ROBERT MICHAEL BALLANTYNE

SNOWFLAKES AND SUNBEAMS; OR, THE YOUNG FUR-TRADERS: A TALE OF THE FAR NORTH

Robert Michael Ballantyne

Snowflakes and Sunbeams; Or, The Young Fur-traders: A Tale of the Far North

http://www.litres.ru/pages/biblio_book/?art=36093717
Snowflakes and Sunbeams; Or, The Young Fur-traders: A Tale of the Far North:

Содержание

R. M. Ballantyne
Snowflakes and Sunbeams; Or, The Young Fur-traders: A Tale of the Far North

PEEFACE

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

CHAPTER I

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

In the very centre of the great continent of North America, far removed from the abodes of civilised men, and about twenty miles to the south of Lake Winnipeg, exists a colony composed of Indians, Scotsmen, and French-Canadians, which is known by the name of Red River Settlement. Red River differs from most colonies in more respects than one—the chief differences being, that whereas other colonies cluster on the sea-coast, this one lies many hundreds of miles in the interior of the country, and is surrounded by a wilderness; and while other colonies, acting on the Golden Rule, export their produce in return for goods imported, this of Red River imports a large quantity, and exports nothing, or next to nothing. Not but that it *might* export,

if it only had an outlet or a market; but being eight hundred miles removed from the sea, and five hundred miles from the nearest market, with a series of rivers, lakes, rapids, and cataracts separating from the one, and a wide sweep of treeless prairie dividing from the other, the settlers have long since come to the conclusion that they were born to consume their own produce, and so regulate the extent of their farming operations by the strength of their appetites. Of course, there are many of the necessaries, or at least the luxuries, of life which the colonists cannot grow—such as tea, coffee, sugar, coats, trousers, and shirts—and which, consequently, they procure from England, by means of the Hudson's Bay Fur Company's ships, which sail once a year from Gravesend, laden with supplies for the trade carried on with the Indians. And the bales containing these articles are conveyed in boats up the rivers, carried past the waterfalls and rapids overland on the shoulders of stalwart voyageurs, and finally landed at Red River, after a rough trip of many weeks' duration. The colony was founded in 1811, by the Earl of Selkirk, previously to which it had been a trading-post of the Fur Company. At the time of which we write, it contained about five thousand souls, and extended upwards of fifty miles along the Red and Assiniboine rivers, which streams supplied the settlers with a variety of excellent fish. The banks were clothed with fine trees; and immediately behind the settlement lay the great prairies, which extended in undulating waves—almost entirely devoid of shrub or tree—to the base of the Rocky

Mountains.

Although far removed from the civilised world, and containing within its precincts much that is savage and very little that is refined, Red River is quite a populous paradise, as compared with the desolate, solitary establishments of the Hudson's Bay Fur Company. These lonely dwellings of the trader are scattered far and wide over the whole continent—north, south, east, and west. Their population generally amounts to eight or ten men—seldom to thirty. They are planted in the thick of an uninhabited desert—their next neighbours being from two to five hundred miles off—their occasional visitors, bands of wandering Indians—and the sole object of their existence being to trade the furry hides of foxes, martens, beavers, badgers, bears, buffaloes, and wolves. It will not, then, be deemed a matter of wonder that the gentlemen who have charge of these establishments, and who, perchance, may have spent ten or twenty years in them, should look upon the colony of Red River as a species of Elysium, a sort of haven of rest, in which they may lay their weary heads, and spend the remainder of their days in peaceful felicity, free from the cares of a residence among wild beasts and wild men. Many of the retiring traders prefer casting their lot in Canada; but not a few of them *smoke* out the remainder of their existence in this colony—especially those who, having left home as boys fifty or sixty years before, cannot reasonably expect to find the friends of their childhood where they left them, and cannot hope to remodel tastes and habits long nurtured in the backwoods so

as to relish the manners and customs of civilised society.

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

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

About the same time the council which is annually held at Red River in spring for the purpose of arranging the affairs of the country for the ensuing year thought proper to appoint Mr. Kennedy to a still more outlandish part of the country—as near, in fact, to the North Pole as it was possible for mortal man to live

—and sent him an order to proceed to his destination without loss of time. On receiving this communication, Mr. Kennedy upset his chair, stamped his foot, ground his teeth, and vowed, in the hearing of his wife and children, that sooner than obey the mandate he would see the governors and council of Rupert's Land hanged, quartered, and boiled down into tallow! Ebullitions of this kind were peculiar to Frank Kennedy, and meant *nothing*. They were simply the safety-valves to his superabundant ire, and, like safety-valves in general, made much noise but did no damage. It was well, however, on such occasions to keep out of the old fur-trader's way; for he had an irresistible propensity to hit out at whatever stood before him, especially if the object stood on a level with his own eyes and wore whiskers. On second thoughts, however, he sat down before his writing-table, took a sheet of blue ruled foolscap paper, seized a quill which he had mended six months previously, at a time when he happened to be in high good-humour, and wrote as follows:—

Letter

To the Governor and Council of Rupert's Land, Fort Paskisegun

Red River Settlement. June 15, 18—.

Gentlemen,—I have the honour to acknowledge receipt of your favour of 26th April last, appointing me to the charge of Peel's River, and directing me to strike out new channels of trade in that quarter. In reply, I have to state that I shall have the honour to fulfil your instructions by taking my departure in a light canoe

as soon as possible. At the same time I beg humbly to submit that the state of my health is such as to render it expedient for me to retire from the service, and I herewith beg to hand in my resignation. I shall hope to be relieved early next spring.—I have the honour to be, gentlemen, your most obedient, humble servant,

F. Kennedy.

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

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

After this he put his two children to school. The settlement was at this time fortunate in having a most excellent academy, which was conducted by a very estimable man. Charles and Kate Kennedy, being obedient and clever, made rapid progress under

his judicious management, and the only fault that he had to find with the young people was, that Kate was a little too quiet and fond of books, while Charley was a little too riotous and fond of fun.

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

gave vent to another puff so thick and long that it seemed as if all the previous puffs had concealed themselves up to this moment within his capacious chest, and rushed out at last in one thick and long-continued stream.

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

—leading, as it does, to all sorts of absurd exaggerations, such as gravely asserting that we are "broiling hot" when we are simply "rather warm," or more than "half dead" with fatigue when we are merely "very tired." However, Charley *said* that he would rather be "a buffalo than do it," and so we feel bound in honour to record the fact.

