The Young Fur Traders
Vol.II

By
R. M. Ballantyne

The Young Fur Traders

CHAPTER XVII.
The scene changesBachelor's HallA practical joke and its consequencesA snow-shoe walk at night in the forest.

Leaving Charley to pursue his adventurous career among the Indians, we will introduce our reader to a new scene, and follow for a time the fortunes of our friend Harry Somerville. It will be remembered that we left him labouring under severe disappointment at the idea of having to spend a year, it might be many years, at the depot, and being condemned to the desk, instead of realising his fond dreams of bear-hunting and deer-stalking in the woods and prairies.

It was now the autumn of Harry's second year at York Fort. This period of the year happens to be the busiest at the depot, in consequence of the preparation of the annual accounts for transmission to England, in the solitary ship which visits this lonely spot once a year; so that Harry was tied to his desk all day and the greater part of the night too, so that his spirits fell infinitely below zero, and he began to look on himself as the most miserable of mortals. His spirits rose, however, with amazing rapidity after the ship went away, and the "young gentlemen," as the clerks were styled en masse, were permitted to run wild in the swamps and woods for the three weeks succeeding that event. During this glimpse of sunshine they recruited their exhausted frames by paddling about all day in Indian canoes, or wandering through the marshes, sleeping at nights in tents or under the pine trees, and spreading dismay among the feathered tribes, of which there were immense numbers of all kinds. After

this they returned to their regular work at the desk; but as this was not so severe as in summer, and was further lightened by Wednesdays and Saturdays being devoted entirely to recreation, Harry began to look on things in a less gloomy aspect, and at length regained his wonted cheerful spirits.

Autumn passed away. The ducks and geese took their departure to more genial climes. The swamps froze up and became solid. Snow fell in great abundance, covering every vestige of vegetable nature, except the dark fir trees, that only helped to render the scenery more dreary, and winter settled down upon the land. Within the pickets of York Fort, the thirty or forty souls who lived there were actively employed in cutting their firewood, putting in double window-frames to keep out the severe cold, cutting tracks in the snow from one house to another, and otherwise preparing for a winter of eight months' duration, as cold as that of Nova Zembla, and in the course of which the only new faces they had any chance of seeing were those of the two men who conveyed the annual winter packet of letters from the next station. Outside of the fort, all was a wide, waste wilderness for thousands of miles around. Deathlike stillness and solitude reigned everywhere, except when a covey of ptarmigan whirred like large snowflakes athwart the sky, or an arctic fox prowled stealthily through the woods in search of prey.

As if in opposition to the gloom and stillness and solitude outside, the interior of the clerks' house presented a striking contrast of ruddy warmth, cheerful sounds, and bustling activity.

It was evening; but although the sun had set, there was still sufficient daylight to render candles unnecessary, though not enough to prevent a bright glare from the stove in the centre of the hall taking full effect in the darkening chamber, and making it glow with fiery red. Harry Somerville sat in front, and full in the blaze of this stove, resting after the labours of the day; his arms crossed on his breast, his head a little to one side, as if in deep contemplation, as he gazed earnestly into the fire, and his chair tilted on its hind legs so as to balance with such nicety that a feather's weight additional outside its centre of gravity would have upset it. He had divested himself of his coata practice that prevailed among the young gentlemen when at home, as being free-and-easy as well as convenient. The doctor, a tall, broad-shouldered man, with red hair and whiskers, paced the room sedately, with a long pipe depending from his lips, which he removed occasionally to address a few remarks to the accountant, a stout, heavy man of about thirty, with a voice like a Stentor, eyes sharp and active as those of a ferret, and a tongue that moved with twice the ordinary amount of lingual rapidity. The doctor's remarks seemed to be particularly humorous, if one might judge from the peals of laughter with which they were received by the accountant, who stood with his back to the

stove in such a position that, while it warmed him from his heels to his waist, he enjoyed the additional benefit of the pipe or chimney, which rose upwards, parallel with his spine, and, taking a sudden bend near the roof, passed over his headthus producing a genial and equable warmth from top to toe.

"Yes," said the doctor, "I left him hotly following up a rabbit-track, in the firm belief that it was that of a silver fox."

"And did you not undeceive the greenhorn?" cried the accountant, with another shout of laughter.

"Not I," replied the doctor. "I merely recommended him to keep his eye on the sun, lest he should lose his way, and hastened home; for it just occurred to me that I had forgotten to visit Louis Blanc, who cut his foot with an axe yesterday, and whose wound required redressing, so I left the poor youth to learn from experience."

"Pray, who did you leave to that delightful fate?" asked Mr. Wilson, issuing from his bedroom, and approaching the stove.

Mr. Wilson was a middle-aged, good-humoured, active man, who filled the onerous offices of superintendent of the men, trader of furs, seller of goods to the Indians, and general factotum.

"Our friend Hamilton," answered the doctor, in reply to his question. "I think he is, without exception, the most egregious nincompoop I ever saw. Just as I passed the long swamp on my way home, I met him crashing through the bushes in hot pursuit of a rabbit, the track of which he mistook for a fox. Poor fellow! He had been out since breakfast, and only shot a brace of ptarmigan, although they are as thick as bees and quite tame. 'But then, do you see,' said he, in excuse, 'I'm so very shortsighted! Would you believe it, I've blown fifteen lumps of snow to atoms, in the belief that they were ptarmigan!' and then he rushed off again."

"No doubt," said Mr. Wilson, smiling, "the lad is very green, but he's a good fellow for all that."

"I'll answer for that," said the accountant; "I found him over at the men's houses this morning doing your work for you, doctor."

"How so?" inquired the disciple of Æsculapius.

"Attending to your wounded man, Louis Blanc, to be sure; and he seemed to speak to him as wisely as if he had walked the hospitals, and regularly passed for an M.D."

"Indeed!" said the doctor, with a mischievous grin. "Then I must pay him off for interfering with my patients."

"Ah, doctor, you're too fond of practical jokes. You never let slip an opportunity of 'paying off' your friends for something or other. It's a bad habit. Practical jokes are very bad thingsshockingly bad," said Mr. Wilson, as he put on his fur cap, and wound a thick shawl round his throat, preparatory to leaving the room.

As Mr. Wilson gave utterance to this opinion, he passed Harry Somerville, who was still staring at the fire in deep mental abstraction, and, as he did so, gave his tilted chair a very slight push backwards with his fingeran action which caused Harry to toss up his legs, grasp convulsively with both hands at empty air, and fall with a loud noise and an angry yell to the ground, while his persecutor vanished from the scene.

"O you outrageous villain!" cried Harry, shaking his fist at the door, as he slowly gathered himself up; "I might have expected that."

"Quite so," said the doctor; "you might. It was very neatly done, undoubtedly. Wilson deserves credit for the way in which it was executed."

"He deserves to be executed for doing it at all," replied Harry, rubbing his elbow as he resumed his seat.

"Any bark knocked off?" inquired the accountant, as he took a piece of glowing charcoal from the stove wherewith to light his pipe. "Try a whiff, Harry. It's good for such things. Bruises, sores, contusions, sprains, rheumatic affections of the back and loins, carbuncles and earachethere's nothing that smoking won't cure; eh, doctor?"

"Certainly. If applied inwardly, there's nothing so good for digestion when one doesn't require tonicsTry it, Harry; it will do you good, I assure you."

"No, thank you," replied Harry; "I'll leave that to you and the chimney. I don't wish to make a soot-bag of my mouth. But tell me, doctor, what do you mean to do with that lump of snow there?"

Harry pointed to a mass of snow, of about two feet square, which lay on the floor beside the door. It had been placed there by the doctor some time previously.

"Do with it? Have patience, my friend, and you shall see. It is a little surprise I have in store for Hamilton."

As he spoke, the door opened, and a short, square-built man rushed into the

room, with a pistol in one hand and a bright little bullet in the other.

"Hollo, skipper!" cried Harry, "what's the row?"

"All right," cried the skipper; "here it is at last, solid as the fluke of an anchor. Toss me the powder-flask Harry; look sharp, else it'll melt."

A powder-flask was immediately produced, from which the skipper hastily charged the pistol, and rammed down the shining bullet.

"Now then," said he, "look out for squalls. Clear the decks there."

And rushing to the door, he flung it open, took a steady aim at something outside, and fired.

"Is the man mad?" said the accountant, as with a look of amazement he beheld the skipper spring through the doorway, and immediately return bearing in his arms a large piece of fir plank.

"Not quite mad yet," he said, in reply, "but I've sent a ball of quicksilver through an inch plank, and that's not a thing to be done every dayeven here, although it is cold enough sometimes to freeze up one's very ideas."

"Dear me," interrupted Harry Somerville, looking as if a new thought had struck him, "that must be it! I've no doubt that poor Hamilton's ideas are frozen, which accounts for the total absence of any indication of his possessing such things."

"I observed," continued the skipper, not noticing the interruption, "that the glass was down at 45 degrees below zero this morning, and put out a bullet-mould full of mercury, and you see the result." As he spoke he held up the perforated plank in triumph.

The skipper was a strange mixture of qualities. To a wild, off-hand, sailor-like hilarity of disposition in hours of leisure, he united a grave, stern energy of character while employed in the performance of his duties. Duty was always paramount with him. A smile could scarcely be extracted from him while it was in the course of performance. But the instant his work was done a new spirit seemed to take possession of the man. Fun, mischief of any kind, no matter how childish, he entered into with the greatest delight and enthusiasm. Among other peculiarities, he had become deeply imbued with a thirst for scientific knowledge, ever since he had acquired, with infinite labour, the small modicum of science necessary to navigation; and his doings in pursuit of statistical information relative to the weather, and the phenomena of nature generally, were very peculiar, and in some cases outrageous. His transaction

with the quicksilver was in consequence of an eager desire to see that metal frozen (an effect which takes place when the spirit-of-wine thermometer falls to 39 degrees below zero of Fahrenheit), and a wish to be able to boast of having actually fired a mercurial bullet through an inch plank. Having made a careful note of the fact, with all the relative circumstances attending it, in a very much blotted book, which he denominated his scientific log, the worthy skipper threw off his coat, drew a chair to the stove, and prepared to regale himself with a pipe. As he glanced slowly round the room while thus engaged, his eye fell on the mass of snow before alluded to. On being informed by the doctor for what it was intended, he laid down his pipe and rose hastily from his chair.

"You've not a moment to lose," said he. "As I came in at the gate just now, I saw Hamilton coming down the river on the ice, and he must be almost arrived now."

"Up with it then," cried the doctor, seizing the snow, and lifting it to the top of the door. "Hand me those bits of stick, Harry; quick, man, stir your stumps.Now then, skipper, fix them in so, while I hold this up."

The skipper lent willing and effective aid, so that in a few minutes the snow was placed in such a position that upon the opening of the door it must inevitably fall on the head of the first person who should enter the room.

"So," said the skipper, "that's rigged up in what I call ship-shape fashion."

"True," remarked the doctor, eyeing the arrangement with a look of approval; "it will do, I think, admirably."

"Don't you think, skipper," said Harry Somerville gravely, as he resumed his seat in front of the fire, "that it would be worth while to make a careful and minute entry in your private log of the manner in which it was put up, to be afterwards followed by an account of its effect? You might write an essay on it now, and call it the extraordinary effects of a fall of snow in latitude so and so, eh? What think you of it?"

The skipper vouchsafed no reply, but made a significant gesture with his fist, which caused Harry to put himself in a posture of defence.

At this moment footsteps were heard on the wooden platform in front of the building.

Instantly all became silence and expectation in the hall as the result of the practical joke was about to be realised. Just then another step was heard on the platform, and it became evident that two persons were approaching the door.

"Hope it'll be the right man," said the skipper, with a look savouring slightly of anxiety.

As he spoke the door opened, and a foot crossed the threshold; the next instant the miniature avalanche descended on the head and shoulders of a man, who reeled forward from the weight of the blow, and, covered from head to foot with snow, fell to the ground amid shouts of laughter.

With a convulsive stamp and shake, the prostrate figure sprang up and confronted the party. Had the cast-iron stove suddenly burst into atoms, and blown the roof off the house, it could scarcely have created greater consternation than that which filled the merry jesters when they beheld the visage of Mr. Rogan, the superintendent of the fort, red with passion and fringed with snow.

"So," said he, stamping violently with his foot, partly from anger, and partly with a view of shaking off the unexpected covering, which stuck all over his dress in little patches, producing a somewhat piebald effect,"so you are pleased to jest, gentlemen. Pray, who placed that piece of snow over the door?" Mr. Rogan glared fiercely round upon the culprits, who stood speechless before him.

For a moment he stood silent, as if uncertain how to act; then turning short on his heel, he strode quickly out of the room, nearly overturning Mr. Hamilton, who at the same instant entered it, carrying his gun and snowshoes under his arm.

"Dear me, what has happened?" he exclaimed, in a peculiarly gentle tone of voice, at the same time regarding the snow and the horror-stricken circle with a look of intense surprise.

"You see what has happened," replied Harry Somerville, who was the first to recover his composure; "I presume you intended to ask, 'What has caused it to happen?' Perhaps the skipper will explain; it's beyond me, quite."

Thus appealed to, that worthy cleared his throat, and said,

"Why, you see, Mr. Hamilton, a great phenomenon of meteorology has happened. We were all standing, you must know, at the open door, taking a squint at the weather, when our attention was attracted by a curious object that appeared in the sky, and seemed to be coming down at the rate of ten knots an hour, right end-on for the house. I had just time to cry, 'Clear out, lads,' when it came slap in through the doorway, and smashed to shivers there, where you see the fragments. In fact, it's a wonderful aërolite, and Mr. Rogan has just

gone out with a lot of the bits in his pocket, to make a careful examination of them, and draw up a report for the Geological Society in London. I shouldn't wonder if he were to send off an express to-night; and maybe you will have to convey the news to headquarters, so you'd better go and see him about it soon."

Soft although Mr. Hamilton was supposed to be, he was not quite prepared to give credit to this explanation; but being of a peaceful disposition, and altogether unaccustomed to retort, he merely smiled his disbelief, as he proceeded to lay aside his fowling-piece, and divest himself of the voluminous out-of-door trappings with which he was clad. Mr. Hamilton was a tall, slender youth, of about nineteen. He had come out by the ship in autumn, and was spending his first winter at York Fort. Up to the period of his entering the Hudson's Bay Company's service, he had never been more than twenty miles from home, and having mingled little with the world, was somewhat unsophisticated, besides being by nature gentle and unassuming.

Soon after this the man who acted as cook, waiter, and butler to the mess, entered, and said that Mr. Rogan desired to see the accountant immediately.

"Who am I to say did it?" enquired that gentleman, as he rose to obey the summons.

"Wouldn't it be a disinterested piece of kindness if you were to say it was yourself?" suggested the doctor.

"Perhaps it would, but I won't," replied the accountant, as he made his exit.

In about half-an-hour Mr. Rogan and the accountant re-entered the apartment. The former had quite regained his composure. He was naturally amiable; which happy disposition was indicated by a habitually cheerful look and smile.

"Now, gentlemen," said he, "I find that this practical joke was not intended for me, and therefore look upon it as an unlucky accident; but I cannot too strongly express my dislike to practical jokes of all kinds. I have seen great evil, and some bloodshed, result from practical jokes; and I think that, being a sufferer in consequence of your fondness for them, I have a right to beg that you will abstain from such doings in futureat least from such jokes as involve risk to those who do not choose to enter into them."

Having given vent to this speech, Mr. Rogan left his volatile friends to digest it at their leisure.

"Serves us right," said the skipper, pacing up and down the room in a repentant frame of mind, with his thumbs hooked into the arm-holes of his vest.

The doctor said nothing, but breathed hard and smoked vigorously.

While we admit most thoroughly with Mr. Rogan that practical jokes are exceedingly bad, and productive frequently of far more evil than fun, we feel it our duty, as a faithful delineator of manners, customs, and character in these regions, to urge in palliation of the offence committed by the young gentlemen at York Fort, that they had really about as few amusements and sources of excitement as fall to the lot of any class of men. They were entirely dependent on their own unaided exertions, during eight or nine months of the year, for amusement or recreation of any kind. Their books were few in number, and soon read through. The desolate wilderness around afforded no incidents to form subjects of conversation further than the events of a day's shooting, which, being nearly similar every day, soon lost all interest. No newspapers came to tell of the doings of the busy world from which they were shut out, and nothing occurred to vary the dull routine of their life; so that it is not matter for wonder that they were driven to seek for relaxation and excitement occasionally in most outrageous and unnatural ways, and to indulge now and then in the perpetration of a practical joke.

For some time after the rebuke administered by Mr. Rogan, silence reigned in Bachelor's Hall, as the clerks' house was termed. But at length symptoms of ennui began to be displayed. The doctor yawned and lay down on his bed to enjoy an American newspaper about twelve months old. Harry Somerville sat down to reread a volume of Franklin's travels in the polar regions, which he had perused twice already. Mr. Hamilton busied himself in cleaning his fowling-piece; while the skipper conversed with Mr. Wilson, who was engaged in his room in adjusting an ivory head to a walking-stick. Mr. Wilson was a jack-of-all-trades, who could make shift, one way or other, to do anything. The accountant paced the uncarpeted floor in deep contemplation.

At length he paused, and looked at Harry Somerville for some time.

"What say you to a walk through the woods to North River, Harry?"

"Ready," cried Harry, tossing down the book with a look of contempt"ready for anything."

"Will you come, Hamilton?" added the accountant. Hamilton looked up in surprise.

"You don't mean, surely, to take so long a walk in the dark, do you? It is snowing, too, very heavily, and I think you said that North River was five miles off, did you not?"

"Of course I mean to walk in the dark," replied the accountant, "unless you can extemporize an artificial light for the occasion, or prevail on the moon to come out for my special benefit. As to snowing and a short tramp of five miles, why, the sooner you get to think of such things as trifles the better, if you hope to be fit for anything in this country."

"I don't think much of them," replied Hamilton, softly and with a slight smile; "I only meant that such a walk was not very attractive so late in the evening."

"Attractive!" shouted Harry Somerville from his bedroom, where he was equipping himself for the walk; "what can be more attractive than a sharp run of ten miles through the woods on a cool night to visit your traps, with the prospect of a silver fox or a wolf at the end of it, and an extra sound sleep as the result? Come, man, don't be soft; get ready, and go along with us."

"Besides," added the accountant, "I don't mean to come back to-night. To-morrow, you know, is a holiday, so we can camp out in the snow after visiting the traps, have our supper, and start early in the morning to search for ptarmigan."

"Well, I will go," said Hamilton, after this account of the pleasures that were to be expected; "I am exceedingly anxious to learn to shoot birds on the wing."

"Bless me! have you not learned that yet!" asked the doctor, in affected surprise, as he sauntered out of his bedroom to relight his pipe.

The various bedrooms in the clerks' house were ranged round the hall, having doors that opened directly into it, so that conversation carried on in a loud voice was heard in all the rooms at once, and was not infrequently sustained in elevated tones from different apartments, when the occupants were lounging, as they often did of an evening, in their beds.

"No," said Hamilton, in reply to the doctor's question, "I have not learned yet, although there were a great many grouse in the part of Scotland where I was brought up. But my aunt, with whom I lived, was so fearful of my shooting either myself or someone else, and had such an aversion to firearms, that I determined to make her mind easy, by promising that I would never use them so long as I remained under her roof."

"Quite right; very dutiful and proper," said the doctor, with a grave, patronising air.

"Perhaps you'll fall in with more fox tracks of the same sort as the one you gave chase to this morning," shouted the skipper, from Wilson's room.

"Oh! there's hundreds of them out there," said the accountant; "so let's off at once."

The trio now proceeded to equip themselves for the walk. Their costumes were peculiar, and merit description. As they were similar in the chief points, it will suffice to describe that of our friend Harry.

On his head he wore a fur-cap made of otter-skin, with a flap on each side to cover the ears, the frost being so intense in these climates that without some such protection they would inevitably freeze and fall off.

As the nose is constantly in use for the purposes of respiration, it is always left uncovered to fight with the cold as it best can; but it is a hard battle, and there is no doubt that, if it were possible, a nasal covering would be extremely pleasant. Indeed, several desperate efforts have been made to construct some sort of nose-bag, but hitherto without success, owing to the uncomfortable fact that the breath issuing from that organ immediately freezes, and converts the covering into a bag of snow or ice, which is not agreeable. Round his neck Harry wound a thick shawl of such portentious dimensions that it entirely enveloped the neck and lower part of the face; thus the entire head was, as it were, eclipsedthe eyes, the nose, and the cheek-bones alone being visible. He then threw on a coat made of deer-skin, so prepared that it bore a slight resemblance to excessively coarse chamois leather. It was somewhat in the form of a long, wide surtout, overlapping very much in front, and confined closely to the figure by means of a scarlet worsted belt instead of buttons, and was ornamented round the foot by a number of cuts, which produced a fringe of little tails. Being lined with thick flannel, this portion of attire was rather heavy, but extremely necessary. A pair of blue cloth leggings, having a loose flap on the outside, were next drawn on over the trousers, as an additional protection to the knees. The feet, besides being portions of the body that are peculiarly susceptible of cold, had further to contend against the chafing of the lines which attach them to the snow-shoes, so that special care in their preparation for duty was necessary. First were put on a pair of blanketing or duffel socks, which were merely oblong in form, without sewing or making-up of any kind. These were wrapped round the feet, which were next thrust into a pair of made-up socks, of the same material, having ankle-pieces; above these were put another pair, without flaps for the ankles. Over all was drawn a pair of moccasins made of stout deer-skin, similar to that of the coat. Of course, the elegance of Harry's feet was entirely destroyed, and had he been met in this guise by any of his friends in the "old country," they would infallibly have come to the conclusion that he was afflicted with gout. Over his shoulders he slung a powder-horn and shot-pouch, the latter tastefully embroidered with dyed quill-work, A pair of deer-skin mittens, having a little bag for the thumb,

and a large bag for the fingers, completed his costume.

While the three were making ready, with a running accompaniment of grunts and groans at refractory pieces of apparel, the night without became darker, and the snow fell thicker, so that when they issued suddenly out of their warm abode, and emerged into the sharp frosty air, which blew the snow-drift into their eyes, they felt a momentary desire to give up the project and return to their comfortable quarters.

"What a dismal-looking night it is!" said the accountant, as he led the way along the wooden platform towards the gate of the fort.

"Very!" replied Hamilton, with an involuntary shudder.

"Keep up your heart," said Harry, in a cheerful voice; "you've no notion how your mind will change on that point when you have walked a mile or so and got into a comfortable heat. I must confess, however, that a little moonshine would be an improvement," he added, on stumbling, for the third time, off the platform into the deep snow.

"It is full moon just now," said the accountant, "and I think the clouds look as if they would break soon. At any rate, I've been at North River so often that I believe I could walk out there blindfold."

As he spoke they passed the gate, and diverging to the right, proceeded, as well as the imperfect light permitted, along the footpath that led to the forest.

CHAPTER XVIII.
The walk continuedFrozen toesAn encampment in the snow.

After quitting York Fort, the three friends followed the track leading to the spot where the winter's firewood was cut. Snow was still falling thickly, and it was with some difficulty that the accountant kept in the right direction. The night was excessively dark, while the dense fir forest, through which the narrow road ran, rendered the gloom if possible more intense.

When they had proceeded about a mile, their leader suddenly came to a stand.

"We must quit the track now," said he; "so get on your snow-shoes as fast as you can."

Hitherto they had carried their snow-shoes under their arms, as the beaten track along which they travelled rendered them unnecessary; but now, having to leave the path and pursue the remainder of their journey through deep snow, they availed themselves of those useful machines, by means of which the

inhabitants of this part of North America are enabled to journey over many miles of trackless wilderness, with nearly as much ease as a sportsman can traverse the moors in autumn, and that over snow so deep that one hour's walk through it without such aids would completely exhaust the stoutest trapper, and advance him only a mile or so on his journey. In other words, to walk without snow-shoes would be utterly impossible, while to walk with them is easy and agreeable. They are not used after the manner of skates, with a sliding, but a stepping action, and their sole use is to support the wearer on the top of snow, into which without them he would sink up to the waist. When we say that they support the wearer on the top of the snow, of course we do not mean that they literally do not break the surface at all. But the depth to which they sink is comparatively trifling, and varies according to the state of the snow and the season of the year. In the woods they sink frequently about six inches, sometimes more, sometimes less, while on frozen rivers, where the snow is packed solid by the action of the wind, they sink only two or three inches, and sometimes so little as to render it preferable to walk without them altogether. Snow-shoes are made of a light, strong framework of wood, varying from three to six feet long by eighteen and twenty inches broad, tapering to a point before and behind, and turning up in front. Different tribes of Indians modify the form a little, but in all essential points they are the same. The framework is filled up with a netting of deer-skin threads, which unites lightness with great strength, and permits any snow that may chance to fall upon the netting to pass through it like a sieve.

On the present occasion the snow, having recently fallen, was soft, and the walking, consequently, what is called heavy.

"Come on," shouted the accountant, as he came to a stand for the third time within half-an-hour, to await the coming up of poor Hamilton, who, being rather awkward in snow-shoe walking even in daylight, found it nearly impossible in the dark.

"Wait a little, please," replied a faint voice in the distance; "I've got among a quantity of willows, and find it very difficult to get on. I've been down twice al"

The sudden cessation of the voice, and a loud crash as of breaking branches, proved too clearly that our friend had accomplished his third fall.

"There he goes again," exclaimed Harry Somerville, who came up at the moment. "I've helped him up once already. We'll never get to North River at this rate. What is to be done?"

"Let's see what has become of him this time, however," said the accountant, as

he began to retrace his steps. "If I mistake not, he made rather a heavy plunge that time, judging from the sound."

At that moment the clouds overhead broke, and a moonbeam shot down into the forest, throwing a pale light over the cold scene. A few steps brought Harry and the accountant to the spot whence the sound had proceeded, and a loud startling laugh rang through the night air, as the latter suddenly beheld poor Hamilton struggling, with his arms, head, and shoulders stuck into the snow, his snow-shoes twisted and sticking with the heels up and awry, in a sort of rampant confusion, and his gun buried to the locks beside him. Regaining one's perpendicular after a fall in deep snow, when the feet are encumbered by a pair of long snow-shoes, is by no means an easy thing to accomplish, in consequence of the impossibility of getting hold of anything solid on which to rest the hands. The depth is so great that the outstretched arms cannot find bottom, and every successive struggle only sinks the unhappy victim deeper down. Should no assistance be near, he will soon beat the snow to a solidity that will enable him to rise, but not in a very enviable or comfortable condition.

"Give me a hand, Harry," gasped Hamilton, as he managed to twist his head upwards for a moment.

"Here you are," cried Harry, holding out his hand and endeavouring to suppress his desire to laugh; "up with you," and in another moment the poor youth was upon his legs, with every fold and crevice about his person stuffed to repletion with snow.

"Come, cheer up," cried the accountant, giving the youth a slap on the back; "there's nothing like experiencethe proverb says that it even teaches fools, so you need not despair."

Hamilton smiled as he endeavoured to shake off some of his white coating.

"We'll be all right immediately," added Harry; "I see that the country ahead is more open, so the walking will be easier."

"Oh, I wish that I had not come!" said Hamilton, sorrowfully, "because I am only detaining you. But perhaps I shall do better as we get on. At any rate, I cannot go back now, as I could never find the way."

"Go back! of course not," said the accountant; "in a short time we shall get into the old woodcutters' track of last year, and although it's not beaten at all, yet it is pretty level and open, so that we shall get on famously."

"Go on, then," sighed Hamilton.

"Drive ahead," laughed Harry, and without further delay they resumed their march, which was soon rendered more cheerful as the clouds rolled away, the snow ceased to fall, and the bright full moon poured its rays down upon their path.

For a long time they proceeded in silence, the muffled sound of the snow, as it sank beneath their regular footsteps, being the only interruption to the universal stillness around. There is something very solemnizing in a scene such as we are now describingthe calm tranquillity of the arctic night; the pure whiteness of the snowy carpet, which rendered the dark firs inky black by contrast; the clear, cold, starry sky, that glimmered behind the dark clouds, whose heavy masses, now rolling across the moon, partially obscured the landscape, and anon, passing slowly away, let a flood of light down upon the forest, which, penetrating between the thick branches, scattered the surface of the snow, as it were, with flakes of silver. Sleep has often been applied as a simile to nature in repose, but in this case death seemed more appropriate. So silent, so cold, so still was the scene, that it filled the mind with an indefinable feeling of dread, as if there was some mysterious danger near. Once or twice during their walk the three travellers paused to rest, but they spoke little, and in subdued voices, as if they feared to break the silence of the night.

"It is strange," said Harry, in a low tone, as he walked beside Hamilton, "that such a scene as this always makes me think more than usual of home."

"And yet it is natural," replied the other, "because it reminds us more forcibly than any other that we are in a foreign landin the lonely wildernessfar away from home."

Both Harry and Hamilton had been trained in families where the Almighty was feared and loved, and where their minds had been early led to reflect upon the Creator when regarding the works of His hand: their thoughts, therefore, naturally reverted to another home, compared with which this world is indeed a cold, lonely wilderness; but on such subjects they feared to converse, partly from a dread of the ridicule of reckless companions, partly from ignorance of each other's feelings on religious matters, and although their minds were busy, their tongues were silent.

The ground over which the greater part of their path lay was a swamp, which, being now frozen, was a beautiful white plain, so that their advance was more rapid, until they approached the belt of woodland that skirts North River. Here they again encountered the heavy snow, which had been such a source of difficulty to Hamilton at setting out. He had profited by his former experience, however, and by the exercise of an excessive degree of caution managed to

scramble through the woods tolerably well, emerging at last, along with his companions, on the bleak margin of what appeared to be the frozen sea.

North River, at this place, is several miles broad, and the opposite shore is so low that the snow causes it to appear but a slight undulation of the frozen bed of the river. Indeed, it would not be distinguishable at all, were it not for the willow bushes and dwarf pines, whose tops, rising above the white garb of winter, indicate that terra firma lies below.

"What a cold, desolate-looking place!" said Hamilton, as the party stood still to recover breath before taking their way over the plain to the spot where the accountant's traps were set. "It looks much more like the frozen sea than a river."

"It can scarcely be called a river at this place," remarked the accountant, "seeing that the water hereabouts is brackish, and the tides ebb and flow a good way up. In fact, this is the extreme mouth of North River, and if you turn your eyes a little to the right, towards yonder ice-hummock in the plain, you behold the frozen sea itself."

"Where are your traps set?" inquired Harry.

"Down in the hollow, behind yon point covered with brushwood."

"Oh, we shall soon get to them then; come along," cried Harry.

Harry was mistaken, however. He had not yet learned by experience the extreme difficulty of judging of distance in the uncertain light of nighta difficulty that was increased by the ignorance of the locality, and by the gleams of moonshine that shot through the driving clouds and threw confused fantastic shadows over the plain. The point which he had at first supposed was covered with low bushes, and about a hundred yards off, proved to be clad in reality with large bushes and small trees, and lay at a distance of two miles.

"I think you have been mistaken in supposing the point so near, Harry," said Hamilton, as he trudged on beside his friend.

"A fact evident to the naked eye," replied Harry. "How do your feet stand it, eh? Beginning to lose bark yet?"

Hamilton did not feel quite sure. "I think," said he softly, "that there is a blister under the big toe of my left foot. It feels very painful."

"If you feel at all uncertain about it, you may rest assured that there is a blister. These things don't give much pain at first. I'm sorry to tell you, my dear fellow, that you'll be painfully aware of the fact to-morrow. However, don't

distress yourself; it's a part of the experience that everyone goes through in this country. Besides," said Harry smiling, "we can send to the fort for medical advice."

"Don't bother the poor fellow, and hold your tongue. Harry," said the accountant, who now began to tread more cautiously as he approached the place where the traps were set.

"How many traps have you?" inquired Harry in a low tone.

"Three," replied the accountant.

"Do you know I have a very strange feeling about my heelsor rather a want of feeling," said Hamilton, smiling dubiously.

"A want of feeling! what do you mean?" cried the accountant, stopping suddenly and confronting his young friend.

"Oh, I daresay it's nothing," he exclaimed, looking as if ashamed of having spoken of it; "only I feel exactly as if both my heels were cut off, and I were walking on tip-toe!"

"Say you so? then right about wheel. Your heels are frozen, man, and you'll lose them if you don't look sharp."

"Frozen!" cried Hamilton, with a look of incredulity.

"Ay, frozen; and it's lucky you told me. I've a place up in the woods here, which I call my winter camp, where we can get you put to rights. But step out; the longer we are about it the worse for you."

Harry Somerville was at first disposed to think that the accountant jested, but seeing that he turned his back towards his traps, and made for the nearest point of the thick woods with a stride that betokened thorough sincerity, he became anxious too, and followed as fast as possible.

The place to which the accountant led his young friends was a group of fir trees which grew on a little knoll, that rose a few feet above the surrounding level country. At the foot of this hillock a small rivulet or burn ran in summer, but the only evidence of its presence now was the absence of willow bushes all along its covered narrow bed. A level tract was thus formed by nature, free from all underwood, and running inland about the distance of a mile, where it was lost in the swamp whence the stream issued. The wooded knoll or hillock lay at the mouth of this brook, and being the only elevated spot in the neighbourhood, besides having the largest trees growing on it, had been selected by the accountant as a convenient place for "camping out" on, when

he visited his traps in winter, and happened to be either too late or disinclined to return home. Moreover, the spreading fir branches afforded an excellent shelter alike from wind and snow in the centre of the clump, while from the margin was obtained a partial view of the river and the sea beyond. Indeed, from this look-out there was a very fine prospect on clear winter nights of the white landscape, enlivened occasionally by groups of arctic foxes, which might be seen scampering about in sport, and gambolling among the hummocks of ice like young kittens.

