

The Desert Home

The Adventures of a Lost Family in the Wilderness

Mayne Reid



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Captain Mayne Reid

"The Desert Home"

Chapter One.

The Great American Desert.

There is a great desert in the interior of North America. It is almost as large as the famous Saära of Africa. It is fifteen hundred miles long, and a thousand wide. Now, if it were of a regular shape—that is to say, a parallelogram—you could at once compute its area, by multiplying the length upon the breadth; and you would obtain one million and a half for the result—one million and a half of square miles. But its outlines are as yet very imperfectly known; and although it is fully fifteen hundred miles long, and in some places a thousand in breadth, its surface-extent is probably not over one million of square miles, or twenty-five times the size of England. Fancy a desert twenty-five times as big as all England! Do you not think that it has received a most appropriate name when it is called the *Great American Desert*?

Now, my young friend, what do you understand by a desert? I think I can guess. When you read or hear of a desert, you think of a vast level plain, covered with sand, and without trees, or grass, or *any* kind of vegetation. You think, also, of this sand being blown about in thick yellow clouds, and no water to be met with in any direction. This is your idea of a desert, is it not? Well, it is not altogether the correct one. It is true that in almost every desert there are these sandy plains, yet are there other parts of its surface of a far different character, equally deserving the name of *desert*. Although the interior of the great Saära has not been fully explored, enough is known of it to prove that it contains large tracts of mountainous and hilly country, with rocks and valleys, lakes, rivers, and springs. There are, also, fertile spots, at wide distances from each other, covered with trees, and shrubs, and beautiful vegetation. Some of these spots are small, while others are of large extent, and inhabited by independent tribes, and even whole kingdoms of people. A fertile tract of this kind is called an oasis; and, by looking at your map, you will perceive that there

are many oases in the Saära of Africa.

Of a similar character is the Great American Desert; but its surface is still more varied with what may be termed “geographical features.” There are plains—some of them more than a hundred miles wide—where you can see nothing but white sand, often drifting about on the wind, and here and there thrown into long ridges such as those made by a snowstorm. There are other plains, equally large, where no sand appears, but brown barren earth utterly destitute of vegetation. There are others, again, on which grows a stunted shrub with leaves of a pale silvery colour. In some places it grows so thickly, interlocking its twisted and knotty branches, that a horseman can hardly ride through among them. This shrub is the *artemisia*—a species of wild sage or wormwood,—and the plains upon which it grows are called by the hunters, who cross them, the *sage prairies*. Other plains are met with that present a black aspect to the traveller. These are covered with lava, that at some distant period of time has been vomited forth from volcanic mountains, and now lies frozen up, and broken into small fragments like the stones upon a new-made road. Still other plains present themselves in the American Desert. Some are white, as if snow had fallen freshly upon them, and yet it is not snow, but salt! Yes; pure white salt—covering the ground six inches deep, and for fifty miles in every direction! Others, again, have a similar appearance; but instead of salt, you find the substance which covers them to be soda—a beautiful efflorescence of soda!

There are mountains, too—indeed, one-half of this Desert is very mountainous; and the great chain of the Rocky Mountains—of which you have no doubt heard—runs sheer through it from north to south, and divides it into two nearly equal parts. But there are other mountains besides these; mountains of every height, and sometimes in their shape and colour presenting very striking and singular appearance. Some of them run for miles in horizontal ridges like the roofs of houses, and seemingly so narrow at their tops that one might sit astride of them. Others, again, of a conical form, stand out in the plain apart from the rest, and look like teacups turned upside down in the middle of a table. Then there are sharp peaks that shoot upward like needles, and others shaped like the dome of some great cathedral—like the dome of Saint Paul’s. These mountains are of many colours. Some are dark, or dark-green, or blue when seen from a distance. They are of this colour when covered by

forests of pine or cedar, both of which trees are found in great plenty among the mountains of the Desert.

There are many mountains, where no trees are seen, nor any signs of vegetation along their sides. Huge naked rocks of granite appear piled upon each other, or jutting out over dark and frowning chasms. There are peaks perfectly white, because they are covered with a thick mantle of snow. These can always be seen from the greatest distance, as the snow lying upon them all the year without melting proves them to be of vast elevation above the level of the sea. There are other peaks almost as white, and yet it is not with snow. They are of a milky hue, and stunted cedar-trees may be seen clinging in seams and crevices along their sides. These are mountains of pure limestone, or the white quartz rock. There are mountains, again, upon which neither tree nor leaf is to be seen; but, in their stead, the most vivid colours of red and green and yellow and white, appearing in stripes along their sides, as though they had been freshly painted. These stripes mark the strata of different coloured rocks, of which the mountains are composed. And there are still other mountains in the Great American Desert, to startle the traveller with their strange appearance. They are those that glitter with the mica and selenite. These, when seen from a distance flashing under the sun, look as though they were mountains of silver and gold!

The rivers, too. Strange rivers are they. Some run over broad shallow beds of bright sand. Large rivers—hundreds of yards in width, with sparkling waters. Follow them down their course. What do you find? Instead of growing larger, like the rivers of your own land, they become less and less, until at length their waters sink into the sands, and you see nothing but the dry channel for miles after miles! Go still farther down, and again the water appears, and increases in volume, until—thousands of miles from the sea—large ships can float upon their bosom. Such are the Arkansas and the Platte.

There are other rivers that run between bleak, rocky banks—banks a thousand feet high, whose bald, naked “bluffs” frown at each other across the deep chasm, in the bottom of which roars the troubled water. Often these banks extend for hundreds of miles, so steep at all points that one cannot go down to the bed of their stream; and often—often—the traveller has perished with thirst, while the roar of their water was

sounding in his ears! Such are the Colorado and the Snake.

Still others go sweeping through the broad plains, tearing up the clay with their mighty floods, and year after year changing their channels, until they are sometimes an hundred miles from their ancient beds. Here they are found gurgling for many leagues under ground—under vast rafts formed by the trees which they have borne downward in their current. There you find them winding by a thousand loops like the sinuosities of a great serpent, rolling sluggishly along, with waters red and turbid as though they were rivers of blood! Such are the Brazos and the Red River.

Strange rivers are they that struggle through the mountains, and valleys, and plateau-lands of the Great American Desert.

Not less strange are its lakes. Some lie in the deep recesses of hills that dip down so steeply you cannot reach their shores; while the mountains around them are so bleak and naked, that not even a bird ever wings its flight across their silent waters. Other lakes are seen in broad, barren plains; and yet, a few years after, the traveller finds them not—they have dried up and disappeared. Some are fresh, with waters like crystal—others brackish and muddy—while many of them are more salt than the ocean itself.

In this Desert there are springs—springs of soda and sulphur, and salt waters; and others so hot that they boil up as in a great caldron, and you could not dip your finger into them without scalding it.

There are vast caves piercing the sides of the mountains, and deep chasms opening into the plains—some of them so deep, that you might fancy mountains had been scooped out to form them. They are called “barrancas.” There are precipices rising straight up from the plains—thousands of feet in height—and steep as a wall; and through the mountains themselves you may see great clefts cut by the rivers, as though they had been tunnelled and their tops had fallen in. They are called “cañons.” All these singular formations mark the wild region of the Great American Desert.

It has its denizens. There are oases in it; some of them large, and settled by civilised men. One of these is the country of New Mexico, containing

many towns, and 100,000 inhabitants. These are of the Spanish and mixed Indian races. Another oasis is the country around the Great Salt and Utah Lakes. Here is also a settlement, established in 1846. Its people are Americans and Englishmen. They are the Mormons; and, although they dwell hundreds of miles from any sea, they seem likely to become a large and powerful nation of themselves.

Besides these two great oases, there are thousands of others, of all sizes—from fifty miles in breadth, to the little spot of a *few* acres, formed by the fertilising waters of some gurgling spring. Many of these are without inhabitants. In others, again, dwell tribes of Indians—some of them numerous and powerful, possessing horses and cattle; while others are found in small groups of three or four families each, subsisting miserably upon roots, seeds, grass, reptiles, and insects. In addition to the two great settlements we have mentioned, and the Indians, there is another class of men scattered over this region. These are white men—hunters and trappers. They subsist by trapping the beaver, and hunting the buffalo and other animals. Their life is one continued scene of peril, both from the wild animals which they encounter in their lonely excursions, and the hostile Indians with whom they come in contact. These men procure the furs of the beaver, the otter, the musk-rat, the marten, the ermine, the lynx, the fox, and the skins of many other animals. This is their business, and by this they live. There are forts, or trading posts—established by adventurous merchants—at long distances from each other; and at these forts the trappers exchange their furs for food, clothing, and for the necessary implements of their perilous calling.

There is another class of men who traverse the Great Desert. For many years there has been a commerce carried on between the oasis of New Mexico and the United States. This commerce employs a considerable amount of capital, and a great number of men—principally Americans. The goods transported in large wagons drawn by mules or oxen; and a train of these wagons is called a “caravan.” Other caravans—Spanish ones—cross the western wing of the Desert, from Sonora to California, and thence to New Mexico. Thus, you see, the American Desert has its caravans as well as the Saära of Africa.

These caravans travel for hundreds of miles through countries in which there are no inhabitants, except the scattered and roving bands of

Indians; and there are many parts on their routes so sterile, that not even Indians can exist there.

The caravans, however, usually follow a track which is known, and where grass and water may be found at certain seasons of the year. There are several of these tracks, or, as they are called, "trails," that cross from the frontier settlements of the United States to those of New Mexico. Between one and another of these trails, however, stretch vast regions of desert country—entirely unexplored and unknown—and many fertile spots exist, that have never been trodden by the foot of man.

Such, then, my young friend, is a rough sketch of some of the more prominent features of the Great American Desert.

Let me conduct you into it, and show you—from a nearer view—some of its wild but interesting aspects. I shall not show you the wildest of them, lest they might terrify you. Fear not—I shall not lead you into danger. Follow me.

Chapter Two.

The White Peak.

Some years ago, I was one of a party of "prairie merchants," who crossed with a caravan from Saint Louis on the Mississippi, to Santa Fé in New Mexico. We followed the usual "Santa Fé trail." Not disposing of all our goods in New Mexico, we kept on to the great town of Chihuahua, which lies farther to the south. There we settled our business, and were about to return to the United States the way we had come, when it was proposed (as we had now nothing to encumber us but our bags of money), that we should explore a new "trail" across the prairies. We all wished to find a better route than the Santa Fé road; and we expected that such an one lay between the town of El Paso—on the Del Norte River—and some point on the frontiers of Arkansas.

On arriving at El Paso, we sold our wagons, and purchased Mexican pack-mules—engaging, at the same time, a number of "arrieros," or muleteers to manage them. We also purchased saddle-horses—the

small tight horses of New Mexico, which are excellent for journeying in the Desert. We provided ourselves, moreover, with such articles of clothing and provisions as we might require upon our unknown route. Having got everything ready for the journey, we bade adieu to El Paso, and turned our faces eastward. There were in all twelve of us—traders, and a number of hunters, who had agreed to accompany us across the plains. There was a miner, too, who belonged to a copper mine near El Paso. There were also four Mexicans—the “arrieros” who had charge of our little train of pack-mules. Of course, we were all well armed, and mounted upon the best horses we could procure for money.

We had first to cross over the Rocky Mountains, which run north and south through all the country. That chain of them which lies eastward of El Paso is called the Sierra de Organos, or “Organ mountains.” They are so called from the fancied resemblance which is seen in one of their cliffs to the tubes of an organ. These cliffs are of trap rock, which, as you are aware, often presents very fantastic and singular formations, by means of its peculiar stratification. But there is a still more curious feature about these Organ mountains. On the top of one of them is a lake, which has its tides that ebb and flow like the tides of the ocean! No one has yet accounted for this remarkable phenomenon, and it remains a puzzle to the geological inquirer. This lake is a favourite resort for the wild animals of the country, and deer and elk are found in great numbers around its shores. They are not even molested by the Mexican hunters of these parts, who seem to have a superstitious fear of the spirits of the Organ mountains, and rarely climb up their steep sides.

Our party found an easy pass through the range, which brought us out into an open country on the other side. After travelling several days through the eastern spurs of the Rocky Mountains, known as the Sierras Sacramento and Guadalupe, we struck upon a small stream, which we followed downward. It brought us at length to a large river running north and south, which we knew to be the celebrated Pecos, or, as it is sometimes called, the Puerco. These, you will perceive, are all Spanish names, for the country through which we were travelling, although uninhabited and almost unexplored by the Mexican Spaniards, was yet part of their territory; and such objects as were known to them, through hunters or others, had received names in their language.

We crossed the Pecos, and travelled for some days up its left bank, in hopes of reaching some other stream that might run into it from the east, which we could follow. No such stream appeared; and we were forced at times to leave the Pecos itself, and take out into the open country for a distance of miles, before we could get back to its waters. This was on account of the deep channel which the river—working for long ages—had cut through hills that opposed its course, leaving on both sides vast precipices for its banks.

Having got farther to the north than we wished, our party at length determined to attempt the passage of the arid plain which stretched away eastward as far as the eye could reach. It was a perilous enterprise to leave the river, without some knowledge that there was water ahead of us. Travellers, under such circumstances, usually keep close to a stream—wherever it runs in the direction in which they wish to go; but we had grown impatient on not finding one flowing into the Pecos from the east; and, having filled our gourd canteens, and given our animals as much water as they could drink, we turned their heads towards the open plain.

After riding for several hours, we found ourselves in the midst of a wide desert, with neither hill, mountain, nor any other landmark in view. Scarcely a trace of vegetation appeared around us. Here and there were patches of stunted sage-bushes and clumps of thorny cactus; but not a blade of grass to gladden the eyes of our animals. Not a drop of water was met with, nor any indication that rain had ever fallen upon that parched plain. The soil was as dry as powder, and the dust, kicked up by the hoofs of our mules and horses, hung around us in clouds as we marched. In addition to this, the heat was excessive; and this, with the dust and fatigue of travel, brought on an unquenchable thirst, that soon caused us to drink up the contents of our water-gourds. Long before night they were all empty, and every one of our party was crying out from thirst. Our animals suffered worse—for we, at least, had food, while they, poor brutes, were without a bite to sustain them.

We could not well turn back. We thought we should surely come to water, sooner than we could get back to the river we had left; and with this hope we struggled on. Late in the afternoon, our eyes were greeted by a glad sight, that caused us to start up in our saddles with a feeling of joy. You may think that it was water—but it was not. It was a white object that

appeared against the sky at a great distance. It was of a triangular shape, and seemed to be suspended in the air like the upper half of a huge kite. All of us knew at a glance what it was. We knew that it was the white cap of a snowy mountain.

You will wonder why this sight should have given us such feelings of pleasure, as, in your opinion, there is nothing very hospitable in the appearance of a snow-capped mountain. That is because you do not understand the peculiarities of the Desert. I will explain. We knew, from the appearance of the mountain, that it was one of those where the snow lies for ever, and which throughout Mexico are termed "Nevada," or snowy. We knew, moreover, that wherever these are met with, streams of water will be found running down their sides, almost at all seasons, but certainly in hot or summer weather, in consequence of the melting of the snow. It was this knowledge, then, that cheered us; and although the mountain seemed at a great distance, we pushed forward with renewed energy and hope. Our animals, too, as if they also understood the matter, neighed and brayed loudly, and stepped out with a more springy and elastic tread.

The white triangle grew bigger as we advanced. At sunset we could distinguish the brown seams in the lower part of the mountain; and the yellow rays glancing upon the snowy crystals of the cone caused it to glitter like a coronet of gold. The sight cheered us on.

The sun set, and the moon took his place in the heavens. Under her pale light we travelled on—the peak of the mountain still glistening coldly before us. We travelled all night—and why not? There was nothing to halt for. We could not have halted, except to die.

The morning broke upon us as we dragged wearily along. We could not have ridden less than an hundred miles since leaving the Pecos river; and yet, to our dismay, the mountain was still at a good distance before us. As the day brightened, we could trace the configuration of its base; and we observed that upon its southern face a deep ravine indented the mountain nearly to its top. On its western side—the one nearest us—there was no such feature; and we conjectured that the most likely place for water would be in the ravine on the south, where a stream would be formed by the aggregation of the melted snows.

