growl he gave that it was he.

"In about half-an-hour the doctor's spade struck upon the coffin lid, which gave forth a hollow sound.

"Now then, we're about done with it,' said he, standing up to wipe away the perspiration that trickled down his face. 'Take the axe and force up the lid, it's only fixed with common nails, while I--' He did not finish the sentence, but drew a large scalping-knife from a sheath which hung at his belt.

"Wilson shuddered and obeyed. A good wrench caused the lid to start, and while he held it partially open the doctor inserted the knife. For five minutes he continued to twist and work with his arms, muttering between his teeth, every now and then, that he was a 'tough subject,' while the crackling of bones and other disagreeable sounds struck upon the horrified ears of his companion.

"All right,' he exclaimed at last, as he dragged a round object from the coffin and let down the lid with a bang, at the same time placing the savage's head with its ghastly features full in the blaze of the lantern.

"Now, then, close up,' said he, jumping out of the hole and shovelling in the earth.

"In a few minutes they had filled the grave up and smoothed it down on the surface, and then, throwing the head into the game-bag, retraced their steps to the fort. Their nerves were by this time worked up to such a pitch of excitement, and their minds filled with such a degree of supernatural horror, that they tripped and stumbled over stumps and branches innumerable in their double-quick march. Neither would confess to the other, however, that he was afraid. They even attempted to pass a few facetious remarks as they hurried along, but it would not do, so they relapsed into silence till they came to the hollow beside the powder-magazine. Here the doctor's foot happening to slip, he suddenly grasped Wilson by the shoulder to support himself--a movement which, being unexpected, made his friend leap, as he afterwards expressed it, nearly out of his skin. This was almost too much for them. For a moment they looked at each other as well as the darkness would permit, when all at once a large stone, which the doctor's slip had overbalanced, fell down the bank and through the bushes with a loud crash. Nothing more was wanting. All further effort to disguise their feelings was dropped. Leaping the rail of the open field in a twinkling, they gave a simultaneous yell of consternation and fled to the fort like autumn leaves before the wind, never drawing breath till they were safe within the pickets."

"But what has all this to do with Peterkin?" asked Harry, as the accountant paused to relight his pipe and toss a fresh log on the fire.

"Have patience, lad; you shall hear."

The accountant stirred the logs with his toe, drew a few whiffs to see that the pipe was properly ignited, and proceeded.

"For a day or two after this, the doctor was observed to be often mysteriously engaged in an outhouse, of which he kept the key. By some means or other, the skipper, who is always up to mischief, managed to discover the secret. Watching where the doctor hid the

key, he possessed himself of it one day, and sallied forth, bent on a lark of some kind or other, but without very well knowing what. Passing the kitchen, he observed Anderson, the butler, raking the fire out of the large oven which stands in the backyard.

"Baking again, Anderson?" said he in passing. 'You get soon through with a heavy cargo of bread just now.'

"Yes, sir; many mouths to feed, sir," replied the butler, proceeding with his work.

The skipper sauntered on, and took the track which led to the boathouse, where he stood for some time in meditation. Casting up his eyes, he saw Peterkin in the distance, looking as if he didn't very well know what to do.

A sudden thought struck him. Pulling off his coat, he seized a mallet and a calking-chisel, and began to belabour the side of a boat as if his life depended on it. All at once he stopped and stood up, blowing with the exertion.

"Hollo, Peterkin!" he shouted, and waved his hand.

Peterkin hastened towards him.

"Well, sir" said he, 'do you wish to speak to me?'

"Yes,' replied the skipper, scratching his head, as if in great perplexity. 'I wish you to do me a favour, Peterkin, but I don't know very well how to ask you.'

"Oh, I shall be most happy,' said poor Butter eagerly, 'if I can be of any use to you.'

"I don't doubt your willingness,' replied the other; 'but then--the doctor, you see--the fact is, Peterkin, the doctor being called away to see a sick Indian, has intrusted me with a delicate piece of business--rather a nasty piece of business, I may say--which I promised to do for him. You must know that the Surgical Society of London has written to him, begging, as a great favour, that he would, if possible, procure them the skull of a native. After much trouble, he has succeeded in getting one, but is obliged to keep it a great secret, even from his fellow-clerks, lest it should get wind: for if the Indians heard of it they would be sure to kill him, and perhaps burn the fort too. Now I suppose you are aware that it is necessary to boil an Indian's head in order to get the flesh clean off the skull?'

"Yes; I have heard something of that sort from the students at college, who say that boiling brings flesh more easily away from the bone. But I don't know much about it,' replied Peterkin.

"Well,' continued the skipper, 'the doctor, who is fond of experiments, wishes to try whether baking won't do better than boiling, and ordered the oven to be heated for that purpose this morning; but being called suddenly away, as I have said, he begged me to put the head into it as soon as it was ready. I agreed, quite forgetting at the time that I had to get this precious boat ready for sea this very afternoon. Now the oven is prepared, and I dare not

leave my work; indeed, I doubt whether I shall have it quite ready and taut after all, and there's the oven cooling; so, if you don't help me, I'm a lost man.'

"Having said this, the skipper looked as miserable as his jolly visage would permit, and rubbed his nose.

"'Oh, I'll be happy to do it for you, although it is not an agreeable job,' replied Butter.

"'That's right--that's friendly now!' exclaimed the skipper, as if greatly relieved. 'Give us your flipper, my lad;' and seizing Peterkin's hand, he wrung it affectionately. 'Now, here is the key of the outhouse; do it as quickly as you can, and don't let anyone see you. It's in a good cause, you know, but the results might be terrible if discovered.'

"So saying, the skipper fell to hammering the boat again with surprising vigour till Butter was out of sight, and then resuming his coat, returned to the house.

"An hour after this, Anderson went to take his loaves out of the oven; but he had no sooner taken down the door than a rich odour of cooked meat greeted his nostrils. Uttering a deep growl, the butler shouted out 'Sprat!'

"Upon this, a very thin boy, with arms and legs like pipe stems, issued from the kitchen, and came timidly towards his master.

"'Didn't I tell you, you young blackguard, that the grouse-pie was to be kept for Sunday? and there you've gone and put it to fire to-day.'

"'The grouse-pie!' said the boy, in amazement.

"'Yes, the grouse-pie,' retorted the indignant butler; and seizing the urchin by the neck, he held his head down to the mouth of the oven.

"'Smell _that_, you villain! What did you mean by it, eh?'

"'Oh, murder!' shouted the boy, as with a violent effort he freed himself, and ran shrieking into the house. "'Murder!' repeated Anderson in astonishment, while he stooped to look into the oven, where the first thing that met his gaze was a human head, whose ghastly visage and staring eyeballs worked and moved about under the influence of the heat as if it were alive.

"With a yell that rung through the whole fort, the horrified butler rushed through the kitchen and out at the front door, where, as ill-luck would have it, Mr. Rogan happened to be standing at the moment. Pitching head first into the small of the old gentleman's back, he threw him off the platform and fell into his arms. Starting up in a moment, the governor dealt Anderson a cuff that sent him reeling towards the kitchen door again, on the steps of which he sat down, and began to sing out, 'Oh, murder, murder! the oven, the oven!' and not another word, bad, good, or indifferent, could be got out of him for the next half-hour, as he swayed himself to and fro and wrung his hands.

"To make a long story short, Mr. Rogan went himself to the oven, and fished out the head, along with the loaves, which were, of course, all spoiled."

"And what was the result?" enquired Harry.

"Oh, there was a long investigation, and the skipper got a blowing-up, and the doctor a warning to let Indians' skulls lie at peace in their graves for the future, and poor Butter was sent to M'Kenzie's River as a punishment, for old Rogan could never be brought to believe that he hadn't been a willing tool in the skipper's hands; and Anderson lost his batch of bread and his oven, for it had to be pulled down and a new one built."

"Humph! and I've no doubt the governor read you a pretty stiff lecture on practical joking."

"He did," replied the accountant, laying aside his pipe and drawing the green blanket over him, while Harry piled several large logs on the fire.

"Good-night," said the accountant.

"Good-night," replied his companions; and in a few minutes more they were sound asleep in their snowy camp, while the huge fire continued, during the greater part of the night, to cast its light on their slumbering forms.

CHAPTER XXI.

Ptarmigan-hunting--Hamilton's shooting powers severely tested--A snowstorm.

At about four o'clock on the following morning, the sleepers were awakened by the cold, which had become very intense. The fire had burned down to a few embers, which merely emitted enough light to make darkness visible. Harry being the most active of the party, was the first to bestir himself. Raising himself on his elbow, while his teeth chattered and his limbs trembled with cold, he cast a woebegone and excessively sleepy glance towards the place where the fire had been; then he scratched his head slowly; then he stared at the fire again; then he languidly glanced at Hamilton's sleeping visage, and then he yawned. The accountant observed all this; for although he appeared to be buried in the depths of slumber, he was wide awake in reality, and moreover, intensely cold. The accountant, however, was sly--deep, as he would have said himself--and knew that Harry's active habits would induce him to rise, on awaking, and rekindle the fire,--an event which the accountant earnestly desired to see accomplished, but which he as earnestly resolved should not be performed by him. Indeed, it was with this end in view that he had given vent to the terrific snore which had aroused his young companion a little sooner than would have otherwise been the case.

"My eye," exclaimed Harry, in an undertone, "how precious cold it is!"