Charley and Kate were warmly attached to each other. Moreover, they had been, ever since they could walk, in the habit of mingling their little joys and sorrows in each other's bosoms; and although, as years flew past, they gradually ceased to sob in each other's arms at every little mishap, they did not cease to interchange their inmost thoughts, and to mingle their tears when occasion called them forth. They knew the power, the inexpressible sweetness, of sympathy. They understood experimentally the comfort and joy that flow from obedience to that blessed commandment to "rejoice with those that do rejoice, and weep with those that weep." It was natural, therefore, that on Mr. Kennedy announcing his decrees, Charley and Kate should hasten to some retired spot where they could commune in solitude; the effect of which communing was to reduce them to a somewhat calmer and rather happy state of mind. Charley's sorrow was blunted by sympathy with Kate's joy, and Kate's joy was subdued by sympathy with Charley's sorrow; so that, after the first effervescing burst, they settled down into a calm and comfortable state of flatness, with very red eyes and exceedingly pensive minds. We must, however, do Charley the justice to say

that the red eyes applied only to Kate; for although a tear or two could without much coaxing be induced to hop over his sun-burned cheek, he had got beyond that period of life when boys are addicted to (we must give the word, though not pretty, because it is eminently expressive) *blubbering*.

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

CHAPTER II

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

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

more dreadful to those *behind* than to those who might chance to be in front of the guns. Nevertheless they were imposing, and harmonised well with the flag-staff, which was the only other military symptom about the place. This latter was used on particular occasions, such as the arrival or departure of a brigade of boats, for the purpose of displaying the folds of a red flag on which were the letters H. B. C.

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

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

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

the corner of the new fence now. Ha! just so—there he goes!"

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

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

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

"Why, my good friend," said Mr. Grant, smiling, "the fence and the road are of themselves pretty conclusive proof to most

men that the road is changed; and, besides, we don't often have people driving round corners at full gallop; but—"

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

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

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

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

"True," said Mr. Grant: "he'll never reach the stable by that road; he's much more likely to visit the White-horse Plains. But come, friend, it's of no use fretting, Charley will soon tire of his ride; so come with me to my room and have a pipe before dinner."

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

the house.

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

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

"Well, Kennedy," said Mr. Grant, throwing himself back in his chair, elevating his chin, and emitting a long thin stream of white vapour from his lips, through which he gazed at his friend

complacently—"well, Kennedy, to what fortunate chance am I indebted for this visit? It is not often that we have the pleasure of seeing you here."

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

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

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

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

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

Mr. Grant looked as if he would rather not undertake to lend his aid in a work that was evidently difficult; but being a

good-natured man, he said, "And how, friend, can I assist in the operation?"

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

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

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

At last he broke silence.

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

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

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

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

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

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

into a loud sarcastic laugh.

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

"What?" inquired Mr. Kennedy abruptly.

"Take it," said Mr. Grant.

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

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

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

"There's his sister Kate, now," continued the old gentleman; "she's as gentle and biddable as a lamb. I've only to say a word, and she's off like a shot to do my bidding; and she does it with such a sweet smile too." There was a touch of pathos in the old trader's voice as he said this. He was a man of strong feeling, and as impulsive in his tenderness as in his wrath. "But that rascal

Charley," he continued, "is quite different. He's obstinate as a mule. To be sure, he has a good temper; and I must say for him he never goes into the sulks, which is a comfort, for of all things in the world sulking is the most childish and contemptible. He *generally* does what I bid him, too. But he's *always* getting into scrapes of one kind or other. And during the last week, notwithstanding all I can say to him, he won't admit that the best thing for him is to get a place in your counting-room, with the prospect of rapid promotion in the service. Very odd. I can't understand it at all;" and Mr. Kennedy heaved a deep sigh.

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

"Can't say I ever did."

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

"No."

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

"Certainly not."

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Charley made no reply, but cast down his eyes again and

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Besides," said Mr. Grant, again interrupting the somewhat

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

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

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

Frank Kennedy was not a man to stand this unexpected miscarriage of his eloquence with equanimity. His first action

was to throw his pipe at the head of his enthusiastic boy; without worse effect, however, than smashing it to atoms on the opposite wall. He then started up and rushed towards his son, who, being near the door, retreated precipitately and vanished.

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

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

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

CHAPTER III

The Counting-room.

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

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

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

a man even to look at it, and renders candles quite unnecessary.

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

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

or, failing this, drove them to distraction.

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

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

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

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

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

"No chance! what do you mean?"

"Only that we are to have a wolf-hunt in the plains to-morrow; and if you've aggravated your father, he'll be taking you home

to-night, that's all."

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Well, well, it don't much signify; perhaps we can mount you."

(Charley's face brightened.) "Go," he continued, addressing Harry

Somerville—"go, tell Tom Whyte I wish to speak to him."

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

In a few minutes he returned, followed by the groom Tom Whyte.

"Tom," said the senior clerk, "do you think we could manage to mount

Charley to-morrow?"

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"That's unfortunate," said the senior clerk.—"I fear, Charley, that you'll need to ride behind Harry on his gray pony. It wouldn't

improve his speed, to be sure, having two on his back; but then he's so like a pig in his movements at any rate, I don't think it would spoil his pace much."

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

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

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

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

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

"The very thing," said the senior clerk.—"Run, Tom; give the miller my compliments, and beg the loan of his horse for Charley

Kennedy.—I think he knows you, Charley?"

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

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

The room in which he sat was a fair specimen of the dwellings devoted to the *employés* of the Hudson's Bay Company throughout the country. It was large, and low in the roof, built entirely of wood, which was unpainted; a matter, however, of no consequence, as, from long exposure to dust and tobacco smoke, the floor, walls, and ceiling had become one deep, uniform brown. The men's beds were constructed after the fashion of berths on board ship, being wooden boxes ranged in tiers round the room. Several tables and benches were strewn miscellaneously about the floor, in the centre of which stood a large double iron stove, with the word *"Carron"* stamped on it. This served at once for cooking and warming the place. Numerous guns, axes, and canoe-paddles hung round the walls or

were piled in corners, and the rafters sustained a miscellaneous mass of materials, the more conspicuous among which were snow-shoes, dog-sledges, axe-handles, and nets.

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

CHAPTER IV

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

During the long winter that reigns in the northern regions of America, the thermometer ranges, for many months together, from zero down to 20, 30, and 40 degrees *below* it. In different parts of the country the intensity of the frost varies a little, but not sufficiently to make any appreciable change in one's sensation of cold. At York Fort, on the shores of Hudson's Bay, where the winter is eight months long, the spirit-of-wine (mercury being useless in so cold a climate) sometimes falls so low as 50 degrees below zero; and away in the regions of Great Bear Lake it has been known to fall considerably lower than 60 degrees below zero of Fahrenheit. Cold of such intensity, of course, produces many curious and interesting effects, which, although scarcely noticed by the inhabitants, make a strong impression upon the minds of those who visit the country for the first time. A youth goes out to walk on one of the first sharp, frosty mornings. His locks are brown and his face ruddy. In half-an-hour he returns with his face blue, his nose frost-bitten, and his locks *white*—the latter effect being produced by his breath congealing on his hair and breast, until both are covered with hoar-frost. Perhaps he is of a sceptical nature, prejudiced it may be, in favour of old habits and customs; so that, although told by those who ought to know that

it is absolutely necessary to wear moccasins in winter, he prefers the leather boots to which he has been accustomed at home, and goes out with them accordingly In a few minutes the feet begin to lose sensation. First the toes, as far as feeling goes, vanish; then the heels depart, and he feels the extraordinary and peculiar and altogether disagreeable sensation of one who has had his heels and toes amputated, and is walking about on his insteps. Soon, however, these also fade away, and the unhappy youth rushes frantically home on the stumps of his ankle-bones—at least so it appears to him, and so in reality it would turn out to be if he did not speedily rub the benumbed appendages into vitality again.