We directed our course toward the point, where the ravine appeared to have its débouchement on the plain. We had calculated rightly. As we approached it, winding round the foot of the mountain, we saw a line of a bright green colour, running out into the brown desert. It looked like a low hedge, with here and there tall trees growing up above the rest. We knew well what it was—a grove of willows, with trees of cotton-wood interspersed. We knew them to be the sure signs of water, and we hailed their appearance with delight. The men huzzaed hoarsely—the horses neighed—the mules hinnied—and, in a few moments more, men, mules, and horses, were kneeling by a crystal streamlet, and drinking deeply of its sweet and refreshing waters.

Chapter Three.

The Valley Oasis.

After so long and terrible a journey, of course, we all stood in need of rest and refreshment. We made up our minds to stay by the stream all night, and perhaps for a day or two. The fringe of willows extended on both sides of it for a distance of fifty yards into the plain; and among these, growing under their shade, there were patches of grass—that species known in Mexico as the *gramma* grass. It is a rich, nutritious herbage; and horses and cattle—as well as the buffaloes and other wild animals—are very fond of it. Our mules and horses gave proof of this; for, as soon as they had satisfied themselves with the water, they attacked it with open mouths, and eyes sparkling with delight. We relieved them of their packs and saddles: and then, having picketed them, left them to eat to their hearts' content.

We now set about looking after something for our own supper. We had not yet suffered much from hunger, as we had occasionally chewed pieces of our dried meat while crossing the plain. But we had eaten it quite raw; and *tasajo*—for that is its name—is no great eating, either raw or roasted. We had been living upon it for more than a week, and we longed for something fresh. During all the route from El Paso we had fallen in with no game, except some half-dozen lean antelopes, only one of which we had succeeded in shooting.

While we were picketing our animals, and getting ready to cook our supper of coffee and tasajo, one of the hunters—a tireless fellow named Lincoln—had stolen off up the ravine. Presently we heard the sharp crack of his rifle ringing through the defile; and, looking up, we saw a flock of “bighorns”—so the wild sheep of the Rocky Mountains are called—leaping from rock to rock, and almost flying like birds up the face of the cliffs. It was not long before Lincoln made his appearance at the mouth of the defile, carrying a large body upon his shoulders—which we knew, by the huge crescent-shaped horns, had once been a member of the flock we had seen escaping. It proved to be as fat as a buck; and the knives of the skilful hunters were not long in skinning and dissecting it. Meanwhile, a couple of axes had been grappled by stout hands; a cotton-wood tree name crashing down after a few sharp blows; and, having been cut into “logs,” was soon crackling under the red blaze. Over this, the ribs and steaks of the bighorn soon sputtered, and the coffee-kettle steamed, simmered, and bubbled, with its brown and aromatic contents. Our supper over, one and all of us rolled ourselves in our blankets, and were soon forgetful of the perils through which we had passed.

Next morning we arose refreshed, and after breakfast a consultation was held as to what course we should now take. We would have followed the stream, but it appeared to run in a southerly direction, and that would not do for us. We wanted to go eastward. While we were deliberating upon this, an exclamation from the hunter Lincoln drew our attention. He was standing in the open ground, at some distance out from the willows, and pointing southward. We all looked in that direction, and, to our great surprise, beheld a pillar of blue smoke curling up into the sky, and seeming to rise out of the plain!

“It must be Indians!” cried one.

“I noticed an odd-looking hole in the prairie down there,” said Lincoln; “I noticed it last night, when I was up after the bighorn. The smoke we see comes out of it; and where there’s smoke there must be a fire, they say—there’s somebody about that fire, be they Injuns or whites.”

“Indians, of course,” rejoined several; “who else would be found within hundreds of miles of such a place as this? Indians, they must be.”

A brief consultation was held among us, as to what was best to be done. Our fire was at once “choked out,” and our mules and horses brought into the cover of the willow thicket. Some proposed that a small party of us should go down the stream and reconnoitre; while others advised that we should climb the mountain, from which we might get a view of the strange place whence the smoke seemed to proceed. This was plainly the best course to adopt—as, in case it should fail to satisfy us, we could still follow the other plan. Half-a-dozen of us, therefore, leaving the others to guard the camp, immediately set out to ascend the mountain.

We climbed up the ravine, occasionally stopping to look out over the plain. We climbed until we had reached a considerable elevation. At length we caught a glimpse of what appeared to be a deep barranca,—into which ran the stream—but we could distinguish nothing within it at so great a distance. We could see the plain stretching away beyond, naked and sterile. On one side only, and that towards the east, there was a belt of verdure, with here and there a solitary tree, or at most two or three growing together, stunted-like and shrubby. Running in the centre of this belt, we could distinguish a line or crack in the plain. This was, no doubt, a channel by which the stream escaped from the barranca. As nothing farther could be gained by remaining upon the mountain, we descended, and joined our companions at the camp.

It was now agreed that a select party should follow the stream, until we had approached the edge of this strange valley, and reconnoitred it with caution. Six of us again started, leaving our horses as before. We stole silently along, keeping among the willows, and as near as possible to the banks of the rivulet. In this way we travelled about a mile and a half. We saw then that we were near to the end of the barranca. We could hear a noise like the sound of a waterfall. We guessed that it must be a cataract formed by the stream, where it leaped into the strange ravine that already began to expand before our faces. We were right in our conjectures, for the next moment we crept out upon the edge of a fearful cliff, where the water of the rivulet swept over, and fell through a height of several hundred feet.

It was a beautiful sight to look upon, as the long jet, curving like the tail of a horse, plunged into the foaming pool below; and then rising with its millions of globules of snowy spray, glittered under the sunbeam with all

the colours of the rainbow. It was, indeed, a beautiful sight; but our eyes did not dwell long upon it, for other objects were before them that filled us with wonder. Away below—far below where we were—lay a lovely valley, smiling in all the luxuriance of bright vegetation. It was of nearly an oval shape, bounded upon all sides by a frowning precipice, that rose around it like a wall. Its length could not have been less than ten miles, and its greatest breadth about half of its length. We were at its upper end, and of course viewed it lengthwise. Along the face of the precipice there were trees hanging out horizontally, and some of them even growing with their tops downward. These trees were cedars and pines; and we could perceive also the knotted limbs of huge cacti protruding from the crevices of the rocks. We could see the mezcal, or wild maguey plant, growing against the cliff—its scarlet leaves contrasting finely with the dark foliage of the cedars and cacti. Some of these plants stood out on the very brow of the overhanging precipice, and their long curving blades gave a singular character to the landscape. Along the face of the dark cliffs all was rough, and gloomy, and picturesque. How different was the scene below! Here everything looked soft, and smiling, and beautiful. There were broad stretches of woodland, where the thick foliage of the trees met and clustered together, so that it looked like the surface of the earth itself; but we knew it was only the green leaves, for here and there were spots of brighter green, that we saw were glades covered with grassy turf. The leaves of the trees were of different colours, for it was now late in the autumn. Some were yellow, and some of a deep claret colour. Some were bright red, and some of a beautiful maroon; and there were green, and brighter green, and others of a silvery, whitish hue. All these colours were mingled together, and blended into each other, like the flowers upon a rich carpet.

Near the centre of the valley was a large shining object, which we knew to be water. It was evidently a lake of crystal purity, and smooth as a mirror. The sun was now up to meridian height, and his yellow beams falling upon its surface caused it to gleam like a sheet of gold. We could not trace the outlines of the water—for the trees partially hid it from our view—but we saw that the smoke that had at first attracted us rose up somewhere from the western shore of the lake.

We returned to the camp, where we had left our companions. It was now agreed that we should all ride down the side of the barranca together,

until we could find a place to descend into it. It was evident some such place existed, else, how could they have got in who had kindled the fire there?

We left the Mexicans in camp with our mules, and all the rest of us having mounted our horses, rode off together. We went by the eastern side, keeping well back upon the plain, so that we might not be seen until we discovered what sort of people were in the valley. When we had got opposite to where the smoke was still curling up, we stopped; and two of us, dismounting, crawled forward to the very edge of the precipice. We took care to keep some bushes, that grew along the brink, between ourselves and the lake. At length we were able to get a good view of everything below; and a very strange sight that was,—at least it was very strange in such a place, where it was so little expected. There was a large lake—as I have already stated—and on its opposite side, not over a hundred yards from its shore, was a fine-looking log-house, with other smaller ones standing in the rear. There were rail-fences around them, and a cleared space divided into fields, some of which appeared to be under cultivation, while others were green and filled with flocks of animals. The whole picture was exactly like a snug farm-house, with its stables and other outhouses, with its garden and fields, and horses and cattle! The distance was too great for us to distinguish what sort of cattle they were, but there appeared to be many kinds, both red, and black, and speckled. We could see several figures of men and boys—four of them in all—moving about the enclosures, and there was a woman near the door of the house. It was impossible in the distance to tell whether they were white people, but we never imagined for a moment they could be Indians. No Indian could have built such a house. Of course we were filled with astonishment at finding such a picture in so unexpected a place; and a beautiful picture it was to our eyes, fresh as we were from looking upon the barren desert. The lake was smooth as a mirror; the sun was shining upon it, and we could see upon its farther shore several large animals standing up to their knee in the water.

There were many other striking objects which met our eyes, but we had no time to dwell upon them, and we crawled back again to our companions.

It was at once agreed that we should go still farther down, and endeavour

to find a road leading into this most singular oasis. We thought we could distinguish a sort of depression in the plain near the lower end of the valley, and for this point we directed our course. After riding a few miles farther we reached the place where the stream issued out in an easterly direction. There sure enough, was the very road we were in search of, winding down along the bank of the stream, and as if carved out from the face of the precipice. It was not much wider than the track of a wagon, but was of very easy descent. We did not hesitate a moment, but commenced riding downward.

Chapter Four.

The Strange Settlement.

We were soon in the bottom of the valley, where we followed a plain track that led along the banks of the rivulet. We knew that that would direct us up to the lake, where we should get a view of the house. We were astonished at the great variety of trees which we saw in the woods; but there appeared to be almost as great a variety of beautiful birds, that fluttered among the leaves as we rode forward.

We came at length within sight of the opening in which the house and lake were situated. It was prudent to make another reconnoissance before we advanced farther; and two of us, again dismounting, stole cautiously forward through a thicket of leafy Shrubs. The house and all its grounds lay before us.

It was a log-house—such as are met with in the western states of America—and well constructed. There was a garden at one end, and fields on all sides. These fields were, as we had supposed, some of them under cultivation. We noticed one with a crop of Indian corn, and another of wheat. But what most astonished us was the kind of animals we saw in the enclosures. One would have thought at first sight that they were the animals usually seen around an English or American farm-house,—that is to say, horses, cattle, sheep, goats, hogs, and poultry. You may fancy, then, our surprise, when, on looking narrowly at them, we could not make out a single animal exactly resembling any one of the above, with the

exception of horses; and even these were unlike the common kind, for they were smaller, and spotted all over like hounds! We knew that they were *mustangs*—the wild horses of the Desert.

We glanced at the animals we had taken for black cattle. What were they but buffaloes! Buffaloes penned up in fields, and not heeding the human beings that passed shouting among them! More than all, we now saw that two animals yoked to the plough were of the same species,—a pair of huge buffalo bulls; and they were working with all the quietness and regularity of oxen!

Another kind of large animals drew our attention, still taller than the buffaloes. We saw several of them standing quietly in the water of the lake, in which their huge bodies and branching horns were shadowed as in a mirror. These we knew to be elk—the great American elk. We saw several kinds of deer, and antelopes with their short pronged horns, and animals that resembled these last in size—but with immense curving horns like those of the ram—and other animals like goats or sheep. We saw some without tails, having the appearance of pigs, and others resembling foxes and dogs. We could see fowls of different kinds moving about the doors, and among others we distinguished the tall, upright form of the wild turkey. The whole picture looked like the collection of some zoological garden or menagerie.

Two men were seen,—one a tall, white man, with a somewhat florid complexion. The other was a short and very thick-set negro. The latter was by the plough. There were two younger men, or lads nearly grown. A woman sat by the door engaged in some occupation, and near her were two little girls, no doubt her daughters.

But the sight which was strangest of all, both to my companion and myself, was what appeared in front of the house, and around the little porch where the woman was sitting. It was a fearful sight to look upon. First there were two large black bears, perfectly loose, and playing with each other! Then there were several smaller animals, that we had at first taken for dogs, but that we now recognised, by their bushy tails, sharp snouts, and short erect ears, to have at least as much of the wolf as dog in them. They were of that kind often met with among the Indians, and might more properly be called dog-wolves than wolf-dogs. There were at

least half-a-dozen of them sauntering about. But the most fearful-looking of all were two animals of a tawny red colour, that lay in crouching attitudes within the porch, almost at the feet of the woman. Their round, cat-like heads and ears, their short black muzzles, their white throats, and pale reddish breasts, told us what they were at a glance.

“Panthers!” ejaculated my companion, drawing a long breath, and looking at me with a puzzled air. Yes; they were panthers—so called by the hunters, but more properly cougars—the *felis concolor* of the naturalists—the lion of America.

In the midst of all these fierce creatures, the two young girls were moving about, apparently unconcerned at their presence, while the animals appeared equally unconcerned about them! The whole scene reminded us of the fanciful pictures, we had seen, of that time promised in the Sacred Book, when all the earth shall be at peace, and “the lion shall lie down with the lamb.”

We did not stop to see more. We were satisfied, and went back for our companions. In five minutes after, the whole of us entered the clearing, and rode up to the house. Our sudden appearance produced consternation on all sides. The men shouted to each other—the horses neighed—the dogs howled and barked hoarsely—and the fowls mingled their voices in the clamour. We were taken, no doubt, for a party of Indians; but we were not long in making it understood who and what we were. As soon as our explanations were given, the white man invited us, in the politest manner, to alight, and partake of his hospitality. At the same time he gave orders for our dinner to be prepared; and, desiring us to lead our horses into one of the enclosures, he commenced throwing corn into a large wooden trough. In this he was assisted by the negro, who was his servant, and the two young lads, who appeared to be his sons.

As yet we had not ceased to wonder. Everything around us was strange and inexplicable. The animals, which none of us had ever seen, except in their wild state, were as tame and gentle as farm cattle; and we noticed some new species at every turn. There were strange plants too, growing in the fields and garden, and vines trained upon espaliers, and corn-cribs filled with yellow corn, and dove-cotes, and martin-boxes, with swallows

twittering around them. All formed a curious but pleasing picture.

We had sauntered about for an hour, when we were summoned to dinner.

“Follow me, gentlemen,” said our host, as he led the way to the house. We entered, and seated ourselves around a good-sized table, upon which smoked several savoury and inviting dishes. Some of these we recognised as old acquaintances, while others were new to us. We found venison-steaks, with buffalo tongues and hump-ribs,—the daintiest portions of that animal. There were fresh-cooked fowls, and eggs of the wild turkey boiled and dressed in omelettes. There were bread and butter, and milk and rich cheese, all set out to tempt our appetites, that, to say the truth, just at that time did not require much coaxing to do justice to the viands before us. We were all quite hungry, for we had eaten nothing since morning. A large kettle simmered by the fire. What could it contain? thought we; surely, not tea or coffee. In a short time we were satisfied on this head. Bowls were placed before us; and into these the hot liquid was poured, which we found to be a very palatable as well as wholesome beverage—the tea of the sassafras root. It was sweetened by maple-sugar; and each helped himself to cream to his own liking. We had all tasted such tea before, and many of our party liked it as well as the tea of China.

While we continued to eat, we could not help noticing the strangeness of everything around us. All the articles of furniture were of unique and rude description; and it was plain that most of them had been manufactured upon the spot. The vessels were of several sorts and of different materials. There were cups and dishes, and bowls cut out of shells of the gourd or calabash; and there were spoons and ladles of the same material. There were wooden platters and trays carved and scooped out of the solid tree. And more numerous were the vessels of red pottery, of different shapes and for different uses. Of these there were large pots for cooking, and jars for holding water, and jugs of various dimensions.

The chairs, too, were all of rude construction; but admirably adapted to their purpose. Most of them were covered with raw-hide seats, which stretched up the back in a slanting line, and thus rendered them firm and commodious. A few lighter ones—evidently intended as the furniture of

the inner rooms—(there were but two in the house), had seats woven out of the leaves of the palmetto.

There was very little attempt at ornament upon the walls—if we except some curiosities that were placed there, all of which were evidently the productions of the valley itself. There were stuffed birds of rare and bright plumage, and huge horns of animals, with two or three shells of the land tortoise carefully polished. There were no mirrors nor pictures, and not a book to be seen, except *one*; that was a medium-sized volume, placed on a small table by itself, and evidently preserved with great care as it had been neatly and elaborately bound in the skin of a young antelope. I had the curiosity to open this book, shortly after entering. I read upon the title-page the words “Holy Bible.” This circumstance increased the interest I already felt in our host and his family; and I sat down with feelings of confidence, for I knew that even in this remote place we were enjoying the hospitality of a Christian.