His eye making no reply to this remark, he arose, and going down on his hands and knees, began to coax the charcoal into a flame. By dint of severe blowing, he soon succeeded, and heaping on a quantity of small twigs, the fitful flame sprang up into a steady blaze. He then threw several heavy logs on the fire, and in a very short space of time restored it almost to its original vigour.

"What an abominable row you are kicking up!" growled the accountant; "why, you would waken the seven sleepers. Oh! mending the fire," he added, in an altered tone: "ah! I'll excuse you, my boy, since that's what you're at."

The accountant hereupon got up, along with Hamilton, who was now also awake, and the three spread their hands over the bright fire, and revolved their bodies before it, until they imbibed a satisfactory amount of heat. They were much too sleepy to converse, however, and contented themselves with a very brief enquiry as to the state of Hamilton's heels, which elicited the sleepy reply, "They feel quite well, thank you." In a short time, having become agreeably warm, they gave a simultaneous yawn, and lying down again, they fell into a sleep from which they did not awaken until the red winter sun shot its early rays over the arctic scenery.

Once more Harry sprang up, and let his hand fall heavily on Hamilton's shoulder. Thus rudely assailed, that youth also sprang up, giving a shout, at the same time, that brought the accountant to his feet in an instant; and so, as if by an electric spark, the sleepers were simultaneously roused into a state of wide-awake activity.

"How excessively hungry I feel! isn't it strange?" said Hamilton, as he assisted in rekindling the fire, while the accountant filled his pipe, and Harry stuffed the tea-kettle full of snow.

"Strange!" cried Harry, as he placed the kettle on the fire--"strange to be hungry after a five miles' walk and a night in the snow? I would rather say it was strange if you were not hungry. Throw on that billet, like a good fellow, and spit those grouse, while I cut some pemmican and prepare the tea."

"How are the heels now, Hamilton?" asked the accountant, who divided his attention between his pipe and his snow-shoes, the lines of which required to be readjusted.

"They appear to be as well as if nothing had happened to them," replied Hamilton: "I've been looking at them, and there is no mark whatever. They do not even feel tender."

"Lucky for you, old boy, that they were taken in time, else you'd had another story to tell."

"Do you mean to say that people's heels really freeze and fall off?" inquired the other, with a look of incredulity.

"Soft, very soft and green," murmured Harry, in a low voice, while he continued his work of adding fresh snow to the kettle as the process of melting reduced its bulk.

"I mean to say," replied the accountant, tapping the ashes out of his

pipe, "that not only heels, but hands, feet, noses, and ears, frequently freeze, and often fall off in this country, as you will find by sad experience if you don't look after yourself a little better than you have done hitherto."

One of the evil effects of the perpetual jesting that prevailed at York Fort was, that "soft" (in other words, straightforward, unsuspecting) youths had to undergo a long process of learning-by-experience: first, believing everything, and then doubting everything, ere they arrived at that degree of sophistication which enabled them to distinguish between truth and falsehood.

Having reached the doubting period in his training, Hamilton looked down and said nothing, at least with his mouth, though his eyes evidently remarked, "I don't believe you." In future years, however, the evidence of these same eyes convinced him that what the accountant said upon this occasion was but too true.

Breakfast was a repetition of the supper of the previous evening. During its discussion they planned proceedings for the day.

"My notion is," said the accountant, interrupting the flow of words ever and anon to chew the morsel with which his mouth was filled--"my notion is, that as it's a fine clear day we should travel five miles through the country parallel with North River. I know the ground, and can guide you easily to the spots where there are lots of willows, and therefore plenty of ptarmigan, seeing that they feed on willow tops; and the snow that fell last night will help us a little."

"How will the snow help us?" inquired Hamilton.

"By covering up all the old tracks, to be sure, and showing only the new ones."

"Well, captain," said Harry, as he raised a can of tea to his lips, and nodded to Hamilton as if drinking his health, "go on with your proposals for the day. Five miles up the river to begin with, then--"

"Then we'll pull up," continued the accountant; "make a fire, rest a bit, and eat a mouthful of pemmican; after which we'll strike across country for the southern woodcutters' track, and so home."

"And how much will that be?"

"About fifteen miles."

"Ha!" exclaimed Harry; "pass the kettle, please. Thanks.--Do you think you're up to that, Hammy?"

"I will try what I can do," replied Hamilton. "If the snow-shoes don't cause me to fall often, I think I shall stand the fatigue very well."

"That's right," said the accountant; "'faint heart,' etc., you know. If you go on as you've begun, you'll be chosen to head the next expedition to the north pole."

"Well," replied Hamilton, good-humouredly, "pray head the present expedition, and let us be gone."

"Right!" ejaculated the accountant, rising. "I'll just put my odds and ends out of the reach of the foxes, and then we shall be off."

In a few minutes everything was placed in security, guns loaded, snow-shoes put on, and the winter camp deserted. At first the walking was fatiguing, and poor Hamilton more than once took a sudden and eccentric plunge; but after getting beyond the wooded country, they found the snow much more compact, and their march, therefore, much more agreeable. On coming to the place where it was probable that they might fall in with ptarmigan, Hamilton became rather excited, and apt to imagine that little lumps of snow which hung upon the bushes here and there were birds.

"There now," he cried, in an energetic and slightly positive tone, as another of these masses of snow suddenly met his eager eye--"that's one, I'm quite sure."

The accountant and Harry both stopped short on hearing this, and looked in the direction indicated.

"Fire away, then, Hammy," said the former, endeavouring to suppress a smile.

"But do you think it really is one?" asked Hamilton, anxiously.

"Well, I don't see it exactly, but then, you know, I'm near-sighted."

"Don't give him a chance of escape," cried Harry, seeing that his friend was undecided. "If you really do see a bird, you'd better shoot it, for they've got a strong propensity to take wing when disturbed."

Thus admonished Hamilton raised his gun and took aim. Suddenly he lowered his piece again, and looking round at Harry, said in a low whisper,--

"Oh, I should like so much to shoot it while flying! Would it not be better to set it up first?"

"By no means," answered the accountant. "'A bird in the hand,' etc. Take him as you find him--look sharp; he'll be off in a second."

Again the gun was pointed, and, after some difficulty in taking aim, fired.

"Ah, what a pity you've missed him!" shouted Harry,

"But see, he's not off yet; how tame he is, to be sure! Give him the other barrel, Hammy."

This piece of advice proved to be unnecessary. In his anxiety to get the bird, Hamilton had cocked both barrels, and while gazing, half in disappointment, half in surprise, at the supposed bird, his finger unintentionally pressed the second trigger. In a moment the piece exploded. Being accidentally aimed in the right direction, it blew the lump of snow to atoms, and at the same time hitting its owner on the chest with the butt, knocked him over flat upon his back.

"What a gun it is, to be sure!" said Harry, with a roguish laugh, as he assisted the discomfited sportsman to rise; "it knocks over game with butt and muzzle at once."

"Quite a rare instance of one butt knocking another down," added the accountant.

At this moment a large flock of ptarmigan, startled by the double report, rose with a loud whirring noise about a hundred yards in advance, and after flying a short distance alighted.

"There's real game at last, though," cried the accountant, as he hurried after the birds, followed closely by his young friends.

They soon reached the spot where the flock had alighted, and after following up the tracks for a few yards further, set them up again. As the birds rose, the accountant fired and brought down two; Harry shot one and missed another; Hamilton being so nervously interested in the success of his comrades that he forgot to fire at all.

"How stupid of me!" he exclaimed, while the others loaded their guns.

"Never mind; better luck next time," said Harry, as they resumed their walk. "I saw the flock settle down about half-a-mile in advance of us; so step out."

Another short walk brought the sportsmen again within range.

"Go to the front, Hammy," said the accountant, "and take the first shot this time."

Hamilton obeyed. He had scarcely made ten steps in advance, when a single bird, that seemed to have been separated from the others, ran suddenly out from under a bush, and stood stock-still, at a distance of a few yards, with its neck stretched out and its black eyes wide open, as if in astonishment.

"Now then, you can't miss that."

Hamilton was quite taken aback by the suddenness of this necessity for instantaneous action. Instead, therefore, of taking aim leisurely (seeing that he had abundant time to do so), he flew entirely to the opposite extreme, took no aim at all, and fired off both barrels at once, without putting the gun to his shoulder. The result of this was that the affrighted bird flew away unharmed, while Harry and the accountant burst spontaneously into fits of laughter.

"How very provoking!" said the poor youth, with a dejected look.

"Never mind--never say die--try again," said the accountant, on recovering his gravity. Having reloaded, they continued the pursuit.

"Dear me!" exclaimed Harry, suddenly, "here are three dead birds.--I verily believe, Hamilton, that you have killed them all at one shot by accident."

"Can it be possible?" exclaimed his friend, as with a look of amazement he regarded the birds.

There was no doubt about the fact. There they lay, plump and still warm, with one or two drops of bright red blood upon their white plumage. Ptarmigan are almost pure white, so that it requires a practised eye to detect them, even at a distance of a few yards; and it would be almost impossible to hunt them without dogs, but for the tell-tale snow, in which their tracks are distinctly marked, enabling the sportsman to follow them up with unerring certainty. When Hamilton made his bad shot, neither he nor his companions observed a group of ptarmigan not more than fifty yards before them, their attention being riveted at the time on the solitary bird; and the gun happening to be directed towards them when it was fired, three were instantly and unwittingly placed *_hors de combat_*, while the others ran away. This the survivors frequently do when very tame, instead of taking wing. Thus it was that Hamilton, to his immense delight, made such a successful shot without being aware of it.