The whole country during this season is buried in snow, and the prairies of Red River present the appearance of a sea of the purest white for five or six months of the year. Impelled by hunger, troops of prairie wolves prowl round the settlement, safe from the assault of man in consequence of their light weight permitting them to scamper away on the surface of the snow, into which man or horse, from their greater weight, would sink, so as to render pursuit either fearfully laborious or altogether impossible. In spring, however, when the first thaws begin to take place, and commence that delightful process of disruption which introduces this charming season of the year, the relative position of wolf and man is reversed. The snow becomes suddenly soft, so that the short legs of the wolf, sinking deep into it, fail to reach the solid ground below, and he is obliged to drag heavily along; while the long legs of the horse enable him to plunge through

and dash aside the snow at a rate which, although not very fleet, is sufficient nevertheless to overtake the chase and give his rider a chance of shooting it. The inhabitants of Red River are not much addicted to this sport, but the gentlemen of the Hudson's Bay Service sometimes practise it; and it was to a hunt of this description that our young friend Charley Kennedy was now so anxious to go.

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

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

for a few weeks after the first awakening.

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

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

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

He merely gave a grunt, and continued to gaze at Tom's fishy eyes, which were about as interesting as the face to which they belonged, and *that* might have been mistaken for almost anything.

"Yes, Joseph," he continued, "that's a fact. There's the noo brown o'ss now, *it's* a skittish 'un. And there's Mr. Kennedy's gray mare, wot's a standin' of beside me, she ain't skittish a bit,

though she's plenty of spirit, and wouldn't care hanythink for a five-barred gate. Now, wot I want to know is, wot's the reason why?"

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

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

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

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

"Well, sir, the miller said 'e'd get 'em put on early this mornin', an'

I 'xpect 'e'll be 'ere in 'alf-a-hour at farthest, sir."

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

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

Charley and Harry stopped and looked at each other. Then they looked at the groom, and as their eyes surveyed his solemn,

cadaverous countenance, which seemed a sort of bad caricature of the long visages of the horses that stood around him, they burst into a simultaneous and prolonged laugh.

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

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

The remainder of Tom's speech was cut short by one of those unforeseen operations of the laws of nature which are peculiar to arctic climates. During the long winter repeated falls of snow cover the housetops with white mantles upwards of a foot thick, which become gradually thicker and more consolidated as winter advances. In spring the suddenness of the thaw loosens these from the sloping roofs, and precipitates them in masses to the ground. These miniature avalanches are dangerous, people having been seriously injured and sometimes killed by them. Now it happened that a very large mass of snow, which lay on and partly depended from the roof of the house near to which the horses were standing, gave way, and just at that critical point in Tom Whyte's speech when he "'ad 'im down to the smith," fell with a stunning crash on the back of Mr. Kennedy's gray mare. The mare was not "skittish"—by no means—according to Tom's idea, but it would have been more than an ordinary mare to have stood the sudden descent of half-a-ton of snow without *some*

symptoms of consciousness. No sooner did it feel the blow than it sent both heels with a bang against the wooden store, by way of preliminary movement, and then rearing up with a wild snort, it sprang over Tom Whyte's head, jerked the reins from his hand, and upset him in the snow. Poor Tom never *bent* to anything. The military despotism under which he had been reared having substituted a touch of the cap for a bow, rendered it unnecessary to bend; prolonged drill, laziness, and rheumatism made it at last impossible. When he stood up, he did so after the manner of a pillar; when he sat down, he broke across at two points, much in the way in which a foot-rule would have done had *it* felt disposed to sit down; and when he fell, he came down like an overturned lamp-post. On the present occasion Tom became horizontal in a moment, and from his unfortunate propensity to fall straight, his head, reaching much farther than might have been expected, came into violent contact with the small Indian boy, who fell flat likewise, letting go the reins of the horses, which latter no sooner felt themselves free than they fled, curvetting and snorting round the court, with reins and manes flying in rare confusion.

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

A few minutes after this Mr. Grant issued from the principal house leaning on Mr. Kennedy's arm, and followed by the senior clerk, Peter Mactavish, and one or two friends who had come to

take part in the wolf-hunt. They were all armed with double or single barrelled guns or pistols, according to their several fancies. The two elderly gentlemen alone entered upon the scene without any more deadly weapons than their heavy riding-whips. Young Harry Somerville, who had been strongly advised not to take a gun lest he should shoot himself or his horse or his companions, was content to take the field with a small pocket-pistol, which he crammed to the muzzle with a compound of ball and swan-shot.

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

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

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

"Humph!" ejaculated Mr. Kennedy, with a frown—"Come here, Charley," he said, as the boy approached with a disappointed look to tell of his failure in getting a horse; "I've been talking with Mr. Grant again about this business, and he says he can easily get you into the counting-room here for a year, so you'll make arrangements—"

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

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

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

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

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

How's that?"

"No, sir," said Tom.

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

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

"And the new horse?"

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

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

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

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

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

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

Harry evidently did not know what was to be done, and made no difficulty of saying so in a very sympathising tone. Moreover, he begged Charley very earnestly to take *his* pony, but this the

other would not hear of; so they came to the conclusion that there was nothing for it but to wait as patiently as possible for the arrival of the expected horse. In the meantime Harry proposed a saunter in the field adjoining the fort. Charley assented, and the two friends walked away, leading the gray pony along with them.

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

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

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

"You'd better not."

"Why not?"

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

"Nonsense," cried Charley. "Father didn't say I wasn't to take

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

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

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

The young horse was a well-formed, showy animal, with a good deal of bone—perhaps too much for elegance. He was of a beautiful dark brown, and carried a high head and tail, with a high-stepping gait, that gave him a noble appearance. As Charley cantered along at a steady pace, he could discover no symptoms of the refractory spirit which had been ascribed to him.

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

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

back.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Words cannot convey to you, dear reader, an adequate conception of the peculiar fascination, the exhilarating splendour of the scene by which our hunters were surrounded. Its beauty lay not in variety of feature in the landscape, for there was none. One vast sheet of white alone met the view, bounded all round by the blue circle of the sky, and broken, in one or two places, by a patch or two of willows, which, rising on the plain, appeared like little islands in a frozen sea. It was the glittering sparkle of the snow in the bright sunshine; the dreamy haziness of the atmosphere, mingling earth and sky as in a halo of gold; the first taste, the first *smell* of spring after a long winter, bursting suddenly upon the senses, like the unexpected visit of a long-absent, much-loved, and almost-forgotten friend; the soft, warm feeling of the south wind, bearing on its wings the balmy influences of sunny climes, and recalling vividly the scenes, the pleasures,

the bustling occupations of summer. It was this that caused the hunters' hearts to leap within them as they rode along—that induced old Mr. Kennedy to forget his years, and shout as he had been wont to do in days gone by, when he used to follow the track of the elk or hunt the wild buffalo; and it was this that made the otherwise monotonous prairies, on this particular clay, so charming.