"Now we shall turn up here," said the accountant, as he walked a short way up the brook before mentioned, and halted in front of what appeared to be an impenetrable mass of bushes.

"We shall have to cut our way, then," said Harry, looking to the right and left in the vain hope of discovering a place where, the bushes being less dense, they might effect an entrance into the knoll or grove.

"Not so. I have taken care to make a passage into my winter camp, although it was only a whim, after all, to make a concealed entrance, seeing that no one ever passes this way except wolves and foxes, whose noses render the use of their eyes in most cases unnecessary."

So saying, the accountant turned aside a thick branch, and disclosed a narrow track, into which he entered, followed by his two companions.

A few minutes brought them to the centre of the knoll. Here they found a clear space of about twenty feet in diameter, round which the trees circled so thickly that in daylight nothing could be seen but tree-stems as far as the eye could penetrate, while overhead the broad flat branches of the firs, with their evergreen verdure, spread out and interlaced so thickly that very little light penetrated into the space below. Of course at night, even in moonlight, the place was pitch dark. Into this retreat the accountant led his companions, and bidding them stand still for a minute lest they should stumble into the fireplace, he proceeded to strike a light.

Those who have never travelled in the wild parts of this world can form but a faint conception of the extraordinary and sudden change that is produced, not only in the scene, but in the mind of the beholder, when a blazing fire is lighted on a dark night. Before the fire is kindled, and you stand, perhaps (as Harry and his friend did on the present occasion) shivering in the cold, the heart sinks, and sad, gloomy thoughts arise, while your eye endeavours to pierce the thick darkness, which, if it succeeds in doing so, only adds to the effect by disclosing the pallid snow, the cold, chilling beams of the moon, the wide vista of savage scenery, the awe-inspiring solitudes that tell of your

isolated condition, or stir up sad memories of other and far-distant scenes. But the moment the first spark of fire sends a fitful gleam of light upwards, these thoughts and feelings take wing and vanish. The indistinct scenery is rendered utterly invisible by the red light, which attracts and rivets the eye as if by a species of fascination. The deep shadows of the woods immediately around you grow deeper and blacker as the flames leap and sparkle upwards, causing the stems of the surrounding trees, and the foliage of the overhanging branches, to stand out in bold relief, bathed in a ruddy glow, which converts the forest chamber into a snug home-like place, and fills the mind with agreeable, home-like feelings and meditations. It seemed as if the spirit, in the one case, were set loose and etherealized to enable it to spread itself over the plains of cold, cheerless, illimitable space, and left to dwell upon objects too wide to grasp, too indistinct to comprehend; while, in the other, it is recalled and concentrated upon matters circumscribed and congenial, things of which it has long been cognizant, and which it can appreciate and enjoy without the effort of a thought.

Some such thoughts and feelings passed rapidly through the minds of Harry and Hamilton, while the accountant struck a light and kindled a roaring fire of logs, which he had cut and arranged there on a previous occasion. In the middle of the space thus brilliantly illuminated, the snow had been cleared away till the moss was uncovered, thus leaving a hole of about ten feet in diameter. As the snow was quite four feet deep, the hole was surrounded with a pure white wall, whose height was further increased by the masses thrown out in the process of digging to nearly six feet. At one end of this space was the large fire which had just been kindled, and which, owing to the intense cold, only melted a very little of the snow in its immediate neighbourhood. At the other end lay a mass of flat pine branches, which were piled up so thickly as to form a pleasant elastic couch, the upper end being slightly raised so as to form a kind of bolster, while the lower extended almost into the fire. Indeed, the branches at the extremity were burnt quite brown, and some of them charred. Beside the bolster lay a small wooden box, a round tin kettle, an iron tea-kettle, two tin mugs, a hatchet, and a large bundle tied up in a green blanket. There were thus, as it were, two apartments, one within the othernamely, the outer one, whose walls were formed of tree-stems and thick darkness, and the ceiling of green boughs; and then the inner one, with walls of snow, that sparkled in the firelight as if set with precious stones, and a carpet of evergreen branches.

Within this latter our three friends were soon actively employed. Poor Hamilton's moccasins were speedily removed, and his friends, going down on their knees, began to rub his feet with a degree of energy that induced him to beg for mercy.

"Mercy!" exclaimed the accountant, without pausing for an instant; "faith, it's little mercy there would be in stopping just now.Rub away, Harry. Don't give in. They're coming right at last."

After a very severe rubbing, the heels began to show symptoms of returning vitality. They were then wrapped up in the folds of a thick blanket, and held sufficiently near to the fire to prevent any chance of the frost getting at them again.

"Now, my boy," said the accountant, as he sat down to enjoy a pipe and rest himself on a blanket, which, along with the one wrapped round Hamilton's feet, had been extracted from the green bundle before mentioned"now, my boy, you'll have to enjoy yourself here as you best can for an hour or two, while Harry and I visit the traps. Would you like supper before we go, or shall we have it on our return?"

"Oh, I'll wait for it by all means till you return. I don't feel a bit hungry just now, and it will be much more cheerful to have it after all your work is over. Besides, I feel my feet too painful to enjoy it just now."

"My poor fellow," said Harry, whose heart smote him for having been disposed at first to treat the thing lightly, "I'm really sorry for you. Would you not like me to stay with you?"

"By no means," replied Hamilton quickly. "You can do nothing more for me, Harry; and I should be very sorry if you missed seeing the traps."

"Oh, never mind the traps. I've seen traps, and set them too, fifty times before now. I'll stop with you, old boy, I will," said Harry doggedly, while he made arrangements to settle down for the evening.

"Well, if you won't go, I will," said Hamilton coolly, as he unwound the blanket from his feet and began to pull on his socks.

"Bravo, my lad!" exclaimed the accountant, patting him approvingly on the back; "I didn't think you had half so much pluck in you. But it won't do, old fellow. You're in my castle just now, and must obey orders. You couldn't walk half-a-mile for your life; so just be pleased to pull off your socks again. Besides, I want Harry to help me to carry up my foxes, if there are any;so get ready, sirrah!"

"Ay, ay, captain," cried Harry, with a laugh, while he sprang up and put on his snow-shoes.

"You needn't bring your gun," said the accountant, shaking the ashes from his

pipe as he prepared to depart, "but you may as well shove that axe into your belt; you may want it.Now, mind, don't roast your feet," he added, turning to Hamilton.

"Adieu!" cried Harry, with a nod and a smile, as he turned to go. "Take care the bears don't find you out."

"No fear. Good-bye, Harry," replied Hamilton, as his two friends disappeared in the wood and left him to his solitary meditations.

CHAPTER XIX.
Shows how the accountant and Harry set their traps, and what came of it.

The moon was still up, and the sky less overcast, when our amateur trappers quitted the encampment, and, descending to the mouth of the little brook, took their way over North River in the direction of the accountant's traps. Being somewhat fatigued both in mind and body by the unusual exertions of the night, neither of them spoke for some time, but continued to walk in silence, contemplatively gazing at their long shadows.

"Did you ever trap a fox, Harry?" said the accountant at length.

"Yes, I used to set traps at Red River; but the foxes there are not numerous, and are so closely watched by the dogs that they have become suspicious. I caught but few."

"Then you know how to set a trap?"

"Oh, yes; I've set both steel and snow traps often. You've heard of old Labonté, who used to carry one of the winter packets from Red River until within a few years back?"

"Yes, I've heard of him; his name is in my ledgerat least, if you mean Pierre Labonté, who came down last fall with the brigade."

"The same. Well, he was a great friend of mine. His little cabin lay about two miles from Fort Garry, and after work was over in the office I used to go down to sit and chat with him by the fire, and many a time I have sat up half the night listening to him as he recounted his adventures. The old man never tired of relating them, and of smoking twist tobacco. Among other things, he set my mind upon trapping, by giving me an account of an expedition he made, when quite a youth, to the Rocky Mountains; so I got him to go into the woods and teach me how to set traps and snares, and I flatter myself he found me an apt pupil."

"Humph!" ejaculated the accountant; "I have no doubt you do flatter yourself. But here we are. The traps are just beyond that mound; so look out, and don't stick your feet into them."

"Hist!" exclaimed Harry, laying his hand suddenly on his companion's arm. "Do you see that?" pointing towards the place where the traps were said to be.

"You have sharp eyes, younker. I do see it, now that you point it out. It's a fox, and caught, too, as I'm a scrivener."

"You're in luck to-night," exclaimed Harry, eagerly, "It's a silver fox. I see the white tip on its tail."

"Nonsense," cried the accountant, hastening forward; "but we'll soon settle the point."

Harry proved to be right. On reaching the spot they found a beautiful black fox, caught by the fore leg in a steel trap, and gazing at them with a look of terror.

The skin of the silver foxso called from a slight sprinkling of pure white hairs covering its otherwise jet-black bodyis the most valuable fur obtained by the fur-traders, and fetches an enormous price in the British market, so much as thirty pounds sterling being frequently obtained for a single skin. The foxes vary in colour from jet black, which is the most valuable, to a light silvery hue, and are hailed as great prizes by the Indians and trappers when they are so fortunate as to catch them. They are not numerous, however, and being exceedingly wary and suspicious, are difficult to catch, ft may be supposed, therefore, that our friend the accountant ran to secure his prize with some eagerness.

"Now, then, my beauty, don't shrink," he said, as the poor fox backed at his approach as far as the chain which fastened the trap to a log of wood, would permit, and then, standing at bay, showed a formidable row of teeth. That grin was its last; another moment, and the handle of the accountant's axe stretched it lifeless on the snow.

"Isn't it a beauty!" cried he, surveying the animal with a look of triumphant pleasure; and then feeling as if he had compromised his dignity a little by betraying so much glee, he added, "But come now, Harry; we must see to the other traps. It's getting late."

The others were soon visited; but no more foxes were caught. However, the accountant set them both off to see that all was right; and then readjusting one himself, told Harry to set the other, in order to clear himself of the charge of

boasting.

Harry, nothing loath, went down on his knees to do so.

The steel trap used for catching foxes is of exactly the same form as the ordinary rat-trap, with this difference, that it has two springs instead of one, is considerably larger, and has no teeth, as these latter would only tend to spoil the skin. Owing to the strength of the springs, a pretty strong effort is required to set the trap, and, clumsy fellows frequently catch the tails of their coats or the ends of their belts, and not unfrequently the ends of their fingers, in their awkward attempts. Haying set it without any of the above untoward accidents occurring, Harry placed it gently on a hole which he had previously scrapedplacing it in such a manner that the jaws and plate, or trigger, were a hair-breadth below the level of the snow. After this he spread over it a very thin sheet of paper, observing as he did so that hay or grass was preferable; but as there was none at hand, paper would do. Over this he sprinkled snow very lightly, until every vestige of the trap was concealed from view, and the whole was made quite level with the surrounding plain, so that even the accountant himself, after he had once removed his eyes from it, could not tell where it lay. Some chips of a frozen ptarmigan were then scattered around the spot, and a piece of wood left to mark its whereabouts. The bait is always scattered round and not on the trap, as the fox, in running from one piece to another, is almost certain to set his foot on it, and so get caught by the leg; whereas, were the bait placed upon the trap, the fox would be apt to get caught, while in the act of eating, by the snout, which, being wedge-like in form, is easily dragged out of its gripe.

"Now then, what say you to going farther out on the river, and making a snow trap for white foxes?" said the accountant. "We shall still have time to do so before the moon sets."

"Agreed," cried Harry. "Come along."

Without further parley they left the spot and stretched out towards the sea.

The snow on the river was quite hard on its surface, so that snow-shoes being unnecessary, they carried them over their shoulders, and advanced much more rapidly. It is true that their road was a good deal broken, and jagged pieces of ice protruded their sharp corners so as to render a little attention necessary in walking; but one or two severe bumps on their toes made our friends sensitively alive to these minor dangers of the way.

"There goes a pack of them!" exclaimed Harry, as a troop of white foxes scampered past, gambolling as they went, and, coming suddenly to a halt at a short distance, wheeled about and sat down on their haunches, apparently

resolved to have a good look at the strangers who dared to venture into their wild domain.

"Oh, they are the most stupid brutes alive," said the accountant, as he regarded the pack with a look of contempt. "I've seen one of them sit down and look at me while I set a trap right before his eyes; and I had not got a hundred yards from the spot when a yell informed me that the gentleman's curiosity had led him to put his foot right into it."

"Indeed!" exclaimed Harry. "I had no idea that they were so tame.
Certainly no other kind of fox would do that."
"No, that's certain. But these fellows have done it to me again and again. I shouldn't wonder if we got one to-night in the very same way. I'm sure, by the look of these rascals, that they would do anything of a reckless, stupid nature just now."

"Had we not better make our trap here, then? There is a point, not fifty yards off, with trees on it large enough for our purpose."

"Yes; it will do very well here. Now, then, to work. Go to the wood, Harry, and fetch a log or two, while I cut out the slabs." So saying, the accountant drew the axe which he always carried in his belt; and while Harry entered the wood and began to hew off the branch of a tree, he proceeded, as he had said, to "cut out the slabs." With the point of his knife he first of all marked out an oblong in the snow, then cut down three or four inches with the axe, and putting the handle under the cut, after the manner of a lever, detached a thick solid slab of about three inches thick, which, although not so hard as ice, was quite hard enough for the purpose for which it was intended. He then cut two similar slabs, and a smaller one, the same in thickness and breadth, but only half the length. Having accomplished this, he raised himself to rest a little, and observed that Harry approached, staggering under a load of wood, and that the foxes were still sitting on their haunches, gazing at him with a look of deep interest.

"If I only had my gun here!" thought he. But not having it, he merely shook his fist at them, stooped down again, and resumed his work. With Harry's assistance the slabs were placed in such a way as to form a sort of box or house, having one end of it open. This was further plastered with soft snow at the joinings, and banked up in such a way that no animal could break into it easilyat least such an attempt would be so difficult as to make an entrance into the interior by the open side much more probable. When this was finished, they took the logs that Harry had cut and carried with so much difficulty from the wood, and began to lop off the smaller branches and twigs. One large log was placed across the opening of the trap, while the others were piled on one

end of it so as to press it down with their weight. Three small pieces of stick were now preparedtwo of them being about half a foot long, and the other about a foot. On the long piece of stick the breast of a ptarmigan was fixed as a bait, and two notches cut, the one at the end of it, the other about four or five inches further down. All was now ready to set the trap.

"Raise the log now while I place the trigger," said Harry, kneeling down in front of the door, while the accountant, as directed, lifted up the log on which the others lay so as to allow his companion to introduce the bait-stick, in such a manner as to support it, while the slightest pull on the bait would set the stick with the notches free, and thus permit the log to fall on the back of the fox, whose effort to reach the bait would necessarily place him under it.

While Harry was thus engaged, the accountant stood up and looked towards the foxes. They had approached so near in their curiosity, that he was induced to throw his axe frantically at the foremost of the pack. This set them galloping off, but they soon halted and sat down as before.

"What aggravating brutes they are, to be sure!" said Harry, with a laugh, as his companion returned with the hatchet.

"Humph! yes, but we'll be upsides with them yet. Come along into the wood, and I wager that in ten minutes we shall have one."

They immediately hurried towards the wood, but had not walked fifty paces when they were startled by a loud yell behind them.

"Dear me!" exclaimed the accountant, while he and Harry turned round with a start. "It cannot surely be possible that they have gone in already." A loud howl followed the remark, and the whole pack fled over the plain like snow-drift, and disappeared.

"Ah, that's a pity! something must have scared them to make them take wing like that. However, we'll get one to-morrow for certain; so come along, lad, let us make for the camp."

"Not so fast," replied the other; "if you hadn't pored over the big ledger till you were blind, you would see that there is one prisoner already."

This proved to be the case. On returning to the spot they found an arctic fox in his last gasp, lying flat on the snow, with the heavy log across his back, which seemed to be broken. A slight tap on the snout with the accountant's deadly axe-handle completed its destruction.

"We're in luck to-night," cried Harry, as he kneeled again to reset the trap. "But

after all these white brutes are worth very little; I fancy a hundred of their skins would not be worth the black one you got first."

"Be quick, Harry; the moon is almost down, and poor Hamilton will think that the polar bears have got hold of us."

"Ail right! Now then, step out," and glancing once more at the trap to see that all was properly arranged, the two friends once more turned their faces homewards, and travelled over the snow with rapid strides.

The moon had just set, leaving the desolate scene in deep gloom, so that they could scarcely find their way to the forest; and when they did at last reach its shelter, the night became so intensely dark that they had almost to grope their way, and would certainly have lost it altogether were it not for the accountant's thorough knowledge of the locality. To add to their discomfort, as they stumbled on, snow began to fall, and ere long a pretty steady breeze of wind drove it sharply in their faces. However, this mattered but little, as they penetrated deeper in among the trees, which proved a complete shelter both from wind and snow. An hour's march brought them to the mouth of the brook, although half that time would have been sufficient had it been daylight, and a few minutes later they had the satisfaction of hearing Hamilton's voice hailing them as they pushed aside the bushes and sprang into the cheerful light of their encampment.

"Hurrah!" shouted Harry, as he leaped into the space before the fire, and flung the two foxes at Hamilton's feet. "What do you think of that, old fellow? How are the heels? Rather sore, eh? Now for the kettle. Polly, put the kettle on; we'll all haveMy eye! where's the kettle, Hamilton? have you eaten it?"

"If you compose yourself a little, Harry, and look at the fire, you'll see it boiling there."

"Man, what a chap you are for making unnecessary speeches! Couldn't you tell me to look at the fire without the preliminary piece of advice to compose myself? Besides, you talk nonsense, for I'm composed already, of blood, bones, flesh, sinews, fat, and"

"Humbug!" interrupted the accountant. "Lend a hand to get supper, you young goose!"

"And so," continued Harry, not noticing the interruption, "I cannot be expected, nor is it necessary, to compose myself over again. But to be serious," he added, "it was very kind and considerate of you, Hammy, to put on the kettle, when your heels were in a manner uppermost."

"Oh, it was nothing at all; my heels are much better, thank you, and it kept me from wearying."

"Poor fellow!" said the accountant, while he busied himself in preparing their evening meal, "you must be quite ravenous by this timeat least I am, which is the same thing."

Supper was soon ready. It consisted of a large kettle of tea, a lump of pemmican, a handful of broken biscuit, and three ptarmiganall of which were produced from the small wooden box which the accountant was wont to call his camp-larder. The ptarmigan had been shot two weeks before, and carefully laid up for future use; the intense frost being a sufficient guarantee for their preservation for many months, had that been desired.

It would have done you good, reader (supposing you to be possessed of sympathetic feelings), to have witnessed those three nor'-westers enjoying their supper in the snowy camp. The fire had been replenished with logs, till it roared and crackled again, as if it were endued with a vicious spirit, and wished to set the very snow in flames. The walls shone like alabaster studded with diamonds, while the green boughs overhead and the stems around were of a deep red colour in the light of the fierce blaze. The tea-kettle hissed, fumed, and boiled over into the fire. A mass of pemmican simmered in the lid in front of it. Three pannikins of tea reposed on the green branches, their refreshing contents sending up little clouds of steam, while the ptarmigan, now split up, skewered, and roasted, were being heartily devoured by our three hungry friends.

The pleasures that fall to the lot of man are transient. Doubtless they are numerous and oft recurring; still they are transient, and sosupper came to an end.

"Now for a pipe," said the accountant, disposing his limbs at full length on a green blanket. "O thou precious weed, what should we do without thee!"

"Smoke tea, to be sure," answered Harry.

"Ah! true, it is possible to exist on a pipe of tea-leaves for a time, but only for a time. I tried it myself once, in desperation, when I ran short of tobacco on a journey, and found it execrable, but better than nothing."

"Pity we can't join you in that." remarked Harry.

"True; but perhaps since you cannot pipe, it might prove an agreeable diversification to dance."

"Thank you, I'd rather not," said Harry; "and as for Hamilton, I'm convinced that his mind is made up on the subject.How go the heels now?"

"Thank you, pretty well," he replied, reclining his head on the pine branches, and extending his smitten members towards the fire. "I think they will be quite well in the morning."

"It is a curious thing," remarked the accountant, in a soliloquising tone, "that soft fellows never smoke!"

"I beg your pardon," said Harry, "I've often seen hot loaves smoke, and they're soft enough fellows, in all conscience!"

"Ah!" sighed the accountant, "that reminds me of poor Peterkin, who was so soft that he went by the name of 'Butter.' Did you ever hear of what he did the summer before last with an Indian's head?"

"No, never; what was it!"

"I'll tell you the story," replied the accountant, drawing a few vigorous whiffs of smoke, to prevent his pipe going out while he spoke.

As the story in question, however, depicts a new phase of society in the woods, it deserves a chapter to itself.

CHAPTER XX.
The accountant's story.

"Spring had passed away, and York Fort was filled with all the bustle and activity of summer. Brigades came pouring in upon us with furs from the interior, and as every boat brought a C. T. or a clerk, our mess-table began to overflow.

"You've not seen the summer mess-room filled yet, Hamilton. That's a treat in store for you."

"It was pretty full last autumn, I think," suggested Hamilton, "at the time I arrived from England."

"Full! why, man, it was getting to feel quite lonely at that time. I've seen more than fifty sit down to table there, and it was worth going fifty miles to hear the row they kicked uptelling stories without end (and sometimes without foundation) about their wild doings in the interior, where every man-jack of them having spent at least eight months almost in perfect solitude, they hadn't had a chance of letting their tongues go till they came down here. But to

proceed. When the ship came out in the fall, she brought a batch of new clerks, and among them was this miserable chap Peterkin, whom we soon nicknamed Butter. He was the softest fellow I ever knew (far worse than you, Hamilton), and he hadn't been here a week before the wild blades from the interior, who were bursting with fun and mischief, began to play off all kinds of practical jokes upon him. The very first day he sat down at the mess-table, our worthy governor (who, you are aware, detests practical jokes) played him a trick, quite unintentionally, which raised a laugh against him for many a day. You know that old Mr. Rogan is rather absent at times; well, the first day that Peterkin came to mess (it was breakfast), the old governor asked him, in a patronizing sort of way, to sit at his right hand. Accordingly down he sat, and having never, I fancy, been away from his mother's apron-string before, he seemed to feel very uncomfortable, especially as he was regarded as a sort of novelty. The first thing he did was to capsize his plate into his lap, which set the youngsters at the lower end of the table into suppressed fits of laughter. However, he was eating the leg of a dry grouse at the time, so it didn't make much of a mess.

"'Try some fish, Peterkin,' said Mr. Rogan kindly, seeing that the youth was ill at ease. 'That old grouse is tough enough to break your knife.'

"'A very rough passage,' replied the youngster, whose mind was quite confused by hearing the captain of the ship, who sat next to him, giving to his next neighbour a graphic account of the voyage in a very loud key'I mean, if you please, no, thank you,' he stammered, endeavouring to correct himself.

"'Ah! a cup of tea perhaps.Here, Anderson' (turning to the butler), 'a cup of tea to Mr. Peterkin.'

"The butler obeyed the order.

"'And here, fill my cup,' said old Rogan, interrupting himself in an earnest conversation, into which he had plunged with the gentleman on his left hand. As he said this he lifted his cup to empty the slops, but without paying attention to what he was doing. As luck would have it, the slop-basin was not at hand, and Peterkin's cup was, so he emptied it innocently into that. Peterkin hadn't courage to arrest his hand, and when the deed was done he looked timidly round to see if the action had been observed. Nearly half the table had seen it, but they pretended ignorance of the thing so well that he thought no one had observed, and so went quietly on with his breakfast, and drank the tea! But I am wandering from my story. Well, about this time there was a young Indian who shot himself accidentally in the woods, and was brought to the fort to see if anything could be done for him. The doctor examined his wound, and found that the ball had passed through the upper part of his right arm and the

middle of his right thigh, breaking the bone of the latter in its passage. It was an extraordinary shot for a man to put into himself, for it would have been next to impossible even for another man to have done it, unless the Indian had been creeping on all fours. When he was able to speak, however, he explained the mystery. While running through a rough part of the wood after a wounded bird, he stumbled and fell on all fours. The gun, which he was carrying over his shoulder, holding it, as the Indians usually do, by the muzzle, flew forward, and turned right round as he fell, so that the mouth of it was presented towards him. Striking against the stem of a tree, it exploded and shot him through the arm and leg as described ere he had time to rise. A comrade carried him to his lodge, and his wife brought him in a canoe to the fort. For three or four days the doctor had hopes of him, but at last he began to sink, and died on the sixth day after his arrival. His wife and one or two friends buried him in our graveyard, which lies, as you know, on that lonely-looking point just below the powder-magazine. For several months previous to this our worthy doctor had been making strenuous efforts to get an Indian skull to send home to one of his medical friends, but without success. The Indians could not be prevailed upon to cut off the head of one of their dead countrymen for love or money, and the doctor had a dislike to the idea, I suppose, of killing one for himself; but now here was a golden opportunity. The Indian was buried near to the fort, and his relatives had gone away to their tents again. What was to prevent his being dug up? The doctor brooded over the thing for one hour and a half (being exactly the length of time required to smoke out his large Turkey pipe), and then sauntered into Wilson's room. Wilson was busy, as usual, at some of his mechanical contrivances.

"Thrusting his hands deep into his breeches pockets, and seating himself on an old sea-chest, he began,

"'I say, Wilson, will you do me a favour?'

"'That depends entirely on what the favour is,' he replied, without raising his head from his work.

"'I want you to help me to cut off an Indian's head!'

"' Then I won't do you the favour. But pray, don't humbug me just now; I'm busy.'

"'No; but I'm serious, and I can't get it done without help, and I know you're an obliging fellow. Besides, the savage is dead, and has no manner of use for his head now.'

"Wilson turned round with a look of intelligence on hearing this.

"'Ha!' he exclaimed, 'I see what you're up to; but I don't half like it. In the first place, his friends would be terribly cut up if they heard of it; and then I've no sort of aptitude for the work of a resurrectionist; and then, if it got wind, we should never hear the last of it; and then'

"'And then,' interrupted the doctor, 'it would be adding to the light of medical science, you unaspiring monster.'

"'A light,' retorted Wilson, 'which, in passing through some members of the medical profession, is totally absorbed, and reproduced in the shape of impenetrable darkness.'

"'Now, don't object, my dear fellow; you know you're going to do it, so don't coquette with me, but agree at once.'

"'Well, I consent, upon one condition.'

"'And what is that?'

"'That you do not play any practical jokes on me with the head when you have got it.'

"'Agreed!' cried the doctor, laughing; 'I give you my word of honour. Now he has been buried three days already, so we must set about it at once. Fortunately the graveyard is composed of a sandy soil, so he'll keep for some time yet.

"The two worthies then entered into a deep consultation as to how they were to set about this deed of darkness. It was arranged that Wilson should take his gun and sally forth a little before dark, as if he were bent on an hour's sport, and, not forgetting his game-bag, proceed to the graveyard, where the doctor engaged to meet him with a couple of spades and a dark lantern. Accordingly, next evening, Mr. Wilson, true to his promise, shouldered his gun and sallied forth.

"It soon became an intensely dark night. Not a single star shone forth to illumine the track along which he stumbled. Everything around was silent and dark, and congenial with the work on which he was bent. But Wilson's heart beat a little more rapidly than usual. He is a bold enough man, as you know, but boldness goes for nothing when superstition comes into play. However, he trudged along fearlessly enough till he came to the thick woods just below the fort, into which he entered with something of a qualm. Scarcely had he set foot on the narrow track that leads to the graveyard, when he ran slap against the post that stands there, but which, in his trepidation, he had entirely forgotten. This quite upset the small amount of courage that remained, and he has since confessed that if he had not had the hope of meeting with the doctor in a few

minutes, he would have turned round and fled at that moment.

"Recovering a little from this accident, he hurried forward, but with more caution, for although the night seemed as dark as could possibly be while he was crossing the open country, it became speedily evident that there were several shades of darkness which he had not yet conceived. In a few minutes he came to the creek that runs past the graveyard, and here again his nerves got another shake; for slipping his foot while in the act of commencing the descent, he fell and rolled heavily to the bottom, making noise enough in his fall to scare away all the ghosts in the country. With a palpitating heart poor Wilson gathered himself up, and searched for his gun, which fortunately had not been injured, and then commenced to climb the opposite bank, starting at every twig that snapped under his feet. On reaching the level ground again he breathed a little more freely, and hurried forward with more speed than caution. Suddenly he came into violent contact with a figure, which uttered a loud growl as Wilson reeled backwards.

"'Back, you monster,' he cried, with a hysterical yell, 'or I'll blow your brains out!'

"'It's little good that would do ye,' cried the doctor as he came forward. 'Why, you stupid, what did you take me for? You've nearly knocked out my brains as it is,' and the doctor rubbed his forehead ruefully.

"'Oh, it's you, doctor!' said Wilson, feeling as if a ton weight had been lifted off his heart; 'I verily thought it was the ghost of the poor fellow we're going to disturb. I do think you had better give it up. Mischief will come of it, you'll see.'

"'Nonsense,' cried the doctor; 'don't be a goose, but let's to work at once. Why, I've got half the thing dug up already.' So saying, he led the way to the grave, in which there was a large opening. Setting the lantern down by the side of it, the two seized their spades and began to dig as if in earnest.

"The fact is that the doctor was nearly as frightened as Wilson, and he afterwards confessed to me that it was an immense relief to him when he heard him fall down the bank of the creek, and knew by the growl he gave that it was he.
"In about half-an-hour the doctor's spade struck upon the coffin lid, which gave forth a hollow sound.

"'Now then, we're about done with it,' said he, standing up to wipe away the perspiration that trickled down his face. 'Take the axe and force up the lid, it's only fixed with common nails, while I' He did not finish the sentence, but drew a large scalping-knife from a sheath which hung at his belt.

"Wilson shuddered and obeyed. A good wrench caused the lid to start, and while he held it partially open the doctor inserted the knife. For five minutes he continued to twist and work with his arms, muttering between his teeth, every now and then, that he was a 'tough subject,' while the crackling of bones and other disagreeable sounds struck upon the horrified ears of his companion.

"'All right,' he exclaimed at last, as he dragged a round object from the coffin and let down the lid with a bang, at the same time placing the savage's head with its ghastly features full in the blaze of the lantern.

"'Now, then, close up,' said he, jumping out of the hole and shovelling in the earth.

"In a few minutes they had filled the grave up and smoothed it down on the surface, and then, throwing the head into the game-bag, retraced their steps to the fort. Their nerves were by this time worked up to such a pitch of excitement, and their minds filled with such a degree of supernatural horror, that they tripped and stumbled over stumps and branches innumerable in their double-quick march. Neither would confess to the other, however, that he was afraid. They even attempted to pass a few facetious remarks as they hurried along, but it would not do, so they relapsed into silence till they came to the hollow beside the powder-magazine. Here the doctor's foot happening to slip, he suddenly grasped Wilson by the shoulder to support himselfa movement which, being unexpected, made his friend leap, as he afterwards expressed it, nearly out of his skin. This was almost too much for them. For a moment they looked at each other as well as the darkness would permit, when all at once a large stone, which the doctor's slip had overbalanced, fell down the bank and through the bushes with a loud crash. Nothing more was wanting. All further effort to disguise their feelings was dropped. Leaping the rail of the open field in a twinkling, they gave a simultaneous yell of consternation and fled to the fort like autumn leaves before the wind, never drawing breath till they were safe within the pickets."

"But what has all this to do with Peterkin?" asked Harry, as the accountant paused to relight his pipe and toss a fresh log on the fire.

"Have patience, lad; you shall hear."

The accountant stirred the logs with his toe, drew a few whiffs to see that the pipe was properly ignited, and proceeded.

"For a day or two after this, the doctor was observed to be often mysteriously engaged in an outhouse, of which he kept the key. By some means or other, the skipper, who is always up to mischief, managed to discover the secret.

Watching where the doctor hid the key, he possessed himself of it one day, and sallied forth, bent on a lark of some kind or other, but without very well knowing what. Passing the kitchen, he observed Anderson, the butler, raking the fire out of the large oven which stands in the backyard.

"'Baking again, Anderson?' said he in passing. 'You get soon through with a heavy cargo of bread just now.'

"'Yes, sir; many mouths to feed, sir,' replied the butler, proceeding with his work.

"The skipper sauntered on, and took the track which led to the boathouse, where he stood for some time in meditation. Casting up his eyes, he saw Peterkin in the distance, looking as if he didn't very well know what to do.

"A sudden thought struck him. Pulling off his coat, he seized a mallet and a calking-chisel, and began to belabour the side of a boat as if his life depended on it. All at once he stopped and stood up, blowing with the exertion.

"'Hollo, Peterkin!' he shouted, and waved his hand.

"Peterkin hastened towards him.

"'Well, sir' said he, 'do you wish to speak to me?'

"'Yes,' replied the skipper, scratching his head, as if in great perplexity. 'I wish you to do me a favour, Peterkin, but I don't know very well how to ask you.'

"'Oh, I shall be most happy,' said poor Butter eagerly, 'if I can be of any use to you.'