Having bagged their game, the party proceeded on their way. Several large flocks of birds were raised, and the game-bags nearly filled, before reaching the spot where they intended to turn and bend their steps homewards. This induced them to give up the idea of going further; and it was fortunate they came to this resolution, for a storm was brewing, which in the eagerness of pursuit after game they had not noticed. Dark masses of leaden-coloured clouds were gathering in the sky overhead, and faint sighs of wind came, ever and anon, in fitful gusts from the north-west.

Hurrying forward as quickly as possible, they now pursued their course in a direction which would enable them to cross the woodcutters' track. This they soon reached, and finding it pretty well beaten, were enabled to make more rapid progress. Fortunately the wind was blowing on their backs, otherwise they would have had to contend not only with its violence, but also with the snow-drift, which now whirled in bitter fury among the trees, or scoured like driving clouds over the plain. Under this aspect, the flat country over which they travelled seemed the perfection of bleak desolation. Their way, however, did not lie in a direct line. The track was somewhat tortuous, and gradually edged towards the north, until the wind blew nearly in their teeth. At this point, too, they came to a stretch of open ground which they had crossed at a point some miles further to the northward in their night march. Here the storm raged in all its fury, and as they looked out upon the plain, before quitting the shelter of the wood, they paused to tighten their belts and readjust their snow-shoe lines. The gale was so violent that the whole plain seemed tossed about like billows of the sea, as the drift rose and fell, curled, eddied, and dashed along, so that it was impossible to see more than half-a-dozen yards in advance.

"Heaven preserve us from ever being caught in an exposed place on such a night as this!" said the accountant, as he surveyed the prospect before him. "Luckily the open country here is not more than a quarter of a mile broad, and even that little bit will try our wind somewhat."

Hamilton and Harry seemed by their looks to say, "We could easily face even a stiffer breeze than that, if need be."

"What should we do," inquired the former, "if the plain were five or six miles broad?"

"Do? why, we should have to camp in the woods till it blew over, that's all," replied the accountant; "but seeing that we are not reduced to such a necessity just now, and that the day is drawing to a close, let us face it at once. I'll lead the way, and see that you follow close at my heels. Don't lose sight of me for a moment, and if you do by chance, give a shout; d'ye hear?"

The two lads replied in the affirmative, and then bracing themselves up as if for a great effort, stepped vigorously out upon the plain, and were instantly swallowed up in clouds of snow. For half-an-hour or more they battled slowly against the howling storm, pressing forward for some minutes with heads down, as if boring through it, then turning their backs to the blast for a few seconds' relief, but always keeping as close to each other as possible. At length the woods were gained; on entering which it was discovered that Hamilton was missing.

"Hollo! where's Hamilton?" exclaimed Harry; "I saw him beside me not five minutes ago." The accountant gave a loud shout, but there was no reply. Indeed, nothing short of his own stentorian voice could have been heard at all amid the storm.

"There's nothing for it," said Harry, "but to search at once, else he'll wander about and get lost." Saying this, he began to retrace his steps, just as a brief lull in the gale took place.

"Hollo! don't you hear a cry, Harry?"

At this moment there was another lull; the drift fell, and for an instant cleared away, revealing the bewildered Hamilton, not twenty yards off, standing, like a pillar of snow, in mute despair.

Profiting by the glimpse, Harry rushed forward, caught him by the arm, and led him into the partial shelter of the forest.

Nothing further befell them after this. Their route lay in shelter all the way to the fort. Poor Hamilton, it is true, took one or two of his occasional plunges by the way, but without any serious result--not even to the extent of stuffing his nose, ears, neck, mittens, pockets, gun-barrels, and everything else with snow, because, these being quite full and hard packed already, there was no room left for the addition of another particle.

CHAPTER XXII.

The winter packet--Harry hears from old friends, and wishes that he was with them.

Letters from home! What a burst of sudden emotion--what a riot of conflicting feelings of dread and joy, expectation and anxiety--what a flood of old memories--what stirring up of almost forgotten associations these three words create in the hearts of those who dwell in distant regions of this earth, far, far away from kith and kin, from friends and acquaintances, from the much-loved scenes of

childhood, and from _home_! Letters from home! How gratefully the sound falls upon ears that have been long unaccustomed to sounds and things connected with home, and so long accustomed to wild, savage sounds, that these have at length lost their novelty, and become everyday and commonplace, while the first have gradually grown strange and unwonted. For many long months home and all connected with it have become a dream of other days, and savage-land a present reality. The mind has by degrees become absorbed by surrounding objects--objects so utterly unassociated with or unsuggestive of any other land, that it involuntarily ceases to think of the scenes of childhood with the same feelings that it once did. As time rolls on, home assumes a misty, undefined character, as if it were not only distant in reality, but were also slowly retreating further and further away--growing gradually faint and dream-like, though not less dear, to the mental view.

"Letters from home!" shouted Mr. Wilson, and the doctor, and the skipper, simultaneously, as the sportsmen, after dashing through the wild storm, at last reached the fort, and stumbled tumultuously into Bachelors' Hall.

"What!--Where!--How!--You don't mean it!" they exclaimed, coming to a sudden stand, like three pillars of snow-clad astonishment.

"Ay," replied the doctor, who affected to be quite cool upon all occasions, and rather cooler than usual if the occasion was more than ordinarily exciting--"ay, we _do_ mean it. Old Rogan has got the packet, and is even now disembowelling it."

"More than that," interrupted the skipper, who sat smoking as usual by the stove, with his hands in his breeches pockets--"more than that, I saw him dissecting into the very marrow of the thing; so if we don't storm the old admiral in his cabin, he'll go to sleep over these prosy yarns that the governor-in-chief writes to him, and we'll have to whistle for our letters till midnight."

The skipper's remark was interrupted by the opening of the outer door and the entrance of the butler. "Mr. Rogan wishes to see you, sir," said that worthy to the accountant.

"I'll be with him in a minute," he replied, as he threw off his capote and proceeded to unwind himself as quickly as his multitudinous haps would permit.

By this time Harry Somerville and Hamilton were busily occupied in a similar manner, while a running fire of question and answer, jesting remark and bantering reply, was kept up between the young men, from their various apartments and the hall. The doctor was cool, as usual, and impudent. He had a habit of walking up and down while he smoked, and was thus enabled to look in upon the inmates of the several sleeping-rooms, and make his remarks in a quiet, sarcastic manner, the galling effect of which was heightened by his habit of pausing at the end of every two or three words, to emit a few puffs of smoke. Having exhausted a good deal of small talk in this way, and having, moreover, finished his pipe, the doctor went to the stove to refill and relight.

"What a deal of trouble you do take to make yourself comfortable!" said he to the skipper, who sat with his chair tilted on its hind

legs, and a pillow at his back.

"No harm in that, doctor," replied the skipper, with a smile.

"No harm, certainly, but it looks uncommonly lazy-like."

"What does?"

"Why, putting a pillow at your back, to be sure."

The doctor was a full-fleshed, muscular man, and owing to this fact it mattered little to him whether his chair happened to be an easy one or not. As the skipper sometimes remarked, he carried padding always about with him; he was, therefore, a little apt to sneer at the attempts of his brethren to render the ill-shaped, wooden-bottomed chairs, with which the hall was ornamented, bearable.

"Well, doctor," said the skipper, "I cannot see how you make me out lazy. Surely it is not an evidence of laziness, my endeavouring to render these instruments of torture less tormenting? Seeking to be comfortable, if it does not inconvenience anyone else, is not laziness. Why, what is comfort?" The skipper began to wax philosophical at this point, and took the pipe from his mouth as he gravely propounded the momentous question. "What is comfort? If I go out to camp in the woods, and after turning in find a sharp stump sticking into my ribs on one side, and a pine root driving in the small of my back on the other side, is that comfort? Certainly not. And if I get up, seize a hatchet, level the stump, cut away the root, and spread pine brush over the place, am I to be called lazy for doing so? Or if I sit down on a chair, and on trying to lean back to rest myself find that the stupid lubber who made it has so constructed it that four small hard points alone touch my person--two being at the hip-joints and two at the shoulder-blades; and if to relieve such physical agony I jump up and clap a pillow at my back, am I to be called lazy for doing that?"

"What a glorious entry that would make in the log!" said the doctor, in a low tone, soliloquizingly, as if he made the remark merely for his own satisfaction, while he tapped the ashes out of his pipe.

The skipper looked as if he meditated a sharp reply; but his intentions, whatever they might have been, were interrupted by the opening of the door, and the entrance of the accountant, bearing under his arm a packet of letters.

A general rush was made upon him, and in a few minutes a dead silence reigned in the hall, broken only at intervals by an exclamation of surprise or pathos, as the inmates, in the retirement of their separate apartments, perused letters from friends in the interior of the country and friends at home: letters that were old--some of them bearing dates many months back--and travel-stained, but new and fresh and cheering, nevertheless, to their owners, as the clear bright sun in winter or the verdant leaves in spring.