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

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

"There he is!" exclaimed Mr. Grant. "That's a fact," cried Mr. Kennedy; and both gentlemen, instantaneously giving a shout, bounded towards the object; not, however, before the senior clerk, who was mounted on a fleet and strong horse, had taken the lead by six yards. A moment afterwards the speck rose up and discovered itself to be a veritable wolf. Moreover, he

condescended to show his teeth, and then, conceiving it probable that his enemies were too numerous for him, he turned suddenly round and fled away. For ten minutes or so the chase was kept up at full speed, and as the snow happened to be shallow at the starting-point, the wolf kept well ahead of its pursuers—indeed, distanced them a little. But soon the snow became deeper, and the wolf plunged heavily, and the horses gained considerably. Although to the eye the prairies seemed to be a uniform level, there were numerous slight undulations, in which drifts of some depth had collected. Into one of these the wolf now plunged and laboured slowly through it. But so deep was the snow that the horses almost stuck fast. A few minutes, however, brought them out, and Mr. Grant and Mr. Kennedy, who had kept close to each other during the run, pulled up for a moment on the summit of a ridge to breathe their panting steeds.

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

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

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

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

"It can't be surely—not possible!" exclaimed Mr. Grant. "It's

not

Charley on the new horse!"

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

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

Charley had had a long run since we last saw him. After describing a wide curve, in which his charger displayed a surprising aptitude for picking out the ground that was least covered with snow, he headed straight for the fort again at the same pace at which he had started. At first Charley tried every possible method to check him, but in vain; so he gave it up, resolving to enjoy the race, since he could not prevent it. The young horse seemed to be made of lightning, with bones and muscles of brass; for he bounded untiringly forward for miles, tossing his head and snorting in his wild career. But Charley was a

good horseman, and did not mind *that* much, being quite satisfied that the horse *was* a horse and not a spirit, and that therefore he could not run for ever. At last he approached the party, in search of which he had originally set out. His eyes dilated and his colour heightened as he beheld the wolf running directly towards him. Fumbling hastily for the pistol which he had borrowed from his friend Harry, he drew it from his pocket, and prepared to give the animal a shot in passing. Just at that moment the wolf caught sight of this new enemy in advance, and diverged suddenly to the left, plunging into a drift in his confusion, and so enabling the senior clerk to overtake him, and send an ounce of heavy shot into his side, which turned him over quite dead. The shot, however had a double effect. At that instant Charley swept past; and his mettlesome steed swerved as it heard the loud report of the gun, thereby almost unhorsing his rider, and causing him unintentionally to discharge the conglomerate of bullets and swan-shot into the flank of Peter Mactavish's horse—fortunately at a distance which rendered the shot equivalent to a dozen very sharp and particularly stinging blows. On receiving this unexpected salute, the astonished charger reared convulsively, and fell back upon his rider, who was thereby buried deep in the snow, not a vestige of him being left, no more than if he had never existed at all. Indeed, for a moment it seemed to be doubtful whether poor Peter *did* exist or not, until a sudden upheaving of the snow took place, and his dishevelled head appeared, with the eyes and mouth wide open, bearing on them

an expression of mingled horror and amazement. Meanwhile the second shot acted like a spur on the young horse, which flew past Mr. Kennedy like a whirlwind.

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

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

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

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

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

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

On witnessing this climax, Mr. Kennedy, senior, pulled up, dismounted, and ran—with an expression of some anxiety on his countenance—to the help of his son, while Tom Whyte came out of the stable just in time to receive the "noo 'oss" as he floundered out of the snow.

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

could 'ave done myself."

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

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

CHAPTER V

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

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

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

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

In Red River there is only one *genuine* doctor; and as the settlement is fully sixty miles long, he has enough to do, and cannot always be found when wanted, so that Charley had to rest content with amateur treatment in the meantime. Peter Mactavish was the first to try his powers. He was aware that laudanum had the effect of producing sleep, and seeing that Charley looked somewhat sleepy after recovering consciousness, he thought it advisable to help out that propensity to slumber, and went to the medicine-chest, whence he extracted a small phial of tincture of rhubarb, the half of which he emptied into a wine-glass, under the impression that it was laudanum, and poured down Charley's throat! The poor boy swallowed a little, and sputtered the remainder over the bedclothes. It may be remarked here that Mactavish was a wild, happy, half-mad

sort of fellow—wonderfully erudite in regard to some things, and profoundly ignorant in regard to others. Medicine, it need scarcely be added, was not his *forte*. Having accomplished this feat to his satisfaction, he sat down to watch by the bedside of his friend. Peter had taken this opportunity to indulge in a little private practice just after several of the other gentlemen had left the office, under the impression that Charley had better remain quiet for a short time.

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

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

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

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

"Only a little laudanum."

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"'Eavens an' 'arth!" ejaculated the groom, wheeling round, and stalking rapidly off to the stable like a pair of insane compasses, while the senior clerk returned to the bedroom, where he found Mr. Kennedy still raving, Peter Mactavish still

aghast and deadly pale, and Harry Somerville staring like a maniac at his young friend, as if he expected every moment to see him explode, although, to all appearance, he was sleeping soundly, and comfortably too, notwithstanding the noise that was going on around him. Suddenly Harry's eye rested on the label of the half-empty phial, and he uttered a loud, prolonged cheer.

"It's only tincture of—"

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

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

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

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

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

expect him back that night.

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

She couldn't tell; she knew it was somewhere about the White-horse

Plains, but she didn't know more than that.

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

"No, he didn't."

"Oh dear!" said Tom, rubbing his long nose in great perplexity. "It's an 'orrible case o' sudden and onexpected pison."

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

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

In a few minutes Kate and Tom were seated side by side in the little cariole, driving swiftly up the frozen river; and two hours later the former was seated by her brother's bedside, watching

him as he slept with a look of tender affection and solicitude.

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

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

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

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

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

"Now, you bad boy," said Kate, "why *won't* you try to rest?"

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

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

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

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

"Very well, my pet; if you do, I'll get up and dress and follow you, that's all! But come, Kate, tell me first of all how it was that

I got pitched off that long-legged rhinoceros, and who it was that picked me up, and why wasn't I killed, and how did I come here; for my head is sadly confused, and I scarcely recollect anything that has happened; and before commencing your discourse, Kate, please hand me a glass of water, for my mouth is as dry as a whistle."

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

"Thank you, Kate; now go on."