During the meal our host with his family were present. We had seen them all on our arrival, for they had run forward to greet and welcome us; but we became puzzled as we listened to the conversation of the children. We heard with surprise that we were the first white men they had seen for a period of nearly ten years! They were all beautiful children—robust, and full of life and animation. There were two boys—Frank and Harry,—so their mother called them—and two girls. Of the girls one was of a very dark complexion—in fact, quite a brunette, and with a Spanish expression of face. The other was as fair as her sister was dark. The fair one was a beautiful little creature with flowing yellow hair and deep blue eyes, with long, dark lashes. Her name was Mary. That of the sister was Luisa. They were both very pretty, but very unlike each other; and, what was odd to me, they appeared to be about the same age and size. The boys were also of like size, though both much older than their sisters. They appeared to be seventeen or more, but I could not have guessed which was the elder. Harry, with his fair curling hair, and red manly face, bore a strong resemblance to his father; while the other was darker, and altogether more like the mother. She herself did not appear to be much over thirty-five years of age, and was still a beautiful and evidently a light-hearted woman.

Our host was a man of about forty—a tall, well formed man, with light

ruddy complexion, and hair that had been fair and curling, but was now somewhat grey. He had neither beard nor whiskers; but, on the contrary, his chin bore evidence that he had freshly shaved himself that very day; and his whole appearance was that of a man who regularly attended to the duties of the toilet. There was also about him a gentlemanlike bearing; and his address and conversation soon convinced all of us that we were in the company of an educated man.

The dress of the whole family was peculiar. The man himself wore a hunting-shirt and leggings of tanned deerskin, and not unlike that of our own hunters. The boys were similarly attired, but we could see that they had a sort of homespun linen garment underneath. The female part of the family were dressed in clothes, part of which were of the same homespun, and part of a fine skin, that of the fawn, dressed to the softness of a glove. Several hats were lying about; and we noticed that they were curiously fabricated from the leaves of the palmetto.

While we were eating, the negro appeared at the door, and, looking in, eyed us with glances of extreme curiosity. He was a short, stout man, black as jet, and apparently about forty years old. His head was covered with a thick crop of small curls, that appeared to form an even surface, making the outline of the skull as round as a ball. His teeth were very large and white, and anything but fierce—as he showed them only when he smiled, and that he did almost continually. There was something very pleasing in the expression of his rich black eyes, which were never at rest, but kept always rolling on both sides of his flat and expanded nose.

“Cudjo! drive out these animals,” said the woman—or rather lady, we should call her—for she was evidently entitled to be so styled. Her command, or more properly request—for she had made it in that tone—was obeyed with alacrity. Cudjo leaped into the floor, and, after a short while, succeeded in turning out the wolf-dogs, and panthers, and other strange animals, that up to this time had been snarling at each other, among our feet, to the no small terror of several of our party.

All these things were so strange, that we watched them with interest and curiosity. At length our meal was ended; and as we were most anxious to have everything explained to us, we signified this desire to our host.

“Wait until night,” said he. “Around the cheerful log-fire I will tell you my story. Meanwhile you all need other refreshment than eating. Come to the lake then, and take a bath. The sun is high and warm. A bath will refresh you after your dusty travel.”

So saying, he stepped out of the cottage, and proceeded towards the lake, followed by all our party. A few minutes after, we were refreshing ourselves in the crystal water.

During the remainder of the day, we occupied ourselves at different employments. Some went back to the mountain-foot for the mules and Mexicans; while the rest of us strolled about the house and grounds—every now and then stumbling upon some new object of wonder.

We were impatient for the coming of night, for we were wound up to a pitch of extreme curiosity, and longed for an explanation of what we saw around us.

Night came at length; and after an excellent supper, we all sat around the cheerful fire, to listen to the strange history of Robert Rolfe—for that was the name of our host.

Chapter Five.

Rolfe’s Early History.

“Brothers,” began he, “I am of your own race, although I am not an American. I am an Englishman. I was born in the south of that country something more than forty years ago. My father was a yeoman—an independent, or, as he was sometimes styled, a gentleman-farmer. Unfortunately, he was a man of too much ambition for his class. He was determined that I, his only son, should be a gentleman in the ordinary sense of the word; that is, that I should be educated in all those expensive habits and accomplishments, which are sure to lead men of moderate fortune along the direct road to ruin. This was not wise of my father; but it would not be graceful in me to reflect upon a fault, that consisted in his too great fondness for myself. I believe it was the only fault which my good, kind father, was ever charged with. Beyond this

somewhat foolish ambition, his character was without reproach among men.

“I was sent to those schools where I should meet the scions of the aristocracy. I was taught to dance, to ride, and to play. I was allowed spending money at will, and could call for champagne, and drink it, with any of my companions. At the end of my college life, I was sent upon my travels. I made the tour of the Rhine, of France, and Italy; and after some years spent in this way, I returned to England—sent for, to be present at the death of my father.

“I was now sole heir to his property, which was by no means inconsiderable for a man of his class. I soon reduced it in bulk. I must needs live in London, where I could enjoy the company of many of my old school and college companions. I was welcome amongst them while my purse held out—for many of them were needy men—lawyers without briefs, and officers with nothing to live upon but their pay. Of course, such men are fond of play. They have nothing to lose, and all to win; and it was but a short year or two, until they had won from me the best part of my patrimonial property. I was on the eve of becoming a bankrupt. But one thing saved me—*she* saved me!”

Here our host pointed to his wife, who sat surrounded by her family at one side of the great fireplace. The lady held down her eyes and smiled; while the children, who had been listening attentively, all turned towards her with looks of interest.

“Yes,” continued he, “Mary saved me. We had been playmates together in earlier life; and at this time we again met. We felt an affection for each other. It ended in our getting married.

“Fortunately, my dissipated life had not destroyed, as it often does with men, all my virtuous principles. Many of these, that had been early instilled into my mind by the teachings of a good mother, still remained fixed and true.

“As soon as we were married, I resolved to change altogether my mode of life. But this is not so easily done as men imagine. Once you are surrounded by associates, such as mine were—once you are plunged

into debts and obligations—it requires both courage and virtuous determination to meet and discharge them. It requires a terrible effort to free one's self from evil companions, whose interest it is, that you should still remain as profligate as themselves. But I was resolved; and, thanks to the counsels of my Mary, I succeeded in carrying out my resolve.

“To pay my debts, I was compelled to sell the property left me by my father. This done, and every bill discharged, I found myself worth only five hundred pounds.

“My little wife, there, had brought me the sum of twenty-five hundred; and this still left us three thousand pounds with which to begin the world. Three thousand pounds is not much to live upon in England—that is, among the class of people with whom I had hitherto associated; and after spending several years in trying to increase it, I found that it was every day growing less. I found, after three years engaged in farming, that my three thousand pounds was only worth two. I was told that this sum would go much farther in America—that it would purchase me a fine home—and, with thoughts of providing well for my family, I embarked with my wife and children for New York.

“There I found the very man whom I wanted—that was, some one to advise me how to begin life in the New World. My predilections were in favour of agriculture; and these were encouraged by the advice of him whom I had met. He told me that it would be unwise for me to lay out my money upon new or uncleared land; as, with my want of experience as a farmer, I would have to pay more for clearing it of its timber than the land would be worth. ‘It would be better for you,’ continued my new acquaintance, ‘to buy a tract already cleared and fenced, with a good house upon it, where you will be at home at once.’

“I admitted the truth of all this reasoning; but would my money be sufficient for this? ‘Oh, yes,’ answered he; and then he told me that he ‘knew of a farm in the State of Virginia,’—a plantation, as he called it, that would suit me exactly. It could be purchased for five hundred pounds. With the remainder of my money I should be able to stock it handsomely.

“After some farther conversation, I found that the plantation belonged to himself. So much the better, thought I; and in the end I bought it from

him, and set out immediately after for my new home.”



Chapter Six.

The Virginia Plantation.

“I found the farm everything he had described it—a large plantation with a good wooden house, and well-enclosed fields. I immediately set about ‘stocking’ it with my remaining cash. What was my surprise to find that I must spend the greater part of this in *buying men*! Yes—there was no alternative. There were no labourers to be had in the place—except such as were slaves—and these I must either buy for myself, or hire from their masters, which, in point of morality, amounted to the same thing.

“Thinking that I might treat them with at least as much humanity, as they appeared to receive from others, I chose the former course; and purchasing a number of blacks, both men and women, I began life as a planter. After such a bargain as that, I did not deserve to prosper; and I did not prosper, as you shall see.

“My first crop failed; in fact, it scarcely returned me the seed. The second was still worse; and to my mortification I now ascertained the cause of the failure. I had come into possession of a ‘worn-out’ farm. The land looked well, and on sight you would have called it a fertile tract. When I first saw it myself, I was delighted with my purchase—which seemed indeed a great bargain for the small sum of money I had paid. But appearances are often deceptive; and never was there a greater deception than my beautiful plantation in Virginia. It was utterly worthless. It had been cropped for many years with maize, and cotton, and tobacco. These had been regularly carried off the land, and not a stalk or blade suffered to return to the soil. As a natural fact, known to almost every one, the vegetable or organic matter will thus in time become exhausted, and nothing will remain but inorganic or purely mineral substances, which of themselves cannot nourish vegetation, and of course can give no crop. This is the reason why manure is spread upon land—the manure consisting of substances that are for the most part organic, and contain the principles of life and vegetation. Of course, gentlemen, these things are known to you; but you will pardon my digression, as my children are listening to me, and I never lose an opportunity of instructing them in

facts that may hereafter be useful to them.

“Well, as I have said, I had no crops, or rather very bad ones, for the first and second years. On the third it was, if possible, still worse; and on the fourth and fifth no better than ever. I need hardly add that by this time I was ruined, or very nearly so. The expense of feeding and clothing my poor negroes had brought me in debt to a considerable amount. I could not have lived longer on my worthless plantation, even had I desired it. I was compelled, in order to pay my debts, to sell out everything—farm, cattle, and negroes. No, I did not sell all. There was one honest fellow to whom both Mary and I had become attached. I was resolved not to sell him into slavery. He had served us faithfully. It was he who first told me how I had been tricked; and, sympathising in my misfortune, he endeavoured—both by industry on his own part, and by encouraging his fellow-labourers—to make the ungrateful soil yield me a return. His efforts had been vain, but I determined to repay him for his rude but honest friendship. I gave him his liberty. He would not accept it. He would not part from us. He is there!”

As the narrator said this, he pointed to Cudjo, who stood hanging by the door-post; and, delighted at these compliments which were being paid him, was showing his white teeth in a broad and affectionate smile.

Rolfe continued:—

“When the sale was completed, and the account settled, I found that I had just five hundred pounds left. I had now some experience in farming; and I resolved to move out to the West—into the great valley of the Mississippi. I knew that there my five hundred pounds would still set me up again in a farm as big as I wanted, where the timber was still growing upon it.

“Just at this time my eye fell upon some flaming advertisements in the newspapers, about a new city which was then being built at the junction of the Ohio and Mississippi rivers. It was called ‘Cairo,’ and as it was situated on the fork between two of the largest and most navigable rivers in the world, it could not fail in a few years to become one of the largest cities in the world. So said the advertisement. There were maps of the new city everywhere, and on these were represented theatres, and

banks, and court-houses, and churches of different religious denominations. There were lots offered for sale, and, along with these, small tracts of land adjoining the town—so that the inhabitants might combine the occupations of merchant and agriculturist. These lots were offered very cheap, thought I; and I did not rest, night nor day, until I had purchased one of them, and also a small farm in the adjacent country.

“Almost as soon as I had made the purchase, I set out to take possession. Of course, I took with me my wife and children. I had now three—the two eldest being twins and about nine years old. I did not intend to return to Virginia any more. Our faithful Cudjo accompanied us to our far Western home.

“It was a severe journey, but not so severe as the trial that awaited us on our arrival at ‘Cairo.’ As soon as I came within sight of the place, I saw, to use an expressive phrase, that I had been ‘sold’ again. There was but one house, and that stood upon the only ground that was not a swamp. Nearly the whole site of the proposed city was under water, and the part not wholly inundated consisted of a dark morass, covered with trees and tall reeds! There were no theatres, no churches, no court-houses, no banks, nor any likelihood there ever would be, except such as might be built to keep back the water from the only house in the place—a sort of rough hotel, filled with swearing boatmen.

“I had landed, of course; and, after putting up at the hotel, proceeded in search of my ‘property.’ I found my town-lot in a marsh, which took me over the ankles in mud. As for my farm, I was compelled to get a boat to visit it; and after sailing all over it without being able to touch bottom, I returned to the hotel, heartless and disgusted.

“By the next steamboat that came along, I embarked for Saint Louis—where I sold both lot and farm for a mere trifle.

“I need not say that I was mortified at all this. I was almost heart-broken when I reflected on my repeated failures, and thought of my young wife and children. I could have bitterly cursed both America and the Americans, had that been of any use; and yet such a thing would have been as unjust as immoral. It is true I had been twice outrageously swindled; but the same thing had happened to me in my own country,

and I had suffered in the same way by those who professed to be my friends. There are bad men in every country—men willing to take advantage of generosity and inexperience. It does not follow that all are so; and we hope far less than the half—for it must be remembered that the bad points of one country are more certain to be heard of in another than its good ones. When I look to the schemes and speculations which have been got up in England, and which have enriched a few accomplished rogues, by the ruin of thousands of honest men, I cannot, as an Englishman, accuse our American cousins of being greater swindlers than ourselves. It is true I have been deceived by them, but it was from the want of proper judgment in myself, arising from a foolish and ill-directed education. I should have been equally ill-treated in the purchase of a horse at Tattersall's, or a pound of tea in Piccadilly, had I been equally unacquainted with the value of the articles. We both, as nations, have erred. Neither of us can, with grace, cast a stone at the other; and as for myself, why, look there!" said Rolfe, smiling and pointing to his family, "two of my children only are Englishmen; the others are little Yankees. Almost every Englishman can say something similar. Why, then, should we sow jealousy between them?"

Chapter Seven.

The Caravan and its Fate.

Our host continued:—

"Well, my friends, I was in Saint Louis. I had now left out of my three thousand pounds not quite an hundred; and this would soon melt away should I remain idle. What was I to do?

"There happened to be a young Scotchman at the hotel where I had put up. He was, like myself, a stranger in Saint Louis; and being from the 'old country,' we soon became acquainted, and, very naturally under the circumstances, shared each other's confidence. I told him of my blunders in Virginia and Cairo, and I believe that he really felt sympathy for me. In return, he detailed to me part of his past history, and also his plans for the future. He had been for several years employed in a copper mine, away

near the centre of the Great American Desert, in the mountains called Los Mimbres, that lie west of the Del Norte river.

“They are a wonderful people these same Scotch. They are but a small nation, yet their influence is felt everywhere upon the globe. Go where you will, you will find them in positions of trust and importance—always prospering, yet, in the midst of prosperity, still remembering, with strong feelings of attachment, the land of their birth. They manage the marts of London—the commerce of India—the fur trade of America—and the mines of Mexico. Over all the American wilderness you will meet them, side by side with the backwoods-pioneer himself, and even pushing him from his own ground. From the Gulf of Mexico to the Arctic Sea, they have impressed with their Gaelic names rock, river, and mountain; and many an Indian tribe owns a Scotchman for its chief. I say, again, they are a wonderful people.

“Well; my Saint Louis Scotchman had come from his mine upon a visit of business to the United States, and was now on his return by Saint Louis and Santa Fé. His wife was along with him—a fine-looking, young Mexican woman, with only one child. He was waiting for a small caravan of Spanish people, who were about to start for New Mexico. With these he intended to travel, so as to be in safety from the Indians along the route.

“As soon as he understood my situation, he advised me to accompany him—offering me a lucrative situation in the mine, of which he was the sole manager.

“Disgusted as I then was with the treatment I had received in the United States, I embraced his proposal with alacrity; and, under his superintendence, I set about making preparations for the long journey that lay before us. The money I had left, enabled me to equip myself in a tolerable manner. I bought a wagon and two pair of stout oxen. This was to carry my wife and children, with such furniture and provisions as would be necessary on the journey. I had no need to hire a teamster, as our faithful Cudjo was to accompany us, and I knew there was no better hand to manage a team of oxen than Cudjo. For myself I purchased a horse, a rifle, with all the paraphernalia that are required by those who cross the great prairies. My boys, Harry and Frank, had also a small rifle each,

which we had brought with us from Virginia: and Harry was very proud of the manner in which he could handle his.