"'I don't doubt your willingness,' replied the other; 'but thenthe doctor, you seethe fact is, Peterkin, the doctor being called away to see a sick Indian, has intrusted me with a delicate piece of businessrather a nasty piece of business, I may saywhich I promised to do for him. You must know that the Surgical Society of London has written to him, begging, as a great favour, that he would, if possible, procure them the skull of a native. After much trouble, he has succeeded in getting one, but is obliged to keep it a great secret, even from his fellow-clerks, lest it should get wind: for if the Indians heard of it they would be sure to kill him, and perhaps burn the fort too. Now I suppose you are aware that it is necessary to boil an Indian's head in order to get the flesh clean off the skull?'

"'Yes; I have heard something of that sort from the students at college, who say that boiling brings flesh more easily away from the bone. But I don't know much about it,' replied Peterkin.

"'Well,' continued the skipper, 'the doctor, who is fond of experiments, wishes to try whether baking won't do better than boiling, and ordered the oven to be heated for that purpose this morning; but being called suddenly away, as I have said, he begged me to put the head into it as soon as it was ready. I agreed, quite forgetting at the time that I had to get this precious boat ready for sea this very afternoon. Now the oven is prepared, and I dare not leave my work; indeed, I doubt whether I shall have it quite ready and taut after all, and there's the oven cooling; so, if you don't help me, I'm a lost man.'

"Having said this, the skipper looked as miserable as his jolly visage would permit, and rubbed his nose.

"'Oh, I'll be happy to do it for you, although it is not an agreeable job,' replied Butter.

"'That's rightthat's friendly now!' exclaimed the skipper, as if greatly relieved. 'Give us your flipper, my lad;' and seizing Peterkin's hand, he wrung it affectionately. 'Now, here is the key of the outhouse; do it as quickly as you can, and don't let anyone see you. It's in a good cause, you know, but the results might be terrible if discovered.'

"So saying, the skipper fell to hammering the boat again with surprising vigour till Butter was out of sight, and then resuming his coat, returned to the house.

"An hour after this, Anderson went to take his loaves out of the oven; but he had no sooner taken down the door than a rich odour of cooked meat greeted his nostrils. Uttering a deep growl, the butler shouted out 'Sprat!'

"Upon this, a very thin boy, with arms and legs like pipe stems, issued from the kitchen, and came timidly towards his master.

"'Didn't I tell you, you young blackguard, that the grouse-pie was to be kept for Sunday? and there you've gone and put it to fire to-day.'

"'The grouse-pie!' said the boy, in amazement.

"'Yes, the grouse-pie,' retorted the indignant butler; and seizing the urchin by the neck, he held his head down to the mouth of the oven.

"'Smell that, you villain! What did you mean by it, eh?'

"'Oh, murder!' shouted the boy, as with a violent effort he freed himself, and ran shrieking into the house. "'Murder!' repeated Anderson in astonishment, while he stooped to look into the oven, where the first thing that met his gaze

was a human head, whose ghastly visage and staring eyeballs worked and moved about under the influence of the heat as if it were alive.

"With a yell that rung through the whole fort, the horrified butler rushed through the kitchen and out at the front door, where, as ill-luck would have it, Mr. Rogan happened to be standing at the moment. Pitching head first into the small of the old gentleman's back, he threw him off the platform and fell into his arms. Starting up in a moment, the governor dealt Anderson a cuff that sent him reeling towards the kitchen door again, on the steps of which he sat down, and began to sing out, 'Oh, murder, murder! the oven, the oven!' and not another word, bad, good, or indifferent, could be got out of him for the next half-hour, as he swayed himself to and fro and wrung his hands.

"To make a long story short, Mr. Rogan went himself to the oven, and fished out the head, along with the loaves, which were, of course, all spoiled."

"And what was the result?" enquired Harry.

"Oh, there was a long investigation, and the skipper got a blowing-up, and the doctor a warning to let Indians' skulls lie at peace in their graves for the future, and poor Butter was sent to M'Kenzie's River as a punishment, for old Rogan could never be brought to believe that he hadn't been a willing tool in the skipper's hands; and Anderson lost his batch of bread and his oven, for it had to be pulled down and a new one built."

"Humph! and I've no doubt the governor read you a pretty stiff lecture on practical joking."

"He did," replied the accountant, laying aside his pipe and drawing the green blanket over him, while Harry piled several large logs on the fire.

"Good-night," said the accountant.

"Good-night," replied his companions; and in a few minutes more they were sound asleep in their snowy camp, while the huge fire continued, during the greater part of the night, to cast its light on their slumbering forms.

CHAPTER XXI.
PtarmiganhuntingHamilton's shooting powers severely testedA snowstorm.

At about four o'clock on the following morning, the sleepers were awakened by the cold, which had become very intense. The fire had burned down to a few embers, which merely emitted enough light to make darkness visible. Harry being the most active of the party, was the first to bestir himself. Raising

himself on his elbow, while his teeth chattered and his limbs trembled with cold, he cast a woebegone and excessively sleepy glance towards the place where the fire had been; then he scratched his head slowly; then he stared at the fire again; then he languidly glanced at Hamilton's sleeping visage, and then he yawned. The accountant observed all this; for although he appeared to be buried in the depths of slumber, he was wide awake in reality, and moreover, intensely cold. The accountant, however, was slydeep, as he would have said himselfand knew that Harry's active habits would induce him to rise, on awaking, and rekindle the fire,an event which the accountant earnestly desired to see accomplished, but which he as earnestly resolved should not be performed by him. Indeed, it was with this end in view that he had given vent to the terrific snore which had aroused his young companion a little sooner than would have otherwise been the case.

"My eye," exclaimed Harry, in an undertone, "how precious cold it is!"

His eye making no reply to this remark, he arose, and going down on his hands and knees, began to coax the charcoal into a flame. By dint of severe blowing, he soon succeeded, and heaping on a quantity of small twigs, the fitful flame sprang up into a steady blaze. He then threw several heavy logs on the fire, and in a very short space of time restored it almost to its original vigour.

"What an abominable row you are kicking up!" growled the accountant; "why, you would waken the seven sleepers. Oh! mending the fire," he added, in an altered tone: "ah! I'll excuse you, my boy, since that's what you're at."

The accountant hereupon got up, along with Hamilton, who was now also awake, and the three spread their hands over the bright fire, and revolved their bodies before it, until they imbibed a satisfactory amount of heat. They were much too sleepy to converse, however, and contented themselves with a very brief enquiry as to the state of Hamilton's heels, which elicited the sleepy reply, "They feel quite well, thank you." In a short time, having become agreeably warm, they gave a simultaneous yawn, and lying down again, they fell into a sleep from which they did not awaken until the red winter sun shot its early rays over the arctic scenery.

Once more Harry sprang up, and let his hand fall heavily on Hamilton's shoulder. Thus rudely assailed, that youth also sprang up, giving a shout, at the same time, that brought the accountant to his feet in an instant; and so, as if by an electric spark, the sleepers were simultaneously roused into a state of wide-awake activity.

"How excessively hungry I feel! isn't it strange?" said Hamilton, as he assisted

in rekindling the fire, while the accountant filled his pipe, and Harry stuffed the tea-kettle full of snow.

"Strange!" cried Harry, as he placed the kettle on the fire"strange to be hungry after a five miles' walk and a night in the snow? I would rather say it was strange if you were not hungry. Throw on that billet, like a good fellow, and spit those grouse, while I cut some pemmican and prepare the tea."

"How are the heels now, Hamilton?" asked the accountant, who divided his attention between his pipe and his snow-shoes, the lines of which required to be readjusted.

"They appear to be as well as if nothing had happened to them," replied Hamilton: "I've been looking at them, and there is no mark whatever.
They do not even feel tender."
"Lucky for you, old boy, that they were taken in time, else you'd had another story to tell."

"Do you mean to say that people's heels really freeze and fall off?" inquired the other, with a look of incredulity.

"Soft, very soft and green," murmured Harry, in a low voice, while he continued his work of adding fresh snow to the kettle as the process of melting reduced its bulk.

"I mean to say," replied the accountant, tapping the ashes out of his pipe, "that not only heels, but hands, feet, noses, and ears, frequently freeze, and often fall off in this country, as you will find by sad experience if you don't look after yourself a little better than you have done hitherto."

One of the evil effects of the perpetual jesting that prevailed at York Fort was, that "soft" (in other words, straightforward, unsuspecting) youths had to undergo a long process of learning-by-experience: first, believing everything, and then doubting everything, ere they arrived at that degree of sophistication which enabled them to distinguish between truth and falsehood.

Having reached the doubting period in his training, Hamilton looked down and said nothing, at least with his mouth, though his eyes evidently remarked, "I don't believe you." In future years, however, the evidence of these same eyes convinced him that what the accountant said upon this occasion was but too true.

Breakfast was a repetition of the supper of the previous evening.
During its discussion they planned proceedings for the day.
"My notion is," said the accountant, interrupting the flow of words ever and

anon to chew the morsel with which his mouth was filled"my notion is, that as it's a fine clear day we should travel five miles through the country parallel with North River. I know the ground, and can guide you easily to the spots where there are lots of willows, and therefore plenty of ptarmigan, seeing that they feed on willow tops; and the snow that fell last night will help us a little."

"How will the snow help us?" inquired Hamilton.

"By covering up all the old tracks, to be sure, and showing only the new ones."

"Well, captain," said Harry, as he raised a can of tea to his lips, and nodded to Hamilton as if drinking his health, "go on with your proposals for the day. Five miles up the river to begin with, then"

"Then we'll pull up," continued the accountant; "make a fire, rest a bit, and eat a mouthful of pemmican; after which we'll strike across country for the southern woodcutters' track, and so home."

"And how much will that be?"

"About fifteen miles."

"Ha!" exclaimed Harry; "pass the kettle, please. Thanks.Do you think you're up to that, Hammy?"

"I will try what I can do," replied Hamilton. "If the snow-shoes don't cause me to fall often, I think I shall stand the fatigue very well."

"That's right," said the accountant; "'faint heart,' etc., you know. If you go on as you've begun, you'll be chosen to head the next expedition to the north pole."

"Well," replied Hamilton, good-humouredly, "pray head the present expedition, and let us be gone."

"Right!" ejaculated the accountant, rising. "I'll just put my odds and ends out of the reach of the foxes, and then we shall be off."

In a few minutes everything was placed in security, guns loaded, snow-shoes put on, and the winter camp deserted. At first the walking was fatiguing, and poor Hamilton more than once took a sudden and eccentric plunge; but after getting beyond the wooded country, they found the snow much more compact, and their march, therefore, much more agreeable. On coming to the place where it was probable that they might fall in with ptarmigan, Hamilton became rather excited, and apt to imagine that little lumps of snow which hung upon the bushes here and there were birds.

"There now," he cried, in an energetic and slightly positive tone, as another of these masses of snow suddenly met his eager eye"that's one, I'm quite sure."

The accountant and Harry both stopped short on hearing this, and looked in the direction indicated.

"Fire away, then, Hammy," said the former, endeavouring to suppress a smile.

"But do you think it really is one?" asked Hamilton, anxiously.

"Well, I don't see it exactly, but then, you know, I'm near-sighted."

"Don't give him a chance of escape," cried Harry, seeing that his friend was undecided. "If you really do see a bird, you'd better shoot it, for they've got a strong propensity to take wing when disturbed."

Thus admonished Hamilton raised his gun and took aim. Suddenly he lowered his piece again, and looking round at Harry, said in a low whisper,

"Oh, I should like so much to shoot it while flying! Would it not be better to set it up first?"

"By no means," answered the accountant. "'A bird in the hand,' etc.
Take him as you find himlook sharp; he'll be off in a second."
Again the gun was pointed, and, after some difficulty in taking aim, fired.

"Ah, what a pity you've missed him!" shouted Harry,

"But see, he's not off yet; how tame he is, to be sure! Give him the other barrel, Hammy."

This piece of advice proved to be unnecessary. In his anxiety to get the bird, Hamilton had cocked both barrels, and while gazing, half in disappointment, half in surprise, at the supposed bird, his finger unintentionally pressed the second trigger. In a moment the piece exploded. Being accidentally aimed in the right direction, it blew the lump of snow to atoms, and at the same time hitting its owner on the chest with the butt, knocked him over flat upon his back.

"What a gun it is, to be sure!" said Harry, with a roguish laugh, as he assisted the discomforted sportsman to rise; "it knocks over game with butt and muzzle at once."

"Quite a rare instance of one butt knocking another down," added the accountant.

At this moment a large flock of ptarmigan, startled by the double report, rose with a loud whirring noise about a hundred yards in advance, and after flying a short distance alighted.

"There's real game at last, though," cried the accountant, as he hurried after the birds, followed closely by his young friends.

They soon reached the spot where the flock had alighted, and after following up the tracks for a few yards further, set them up again. As the birds rose, the accountant fired and brought down two; Harry shot one and missed another; Hamilton being so nervously interested in the success of his comrades that he forgot to fire at all.

"How stupid of me!" he exclaimed, while the others loaded their guns.

"Never mind; better luck next time," said Harry, as they resumed their walk. "I saw the flock settle down about half-a-mile in advance of us; so step out."

Another short walk brought the sportsmen again within range.

"Go to the front, Hammy," said the accountant, "and take the first shot this time."

Hamilton obeyed. He had scarcely made ten steps in advance, when a single bird, that seemed to have been separated from the others, ran suddenly out from under a bush, and stood stock-still, at a distance of a few yards, with its neck stretched out and its black eyes wide open, as if in astonishment.

"Now then, you can't miss that."

Hamilton was quite taken aback by the suddenness of this necessity for instantaneous action. Instead, therefore, of taking aim leisurely (seeing that he had abundant time to do so), he flew entirely to the opposite extreme, took no aim at all, and fired off both barrels at once, without putting the gun to his shoulder. The result of this was that the affrighted bird flew away unharmed, while Harry and the accountant burst spontaneously into fits of laughter.

"How very provoking!" said the poor youth, with a dejected look.

"Never mindnever say dietry again," said the accountant, on recovering his gravity. Having reloaded, they continued the pursuit.

"Dear me!" exclaimed Harry, suddenly, "here are three dead birds.I verily believe, Hamilton, that you have killed them all at one shot by accident."

"Can it be possible?" exclaimed his friend, as with a look of amazement he

regarded the birds.

There was no doubt about the fact. There they lay, plump and still warm, with one or two drops of bright red blood upon their white plumage. Ptarmigan are almost pure white, so that it requires a practised eye to detect them, even at a distance of a few yards; and it would be almost impossible to hunt them without dogs, but for the tell-tale snow, in which their tracks are distinctly marked, enabling the sportsman to follow them up with unerring certainty. When Hamilton made his bad shot, neither he nor his companions observed a group of ptarmigan not more than fifty yards before them, their attention being riveted at the time on the solitary bird; and the gun happening to be directed towards them when it was fired, three were instantly and unwittingly placed hors de combat, while the others ran away. This the survivors frequently do when very tame, instead of taking wing. Thus it was that Hamilton, to his immense delight, made such a successful shot without being aware of it.

Having bagged their game, the party proceeded on their way. Several large flocks of birds were raised, and the game-bags nearly filled, before reaching the spot where they intended to turn and bend their steps homewards. This induced them to give up the idea of going further; and it was fortunate they came to this resolution, for a storm was brewing, which in the eagerness of pursuit after game they had not noticed. Dark masses of leaden-coloured clouds were gathering in the sky overhead, and faint sighs of wind came, ever and anon, in fitful gusts from the north-west.

Hurrying forward as quickly as possible, they now pursued their course in a direction which would enable them to cross the woodcutters' track. This they soon reached, and finding it pretty well beaten, were enabled to make more rapid progress. Fortunately the wind was blowing on their backs, otherwise they would have had to contend not only with its violence, but also with the snow-drift, which now whirled in bitter fury among the trees, or scoured like driving clouds over the plain. Under this aspect, the flat country over which they travelled seemed the perfection of bleak desolation. Their way, however, did not lie in a direct line. The track was somewhat tortuous, and gradually edged towards the north, until the wind blew nearly in their teeth. At this point, too, they came to a stretch of open ground which they had crossed at a point some miles further to the northward in their night march. Here the storm raged in all its fury, and as they looked out upon the plain, before quitting the shelter of the wood, they paused to tighten their belts and readjust their snow-shoe lines. The gale was so violent that the whole plain seemed tossed about like billows of the sea, as the drift rose and fell, curled, eddied, and dashed along, so that it was impossible to see more than half-a-dozen yards in advance.

"Heaven preserve us from ever being caught in an exposed place on such a night as this!" said the accountant, as he surveyed the prospect before him. "Luckily the open country here is not more than a quarter of a mile broad, and even that little bit will try our wind somewhat."

Hamilton and Harry seemed by their looks to say, "We could easily face even a stiffer breeze than that, if need be."

"What should we do," inquired the former, "if the plain were five or six miles broad?"

"Do? why, we should have to camp in the woods till it blew over, that's all," replied the accountant; "but seeing that we are not reduced to such a necessity just now, and that the day is drawing to a close, let us face it at once. I'll lead the way, and see that you follow close at my heels. Don't lose sight of me for a moment, and if you do by chance, give a shout; d'ye hear?"

The two lads replied in the affirmative, and then bracing themselves up as if for a great effort, stepped vigorously out upon the plain, and were instantly swallowed up in clouds of snow. For half-an-hour or more they battled slowly against the howling storm, pressing forward for some minutes with heads down, as if boring through it, then turning their backs to the blast for a few seconds' relief, but always keeping as close to each other as possible. At length the woods were gained; on entering which it was discovered that Hamilton was missing.

"Hollo! where's Hamilton?" exclaimed Harry; "I saw him beside me not five minutes ago." The accountant gave a loud shout, but there was no reply. Indeed, nothing short of his own stentorian voice could have been heard at all amid the storm.

"There's nothing for it," said Harry, "but to search at once, else he'll wander about and get lost." Saying this, he began to retrace his steps, just as a brief lull in the gale took place.

"Hollo! don't you hear a cry, Harry?"

At this moment there was another lull; the drift fell, and for an instant cleared away, revealing the bewildered Hamilton, not twenty yards off, standing, like a pillar of snow, in mute despair.

Profiting by the glimpse, Harry rushed forward, caught him by the arm, and led him into the partial shelter of the forest.

Nothing further befell them after this. Their route lay in shelter all the way to

the fort. Poor Hamilton, it is true, took one or two of his occasional plunges by the way, but without any serious resultnot even to the extent of stuffing his nose, ears, neck, mittens, pockets, gun-barrels, and everything else with snow, because, these being quite full and hard packed already, there was no room left for the addition of another particle.

CHAPTER XXII.
The winter packetHarry hears from old friends, and wishes that he was with them.

Letters from home! What a burst of sudden emotionwhat a riot of conflicting feelings of dread and joy, expectation and anxietywhat a flood of old memorieswhat stirring up of almost forgotten associations these three words create in the hearts of those who dwell in distant regions of this earth, far, far away from kith and kin, from friends and acquaintances, from the much-loved scenes of childhood, and from home! Letters from home! How gratefully the sound falls upon ears that have been long unaccustomed to sounds and things connected with home, and so long accustomed to wild, savage sounds, that these have at length lost their novelty, and become everyday and commonplace, while the first have gradually grown strange and unwonted. For many long months home and all connected with it have become a dream of other days, and savage-land a present reality. The mind has by degrees become absorbed by surrounding objectsobjects so utterly unassociated with or unsuggestive of any other land, that it involuntarily ceases to think of the scenes of childhood with the same feelings that it once did. As time rolls on, home assumes a misty, undefined character, as if it were not only distant in reality, but were also slowly retreating further and further awaygrowing gradually faint and dream-like, though not less dear, to the mental view.

"Letters from home!" shouted Mr. Wilson, and the doctor, and the skipper, simultaneously, as the sportsmen, after dashing through the wild storm, at last reached the fort, and stumbled tumultuously into Bachelors' Hall.

"What!Where!How!You don't mean it!" they exclaimed, coming to a sudden stand, like three pillars of snow-clad astonishment.

"Ay," replied the doctor, who affected to be quite cool upon all occasions, and rather cooler than usual if the occasion was more than ordinarily exciting"ay, we do mean it. Old Rogan has got the packet, and is even now disembowelling it."

"More than that," interrupted the skipper, who sat smoking as usual by the stove, with his hands in his breeches pockets"more than that, I saw him dissecting into the very marrow of the thing; so if we don't storm the old

admiral in his cabin, he'll go to sleep over these prosy yarns that the governor-in-chief writes to him, and we'll have to whistle for our letters till midnight."

The skipper's remark was interrupted by the opening of the outer door and the entrance of the butler. "Mr. Rogan wishes to see you, sir," said that worthy to the accountant.

"I'll be with him in a minute," he replied, as he threw off his capote and proceeded to unwind himself as quickly as his multitudinous haps would permit.

By this time Harry Somerville and Hamilton were busily occupied in a similar manner, while a running fire of question and answer, jesting remark and bantering reply, was kept up between the young men, from their various apartments and the hall. The doctor was cool, as usual, and impudent. He had a habit of walking up and down while he smoked, and was thus enabled to look in upon the inmates of the several sleeping-rooms, and make his remarks in a quiet, sarcastic manner, the galling effect of which was heightened by his habit of pausing at the end of every two or three words, to emit a few puffs of smoke. Having exhausted a good deal of small talk in this way, and having, moreover, finished his pipe, the doctor went to the stove to refill and relight.

"What a deal of trouble you do take to make yourself comfortable!" said he to the skipper, who sat with his chair tilted on its hind legs, and a pillow at his back.

"No harm in that, doctor," replied the skipper, with a smile.

"No harm, certainly, but it looks uncommonly lazy-like."

"What does?"

"Why, putting a pillow at your back, to be sure."

The doctor was a full-fleshed, muscular man, and owing to this fact it mattered little to him whether his chair happened to be an easy one or not. As the skipper sometimes remarked, he carried padding always about with him; he was, therefore, a little apt to sneer at the attempts of his brethren to render the ill-shaped, wooden-bottomed chairs, with which the hall was ornamented, bearable.

"Well, doctor," said the skipper, "I cannot see how you make me out lazy. Surely it is not an evidence of laziness, my endeavouring to render these instruments of torture less tormenting? Seeking to be comfortable, if it does not inconvenience anyone else, is not laziness. Why, what is comfort?" The

skipper began to wax philosophical at this point, and took the pipe from his mouth as he gravely propounded the momentous question. "What is comfort? If I go out to camp in the woods, and after turning in find a sharp stump sticking into my ribs on one side, and a pine root driving in the small of my back on the other side, is that comfort? Certainly not. And if I get up, seize a hatchet, level the stump, cut away the root, and spread pine brush over the place, am I to be called lazy for doing so? Or if I sit down on a chair, and on trying to lean back to rest myself find that the stupid lubber who made it has so constructed it that four small hard points alone touch my persontwo being at the hip-joints and two at the shoulder-blades; and if to relieve such physical agony I jump up and clap a pillow at my back, am I to be called lazy for doing that?"

"What a glorious entry that would make in the log!" said the doctor, in a low tone, soliloquizingly, as if he made the remark merely for his own satisfaction, while he tapped the ashes out of his pipe.

The skipper looked as if he meditated a sharp reply; but his intentions, whatever they might have been, were interrupted by the opening of the door, and the entrance of the accountant, bearing under his arm a packet of letters.

A general rush was made upon him, and in a few minutes a dead silence reigned in the hall, broken only at intervals by an exclamation of surprise or pathos, as the inmates, in the retirement of their separate apartments, perused letters from friends in the interior of the country and friends at home: letters that were oldsome of them bearing dates many months backand travel-stained, but new and fresh and cheering, nevertheless, to their owners, as the clear bright sun in winter or the verdant leaves in spring.

Harry Somerville's letters were numerous and long. He had several from friends in Red River, besides one or two from other parts of the Indian country, and oneit was very thick and heavythat bore the post-marks of Britain. It was late that night ere the last candle was extinguished in the hall, and it was late too before Harry Somerville ceased to peruse and re-peruse the long letter from home, and found time or inclination to devote to his other correspondents. Among the rest was a letter from his old friend and companion, Charley Kennedy, which ran as follows:

MY DEAR HARRY,It really seems more than an age since I saw you. Your last epistle, written in the perturbation of mind consequent upon being doomed to spend another winter at York Fort, reached me only a few days ago, and filled me with pleasant recollections of other days. Oh! man, how much I wish that you were with me in this beautiful country! You are aware that I have been what they call "roughing it" since you and I parted on the shores of Lake

Winnipeg; but, my dear fellow, the idea that most people have of what that phrase means is a very erroneous one indeed. "Roughing it," I certainly have been, inasmuch as I have been living on rough fare, associating with rough men, and sleeping on rough beds under the starry sky; but I assure you that all this is not half so rough upon the constitution as what they call leading an easy life, which is simply a life that makes a poor fellow stagnate, body and spirit, till the one comes to be unable to digest its food, and the other incompetent to jump at so much as half an idea. Anything but an easy life, to my mind. Ah! there's nothing like roughing it, Harry, my boy. Why, I am thriving on itgrowing like a young walrus, eating like a Canadian voyageur, and sleeping like a top! This is a splendid country for sport, and as our bourgeois [Footnote: The gentleman in charge of an establishment is always designated the bourgeois.] has taken it into his head that I am a good hand at making friends with the Indians, he has sent me out on several expeditions, and afforded me some famous opportunities of seeing life among the red-skins. There is a talk just now of establishing a new outpost in this district, so if I succeed in persuading the governor to let me accompany the party, I shall have something interesting to write about in my next letter. By the way, I wrote to you a month ago, by two Indians who said they were going to the missionary station at Norway House. Did you ever get it? There is a hunter here just now who goes by the name of Jacques Caradoc. He is a first-ratercan do anything, in a wild way, that lies within the power of mortal man, and is an inexhaustible anecdote-teller, in a quiet way. He and I have been out buffalo-hunting two or three times, and it would have done your heart good, Harry, my dear boy, to have seen us scouring over the prairie together on two big-boned Indian horsesregular trained buffalo-runners, that didn't need the spur to urge, nor the rein to guide them, when once they caught sight of the black cattle, and kept a sharp look-out for badger-holes, just as if they had been reasonable creatures. The first time I went out I had several rather ugly falls, owing to my inexperience. The fact is, that if a man has never run buffaloes before, he's sure to get one or two upsets, no matter how good a horseman he may be. And that monster Jacques, although he's the best fellow I ever met with for a hunting companion, always took occasion to grin at my mishaps, and gravely to read me a lecture to the effect that they were all owing to my own clumsiness or stupidity; which, you will acknowledge, was not calculated to restore my equanimity.

The very first run we had cost me the entire skin of my nose, and converted that feature into a superb Roman for the next three weeks. It happened thus. Jacques and I were riding over the prairies in search of buffaloes. The place was interspersed with sundry knolls covered with trees, slips and belts of woodland, with ponds scattered among them, and open sweeps of the plain here and there; altogether a delightful country to ride through. It was a clear

early morning, so that our horses were fresh and full of spirit. They knew, as well as we ourselves did, what we were out for, and it was no easy matter to restrain them. The one I rode was a great long-legged beast, as like as possible to that abominable kangaroo that nearly killed me at Red River; as for Jacques, he was mounted on a first-rate charger. I don't know how it is, but somehow or other everything about Jacques, or belonging to him, or in the remotest degree connected with him, is always first-rate! He generally owns a first-rate horse, and if he happens by any unlucky chance to be compelled to mount a bad one, it immediately becomes another animal. He seems to infuse some of his own wonderful spirit into it! Well, as Jacques and I curvetted along, skirting the low bushes at the edge of a wood, out burst a whole herd of buffaloes. Bang went Jacques's gun, almost before I had winked to make sure that I saw rightly, and down fell the fattest of them all, while the rest tossed up their tails, heels, and heads in one grand whirl of indignant amazement, and scoured away like the wind. In a moment our horses were at full stretch after them, on their own account entirely, and without any reference to us. When I recovered my self-possession a little, I threw forward my gun and fired; but owing to my endeavouring to hold the reins at the same time, I nearly blew off one of my horse's ears, and only knocked up the dust about six yards ahead of us! Of course Jacques could not let this pass unnoticed. He was sitting quietly loading his gun, as cool as a cucumber, while his horse was dashing forward at full stretch, with the reins hanging loosely on his neck.

"Ah, Mister Charles," said he, with the least possible grin on his leathern visage, "that was not well done. You should never hold the reins when you fire, nor try to put the gun to your shoulder. It a'n't needful. The beast'll look arter itself, if it's a riglar buffalo-runner; any ways holdin' the reins is of no manner of use. I once know'd a gentleman that came out here to see the buffalo-huntin'. He was a good enough shot in his way, an' a first-rate rider. But he was full o' queer notions: he would load his gun with the ramrod in the riglar way, instead o' doin' as we do, tumblin' in a drop powder, spittin' a ball out your mouth down the muzzle, and hittin' the stock on the pommel of the saddle to send it home. And he had them miserable thingsthe somethin' 'cussion-caps, and used to fiddle away with them while we were knockin' over the cattle in all directions. Moreover, he had a notion that it was altogether wrong to let go his reins even for a moment, and so, what between the ramrod and the 'cussion-caps and the reins, he was worse than the greenest clerk that ever came to the country. He gave it up in despair at last, after lamin' two horses, and finished off by runnin' after a big bull, that turned on him all of a suddent, crammed its head and horns into the side of his horse, and sent the poor fellow head over heels on the green grass. He wasn't much the worse for it, but his fine double-barrelled gun was twisted into a shape that would almost have puzzled an Injin to tell what it was." Well, Harry, all the time that Jacques

was telling me this we were gaining on the buffaloes, and at last we got quite close to them, and as luck would have it, the very thing that happened to the amateur sportsman happened to me. I went madly after a big bull in spite of Jacques's remonstrances, and just as I got alongside of him up went his tail (a sure sign that his anger was roused), and round he came, head to the front, stiff as a rock; my poor charger's chest went right between his horns, and, as a matter of course, I continued the race upon nothing, head first, for a distance of about thirty yards, and brought up on the bridge of my nose. My poor dear father used to say I was a bull-headed rascal, and, upon my word, I believe he was more literally correct than he imagined; for although I fell with a fearful crash, head first, on the hard plain, I rose up immediately, and in a few minutes was able to resume the chase again. My horse was equally fortunate, for although thus brought to a sudden stand while at full gallop, he wheeled about, gave a contemptuous flourish with his heels, and cantered after Jacques, who soon caught him again. My head bothered me a good deal for some time after this accident, and swelled up till my eyes became almost undistinguishable; but a few weeks put me all right again. And who do you think this man Jacques is? You'd never guess. He's the trapper whom Redfeather told us of long ago, and whose wife was killed by the Indians. He and Redfeather have met, and are very fond of each other. How often in the midst of these wild excursions have my thoughts wandered to you, Harry! The fellows I meet with here are all kind-hearted, merry companions, but none like yourself. I sometimes say to Jacques, when we become communicative to each other beside the camp-fire, that my earthly felicity would be perfect if I had Harry Somerville here; and then I think of Kate, my sweet, loving sister Kate, and feel that, even although I had you with me, there would still be something wanting to make things perfect. Talking of Kate, by the way, I have received a letter from her, the first sheet of which, as it speaks of mutual Red River friends, I herewith enclose. Pray keep it safe, and return per first opportunity. We've loads of furs here and plenty of deerstalking, not to mention galloping on horseback on the plains in summer and dog-sledging in the winter. Alas! my poor friend, I fear that it is rather selfish in me to write so feelingly about my agreeable circumstances, when I know you are slowly dragging out your existence at that melancholy place York Fort; but believe me, I sympathize with you, and I hope earnestly that you will soon be appointed to more genial scenes. I have much, very much, to tell you yet, but am compelled to reserve it for a future epistle, as the packet which is to convey this is on the point of being closed.

Adieu, my dear Harry, and wherever you may happen to pitch your tent, always bear in kindly remembrance your old friend, CHARLES KENNEDY.