"Well, you see," she began—

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

"Well, then, you must understand—"

"Must I? Oh!—"

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

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

"Oh yes."

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

"No; only our father, who was chasing you at the time," replied

Kate, with a merry laugh.

"And no one else?"

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

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

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

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

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

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

of wool. Although the old lady could not see exactly that there was anything very blameworthy in her husband's conduct on this occasion, yet her nerves had received so severe a shock that she refused to be comforted for two entire days.

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

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

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

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

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

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

"To be sure not," said Charley gaily; "it would be absurd to be always making solemn speeches, and things of that sort, every

time one has a little accident."

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

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

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

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

Charley's disposition to levity entirely vanished while his sister

spoke; and twining his tough little arm round her neck, he pressed her fervently to his heart.

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

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

"Do *what* for me?" asked Charley.

"Why, the office work," said Kate.

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

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

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

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

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

"Now, Charley, you must not speak so. Father loves you tenderly, although he *is* a little rough at times. If you only heard how kindly he speaks of you to our mother when you are away, you could not think of giving him so much pain. And then the Bible says, 'Honour thy father and thy mother, that thy days may be long in the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee;' and as God speaks in the Bible, *surely* we should pay attention to it!"

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

he said,—

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

CHAPTER VI

Spring and the voyageurs.

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

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

By those who have never known an arctic winter, the delights of an arctic spring can never, we fear, be fully appreciated or

understood. Contrast is one of its strongest elements; indeed, we might say, *the* element which gives to all the others peculiar zest. Life in the arctic regions is like one of Turner's pictures, in which the lights are strong, the shadows deep, and the *tout ensemble* hazy and romantic. So cold and prolonged is the winter, that the first mild breath of spring breaks on the senses like a zephyr from the plains of Paradise. Everything bursts suddenly into vigorous life, after the long, death-like sleep of Nature; as little children burst into the romping gaieties of a new day, after the deep repose of a long and tranquil night. The snow melts, the ice breaks up, and rushes in broken masses, heaving and tossing in the rising floods, that grind and whirl them into the ocean, or into those great fresh-water lakes that vie with ocean itself in magnitude and grandeur. The buds come out and the leaves appear, clothing all nature with a bright refreshing green, which derives additional brilliancy from sundry patches of snow, that fill the deep creeks and hollows everywhere, and form ephemeral fountains whose waters continue to supply a thousand rills for many a long day, until the fierce glare of the summer sun prevails at last and melts them all away.

Red River flows on now to mix its long-pent-up waters with Lake Winnipeg. Boats are seen rowing about upon its waters, as the settlers travel from place to place; and wooden canoes, made of the hollowed-out trunks of large trees, shoot across from shore to shore—these canoes being a substitute for bridges, of which there are none, although the settlement lies on both sides of the

river. Birds have now entered upon the scene, their wild cries and ceaseless flight adding to it a cheerful activity. Ground squirrels pop up out of their holes to bask their round, fat, beautifully-striped little bodies in the sun, or to gaze in admiration at the farmer, as he urges a pair of *very* slow-going oxen, that drag the plough at a pace which induces one to believe that the wide field *may* possibly be ploughed up by the end of next year. Frogs whistle in the marshy grounds so loudly that men new to the country believe they are being regaled by the songs of millions of birds. There is no mistake about their *whistle*. It is not merely *like* a whistle, but it *is* a whistle, shrill and continuous; and as the swamps swarm with these creatures, the song never ceases for a moment, although each individual frog creates only *one* little gush of music, composed of half-a-dozen trills, and then stops a moment for breath before commencing the second bar. Bull-frogs, too, though not so numerous, help to vary the sound by croaking vociferously, as if they understood the value of bass, and were glad of having an opportunity to join in the universal hum of life and joy which rises everywhere, from the river and the swamp, the forest and the prairie, to welcome back the spring.

Such was the state of things in Red River one beautiful morning in April, when a band of voyageurs lounged in scattered groups about the front gate of Fort Garry. They were as fine a set of picturesque, manly fellows as one could desire to see. Their mode of life rendered them healthy, hardy, arid good-humoured, with a strong dash of recklessness—perhaps too much of it—

in some of the younger men. Being descended, generally, from French-Canadian sires and Indian mothers, they united some of the good and not a few of the bad qualities of both, mentally as well as physically—combining the light, gay-hearted spirit and full, muscular frame of the Canadian with the fierce passions and active habits of the Indian. And this wildness of disposition was not a little fostered by the nature of their usual occupations. They were employed during a great part of the year in navigating the Hudson's Bay Company's boats, laden with furs and goods, through the labyrinth of rivers and lakes that stud and intersect the whole continent, or they were engaged in pursuit of the bisons, [Footnote: These animals are always called buffaloes by American hunters and fur-traders.] which roam the prairies in vast herds.

They were dressed in the costume of the country: most of them wore light-blue cloth capotes, girded tightly round them', by scarlet or crimson worsted belts. Some of them had blue and others scarlet cloth leggings, ornamented more or less with stained porcupine quills, coloured silk, or variegated beads; while some might be seen clad in the leathern coats of winter—deer-skin dressed like chamois leather, fringed all round with little tails, and ornamented much in the same way as those already described. The heavy winter moccasins and duffel socks, which gave to their feet the appearance of being afflicted with gout, were now replaced by moccasins of a lighter and more elegant character, having no socks below, and fitting tightly

to the feet like gloves. Some wore hats similar to those made of silk or beaver which are worn by ourselves in Britain, but so bedizened with scarlet cock-tail feathers, and silver cords and tassels, as to leave the original form of the head-dress a matter of great uncertainty. These hats, however, are only used on high occasions, and chiefly by the fops. Most of the men wore coarse blue cloth caps with peaks, and not a few discarded head-pieces altogether, under the impression, apparently, that nature had supplied a covering which was in itself sufficient. These costumes varied not only in character but in quality, according to the circumstances of the wearer; some being highly ornamental and mended—evincing the felicity of the owner in the possession of a good wife—while others were soiled and torn, or but slightly ornamented. The voyageurs were collected, as we have said, in groups. Here stood a dozen of the youngest—consequently the most noisy and showily dressed—laughing loudly, gesticulating violently, and bragging tremendously. Near to them were collected a number of sterner spirits—men of middle age, with all the energy, and muscle, and bone of youth, but without its swaggering hilarity; men whose powers and nerves had been tried over and over again amid the stirring scenes of a voyageur's life; men whose heads were cool, and eyes sharp, and hands ready and powerful, in the mad whirl of boiling rapids, in the sudden attack of wild beast and hostile man, or in the unexpected approach of any danger; men who, having been well tried, needed not to boast, and who, having

carried off triumphantly their respective brides many years ago, needed not to decorate their persons with the absurd finery that characterised their younger brethren. They were comparatively few in number, but they composed a sterling band, of which every man was a hero. Among them were those who occupied the high positions of bowman and steersman, and when we tell the reader that on these two men frequently hangs the safety of a boat, with all its crew and lading, it will be easily understood how needful it is that they should be men of iron nerve and strength of mind.