Harry Somerville's letters were numerous and long. He had several from friends in Red River, besides one or two from other parts of the Indian country, and one--it was very thick and heavy--that bore the post-marks of Britain. It was late that night ere the last candle was extinguished in the hall, and it was late too before Harry Somerville

ceased to peruse and re-peruse the long letter from home, and found time or inclination to devote to his other correspondents. Among the rest was a letter from his old friend and companion, Charley Kennedy, which ran as follows:--

MY DEAR HARRY,--It really seems more than an age since I saw you. Your last epistle, written in the perturbation of mind consequent upon being doomed to spend another winter at York Fort, reached me only a few days ago, and filled me with pleasant recollections of other days. Oh! man, how much I wish that you were with me in this beautiful country! You are aware that I have been what they call "roughing it" since you and I parted on the shores of Lake Winnipeg; but, my dear fellow, the idea that most people have of what that phrase means is a very erroneous one indeed. "Roughing it," I certainly have been, inasmuch as I have been living on rough fare, associating with rough men, and sleeping on rough beds under the starry sky; but I assure you that all this is not half so rough upon the constitution as what they call leading an easy life, which is simply a life that makes a poor fellow stagnate, body and spirit, till the one comes to be unable to digest its food, and the other incompetent to jump at so much as half an idea. Anything but an easy life, to my mind. Ah! there's nothing like roughing it, Harry, my boy. Why, I am thriving on it--growing like a young walrus, eating like a Canadian voyageur, and sleeping like a top! This is a splendid country for sport, and as our bourgeois [Footnote: The gentleman in charge of an establishment is always designated the bourgeois.] has taken it into his head that I am a good hand at making friends with the Indians, he has sent me out on several expeditions, and afforded me some famous opportunities of seeing life among the red-skins. There is a talk just now of establishing a new outpost in this district, so if I succeed in persuading the governor to let me accompany the party, I shall have something interesting to write about in my next letter. By the way, I wrote to you a month ago, by two Indians who said they were going to the missionary station at Norway House. Did you ever get it? There is a hunter here just now who goes by the name of Jacques Caradoc. He is a first-rater--can do anything, in a wild way, that lies within the power of mortal man, and is an inexhaustible anecdote-teller, in a quiet way. He and I have been out buffalo-hunting two or three times, and it would have done your heart good, Harry, my dear boy, to have seen us scouring over the prairie together on two big-boned Indian horses--regular trained buffalo-runners, that didn't need the spur to urge, nor the rein to guide them, when once they caught sight of the black cattle, and kept a sharp look-out for badger-holes, just as if they had been reasonable creatures. The first time I went out I had several rather ugly falls, owing to my inexperience. The fact is, that if a man has never run buffaloes before, he's sure to get one or two upsets, no matter how good a horseman he may be. And that monster Jacques, although he's the best fellow I ever met with for a hunting companion, always took occasion to grin at my mishaps, and gravely to read me a lecture to the effect that they were all owing to my own clumsiness or stupidity; which, you will acknowledge, was not calculated to restore my equanimity.

The very first run we had cost me the entire skin of my nose, and converted that feature into a superb Roman for the next three weeks. It happened thus. Jacques and I were riding over the prairies in search of buffaloes. The place was interspersed with sundry knolls covered with trees, slips and belts of woodland, with ponds scattered

among them, and open sweeps of the plain here and there; altogether a delightful country to ride through. It was a clear early morning, so that our horses were fresh and full of spirit. They knew, as well as we ourselves did, what we were out for, and it was no easy matter to restrain them. The one I rode was a great long-legged beast, as like as possible to that abominable kangaroo that nearly killed me at Red River; as for Jacques, he was mounted on a first-rate charger. I don't know how it is, but somehow or other everything about Jacques, or belonging to him, or in the remotest degree connected with him, is always first-rate! He generally owns a first-rate horse, and if he happens by any unlucky chance to be compelled to mount a bad one, it immediately becomes another animal. He seems to infuse some of his own wonderful spirit into it! Well, as Jacques and I curvetted along, skirting the low bushes at the edge of a wood, out burst a whole herd of buffaloes. Bang went Jacques's gun, almost before I had winked to make sure that I saw rightly, and down fell the fattest of them all, while the rest tossed up their tails, heels, and heads in one grand whirl of indignant amazement, and scoured away like the wind. In a moment our horses were at full stretch after them, on their own account entirely, and without any reference to us. When I recovered my self-possession a little, I threw forward my gun and fired; but owing to my endeavouring to hold the reins at the same time, I nearly blew off one of my horse's ears, and only knocked up the dust about six yards ahead of us! Of course Jacques could not let this pass unnoticed. He was sitting quietly loading his gun, as cool as a cucumber, while his horse was dashing forward at full stretch, with the reins hanging loosely on his neck.

"Ah, Mister Charles," said he, with the least possible grin on his leathern visage, "that was not well done. You should never hold the reins when you fire, nor try to put the gun to your shoulder. It a'n't needful. The beast'll look arter itself, if it's a riglar buffalo-runner; any ways holdin' the reins is of no manner of use. I once know'd a gentleman that came out here to see the buffalo-huntin'. He was a good enough shot in his way, an' a first-rate rider. But he was full o' queer notions: he would load his gun with the ramrod in the riglar way, instead o' doin' as we do, tumblin' in a drop powder, spittin' a ball out your mouth down the muzzle, and hittin' the stock on the pommel of the saddle to send it home. And he had them miserable things--the somethin' 'cussion-caps, and used to fiddle away with them while we were knockin' over the cattle in all directions. Moreover, he had a notion that it was altogether wrong to let go his reins even for a moment, and so, what between the ramrod and the 'cussion-caps and the reins, he was worse than the greenest clerk that ever came to the country. He gave it up in despair at last, after lamin' two horses, and finished off by runnin' after a big bull, that turned on him all of a sudden, crammed its head and horns into the side of his horse, and sent the poor fellow head over heels on the green grass. He wasn't much the worse for it, but his fine double-barrelled gun was twisted into a shape that would almost have puzzled an Injin to tell what it was." Well, Harry, all the time that Jacques was telling me this we were gaining on the buffaloes, and at last we got quite close to them, and as luck would have it, the very thing that happened to the amateur sportsman happened to me. I went madly after a big bull in spite of Jacques's remonstrances, and just as I got alongside of him up went his tail (a sure sign that his anger was roused), and round he came, head to the front, stiff as a rock; my poor charger's chest went right between his horns, and, as a matter of course, I continued the race upon nothing, head first,

for a distance of about thirty yards, and brought up on the bridge of my nose. My poor dear father used to say I was a bull-headed rascal, and, upon my word, I believe he was more literally correct than he imagined; for although I fell with a fearful crash, head first, on the hard plain, I rose up immediately, and in a few minutes was able to resume the chase again. My horse was equally fortunate, for although thus brought to a sudden stand while at full gallop, he wheeled about, gave a contemptuous flourish with his heels, and cantered after Jacques, who soon caught him again. My head bothered me a good deal for some time after this accident, and swelled up till my eyes became almost undistinguishable; but a few weeks put me all right again. And who do you think this man Jacques is? You'd never guess. He's the trapper whom Redfeather told us of long ago, and whose wife was killed by the Indians. He and Redfeather have met, and are very fond of each other. How often in the midst of these wild excursions have my thoughts wandered to you, Harry! The fellows I meet with here are all kind-hearted, merry companions, but none like yourself. I sometimes say to Jacques, when we become communicative to each other beside the camp-fire, that my earthly felicity would be perfect if I had Harry Somerville here; and then I think of Kate, my sweet, loving sister Kate, and feel that, even although I had you with me, there would still be something wanting to make things perfect. Talking of Kate, by the way, I have received a letter from her, the first sheet of which, as it speaks of mutual Red River friends, I herewith enclose. Pray keep it safe, and return per first opportunity. We've loads of furs here and plenty of deerstalking, not to mention galloping on horseback on the plains in summer and dog-sledging in the winter. Alas! my poor friend, I fear that it is rather selfish in me to write so feelingly about my agreeable circumstances, when I know you are slowly dragging out your existence at that melancholy place York Fort; but believe me, I sympathize with you, and I hope earnestly that you will soon be appointed to more genial scenes. I have much, very much, to tell you yet, but am compelled to reserve it for a future epistle, as the packet which is to convey this is on the point of being closed.

Adieu, my dear Harry, and wherever you may happen to pitch your tent, always bear in kindly remembrance your old friend,
CHARLES
KENNEDY.

