REID MAYNE

POPULAR ADVENTURE TALES

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Содержание

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BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Captain Mayne Reid was born at Ballyroney, County Down, on the 4th April, 1818, and was the son of the Rev. Thomas Mayne Reid. Mayne Reid was educated with a view to the Church, but finding his inclinations opposed to this calling, he emigrated to America and arrived in New Orleans on January, 1840. After a varied career as plantation over-seer, school-master, and actor, with a number of expeditions in connection with hunting and Indian warfare, he settled down in 1843 as a journalist in Philadelphia, where he made the acquaintance of Edgar Allan Poe.

Leaving Philadelphia in 1846, he spent the summer at Newport, Rhode Island, as the correspondent of the *New York Herald*, and in December of the same year, having obtained a commission as second lieutenant in the 1st New York Volunteers, he sailed for Vera Cruz to take part in the Mexican war. He behaved with conspicuous gallantry in many engagements, and was severely wounded and disabled at the storming of Chapultepec on the 13th September, 1847.

Returning to the United States in the spring of 1848, he

resumed literary work. But in June, 1849, he sailed for Europe in order to take part in the revolutionary movements going on in Hungary and Bavaria, arriving however too late, he turned his attention again to literature, and in London in 1850, published his first novel "The Rifle Rangers," in two volumes. Between this date and his death, he produced a large number of volumes, which indeed no one else was capable of writing, for in them are avowedly embodied the observations and experiences of his own extraordinary career.

Unfortunate building and journalistic speculation and enterprises involved him in financial failure, so he returned to New York in October, 1867. There he founded and conducted *The Onward Magazine*, but owing to recurring bad effects of his old Mexican wound, he had to abandon work for sometime and go into the hospital, on leaving which he returned to England in 1870. During the later years of his life he resided at Ross in Herefordshire where he died on the 22nd October, 1883, and was buried in Kensal Green Cemetery.

Mayne Reid wrote in all thirty-five works, chiefly books of adventure and travel. As in the case of all authors, the books vary much in merit, but most of them are of a high order in their own department of literature. Many of them have been extraordinary popular and have become standard works. Reid has not been surpassed by any other writer in combining at one and the same time, the features of thrilling adventure and great instruction in the fields of natural history. Many of the works

have been translated into Continental languages and are as highly esteemed among the French and Germans as at home.

Popular Adventure Tales

THE YOUNG VOYAGEURS

OR

BOY HUNTERS IN THE NORTH

CHAPTER I
THE FUR COUNTRIES

Boy reader, you have heard of the Hudson's Bay Company? Ten to one you have worn a piece of fur which it has provided for you; if not, your pretty little sister has – in her muff, or her boa, or as a trimming for her winter dress. Would you like to know something of the country whence come these furs? – of the animals whose backs have been stripped to obtain them? As I feel certain that you and I are old friends, I make bold to answer for you – yes. Come, then! let us journey together to the "Fur Countries;" let us cross them from south to north.

A vast journey it will be. It will cost us many thousand miles of travel. We shall find neither railway-train, nor steamboat, nor stagecoach, to carry us on our way. We shall not even have the help of a horse. For us no hotel shall spread its luxurious board; no road-side inn shall hang out its inviting sign and "clean beds;" no roof of any kind shall offer us its hospitable shelter. Our table shall be a rock, a log, or the earth itself; our lodging a tent; and our bed the skin of a wild beast. Such are the best accommodations we can expect upon our journey. Are you still ready to undertake it? Does the prospect not deter you?

No – I hear you exclaim – I shall be satisfied with the table – what care I for mahogany? With the lodging – I can tent like an Arab. With the bed – fling feathers to the wind!

Enough, brave boy! you shall go with me to the wild regions of the "North-west," to the far "fur countries" of America. But, first – a word about the land through which we are going to travel.

Take down your atlas. Bend your eye upon the map of North America. Note two large islands – one upon the right side, Newfoundland; another upon the left, Vancouver. Draw a line from one to the other; it will nearly bisect the continent. North of that line you behold a vast territory. How vast? You may take your scissors, and clip fifty Englands out of it! There are lakes there in which you might *drown* England, or make an island of it! Now, you may form some idea of the vastness of that region known as the "fur countries."

Will you believe me, when I tell you that all this immense tract is a wilderness – a howling wilderness, if you like a poetical name? It is even so. From north to south, from ocean to ocean – throughout all that vast domain, there is neither town nor village – hardly anything that can be dignified with the name of "settlement." The only signs of civilisation to be seen are the "forts," or trading posts of the Hudson's Bay Company; and these "signs" are few and far – hundreds of miles – between.

For inhabitants, the country has less than ten thousand white men, the *employés* of the Company; and its native people are Indians of many tribes, living far apart, few in numbers, subsisting by the chase, and half starving for at least a third part of every year! In truth, the territory can hardly be called "inhabited." There is not a man to every ten miles; and in many

parts of it you may travel hundreds of miles without seeing a face, red, white, or black!

The physical aspect is, therefore, entirely wild. It is very different in different parts of the territory. One tract is peculiar. It has been long known as the "Barren Grounds." It is a tract of vast extent. It lies north-west from the shores of Hudson's Bay, extending nearly to the Mackenzie River. Its rocks are *primitive*. It is a land of hills and valleys – of deep dark lakes and sharp-running streams. It is a woodless region. No timber is found there that deserves the name. No trees but glandular dwarf birches, willows, and black spruce, small and stunted. Even these only grow in isolated valleys. More generally the surface is covered with coarse sand – the *debris* of granite or quartz-rock – upon which no vegetable, save the lichen or the moss, can find life and nourishment.

In one respect these "Barren Grounds" are unlike the deserts of Africa: they are well watered. In almost every valley there is a lake; and though many of these are land-locked, yet do they contain fish of several species. Sometimes these lakes communicate with each other by means of rapid and turbulent streams passing through narrow gorges; and lines of those connected lakes form the great rivers of the district.

Such is a large portion of the Hudson's Bay territory. Most of the extensive peninsula of Labrador partakes of a similar character; and there are other like tracts west of the Rocky Mountain range in the "Russian possessions."

Yet these "Barren Grounds" have their denizens. Nature has formed animals that delight to dwell there, and that are never found in more fertile regions. Two ruminating creatures find sustenance upon the mosses and lichens that cover their cold rocks: they are the caribou (reindeer) and the musk-ox. These, in their turn, become the food and subsistence of preying creatures. The wolf, in all its varieties of grey, black, white, pied, and dusky, follows upon their trail. The "brown bear" – a large species, nearly resembling the "grizzly" – is found only in the Barren Grounds; and the great "Polar bear" comes within their borders, but the latter is a dweller upon their shores alone, and finds his food among the finny tribes of the seas that surround them. In marshy ponds, existing here and there, the musk-rat builds his house, like that of his larger cousin, the beaver. Upon the water sedge he finds subsistence; but his natural enemy, the wolverene, skulks in the same neighbourhood.

The "Polar hare" lives upon the leaves and twigs of the dwarf birch-tree; and this, transformed into its own white flesh, becomes the food of the Arctic fox. The herbage, sparse though it be, does not grow in vain. The seeds fall to the earth, but they are not suffered to decay. They are gathered by the little lemmings and meadow-mice, who, in their turn, become the prey of two species of *mustelidæ*, the ermine and vison weasels. Have the fish of the lakes no enemy? Yes – a terrible one in the Canada otter. The mink-weasel, too, pursues them; and in summer, the osprey, the great pelican, the cormorant, and the white-headed eagle.

These are the *fauna* of the Barren Grounds. Man rarely ventures within their boundaries. The wretched creatures who find a living there are the Esquimaux on their coasts, and a few Chippewa Indians in the interior, who hunt the caribou, and are known as "caribou-eaters." Other Indians enter them only in summer, in search of game, or journeying from point to point; and so perilous are these journeyings, that numbers frequently perish by the way. There are no white men in the Barren Grounds. The "Company" has no commerce there. No fort is established in them: so scarce are the fur-bearing animals of these parts, their skins would not repay the expense of a "trading post."

Far different are the "wooded tracts" of the fur countries. These lie mostly in the southern and central regions of the Hudson's Bay territory. There are found the valuable beaver and the wolverene that preys upon it. There dwells the American hare with its enemy the Canada lynx. There are the squirrels, and the beautiful martens (sables) that hunt them from tree to tree. There are found the foxes of every variety, the red, the cross, and the rare and highly-prized silver-fox, whose shining skin sells for its weight in gold! There, too, the black bear yields its fine coat to adorn the winter carriage, the holsters of the dragoon, and the shako of the grenadier. There the fur-bearing animals exist in greatest plenty, and many others whose skins are valuable in commerce, as the moose, the wapiti, and the wood-bison.

But there is also a "prairie" district in the fur countries. The

great table prairies of North America, that slope eastward from the Rocky Mountains, also extend northward into the Hudson's Bay territory. They gradually grow narrower, however, as you proceed farther north, until, on reaching the latitude of the Great Slave Lake, they end altogether. This "prairie-land" has its peculiar animals. Upon it roams the buffalo, the prong-horned antelope, and the mule-deer. There, too, may be seen the "barking wolf" and the "swift fox." It is the favourite home of the marmots, and the gauffres or sand-rats; and there, too, the noblest of animals, the horse, runs wild.

West of this prairie tract is a region of far different aspect – the region of the Rocky Mountains. This stupendous chain, sometimes called the Andes of North America, continues throughout the fur countries from their southern limits to the shores of the Arctic Sea. Some of its peaks overlook the waters of that sea itself, towering up near the coast. Many of these, even in southern latitudes, carry the "eternal snow." This "mountain-chain" is, in places, of great breadth. Deep valleys lie in its embrace, many of which have never been visited by man. Some are desolate and dreary; others are oäses of vegetation, which fascinate the traveller whose fortune it has been, after toiling among naked rocks, to gaze upon their smiling fertility.

These lovely wilds are the favourite home of many strange animals. The argali, or mountain-sheep, with his huge curving horns, is seen there; and the shaggy wild goat bounds along the steepest cliffs. The black bear wanders through the wooded

ravines; and his fiercer congener, the "grizzly" – the most dreaded of all American animals – drags his huge body along the rocky declivities.

Having crossed the mountains, the fur countries extend westward to the Pacific. There you encounter barren plains, treeless and waterless; rapid rivers, that foam through deep, rock-bound channels; and a country altogether rougher in aspect, and more mountainous, than that lying to the east of the great chain. A warmer atmosphere prevails as you approach the Pacific, and in some places forests of tall trees cover the earth. In these are found most of the fur-bearing animals; and, on account of the greater warmth of the climate, the true *felidæ*– the long-tailed cats – here wander much farther north than upon the eastern side of the continent. Even so far north as the forests of Oregon these appear in the forms of the cougar and the ounce.

But it is not our intention at present to cross the Rocky Mountains. Our journey will lie altogether on the eastern side of that great chain. It will extend from the frontiers of civilization to the shores of the Arctic Sea. It is a long and perilous journey, boy reader; but as we have made up our minds to it, let us waste no more time in talking, but set forth at once. You are ready? Hurrah!

CHAPTER II
THE YOUNG VOYAGEURS

There is a canoe upon the waters of Red River – Red River of the north. It is near the source of the stream, but passing downward. It is a small canoe, a frail structure of birch-bark, and contains only four persons. They are all young – the eldest of them evidently not over nineteen years of age, and the youngest about fifteen.

The eldest is nearly full-grown, though his body and limbs have not yet assumed the muscular development of manhood. His complexion is dark, nearly olive. His hair is jet black, straight as an Indian's, and long. His eyes are large and brilliant, and his features prominent. His countenance expresses courage, and his well-set jaws betoken firmness and resolution. He does not belie his looks, for he possesses these qualifications in a high degree. There is a gravity in his manner, somewhat rare in one so young; yet it is not the result of a morose disposition, but a subdued temperament produced by modesty, good sense, and much experience. Neither has it the air of stupidity. No: you could easily tell that the mind of this youth, if once roused, would exhibit both energy and alertness. His quiet manner has a far different expression. It is an air of coolness and confidence, which tells you he has met with dangers in the past, and would not fear to encounter them again.

It is an expression peculiar, I think, to the hunters of the "Far West," – those men who dwell amidst dangers in the wild regions of the great prairies. Their solitary mode of life begets this expression. They are often for months without the company of a creature with whom they may converse – months without beholding a human face. They live alone with Nature, surrounded by her majestic forms. These awe them into habits of silence. Such was in point of fact the case with the youth whom we have been describing. He had hunted much, though not as a professional hunter. With him the chase had been followed merely as a pastime; but its pursuit had brought him into situations of peril, and in contact with Nature in her wild solitudes. Young as he was, he had journeyed over the grand prairies, and through the pathless forests of the West. He had slain the bear and the buffalo, the wild cat and the cougar. These experiences had made their impression upon his mind, and stamped his countenance with that air of gravity we have noticed.

The second of the youths whom we shall describe is very different in appearance. He is of blonde complexion, rather pale, with fair silken hair that waves gently down his cheeks, and falls upon his shoulders. He is far from robust. On the contrary, his form is thin and delicate. It is not the delicacy of feebleness or ill-health, but only a body of slighter build. The manner in which he handles his oar shows that he possesses both health and strength, though neither in such a high degree as the dark youth. His face expresses, perhaps, a larger amount of intellect,

and it is a countenance that would strike you as more open and communicative. The eye is blue and mild, and the brow is marked by the paleness of study and habits of continued thought. These indications are no more than just, for the fair-haired youth *is* a student, and one of no ordinary attainments. Although only seventeen years of age, he is already well versed in the natural sciences; and many a graduate of Oxford or Cambridge would but ill compare with him. The former might excel in the knowledge – if we can dignify it by that name – of the laws of scansion, or in the composition of Greek idylls; but in all that constitutes *real* knowledge he would prove but an idle theorist, a dreamy imbecile, alongside our practical young scholar of the West.

The third and youngest of the party – taking them as they sit from stem to bow – differs in many respects from both those described. He has neither the gravity of the first, nor yet the intellectuality of the second. His face is round, and full, and ruddy. It is bright and smiling in its expression. His eye dances merrily in his head, and its glance falls upon everything. His lips are hardly ever at rest. They are either engaged in making words – for he talks almost incessantly – or else contracting and expanding with smiles and joyous laughter. His cap is jauntily set, and his fine brown curls, hanging against the rich roseate skin of his cheeks, give to his countenance an expression of extreme health and boyish beauty. His merry laugh and free air tell you he is not the boy for books. He is not much of a hunter either. In

fact, he is not particularly given to anything – one of those easy natures who take the world as it comes, look upon the bright side of everything, without getting sufficiently interested to excel in anything.

These three youths were dressed nearly alike. The eldest wore the costume, as near as may be, of a backwoods hunter – a tunic-like hunting-shirt, of dressed buckskin, leggings and mocassins of the same material, and all – shirt, leggings, and mocassins – handsomely braided and embroidered with stained quills of the porcupine. The cape of the shirt was tastefully fringed, and so was the skirt as well as the seams of the mocassins. On his head was a hairy cap of raccoon skin, and the tail of the animal, with its dark transverse bars, hung down behind like the drooping plume of a helmet. Around his shoulders were two leathern belts that crossed each other upon his breast. One of these slung a bullet-pouch covered with a violet-green skin that glittered splendidly in the sun. It was from the head of the "wood-duck" the most beautiful bird of its tribe. By the other strap was suspended a large crescent-shaped horn taken from the head of an Opelousas bull, and carved with various ornamental devices. Other smaller implements hung from the belts, attached by leathern thongs: there was a picker, a wiper, and a steel for striking fire with. A third belt – a broad stout one of alligator leather – encircled the youth's waist. To this was fastened a holster, and the shining butt of a pistol could be seen protruding out; a hunting-knife of the kind denominated "bowie" hanging over the left hip, completed

his “arms and accoutrements.”

The second of the youths was dressed, as already stated, in a somewhat similar manner, though his accoutrements were not of so warlike a character. Like the other, he had a powder-horn and pouch, but instead of knife and pistol, a canvass bag or haversack hung from his shoulder; and had you looked into it, you would have seen that it was half filled with shells, pieces of rock, and rare plants, gathered during the day – the diurnal storehouse of the geologist, the palæontologist, and botanist – to be emptied for study and examination by the night camp-fire. Instead of the 'coon-skin cap he wore a white felt hat with broad leaf; and for leggings and mocassins he had trousers of blue cottonade and laced buskins of tanned leather.

The youngest of the three was dressed and accoutred much like the eldest, except that his cap was of blue cloth – somewhat after the fashion of the military forage cap. All three wore shirts of coloured cotton, the best for journeying in these uninhabited regions, where soap is scarce, and a laundress not to be had at any price.

Though very unlike one another, these three youths were brothers. I knew them well. I had seen them before – about two years before – and though each had grown several inches taller since that time, I had no difficulty in recognising them. Even though they were now two thousand miles from where I had formerly encountered them, I could not be mistaken as to their identity. Beyond a doubt they were the same brave young

adventurers whom I had met in the swamps of Louisiana, and whose exploits I had witnessed upon the prairies of Texas. They were the "Boy Hunters," – Basil, Lucien, François! I was right glad to renew acquaintance with them. Boy reader, do you share my joy?

But whither go they now? They are full two thousand miles from their home in Louisiana. The Red River upon which their canoe floats is not that Red River, whose blood-like waters sweep through the swamps of the hot South – the home of the alligator and the gar. No, it is a stream of a far different character, though also one of great magnitude. Upon the banks of the former ripens the rice-plant, and the sugar-cane waves its golden tassels high in the air. There, too, flourishes the giant reed, the fan-palm, and the broad-leafed magnolia, with its huge snow-white flowers. There the aspect is Southern, and the heat tropical for most part of the year.

All this is reversed on the Red River of the North. It is true that on its banks sugar is also produced; but it is no longer from a plant but a lordly tree – the great sugar-maple. There is rice too, – vast fields of rice upon its marshy borders; but it is not the pearly grain of the South. It is the wild rice, "the water oats," the food of millions of winged creatures, and thousands of human beings as well. Here, for three-fourths of the year, the sun is feeble, and the aspect that of winter. For months the cold waters are bound up in an icy embrace. The earth is covered with thick snow, over which rise the needle-leafed *coniferæ*– the pines, the cedars, the

spruce, and the hemlock. Very unlike each other are the countries watered by the two streams, the Red River of the South and its namesake of the North.

But whither go our Boy Hunters in their birch-bark canoe? The river upon which they are *voyaging* runs due northward into the great lake Winnipeg. They are floating with its current, and consequently increasing the distance from their home. Whither go they?

The answer leads us to some sad reflections. Our joy on again beholding them is to be mingled with grief. When we last saw them they had a father, but no mother. Now they have neither one nor the other. The old Colonel, their father – the French *émigré*, the *hunter naturalist*– is dead. He who had taught them all he knew; who had taught them to ride, to swim, to dive deep rivers, to fling the lasso, to climb tall trees, and scale steep cliffs, to bring down birds upon the wing or beasts upon the run, with the arrow and the unerring rifle; who had trained them to sleep in the open air, in the dark forest, on the unsheltered prairie, along the white snow-wreath – anywhere – with but a blanket or a buffalo robe for their bed; who had taught them to live on the simplest food, and had imparted to one of them a knowledge of science, of botany in particular, that enabled them, in case of need, to draw sustenance, from plants and trees, from roots and fruits, to find resources where ignorant men would starve.

He also had taught them to kindle a fire without flint, steel, or detonating powder; to discover their direction without a compass,

from the rocks and the trees and the signs of the heavens; and in addition to all, had taught them, as far as was then known, the geography of that vast wilderness that stretches from the Mississippi to the shores of the Pacific Ocean, and northward to the icy borders of the Arctic Sea – he who had taught them all this, their father, was no more; and his three sons, the "boy men," of whom he was so proud, and of whose accomplishments he was wont to boast, were now orphans upon the wide world.

But little more than a year after their return from their grand expedition to the Texan prairies, the "old Colonel" had died. It was one of the worst years of that scourge of the South – the yellow fever – and to this dread pestilence he had fallen a victim.

Hugot, the *ex-chasseur* and attached domestic, who was accustomed to follow his master like a shadow, had also followed him into the next world. It was not grief that killed Hugot, though he bore the loss of his kind master sadly enough. But it was not grief that killed Hugot. He was laid low by the same disease of which his master had died – the yellow fever. A week had scarcely passed after the death of the latter, before Hugot caught the disease, and in a few days he was carried to the tomb and laid by the side of his "old Colonel."

The Boy Hunters – Basil, Lucien, François – became orphans. They knew of but one relation in the whole world, with whom their father had kept up any correspondence. This relation was an uncle, and, strange as it may seem, a Scotchman – a Highlander, who had strayed to Corsica in early life, and had there married

the Colonel's sister. That uncle had afterwards emigrated to Canada, and had become extensively engaged in the fur trade. He was now a superintendent or "factor" of the Hudson's Bay Company, stationed at one of their most remote posts near the shores of the Arctic Sea! There is a romance in the history of some men wilder than any fiction that could be imagined.

I have not yet answered the question as to where our Boy Hunters were journeying in their birch-bark canoe. By this time you will have divined the answer. Certainly, you will say, they were on their way to join their uncle in his remote home. For no other object could they be travelling through the wild regions of the Red River. That supposition is correct. To visit this Scotch uncle (they had not seen him for years) was the object of their long, toilsome, and perilous journey. After their father's death he had sent for them. He had heard of their exploits upon the prairies; and, being himself of an adventurous disposition, he was filled with admiration for his young kinsmen, and desired very much to have them come and live with him.

Being now their guardian, he might command as much, but it needed not any exercise of authority on his part to induce all three of them to obey his summons. They had travelled through the mighty forests of the Mississippi, and upon the summer prairies of the South. These great features of the earth's surface were to them familiar things, and they were no longer curious about them. But there remained a vast country which they longed eagerly to explore. They longed to look upon its shining lakes

and crystal rivers; upon its snow-clad hills and ice-bound streams; upon its huge mammalia – its moose and its musk-oxen, its wapiti and its monster bears. This was the very country to which they were now invited by their kinsman, and cheerfully did they accept his invitation.

Already had they made one-half the journey, though by far the easier half. They had travelled up the Mississippi by steamboat as far as the mouth of the St. Peter's. There they had commenced their canoe voyage – in other words became "voyageurs" – for such is the name given to those who travel by canoes through these wild territories. Their favourite horses and the mule "Jeannette" had been left behind. This was a necessity, as these creatures, however useful upon the dry prairies of the South, where there are few or no lakes, and where rivers only occur at long intervals, would be of little service to the traveller in the Northern regions. Here the route is crossed and intercepted by numerous rivers; and lakes of all sizes, with tracts of inundated marsh, succeed one another continually. Such, in fact, are the highways of the country, and the canoe the travelling carriage; so that a journey from one point of the Hudson's Bay territory to another is often a canoe voyage of thousands of miles – equal to a "trip" across the Atlantic.

Following the usual custom, therefore, our Boy Hunters had become voyageurs – "*Young Voyageurs*." They had navigated the St. Peter's in safety, almost to its head-waters. These interlock with the sources of the Red River. By a "portage" of a few

miles they had crossed to the latter stream; and, having launched their canoe upon its waters, were now floating downward and northward with its current. But they had yet a long journey before them – nearly two thousand miles! Many a river to be "run," many a rapid to be "shot," many a lake to be crossed, and many a "portage" to be passed, ere they could reach the end of that great *voyage*.

Come, boy reader, shall we accompany them? Yes. The strange scenes and wild adventures through which we must pass, may lighten the toils, and perhaps repay us for the perils of the journey. Think not of the toils. Roses grow only upon thorns. From toil we learn to enjoy leisure. Regard not the perils. "From the nettle danger we pluck the flower safety." Security often springs from peril. From such hard experiences great men have arisen. Come, then, my young friend! mind neither toil nor peril, but with me to the great wilderness of the North!

Stay! We are to have another "*compagnon du voyage*." There is a fourth in the boat, a fourth "young voyageur." Who is he? In appearance he is as old as Basil, full as tall, and not unlike him in "build." But he is altogether of a different *colour*. He is fair-haired; but his hair (unlike that of Lucien, which is also light-coloured) is strong, crisp, and curly. It does not droop, but stands out over his cheeks in a profusion of handsome ringlets. His complexion is of that kind known as "fresh," and the weather, to which it has evidently been much exposed, has bronzed and rather enriched the colour. The eyes are dark blue,

and, strange to say, with *black* brows and lashes! This is not common, though sometimes observed; and, in the case of the youth we are describing, arose from a difference of complexion on the part of his parents. He looked through the eyes of his mother, while in other respects he was more like his father, who was fair-haired and of a "fresh" colour.

The youth, himself, might be termed handsome. Perhaps he did not possess the youthful beauty of François, nor the bolder kind that characterized the face of Basil. Perhaps he was of a coarser "make" than any of his three companions. His intellect had been less cultivated by education, and *education adds to the beauty of the face*. His life had been a harder one – he had toiled more with his hands, and had seen less of civilized society. Still many would have pronounced him a handsome youth. His features were regular, and of clean outline. His lips expressed good-nature as well as firmness. His eye beamed with native intelligence, and his whole face bespoke a heart of true and determined honesty —*that made it beautiful*.

Perhaps a close scrutinizer of countenances might have detected some resemblance – a family one – between him and his three companions. If such there was, it was very slight; but there might have been, from the relationship that existed between them and him. He was their cousin – their full cousin – the only son of that uncle they were now on their way to visit, and the messenger who had been sent to bring them. Such was the fourth of "the young voyageurs."

His dress was not unlike that worn by Basil; but as he was seated on the bow, and acting as pilot, and therefore more likely to feel the cold, he wore over his hunting-shirt, a Canadian *capote* of white woollen cloth, with its hood hanging down upon his shoulders.

But there was still another "voyageur," an old acquaintance, whom you, boy reader, will no doubt remember. This was an animal, a quadruped, who lay along the bottom of the canoe upon a buffalo's hide. "From his size and colour – which was a tawny red – you might have mistaken him for a panther – a cougar. His long black muzzle and broad hanging ears gave him quite a different aspect, however, and declared him to be a hound. He *was* one – a bloodhound, with the cross of a mastiff – a powerful animal. It was the dog 'Marengo.'" You remember Marengo?

In the canoe there were other objects of interest. There were blankets and buffalo robes; there was a small canvas tent folded up; there were bags of provisions, and some cooking utensils; there was a spade and an axe; there were rifles – three of them – and a double-barrelled shot-gun; besides a fish-net, and many other articles, the necessary equipments for such a journey.

Loaded almost to the gunwale was that little canoe, yet lightly did it float down the waters of the Red River of the North.

CHAPTER III
THE TRUMPETER SWAN AND THE BALD EAGLE

It was the spring season, though late. The snow had entirely disappeared from the hills, and the ice from the water, and the melting of both had swollen the river, and rendered its current more rapid than usual. Our young voyageurs needed not therefore to ply their oars, except now and then to guide the canoe; for these little vessels have no rudder, but are steered by the paddles. The skilful voyageurs can shoot them to any point they please, simply by their dexterous handling of the oars; and Basil, Lucien, and François, had had sufficient practice both with “skiffs” and “dug-outs” to make good oarsmen of all three. They had made many a canoe trip upon the lower Mississippi and the bayous of Louisiana; besides their journey up the St. Peter's had rendered them familiar with the management of their birchen craft. An occasional stroke of the paddle kept them in their course, and they floated on without effort.

Norman – such was the name of their Canadian or Highland cousin – sat in the bow and directed their course. This is the post of honour in a canoe; and as he had more experience than any of them in this sort of navigation, he was allowed habitually to occupy this post. Lucien sat in the stern. He held in his hands a

book and pencil; and as the canoe glided onward, he was noting down his memoranda. The trees upon the banks were in leaf – many of them in blossom – and as the little craft verged near the shore, his keen eye followed the configuration of the leaves, to discover any new species that might appear.

There is a rich vegetation upon the banks of the Red River; but the *flora* is far different from that which appears upon the low *alluvion* of Louisiana. It is Northern, but not Arctic. Oaks, elms, and poplars, are seen mingling with birches, willows, and aspens. Several species of indigenous fruit trees were observed by Lucien, among which were crab-apple, raspberry, strawberry, and currant. There was also seen the fruit called by the voyageurs "le poire," but which in English phraseology is known as the "service-berry." It grows upon a small bush or shrub of six or eight feet high, with smooth pinnate leaves. These pretty red berries are much esteemed and eaten both by Indians and whites, who preserve them by drying, and cook them in various ways.

There was still another bush that fixed the attention of our young botanist, as it appeared all along the banks, and was a *characteristic* of the vegetation of the country. It was not over eight feet in height, with spreading branches of a grey-colour. Its leaves were three inches wide, and somewhat lobed like those of the oak. Of course, at this early season, the fruit was not ripe upon it; but Lucien knew the fruit well. When ripe it resembles very much a red cherry, or, still more, a cranberry, having both the appearance and acrid taste of the latter. Indeed, it

is sometimes used as a substitute for cranberries in the making of pies and tarts; and in many parts it is called the "bush cranberry."

The name, however, by which it is known among the Indians of Red River is "*anepeminan*" from "*nepen*," summer, and "*minan*," berry. This has been corrupted by the fur-traders and voyageurs into "Pembina;" hence, the name of a river which runs into the Red, and also the name of the celebrated but unsuccessful settlement of "Pembina," formed by Lord Selkirk many years ago. Both took their names from this berry that grows in abundance in the neighbourhood. The botanical appellation of this curious shrub is *Viburnum oxycoccos*; but there is another species of the viburnum, which is also styled "oxycoccos." The common "snowball bush" of our garden is a plant of the same genus, and very like the "Pembina," both in leaf and flower. In fact, in a wild state they might be regarded as the same; but it is well known that the flowers of the snowball are sterile, and do not produce the beautiful bright crimson berries of the "Pembina."

Lucien lectured upon these points to his companions as they floated along. Norman listened with astonishment to his philosophic cousin, who, although he had never been in this region before, knew more of its plants and trees than he did himself. Basil also was interested in the explanations given by his brother. On the contrary, François, who cared but little for botanical studies, or studies of any sort, was occupied differently. He sat near the middle of the canoe, double-barrel in hand, eagerly watching for a shot. Many species of water-fowl were

upon the river, for it was now late in the spring, and the wild geese and ducks had all arrived, and were passing northward upon their annual migration. During the day François had got several shots, and had "bagged" three wild geese, all of different kinds, for there are many species of wild geese in America.

He had also shot some ducks. But this did not satisfy him. There was a bird upon the river that could not be approached. No matter how the canoe was manœuvred, this shy creature always took flight before François could get within range. For days he had been endeavouring to kill one. Even upon the St. Peter's many of them had been seen, sometimes in pairs, at other times in small flocks of six or seven, but always shy and wary. The very difficulty of getting a shot at them, along with the splendid character of the birds themselves, had rendered François eager to obtain one. The bird itself was no other than the great wild swan – the king of aquatic birds.

"Come, brother!" said François, addressing Lucien, "bother your viburnums and your oxycocks! Tell us something about these swans. See! there goes another of them! What a splendid fellow he is! I'd give something to have him within range of buckshot."

As François spoke he pointed down-stream to a great white bird that was seen moving out from the bank. It was a swan, and one of the very largest kind – "a trumpeter."

It had been feeding in a sedge of the wild rice, and no doubt the sight of the canoe or the plash of the guiding oar

had disturbed, and given it the alarm. It shot out from the reeds with head erect and wings slightly raised, offering to the eyes of the voyageurs a spectacle of graceful and majestic bearing, that, among the feathered race at least, is quite inimitable.

A few strokes of its broad feet propelled it into the open water near the middle of the stream, when, making a half wheel, it turned head down the river, and swam with the current.

At the point where it turned it was not two hundred yards ahead of the canoe. Its apparent boldness in permitting them to come so near without taking wing, led François to hope that they might get still nearer; and, begging his companions to ply the paddles, he seized hold of his double-barrel, and leaned forward in the canoe. Basil also conceived a hope that a shot was to be had, for he took up his rifle, and looked to the cock and cap. The others went steadily and quietly to work at the oars. In a few moments the canoe cleft the current at the rate of a galloping horse, and one would have supposed that the swan must either at once take wing or be overtaken.

Not so, however. The "trumpeter" knew his game better than that. He had full confidence both in his strength and speed upon the water. He was not going to undergo the trouble of a fly, until the necessity arose for so doing; and, as it was, he seemed to be satisfied that that necessity had not yet arrived. The swim cost him much less muscular exertion than flying would have done, and he judged that the current, here very swift, would carry him out of reach of his pursuers.