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

one by any means.

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

Besides the groups already enumerated, there were one or two others, composed of grave, elderly men, whose wrinkled brows, gray hairs, and slow, quiet step, showed that the strength of their days was past; although their upright figures and warm brown complexions gave promise of their living to see many summers still. These were the principal steersmen and old guides—men of renown, to whom the others bowed as oracles or looked up to as fathers; men whose youth and manhood had been spent in roaming the trackless wilderness, and who were, therefore,

eminently qualified to guide brigades through the length and breadth of the land; men whose power of threading their way among the perplexing intricacies of the forest had become a second nature, a kind of instinct, that was as sure of attaining its end as the instinct of the feathered tribes, which brings the swallow, after a long absence, with unerring certainty back to its former haunts again in spring.

CHAPTER VII

The store.

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

This is the trading-store. It is always recognisable, if natives are in the neighbourhood, by the bevy of red men that cluster round it, awaiting the coming of the storekeeper or the trader with that stoic patience which is peculiar to Indians. It may be further recognised, by a close observer, by the soiled condition of its walls occasioned by loungers rubbing their backs perpetually against it, and the peculiar dinginess round the keyhole, caused by frequent applications of the key, which renders it conspicuous beyond all its comrades. Here is contained that which makes the red man's life enjoyable; that which causes his heart to leap, and induces him to toil for months and months together in the heat of summer and amid the frost and snow of winter; that which *actually* accomplishes, what music is *said* to achieve, the "soothing of the savage breast:" in short, here are stored up blankets, guns, powder, shot, kettles, axes, and knives; twine for nets, vermilion for war-paint, fishhooks and scalping-knives,

capotes, cloth, beads, needles, and a host of miscellaneous articles, much too numerous to mention. Here, also occur periodical scenes of bustle and excitement, when bands of natives arrive from distant hunting-grounds, laden with rich furs, which are speedily transferred to the Hudson's Bay Company's stores in exchange for the goods aforementioned. And many a tough wrangle has the trader on such occasions with sharp natives, who might have graduated in Billingsgate, so close are they at a bargain. Here, too, voyageurs are supplied with an equivalent for their wages, part in advance, if they desire it (and they generally do desire it), and part at the conclusion of their long and arduous voyages.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Oh, to be sure," cried Peter. "I might have guessed that *that* was uppermost in your mind. Well, how much will you have?" Peter began to unwind the fragrant weed off a coil of most appalling size and thickness, which looked like a snake of endless

length. "Will that do?" and he flourished about four feet of the snake before the eyes of the voyageur.

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

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

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

Louis Peltier, one of the principal guides, and a man of importance therefore, now stood forward. He was probably about forty-five years of age; had a plain, olive-coloured countenance, surrounded by a mass of long jet-black hair, which he inherited, along with a pair of dark, piercing eyes, from his Indian mother; and a robust, heavy, yet active frame, which bore a strong resemblance to what his Canadian father's had been many years before. His arms, in particular, were of herculean mould, with large swelling veins and strongly-marked muscles. They seemed, in fact, just formed for the purpose of pulling the heavy sweep of an inland boat among strong rapids. His face combined an

expression of stern resolution with great good-humour; and truly his countenance did not belie him, for he was known among his comrades as the most courageous and at the same time the most peaceable man in the settlement. Louis Peltier was singular in possessing the latter quality, for assuredly the half-breeds, whatever other good points they boast, cannot lay claim to very gentle or dove-like dispositions. His grey capote and blue leggings were decorated with no unusual ornaments, and the scarlet belt which encircled his massive figure was the only bit of colour he displayed.

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

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

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

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

"Lost the half of it, Louis!" said Mactavish. "Why, how was

that? You must have lost *more* than half your spirits with it!"

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

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

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

"Why, how came that about?" said Peter, pausing in his work, and laying a handful of pipes on the counter.

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

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

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

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

short."

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

"It was on a cold, wet afternoon," said Louis, "that we were descending the Hill River, at a part of the rapids where there is a sharp bend in the stream, and two or three great rocks that stand up in front of the water, as it plunges over a ledge, as if they were put there a purpose to catch it, and split it up into foam, or to stop the boats and canoes that try to run the rapids, and cut them up into splinters. It was an ugly place, monsieur, I can tell you; and though I've run it again and again, I always hold my breath tighter when we get to the top, and breathe freer when we get to the bottom. Well, there was a chum of mine at the bow, Francois by name, and a fine fellow he was as I ever came across. He used to sleep with me at night under the same blanket, although it was somewhat inconvenient; for being as big as myself and a stone heavier, it was all we could do to make the blanket cover us. However, he and I were great friends, and we managed it somehow. Well, he was at the bow when we took the rapids, and a first-rate bowman he made. His pole was twice as long and twice as thick as any other pole in the boat, and he twisted it about just like a fiddlestick. I remember well the night before

we came to the rapids, as he was sitting by the fire, which was blazing up among the pine-branches that overhung us, he said that he wanted a good pole for the rapids next day; and with that he jumped up, laid hold of an axe, and went back into the woods a bit to get one. When he returned, he brought a young tree on his shoulder, which he began to strip of its branches, and bark. 'Louis, says he, 'this is hot work; give us a pipe.' So I rummaged about for some tobacco, but found there was none left in my bag; so I went to my kit and got out my roll, about three fathoms or so, and cutting half of it off, I went to the fire and twisted it round his neck by way of a joke, and he said he'd wear it as a necklace all night, and so he did, too, and forgot to take it off in the morning; and when we came near the rapids I couldn't get at my bag to stow it away, so says I, 'Francois, you'll have to run with it on, for I can't stop to stow it now.' 'All right,' says he, 'go ahead;' and just as he said it, we came in sight of the first run, foaming and boiling like a kettle of robbiboo. 'Take care, lads,' I cried, and the next moment we were dashing down towards the bend in the river. As we came near to the shoot, I saw Francois standing up on the gunwale to get a better view of the rocks ahead, and every now and then giving me a signal with his hand how to steer; suddenly he gave a shout, and plunged his long pole into the water, to fend off from a rock which a swirl in the stream had concealed. For a second or two his pole bent like a willow, and we could feel the heavy boat jerk off a little with the tremendous strain, but all at once the pole broke off short

with a crack, Francois' heels made a flourish in the air, and then he disappeared head foremost into the foaming water, with my tobacco coiled round his neck! As we flew past the place, one of his arms appeared, and I made a grab at it, and caught him by the sleeve; but the effort upset myself and over I went too. Fortunately, however, one of my men caught me by the foot, and held on like a vice; but the force of the current tore Francois' sleeve out of my grasp, and I was dragged into the boat again just in time to see my comrade's legs and arms going like the sails of a windmill, as he rolled over several times and disappeared. Well, we put ashore the moment we got into still water, and then five or six of us started off on foot to look for Francois. After half-an-hour's search, we found him pitched upon a flat rock in the middle of the stream like a bit of driftwood, We immediately waded out to the rock and brought him ashore, where we lighted a fire, took off all his clothes, and rubbed him till he began to show signs of life again. But you may judge, mes garçons, of my misery when I found that the coil of tobacco was gone. It had come off his neck during his struggles, and there wasn't a vestige of it left, except a bright red mark on the throat, where it had nearly strangled him. When he began to recover, he put his hand up to his neck as if feeling for something, and muttered faintly, 'The tabac.' 'Ah, morbleu!' said I, 'you may say that! Where is it?' Well, we soon brought him round, but he had swallowed so much water that it damaged his lungs, and we had to leave him at the next post we came to; and so I lost my friend too."