“Everything being prepared, we bade adieu to Saint Louis, and set forth upon the wild prairies.

“Ours was but a small caravan, as the large one which crosses annually to Santa Fé had taken its departure some weeks before. There were about twenty men of us, and less than half that number of wagons. The men were nearly all Mexicans, who had been to the United States to procure some pieces of cannon, for which they had been sent by the governor of Santa Fé. They had the cannon along with them—two brass howitzers, with their carriages and caissons.

“My friends, I need not tell you the various incidents that befell us, in crossing the great plains and rivers that lie between Saint Louis and Santa Fé. Upon the plains we fell in with the Pawnees; and near the crossing of the Arkansas, we encountered a small tribe of Cheyennes; but neither of these bands offered us any molestation. When we were nearly two months on our journey, the party left the usual trail taken by the traders, and struck across to one of the head tributaries of the Canadian river. This they did to avoid meeting the Arapahoes, who were hostile to the Mexican people. We kept down the banks of this stream as far as the Canadian itself; and, then turning westward, travelled up the latter. We travelled upon the right or southern bank, for we had forded the Canadian on reaching it.

“It soon became apparent that we had got into a very rough and difficult country. It was the morning of the second day, after we had turned westward up the Canadian river. We were making but slow progress, as the trail we had to follow was intersected at frequent intervals with ‘arroyos’ running into the river from the south. Many of these were deep ditches, although quite dry; and every now and then we were compelled to stop the whole train until we levelled in the banks, and made a road for the wagons to pass.

“In crossing one of these ruts, the tongue of my wagon was broken; and Cudjo and I, having loosed out the oxen, set about splicing it the best way we could. The rest of the train was ahead of us, and kept moving on.

My friend, the young Scotchman, seeing that we had stopped, came galloping back, and offered to remain and assist us. I declined his offer, telling him to move on with the rest, as I would easily overtake them; at all events, I would get up, whenever they halted for their night camp. It was not unfrequent for a single wagon, with its attendants, thus to stay behind the rest, to make some repairs. When it did not come up to the night encampment, a party would go back early the next morning to ascertain the cause of the delay. For several years, before the time I am telling you about, there had been no trouble with the Indians in crossing the prairies; and consequently the people of the caravans had grown less cautious. Besides, we were then in a part of the country where Indians had been seldom seen—as it was an extremely desert place, without grass or game of any description. On this account—and knowing that Cudjo was an excellent carpenter—I had no fears but that I could be up with the others before night. So, by my persuasion, the young Scotchman left me, and rode on to look after his own wagons.

“After about an hour’s hammering and splicing, Cudjo and I got the tongue all right again; and ‘hitching up’ the oxen, we drove on after our companions. We had not gone a mile, when the shoeing of one of the wheels—that had shrunk from the extreme dryness of the atmosphere—rolled off; and the felloes came very near flying asunder. We were luckily able to prevent this, by suddenly stopping, and setting a prop under the body of the wagon. This, as you may perceive, was a much more serious accident than the breaking of the tongue; and at first I thought of galloping forward, and asking some of our companions to come back to my assistance. But in consequence of my inexperience upon the prairies, I knew that I had given them considerable trouble along the route, at which some of them had murmured—being Mexicans—and in one or two instances had refused to assist me. I might bring back the young Scotchman, it was true, but—‘Come!’ cried I, ‘it is not yet as bad as Cairo. Come, Cudjo! we shall do it ourselves, and be indebted to no one.’

“‘Dat’s right, Massa Roff!’ replied Cudjo; ‘ebery man put him own shoulder to him own wheel, else de wheel no run good.’

“And so the brave fellow and I stripped off our coats, and set to work in earnest. My dear Mary here, who had been brought up a delicate lady, but could suit herself gracefully to every situation, helped us all she

could, cheering us every now and then with an allusion to Cairo, and our farm under the water. It has always a comforting effect, to persons in situations of difficulty to reflect that they might still be worse off, and such reflections will often prop up the drooping spirits, and lead to success in conquering the difficulty. 'Never give up' is a good old motto, and God will help them who show perseverance and energy.

"So did it happen with us. By dint of wedging and hammering we succeeded in binding the wheel as fast as ever; but it was near night before we had finished the job. When we had got it upon the axle again, and were ready for the road, we saw, with some apprehension, that the sun was setting. We knew we could not travel by night, not knowing what road to take; and, as we were close to water, we resolved to stay where we were until morning.

"We were up before day, and, having cooked and eaten our breakfast, moved forward upon the track made by the caravan. We wondered that none of our companions had come back during the night—as this is usual in such cases,—but we expected every moment to meet some of them returning to look after us. We travelled on, however, until noon, and still none of them appeared. We could see before us a rough tract of country with rocky hills, and some trees growing in the valleys; and the trail we were following evidently led among these.

"As we pushed forward, we heard among the hills a loud crashing report like the bursting of a bombshell. What could it mean? We knew there were some shells along with the howitzers. Were our comrades attacked by Indians, and was it one of the cannon they had fired upon them? No; that could not be. There was but one report, and I knew that the discharge of a shell from a howitzer must give two,—that which accompanies the discharge, and then the bursting of the bomb itself. Could one of the shells have burst by accident? That was more likely; and we halted, and listened for further sounds. We stopped for nearly half an hour, but could hear nothing, and we then moved on again. We were filled with apprehension—less from the report we had heard, than from the fact that none of the men had come back to see what delayed us. We still followed the track of the wagons. We saw that they must have made a long march on the preceding day, for it was near sunset when we entered among the hills, and as yet we had not reached their camp of the

night before. At length we came in sight of it,—and oh! horror! what a sight! My blood runs cold when I recall it to my memory. There were the wagons—most of them with their tilts torn off, and part of their contents scattered over the ground. There were the cannons too, with fires smouldering near them, but not a human being was in sight! Yes, there were human beings—dead men lying over the ground! and living things—wolves they were—growling, and quarrelling, and tearing the flesh from their bodies! Some of the animals that had belonged to the caravan were also prostrate—dead horses, mules, and oxen. The others were not to be seen.

“We were all horror-struck at the sight. We saw at once that our companions had been attacked and slaughtered by some band of savage Indians. We would have retreated, but it was now too late, for we were close in to the camp, before we had seen it. Had the savages still been upon the ground, retreat would be of no avail. But I knew that they must have gone some time, from the havoc the wolves had made in their absence.

“I left my wife by our wagon, where Harry and Frank remained with their little rifles ready to guard her, and along with Cudjo I went forward to view the bloody scene. We chased the wolves from their repast. There was a pack of more than fifty of these hideous animals, and they only ran a short distance from us. On reaching the ground we saw that the bodies were those of our late comrades, but they were all so mutilated that we could not distinguish a single one of them. They had every one been scalped by the Indians; and it was fearful to look upon them as they lay. I saw the fragments of one of the shells that had burst in the middle of the camp, and had torn two or three of the wagons to pieces. There had not been many articles of merchandise in the wagons, as it was not a traders’ caravan; but such things as they carried, that could be of any value to the Indians, had been taken away. The other articles, most of them heavy and cumbersome things, were lying over the ground, some of them broken. It was evident the savages had gone off in a hurry. Perhaps they had been frightened by the bursting of the shell, not knowing what it was, and from its terrible effects—which they no doubt witnessed and felt—believing it to be the doing of the Great Spirit.

“I looked on all sides for my friend, the young Scotchman, but I could not

distinguish his body from the rest. I looked around, too, for his wife—who was the only woman besides Mary that accompanied the caravan. Her body was not to be seen. ‘No doubt,’ said I to Cudjo, ‘the savages have carried her off alive.’ At this moment we heard the howls and hoarse worrying of dogs, with the fiercer snarling of wolves, as though the dogs were battling with these animals. The noises came from a thicket near the camp. We knew that the miner had brought with him two large dogs from Saint Louis. It must be they. We ran in the direction of the thicket, and dashed in among the bushes. Guided by the noises, we kept on, and soon came in sight of the objects that had attracted us. Two large dogs, foaming and torn and covered with blood, were battling against several wolves, and keeping them off from some dark object that lay among the leaves. We saw that the dark object was a woman, and clinging around her neck, and screaming with terror, was a beautiful child! At a glance we saw that the woman was dead, and—”

Here the narrative of our host was suddenly interrupted. McKnight, the miner, who was one of our party, and who had appeared labouring under some excitement during the whole of the recital, suddenly sprang to his feet, exclaiming—

“O God! my wife—my poor wife! Oh! Rolfe—Rolfe—do you not know me?”

“McKnight!” cried Rolfe, springing up with an air of astonishment, “McKnight! it is he indeed!”

“My wife!—my poor wife!” continued the miner, in accents of sorrow. “I knew they had killed her. I saw her remains afterwards—but my child! Oh, Rolfe! what of my child?”

“She is *there!*” said our host, pointing to the darkest of the two girls, and the next moment the miner had lifted the little Luisa in his arms, and was covering her with his kisses. He was her father!

Chapter Eight.

The Miner’s Story.

It would be very difficult, my young readers, to describe to you the scene which followed this unexpected recognition. The family had all risen to their feet, and with cries and tears in their eyes clung around the little Luisa as though they were about to lose her for ever. And, indeed, it is likely that an indistinct thought of this kind had flitted across their minds, when they saw that she was no longer their sister—for they had almost forgotten that she was not so, and they loved her as well as if she had been. Up to this time none of them had thought of her but as a sister; and Harry, with whom she was a great favourite, used to call her his “dark sister,” while the younger, Mary, was known as the “fair” one in the midst of the group stood the little brunette, like the rest, overwhelmed with singular emotions, but calmer, and apparently more mistress of her feelings, than any of them.

The traders and hunters were all upon their feet congratulating McKnight on the happy discovery; while each of them shook hands with our host and his wife, whom they now remembered having heard of, as well as the story of the massacre. Old Cudjo leaped over the floor, whipping the panthers and wolf-dogs, and cutting various capers, while the very animals themselves howled with a sort of fierce joy. Our host went into an inner apartment of the cabin, and presently returned with a large jar of brown earthenware. Cups cut out of the calabash were set upon the table; and into these a red liquid was poured from the jar, and we were all invited to drink. What was our surprise on tasting the beverage to find that it was wine—wine in the middle of the desert! But it was so—excellent wine—homemade, as our host informed us—pressed from the wild muscadine grapes that grew plentifully in his valley.

As soon as we had all passed the cups of wine, and had got fairly seated again, McKnight, at the request of Rolfe, took up the thread of the story, in order to detail how he had escaped from the Indians on that fearful night. His story was a short one and ran as follows:—

“After I left you,” said he, addressing Rolfe, “where you had broken your wagon, I rode on, and overtook the caravan. The road, as you may remember, became smooth and level; and as there appeared to be no good camping-ground nearer than the hills, we kept on for them without stopping. It was near sundown, when we reached the little stream where you saw the wagons. There, of course, we halted, and formed our camp.

I did not expect you to come in for an hour or so later, as I calculated that it would take you about that length of time to mend the tongue. We kindled fires, and, having cooked our supper and eaten it, were sitting around the logs chatting, smoking, and some of the Mexicans, as is their custom, playing at *monte*. We had put out no guard, as we had no expectation that there were Indians in that quarter. Some of the men said they had travelled the trail before; and had never met an Indian within fifty miles of the place. At length it became dark, and I began to grow uneasy about you, fearing you might not be able to make out our trail in the night. Leaving my wife and child by one of the fires I climbed a hill that looked in the direction you should have come; but I could see nothing for the darkness. I stood for some time listening, thinking I might hear the rattle of your wheels, or some one of you talking. All at once a yell broke upon my ears, that caused me to turn toward the camp with a feeling of consternation. I well knew the meaning of that yell. I knew it was the war-cry of the Arapahoes. I saw savage figures dashing about in the red glare of the fires. I heard shots and shouts, and screams and groans; and, among the rest, I recognised the voice of my wife calling me by name!

“I did not hesitate a moment, but ran down the hill, and flung myself into the thick of the fight, which was now raging fiercely. I had nothing with which to arm myself but a large knife, with which I struck on all sides, prostrating several of the savages. Here I fought for a moment, and there I ran, calling for my wife. I passed through among the wagons, and on all sides of the camp crying, ‘Luisa!’ There was no answer; she was nowhere to be seen. Again I was face to face with painted savages, and battling with desperation. Most of my comrades were soon killed, and I was forced among the bushes, and into the darkness, by one of the Indians, who pressed upon me with his spear. I felt the weapon pass through my thigh, and I fell impaled upon the shaft. The Indian fell above me; but, before he could struggle up again, I had thrust him through with my knife, and he lay senseless.

“I rose to my feet, and succeeded in drawing out the spear. I saw that the struggle had ceased around the fires; and, believing that my comrades, as well as my wife and child, were all dead, I turned my back upon the fires, and stole off into the thicket, determined to get as far as possible from the camp. I had not gone more than three hundred yards when I fell, exhausted with the loss of blood and the pain of my wound. I had fallen

near some rocks at the bottom of a precipice, where I saw there was a small crevice or cave. I had still strength enough left to enable me to reach this cave, and crawl into it; but I fainted as soon as the effort was over.

“I must have lain insensible for many hours. When I came to consciousness again, I saw that daylight was shining into the cave. I felt that I was very weak, and could scarcely move. My ghastly wound stared me in the face,—still undressed, but the blood had ceased flowing of its own accord. I tore up my shirt, and dressed it as well as I was able; and then, getting nearer to the mouth of the cave, I lay and listened. I could hear the voices of the Indians, though very indistinctly, in the direction of the camp. This continued for an hour or more; and then the rocks rang with a terrible explosion, which I knew to be the bursting of a shell. After that I could hear loud shouts, and soon after, the hurried trampling of many horses; and then all was silence. I thought at the time that the Indians had taken their departure; but I knew not what had caused them to go off in such a hurry. I found out afterwards. Your conjecture was right. They had thrown one of the bombs into the fire, and the fuse catching, had caused it to explode, killing several of their number. As they believed it to be the hand of the Great Spirit, they had hastily gathered up such plunder as was most desirable to them, and ridden away from the spot. I did not know this at the time, and I lay still in my cave. For several hours all was silence; but, as night drew near, I fancied I again heard noises about the camp, and I thought the Indians might not yet be gone.

“When darkness came, I would have crawled toward the camp, but I could not; and I lay all night in the cave, chafing with the pain of my wound, and listening to the howling of the wolves. That was a terrible night.

“Morning dawned again, and I could hear no sounds. I was now suffering dreadfully, both from hunger and thirst. I saw a well-known tree growing in front of the cave. I knew it, because the same tree is found upon the mountains of the Mimbres, near our mine. It was a species of pine, called by the Mexicans ‘piñon,’ whose cones afford food to thousands of the miserable savages who roam over the great western Desert from the Rocky Mountains to California. If I could only reach this tree, I might find some of its nuts upon the ground; and, with this hope, I dragged myself

painfully out of the cave. It was not twenty paces from the rocks where the tree grew; yet, with my weakness and the pain of my wound, I was nearly half an hour in reaching it. To my joy, I found the ground under it covered with cones. I was not long in stripping off the rinds of many of them, and getting the seeds, which I ate greedily, until I had satisfied my hunger.

“But another appetite far more terrible was craving me—I was tortured with thirst. Could I crawl as far as the camp? I knew that there I should find water in the stream; and, from the position of the cave, I knew I could not find it nearer. I must either reach it or die; and, with this thought to spur me on, I commenced the short journey of three hundred yards, although I was not certain I might live to see the end of it. I had not crawled six paces through the underwood, when a bunch of small white flowers attracted my attention. They were the flowers of the sorrel-tree—the beautiful lyonia—the very sight of which sent a thrill of gladness through my heart. I was soon under the tree, and, clutching one of its lowermost branches, I stripped it of its smooth, serrated leaves, and eagerly chewed them. Another and another branch were successively divested of their foliage, until the little tree looked as if a flock of goats had been breakfasting upon it. I lay for nearly an hour masticating the soft leaves, and swallowing their delicious and acid juice. At length my thirst was alleviated, and I fell asleep under the cool shadow of the lyonia.