The letter was finished, but Harry did not cease to hold intercourse with his

friend. With his head resting on his two hands, and his elbows on the table, he sat long, silently gazing on the signature, while his mind revelled in the past, the present, and the future. He bounded over the wilderness that lay between him and the beautiful plains of the Saskatchewan. He seized Charley round the neck, and hugged and wrestled with him as in days of yore. He mounted an imaginary charger, and swept across the plains along with him; listened to anecdotes innumerable from Jacques, attacked thousands of buffaloes, singled out scores of wild bulls, pitched over horses' heads and alighted precisely on the bridge of his nose, always in close proximity to his old friend. Gradually his mind returned to its prison-house, and his eye fell on Kate's letter, which he picked up and began to read. It ran thus:

MY DEAR, DEAR, DARLING CHARLEY,I cannot tell you how much my heart has yearned to see you, or hear from you, for many long, long months past. Your last delightful letter, which I treasure up as the most precious object I possess, has indeed explained to me how utterly impossible it was to have written a day sooner than you did; but that does not comfort me a bit, or make those weary packets more rapid and frequent in their movements, or the time that passes between the periods of hearing from you less dreary and anxious. God bless and protect you, my darling, in the midst of all the dangers that surround you. But I did not intend to begin this letter by murmuring, so pray forgive me, and I shall try to atone for it by giving you a minute account of everybody here about whom you are interested. Our beloved father and mother, I am thankful to say, are quite well. Papa has taken more than ever to smoking since you went away. He is seldom out of the summer-house in the garden now, where I very frequently go, and spend hours together in reading to and talking with him. He very often speaks of you, and I am certain that he misses you far more than we expected, although I think he cannot miss you nearly so much as I do. For some weeks past, indeed ever since we got your last letter, papa was engaged all the forenoon in some mysterious work, for he used to lock himself up in the summer-housea thing he never did before. One day I went there at my usual time and instead of having to wait till he should unlock the door, I found it already open, and entered the room, which was so full of smoke that I could hardly see. I found papa writing at a small table, and the moment he heard my footstep he jumped up with a fierce frown, and shouted, "Who's there?" in that terrible voice that he used to speak in long ago when angry with his men, but which he has almost quite given up for some time past. He never speaks to me, as you know very well, but in the kindest tones, so you may imagine what a dreadful fright I got for a moment; but it was only for a moment, because the instant he saw that it was me his dear face changed, and he folded me in his arms, saying, "Ah, Kate, forgive me, my darling! I did not know it was you, and I thought I had locked the door, and was angry at being so unceremoniously interrupted." He then told me he was

just finishing a letter of advice to you, and going up to the table, pushed the papers hurriedly into a drawer. As he did so, I guessed what had been his mysterious occupation, for he seemed to have covered quires of paper with the closest writing. Ah, Charley, you're a lucky fellow to be able to extort such long letters from our dear father. You know how difficult he finds it to write even the shortest note, and you remember his old favourite expression, "I would rather skin a wild buffalo bull alive than write a long letter." He deserves long ones in return, Charley; but I need not urge you on that scoreyou are an excellent correspondent. Mamma is able to go out every day now for a drive in the prairie. She was confined to the house for nearly three weeks last month, with some sort of illness that the doctor did not seem to understand, and at one time I was much frightened, and very, very anxious about her, she became so weak. It would have made your heart glad to have seen the tender way in which papa nursed her through the illness. I had fancied that he was the very last man in the world to make a sick-nurse, so bold and quick in his movements, and with such a loud, gruff voicefor it is gruff, although very sweet at the same time. But the moment he began to tend mamma he spoke more softly even than dear Mr. Addison does, and he began to walk about the house on tiptoe, and persevered so long in this latter that all his moccasins began to be worn out at the toes, while the heels remained quite strong. I begged of him often not to take so much trouble, as I was naturally the proper nurse for mamma; but he wouldn't hear of it, and insisted on carrying breakfast, dinner, and tea to her, besides giving her all her medicine. He was for ever making mistakes, however, much to his own sorrow, the darling man; and I had to watch him pretty closely, for more than once he has been on the point of giving mamma a glass of laudanum in mistake for a glass of port wine. I was a good deal frightened for him at first, as, before he became accustomed to the work, he tumbled over the chairs and tripped on the carpets while carrying trays with dinners and breakfasts, till I thought he would really injure himself at last, and then he was so terribly angry with himself at making such a noise and breaking the dishesI think he has broken nearly an entire dinner and tea set of crockery. Poor George, the cook, has suffered most from these mishapsfor you know that dear papa cannot get angry without letting a little of it out upon somebody; and whenever he broke a dish or let a tray fall, he used to rush into the kitchen, shake his fist in George's face, and ask him, in a fierce voice, what he meant by it. But he always got better in a few seconds, and finished off by telling him never to mind, that he was a good servant on the whole, and he wouldn't say any more about it just now, but he had better look sharp out and not do it again. I must say, in praise of George, that on such occasions he looked very sorry indeed, and said he hoped that he would always do his best to give him satisfaction. This was only proper in him, for he ought to be very thankful that our father restrains his anger so much; for you

know he was rather violent once, and you've no idea, Charley, how great a restraint he now lays on himself. He seems to me quite like a lamb, and I am beginning to feel somehow as if we had been mistaken, and that he never was a passionate man at all. I think it is partly owing to dear Mr. Addison, who visits us very frequently now, and papa and he are often shut up together for many hours in the smoking-house. I was sure that papa would soon come to like him, for his religion is so free from everything like severity or affected solemnity. The cook, and Rosa, and my dog that you named Twist, are all quite well. The last has grown into a very large and beautiful animal, something like the stag-hound in the picture-book we used to study together long ago. He is exceedingly fond of me, and I feel him to be quite a protector. The cocks and hens, the cow and the old mare, are also in perfect health; so now, having told you a good deal about ourselves, I will give you a short account of the doings in the colony.

First of all, your old friend Mr. Kipples is still alive and well, and so are all our old companions in the school. One or two of the latter have left, and young Naysmith has joined the Company's service. Betty Peters comes very often to see us, and she always asks for you with great earnestness. I think you have stolen the old woman's heart, Charley, for she speaks of you with great affection. Old Mr. Seaforth is still as vigorous as ever, dashing about the settlement on a high-mettled steed, just as if he were one of the youngest men in the colony. He nearly poisoned himself, poor man, a month ago, by taking a dose of some kind of medicine by mistake. I did not hear what it was, but I am told that the treatment was rather severe. Fortunately the doctor happened to be at home when he was sent for, else our old friend would, I fear, have died. As it was, the doctor cured him with great difficulty. He first gave him an emetic, then put mustard blisters to the soles of his feet, and afterwards lifted him into one of his own carts, without springs, in which he drove him for a long time over all the ploughed fields in the neighbourhood. If this is not an exaggerated account, Mr. Seaforth is certainly made of sterner stuff than most men. I was told a funny anecdote of him a few days ago, which I am sure you have never heard, otherwise you would have told it to me, for there used to be no secrets between us, Charleyalas! I have no one to confide in or advise with now that you are gone. You have often heard of the great flood; not Noah's one, but the flood that nearly swept away our settlement and did so much damage before you and I were born. Well, you recollect that people used to tell of the way in which the river rose after the breaking up of the ice, and how it soon overflowed all the low points, sweeping off everything in its course. Old Mr. Seaforth's house stood at that time on the little point, just beyond the curve of the river, at the foot of which our own house stands, and as the river continued to rise, Mr. Seaforth went about actively securing his property. At first he only thought of his boat and canoes, which, with the help of his son

Peter and a Canadian, who happened at the time to be employed about the place, he dragged up and secured to an iron staple in the side of his house. Soon, however, he found that the danger was greater than at first he imagined. The point became completely covered with water, which brought down great numbers of half-drowned and quite-drowned cattle, pigs, and poultry, and stranded them at the garden fence, so that in a short time poor Mr. Seaforth could scarcely move about his overcrowded domains. On seeing this, he drove his own cattle to the highest land in his neighbourhood and hastened back to the house, intending to carry as much of the furniture as possible to the same place. But during his short absence the river had risen so rapidly that he was obliged to give up all thoughts of this, and think only of securing a few of his valuables. The bit of land round his dwelling was so thickly covered with the poor cows, sheep, and other animals, that he could scarcely make his way to the house, and you may fancy his consternation on reaching it to find that the water was more than knee-deep round the walls, while a few of the cows and a whole herd of pigs had burst open the door (no doubt accidentally) and coolly entered the dining-room, where they stood with drooping heads, very wet, and apparently very miserable. The Canadian was busy at the back of the house, loading the boat and canoe with everything he could lay hands on, and was not aware of the foreign invasion in front. Mr. Seaforth cared little for this, however, and began to collect all the things he held most valuable, and threw them to the man, who stowed them away in the boat. Peter had been left in charge of the cattle, so they had to work hard. While thus employed the water continued to rise with fearful rapidity, and rushed against the house like a mill-race, so that it soon became evident that the whole would ere long be swept away. Just as they finished loading the boat and canoes, the staple which held them gave way; in a moment they were swept into the middle of the river, and carried out of sight. The Canadian was in the boat at the time the staple broke, so that Mr. Seaforth was now left in a dwelling that bid fair to emulate Noah's ark in an hour or two, without a chance of escape, and with no better company than five black oxen, in the dining-room, besides three sheep that were now scarcely able to keep their heads above water, and three little pigs that were already drowned. The poor old man did his best to push out the intruders, but only succeeded in ejecting two sheep and an ox. All the others positively refused to go, so he was fain to let them stay. By shutting the outer door he succeeded in keeping out a great deal of water. Then he waded into the parlour, where he found some more little pigs, floating about and quite dead. Two, however, more adventurous than their comrades, had saved their lives by mounting first on a chair and then upon the table, where they were comfortably seated, gazing languidly at their mother, a very heavy fat sow, which sat, with what seemed an expression of settled despair, on the sofa. In a fit of wrath, Mr. Seaforth seized the young pigs and tossed them out of the

window; whereupon the old one jumped down, and half-walking, half-swimming, made her way to her companions in the dining-room. The old gentleman now ascended to the garret, where from a small window he looked out upon the scene of devastation. His chief anxiety was about the foundation of the house, which, being made of a wooden framework, like almost all the others in the colony, would certainly float if the water rose much higher. His fears were better founded than the house. As he looked up the river, which had by this time overflowed all its banks, and was spreading over the plains, he saw a fresh burst of water coming down, which, when it dashed against his dwelling, forced it about two yards from its foundation. Suddenly he remembered that there were a large anchor and chain in the kitchen, both of which he had brought there one day, to serve as a sort of anvil when he wanted to do some blacksmith work. Hastening down, he fastened one end of the chain to the sofa, and cast the anchor out of the window. A few minutes afterwards another rush of water struck the building, which yielded to pressure, and swung slowly down until the anchor arrested its further progress. This was only for a few seconds, however. The chain was a slight one. It snapped, and the house swept majestically down the stream, while its terrified owner scrambled to the roof, which he found already in possession of his favourite cat. Here he had a clear view of his situation. The plains were converted into a lake, above whose surface rose trees and houses, several of which, like his own, were floating on the stream or stranded among shallows. Settlers were rowing about in boats and canoes in all directions, but although some of them noticed the poor man sitting beside his cat on the housetop, they were either too far off or had no time to render him assistance.

For two days nothing was heard of old Mr. Seaforth. Indeed, the settlers had too much to do in saving themselves and their families to think of others; and it was not until the third day that people began to inquire about him. His son Peter had taken a canoe and made diligent search in all directions, but although he found the house sticking on a shallow point, neither his father nor the cat was on or in it. At last he was brought to the island, on which nearly half the colony had collected, by an Indian who had passed the house, and brought him away in his canoe, along with the old cat. Is he not a wonderful man, to have come through so much in his old age? and he is still so active and hearty! Mr. Swan of the mill is dead. He died of fever last week. Poor old Mr. Cordon is also gone. His end was very sad. About a month ago he ordered his horse and rode off, intending to visit Fort Garry. At the turn of the road, just above Grant's house, the horse suddenly swerved, and its rider was thrown to the ground. He did not live more than half-an-hour after it. Alas! how very sad to see a man, after escaping all the countless dangers of a long life in the woods (and his, you know, was a very adventurous one), thus cut violently down in his old age. O Charley, how little we know what is before us! How

needful to have our peace made with God through Jesus Christ, so that we may be ready at any moment when our Father calls us away. There are many events of great interest that have occurred here since you left. You will be glad to hear the Jane Patterson is married to our excellent friend Mr. Cameron, who has taken up a store near to us, and intends to run a boat to York Fort next summer. There has been another marriage here which will cause you astonishment at least, if not pleasure. Old Mr. Peters has married Marie Peltier! What could have possessed her to take such a husband? I cannot understand it. Just think of her, Charley, a girl of eighteen, with a husband of seventy-five!

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At this point the writing, which was very close and very small, terminated. Harry laid it down with a deep sigh, wishing much that Charley had thought it advisable to send him the second sheet also. As wishes and regrets on this point were equally unavailing, he endeavoured to continue it in imagination, and was soon as deeply absorbed in following Kate through the well-remembered scenes of Red River as he had been, a short time before, in roaming with her brother over the wide prairies of Saskatchewan. The increasing cold, however soon warned him that the night was far spent. He rose and went to the stove; but the fire had gone out, and the almost irresistible frost of these regions was already cooling everything in Bachelors' Hall down to the freezing-point. All his companions had put out their candles, and were busy, doubtless, dreaming of the friends whose letters had struck and reawakened the long-dormant chords that used to echo to the tones and scenes of other days. With a slight shiver, Harry returned to his apartment, and kneeled to thank God for protecting and preserving his absent friends, and especially for sending him "good news from a far land." The letter with the British post-marks on it was placed under his pillow. It occupied his waking and sleeping thoughts that night, and it was the first thing he thought of and reread on the following morning, and for many mornings afterwards. Only those can fully estimate the value of such letters who live in distant lands, where letters are fewvery, very fewand far between.

CHAPTER XXIII.
ChangesHarry and Hamilton find that variety is indeed charmingThe latter astonishes the former considerably.

Three months passed away, but the snow still lay deep and white and undiminished around York Fort. Wintercold, silent, unyielding winterstill drew its white mantle closely round the lonely dwelling of the fur-traders of the Far North.

Icicles hung, as they had done for months before, from the eaves of every house, from the tall black scaffold on which the great bell hung, and from the still taller erection that had been put up as an outlook for "the ship" in summer. At the present time it commanded a bleak view of the frozen sea. Snow covered every housetop, and hung in ponderous masses from their edges, as if it were about to fall; but it never fellit hung there in the same position day after day, unmelted, unchanged. Snow covered the whole land, and the frozen river, the swamps, the sea-beach, and the sea itself, as far as the eye could reach, seemed like a pure white carpet. Snow lined the upper edge of every paling, filled up the key-hole of every door, embanked about half of every window, stuck in little knobs on the top of every picket, and clung in masses on every drooping branch of the pine trees in the forest. Frostsharp, biting frostsolidified, surrounded, and pervaded everything. Mercury was congealed by it; vapour was condensed by it; iron was cooled by it until it could scarcely be touched without (as the men expressed it) "burning" the fingers. The water-jugs in Bachelors' Hall and the water-buckets were frozen by it, nearly to the bottom; though there was a good stove there, and the Hall was not usually a cold place by any means. The breath of the inhabitants was congealed by it on the window-panes, until they had become coated with ice an inch thick. The breath of the men was rendered white and opaque by it, as they panted and hurried to and fro about their ordinary avocations; beating their gloved hands together, and stamping their well-wrapped-up feet on the hard-beaten snow to keep them warm. Old Bobin's nose seemed to be entirely shrivelled up into his face by it, as he drove his ox-cart to the river to fetch his daily supply of water. The only things that were not affected by it were the fires, which crackled and roared as if in laughter, and twisted and leaped as if in uncontrollable glee at the bare idea of John Frost acquiring, by any artifice whatever, the smallest possible influence over them! Three months had elapsed, but frost and snow, instead of abating, had gone on increasing and intensifying, deepening and extending its work, and riveting its chains. Wintercold, silent, unyielding winterstill reigned at York Fort, as though it had made it a sine qua non of its existence at all that it should reign there for ever!

But although everything was thus wintry and cold, it was by no means cheerless or dreary. A bright sun shone in the blue heavens with an intenseness of brilliancy that was quite dazzling to the eyes, that elated the spirits, and caused man and beast to tread with a more elastic step than usual. Although the sun looked down upon the scene with an unclouded face, and found a mirror in every icicle and in every gem of hoar-frost with which the objects of nature were loaded, there was, however, no perceptible heat in his rays. They fell on the white earth with all the brightness of midsummer, but they fell powerless as moonbeams in the dead of winter.

On the frozen river, just in front of the gate of the fort, a group of men and dogs were assembled. The dogs were four in number, harnessed to a small flat sledge of the slender kind used by Indians to drag their furs and provisions over the snow. The group of men was composed of Mr. Rogan and the inmates of Bachelors' Hall, one or two men who happened to be engaged there at the time in cutting a new water-hole in the ice, and an Indian, who, to judge from his carefully-adjusted costume, the snow-shoes on his feet, and the short whip in his hand, was the driver of the sledge, and was about to start on a journey. Harry Somerville and young Hamilton were also wrapped up more carefully than usual.

"Good-bye, then, good-bye," said Mr. Rogan, advancing towards the Indian, who stood beside the leading dog, ready to start. "Take care of our young friends; they've not had much experience in travelling yet; and don't over drive your dogs. Treat them well, and they'll do more work. They're like men in that respect." Mr. Rogan shook the Indian by the hand, and the latter immediately flourished the whip and gave a shout, which the dogs no sooner heard than they uttered a simultaneous yell, sprang forward with a jerk, and scampered up the river, closely followed by their dark-skinned driver.

"Now, lads, farewell," said the old gentleman, turning with a kindly smile to our two friends, who were shaking hands for the last time with their comrades. "I'm sorry you're going to leave us, my boys. You've done your duty well while here, and I would willingly have kept you a little longer with me, but our governor wills it otherwise. However, I trust that you'll be happy wherever you may be sent. Don't forget to write to me. God bless you. Farewell."

Mr. Rogan shook them heartily by the hand, turned short round, and walked slowly up to his house, with an expression of sadness on his mild face; while Harry and Hamilton, having once more waved farewell to their friends, marched up the river side by side in silence. They followed the track left by the dog-sledge, which guided them with unerring certainty, although their Indian leader and his team were out of sight in advance.

A week previous to this time an Indian arrived from the interior, bearing a letter from headquarters, which directed that Messrs. Somerville and Hamilton should be forthwith despatched on snow-shoes to Norway House. As this establishment is about three hundred miles from the sea-coast, the order involved a journey of nearly two weeks' duration through a country that was utterly destitute of inhabitants. On receiving a command from Mr. Rogan to prepare for an early start, Harry retired precipitately to his own room, and there, after cutting unheard of capers, and giving vent to sudden, incomprehensible shouts, all indicative of the highest state of delight, he

condescended to tell his companions of his good fortune, and set about preparations without delay. Hamilton, on the contrary, gave his usual quiet smile on being informed of his destination, and returning somewhat pensively to Bachelors' Hall, proceeded leisurely to make the necessary arrangements for departure. As the time drew on, however, a perpetual flush on his countenance, and an unusual brilliancy about his eye, showed that he was not quite insensible to the pleasures of a change, and relished the idea more than he got credit for. The Indian who had brought the letter was ordered to hold himself in readiness to retrace his steps, and conduct the young men through the woods to Norway House, where they were to await further orders. A few days later the three travellers, as already related, set out on their journey.

After walking a mile up the river, they passed a point of land which shut out the fort from view. Here they paused to take a last look, and then pressed forward in silence, the thoughts of each being busy with mingled recollections of their late home and anticipations of the future. After an hour's sharp walking they came in sight of the guide, and slackened their pace.

"Well, Hamilton," said Harry, throwing off his reverie with a deep sigh, "are you glad to leave York Fort, or sorry?"

"Glad, undoubtedly," replied Hamilton, "but sorry to part from our old companions there. I had no idea, Harry, that I loved them all so much. I feel as if I should be glad were the order for us to leave them countermanded even now."

"That's the very thought," said Harry, "that was passing through my own brain when I spoke to you. Yet somehow I think I should feel uncommonly sorry after all if we were really sent back. There's a queer contradiction, Hammy: we're sorry and happy at the same time! If I were the skipper now, I would found a philosophical argument upon it."

"Which the skipper would carry on with untiring vigour," said Hamilton, smiling, "and afterwards make an entry of in his log. But I think, Harry, that to feel the emotion of sorrow and joy at the same time is not such a contradiction as it at first appears."

"Perhaps not," replied Harry; "but it seems very contradictory to me, and yet it's an evident fact, for I'm very sorry to leave them, and I'm very happy to have you for my companion here."

"So am I, so am I," said the other heartily. "I would rather travel with you, Harry, than with any of our late companions, although I like them all very much."

The two friends had grown, almost imperceptibly, in each other's esteem during their residence under the same roof, more than either of them would have believed possible. The gay, reckless hilarity of the one did not at first accord with the quiet gravity and, as his comrades styled it, softness of the other. But character is frequently misjudged at first sight, and sometimes men who on a first acquaintance have felt repelled from each other have, on coming to know each other better, discovered traits and good qualities that ere long formed enduring bonds of sympathy, and have learned to love those whom at first they felt disposed to dislike or despise. Thus Harry soon came to know that what he at first thought and, along with his companions, called softness in Hamilton in reality gentleness of disposition and thorough good-nature, united in one who happened to be utterly unacquainted with the knowing ways of this peculiarly sharp and clever world, while in the course of time new qualities showed themselves in a quiet, unobtrusive way that won upon his affections and raised his esteem. On the other hand, Hamilton found that although Harry was volatile, and possessed of an irresistible tendency to fun and mischief, he never by any chance gave way to anger, or allowed malice to enter into his practical jokes. Indeed, he often observed him to restrain his natural tendencies when they were at all likely to give pain, though Harry never dreamed that such efforts were known to any one but himself. Besides this, Harry was peculiarly unselfish, and when a man is possessed of this inestimable disposition, he is, not quite but very nearly, perfect!

After another pause, during which the party had left the open river and directed their course through the woods, where the depth of the snow obliged them to tread in each other's footsteps, Harry resumed the conversation.

"You have not yet told me, by-the-by, what old Mr. Rogan said to you just before we started. Did he give you any hint as to where you might be sent to after reaching Norway House?"

"No; he merely said he knew that clerks were wanted both for Mackenzie River and the Saskatchewan districts, but he did not know which I was destined for."

"Hum! exactly what he said to me, with the slight addition that he strongly suspected that Mackenzie River would be my doom. Are you aware, Hammy my boy, that the Saskatchewan district is a sort of terrestrial paradise, and Mackenzie River equivalent to Botany Bay?"

"I have heard as much during our conversations in Bachelors' Hall, butStop a bit, Harry; these snow-shoe lines of mine have got loosened with tearing through this deep snow and these shockingly thick bushes. Therethey are right now; go on. I was going to say that I don'toh!"

This last exclamation was elicited from Hamilton by a sharp blow caused by a branch which, catching on part of Harry's dress as he plodded on in front, suddenly rebounded and struck him across the face. This is of common occurrence in travelling through the woods, especially to those who from inexperience walk too closely on the heels of their companions.

"What's wrong now, Hammy?" inquired his friend, looking over his shoulder.

"Oh, nothing worth mentioningrather a sharp blow from a branch, that's all."

"Well, proceed; you've interrupted yourself twice in what you were going to say. Perhaps it'll come out if you try it a third time."

"I was merely going to say that I don't much care where I am sent to, so long as it is not to an outpost where I shall be all alone."

"All very well, my friend; but seeing that outposts are, in comparison with principal forts, about a hundred to one, your chance of avoiding them is rather slight. However, our youth and want of experience is in our favour, as they like to send men who have seen some service to outposts. But I fear that, with such brilliant characters as you and I, Hammy, youth will only be an additional recommendation, and inexperience won't last long.Hollo! what's going on yonder?"

Harry pointed as he spoke to an open spot in the woods about a quarter of a mile in advance, where a dark object was seen lying on the snow, writhing about, now coiling into a lump, and anon extending itself like a huge snake in agony.

As the two friends looked, a prolonged howl floated towards them.

"Something wrong with the dogs, I declare!" cried Harry.

"No doubt of it," replied his friend, hurrying forward, as they saw their Indian guide rise from the ground and flourish his whip energetically, while the howls rapidly increased.

A few minutes brought them to the scene of action, where they found the dogs engaged in a fight among themselves, and the driver, in a state of vehement passion, alternately belabouring and trying to separate them. Dogs in these regions, like the dogs of all other regions, we suppose, are very much addicted to fightinga propensity which becomes extremely unpleasant if indulged while the animals are in harness, as they then become peculiarly savage, probably from their being unable, like an ill-assorted pair in wedlock, to cut or break the ties that bind them. Moreover, they twist the traces into such an ingeniously

complicated mass that it renders disentanglement almost impossible, even after exhaustion has reduced them to obedience. Besides this, they are so absorbed in worrying each other that for the time they are utterly regardless of their driver's lash or voice. This naturally makes the driver angry, and sometimes irascible men practise shameful cruelties on the poor dogs. When the two friends came up they found the Indian glaring at the animals, as they fought and writhed in the snow, with every lineament of his swarthy face distorted with passion, and panting from his late exertions. Suddenly he threw himself on the dogs again, and lashed them furiously with the whip. Finding that this had no effect, he twined the lash round his hand, and struck them violently over their heads and snouts with the handle; then falling down on his knees, he caught the most savage of the animals by the throat, and seizing its nose between his teeth almost bit it off. The appalling yell that followed this cruel act seemed to subdue the dogs, for they ceased to fight, and crouched, whining, in the snow.

With a bound like a tiger young Hamilton sprang upon the guide, and seizing him by the throat, hurled him violently to the ground. "Scoundrel!" he cried, standing over the crestfallen Indian with flushed face and flashing eyes, "how dare you thus treat the creatures of God?"

The young man would have spoken more, but his indignation was so fierce that it could not find vent in words. For a moment he raised his fist, as if he meditated dashing the Indian again to the ground as he slowly arose; then, as if changing his mind, he seized him by the back of the neck, thrust him towards the panting dogs, and stood in silence over him with the whip grasped firmly in his hand, while he disentangled the traces.

This accomplished, Hamilton ordered him in a voice of suppressed anger to "go forward"an order which the cowed guide promptly obeyed, and in a few minutes more the two friends were again alone.

"Hamilton, my boy," exclaimed Harry, who up to this moment seemed to have been petrified, "you have perfectly amazed me! I'm utterly bewildered."

"Indeed, I fear that I have been very violent," said Hamilton, blushing deeply.

"Violent!" exclaimed his friend. "Why, man, I've completely mistaken your character. II"

"I hope not, Harry," said Hamilton, in a subdued tone; "I hope not. Believe me, I am not naturally violent. I should be very sorry were you to think so. Indeed, I never felt thus before, and now that it is over I am amazed at myself; but surely you'll admit that there was great provocation. Such terrible cruelty to"

"My dear fellow, you quite misunderstand me. I'm amazed at your pluck, your energy. Soft indeed! we have been most egregiously mistaken. Provocation! I just think you had; my only sorrow is that you didn't give him a little more."

"Come, come, Harry; I see you would be as cruel to him as he was to the poor dog. But let us press forward; it is already growing dark, and we must not let the fellow out of sight ahead of us."

"Allons donc," cried Harry; and hastening their steps, they travelled silently and rapidly among the stems of the trees, while the shades of night gathered slowly round them.

That night the three travellers encamped in the snow under the shelter of a spreading pine. The encampment was formed almost exactly in a similar manner to that in which they had slept on the night of their exploits at North River. They talked less, however, than on that occasion, and slept more soundly. Before retiring to rest, and while Harry was extended, half asleep and half awake, on his green blanket, enjoying the delightful repose that follows a hard day's march and a good supper, Hamilton drew near to the Indian, who sat sullenly smoking a little apart from the young men. Sitting down beside him, he administered a long rebuke in a low, grave tone of voice. Like rebukes generally, it had the effect of making the visage of the Indian still more sullen. But the young man did not appear to notice this; he still continued to talk. As he went on, the look grew less and less sullen, until it faded entirely away, and was succeeded by that grave, quiet, respectful expression peculiar to the face of the North American Indian.

Day succeeded day, night followed night, and still found them plodding laboriously through the weary waste of snow, or encamping under the trees of the forest. The two friends went through all the varied stages of experience which are included in what is called "becoming used to the work," which is sometimes a modified meaning of the expression "used up." They started with a degree of vigour that one would have thought no amount of hard work could possibly abate. They became aware of the melancholy fact that fatigue unstrings the youngest and toughest sinews. They pressed on, however, from stern necessity, and found, to their delight, that young muscles recover their elasticity even in the midst of severe exertion. They still pressed on, and discovered, to their dismay, that this recovery was only temporary, and that the second state of exhaustion was infinitely worse than the first. Still they pressed on, and raised blisters on their feet and toes that caused them to limp wofully; then they learned that blisters break and take a long time to heal, and are much worse to walk upon during the healing process than they are at the commencementat which time they innocently fancied that nothing could be more dreadful. Still they pressed on day after day, and found to their

satisfaction that such things can be endured and overcome; that feet and toes can become hard like leather, that muscles can grow tough as india-rubber, and that spirits and energy can attain to a pitch of endurance which nothing within the compass of a day's march can by any possibility overcome. They found also, from experience, that their conversation changed, both in manner and subject, as they progressed on their journey. At first they conversed frequently and on various topics, chiefly on the probability of their being sent to pleasant places or the reverse. Then they spoke less frequently, and growled occasionally, as they advanced in the painful process of training. After that, as they began to get hardy, they talked of the trees, the snow, the ice, the tracks of wild animals they happened to cross, and the objects of nature generally that came under their observation. Then as their muscles hardened and their sinews grew tough, and the day's march at length became first a matter of indifference, and ultimately an absolute pleasure, they chatted cheerfully on any and every subject, or sang occasionally, when the sun shone out and cast an appearance of warmth across their path. Thus onward they pressed, without halt or stay, day after day, through wood and brake, over river and lake, on ice and on snow, for miles and miles together, through the great, uninhabited, frozen wilderness.

CHAPTER XXIV.
Hopes and fearsAn unexpected meetingPhilosophical talk between the hunter and the parson.

On arriving at Norway House, Harry Somerville and his friend Hamilton found that they were to remain at that establishment during an indefinite period of time, until it should please those in whose hands their ultimate destination lay to direct them how and where to proceed. This was an unlooked-for trial of their patience; but after the first exclamation of disappointment, they made up their minds, like wise men, to think no more about it, but bide their time, and make the most of present circumstances.

"You see," remarked Hamilton, as the two friends, after having had an audience of the gentleman in charge of the establishment, sauntered towards the rocks that overhang the margin of Playgreen Lake"you see, it is of no use to fret about what we cannot possibly help. Nobody within three hundred miles of us knows where we are destined to spend next winter. Perhaps orders may come in a couple of weeks, perhaps in a couple of months, but they will certainly come at last. Anyhow, it is of no use thinking about it, so we had better forget it, and make the best of things as we find them."

"Ah!" exclaimed Harry, "your advice is, that we should by all means be happy, and if we can't be happy, be as happy as we can. Is that it?"

"Just so. That's it exactly."

"Ho! But then you see, Hammy, you're a philosopher and I'm not, and that makes all the difference. I'm not given to anticipating evil, but I cannot help dreading that they will send me to some lonely, swampy, out-of-the-way hole, where there will be no society, no shooting, no riding, no work even to speak ofnothing, in fact, but the miserable satisfaction of being styled 'bourgeois' by five or six men, wretched outcasts like myself."

"Come, Harry," cried Hamilton; "you are taking the very worst view of it. There certainly are plenty of such outposts in the country, but you know very well that young fellows like you are seldom sent to such places."

"I don't know that," interrupted Harry. "There's young M'Andrew: he was sent to an outpost up the Mackenzie his second year in the service, where he was all but starved, and had to live for about two weeks on boiled parchment. Then there's poor Forrester: he was shipped off to a placethe name of which I never could remembersomewhere between the head-waters of the Athabasca Lake and the North Pole. To be sure, he had good shooting, I'm told, but he had only four labouring men to enjoy it with; and he has been there ten years now, and he has more than once had to scrape the rocks of that detestable stuff called tripe de roche to keep himself alive. And then there's"

"Very true," interrupted Hamilton. "Then there's your friend Charles Kennedy, whom you so often talk about, and many other young fellows we know, who have been sent to the Saskatchewan, and to the Columbia, and to Athabasca, and to a host of other capital places, where they have enough of societymale society, at leastand good sport."

The young men had climbed a rocky eminence which commanded a view of the lake on the one side, and the fort, with its background of woods, on the other. Here they sat down on a stone, and continued for some time to admire the scene in silence.

"Yes," said Harry, resuming the thread of discourse, "you are right: we have a good chance of seeing some pleasant parts of the country. But suspense is not pleasant. O man, if they would only send me up the Saskatchewan River! I've set my heart upon going there. I'm quite sure it's the very best place in the whole country."

"You've told the truth that time, master," said a deep voice behind them.

The young men turned quickly round. Close beside them, and leaning composedly on a long Indian fowling-piece, stood a tall, broad-shouldered,

sun-burned man, apparently about forty years of age. He was dressed in the usual leathern hunting-coat, cloth leggings, fur cap, mittens, and moccasins that constitute the winter garb of a hunter; and had a grave, firm, but good-humoured expression of countenance.

"You've told the truth that time, master," he repeated, without moving from his place. "The Saskatchewan is, to my mind, the best place in the whole country; and havin' seen a considerable deal o' places in my time, I can speak from experience."

"Indeed, friend," said Harry, "I'm glad to hear you say so. Come, sit down beside us, and let's hear something about it."

Thus invited, the hunter seated himself on a stone and laid his gun on the hollow of his left arm.

"First of all, friend," continued Harry, "do you belong to the fort here?"

"No," replied the man, "I'm staying here just now, but I don't belong to the place."

"Where do you come from then, and what's your name?"

"Why, I've comed d'rect from the Saskatchewan with a packet o' letters. I'm payin' a visit to the missionary village yonder"the hunter pointed as he spoke across the lake"and when the ice breaks up I shall get a canoe and return again."

"And your name?"

"Why, I've got four or five names. Somehow or other people have given me a nickname wherever I ha' chanced to go. But my true name, and the one I hail by just now, is Jacques Caradoc."

"Jacques Caradoc!" exclaimed Harry, starting with surprise. "You knew a Charley Kennedy in the Saskatchewan, did you?"
"That did I. As fine a lad as ever pulled a trigger."

"Give us your hand, friend," exclaimed Harry, springing forward, and seizing the hunter's large, hard fist in both hands. "Why, man, Charley is my dearest friend, and I had a letter from him some time ago in which he speaks of you, and says you're one of the best fellows he ever met."