It soon began to appear that he judged rightly; and the voyageurs, to their chagrin, saw that, instead of gaining upon him, as they had expected, every moment widened the distance between him and the canoe. The bird had an advantage over his pursuers. Three distinct powers propelled him, while they had only two to rely upon. He had the current in his favour – so had they. He had oars or paddles – his feet; they had oars as well. He "carried sail," while they spread not a "rag." The wind chanced to blow directly down-stream, and the broad wings of the bird, held out from his body, and half extended, caught the very pith of the breeze on their double concave surfaces, and carried him through the water with the velocity of an arrow. Do you think that he was not aware of this advantage when he started in the race?

Do you suppose that these birds do not *think*? I for one am satisfied they do, and look upon every one who prates about the *instinct* of these creatures as a philosopher of a very old school indeed. Not only does the great swan think, but so does your parrot, and your piping bullfinch, and the little canary that hops on your thumb. All think, and *reason*, and *judge*. Should it ever be your fortune to witness the performance of those marvellous birds, exhibited by the graceful Mdlle. Vandermeersch in the fashionable *salons* of Paris and London, you will agree with me in the belief that the smallest of them has a mind like yourself.

Most certainly the swan, which our voyageurs were pursuing, thought, and reasoned, and judged, and calculated his distance, and resolved to keep on "the even tenor of his way," without

putting himself to extra trouble by beating the air with his wings, and lifting his heavy body – thirty pounds at least – up into the heavens. His judgment proved sound; for, in less than ten minutes from the commencement of the chase, he had gained a clear hundred yards upon his pursuers, and continued to widen the distance. At intervals he raised his beak higher than usual, and uttered his loud booming note, which fell upon the ears of the voyageurs as though it had been sent back in mockery and defiance.

They would have given up the pursuit, had they not noticed that a few hundred yards farther down the river made a sharp turn to the right. The swan, on reaching this, would no longer have the wind in his favour. This inspired them with fresh hopes. They thought they would be able to overtake him after passing the bend, and then, either get a shot at him, or force him into the air. The latter was the more likely; and, although it would be no great gratification to see him fly off, yet they had become so interested in this singular chase that they desired to terminate it by putting the trumpeter to some trouble. They bent, therefore, with fresh energy to their oars, and pulled onward in the pursuit.

First the swan, and after him the canoe, swung round the bend, and entered the new "reach" of the river. The voyageurs at once perceived that the bird now swam more slowly. He no longer "carried sail," as the wind was no longer in his favour. His wings lay closely folded to his body, and he moved only by the aid of his webbed feet and the current, which last happened to be

sluggish, as the river at this part spread over a wide expanse of level land. The canoe was evidently catching up, and each stroke was bringing the pursuers nearer to the pursued.

After a few minutes' brisk pulling, the trumpeter had lost so much ground that he was not two hundred yards in the advance, and "dead ahead." His body was no longer carried with the same gracefulness, and the majestic curving of his neck had disappeared. His bill protruded forward, and his thighs began to drag the water in his wake. He was evidently on the threshold of flight. Both François and Basil saw this, as they stood with their guns crossed and ready.

At this moment a shrill cry sounded over the water. It was the scream of some wild creature, ending in a strange laugh, like the laugh of a maniac!

On both sides of the river there was a thick forest of tall trees of the cotton-wood species. From this forest the strange cry had proceeded, and from the right bank. Its echoes had hardly ceased, when it was answered by a similar cry from the trees upon the left. So like were the two, that it seemed as if some one of God's wild creatures was mocking another. These cries were hideous enough to frighten any one not used to them. They had not that effect upon our voyageurs, who knew their import. One and all of them were familiar with the voice of the *white-headed eagle*!

The trumpeter knew it as well as any of them, but on him it produced a far different effect. His terror was apparent, and his intention was all at once changed. Instead of rising into the

air, as he had premeditated, he suddenly lowered his head, and disappeared under the water!

Again was heard the wild scream and the maniac laugh; and the next moment an eagle swept out from the timber, and, after a few strokes of its broad wing, poised itself over the spot where the trumpeter had gone down. The other, its mate, was seen crossing at the same time from the opposite side.

Presently the swan rose to the surface, but his head was hardly out of the water when the eagle once more uttered its wild note, and, half folding its wings, darted down from above. The swan seemed to have expected this, for before the eagle could reach the surface, he had gone under a second time, and the latter, though passing with the velocity of an arrow, plunged his talons in the water to no purpose. With a cry of disappointment the eagle mounted back into the air, and commenced wheeling in circles over the spot. It was now joined by its mate, and both kept round and round watching for the reappearance of their intended victim.

Again the swan came to the surface, but before either of the eagles could swoop upon him he had for the third time disappeared. The swan is but an indifferent diver; but under such circumstances he was likely to do his best at it. But what could it avail him? He must soon rise to the surface to take breath – each time at shorter intervals. He would soon become fatigued and unable to dive with sufficient celerity, and then his cruel enemies would be down upon him with their terrible talons. Such is the

usual result, unless the swan takes to the air, which he sometimes does. In the present case he had built his hopes upon a different means of escape. He contemplated being able to conceal himself in a heavy sedge of bulrushes that grew along the edge of the river, and towards these he was evidently directing his course under the water.

At each emersion he appeared some yards nearer them, until at length he rose within a few feet of their margin, and diving again was seen no more! He had crept in among the sedge, and no doubt was lying with only his head, or part of it, above the water, his body concealed by the broad leaves of the *nymphæ*, while the head itself could not be distinguished among the white flowers that lay thickly along the surface.

The eagles now wheeled over the sedge, flapping the tops of the bulrushes with their broad wings, and screaming with disappointed rage. Keen as were their eyes they could not discover the hiding-place of their victim. No doubt they would have searched for it a long time, but the canoe – which they now appeared to notice for the first time – had floated near; and, becoming aware of their own danger, both mounted into the air again, and with a farewell scream flew off, and alighted at some distance down the river.

"A swan for supper!" shouted François, as he poised his gun for the expected shot.

The canoe was headed for the bulrushes near the point where the trumpeter had been last seen; and a few strokes of the

paddles brought the little craft with a whizzing sound among the sedge. But the culms of the rushes were so tall, and grew so closely together, that the canoe-men, after entering, found to their chagrin they could not see six feet around them. They dared not stand up, for this is exceedingly dangerous in a birch canoe, where the greatest caution is necessary to keep the vessel from careening over. Moreover, the sedge was so thick, that it was with difficulty they could use their oars.

They remained stationary for a time, surrounded by a wall of green bulrush. They soon perceived that that would never do, and resolved to push back into the open water. Meanwhile Marengo had been sent into the sedge, and was now heard plunging and sweltering about in search of the game. Marengo was not much of a water-dog by nature, but he had been trained to almost every kind of hunting, and his experience among the swamps of Louisiana had long since relieved him of all dread for the water. His masters therefore had no fear but that Marengo would "put up" the trumpeter.

Marengo had been let loose a little too soon. Before the canoe could be cleared of the entangling sedge, the dog was heard to utter one of his loud growls, then followed a heavy plunge, there was a confused fluttering of wings, and the great white bird rose majestically into the air! Before either of the gunners could direct their aim, he was beyond the range of shot, and both prudently reserved their fire. Marengo having performed his part, swam back to the canoe, and was lifted over the gunwale.

The swan, after clearing the sedge, rose almost vertically into the air. These birds usually fly at a great elevation – sometimes entirely beyond the reach of sight. Unlike the wild geese and ducks, they never alight upon land, but always upon the bosom of the water. It was evidently the intention of this one to go far from the scene of his late dangers, perhaps to the great lake Winnipeg itself.

After attaining a height of several hundred yards, he flew forward in a horizontal course, and followed the direction of the stream. His flight was now regular, and his trumpet note could be heard at intervals, as, with outstretched neck, he glided along the heavens. He seemed to feel the pleasant sensations that every creature has after an escape from danger, and no doubt he fancied himself secure. But in this fancy he deceived himself. Better for him had he risen a few hundred yards higher, or else had uttered his self-gradulation in a more subdued tone; for it was heard and answered, and that response was the maniac laugh of the white-headed eagle.

At the same instant two of these birds – those already introduced – were seen mounting into the air. They did not fly up vertically, as the swan had done, but in spiral curves, wheeling and crossing each other as they ascended. They were making for a point that would intersect the flight of the swan should he keep on in his horizontal course. This, however, he did not do. With an eye as quick as theirs, he saw that he was "headed;" and, stretching his long neck upward, he again pursued an almost

vertical line.

But he had to carry thirty pounds of flesh and bones, while the largest of the eagles – the female bird – with a still broader spread of wing, was a "light weight" of only seven. The result of this difference was soon apparent. Before the trumpeter had got two hundred yards higher, the female of the eagles was seen wheeling around him on the same level. The swan was now observed to double, fly downward, and then upward again, while his mournful note echoed back to the earth. But his efforts were in vain. After a series of contortions and manœuvres, the eagle darted forward, with a quick toss threw herself back-downward, and, striking upward, planted her talons in the under part of the wing of her victim. The lacerated shaft fell uselessly down; and the great white bird, no longer capable of flight, came whistling through the air.

But it was not allowed to drop directly to the earth; it would have fallen on the bosom of the broad river, and that the eagles did not wish, as it would have given them some trouble to get the heavy carcass ashore. As soon as the male – who was lower in the air – saw that his partner had struck the bird, he discontinued his upward flight, and, poising himself on his spread tail, waited its descent. A single instant was sufficient. The white object passed him still fluttering; but the moment it was below his level he shot after it like an arrow, and, clutching it in his talons, with an outward stroke sent it whizzing in a diagonal direction. The next moment a crashing was heard among the twigs, and a dull sound

announced that the swan had fallen upon the earth.

The eagles were now seen sailing downward, and soon disappeared among the tops of the trees.

The canoe soon reached the bank; and François, accompanied by Basil and Marengo, leaped ashore, and went in search of the birds. They found the swan quite dead and lying upon its back as the eagles had turned it. Its breast was torn open, and the crimson blood, with which they had been gorging themselves, was spread in broad flakes over its snowy plumage. The eagles themselves, scared by the dog Marengo, had taken flight before the boys could get within shot of them.

As it was just the hour for a “noon halt” and a luncheon, the swan was carried to the bank of the river, where a crackling fire was soon kindled to roast him.

CHAPTER IV
A SWAN-HUNT BY TORCHLIGHT

A few days brought our travellers to the settlement of Red River, where they made but a very short stay; and, having procured a few articles which they stood in need of, they resumed their journey, and floated on towards Lake Winnipeg. The swans were seen in greater numbers than ever. They were not less shy however, and François, as before, in vain tried to get a shot at one.

He was very desirous of bringing down one of these noble birds, partly because the taste he had had of their flesh had given him a liking for it; and partly because their shyness had greatly tantalized him. One is always more eager to kill shy game, both on account of the rarity of the thing, and the credit one gets for his expertness. But the voyageurs had now got within less than twenty miles of Lake Winnipeg, and François had not as yet shot a single swan. It was not at all likely the eagles would help him to another. So there would be no more roast swan for supper.

Norman, seeing how eager François was to shoot one of these birds, resolved to aid him by his advice.

"Cousin Frank," said he, one evening as they floated along, "you wish very much to get a shot at the swans?"

"I do," replied François, – "I do; and if you can tell me how to accomplish that business, I'll make you a present of this knife." Here François held up a very handsome clasp-knife that

he carried in his pouch.

A knife in the fur countries is no insignificant affair. With a knife you may sometimes buy a horse, or a tent, or a whole carcass of beef, or, what is stranger still, a wife! To the hunter in these wild regions – perhaps a thousand miles from where knives are sold – such a thing is of very great value indeed; but the knife which François offered to his cousin was a particularly fine one, and the latter had once expressed a wish to become the owner of it. He was not slow, therefore, in accepting the conditions.

"Well," rejoined he, "you must consent to travel a few miles by night, and I think I can promise you a shot at the trumpeters – perhaps several."

"What say you, brothers?" asked François, appealing to Basil and Lucien; "shall we have the sport? Say yes."

"Oh! I have no objection," said Lucien.

"Nor I," added Basil. "On the contrary, I should like it above all things. I wish very much to know what plan our cousin shall adopt. I never heard of any mode of approaching these birds."

"Very well, then," answered Norman, "I shall have the pleasure of instructing you in a way that is in use in these parts among the Indians, who hunt the swan for its skin and quills, which they trade to us at the post. We can manage it to-night, I think," continued he, looking up at the sky: "there is no moon, and the sky is thick. Yes, it will be dark enough."

"Is it necessary the night should be a dark one?" asked François.

"The darker the better," replied Norman. "To-night, if I am not mistaken, will be as black as pitch. But we need to make some preparations. It is near sundown, and we shall have just time to get ready for the business. Let us get ashore, then, as quickly as possible."

"Oh! certainly – let us land," replied all three at once.

The canoe was now turned to the shore; and when it had arrived within a few feet of the land it was brought to a stop. Its keel was not allowed to touch the bottom of the river, as that would have injured the little craft. The greatest precaution is always observed both in landing and embarking these vessels. The voyageurs first get out and wade to the shore, one or two remaining to hold the canoe in its place. The cargo, whatever it be, is then taken out and landed; and after that the canoe itself is lifted out of the water, and carried ashore, where it is set, bottom upward, to dry.

The birch-bark canoe is so frail a structure, that, were it brought rudely in contact either with the bottom or the bank, it would be very much damaged, or might go to pieces altogether. Hence the care with which it is handled. It is dangerous, also, to stand upright in it, as it is so "crank" that it would easily turn over, and spill both canoe-men and cargo into the water. The voyageurs, therefore, when once they have got in, remain seated during the whole passage, shifting about as little as they can help. When landed for the night, the canoe is always taken out of the water as described. The bark is of a somewhat spongy nature; and

if left in the water for a length of time, would become soaked and heavy, and would not run so well. When kept all night, bottom upward, it drips and becomes dryer and lighter. In the morning, at the commencement of the day's journey, it sits higher upon the water than in the afternoon and evening, and is at that time more easily paddled along.

Our voyageurs, having got on shore, first kindled a fire to cook their supper. This they intended to despatch earlier than usual, so as to give them the early part of the night for their swan hunt, which they expected to finish before midnight. Lucien did the cooking, while Norman, assisted by Basil and François, made his preparations for the hunt. François, who was more interested in the result than any of them, watched every movement of his cousin. Nothing escaped him.

Norman proceeded as follows: —

He walked off into the woods, accompanied by François. After going about an hundred yards or so, he stopped at the foot of a certain tree. The tree was a birch – easily distinguished by its smooth, silvery bark. By means of his sharp hunting-knife he "girdled" this tree near the ground, and then higher up, so that the length between the two "girdlings," or circular cuttings, was about four feet. He then made a longitudinal incision by drawing the point of his knife from one circle to the other. This done he inserted the blade under the bark, and peeled it off, as he would have taken the skin from a buffalo. The tree was a foot in diameter, consequently the bark, when stripped off and spread

flat, was about three feet in width; for you must remember that the circumference of a circle or a cylinder is always about three times the length of its diameter, and therefore a tree is three times as much "*round*" as it is "*through*."

They now returned to the camp-fire, taking along with them the piece of bark that had been cut off. This was spread out, though not quite flat, still leaving it somewhat curved. The convex side, that which had lain towards the tree, was now blackened with pulverized charcoal, which Norman had directed Basil to prepare for the purpose; and to the bark at one end was fastened a stake or shaft. Nothing more remained but to fix this stake in the canoe, in an upright position near the bow, and in such a way that the bottom of the piece of bark would be upon a level with the seats, with its hollow side looking forward. It would thus form a screen, and prevent those in the canoe from being seen by any creature that might be ahead.

When all this had been arranged, Norman shouldered the axe, and again walked off into the woods. This time his object was to obtain a quantity of "knots" of the pitch-pine (*Pinus rigida*), which he knew would most likely be found in such a situation. The tree was soon discovered, and pointed out to François, who accompanied him as before. François saw that it was a tree of about fifty feet in height, and a foot in diameter at its base. Its bark was thick, very dark in the colour, and full of cracks or fissures. Its leaves, or "needles," were about three inches long, and grew in threes, each three forming a little bunch, bound

together at its base by a brownish sheath.

These bunches, in botanical language, are termed “fasciles.” The cones were somewhat shorter than the leaves, nearly the shape of eggs, and clustered together in threes and fours. François noticed that the tree was thickly branched, and therefore there are many knots in the wood. For this reason it is not much use as timber; but on account of the resin which it contains, it is the best species for firewood; and for that purpose it is used in all parts of the United States, where it grows. Most of the *pine-wood* sold for fuel in the large cities of America is the wood of this species.

François supposed that his companion was about to fell one of the trees. He was mistaken, however; Norman had no such intention; he had only stopped before one to examine it, and make sure that it was the species he was in search of. He was soon satisfied of this, and moved on, directing his eyes along the ground. Again he stopped; but this time it was by a tree that had already fallen – blown down, perhaps, by the wind. It was half decayed; but François could see that it was one of the same species – the pitch-pine.

This was the very thing Norman wanted, and plying his axe, he soon knocked out a large quantity of the resinous knots. These he at length collected, and putting them into a bag, returned with François to the fire. He then announced that he had no further preparations to make.

All four now sat down to supper, which consisted of dry meat,

with biscuits and coffee; and, as their appetites were sharpened by their water journey, they made a hearty meal of it.

As soon as they had finished eating, the canoe was launched and got ready. The screen of birch-bark was set up, by lashing its shaft to the bottom timbers, and also to one of the seats. Immediately in front of this, and out upon the bow, was placed the frying-pan; and this having been secured by being tied at the handle, was filled with dry pine-knots, ready to be kindled at a moment's notice. These arrangements being made, the hunters only awaited the darkness to set forth.

In the progress of their hunt they would be carried still farther down-stream; but as that was the direction in which they were travelling, they would only be progressing on their journey, and thus "killing two birds with one stone." This was altogether a very pleasant consideration; and having stowed everything snugly in the canoe, they sat chatting agreeably and waiting for the arrival of night.

Night came at length, and, as Norman had predicted, it was as "dark as pitch." Stepping gently into the canoe, and seating themselves in their respective places, they pushed out and commenced floating down-stream. Norman sat near the bow, in order to attend to his torch of pine-knots. François was next to him, holding his double-barrel, loaded with buckshot, which is the same size as that used for swans, and in England is even known as "swan-shot."

Next came Basil with his rifle. He sat near François, just by

the middle of the little vessel. Lucien, who was altogether a man of peace principles, and but little of a shot compared with either of his brothers, handled the oar – not to propel the canoe, but merely to guide it. In this way the party floated on in silence.

Norman soon kindled his torch, which now cast its red glare over the surface of the river, extending its fiery radii even to the banks on both sides of the stream. The trees that overhung the water seemed tinged with vermilion, and the rippling wave sparkled like liquid gold. The light only extended over a semicircle. From the manner in which the torch was placed, its light did not fall upon the other half of the circle, and this, by contrast, appeared even darker than it would otherwise have done.

The advantage of the plan which Norman had adopted was at once apparent to all. Ahead of the canoe the whole river was plainly seen, for a distance of several hundred yards. No object larger than a cork could have floated on its surface, without being visible to those in the vessel – much less the great white body of a trumpeter swan. Astern of the canoe, on the other hand, all was pitchy darkness, and any one looking at the vessel from a position ahead could have seen nothing but the bright torch and the black uniform surface behind it.

As I have already stated, the convex side of the bark was *towards* the blaze, and the pan containing the torch being placed close into the screen, none of the light could possibly fall upon the forms of those within the canoe. They were therefore invisible

to any creature from the front, while they themselves could see everything before them.

Two questions yet remained unanswered. First – would our hunters find any swans on the river? Second – if they should, would these birds allow themselves to be approached near enough to be shot at? The first question Norman, of course, could not answer. That was a matter beyond his knowledge or control. The swans might or might not appear, but it was to be hoped they would. It was likely enough. Many had been seen on the preceding day, and why not then? To the second question, the young Canadian gave a definite reply.

He assured his cousins that, if met with, the birds would be easily approached in this manner; he had often hunted them so. They would either keep their place, and remain until the light came very near them, or they would move towards it (as he had many times known them to do), attracted by curiosity and the novelty of the spectacle. He had hunted deer in the same manner; he had shot, he said, hundreds of these animals upon the banks of rivers, where they had come down to the water to drink, and stood gazing at the light.

His cousins could well credit his statements. They themselves had hunted deer by torchlight in the woods of Louisiana, where it is termed "fire-hunting." They had killed several in this way. The creatures as if held by some fascination, would stand with head erect looking at the torch carried by one of the party, while the other took sight between their glancing eyes and fired the

deadly bullet. Remembering this, they could easily believe that the swans might act in a similar manner.

It was not long until they were convinced of it by actual experience. As the canoe rounded a bend in the river, three large white objects appeared in the "reach" before them. A single glance satisfied all that they were swans, though in the deceptive glare of the torch, they appeared even larger than swans. Their long upright necks, however, convinced the party they could be nothing else, and the canoe was headed directly for them.

As our hunters approached, one of the birds was heard to utter his strange trumpet note, and this he repeated at intervals as they drew nearer.

"I have heard that they sing before death," muttered François to Basil, who sat nearest him. "If so, I hope that's the song itself;" and François laughed quietly at the joke he had perpetrated.

Basil also laughed; and Lucien, who had overheard the remark, could not refrain himself from joining in the laughter.

"I fear not," rejoined Basil; "there is hardly enough music in the note to call it a song. They may live to 'blow their own trumpet' a long while yet."

This remark called forth a fresh chorus of laughter, in which all took part; but it was a very silent kind of laughter, that could not have been heard ten yards off: it might have been termed "laughing in a whisper."

It soon ended, however, as matters now became serious: they were already within less than two hundred yards of the game,

and the greatest caution had to be observed. The gunners had arranged the order of fire: Basil was to shoot first, taking steady aim with his rifle at any one of the birds; while François should fire as soon as he heard the report of his brother's gun, taking the remaining swans upon the wing, with one or both barrels, as he best might.

At length Basil deemed himself near enough, and, levelling his piece, fired. The bird threw out its wings, and flattened down upon the water, almost without a struggle. The other two were rising into the air, when “crack! crack!” went the two barrels of François' piece, and one of the swans fell back with a broken wing, and fluttered over the surface of the stream. Basil's had been shot dead, and was taken up easily; but the wounded bird was only captured after a long chase with the canoe; and when overtaken, it struck so fiercely with its remaining wing, that one of the blows inflicted a painful wound on the wrist of François. Both, however, were at length got safely aboard, and proved to be a male and female of the largest dimensions.

CHAPTER V
"CAST AWAY"

Of course, the reports of the guns must have frightened any other swans that were near. It was not likely they would find any more before going some distance farther down the river; so, having stowed away in a safe place the two already killed, the hunters paddled rapidly onward.

They had hardly gone half-a-mile farther, when another flock of swans was discovered. These were approached in a similar way, and no less than three were obtained – François making a remarkable shot, and killing with both barrels. A little farther down, one of the "hoopers" was killed; and still farther on, another trumpeter; making in all no less than seven swans that lay dead in the bottom of the canoe!

These seven great birds almost filled the little craft to the gunwales, and you would think that our "torch-hunters" ought to have been content with such a spoil; but the hunter is hard to satisfy with game, and but too often inclined to "spill much more blood" than is necessary to his wants. Our voyageurs, instead of desisting, again set the canoe in motion, and continued the hunt.

A short distance below the place where they had shot the last swan, as they were rounding a bend in the river, a loud rushing sounded in their ears, similar to that produced by a cascade or waterfall. On first hearing it, they were startled and somewhat

alarmed. It might be a "fall," thought they. Norman could not tell: he had never travelled this route; he did not know whether there were falls in the Red River or not, but he believed not. In his voyage to the South, he had travelled by another route; that was, up the Winnipeg River, and through Rainy Lake and the Lake of the Woods to Lake Superior. This is the usual and well-known track followed by the *employés* of the Hudson's Bay Company; and Norman had travelled it.

In this uncertainty the canoe was brought to a stop, and our voyageurs remained listening. The noise made by the water was not very distant, and sounded like the roaring of "rapids," or the rush of a "fall." It was evidently one or the other; but, after listening to it for a considerable time, all came to the conclusion that the sound did not proceed from the Red River itself, but from some stream that emptied into it upon the right. With this belief they again put the canoe in motion, and glided slowly and cautiously onward.

Their conjecture proved to be correct. As they approached nearer, they perceived that the noise appeared every moment more and more to their right; and presently they saw, below them, a rapid current sweeping into the Red River from the right bank. This was easily distinguished by the white froth and bubbles that were carried along upon its surface, and which had evidently been produced by some fall over which the water had lately passed. The hunters now rowed fearlessly forward, and in a few moments came opposite the *débouchure* of the tributary stream, when a

considerable cascade appeared to their view, not thirty yards from the Red River itself. The water foamed and dashed over a series of steps, and then swept rapidly on, in a frothy current. They had entered this current, and were now carried along with increased velocity, so that the oarsmen suspended operations, and drew their paddles within the canoe.

A flock of swans now drew their attention. It was the largest flock they had yet seen, numbering nearly a score of these noble birds, – a sight, as Norman informed them, that was exceedingly rare even in the most favoured haunts of the swan. Rarely are more than six or seven seen together, and oftener only two or three. A grand *coup* was determined upon. Norman took up his own gun, and even Lucien, who managed the stern oar, and guided the craft, also brought his piece – a very small rifle – close to his hand, so that he might have a shot as well as the others.

The canoe was directed in such a manner that, by merely keeping its head down the stream, it would float to the spot where the swans were.

In a short while they approached very near the great birds, and our hunters could see them sitting on the water, with upraised necks, gazing in wonder at the torch. Whether they sounded their strange note was not known, for the "sough" of the waterfall still echoed in the ears of the canoe-men, and they could not hear aught else.

Basil and Norman fired first, and simultaneously; but the louder detonations of François' double-barrel, and even the tiny

crack of Lucien's rifle, were heard almost the instant after. Three of the birds were killed by the volley, while a fourth, evidently "winged," was seen to dive, and flutter down-stream. The others mounted into the air, and disappeared in the darkness.

During the time occupied in this manœuvre, the canoe, no longer guided by Lucien's oar, had been caught by some eddy in the current, and swept round stern-foremost. In this position the light no longer shone upon the river ahead, but was thrown up-stream. All in a downward direction was buried in deep darkness. Before the voyageurs could bring the canoe back to its proper direction, a new sound fell upon their ears that caused some of them to utter a cry of terror. It was the noise of rushing water, but not that which they had already heard and passed. It was before them in the river itself. Perhaps it was a cataract, and *they were sweeping rapidly to its brink*!

The voice of Norman was heard exclaiming, "Hold with your oars! – the rapids! – the rapids!" At the same time he himself was seen rising up and stretching forward for an oar. All was now consternation; and the movements of the party naturally consequent upon such a sudden panic shook the little craft until her gunwales lipped the water. At the same time she had swung round, until the light again showed the stream ahead, and a horrid sight it was.

Far as the eye could see, was a reach of foaming rapids. Dark points of rocks, and huge black boulders, thickly scattered in the channel, jutted above the surface; and around and against these,

the water frothed and hissed furiously. There was no cataract, it is true – there is none such in Red River – but for all purposes of destruction the rapids before them were equally dangerous and terrible to the eyes of our voyageurs. They no longer thought of the swans. The dead were permitted to float down unheeded, the wounded to make its escape. Their only thought was to stop the canoe before it should be carried upon the rapids.

With this intent all had taken to the oars, but in spite of every exertion they soon found that the light craft had got within the influence of the strong current, and was sucked downward more rapidly than ever. Their backward strokes were to no purpose.

In a few seconds the canoe had passed over the first stage of the rapids, and shot down with the velocity of an arrow. A huge boulder lay directly in the middle of the channel, and against this the current broke with fury, laving its sides in foaming masses. The canoe was hurried to this point; and as the light was again turned up-stream, none of the voyageurs could see this dangerous rock. But they could not have shunned it then. The boat had escaped from their control, and spun round at will. The rock once more came under the light, but just as the canoe, with a heavy crash, was driven against it.

For some moments the vessel, pressed by the current against the rock, remained motionless, but her sides were stove in, and the water was rushing through. The quick eye of Basil – cool in all crises of extreme danger – perceived this at a glance. He saw that the canoe was a wreck, and nothing remained but to save

themselves as they best might. Dropping the oar, and seizing his rifle, he called to his companions to leap to the rock; and all together immediately sprang over the gunwale. The dog Marengo followed after.

The canoe, thus lightened, heeled round into the current, and swept on. The next moment she struck another rock, and was carried over on her beams. The water then rushed in – the white bodies of the swans, with the robes, blankets, and implements, rose on the wave; the blazing knots were spilled from the pan, and fell with a hissing sound; and a few seconds after they were extinguished, and all was darkness!

CHAPTER VI
A BRIDGE OF BUCKSKIN

The canoe was lost, and all it had contained, or nearly all. The voyageurs had saved only their guns, knives, and the powder-horns and pouches, that had been attached to their persons. One other thing had been saved – an axe which Basil had flung upon the rock as he stepped out of the sinking vessel. All the rest – robes, blankets, swans, cooking utensils, bags of provisions, such as coffee, flour, and dried meat – were lost – irrecoverably lost. These had either drifted off upon the surface, or been carried under water and hidden among the loose stones at the bottom. No matter where, they were lost; and our voyageurs now stood on a small naked rock in the middle of the stream, with nothing left but the clothes upon their backs, and the arms in their hands. Such was their condition.

There was something so sudden and awful in the mishap that had befallen them, that for some minutes they stood upon the spot where they had settled without moving or addressing a word to one another. They gazed after the canoe. They knew that it was wrecked, although they could see nothing either of it or its contents. Thick darkness enveloped them, rendered more intense from the sudden extinction of the torchlight. They saw nothing but the foam flickering along the river; like the ghosts of the swans they had killed, and they heard only the roaring of the

water, that sounded in their ears with a hoarse and melancholy wail.

For a long time they stood impressed with the lamentable condition into which the accident had plunged them; and a lamentable condition it was, sure enough. They were on a small rock in the midst of a rapid river. They were in the midst of a great wilderness too, many long miles from a settlement. The nearest could only be reached by travelling through pathless forests, and over numerous and deep rivers. Impassable swamps, and lakes with marshy shores, lay on the route, and barred the direct course, and all this journey would have to be made on foot.

But none of our young voyageurs were of that stamp to yield themselves to despair. One and all of them had experienced perils before – greater even than that in which they now stood. As soon, therefore, as they became fully satisfied that their little vessel was wrecked, and all its contents scattered, instead of despairing, their first thoughts were how to make the best of their situation.

For that night, at least, they were helpless. They could not leave the rock. It was surrounded by rapids. Sharp, jagged points peeped out of the water, and between these the current rushed with impetuosity. In the darkness no human being could have crossed to either shore in safety. To attempt it would have been madness, and our voyageurs soon came to this conclusion. They had no other choice than to remain where they were until the morning; so, seating themselves upon the rock, they prepared to pass the night.

They sat huddled close together. They could not lie down – there was not room enough for that. They kept awake most of the night, one or other of them, overcome by fatigue, occasionally nodding over in a sort of half-sleep, but awaking again after a few minutes' uncomfortable dreaming. They talked but little, as the noise of the rushing rapids rendered conversation painful. To be heard, they were under the necessity of shouting to one another, like passengers in an omnibus. It was cold, too. None of them had been much wetted in escaping from the canoe; but they had saved neither overcoat, blanket, nor buffalo-robe; and, although it was now late in the spring, the nights near Lake Winnipeg, even at that season, are chilly. They were above the latitude of 50°; and although in England, which is on that parallel, it is not very cold of a spring night, it must be remembered that the line of equal temperature – in the language of meteorologists the "*isothermal line*," – is of a much lower latitude in America than in Europe.

Our voyageurs were chilled to the very bones, and of course glad to see the daylight glimmering through the tops of the trees that grew upon the banks of the river. As soon as day broke, they began to consider how they would reach those trees. Although swimming a river of that width would have been to any of the four a mere bagatelle, they saw that it was not to be so easy an affair. Had they been upon either bank, they could have crossed to the other without difficulty – as they would have chosen a place where the water was comparatively still. On the rock they had no choice, as the rapids extended on both sides above and below

it. Between the boulders the current rushed so impetuously, that had they attempted to swim to either bank, they would have been carried downward, and perhaps dashed with violence against one or other of the sharp stones.

As soon as it was light, they saw all this; not without feelings of apprehension and uneasiness. Their whole attention was now occupied with the one object – how they should get to the bank of the river.

The right bank was the more distant; but the passage in that direction appeared the easier one. The current was not so swift, nor yet did it seem so deep. They thought they might ford it, and Basil made the attempt; but he soon got beyond his depth; and was obliged, after being carried off his feet, to swim up under the lee of the rock again.

From the rock to the right bank was about an hundred yards' distance. Here and there, at irregular intervals, sharp, jagged stones rose above the surface, some of them projecting three feet or more out of the water, and looking very much like upright tombstones. Lucien had noticed these, and expressed the opinion that if they only had a rope, they might fling it over one of these stones, and then, holding it fast at the other end, might pass by that means from one to the other.