“When I awoke again, I felt much stronger, and with new appetite to eat. The fever which had begun to threaten me was much allayed; and I knew this was to be attributed to the virtue of the leaves I had eaten—for besides relieving thirst, the sap of the sorrel-tree is a most potent febrifuge. Gathering a fresh quantity of the leaves, and tying them together, I again set out for the piñon-tree. I took the leaves with me, so that I should not have to make the return trip to the sorrel that night again. In a few minutes I had reached the end of my journey, and was busy among the cones. You laugh at my calling it a journey; but I assure you it was a most painful one to me, although it was not ten paces from one tree to the other. The slightest motion agonised me.

“That night I passed under the piñon, and in the morning, having made my breakfast of the seeds, I collected my pockets full, and set out again

for the sorrel-tree. Here I spent the day; and with a fresh cargo of leaves returned at night to the piñon, where I again slept.

“Thus, for four successive days and nights, I passed between these two brave trees, living upon the sustenance they afforded. The fever was luckily warded off by the leaves of the friendly *Lyonia*. My wound began to heal, and the pain left it. The wolves came at intervals; but, seeing my long knife, and that I still lived, they kept at a wary distance.

“Although the leaves of the sorrel assuaged my thirst, they did not satisfy it. I longed for a good draught of water; and, on the fourth day, I set out for the stream. I was now able to creep upon my hands and one knee, dragging the wounded limb after me. When I had got about half-way through the underwood, I came upon an object that almost congealed the blood in my veins. It was a human skeleton. I knew it was not that of a man—I knew it was—”

Here the voice of the miner became choked with sobs, and he was unable to finish the sentence. Nearly all in the room—even the rude hunters—wept as they beheld his emotion. After an effort he continued:—

“I saw that she had been buried; and I wondered at this, for I knew the Indians had not done it. I was never certain until this hour who had performed for her that sacred rite. I thought, however, it must have been you; for after I had recovered I went back upon the trail; and, not finding your wagon anywhere, I knew you must have come on to the camp, and gone away again. I looked in every direction to find which way you had gone; but, as you will remember, there was a heavy fall of rain shortly after, and that had obliterated every track. All this happened after I was able to get upon my feet, which was not for a month after the night of the massacre. But let me go back in my narrative to where I had found the remains of my poor wife.

“The wolves had torn the body from its grave. I looked for some vestige of my child. With my hands I dug down into the loose mould and leaves, which you had thrown over her body; but no infant was there. I crawled on to the camp. I found that, just as you have described it—except that the bodies were now bleaching skeletons, and the wolves had taken their departure. I searched around, on all sides, thinking I might find some

traces of my little Luisa; but in vain. 'The Indians have either carried the child away,' thought I, 'or the fierce wolves have devoured it altogether.'

"In one of the wagons I found an old mess-chest lying hid under some rubbish. It had escaped the hurried plunder of the savages. On opening it, I saw that it contained, among other things, some coffee and several pounds of jerked meat. This was a fortunate event, for the meat and coffee nourished me, until I was able to gather a sufficient quantity of the piñons.

"In this way I spent a whole month, sleeping in one of the wagons at night, and crawling off to collect piñons during the day. I had but little fear that the Indians would return; for I knew that that part of the country was not inhabited by any tribe; and we must have fallen in with a party of the Arapahoes, wandering out of their usual range. As soon as I grew strong enough, I dug a grave, where I interred the remains of my poor wife; and now I began to think of taking my leave of that melancholy scene.

"I knew that I was not much more than a hundred miles distant from the eastern settlements of New Mexico; but a hundred miles of uninhabited wilderness, and on foot, was a barrier that seemed almost as impassable as the ocean itself. I was determined, however, to make the attempt; and I set about sewing a bag in which I should carry my roasted piñons—the only provision I could get to sustain me through the journey.

"While engaged in this operation, with my eyes fixed upon the work, I heard footsteps near me. I raised my head suddenly, and in alarm. What was my joy, when I saw that the object which had startled me was neither more nor less than a mule, that was slowly coming towards the camp! I recognised it as one of the mules that had belonged to our caravan.

"The animal had not yet observed me; and I thought it might shy away, if I showed myself too suddenly. I resolved, therefore, to capture it by stratagem. I crept into the wagon, where I knew there was a lazo; and having got hold of this, I placed myself in ambush, where I saw the mule would most likely pass. I had scarcely got the noose ready, when, to my extreme satisfaction, the mule came directly to where I lay expecting it. The next moment its neck was firmly grasped in the loop of the lazo, and the animal itself stood tied to the tongue of one of the wagons. It was one

of our mules that had escaped from the Indians, and after wandering over the country for weeks had now found the track, and would, no doubt, had I not caught it, have found its way back to Saint Louis; for this is by no means an unfrequent occurrence with animals that stray off from the caravans. It soon became tame with me, and in a few days more I had manufactured a bridle and saddle; and, mounting with my bag of roasted piñons, I rode off on the trail for Santa Fé. In about a week I reached that place in safety, and continued my journey southward to the mine.

“My history since that time can have but little interest for any of you. It is that of a man sorrowing for the loss of all he loved on earth. But you, Rolfe, you have given me new life in restorer; to me my child, my Luisa; and every chapter of your history, woven as it is with hers, will be to me, at least, of the deepest interest. Go on then,—go on!”

With this the miner concluded; and our host, after inviting each of us to re-fill our cups with wine, and our pipes with tobacco, resumed his narrative where he had left it off, in consequence of the happy, but unexpected episode, to which it had led.

Chapter Nine.

Lost in the Desert.

“Well, my friends,” proceeded our host, “it was a terrible sight to look upon—those fierce, gaunt wolves—the mad and foaming mastiffs—the dead mother, and the terrified and screaming child. Of course, the wolves fled at the approach of myself and Cudjo, and the dogs whimpered with delight. Well they might, poor brutes! for had we not come to their aid, they could not have held out much longer against such fearful odds. Although the battle had not been a long one, and commenced most likely after we had driven the wolves from the camp, yet the poor mastiffs were torn and bleeding in many places. As I stooped down to take up the little Luisa, she still clung close around the neck of her mother, crying for her ‘mamma’ to awake. I saw that her mamma would never wake again. She was lifeless and cold. There was an arrow in her breast. It was plain, that after receiving this wound she had fled into the thicket—no doubt

followed by the faithful dogs—and, favoured by the darkness, had kept on, until she had fallen and died. The position of her arms showed that she had breathed her last clasping her child to her bosom.

“Leaving Cudjo to guard the body, I carried the child back to my own wagon. Although so lately terrified with the battle of the wolves and dogs, the little creature cried at being separated from its mother, and struggled in my arms to be taken back.”

Here Rolfe’s narrative was again interrupted by the sobs of McKnight, who—although a firm, lion-hearted man—could not restrain himself on listening to these painfully affecting details. The children of Rolfe, too, repeatedly wept aloud. The “dark sister” herself seemed least affected of all. Perhaps that terrible scene, occurring at such an early period of her life, had impressed her character with the firmness and composure which afterwards marked it. Every now and then she bent towards the “fair one,” throwing her arms around the neck of the latter, and endeavouring to restrain her tears.

“I gave the child to my wife,” continued Rolfe, after a pause, “and in the company of little Mary, then about her own age, she soon ceased crying, and fell asleep in my wife’s bosom. I took a spade which I had in my wagon, and going back dug a grave; and, with the help of Cudjo, hastily interred the body. I say *hastily*, for we did not know the moment we might stand in need of some one to do as much for ourselves. It seems that our labour was in vain; yet even had we known this was to be the case, we should not the less have acted as we did. There was some satisfaction in performing this last sacred and Christian ceremony for our murdered friend; and both Cudjo and I felt it to be nothing more than our duty.

“We did not remain any longer near the spot, but hastening back to our wagon, I led the oxen in among some trees, where they might be hidden from view. Commending my wife and little ones to God, I shouldered my rifle, and set out—for the purpose of discovering whether the savages had left the place, and in what direction they had gone. It was my intention, should I be able to satisfy myself about the road they had taken, to go by some other course, yet by one that would bring me back into the trail, so that I could go on to the country of New Mexico. I knew very well that at that late season, and with oxen worn-out, as ours were, I

could never get back to Saint Louis—which was nearly eight hundred miles distant.

“After proceeding a mile or two—creeping through bushes, and skulking behind rocks—I saw the trail of the Indians striking out into an open plain, in a due westerly direction. They must have formed a large band, and all mounted, as the tracks of their horses testified. Seeing that they had moved off westward, I formed the resolution of making two or three days’ journey to the south, and afterwards turning in a westerly direction. This would most likely secure me from meeting them again, and would bring me, as I guessed, to the eastern ranges of the Rocky Mountains through which I might pass into the valley of New Mexico. I had heard my companions speak of a more southern pass through these mountains, than that which lies near Santa Fé; and I hoped to be able to reach it, although I believed it to be two hundred miles distant. With these plans in my mind, I returned to where I had left my little party.

“It was night when I got back to the wagon, and I found Mary and the children in great distress at my delay; but I had brought them good news—that the Indians were gone away.

“I first thought of remaining all night where we were; but, not being yet fully satisfied that the Indians were gone, I changed my intention. Seeing that we were to have a moon, and that a smooth plain stretched away towards the south, I concluded that it would be better to make a night journey of it, and put twenty miles, if possible, between us and the camp. All agreed with this proposal. In fact, we were all equally anxious to get away from that fearful spot; and had we stayed by it, not one of us could have slept a wink. The apprehension that the savages might return, and the excited state of our feelings—to say nothing of the terrible howling of the wolves—would have kept us awake; so, resolving to take our departure, we waited for the rising of the moon.

“We did not waste time, my friends. You all know that water is the great want in these deserts, both for man and beast. We knew not where or when we might next find it; so we took the precaution to fill our vessels at the stream. We filled all we had that would hold water. Alas! these were not enough, as you shall hear.

“The moon rose at length. She seemed to smile upon the horrid picture that lay below at the deserted camp; but we stayed no longer to contemplate it. Leading our oxen out of their *cache*, we struck out into the open plain, in a direction as nearly south as I could guide myself. I looked northward for the star in the tail of the Little Bear—the polar star—which I soon found by the pointers of the Ursa Major; and keeping this directly on our backs, we proceeded on. Whenever the inequalities of the ground forced us out of our track, I would again turn to this little star, and consult its unfailing index. There it twinkled in the blue heavens like the eye of a friend. It was the finger of God pointing us onward.

“And onward we went—here creeping around some gaping fissure, that opened across our track—there wading over a sandy swell—and anon rolling briskly along the smooth, herbless plain; for the country we were passing through was a parched and treeless desert.

“We made a good night’s journey of it, cheered by the prospect of escaping from the savages. When day broke, we were twenty miles from the camp. The rough hills that surrounded it were completely lost to our view, and we knew from this that we had travelled a long way; for some of these hills were of great height. We knew that we must have passed over a considerable arc of the earth’s surface before their tops could have sunk below the horizon. Of course, some intervening ridges, such as the sandy swells I have mentioned, helped to hide them from our view; but, at all events, we had the satisfaction of knowing that the savages, even had they returned to the camp, could not now see us from that point. We only feared the chances of their discovering our tracks, and following us. Urged by this apprehension, we did not halt when the day broke, but kept on until near noontide. Then we drew up—for our oxen, as well as the horse, were completely tired out, and could go no farther without rest.

“It was but a poor rest for them—with neither grass nor water—not a blade of anything green except the *artemisia* plant, the wild wormwood—which, of course, neither horse nor oxen would touch. This grew all around us in low thickets. Its gnarled and twisted bushes, with their white silvery leaves, so far from gladdening the eye, only served to render the scene more dreary and desolate—for we knew that this plant denoted the extreme barrenness of the soil. We knew that, wherever it grew, the

desert was around it.

“It was, indeed, but a poor rest for our animals—for the hot sun glanced down upon them during the noon hours, making them still more thirsty. We could not afford them a drop of the precious water; for we ourselves were oppressed with extreme thirst, and our stock was hourly diminishing. It was as much as we could to spare a small quantity to the dogs, Castor and Pollux.

“Long before night, we once more yoked to the oxen, and continued our journey, in the hope of reaching some stream or spring. By sunset we had made ten miles farther to the south, but no landmark as yet appeared in sight—nothing to indicate the presence of water. We could see nothing around us but the sterile plain stretching on all sides to the horizon—not even a bush, or rock, or the form of a wild animal, relieved the monotonous expanse. We were as much alone, as if we had been in an open boat in the middle of the ocean!

“We began to grow alarmed, and to hesitate. Should we go back? No, that would never do. Even had the prospect at the end of a backward journey been more cheering, we felt uncertain whether we might be able to reach the stream we had just left. We should surely reach water as soon by keeping forward; and with this thought we travelled on through all the livelong night.

“When morning came, I again surveyed the horizon, but could see no object along its level line. I was riding gloomily alongside the poor oxen, watching their laborious efforts, when a voice sounded in my ears. It was that of Frank, who was standing in the fore part of the wagon, looking out from under the tilt.

“‘Papa! papa!’ cried he, ‘look at the pretty white cloud!’

“I looked up at the boy, to see what he meant. I saw that he was pointing to the south-east, and I turned my eyes in that direction. I uttered an exclamation of joy, which startled my companions; for I saw that what Frank had taken for a white cloud was the snowy cap of a mountain! I might have seen it before, had my eyes been searching in that quarter; but they were not, as I was examining the sky more towards the south

and west.

“Guided by no very extraordinary experience, I knew that where there was snow there must be water; and, without another word, I directed Cudjo to head his oxen for the mountain. It was out of the way we wanted to go; but we thought not of that, for the saving of our lives had now come to be the only question with us.

“The mountain was still twenty miles distant. We could have seen it much farther off, but we had been travelling through the night. The question was, would our oxen be able to reach it? They were already tottering in their tracks. If they should break down, could we reach it? Our water was all gone, and we were suffering from thirst as the sun rose. A river, thought I, must run from the mountain, fed by the melting of its snows. Perhaps we might come to this river before arriving at the mountain-foot. But, no;—the plain evidently sloped down from us to the mountain. Whatever stream ran from it must go the other way. We should find no water before reaching the mountain—perhaps, not then; and, tortured with these doubts, we pushed gloomily forward.

“By noon the oxen began to give out. One of them fell dead, and we left him. The other three could not go much farther. Every article that was of no present use was thrown from the wagon to lighten it, and left lying on the plain; but still the poor brutes were scarce able to drag it along. We went at a snail’s pace.

“A short rest might recruit the animals, but I could not bring myself to halt again, as my heart was agonised by the cries of my suffering children. Mary bore up nobly; so, too, did the boys. For myself, I could not offer a word of consolation, for I knew that we were still ten miles from the foot of the mountain. I thought of the possibility of riding on ahead, and bringing back some water in the vessels; but I saw that my horse could never stand it. He was even now unable to carry me, and I was afoot, leading him. Cudjo also walked by the side of the oxen. Another of these now gave up, and only two remained to drag the vehicle.

“At this terrible moment several objects appeared before us on the plain, that caused me to cry out with delight. They were dark-green masses, of different sizes—the largest of them about the size of a bee cap. They

looked like a number of huge hedge hogs rolled up, and presenting on all sides their thorny spikes. On seeing them, I dropped my horse; and, drawing my knife, ran eagerly forward. My companions thought I had gone mad, not understanding why I should have drawn my knife on such harmless-looking objects, and not knowing what they were. But I knew well what they were: I knew they were the *globe cacti*.

“In a moment’s time I had peeled the spikelets from several of them; and as the wondering party came up, and saw the dark-green succulent vegetables, with the crystal water oozing out of their pores, they were satisfied that I had not gone mad.

“In a short while, we had cut the huge spheroids into slices, which we chewed with avidity. We set some of them also before the horse and oxen, both of which devoured them greedily, sap, fibres, and all; while the dogs lapped the cool liquid wherever they were cut.

“It is true, that this did not quench thirst, in the same way that a drink of water would have done; but it greatly relieved us, and would, perhaps, enable us to reach the mountain. We resolved to halt for a short while, in order to rest the oxen. Unfortunately, the relief had come too late for one of them. It had been his last stretch; and when we were about to start again, we found that he had lain down and was unable to rise. We saw that we must leave him; and, taking such harness as we could find, we put the horse in his place, and moved onward. We were in hopes of finding another little garden of cactus plants; but none appeared, and we toiled on, suffering as before.

“When we had got within about five miles of the mountain-foot, the other ox broke down, and fell—as we supposed—dead. We could take the wagon no farther; but it was no time either to hesitate or halt: we must try it afoot, or perish where we were.