The letter was finished, but Harry did not cease to hold intercourse with his friend. With his head resting on his two hands, and his elbows on the table, he sat long, silently gazing on the signature, while his mind revelled in the past, the present, and the future. He bounded over the wilderness that lay between him and the beautiful plains of the Saskatchewan. He seized Charley round the neck, and hugged and wrestled with him as in days of yore. He mounted an imaginary charger, and swept across the plains along with him; listened to anecdotes innumerable from Jacques, attacked thousands of buffaloes, singled out scores of wild bulls, pitched over horses' heads and alighted precisely on the bridge of his nose, always in close proximity to his old friend. Gradually his mind returned to its prison-house, and his eye fell on Kate's letter, which he picked up and began to read. It ran thus:--

MY DEAR, DEAR, DARLING CHARLEY,--I cannot tell you how much my heart has yearned to see you, or hear from you, for many long, long months past. Your last delightful letter, which I treasure up as the most precious object I possess, has indeed explained to me how utterly

impossible it was to have written a day sooner than you did; but that does not comfort me a bit, or make those weary packets more rapid and frequent in their movements, or the time that passes between the periods of hearing from you less dreary and anxious. God bless and protect you, my darling, in the midst of all the dangers that surround you. But I did not intend to begin this letter by murmuring, so pray forgive me, and I shall try to atone for it by giving you a minute account of everybody here about whom you are interested. Our beloved father and mother, I am thankful to say, are quite well. Papa has taken more than ever to smoking since you went away. He is seldom out of the summer-house in the garden now, where I very frequently go, and spend hours together in reading to and talking with him. He very often speaks of you, and I am certain that he misses you far more than we expected, although I think he cannot miss you nearly so much as I do. For some weeks past, indeed ever since we got your last letter, papa was engaged all the forenoon in some mysterious work, for he used to lock himself up in the summer-house--a thing he never did before. One day I went there at my usual time and instead of having to wait till he should unlock the door, I found it already open, and entered the room, which was so full of smoke that I could hardly see. I found papa writing at a small table, and the moment he heard my footstep he jumped up with a fierce frown, and shouted, "Who's there?" in that terrible voice that he used to speak in long ago when angry with his men, but which he has almost quite given up for some time past. He never speaks to me, as you know very well, but in the kindest tones, so you may imagine what a dreadful fright I got for a moment; but it was only for a moment, because the instant he saw that it was me his dear face changed, and he folded me in his arms, saying, "Ah, Kate, forgive me, my darling! I did not know it was you, and I thought I had locked the door, and was angry at being so unceremoniously interrupted." He then told me he was just finishing a letter of advice to you, and going up to the table, pushed the papers hurriedly into a drawer. As he did so, I guessed what had been his mysterious occupation, for he seemed to have covered quires of paper with the closest writing. Ah, Charley, you're a lucky fellow to be able to extort such long letters from our dear father. You know how difficult he finds it to write even the shortest note, and you remember his old favourite expression, "I would rather skin a wild buffalo bull alive than write a long letter." He deserves long ones in return, Charley; but I need not urge you on that score--you are an excellent correspondent. Mamma is able to go out every day now for a drive in the prairie. She was confined to the house for nearly three weeks last month, with some sort of illness that the doctor did not seem to understand, and at one time I was much frightened, and very, very anxious about her, she became so weak. It would have made your heart glad to have seen the tender way in which papa nursed her through the illness. I had fancied that he was the very last man in the world to make a sick-nurse, so bold and quick in his movements, and with such a loud, gruff voice--for it is gruff, although very sweet at the same time. But the moment he began to tend mamma he spoke more softly even than dear Mr. Addison does, and he began to walk about the house on tiptoe, and persevered so long in this latter that all his moccasins began to be worn out at the toes, while the heels remained quite strong. I begged of him often not to take so much trouble, as I was naturally the proper nurse for mamma; but he wouldn't hear of it, and insisted on carrying breakfast, dinner, and tea to her, besides giving her all her medicine. He was for ever making mistakes, however, much to his own sorrow, the darling man; and I had to watch

him pretty closely, for more than once he has been on the point of giving mamma a glass of laudanum in mistake for a glass of port wine. I was a good deal frightened for him at first, as, before he became accustomed to the work, he tumbled over the chairs and tripped on the carpets while carrying trays with dinners and breakfasts, till I thought he would really injure himself at last, and then he was so terribly angry with himself at making such a noise and breaking the dishes--I think he has broken nearly an entire dinner and tea set of crockery. Poor George, the cook, has suffered most from these mishaps--for you know that dear papa cannot get angry without letting a little of it out upon somebody; and whenever he broke a dish or let a tray fall, he used to rush into the kitchen, shake his fist in George's face, and ask him, in a fierce voice, what he meant by it. But he always got better in a few seconds, and finished off by telling him never to mind, that he was a good servant on the whole, and he wouldn't say any more about it just now, but he had better look sharp out and not do it again. I must say, in praise of George, that on such occasions he looked very sorry indeed, and said he hoped that he would always do his best to give him satisfaction. This was only proper in him, for he ought to be very thankful that our father restrains his anger so much; for you know he was rather violent once, and you've no idea, Charley, how great a restraint he now lays on himself. He seems to me quite like a lamb, and I am beginning to feel somehow as if we had been mistaken, and that he never was a passionate man at all. I think it is partly owing to dear Mr. Addison, who visits us very frequently now, and papa and he are often shut up together for many hours in the smoking-house. I was sure that papa would soon come to like him, for his religion is so free from everything like severity or affected solemnity. The cook, and Rosa, and my dog that you named Twist, are all quite well. The last has grown into a very large and beautiful animal, something like the stag-hound in the picture-book we used to study together long ago. He is exceedingly fond of me, and I feel him to be quite a protector. The cocks and hens, the cow and the old mare, are also in perfect health; so now, having told you a good deal about ourselves, I will give you a short account of the doings in the colony.

First of all, your old friend Mr. Kipples is still alive and well, and so are all our old companions in the school. One or two of the latter have left, and young Naysmith has joined the Company's service. Betty Peters comes very often to see us, and she always asks for you with great earnestness. I think you have stolen the old woman's heart, Charley, for she speaks of you with great affection. Old Mr. Seaforth is still as vigorous as ever, dashing about the settlement on a high-mettled steed, just as if he were one of the youngest men in the colony. He nearly poisoned himself, poor man, a month ago, by taking a dose of some kind of medicine by mistake. I did not hear what it was, but I am told that the treatment was rather severe. Fortunately the doctor happened to be at home when he was sent for, else our old friend would, I fear, have died. As it was, the doctor cured him with great difficulty. He first gave him an emetic, then put mustard blisters to the soles of his feet, and afterwards lifted him into one of his own carts, without springs, in which he drove him for a long time over all the ploughed fields in the neighbourhood. If this is not an exaggerated account, Mr. Seaforth is certainly made of sterner stuff than most men. I was told a funny anecdote of him a few days ago, which I am sure you have never heard, otherwise you would have told it to me, for there used to be no secrets between us, Charley--alas! I have no one to confide

in or advise with now that you are gone. You have often heard of the great flood; not Noah's one, but the flood that nearly swept away our settlement and did so much damage before you and I were born. Well, you recollect that people used to tell of the way in which the river rose after the breaking up of the ice, and how it soon overflowed all the low points, sweeping off everything in its course. Old Mr. Seaforth's house stood at that time on the little point, just beyond the curve of the river, at the foot of which our own house stands, and as the river continued to rise, Mr. Seaforth went about actively securing his property. At first he only thought of his boat and canoes, which, with the help of his son Peter and a Canadian, who happened at the time to be employed about the place, he dragged up and secured to an iron staple in the side of his house. Soon, however, he found that the danger was greater than at first he imagined. The point became completely covered with water, which brought down great numbers of half-drowned and quite-drowned cattle, pigs, and poultry, and stranded them at the garden fence, so that in a short time poor Mr. Seaforth could scarcely move about his overcrowded domains. On seeing this, he drove his own cattle to the highest land in his neighbourhood and hastened back to the house, intending to carry as much of the furniture as possible to the same place. But during his short absence the river had risen so rapidly that he was obliged to give up all thoughts of this, and think only of securing a few of his valuables. The bit of land round his dwelling was so thickly covered with the poor cows, sheep, and other animals, that he could scarcely make his way to the house, and you may fancy his consternation on reaching it to find that the water was more than knee-deep round the walls, while a few of the cows and a whole herd of pigs had burst open the door (no doubt accidentally) and coolly entered the dining-room, where they stood with drooping heads, very wet, and apparently very miserable. The Canadian was busy at the back of the house, loading the boat and canoe with everything he could lay hands on, and was not aware of the foreign invasion in front. Mr. Seaforth cared little for this, however, and began to collect all the things he held most valuable, and threw them to the man, who stowed them away in the boat. Peter had been left in charge of the cattle, so they had to work hard. While thus employed the water continued to rise with fearful rapidity, and rushed against the house like a mill-race, so that it soon became evident that the whole would ere long be swept away. Just as they finished loading the boat and canoes, the staple which held them gave way; in a moment they were swept into the middle of the river, and carried out of sight. The Canadian was in the boat at the time the staple broke, so that Mr. Seaforth was now left in a dwelling that bid fair to emulate Noah's ark in an hour or two, without a chance of escape, and with no better company than five black oxen, in the dining-room, besides three sheep that were now scarcely able to keep their heads above water, and three little pigs that were already drowned. The poor old man did his best to push out the intruders, but only succeeded in ejecting two sheep and an ox. All the others positively refused to go, so he was fain to let them stay. By shutting the outer door he succeeded in keeping out a great deal of water. Then he waded into the parlour, where he found some more little pigs, floating about and quite dead. Two, however, more adventurous than their comrades, had saved their lives by mounting first on a chair and then upon the table, where they were comfortably seated, gazing languidly at their mother, a very heavy fat sow, which sat, with what seemed an expression of settled despair, on the sofa. In a fit of wrath, Mr. Seaforth seized the young pigs and tossed them out of the window;

whereupon the old one jumped down, and half-walking, half-swimming, made her way to her companions in the dining-room. The old gentleman now ascended to the garret, where from a small window he looked out upon the scene of devastation. His chief anxiety was about the foundation of the house, which, being made of a wooden framework, like almost all the others in the colony, would certainly float if the water rose much higher. His fears were better founded than the house. As he looked up the river, which had by this time overflowed all its banks, and was spreading over the plains, he saw a fresh burst of water coming down, which, when it dashed against his dwelling, forced it about two yards from its foundation. Suddenly he remembered that there were a large anchor and chain in the kitchen, both of which he had brought there one day, to serve as a sort of anvil when he wanted to do some blacksmith work. Hastening down, he fastened one end of the chain to the sofa, and cast the anchor out of the window. A few minutes afterwards another rush of water struck the building, which yielded to pressure, and swung slowly down until the anchor arrested its further progress. This was only for a few seconds, however. The chain was a slight one. It snapped, and the house swept majestically down the stream, while its terrified owner scrambled to the roof, which he found already in possession of his favourite cat. Here he had a clear view of his situation. The plains were converted into a lake, above whose surface rose trees and houses, several of which, like his own, were floating on the stream or stranded among shallows. Settlers were rowing about in boats and canoes in all directions, but although some of them noticed the poor man sitting beside his cat on the housetop, they were either too far off or had no time to render him assistance.