The suggestion was a good one, but where was the rope to come from? All their ropes and cords – lassoes and all – had been swept away in the wreck. Not a string remained, except those that fastened their horns, flasks, and other accoutrements; and

these were only small thongs, and would be of no use for such a purpose. It would require a rope strong enough to carry the weight of a man impelled by a rapid current – in fact, a weight equal to that of several men. They all set to thinking how this was to be obtained. Each looked at the other, and scanned the straps and thongs that were around their bodies.

They were satisfied at a glance that these would not be sufficient to make such a rope as was wanted. They did not give up the hope of being able to obtain one. They were all of them accustomed to resort to strange expedients, and a sufficiently strange one now suggested itself. Basil and Norman seemed to have thought of it at the same time, for both at once unbuckled their straps, and commenced pulling off their buckskin hunting-shirts. The others said nothing, as they knew well what they were going to do with them – they knew they intended cutting them into strips, and then twisting a rope out of them.

All four set to work together. Lucien and François held the shirts taut, while Basil and Norman handled the knives, and in a few minutes the rock was covered with strips of buckskin about two inches wide, by a yard or so in length. These were next joined and plaited together in such a manner that a rope was formed nearly forty feet long. An eye was made at one end, and through this the other end was reeved – so that a running noose was obtained, in the same manner as the Mexicans and Indians make their lassoes. The rope was now ready for use, and Basil was the very hand to use it; for Basil knew how to fling a lasso as well

as either Mexican or Indian. He had practised it often, and had lassoed many a long-horned bull upon the prairies of Opelousas and the Attakapas. To Basil, therefore, the rope was given.

He placed himself on the highest part of the rock, having first coiled the new-made lasso, and hung the coil lightly over his left arm. He then took the noose-end in his right hand, and commenced winding it around his head. His companions had laid themselves flat, so as not to be in the way of the noose as it circled about. After a few turns the rope was launched forth, and a loud "hurrah!" from François announced that the throw was successful.

It was so in fact, as the noose was seen settling smoothly over the jutting-stone, taking full hold upon it. A pull from Basil fixed it; and in a few minutes it was made quite fast, without the slightest danger of its slipping off. The other end was then carried round a projecting point of the rock on which they stood, and knotted firmly, so that the rope was quite taut, and stretched in a nearly horizontal direction, about a foot above the surface of the water.

The voyageurs now prepared to cross over. Their guns, pouches, and flasks were carefully secured, so that the water could not damage them. Then each took a piece of the buckskin thong, and fastened it round his waist, leaving enough to form a running loop. This loop was intended to embrace the rope, and run along it, as they drew themselves forward by their hands.

Basil passed over first. He was the oldest, and, as he asserted,

it was but right he should run the risk in testing the new-fashioned bridge, of which he was the architect. It worked admirably, and sustained the weight of his body, with the whole force of the current acting upon it. Of course he was swept far down, and the rope was stretched to its full tension, but he succeeded in handing himself along, until he was able to touch the second rock, and clamber upon it in safety. During the passage across he was watched by his companions with emotions of no ordinary character, but as soon as he had reached the opposite end of the rope all three uttered a loud and simultaneous cheer. Lucien passed over next, and after him François. Notwithstanding his danger, François laughed loudly all the time he was in the water, while his brothers were not without some fears for his safety. Marengo was next attached to the rope, and pulled safely over.

Norman was the last to cross upon the buckskin bridge, but, like the others, he landed in safety; and the four, with the dog, now stood upon the little isolated boulder where there was just room enough to give them all a footing.

A difficulty now presented itself, which they had not hitherto thought of. Another reach of rapid current was to be crossed, before they could safely trust themselves to enter the water. This they knew before, but they had also noticed that there was another jutting rock, upon which they might fling their rope. But the rope itself was now the difficulty. It was fast at both ends, and how were they to release it from the rock they had left? One of them could easily cross over again and untie it, but how was

he to get back to the others? Here was a dilemma which had not presented itself before, and they now saw themselves no better off than ever. The rapid that remained to be crossed, was as dangerous as the one they had succeeded in passing. There was no hope that they could swim it in safety. They would certainly be swept with violence against the rocks below. There was no chance, then, of their going an inch farther – unless by some means similar to that they had just used, and the rope was no longer at their service.

For some time they all stood silent, each considering the matter in his own way. How could they free the rope?

"It cannot be done," said one.

"Impossible," rejoined another. "We must make a second rope. François's shirt still remains, and our leggings – we can use them."

This was the mode suggested by François and Norman, and Lucien seemed to assent to it. They had already commenced untying their leggings, when Basil uttered the ejaculation —

"Stop!"

"Well, what is it, brother?" asked Lucien.

"I think I can free the rope at the other end. At all events, let me try. It will not cost much, either in time or trouble."

"How do you mean to do it, brother?"

"Sit close, all of you. Give me room – you shall see presently."

As directed by Basil, they all cowered closely down, so as to occupy as little space as possible. Basil, having uncovered the

lock of his rifle – which had been carefully bound up in a piece of deer's bladder – placed himself in a firm position, and appeared as if about to fire. Such was his intention – for in a few moments he was seen to raise the gun to his shoulder, and take aim. None of his companions uttered a word. They had already guessed the object of this movement, and sat silently awaiting the result.

On the rock which they had left, the rope still bound fast passed around one of the angles, in such a way that, from the point where Basil stood, it offered a fair mark. It was at this Basil was aiming. His object was to cut the thong with his bullet. He could not do it with a single shot, as the thong was broader than the bullet, but he had calculated that he might effect his purpose with several. If he did not succeed in cutting it clean through, the ball flattening upon the rock would, perhaps, tear the rope in such a manner that, by pulling by the other end, they might detach it. Such were the calculations and hopes of Basil.

A moment more and the crack of his rifle was heard. At the same instant the dust rose up from the point at which he had aimed, and several small fragments flew off into the water. Again was heard François's "hurrah," for François, as well as the others, had seen that the rope had been hit at the right place, and now exhibited a mangled appearance.

While Basil was reloading, Norman took aim and fired. Norman was a good shot, though perhaps not so good a one as Basil, for that was no easy matter, as there were few such marksmen to be found anywhere, not even among the

professional trappers and hunters themselves. But Norman was a fair shot, and this time hit his mark. The thong was evidently better than half divided by the two bullets. Seeing this, François took hold of the other end, and gave it a strong jerk or two, but it was still too much for him, and he ceased pulling and waited the effect of Basil's second shot.

The later had now reloaded, and, taking deliberate aim again, fired. The rope was still held taut upon the rock, for part of it dragged in the current, the force of which kept pressing it hard downward. Scarcely was the report heard, when the farther end of the thong flew from its fastening, and, swept by the running water, was seen falling into the lee of the boulder on which the party now stood. A third time was heard the voice of François uttering one of his customary "hurrahs." The rope was now dragged up, and made ready for further use. Basil again took hold of it; and, after coiling it as before, succeeded in throwing the noose over the third rock, where it settled and held fast. The other end was tied as before, and all passed safely to the new station. Here, however, their labour ended. They found that from this point to the shore the river was shallow, and fordable; and, leaving the rope where it was, all four took the water, and waded safely to the bank.

CHAPTER VII
DECOYING THE ANTELOPES

For the present, then, our voyageurs had escaped. They were safe upon the river's bank; but when we consider the circumstances in which they were placed, we shall perceive that they were far from being pleasant ones. They were in the midst of a wilderness, without either horse or boat to carry them out of it. They had lost everything but their arms and their axe. The hunting-shirts of some of them, as we have seen, were destroyed, and they would now suffer from the severe cold that even in summer, as we have said, often reigns in these latitudes. Not a vessel was left them for cooking with, and not a morsel of meat or anything was left to be cooked. For their future subsistence they would have to depend upon their guns, which, with their ammunition, they had fortunately preserved.

After reaching the shore, their first thoughts were about procuring something to eat. They had now been a long time without food, and all four were hungry enough. As if by one impulse, all cast their eyes around, and looked upward among the branches of the trees, to see if any animal could be discovered that might serve them for a meal. Bird or quadruped, it mattered not, so that it was large enough to give the four a breakfast. But neither one nor the other was to be seen, although the woods around had a promising appearance. The trees were large, and

as there was much underwood, consisting of berry-bushes and plants with edible roots, our voyageurs did not doubt that there would be found game in abundance. It was agreed, then, that Lucien and François should remain on the spot and kindle a fire, while Basil and Norman went off in search of something to be cooked upon it.

In less than an hour the latter returned, carrying an animal upon his shoulders, which both the boys recognised as an old acquaintance – the prong-horned antelope, so called from the single fork or prong upon its horns. Norman called it "a goat," and stated that this was its name among the fur-traders, while the Canadian voyageurs give it the title of "cabree." Lucien, However, knew the animal well. He knew it was not of the goat kind, but a true antelope, and the only animal of that genus found in North America. Its habitat is the prairie country, and at the present time it is not found farther east than the prairies extend, not farther north either, as it is not a creature that can bear extreme cold.

In early times, however – that is nearly two centuries ago – it must have ranged nearly to the Atlantic shores, as Father Hennipen in his *Travels* speaks of "goats" being killed in the neighbourhood of Niagara, meaning no other than the prong-horned antelopes. The true wild goat of America is a very different animal, and is only found in the remote regions of the Rocky Mountains.

What Norman had shot, then, was an antelope; and the reason

why it is called “cabree” by the voyageurs, and “goat” by the fur-traders, is partly from its colour resembling that of the common goat, but more from the fact, that along the upper part of its neck there is a standing mane, which does in truth give it somewhat the appearance of the European goat. Another point of resemblance lies in the fact, that the “prong-horns” emit the same disagreeable odour, which is a well-known characteristic of the goat species. This proceeds from two small glandular openings that lie at the angles of the jaws, and appear spots of a blackish-brown colour.

Both Lucien and François had shot antelopes. They had decoyed them within range in their former expedition on the prairies, and had seen wolves do the same. The Indians usually hunt them in this manner, by holding up some bright-coloured flag, or other curious object, which rarely fails to bring them within shot; but Norman informed his cousins that the Indians of the Hudson's Bay Company care little about the antelope, and rarely think it worth hunting. Its skin is of little value to them, and they consider its flesh but indifferent eating. But the chief reason why they take so little notice of it is, because it is found in the same range, with the buffalo, the moose, and the elk; and, as all these animals are more valuable to the Indian hunter, he allows the antelope to go unmolested, unless when he is hard pressed with hunger, and none of the others are to be had.

While skinning the antelope for breakfast, Norman amused his companions by relating how he had killed it. He said he had got near enough to shoot it by practising a “dodge.” After

travelling through the woods for some half-mile or so, he had come out into a country of "openings," and saw that there was a large prairie beyond. He saw that the woods extended no farther than about a mile from the banks of the river, and that the whole country beyond was without timber, except in scattered clumps. This is, in fact, true of the Red River country, particularly of its western part, from which the great prairies stretch westward even to the "foot-hills" of the Rocky Mountains.

Well, then, after arriving at the openings, Norman espied a small herd of antelopes, about ten or a dozen in all. He would rather they had been something else, as elk or deer; for, like the Indians, he did not much relish the "goat's" meat. He was too hungry, however, to be nice, and so he set about trying to get within shot of the herd. There was no cover, and he knew he could not approach near enough without using some stratagem. He therefore laid himself flat upon his back, and raised his heels as high as he could into the air. These he kicked about in such a manner as soon to attract the attention of the antelopes, that, curious to make out what it was, commenced running round and round in circles, of which Norman himself was the centre.

The circles gradually became smaller and smaller, until the hunter saw that his game was within range; when slyly rolling himself round on one shoulder, he took aim at a buck, and fired. The buck fell, and the rest of the herd bounded off like the wind. Norman feeling hungry himself, and knowing that his companions were suffering from the same cause, lost no time in

looking for other game, but shouldering the "goat," carried it into camp.

By this time Lucien and François had a fire kindled – a roaring fire of "pine-knots" – and both were standing by it, smoking all over in their wet leggings. They had got nearly dry when Norman returned, and they proceeded to assist in butchering the antelope. The skin was whipped off in a trice; and the venison, cut into steaks and ribs, was soon spitted and sputtering cheerily in the blaze of the pine-knots. Everything looked pleasant and promising, and it only wanted the presence of Basil to make them all feel quite happy again. Basil, however, did not make his appearance; and as they were all as hungry as wolves, they could not wait for him, but set upon the antelope-venison, and made each of them a hearty meal from it.

As yet they had no apprehensions about Basil. They supposed he had not met with any game, and was still travelling about in search of it. Should he succeed in killing any, he would bring it in; and should he not, he would return in proper time without it. It was still early in the day.

But several hours passed over and he did not come. It was an unusual length of time for him to be absent, especially in strange woods of which he knew nothing; moreover, he was in his shirt sleeves, and the rest of his clothing had been dripping wet when he set out. Under these circumstances would he remain so long, unless something unpleasant had happened to him?

This question the three began to ask one another. They began

to grow uneasy about their absent companion; and as the hours passed on without his appearing, their uneasiness increased to serious alarm. They at length resolved to go in search of him. They took different directions, so that there would be a better chance of finding him. Norman struck out into the woods, while Lucien and François, followed by the dog Marengo, kept down the bank – thinking that if Basil had got lost, he would make for the river to guide him, as night approached. All were to return to the camp at nightfall whether successful or not.

After several hours spent in traversing the woods and openings, Norman came back. He had been unable to find any traces of their missing companion. The others had got back before him. They heard his story with sorrowing hearts, for neither had they fallen in with the track of living creature. Basil was lost, beyond a doubt. He would never have stayed so long, had not some accident happened to him. Perhaps he was dead – killed by some wild animal – a panther or a bear. Perhaps he had met with Indians, who had carried him off, or put him to death on the spot. Such were the painful conjectures of his companions.

It was now night. All three sat mournfully over the fire, their looks and gestures betokening the deep dejection they felt. Although in need of repose, none of them attempted to go to sleep. At intervals they discussed the probability of his return, and then they would remain silent. Nothing could be done that night. They could only await the morning light, when they would renew their search, and scour the country in every direction.

It was near midnight, and they were sitting silently around the fire, when Marengo started to his feet, and uttered three or four loud barks. The echoes of these had hardly died among the trees when a shrill whistle was heard at some distance off in the woods.

"Hurrah!" shouted François, leaping to his feet at the instant; "that's Basil's whistle, I'll be bound. I'd know it a mile off. Hurrah!"

François' "hurrah!" rang through the woods, and the next moment came back a loud "Hilloa!" which all recognised as the voice of Basil.

"Hilloa!" shouted the three by the fire.

"Hilloa, my boys! all right!" replied the voice; and a few seconds after, the tall upright form of Basil himself was seen advancing, under the glare of the pine-knots. A shout of congratulation was again raised; and all the party, preceded by Marengo, rushed out to meet the new-comer. They soon returned, bringing Basil up to the fire, when it was seen that he had not returned empty-handed. In one hand he carried a bag of grouse, or "prairie hens," while from the muzzle of his shouldered rifle there hung something that was at once recognised as a brace of buffalo tongues.

"*Voilà*!" cried Basil, flinging down the bag, "how are you off for supper? And here," continued he, pointing to the tongues, "here's a pair of tit-bits that'll make you lick your lips. Come! let us lose no time in the cooking, for I'm hungry enough to eat either of them raw."

Basil's request was instantly complied with. The fire was raked up, spits were speedily procured, a tongue and one of the grouse were roasted; and although Lucien, François, and Norman, had already supped on the “goat's meat,” they set to upon the new viands with fresh appetites. Basil was hungrier than any, for he had been all the while fasting. It was not because he was without meat, but because he knew that his comrades would be uneasy about him, and he would not stop to cook it. Of meat he had enough, since he had slain the two buffaloes to which the tongues had belonged; and these same buffaloes, he now informed them, had been the cause of his long absence.

Of course, all were eager to know how the buffaloes could have delayed him; and therefore, while they were discussing their savoury supper, Basil narrated the details of his day's adventure.

CHAPTER VIII.
A "PARTRIDGE DANCE."

"After leaving here," said Basil, "I struck off through the woods in a line that led from the river, in a diagonal direction. I hadn't walked more than three hundred yards, when I heard a drumming sound, which I at first took to be thunder; but, after listening a while, I knew it was not that, but the drumming of the ruffed grouse. As soon as I could ascertain the direction of the sound, I hurried on in that way; but for a long time I appeared to get no nearer it, so greatly does this sound deceive one. I should think I walked a full mile before I arrived at the place where the birds were, for there were many of them. I then had a full view of them, as they went through their singular performances.

"There were, in all, about a score. They had selected a piece of open and level ground, and over this they were running in a circle, about twenty feet in diameter. They did not all run in the same direction, but met and crossed each other, although they never deviated much from the circumference of the circle, around which the grass was worn quite bare, and a ring upon the turf looked baked and black. When I first got near, they heard my foot among the leaves, and I saw that one and all of them stopped running, and squatted close down.

"I halted, and hid myself behind a tree. After remaining quiet a minute or so, the birds began to stretch up their necks, and then

all rose together to their feet, and commenced running round the ring as before. I knew they were performing what is called the 'Partridge Dance;' and as I had never witnessed it I held back awhile, and looked on. Even hungry as I was, and as I knew all of you to be, so odd were the movements of these creatures, that I could not resist watching them a while, before I sent my unwelcome messenger into their 'ball-room.'

"Now and then an old cock would separate from the pack, and running out to some distance, would leap upon a rock that was there; then, after dropping his wings, flirting with his spread tail, erecting the ruff upon his neck, and throwing back his head, he would swell and strut upon the rock, exhibiting himself like a diminutive turkey-cock. After manœuvring in this way for a few moments, he would commence flapping his wings in short quick strokes, which grew more rapid as he proceeded, until a 'booming' sound was produced, more like the rumble of distant thunder than anything I can think of.

"This appeared to be a challenge to the others; and then a second would come out, and, after replying to it by putting himself through a similar series of attitudes, the two would attack each other, and fight with all the fury of a pair of game-cocks."

"I could have watched their manœuvres much longer," continued Basil, "but hunger got the better of me, and I made ready to fire. Those that were 'dancing' moved so quickly round the ring that I could not sight one of them. If I had had a shot gun, I might have covered several, but with the rifle I could not

hope for more than a single bird; so, wanting to make sure of that, I waited until an old cock mounted the rock, and got to 'drumming.' Then I sighted him, and sent my bullet through his crop. I heard the loud whirr of the pack as they rose up from the ring; and, marking them, I saw that they all alighted only a couple of hundred yards off, upon a large spruce-tree.

"Hoping they would sit there until I could get another shot, I loaded, as quickly as possible, and stepped forward. The course I took brought me past the one I had killed, which I picked up, and thrust hastily into my bag. Beyond this I had to pass over some logs that lay along the ground, with level spaces between them. What was my surprise in getting among these, to see two of the cocks down upon the grass, and fighting so desperately that they took no notice of my approach! At first I threw up my rifle, intending to fire, but seeing that the birds were within a few feet of me, I thought they might let me lay hold of them, which they, in fact, did; for the next moment I had 'grabbed' both of them, and cooled their bellicose spirits by wringing their heads off.

"I now proceeded to the pack, that still kept the tree. When near enough, I sheltered myself behind another tree; and taking aim at one, I brought him tumbling to the ground. The others sat still. Of course, I shot the one upon the lowest branch: I knew that, so long as I did this, the others would sit until I might get the whole of them; but that if I shot one of the upper ones, its fluttering down through the branches would alarm the rest, and cause them to fly off. I loaded and fired, and loaded and fired,

until half-a-dozen of the birds lay around the root of the tree.

"I believe I could have killed the whole pack, but it just then occurred to me that I was wasting our precious ammunition, and that, considering the value of powder and shot to us just now, the birds were hardly worth a load a-piece; so I left off cracking at them. As I stepped forward to gather what I had killed, the rest whirred away into the woods.

"On reaching the tree where they had perched, I was very much surprised to find a raw-hide rope neatly coiled up, and hanging from one of the lower branches. I knew that somebody must have placed it there, and I looked round to see what "sign" there was besides. My eye fell upon the cinders of an old fire near the foot of the tree; and I could tell that some Indians had made their camp by it. It must have been a good while ago, as the ashes were beaten into the ground by the rain, and, moreover, some young plants were springing up through them. I concluded, therefore, that whoever had camped there had hung the rope upon the tree, and on leaving the place had forgotten it.

"I took the rope down to examine it: it was no other than a lasso, full fifty feet long, with an iron ring neatly whipped into the loop-end; and, on trying it with a pull, I saw it was in the best condition. Of course, I was not likely to leave such a prize behind me. I had grown, as you may all conceive, to have a very great regard for a rope, considering that one had just saved all our lives; so I resolved on bringing the lasso with me. In order to carry it the more conveniently, I coiled it, and then hung the coil

across my shoulders like a belt. I next packed my game into the bag, which they filled chock up to the mouth, and was turning to come back to camp, when my eye fell upon an object that caused me suddenly to change my intention.

"I was near the edge of the woods, and through the trunks I could see a large open space beyond, where there were no trees, or only one here and there. In the middle of this opening there was a cloud of dust, and in the thick of it I could see two great dark animals in motion. They were running about, and now and then coming together with a sudden rush; and every time they did so, I could hear a loud thump, like the stroke of a sledge-hammer. The sun was shining upon the yellow dust-cloud, and the animals appeared from this circumstance to be of immense size – much larger than they really were. Had I not known what kind of creatures were before me, I should have believed that the mammoths were still in existence. But I knew well what they were: I had seen many before, carrying on just such a game. I knew they were buffalo bulls, engaged in one of their terrible battles.

"Here Basil's narrative was interrupted by a singular incident. Indeed, it had been interrupted more than once by strange noises that were heard at some distance off in the woods. These noises were not all alike: at one time they resembled the barking of a cur dog; at another, they might have been mistaken for the gurglings of a person who was being hanged; and then would follow a shriek so dreadful that for some time the woods would echo with

its dismal sound! After the shriek a laugh would be heard, but a miserable "haw-haw-haw!" unlike the laugh of a sane person.

"All these strange voices were calculated to inspire terror, and so have they many a time, with travellers not accustomed to the solitary woods of America. But our young voyageurs were not at all alarmed by them. They knew from what sort of a creature they proceeded; they knew they were the varying notes of the great horned-owl; and as they had seen and heard many a one before, they paid no heed to this individual.

"While Basil was going on with his relation, the bird had been several times seen to glide past, and circle around upon his noiseless pinions. So easy was his flight, that the slightest inclining of his spread tail, or the bending of his broad wing, seemed sufficient to turn and carry him in any direction. Nothing could be more graceful than his flight, which was not unlike that of the eagle, while he was but little inferior in size to one of these noble birds.

"What interrupted Basil was, that the owl had alighted upon a branch not twenty feet from where they were all sitting round the fire, by the blaze of which they now had a full view of this singular creature. The moment it alighted, it commenced uttering its hideous and unmusical cries, at the same time going through such a variety of contortions, both with its head and body, as to cause the whole party a fit of laughter. It was, in fact, an odd and interesting sight to witness its grotesque movements, as it turned first its body, and then its head around, without moving

the shoulders, while its great honey-coloured eyes glared in the light of the fire. At the end of every attitude and utterance, it would snap its bill with such violence, that the cracking of the mandibles upon each other might have been heard to the distance of several hundred yards.

"This was too much for François' patience to bear, and he immediately crept to his gun. He had got hold of the piece, and cocked it; but, just as he was about to take aim, the owl dropped silently down from the branch, and, gliding gently forward, thrust out its feathered leg, and lifted one of the grouse in its talons. The latter had been lying upon the top of a fallen tree not six feet from the fire! The owl, after clutching it, rose into the air; and the next moment would have been lost in darkness, but the crack of François' rifle put a sudden stop to its flight, and with the grouse still clinging to its claws it fell fluttering to the earth. Marengo jumped forward to seize it; but Marengo little knew the sort of creature he had to deal with."

It happened to be only "winged," and as soon as the dog came near, it threw itself upon its back, and struck at him with its talons so wickedly, that he was fain to approach it with more caution. It cost Marengo a considerable fight before he succeeded in getting his jaws over it. During the contest it continually snapped its bill, while its great goggle eyes kept alternately and quickly opening and closing, and the feathers being erected all over its body, gave it the appearance of being twice its real size. Marengo at length succeeded in "crunching" it – although not until he was well

scratched about the snout – and its useless carcass having been thrown upon the ground, the dog continued to worry and chew at it, while Basil went on with his narration.

CHAPTER IX.
BASIL AND THE BISON-BULL

"As soon as I saw the buffaloes," continued Basil, "my first thought was to get near, and have a shot at them. *They* were worth a charge of powder and lead, and I reflected that if I could kill but one of them, it would ensure us against hunger for a couple of weeks to come. So I hung my game-bag to the branch of a tree, and set about approaching them. I saw that the wind was in my favour, and there was no danger of their scenting me. But there was no cover near them – the ground was as level as a table, and there was not a score of trees upon as many acres. It was no use crawling up, and I did not attempt it, but walked straight forward, treading lightly as I went. In five minutes, I found myself within good shooting range. Neither of the bulls had noticed me. They were too busy with one another, and in all my life I never saw two creatures fighting in such earnest. They were foaming at the mouth, and the steam poured out of their nostrils incessantly."

At times, they would back from each other like a pair of rams, and then rush together head-foremost, until their skulls cracked with the terrible collision. One would have fancied that they would break them at every fresh encounter, but I knew the thickness of a buffalo's skull before that time. I remember having fired a musket at one that stood fronting me not more than six feet distant, when, to my surprise, the bullet flattened and fell to

the ground before the nose of the buffalo! The creature was not less astonished than myself, as up to that time it had not seen me.

"Well," continued Basil after a pause, "I did not stop long to watch the battle of the bison-bulls. I was not curious about that. I had seen such many a time. I was thinking about the meat; and I paused just long enough to select the one that appeared to have the most fat upon his flanks, when I drew up my rifle and fired. I aimed for the heart, and my aim was a true one, for the animal came to its knees along with the crack. Just at that moment the other was charging upon it, and, to my surprise, it continued to run on, until striking the wounded one full butt upon the forehead, it knocked the latter right over upon its side; where, after giving half-a-dozen kicks, it lay quite dead.

"The remaining bull had dashed some paces beyond the spot, and now turned round again to renew his attack. On seeing his antagonist stretched out and motionless, he seemed to be as much astonished as I was. At first, no doubt, he fancied himself the author of a grand *coup*, for it was plain that up to this time he had neither noticed my presence, nor the report of the rifle. The bellowing noise that both were making had drowned the latter; and the dust, together with the long shaggy tufts that hung over his eyes, had prevented him from seeing anything more than his rival, with whom he was engaged.

"Now that the other was no longer able to stand before him, and thinking it was himself that had done the deed, he tossed up his head and snorted in triumph. At this moment, the matted hair

was thrown back from his eyes, and the dust having somewhat settled away, he sighted me, where I stood reloading my gun. I fancied he would take off before I could finish, and I made all the haste in my power – so much so that I dropped the box of caps at my feet. I had taken one out, however, and hurriedly adjusted it, thinking to myself, as I did so, that the box might lie where it was until I had finished the job.

"I brought the piece to my shoulder, when, to my surprise, the bull, instead of running away, as I had expected, set his head, and uttering one of his terrible bellows, came rushing towards me. I fired, but the shot was a random one, and though it hit him in the snout, it did not in the least disable him. Instead of keeping him off, it only seemed to irritate him the more, and his fury was now at its height.

"I had no time to load again. He was within a few feet of me when I fired, and it was with difficulty that, by leaping to one side, I avoided his horns; but I did so, and he passed me with such violence that I felt the ground shake under his heavy tread.

"He wheeled immediately, and made at me a second time. I knew that if he once touched me I was gone. His horns were set, and his eyes glared with a terrible earnestness. I rushed towards the body of the buffalo that lay near, hoping that this might assist me in avoiding the onset. It did so, for, as he dashed forward over it, he became entangled among the limbs, and again charged without striking me. He turned, however, as quick as thought, and again rushed bellowing upon me. There was a tree near at

hand. I had noticed it before, but I could not tell whether I should have time to reach it. I was now somewhat nearer it, and, fearing that I might not be able to dodge the furious brute any longer upon the ground, I struck out for the tree.

"You may be sure I did my best at running. I heard the bull coming after, but before he could overtake me, I had got to the root of the tree. It was my intention, at first, only to take shelter behind the trunk; but when I had got there, I noticed that there were some low branches, and catching one of these I swung myself up among them.

"The bull passed under me with a rush – almost touching my feet as I hung by the branch – but I was soon safely lodged in a fork, and out of his reach.

"My next thought was to load my gun, and fire at him from my perch, and, with this intention, I commenced loading. I had no fear but that he would give me an opportunity, for he kept round the tree, and at times attacked the trunk, butting and goring it with his horns, and all the while bellowing furiously. The tree was a small one, and it shook so, that I began to fear it might break down. I therefore made all the haste I could to get in the load, expecting soon to put an end to his attacks.

"I succeeded at length in ramming down the bullet, and was just turning the gun to put on a cap, when I recollected that the cap-box was still lying on the ground where it had fallen! The sudden attack of the animal had prevented me from taking it up. My caps were all within that box, and my gun, loaded though it

was, was as useless in my hands as a bar of iron. To get at the caps would be quite impossible. I dared not descend from the tree. The infuriated bull still kept pacing under it, now going round and round, and occasionally stopping for a moment and looking angrily up.

"My situation was anything but a pleasant one. I began to fear that I might not be permitted to escape at all. The bull seemed to be most pertinacious in vengeance. I could have shot him in the back, or the neck, or where I liked, if I had only one cap. He was within three feet of the muzzle of my rifle; but what of that when I could not get the gun to go off? After a while I thought of making some tinder paper, and then trying to 'touch off' the piece with it, but a far better plan at that moment came into my head. While I was fumbling about my bullet-pouch to get at my flint and steel, of course my fingers came into contact with the lasso, which was still hanging around my shoulders. It was this that suggested my plan, which was no other than to *lasso the bull, and tie him to the tree*!

"I lost no time in carrying it into execution. I uncoiled the rope, and first made one end fast to the trunk. The other was the loop-end, and reeving it through the ring, I held it in my right hand while I leaned over and watched my opportunity. It was not long before a good one offered. The bull still continued his angry demonstrations below, and passed round and round. It was no new thing for me to fling a lasso, and at the first pitch I had the satisfaction of seeing the noose pass over the bison's head, and

settle in a proper position behind his horns. I then gave it a twitch, so as to tighten it, and after that I ran the rope over a branch, and thus getting 'a purchase' upon it, I pulled it with all my might.

"As soon as the bull felt the strange cravat around his neck, he began to plunge and 'rout' with violence, and at length ran furiously out from the tree. But he soon came to the end of his tether; and the quick jerk, which caused the tree itself to crack, brought him to his haunches, while the noose tightening on his throat was fast strangling him. But for the thick matted hair it would have done so, but this saved him, and he continued to sprawl and struggle at the end of the rope. The tree kept on cracking, and as I began to fear that it might give way and precipitate me to the ground, I thought it better to slip down. I ran direct to where I had dropped the caps; and, having got hold of the box, I soon had one upon my gun. I then stole cautiously back, and while the bison was hanging himself as fast as he could, I brought his struggles to a period by sending a bullet through his ribs.

"As it was quite night when I had finished the business, of course I could not stay to butcher the bulls. I knew that you would be wondering what kept me, so I cut out the tongues, and coming by the place where I had left the grouse, brought them along. I left a 'scare-wolf' over both the bulls, however, and I guess we'll find them all right in the morning."

Basil having finished the narration of his day's adventures, fresh fuel was heaped on the embers, and a huge fire was built

– one that would last until morning. This was necessary, as none of them had now either blankets or bedding. Basil himself and Norman were even in their shirt-sleeves, and of course their only chance for keeping warmth in their bodies would be to keep up a roaring fire all the night. This they did, and all four laying themselves close together, slept soundly enough.

CHAPTER X.
THREE CURIOUS TREES

Next morning they were awake at an early hour. There was still enough of the tongues and grouse left, along with some ribs of the antelope, to breakfast the party; and then all four set out to bring the flesh of Basil's buffaloes into camp. This they accomplished, after making several journeys. It was their intention to dry the meat over the fire, so that it might keep for future use. For this purpose the flesh was removed from the bones, and after being cut into thin slices and strips, was hung up on poles at some distance from the blaze. Nothing more could be done, but wait until it became sufficiently parched by the heat.

While this process was going on our voyageurs collected around the fire, and entered into a consultation about what was best to be done. At first they thought of going back to the Red River settlement, and obtaining another canoe, as well as a fresh stock of provisions and implements. But they all believed that getting back would be a toilsome and difficult matter. There was a large lake and several extensive marshes on the route, and these would have to be got round, making the journey a very long one indeed. It would take them days to perform it on foot, and nothing is more discouraging on a journey than to be forced by some accident to what is called “taking the back-track.”