“I loosed out the horse, and left him to his will—I saw he was no longer able to carry any of us. I took an axe from the wagon—also a tin-pot, and a piece of dry beef that still remained to us. Cudjo shouldered the axe and little Mary; I carried the beef, the pot, Luisa, and my rifle; while my wife, Frank, and Harry, each held something in their hands. Thus burdened, we bade adieu to the wagon, and struck off toward the

mountain. The dogs followed; and the poor horse, not willing to be left behind, came tottering after.

“There is not much more of that journey to be detailed. We toiled through the five miles the best way we could. As we drew nearer to the mountain, we could see deep dark ravines running down its sides, and in the bottom of one we distinguished a silvery thread, which we knew was the foam of water as it dashed over the rocks. The sight gave us new energy, and in another hour we had reached the banks of a crystal stream, and were offering thanks for our deliverance.”



Chapter Ten.

Adventure with an Armadillo.

“Well, my friends, we had arrived on the banks of a rivulet, and were thanking God for bringing us safely there. We soon satisfied our thirst, as you may believe, and began to look around us. The stream we had reached was not that which runs into the valley here, but altogether on the other side of the mountain. It was but a mere rill, and I saw that several similar ones issued from the ravines, and after running a short distance into the plain, fell off toward the south-east, and united with others running from that side. I found afterwards that they all joined into the same channel, forming a considerable river, which runs from this elevated plain in an easterly direction; and which I take to be a head-water of the Great Red River of Louisiana, or perhaps of the Brazos, or Colorado, of Texas. I have called it a considerable river. That is not quite correct; for although, where they all unite, they form a good-sized body of water, yet twenty miles farther down, for three-fourths of the year the channel is perfectly dry; and that is the case I know not how far beyond. The water, which passes from the mountain at all times, is either evaporated by the hot sun, or sinks into the sands of its own bed, during a run of twenty miles. It is only in times of great rain—a rare occurrence here—or when very hot weather melts an unusual quantity of the snow, that there is water enough to carry the stream over a flat sandy tract which stretches away to the eastward. All these things I found out afterwards, and as you, my friends, know them to be common phenomena of the Desert, I shall not now dwell upon them.

“I saw that, where we were, there was but little chance of getting anything to eat. The sides of the mountain were rugged and grim, with here and there a stunted cedar hanging from the rocks. The small patches of grass and willows that lined the banks of the little rills—although cheering to the eye, when compared with the brown barrenness of the Desert—offered but little prospect that we should get any thing to eat there. If the Desert stretched away to the south of the mountain, as we saw that it did to the north, east, and west, then we had only reached a temporary resting-place, and we might still perish, if not from thirst, from what was equally

bad—hunger.

“This was uppermost in our thoughts at the time,—for we had not eaten a morsel during that day; so we turned our attention to the piece of dried meat.

“‘Let us cook it, and make a soup,’ said Mary; ‘that will be better for the children.’ My poor wife! I saw that the extreme fatigue she had undergone had exhausted her strength, yet still she endeavoured to be cheerful.

“‘Yes, papa, let us make soup; soup is very nice,’ added Frank, trying to cheer his mother by showing that he was not dismayed.

“‘Very well, then,’ I replied. ‘Come, Cudjo, shoulder your axe, and let us to the mountain for wood. Yonder are some pine-trees near the foot,—they will make an excellent fire.’

“So Cudjo and I started for the wood, which was growing about three hundred yards distant, and close in to the rocks where the stream came down.

“As we drew nearer to the trees, I saw that they were not pine-trees, but very different indeed. Both trunks and branches had long thorny spikes upon them like porcupine’s quills, and the leaves were of a bright shining green, pinnate with small oval leaflets. But what was most singular was the long bean-shaped pods that hung down thickly from the branches. These were about an inch and a half in breadth, and some of them not less than twelve inches in length. They were of a reddish-brown, nearly a claret colour. Except in the colour, they looked exactly like large bean-pods filled with beans.

“I was not ignorant of what species of tree was before us. I had seen it before. I knew it was the honey-locust, or thorny acacia,—the carob-tree of the East, and the famed ‘algarobo’ of the Spaniards.

“I was not ignorant of its uses neither,—for I knew this to be the tree upon which (as many suppose) Saint John the Baptist sustained himself in the Desert, where it is said, ‘his meat was locusts and wild honey.’ Hence it is sometimes called, ‘Saint John’s bread.’ Neither was Cudjo ignorant of its value. The moment his eyes rested upon the long brown legumes, he

cried out, with gestures of delight:—

“Massa—Massa Roff, lookee yonder!—beans and honey for supper!”

“We were soon under the branches: and while I proceeded to knock down and collect a quantity of the ripe fruit. Cudjo went farther up among the rocks, to procure his firewood from the pines that grew there.

“I soon filled my handkerchief, and was waiting for Cudjo, when I heard him shout,—

“Massa Roff! come dis away, and see de varmint—what him be.’

“I immediately ran up among the rocks. On reaching the spot where Cudjo was, I found him bending over a crevice or hole in the ground, from which protruded an object very much like the tail of a pig.

“‘What is it, Cudjo?’ I asked.

“‘Don’t know, Massa. Varmint I never see in Vaginny—looks someting like de ole ’possum.’

“‘Catch hold of the tail, and pull him out,’ said I.

“‘Lor! Massa Roff, I’ve tried ma best, but can’t fetch ’im no how. Look yar!’ And so saying, my companion seized the tail, and pulled—seemingly with all his might—but to no purpose.

“‘Did you see the animal when it was outside?’ I inquired.

“‘Yes, Massa; see ’im and chase ’im ’till I tree him yar in dis cave.’

“‘What was it like?’

“‘Berry like a pig—maybe more belike ole ’possum, but cubberd all ober wi’ shell like a Vaginny turtle.’

“‘Oh! then—it is an armadillo.’

“‘An amadiller! Cudjo niver hear o’ dat varmint afore.’

“I saw that the animal which had so astonished my companion was one of those curious living things—which Nature, in giving variety to her creatures, has thought proper to form—and which are known throughout Mexico and South America by the name of ‘armadilloes.’ They are so called from the Spanish word ‘armado,’ which signifies armed—because all over their body there is a hard, shell-like covering divided into bands and regular figures, exactly like the coats-of-mail worn by the warriors of ancient times. There is even a helmet covering the head, connected with the other parts of the armour by a joint, which renders this resemblance still more complete and singular. There are many species of these animals; some of them as large as a full-sized sheep, but the generality of them are much smaller. The curious figuring of the shell that covers them differs in the different species. In some the segments are squares, in others hexagons, and in others, again, they are of a pentagonal shape. In all of them, however, the figures have a mathematical form and precision, that is both strange and beautiful. They look as though they were artificial,—that is, carved by the hand of man. They are harmless creatures, and most of the species feed upon herbs and grass. They do not run very nimbly, though they can go much faster than one would suppose, considering the heavy armour which they carry. This, however, is not all in one shell, but in many pieces connected together by a tough, pliable skin. Hence they can use their limbs with sufficient ease. They are not such slow travellers as the turtles and tortoises. When they are pursued and overtaken, they sometimes gather themselves into a round ball, as hedgehogs do; and if they should happen to be near the edge of a precipice they will roll themselves over to escape from their enemy. More often when pursued they betake themselves to their holes, or to any crevice among rocks that may be near; and this was evidently the case with that which Cudjo had surprised. When they can hide their heads, like the ostrich they fancy themselves safe; and so, no doubt, thought this one, until he felt the sinewy fingers of Cudjo grasping him by the tail. It was evident the animal had run into a shallow crack where he could get no farther, else we would soon have lost sight of his tail; but it was equally evident, that pulling by that appendage was not the method to get him out. I could see that he had pushed the scaly armour outward and upward, so that it held fast against the rocks on every side. Moreover, his claws, which are remarkable both for length and tenacity, were clutched firmly against the bottom of the crevice. It would have taken a team of oxen to have pulled him out, as Cudjo remarked with a

grin.

“I had heard of a plan used by the Indians who hunt the armadillo, and are very fond of his flesh; and as I was determined to try it, I told my companion to let go the tail, and stand to one side.

“I now knelt down in front of the cave, and, taking a small branch of cedar, commenced tickling the hind-quarters of the animal with the sharp needles. In a moment I saw that his muscles began to relax, as the shell to separate from the rocks, and close in toward his body. After continuing the operation for some minutes, I observed that he had reduced himself to his natural size, and had no doubt forgotten to keep a look-out with his claws. Seeing this, I seized the tail firmly; and, giving it a sudden jerk, swung the armadillo out between the feet of my companion. Cudjo aimed a blow with the axe which nearly severed its head from its body, and killed the animal outright. It was about the size of a rabbit, and proved to be of the eight-banded species—reckoned more delicious eating than any other.

“We now returned to camp with our firewood, our locust-beans, and our armadillo—the last of which horrified my wife, when I told her I was going to eat it. It proved a great curiosity to the boys, however, who amused themselves by running their fingers all over its mottled armour. But I had something that amused the little Mary and Luisa still more—the delicious, honey-like pulp from the pods of the locust-tree, which they greedily ate. The seeds we extracted from the pulp, intending to roast them as soon as we had kindled our fire.

“And now, my friends,” continued Rolfe, rising to his feet, “since we have got to talking about this same locust-tree, I hope you will not refuse to try a mug of my home-brewed beer, which I made out of its beans this very day, while you were wandering about my grounds and through the valley. It is, perhaps, not equal to Barclay and Perkins’; but I flatter myself that, under the circumstances, you will not find it unpalatable.”

Saying this, our host brought forward a large flagon, and pouring into our cups a brown-coloured liquid, set them before us. We all drank of the “locust beer,” which was not unlike mead or new cider; and to prove that we liked it, we drank again and again.

This ceremony over Rolfe once more resumed his narrative.

Chapter Eleven.

A Very Lean Buffalo.

“We were all soon engaged in different occupations. Mary was preparing the dried meat, which she intended to boil along with the locust-beans in our tin-pot. Fortunately, it was a large one, and held nearly a gallon. Cudjo was busy kindling the fire, which already sent up its volumes of blue smoke. Frank, Harry, and the little ones, were sucking away at the natural preserves of the acacia, while I was dressing my armadillo for the spit. In addition to this, our horse was filling out his sides upon the rich buffalo-grass that grew along the stream; and the dogs—poor fellows! they were like to fare worst of all—stood watching my operations, and snapped eagerly at every scrap that fell from my knife. In a very short while the fire was blazing up, the beef and beans were bubbling over it in the tin-pot, and the armadillo was sputtering on the spit beside them. In another short while all things were cooked and ready to be eaten.

“We now remembered that we had neither plates, glasses, knives, forks, nor spoons—yes, Cudjo and I had our hunting-knives; and, as it was no time to be nice, with these we fished the pieces of meat and some of the beans out of the soup-pot, and placed them upon a clean, flat stone. For the soup itself, we immersed the lower part of the pot into the cool water of the stream, so that in a short time Mary and the children could apply the edge of it to their lips, and drink of it in turn.

“As for Cudjo and myself, we did not want any of the soup. We were altogether for the ‘substantials.’

“I thought, at first, I should have all the armadillo to myself. Even Cudjo, who in ‘ole Vaginnny’ had bolted ‘coons, ‘possums, and various other ‘varmint,’ for a long time hung back. Seeing, however, that I was eating with evident relish, he held out his sable paw, and desired me to help him to a small piece. Having once tasted it, the ice of his appetite seemed to be all at once broken, and he kept asking for more, and then for more,

until I began to fear he would not leave me enough for my own support.

“Neither Mary nor the boys, however, would consent to share with us, although I assured them, what was positively the fact, that what I was eating was equal in delicacy of flavour to the finest roast pig—a dish, by the way, to which the armadillo bears a very great resemblance.

“The sun was now setting, and we began to think how we were to pass the night. We had left all our blankets in the wagon, and the air was fast becoming cold, which is always the case in the neighbourhood of snowy mountains. This is easily explained. The atmosphere getting cool upon the peak, where it envelopes the snow, of course becomes heavier, and keeps constantly descending around the base of the mountain, and pushing up and out that air which is warmer and lighter. In fact, there was a sensible breeze blowing down the sides of the mountain—caused by these natural laws—and it had already made us chilly, after the burning heat through which we had been travelling. Should we sleep in this cold atmosphere—even though we should keep up a fire during the whole night—I knew that we must suffer much.

“The thought now entered my mind, that I might go back to the wagon—which was only five miles off—and bring up our blankets. Should I go myself, or send Cudjo, or should both of us go? All at once the idea came into my head that one of us might ride there, and bring back a load of other articles, as well as the blankets. Our horse, who had been filling himself for the last hour and a half with good grass and water, already began to show symptoms of life and vigour. Animals of this kind soon recover from fatigue, when their food and drink are restored to them. I saw that he would be quite able to do the journey, so I gave Cudjo directions to catch him. There happened to be a piece of rope around his neck, and this would serve for a bridle. I hesitated for some time, whether both Cudjo and I should leave Mary and the children; but my wife urged us to go, telling us she would have no fear, as long as Harry and Frank with their rifles remained with her. The dogs, too, would stay. Indeed, there was not much danger of their leaving her, while she held in her arms the little Luisa, whom both these animals seemed to watch over.

“Influenced by her advice, I consented to leave her alone with the children; and, giving directions that they should fire off one of the rifles, in

case of any alarm, I set forth, with Cudjo and the horse.

“We could see the white tilt of the wagon from the very start; and we had no difficulty in guiding ourselves to it.

“As we passed onward, I was reflecting whether the wolves had not already made a meal of our poor ox that we had left by the wagon. If not, it was my intention to skin him, and save the meat, lean and tough as it must be—for the animal, when we left him, looked like some dry skeleton to be preserved in a museum. Still I saw before us no prospect of a better breakfast, and I began to grow very anxious as to whether we might find a bit of him left. At this moment, I was startled from my reflections by an exclamation from Cudjo, who had stopped suddenly, and was pointing to some object directly ahead of us. I looked forward; and saw in the dim light something that very much resembled a large quadruped.

“‘P’raps, Massa,’ whispered Cudjo, ‘him be de buffler.’

“‘Perhaps it is a buffalo; but what is to be done? I have left my rifle. Here! take the horse, and I will endeavour to get near enough to kill it with my pistols.’

“Giving Cudjo the horse, and cautioning him to be silent, I drew the largest of my pistols, and crept silently forward. I went upon my hands and knees, and very slowly, so as not to give the animal an alarm. As I got nearer, I felt sure it was a buffalo; but the moon had not yet risen, and I could see its form but very indistinctly. At length, I believed I had it within range of my pistol; at least, thought I, if I go any nearer it will make off; so I halted—still upon my knees—and made ready to fire. As I raised my weapon, the horse suddenly neighed; and, in answer to his neigh, the strange animal uttered a loud roar, which I knew to be nothing else than the bellowing of an ox! And so it proved, as it was neither more nor less than our own ox, who had left the wagon, and was slowly making his way for the mountain. The cool air had somewhat revived him, and instinct, or a knowledge of the way we had gone, was guiding him in that direction.

“I know not whether I was more pleased or disappointed at meeting our old companion. A good fat buffalo would have been more welcome at the time than a famished ox; but when I reflected that he might yet help us to

get out of the Desert, I felt that we were fortunate in finding him still alive. The horse and he put their noses together, evidently pleased at again meeting each other; and I could not help thinking, as the ox shook his long tail, that the horse must have whispered to him about the nice grass and water that were so near. The ox had his reins upon him; and lest he might stray from the track, we tied him to a sage-bush, so that we might take him with us on our way back.

“We were about leaving him, when it occurred to me, that if the ox only had a little water, he might, along with the horse, enable us to bring the wagon up to the mountain. What a delightful surprise it would be to Mary, to see us return with ox, wagon, and all;—not only the blankets, but also our cups, pans, and cooking-pots, besides some coffee, and other little luxuries, that were stored away in our great chest! Ha! thought I, that would be delightful; and I immediately communicated the idea to Cudjo. My companion fully agreed with me, and believed it quite possible and practicable. We had brought along with us the tin-pot full of cool water from the stream; but it was too narrow at the mouth, and the ox could not possibly drink out of it.

“‘Let us gib it, Massa Roff,’ advised Cudjo, ‘in de ole hoss-bucket, once we gets ’im back to de wagon. Ya! ya! we gib Missa an abstonishment.’ And my light-hearted companion laughed with delight, at the prospect of making his mistress happy on our return.