"You don't say so," replied the hunter, returning Harry's grasp warmly, while his eyes sparkled with pleasure, and a quiet smile played at the corner of his mouth.

"Yes I do," said Harry; "and I'm very nearly as glad to meet with you, friend Jacques, as I would be to meet with him. But come; it's cold work talking here. Let's go to my room; there's a fire in the stove.Come along, Hammy;" and taking his new friend by the arm, he hurried him along to his quarters in the fort.

Just as they were passing under the fort gate, a large mass of snow became detached from a housetop and fell heavily at their feet, passing within an inch of Hamilton's nose. The young man started back with an exclamation, and became very red in the face.

"Hollo!" cried Harry, laughing, "got a fright, Hammy! That went so close to your chin that it almost saved you the trouble of shaving."

"Yes; I got a little fright from the suddenness of it," said Hamilton quietly.

"What do you think of my friend there?" said Harry to Jacques, in a low voice, pointing to Hamilton, who walked on in advance.

"I've not seen much of him, master," replied the hunter. "Had I been asked the same question about the same lad twenty years agone, I should ha' said he was soft, and perhaps chicken-hearted. But I've learned from experience to judge better than I used to do. I niver thinks o' forming an opinion o' anyone till I geen them called to sudden action. It's astonishin' how some faint-hearted men will come to face a danger and put on an awful look o' courage if they only get warnin', but take them by surprisethat's the way to try them."

"Well, Jacques, that is the very reason why I ask your opinion of Hamilton. He was pretty well taken by surprise that time, I think."
"True, master; but that kind of start don't prove much. Hows'ever, I don't think he's easy upset. He does look uncommon soft, and his face grew red when the snow fell, but his eyebrow and his under lip showed that it wasn't from fear."

During that afternoon and the greater part of that night the three friends continued in close conversationHarry sitting in front of the stove, with his hands in his pockets, on a chair tilted as usual on its hind legs, and pouring out volleys of questions, which were pithily answered by the good-humoured, loquacious hunter, who sat behind the stove, resting his elbows on his knees, and smoking his much-loved pipe; while Hamilton reclined on Harry's bed, and listened with eager avidity to anecdotes and stories, which seemed, like the narrator's pipe, to be inexhaustible.

"Good-night, Jacques, good-night," said Harry, as the latter rose at last to

depart; "I'm delighted to have had a talk with you. You must come back to-morrow. I want to hear more about your friend Redfeather. Where did you say you left him?"

"In the Saskatchewan, master. He said that he would wait there, as he'd heerd the missionary was comin' up to pay the Injins a visit."

"By-the-by, you're going over to the missionary's place to-morrow, are you not?"

"Yes, I am."

"Ah, then, that'll do. I'll go over with you. How far off is it?"

"Three miles or thereabouts."

"Very good. Call in here as you pass, and my friend Hamilton and I will accompany you. Good-night."

Jacques thrust his pipe into his bosom, held out his horny hand, and giving his young friends a hearty shake, turned and strode from the room.

On the following day Jacques called according to promise, and the three friends set off together to visit the Indian village. This missionary station was under the management of a Wesleyan clergyman, Pastor Conway by name, an excellent man, of about forty-five years of age, with an energetic mind and body, a bald head, a mild, expressive countenance, and a robust constitution. He was admirably qualified for his position, having a natural aptitude for every sort of work that man is usually called on to perform. His chief care was for the instruction of the Indians, whom he had induced to settle around him, in the great and all-important truths of Christianity. He invented an alphabet, and taught them to write and read their own language. He commenced the laborious task of translating the Scriptures into the Cree language; and being an excellent musician, he instructed his converts to sing in parts the psalms and Wesleyan hymns, many of which are exceedingly beautiful. A school was also established and a church built under his superintendence, so that the natives assembled in an orderly way in a commodious sanctuary every Sabbath day to worship God; while the children were instructed, not only in the Scriptures, and made familiar with the narrative of the humiliation and exaltation of our blessed Saviour, but were also taught the elementary branches of a secular education. But good Pastor Conway's energy did not stop here. Nature had gifted him with that peculiar genius which is powerfully expressed in the term "a jack-of-all-trades." He could turn his hand to anything; and being, as we have said, an energetic man, he did turn his hand to almost everything. If anything happened to get broken, the pastor could either

"mend it himself or direct how it was to be done. If a house was to be built for a new family of red men, who had never handled a saw or hammer in their lives, and had lived up to that time in tents, the pastor lent a hand to begin it, drew out the plan (not a very complicated thing certainly), set them fairly at work, and kept his eye on it until it was finished. In short, the worthy pastor was everything to everybody, "that by all means he might gain some."

Under such management the village flourished as a matter of course, although it did not increase very rapidly owing to the almost unconquerable aversion of North American Indians to take up a settled habitation.

It was to this little hamlet, then, that our three friends directed their steps. On arriving, they found Pastor Conway in a sort of workshop, giving directions to an Indian who stood with a soldering-iron in one hand and a sheet of tin in the other, which he was about to apply to a curious-looking half-finished machine that bore some resemblance to a canoe.

"Ah, my friend Jacques!" he exclaimed as the hunter approached him, "the very man I wished to see. But I beg pardon, gentlemen,-strangers, I perceive. You are heartily welcome. It is seldom that I have the pleasure of seeing new friends in my wild dwelling. Pray come with me to my house."

Pastor Conway shook hands with Harry and Hamilton with a degree of warmth that evinced the sincerity of his words. The young men thanked him and accepted the invitation.

As they turned to quit the workshop, the pastor observed Jacques's eye fixed with a puzzled expression of countenance, on his canoe.

"You have never seen anything like that before, I daresay?" said he, with a smile.

"No, sir; I never did see such a queer machine afore."

"It is a tin canoe, with which I hope to pass through many miles of country this spring, on my way to visit a tribe of Northern Indians, and it was about this very thing that I wanted to see you, my friend."

Jacques made no reply, but cast a look savouring very slightly of contempt on the unfinished canoe as they turned and went away.

The pastor's dwelling stood at one end of the village, a view of which it commanded from the back windows, while those in front overlooked the lake. It was pleasantly situated and pleasantly tenanted, for the pastor's wife was a cheerful, active little lady, like-minded with himself, and delighted to receive

and entertain strangers. To her care Mr. Conway consigned the young men, after spending a short time in conversation with them; and then, requesting his wife to show them through the village, he took Jacques by the arm and sauntered out.

"Come with me, Jacques," he began; "I have somewhat to say to you. I had not time to broach the subject when I met you at the Company's fort, and have been anxious to see you ever since. You tell me that you have met with my friend Redfeather."

"Yes, sir; I spent a week or two with him last fall I found him stayin' with his tribe, and we started to come down here together."

"Ah, that is the very point," exclaimed the pastor, "that I wish to inquire about. I firmly believe that God has opened that Indian's eyes to see the truth; and I fully expected from what he said when we last met, that he would have made up his mind to come and stay here."

"As to what the Almighty has done to him," said Jacques, in a reverential tone of voice, "I don't pretend to know; he did for sartin speak, and act too, in a way that I never seed an Injin do before. But about his comin' here, sir, you were quite right: he did mean to come, and I've no doubt will come yet."

"What prevented him coming with you, as you tell me he intended?" inquired the pastor.

"Well, you see, sir, he and I and his squaw, as I said, set off to come here together: but when we got the length o' Edmonton House, we heerd that you were comin' up to pay a visit to the tribe to which Redfeather belongs; and so seem' that it was o' no use to come down hereaway just to turn about an' go up agin, he stopped there to wait for you, for he knew you would want him to interpret"

"Ay," interrupted the pastor, "that's true. I have two reasons for wishing to have him here. The primary one is, that he may get good to his immortal soul; and then he understands English so well that I want him to become my interpreter; for although I understand the Cree language pretty well now, I find it exceedingly difficult to explain the doctrines of the Bible to my people in it. But pardon me, I interrupted you."

"I was only going to say," resumed Jacques, "that I made up my mind to stay with him; but they wanted a man to bring the winter packet here, so, as they pressed me very hard, an' I had nothin' particular to do, I 'greed and came, though I would rather ha' stopped; for Redfeather an' I ha' struck up a friendship togithera thing that I would never ha' thought it poss'ble for me to

do with a red Injin."

"And why not with a red Indian, friend?" inquired the pastor, while a shade of sadness passed over his mild features, as if unpleasant thoughts had been roused by the hunter's speech.

"Well, it's not easy to say why," rejoined the other. "I've no partic'lar objection to the red-skins. There's only one man among them that I bears a grudge agin, and even that one I'd raythe avoid than otherwise."

"But you should forgive him, Jacques. The Bible tells us not only to bear our enemies no grudge, but to love them and to do them good."

The hunter's brow darkened. "That's impossible, sir," he said; "I couldn't do him a good turn if I was to try ever so hard. He may bless his stars that I don't want to do him mischief; but to love him, it's jist imposs'ble."

"With man it is impossible, but with God all things are possible," said the pastor solemnly.

Jacques's naturally philosophic though untutored mind saw the force of this. He felt that God, who had formed his soul, his body, and the wonderfully complicated machinery and objects of nature, which were patent to his observant and reflective mind wherever he went, must of necessity be equally able to alter, influence, and remould them all according to His will. Common-sense was sufficient to teach him this; and the bold hunter exhibited no ordinary amount of common-sense in admitting the fact at once, although in the case under discussion (the loving of his enemy) it seemed utterly impossible to his feelings and experience. The frown, therefore, passed from his brow, while he said respectfully, "What you say, sir, is true; I believe though I can't feel it. But I s'pose the reason I niver felt much drawn to the red-skins is, that all the time I lived in the settlements I was used to hear them called and treated as thievin' dogs, an 'when I com'd among them I didn't see much to alter my opinion. Here an' there I have found one or two honest Injins, an' Redfeather is as true as steel; but the most o' them are no better than they should be. I s'pose I don' think much o' them just because they are red-skins."

"Ah, Jacques, you will excuse me if I say that there is not much sense in that reason. An Indian cannot help being a red man any more than you can help being a white one, so that he ought not to be despised on that account. Besides, God made him what he is, and to despise the work of God, or to undervalue it, is to despise God Himself. You may indeed despise, or rather abhor, the sins that red men are guilty of; but if you despise them on this ground, you must much more despise white men, for they are guilty of greater iniquities than

Indians are. They have more knowledge, and are therefore more inexcusable when they sin; and anyone who has travelled much must be aware that, in regard to general wickedness, white men are at least quite as bad as Indians. Depend upon it, Jacques, that there will be Indians found in heaven at the last day as well as white men. God is no respecter of persons."

"I niver thought much on that subject afore, sir," returned the hunter; "what you say seems reasonable enough. I'm sure an' sartin, any way, that if there's a red-skin in heaven at all, Redfeather will be there, an' I only hope that I may be there too to keep him company."

"I hope so, my friend,", said the pastor earnestly; "I hope so too, with all my heart. And if you will accept of this little book, it will show you how to get there."

The missionary drew a small, plainly-bound copy of the Bible from his pocket as he spoke, and presented it to Jacques, who received it with a smile, and thanked him, saying, at the same time, that he "was not much up to book-larnin', but he would read it with pleasure."

"Now, Jacques," said the pastor, after a little further conversation on the subject of the Bible, in which he endeavoured to impress upon him the absolute necessity of being acquainted with the blessed truths which it contains"now, Jacques, about my visit to the Indians. I intend, if the Almighty spares me, to embark in yon tin canoe that you found me engaged with, and, with six men to work it, proceed to the country of the Knisteneux Indians, visit their chief camp, and preach to them there as long as the weather will permit. When the season is pretty well advanced, and winter threatens to cut off my retreat, I shall re-embark in my canoe and return home. By this means I hope to be able to sow the good seed of Christian truths in the hearts of men who, as they will not come to this settlement, have no chance of being brought under the power of the Gospel by any other means."

Jacques gave one of his quiet smiles on hearing this. "Right sirright," he said, with some energy; "I have always thought, although I niver made bold to say it before, that there was not enough o' this sort o' thing. It has always seemed to me a kind o' madness (excuse my plainness o' speech, sir) in you pastors, thinkin' to make the red-skins come and settle round you like so many squaws, and dig up an' grub at the ground, when it's quite clear that their natur' and the natur' o' things about them meant them to be hunters. An' surely, since the Almighty made them hunters, He intended them to be hunters, an' won't refuse to make them Christians on that account. A red-skin's natur' is a huntin' natur', an' nothin' on arth 'll ever make it anything else.'

"There is much truth in what you observe, friend," rejoined the pastor; "but you are not altogether right. Their nature may be changed, although certainly nothing on earth will change it. Look at that frozen lake." He pointed to the wide field of thick snow-covered ice that stretched out for miles like a sheet of white marble before them. "Could anything on earth break up or sink or melt that?"

"Nothin'," replied Jacques, laconically.

"But the warm beams of yon glorious sun can do it," continued the pastor, pointing upwards as he spoke, "and do it effectually too; so that, although you can scarcely observe the process, it nevertheless turns the hard, thick, solid ice into limpid water at last. So is it in regard to man. Nothing on earth can change his heart, or alter his nature; but our Saviour, who is called the Sun of Righteousness, can. When He shines into a man's soul it melts. The old man becomes a little child, the wild savage a Christian. But I agree with you in thinking that we have not been sufficiently alive to the necessity of seeking to convert the Indians before trying to gather them round us. The one would follow as a natural consequence, I think, of the other, and it is owing to this conviction that I intend, as I have already said, to make a journey in spring to visit those who will not or cannot come to visit me. And now, what I want to ask is whether you will agree to accompany me as steersman and guide on my expedition."

The hunter slowly shook his head. "I'm afeard not sir; I have already promised to take charge of a canoe for the Company. I would much rather go with you, but I must keep my word."

"Certainly, Jacques, certainly; that settles the question You cannot go with meunless" the pastor paused as if in thought for a moment"unless you can persuade them to let you off."

"Well, sir, I can try," returned Jacques.

"Do; and I need not say how happy I shall be if you succeed. Good-day, friend, good-bye." So saying, the missionary shook hands with the hunter and returned to his house, while Jacques wended his way to the village in search of Harry and Hamilton.

CHAPTER XXV.
Good news and romantic sceneryBear-hunting and its results.

Jaques failed in his attempt to break off his engagement with the fur-traders. The gentleman in charge of Norway House, albeit a good-natured, estimable

man, was one who could not easily brook disappointment, especially in matters that involved the interests of the Hudson's Bay Company; so Jacques was obliged to hold to his compact, and the pastor had to search for another guide.

Spring came, and with it the awakening (if we may use the expression) of the country from the long, lethargic sleep of winter. The sun burst forth with irresistible power, and melted all before it. Ice and snow quickly dissolved, and set free the waters of swamp and river, lake and sea, to leap and sparkle in their new-found liberty. Birds renewed their visits to the regions of the north; frogs, at last unfrozen, opened their leathern jaws to croak and whistle in the marshes; and men began their preparations for a summer campaign.

At the commencement of the season an express arrived with letters from headquarters, which, among other matters of importance, directed that Messrs. Somerville and Hamilton should be despatched forthwith to the Saskatchewan district, where, on reaching Fort Pitt, they were to place themselves at the disposal of the gentleman in charge of the district. It need scarcely be added that the young men were overjoyed on receiving this almost unhoped-for intelligence, and that Harry expressed his satisfaction in his usual hilarious manner, asserting, somewhat profanely, in the excess of his glee, that the governor-in-chief of Rupert's Land was a "regular brick." Hamilton agreed to all his friend's remarks with a quiet smile, accompanied by a slight chuckle, and a somewhat desperate attempt at a caper, which attempt, bordering as it did on a region of buffoonery into which our quiet and gentlemanly friend had never dared hitherto to venture proved an awkward and utter failure. He felt this and blushed deeply.

It was further arranged and agreed upon that the young men should accompany Jacques Caradoc in his canoe. Having become sufficiently expert canoemen to handle their paddles well, they scouted the idea of taking men with them, and resolved to launch boldly forth at once as bona-fide voyageurs. To this arrangement Jacques, after one or two trials to test their skill, agreed; and very shortly after the arrival of the express, the trio set out on their voyage, amid the cheers and adieus of the entire population of Norway House, who were assembled on the end of the wooden wharf to witness their departure, and with whom they had managed during their short residence at that place, to become special favourites. A month later, the pastor of the Indian village, having procured a trusty guide, embarked in his tin canoe with a crew of six men, and followed in their track.

In process of time spring merged into summera season mostly characterised in those climes by intense heat and innumerable clouds of musquitoes, whose vicious and incessant attacks render life, for the time being, a burden. Our

three voyageurs, meanwhile, ascended the Saskatchewan, penetrating deeper each day into the heart of the North American continent. On arriving at Fort Pitt, they were graciously permitted to rest for three days, after which they were forwarded to another district, where fresh efforts were being made to extend the fur-trade into lands hitherto almost unvisited. This continuation of their travels was quite suited to the tastes and inclinations of Harry and Hamilton, and was hailed by them as an additional reason for self-gratulation. As for Jacques, he cared little to what part of the world he chanced to be sent. To hunt, to toil in rain and in sunshine, in heat and in cold, at the paddle or on the snow-shoe, was his vocation, and it mattered little to the bold hunter whether he plied it upon the plains of the Saskatchewan or among the woods of Athabasca. Besides, the companions of his travels were young, active, bold, adventurous, and therefore quite suited to his taste. Redfeather, too, his best and dearest friend, had been induced to return to his tribe for the purpose of mediating between some of the turbulent members of it and the white men who had gone to settle among them, so that the prospect of again associating with his red friend was an additional element in his satisfaction. As Charley Kennedy was also in this district, the hope of seeing him once more was a subject of such unbounded delight to Harry Somerville, and so, sympathetically, to young Hamilton, that it was with difficulty they could realize the full amount of their good fortune, or give adequate expression to their feelings. It is therefore probable that there never were three happier travellers than Jacques, Harry, and Hamilton, as they shouldered their guns and paddles, shook hands with the inmates of Fort Pitt, and with light steps and lighter hearts launched their canoe, turned their bronzed faces once more to the summer sun, and dipped their paddles again in the rippling waters of the Saskatchewan River.

As their bark was exceedingly small, and burdened with but little lading, they resolved to abandon the usual route, and penetrate the wilderness through a maze of lakes and small rivers well known to their guide. By this arrangement they hoped to travel more speedily, and avoid navigating a long sweep of the river by making a number of portages; while, at the same time, the changeful nature of the route was likely to render it more interesting. From the fact of its being seldom traversed, it was also more likely that they should find a supply of game for the journey.

Towards sunset, one fine day, about two weeks after their departure from Fort Pitt, our voyageurs paddled their canoe round a wooded point of land that jutted out from, and partly concealed, the mouth of a large river, down whose stream they had dropped leisurely during the last three days, and swept out upon the bosom of a large lake. This was one of those sheets of water which glitter in hundreds on the green bosom of America's forests, and are so

numerous and comparatively insignificant as to be scarce distinguished by a name, unless when they lie directly in the accustomed route of the fur-traders. But although, in comparison with the freshwater oceans of the Far West, this lake was unnoticed and almost unknown, it would by no means have been regarded in such a light had it been transported to the plains of England. In regard to picturesque beauty, it was perhaps unsurpassed. It might be about six miles wide, and so long that the land at the farther end of it was faintly discernible on the horizon. Wooded hills, sloping gently down to the water's edge; jutting promontories, some rocky and barren, others more or less covered with trees; deep bays, retreating in some places into the dark recesses of a savage-looking gorge, in others into a distant meadow-like plain, bordered with a stripe of yellow sand; beautiful islands of various sizes, scattered along the shores as if nestling there for security, or standing barren and solitary in the centre of the lake, like bulwarks of the wilderness, some covered with luxuriant vegetation, others bald and grotesque in outline, and covered with gulls and other water-fowl,this was the scene that broke upon the view of the travellers as they rounded the point, and, ceasing to paddle, gazed upon it long and in deep silence, their hands raised to shade their eyes from the sun's rays, which sparkled in the water, and fell, here in bright spots and broken patches, and there in yellow floods, upon the rocks, the trees, the forest glades and plains around them.

"What a glorious scene!" murmured Hamilton, almost unconsciously.

"A perfect paradise!" said Harry, with a long-drawn sigh of satisfaction."Why, Jacques, my friend, it's a matter of wonder to me that you, a free man, without relations or friends to curb you, or attract you to other parts of the world, should go boating and canoeing all over the country at the beck of the fur-traders, when you might come and pitch your tent here for ever!"

"For ever!" echoed Jacques.

"Well, I mean as long as you live in this world."

"Ah, master," rejoined the guide, in a sad tone of voice, "it's just because I have neither kith nor kin nor friends to draw me to any partic'lar spot on arth, that I don't care to settle down in this one, beautiful though it be."

"True, true," muttered Harry; "man's a gregarious animal, there's no doubt of that."

"Anon?" exclaimed Jacques.

"I meant to say that man naturally loves company," replied Harry, smiling.

"An' yit I've seen some as didn't, master; though, to be sure, that was onnat'ral, and there's not many o' them, by good luck. Yes, man's fond o' seein' the face o' man."

"And woman, too," interrupted Harry."Eh, Hamilton, what say you?

'O woman, in our hours of ease,
Uncertain, coy, and hard to please,
When pain and anguish wring the brow,
A ministering angel thou.'

Alas, Hammy! pain and anguish and every thing else may wring our unfortunate brows here long enough before woman, 'lovely woman,' will come to our aid. What a rare sight it would be, now, to see even an ordinary house-maid or cook out here! It would be good for sore eyes. It seems to me a sort of horrible untruth to say that I've not seen a woman since I left Red River; and yet its a frightful fact, for I don't count the copper-coloured nondescripts one meets with hereabouts to be women at all. I suppose they are, but they don't look like it."

"Don't be a goose, Harry," said Hamilton.

"Certainly not, my friend. If I were under the disagreeable necessity of being anything but what I am, I should rather be something that is not in the habit of being shot," replied the other, paddling with renewed vigour in order to get rid of some of the superabundant spirits that the beautiful scene and brilliant weather, acting on a young and ardent nature, had called forth.

"Some of these same red-skins," remarked the guide, "are not such bad sort o' women, for all their ill looks. I've know'd more than one that was a first-rate wife an' a good mother, though it's true they had little edication beyond that o' the woods."

"No doubt of it," replied Harry, laughing gaily. "How shall I keep the canoe's head, Jacques?"

"Right away for the pint that lies jist between you an' the sun."

"Yes; I give them all credit for being excellent wives and mothers, after a fashion," resumed Harry. "I've no wish to asperse the characters of the poor Indians; but you must know, Jacques, that they're very different from the women that I allude to and of whom Scott sung. His heroines were of a very different stamp and colour!"

"Did he sing of niggers?" inquired Jacques, simply.

"Of niggers!" shouted Harry, looking over his shoulder at Hamilton, with a broad grin; "no, Jacques, not exactly of niggers"

"Hist!" exclaimed the guide, with that peculiar subdued energy that at once indicates an unexpected discovery, and enjoins caution, while at the same moment, by a deep, powerful back-stroke of his paddle, he suddenly checked the rapid motion of the canoe.

Harry and his friend glanced quickly over their shoulders with a look of surprise.

"What's in the wind now?" whispered the former.

"Stop paddling, masters, and look ahead at the rock yonder, jist under the tall cliff. There's a bear a-sittin' there, and if we can only get ashore afore he sees us, we're sartin sure of him."

As the guide spoke, he slowly edged the canoe towards the shore, while the young men gazed with eager looks in the direction indicated, where they beheld what appeared to be the decayed stump of an old tree or a mass of brown rock. While they strained their eyes to see it more clearly, the object altered its form and position.

"So it is," they exclaimed simultaneously, in a tone that was equivalent to the remark, "Now we believe, because we see it."

In a few seconds the bow of the canoe touched the land, so lightly as to be quite inaudible, and Harry, stepping gently over the side, drew it forward a couple of feet, while his companions disembarked.

"Now, Mister Harry," said the guide, as he slung a powder-horn and shot-belt over his shoulder, "we've no need to circumvent the beast, for he's circumvented himself."

"How so?" inquired the other, drawing the shot from his fowling-piece, and substituting in its place a leaden bullet.

Jacques led the way through the somewhat thinly scattered underwood as he replied, "You see, Mister Harry, the place where he's gone to sun hisself is just at the foot o' a sheer precipice, which runs round ahead of him and juts out into the water, so that he's got three ways to choose between. He must clamber up the precipice, which will take him some time, I guess, if he can do it at all; or he must take to the water, which he don't like, and won't do if he can help it; or he must run out the way he went in, but as we shall go to meet him by the

same road, he'll have to break our ranks before he gains the woods, an' that'll be no easy job."

The party soon reached the narrow pass between the lake and the near end of the cliff, where they advanced with greater caution, and peeping over the low bushes, beheld Bruin, a large brown fellow, sitting on his haunches, and rocking himself slowly to and fro, as he gazed abstractedly at the water. He was scarcely within good shot, but the cover was sufficiently thick to admit of a nearer approach.

"Now, Hamilton," said Harry, in a low whisper, "take the first shot. I killed the last one, so it's your turn this time."

Hamilton hesitated, but could make no reasonable objection to this, although his unselfish nature prompted him to let his friend have the first chance. However, Jacques decided the matter by saying, in a tone that savoured strongly of command, although it was accompanied with a good-humoured smile,

"Go for'ard, young man; but you may as well put in the primin' first."

Poor Hamilton hastily rectified this oversight with a deep blush, at the same time muttering that he never would make a hunter; and then advanced cautiously through the bushes, slowly followed at a short distance by his companions.

On reaching the bush within seventy yards of the bear, Hamilton pushed the twigs aside with the muzzle of his gun; his eye flashed and his courage mounted as he gazed at the truly formidable animal before him, and he felt more of the hunter's spirit within him at that moment than he would have believed possible a few minutes before. Unfortunately, a hunter's spirit does not necessarily imply a hunter's eye or hand. Having, with much care and long time, brought his piece to bear exactly where he supposed the brute's heart should be, he observed that the gun was on half-cock, by nearly breaking the trigger in his convulsive efforts to fire. By the time that this error was rectified, Bruin, who seemed to feel intuitively that some imminent danger threatened him, rose, and began to move about uneasily, which so alarmed the young hunter lest he should lose his shot that he took a hasty aim, fired, and missed. Harry asserted afterwards that he even missed the cliff! On hearing the loud report, which rolled in echoes along the precipice, Bruin started, and looking round with an undecided air, saw Harry step quietly from the bushes, and fire, sending a ball into his flank. This decided him. With a fierce growl of pain, he scampered towards the water; then changing his mind, he wheeled round, and dashed at the cliff, up which he scrambled with wonderful speed.

"Come, Mister Hamilton, load again; quick, I'll have to do the job myself, I fear," said Jacques, as he leaned quietly on his long gun, and with a half-pitying smile watched the young man, who madly essayed to recharge his piece more rapidly than it was possible for mortal man to do. Meanwhile, Harry had reloaded and fired again; but owing to the perturbation of his young spirits, and the frantic efforts of the bear to escape, he missed. Another moment, and the animal would actually have reached the top, when Jacques hastily fired, and brought it tumbling down the precipice. Owing to the position of the animal at the time he fired, the wound was not mortal; and foreseeing that Bruin would now become the aggressor, the hunter began rapidly to reload, at the same time retreating with his companions, who in their excitement had forgotten to recharge their pieces. On reaching level ground, Bruin rose, shook himself, gave a yell of anger on beholding his enemies, and rushed at them.

It was a fine sight to behold the bearing of Jacques at this critical juncture. Accustomed to bear-hunting from his youth, and utterly indifferent to consequences when danger became imminent, he saw at a glance the probabilities of the case. He knew exactly how long it would take him to load his gun, and regulated his pace so as not to interfere with that operation. His features wore their usual calm expression. Every motion of his hands was quick and sudden, yet not hurried, but performed in a way that led the beholder irresistibly to imagine that he would have done it even more rapidly if necessary. On reaching a ledge of rock that overhung the lake a few feet he paused and wheeled about; click went the dog-head, just as the bear rose to grapple with him; another moment, and a bullet passed through the brute's heart, while the bold hunter sprang lightly on one side, to avoid the dash of the falling animal. As he did so, young Hamilton, who had stood a little behind him with an uplifted axe, ready to finish the work should Jacques's fire prove ineffective, received Bruin in his arms, and tumbled along with him over the rock, headlong into the water, from which, however, he speedily arose unhurt, sputtering and coughing, and dragging the dead bear to the shore.

"Well done, Hammy," shouted Harry, indulging in a prolonged peal of laughter when he ascertained that his friend's adventure had cost him nothing more than a ducking; "that was the most amicable, loving plunge I ever saw."

"Better a cold bath in the arms of a dead bear than an embrace on dry land with a live one," retorted Hamilton, as he wrung the water out of his dripping garments.

"Most true, O sagacious diver! But the sooner we get a fire made the better; so come along."

While the two friends hastened up to the woods to kindle a fire, Jacques drew his hunting-knife, and, with doffed coat and upturned sleeves, was soon busily employed in divesting the bear of his natural garment. The carcass, being valueless in a country where game of a more palatable kind was plentiful, they left behind as a feast to the wolves. After this was accomplished and the clothes dried, they re-embarked, and resumed their journey, plying the paddles energetically in silence, as their adventure had occasioned a considerable loss of time.

It was late, and the stars had looked down for a full hour into the profound depths of the now dark lake ere the party reached the ground at the other side of the point, on which Jacques had resolved to encamp. Being somewhat wearied, they spent but little time in discussing supper, and partook of that meal with a degree of energy that implied a sense of duty as well as of pleasure. Shortly after, they were buried in repose, under the scanty shelter of their canoe.

CHAPTER XXVI.
An unexpected meeting, and an unexpected deer-huntArrival at the outpostDisagreement with the nativesAn enemy discovered, and a murder.

Next morning they rose with the sun, and therefore also with the birds and beasts.

A wide traverse of the lake now lay before them. This they crossed in about two hours, during which time they paddled unremittingly, as the sky looked rather lowering, and they were well aware of the danger of being caught in a storm in such an egg-shell craft as an Indian canoe.

"We'll put in here now, Mister Harry," exclaimed Jacques, as the canoe entered the mouth of one of these small rivulets which are called in Scotland burns, and in America creeks; "it's like that your appetite is sharpened after a spell like that. Keep her head a little more to the leftstraight for the p'intso. It's likely we'll get some fish here if we set the net."

"I say, Jacques, is yon a cloud or a wreath of smoke above the trees in the creek?" inquired Harry, pointing with his paddle towards the object referred to.

"It's smoke, master; I've seed it for some time, and mayhap we'll find some Injins there who can give us news of the traders at Stoney Creek."

"And pray, how far do you think we may now be from that place?" inquired Harry.

"Forty miles, more or less."

As he spoke the canoe entered the shallow water of the creek, and began to ascend the current of the stream, which at its mouth was so sluggish as to be scarcely perceptible to the eye. Not so, however, to the arms. The light bark, which while floating on the lake had glided buoyantly forward as if it were itself consenting to the motion, had now become apparently imbued with a spirit of contradiction, bounding convulsively forward at each stroke of the paddles, and perceptibly losing speed at each interval. Directing their course towards a flat rock on the left bank of the stream, they ran the prow out of the water and leaped ashore. As they did so the unexpected figure of a man issued from the bushes, and sauntered towards the spot. Harry and Hamilton advanced to meet him, while Jacques remained to unload the canoe. The stranger was habited in the usual dress of a hunter, and carried a fowling piece over his right shoulder. In general appearance he looked like an Indian; but though the face was burned by exposure to a hue that nearly equalled the red skins of the natives, a strong dash of pink in it, and the mass of fair hair that encircled it, proved that as Harry paradoxically expressed it, its owner was a white man. He was young, considerably above the middle height, and apparently athletic. His address and language on approaching the young men put the question of his being a white man beyond a doubt.

"Good-morning, gentlemen," he began. "I presume that you are the party we have been expecting for some time past to reinforce our staff at Stoney Creek. Is it not so?"

To this query young Somerville, who stood in advance of his friend, made no reply, but stepping hastily forward, laid a hand on each of the stranger's shoulders, and gazed earnestly into his face, exclaiming as he did so,

"Do my eyes deceive me? Is Charley Kennedy before meor his ghost?"

"What! eh," exclaimed the individual thus addressed, returning Harry's gripe and stare with interest, "is it possible? noit cannotHarry Somerville, my old, dear, unexpected friend!"and pouring out broken sentences, abrupt ejaculations, and incoherent questions, to which neither vouchsafed replies, the two friends gazed at and walked round each other, shook hands, partially embraced, and committed sundry other extravagances, utterly unconscious of or indifferent to the fact that Hamilton was gazing at them, open-mouthed, in a species of stupor, and that Jacques was standing by, regarding them with a look of mingled amusement and satisfaction. The discovery of this latter personage was a source of renewed delight and astonishment to Charley, who was so much upset by the commotion of his spirits, in consequence of this, so

to speak, double shot, that he became rambling and incoherent in his speech during the remainder of that day, and gave vent to frequent and sudden bursts of smothered enthusiasm, in which it would appear, from the occasional muttering of the names of Redfeather and Jacques, that he not only felicitated himself on his own good fortune, but also anticipated renewed pleasure in witnessing the joyful meeting of these two worthies ere long. In fact, this meeting did take place on the following day, when Redfeather, returning from a successful hunt, with part of a deer on his shoulders, entered Charley's tent, in which the travellers had spent the previous day and night, and discovered the guide gravely discussing a venison steak before the fire.