All of them acknowledged this, but what else could they do?

It is true there was a post of the Hudson's Bay Company at the northern end of Lake Winnipeg. This post was called Norway House. How were they to reach that afoot? To walk around the borders of the lake would be a distance of more than four hundred miles. There would be numerous rivers to cross, as well as swamps and pathless forests to be threaded. Such a journey would occupy a month or more, and at Norway House they would still be as it were only at the beginning of the great journey on which they had set out. Moreover, Norway House lay entirely out of their way. Cumberland House – another trading-post upon the River Saskatchewan – was the next point where they had intended to rest themselves, after leaving the Red River settlements. To reach Cumberland House *afoot* would be equally difficult, as it, too, lay at the distance of hundreds of miles, with lakes, and rivers, and marshes, intervening. What, then, could they do?

"Let us *not* go back," cried François, ever ready with a bold advice: "let us make a boat, and keep on, say I."

"Ha! François," rejoined Basil, "it's easy to say 'make a boat;' how is that to be done, I pray?"

"Why, what's to hinder us to hew a log, and make a dug-out? We have still got the axe, and two hatchets left."

Norman asked what François meant by a dug-out. The phrase was new to him.

"A canoe," replied François, "hollowed out of a tree. They are sometimes called 'dug-outs' on the Mississippi, especially when they are roughly made. One of them, I think, would carry all four

of us well enough. Don't you think so, Luce?"

"Why, yes," answered the student; "a large one might: but I fear there are no trees about here of sufficient size. We are not among the great timber of the Mississippi bottom, you must remember."

"How large a tree would it require?" asked Norman, who knew but little of this kind of craft.

"Three feet in diameter, at least," replied Lucien; "and it should be of that thickness for a length of nearly twenty feet. A less one would not carry four of us."

"Then I am sure enough," responded Norman, "that we won't find such timber here. I have seen no tree of that size either yesterday, or while we were out this morning."

"Nor I," added Basil.

"I don't believe there's one," said Lucien.

"If we were in Louisiana," rejoined François, "I could find fifty canoe-trees by walking as many yards. Why I never saw such insignificant timber as this here."

"You'll see smaller timber than this Cousin Frank, before we reach the end of our voyage."

This remark was made by Norman, who knew that, as they proceeded northward, the trees would be found decreasing in size until they would appear like garden shrubbery.

"But come," continued he, "if we can't build a craft to carry us from *one* tree, perhaps we can do it out of *three*."

"With three!" echoed François. "I should like to see a canoe

made from three trees! Is it a raft you mean, Cousin Norman?"

"No," responded the other; "a canoe, and one that will serve us for the rest of our voyage."

All three – Basil, Lucien, and François – looked to their cousin for an explanation.

"You would rather not go back up the river?" he inquired, glancing from one to the other.

"We wish to go on – all of us," answered Basil, speaking for his brothers as well.

"Very well," assented the young fur-trader; "I think it is better as you wish it. Out of these trees I can build a boat that will carry us. It will take us some days to do it, and some time to find the timber, but I am tolerably certain it is to be found in these woods. To do the job properly I want three kinds; two of them I can see from where I sit; the third I expect will be got in the hills we saw this morning."

As Norman spoke he pointed to two trees that grew among many others not far from the spot. These trees were of very different kinds, as was easily told by their leaves and bark. The nearer and more conspicuous of them at once excited the curiosity of the three Southerners. Lucien recognised it from its botanical description. Even Basil and François, though they had never seen it, as it is not to be found in the hot clime of Louisiana, knew it from the accounts given of it by travellers. The tree was the celebrated "canoe-birch," or as Lucien named it, "paper-birch," celebrated as the tree out of whose bark those

beautiful canoes are made that carry thousands of Indians over the interior lakes and rivers of North America; out of whose bark whole tribes of these people fashion their bowls, their pails, and their baskets; with which they cover their tents, and from which they even make their soup-kettles and boiling-pots! This, then, was the canoe birch-tree, so much talked of, and so valuable to the poor Indians who inhabit the cold regions where it grows.

Our young Southerners contemplated the tree with feelings of interest and curiosity. They saw that it was about sixty feet high, and somewhat more than a foot in diameter. Its leaves were nearly cordate, or heart-shaped, and of a very dark-green colour; but that which rendered it most conspicuous among the other trees of the forest was the shining white or silver-coloured bark that covered its trunk, and its numerous slender branches. This bark is only white externally. When you have cut through the epidermis you find it of a reddish tinge, very thick, and capable of being divided into several layers. The wood of the tree makes excellent fuel, and is also often used for articles of furniture. It has a close, shining grain, and is strong enough for ordinary implements; but if exposed to the weather will decay rapidly.

The "canoe-birch" is not the only species of these trees found in North America. The genus *Betula* (so called from the Celtic word *batu*, which means birch) has at least half-a-dozen other known representatives in these parts. There is the "white birch," a worthless tree of some twenty feet in height, and less than six inches diameter. The bark of this species is useless, and its

wood, which is soft and white, is unfit even for fuel. It grows, however, in the poorest soil. Next there is a species called the "cherry-birch," so named from the resemblance of its bark to the common cherry-tree. It is also called "sweet birch," because its young twigs, when crushed, give out a pleasant aromatic odour. Sometimes the name of "black birch," is given to this species. It is a tree of fifty or sixty feet in height, and its wood is much used in cabinet-work, as it is close-grained, of a beautiful reddish colour, and susceptible of a high polish.

The information regarding the birches of America was given by Lucien to his brothers, not at that time, but shortly afterward, when the three were engaged in felling one of these trees. Just then other matters occupied them, and they had only glanced, first at the canoe-birch and then at the other tree which Norman had pointed out. The latter was of a different genus. It belonged to the order *Coniferæ*, or cone-bearing trees, as was evident from the cone-shaped fruits that hung upon its branches, as well as from its needle-like evergreen leaves.

The cone-bearing trees of America are divided by botanists into three great sub-orders – the *Pines*, the *Cypresses* and the *Yews*. Each of these includes several genera. By the "pine tribe" is meant all those trees known commonly by the names pine, spruce, fir, and larch: while the *Cupressinæ*, or cypress tribe, are the cypress proper, the cedars, the arbor-vitæ, and the junipers. The yew tribe has fewer genera or species; but the trees in America known as yews and hemlocks – of which there are

several varieties – belong to it.

The pines cannot be termed trees of the tropics, yet do they grow in southern and warm countries. In the Carolinas, tar and turpentine, products of the pine, are two staple articles of exportation; and even under the equator itself, the high mountains are covered with pine-forests. But the pine is more especially the tree of a northern *sylva*. As you approach the Arctic circle, it becomes the characteristic tree. Then it appears in extensive forests, lending their picturesque shelter to the snowy desolation of the earth. One species of pine is the very last tree that disappears as the traveller, in approaching the pole, takes his leave of the limits of vegetation. This species is the "white spruce" the very one which, along with the birch-tree, had been pointed out by Norman to his companions.

It was a tree not over thirty or forty feet high, with a trunk of less than a foot in thickness, and of a brownish colour. Its leaves or "needles" were about an inch in length, very slender and acute, and of a bluish green tint. The cones upon it, which at that season were young were of a pale green. When ripe, however, they become rusty-brown, and are nearly two inches in length.

What use Norman would make of this tree in building his canoe, neither Basil nor François knew. Lucien only guessed at it. François asked the question, by saying that he supposed the "timbers" were to come out of it.

"No," said Norman, "for that I want still another sort. If I can't find that sort, however, I can manage to do without it, but not

so well."

"What other sort?" demanded François.

"I want some cedar-wood," replied the other.

"Ah! that's for the timbers," said François; "I am sure of it. The cedar-wood is lighter than any other, and, I dare say, would answer admirably for ribs and other timbers."

"You are right this time, Frank – it is considered the best for that purpose."

"You think there are cedar-trees on the hills we saw this morning?" said François, addressing his Canadian cousin.

"I think so. I noticed something like them."

"And I, too, observed a dark foliage," said Lucien, "which looked like the cedar. If anywhere in this neighbourhood, we shall find them there. They usually grow upon rocky, sterile hills, such as those appear to be – that is their proper situation."

"The question," remarked Basil, "ought to be settled at once. We have made up our mind to the building of a canoe, and I think we should lose no time in getting ready the materials. Suppose we all set out for the hills."

"Agreed – agreed!" shouted the others with one voice; and then shouldering their guns, and taking the axe along, all four set out for the hills. On reaching these, the object of their search was at once discovered. The tops of all the hills – dry, barren ridges they were – were covered with a thick grove of the red cedar. The trees were easily distinguished by the numerous branches spreading horizontally, and thickly covered with short dark green

needles, giving them that sombre, shady appearance, that makes them the favourite haunt of many species of owls. Their beautiful reddish wood was well known to all the party, as it is to almost every one in the civilized world. Everybody who has seen or used a black-lead pencil must know what the wood of the red cedar is like – for it is in this the black-lead is usually incased. In all parts of America, where this tree grows in plenty, it is employed for posts and fence-rails, as it is one of the most durable woods in existence. It is a great favourite also for kindling fires, as it catches quickly, and blazes up in a few seconds, so as to ignite the heavier logs of other timbers, such as the oak and the pine.

"Now," said Norman, after examining a few of the cedar-trees, "we have here all that's wanted to make our canoe. We need lose no more time, but go to work at once."

"Very well," replied the three brothers, "we are ready to assist you, – tell us what to do."

"In the first place," said the other, "I think we had better change our camp to this spot, as I see all the different kinds of trees here, and much better ones than those near the river. There," continued he, pointing to a piece of moist ground in the valley, – "there are some splendid birches, and there beside them is plenty of the *épinette*" (so the voyageurs term the white spruce). "It will save us many journeys if we go back and bring our meat to this place at once."

To this they all of course agreed, and started back to their first camp. They soon returned with the meat and other things,

and having chosen a clean spot under a large-spreading cedar-tree, they kindled a new fire and made their camp by it – that is, they strung up the provisions, hung their horns and pouches upon the branches around, and rested their guns against the trees. They had no tent to pitch, but that is not necessary to constitute a camp. In the phraseology of the American hunter, wherever you kindle your fire or spend the night is a “camp.”

CHAPTER XI.
HOW TO BUILD A BARK CANOE

Norman expected that they would be able to finish the canoe in about a week. Of course, the sooner the better, and no time was lost in setting about it. The ribs or "timbers" were the first thing to be fashioned, and a number of straight branches of cedar were cut, out of which they were to be made. These branches were cleared of twigs, and rendered of an equal thickness at both ends. They were then flattened with the knife; and, by means of a little sweating in the ashes, were bent so as to bear some resemblance in shape to the wooden ox-yokes commonly used in America, or indeed to the letter U.

The ribs when thus bent were not all of the same width. On the contrary, those which were intended to be placed near the middle or gangway of the vessel, were about two feet across from side to side, while the space between the sides of the others was gradually less in each fresh pair, according as their position was to be near to the stem and stern. When the whole of them had been forced into the proper shape, they were placed, one inside the other after the manner of dishes, and then all were firmly lashed together, and left to dry. When the lashing should be removed, they would hold to the form thus given them, and would be ready for fastening to the kelson.

While Norman was occupied with the timbers the others were

not idle. Basil had cut down several of the largest and straightest birches, and Lucien employed himself in carefully removing the bark and cleansing it of nodules and other inequalities. The broad sheets were suspended by a smoke fire, so as completely to dry up the sap, and render it tough and elastic. François had his part to play, and that was to collect the resinous gum which was distilled in plenty from the trunks of the épinette or spruce-trees.

This gum is a species of pitch, and is one of the most necessary materials in the making of a bark canoe. It is used for "paying" the seams, as well as any cracks that may show themselves in the bark itself; and without it, or some similar substance, it would be difficult to make one of these little vessels water-tight. But that is not the only thing for which the épinette is valued in canoe-building; far from it. This tree produces another indispensable material; its long fibrous roots when split, form the twine-like threads by which the pieces of bark are sewed to each other and fastened to the timbers. These threads are as strong as the best cords of hemp, and are known among the Indians by the name of "watap."

In a country, therefore, where hemp and flax cannot be readily procured, the "watap" is of great value. You may say that deer are plenty, and that thongs of buckskin would serve the same purpose. This, however, is not the case. The buckskin would never do for such a use. The moment it becomes wet it is liable to stretch, so that the seams would open and the canoe get filled with water. The watap, wet or dry, does not yield, and has

therefore been found to be the best thing of all others for this purpose.

The only parts now wanted were the gunwale and the bottom. The former was easily obtained. Two long poles, each twenty feet in length, were bent somewhat like a pair of bows, and then placed with their convex sides towards each other, and firmly lashed together at the ends. This was the gunwale. The bottom was the most difficult part of all. For that a solid plank was required, and they had no saw. The axe and the hatchet, however, were called into requisition, and a log was soon hewn and thinned down to the proper dimensions. It was sharpened off at the ends, so as to run to a very acute angle, both at the stem and stern.

When the bottom was considered sufficiently polished, and modelled to the right shape, the most difficult part of the undertaking was supposed to be accomplished. A few long poles were cut and trimmed flat. These were to be laid longitudinally between the ribs and the bark, somewhat after the fashion of laths in the roofing of a house. Their use was to prevent the bark from splitting. The materials were now all obtained complete, and, with a few days' smoking and drying, would be ready for putting together.

While waiting for the timbers to dry, paddles were made, and Norman, with the help of the others, prepared what he jokingly called his “dock,” and also his “ship-yard.” This was neither more nor less than a long mound of earth – not unlike a new-made grave, only three times the length of one, or even longer. It was

flat upon the top, and graded with earth so as to be quite level and free from inequalities.

At length all the materials were considered quite ready for use, and Norman went to work to put them together.

His first operation was to untie the bundle of timbers, and separate them. They were found to have taken the exact form into which they had been bent, and the thongs being no longer necessary to keep them in place, were removed. The timbers themselves were next placed upon the bottom or kelson, those with the widest bottoms being nearer to "midships," while those with the narrower bend were set towards the narrower ends of the plank. Thus placed, they were all firmly lashed with strong cords of watap, by means of holes pierced in the bottom plank.

Fortunately Lucien happened to have a pocket-knife, in which there was a good awl or piercer, that enabled them to make these holes – else the matter would have been a much more difficult one, as an awl is one of the most essential tools in the construction of a bark canoe. Of course it took Norman a considerable time to set all the ribs in their proper places, and fasten them securely; but he was ably assisted by François, who waited upon him with much diligence, handing him now the awl, and then the watap, whenever he required them.

Norman's next operation was the laying of his kelson "in dock." The timbers being attached to it, it was lifted up on the earthen mound, where it reached quite from end to end. Half-a-dozen large heavy stones were then placed upon it, so that,

pressed down by these upon the even surface of the mould, it was rendered quite firm; and, moreover, was of such a height from the ground that the young shipwright could work upon it without too much bending and kneeling.

The gunwale, already prepared, was next placed so as to touch the ends of the ribs all round, and these ends were adjusted to it with great nicety, and firmly joined. Strong cross-pieces were fixed, which were designed, not only to keep the gunwale from spreading or contracting, but afterwards to serve as seats.

Of course the gunwale formed the complete mouth, or upper edge of the canoe. It was several feet longer than the bottom plank, and, when in place, projected beyond the ribs at both ends. From each end of the bottom plank, therefore, to the corresponding end of the gunwale, a straight piece of wood was stretched, and fastened. One of these pieces would form the stem or cutwater, while the other would become the stern of the craft. The long poles were next laid longitudinally upon the ribs outside, and lashed in their places; and this done, the skeleton was completed, ready for the bark.

The latter had been already cut to the proper dimensions and shape. It consisted of oblong pieces – each piece being a regular parallelogram, as it had been stripped from the tree. These were laid upon the ribs longitudinally, and then sewed to the edge of the bottom plank, and also to the gunwale. The bark itself was in such broad pieces that two of them were sufficient to cover half a side, so that but one seam was required lengthwise, in

addition to the fastenings at the top and bottom. Two lengths of the bark also reached cleverly from stem to stern, and thus required only one transverse seam on each side. There was an advantage in this arrangement, for where the birch-bark can only be obtained in small flakes, a great number of seams is a necessary consequence, and then it is extremely difficult to keep the canoe from leaking. Thanks to the fine birch-trees, that grew in abundance around, our boat-builders had procured the very best bark.

The canoe was now completed all but the "paying," and that would not take long to do. The gum of the épinette had to be boiled, and mixed with a little grease, so as to form a species of wax. For this the fat already obtained from the buffaloes was the very thing; and a small tin cup which Basil had saved from the wreck (it had been strung to his bullet-pouch), enabled them to melt the gum, and apply it hot. In less than an hour the thing was done. Every crack and awl-hole was payed, and the canoe was pronounced "water-tight," and, as François added, with a laugh, "seaworthy."

A small pond was near, at the bottom of the hill: François espied it.

"Come, boys," cried he, "a launch! a launch!"

This was agreed to by all. The great stones were taken out. Basil and Norman, going one to the stem the other to the stern, lifted the canoe from the "dock," and, raising it upon their shoulders, carried it down to the pond. The next moment it was

pushed into the water, where it floated like a cork. A loud cheer was given, in which even Marengo joined; and a salute was then fired – a full broadside – from the four guns. François, to complete the thing, seized one of the paddles, and leaping into the canoe, shot the little craft out upon the bosom of the pond, cheering all the while like one frantic.

After amusing himself for some minutes, he paddled back to the shore, when they all looked eagerly into the canoe, and perceived to their gratification that not as much as a drop of water had leaked during the "trip." Thanks and congratulations now greeted Norman from every side; and, taking their vessel from the water, the young voyageurs returned to their camp, to regale themselves with a grand dinner, which Lucien had cooked for the occasion.

CHAPTER XII
THE CHAIN OF LAKES

Our young voyageurs now prepared to resume their journey. While Norman was engaged in building his canoe, with his assistant, François, the others had not been idle. Basil was, of course, the hunter of the party; and, in addition to the small game, such as hares, geese, and grouse, he had killed three caribou, of the large variety known as "woodland caribou." These are a species of the reindeer of which I have more to say hereafter. Lucien had attended to the drying of their flesh; and there was enough of it still left, as our voyageurs believed, to supply their wants until they should reach Cumberland House, where they would, of course, procure a fresh stock of provisions. The skins of the caribou had also been scraped and dressed by Lucien – who understood the process well – and these, with the skin of the antelope, were sufficient to make a pair of hunting-shirts for Basil and Norman, who, it will be remembered, had lost theirs by cutting them up.

Next morning the canoe was launched upon the river – below the rapids – and the dried meat, with their other matters, snugly stowed in the stern. Then the young voyageurs got in, and, seating themselves in their places, seized hold of the paddles. The next moment the canoe shot out into the stream; and a triumphant cheer from the crew announced that they had recommenced

their journey. They found to their delight that the little vessel behaved admirably – shooting through the water like an arrow, and leaking not water enough, as François expressed it, "to drown a mosquito."

They had all taken their seats in the order which had been agreed upon for the day. Norman was "bowsman," and, of course, sat in the bow. This, among the regular Canadian voyageurs, is esteemed the post of honour, and the bowsman is usually styled "Captain" by the rest of the crew. It is also the post that requires the greatest amount of skill on the part of its occupant, particularly where there are rapids or shoals to be avoided. The post of "steersman" is also one of honour and importance; and both steersman and bowsman receive higher wages than the other voyageurs who pass under the name of "middlemen." The steersman sits in the stern, and that place was now occupied by Lucien, who had proved himself an excellent steersman. Basil and François were, of course, the "middlemen," and plied the paddles.

This was the arrangement made for the day; but although on other days the programme was to be changed, so as to relieve Basil and François, on all occasions when there were rapids or other difficulties to be encountered they were to return to this order. Norman, of course, understood canoe navigation better than his Southern cousins; and therefore, by universal assent, he was acknowledged "the Captain," and François always addressed him as such. Lucien's claim to the post of second honour was

admitted to be just, as he had proved himself capable of filling it to the satisfaction of all. Marengo had no post, but lay quietly upon the buffalo skin between Lucien's legs, and listened to the conversation without joining in it, or in any way interfering in the working of the vessel.

In a few hours our voyageurs had passed through the low marshy country that lies around the mouth of the Red River, and the white expanse of the great Lake Winnipeg opened before them, stretching northward far beyond the range of their vision. Norman knew the lake, having crossed it before, but its aspect somewhat disappointed the Southern travellers. Instead of a vast dark lake which they had expected to see, they looked upon a whitish muddy sheet, that presented but few attractive points to the eye, either in the hue of its water or the scenery of its shores.

These, so far as they could see them, were low, and apparently marshy; and this is, in fact, the character of the southern shores of Winnipeg. On its east and north, however, the country is of a different character. There the geological formation is what is termed *primitive*. The rocks consist of granite, sienite, gneiss, &c.; and, as is always the case where such rocks are found, the country is hilly and rugged. On the western shores a *secondary* formation exists. This is *stratified limestone*– the same as that which forms the bed of many of the great prairies of America; and, indeed, the Lake Winnipeg lies between this secondary formation and the primitive, which bounds it on the east. Along its western shores extends the flat limestone country, partly

wooded and partly prairie land, running from that point for hundreds of miles up to the very foot of the Rocky Mountains, where the primitive rocks again make their appearance in the rugged peaks of that stupendous chain.

Lake Winnipeg is nearly three hundred miles in length, but it is very narrow – being in its widest reach not over fifty miles, and in many places only fifteen miles from shore to shore. It trends nearly due north and south, leaning a little north-west and south-east, and receives many large rivers, as the Red, the Saskatchewan, and the Winnipeg. The waters of these are again carried out of it by other rivers that run from the lake, and empty into the Hudson's Bay. There is a belief among the hunters and voyageurs that this lake has its tides like the ocean. Such, however, is not the case. There is at times a rise and overflow of its waters, but it is not periodical, and is supposed to be occasioned by strong winds forcing the waters towards a particular shore.

Lake Winnipeg is remarkable, as being in the very centre of the North American continent, and may be called the centre of the *canoe navigation*. From this point it is possible to travel *by water* to Hudson's Bay on the north-east, to the Atlantic Ocean on the east, to the Gulf of Mexico on the south, to the Pacific on the west, and to the Polar Sea on the north and north-west. Considering that some of these distances are upwards of three thousand miles, it will be perceived that Lake Winnipeg holds a singular position upon the continent. All the routes

mentioned can be made without any great "portage," and even a choice of route is often to be had upon those different lines of communication.

These were points of information communicated by Norman as the canoe was paddled along the shore; for Norman, although troubling himself but little about the causes of things, possessed a good practical knowledge of things as they actually were. He was tolerably well acquainted with the routes, their portages, and distances. Some of them he had travelled over in company with his father, and of others he had heard the accounts given by the voyageurs, traders, and trappers. Norman knew that Lake Winnipeg was muddy – he did not care to inquire the cause. He knew that there was a hilly country on its eastern and a low level land on its western shores, but it never occurred to him to speculate on this geological difference.

It was the naturalist, Lucien, who threw out some hints on this part of the subject, and further added his opinion, that the lake came to be there in consequence of the wearing away of the rocks at the junction of the stratified with the primitive formation, thus creating an excavation in the surface, which in time became filled with water and formed the lake. This cause he also assigned for the existence of a remarkable "chain of lakes" that extends almost from the Arctic Sea to the frontiers of Canada. The most noted of these are Martin, Great Slave, Athabasca, Wollaston, Deer, Lake Winnipeg and the Lake of the Woods.

Lucien further informed his companions, that where primitive

rocks form the surface of a country, that surface will be found to exhibit great diversity of aspect. There will be numerous lakes and swamps, rugged steep hills with deep valleys between, short streams with many falls and rapids. These are the characteristics of a primitive surface. On the other hand, where secondary rocks prevail the surface is usually a series of plains, often high, dry, and treeless, as is the case upon the great American prairies.

Upon such topics did Lucien instruct his companions, as they paddled their canoe around the edge of the lake. They had turned the head of their little vessel westward – as it was their design to keep along the western border of the lake until they should reach the mouth of the Saskatchewan. They kept at a short distance from the shore, usually steering from point to point, and in this way making their route as direct as possible. It would have been still more direct had they struck out into the open lake, and kept up its middle; but this would have been a dangerous course to pursue.

There are often high winds upon Lake Winnipeg, that spring up suddenly; and at such times the waves, if not mountains high, at least arrive at the height of houses. Among such billows the little craft would have been in danger of being swamped, and our voyageurs of going to the bottom. They, therefore, wisely resolved not to risk such an accident, but to "hug the shore," though it made their voyage longer. Each night they would land at some convenient place, kindle their fire, cook their supper, and dry their canoe for the next day's journey.

According to this arrangement, a little before sunset of the first day they came to land and made their camp. The canoe was unloaded, carefully lifted out of the water, and then set bottom upward to drip and dry. A fire was kindled, some of the dry meat cooked, and all four sat down and began to eat, as only hungry travellers can.

CHAPTER XIII
WAPITI, WOLVES, AND WOLVERENE

The spot where our voyageurs had landed was at the bottom of a small bay. The country back from the lake was level and clear of timber. Here and there, nearer the shore, however, its surface was prettily interspersed with small clumps of willows, that formed little copse-like thickets of deep green. Beside one of these thickets, within a hundred yards of the beach, the fire had been kindled, on a spot of ground that commanded a view of the plain for miles back.

"Look yonder!" cried François, who had finished eating, and risen to his feet. "What are these, captain?" François pointed to some objects that appeared at a great distance off upon the plain.

The "captain" rose up, placed his hand so as to shade his eyes from the sun, and, after looking for a second or two in the direction indicated, replied to the other's question by simply saying —

"Wapiti."

"I'm no wiser than before I asked the question," said François. "Pray, enlighten me as to what a wapiti may be!"

"Why, red deer; or elk, if you like."

"Oh! elk – now I understand you. I thought they were elk, but

they're so far off I wasn't sure."

Lucien at this moment rose up, and looking through a small telescope, which he carried, confirmed the statement of the "captain," and pronounced it to be a herd of elk.

"Come, Luce," demanded François, "tell us what you know of the elk. It will pass the time. Norman says it's no use going after them out there in the open ground, as they'd shy off before one could get within shot. You see there is not a bush within half-a-mile of them."

"If we wait," interrupted Norman, "I should not wonder but we may have them among the bushes before long. They appear to be grazing this way. I warrant you, they'll come to the lake to drink before nightfall."

"Very well then: the philosopher can tell us all about them before that."

Lucien, thus appealed to, began: —

"There are few animals that have so many names as this. It is called in different districts, or by different authors, *elk*, *round-horned elk*, *American elk*, *stag*, *red deer*, *grey moose*, *le biche*, *wapiti* and *wewaskish*.

"You may ask, Why so many names? I shall tell you. It is called 'elk' because it was supposed by the early colonists to be the same as the elk of Europe. Its name of 'grey moose' is a hunter appellation, to distinguish it from the real moose, which the same hunters know as the 'black moose.' 'Round-horned elk' is also a hunter name. 'Wewaskish,' or 'waskesse,' is an Indian

name for the animal. 'Stag' comes from the European deer so called, because this species somewhat resembles the stag; and 'red deer' is a name used by the Hudson Bay traders. 'Le biche' is another synonyme of French authors.

"Of all these names I think that of 'wapiti,' which our cousin has given, the best. The names of 'elk,' 'stag,' and 'red deer,' lead to confusion, as there are other species to which they properly belong, all of which are entirely different from the wapiti. I believe that this last name is now used by the best-informed naturalists.

"In my opinion," continued Lucien, "the wapiti is the noblest of all the deer kind. It possesses the fine form of the European stag, while it is nearly a third larger and stronger. It has all the grace of limb and motion that belongs to the common deer, while its towering horns give it a most majestic and imposing appearance. Its colour during the summer is of a reddish brown, hence the name red deer; but, indeed, the reddish tint upon the wapiti is deeper and richer than that of its European cousin.

"The wapiti, like other deer, brings forth its fawns in the spring. They are usually a male and female, for two is the number it produces. The males only have horns; and they must be several years old before the antlers become full and branching. They fall every year, but not until February or March, and then the new ones grow out in a month or six weeks. During the summer the horns remain soft and tender to the touch. They are covered at this time with a soft membrane, that looks like greyish velvet,

and they are then said to be 'in the velvet.' There are nerves and blood-vessels running through this membrane, and a blow upon the horns at this season gives great pain to the animal. When the autumn arrives the velvet peels off, and they become as hard as bone.

"They would need to be, for this is the 'rutting' season, and the bucks fight furious battles with each other, clashing their horns together, as if they would break them to pieces. Very often a pair of bucks, while thus contending, 'lock' their antlers, and being unable to draw them apart, remain head to head, until both die with hunger, or fall a prey to the prowling wolves. This is true not only of the elk, but also of the reindeer, the moose, and many other species of deer. Hundreds of pairs of horns have been found thus 'locked,' and the solitary hunter has often surprised the deer in this unpleasant predicament.

"The wapiti utters a whistling sound, that can be heard far off, and often guides the hunter to the right spot. In the rutting season the bucks make other noises, which somewhat resemble the braying of an ass, and are equally disagreeable to listen to.

"The wapiti travel about in small herds, rarely exceeding fifty, but often of only six or seven. Where they are not much hunted they are easily approached, but otherwise they are shy enough. The bucks, when wounded and brought to bay, become dangerous assailants; much more so than those of the common deer. Hunters have sometimes escaped with difficulty from their horns and hoofs, with the latter of which they can inflict

very severe blows. They are hunted in the same way as other deer; but the Indians capture many of them in the water, when they discover them crossing lakes or rivers. They are excellent swimmers, and can make their way over the arm of a lake or across the widest river.

"They feed upon grass, and sometimes on the young shoots of willows and poplar trees. They are especially fond of a species of wild rose which grows in the countries they frequent.

"The wapiti at one time ranged over a large part of the continent of North America. Its range is now restricted by the spread of the settlements. It is still found in most of the Northern parts of the United States, but only in remote mountainous districts and even there it is a rare animal. In Canada it is more common; and it roams across the continent to the shores of the Pacific. It it not an animal of the tropical countries, as it is not found in Mexico proper. On the other hand, wapiti do not go farther north than about the fifty-seventh parallel of latitude, and then they are not in their favourite habitat, which is properly the temperate zone."

Lucien was interrupted by an exclamation from Basil, who stood up looking out upon the prairie. They all saw that he had been observing the wapiti.

"What is it?" cried they.

"Look yonder!" replied Basil, pointing in the direction of the herd. "Something disturbs them. Give me your glass, Luce."

Lucien handed the telescope to his brother, who, drawing it to

the proper focus, pointed it towards the deer. The rest watched them, with the naked eye. They could see that there was some trouble among the animals. There were only six in the herd, and even at the distance our voyageurs could tell that they were all bucks, for it was the season when the does secrete themselves in the woods and thickets to bring forth their young. They were running to and fro upon the prairie, and doubling about as if playing, or rather as if some creature was chasing them. With the naked eye, however, nothing could be seen upon the ground but the bucks themselves, and all the others looked to Basil, who held the glass, for an explanation of their odd manœuvres.

"There are wolves at them," said Basil, after regarding them for a second or two.

"That's odd," rejoined Norman. "Wolves don't often attack full-grown wapiti, except when wounded or crippled somehow. They must be precious hungry. What sort of wolves are they?"

To you, boy reader, this question may seem strange. You, perhaps, think that a wolf is a wolf, and there is but one kind. Such, however, is not the exact truth. In America there are two distinct species or wolves, and of these two species there are many varieties, which differ so much in colour and other respects, that some authors have classed them as so many distinct species instead of considering them mere varieties. Whether they may be species or not is still a question among naturalists; but certain it is that *two* well-defined species do exist, which differ in size, form, colour, and habits.

These are the *large* or *common wolf*, and the barking or prairie wolf. The first species is the American representative of the common wolf of Europe; and although an animal of similar nature and habits, it differs very much from the latter in form and appearance. It is, therefore, not the *same*, as hitherto supposed. This American wolf is found in greater or less numbers throughout the whole continent; but in the Northern regions it is very common, and is seen in at least five different varieties, known by the characteristic names of *black*, *pied*, *white*, *dusky*, and *grey* wolves. Of these the grey is the most numerous kind; but as I shall have occasion to speak of the large wolves hearafter, I shall say no more of them at present, but direct your attention to the second and very different species, the *prairie wolves*.