“Without farther parley, we unloosed the rein from the sage-bush, and led the ox back towards the wagon. Neither of us rode the horse, as we knew he would have enough to do in dragging up his share of the load.

“On reaching the wagon, we found everything as we had left it; but several large white wolves were prowling around; and, no doubt, it had been the sight of them that had roused the ox, and imparted to him the energy that had enabled him to get away from the spot.

“We soon found the bucket; and, pouring the water into it, set it before the ox, who drank every drop of it, and then licked the sides and bottom, of the vessel until they were quite dry. We now ‘hitched to’ both the animals; and, without more ado, drove off towards our little camp at the mountain.

“We guided ourselves by the fire, which we could see burning brightly under the dark shadow of the cliffs. Its blaze had a cheering effect on the spirits both of my companion and myself; and even the horse and ox seemed to understand that it would be the end of their journey, and pressed forward with alacrity to reach it.

“When within about half a mile, I heard the report of a rifle ringing among the rocks. I was filled with alarm. Were Mary and the children attacked by Indians?—perhaps by some savage animal?—perhaps by the grizzly bear?

“I did not hesitate a moment, but ran forward—leaving Cudjo with the wagon. I drew my pistol, and held it in readiness as I advanced, all the while listening eagerly to catch every sound that might come from the direction of the fire. Once or twice I stopped for short intervals to breathe and listen; but there were no noises from the camp! What could be the meaning of the silence? Where were the dogs? I knew that, had they been attacked by a grizzly bear, or any other animal, I should have heard their barks and worrying. But there was not a sound. Had they been killed all at once by Indian arrows, so silent in their deadly effect? O God! had my wife, and children too, fallen victims?

“Filled with painful apprehensions, I ran forward with increased energy, determined to rush into the midst of the enemy—whoever they might be—and sell my life as dearly as possible.

“At length, I came within full view of the fire. What was my astonishment, as well as joy, on seeing my wife sitting by the blaze, with little Luisa upon her knee, while Mary was playing upon the ground at her feet! But where were Harry and Frank? It was quite incomprehensible. I knew that they would not have fired the rifle to alarm me unnecessarily, yet there sat Mary as though no rifle had been fired!

“‘What was it, dear Mary?’ I cried, running up. ‘Where are the boys?—they discharged the rifle, did they not?’

“‘They did,’ she replied; ‘Harry fired at something.’

“‘At what?—at what?’ I inquired.

“At some animal, I know not what kind; but I think they must have wounded it, for they all ran out, dogs and all, after the shot was fired, and have not yet come back.’

“In what direction?’ I asked hurriedly.

“Mary pointed out the direction; and, without waiting further, I ran off into the darkness. When about an hundred yards from the fire, I came upon Harry, Frank, and the mastiffs, standing over some animal which I saw was quite dead. Harry was not a little proud of the shot he had made, and expected me to congratulate him, which of course I did; and laying hold of the animal by one of its hind-legs—for it had no tail to lay hold of—I dragged it forward to the light of the fire. It appeared to be about the size of a sucking calf, though much more elegantly shaped, for its legs were long and slender, and its shanks not thicker than a common walking-cane. It was of a pale red colour, whitish along the breast and belly, but its large, languishing eyes and slender forking horns told me at once what sort of animal it was; it was the prong-horned antelope,—the only species of antelope found in North America.

“Mary now related the adventure. While they were sitting silently by the fire, and somewhat impatiently awaiting our return—for the wagon had delayed us considerably—they saw a pair of large eyes glancing in the darkness like two candles, and not many yards from where they sat. They could see nothing but the eyes; but this of itself was sufficient to alarm them, as they fancied it might be a wolf, or, perhaps still worse, a bear or panther. They did not lose presence of mind, however; and they knew that to escape by running away would be impossible; so both Frank and Harry took hold of their rifles—though Harry was foremost with his. He then aimed, as well as he could, between the two glancing eyes, and pulled trigger. Of course the smoke blinded them, and in the darkness they could not tell whether the bullet had hit the animal or not; but the dogs—who up to this time had been sleeping by the fire—sprang to their feet, and ran out in pursuit. They could hear them running for some distance, and then they heard a scramble and a struggle, and then they were silent; so they concluded—what afterwards proved to be the case—that Harry had wounded the animal, and that the dogs had caught, and were worrying it. And so they were, for as the boys got to the spot they had just killed it; and—hungry as they were—would soon have made a

meal of it had Frank and Harry not got up in good time to prevent them. The antelope had been shot in the shoulder, and had only run for a short distance before it fell.

“Although Harry did not boast of his prowess, I saw that he had a triumphant look,—the more so as this fine piece of venison would ensure us all against hunger for three days at the least; and, considering that only an hour before we did not know where the next meal was to come from, it was certainly no small matter to be proud of. I thought just then of the surprise I had prepared for them, not only in bringing up the wagon which contained all our utensils and comforts, but in the recovery of our best ox.

“‘Where is Cudjo?’ asked my wife. ‘Is he bringing the blankets?’

“‘Yes,’ said I, knowingly, ‘and a good load besides.’

“At that moment was heard the creaking of wheels, and the great tilt of white canvass was seen, far out, reflecting back the blaze of the fire. Frank leaped to his feet, and, clapping his hands with delight, cried out,—

“‘Mamma! mamma! it is the wagon!’

“Then was heard the loud voice of Cudjo in a joyous ‘Wo-ha!’ and the moment after, the horse and ox stepped up to the fire as lightly as if the pull had been a mere bagatelle; and they could have stood it an hundred miles farther without flinching. We were not slow in relieving both of them from their traces, and giving them a full swing at the grass and water.

“As it was now late in the night, and we were all very tired, from the fatigues we had undergone, we determined to lose no time in going to rest. Mary went to prepare a bed in the wagon,—for this was our only tent, and a very excellent tent it was, too. At the same time, Cudjo and I set about skinning the antelope, so that we might have it in fine order for our breakfast in the morning. The dogs, too, were interested in this operation,—for they, poor brutes, up to this time, had fared worse than any of us. However, the head, feet, and intestines, fell to their share; and they soon had a supper to their hearts’ content. Having finished skinning the antelope, we tied a rope to its legs, and slung it up to the branch of a tree—high enough to be out of the reach of wolves, as well as our own

dogs, during the night.

“Mary had by this time completed the arrangements for our sleeping; and but one thing more remained to be done before retiring to rest. That was a duty which we never neglected when circumstances admitted of its being performed. Mary knew this, and had brought out of the wagon the only book which it contained—the Bible. Cudjo turned up the pine logs upon the fire; and, seating ourselves around the blaze, I read from the Sacred Book those passages which were most appropriate to our own situation,—how God had preserved Moses and the children of Israel in the Desert Wilderness.

“Then, with clasped hands and grateful hearts, we all knelt, and offered thanks for our own almost miraculous deliverance.”

Chapter Twelve.

The Bighorns.

“Next morning we were up by the earliest break of day, and had the pleasure of witnessing a beautiful phenomenon in the sunrise. The whole country to the east, as far as we could see, was a level plain; and the horizon, of course, resembled that of the ocean when calm. As the great yellow globe of the sun appeared above it, one could have fancied that he was rising out of the earth itself—although he was more than ninety millions of miles distant from any part of it. It was a beautiful sky into which the sun was slowly climbing up. It was of a pale blue colour, and without the smallest cloud—for on these high table-plains in the interior of America, you may often travel for days without seeing a cloud as big as a kite. We were all in better spirits, for we had rested well, and had no longer any fear of being followed by the savages who had massacred our companions. They would have been fools, indeed, to have made that dreadful journey for all they could have gotten from us. Moreover, the sight of our antelope, with its nice yellow fat, crisped by the cold night-air, was anything but disheartening. As Cudjo was a dexterous butcher, I allowed him to quarter it, while I shouldered the axe and marched off to the mountain-foot to procure more wood for the fire. Mary was busy

among her pots, pans, and platters, scouring and washing them all in the clear stream—for the dust of the barren plains had blown into the wagon as we marched, and had formed a thick coating over the vessels. Fortunately we had a good stock of these utensils—consisting of a gridiron, a large camp-kettle, a couple of mess-pans, a baking-dish, a first-rate coffee-pot and mill, half-a-dozen tin-cups and plates, with an assortment of knives, forks, and spoons. All these things we had laid in at Saint Louis, by the advice of our Scotch friend, who know very well what articles were required for a journey across the Desert.

“I was not long in getting the wood, and our fire was soon replenished and blazing brightly. Mary attended to the coffee, which she parched in one of the mess-pans, and then ground in the mill. I handled the gridiron and broiled the venison-steaks, while Cudjo collected a large supply of locust-beans, and roasted them. These last were to serve us for bread, as we had neither meal nor flour. The supply we had brought from Saint Louis had been exhausted several days before; and we had lived altogether upon dried beef and coffee. Of this last article we were very sparing, as we had not over a pound of it left, and it was our most precious luxury. We had no sugar whatever, nor cream, but we did not mind the want of either, as those who travel in the wilderness find coffee very palatable without them—perhaps quite as much so as it is, when mixed with the whitest of sugar and the yellowest of cream, to the pampered appetites of those who live always at home. But, after all, we should not have to drink our coffee without sweetening, as I observed that Frank, while extracting the beans of the locust, was also scraping the honeyed pulp from the pods, and putting it to one side. He had already collected nearly a plate full. Well done, Frank!

“The great mess-chest had been lifted out of the wagon; and the lid of this, with a cloth spread over it, served us for a table. For seats we had rolled several large stones around the chest; and upon these we sat drinking the delicious coffee, and eating the savoury steaks of venison.

“While we were thus pleasantly engaged, I observed Cudjo suddenly rolling the whites of his eyes upwards, at the same time exclaiming,—

“‘Golly! Massa—Massa—lookee yonder!’

“The rest of us turned quickly round—for we had been sitting with our backs to the mountain—and looked in the direction indicated by Cudjo. There were high cliffs fronting us; and along the face of these, five large reddish objects were moving, so fast, that I at first thought they were birds upon the wing. After watching them a moment, however, I saw that they were quadrupeds; but so nimbly did they go, leaping from ledge to ledge, that it was impossible to see their limbs. They appeared to be animals of the deer species—somewhat larger than sheep or goats—but we could see that, in place of antlers, each of them had a pair of huge curving horns. As they leaped downward, from one platform of the cliffs to another, we fancied that they whirled about in the air, as though they were ‘turning somersaults,’ and seemed at times to come down heads foremost!

“There was a spur of the cliff that sloped down to within less than a hundred yards of the place where we sat. It ended in an abrupt precipice of some sixty or seventy feet in height above the plain. The animals, on reaching the level of this spur, ran along it until they had arrived at its end. Seeing the precipice they suddenly stopped, as if to reconnoitre it; and we had now a full view of them, as they stood outlined against the sky, with their graceful limbs and great curved horns almost as large as their bodies. We thought, of course, they could get no farther for the precipice, and I was calculating whether my rifle—which I had laid hold of—would reach them at that distance. All at once, to our astonishment, the foremost sprang out from the cliff; and whirling through the air, lit upon his head on the hard plain below!” We could see that he came down upon his horns, and rebounding up again to the height of several feet, turned a second somersault, and then dropped upon his legs, and stood still! Nothing daunted the rest followed, one after the other in quick succession, like so many street-tumblers, and like them—after the feat had been performed—the animals stood for a moment, as if waiting for applause!

“The spot where they had dropped was not more than fifty paces from our camp; but I was so astonished at the tremendous leap, that I quite forgot the rifle I held in my hands. The animals, too, seemed equally astonished upon discovering us—which they now did for the first time. The yelping of the dogs, who rushed forward at the moment, brought me to myself again, as it did also the strangers to a sense of their dangerous

proximity; and, wheeling suddenly, they bounded back for the mountain. I fired after them at random; but we all supposed without effect, as the whole five kept on to the foot of the mountain, followed by the dogs. Presently they commenced ascending, as though they had wings; but we noticed that one of them hung in the rear, and seemed to leap upward with difficulty. Upon this one our eyes became fixed, as we now fancied it was wounded. We were right in this. The rest soon disappeared out of sight; but that which lagged behind, on leaping for a high ledge, came short in the attempt, and rolled backward down the face of the mountain. The next moment we saw him struggling between the mastiffs.

“Cudjo, Frank, and Harry, ran together up the steep; and soon returned, bringing the animal along with them quite dead—as the dogs had put an end to him. It was a good load for Cudjo, and proved upon closer acquaintance to be as large as a fallow-deer. From the huge wrinkled horns, and other marks, I knew it to be the *argali*, or wild sheep, known among hunters by the name of the ‘bighorn,’ and sometimes spoken of in books as the ‘Rocky Mountain sheep,’ although in its general appearance it looked more like an immense yellow goat, or deer with a pair of rams’ horns stuck upon his head. We knew, however, it was not bad to eat,—especially to people in our circumstances; and as soon as we had finished our breakfast, Cudjo and I whetted our knives, and having removed the skin, hung up the carcass alongside the remainder of the antelope. The dogs for their pains had a breakfast to their satisfaction; and the rest of us, seeing so much fresh meat hanging to the tree, with a cool stream of water running beneath it, began to fancy we were quite delivered from the Desert.

“We now sat down together to deliberate on our future proceedings. Between the *argali* and the antelope, we had provision enough to last us for a week at least; but when that was done, what likelihood was there of our procuring a further supply of either? Not much, thought we; for although there might be a few more antelopes and a few more ‘bighorns’ about the place, there could not be many with so little appearance of anything for them to feed upon. Moreover, we might not find it so easy to kill any more of them,—for those we had already shot seemed to have fallen in our way by chance, or—as we more properly believed at the time and still believe—by the guiding of a Providential hand. But we knew it was not right or wise to rely altogether on this,—that is, we knew it was

our duty, while trusting in its guidance, at the same time to make every effort which lay in our own power to save ourselves. When our present supply should be exhausted, where was the next to come from? We could not always live upon armadilloes, and argalis, and antelopes,—even supposing they were as plenty as the rocks. But the chances were ten to one we should get no more of them. Our ox in a week would have improved in condition. He would sustain us for a time; and then—our horse—and then—and then—the dogs—and then—we should starve to a certainty.

“Any of these necessities was sufficiently fearful to contemplate. Should we kill our ox, we would be unable to take the wagon along, and how could the horse carry us all out of the Desert? If we then killed the horse, we should be still worse off, and utterly helpless on foot. No man can cross the Great Desert on foot—not even the hunters—and how could we do it? To remain where we were would be impossible. There were a few patches of vegetation on the different runlets that filtered away from the mountain-foot. There were clumps of willows growing along these, but not enough of grass to support any stock of game upon which we could live, even were we certain of being able to capture it. It was evident, then, to us all, that we should have to get away from that place as speedily as possible.

“The next point to be determined was, whether the Desert extended away to the south, as we already knew that it did to the north. To ascertain this, I resolved to go around the mountain, leaving the rest at the camp until my return.

“Our horse was by this time rested, and well fed; and, having saddled him and shouldered my rifle, I mounted and rode off. I kept around the mountain-foot, going by the eastern side. I crossed several rivulets resembling the one on which we had encamped; and noticed that all these turned off toward the eastward, making their way to a main stream. In this direction, too, I saw a few stunted trees, with here and there an appearance of greenness on the surface of the plain. On the way I saw an antelope, and another animal resembling a deer, but differing from all the deer I had ever seen, in having a long tail like a cow. I knew not at the time what sort of an animal it was, as I had never met with any description of it in books of natural history.

“After riding about five miles, I got fairly round to the east side of the mountain, and could view the country away to the south. As far as my sight could reach, I saw nothing but an open plain—if possible more sterile in its character than that which stretched northward. The only direction in which there were any signs of fertility was to the east, and that was but in patches of scanty vegetation.

“It was a cheerless prospect. We should now certainly have a desert to cross before we could get to any inhabited country. To strike eastwardly again, for the American frontier—circumstanced as we were without provisions and with worn-out cattle—would be madness; as the distance was at least eight hundred miles. Besides, I knew there were many hostile tribes of Indians living on that route, so that, even should the country prove fertile, we could never hope to get through it. To go northward or southward would be equally impossible, as there was no civilised settlement for a thousand miles in either direction. Our only hope, then, would be, to attempt crossing the Desert westwardly to the Mexican settlements on the Del Norte,—a distance of nearly two hundred miles! To do this, we should need first to rest our ill-matched team for several days. We should also require provisions enough for the route, and how were these to be obtained? Again, thought I, we must trust to Providence, who has already so manifestly extended a helping hand to us.