For two days nothing was heard of old Mr. Seaforth. Indeed, the settlers had too much to do in saving themselves and their families to think of others; and it was not until the third day that people began to inquire about him. His son Peter had taken a canoe and made diligent search in all directions, but although he found the house sticking on a shallow point, neither his father nor the cat was on or in it. At last he was brought to the island, on which nearly half the colony had collected, by an Indian who had passed the house, and brought him away in his canoe, along with the old cat. Is he not a wonderful man, to have come through so much in his old age? and he is still so active and hearty! Mr. Swan of the mill is dead. He died of fever last week. Poor old Mr. Cordon is also gone. His end was very sad. About a month ago he ordered his horse and rode off, intending to visit Fort Garry. At the turn of the road, just above Grant's house, the horse suddenly swerved, and its rider was thrown to the ground. He did not live more than half-an-hour after it. Alas! how very sad to see a man, after escaping all the countless dangers of a long life in the woods (and his, you know, was a very adventurous one), thus cut violently down in his old age. O Charley, how little we know what is before us! How needful to have our peace made with God through Jesus Christ, so that we may be ready at any moment when our Father calls us away. There are many events of great interest that have occurred here since you left. You will be glad to hear the Jane Patterson is married to our excellent friend Mr. Cameron, who has taken up a store near to us, and intends to run a boat to York Fort next summer. There has been another marriage here which will cause you astonishment at least, if not pleasure. Old Mr. Peters has married Marie Peltier! What could have possessed her to take such a husband? I cannot understand it. Just think of her, Charley, a girl of eighteen, with a husband of seventy-five!--

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At this point the writing, which was very close and very small, terminated. Harry laid it down with a deep sigh, wishing much that Charley had thought it advisable to send him the second sheet also. As wishes and regrets on this point were equally unavailing, he endeavoured to continue it in imagination, and was soon as deeply absorbed in following Kate through the well-remembered scenes of Red River as he had been, a short time before, in roaming with her brother over the wide prairies of Saskatchewan. The increasing cold, however soon warned him that the night was far spent. He rose and went to the stove; but the fire had gone out, and the almost irresistible frost of these regions was already cooling everything in Bachelors' Hall down to the freezing-point. All his companions had put out their candles, and were busy, doubtless, dreaming of the friends whose letters had struck and reawakened the long-dormant chords that used to echo to the tones and scenes of other days. With a slight shiver, Harry returned to his apartment, and kneeled to thank God for protecting and preserving his absent friends, and especially for sending him "good news from a far land." The letter with the British post-marks on it was placed under his pillow. It occupied his waking and sleeping thoughts that night, and it was the first thing he thought of and reread on the following morning, and for many mornings afterwards. Only those can fully estimate the value of such letters who live in distant lands, where letters are few--very, very few--and far between.

CHAPTER XXIII.

Changes--Harry and Hamilton find that variety is indeed charming--The latter astonishes the former considerably.

Three months passed away, but the snow still lay deep and white and undiminished around York Fort. Winter--cold, silent, unyielding winter--still drew its white mantle closely round the lonely dwelling of the fur-traders of the Far North.

Icicles hung, as they had done for months before, from the eaves of every house, from the tall black scaffold on which the great bell hung, and from the still taller erection that had been put up as an outlook for "_the ship_" in summer. At the present time it commanded a bleak view of the frozen sea. Snow covered every housetop, and hung in ponderous masses from their edges, as if it were about to fall; but it never fell--it hung there in the same position day after day, unmelted, unchanged. Snow covered the whole land, and the frozen river, the swamps, the sea-beach, and the sea itself, as far as the eye could reach, seemed like a pure white carpet. Snow lined the upper edge of every paling, filled up the key-hole of every door, embanked about half of every window, stuck in little knobs on the top of every picket, and clung in masses on every drooping branch of the pine trees in the forest. Frost--sharp, biting frost--solidified, surrounded, and pervaded everything. Mercury was congealed by it; vapour was condensed by it; iron was cooled by it until it could scarcely be touched without (as the men expressed it) "burning" the

fingers. The water-jugs in Bachelors' Hall and the water-buckets were frozen by it, nearly to the bottom; though there was a good stove there, and the Hall was not _usually_ a cold place by any means. The breath of the inhabitants was congealed by it on the window-panes, until they had become coated with ice an inch thick. The breath of the men was rendered white and opaque by it, as they panted and hurried to and fro about their ordinary avocations; beating their gloved hands together, and stamping their well-wrapped-up feet on the hard-beaten snow to keep them warm. Old Bobin's nose seemed to be entirely shrivelled up into his face by it, as he drove his ox-cart to the river to fetch his daily supply of water. The only things that were not affected by it were the fires, which crackled and roared as if in laughter, and twisted and leaped as if in uncontrollable glee at the bare idea of John Frost acquiring, by any artifice whatever, the smallest possible influence over _them_! Three months had elapsed, but frost and snow, instead of abating, had gone on increasing and intensifying, deepening and extending its work, and riveting its chains. Winter--cold, silent, unyielding winter--still reigned at York Fort, as though it had made it a _sine qua non_ of its existence at all that it should reign there for ever!

But although everything was thus wintry and cold, it was by no means cheerless or dreary. A bright sun shone in the blue heavens with an intenseness of brilliancy that was quite dazzling to the eyes, that elated the spirits, and caused man and beast to tread with a more elastic step than usual. Although the sun looked down upon the scene with an unclouded face, and found a mirror in every icicle and in every gem of hoar-frost with which the objects of nature were loaded, there was, however, no perceptible heat in his rays. They fell on the white earth with all the brightness of midsummer, but they fell powerless as moonbeams in the dead of winter.

On the frozen river, just in front of the gate of the fort, a group of men and dogs were assembled. The dogs were four in number, harnessed to a small flat sledge of the slender kind used by Indians to drag their furs and provisions over the snow. The group of men was composed of Mr. Rogan and the inmates of Bachelors' Hall, one or two men who happened to be engaged there at the time in cutting a new water-hole in the ice, and an Indian, who, to judge from his carefully-adjusted costume, the snow-shoes on his feet, and the short whip in his hand, was the driver of the sledge, and was about to start on a journey. Harry Somerville and young Hamilton were also wrapped up more carefully than usual.

"Good-bye, then, good-bye," said Mr. Rogan, advancing towards the Indian, who stood beside the leading dog, ready to start. "Take care of our young friends; they've not had much experience in travelling yet; and don't over drive your dogs. Treat them well, and they'll do more work. They're like men in that respect." Mr. Rogan shook the Indian by the hand, and the latter immediately flourished the whip and gave a shout, which the dogs no sooner heard than they uttered a simultaneous yell, sprang forward with a jerk, and scampered up the river, closely followed by their dark-skinned driver.

"Now, lads, farewell," said the old gentleman, turning with a kindly smile to our two friends, who were shaking hands for the last time with their comrades. "I'm sorry you're going to leave us, my boys. You've done your duty well while here, and I would willingly have kept you a little longer with me, but our governor wills it

otherwise. However, I trust that you'll be happy wherever you may be sent. Don't forget to write to me. God bless you. Farewell."

Mr. Rogan shook them heartily by the hand, turned short round, and walked slowly up to his house, with an expression of sadness on his mild face; while Harry and Hamilton, having once more waved farewell to their friends, marched up the river side by side in silence. They followed the track left by the dog-sledge, which guided them with unerring certainty, although their Indian leader and his team were out of sight in advance.

A week previous to this time an Indian arrived from the interior, bearing a letter from headquarters, which directed that Messrs. Somerville and Hamilton should be forthwith despatched on snow-shoes to Norway House. As this establishment is about three hundred miles from the sea-coast, the order involved a journey of nearly two weeks' duration through a country that was utterly destitute of inhabitants. On receiving a command from Mr. Rogan to prepare for an early start, Harry retired precipitately to his own room, and there, after cutting unheard of capers, and giving vent to sudden, incomprehensible shouts, all indicative of the highest state of delight, he condescended to tell his companions of his good fortune, and set about preparations without delay. Hamilton, on the contrary, gave his usual quiet smile on being informed of his destination, and returning somewhat pensively to Bachelors' Hall, proceeded leisurely to make the necessary arrangements for departure. As the time drew on, however, a perpetual flush on his countenance, and an unusual brilliancy about his eye, showed that he was not quite insensible to the pleasures of a change, and relished the idea more than he got credit for. The Indian who had brought the letter was ordered to hold himself in readiness to retrace his steps, and conduct the young men through the woods to Norway House, where they were to await further orders. A few days later the three travellers, as already related, set out on their journey.