These are a full third smaller than the common kind. They are swifter, and go in larger packs. They bring forth their young in burrows on the open plain, and not among the woods, like the other species. They are the most cunning of American animals, not excepting their kindred the foxes. They cannot be trapped by any contrivance, but by singular manœuvres often themselves decoy the over-curious antelope to approach too near them. When a gun is fired upon the prairies they may be seen starting up on all sides, and running for the spot in hopes of coming in for a share of the game. Should an animal – deer, antelope, or buffalo – be wounded, and escape the hunter, it is not likely to escape them also. They will set after it, and run it down if *the wound has been a mortal one*.

On the other hand, if the wound has been only slight, and is not likely in the end to cripple the animal, the wolves will not stir from – the spot. This extraordinary sagacity often tells the hunter whether it is worth his while to follow the game he has shot at; but in any case he is likely to arrive late, if the wolves set out before him, as a dozen of them will devour the largest deer in a few minutes' time. The prairie wolves as well as the others follow the herds of buffaloes, and attack the gravid cows and calves when separated from the rest. Frequently they sustain a contest with the bulls, when the latter are old or wounded, but on such occasions many of them get killed before the old bull becomes their prey.

They resemble the common grey wolf in colour, but there are varieties in this respect, though not so great as among the larger species. Their voice is entirely different, and consists of three distinct barks, ending in a prolonged howl. Hence the specific and usual name "barking wolf." They are found only in the Western or prairie half of the continent, and thence west to the Pacific. Their Northern range is limited to the fifty-fifth parallel of latitude – but they are met with southward throughout Mexico, where they are common enough, and known by the name of "coyoté."

Their skins are an article of trade with the Hudson's Bay Company. The fur is of about the same quality with that of other wolves, and consists of long hairs, with a thick wool at the base. In commerce they are termed "cased wolves," because

their skins, on being removed, are not split open as with the large wolf-skins, but are stript off after the manner of rabbits, and then turned inside out, or "cased," as it is termed.

"Prairie wolves!" said Basil, in answer to the question put by his cousin.

"There must be something the matter with one of the bucks, then," remarked Norman, "or else there's a good big pack of the wolves, and they expect to tire one down. I believe they sometimes do try it that way."

"There appears to be a large pack," answered Basil, still looking through the glass; "fifty at least – See! they have separated one of the bucks from the herd – it's running this way!"

Basil's companions had noticed this as soon as himself, and all four now leaped to their guns. The wapiti was plainly coming towards them, and they could now distinguish the wolves following upon his heels, strung out over the prairie like a pack of hounds. When first started, the buck was a full half-mile distant, but in less than a minute's time he came breasting forward until the boys could see his sparkling eyes and the play of his proud flanks. He was a noble animal to look at. His horns were full grown, but still "in the velvet," and as he ran with his snout thrown forward, his antlers lay along both sides of his neck until their tips touched his shoulders.

He continued on in a direct line until he was within less than an hundred paces of the camp; but, perceiving the smoke of the fire, and the figures crouching around it, he swerved suddenly from

his course, and darted into the thicket of willows, where he was for the moment hidden from view. The wolves – fifty of them at least – had followed him up to this point; and as he entered the thicket several had been close upon his heels. The boys expected to see the wolves rush in after him – as there appeared to be no impediment to their doing so – but, to the astonishment of all, the latter came to a sudden halt, and then went sneaking back – some of them even running off as if terrified!

At first the hunters attributed this strange conduct to their own presence, and the smoke of the camp; but a moment's reflection convinced them that this could not be the reason of it, as they were all well acquainted with the nature of the prairie wolf, and had never witnessed a similar exhibition before.

They had no time to think of the wolves just then. The buck was the main attraction, and, calling to each other to surround the thicket, all four started in different directions. In a couple of minutes they had placed themselves at nearly equal distances around the copse, and stood watching eagerly for the reappearance of the wapiti.

The willows covered about an acre of ground, but they were tolerably think and full-leaved, and the buck could not be seen from any side. Wherever he was, he was evidently at a stand-still, for not a rustle could be heard among the leaves, nor were any of the tall stalks seen to move.

Marengo was now sent in. This would soon start him, and all four stood with guns cocked and ready. But before the dog had

made three lengths of himself into the thicket, a loud snort was heard, followed by a struggle and the stamping of hoofs, and the next moment the wapiti came crashing through the bushes. A shot was fired – it was the crack of Lucien's small rifle – but it had missed, for the buck was seen passing onward and outward. All ran round to the side he had taken, and had a full view of the animal as he bounded off. Instead of running free as before, he now leaped heavily forward, and what was their astonishment on seeing that he *carried another animal upon his back*!

The hunters could hardly believe their eyes, but there it was, sure enough, a brown shaggy mass, lying flat along the shoulders of the wapiti, and clutching it with large spreading claws. François cried out, "A panther!" and Basil at first believed it to be a bear, but it was hardly large enough for that. Norman, however, who had lived more in those parts where the animal is found, knew it at once to be the dreaded "wolverene." Its head could not be seen, as that was hid behind the shoulder of the wapiti, whose throat it was engaged in tearing. But its short legs and broad paws, its bushy tail and long shaggy hair, together with its round-arching back and dark-brown colour, were all familiar marks to the young fur-trader; and he at once pronounced it a "wolverene."

When first seen, both it and the wapiti were beyond the reach of their rifles; and the hunters, surprised by such an unexpected apparition, had suddenly halted. François and Basil were about to renew the pursuit, but were prevented by Norman,

who counselled them to remain where they were.

"They won't go far," said he; "let us watch them a bit. See! the buck takes the water!"

The wapiti, on leaving the willows, had run straight out in the first direction that offered, which happened to be in a line parallel with the edge of the lake. His eye, however, soon caught sight of the water, and, doubling suddenly round, he made directly towards it, evidently with the intention of plunging in. He had hopes, no doubt, that by this means he might rid himself of the terrible creature that was clinging to his shoulders, and tearing his throat to pieces.

A few bounds brought him to the shore. There was no beach at the spot. The bank – a limestone bluff – rose steeply from the water's edge to a height of eight feet, and the lake under it was several fathoms in depth. The buck did not hesitate, but sprang outward and downwards. A heavy plash followed, and for some seconds both wapiti and wolverene were lost under the water. They rose to the surface, just as the boys reached the bank, but they came up *separately*. The dip had proved a cooler to the fierce wolverene; and while the wapiti was seen to strike boldly out into the lake and swim off, the latter – evidently out of his element – kept plunging about clumsily, and struggling to get back to the shore.

Their position upon the cliff above gave the hunters an excellent opportunity with their rifles, and both Basil and Norman sent their bullets into the wolverene's back. François

also emptied his double-barrelled gun at the same object, and the shaggy brute sank dead to the bottom of the lake. Strange to say, not one of the party had thought of firing at the buck. This persecution by so many enemies had won for him their sympathy, and they would now have suffered him to go free, but the prospect of fresh venison for supper overcame their commiseration, and the moment the wolverene was despatched all set about securing the deer.

Their guns were reloaded, and, scattering along the shore, they prepared to await his return. But the buck, seeing there was nothing but death in his rear, swam on, keeping almost in a direct line out into the lake. It was evident to all that he could not swim across the lake, as its farther shore was not even visible. He must either return to where they were, or drown; and knowing this to be his only alternative, they stood still and watched his motions. When he had got about half-a-mile from the shore, to the surprise of all, he was seen to rise higher and higher above the surface, and then all at once stop, with half of his body clear out of the water! He had come upon a shoal, and, knowing the advantage of it, seemed determined to remain there.

Basil and Norman ran to the canoe, and in a few minutes the little craft was launched, and shooting through the water. The buck now saw that it was likely to be all up with him, and, instead of attempting to swim farther, he faced round, and set his antlers forward in a threatening attitude. But his pursuers did not give him the chance to make a rush. When within fifty yards or so,

Norman, who used the paddles, stopped and steadied the canoe, and the next moment the crack of Basil's rifle echoed over the lake, and the wapiti fell upon the water, where, after struggling a moment, he lay dead.

The canoe was paddled up, and his antlers being made fast to the stern, he was towed back to the shore, and carried into camp. What now surprised our voyageurs was, their finding that the wapiti had been wounded before encountering either the wolves, wolverene, or themselves. An arrow-head, with a short piece of the shaft, was sticking in one of his thighs. The Indians, then, had been after him, and very lately too, as the wound showed. It was not a mortal wound, had the arrow-head been removed; but of course, as it was, it would have proved his death in the long run. This explained why the wolves had assailed an animal, that otherwise, from his great size and strength, would have defied them.

The wolverene, moreover, rarely attacks game so large as the wapiti; but the latter had, no doubt, chanced upon the lair of his fierce enemy, who could not resist such a tempting opportunity of getting a meal. The wolves had seen the wolverene as they approached the thicket, and that accounted for their strange behaviour in the pursuit. These creatures are as great cowards as they are tyrants, and their dread of a wolverene is equal to that with which they themselves often inspire the wounded deer.

CHAPTER XIV.
A PAIR OF DEEP DIVERS

The wapiti was carefully skinned, and the skin spread out to dry. Since their mishap our voyageurs had been very short of clothing. The three skins of the woodland caribou had made only a pair of jackets, instead of full hunting-shirts, and even these were pinched fits. For beds and bed-clothes they had nothing but the hides of buffaloes, and these, although good as far as they went, were only enough for two. Lucien, the most delicate of the party, appropriated one, as the others insisted upon his so doing. François had the other.

As for Basil and Norman, they were forced each night to lie upon the naked earth, and but for the large fires which they kept blazing all the night, they would have suffered severely from cold. Indeed, they did suffer quite enough; for some of the nights were so cold, that it was impossible to sleep by the largest fire without one-half of their bodies feeling chilled. The usual practice with travellers in the West is to lie with their feet to the fire, while the head is at the greatest distance from it. This is considered the best mode, for so long as the feet are warm, the rest of the body will not suffer badly; but, on the contrary, if the feet are allowed to get cold, no matter what state the other parts be in, it is impossible to sleep with comfort.

Of course our young voyageurs followed the well-known

practice of the country, and lay with their feet to the fire in such a manner that, when all were placed, their bodies formed four radii of a circle, of which the fire was the centre. Marengo usually lay beside Basil, whom he looked upon as his proper master.

Notwithstanding a bed of grass and leaves which they each night spread for themselves, they were sadly in want of blankets, and therefore the skin of the wapiti, which was a very fine one, would be a welcome addition to their stock of bedding. They resolved, therefore, to remain one day where they had killed it, so that the skin might be dried and receive a partial dressing. Moreover, they intended to "jerk" some of the meat – although elk-venison is not considered very palatable where other meat can be had. It is without juice, and resembles dry short-grained beef more than venison. For this reason it is looked upon by both Indians and white hunters as inferior to buffalo, moose, caribou, or even the common deer. One peculiarity of the flesh of this animal is, that the fat becomes hard the moment it is taken off the fire. It freezes upon the lips like suet, and clings around the teeth of a person eating it, which is not the case with that of other species of deer.

The skin of the wapiti, however, is held in high esteem among the Indians. It is thinner than that of the moose, but makes a much better article of leather. When dressed in the Indian fashion – that is to say, soaked in a lather composed of the brains and fat of the animal itself, and then washed, dried, scraped, and smoked – it becomes as soft and pliable as a kid-glove, and will

wash and dry without stiffening like chamois leather. That is a great advantage which it has, in the eyes of the Indians, over the skins of other species of deer, as the moose and caribou – for the leather made from these, after a wetting, becomes harsh and rigid and requires a great deal of rubbing to render it soft again.

Lucien knew how to dress the elk-hide, and could make leather out of it as well as any Indian squaw in the country. But travelling as they were, there was not a good opportunity for that; so they were content to give it such a dressing as the circumstances might allow. It was spread out on a frame of willow-poles, and set up in front of the fire, to be scraped at intervals and cleared of the fatty matter, as well as the numerous parasites that at this season adhere to the skins of the wapiti.

While Lucien was framing the skin, Basil and Norman occupied themselves in cutting the choice pieces of the meat into thin slices and hanging them up before the fire. This job being finished, all sat down to watch Lucien currying his hide.

"Ho, boys!" cried François, starting up as if something had occurred to him; "what about the wolverene? It's a splendid skin – why not get it too?"

"True enough," replied Norman, "we had forgotten that. But the beast's gone to the bottom – how can we get at him?"

"Why, fish him up, to be sure," said François. "Let's splice one of these willow-poles to my ram rod, and I'll screw it into him, and draw him to the surface in a jiffy. Come!"

"We must get the canoe round, then," said Norman. "The

bank's too steep for us to reach him without it."

"Of course," assented François, at the same time going towards the willows; "get you the canoe into the water, while I cut the sapling."

"Stay!" cried Basil, "I'll show you a shorter method. Marengo!"

As Basil said this, he rose to his feet, and walked down to the bluff where they had shot the wolverene. All of them followed him as well as Marengo, who bounded triumphantly from side to side, knowing he was wanted for some important enterprise.

"Do you expect the dog to fetch him out?" inquired Norman.

"No," replied Basil; "only to help."

"How?"

"Wait a moment – you shall see."

Basil flung down his 'coon-skin cap, and stripped off his caribou jacket, then his striped cotton shirt, then his under-shirt of fawn skin, and, lastly, his trousers, leggings, and mocassins. He was now as naked as Adam.

"I'll show you, cousin," said he, addressing himself to Norman, "how we take the water down there on the Mississippi."

So saying, he stepped forward to the edge of the bluff; and having carefully noted the spot where the wolverene had gone down, turned to the dog, and simply said, —

"Ho! Marengo! *Chez moi*!"

The dog answered with a whimper, and a look of intelligence which showed that he understood his master's wish.

Basil again pointed to the lake, raised his arms over his head, placing his palms close together, launched himself out into the air, and shot down head-foremost into the water.

Marengo, uttering a loud bay, sprang after so quickly that the plunges were almost simultaneous, and both master and dog were for some time hidden from view. The latter rose first, but it was a long time before Basil came to the surface – so long that Norman and the others were beginning to feel uneasy, and to regard the water with some anxiety. At length, however, a spot was seen to bubble, several yards from where he had gone down, and the black head of Basil appeared above the surface. It was seen that he held something in his teeth, and was pushing a heavy body before him, which they saw was the wolverene.

Marengo, who swam near, now seized hold of the object, and pulled it away from his master, who, calling to the dog to follow, struck out towards a point where the bank was low and shelving. In a few minutes Basil reached a landing-place, and shortly after Marengo arrived towing the wolverene, which was speedily pulled out upon the bank, and carried, or rather dragged, by Norman and François to the camp. Lucien brought Basil's clothes, and all four once more assembled around the blazing fire.

There is not a more hideous-looking animal in America than the wolverene. His thick body and short stout legs, his shaggy coat and bushy tail, but, above all, his long curving claws and dog-like jaws, gave him a formidable appearance. His gait is low

and skulking, and his look bold and vicious. He walks somewhat like a bear, and his tracks are often mistaken for those of that animal. Indians and hunters, however, know the difference well. His hind feet are plantigrade, that is, they rest upon the ground from heel to toe; and his back curves like the segment of a circle. He is fierce and extremely voracious – quite as much so as the "glutton," of which he is the American representative.

No animal is more destructive to the small game, and he will also attack and devour the larger kinds when he can get hold of them; but as he is somewhat slow, he can only seize most of them by stratagem. It is a common belief that he lies in wait upon trees and rocks to seize the deer passing beneath. It has been also asserted that he places moss, such as these animals feed upon under his perch, in order to entice them within reach; and it has been still further asserted, that the arctic foxes assist him in his plans, by hunting the deer towards the spot where he lies in wait, thus acting as his jackals.

These assertions have been made more particularly about his European cousin, the "glutton," about whom other stories are told equally strange – one of them, that he eats until scarce able to walk, and then draws his body through a narrow space between two trees, in order to relieve himself and get ready for a fresh meal. Buffon and others have given credence to these tales upon the authority of one "Olaus Magnus," whose name, from the circumstance, might be translated "great fibber." There is no doubt, however, that the glutton is one of the most sagacious of

animals, and so, too, is the wolverene. The latter gives proof of this by many of his habits; one in particular fully illustrates his cunning. It is this.

The marten trappers of the Hudson Bay territory set their traps in the snow, often extending over a line of fifty miles. These traps are constructed out of pieces of wood found near the spot, and are baited with the heads of partridges, or pieces of venison, of which the marten is very fond. As soon as the marten seizes the bait, a trigger is touched, and a heavy piece of wood falling upon the animal, crushes or holds it fast. Now the wolverene *enters the trap from behind*, tears the back out of it before touching the bait, and thus avoids the falling log! Moreover, he will follow the tracks of the trapper from one to another, until he has destroyed the whole line.

Should a marten happen to have been before him, and got caught in the trap, he rarely ever eats it, as he is not fond of its flesh. But he is not satisfied to leave it as he finds it. He usually digs it from under the log, tears it to pieces, and then buries it under the snow. The foxes, who are well aware of this habit, and who themselves greedily eat the marten, are frequently seen following him upon such excursions. They are not strong enough to take the log from off the trapped animal, but from their keen scent can soon find it where the other has buried it in the snow. In this way, instead of their being providers for the wolverene, the reverse is the true story. Notwithstanding, the wolverene will eat *them* too, whenever he can get his claws upon them; but as

they are much swifter than he, this seldom happens.

The foxes, however, are themselves taken in traps, or more commonly shot by guns set for the purpose, with the bait attached by a string to the trigger. Often the wolverene, finding the foxes dead or wounded, makes a meal of them before the hunter comes along to examine his traps and guns. The wolverene kills many of the foxes while young, and sometimes on finding their burrow, widens it with his strong claws, and eats the whole family in their nests. Even young wolves sometimes become his prey. He lives, in fact, on very bad terms with both foxes and wolves, and often robs the latter of a fat deer which they may have just killed, and are preparing to dine upon. The beaver, however, is his favourite food, and but that these creatures can escape him by taking to the water – in which element he is not at all at home – he would soon exterminate their whole race. His great strength and acute scent enable him to overcome almost every wild creature of the forest or prairie. He is even said to be a full match for either the panther or the black bear.

The wolverene lives in clefts of rock, or in hollow trees, where such are to be found; but he is equally an inhabitant of the forest and the prairie. He is found in fertile districts, as well as in the most remote deserts. His range is extensive, but he is properly a denizen of the cold and snowy regions. In the southern parts of the United States he is no longer known, though it is certain that he once lived there when those countries were inhabited by the beaver. North of latitude 40° he ranges perhaps to the pole itself,

as traces of him have been found as far as man has yet penetrated.

He is a solitary creature, and, like most predatory animals, a nocturnal prowler. The female brings forth two, sometimes three and four, at a birth. The cubs are of a cream colour, and only when full grown acquire that dark brown hue, which in the extreme of winter often passes into black. The fur is not unlike that of the bear but is shorter-haired, and of less value than a bear-skin. Notwithstanding, it is an article of trade with the Hudson's Bay Company, who procure many thousands of the skins annually.

The Canadian voyageurs call the wolverene “carcajou;” while among the Orkney and Scotch servants of the Hudson's Bay Company he is oftener known as the “quickhatch.” It is supposed that both, these names are corruptions of the Cree word *okee-coo-haw-gew* (the name of the wolverene among the Indians of that tribe). Many words from the same language have been adopted by both voyageurs and traders.

Those points in the natural history of the wolverene, that might be called *scientific*, were imparted by Lucien, while Norman furnished the information about its habits. Norman knew the animal as one of the most common in the “trade”; and in addition to what we have recorded, also related many adventures and stories current among the voyageurs, in which this creature figures in quite as fanciful a manner as he does in the works either of Olaus Magnus, or Count de Buffon.

CHAPTER XV.
A GRAND SUNDAY DINNER

After remaining a day at their first camp on the lake, our voyageurs continued their journey. Their course lay a little to the west of north, as the edge of the lake trended in that direction. Their usual plan, as already stated, was to keep out in the lake far enough to shun the numerous indentations of the shore, yet not so far as to endanger their little craft when the wind was high. At night they always landed, either upon some point or on an island. Sometimes the wind blew “dead ahead,” and then their day's journey would be only a few miles. When the wind was favourable they made good progress, using the skin of the wapiti for a sail. On one of these days they reckoned a distance of over forty miles from camp to camp.

It was their custom always to lie by on Sunday, for our young voyageurs were Christians. They had done so on their former expedition across the Southern prairies, and they had found the practice to their advantage in a physical as well as a moral sense. They required the rest thus obtained; besides, a general cleaning up is necessary, at least, once every week. Sunday was also a day of feasting with them. They had more time to devote to culinary operations, and the *cuisine* of that day was always the most varied of the week. Any extra delicacy obtained by the rifle on previous days, was usually reserved for the Sunday's dinner.

On the first Sunday after entering Lake Winnipeg the "camp" chanced to be upon an island. It was a small island, of only a few acres in extent. It lay near the shore, and was well wooded over its whole surface with trees of many different kinds. Indeed, islands in a large lake usually have a great variety of trees, as the seeds of all those sorts that grow around the shores are carried thither by the waves, or in the crops of the numerous birds that flit over its waters. But as the island in question lay in a lake, whose shores exhibited such a varied geology, it was natural the vegetation of the island itself should be varied. And, in truth, it was so.

Among the low bushes and shrubs there were rose and wild raspberry; there were apple and plum trees, and whole thickets of the "Pembina." There is, in fact, no part of the world where a greater variety of wild fruit has been found indigenous than upon the banks of the Red River of the North, and this variety extended to the little island where our voyageurs had encamped.

The camp had been placed under a beautiful tree – the tacamahac, or balsam poplar. This is one of the finest trees of America, and one of those that extend farthest north into the cold countries. In favourable situations it attains a height of one hundred and fifty feet, with a proportionate thickness of trunk; but it is oftener only fifty or eighty feet high. Its leaves are oval, and, when young, of a rich yellowish colour, which changes to a bright green. The buds are very large, yellow, and covered with a varnish, which exhales a delightful fragrance, and gives to the tree its specific name.

It was near sunset on the afternoon of Saturday, the travellers had just finished their repast, and were reclining around a fire of red cedar, whose delicate smoke curled up among the pale green leaves of the poplars. The fragrant smell of the burning wood, mixed with the aromatic odour of the balsam-tree, filled the air with a sweet perfume, and, almost without knowing why, our voyageurs felt a sense of pleasure stealing over them. The woods of the little island were not without their voices.

The scream of the jay was heard, and his bright azure wing appeared now and then among the foliage. The scarlet plumage of the cardinal grosbeak flashed under the beams of the setting sun; and the trumpet-note of the ivory-billed woodpecker was heard near the centre of the island. An osprey was circling in the air, with his eye bent on the water below, watching for his finny prey; and a pair of bald eagles were winging their way towards the adjacent mainland. Half-a-dozen turkey vultures were wheeling above the beach, where some object, fish or carrion, had been thrown up by the waves.

For some time the party remained silent, each contemplating the scene with feelings of pleasure. François, as usual, first broke the silence.

"I say, cook, what's for dinner to-morrow?"

It was to Lucien this speech was addressed. He was regarded as the *maitre de cuisine*.

"Roast or boiled – which would you prefer?" asked the cook, with a significant smile.

"Ha! ha! ha!" laughed François; "boiled, indeed! a pretty boil we could have in a tin cup, holding less than a pint. I wish we *could* have a boiled joint and a bowl of soup. I'd give something for it. I'm precious tired of this everlasting dry roast."

"You shall have both," rejoined Lucien, "for to-morrow's dinner. I promise you both the soup and the joint."

Again François laughed incredulously.

"Do you mean to make soup in your shoe, Luce?"

"No; but I shall make it in this."

And Lucien held up a vessel somewhat like a water-pail, which the day before he had himself made out of birch-bark.

"Well," replied François, "I know you have got a vessel that holds water, but cold water ain't soup; and if you can boil water in that vessel, I'll believe you to be a conjuror. I know you can do some curious things with your chemical mixtures; but that you can't do, I'm sure. Why, man, the bottom would be burned out of your bucket before the water got blood-warm. Soup, indeed!"

"Never mind, Frank, you shall see. You're only like the rest of mankind – incredulous about everything they can't comprehend. If you'll take your hook and line, and catch some fish, I promise to give you a dinner to-morrow, with all the regular courses – soup, fish, boiled, roast, and dessert, too! I'm satisfied I can do all that."

"*Parbleu*! brother, you should have been cook to Lucullus. Well, I'll catch the fish for you."

So saying, François took a fish-hook and line out of his pouch,

and fixing a large grasshopper upon the hook, stepped forward to the edge of the water, and cast it in. The float was soon seen to bob and then sink, and François jerked his hook ashore with a small and very pretty fish upon it of a silver hue, with which the lake and the waters running into it abound. Lucien told him it was a fish of the genus *Hyodon*. He also advised him to bait with a worm, and let his bait sink to the bottom, and he might catch a sturgeon, which would be a larger fish.

"How do you know there are sturgeon in the lake?" inquired François.

"I am pretty sure of that," answered the naturalist; "the sturgeon is found all round the world in the northern temperate zone – both in its seas and fresh waters; although, when you go farther south into the warmer climate, no sturgeons exist. I am sure there are some here, perhaps more than one species. Sink your bait for the sturgeon is a toothless fish, and feeds upon soft substances at the bottom."

François followed the advice of his brother, and in a few minutes he had a "nibble," and drew up and landed a very large fish, full three feet in length. Lucien at once pronounced it a sturgeon, but of a species he had not before seen. It was the *Acipenser carbonarius*, a curious sort of fish found in these waters. It did not look like a fish that would be pleasant eating; therefore François again took to bobbing for the silver fish which, though small, he knew to be excellent when broiled.

"Come," said Basil, "I must furnish my quota to this famous

dinner that is to be. Let me see what there is on the island in the way of game;" and shouldering his rifle, he walked off among the trees.

"And I," said Norman, "am not going to eat the produce of other people's labour without contributing my share."

So the young trader took up his gun and went off in a different direction.

"Good!" exclaimed Lucien, "we are likely to have plenty of meat for the dinner. I must see about the vegetables;" and taking with him his new-made vessel, Lucien sauntered off along the shore of the islet. François alone remained by the camp and continued his fishing. Let us follow the plant-hunter, and learn a lesson of practical botany.

Lucien had not gone far, when he came to what appeared to be a mere sedge growing in the water. The stalks or culms of this sedge were full eight feet high, with smooth leaves, an inch broad, nearly a yard in length, and of a light green colour. At the top of each stalk was a large panicle of seeds, somewhat resembling a head of oats. The plant itself was the famous wild rice so much prized by the Indians as an article of food, and also the favourite of many wild birds especially the reed-bird or rice-bunting. The grain of the zizania was not yet ripe, but the ears were tolerably well filled, and Lucien saw that it would do for his purpose. He therefore waded in, and stripped off into his vessel as much as he wanted.

"I am safe for rice-soup, at all events," soliloquised he, "but

I think I can do still better;" and he continued on around the shore, and shortly after struck into some heavy timber that grew in a damp, rich soil. He had walked about an hundred yards farther, when he was seen to stoop and examine some object on the ground.

"It ought to be found here," he muttered to himself; "this is the very soil for it – yes, here we have it!"

The object over which he was stooping was a plant, but its leaves appeared shrivelled, or rather quite withered away. The upper part of a bulbous root, however, was just visible above the surface. It was a bulb of the wild leek. The leaves, when young, are about six inches in length, of a flat shape and often three inches broad; but, strange to say, they shrivel or die off very early in the season – even before the plant flowers, and then it is difficult to find the bulb.

Lucien, however, had sharp eyes for such things; and in a short while he had rooted out several bulbs as large as pigeons' eggs, and deposited them in his birchen vessel. He now turned to go back to camp, satisfied with what he had obtained. He had the rice to give consistency to his soup, and the leek roots to flavour it with. That would be enough.

As he was walking over a piece of boggy ground his eye was attracted to a singular plant, whose tall stem rose high above the grass. It was full eight feet in height, and at its top there was an umbel of conspicuous white flowers. Its leaves were large, lobed, and toothed, and the stem itself was over an inch in diameter,

with furrows running longitudinally. Lucien had never seen the plant before, although he had often heard accounts of it, and he at once recognised it from its botanical description. It was the celebrated "cow parsnip." Its stem was jointed and hollow, and Lucien had heard that the Indians called it in their language "flute stem," as they often used it to make their rude musical instruments from, and also a sort of whistle or "call," by which they were enabled to imitate and decoy several kinds of deer. But there was another use to which the plant was put, of which the naturalist was not aware. Norman who had been wandering about, came up at this moment, and seeing Lucien standing by the plant, uttered a joyful "Hulloh!"

"Well," inquired Lucien, "what pleases you, coz?"

"Why, the flute-stem, of course. You talked of making a soup. It will help you, I fancy."

"How?" demanded Lucien.

"Why, the young stems are good eating, and the roots, if you will; but the young shoots are better. Both Indians and voyageurs eat them in soup, and are fond of them. It's a famous thing, I assure you."

"Let us gather some, then," said Lucien; and the cousins commenced cutting off such stems as were still young and tender. As soon as they had obtained enough, they took their way back to the camp. Basil had already arrived with a fine *prairie hen* which he had shot, and Sandy had brought back a squirrel; so that, with François's fish, of which a sufficient number had been caught,

Lucien was likely to be able to keep his promise about the dinner.

François, however, could not yet comprehend how the soup was to be boiled in a wooden pot; and, indeed, Basil was unable to guess. Norman, however, knew well enough, for he had travelled through the country of the Assinoboil Indians, who take their name from this very thing. He had also witnessed the operation performed by Crees, Chippewas, and even voyageurs, where metal or earthen pots could not be obtained.

On the next day the mystery was cleared up to Basil and François. Lucien first collected a number of stones – about as large as paving-stones. He chose such as were hard and smooth. These he flung into the cinders, where they soon became red-hot. The water and meat were now put into the bark pot, and then one stone after another, – each being taken out as it got cooled, – until the water came to a fierce boil. The rice and other ingredients were added at the proper time, and in a short while an excellent soup was made. So much, then, for the soup, and the boiled dishes with vegetables. The roast, of course, was easily made ready upon green-wood spits, and the "game" was cooked in a similar way. The fish were broiled upon the red cinders, and eaten, as is usual, after the soup. There were no puddings or pies, though, no doubt, Lucien could have made such had they been wanted.

In their place there was an excellent service of fruit. There were strawberries and raspberries, one sort of which found wild in this region is of a most delicious flavour. There were

gooseberries and currants; but the most delicious fruit, and that which François liked best, was a small berry of a dark blue colour, not unlike the huckleberry, but much sweeter and of higher flavour. It grows on a low bush or shrub with ovate leaves; and this bush when it blossoms is so covered with beautiful white flowers, that neither leaves nor branches can be seen. There are no less than four varieties of it known, two of which attain to the height of twenty feet or more. The French Canadians call it "le poire," but in most parts of America it is known as the "service-berry," although several other names are given to it in different districts. Lucien informed his companions, while they were crushing its sweet purplish fruit between their teeth, that its botanical name is *Amelanchier*.

"Now," remarked François, "if we only had a cup of coffee and a glass of wine, we might say that we had dined in fashionable style."

"I think," replied Lucien, "we are better without the wine, and as for the other I cannot give you that, but I fancy I can provide you with a cup of tea if you only allow me a little time."

"Tea!" screamed François; "why, there's not a leaf of tea nearer than China; and for the sugar, not a grain within hundreds of miles!"

"Come, Frank," said Lucien, "nature has not been so ungenerous here, even in such luxuries as tea and sugar. Look yonder! You see those large trees with the dark-coloured trunks. What are they?"

"Sugar-maples," replied François.

"Well," said Lucien, "I think even at this late season we might contrive to extract sap enough from them to sweeten a cup of tea. You may try, while I go in search of the tea-plant."

"Upon my word, Luce, you are equal to a wholesale grocery. Very well. Come, Basil, we'll tap the maples; let the captain go with Luce."

The boys, separating into pairs, walked off, in different directions. Lucien and his companion soon lighted upon the object of their search in the same wet bottom where they had procured the *Heracleum*. It was a branching shrub, not over two feet in height, with small leaves of a deep green colour above, but whitish and woolly underneath. It is a plant well known throughout most of the Hudson's Bay territory by the name of "Labrador tea-plant;" and is so called because the Canadian voyageurs, and other travellers through these northern districts, often drink it as tea. It is one of the *Ericaceæ*, or heath tribe, of the genus *Ledum*– though it is not a true heath, as, strange to say, no true heath is found upon the continent of America.

There are two kinds of it known, – the "narrow-leafed" and "broad-leafed" and the former makes the best tea. But the pretty white flowers of the plant are better for the purpose than the leaves of either variety; and these it was that were now gathered by Lucien and Norman. They require to be dried before the decoction is made; but this can be done in a short time over a fire; and so in a short time it was done, Norman having parched

them upon heated stones.