It would be vain to attempt a description of all that the reunited friends said and did during the first twenty-four hours after their meeting: how they talked of old times, as they lay extended round the fire inside of Charley's tent, and recounted their adventures by flood and field since they last met; how they sometimes diverged into questions of speculative philosophy (as conversations will often diverge, whether we wish it or not), and broke short off to make sudden inquiries after old friends; how this naturally led them to talk of new friends and new scenes, until they began to forecast their eyes a little into the future; and how, on feeling that this was an uncongenial theme under present circumstances, they reverted again to the past, and by a peculiar train of conversationto retrace which were utterly impossiblethey invariably arrived at old times again. Having in course of the evening pretty well exhausted their powers, both mental and physical, they went to sleep on it, and resumed the colloquial mélange in the morning.

"And now tell me, Charley, what you are doing in this uninhabited part of the world, so far from Stoney Creek," said Harry Somerville, as they assembled round the fire to breakfast.

"That is soon explained," replied Charley. "My good friend and superior, Mr. Whyte, having got himself comfortably housed at Stoney Creek, thought it advisable to establish a sort of half outpost, half fishing-station about twenty miles below the new fort, and believing (very justly) that my talents lay a good deal in the way of fishing and shooting, sent me to superintend it during the summer months. I am, therefore, at present monarch of that notable establishment, which is not yet dignified with a name. Hearing that there were plenty of deer about twenty miles below my palace, I resolved the other day to gratify my love of sport, and at the same time procure some venison for Stoney Creek; accordingly, I took Redfeather with me, andhere I am."

"Very good," said Harry; "and can you give us the least idea of what they are going to do with my friend Hamilton and me when they get us?"

"Can't say. One of you, at any rate, will be kept at the creek, to assist Mr. Whyte; the other may, perhaps, be appointed to relieve me at the fishing for a time, while I am sent off to push the trade in other quarters. But I'm only guessing. I don't know anything definitely, for Mr. Whyte is by no means communicative."

"An' please, master," put in Jacques, "when do you mean to let us off from this place? I guess the bourgeois won't be over pleased if we waste time here."

"We'll start this forenoon, Jacques. I and Redfeather shall go along with you, as I intended to take a run up to the creek about this time at any rate.Have you the skins and dried meat packed, Redfeather?"

To this the Indian replied in the affirmative, and the others having finished breakfast, the whole party rose to prepare for departure, and set about loading their canoes forthwith. An hour later they were again cleaving the waters of the lake, with this difference in arrangement, that Jacques was transferred to Redfeather's canoe, while Charley Kennedy took his place in the stern of that occupied by Harry and Hamilton.

The establishment of which our friend Charley pronounced himself absolute monarch, and at which they arrived in the course of the same afternoon, consisted of two small log houses or huts, constructed in the rudest fashion, and without any attempt whatever at architectural embellishment. It was pleasantly situated on a small bay, whose northern extremity was sheltered from the arctic blast by a gentle rising ground clothed with wood. A miscellaneous collection of fishing apparatus lay scattered about in front of the buildings, and two men and an Indian woman were the inhabitants of the place; the king himself, when present, and his prime minister, Redfeather, being the remainder of the population.

"Pleasant little kingdom that of yours, Charley," remarked Harry Somerville, as they passed the station.
"Very," was the laconic reply.

They had scarcely passed the place above a mile, when a canoe, containing a solitary Indian, was observed to shoot out from the shore and paddle hastily towards them. From this man they learned that a herd of deer was passing down towards the lake, and would be on its banks in a few minutes. He had been waiting their arrival when the canoes came in sight, and induced him to hurry out so as to give them warning. Having no time to lose, the whole party now paddled swiftly for the shore, and reached it just a few minutes before the branching antlers of the deer came in sight above the low bushes that skirted the wood. Harry Somerville embarked in the bow of the strange Indian's

canoe, so as to lighten the other and enable all parties to have a fair chance. After snuffing the breeze for a few seconds, the foremost animal took the water, and commenced swimming towards the opposite shore of the lake, which at this particular spot was narrow. It was followed by seven others. After sufficient time was permitted to elapse to render their being cut off, in an attempt to return, quite certain, the three canoes darted from the shelter of the overhanging bushes, and sprang lightly over the water in pursuit.

"Don't hurry, and strike sure," cried Jacques to his young friends, as they came up with the terrified deer that now swam for their lives.

"Ay, ay," was the reply.

In another moment they shot in among the struggling group. Harry Somerville stood up, and seizing the Indian's spear, prepared to strike, while his companions directed their course towards others of the herd. A few seconds sufficed to bring him up with it. Leaning backwards a little, so as to give additional force to the blow, he struck the spear deep into the animal's back. With a convulsive struggle, it ceased to swim, its head slowly sank, and in another second it lay dead upon the water. "Without waiting a moment, the Indian immediately directed the canoe towards another deer; while the remainder of the party, now considerably separated from each other, despatched the whole herd by means of axes and knives.

"Ha!" exclaimed Jacques, as they towed their booty to the shore, "that's a good stock o' meat, Mister Charles. It will help to furnish the larder for the winter pretty well."

"It was much wanted, Jacques: we've a good many mouths to feed, besides treating the Indians now and then. And this fellow, I think, will claim the most of our hunt as his own. We should not have got the deer but for him."

"True, true, Mister Charles. They belong to the red-skin by rights, that's sartin."

After this exploit, another night was passed under the trees; and at noon on the day following they ran their canoe alongside the wooden wharf at Stoney Creek.

"Good-day to you, gentlemen," said Mr. Whyte to Harry and Hamilton as they landed; "I've been looking out for you these two weeks past. Glad you've come at last, however. Plenty to do, and no time to lose. You have despatches, of course. Ah! that's right." (Harry drew a sealed packet from his bosom and presented it with a bow), "that's right. I must peruse these at once.Mr. Kennedy, you will show these gentlemen their quarters. We dine in half-an-

hour." So saying, Mr. Whyte thrust the packet into his pocket, and without further remark strode towards his dwelling; while Charley, as instructed, led his friends to their new residencenot forgetting, however, to charge Redfeather to see to the comfortable lodgment of Jacques Caradoc.

"Now it strikes me," remarked Harry, as he sat down on the edge of Charley's bed and thrust his hands doggedly down into his pockets, while Hamilton tucked up his sleeves and assaulted a washhand-basin which stood on an unpainted wooden chair in a corner"it strikes me that if that's his usual style of behaviour, old Whyte is a pleasure that we didn't anticipate."

"Don't judge from first impressions; they're often deceptive," spluttered Hamilton, pausing in his ablutions to look at his friend through a mass of soap-sudsan act which afterwards caused him a good deal of pain and a copious flow of unbidden tears.

"Right," exclaimed Charley, with an approving nod to Hamilton."You must not judge him prematurely, Harry. He's a good-hearted fellow at bottom; and if he once takes a liking for you, he'll go through fire and water to serve you, as I know from experience."

"Which means to say three things," replied the implacable Harry: "first, that for all his good-heartedness at bottom, he never shows any of it at top, and is therefore like unto truth, which is said to lie at the bottom of a wellso deep, in fact, that it is never got out, and so is of use to nobody; secondly, that he is possessed of that amount of affection which is common to all mankind (to a great extent even to brutes), which prompts a man to be reasonably attentive to his friends; and thirdly, that you, Master Kennedy, enjoy the peculiar privilege of being the friend of a two-legged polar bear!"

"Were I not certain that you jest," retorted Kennedy, "I would compel you to apologize to me for insulting my friend, you rascal! But see, here's the cook coming to tell us that dinner waits. If you don't wish to see the teeth of the polar bear, I'd advise you to be smart."

Thus admonished, Harry sprang up, plunged his hands and face in the basin and dried them, broke Charley's comb in attempting to pass it hastily through his hair, used his fingers savagely as a substitute, and overtook his companions just as they entered the mess-room.

The establishment of Stoney Creek was comprised within two acres of ground. It consisted of eight or nine housesthree of which, however, alone met the eye on approaching by the lake. The "great" house, as it was termed, on account of its relative proportion to the other buildings, was a small edifice, built substantially but roughly of unsquared logs, partially whitewashed, roofed

with shingles, and boasting six small windows in front, with a large door between them. On its east side, and at right angles to it, was a similar edifice, but smaller, having two doors instead of one, and four windows instead of six. This was the trading-shop and provision-store. Opposite to this was a twin building which contained the furs and a variety of miscellaneous stores. Thus were formed three sides of a square, from the centre of which rose a tall flagstaff. The buildings behind those just described were smaller and insignificantthe principal one being the house appropriated to the men; the others were mere sheds and workshops. Luxuriant forests ascended the slopes that rose behind and encircled this oasis on all sides, excepting in front, where the clear waters of the lake sparkled like a blue mirror.

On the margin of this lake the new arrivals, left to enjoy themselves as they best might for a day or two, sauntered about and chatted to their heart's content of things past, present, and future.

During these wanderings, Harry confessed that his opinion of Mr. Whyte had somewhat changed; that he believed a good deal of the first bad impressions was attributable to his cool, not to say impolite, reception of them; and that he thought things would go on much better with the Indians if he would only try to let some of his good qualities be seen through his exterior.

An expression of sadness passed over Charley's face as his friend said this.

"You are right in the last particular," he said, with a sigh. "Mr. Whyte is so rough and overbearing that the Indians are beginning to dislike him. Some of the more clear-sighted among them see that a good deal of this lies in mere manner, and have penetration enough to observe that in all his dealings with them he is straightforward and liberal; but there are a set of them who either don't see this, or are so indignant at the rough speeches he often makes, and the rough treatment he sometimes threatens, that they won't forgive him, but seem to be nursing their wrath. I sometimes wish he was sent to a district where the Indians and traders are, from habitual intercourse, more accustomed to each other's ways, and so less likely to quarrel."

"Have the Indians, then, used any open threats?" asked Harry.

"No, not exactly; but through an old man of the tribe, who is well affected towards us, I have learned that there is a party among them who seem bent on mischief."

"Then we may expect a row some day or other. That's pleasant!What think you, Hammy?" said Harry, turning to his friend.

"I think that it would be anything but pleasant," he replied; "and I sincerely

hope that we shall not have occasion for a row."

"You're not afraid of a fight, are you, Hamilton?" asked Charley.

The peculiarly bland smile with which Hamilton usually received any remark that savoured of banter overspread his features as Charley spoke, but he merely replied

"No, Charley, I'm not afraid."

"Do you know any of the Indians who are so anxious to vent their spleen on our worthy bourgeois?" asked Harry, as he seated himself on a rocky eminence commanding a view of the richly-wooded slopes, dotted with huge masses of rock that had fallen from the beetling cliffs behind the creek.

"Yes, I do," replied Charley; "and, by the way, one of themthe ringleaderis a man with whom you are acquainted, at least by name. You've heard of an Indian called Misconna?"

"What!" exclaimed Harry, with a look of surprise; "you don't mean the blackguard mentioned by Redfeather, long ago, when he told us his story on the shores of Lake Winnipegthe man who killed poor Jacques's young wife?"

"The same," replied Charley.

"And does Jacques know he is here?"

"He does; but Jacques is a strange, unaccountable mortal. You remember that in the struggle described by Redfeather, the trapper and Misconna had neither of them seen each other, Redfeather having felled the latter before the former reached the scene of actiona scene which, he has since told me, he witnessed at a distance, while rushing to the rescue of his wife-so that Misconna is utterly ignorant of the fact that the husband of his victim is now so near him; indeed, he does not know that she had a husband at all. On the other hand, although Jacques is aware that his bitterest enemy is within rifle-range of him at this moment, he does not know him by sight; and this morning he came to me, begging that I would send Misconna on some expedition or other, just to keep him out of his way."

"And do you intend to do so?"

"I shall do my best," replied Charley; "but I cannot get him out of the way till to-morrow, as there is to be a gathering of Indians in the hall this very day, to have a palaver with Mr. Whyte about their grievances, and Misconna wouldn't miss that for a trifle. But Jacques won't be likely to recognise him among so many; and if he does, I rely with confidence on his powers of restraint and

forbearance. By the way," he continued, glancing upwards, "it is past noon, and the Indians will have begun to assemble, so we had better hasten back, as we shall be expected to help in keeping order."

So saying, he rose, and the young men returned to the fort. On reaching it they found the hall crowded with natives, who sat cross-legged around the walls, or stood in groups conversing in low tones, and to judge from the expression of their dark eyes and lowering brows, they were in extremely bad humour. They became silent and more respectful, however, in their demeanour when the young men entered the apartment and walked up to the fireplace, in which a small fire of wood burned on the hearth, more as a convenient means of rekindling the pipes of the Indians when they went out than as a means of heating the place. Jacques and Redfeather stood leaning against the wall near to it, engaged in a whispered conversation. Glancing round as he entered, Charley observed Misconna sitting a little apart by himself, and apparently buried in deep thought. He had scarcely perceived him, and nodded to several of his particular friends among the crowd, when a side-door opened, and Mr. Whyte, with an angry expression on his countenance, strode up to the fireplace, planted himself before it, with his legs apart and his hands behind him, while he silently surveyed the group.

"So," he began, "you have asked to speak with me; well, here I am. What have you to say?"

Mr. Whyte addressed the Indians in their native tongue, having, during a long residence in the country, learned to speak it as fluently as English.

For some moments there was silence. Then an old chiefthe same who had officiated at the feast described in a former chapterrose, and standing forth into the middle of the room, made a long and grave oration, in which, besides a great deal that was bombastic, much that was irrelevant, and more that was utterly fabulous and nonsensical, he recounted the sorrows of himself and his tribe, concluding with a request that the great chief would take these things into considerationthe principal "things" being that they did not get anything in the shape of gratuities, while it was notorious that the Indians in other districts did, and that they did not get enough of goods in advance, on credit of their future hunts.

Mr. Whyte heard the old man to the end in silence: then, without altering his position, he looked round on the assembly with a frown, and said, "Now listen to me; I am a man of few words. I have told you over and over again, and I now repeat it, that you shall get no gratuities until you prove yourselves worthy of them. I shall not increase your advances by so much as half an inch of tobacco till your last year's debts are scored off, and you begin to show

more activity in hunting and less disposition to grumble. Hitherto you have not brought in anything like the quantity of furs that the capabilities of the country led me to expect. You are lazy. Until you become better hunters you shall have no redress from me."

As he finished, Mr. Whyte made a step towards the door by which he had entered, but was arrested by another chief, who requested to be heard. Resuming his place and attitude, Mr. Whyte listened with an expression of dogged determination, while guttural grunts of unequivocal dissatisfaction issued from the throats of several of the malcontents. The Indian proceeded to repeat a few of the remarks made by his predecessor, but more concisely, and wound up by explaining that the failure in the hunts of the previous year was owing to the will of the Great Manito, and not by any means on account of the supposed laziness of himself or his tribe.

"That is false," said Mr. Whyte; "you know it is not true."

As this was said, a murmur of anger ran round the apartment, which was interrupted by Misconna, who, apparently unable to restrain his passion, sprang into the middle of the room, and confronting Mr. Whyte, made a short and pithy speech, accompanied by violent gesticulation, in which he insinuated that if redress was not granted the white men would bitterly repent it.

During his speech the Indians had risen to their feet and drawn closer together, while Jacques and the three young men drew near their superior. Redfeather remained apart, motionless, and with his eyes fixed on the ground.

"And, pray, what dogwhat miserable thieving cur are you, who dare to address me thus?" cried Mr. Whyte, as he strode, with flashing eyes, up to the enraged Indian.

Misconna clinched his teeth, and his fingers worked convulsively about the handle of his knife, as he exclaimed, "I am no dog. The pale-faces are dogs. I am a great chief. My name is known among the braves of my tribe. It is Misconna"

As the name fell from his lips, Mr. Wiryte and Charley were suddenly dashed aside, and Jacques sprang towards the Indian, his face livid, his eyeballs almost bursting from their sockets, and his muscles rigid with passion. For an instant he regarded the savage intently as he shrank appalled before him; then his colossal fist fell like lightning, with the weight of a sledge-hammer, on Misconna's forehead, and drove him against the outer door, which, giving way before the violent shock, burst from its fastenings and hinges, and fell, along with the savage, with a loud crash to the ground.

For an instant everyone stood aghast at this precipitate termination to the discussion, and then, springing forward in a body, with drawn knives, the Indians rushed upon the white men, who in a close phalanx, with such weapons as came first to hand, stood to receive them. At this moment Redfeather stepped forward unarmed between the belligerents, and, turning to the Indians, said

"Listen: Redfeather does not take the part of his white friends against his comrades. You know that he never failed you in the war-path, and he would not fail you now if your cause were just. But the eyes of his comrades are shut. Redfeather knows what they do not know. The white hunter" (pointing to Jacques) "is a friend of Redfeather. He is a friend of the Knisteneux. He did not strike because you disputed with his bourgeois; he struck because Misconna is his mortal foe. But the story is long. Redfeather will tell it at the council fire."

"He is right," exclaimed Jacques, who had recovered his usual grave expression of countenance; "Redfeather is right. I bear you no ill-will, Injins, and I shall explain the thing myself at your council fire."

As Jacques spoke the Indians sheathed their knives, and stood with frowning brows, as if uncertain what to do. The unexpected interference of their comrade-in-arms, coupled with his address and that of Jacques, had excited their curiosity. Perhaps the undaunted deportment of their opponents, who stood ready for the encounter with a look of stern determination, contributed a little to allay their resentment.

While the two parties stood thus confronting each other, as if uncertain how to act, a loud report was heard just outside the doorway. In another moment Mr. Whyte fell heavily to the ground, shot through the heart.

CHAPTER XXVII.
The chaseThe fightRetributionLow spirits and good news.

The tragical end of the consultation related in the last chapter had the effect of immediately reconciling the disputants. With the exception of four or five of the most depraved and discontented among them, the Indians bore no particular ill-will to the unfortunate principal of Stoney Creek; and although a good deal disappointed to find that he was a stern, unyielding trader, they had, in reality, no intention of coming to a serious rupture with him, much less of laying violent hands either upon master or men of the establishment.

When, therefore, they beheld Mr. Whyte weltering in his blood at their feet, a

sacrifice to the ungovernable passion of Misconna, who was by no means a favourite among his brethren, their temporary anger was instantly dissipated, and a feeling of deepest indignation roused in their bosoms against the miserable assassin who had perpetrated the base and cowardly murder. It was, therefore, with a yell of rage that several of the band, immediately after the victim fell, sprang into the woods in hot pursuit of him, whom they now counted their enemy. They were joined by several men belonging to the fort, who had hastened to the scene of action on hearing that the people in the hall were likely to come to blows. Redfeather was the first who had bounded like a deer into the woods in pursuit of the fugitive. Those who remained assisted Charley and his friends to convey the body of Mr. Whyte into an adjoining room, where they placed him on a bed. He was quite dead, the murderer's aim having been terribly true.

Finding that he was past all human aid, the young men returned to the hall, which they entered just as Redfeather glided quickly through the open doorway, and, approaching the group, stood in silence beside them, with his arms folded on his breast.

"You have something to tell, Redfeather," said Jacques, in a subdued tone, after regarding him a few seconds. "Is the scoundrel caught?"

"Misconna's foot is swift," replied the Indian, "and the wood is thick.
It is wasting time to follow him through the bushes."
"What would you advise then?" exclaimed Charley, in a hurried voice. "I see that you have some plan to propose."

"The wood is thick," answered Redfeather, "but the lake and the river are open. Let one party go by the lake, and one party by the river."

"That's it, that's it, Injin," interrupted Jacques, energetically; "your wits are always jumpin'. By crosin' over to Duck River, we can start at a point five or six miles above the lower fall, an' as it's thereabouts he must cross, we'll be time enough to catch him. If he tries the lake, the other party'll fix him there; and he'll be soon poked up if he tries to hide in the bush."

"Come, then; we'll all give chase at once," cried Charley, feeling a temporary relief in the prospect of energetic action from the depressing effects of the calamity that had so suddenly befallen him in the loss of his chief and friend.

Little time was needed for preparation. Jacques, Charley, and Harry proceeded by the river; while Redfeather and Hamilton, with a couple of men, launched their canoe on the lake and set off in pursuit.

Crossing the country for about a mile, Jacques led his party to the point on the

Duck River to which he had previously referred. Here they found two canoes, into one of which the guide stepped with one of the men, a Canadian, who had accompanied them, while Harry and Charley embarked in the other. In a few minutes they were rapidly descending the stream.

"How do you mean to act, Jacques?" inquired Charley, as he paddled alongside of the guide's canoe. "Is it not likely that Misconna may have crossed the river already? in which case we shall have no chance of catching him."

"Niver fear," returned Jacques. "He must have longer legs than most men if he gets to the flat-rock fall before us, an' as that's the spot where he'll nat'rally cross the river, being the only straight line for the hills that escapes the bend o' the bay to the south o' Stoney Creek, we're pretty sartin to stop him there."

"True; but that being, as you say, the natural route, don't you think it likely he'll expect that it will be guarded, and avoid it accordingly?"

"He would do so, Mister Charles, if he thought we were here; but there are two reasons agin this. He thinks that he's got the start o' us, an' won't need to double by way o' deceivin' us; and then he knows that the whole tribe is after him, and consekintly won't take a long road when there's a short one, if he can help it. But here's the rock. Look out, Mister Charles. We'll have to run the fall, which isn't very big just now, and then hide in the bushes at the foot of it till the blackguard shows himself. Keep well to the right an' don't mind the big rock; the rush o' water takes you clear o' that without trouble."

With this concluding piece of advice, he pointed to the fall, which plunged over a ledge of rock about half-a-mile ahead of them, and which was distinguishable by a small column of white spray that rose out of it. As Charley beheld it his spirits rose, and forgetting for a moment the circumstances that called him there, he cried out

"I'll run it before you, Jacques. Hurrah! Give way, Harry!" and in spite of a remonstrance from the guide, he shot the canoe ahead, gave vent to another reckless shout, and flew, rather than glided, down the stream. On seeing this, the guide held back, so as to give him sufficient time to take the plunge ere he followed. A few strokes brought Charley's canoe to the brink of the fall, and Harry was just in the act of raising himself in the bow to observe the position of the rocks, when a shout was heard on the bank close beside them. Looking up they beheld an Indian emerge from the forest, fit an arrow to his bow, and discharge it at them. The winged messenger was truly aimed; it whizzed through the air and transfixed Harry Somerville's left shoulder just at the moment they swept over the fall. The arrow completely incapacitated Harry

from using his arm, so that the canoe, instead of being directed into the broad current, took a sudden turn, dashed in among a mass of broken rocks, between which the water foamed with violence, and upset. Here the canoe stuck fast, while its owners stood up to their waists in the water, struggling to set it freean object which they were the more anxious to accomplish that its stern lay directly in the spot where Jacques would infallibly descend. The next instant their fears were realised. The second canoe glided over the cataract, dashed violently against the first, and upset, leaving Jacques and his man in a similar predicament. By their aid, however, the canoes were more easily righted, and embarking quickly they shot forth again, just as the Indian, who had been obliged to make a detour in order to get within range of their position, reappeared on the banks above, and sent another shaft after themfortunately, however, without effect.

"This is unfortunate," muttered Jacques, as the party landed and endeavoured to wring some of the water from their dripping clothes; "an' the worst of it is that our guns are useless after sich a duckin', an' the varmint knows that, an' will be down on us in a twinklin'."

"But we are four to one," exclaimed Harry. "Surely we don't need to fear much from a single enemy."

"Humph!" ejaculated the guide, as he examined the lock of his gun. "You've had little to do with Injins, that's plain, You may be sure he's not alone, an' the reptile has a bow with arrows enough to send us all on a pretty long journey. But we've the trees to dodge behind. If I only had one dry charge!" and the disconcerted guide gave a look, half of perplexity, half of contempt, at the dripping gun.

"Never mind," cried Charley; "we have our paddles. But I forgot, Harry, in all this confusion, that you are wounded, my poor fellow. We must have it examined before doing anything further."

"Oh, it's nothing at alla mere scratch, I think; at least I feel very little pain."

As he spoke the twang of a bow was heard, and an arrow flew past
Jacques's ear.
"Ah, so soon!" exclaimed that worthy, with a look of surprise, as if he had unexpectedly met with an old friend. Stepping behind a tree, he motioned to his friends to do likewise; an example which they followed somewhat hastily on beholding the Indian who had wounded Harry step from the cover of the underwood and deliberately let fly another arrow, which passed through the hair of the Canadian they had brought with them.

From the several trees behind which they had leaped for shelter they now

perceived that the Indian with the bow was Misconna, and that he was accompanied by eight others, who appeared, however, to be totally unarmed; having, probably, been obliged to leave their weapons behind them, owing to the abruptness of their flight. Seeing that the white men were unable to use their guns, the Indians assembled in a group, and from the hasty and violent gesticulations of some of the party, especially of Misconna, it was evident that a speedy attack was intended.

Observing this, Jacques coolly left the shelter of his tree, and going up to Charley, exclaimed, "Now, Mister Charles, I'm goin' to run away, so you'd better come along with me."

"That I certainly will not. Why, what do you mean?" inquired the other, in astonishment.

"I mean that these stupid red-skins can't make up their minds what to do, an' as I've no notion o' stoppin' here all day, I want to make them do what will suit us best. You see, if they scatter through the wood and attack us on all sides, they may give us a deal o' trouble, and git away after all; whereas, if we run away, they'll bolt after us in a body, and then we can take them in hand all at once, which'll be more comfortable-like, an' easier to manage."

As Jacques spoke they were joined by Harry and the Canadian; and being observed by the Indians thus grouped together, another arrow was sent among them.

"Now, follow me," said Jacques, turning round with a loud howl and running away. He was closely followed by the others. As the guide had predicted, the Indians no sooner observed this than they rushed after them in a body, uttering horrible yells.

"Now, then; stop here; down with you."

Jacques instantly crouched behind a bush, while each of the party did the same. In a moment the savages came shouting up, supposing the white men were still running on in advance. As the foremost, a tall, muscular fellow, with the agility of a panther, bounded over the bush behind which Jacques was concealed, he was met with a blow from the guide's fist, so powerfully delivered into the pit of his stomach that it sent him violently back into the bush, where he lay insensible. This event, of course, put a check upon the headlong pursuit of the others, who suddenly paused, like a group of infuriated tigers unexpectedly baulked of their prey. The hesitation, however, was but for a moment. Misconna, who was in advance, suddenly drew his bow again, and let fly an arrow at Jacques, which the latter dexterously avoided; and while his antagonist lowered his eyes for an instant to fit another arrow to the string, the

guide, making use of his paddle as a sort of javelin, threw it with such force and precision that it struck Misconna directly between the eyes and felled him to the earth, In another instant the two parties rushed upon each other, and a general mélée ensued, in which the white men, being greatly superior to their adversaries in the use of their fists, soon proved themselves more than a match for them all although inferior in numbers. Charley's first antagonist, making an abortive attempt to grapple with him, received two rapid blows, one on the chest and the other on the nose, which knocked him over the bank into the river, while his conqueror sprang upon another Indian. Harry, having unfortunately selected the biggest savage of the band as his special property, rushed upon him and dealt him a vigorous blow on the head with his paddle.

The weapon, however, was made of light wood, and, instead of felling him to the ground, broke into shivers. Springing upon each other they immediately engaged in a fierce struggle, in which poor Harry learned, when too late, that his wounded shoulder was almost powerless. Meanwhile, the Canadian having been assaulted by three Indians at once, floored one at the outset, and immediately began an impromptu war-dance round the other two, dealing them occasionally a kick or a blow, which would speedily have rendered them hors de combat, had they not succeeded in closing upon him, when all three fell heavily to the ground. Jacques and Charley having succeeded in overcoming their respective opponents, immediately hastened to his rescue. In the meantime, Harry and his foe had struggled to a considerable distance from the others, gradually edging towards the river's bank. Feeling faint from his wound, the former at length sank under the weight of his powerful antagonist, who endeavoured to thrust him over a kind of cliff which they had approached. He was on the point of accomplishing his purpose, when Charley and his friends perceived Harry's imminent danger, and rushed to the rescue. Quickly though they ran, however, it seemed likely that they would be too late. Harry's head already overhung the bank, and the Indian was endeavouring to loosen the gripe of the young man's hand from his throat, preparatory to tossing him over, when a wild cry rang through the forest, followed by the reports of a double-barrelled gun, fired in quick succession. Immediately after, young Hamilton bounded like a deer down the slope, seized the Indian by the legs, and tossed him over the cliff, where he turned a complete somersault in his descent, and fell with a sounding splash into the water.

"Well done, cleverly done, lad!" cried Jacques, as he and the rest of the party came up and crowded round Harry, who lay in a state of partial stupor on the bank.

At this moment Redfeather hastily but silently approached; his broad chest was heaving heavily, and his expanded nostrils quivering with the exertions he

had made to reach the scene of action in time to succour his friends.

"Thank God!" said Hamilton softly, as he kneeled beside Harry and supported his head, while Charley bathed his temples"thank God that I have been in time! Fortunately I was walking by the river considerably in advance of Redfeather, who was bringing up the canoe, when I heard the sounds of the fray, and hastened to your aid."

At this moment Harry opened his eyes, and saying faintly that he felt better, allowed himself to be raised to a sitting posture, while his coat was removed and his wound examined. It was found to be a deep flesh-wound in the shoulder, from which a fragment of the broken arrow still protruded.

"It's a wonder to me, Mr. Harry, how ye held on to that big thief so long," muttered Jacques, as he drew out the splinter and bandaged up the shoulder. Having completed the surgical operation after a rough fashion, they collected the defeated Indians. Those of them that were able to walk were bound together by the wrists and marched off to the fort, under a guard which was strengthened by the arrival of several of the fur-traders, who had been in pursuit of the fugitives, and were attracted to the spot by the shouts of the combatants. Harry, and such of the party as were more or less severely injured, were placed in canoes and conveyed to Stoney Creek by the lake, into which Duck River runs at the distance of about half-a-mile from the spot on which the skirmish had taken place. Misconna was among the latter.

On arriving at Stoney Creek, the canoe party found a large assemblage of the natives awaiting them on the wharf, and no sooner did Misconna land than they advanced to seize him.

"Keep back, friends," cried Jacques, who perceived their intentions, and stepped hastily between them."Come here, lads," he continued, turning to his companions; "surround Misconna. He is our prisoner, and must ha' fair justice done him, accordin' to white law."

They fell back in silence on observing the guide's determined manner; but as they hurried the wretched culprit towards the house, one of the Indians pressed close upon their rear, and before anyone could prevent him, dashed his tomahawk into Misconna's brain. Seeing that the blow was mortal, the traders ceased to offer any further opposition; and the Indians rushing upon his body, bore it away amid shouts and yells of execration to their canoes, to one of which the body was fastened by a rope, and dragged through the water to point of land which jutted out into the lake near at hand. Here they lighted a fire and burned it to ashes.

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There seems to be a period in the history of every one when the fair aspect of this world is darkenedwhen everything, whether past, present, or future, assumes a hue of the deepest gloom; a period when, for the first time, the sun, which has shone in the mental firmament with more or less brilliancy from childhood upwards, entirely disappears behind a cloud of thick darkness, and leaves the soul in a state of deep melancholy; a time when feelings somewhat akin to despair pervade us, as we begin gradually to look upon the past as a bright, happy vision, out of which we have at last awakened to view the sad realities of the present, and look forward with sinking hope to the future. Various are the causes which produce this, and diverse the effects of it on differently constituted minds; but there are few, we apprehend, who have not passed through the cloud in one or other of its phases, and who do not feel that this first period of prolonged sorrow is darker, and heavier, and worse to bear, than many of the more truly grievous afflictions that sooner or later fall to the lot of most men.

Into a state of mind somewhat similar to that which we have endeavoured to describe, our friend Charley Kennedy fell immediately after the events just narrated. The sudden and awful death of his friend Mr. Whyte fell upon his young spirit, unaccustomed as he was to scenes of bloodshed and violence, with overwhelming power. From the depression, however, which naturally followed he would probably soon have rallied had not Harry Somerville's wound in the shoulder taken an unfavourable turn, and obliged him to remain for many weeks in bed, under the influence of a slow fever; so that Charley felt a desolation creeping over his soul that no effort he was capable of making could shake off. It is true he found both occupation and pleasure in attending upon his sick friend; but as Harry's illness rendered great quiet necessary, and as Hamilton had been sent to take charge of the fishing-station mentioned in a former chapter, Charley was obliged to indulge his gloomy reveries in silence. To add to his wretchedness he received a letter from Kate about a week after Mr. Whyte's burial, telling him of the death of his mother.