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Blanket, monsieur,"

"Good. And—"

"A capote, monsieur."

"And—"

"An axe—"

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

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

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

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

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

"Oh, that was it!" cried Harry, "that was it! thirty pipes, to be sure.

What an ass I am!"

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

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

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

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

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

Just then a tall, raw-boned man entered the store, and rudely

thrusting

Baptiste aside, asked if he could get his supplies now.

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

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

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

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

The big Scotchman held his little opponent in contempt; so that, instead of putting himself on the defensive, he leaned his back against the door, thrust his hands into his pockets, and

requested to know "what that was to him."

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

"Well done!" shouted the men; "bravo, Baptiste! *Regardez le nez, mes enfants!*"

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

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

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

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

Every nation has its own peculiar method of fighting, and its own ideas of what is honourable and dishonourable in combat. The English, as everyone knows, have particularly stringent rules regarding the part of the body which may or may not be hit with propriety, and count it foul disgrace to strike a man when he is

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

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

For a minute or so they struggled and kicked like a couple of serpents, and then, bounding to their feet again, they began to perform a war-dance round each other, revolving their fists at the same time in, we presume, the most approved fashion. Owing to his bulk and natural laziness, which rendered jumping about like a jack-in-the-box impossible, Hugh Mathison preferred to stand on the defensive; while his lighter opponent, giving way

to the natural bent of his mercurial temperament and corporeal predilections, comported himself in a manner that cannot be likened to anything mortal or immortal, human or inhuman, unless it be to an insane cat, whose veins ran wild-fire instead of blood. Or perhaps we might liken him to that ingenious piece of firework called a zigzag cracker, which explodes with unexpected and repeated suddenness, changing its position in a most perplexing manner at every crack. Baptiste, after the first onset, danced backwards with surprising lightness, glaring at his adversary the while, and rapidly revolving his fists as before mentioned; then a terrific yell was heard; his head, arms, and legs became a sort of whirling conglomerate; the spot on which he danced was suddenly vacant, and at the same moment Mathison received a bite, a scratch, a dab on the nose, and a kick on the stomach all at once. Feeling that it was impossible to plant a well-directed blow on such an assailant, he waited for the next onslaught; and the moment he saw the explosive object flying through the air towards him, he met it with a crack of his heavy fist, which, happening to take effect in the middle of the chest, drove it backwards with about as much velocity as it had approached, and poor Baptiste measured his length on the ground.

"Oh, pauvre chien!" cried the spectators, "c'est fini!"

"Not yet," cried Baptiste, as he sprang with a scream to his feet again, and began his dance with redoubled energy, just as if all that had gone before was a mere sketch—a sort of

playful rehearsal, as it were, of what was now to follow. At this moment Hugh stumbled over a canoe-paddle, and fell headlong into Baptiste's arms, as he was in the very act of making one of his violent descents. This unlooked-for occurrence brought them both to a sudden pause, partly from necessity and partly from surprise. Out of this state Baptiste recovered first, and taking advantage of the accident, threw Mathison heavily to the ground. He rose quickly, however, and renewed the light with freshened vigour.

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

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

"Oh, you precious blackguards!" he cried, running up to the

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

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

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

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

with a loud crash, and shot head first, like a startled alligator, into the water, amid a roar of laughter from his comrades and the people belonging to the fort; most of whom, attracted by the fight, were now assembled on the banks of the river.

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

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

CHAPTER VIII

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

On the following day at noon, the spot on which the late combat had taken place became the theatre of a stirring and animated scene. Fort Garry, and the space between it and the river, swarmed with voyageurs, dressed in their cleanest, newest, and most brilliant costume. The large boats for the north, six in number, lay moored to the river's bank, laden with bales of furs, and ready to start on their long voyage. Young men, who had never been on the road before, stood with animated looks watching the operations of the guides as they passed critical examination upon their boats, overhauled the oars to see that they were in good condition, or with crooked knives (a species of instrument in the use of which voyageurs and natives are very expert) polished off the top of a mast, the blade of an oar, or the handle of a tiller. Old men, who had passed their lives in similar occupations, looked on in silence—some standing with their heads bent on their bosoms, and an expression of sadness about their faces, as if the scene recalled some mournful event of their early life, or possibly reminded them of wild, joyous scenes of other days, when the blood coursed warmly in their young veins, and the strong muscles sprang lightly to obey their will; when the work they had to do was hard, and the sleep that

followed it was sound—scenes and days that were now gone by for ever. Others reclined against the wooden fence, their arms crossed, their thin white hair waving gently in the breeze, and a kind smile playing on their sunburned faces, as they observed the swagger and coxcombry of the younger men, or watched the gambols of several dark-eyed little children—embryo buffalo-hunters and voyageurs—whose mothers had brought them to the fort to get a last kiss from papa, and witness the departure of the boats.

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

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

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

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

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

"O Charley," she continued, "why *won't* you stay?"

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

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

"No, don't interrupt me, Kate," said Charley, kissing her forehead; "I'm quite satisfied with *two short* legs, and have no

desire whatever to make my bread on the top of *three long* ones. Besides, you know I can write to you."

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

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

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

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

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

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

"O dear Mr. Addison," cried Kate, grasping his hand in both of hers, and gazing imploringly up at him through a perfect wilderness of ringlets and tears, "do prevail upon Charley to stay at home; please do!"

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

extreme earnestness.

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

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

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

"I do not care to say much to you about being kind and obliging to all whom you may meet with during your travels, nor about the dangers to which you will be exposed by being thrown into the company of wild and reckless, perhaps very wicked, men. There is but *one* incentive to every good, and *one* safeguard against all evil, my boy, and that is the love of God. You may

perhaps forget much that I have said to you; but remember this, Charley, if you would be happy in this world, and have a good hope for the next, centre your heart's affection on our blessed Lord Jesus Christ; for believe me, boy, *His* heart's affection is centred upon you."

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

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

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

innocent voyageur, who happened accidentally to confront him at the moment.

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

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

CHAPTER IX

The voyage—The encampment—A surprise.