Meanwhile Basil and François had obtained the sugar-water, and Lucien having washed his soup-kettle clean, and once more made his boiling stones red-hot, prepared the beverage; and then it was served out in the tin cup, and all partook of it. Norman had drunk the Labrador tea before, and was rather fond of it, but his Southern cousins did not much relish it. Its peculiar flavour, which somewhat resembles rhubarb, was not at all to the liking of François. All, however, admitted that it produced a cheering effect upon their spirits; and, after drinking it, they felt in that peculiarly happy state of mind which one experiences after a cup of the real “Bohea.”

CHAPTER XVI.
THE MARMOTS OF AMERICA

From such a luxurious dinner you may suppose that our young voyageurs lived in prime style. But it was not always so. They had their fasts as well as feasts. Sometimes for days they had nothing to eat but the jerked deer-meat. No bread – no beer – no coffee, nothing but water – dry venison and water. Of course, this is food enough for a hungry man; but it can hardly be called luxurious living. Now and then a wild duck, or a goose, or perhaps a young swan, was shot; and this change in their diet was very agreeable. Fish were caught only upon occasions, for often these capricious creatures refused François' bait, however temptingly offered.

After three weeks' coasting the Lake, they reached the Saskatchewan, and turning up that stream, now travelled in a due westerly direction. At the Grand Rapids, near the mouth of this river, they were obliged to make a portage of no less than three miles, but the magnificent view of these “Rapids” fully repaid them for the toil they underwent in passing them.

The Saskatchewan is one of the largest rivers in America, being full 1600 miles in length, from its source in the Rocky Mountains to its *débouchure*, under the name of the “Nelson River,” in Hudson's Bay. For some distance above Lake Winnipeg, the country upon its banks is well wooded. Farther up, the river runs through dry sandy prairies that extend westward

to the foot-hills of the Rocky Mountains. Many of these prairies may be properly called “deserts.” They contain lakes as salt as the ocean itself, and vast tracts – hundreds of square miles in extent – where not a drop of water is to be met with. But the route of our voyageurs did not lie over these prairies. It was their intention, after reaching Cumberland House, to turn again in a northerly direction.

One evening, when within two days' journey of the Fort, they had encamped upon the bank of the Saskatchewan. They had chosen a beautiful spot for their camp, where the country, swelling into rounded hills, was prettily interspersed with bushy copses of *Amelanchiers*, and *Rosa blanda* whose pale red flowers were conspicuous among the green leaves, and filled the air with a sweet fragrance, that was wafted to our voyageurs upon the sunny breeze. The ground was covered with a grassy sward enamelled by the pink flowers of the *Cleome*, and the deeper red blossoms of the beautiful wind-flower.

Upon that day our travellers had not succeeded in killing any game, and their dinner was likely to consist of nothing better than dry venison scorched over the coals. As they had been travelling all the morning against a sharp current, and, of course, had taken turn about at the paddles, they all felt fatigued, and none of them was inclined to go in search of game. They had flung themselves down around the fire, and were waiting until the venison should be broiled for dinner.

The camp had been placed at the foot of a tolerably steep

hill, that rose near the banks of the river. There was another and higher hill facing it, the whole front of which could be seen by our travellers as they sat around their fire. While glancing their eyes along its declivity, they noticed a number of small protuberances or mounds standing within a few feet of each other. Each of them was about a foot in height, and of the form of a truncated cone – that is, a cone with its top cut off, or beaten down.

"What are they?" inquired François.

"I fancy," answered Lucien, "they are marmot-houses."

"They are," affirmed Norman; "there are plenty of them in this country."

"Oh! marmots!" said François. "Prairie-dogs, you mean? – the same we met with on the Southern prairies?"

"I think not," replied Norman: "I think the prairie-dogs are a different sort. Are they not, cousin Luce?"

"Yes, yes," answered the naturalist; "these must be a different species. There are too few of them to be the houses of prairie-dogs. The 'dogs' live in large settlements, many hundreds of them in one place; besides, their domes are somewhat different in appearance from these. The mounds of the prairie-dogs have a hole in the top or on one side. These, you see, have not. The hole is in the ground beside them, and the hill is in front, made by the earth taken out of the burrow, just as you have seen it at the entrance of a rat's hole. They are marmots, I have no doubt, but of a different species from the prairie-dog marmots."

"Are there not many kinds of marmots in America? I have

heard so," said François.

This question was of course addressed to Lucien.

"Yes," answered he. "The *fauna* of North America is peculiarly rich in species of these singular animals. There are thirteen kinds of them, well known to naturalists; and there are even some varieties in these thirteen kinds that might almost be considered distinct species. I have no doubt, moreover, there are yet other species which have not been described. Perhaps, altogether, there are not less than twenty different kinds of marmots in North America. As only one or two species are found in the settled territories of the United States, it was supposed, until lately, that there were no others. Latterly the naturalists of North America have been very active in their researches, and no genus of animals has rewarded them so well as the marmots – unless, perhaps, it may be the squirrels. Almost every year a new species of one or the other of these has been found – mostly inhabiting the vast wilderness territories that lie between the Mississippi and the Pacific Ocean.

"These little animals seem to form a link between the squirrels and rabbits. On the side of the squirrels they very naturally join on, if I may use the expression, to the ground-squirrel, and some of them, differ but little in their habits from many of the latter. Other species, again, are more allied to the rabbits, and less like the squirrels; and there are two or three kinds that I should say – using a Yankee expression – have a 'sprinkling' of the rat in them. Some, as the ground-hog, or wood-chuck of the United States,

are as large as rabbits, while others, as the leopard-marmot, are not bigger than Norway rats.

"Some species have cheek-pouches, in which they can carry a large quantity of seeds, nuts, and roots, when they wish to hoard them up for future use. These are the spermophiles, and some species of these have more capacious pouches than others. Their food differs somewhat, perhaps according to the circumstances in which they may be placed. In all cases it is vegetable. Some, as the prairie-dogs, live upon grasses, while others subsist chiefly upon seeds, berries, and leaves.

"It was long supposed that the marmots, like the squirrels, laid up stores against the winter. I believe this is not the case with any of the different species. I know for certain that most of them pass the winter in a state of torpidity, and of course require no provisions, as they eat nothing during that season. In this we observe one of those cases in which Nature so beautifully adapts a creature to its circumstances. In the countries where many of the marmots are found, so severe are the winters, and so barren the soil, that it would be impossible for these creatures to get a morsel of food for many long months.

"During this period, therefore, Nature suspends her functions, by putting them into a deep, and, for aught we know to the contrary, a pleasant sleep. It is only when the snow melts, under the vernal sun, and the green blades of grass and the spring flowers array themselves on the surface of the earth, that the little marmots make their appearance again. Then the warm air,

penetrating into their subterranean abodes, admonishes them to awake from their protracted slumber, and come forth to the enjoyment of their summer life. These animals may be said, therefore, to have no winter. Their life is altogether a season of summer and sunshine."

"Some of the marmots," continued Lucien, "live in large communities, as the prairie dogs; others, in smaller tribes, while still other species lead a solitary life, going only in pairs, or at most in families. Nearly all of them are burrowing animals, though there are one or two species that are satisfied with a cleft in the rock, or a hole among loose stones for their nests. Some of them are tree-climbers, but it is supposed they only ascend trees in search of food, as they do not make their dwellings there. Many of the species are very prolific, the females bringing forth eight, and even ten young at a birth.

"The marmots are extremely shy and watchful creatures. Before going to feed, they usually reconnoitre the ground from the tops of their little mounds. Some species do not have such mounds, and for this purpose ascend any little hillock that may be near. Nearly all have the curious habit of placing sentries to watch while the rest are feeding. These sentries station themselves on some commanding point, and when they see an enemy approaching give warning to the others by a peculiar cry. In several of the species this cry resembles the syllables 'seek-seek' repeated with a hiss. Others bark like 'toy-dogs,' while still other kinds utter a whistling noise, from which one species derives its

trivial name of 'whistler' among the traders, and is the 'siffleur' of the Canadian voyageurs.

"The 'whistler's' call of alarm can be heard at a great distance; and when uttered by the sentinel is repeated by all the others as far as the troop extends.

"The marmots are eaten both by Indians and white hunters. Sometimes they are captured by pouring water into their burrows; but this method only succeeds in early spring, when the animals awake out of their torpid state, and the ground is still frozen hard enough to prevent the water from filtering away. They are sometimes shot with guns; but, unless killed upon the spot, they will escape to their burrows, and tumble in before the hunter can lay his hands upon them."

CHAPTER XVII.
THE BLAIREAU, THE "TAWNIES," AND THE "LEOPARDS."

Perhaps Lucien would have carried his account of the marmots still farther – for he had not told half what he knew of their habits – but he was at that moment interrupted by the marmots themselves. Several of them appeared at the mouths of their holes; and, after looking out and reconnoitring for some moments, became bolder, and ran up to the tops of their mounds, and began to scatter along the little beaten paths that led from one to the other. In a short while as many as a dozen could be seen moving about, jerking their tails, and at intervals uttering their seek-seek.

Our voyageurs saw that there were two kinds of them, entirely different in colour, size, and other respects. The larger ones were of a greyish yellow above, with an orange tint upon the throat and belly. These were the "tawny marmots," called sometimes "ground-squirrels," and by the voyageurs, "siffleurs," or "whistlers."

The other species seen were the most beautiful of all the marmots. They were very little smaller than the tawny marmots; but their tails were larger and more slender, which rendered their appearance more graceful. Their chief beauty, however,

lay in their colours and markings. They were striped from the nose to the rump with bands of yellow and chocolate colour, which alternated with each other, while the chocolate bands were themselves variegated by rows of yellow spots regularly placed. These markings gave the animals that peculiar appearance so well known as characterising the skin of the leopard, hence the name of these little creatures was "leopard marmots."

It was plain from their actions that both kinds were "at home" among the mounds, and that both had their burrows there. This was the fact, and Norman told his companion that the two kinds are always found together, not living in the same houses, but only as neighbours in the same "settlement." The burrows of the "leopard" have much smaller entrances than those of their "tawny kin," and run down perpendicularly to a greater depth before branching off in a horizontal direction. A straight stick may be thrust down one of these full five feet before reaching an "elbow."

The holes of the tawny marmots, on the contrary, branch off near the surface, and are not so deep under ground. This guides us to the explanation of a singular fact – which is, that the "tawnies" make their appearance three weeks earlier in spring than the "leopards," in consequence of the heat of the sun reaching them sooner, and waking them out of their torpid sleep.

While these explanations were passing among the boys, the marmots had come out, to the number of a score, and were carrying on their gambols along the declivity of the hill. They were at too great a distance to heed the movements of the

travellers by the camp fire. Besides, a considerable valley lay between them and the camp, which, as they believed, rendered their position secure. They were not at such a distance but that many of their movements could be clearly made out by the boys, who after a while noticed that several furious battles were being fought among them. It was not the "tawnies" against the others, but the males of each kind in single combats with one another.

They fought like little cats, exhibiting the highest degree of boldness and fury; but it was noticed that in these conflicts the leopards were far more active and spiteful than their kinsmen. In observing them through his glass Lucien noticed that they frequently seized each other by the tails, and he further noticed that several of them had their tails much shorter than the rest. Norman said that these had been bitten off in their battles; and, moreover, that it was a rare thing to find among the males, or "bucks," as he called them, one that had a perfect tail!

While these observations were being made, the attention of our party was attracted to a strange animal that was seen slowly crawling around the hill. It was a creature about as big as an ordinary setter dog, but much thicker in the body, shorter in the legs, and shaggier in the coat. Its head was flat, and its ears short and rounded. Its hair was long, rough, and of a mottled hoary grey colour, but dark-brown upon the legs and tail. The latter, though covered with long hair, was short, and carried upright; and upon the broad feet of the animal could be seen long and strong curving claws. Its snout was sharp as that of a greyhound –

though not so prettily formed – and a white stripe, passing from its very tip over the crown, and bordered by two darker bands, gave a singular expression to the animal's countenance.

It was altogether, both in form and feature, a strange and vicious-looking creature. Norman recognised it at once as the "blaireau," or American badger. The others had never seen such a creature before – as it is not an inhabitant of the South, nor of any part of the settled portion of the United States.

The badger when first seen was creeping along with its belly almost dragging the ground, and its long snout projected horizontally in the direction of the marmot "village." It was evidently meditating a surprise of the inhabitants. Now and then it would stop, like a pointer dog when close to a partridge, reconnoitre a moment, and then go on again. Its design appeared to be to get between the marmots and their burrows, intercept some of them, and get a hold of them without the trouble of digging them up – although that would be no great affair to it, for so strong are its fore-arms and claws that in loose soil it can make its way under the ground as fast as a mole.

Slowly and cautiously it stole along, its hind-feet resting all their length upon the ground, its hideous snout thrown forward, and its eyes glaring with a voracious and hungry expression. It had got within fifty paces of the marmots, and would, no doubt, have succeeded in cutting off the retreat of some of them, but at that moment a burrowing owl that had been perched upon one of the mounds, rose up, and commenced hovering in circles above

the intruder. This drew the attention of the marmot sentries to their well-known enemy, and their warning cry was followed by a general scamper of both tawnies and leopards towards their respective burrows.

The blaireau, seeing that further concealment was no longer of any use, raised himself higher upon his limbs, and sprang forward in pursuit. He was too late, however, as the marmots had all got into their holes, and their angry "seek-seek" was heard proceeding from various quarters out of the bowels of the earth. The blaireau only hesitated long enough to select one of the burrows into which he was sure a marmot had entered; and then, setting himself to his work, he commenced throwing out the mould like a terrier. In a few seconds he was half buried, and his hind-quarters and tail alone remained above ground.

He would soon have disappeared entirely, but at that moment the boys, directed and headed by Norman, ran up the hill, and, seizing him by the tail, endeavoured to jerk him back. That, however, was a task which they could not accomplish, for first one and then another, and then Basil and Norman – who were both strong boys – pulled with all their might, and could not move him. Norman cautioned them against letting him go, as in a moment's time he would burrow beyond their reach. So they held on until François had got his gun ready. This the latter soon did, and a load of small shot was fired into the blaireau's hips, which, although it did not quite kill him, caused him to back out of the hole, and brought him into the clutches of Marengo.

A desperate struggle ensued, which ended by the bloodhound doubling his vast black muzzle upon the throat of the blaireau, and choking him to death in less than a dozen seconds; and then his hide – the only part which was deemed of any value – was taken off and carried to the camp. The carcass was left upon the face of the hill, and the red shining object was soon espied by the buzzards and turkey vultures, so that in a few minutes' time several of these filthy birds were seen hovering around, and alighting upon the hill.

But this was no new sight to our young voyageurs, and soon ceased to be noticed by them. Another bird, of a different kind, for a short time engaged their attention. It was a large hawk, which Lucien, as soon as he saw it, pronounced to be one of the kind known as buzzards. Of these there are several species in North America, but it is not to be supposed that there is any resemblance between them and the buzzards just mentioned as having alighted by the carcass of the blaireau. The latter, commonly called “turkey buzzards,” are true vultures, and feed mostly, though not exclusively, on carrion; while the “hawk buzzards” have all the appearance and general habits of the rest of the falcon tribe.

The one in question, Lucien said, was the “marsh-hawk,” sometimes also called the “hen-harrier.” Norman stated that it was known among the Indians of these parts as the “snake-bird,” because it preys upon a species of small green snake that is common on the plains of the Saskatchewan, and of which it is

fonder than of any other food.

The voyageurs were not long in having evidence of the appropriateness of the Indian appellation; for these people, like other savages, have the good habit of giving names that express some quality or characteristic of the thing itself. The bird in question was on the wing, and from its movements evidently searching for game. It sailed in easy circlings near the surface, *quartering* the ground like a pointer dog. It flew so lightly that its wings were not seen to move, and throughout all its wheelings and turnings it appeared to be carried onwards or upwards by the power of mere volition.

Once or twice its course brought it directly over the camp, and François had got hold of his gun, with the intention of bringing it down, but on each occasion it perceived his motions; and, soaring up like a paper-kite until out of reach, it passed over the camp, and then sank down again upon the other side, and continued its "quarterings" as before. For nearly half-an-hour it went on manœvring in this way, when all at once it was seen to make a sudden turning in the air as it fixed its eyes upon some object in the grass.

The next moment it glided diagonally towards the earth, and poising itself for a moment above the surface, rose again with a small green-coloured snake struggling in its talons. After ascending to some height, it directed its flight towards a clump of trees, and was soon lost to the view of our travellers.

Lucien now pointed out to his companions a characteristic of

the hawk and buzzard tribe, by which these birds can always be distinguished from the true falcon. That peculiarity lay in the manner of seizing their prey. The former skim forward upon it sideways – that is, in a horizontal or diagonal direction, and pick it up in passing; while the true falcons – as the merlin, the peregrine, the gerfalcon, and the great eagle-falcons – shoot down upon their prey *perpendicularly* like an arrow, or a piece of falling lead.

He pointed out, moreover, how the structure of the different kinds of preying birds, such as the size and form of the wings and tail, as well as other parts, were in each kind adapted to its peculiar mode of pursuing its prey; and then there arose a discussion as to whether this adaption should be considered a *cause*, or an *effect*. Lucien succeeded in convincing his companions that the structure was the effect and not the cause of the habit, for the young naturalist was a firm believer in the changing and progressive system of nature.

CHAPTER XVIII.
AN ODD SORT OF DECOY-DUCK

Two days after the adventure with the blaireau, the young voyageurs arrived at Cumberland House – one of the most celebrated posts of the Hudson's Bay Company. The chief factor, who resided there, was a friend of Norman's father, and of course the youths were received with the warmest hospitality, and entertained during their stay in the best manner the place afforded. They did not make a long stay, however, as they wished to complete their journey before the winter should set in, when canoe-travelling would become impossible.

During winter, not only the lakes, but the most rapid rivers of these Northern regions, become frozen up, and remain so for many months. Nearly the whole surface of the earth is buried under deep snow, and travelling can only be done with snow-shoes, or with sledges drawn by dogs. These are the modes practised by the Indians, the Esquimaux, and the few white traders and trappers who have occasion in winter to pass from one point to another of that icy and desolate region.

Travelling under such circumstances is not only difficult and laborious, but is extremely perilous. Food cannot always be obtained – supplies fall short, or become exhausted – game is scarce, or cannot be found at all, as at that season many of the quadrupeds and most of the birds have forsaken the country, and

migrated to the South – and whole parties of travellers – even Indians, who can eat anything living or dead, roast or raw – often perish from hunger.

Our travellers were well acquainted with these facts; and being anxious, therefore, to get to the end of their journey before the winter should come down upon them, made all haste to proceed. Of course they obtained a new "outfit" at the Fort; but they took with them only such articles as were absolutely necessary, as they had many portages to make before they could reach the waters of the Mackenzie River. As it required two of the party to carry the canoe, with a few little things besides, all the baggage was comprised in such loads as the others could manage; and of course that was not a great deal, for François was but a lad, and Lucien was far from being in robust health. A light axe, a few cooking utensils, with a small stock of provisions, and of course their guns, formed the bulk of their loads.

After leaving the Fort they kept for several days' journey up the Saskatchewan. They then took leave of that river, and ascended a small stream that emptied into it from the north. Making their first portage over a "divide," they reached another small stream that ran in quite a different direction, emptying itself into one of the branches of the Mississippi, or Churchill River. Following this in a north-westerly course, and making numerous other portages, they reached Lake La Crosse, and afterwards in succession, Lakes Clear, Buffalo, and Methy.

A long "portage" from the last-mentioned lake brought them

to the head of a stream known as the "Clear Water;" and launching their canoe upon this, they floated down to its mouth, and entered the main stream of the Elk, or Athabasca, one of the most beautiful rivers of America. They were now in reality upon the waters of the Mackenzie itself, for the Elk, after passing through the Athabasca takes from thence the name of Slave River, and having traversed Great Slave Lake, becomes the Mackenzie – under which name it continues on to the Arctic Ocean.

Having got, therefore, upon the main head-water of the stream which they intended to traverse, they floated along in their canoe with light hearts and high hopes. It is true they had yet fifteen hundred miles to travel, but they believed that it was all down-hill work now; and as they had still nearly two months of summer before them, they doubted not being able to accomplish the voyage in good time.

On they floated down stream, feasting their eyes as they went – for the scenery of the Elk valley is of a most picturesque and pleasing character; and the broad bosom of the stream itself, studded with wooded islands, looked to our travellers more like a continuation of lakes than a running river. Now they glided along without using an oar, borne onward by the current; then they would take a spell at the paddles, while the beautiful Canadian boat-song could be heard as it came from the tiny craft, and the appropriate chorus "Row, brothers, row!" echoed from the adjacent shores. No part of their journey was more pleasant than

while descending the romantic Elk.

They found plenty of fresh provisions, both in the stream itself and on its banks. They caught salmon in the water, and the silver-coloured hyodon, known among the voyageurs by the name of "Doré." They shot both ducks and geese, and roast-duck or goose had become an everyday dinner with them. Of the geese there were several species. There were "snow-geese," so called from their beautiful white plumage; and "laughing geese," that derive their name from the circumstance that their call resembles the laugh of a man.

The Indians decoy these by striking their open hand repeatedly over the mouth while uttering the syllable "wah." They also saw the "Brent goose," a well-known species, and the "Canada goose," which is the *wild goose par excellence*. Another species resembling the latter, called the "barnacle goose," was seen by our travellers. Besides these, Lucien informed them that there were several other smaller kinds that inhabit the northern countries of America. These valuable birds are objects of great interest to the people of the fur countries for months in the year. Whole tribes of Indians look to them as a means of support.

With regard to ducks, there was one species which our travellers had not yet met with, and for which they were every day upon the look-out. This was the far-famed "canvass-back," so justly celebrated among the epicures of America. None of them had ever eaten of it, as it is not known in Louisiana, but only upon the Atlantic coast of the United States. Norman, however,

had heard of its existence in the Rocky Mountains – where it is said to breed – as well as in other parts of the fur countries, and they were in hopes that they might fall in with it upon the waters of the Athabasca.

Lucien was, of course, well acquainted with its "biography," and could have recognised one at sight; and as they glided along he volunteered to give his companions some information, not only about this particular species, but about the whole genus of these interesting birds.

"The canvass-back," began he, "is perhaps the most celebrated and highly-prized of all the ducks, on account of the exquisite flavour of its flesh – which is thought by some epicures to be superior to that of all other birds. It is not a large duck – rarely weighing over three pounds – and its plumage is far from equalling in beauty that of many other species. It has a red or chestnut-coloured head, a shining black breast, while the greater part of its body is of a greyish colour; but upon close examination this grey is found to be produced by a whitish ground minutely mottled with zig-zag black lines. I believe it is this mottling, combined with the colour, which somewhat resembles the appearance and texture of ship's canvass, that has given the bird its trivial name; but there is some obscurity about the origin of this.

"Shooting the canvass-backs is a source of profit to hundreds of gunners who live around the Chesapeake Bay, as these birds command a high price in the markets of the American cities.

Disputes have arisen between the fowlers of different States around the Bay about the right of shooting upon it; and vessels full of armed men – ready to make war upon one another – have gone out on this account. But the government of these States succeeded in settling the matter peacefully, and to the satisfaction of all parties."

The canoe at this moment shot round a bend, and a long smooth expanse of the river appeared before the eyes of our voyageurs. They could see that upon one side another stream ran in, with a very sluggish current; and around the mouth of this, and for a good stretch below it, there appeared a green sedge-like water-grass, or rushes. Near the border of this sedge, and in a part of it that was thin, a flock of wild fowl was diving and feeding. They were small, and evidently ducks; but the distance was yet too great for the boys to make out to what species they belonged.

A single large swan – a trumpeter – was upon the water, between the shore and the ducks, and was gradually making towards the latter. François immediately loaded one of his barrels with swan, or rather "buck" shot, and Basil looked to his rifle. The ducks were not thought of – the trumpeter was to be the game. Lucien took out his telescope, and commenced observing the flock. They had not intended to use any precaution in approaching the birds, as they were not extremely anxious about getting a shot, and were permitting the canoe to glide gently towards them.

An exclamation from Lucien, however, caused them to change their tactics. He directed them suddenly to "hold water," and stop the canoe, at the same time telling them that the birds ahead were the very sort about which they had been conversing – the "canvass-backs." He had no doubt of it, judging from their colour, size, and peculiar movements.

The announcement produced a new excitement. All four were desirous not only of shooting, but of *eating*, a canvass-back; and arrangements were set about to effect the former. It was known to all that the canvass-backs are among the shyest of water-fowl, so much so that it is difficult to approach them unless under cover. While feeding, it is said, they keep sentinels on the look-out. Whether this be true or not, it is certain that they never all dive together, some always remaining above water, and apparently watching while the others are under.

A plan to get near them was necessary, and one was suggested by Norman, which was to tie bushes around the sides of the canoe, so as to hide both the vessel and those in it. This plan was at once adopted – the canoe was paddled up to the bank – thick bushes were cut, and tied along the gunwale; and then our voyageurs climbed in, and laying themselves as low as possible, commenced paddling gently downward in the direction of the ducks. The rifles were laid aside, as they could be of little service with such game. François' double-barrel was the arm upon which dependence was now placed; and François himself leaned forward in the bow in order to be ready, while the others

attended to the guidance of the vessel. The buckshot had been drawn out, and a smaller kind substituted. The swan was no longer cared for or even thought of.

In about a quarter of an hour's time, the canoe, gliding silently along the edge of the sedge – which was the wild celery – came near the place where the ducks were; and the boys, peeping through the leafy screen, could now see the birds plainly. They saw that they were not all canvass-backs, but that three distinct kinds of ducks were feeding together. One sort was the canvass-backs themselves, and a second kind very much resembled them, except that they were a size smaller. These were the "red-heads" or "pochards."

The third species was different from either. They had also heads of a reddish colour, but of a brighter red, and marked by a white band that ran from the root of the bill over the crown. This mark enabled Lucien at once to tell the species. They were widgeons; but the most singular thing that was now observed by our voyageurs was the terms upon which these three kinds of birds lived with each other. It appeared that the widgeon obtained its food by a regular system of robbery and plunder perpetrated upon the community of the canvass-backs. The latter, as Lucien explained, feeds upon the roots of the valisneria; but for these it is obliged to dive to the depth of four or five feet, and also to spend some time at the bottom while plucking them up. Now the widgeon is as fond of the "celery" as the canvass-back, but the former is not a diver – in fact, never goes under water except

when washing itself or in play, and it has therefore no means of procuring the desired roots. Mark, then, the plan that it takes to effect this end.

Seated as near as is safe to the canvass-back, it waits until the latter makes his *somersault* and goes down. It (the widgeon) then darts forward so as to be sufficiently close, and, pausing again, scans the surface with eager eye. It can tell where the other is at work, as the blades of the plant at which it is tugging are seen to move above the water. These at length disappear, pulled down as the plant is dragged from its root, and almost at the same instant the canvass-back comes up holding the root between his mandibles.

But the widgeon is ready for him. He has calculated the exact spot where the other will rise; and, before the latter can open his eyes or get them clear of the water, the widgeon darts forward, snatches the luscious morsel from his bill, and makes off with it. Conflicts sometimes ensue; but the widgeon, knowing himself to be the lesser and weaker bird, never stands to give battle, but secures his prize through his superior agility. On the other hand, the canvass-back rarely attempts to follow him, as he knows that the other is swifter upon the water than he. He only looks after his lost root with an air of chagrin, and then, reflecting that there is "plenty more where it came from," kicks up its heels, and once more plunges to the bottom.

The red-head rarely interferes with either, as he is contented to feed upon the leaves and stalks, at all times floating in plenty

upon the surface.

As the canoe glided near, those on board watched these curious manœuvres of the birds with feelings of interest. They saw, moreover, that the "trumpeter" had arrived among them, and the ducks seemed to take no notice of him. Lucien was struck with something unusual in the appearance of the swan. Its plumage seemed ruffled and on end, and it glided along in a stiff and unnatural manner. It moved its neck neither to one side nor the other, but held its head bent forward, until its bill almost touched the water, in the attitude that these birds adopt when feeding upon something near the surface. Lucien said nothing to his companions, as they were all silent, lest they might frighten the ducks; but Basil and Norman had also remarked the strange look and conduct of the trumpeter. François' eyes were bent only upon the ducks, and he did not heed the other.

As they came closer, first Lucien, and then Basil and Norman, saw something else that puzzled them. Whenever the swan approached any of the ducks, these were observed to disappear under the water. At first, the boys thought that they merely dived to get out of his way, but it was not exactly in the same manner as the others were diving for the roots. Moreover, none of those that went down in the neighbourhood of the swan were seen to come up again!

There was something very odd in all this, and the three boys, thinking so at the same time, were about to communicate their thoughts to one another, when the double crack of François' gun

drove the thing, for a moment, out of their heads; and they all looked over the bushes to see how many canvass-backs had been killed. Several were seen dead or fluttering along the surface; but no one counted them, for a strange, and even terrible, object now presented itself to the astonished senses of all. If the conduct of the swan had been odd before, it was now doubly so.

Instead of flying off after the shot, as all expected it would do, it was now seen to dance and plunge about on the water, uttering loud screams, that resembled the human voice far more than any other sounds! Then it rose as if pitched into the air, and fell on its back some distance off; while in its place was seen a dark, round object moving through the water, as if making for the bank, and uttering, as it went, the same hideous human-like screams!

This dark object was no other than the poll of a human being; and the river shallowing towards the bank, it rose higher and higher above the water, until the boys could distinguish the glistening neck and naked shoulders of a red and brawny Indian! All was now explained. The Indian had been duck-hunting, and had used the stuffed skin of the swan as his disguise; and hence the puzzling motions of the bird. He had not noticed the canoe – concealed as it was – until the loud crack of François' gun had startled him from his work.

This, and the heads and white faces of the boys peeping over the bushes, had frightened him, even more than he had them. Perhaps they were the first white faces he had ever seen. But, whether or not, sadly frightened he was; for, on reaching the

bank, he did not stop, but ran off into the woods, howling and yelling as if Old Nick had been after him: and no doubt he believed that such was the case.

The travellers picked up the swan-skin put of curiosity; and, in addition to the ducks which François had killed, they found nearly a score of these birds, which the Indian had dropped in his fright, and that had afterwards risen to the surface. These were strung together, and all had their necks broken.

After getting them aboard, the canoe was cleared of the bushes; and the paddles being once more called into service, the little craft shot down stream like an arrow.

CHAPTER XIX.
THE SHRIKE AND THE HUMMING-BIRDS

The picturesque scenery of the Elk appeared to be a favourite resort with the feathered creation. Here our voyageurs saw many kinds of birds; both those that migrate into the fur countries during summer, and those that make their home there in the cold, dark days of winter. Among the former were observed – the beautiful blue bird of Wilson which, on account of its gentle and innocent habits, is quite as much esteemed in America as the "robin" in England.

Another favourite of the farmer and the homestead, the purple martin, was seen gracefully wheeling through the air; while, among the green leaves, fluttered many brilliant birds. The "cardinal grosbeak" with his bright scarlet wings; the blue jay, noisy and chattering; the rarer "crossbill" with its deep crimson colour; and many others, equally bright and beautiful, enlivened the woods, either with their voice or their gaudy plumage.

There was one bird, however, that had neither "fine feathers" nor an agreeable voice, but that interested our travellers more than any of the others. Its voice was unpleasant to the ear, and sounded more like the grating of a rusty hinge than anything else they could think of. The bird itself was not larger than

a thrush, of a light grey colour above, white underneath, and with blackish wings. Its bill resembled that of the hawks, but its legs were more like those of the woodpecker tribe; and it seemed, in fact, to be a cross between the two. It was neither the colour of the bird, nor its form, nor yet its song, that interested our travellers, but its singular habits; and these they had a fine opportunity of observing at one of their "noon camps," where they had halted to rest and refresh themselves during the hot mid-day hours. The place was on one of the little islets, which was covered with underwood, with here and there some larger trees. The underwood bushes were of various sorts; but close to the spot where they had landed was a large thicket of honeysuckle, whose flowers were in full bloom, and filled the air with their sweet perfume.

While seated near these, François' quick eye detected the presence of some very small birds moving among the blossoms. They were at once pronounced to be humming-birds, and of that species known as the "ruby-throats" so called, because a flake of a beautiful vinous colour under the throat of the males exhibits, in the sun, all the glancing glories of the ruby. The back, or upper parts, are of a gilded green colour; and the little creature is the smallest bird that migrates into the fur countries, with one exception, and that is a bird of the same genus – the "cinnamon humming-bird." The latter, however, has been seen in the Northern regions, only on the western side of the Rocky Mountains; but then it has been observed even as far north as

the bleak and inhospitable shores of Nootka Sound. Mexico, and the tropical countries of America, are the favourite home of the humming-birds; and it was, for a long time, supposed that the "ruby-throats" were the only ones that migrated farther north than the territory of Mexico itself. It is now known, that besides the "cinnamon humming-bird," two or three other species annually make an excursion into higher latitudes.

The "ruby-throats" not only travel into the fur countries, but breed in numbers upon the Elk River, the very place where our travellers now observed them.