Meanwhile, Redfeather and Jacquesboth of whom at their young master's earnest solicitation, agreed to winter at Stoney Creekcultivated each other's acquaintance sedulously. There were no books of any kind at the outpost, excepting three Biblesone belonging to Charley, and one to Harry, the third being that which had been presented to Jacques by Mr. Conway the missionary. This single volume, however, proved to be an ample library to Jacques and his Indian friend. Neither of these sons of the forest was much accustomed to reading, and neither of them would have for a moment entertained the idea of taking to literature as a pastime; but Redfeather loved the Bible for the sake of the great truths which he discovered in its inspired

pages, though much of what he read was to him mysterious and utterly incomprehensible. Jacques, on the other hand, read it, or listened to his friend, with that philosophic gravity of countenance and earnestness of purpose which he displayed in regard to everything; and deep, serious, and protracted were the discussions they entered into, as night after night they sat on a log, with the Bible spread out before them, and read by the light of the blazing fire in the men's house at Stoney Creek. Their intercourse, however, was brought to an abrupt conclusion by the unexpected arrival, one day, of Mr. Conway the missionary in his tin canoe. This gentleman's appearance was most welcome to all parties. It was like a bright ray of sunshine to Charley to meet with one who could fully sympathise with him in his present sorrowful frame of mind. It was an event of some consequence to Harry Somerville, inasmuch as it provided him with an amateur doctor who really understood somewhat of his physical complaint, and was able to pour balm, at once literally and spiritually, into his wounds. It was an event productive of the liveliest satisfaction to Redfeather, who now felt assured that his tribe would have those mysteries explained which he only imperfectly understood himself; and it was an event of much rejoicing to the Indians themselves, because their curiosity had been not a little roused by what they heard of the doings and sayings of the white missionary, who lived on the borders of the great lake. The only person, perhaps, on whom Mr. Conway's arrival acted with other than a pleasing influence was Jacques Caradoc. This worthy, although glad to meet with a man whom he felt inclined both to love and respect, was by no means gratified to find that his friend Redfeather had agreed to go with the missionary on his visit to the Indian tribe, and thereafter to accompany him to the settlement on Playgreen Lake. But with the stoicism that was natural to him, Jacques submitted to circumstances which he could not alter, and contented himself with assuring Redfeather that if he lived till next spring he would most certainly "make tracks for the great lake," and settle down at the missionary's station along with him. This promise was made at the end of the wharf of Stoney Creek the morning on which Mr. Conway and his party embarked in their tin canoethe same tin canoe at which Jacques had curled his nose contemptuously when he saw it in process of being constructed, and at which he did not by any means curl it the less contemptuously now that he saw it finished. The little craft answered its purpose marvellously well, however, and bounded lightly away under the vigorous strokes of its crew, leaving Charley and Jacques on the pier gazing wistfully after their friends, and listening sadly to the echoes of their parting song as it floated more and more faintly over the lake.

Winter came, but no ray of sunshine broke through the dark cloud that hung over Stoney Creek. Harry Somerville, instead of becoming better, grew worse and worse every day, so that when Charley despatched the winter packet, he

represented the illness of his friend to the powers at headquarters as being of a nature that required serious and immediate attention and change of scene. But the word immediate bears a slightly different signification in the backwoods to what it does in the lands of railroads and steamboats. The letter containing this hint took many weeks to traverse the waste wilderness to its destination; months passed before the reply was written, and many weeks more elapsed ere its contents were perused by Charley and his friend. When they did read it, however, the dark cloud that had hung over them so long burst at last; a ray of sunshine streamed down brightly upon their hearts, and never forsook them again, although it did lose a little of its brilliancy after the first flash. It was on a rich, dewy, cheerful morning in early spring when the packet arrived, and Charley led Harry, who was slowly recovering his wonted health and spirits, to their favourite rocky resting-place on the margin of the lake. Here he placed the letter in his friend's hand with a smile of genuine delight. It ran as follows:

MY DEAR SIR,Your letter containing the account of Mr. Somerville's illness has been forwarded to me, and I am instructed to inform you that leave of absence for a short time has been granted to him. I have had a conversation with the doctor here, who advises me to recommend that, if your friend has no other summer residence in view, he should spend part of his time in Red River settlement. In the event of his agreeing to this, I would suggest that he should leave Stoney Creek with the first brigade in spring, or by express canoe if you think it advisable.I am, etc.

"Short but sweetuncommonly sweet!" said Harry, as a deep flush of joy crimsoned his pale cheeks, while his own merry smile, that had been absent for many a weary day, returned once more to its old haunt, and danced round its accustomed dimples like a repentant wanderer who has been long absent from and has at last returned to his native home.

"Sweet indeed!" echoed Charley. "But that's not all; here's another lump of sugar for you." So saying, he pulled a letter from his pocket, unfolded it slowly, spread it out on his knee, and, looking up at his expectant friend, winked.

"Go on, Charley; pray don't tantalize me."

"Tantalize you! My dear fellow, nothing is farther from my thoughts.
Listen to this paragraph in my dear old father's letter:
"'So you see, my dear Charley, that we have managed to get you appointed to the charge of Lower Fort Garry, and as I hear that poor Harry Somerville is to get leave of absence, you had better bring him along with you. I need not add that my house is at his service as long as he may wish to remain in it.'

"There! what think ye of that, my boy?" said Charley, as he folded the letter and returned it to his pocket.

"I think," replied Harry, "that your father is a dear old gentleman, and I hope that you'll only be half as good when you come to his time of life; and I think I'm so happy to-day that I'll be able to walk without the assistance of your arm to-morrow; and I think we had better go back to the house now, for I feel, oddly enough, as tired as if I had had a long walk. Ah, Charley, my dear fellow, that letter will prove to be the best doctor I have had yet. But now tell me what you intend to do."

Charley assisted his friend to rise, and led him slowly back to the house, as he replied,

"Do, my boy? that's soon said. I'll make things square and straight at Stoney Creek. I'll send for Hamilton and make him interim commander-in-chief. I'll write two lettersone to the gentleman in charge of the district, telling him of my movements; the other (containing a screed of formal instructions) to the miserable mortal who shall succeed me here. I'll take the best canoe in our store, load it with provisions, put you carefully in the middle of it, stick Jacques in the bow and myself in the stern, and start, two weeks hence, neck and crop, head over heels, through thick and thin, wet and dry, over portage, river, fall, and lake, for Red River settlement!"

CHAPTER XXVIII.
Old friends and scenesComing events cast their shadows before.

Mr. Kennedy, senior, was seated in his own comfortable arm-chair before the fire, in his own cheerful little parlour, in his own snug house, at Red River, with his own highly characteristic breakfast of buffalo steaks, tea, and pemmican before him, and his own beautiful, affectionate daughter Kate presiding over the tea-pot, and exercising unwarrantably despotic sway over a large gray cat, whose sole happiness seemed to consist in subjecting Mr. Kennedy to perpetual annoyance, and whose main object in life was to catch its master and mistress off their guard, that it might go quietly to the table, the meat-safe, or the pantry, and theredeliberatelysteal!

Kate had grown very much since we saw her last. She was quite a woman now, and well worthy of a minute description here; but we never could describe a woman to our own satisfaction. We have frequently tried and failed; so we substitute, in place, the remarks of Kate's friends and acquaintances about hera criterion on which to form a judgment that is a pretty correct one, especially when the opinion pronounced happens to be favourable. Her father said she was an angel, and the only joy of his life. This latter expression, we

may remark, was false; for Mr. Kennedy frequently said to Kate, confidentially, that Charley was a great happiness to him; and we are quite sure that the pipe had something to do with the felicity of his existence. But the old gentleman said that Kate was the only joy of his life, and that is all we have to do with at present. Several ill-tempered old ladies in the settlement said that Miss Kennedy was really a quiet, modest girltestimony this (considering the source whence it came) that was quite conclusive. Then old Mr. Grant remarked to old Mr. Kennedy, over a confidential pipe, that Kate was certainly, in his opinion, the most modest and the prettiest girl in Red River. Her old school companions called her a darling. Tom Whyte said "he never seed nothink like her nowhere." The clerks spoke of her in terms too glowing to remember; and the last arrival among them, the youngest, with the slang of the "old country" fresh on his lips, called her a stunner! Even Mrs. Grant got up one of her half-expressed remarks about her, which everybody would have supposed to be quizzical in its nature, were it not for the frequent occurrence of the terms "good girl," "innocent creature," which seemed to contradict that idea. There were also one or two hapless swains who said nothings, but what they did and looked was in itself unequivocal. They went quietly into a state of slow, drivelling imbecility whenever they happened to meet with Kate; looked as if they had become shockingly unwell, and were rather pleased than otherwise that their friends should think so too; and upon all and every occasion in which Kate was concerned, conducted themselves with an amount of insane stupidity (although sane enough at other times) that nothing could account for, save the idea that their admiration of her was inexpressible, and that that was the most effective way in which they could express it.

"Kate, my darling," said Mr. Kennedy, as he finished the last mouthful of tea, "wouldn't it be capital to get another letter from Charley?"

"Yes, dear papa, it would indeed. But I am quite sure that the next time we shall hear from him will be when he arrives here, and makes the house ring with his own dear voice."

"How so, girl?" said the old trader with a smile. It may as well be remarked here that the above opening of conversation was by no means new; it was stereotyped now. Ever since Charley had been appointed to the management of Lower Fort Garry, his father had been so engrossed by the idea, and spoke of it to Kate so frequently, that he had got into a way of feeling as if the event so much desired would happen in a few days, although he knew quite well that it could not, in the course of ordinary or extra-ordinary circumstances, occur in less than several months. However, as time rolled on he began regularly, every day or two, to ask Kate questions about Charley that she could not by any

possibility answer, but which he knew from experience would lead her into a confabulation about his son, which helped a little to allay his impatience.

"Why, you see, father," she replied, "it is three months since we got his last, and you know there has been no opportunity of forwarding letters from Stoney Creek since it was despatched. Now, the next opportunity that occurs-"

"Mee-aow!" interrupted the cat, which had just finished two pats of fresh butter without being detected, and began, rather recklessly, to exult.

"Hang that cat!" cried the old gentleman, angrily, "it'll be the death o' me yet;" and seizing the first thing that came to hand, which happened to be the loaf of bread, discharged it with such violence, and with so correct an aim, that it knocked, not only the cat, but the tea-pot and sugar-bowl also, off the table.

"O dear papa!" exclaimed Kate.

"Really, my dear," cried Mr. Kennedy, half angry and half ashamed, "we must get rid of that brute immediately. It has scarcely been a week here, and it has done more mischief already than a score of ordinary cats would have done in a twelvemonth."

"But then the mice, papa"

"Well, butbutoh, hang the mice!"

"Yes; but how are we to catch them?" said Kate.

At this moment the cook, who had heard the sound of breaking crockery, and judged it expedient that he should be present, opened the door.

"How now, rascal!" exclaimed his master, striding up to him. "Did I ring for you, eh?"

"No, sir; but"

"But! eh, but! no more 'buts,' you scoundrel, else I'll"

The motion of Mr. Kennedy's fist warned the cook to make a precipitate retreat, which he did at the same moment that the cat resolved to run for its life. This caused them to meet in the doorway, and making a compound entanglement with the mat, they both fell into the passage with a loud crash. Mr. Kennedy shut the door gently, and returned to his chair, patting Kate on the head as he passed.

"Now, darling, go on with what you were saying; and don't mind the tea-potlet it lie."

"Well," resumed Kate, with a smile, "I was saying that the next opportunity Charley can have will be by the brigade in spring, which we expect to arrive here, you know, a month hence; but we won't get a letter by that, as I feel convinced that he and Harry will come by it themselves."

"And the express canoe, Katethe express canoe," said Mr. Kennedy, with a contortion of the left side of his head that was intended for a wink; "you know they got leave to come by express, Kate."

"Oh, as to the express, father, I don't expect them to come by that, as poor Harry Somerville has been so ill that they would never think of venturing to subject him to all the discomforts, not to mention the dangers, of a canoe voyage."

"I don't know that, lassI don't know that," said Mr. Kennedy, giving another contortion with his left cheek. "In fact, I shouldn't wonder if they arrived this very day; and it's well to be on the look-out, so I'm off to the banks of the river, Kate." Saying this, the old gentleman threw on an old fur cap with the peak all awry, thrust his left hand into his right glove, put on the other with the back to the front and the thumb in the middle finger, and bustled out of the house, muttering as he went, "Yes, it's well to be on the look-out for him."

Mr. Kennedy, however, was disappointed: Charley did not arrive that day, nor the next, nor the day after that. Nevertheless the old gentleman's faith each day remained as firm as on the day previous that Charley would arrive on that day "for certain." About a week after this, Mr. Kennedy put on his hat and gloves as usual, and sauntered down to the banks of the river, where his perseverance was rewarded by the sight of a small canoe rapidly approaching the landing-place. From the costume of the three men who propelled it, the cut of the canoe itself, the precision and energy of its movements, and several other minute points about it only apparent to the accustomed eye of a nor'-wester, he judged at once that this was a new arrival, and not merely one of the canoes belonging to the settlers, many of which might be seen passing up and down the river. As they drew near he fixed his eyes eagerly upon them.

"Very odd," he exclaimed, while a shade of disappointment passed over his brow: "it ought to be him, but it's not like him; too bigdifferent nose altogether. Don't know any of the three. Humph!well, he's sure to come to-morrow, at all events." Having come to the conclusion that it was not Charley's canoe, he wheeled sulkily round and sauntered back towards his house, intending to solace himself with a pipe. At that moment he heard a shout behind him, and ere he could well turn round to see whence it came, a young man bounded up the bank and seized him in his arms with a hug that

threatened to dislocate his ribs. The old gentleman's first impulse was to bestow on his antagonist (for he verily believed him to be such) one of those vigorous touches with his clinched fist which in days of yore used to bring some of his disputes to a summary and effectual close; but his intention changed when the youth spoke.

"Father, dear, dear father!" said Charley, as he loosened his grasp, and, still holding him by both hands, looked earnestly into his face with swimming eyes.

Old Mr. Kennedy seemed to have lost his powers of speech. He gazed at his son for a few seconds in silencethen suddenly threw his arms around him and engaged in a species of wrestle which he intended for an embrace.

"O Charley, my boy! you've come at lastGod bless you! Let's look at you. Quite changed: six feet; no, not quite changedthe old nose; black as an Indian. O Charley, my dear boy! I've been waiting for you for months; why did you keep me so long, eh? Hang it, where's my handkerchief?" At this last exclamation Mr. Kennedy's feelings quite overcame him; his full heart overflowed at his eyes, so that when he tried to look at his son, Charley appeared partly magnified and partly broken up into fragments. Fumbling in his pocket for the missing handkerchief, which he did not find, he suddenly seized his fur cap, in a burst of exasperation, and wiped his eyes with that. Immediately after, forgetting that it was a cap he thrust it into his pocket.

"Come, dear father," cried Charley, drawing the old man's arm through his, "let us go home. Is Kate there?"

"Ay, ay," cried Mr. Kennedy, waving his hand as he was dragged away, and bestowing, quite unwittingly, a back-handed slap on the cheek to Harry Somervillewhich nearly felled that youth to the ground. "Ay, ay! Kate, to be sure, darling. Yes, quite right, Charley; a pipethat's it, my boy, let's have a pipe!" And thus, uttering coherent and broken sentences, he disappeared through the doorway with his long-lost and now recovered son.

Meanwhile Harry and Jacques continued to pace quietly before the house, waiting patiently until the first ebullition of feeling, at the meeting of Charley with his father and sister, should be over. In a few minutes Charley ran out.

"Hollo, Harry! come in, my boy; forgive my forgetfulness, but"

"My dear fellow," interrupted Harry, "what nonsense you are talking! Of course you forgot me, and everybody and everything on earth, just now; but have you seen Kate? is"

"Yes, yes," cried Charley, as he pushed his friend before him, and dragged Jacques after him into the parlour."Here's Harry, father, and Jacques.You've heard of Jacques, Kate?"

"Harry, my, dear boy;" cried Mr. Kennedy, seizing his young friend by the hand; "how are you, lad? Better, I hope."

At that moment Mr. Kennedy's eye fell on Jacques, who stood in the doorway, cap in hand, with the usual quiet smile lighting up his countenance.

"What! JacquesJacques Caradoc!" he cried, in astonishment.

"The same, sir; you an' I have know'd each other afore now in the way o' trade," answered the hunter, as he grasped his old bourgeois by the hand and wrung it warmly. Mr. Kennedy, senior, was so overwhelmed by the combination of exciting influences to which he was now subjected, that he plunged his hand into his pocket for the handkerchief again, and pulled out the fur hat instead, which he flung angrily at the cat; then using the sleeve of his coat as a substitute, he proceeded to put a series of abrupt questions to Jacques and Charley simultaneously.

In the meantime Harry went up to Kate and stared at her. We do not mean to say that he was intentionally rude to her. No! He went towards her intending to shake hands, and renew acquaintance with his old companion; but the moment he caught sight of her he was struck not only dumb, but motionless. The odd part of it was that Kate, too, was affected in precisely the same way, and both of them exclaimed mentally, "Can it be possible?" Their lips, however, gave no utterance to the question. At length Kate recollected herself, and blushing deeply, held out her hand, as she said,

"Forgive me, HarMr. Somerville; I was so surprised at your altered appearance, I could scarcely believe that my old friend stood before me."

Harry's cheeks crimsoned as he seized her hand and said: "Indeed, KaaMissthat is, in fact, I've been very ill, and doubtless have changed somewhat; but the very same thought struck me in regard to yourself, you are soso"

Fortunately for Harry, who was gradually becoming more and more confused, to the amusement of Charley, who had closely observed the meeting of his friend and sister, Mr. Kennedy came up.

"Eh! what's that? What did you say struck you, Harry, my lad?"

"You did, father, on his arrival," replied Charley, with a broad grin, "and a very

neat back-hander it was."

"Nonsense, Charley," interrupted Harry, with a laugh."I was just saying, sir, that Miss Kennedy is so changed that I could hardly believe it to be herself."

"And I had just paid Mr. Somerville the same compliment, papa," cried Kate, laughing and blushing simultaneously.
Mr. Kennedy thrust his hands into his pockets, frowned portentously as he looked from one to the other, and said slowly, "Miss Kennedy, Mr. Somerville!" then turning to his son, remarked, "That's something new, Charley, lad; that girl is Miss Kennedy, and that youth there is Mr. Somerville!"

Charley laughed loudly at this sally, especially when the old gentleman followed it up with a series of contortions of the left cheek, meant for violent winking.

"Right, father, right; it won't do here. We don't know anybody but Kate and Harry in this house."

Harry laughed in his own genuine style at this.

"Well, Kate be it, with all my heart," said he; "but, really, at first she seemed so unlike the Kate of former days that I could not bring myself to call her so."

"Humph!" said Mr. Kennedy. "But come, boys, with me to my smoking-room, and let's have a talk over a pipe, while Kate looks after dinner." Giving Charley another squeeze of the hand, and Harry a pat on the shoulder, the old gentleman put on his cap (with the peak behind), and led the way to his glass divan in the garden.

It is perhaps unnecessary for us to say that Kate Kennedy and Harry Somerville had, within the last hour, fallen deeply, hopelessly, utterly, irrevocably, and totally in love with each other. They did not merely fall up to the ears in love. To say that they fell over head and ears in it would be, comparatively speaking, to say nothing. In fact, they did not fall into it at all. They went deliberately backwards, took a long race, sprang high into the air, turned completely round, and went down head first into the flood, descending to a depth utterly beyond the power of any deep-sea lead to fathom, or of any human mind adequately to appreciate. Up to that day Kate had thought of Harry as the hilarious youth who used to take every opportunity he could of escaping from the counting-room and hastening to spend the afternoon in rambling through the woods with her and Charley. But the instant she saw him a man, with a bright, cheerful countenance, on which rough living and exposure to frequent peril had stamped unmistakable lines of energy and

decision, and to which recent illness had imparted a captivating touch of sadnessthe moment she beheld this, and the undeniable scrap of whisker that graced his cheeks, and the slight shade that rested on his upper lip, her heart leaped violently into her throat, where it stuck hard and fast, like a stranded ship on a lee-shore.

In like manner, when Harry beheld his former friend a woman, with beaming eyes and clustering ringlets and(there, we won't attempt it!)in fact, surrounded by every nameless and namable grace that makes woman exasperatingly delightful, his heart performed the same eccentric movement, and he felt that his fate was sealed; that he had been sucked into a rapid which was too strong even for his expert and powerful arm to contend against, and that he must drift with the current now, nolens volens, and run it as he best could.

When Kate retired to her sleeping-apartment that night, she endeavoured to comport herself in her usual manner; but all her efforts failed. She sat down on her bed, and remained motionless for half-an-hour; then she started and sighed deeply; then she smiled and opened her Bible, but forgot to read it; then she rose hastily, sighed again, took off her gown, hung it up on a peg, and returning to the dressing-table sat down on her best bonnet; then she cried a little, at which point the candle suddenly went out; so she gave a slight scream, and at last went to bed in the dark.

Three hours afterwards, Harry Somerville, who had been enjoying a cigar and a chat with Charley and his father, rose, and bidding his friends good-night, retired to his chamber, where he flung himself down on a chair, thrust his hands into his pockets, stretched out his legs, gazed abstractedly before him, and exclaimed"O Kate, my exquisite girl, you've floored me quite that!"

As he continued to sit in silence, the gaze of affection gradually and slowly changed into a look of intense astonishment as he beheld the gray cat sitting comfortably on the table, and regarding him with a look of complacent interest, as if it thought Harry's style of addressing it was highly satisfactorythough rather unusual.

"Brute!" exclaimed Harry, springing from his seat and darting towards it. But the cat was too well accustomed to old Mr. Kennedy's sudden onsets to be easily taken by surprise. With a bound it reached the floor, and took shelter under the bed, whence it was not ejected until Harry, having first thrown his shoes, soap, clothes-brush, and razor-strop at it, besides two or three books and several miscellaneous articles of toilet, at last opened the door (a thing, by the way, that people would do well always to remember before endeavouring to expel a cat from an impregnable position), and drew the bed into the middle of the room. Then, but not till then, it fled, with its back, its tail, its hair, its

eyesin short, its entire bodybristling in rampant indignation. Having dislodged the enemy, Harry replaced the bed, threw off his coat and waistcoat, untied his neckcloth, sat down on his chair again, and fell into a reverie; from which, after half-an-hour, he started, clasped his hands, stamped his foot, glared up at the ceiling, slapped his thigh, and exclaimed, in the voice of a hero, "Yes, I'll do it, or die!"

CHAPTER XXIX.
The first day at homeA gallop in the prairie, and its consequences.

Next morning, as the quartette were at breakfast, Mr. Kennedy, senior, took occasion to propound to his son the plans he had laid down for them during the next week.

"In the first place, Charley, my boy," said he, as well as a large mouthful of buffalo steak and potato would permit, "you must drive up to the fort and report yourself. Harry and I will go with you; and after we have paid our respects to old Grant (another cup of tea, Kate, my darling)you recollect him, Charley, don't you?"

"Yes, perfectly."

"Well, then, after we've been to see him, we'll drive down the river, and call on our friends at the mill. Then we'll look in on the Thomsons; and give a call, in passing, on old Neverinhe's always out, so he'll be pleased to hear we were there, and it won't detain us. Then-"

"But, dear fatherexcuse my interrupting youHarry and I are very anxious to spend our first day at home entirely with you and Kate. Don't you think it would be more pleasant? and then, to-morrow"

"Now, Charley, this is too bad of you," said Mr. Kennedy, with a look of affected indignation: "no sooner have you come back than you're at your old tricks, opposing and thwarting your father's wishes."

"Indeed, I do not wish to do so, father," replied Charley, with a smile; "but I thought that you would like my plan better yourself, and that it would afford us an opportunity of having a good long, satisfactory talk about all that concerns us, past, present, and future."

"What a daring mind you have, Charley," said Harry, "to speak of cramming a satisfactory talk of the past, the present, and the future all into one day!"

"Harry will take another cup of tea, Kate," said Charley, with an arch smile, as he went on,

"Besides, father, Jacques tells me that he means to go off immediately, to visit a number of his old voyageur friends in the settlement, and I cannot part with him till we have had one more canter together over the prairies. I want to show him to Kate, for he's a great original."

"Oh, that will be charming!" cried Kate. "I should like of all things to be introduced to the bold hunter.Another cup of tea, Mr. S-Harry, I mean?"

Harry started on being thus unexpectedly addressed. "Yes, if you pleasethat isthank youno, my cup's full already, Kate!"

"Well, well," broke in Mr. Kennedy, senior, "I see you're all leagued against me, so I give in. But I shall not accompany you on your ride, as my bones are a little stiffer than they used to be" (the old gentleman sighed heavily), "and riding far knocks me up; but I've got business to attend to in my glass house which will occupy me till dinner-time."

"If the business you speak of," began Charley, "is not incompatible with a cigar, I shall be happy to"

"Why, as to that, the business itself has special reference to tobacco, and, in fact, to nothing else; so come along, you young dog," and the old gentleman's cheek went into violent convulsions as he rose, put on his cap, with the peak very much over one eye, and went out in company with the young men.

An hour afterwards four horses stood saddled and bridled in front of the house. Three belonged to Mr. Kennedy; the fourth had been borrowed from a neighbour as a mount for Jacques Caradoc. In a few minutes more Harry lifted Kate into the saddle, and having arranged her dress with a deal of unnecessary care, mounted his nag. At the same moment Charley and Jacques vaulted into their saddles, and the whole cavalcade galloped down the avenue that led to the prairie, followed by the admiring gaze of Mr. Kennedy, senior, who stood in the doorway of his mansion, his hands in his vest pockets, his head uncovered, and his happy visage smiling through a cloud of smoke that issued from his lips. He seemed the very personification of jovial good-humour, and what one might suppose Cupid would become were he permitted to grow old, dress recklessly, and take to smoking!

The prairies were bright that morning, and surpassingly beautiful. The grass looked greener than usual, the dew-drops more brilliant as they sparkled on leaf and blade and branch in the rays of an unclouded sun. The turf felt springy, and the horses, which were first-rate animals, seemed to dance over it, scarce crushing the wild-flowers beneath their hoofs, as they galloped lightly on, imbued with the same joyous feeling that filled the hearts of their riders.

The plains at this place were more picturesque than in other parts, their uniformity being broken up by numerous clumps of small trees and wild shrubbery, intermingled with lakes and ponds of all sizes, which filled the hollows for miles roundtemporary sheets of water these, formed by the melting snow, that told of winter now past and gone. Additional animation and life was given to the scene by flocks of water-fowl, whose busy cry and cackle in the water, or whirring motion in the air, gave such an idea of joyousness in the brute creation as could not but strike a chord of sympathy in the heart of a man, and create a feeling of gratitude to the Maker of man and beast. Although brilliant and warm, the sun, at least during the first part of their ride, was by no means oppressive; so that the equestrians stretched out at full gallop for many miles over the prairie, round the lakes and through the bushes, ere their steeds showed the smallest symptoms of warmth.

During the ride Kate took the lead, with Jacques on her left and Harry on her right, while Charley brought up the rear, and conversed in a loud key with all three. At length Kate began to think it was just possible the horses might be growing wearied with the slapping pace, and checked her steed; but this was not an easy matter, as the horse seemed to hold quite a contrary opinion, and showed a desire not only to continue but to increase its gallopa propensity that induced Harry to lend his aid by grasping the rein and compelling the animal to walk.

"That's a spirited horse, Kate," said Charley, as they ambled along; "have you had him long?"

"No," replied Kate; "our father purchased him just a week before your arrival, thinking that you would likely want a charger now and then. I have only been on him once before.Would he make a good buffalo-runner, Jacques?"

"Yes, miss; he would make an uncommon good runner," answered the hunter, as he regarded the animal with a critical glance"at least if he don't shy at a gunshot."

"I never tried his nerves in that way," said Kate, with a smile; "perhaps he would shy at that. He has a good deal of spiritoh, I do dislike a lazy horse, and I do delight in a spirited one!" Kate gave her horse a smart cut with the whip, half involuntarily, as she spoke. In a moment it reared almost perpendicularly, and then bounded forward; not, however, before Jacques's quick eye had observed the danger, and his ever-ready hand arrested its course.

"Have a care, Miss Kate," he said, in a warning voice, while he gazed in the face of the excited girl with a look of undisguised admiration. "It don't do to wallop a skittish beast like that."

"Never fear, Jacques," she replied, bending forward to pat her charger's arching neck; "see, he is becoming quite gentle again."

"If he runs away, Kate, we won't be able to catch you again, for he's the best of the four, I think," said Harry, with an uneasy glance at the animal's flashing eye and expanded nostrils.

"Ay, it's as well to keep the whip off him," said Jacques. "I know'd a young chap once in St. Louis who lost his sweetheart by usin' his whip too freely."

"Indeed," cried Kate, with a merry laugh, as they emerged from one of the numerous thickets and rode out upon the open plain at a foot pace; "how was that, Jacques? Pray tell us the story."

"As to that, there's little story about it," replied the hunter. "You see, Tim Roughead took arter his name, an' was always doin' some mischief or other, which more than once nigh cost him his life; for the young trappers that frequent St. Louis are not fellows to stand too much jokin', I can tell ye. Well, Tim fell in love with a gal there who had jilted about a dozen lads afore; an' bein' an oncommon handsome, strappin' fellow, she encouraged him a good deal. But Tim had a suspicion that Louise was raythe sweet on a young storekeeper's clerk there; so, bein' an off-hand sort o' critter, he went right up to the gal, and says to her, says he, 'Come, Louise, it's o' no use humbuggin' with me any longer. If you like me, you like me; and if you don't like me, you don't. There's only two ways about it. Now, jist say the word at once, an' let's have an end on't. If you agree, I'll squat with you in whativer bit o' the States you like to name; if not, I'll bid you good-bye this blessed mornin', an' make tracks right away for the Rocky Mountains afore sundown. Ay or no, lass: which is't to be?'

"Poor Louise was taken all aback by this, but she knew well that Tim was a man who never threatened in jest, an' moreover she wasn't quite sure o' the young clerk; so she agreed, an' Tim went off to settle with her father about the weddin'. Well, the day came, an' Tim, with a lot o' his comrades, mounted their horses, and rode off to the bride's house, which was a mile or two up the river out of the town. Just as they were startin', Tim's horse gave a plunge that well-nigh pitched him over its head, an' Tim came down on him with a cut o' his heavy whip that sounded like a pistol-shot. The beast was so mad at this that it gave a kind o' squeal an' another plunge that burst the girths. Tim brought the whip down on its flank again, which made it shoot forward like an arrow out of a bow, leavin' poor Tim on the ground. So slick did it fly away that it didn't even throw him on his back, but let him fall sittin'-wise, saddle and all, plump on the spot where he sprang from. Tim scratched his head an' grinned like a half-worried rattlesnake as his comrades almost rolled off their saddles with

laughin'. But it was no laughin' job, for poor Tim's leg was doubled under him, an' broken across at the thigh. It was long before he was able to go about again, and when he did recover he found that Louise and the young clerk were spliced an' away to Kentucky."

"So you see what are the probable consequences, Kate, if you use your whip so obstreperously again," cried Charley, pressing his horse into a canter.

Just at that moment a rabbit sprang from under a bush and darted away before them. In an instant Harry Somerville gave a wild shout, and set off in pursuit. Whether it was the cry or the sudden flight of Harry's horse, we cannot tell, but the next instant Kate's charger performed an indescribable flourish with its hind legs, laid back its ears, took the bit between its teeth, and ran away. Jacques was on its heels instantly, and a few seconds afterwards Charley and Harry joined in the pursuit, but their utmost efforts failed to do more than enable them to keep their ground. Kate's horse was making for a dense thicket, into which it became evident they must certainly plunge. Harry and her brother trembled when they looked at it and realised her danger; even Jacques's face showed some symptoms of perturbation for a moment as he glanced before him in indecision. The expression vanished, however, in a few seconds, and his cheerful, self-possessed look returned, as he cried out,"Pull the left rein hard, Miss Kate; try to edge up the slope."

Kate heard the advice, and exerting all her strength, succeeded in turning her horse a little to the left, which caused him to ascend a gentle slope, at the top of which part of the thicket lay. She was closely followed by Harry and her brother, who urged their steeds madly forward in the hope of catching her rein, while Jacques diverged a little to the right. By this manoeuvre the latter hoped to gain on the runaway, as the ground along which he rode was comparatively level, with a short but steep ascent at the end of it, while that along which Kate flew like the wind was a regular ascent, that would prove very trying to her horse. At the margin of the thicket grew a row of high bushes, towards which they now galloped with frightful speed. As Kate came up to this natural fence, she observed the trapper approaching on the other side of it. Springing from his jaded steed, without attempting to check its pace, he leaped over the underwood like a stag just as the young girl cleared the bushes at a bound. Grasping the reins and checking the horse violently with one hand, he extended the other to Kate, who leaped unhesitatingly into his arms. At the same instant Charley cleared the bushes, and pulled sharply up; while Harry's horse, unable, owing to its speed, to take the leap, came crashing through them, and dashed his rider with stunning violence to the ground.

Fortunately no bones were broken, and a draught of clear water, brought by Jacques from a neighbouring pond, speedily restored Harry's shaken faculties.

"Now, Kate," said Charley, leading forward the horse which he had ridden, "I have changed saddles, as you see; this horse will suit you better, and I'll take the shine out of your charger on the way home."

"Thank you, Charley," said Kate, with a smile. "I've quite recovered from my frightif, indeed, it is worth calling by that name; but I fear that Harry has"

"Oh, I'm all right," cried Harry, advancing as he spoke to assist Kate in mounting. "I am ashamed to think that my wild cry was the cause of all this."

In another minute they were again in their saddles, and turning their faces homeward, they swept over the plain at a steady gallop, fearing lest their accident should be the means of making Mr. Kennedy wait dinner for them. On arriving, they found the old gentleman engaged in an animated discussion with the cook about laying the table-cloth, which duty he had imposed on himself in Kate's absence.

"Ah, Kate, my love," he cried, as they entered, "come here, lass, and mount guard. I've almost broke my heart in trying to convince that thick-headed goose that he can't set the table properly. Take it off my hands, like a good girl.Charley, my boy, you'll be pleased to hear that your old friend Redfeather is here."