After walking a mile up the river, they passed a point of land which shut out the fort from view. Here they paused to take a last look, and then pressed forward in silence, the thoughts of each being busy with mingled recollections of their late home and anticipations of the future. After an hour's sharp walking they came in sight of the guide, and slackened their pace.

"Well, Hamilton," said Harry, throwing off his reverie with a deep sigh, "are you glad to leave York Fort, or sorry?"

"Glad, undoubtedly," replied Hamilton, "but sorry to part from our old companions there. I had no idea, Harry, that I loved them all so much. I feel as if I should be glad were the order for us to leave them countermanded even now."

"That's the very thought," said Harry, "that was passing through my own brain when I spoke to you. Yet somehow I think I should feel uncommonly sorry after all if we were really sent back. There's a queer contradiction, Hammy: we're sorry and happy at the same time! If I were the skipper now, I would found a philosophical argument upon it."

"Which the skipper would carry on with untiring vigour," said Hamilton, smiling, "and afterwards make an entry of in his log. But I

think, Harry, that to feel the emotion of sorrow and joy at the same time is not such a contradiction as it at first appears."

"Perhaps not," replied Harry; "but it seems very contradictory to _me_, and yet it's an evident fact, for I'm _very_ sorry to leave _them_, and I'm _very_ happy to have you for my companion here."

"So am I, so am I," said the other heartily. "I would rather travel with you, Harry, than with any of our late companions, although I like them all very much."

The two friends had grown, almost imperceptibly, in each other's esteem during their residence under the same roof, more than either of them would have believed possible. The gay, reckless hilarity of the one did not at first accord with the quiet gravity and, as his comrades styled it, _softness_ of the other. But character is frequently misjudged at first sight, and sometimes men who on a first acquaintance have felt repelled from each other have, on coming to know each other better, discovered traits and good qualities that ere long formed enduring bonds of sympathy, and have learned to love those whom at first they felt disposed to dislike or despise. Thus Harry soon came to know that what he at first thought and, along with his companions, called softness in Hamilton in reality gentleness of disposition and thorough good-nature, united in one who happened to be utterly unacquainted with the _knowing_ ways of this peculiarly sharp and clever world, while in the course of time new qualities showed themselves in a quiet, unobtrusive way that won upon his affections and raised his esteem. On the other hand, Hamilton found that although Harry was volatile, and possessed of an irresistible tendency to fun and mischief, he never by any chance gave way to anger, or allowed malice to enter into his practical jokes. Indeed, he often observed him to restrain his natural tendencies when they were at all likely to give pain, though Harry never dreamed that such efforts were known to any one but himself. Besides this, Harry was peculiarly _unselfish_, and when a man is possessed of this inestimable disposition, he is, not _quite_ but _very nearly_, perfect!

After another pause, during which the party had left the open river and directed their course through the woods, where the depth of the snow obliged them to tread in each other's footsteps, Harry resumed the conversation.

"You have not yet told me, by-the-by, what old Mr. Rogan said to you just before we started. Did he give you any hint as to where you might be sent to after reaching Norway House?"

"No; he merely said he knew that clerks were wanted both for Mackenzie River and the Saskatchewan districts, but he did not know which I was destined for."

"Hum! exactly what he said to me, with the slight addition that he strongly suspected that Mackenzie River would be my doom. Are you aware, Hammy my boy, that the Saskatchewan district is a sort of terrestrial paradise, and Mackenzie River equivalent to Botany Bay?"

"I have heard as much during our conversations in Bachelors' Hall, but--Stop a bit, Harry; these snow-shoe lines of mine have got loosened with tearing through this deep snow and these shockingly

thick bushes. There--they are right now; go on. I was going to say that I don't--oh!"

This last exclamation was elicited from Hamilton by a sharp blow caused by a branch which, catching on part of Harry's dress as he plodded on in front, suddenly rebounded and struck him across the face. This is of common occurrence in travelling through the woods, especially to those who from inexperience walk too closely on the heels of their companions.

"What's wrong now, Hammy?" inquired his friend, looking over his shoulder.

"Oh, nothing worth mentioning--rather a sharp blow from a branch, that's all."

"Well, proceed; you've interrupted yourself twice in what you were going to say. Perhaps it'll come out if you try it a third time."

"I was merely going to say that I don't much care where I am sent to, so long as it is not to an outpost where I shall be all alone."

"All very well, my friend; but seeing that outposts are, in comparison with principal forts, about a hundred to one, your chance of avoiding them is rather slight. However, our youth and want of experience is in our favour, as they like to send men who have seen some service to outposts. But I fear that, with such brilliant characters as you and I, Hammy, youth will only be an additional recommendation, and inexperience won't last long.--Hollo! what's going on yonder?"

Harry pointed as he spoke to an open spot in the woods about a quarter of a mile in advance, where a dark object was seen lying on the snow, writhing about, now coiling into a lump, and anon extending itself like a huge snake in agony.

As the two friends looked, a prolonged howl floated towards them.

"Something wrong with the dogs, I declare!" cried Harry.

"No doubt of it," replied his friend, hurrying forward, as they saw their Indian guide rise from the ground and flourish his whip energetically, while the howls rapidly increased.

A few minutes brought them to the scene of action, where they found the dogs engaged in a fight among themselves, and the driver, in a state of vehement passion, alternately belabouring and trying to separate them. Dogs in these regions, like the dogs of all other regions, we suppose, are very much addicted to fighting--a propensity which becomes extremely unpleasant if indulged while the animals are in harness, as they then become peculiarly savage, probably from their being unable, like an ill-assorted pair in wedlock, to cut or break the ties that bind them. Moreover, they twist the traces into such an ingeniously complicated mass that it renders disentanglement almost impossible, even after exhaustion has reduced them to obedience. Besides this, they are so absorbed in worrying each other that for the time they are utterly regardless of their driver's lash or voice. This naturally makes the driver angry, and sometimes irascible men practise shameful cruelties on the poor dogs. When the

two friends came up they found the Indian glaring at the animals, as they fought and writhed in the snow, with every lineament of his swarthy face distorted with passion, and panting from his late exertions. Suddenly he threw himself on the dogs again, and lashed them furiously with the whip. Finding that this had no effect, he twined the lash round his hand, and struck them violently over their heads and snouts with the handle; then falling down on his knees, he caught the most savage of the animals by the throat, and seizing its nose between his teeth almost bit it off. The appalling yell that followed this cruel act seemed to subdue the dogs, for they ceased to fight, and crouched, whining, in the snow.

With a bound like a tiger young Hamilton sprang upon the guide, and seizing him by the throat, hurled him violently to the ground. "Scoundrel!" he cried, standing over the crestfallen Indian with flushed face and flashing eyes, "how dare you thus treat the creatures of God?"

The young man would have spoken more, but his indignation was so fierce that it could not find vent in words. For a moment he raised his fist, as if he meditated dashing the Indian again to the ground as he slowly arose; then, as if changing his mind, he seized him by the back of the neck, thrust him towards the panting dogs, and stood in silence over him with the whip grasped firmly in his hand, while he disentangled the traces.

This accomplished, Hamilton ordered him in a voice of suppressed anger to "go forward"--an order which the cowed guide promptly obeyed, and in a few minutes more the two friends were again alone.

"Hamilton, my boy," exclaimed Harry, who up to this moment seemed to have been petrified, "you have perfectly amazed me! I'm utterly bewildered."

"Indeed, I fear that I have been very violent," said Hamilton, blushing deeply.

"Violent!" exclaimed his friend. "Why, man, I've completely mistaken your character. I--I--"

"I hope not, Harry," said Hamilton, in a subdued tone; "I hope not. Believe me, I am not naturally violent. I should be very sorry were you to think so. Indeed, I never felt thus before, and now that it is over I am amazed at myself; but surely you'll admit that there was great provocation. Such terrible cruelty to--"

"My dear fellow, you quite misunderstand me. I'm amazed at your pluck, your energy. Soft indeed! we have been most egregiously mistaken. Provocation! I just think you had; my only sorrow is that you didn't give him a little more."

"Come, come, Harry; I see you would be as cruel to him as he was to the poor dog. But let us press forward; it is already growing dark, and we must not let the fellow out of sight ahead of us."

"Allons donc," cried Harry; and hastening their steps, they travelled silently and rapidly among the stems of the trees, while the shades of night gathered slowly round them.

That night the three travellers encamped in the snow under the shelter of a spreading pine. The encampment was formed almost exactly in a similar manner to that in which they had slept on the night of their exploits at North River. They talked less, however, than on that occasion, and slept more soundly. Before retiring to rest, and while Harry was extended, half asleep and half awake, on his green blanket, enjoying the delightful repose that follows a hard day's march and a good supper, Hamilton drew near to the Indian, who sat sullenly smoking a little apart from the young men. Sitting down beside him, he administered a long rebuke in a low, grave tone of voice. Like rebukes generally, it had the effect of making the visage of the Indian still more sullen. But the young man did not appear to notice this; he still continued to talk. As he went on, the look grew less and less sullen, until it faded entirely away, and was succeeded by that grave, quiet, respectful expression peculiar to the face of the North American Indian.