As they sat watching these little creatures, for there were several of them skipping about and poising themselves opposite the flowers, the attention of all was attracted to the movements of a far different sort of bird. It was that one we have been speaking of. It was seated upon a tree, not far from the honeysuckles; but every now and then it would spring from its perch, dash forward, and after whirring about for some moments among the humming-birds fly back to the same tree.

At first the boys watched these manœuvres without having their curiosity excited. It was no new thing to see birds acting in this manner. The jays, and many other birds of the fly-catching kind have this habit, and nothing was thought of it at the moment. Lucien, however, who had watched the bird more narrowly, presently declared to the rest that it was catching the humming-birds, and preying upon them – that each time it made a dash among the honeysuckles, it carried off one in its claws,

the smallness of the victim having prevented them at first from noticing this fact. They all now watched it more closely than before, and were soon satisfied of the truth of Lucien's assertion, as they saw it seize one of the ruby-throats in the very act of entering the corolla of a flower.

This excited the indignation of François, who immediately took up his "double-barrel," and proceeded towards the tree where the bird, as before, had carried this last victim. The tree was a low one, of the locust or *pseud-acacia* family, and covered all over with great thorny spikes, like all trees of that tribe. François paid no attention to this; but, keeping under shelter of the underwood, he crept forward until within shot. Then raising his gun, he took aim, and pulling trigger, brought the bird fluttering down through the branches. He stepped forward and picked it up – not that he cared for such unworthy game, but Lucien had called to him to do so, as the naturalist wished to make an examination of the creature.

He was about turning to go back to camp, when he chanced to glance his eye up into the locust-tree. There it was riveted by a sight which caused him to cry out with astonishment. His cry brought the rest running up to the spot, and they were not less astonished than he, when they saw the cause of it. I have said that the branches of the tree were covered with long thorny spikes that pointed in every direction; but one branch in particular occupied their attention. Upon this there was about a dozen of these spikes pointing upward, and upon each spike *was impaled a ruby-throat*!

The little creatures were dead, of course, but they were neither torn nor even much ruffled in their plumage. They were all placed back upwards, and as neatly spitted upon the thorns as if they had been put there by human hands. On looking more closely it was discovered that other creatures as well as the humming-birds, had been served in a similar manner. Several grasshoppers, spiders, and some coleopterous insects were found, and upon another branch two small meadow-mice had been treated to the same terrible death.

To Basil, Norman, and François, the thing was quite inexplicable, but Lucien understood well enough what it meant. All these creatures, he informed them, were placed there by the bird which François had shot, and which was no other than the "shrike" or "butcher-bird" – a name by which it is more familiarly known, and which it receives from the very habit they had just observed. Why it follows such a practice Lucien could not tell, as naturalists are not agreed upon this point. Some have asserted that it spits the spiders and other insects for the purpose of attracting nearer the small birds upon which it preys; but this cannot be true, for it preys mostly upon birds that are not insect-eaters, as the finches: besides, it is itself as fond of eating grasshoppers as anything else, and consumes large quantities of these insects.

The most probable explanation of the singular and apparently cruel habit of the butcher-bird is, that it merely places its victims upon the thorns, in order to keep them safe from ground-ants,

rats, mice, raccoons, foxes, and other preying creatures – just as a good cook would hang up her meat or game in the larder to prevent the cats from carrying it off. The thorny tree thus becomes the storehouse of the shrike, where he hangs up his superfluous spoil for future use, just as the crows, magpies and jays, make their secret deposits in chinks of walls and the hollows of trees. It is no argument against this theory, that the shrike sometimes leaves these stores without returning to them. The fox, and dog, as well as many other preying creatures have the same habit.

Wondering at what they had seen, the voyageurs returned to their camp, and once more embarked on their journey.

CHAPTER XX.
THE FISH-HAWK

A few days after, another incident occurred to our voyageurs, which illustrated the habits of a very interesting bird, the "osprey," or fish-hawk, as it is more familiarly known in America.

The osprey is a bird of the falcon tribe, and one of the largest of the genus – measuring two feet from bill to tail, with an immense spread of wing in proportion, being nearly six feet from tip to tip. It is of a dark brown colour above, that colour peculiar to most of the hawk tribe, while its lower parts are ashy white. Its legs and bill are blue, and its eyes of a yellow orange. It is found in nearly all parts of America, where there are waters containing fish, for on these it exclusively feeds. It is more common on the sea-coast than in the interior, although it also frequents the large lakes, and lives in the central parts of the continent during summer, when these are no longer frozen over. It is not often seen upon muddy rivers, as there it would stand no chance of espying its victims in the water. It is a migratory bird, seeking the South in winter, and especially the shores of the Great Mexican Gulf, where large numbers are often seen fishing together.

In the spring season these birds move to the northward, and make their appearance along the Atlantic coast of the continent, where they diffuse joy into the hearts of the fishermen – because

the latter know, on seeing them, that they may soon expect the large shoals of herring, shad, and other fish, for which they have been anxiously looking out. So great favourites are they with the fisherman, that they would not knowingly kill an osprey for a boat-load of fish, but regard these bold fishing birds in the light of "professional brethren." In this case the old adage that "two of a trade never agree" is clearly contradicted.

The farmer often takes up his gun to fire at the osprey – mistaking it for the red-tailed buzzard or some other hawk, several species of which at a distance it resembles – but, on discovering his mistake, brings down his piece without pulling trigger, and lets the osprey fly off unharmed. This singular conduct on the part of the farmer arises from his knowledge of the fact, that the osprey will not only *not* kill any of his ducks or hens, but that where he makes a settlement he will drive off from the premises all the hawks, buzzards, and kites, that would otherwise prey upon the poultry. With such protection, therefore, the osprey is one of the securest birds in America. He may breed in a tree over the farmer's or fisherman's door without the slightest danger of being disturbed in his incubation.

I say *his* incubation; but the male takes no part in this domestic duty, further than to supply his loved mate with plenty of fish while she does the hatching business. Of course, thus protected, the osprey is not a rare bird. On the contrary, fish-hawks are more numerous than perhaps any other species of the hawk tribe. Twenty or thirty nests may be seen near each other in the same

piece of woods, and as many as three hundred have been counted on one little island. The nests are built upon large trees – not always at the tops, as those of rooks, but often in forks within twenty feet of the ground. They are composed of large sticks, with stalks of corn, weeds, pieces of wet turf, and then lined plentifully with dry sea-grass, or any other grass that may be most convenient.

The whole nest is big enough to make a load for a cart, and would be heavy enough to give any horse a good pull. It can be seen, when the woods are open, to an immense distance, and the more easily, as the tree upon which it is built is always a "dead wood," and therefore without leaves to conceal it. Some say that the birds select a dead or decaying tree for their nest. It is more probable such is the effect and not the cause, of their building upon a particular tree. It is more likely that the tree is killed partly by the mass of rubbish thus piled upon it, and partly by the nature of the substances, such as sea-weed in the nest, the oil of the fish, the excrement of the birds themselves, and the dead fish that have been dropped about the root, and suffered to remain there; for when the osprey lets fall his finny prey, which he often does, he never condescends to pick it up again, but goes in search of another.

Boys "a-nesting" might easily discover the nest of the osprey; but were they inclined to despoil it of its three or four eggs (which are about the size of a duck's, and blotched with Spanish brown), they would find that a less easy task, for the owners would be

very likely to claw their eyes out, or else scratch the tender skin from their beardless cheeks: so that boys do not often trouble the nest of the osprey.

A very curious anecdote is related of a negro having climbed up to plunder a nest of these birds. The negro's head was covered with a close nap of his own black wool, which is supposed by a certain stretch of fancy to have the peculiarity of "growing in at both ends." The negro, having no other protection than that which his thick fur afforded him, was assailed by both the owners of the nest, one of which, making a dash at the "darkie's" head, struck his talons so firmly into the wool, that he was unable to extricate them, and there stuck fast, until the astonished plunderer had reached the foot of the tree. We shall not answer for the truthfulness of this anecdote, although there is nothing improbable about it; for certain it is that these birds defend their nests with courage and fury, and we know of more than one instance of persons being severely wounded who made the attempt to rob them.

The ospreys, as already stated, feed exclusively on fish. They are not known to prey upon birds or quadrupeds of any kind, even when deprived of their customary food, as they sometimes are for days on account of the lakes and rivers, in which they expected to find it being frozen over to a later season than usual. Other birds, as the purple grakles, often build among the sticks of the osprey's nest, and rear their young without being meddled with by this generous bird. This is an important point of difference between

the osprey and other kinds of hawks; and there is a peculiarity of structure about the feet and legs of the osprey, that points to the nature of his food and his mode of procuring it. His legs are disproportionately long and strong. They are without feathers nearly to the knees. The feet and toes are also very long, and the soles are covered with thick, hard scales, like the teeth of a rasp, which enable the bird to hold securely his slippery prey. The claws, too, are long, and curved into semicircles, with points upon them almost as sharp as needles.

I have stated that an incident occurred to our party that illustrated some of the habits of this interesting bird. It was upon the afternoon of a Saturday, after they had fixed their camp to remain for the following day. They had landed upon a point or promontory that ran out into the river, and from which they commanded a view of a fine stretch of water. Near where they had placed their tent was the nest of an osprey, in the forks of a large poplar. The tree, as usual, was dead, and the young were plainly visible over the edge of the nest. They appeared to be full-grown and feathered; but it is a peculiarity of the young ospreys that they will remain in the nest, and be fed by the parent birds, until long after they might be considered able to shift for themselves. It is even asserted that the latter become impatient at length, and drive the young ones out of the nest by beating them with their wings; but that for a considerable time afterwards they continue to feed them – most likely until the young birds learn to capture their finny prey for themselves.

This Lucien gave as a popular statement, but did not vouch for its truth. It was not long, however, before both he and his companions witnessed its complete verification.

The old birds, after the arrival of the voyageurs upon the promontory, had remained for some time around the nest, and at intervals had shot down to where the party was, uttering loud screams, and making the air whizz with the strokes of their wings. Seeing that there was no intention of disturbing them, they at length desisted from these demonstrations, and sat for a good while quietly upon the edge of their nest. Then first one, and shortly after the other, flew out, and commenced sailing in circles, at the height of an hundred feet or so above the water. Nothing could be more graceful than their flight. Now they would poise themselves a moment in the air, then turn their bodies as if on a pivot, and glide off in another direction.

All these motions were carried on with the most perfect ease, and as if without the slightest aid from the wings. Again they would come to a pause, holding themselves fixed in mid-air by a gentle flapping, and appearing to scrutinise some object below. Perhaps it was a fish; but it was either too large a one, or not the species most relished, or maybe it had sunk to too great a depth to be easily taken. Again they sail around; one of them suddenly arrests its flight, and, like a stone projected from a sling, shoots down to the water. Before reaching the surface, however, the fish, whose quick eye has detected the coming enemy, has gone to the dark bottom and concealed himself; and the osprey,

suddenly checking himself by his wings and the spread of his full tail, mounts again, and re-commences his curvilinear flight.

After this had gone on for some time, one of the birds – the larger one, and therefore the female – was seen to leave off hunting and return to the nest. There she sat only for a few seconds, when, to the astonishment of the boys, she began to strike her wings against the young ones, as if she was endeavouring to force them from the nest. This was just what she designed doing. Perhaps her late unsuccessful attempt to get them a fish had led her to a train of reflections, and sharpened her determination to make them shift for themselves. However that may be, in a few moments she succeeded in driving them up to the edge, and then, by half pushing, and half beating them with her wings, one after the other – two of them there were – was seen to take wing, and soar away out over the lake.

At this moment, the male shot down upon the water, and then rose again into the air, bearing a fish, head-foremost, in his talons. He flew directly towards one of the young, and meeting as it hovered in the air, turned suddenly over and held out the fish to it. The latter clutched it with as much ease as if it had been accustomed to the thing for years, and then turning away, carried the fish to a neighbouring tree, and commenced devouring it.

The action had been perceived by the other youngster, who followed after, and alighted upon the same branch, with the intention of sharing in the meal. In a few minutes the best part of the fish was eaten up, and both, rising from the branch, flew

back to their nest. There they were met by the parents, and welcomed with a loud squeaking, that was intended, no doubt, to congratulate them upon the success of their first “fly.”

CHAPTER XXI.
THE OSPREY AND HIS TYRANT

After remaining for some time on the nest along with the others, the old male again resolved to "go a-fishing," and with this intent he shot out from the tree, and commenced wheeling above the water. The boys, having nothing better to engage them, sat watching his motions, while they freely conversed about his habits and other points in his natural history. Lucien informed them that the osprey is a bird common to both Continents, and that it is often seen upon the shores of the Mediterranean, pursuing the finny tribes there, just as it does in America. In some parts of Italy it is called the "leaden eagle," because its sudden heavy plunge upon the water is fancied to resemble the falling of a piece of lead.

While they were discoursing, the osprey was seen to dip once or twice towards the surface of the water, and then suddenly check himself, and mount upward again. These manœuvres were no doubt caused by the fish which he intended to "hook" having suddenly shifted their quarters. Most probably experience had taught them wisdom, and they knew the osprey as their most terrible enemy. But they were not to escape him at all times. As the boys watched the bird, he was seen to poise himself for an instant in the air, then suddenly closing his wings, he shot vertically downward.

So rapid was his descent, that the eye could only trace it like a bolt of lightning. There was a sharp whizzing sound in the air – a plash was heard – then the smooth bosom of the water was seen to break, and the white spray rose several feet above the surface. For an instant the bird was no longer seen. He was underneath, and the place of his descent was marked by a patch of foam. Only a single moment was he out of sight. The next he emerged, and a few strokes of his broad wing carried him into the air, while a large fish was seen griped in his claws. As the voyageurs had before noticed, the fish was carried head-foremost, and this led them to the conclusion that in striking his prey beneath the water the osprey follows it and aims his blow from behind.

After mounting a short distance the bird paused for a moment in the air, and gave himself a shake, precisely as a dog would do after coming out of water. He then directed his flight, now somewhat slow and heavy, toward the nest. On reaching the tree, however, there appeared to be some mismanagement. The fish caught among the branches as he flew inward. Perhaps the presence of the camp had distracted his attention, and rendered him less careful. At all events, the prey was seen to drop from his talons; and bounding from branch to branch, went tumbling down to the bottom of the tree.

Nothing could be more opportune than this, for François had not been able to get a "nibble" during the whole day, and a fresh fish for dinner was very desirable to all. François and Basil had both started to their feet, in order to secure the fish before the

osprey should pounce down and pick it up; but Lucien assured them that they need be in no hurry about that, as the bird would not touch it again after he had once let it fall. Hearing this, they took their time about it, and walked leisurely up to the tree, where they found the fish lying. After taking it up they were fain to escape from the spot, for the effluvium arising from a mass of other fish that lay in a decomposed state around the tree was more than any delicate pair of nostrils could endure.

The one they had secured proved to be a very fine salmon of not less than six pounds weight, and therefore much heavier than the bird itself! The track of the osprey's talons was deeply marked; and by the direction in which the creature was scored, it was evident the bird had seized it from behind. The old hawks made a considerable noise while the fish was being carried away; but they soon gave up their squealing, and, once more hovering out over the river, sailed about with their eyes bent upon the water below.

"What a number of fish they must kill!" said François. "They don't appear to have much difficulty about it. I should think they get as much as they can eat. See! there again! Another, I declare!"

As François spoke the male osprey was seen to shoot down as before, and this time, although he appeared scarcely to dip his foot in the water, rose up with a fish in his talons.

"They have sometimes others to provide for besides themselves," remarked Lucien. "For instance, the bald eagle – "

Lucien was interrupted by a cackling scream, which was at

once recognised as that of the very bird whose name had just escaped his lips. All eyes were instantly turned in the direction whence it came – which was from the opposite side of the river – and there, just in the act of launching itself from the top of a tall tree, was the great enemy of the osprey – the white-headed eagle himself!

"Now a chase!" cried François, "yonder comes the big robber!"

With some excitement of feeling, the whole party watched the movements of the birds. A few strokes of the eagle's wing brought him near; but the osprey had already heard his scream, and knowing it was no use carrying the fish to his nest, turned away from it, and rose spirally upward, in the hope of escaping in that direction. The eagle followed, beating the air with his broad pinions, as he soared after. Close behind him went the female osprey, uttering wild screams, flapping her wings against his very beak, and endeavouring to distract his attention from the chase. It was to no purpose, however, as the eagle full well knew her object, and disregarding her impotent attempts, kept on in steady flight after her mate. This continued until the birds had reached a high elevation, and the ospreys, from their less bulk, were nearly out of sight. But the voyageurs could see that the eagle was on the point of overtaking the one that carried the fish.

Presently, a glittering object dropped down from the heavens, and fell with a plunge upon the water. It was the fish, and almost at the same instant was heard the "whish!" of the eagle, as the

great bird shot after it. Before reaching the surface, however, his white tail and wings were seen to spread suddenly, checking his downward course; and then, with a scream of disappointment, he flew off in a horizontal direction, and alit upon the same tree from which he had taken his departure. In a minute after the ospreys came shooting down, in a diagonal line, to their nest; and, having arrived there, a loud and apparently angry consultation was carried on for some time, in which the young birds bore as noisy a part as either of their parents.

"It's a wonder," said Lucien, "the eagle missed the fish – he rarely does. The impetus which he can give his body enables him to overtake a falling object before it can reach the earth. Perhaps the female osprey was in his way, and hindered him.

"But why did he not pick it up in the water?" demanded François.

"Because it went to the bottom, and he could not reach it – that's clear."

It was Basil who made answer, and the reason he assigned was the true one.

"It's too bad," said François, "that the osprey, not half so big a bird, must support this great robber-tyrant by his industry."

"It's no worse than among our own kind," interposed Basil. "See how the white man makes the black one work for him here in America. That, however, is the *few* toiling for the *million*. In Europe the case is reversed. There, in every country, you see the million toiling for the few – toiling to support an oligarchy in

luxurious case, or a monarch in barbaric splendour."

"But why do they do so? the fools!" asked François, somewhat angrily.

"Because they know no better. That oligarchy, and those monarchs, have taken precious care to educate and train them to the belief that such is the *natural* state of man. They furnish them with school-books, which are filled with beautiful sophisms – all tending to inculcate principles of endurance of wrong, and reverence for their wrongers. They fill their rude throats with hurrah songs that paint false patriotism in glowing colours, making loyalty – no matter to whatsoever despot – the greatest of virtues, and revolution the greatest of crimes; they studiously divide their subjects into several creeds, and then, playing upon the worst of all passions – the passion of religious bigotry – easily prevent their misguided helots from uniting upon any point which would give them a real reform. Ah! it is a terrible game which the present rulers of Europe are playing!"

It was Basil who gave utterance to these sentiments, for the young republican of Louisiana had already begun to think strongly on political subjects. No doubt Basil would one day be an M.C.

"The bald eagles have been much blamed for their treatment of the ospreys, but," said Lucien, "perhaps they have more reason for levying their tax than at first appears. It has been asked: Why they do not capture the fish themselves? Now, I apprehend, that there is a *natural* reason why they do not. As you have seen,

the fish are not always caught upon the surface. The osprey has often to plunge beneath the water in the pursuit, and Nature has gifted him with power to do so, which, if I am not mistaken, she has denied to the eagles. The latter are therefore compelled, in some measure, to depend upon the former for a supply. But the eagles sometimes do catch the fish themselves, when the water is sufficiently shallow, or when their prey comes near enough to the surface to enable them to seize it."

"Do they ever kill the ospreys?" inquired François.

"I think not," replied Lucien; "that would be 'killing the goose,' etc. They know the value of their tax-payers too well to get rid of them in that way. A band of ospreys, in a place where there happens to be many of them together, have been known to unite and drive the eagles off. That, I suppose, must be looked upon in the light of a successful *revolution*."

The conversation was here interrupted by another incident. The ospreys had again gone out fishing, and, at this moment, one of them was seen to pounce down and take a fish from the water. It was a large fish, and, as the bird flew heavily upward, the eagle again left its perch, and gave chase. This time the osprey was overtaken before it had got two hundred yards into the air, and seeing it was no use attempting to carry off the prey, it opened its claws and let it drop.

The eagle turned suddenly, poised himself a moment, and then shot after the falling fish. Before the latter had got near the ground, he overtook and secured it in his talons. Then, arresting

his own flight by the sudden spread of his tail, he winged his way silently across the river, and disappeared among the trees upon the opposite side. The osprey, taking the thing as a matter of course, again descended to the proper elevation, and betook himself to his work. Perhaps he grinned a little, like many another royal taxpayer, but he knew the tax had to be paid all the same, and he said nothing.

An incident soon after occurred that astonished and puzzled our party not a little. The female osprey, that all this time seemed to have had but poor success in her fishing, was now seen to descend with a rush, and plunge deeply into the wave. The spray rose in a little cloud over the spot, and all sat watching with eager eyes to witness the result. What was their astonishment when, after waiting many seconds, the bird still remained under water! Minutes passed, and still she did not come up. *She came up no more!* The foam she had made in her descent floated away – the bosom of the water was smooth as glass – not a ripple disturbed its surface. They could have seen the smallest object for a hundred yards or more around the spot where she had disappeared.

It was impossible she could have emerged without them seeing her. Where, then, had she gone? This, as I have said, puzzled the whole party; and formed a subject of conjecture and conversation for the rest of that day, and also upon the next. Even Lucien was unable to solve the mystery. It was a point in the natural history of the osprey unknown to him. Could she have drowned herself?

Had some great fish, the "gar pike," or some such creature, got hold of and swallowed her? Had she dashed her head against a rock, or become entangled in weeds at the bottom of the river?

All these questions were put, and various solutions of the problem were offered. The true one was not thought of, until accident revealed it. It was Saturday when the incident occurred. The party, of course, remained all next day at the place. They heard almost continually the cry of the bereaved bird, who most likely knew no more than they what had become of his mate. On Monday our travellers re-embarked and continued down-stream. About a mile below, as they were paddling along, their attention was drawn to a singular object floating upon the water. They brought the canoe alongside it.

It was a large fish, a sturgeon, floating dead, with a bird beside it, also dead! On turning both over, what was their astonishment to see that the talons of the bird were firmly fixed in the back of the fish! It was the *female osprey*! This explained all. She had struck a fish too heavy for her strength, and being unable to clear her claws again, had been drawn under the water and had perished along with her victim!

CHAPTER, XXII.
THE VOYAGE INTERRUPTED

About ten days' rapid travelling down the Elk River brought our party into the Athabasca Lake – sometimes called the “Lake of the Hills.” This is another of those great bodies of fresh water that lie between the primitive rocks of the “Barren Grounds,” and the more fertile limestone deposit upon the west. It is nearly two hundred miles long from west to east, and it is only fifteen miles in breadth, but in some places it is so narrow and full of islands that it looks more like a broad river than a lake. Its shores and many of its islands are thickly wooded, particularly upon the southern and western edges; and the eye of the traveller is delighted with many a beautiful vista as he passes along. But our voyageurs took little heed of these things.

A gloom had come over their spirits, for one of their party had taken ill, and was suffering from a painful and dangerous disease – an intermittent fever. It was Lucien – he that was beloved by all of them. He had been complaining for several days – even while admiring the fair scenery of the romantic Elk – but every day he had been getting worse, until, on their arrival at the lake, he declared himself no longer able to travel. It became necessary, therefore, to suspend their journey; and choosing a place for their camp, they made arrangements to remain until Lucien should recover. They built a small log-hut for the invalid,

and did everything to make him as comfortable as possible. The best skins were spread for his couch; and cooling drinks were brewed for him from roots, fruits, and berries, in the way he had already taught his companions to prepare them.

Every day François went forth with his gun, and returned with a pair of young pigeons, or a wood-partridge, or a brace of the beautiful ruffed grouse; and out of these he would make delicate soups, which he was the better able to do as they had procured salt, pepper, and other ingredients, at the Fort. They had also brought with them a stock of tea – the real China tea – and sugar; and as the quantity of both was but small, this luxurious beverage was made exclusively for Lucien, and was found by him exceedingly beneficial during his illness.

To the great joy of all the invalid was at length restored to health, and the canoe being once more launched and freighted, they continued their journey.

They coasted along the shores of the lake, and entered the Great Slave River, which runs from the Athabasca into the Great Slave Lake. They soon came to the mouth of another large river, called the Peace. This runs into the Great Slave a short distance below Lake Athabasca, and, strange to say, the sources of the Peace River lie upon the *western* side of the Rocky Mountains, so that this stream actually runs across the mountain-chain! It passes through the mountains in a succession of deep gorges, which are terrible to behold. On both sides dizzy cliffs and snow-capped peaks rise thousands of feet above its rocky bed, and the scenery

is cold and desolate.

Its head-waters interlock with those of several streams that run into the Pacific; so that, had our voyageurs wished to travel to the shores of that ocean, they might have done so in their birch-bark canoe nearly the whole of the way. But this was not their design at present, so they passed the *débouchure* of the Peace, and kept on for the Great Slave Lake. They were still upon the same water as the Elk, for the Great Slave is only another name for that part of the river lying between the two lakes – Athabasca and Great Slave. Of course the river had now become much larger by the influx of the Peace, and they were travelling upon the bosom of a magnificent stream, with varied scenery upon its banks.

They were not so happy, however, as when descending the Elk – not but that they were all in good health, for Lucien had grown quite strong again. No, it was not any want of health that rendered them less cheerful. It was the prospect before them – the prospect of coming winter, which they now felt certain would arrive before they had got to the end of their journey. The delay of nearly a month, occasioned by Lucien's illness, had deranged all their calculations; and they had no longer any hope of being able to finish their voyage in what remained of the short summer. The ice would soon make its appearance; the lakes and rivers would be frozen up; they could no longer navigate them in their canoe. To travel afoot would be a most laborious undertaking, as well as perilous in an extreme degree.

In this way it is only possible to carry a very small quantity

of provisions – for the traveller is compelled to load himself with skin-clothing in order to keep out the cold. The chances of procuring game by the way in that season are precarious, and not to be depended upon. Most of the birds and many of the quadrupeds migrate to more southern regions; and those that remain are shy and rare. Besides, great snow-storms are to be encountered, in which the traveller is in danger of getting "smoored." The earth is buried under a deep covering of snow, and to pass over this while soft is difficult, and at times quite impossible. All these circumstances were known to our young voyageurs – to Norman better than any of them – and of course the prospect was a cheerless one – much more so than those unacquainted with the winter of these dreary regions would be willing to believe.

It was the month of August, near its end, when they reached the Great Slave Lake, in the latitude of 62°. The days had now become very short, and their journeys grew short in proportion. They already experienced weather as cold as an English winter. There were slight frosts at night – though not yet enough to cover the water with ice – and the mid-day hours were hot, sometimes too hot to be comfortable. But this only caused them to feel the cold the more sensibly when evening set in; and all their robes and skins were necessary to keep them warm during the night.

The Great Slave Lake, like the Athabasca, is very long and very narrow. It extends full 260 miles from east to west, but at its widest part is not over thirty, and in some places much less.

Along its northern shores lies the edge of the "Barren Grounds," and there nothing meets the eye but bleak and naked hills of primitive rock. On its southern side the geology is entirely of a different character. There the limestone prevails, and scarcely anything that deserves the name of hill is to be seen. There are fine forests too, in which poplars, pines, and birches, are the principal trees. The lake is filled with islands, many of which are wholly or partially covered with timber of these kinds, and willows also are abundant.

There are fish of several species in its waters – which are in many places of great depth – sixty fathoms deep – and in some of the islands, and around the wooded shores, game exists in abundance in the summer season. Even in winter it is not scarce, but then it is difficult to follow it on account of the deep snow. Many of the animals, too, at this season become torpid, and are of course hidden in caves and hollow trees, and even in the snow itself, where no one can find them. Notwithstanding all this, our voyageurs knew that it would be the best place for them to make their winter camp. They saw that to complete their journey during that season would be impossible. Even had it been a month earlier it would have been a difficult undertaking.

In a few days winter would be upon them. They would have to stop somewhere. There was no place where they could so safely stay as by the lake. One thing they would have there, which might not be found so plenty elsewhere, that was wood for their fire; and this was an inducement to remain by the lake. Having

made up their minds, therefore, to encamp on some part of it, they looked from day to day for a place that would be most suitable, still continuing their journey towards its western end. As yet no place appeared to their liking, and as the lake near its western point trends away towards the south, Norman proposed that they should follow the shore no longer, but strike across to a promontory on the northern shore of the lake, known as "Slave Point."

This promontory is of the limestone formation, and as Norman had heard, is well wooded, and stocked with game. Even buffaloes are found there. It is, in fact, the farthest point to the north-east that these animals range, and this presents us with a curious fact. It is the farthest point that the limestone deposit extends in that direction. Beyond that, to the east and north, lie the primitive rocks of the Barren Grounds, into which the buffaloes never stray. Thus we observe the connexion that exists between the *fauna* of a country and its geological character.

Of course they all agreed to Norman's proposal. The canoe was, therefore, headed for the open waters; and, after a hard day's paddling – for there was a head-wind – the voyageurs landed upon a small wooded island, about half-way over the lake, where they encamped for the night, intending next day to cross the remaining part.

CHAPTER XXIII.
FISHING UNDER THE ICE

On awaking next morning, to their great surprise, they saw that the *lake was frozen over*! They had almost anticipated as much, for the night was one of the coldest they had yet experienced – so cold that one and all of them had slept but badly. As yet the ice was thin, but so much the worse. It was thick enough to prevent them from using the canoe, but too thin to bear their weight, and they now saw that they were *prisoners upon the island*!

It was not without some feelings of alarm that they made this discovery; but their fears were allayed by reflecting, that they could remain upon the island until the ice either thawed away or become strong enough to bear them, and then they could cross upon it to the northern shore. With this consolation, therefore, they set about making their temporary quarters upon the island as snug as circumstances would permit. Their apprehensions, however, began to return again, when several days had passed over, and the ice neither grew any thinner nor any thicker, but seemed to remain at a stand-still. In the early part of the morning it was almost strong enough to bear them; but during the day the sun melted it, until it was little better than a scum over the surface of the water.

The alarm of our voyageurs increased. Their provisions were nearly out. There was no game on the islet – not so much as a

bird – for they had beaten every bush, and found nothing. Once or twice they thought of launching their canoe and breaking a way for it through the ice. But they knew that this proceeding would be one of much labour as well as danger. The islet was full ten miles from the shore, and they would therefore have to break the ice for ten miles. Moreover, to stand up in a bark canoe, so as to get at the work, would be a difficult task. It could not be accomplished without endangering the equilibrium of the vessel, and indeed without upsetting it altogether. Even to lean forward in the bow would be a perilous experiment; and under these considerations the idea of breaking a way was abandoned.

But their provisions were at length entirely exhausted, and what was to be done? The ice was still too weak to carry them. Near the shore it might have been strong enough, but farther out lay the danger. There they knew it was thinner, for it had not frozen over until a later period. It would have been madness to have risked it yet. On the other hand, they were starving, or likely to starve from hunger, by staying where they were. There was nothing eatable on the island. What was to be done? In the water were fish – they doubted not that – but how were they to catch them? They had tried them with hook and line, letting the hook through a hole in the ice; but at that late season the fish would not take a bait, and although they kept several continually set, and "looked" them most regularly and assiduously, not a "tail" was taken.

They were about to adopt the desperate expedient, now more

difficult than ever, of breaking their way through the ice, when, all at once, it occurred to Norman, that, if they could not coax the fish to take a bait, they might succeed better with a net, and capture them against their will. This idea would have been plausible enough, had there been a net; but there was no net on that islet, nor perhaps within an hundred miles of it. The absence of a net might have been an obstacle to those who are ever ready to despair; but such an obstacle never occurred to our courageous boys. They had two *parchment* skins of the caribou which they had lately killed, and out of these Norman proposed to make a net.

He would soon do it, he said, if the others would set to work and cut the deer-skins into thongs fine enough for the purpose. Two of them, therefore, Basil and Lucien, took out their knives, and went briskly to work; while François assisted Norman in twining the thongs, and afterwards held them, while the latter wove and knotted them into meshes. In a few hours both the skins were cut into fine strips, and worked up; and a net was produced nearly six yards in length by at least two in width. It was rude enough, to be sure, but perhaps it would do its work as well as if it had been twined out of silk. At all events, it was soon to have a trial – for the moment it was finished the sinkers were attached to it, and it was carried down to the edge of the water.

The three "Southerners" had never seen a net set under ice – for in their country ice is an uncommon thing, and indeed never freezes of sufficient thickness to carry the weight of a man. They

were therefore very curious to know how the thing was to be done. They could not conceive how the net was to be stretched under the ice, in such a manner as to catch the fish. Norman, however, knew all about it. He had seen the Indians, and had set many a one himself. It was no new thing for him, and he set about it at once.