"Redfeather, father!" exclaimed Charley, in surprise.

"Yes; he and the parson, from the other end of Lake Winnipeg, arrived an hour ago in a tin kettle, and are now on their way to the upper fort."

"That is, indeed, pleasant news; but I suspect that it will give much greater pleasure to our friend Jacques, who, I believe, would be glad to lay down his life for him, simply to prove his affection."

"Well, well," said the old gentleman, knocking the ashes out of his pipe, and refilling it so as to be ready for an after-dinner smoke, "Redfeather has come, and the parson's come too; and I look upon it as quite miraculous that they have come, considering the thing they came in. What they've come for is more than I can tell, but I suppose it's connected with church affairs.Now then, Kate, what's come o' the dinner, Kate? Stir up that grampus of a cook! I half expect that he has boiled the cat for dinner, in his wrath, for it has been badgering him and me the whole morning.Hollo, Harry, what's wrong?"

The last exclamation was in consequence of an expression of pain which crossed Harry's face for a moment.

"Nothing, nothing," replied Harry. "I've had a fall from my horse, and bruised

my arm a little. But I'll see to it after dinner."

"That you shall not," cried Mr Kennedy energetically, dragging his young friend into his bedroom. "Off with your coat, lad. Let's see it at once. Ay, ay," he continued, examining Harry's left arm, which was very much discoloured, and swelled from the elbow to the shoulder, "that's a severe thump, my boy. But it's nothing to speak of; only you'll have to submit to a sling for a day or two."

"That's annoying, certainly, but I'm thankful it's no worse," remarked Harry, as Mr. Kennedy dressed the arm after his own fashion, and then returned with him to the dining-room.

CHAPTER XXX.
LoveOld Mr. Kennedy puts his foot in it.

One morning, about two weeks after Charley's arrival at Red River, Harry Somerville found himself alone in Mr. Kennedy's parlour. The old gentleman himself had just galloped away in the direction of the lower fort, to visit Charley, who was now formally installed there; Kate was busy in the kitchen giving directions about dinner; and Jacques was away with Redfeather, visiting his numerous friends in the settlement: so that, for the first time since his arrival, Harry found himself at the hour of ten in the morning utterly lone, and with nothing very definite to do. Of course, the two weeks that had elapsed were not without their signs and symptoms, their minor accidents and incidents, in regard to the subject that filled his thoughts. Harry had fifty times been tossed alternately from the height of hope to the depth of despair, from the extreme of felicity to the uttermost verge of sorrow, and he began seriously to reflect, when he remembered his desperate resolution on the first night of his arrival, that if he did not "do" he certainly would "die." This was quite a mistake, however, on Harry's part. Nobody ever did die of unrequited love. Doubtless many people have hanged, drowned, and shot themselves because of it; but, generally speaking, if the patient can be kept from maltreating himself long enough, time will prove to be an infallible remedy. O youthful reader, lay this to heart: but pshaw! why do I waste ink on so hopeless a task? Every one, we suppose, resolves once in a way to die of love; sodie away, my young friends, only make sure that you don't kill yourselves, and I've no fear of the result.

But to return. Kate, likewise, was similarly affected. She behaved like a perfect maniacmentally, that isand plunged herself, metaphorically, into such a succession of hot and cold baths, that it was quite a marvel how her spiritual constitution could stand it.

But we were wrong in saying that Harry was alone in the parlour. The gray cat was there. On a chair before the fire it sat, looking dishevelled and somewhat blase, in consequence of the ill-treatment and worry to which it was continually subjected. After looking out of the window for a short time, Harry rose, and sitting down on a chair beside the cat, patted its heada mark of attention it was evidently not averse to, but which it received, nevertheless, with marked suspicion, and some indications of being in a condition of armed neutrality. Just then the door opened, and Kate entered.

"Excuse me, Harry, for leaving you alone," she said, "but I had to attend to several household matters. Do you feel inclined for a walk?"

"I do indeed," replied Harry; "it is a charming day, and I am exceedingly anxious to see the bower that you have spoken to me about once or twice, and which Charley told me of long before I came here."

"Oh, I shall take you to it with pleasure," replied Kate; "my dear father often goes there with me to smoke. If you will wait for two minutes I'll put on my bonnet," and she hastened to prepare herself for the walk, leaving Harry to caress the cat, which he did so energetically, when he thought of its young mistress, that it instantly declared war, and sprang from the chair with a remonstrative yell.

On their way down to the bower, which was situated in a picturesque, retired spot on the river's bank about a mile below the house, Harry and Kate tried to converse on ordinary topics, but without success, and were at last almost reduced to silence. One subject alone filled their minds; all others were flat. Being sunk, as it were, in an ocean of love, they no sooner opened their lips to speak, than the waters rushed in, as a natural consequence, and nearly choked them. Had they but opened their mouths wide and boldly, they would have been pleasantly drowned together; but as it was, they lacked the requisite courage, and were fain to content themselves with an occasional frantic struggle to the surface, where they gasped a few words of uninteresting air, and sank again instantly.

On arriving at the bower, however, and sitting down, Harry plucked up heart, and, heaving a deep sigh, said

"Kate, there is a subject about which I have long desired to speak to you-"

Long as he had been desiring it, however, Kate thought it must have been nothing compared with the time that elapsed ere he said anything else; so she bent over a flower which she held in her hand, and said in a low voice, "Indeed, Harry, what is it?"

Harry was desperate now. His usually flexible tongue was stiff as stone and dry as a bit of leather. He could no more give utterance to an intelligible idea than he could change himself into Mr. Kennedy's gray cata change that he would not have been unwilling to make at that moment. At last he seized his companion's hand, and exclaimed, with a burst of emotion that quite startled her,

"Kate, Kate! O dearest Kate, I love you! I adore you! I"

At this point poor Harry's powers of speech again failed; so being utterly unable to express another idea, he suddenly threw his arms round her, and pressed her fervently to his bosom.

Kate was taken quite aback by this summary method of coming to the point. Repulsing him energetically, she exclaimed, while she blushed crimson. "O HarryMr Somerville!" and burst into tears.

Poor Harry stood before her for a moment, his head hanging down, and a deep blush of shame on his face.

"O Kate," said he, in a deep tremulous voice, "forgive me; dodo forgive me! I knew not what I said. I scarce knew what I did" (here he seized her hand). "I know but one thing, Kate, and tell it you will, if it should cost me my life. I love you, Kate, to distraction, and I wish you to be my wife. I have been rude, very rude. Can you forgive me, Kate?"

Now, this latter part of Harry's speech was particularly comical, the comicality of it lying in this, that while he spoke, he drew Kate gradually towards him, and at the very time when he gave utterance to the penitential remorse for his rudeness, Kate was infolded in a much more vigorous embrace than at the first; and what is more remarkable still, she laid her little head quietly on his shoulder, as if she had quite changed her mind in regard to what was and what was not rude, and rather enjoyed it than otherwise.

While the lovers stood in this interesting position, it became apparent to Harry's olfactory nerves that the atmosphere was impregnated with tobacco smoke. Looking hastily up, he beheld an apparition that tended somewhat to increase the confusion of his faculties.

In the opening of the bower stood Mr. Kennedy, senior, in a state of inexpressible amazement. We say inexpressible advisedly, because the extreme pitch of feeling which Mr. Kennedy experienced at what he beheld before him cannot possibly be expressed by human visage. As far as the countenance of man could do it, however, we believe the old gentleman's came pretty near the mark on this occasion. His hands were in his coat

pockets, his body bent a little forward, his head and neck outstretched a little beyond it, his eyes almost starting from the sockets, and certainly the most prominent feature in his face: his teeth firmly clinched on his beloved pipe, and his lips expelling a multitude of little clouds so vigorously that one might have taken him for a sort of self-acting intelligent steam-gun that had resolved utterly to annihilate Kate and Harry at short range in the course of two minutes.

When Kate saw her father she uttered a slight scream, covered her face with her hands, rushed from the bower, and disappeared in the wood.

"So, young gentleman," began Mr. Kennedy, in a slow, deliberate tone of voice, while he removed the pipe from his mouth, clinched his fist, and confronted Harry, "you've been invited to my house as a guest, sir, and you seize the opportunity basely to insult my daughter!"

"Stay, stay, my dear sir," interrupted Harry, laying his hand on the old man's shoulder and gazing earnestly into his face. "Oh, do not, even for a moment, imagine that I could be so base as to trifle with the affections of your daughter. I may have been presumptuous, hasty, foolish, mad if you will, but not base. God forbid that I should treat her with disrespect, even in thought! I love her, Mr. Kennedy, as I never loved before. I have asked her to be my wife, andshe"

"Whew!" whistled old Mr. Kennedy, replacing his pipe between his teeth, gazing abstractedly at the ground, and emitting clouds innumerable. After standing thus a few seconds, he turned his back slowly upon Harry, and smiled outrageously once or twice, winking at the same time, after his own fashion, at the river. Turning abruptly round, he regarded Harry with a look of affected dignity, and said, "Pray, sir, what did my daughter say to your very peculiar proposal?"

"She said yeah! that isshe didn't exactly say anything, but sheindeed I"

"Humph!" ejaculated the old gentleman, deepening his frown as he regarded his young friend through the smoke. "In short, she said nothing, I suppose, but led you to infer, perhaps, that she would have said yes if I hadn't interrupted you."

Harry blushed, and said nothing.

"Now, sir," continued Mr. Kennedy, "don't you think that it would have been a polite piece of attention on your part to have asked my permission before you addressed my daughter on such a subject, eh?"

"Indeed," said Harry, "I acknowledge that I have been hasty, but I must

disclaim the charge of disrespect to you, sir. I had no intention whatever of broaching the subject to-day, but my feelings, unhappily, carried me away, andandin fact"

"Well, well, sir," interrupted Mr. Kennedy, with a look of offended dignity, "your feelings ought to be kept more under control. But come, sir, to my house. I must talk further with you on this subject. I must read you a lesson, sira lesson, humph! that you won't forget in a hurry."

"But, my dear sir" began Harry.

"No more, sirno more at present," cried the old gentleman, smoking violently as he pointed to the footpath that led to the house, "Lead the way, sir; I'll follow."

The footpath, although wide enough to allow Kate and Harry to walk, beside each other, did not permit of two gentlemen doing so conveniently a circumstance which proved a great relief to Mr. Kennedy, inasmuch as it enabled him, while walking behind his companion, to wink convulsively, smoke furiously, and punch his own ribs severely, by way of opening a few safety-valves to his glee, without which there is no saying what might have happened. He was nearly caught in these eccentricities more than once, however, as Harry turned half round with the intention of again attempting to exculpate himself attempts which were as often met by a sudden start, a fierce frown, a burst of smoke, and a command to "go on." On approaching the house, the track became a broad road, affording Mr. Kennedy no excuse for walking in the rear, so that he was under the necessity of laying violent restraint on his feelings a restraint which it was evident could not last long. At that moment, to his great relief, his eye suddenly fell on the gray cat, which happened to be reposing innocently on the doorstep.

"That's it! there's the whole cause of it at last!" cried Mr. Kennedy, in a perfect paroxysm of excitement, flinging his pipe violently at the unoffending victim as he rushed towards it. The pipe missed the cat, but went with a sharp crash through the parlour window, at which Charley was seated, while his father darted through the doorway, along the passage, and into the kitchen. Here the cat, having first capsized a pyramid of pans and kettles in its consternation, took refuge in an absolutely unassailable position. Seeing this, Mr. Kennedy violently discharged a pailful of water at the spot, strode rapidly to his own apartment, and locked himself in.

"Dear me, Harry, what's wrong? my father seems unusually excited," said Charley, in some astonishment, as Harry entered the room, and flung himself on a chair with a look of chagrin.

"It's difficult to say, Charley; the fact is, I've asked your sister Kate to be my wife, and your father seems to have gone mad with indignation."

"Asked Kate to be your wife!" cried Charley, starting up, and regarding his friend with a look of amazement.

"Yes, I have," replied Harry, with an air of offended dignity. "I know very well that I am unworthy of her, but I see no reason why you and your father should take such pains to make me feel it."

"Unworthy of her, my dear fellow!" exclaimed Charley, grasping his hand and wringing it violently; "no doubt you are, and so is everybody, but you shall have her for all that, my boy. But tell me, Harry, have you spoken to Kate herself?"

"Yes, I have."

"And does she agree?"

"Well, I think I may say she does."

"Have you told my father that she does?"

"Why, as to that," said Harry, with a perplexed smile, "he didn't need to be told; he made himself pretty well aware of the facts of the case."

"Ah! I'll soon settle him," cried Charley. "Keep your mind easy, old fellow; I'll very soon bring him round." With this assurance, Charley gave his friend's hand another shake that nearly wrenched the arm from his shoulder, and hastened out of the room in search of his refractory father.

CHAPTER XXXI.
The course of true love, curiously enough, runs smooth for once; and the curtain falls.

Time rolled on, and with it the sunbeams of summer wentthe snowflakes of winter came. Needles of ice began to shoot across the surface of Red River, and gradually narrowed its bed. Crystalline trees formed upon the window-panes. Icicles depended from the eaves of the houses. Snow fell in abundance on the plains; liquid nature began rapidly to solidify, and not many weeks after the first frost made its appearance everything was (as the settlers expressed it) "hard and fast."

Mr. Kennedy, senior, was in his parlour, with his back to a blazing wood-fire that seemed large enough to roast an ox whole. He was standing, moreover, in

a semi-picturesque attitude, with his right hand in his breeches pocket and his left arm round Kate's waist. Kate was dressed in a gown that rivalled the snow itself in whiteness. One little gold clasp shone in her bosom; it was the only ornament she wore. Mr. Kennedy, too, had somewhat altered his style of costume. He wore a sky-blue, swallow-tailed coat, whose maker had flourished in London half-a-century before. It had a velvet collar about five inches deep, fitted uncommonly tight to the figure, and had a pair of bright brass buttons, very close together, situated half-a-foot above the wearer's natural waist. Besides this, he had on a canary-coloured vest, and a pair of white duck trousers, in the fob of which evidently reposed an immense gold watch of the olden time, with a bunch of seals that would have served very well as an anchor for a small boat. Although the dress was, on the whole, slightly comical, its owner, with his full, fat, broad figure, looked remarkably well in it, nevertheless.

It was Kate's marriage-day, or rather marriage-evening; for the sun had set two hours ago, and the moon was now sailing in the frosty sky, its pale rays causing the whole country to shine with a clear, cold, silvery whiteness.

The old gentleman had been for some time gazing in silent admiration on the fair brow and clustering ringlets of his daughter, when it suddenly occurred to him that the company would arrive in half-an-hour, and there were several things still to be attended to.

"Hello, Kate!" he exclaimed, with a start, "we're forgetting ourselves. The candles are yet to light, and lots of other things to do." Saying this, he began to bustle about the room in a state of considerable agitation.

"Oh, don't worry yourself, dear father!" cried Kate, running after him and catching him by the hand. "Miss Cookumwell and good Mrs. Taddipopple are arranging everything about tea and supper in the kitchen, and Tom Whyte has been kindly sent to us by Mr. Grant, with orders to make himself generally useful, so he can light the candles in a few minutes, and you've nothing to do but to kiss me and receive the company." Kate pulled her father gently towards the fire again, and replaced his arm round her waist.

"Receive company! Ah, Kate, my love, that's just what I know nothing about. If they'd let me receive them in my own way, I'd do it well enough; but that abominable Mrs. Taddi-what's her name-has quite addled my brains and driven me distracted with trying to get me to understand what she calls etiquette."

Kate laughed, and said she didn't care how he received them, as she was quite sure that, whichever way he did it, he would do it pleasantly and well.

At that moment the door opened, and Tom Whyte entered. He was thinner, if possible, than he used to be, and considerably stiffer, and more upright.

"Please, sir," said he, with a motion that made you expect to hear his back creak (it was intended for a bow)"please, sir, can I do hanythink for yer?"

"Yes, Tom, you can," replied Mr. Kennedy. "Light these candles, my man, and then go to the stable and see that everything there is arranged for putting up the horses. It will be pretty full to-night, Tom, and will require some management. Then, let me seeah yes, bring me my pipe, Tom, my big meerschaum.I'll sport that to-night in honour of you, Kate."

"Please, sir," began Tom, with a slightly disconcerted air, "I'm afeared, sir, thatum"

"Well, Tom, what would you say? Go on."

"The pipe, sir," said Tom, growing still more disconcerted"says I to cook, says I, 'Cook, wot's been an' done it, d'ye think?' 'Dun know, Tom,' says he, 'but it's smashed, that's sartin. I think the gray cat'"

"What!" cried the old trader, in a voice of thunder, while a frown of the most portentous ferocity darkened his brow for an instant. It was only for an instant, however. Clearing his brow quickly, he said with a smile, "But it's your wedding-day, Kate, my darling. It won't do to blow up anybody to-day, not even the cat.There, be off, Tom, and see to things. Look sharp! I hear sleigh-bells already."

As he spoke Tom vanished perpendicularly, Kate hastened to her room, and the old gentleman himself went to the front door to receive his guests.

The night was of that intensely calm and still character that invariably accompanies intense frost, so that the merry jingle of the sleigh-bells that struck on Mr. Kennedy's listening ear continued to sound, and grow louder as they drew near, for a considerable time ere the visitors arrived. Presently the dull, soft tramp of horses' hoofs was heard in the snow, and a well-known voice shouted out lustily, "Now then, Mactavish, keep to the left. Doesn't the road take a turn there? Mind the gap in the fence. That's old Kennedy's only fault. He'd rather risk breaking his friends' necks than mend his fences!"

"All right, here we are," cried Mactavish, as the next instant two sleighs emerged out of the avenue into the moonlit space in front of the house, and dashed up to the door amid an immense noise and clatter of bells, harness, hoofs, snorting, and salutations.

"Ah, Grant, my dear fellow!" cried Mr. Kennedy, springing to the sleigh and seizing his friend by the hand as he dragged him out. "This is kind of you to come early. And Mrs. Grant, too. Take care, my dear madam, step clear of the haps; now, thencleverly done" (as Mrs. Grant tumbled into his arms in a confused heap). "Come along now; there's a capital fire in here.Don't mind the horses, Mactavishfollow us, my lad; Tom Whyte will attend to them."

Uttering such disjointed remarks, Mr. Kennedy led Mrs. Grant into the house, and made her over to Mrs. Taddipopple, who hurried her away to an inner apartment, while Mr. Kennedy conducted her spouse, along with Mactavish and our friend the head clerk at Fort Garry, into the parlour.

"Harry, my dear fellow, I wish you joy," cried Mr. Grant, as the former grasped his hand. "Lucky dog you are. Where's Kate, eh? Not visible yet, I suppose."

"No, not till the parson comes," interrupted Mr. Kennedy, convulsing his left cheek."Hollo, Charley, where are you? Ah! bring the cigars, Charley.Sit down, gentlemen; make yourselves at homeI say, Mrs. TaddiTaddioh, botherationpopple! that's ityour name, madam, is a puzzler-but-we'll need more chairs, I think. Fetch one or two, like a dear!"

As he spoke the jingle of bells was heard outside, and Mr. Kennedy rushed to the door again.

"Good-evening, Mr. Addison," said he, taking that gentleman warmly by the hand as he resigned the reins to Tom Whyte. "I am delighted to see you, sir (Look after the minister's mare, Tom), glad to see you, my dear sir. Some of my friends have come already. This way, Mr. Addison."

The worthy clergyman responded to Mr. Kennedy's greeting in his own hearty manner, and followed him into the parlour, where the guests now began to assemble rapidly.

"Father," cried Charley, catching his sire by the arm, "I've been looking for you everywhere, but you dance about like a will-o'-the-wisp. Do you know I've invited my friends Jacques and Redfeather to come to-night, and also Louis Peltier, the guide with whom I made my first trip. You recollect him, father?"

"Ay, that do I, lad, and happy shall I be to see three such worthy men under my roof as guests on this night."

"Yes, yes, I know that, father; but I don't see them here. Have they come yet?"

"Can't say, boy. By the way, Pastor Conway is also coming, so we'll have a

meeting between an Episcopalian and a Wesleyan. I sincerely trust that they won't fight!" As he said this the old gentleman grinned and threw his cheek into convulsionsan expression which was suddenly changed into one of confusion when he observed that Mr. Addison was standing close beside him, and had heard the remark.

"Don't blush, my dear sir," said Mr. Addison, with a quiet smile, as he patted his friend on the shoulder. "You have too much reason, I am sorry to say, for expecting that clergymen of different denominations should look coldly on each other. There is far too much of this indifference and distrust among those who labour in different parts of the Lord's vineyard. But I trust you will find that my sympathies extend a little beyond the circle of my own particular body. Indeed, Mr. Conway is a particular friend of mine; so I assure you we won't fight."

"Right, right" cried Mr. Kennedy, giving the clergy man an energetic grasp of the hand; "I like to hear you speak that way. I must confess that I've been a good deal surprised to observe, by what one reads in the old-country newspapers, as well as by what one sees even hereaway in the backwood settlements, how little interest clergymen show in the doings of those who don't happen to belong to their own particular sect; just as if a soul saved through the means of an Episcopalian was not of as much value as one saved by a Wesleyan, or a Presbyterian, or a Dissenter. Why, sir, it seems to me just as mean-spirited and selfish as if one of our chief factors was so entirely taken up with the doings and success of his own particular district that he didn't care a gun-flint for any other district in the Company's service."

There was at least one man listening to these remarks whose naturally logical and liberal mind fully agreed with them. This was Jacques Caradoc, who had entered the room a few minutes before, in company with his friend Redfeather and Louis Peltier.

"Right, sir! That's fact, straight up and down," said he, in an approving tone.

"Ha! Jacques, my good fellow, is that you?Redfeather, my friend, how are you?" said Mr. Kennedy, turning round and grasping a hand of each."Sit down there, Louis, beside Mrs. Taddieh?ah!popple.Mr. Addison, this is Jacques Caradoc, the best and stoutest hunter between Hudson's Bay and Oregon."

Jacques smiled and bowed modestly as Mr. Addison shook his hand. The worthy hunter did indeed at that moment look as if he fully merited Mr. Kennedy's eulogium. Instead of endeavouring to ape the gentleman, as many men in his rank of life would have been likely to do on an occasion like this, Jacques had not altered his costume a hair-breadth from what it usually was,

excepting that some parts of it were quite new, and all of it faultlessly clean. He wore the usual capote, but it was his best one, and had been washed for the occasion. The scarlet belt and blue leggings were also as bright in colour as if they had been put on for the first time; and the moccasins, which fitted closely to his well-formed feet, were of the cleanest and brightest yellow leather, ornamented, as usual, in front. The collar of his blue-striped shirt was folded back a little more carefully than usual, exposing his sun-burned and muscular throat. In fact, he wanted nothing, save the hunting-knife, the rifle, and the powder-horn, to constitute him a perfect specimen of a thorough backwoodsman.

Redfeather and Louis were similarly costumed, and a noble trio they looked as they sat modestly in a corner, talking to each other in whispers, and endeavouring, as much as possible, to curtail their colossal proportions.

"Now, Harry," said Mr. Kennedy, in a hoarse whisper, at the same time winking vehemently, "we're about ready, lad. Where's Kate, eh? shall we send for her?"

Harry blushed, and stammered out something that was wholly unintelligible, but which, nevertheless, seemed to afford infinite delight to the old gentleman, who chuckled and winked tremendously, gave his son-in-law a facetious poke in the ribs, and turning abruptly to Miss Cookumwell, said to that lady, "Now, Miss Cookumpopple, we're all ready. They seem to have had enough tea and trash; you'd better be looking after Kate, I think."

Miss Cookumwell smiled, rose, and left the room to obey; Mrs. Taddipopple followed to help, and soon returned with Kate, whom they delivered up to her father at the door. Mr. Kennedy led her to the upper end of the room; Harry Somerville stood by her side, as if by magic; Mr. Addison dropped opportunely before them, as if from the clouds; there was an extraordinary and abrupt pause in the hum of conversation, and ere Kate was well aware of what was about to happen, she felt herself suddenly embraced by her husband, from whom she was thereafter violently torn and all but smothered by her sympathising friends.

Poor Kate! she had gone through the ceremony almost mechanicallyrecklessly, we might be justified in saying; for not having raised her eyes off the floor from its commencement to its close, the man whom she accepted for better or for worse might have been Jacques or Redfeather for all that she knew.

Immediately after this there was heard the sound of a fiddle, and an old Canadian was led to the upper end of the room, placed on a chair, and hoisted, by the powerful arms of Jacques and Louis, upon a table. In this conspicuous

position the old man seemed to be quite at his ease. He spent a few minutes in bringing his instrument into perfect tune; then looking round with a mild, patronising glance to see that the dancers were ready, he suddenly struck up a Scotch reel with an amount of energy, precision, and spirit that might have shot a pang of jealousy through the heart of Neil Gow himself. The noise that instantly commenced, and was kept up from that moment, with but few intervals, during the whole evening, was of a kind that is never heard in fashionable drawing-rooms. Dancing in the backwood settlements is dancing. It is not walking; it is not sailing; it is not undulating; it is not sliding; no, it is bona-fide dancing! It is the performance of intricate evolutions with the feet and legs that make one wink to look at; performed in good time too, and by people who look upon all their muscles as being useful machines, not merely things of which a select few, that cannot be dispensed with, are brought into daily operation. Consequently the thing was done with an amount of vigour that was conducive to the health of performers, and productive of satisfaction to the eyes of beholders. When the evening wore on apace, however, and Jacques's modesty was so far overcome as to induce him to engage in a reel, along with his friend Louis Peltier, and two bouncing young ladies whose father had driven them twenty miles over the plains that day in order to attend the wedding of their dear friend and former playmate, Katewhen these four stood up, we say, and the fiddler played more energetically than ever, and the stout backwoodsmen began to warm and grow vigorous, until, in the midst of their tremendous leaps and rapid but well-timed motions, they looked like very giants amid their brethren, then it was that Harry, as he felt Kate's little hand pressing his arm, and observed her sparkling eyes gazing at the dancers in genuine admiration, began at last firmly to believe that the whole thing was a dream; and then it was that old Mr. Kennedy rejoiced to think that the house had been built under his own special directions, and he knew that it could not by any possibility be shaken to pieces.

And well might Harry imagine that he dreamed; for besides the bewildering tendency of the almost too-good-to-be-true fact that Kate was really Mrs. Harry Somerville, the scene before him was a particularly odd and perplexing mixture of widely different elements, suggestive of new and old associations. The company was miscellaneous. There were retired old traders, whose lives from boyhood had been spent in danger, solitude, wild scenes and adventures, to which those of Robinson Crusoe are mere child's play. There were young girls, the daughters of these men, who had received good educations in the Red River academy, and a certain degree of polish which education always gives; a very different polish, indeed, from that which the conventionalities and refinements of the Old World bestow, but not the less agreeable on that accountnay, we might even venture to say, all the more agreeable on that account. There were Red Indians and clergymen; there were one or two ladies

of a doubtful age, who had come out from the old country to live there, having found it no easy matter, poor things, to live at home; there were matrons whose absolute silence on every subject save "yes" or "no" showed that they had not been subjected to the refining influences of the academy, but whose hearty smiles and laughs of genuine good-nature proved that the storing of the brain has, after all, very little to do with the best and deepest feelings of the heart. There were the tones of Scotch reels soundingtones that brought Scotland vividly before the very eyes; and there were Canadian hunters and half-breed voyageurs, whose moccasins were more accustomed to the turf of the woods than the boards of a drawing-room, and whose speech and accents made Scotland vanish away altogether from the memory. There were old people and young folk; there were fat and lean, short and long. There were songs tooballads of England, pathetic songs of Scotland, alternating with the French ditties of Canada, and the sweet, inexpressibly plaintive canoe-songs of the voyageur. There were strong contrasts in dress also: some wore the home-spun trousers of the settlement, a few the ornamented leggings of the hunter. Capotes were thereloose, flowing, and picturesque; and broad-cloth tail-coats were there, of the last century, tight-fitting, angularin a word, detestable; verifying the truth of the proverb that extremes meet, by showing that the cut which all the wisdom of tailors and scientific fops, after centuries of study, had laboriously wrought out and foisted upon the poor civilised world as perfectly sublime, appeared in the eyes of backwoodsmen and Indians utterly ridiculous. No wonder that Harry, under the circumstances, became quietly insane, and went about committing nothing but mistakes the whole evening. No wonder that he emulated his father-in-law in abusing the gray cat, when he found it surreptitiously devouring part of the supper in an adjoining room; and no wonder that, when he rushed about vainly in search of Mrs. Taddipopple, to acquaint her with the cat's wickedness, he, at last, in desperation, laid violent hands on Miss Cookumwell, and addressed that excellent lady by the name of Mrs. Poppletaddy.

Were we courageous enough to make the attempt, we would endeavour to describe that joyful evening from beginning to end. We would tell you how the company's spirits rose higher and higher, as each individual became more and more anxious to lend his or her aid in adding to the general hilarity; how old Mr. Kennedy nearly killed himself in his fruitless efforts to be everywhere, speak to everybody, and do everything at once, how Charley danced till he could scarcely speak, and then talked till he could hardly dance; and how the fiddler, instead of growing wearied, became gradually and continuously more powerful, until it seemed as if fifty fiddles were playing at one and the same time. We would tell you how Mr. Addison drew more than ever to Mr. Conway, and how the latter gentleman agreed to correspond regularly with the former thenceforth, in order that their interest in the great work each had in

hand for the same Master might be increased and kept up; how, in a spirit of recklessness (afterwards deeply repented of), a bashful young man was induced to sing a song which in the present mirthful state of the company ought to have been a humorous song, or a patriotic song, or a good, loud, inspiriting song, or anything, in short, but what it wasa slow, dull, sentimental song, about wasting gradually away in a sort of melancholy decay, on account of disappointed love, or some such trash, which was a false sentiment in itself, and certainly did not derive any additional tinge of truthfulness from a thin, weak voice, that was afflicted with chronic flatness, and edged all its notes. Were we courageous enough to go on, we would further relate to you how during supper Mr. Kennedy senior, tried to make a speech, and broke down amid uproarious applause; how Mr. Kennedy, junior, got up thereafterbeing urged thereto by his father, who said, with a convulsion of the cheek, "Get me out of the scrape, Charley, my boy"and delivered an oration which did not display much power of concise elucidation, but was replete, nevertheless, with consummate impudence; how during this point in the proceedings the gray cat made a last desperate effort to purloin a cold chicken, which it had watched anxiously the whole evening, and was caught in the very act, nearly strangled, and flung out of the window, where it alighted in safety on the snow, and fled, a wiser, and, we trust, a better cat. We would recount all this to you, reader, and a great deal more besides; but we fear to try your patience, and we tremble violently, much more so, indeed, than you will believe, at the bare idea of waxing prosy.

Suffice it to say that the party separated at an early houra good, sober, reasonable hour for such an occasionsomewhere before midnight. The horses were harnessed; the ladies were packed in the sleighs with furs so thick and plentiful as to defy the cold; the gentlemen seized their reins and cracked their whips; the horses snorted, plunged, and dashed away over the white plains in different directions, while the merry sleigh-bells sounded fainter and fainter in the frosty air. In half-an-hour the stars twinkled down on the still, cold scene, and threw a pale light on the now silent dwelling of the old fur-trader.

Ere dropping the curtain over a picture in which we have sought faithfully to portray the prominent features of those wild regions that lie to the north of the Canadas, and in which we have endeavoured to describe some of the peculiarities of a class of men whose histories seldom meet the public eye, we feel tempted to add a few more touches to the sketch; we would fain trace a little farther the fortunes of one or two of the chief factors in our book. But this is not to be.

Snowflakes and sunbeams came and went as in days gone by. Time rolled on, working many changes in its course, and among others consigning Harry Somerville to an important post in Red River colony, to the unutterable joy of Mr. Kennedy, senior, and of Kate. After much consideration and frequent

consultation with Mr. Addison, Mr. Conway resolved to make another journey to preach the gospel of Jesus Christ to those Indian tribes that inhabit the regions beyond Athabasca; and being a man of great energy, he determined not to await the opening of the river navigation, but to undertake the first part of his expedition on snow-shoes. Jacques agreed to go with him as guide and hunter, Redfeather as interpreter. It was a bright, cold morning when he set out, accompanied part of the way by Charley Kennedy and Harry Somerville, whose hearts were heavy at the prospect of parting with the two men who had guided and protected them during their earliest experience of a voyageur's life, when, with hearts full to overflowing with romantic anticipations, they first dashed joyously into the almost untrodden wilderness.

During their career in the woods together, the young men and the two hunters had become warmly attached to each other; and now that they were about to partit might be for years, perhaps for evera feeling of sadness crept over them which they could not shake off, and which the promise given by Mr. Conway to revisit Red River on the following spring served but slightly to dispel.

On arriving at the spot where they intended to bid their friends a last farewell, the two young men held out their hands in silence. Jacques grasped them warmly.

"Mister Charles, Mister Harry," said he, in a deep, earnest voice, "the Almighty has guided us in safety for many a day when we travelled the woods together; for which praised be His Holy Name! May He guide and bless you still, and bring us together in this world again, if in His wisdom He see fit."

There was no answer save a deeply-murmured "Amen." In another moment the travellers resumed their march. On reaching the summit of a slight eminence, where the prairies terminated and the woods began, they paused to wave a last adieu; then Jacques, putting himself at the head of the little party, plunged into the forest, and led them away towards the snowy regions of the Far North.