It was a fine sight to see the boats depart for the north. It was a thrilling, heart-stirring sight to behold these picturesque, athletic men, on receiving the word of command from their guides, spring lightly into the long, heavy boats; to see them let the oars fall into the water with a loud splash, and then, taking their seats, give way with a will, knowing that the eyes of friends and sweethearts and rivals were bent earnestly upon them. It was a splendid sight to see boat after boat shoot out from the landing-place, and cut through the calm bosom of the river, as the men bent their sturdy backs until the thick oars creaked and groaned on the gunwales and flashed in the stream, more and more vigorously at each successive stroke, until their friends on the bank, who were anxious to see the last of them, had to run faster and faster in order to keep up with them, as the rowers warmed at their work, and made the water gurgle at the bows—their bright blue and scarlet and white trappings reflected in the dark waters in broken masses of colour, streaked with long lines of shining ripples, as if they floated on a lake of liquid rainbows. And it was a glorious thing to hear the wild, plaintive song, led by one clear, sonorous voice, that rang out full and strong in the still air, while at the close of every two lines the whole brigade burst into a loud, enthusiastic chorus, that rolled far and wide over the smooth

waters—telling of their approach to settlers beyond the reach of vision in advance, and floating faintly back, a last farewell, to the listening ears of fathers, mothers, wives, and sisters left behind. And it was interesting to observe how, as the rushing boats sped onwards past the cottages on shore, groups of men and women and children stood before the open doors and waved adieu, while ever and anon a solitary voice rang louder than the others in the chorus, and a pair of dark eyes grew brighter as a voyageur swept past his home, and recognised his little ones screaming farewell, and seeking to attract their *sire's* attention by tossing their chubby arms or flourishing round their heads the bright vermilion blades of canoe-paddles. It was interesting, too, to hear the men shout as they ran a small rapid which occurs about the lower part of the settlement, and dashed in full career up to the Lower Fort—which stands about twenty miles down the river from Fort Garry—and then sped onward again with unabated energy, until they passed the Indian settlement, with its scattered wooden buildings and its small church; passed the last cottage on the bank; passed the low swampy land at the river's mouth; and emerged at last as evening closed, upon the wide, calm, sea-like bosom of Lake Winnipeg.

Charley saw and heard all this during the whole of that long, exciting afternoon, and as he heard and saw it his heart swelled as if it would burst its prison-bars, his voice rang out wildly in the choruses, regardless alike of tune and time, and his spirit boiled within him as he quaffed the first sweet draught of a rover's life

—a life in the woods, the wild, free, enchanting woods, where all appeared in *his* eyes bright, and sunny, and green, and beautiful!

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

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

Pierre needed no second bidding. He grasped a large tin kettle and an axe, with which he hurried into a clump of trees. Laying down the kettle, which he had previously filled with water from the lake, he singled out a dead tree, and with three powerful blows of his axe, brought it to the ground. A few additional strokes cut it up into logs, varying from three to five feet in length, which he piled together, first placing a small bundle of dry grass and twigs beneath them, and a few splinters of wood which he cut from off one of the logs. Having accomplished this, Pierre took a flint and steel out of a gaily ornamented pouch which depended from his waist, and which went by the name of a fire-bag in consequence of its containing the implements for procuring that element. It might have been as appropriately named tobacco-box or smoking-bag, however, seeing that such things had more to do with it, if possible, than fire. Having struck a spark, which

he took captive by means of a piece of tinder, he placed in the centre of a very dry handful of soft grass, and whirled it rapidly round his head, thereby producing a current of air, which blew the spark into a flame; which when applied, lighted the grass and twigs; and so, in a few minutes, a blazing fire roared up among the trees—spouted volumes of sparks into the air, like a gigantic squib, which made it quite a marvel that all the bushes in the neighbourhood were not burnt up at once—glared out red and fierce upon the rippling water, until it became, as it were, red-hot in the neighbourhood of the boats, and caused the night to become suddenly darker by contrast; the night reciprocating the compliment, as it grew later, by causing the space around the fire to glow brighter and brighter, until it became a brilliant chamber, surrounded by walls of the blackest ebony.

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

In less than half-an-hour the several camps were completed, the kettles boiling over the fires, the men smoking in every variety of attitude, and talking loudly. It was a cheerful scene; and so Charley thought as he reclined in his canvas tent, the opening

of which faced the fire, and enabled him to see all that was going on.

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

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

and his years entitled him to rest, and took things very easy in consequence.

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

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

"Now, then," cried Pierre.

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

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

Charley sipped a pannikin of tea as he reclined on his blanket,

and being somewhat fatigued in consequence of his exertions and excitement during the day, said nothing. Mr. Park, for the same reasons, besides being naturally taciturn, was equally mute, so they both enjoyed in silence the spectacle of the men eating their supper. And it *was* a sight worth seeing.

Their food consisted of robbiboo, a compound of flour, pemmican, and water, boiled to the consistency of very thick soup. Though not a species of food that would satisfy the fastidious taste of an epicure, robbiboo is, nevertheless, very wholesome, exceedingly nutritious, and withal palatable. Pemmican, its principal component, is made of buffalo flesh, which fully equals (some think greatly excels) beef. The recipe for making it is as follows:-First, kill your buffalo—a matter of considerable difficulty, by the way, as doing so requires you to travel to the buffalo-grounds, to arm yourself with a gun, and mount a horse, on which you have to gallop, perhaps, several miles over rough ground and among badger-holes at the imminent risk of breaking your neck. Then you have to run up alongside of a buffalo and put a ball through his heart, which, apart from the murderous nature of the action, is a difficult thing to do. But we will suppose that you have killed your buffalo. Then you must skin him; then cut him up, and slice the flesh into layers, which must be dried in the sun. At this stage of the process you have produced a substance which in the fur countries goes by the name of dried meat, and is largely used as an article of food. As its name implies, it is very dry, and it

is also very tough, and very undesirable if one can manage to procure anything better. But to proceed. Having thus prepared dried meat, lay a quantity of it on a flat stone, and take another stone, with which pound it into shreds. You must then take the animal's hide, while it is yet new, and make bags of it about two feet and a half long by a foot and a half broad. Into this put the pounded meat loosely. Melt the fat of your buffalo over a fire, and when quite liquid pour it into the bag until full; mix the contents well together; sew the whole up before it cools, and you have a bag of pemmican of about ninety pounds weight. This forms the chief food of the voyageur, in consequence of its being the largest possible quantity of sustenance compressed into the smallest possible space, and in an extremely convenient, portable shape. It will keep fresh for years, and has been much used, in consequence, by the heroes of arctic discovery, in their perilous journeys along the shores of the frozen sea.

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

At first the keen edge of appetite induced the men to eat in silence; but as the contents of the kettle began to get low, their

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

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

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

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

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

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

By this time the men had risen, and were peering out into

the gloom in the direction whence the sound came, while one or two sauntered down to the margin of the lake to meet the new-comers.

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

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

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

Louis smiled.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.