He first crept out upon the ice to the distance of about twenty or thirty yards from the shore. He proceeded cautiously, as the ice creaked under him. Having arrived at the place where he intended to set the net, he knelt down, and with his knife cut several holes in the ice, at the distance of about six feet from each other, and all in one line. He had already provided himself with a straight sapling of more than six feet in length, to one end of which he had attached a cord. The other end of this cord was tied to the net, at one of its corners. He now thrust the sapling through the first hole he had made, and then guided it so as to pass directly under the second.

At this hole he took a fresh hold of the stick, and passed it along to the next, and so on to the last, where he pulled it out again, and of course along with it the string. The net was not drawn into the first hole, and by means of the cord already received through, was pulled out to its full length. The sinkers, of course, fell down in the water, and drew it into a vertical position. At both its upper corners the net was made fast above the ice, and was now "set." Nothing more could be done until the fish came into it of their own accord, when it could be drawn out upon the

ice by means of the cord attached; and, of course, by the same means could easily be returned to its place, and set again.

All of them now went back to the fire, and with hungry looks sat around it, waiting the result. They had made up their minds, should no fish be caught, to get once more into the canoe and attempt breaking their way to the shore. Summoning all their patience, therefore, they waited for nearly two hours, without examining the net. Then Norman and Basil crawled back upon the ice, to see what fortune had done for them. They approached the spot, and, with their hearts thumping against their ribs, untied the knot and commenced hauling out.

"It certainly feels heavy," said Basil, as the net was being drawn. "Hurrah!" he shouted, "Something kicks, hurrah!" and with the second "hurrah!" a beautiful fish was pulled up through the hole, and landed upon the ice. A loud "hurrah" was uttered in response by Lucien and François – who, fearing the ice might not bear so many, had remained upon the shore. A yard or two more of the net was cleared, and a second fish still larger than the former was greeted with a general "hurrah!" The two fish were now taken out – as these were all that had been caught – and the net was once more carefully set. Basil and Norman came back to the shore – Norman to receive quite a shower of compliments from his companions.

The fish – the largest of which weighed nearly five pounds – proved to be trout; and it was not long before their quality was put to the proof. All declared they had never eaten so fine

trout in their lives; but when the condition of their appetites is taken into account, we may infer that there was, perhaps, a little exaggeration in this statement. If hunger really makes good sauce, our voyageurs had the best of sauce with their fish, as each of them was as hungry as a half-famished wolf.

They felt quite relieved, as far as present appetite went, but they were still uneasy for the future. Should they not succeed in taking more fish – and it was by no means certain they should succeed – they would be no better off than ever. Their anxiety, however, was soon removed. Their second "haul" proved even more successful than the first – as five fish, weighing together not less than twenty pounds, were pulled up.

This supply would enable them to hold out for a long time, but they had not much longer to remain on the islet. Upon that very night there was one of those severe frosts known only in high latitudes, and the ice upon the lake became nearly a foot in thickness. They had no longer any fear of its breaking under their weight; and taking their canoe with all their "traps," they set out to cross over upon the ice. In a few hours they reached the shore of the lake, near the end of the promontory, where they chose a spot, and encamped.

CHAPTER XXIV.
AN ODD ALARM

The first thing our voyageurs did after choosing a suitable situation, was to build a log-hut. Being young backwoodsmen this was but a trifle to them. All four of them knew how to handle an axe with dexterity. The logs were soon cut and notched, and a small cabin was put up, and roofed with split clap-boards. With the stones that lay near the shore of the lake they built a chimney. It was but a rude structure, but it drew admirably. Clay was wanted to "chink" the cabin, but that could not be had, as the ground was hard frozen, and it was quite impossible to make either clay or mud.

Even hot water poured out would freeze into ice in a few minutes. This was a serious want – for in such a cold climate even the smallest hole in the walls will keep a house uncomfortable, and to fill the interstices between the logs, so as to make them air-tight, some soft substance was necessary. Grass was suggested, and Lucien went off in search of it. After awhile he returned with an armful of half-withered grass, which all agreed would be the very thing; and a large quantity was soon collected, as it grew plentifully at a short distance from the cabin.

They now set to work to stuff it into the chinks; when, to their astonishment, they found that this grass had a beautiful smell, quite as powerful and as pleasant as that of mint or thyme! When

a small quantity of it was flung into the fire it filled the cabin with a fragrance as agreeable as the costliest perfumes. It was the "scented grass," which grows in great profusion in many parts of the Hudson's Bay territory, and out of which the Indians often make their beds, burning it also upon the fire to enjoy its aromatic perfume.

For the first day or two, at their new abode, the travellers had lived altogether on fish. They had, of course, brought their net with them from the island, and had set it near the shore in the same way as before. They had captured as many as they wanted, and, strange to say, at one haul they found no less than five different species in the net! One kind, a white fish, the *Coregonus albus* of naturalists, but which is named "tittameg" by the fur-traders, they caught in great plenty. This fish is found in nearly all the lakes and rivers of the Hudson's Bay territory, and is much prized both by whites and Indians for its delicate flavour. At some of the trading posts it often forms, for weeks together, the only food which the residents can obtain; and they are quite satisfied when they can get enough of it. The tittameg is not a large fish; the largest attain to the weight of about eight pounds.

There was another and still smaller species, which, from its colour, the voyageurs call the "poisson bleu," or blue fish. It is the *Coregonus signifer* of ichthyologists. It is a species of grayling, and frequents sharp-running water, where it will leap at the fly like a trout. Several kinds of trout also inhabit the Great Slave Lake, and some of these attain to the enormous weight of eighty

pounds! A few were caught, but none of so gigantic proportions as this. Pike were also taken in the net, and a species of burbot. This last is one of the most voracious of the finny tribe, and preys upon all others that it is able to swallow. It devours whole quantities of cray-fish, until its stomach becomes crammed to such a degree as to distort the shape of its whole body. When this kind was drawn out, it was treated very rudely by the boys – because its flesh was known to be extremely unsavoury, and none of them cared to eat it. Marengo, however, had no such scruples, and he was wont to make several hearty meals each day upon the rejected burbot.

A fish diet exclusively was not the thing; and as our party soon grew tired of it, the hunter Basil shouldered his rifle, and strode off into the woods in search of game. The others remained working upon the cabin, which was still far from being finished.

Basil kept along the edge of the lake in an easterly direction. He had not gone more than a quarter of a mile, when he came upon a dry gravelly ridge, which was thickly covered with a species of pine-trees that resembled the Scotch fir. These trees were not over forty feet in height, with very thick trunks and long flexible branches. No other trees grew among them, for it is the nature of this pine – which was the "scrub" or grey pine – to monopolise the ground wherever it grows. As Basil passed on, he noticed that many of the trees were completely "barked," particularly on the branches; and small pieces of the bark lay scattered over the ground, as though it had been peeled off and

gnawed by some animal. He was walking quietly on and thinking what creature could have made such a wreck, when he came to a place where the ground was covered with fine sand or dust.

In this, to his astonishment, he observed what he supposed to be the tracks of human feet! They were not those of a man, but small tracks, resembling the footsteps of a child of three or four years of age. He was about stooping down to examine them more closely, when a voice sounded in his ears exactly like the cry of a child! This brought him suddenly to an erect attitude again, and he looked all round to discover who or what had uttered that strange cry. He could see no one – child or man – and strange, too, for he had a clear view through the tree-trunks for several hundred yards around. He was filled with curiosity, not unmixed with alarm; and, stepping forward a few paces, he was about to bend down and examine the tracks a second time, when the singular cry again startled him.

This time it was louder than before, as if he was closer to whatever had uttered it, but Basil now perceived that it proceeded from above him. The creature from which it came was certainly not upon the ground, but high up among the tops of the trees. He looked up, and there, in the fork of one of the pines, he perceived a singular and hideous-looking animal – such as he had never before seen. It was of a brown colour, about the size of a terrier-dog, with thick shaggy hair, and clumped up in the fork of the tree – so that its head and feet were scarcely distinguishable.

Its odd appearance, as well as the peculiar cry which it had

uttered, would have alarmed many a one of less courage than our young hunter, and Basil was at first, as he afterwards confessed, "slightly flurried;" but a moment's reflection told him what the animal was – one of the most innocent and inoffensive of God's creatures – the Canada porcupine. It was this, then, that had barked the scrub pines – for they are its favourite food; and it was its track – which in reality very much resembles that of a child – that Basil had seen in the sand.

The first thought of the young hunter was to throw up his rifle, and send a bullet through the ungainly animal; which, instead of making any effort to escape, remained almost motionless, uttering, at intervals, its child-like screams. Basil, however, reflected that the report of his rifle would frighten any large game that might chance to be near; and as the porcupine was hardly worth a shot, he concluded, upon reflection, it would be better to leave it alone. He knew – for he had heard Lucien say so – that he would find the porcupine at any time, were it a week, or even a month after – for these creatures remain sometimes a whole winter in the same grove. He resolved, therefore, should no other game turn up, to return for it; and, shouldering his rifle again, he continued his course through the woods.

As he proceeded, the timber became thinner. The scrub-pines gave place to poplar-trees, with here and there an undergrowth of willows. The trees stood far apart, and the willows grew only in clumps or "islands," so that the view was nearly open for many hundred yards around. Basil walked on with all the silence and

watchfulness of a true "still" hunter – for, among backwoodsmen, this species of hunting is so called. He ascended a low hill, and keeping a tree in front of him, looked cautiously over its crest. Before him, and stretching from the bottom of the hill, was a level tract of considerable extent.

It was bounded on one side by the edge of the lake, and on all the others by thin woods, similar to those through which the hunter had been for some time travelling. Here and there, over the plain, there stood trees, far apart from each other, and in nowise intercepting the view for a mile or more. The ground was clear of underwood, except along the immediate edge of the lake, which was fringed by a thicket of willows.

As Basil looked over the hill, he espied a small group of animals near the interior border of the willows. He had never seen animals of the same species before, but the genus was easily told. The tall antlered horns, that rose upon the head of one of them, showed that they were deer of some kind; and the immense size of the creature that bore them, together with his ungainly form, his long legs, and ass-like ears, his huge head with its overhanging lip, his short neck with its standing mane, and, above all, the broad palmation of the horns themselves, left Basil without any doubt upon his mind that the animals before him were moose-deer – the largest, and perhaps the most awkward, of all the deer kind.

The one with the antlers was the male or bull-moose. The others were the female and her two calves of the preceding year.

The latter were still but half-grown, and, like the female, were without the "branching horns" that adorned the head of the old bull. They were all of a dark-brown colour – looking blackish in the distance – but the large one was darker than any of the others.

Basil's heart beat high, for he had often heard of the great moose, but now saw it for the first time. In his own country it is not found, as it is peculiarly a creature of the cold regions, and ranges no farther to the south than the northern edge of the United States territory. To the north it is met with as far as timber grows – even to the shores of the Polar Sea! Naturalists are not certain, whether or not it be the same animal with the elk of Europe. Certainly the two are but little, if anything, different; but the name "elk" has been given in America to quite another and smaller species of deer – the wapiti.

The moose takes its name from its Indian appellation, "moosŏă," or "wood-eater;" and this name is very appropriate, as the animal lives mostly upon the leaves and twigs of trees. In fact, its structure – like that of the camelopard – is such that it finds great difficulty in reaching grass, or any other herbage, except where the latter chances to be very tall, or grows upon the declivity of a very steep hill. When it wishes to feed upon grass, the moose usually seeks it in such situations; and it may often be seen browsing up the side of a hill, with its legs spread widely on both sides of its neck. But its favourite food is found at a more convenient height, and consists of the young shoots of many species of trees. It prefers those of the poplar, the birch-

tree, and willows, and one kind of these last, the red willow, is its particular favourite.

The "striped" maple is also much relished by the moose – hence the name "moose-wood," by which this tree is known among the hunters. It loves also the common water-lilies, and in summer it may be seen wading out into lakes, and plucking up their succulent leaves. It takes to the water also for other purposes – to cool its body, and rid itself of several species of gnats and mosquitoes that at this season torment it exceedingly. At such times it is more easily approached; and the Indians hunt it in their canoes, and kill it in the water, both with spears and arrows. They never find the moose, however, in large numbers – for it is a solitary animal, and only associates in pairs during one part of the year, and in families at another season – as Basil now found it.

In winter the Indians track it through the snow, following it upon snow-shoes. These give them the advantage of skimming along the surface, while the moose plunges through the deep rift, and is therefore impeded in its flight. Notwithstanding, it will frequently escape from the hunter, after a *chase of several days' duration*! Sometimes, in deep snow, a dozen or more of these animals will be found in one place, where they have got accidentally together. The snow will be trodden down until the place appears as if enclosed by a wall. This the hunters term a "moose-pound," and when found in such situations the moose are easily approached and surrounded – when a general *battue* takes place, in which few or none of the animals are allowed to escape.

I have said that Basil's heart beat high at the sight of the moose. He was very desirous of killing one – partly on account of the novelty of the thing, and partly because he and his companions at the camp were anxious for a change of diet. Moose-meat was the very thing; and he knew that if he could return to camp with a few pieces of this strung over his gun, he would receive a double welcome. He was well aware that the flesh of the moose was of the most savoury and delicate kind, and that the long pendulous upper lip is one of the "tit-bits" of the fur countries. Moreover, the fine hide would be an acceptable addition to their stock, as it is the best of all deer-skins for mocassins, as well as snow-shoes – articles which Basil knew would soon be needed. For these reasons he was unusually desirous of killing one of the moose.

He knew it would be difficult to approach them. He had heard that they were shyest at that very season – the beginning of winter – and indeed such is the case. No deer is so difficult to get a shot at as a moose in early winter. In summer it is not so – as then the musquitoes torment these animals to such a degree that they pay less heed to other enemies, and the hunter can more easily approach them. In winter they are always on the alert. Their sense of smell – as well as of sight and hearing – is acute to an extreme degree, and they are cunning besides. They can scent an enemy a long distance off – if the wind be in their favour – and the snapping of a twig, or the slightest rustle of the leaves, is sufficient to start them off.

In their journeyings through the snow, when they wish to rest

themselves, they make a sort of *détour*, and, coming back, lie down near the track which they have already passed over. This gives them an opportunity of hearing any enemy that may be following upon their trail, and also of making off in a side-direction, while the latter will be looking steadfastly ahead for them.

Basil had heard of all these tricks of the moose – for many an old moose-hunter had poured his tale into Basil's ear. He proceeded, therefore, with all due caution. He first buried his hand in his game-bag, and after a little groping brought out a downy feather which had chanced to be there. This he placed lightly upon the muzzle of his rifle, and having gently elevated the piece above his head, watched the feather. After a moment, the breeze carried it off, and Basil noted the direction it took. This is called, in hunter phrase, "tossing the feather," and gave Basil the exact direction of the wind – an important knowledge in the present case.

To Basil's gratification he saw that it was blowing down the lake, and nearly towards himself. He was not exactly to leeward of the moose; but, what was better still, the willows that fringed the lake were, for he could see them bending from the deer, as the breeze blew freshly. He knew he could easily get among the willows; and as they were not quite leafless, and, moreover, were interspersed with tall reed grass, they formed a tolerable cover under which he might make his approach.

Without losing time, then, he made for the willows, and

placing them between himself and the game, commenced "approaching" along the shore of the lake.

He had a full half-hour's creeping – at one time upon his hands and knees – at another crawling flat upon his breast like a gigantic lizard, and now and then, at favourable spots, walking in a bent attitude. A full half-hour was he, and much pain and patience did it cost him, before getting within shot. But Basil was a hunter, and knew both how to endure the pain and practise the patience – virtues that, in hunting as well as in many other occupations usually meet with their reward. And Basil was likely to meet with his, for on parting the leaves, and looking cautiously through, he saw that he had arrived at the right spot. Within fifty yards of him he saw the high shoulders of the bull-moose and his great flat antlers towering over the tops of the willows, among the leaves of which the snout of the animal was buried. He also caught a glimpse of parts of the other three beyond; but he thought only of the bull, and it was upon him that he kept his eyes fixed. Basil did not think of the quality of the meat, else he would have selected either the cow or one of the calves. Had it been buffaloes he would certainly have done so; but as he had never killed a moose, he was determined to slay the leader of the herd.

Indeed, had he wished to shoot one of the others, it might not have been so easy, as they were farther off, and he could only see the tops of their shoulders over the willows. Neither did the bull offer a fair mark. He stood face to face with the hunter, and Basil fancied that a shot on the frontal bone might not kill him.

He knew it would not kill a buffalo. There was only one other part at which he could aim – the fore-shoulder; and after waiting some moments for the animal to give him a fairer chance he took aim at this and fired. He heard a loud cracking of hoofs, as the cow and calves shambled off over the plain, but he saw that the bull was not with them. He was down behind the willows. No doubt he was dead.

CHAPTER XXV.
ENCOUNTER WITH A MOOSE

What was a rare thing for Basil to do, he rushed forward without reloading his gun. A few springs brought him into the open ground, and in presence of the game. To his astonishment, the bull was not dead, nor down neither, but only upon his knees – of course wounded. Basil saw the "crease" of the bullet along the neck of the animal as he drew near. It was only by a quick glance that he saw this, for as soon as the bull saw *him* he rose to his full height – his eyes flashing like a tiger's – and settling his antlers in a forward position, sprang upon the hunter! Basil leaped aside to avoid the encounter; and in the first rush was successful, but the animal turned suddenly, and, coming up a second time, raised his fore-feet high in the air, and struck forward with his long-pointed hoofs.

Basil attempted to defend himself with his rifle, but the piece was struck out of his hand in an instant. Once more avoiding the forward rush of the infuriated beast, the young hunter looked around for some object to save him. A tree fell under his eye, and he ran towards it with all his speed. The moose followed close upon his heels, and he had just time to reach the tree and get around its trunk, when the animal brushed past, tearing the bark with his sharp antlers. Basil now slipped round the trunk, and when the moose again turned himself the two were on opposite

sides of the tree! The beast, however, rushed up, and struck the tree furiously first with his brow antlers, and then with his hoofs, uttering loud snorts, and at intervals a shrill whistling sound that was terrible to hear.

The disappointment which the enraged animal felt, at seeing his enemy thus escape him, seemed to have added to his rage; and he now vented his spite upon the tree, until the trunk, to the height of six feet, was completely stripped of its bark. While this was going on, Basil remained behind the tree, "dodging" round as the moose manœuvred, and taking care always to have the animal on the opposite side. To have got into a safer situation he would have climbed the tree; but it happened to be a poplar, without a branch for many feet from the ground, and of too great a girth to be "embraced." He could do nothing, therefore, but remain upon the ground, and keep the tree-trunk between himself and the bull.

For nearly an hour this lasted, the moose now remaining at rest for a few minutes, and then making fresh onsets that seemed to abate nothing in their fury. His rage appeared to be implacable, and his vengeance as tenacious as that of a tiger or any other beast of prey. The wound which the hunter had given him was no doubt painful, and kept his resentment from cooling. Unfortunately, it was not a mortal wound, as Basil had every opportunity of seeing. The bullet had hit the fore-shoulder; but, after tearing along the skin, had glanced off without injuring the bone. It had only enraged the bull, without crippling him in the least degree.

Basil began to dread the result. He was becoming faint with fatigue as well as hunger. When would he be relieved? When would the fierce brute feel inclined to leave him? These were questions which the hunter put to himself repeatedly, without being able to divine an answer. He had heard of hunters being killed by wounded moose. He had heard that these creatures will remain for days watching a person whom they may have "treed." He could not stand it for days. He would drop down with fatigue, and then the bull would gore and trample him at pleasure. Would they be able to trace him from the camp? They would not think of that before nightfall. They would not think of him as "lost" before that time; and then they could not follow his trail in the darkness, nor even in the light – for the ground was hard as a rock, and he had made no footmarks. Marengo might trace him. The dog had been left at the camp, as Basil preferred "still-hunting" without him. But in his present situation the hunter's apprehensions were stronger than his hopes. Even Marengo might be baffled in lifting the scent.

The trail was an exceedingly devious one, for Basil had meandered round the sides of the hill in search of game. Deer or other animals might have since crossed it, which might mislead the hound. It would be cold at night, and much colder next morning. There were many chances that no relief might reach him from the camp. Impressed with this conviction, Basil began to feel serious alarm. Not despair, however – he was not the boy to despair. His mind only grew more alive to the necessity for

action. He looked around to discover some means of escape. His gun lay not a hundred yards off. Could he only get hold of the piece, and return safely to the tree again, he could there load it and put an end to the scene at once. But to reach the gun was impossible. The moose would bound after and overtake him to a certainty. The idea of getting the gun was abandoned.

In the opposite direction to that in which the gun lay, Basil perceived that there were other trees. The nearest was but a dozen yards from him; and others, again, grew at about the same distance from that one, and from each other. Basil now conceived the idea of escaping to the nearest, and from that to the next, and by this means getting back into the thick forest. Once there, he believed that he would be the better able to effect his escape, and perhaps reach the camp by dodging from tree to tree. He could beat the moose for a dozen yards – getting a little the start of him – and this he hoped to be able to do. Should he fail in his short race, however – should his foot slip – the alternative was fearful. *It was no other than death!*

He knew that, but it did not change his resolution to make the attempt. He only waited for the animal to work round between him and the tree towards which he intended to run. You will wonder that he did not prefer to have the moose on the other side. But he did not, for this reason – had the bull been there, he could have sprung after him at the first start; whereas, when heading the other way, Basil believed he could brush close past, and gain an advantage, as the unwieldy brute, taken by surprise,

would require some time in turning himself to give chase.

The opportunity at length arrived; and, nerving himself for the race, the hunter sprang past the moose, brushing the very tips of its antlers. He ran without either stopping or even looking back, until he had reached the tree, and sheltered himself behind its trunk. The moose had followed, and arrived but the moment after, snorting and whistling furiously. Enraged at the *ruse*, it attacked this tree, as it had the other, with hoof and horns; and Basil nimbly evaded both by keeping on the opposite side, as before.

In a few minutes he prepared himself for a second rush, and once more started. A third tree was reached in safety – and then a fourth, and a fifth, and many others, in a similar manner – the moose all the while following in hot pursuit. Basil had begun to hope that in this way he would get off, when, to his chagrin, he saw that an open space still intervened between him and the thick woods, upon which there were only a few trees, and those so small that not one of them would have sheltered him. This tract was full two hundred yards in width, and extended all along the edge of the thick forest. He dared not cross it. The moose would overtake him before he could get half the way; and he was obliged to give up the idea of making the attempt.

As he stood behind the last tree he had reached, he saw that it branched, and the lowest branches grew but a little above his head. He could easily climb it, and at once resolved to do so. He would there be safe for the time, and could at least rest himself,

for he was now weak with fatigue. He therefore stretched up his hands, and, laying hold of a branch, swung himself up into the tree. Then, climbing up a little higher, he sat down on one of the forks.

The moose appeared as furious as ever; and ran round the tree, now striking it with his horns, and then rearing upon his hind-legs, and pouncing against the trunk with his hoofs. At times his snout was so close to Basil, that the latter could almost touch it; and he had even drawn his hunting-knife, and reached down with the intent of giving the creature a stab.

This last action led to a train of thought, and Basil seemed suddenly to adopt some new resolution. Leaving the fork where he had perched himself, he climbed higher up the tree; and, selecting one of the longest and straightest branches, commenced cutting it off close to the trunk. This was soon effected; and then, drawing it along his knee, he trimmed off all the twigs and tops until the branch became a straight pole, like a spear-handle. Along one end of this he laid the handle of his knife; and with thongs, which he had already cut out of the strap of his bullet-pouch, he spliced the knife and pole together. This gave him a formidable weapon – for the knife was a "bowie," and had a long blade, with a point like a rapier. He was not slow in using it.

Descending again to the lowermost limbs, he commenced making demonstrations, in order to bring the moose within reach. This he very soon succeeded in doing; and the animal ran forward and reared up against the tree. Before it could get upon its four

legs again, Basil had thrust it in the neck, giving full force to the blow. The blood rushed forth in a thick stream, as the jugular vein had been cut by the keen blade; and the huge brute was seen to totter in its steps, and then fall with a dull heavy sound to the earth. In a few moments the hunter had the satisfaction of perceiving that it was quite dead.

Basil now dropped out of the tree, and walking back to where his rifle lay, took up the piece and carefully reloaded it. He then returned to the moose, and opening the great jaws of the animal, gagged them with a stick. He next unspliced his knife, took off the gristly lips, and cut out the tongue. These he placed in his game-bag, and shouldering his rifle, was about to depart; when some new idea caused him to halt, put down his gun, and again unsheath his knife. Once more approaching the carcass, he made an incision near the kidneys; and having inserted his hand, drew forth what appeared to be a part of the intestines. It was the bladder. He then looked around as if in search of something. Presently his eye rested upon some tall reed-grass that was growing near. This was just what he wanted, and, pulling up one of the stems, he cut and fashioned it into a pipe.

With this the moose-bladder was blown out to its full dimensions, and tied at the neck by a piece of thong. The other end of the thong was fastened to one of the branches of the tree above, so that the bladder dangled within a few feet of the carcass of the moose, dancing about with the lightest breath of wind. All these precautions Basil had taken to keep the wolves

from devouring the moose – for it was his intention to return and butcher it, as soon as he could get help. When he had hung the bladder to his liking, he put up his knife again; and, once more shouldering his rifle, walked off.

On reaching the camp – which he did shortly after – the tongue of the moose was broiled without delay, and, after making a delicious meal of it, the whole party went off for the remainder of the meat. They found it all quite safe; although, had it not been for the bladder, not much of it would have been there – as no less than a dozen great gaunt wolves were seen lurking about, and these would have eaten it up in the shortest possible time. The bladder, however, had kept them off; for, strange to say, these creatures, who are as cunning as foxes, and can hardly be trapped, can yet be deceived and frightened by such a simple thing as a bladder dangling from a branch.

The moose proved to be one of the largest of his kind. His height was quite equal to that of a horse; and his horns, flattened out to the breadth of shovels, weighed over sixty pounds. His carcass was not less than fifteen hundred pounds weight; and our voyageurs had to make two journeys to convey the meat to their camp. On the last journey, François brought the porcupine as well – having found it on the very same tree where Basil had left it!

CHAPTER XXVI.
LIFE IN A LOG-HUT

The log-hut was finished on the 1st of September, and not a day too soon; for on that very day the winter set in with full severity. A heavy fall of snow came down in the night; and next morning, when our voyageurs looked abroad, the ground was covered to the depth of a foot, or more; and the ice upon the lake was also white. Walking through the great wreaths now became very difficult; and the next thing to be done was the making of "snow-shoes."

Snow-shoes are an invention of the Indians; and, in the winter of the Arctic regions of America, are an article almost as indispensable as clothing itself. Without them, travelling afoot would be impossible. In these countries, as already stated, the snow often covers the ground to the depth of many feet; and remains without any considerable diminution for six, and, in some years, eight or nine months. At times, it is frozen hard enough on the surface to bear a man without the snow-shoes; but oftener on account of thaws and fresh falls, it becomes quite soft, and at such times travelling over it is both difficult and dangerous. To avoid both the difficulty and the danger, the Indians make use of this very singular sort of foot-wear – called "snow-shoes" by the English, and "raquets" by the Canadian voyageurs.

They are used by all the Indian tribes of the Hudson's Bay

territory; and were it not for them these people would be confined to one place for months together, and could not follow the deer or other game. As almost all savages are improvident, and none more so than the North American Indians, were they prevented for a season from going out to hunt, whole tribes would starve. Indeed, many individuals of them perish with hunger as it is; and the life of all these Indians is nothing more than one continued struggle for food enough to sustain them. In summer they are often in the midst of plenty; slaughtering deer and buffalo by hundreds, taking out only the tongues, and recklessly leaving the flesh to the wolves! In winter the very same Indians may be seen without a pound of meat in their encampment – the lives of themselves and their families depending upon the success of a single day's hunt!

But let us return to the snow-shoes. Let us see what they are, and learn how they are made.

Any boy who has snared sparrows in snow-time, has, no doubt, done so by tying his snares upon a hoop netted across with twine or other small cord. Now, if he will conceive his hoop bent into an oblong shape – something like what the figure of a boat turned on its mouth would make in snow – and if he will also fancy the netting to consist of thongs of twisted deer-hide woven somewhat closely together, he will get a very good idea of an Indian snow-shoe. It is usually from three to four feet long, by about a foot wide at the middle part, from which it tapers gently to a point, both at the heel and toe.

The frame, as I have said, is like the hoop of a boy's bird-snare. It is made of light, tough wood, and, of course, carefully bent and polished with the knife. The slender branches of the "scrub-pine" are esteemed excellent for this purpose, as their wood is light, flexible and tough in its fibres. This is also a favourite tree, where it grows, to make tent-poles, canoe-timbers, and other implements required by the Indians; and these people use so much of it for their arrows, that it has received from the Canadian voyageurs the name of *bois de flêche* (arrow-wood).

Well, then, the frame of the snow-shoes being bent to its proper shape, two transverse bars are placed across near the middle, and several inches from each other. They are for the foot to rest upon, as well as to give strength to the whole structure. These being made fast, the netting is woven on, and extends over the whole frame, with the exception of a little space in front of the bars where the ball of the foot is to rest. This space is left free of netting, in order to allow play to the toes while walking. The mesh-work is made of thongs usually cut from the parchment-skin of a deer, and twisted. Sometimes twisted intestines are used, and the netting exactly resembles that seen in "racquets" for ball play.

The snow-shoe, when finished, is simply fastened upon the foot by means of straps or thongs; and a pair of them thus placed, will present a surface to the snow of nearly six square feet – more, if required, by making them larger. But this is enough to sustain the heaviest man upon the softest snow, and an Indian thus "shod"

will skim over the surface like a skater.

The shoes used by all tribes of Indians are not alike in shape. There are fashions and fancies in this respect. Some are made – as among the Chippewa Indians – with one side of the frame nearly straight; and these, of course, will not do for either foot, but are "rights and lefts." Generally, however, the shape is such that the snow-shoe will fit either foot.

The snow-shoes having now become a necessary thing, our young voyageurs set about making a complete set for the whole party – that is, no less than four pairs. Norman was the "shoemaker," and Norman knew how. He could splice the frames, and work in the netting, equal to an Indian squaw. Of course all the others assisted him. Lucien cut the moose-skin into fine regular strips; Basil waded off through the snow, and procured the frames from the wood of the scrub-pine trees where he had encountered the porcupine; and then he and François trimmed them with their knives, and sweated them in the hot ashes until they became dry, and ready for the hands of the "shoemaker."

This work occupied them several days, and then each had a pair of shoes fitted to his size and weight.

The next consideration was, to lay in a stock of meat. The moose had furnished them with enough for present use, but that would not last long, as there was no bread nor anything else to eat with it. Persons in their situation require a great deal of meat to sustain them, much more than those who live in great cities,

who eat a variety of substances, and drink many kinds of drinks. The healthy voyageur is rarely without a keen appetite; and meat by itself is a food that speedily digests, and makes way for a fresh meal; so that the ration usually allowed to the *employés* of the fur companies would appear large enough to supply the table of several families. For instance, in some parts of the Hudson's Bay territory, the voyageur is allowed eight pounds of buffalo-meat *per diem*! And yet it is all eaten by him, and sometimes deemed barely sufficient.

A single deer, therefore, or even a buffalo, lasts a party of voyageurs for a very short time, since they have no other substance, such as bread or vegetables, to help it out. It was necessary, then, that our travellers should use all their diligence in laying up a stock of dried meat, before the winter became too cold for them to hunt. There was another consideration – their clothing. They all had clothing sufficient for such weather as they had yet experienced; but that would never do for the winter of the Great Slave Lake, and they knew it. Many deer must be killed, and many hides dressed, before they could make a full set of clothing for all, as well as a set of deer-skin blankets, which would be much needed.

As soon as the snow-shoes were finished, therefore, Basil and Norman went out each day upon long hunting expeditions, from which they rarely returned before nightfall. Sometimes they brought with them a deer, of the caribou or reindeer species, and the “woodland” variety, which were in plenty at this place.

They only carried to camp the best parts with the skin, as the flesh of the woodland caribou is not much esteemed. It is larger than the other kind – the "Barren Ground caribou," weighing about one hundred and fifty pounds; but both its venison and hide are of inferior quality to those of the latter species. Sometimes our hunters killed smaller game; and on several occasions they returned without having emptied their guns at all.

But there was one day that made up for several – one grand day when they were extremely successful, and on which they killed a whole herd of moose, consisting of five individuals – the old bull, a spike buck – that is, a young buck, whose horns had not yet got antlers upon them – the cow, and two calves. These they had tracked and followed for a long distance, and had succeeded, at length, in running them into a valley where the snow was exceedingly deep, and where the moose became entangled. There had been a shower of rain the day before that had melted the surface of the snow; and this had again frozen into an icy crust, upon which the deer lacerated their ankles at every plunge, leaving a track of blood behind them as they ran.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.