Day succeeded day, night followed night, and still found them plodding laboriously through the weary waste of snow, or encamping under the trees of the forest. The two friends went through all the varied stages of experience which are included in what is called "becoming used to the work," which is sometimes a modified meaning of the expression "used up." They started with a degree of vigour that one would have thought no amount of hard work could possibly abate. They became aware of the melancholy fact that fatigue unstrings the youngest and toughest sinews. They pressed on, however, from stern necessity, and found, to their delight, that young muscles recover their elasticity even in the midst of severe exertion. They still pressed on, and discovered, to their dismay, that this recovery was only temporary, and that the second state of exhaustion was infinitely worse than the first. Still they pressed on, and raised blisters on their feet and toes that caused them to limp wofully; then they learned that blisters break and take a long time to heal, and are much worse to walk upon during the healing process than they are at the commencement--at which time they innocently fancied that nothing could be more dreadful. Still they pressed on day after day, and found to their satisfaction that such things can be endured and overcome; that feet and toes can become hard like leather, that muscles can grow tough as india-rubber, and that spirits and energy can attain to a pitch of endurance which nothing within the compass of a day's march can by any possibility overcome. They found also, from experience, that their conversation changed, both in manner and subject, as they progressed on their journey. At first they conversed frequently and on various topics, chiefly on the probability of their being sent to pleasant places or the reverse. Then they spoke less frequently, and growled occasionally, as they advanced in the painful process of training. After that, as they began to get hardy, they talked of the trees, the snow, the ice, the tracks of wild animals they happened to cross, and the objects of nature generally that came under their observation. Then as their muscles hardened and their sinews grew tough, and the day's march at length became first a matter of indifference, and ultimately an absolute pleasure, they chatted cheerfully on any and every subject, or sang occasionally, when the sun shone out and cast an appearance of warmth across their path. Thus onward they pressed, without halt or stay, day after day, through wood and brake, over river and lake, on ice and on snow, for miles and miles together, through the great, uninhabited, frozen wilderness.

CHAPTER XXIV.

Hopes and fears--An unexpected meeting--Philosophical talk between the hunter and the parson.

On arriving at Norway House, Harry Somerville and his friend Hamilton found that they were to remain at that establishment during an indefinite period of time, until it should please those in whose hands their ultimate destination lay to direct them how and where to proceed. This was an unlooked-for trial of their patience; but after the first exclamation of disappointment, they made up their minds, like wise men, to think no more about it, but bide their time, and make the most of present circumstances.

"You see," remarked Hamilton, as the two friends, after having had an audience of the gentleman in charge of the establishment, sauntered towards the rocks that overhang the margin of Playgreen Lake--"you see, it is of no use to fret about what we cannot possibly help. Nobody within three hundred miles of us knows where we are destined to spend next winter. Perhaps orders may come in a couple of weeks, perhaps in a couple of months, but they will certainly come at last. Anyhow, it is of no use thinking about it, so we had better forget it, and make the best of things as we find them."

"Ah!" exclaimed Harry, "your advice is, that we should by all means be happy, and if we can't be happy, be as happy as we can. Is that it?"

"Just so. That's it exactly."

"Ho! But then you see, Hammy, you're a philosopher and I'm not, and that makes all the difference. I'm not given to anticipating evil, but I cannot help dreading that they will send me to some lonely, swampy, out-of-the-way hole, where there will be no society, no shooting, no riding, no work even to speak of--nothing, in fact, but the miserable satisfaction of being styled 'bourgeois' by five or six men, wretched outcasts like myself,"

"Come, Harry," cried Hamilton; "you are taking the very worst view of it. There certainly are plenty of such outposts in the country, but you know very well that young fellows like you are seldom sent to such places."

"I don't know that," interrupted Harry. "There's young M'Andrew: he was sent to an outpost up the Mackenzie his second year in the service, where he was all but starved, and had to live for about two weeks on boiled parchment. Then there's poor Forrester: he was shipped off to a place--the name of which I never could remember--somewhere between the head-waters of the Athabasca Lake and the North Pole. To be sure, he had good shooting, I'm told, but he had only four labouring men to enjoy it with; and he has been there ten years now, and he has more than once had to scrape the rocks of that detestable stuff called tripe de roche to keep himself alive. And then there's----"

"Very true," interrupted Hamilton. "Then there's your friend Charles Kennedy, whom you so often talk about, and many other young fellows we know, who have been sent to the Saskatchewan, and to the Columbia, and to Athabasca, and to a host of other capital places, where they have enough of society--male society, at least--and good sport."

The young men had climbed a rocky eminence which commanded a view of the lake on the one side, and the fort, with its background of woods, on the other. Here they sat down on a stone, and continued for some time to admire the scene in silence.

"Yes," said Harry, resuming the thread of discourse, "you are right: we have a good chance of seeing some pleasant parts of the country. But suspense is not pleasant. O man, if they would only send me up the Saskatchewan River! I've set my heart upon going there. I'm quite sure it's the very best place in the whole country."

"You've told the truth that time, master," said a deep voice behind them.

The young men turned quickly round. Close beside them, and leaning composedly on a long Indian fowling-piece, stood a tall, broad-shouldered, sun-burned man, apparently about forty years of age. He was dressed in the usual leathern hunting-coat, cloth leggings, fur cap, mittens, and moccasins that constitute the winter garb of a hunter; and had a grave, firm, but good-humoured expression of countenance.

"You've told the truth that time, master," he repeated, without moving from his place. "The Saskatchewan is, to my mind, the best place in the whole country; and havin' seen a considerable deal o' places in my time, I can speak from experience."

"Indeed, friend," said Harry, "I'm glad to hear you say so. Come, sit down beside us, and let's hear something about it."

Thus invited, the hunter seated himself on a stone and laid his gun on the hollow of his left arm.

"First of all, friend," continued Harry, "do you belong to the fort here?"

"No," replied the man, "I'm staying here just now, but I don't belong to the place."

"Where do you come from then, and what's your name?"

"Why, I've comed d'irect from the Saskatchewan with a packet o' letters. I'm payin' a visit to the missionary village yonder"--the hunter pointed as he spoke across the lake--"and when the ice breaks up I shall get a canoe and return again."

"And your name?"

"Why, I've got four or five names. Somehow or other people have given me a nickname wherever I ha' chanced to go. But my true name, and the one I hail by just now, is Jacques Caradoc."

"Jacques Caradoc!" exclaimed Harry, starting with surprise. "You knew a Charley Kennedy in the Saskatchewan, did you?"

"That did I. As fine a lad as ever pulled a trigger."

"Give us your hand, friend," exclaimed Harry, springing forward, and seizing the hunter's large, hard fist in both hands. "Why, man, Charley is my dearest friend, and I had a letter from him some time ago in which he speaks of you, and says you're one of the best fellows he ever met."

"You don't say so," replied the hunter, returning Harry's grasp warmly, while his eyes sparkled with pleasure, and a quiet smile played at the corner of his mouth.

"Yes I do," said Harry; "and I'm very nearly as glad to meet with you, friend Jacques, as I would be to meet with him. But come; it's cold work talking here. Let's go to my room; there's a fire in the stove.--Come along, Hammy;" and taking his new friend by the arm, he hurried him along to his quarters in the fort.

Just as they were passing under the fort gate, a large mass of snow became detached from a housetop and fell heavily at their feet, passing within an inch of Hamilton's nose. The young man started back with an exclamation, and became very red in the face.

"Hollo!" cried Harry, laughing, "got a fright, Hammy! That went so close to your chin that it almost saved you the trouble of shaving."

"Yes; I got a little fright from the suddenness of it," said Hamilton quietly.

"What do you think of my friend there?" said Harry to Jacques, in a low voice, pointing to Hamilton, who walked on in advance.

"I've not seen much of him, master," replied the hunter. "Had I been asked the same question about the same lad twenty years ago, I should ha' said he was soft, and perhaps chicken-hearted. But I've learned from experience to judge better than I used to do. I niver thinks o' forming an opinion o' anyone till I geen them called to sudden action. It's astonishin' how some faint-hearted men will come to face a danger and put on an awful look o' courage if they only get warnin', but take them by surprise--that's the way to try them."

"Well, Jacques, that is the very reason why I ask your opinion of Hamilton. He was pretty well taken by surprise that time, I think."

"True, master; but that kind of start don't prove much. Hows'ever, I don't think he's easy upset. He does look uncommon soft, and his face grew red when the snow fell, but his eyebrow and his under lip showed that it wasn't from fear."

During that afternoon and the greater part of that night the three friends continued in close conversation--Harry sitting in front of the stove, with his hands in his pockets, on a chair tilted as usual on its hind legs, and pouring out volleys of questions, which were pithily answered by the good-humoured, loquacious hunter, who sat behind the stove, resting his elbows on his knees, and smoking his much-loved pipe; while Hamilton reclined on Harry's bed, and listened

with eager avidity to anecdotes and stories, which seemed, like the narrator's pipe, to be inexhaustible.

"Good-night, Jacques, good-night," said Harry, as the latter rose at last to depart; "I'm delighted to have had a talk with you. You must come back to-morrow. I want to hear more about your friend Redfeather. Where did you say you left him?"

"In the Saskatchewan, master. He said that he would wait there, as he'd heerd the missionary was comin' up to pay the Injins a visit."

"By-the-by, you're going over to the missionary's place to-morrow, are you not?"

"Yes, I am."

"Ah, then, that'll do. I'll go over with you. How far off is it?"

"Three miles or thereabouts."

"Ver

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