“I observed that the mountain on the southern face descended with an easier slope toward the plain, than upon the north where it is bold and precipitous. From this I concluded that a greater quantity of snow must be melted, and run off in that direction. Doubtless then, thought I, there will be a greater amount of fertility on that side; and I continued to ride on, until I came in sight of the grove of willows and cotton-trees, which line the stream above the valley here. I soon reached them, and saw that there was a stream with considerable pasturage near its borders—much more than where we had encamped I tied my horse to a tree, and climbed some distance up the mountain in order to get a view of the country south and west. I had not got to a great height when I caught sight of the singular chasm that seemed to open up in the plain. I was attracted with this peculiarity, and determined to examine it. Descending again to where I had left my horse, I mounted, and rode straight for it. In a short time I stood upon the brink of the precipice, and looked down into

this smiling valley.

“I cannot describe my sensations at that moment. Only they, whose eyes have been bent for days on the sterile wilderness, can feel the full effect produced by a scene of fertility such as there presented itself. It was late in the autumn, and the woods that lay below me—clad in all the variegated livery of that season—looked like some richly-coloured picture. The music of birds ascended from the groves below, wafted upward upon the perfumed and aromatic air; and the whole scene appeared more like a fabled Elysium than a reality of Nature I could hardly satisfy myself that I was not dreaming, or looking upon some fantastic hallucination of the *mirage*.

“I stood for many minutes in a sort of trance, gazing down into the lovely valley. I could observe no signs of human habitation. No smoke rose over the trees, and no noises issued forth, except the voices of Nature, uttered in the songs of birds and the hum of falling waters. It seemed as though man had never desecrated this isolated paradise by his presence and passions.

“I say I stood for many minutes gazing and listening. I could have remained for hours; but the sinking sun admonished me to hasten away. I was nearly twenty miles from our camp, and my horse was neither strong nor fresh. Determined, therefore, to return on the morrow, bringing with me my companions and all that belonged to us, I turned my horse’s head and rode back. It was late in the night—near midnight—when I reached camp. I found everything as I had left it, except that Mary was in great anxiety about what had delayed me so long. But my return, and the discovery which I communicated, soon restored her spirits; and we laid out our plans for changing our camp to the valley, determined to set forth at an early hour in the morning.”

Chapter Thirteen.

The great Elk.

“We were stirring by sunrise next morning; and having breakfasted

heartily, we packed our wagon and started away from our camp, which we had named 'Camp Antelope.' The stream we called 'Bighorn Creek' ever afterwards. We arrived at the upper end of the valley about an hour before sunset. Here we passed the night. Next day I set forth to find some path by which we might get down into the bottom. I rode for miles along the edge of the bluff, but to my surprise I found that on both sides ran a steep precipice; and I began to fear that the tempting paradise was inaccessible, and had only been created to tantalise us. At length I reached the lower end, where, as you have noticed, the precipice is much less elevated—on account of the sloping of the upper plain. Here I came upon a path winding gradually down, upon which I saw the footmarks of animals of various kinds. This was exactly what I wanted.

"In this valley we could remain until our cattle were sufficiently recruited to face the Desert, while with our rifles we should be able to procure a sufficient stock of provisions for the journey.

"I went back for the wagon; but as I had consumed most of the day in my explorations, it was late when I reached the camp; and we remained another night on the same spot, which we named the 'Willow Camp.'

"Next morning, we started early. On arriving at the point where the path led down, we halted the wagon. Mary and the children remained with it, while Cudjo and I descended into the valley to reconnoitre. The woods were quite thick—the trees apparently all bound together by huge vines, that stretched from one to the other like immense serpents. There was a thick undergrowth of cane; but we saw that a trail had been made through this by the passage of numerous animals. There were no human footmarks to be seen, nor any signs that a human being had ever been upon the spot.

"We followed the trail that led us directly to the banks of the stream. It was then very shallow, and a great part of its shingly bed was dry. I saw that this would afford a good road for our wagon, and we kept on up the channel. About three miles from the lower end of the valley, we came to a place where the forest was more open, and less choked up with underwood. On the right bank of the stream there was a rising ground, forming a clear space of large extent, with only a tree growing here and there. This ground sloped gently down to the stream, and was covered

with beautiful herbage—both grass and flowers. It was a lovely spot; and as we came suddenly out upon it, several animals, frightened by our approach, bounded off into the thickets beyond. We stepped for a moment to gaze upon the bright picture. Birds of brilliant wing were fluttering among the many-coloured leaves, singing or screaming, and chasing each other from tree to tree. There were parrots, and paroquets, and orioles, and blue-jays, and beautiful loxias, both of the scarlet and azure-coloured species. There were butterflies, too, with broad wings mottled all over with the most vivid tints, flapping about from flower to flower. Many of these were as large as some of the birds, and far larger than others—for we saw flocks of tiny humming-birds, not bigger than bees, shooting about like sparkling gems, and balancing themselves over the cups of the open flowers.

“It was a beautiful scene, indeed; and Cudjo and I at once agreed that that was the very place to pitch our camp. At the time, we meant it only for a *camp*—a spot where we might remain until our animals had recruited their strength, and we had collected from the forests around provision enough for the Desert journey. A temporary camp, indeed! That, gentlemen, is ten years ago, and here we are upon the same spot at this moment! Yes, my friends, this house stands in the middle of that very glade I have been describing. You will be surprised, when I tell you, there was no lake then, nor the appearance of one. That came afterwards, as you shall hear.

“What the lake now is was then part of the glade; and its surface, like the rest, was covered with beautiful vegetation, with, here and there, trees standing alone, or in small clumps, which gave it a most park-like appearance. In fact, we could not help fancying, that there was some splendid mansion in the background, to which it belonged—although we saw that the thick, dark woods surrounded it on all sides.

“We did not remain longer than was necessary to examine the ground. We knew that Mary would be anxiously looking for us, so we hastened back to our wagon. In less than three hours from that time, the wagon, with its snow-white tilt, stood in the centre of the glade, and the ox and horse, loosed from their labour, were eagerly browsing over the rich pasture. The children were playing on the green sward, under the shadow of a spreading magnolia; while Mary, Cudjo, the boys, and

myself, were engaged in various occupations about the ground. The birds flew around us, chattering and screaming, to the great delight of our little ones. They came quite close to our encampment, perching upon the nearest trees; and wondering, no doubt, what strange creatures we were, who had thus intruded upon their hitherto untenanted domain. I was glad to see them thus curious about us, as I argued from this that the sight of man was new to them, and, therefore, we should be in no danger of meeting with any of our own kind in the valley. It is strange, that, of all others, man was the animal we most dreaded to meet! Yet, such was the case; for we knew that any human beings we might fall in with in such a place would be Indians, and, in all probability, would prove our most cruel enemies.

“It was still early in the afternoon, and we determined to do nothing for the remainder of that day but rest ourselves, as we had all experienced considerable fatigue in getting far wagon up the stream. Rocks had to be removed, and occasionally a way hewed through the thick branches. But the difficulty being now over, we felt as though we had reached a home, and we set about enjoying it. Cudjo built a fire, and erected a crane over it, upon which to hang our pots and kettles. The crane consisted of two forked sticks driven in to the ground, one on each side of the fire, with a long pole placed horizontally, and resting upon the forks. This is the usual manner of making the crane among backwoods’ travellers, who cook their meals in the open air. The tripod crane, used by gipsies in Europe, is rarely to be seen among the wanderers of the American wilderness.

“In a short time, our camp-kettle, filled with pure water, was boiling and bubbling to receive the aromatic coffee; and the remainder of the antelope, suspended over the fire, was roasting and sputtering in the blaze. Mary had set out the great chest, covered with a clean white cloth—for she had washed it the day before; and upon this our tin plates and cups—scoured until they were shining like silver—were regularly arranged. When all these little preparations had been made, we seated ourselves around the fire, and watched the dainty venison as it became browned and crisped in the blaze. Cudjo had suspended the joint by a piece of strong cord, so that, by simply whirling it around, it would then continue for some time turning itself, as well as if it had been upon a patent jack-spit. We were congratulating ourselves on the fine supper we were likely soon to partake of, when, all at once, our attention was

directed to a noise that came out of the woods, near the border of the open ground. There was a rustling of leaves, with a cracking sound as of dead sticks, broken by the hoofs of some heavy animal. All our eyes were immediately turned in that direction. Presently we saw the leaves in motion; and the next moment three large animals stepped out into the glade, apparently with the intention of crossing it.

“At first sight we thought they were deer—for each of them carried a pair of branching antlers—but their great size at once distinguished them from any of the deer species we had ever seen. Any one of them was as large as a Flemish horse; and their huge antlers rising several feet above their heads, gave them the appearance of being still much larger. On seeing the branched and towering horns, we took them for deer,—and in fact they were so; but far differing from either the red or fallow-deer that are to be met with in parks and forests. They were elk—the great elk of the Rocky Mountains.

“On coming out of the timber, they marched forward, one after the other, with a proud step, that showed the confidence they placed in their great size and strength—as well as in the pointed weapons which they carried upon their heads, and which they can use upon an enemy with terrible effect. Their appearance was extremely majestic; and we all admired them in silence as they approached, for they came directly towards our camp.

“At length they caught sight of our wagon and fire,—neither of which objects, up to this time, they had seen. All at once they halted, tossed up their heads, snorted, and then continued for some moments to gaze at us with an expression of wonder.

“‘They will be off now,’ I muttered in an undertone to my wife and Cudjo. ‘No doubt they will be off in a moment, and they are entirely out of reach of my rifle.’

“I had caught hold of the gun on first seeing them, and held it in readiness across my knees Harry and Frank had also seized their small pieces.

“‘What pity, Massa Roff,’ said Cudjo, ‘de big rifle no reach ’em! Golly! de

be every one fat as 'possum!'

"I was thinking whether I might not creep a little closer to them, when, to our surprise, the animals, instead of starting off into the woods again, came several paces nearer, and again halted, tossing up their heads with a snort similar to that which they had uttered before. I say that this astonished all of us, for we had heard that the elk was an exceedingly shy animal. So, too, they are, of any danger to which they are accustomed; but, like most of the deer and antelope tribe, their curiosity is greater than their fear; and they will approach any object which may be new to them, and examine it minutely, before running off. I saw that curiosity had brought them so much closer to us; and, thinking they might advance still nearer, I cautioned my companions to remain silent, and without making any stir.

"The wagon, with its great white tilt, appeared to be the main attraction to our strange visitors; and, after eyeing it a moment with looks of wonder, they again moved several paces forward, and stopped as before. A third time they advanced towards it, and again made halt.

"As the wagon was at some distance from where we were sitting by the fire, their movements towards it brought their great sides somewhat into our view. Their last advance, moreover, had brought the leader within range of my rifle. He was much the largest of the three, and I determined to wait no longer, but let him have it; so, levelling my piece at the place which I supposed lay nearest to his heart, I pulled trigger.

"'Missed him!' thought I, as the three great animals wheeled in their tracks, and went away like lightning. What was strange to us, they did not gallop, as most deer do, but went off in a sort of shambling trot, like a 'pacing' horse, and quite as fast as a horse could gallop.

"The dogs—which, up to this time, Cudjo had been holding by their necks—dashed after with yelps and barking. They were all—both elk and dogs—soon lost to our eyes; but for some time we could hear the elk breaking through the thick cane and bushes, with the dogs yelling in close pursuit.

"I thought there would be no chance of the mastiffs coming up with them, and was, therefore, not intending to follow; when, all at once, I heard the

voices of the dogs change from yelping to that of a worrying sound, as though they were engaged in a fierce conflict with one another.

“‘Perhaps I have wounded the animal, and they have overtaken it,’ said I. ‘Come, Cudjo! let us after and see. Boys, remain to take care of your mother.’

“I laid hold of Harry’s rifle, and followed by Cudjo, ran across the glade in the track which both elk and dogs had taken. As we entered the bushes, I saw that their leaves were sprinkled with blood.

“‘No doubt,’ said I, ‘he is wounded, and badly, too. We shall have him yet.’

“‘Dat we shall, Massa!’ cried Cudjo; and we ran on as fast as we could through the thick cane-brake, in the track made by the animals. I ran ahead of my companion, as Cudjo was rather slow of foot. Every here and there I saw gouts of blood on the leaves and cane; and, guided by the hoarse voices of the mastiffs, I soon reached the spot where they were. Sure enough the wounded elk was there, down upon his knees, and defending himself with his antlers; while one of the dogs lay sprawling on the ground and howling with pain. The other still kept up the fight, endeavouring to seize the elk from behind; but the latter spun round, as though his knees were upon a pivot, and always presented his horny spikes in the direction of the attack.

“I was afraid the elk might get a blow at one of our brave dogs, and put an end to him, so I fired hastily; and, regardless of consequences, ran forward to finish the elk with the butt of the rifle. I struck with all my might, aiming directly for his head, but in my hurry I missed him; and, carried forward with the force which I had thrown into the blow, I fell right into the midst of his branching antlers! I dropped my rifle, and seized hold of the points, with the intention of extricating myself; but before I could do so, the elk had risen to his feet, and with a powerful jerk of his head tossed me high into the air. I came down upon a thick network of vines and branches; and, my presence of mind still remaining, I clutched them as I fell, and held on. It was well that I did so, for directly under me the infuriated animal was bounding from point to point, evidently in search of me and wondering where I had gone. Had I fallen back to the earth,

instead of clinging to the branches, he would no doubt have crushed me to pieces with his powerful horns.

“For some moments I lay quite helpless where I had been flung, watching what was passing below. The mastiff still continued his attack, but was evidently cowed by the fate of his companion, and only snapped at the elk when he could get round to his flanks. The other dog lay among the weeds howling piteously.

“At this moment Cudjo appeared in sight, for I had headed him some distance in my haste. I could see the whites of his great eyes turned up in wonderment when he perceived the rifle lying upon the ground without seeing me. I had barely time to utter a shout of warning, when the elk spied him; and lowering his head, rushed upon him with a loud and furious snort.

“I was filled with fear for my faithful follower and friend. I saw that he carried a large Indian spear—which he had found at the camp where our companions had been massacred—but I had no hope of his being able to ward off the impetuous attack. I saw that he did not even point the weapon to receive the enraged animal, but stood like a statue. ‘He is paralysed with terror,’ thought I; and I expected the next moment to see him impaled upon the sharp antlers and gored to death. But I had very much mistaken my man Cudjo. When the horns were within two feet of his breast, he stepped nimbly behind a tree, and the elk passed him with a rush. So quick had been the action, that for a moment I thought he had gone under; but, to my agreeable surprise, the next moment I saw him start out from the tree, and, making a lounge with the spear, bury it among the ribs of the animal! No matador in all Spain could have performed the feat more cleverly.

“I shouted with delight as I saw the huge body rolling to the earth; and, dropping down from my perch, I ran toward the spot. On reaching it, I found the elk panting in the throes of death, while Cudjo stood over his body safe and triumphant.

“‘Bravo!’ cried I, ‘my brave Cudjo, you have ended him in earnest!’

“‘Yes, Massa,’ replied Cudjo, coolly, though evidently with some slight

symptoms of triumph in his manner; 'yes, Massa Roff, dis black niggur hab gin de gemman a settler under de rib number five. He butt de breath out of poor Cassy no more—poor ole Cassy!' and Cudjo commenced caressing the dog Castor, which was the one that had suffered most from the horns of the elk.

"We were now joined by Harry, who, hearing the struggle, could remain no longer in the camp. Fortunately we found his rifle quite safe; and Cudjo drawing his knife, let the blood out of the animal in a scientific manner. From its great weight—not less than a thousand pounds—we saw that we could not take the whole carcass to camp without yoking either the horse or ox to it, so we resolved to skin and quarter it where it lay. After going back for the necessary implements, as well as to announce our success, we returned again, and soon finished the operation. Before the sun had set, nearly a thousand pounds of fresh elk-meat were dangling from the trees around our little encampment. We had purposely delayed eating until our work should be done; and while Cudjo and I were engaged in hanging up the huge quarters, Mary had been busy with the gridiron, and an elk rump-steak—quite equal to the best beef—added to the excellence of our supper."

Chapter Fourteen.

Adventure with the Carcajou.

“We arose early next morning; and, having eaten a hearty breakfast of elk-steaks and coffee, began to consider what was the next thing to be done. We had now quite enough of meat to carry us to the end of the longest journey, and it only remained to be cured, so that it would keep on the way. But how were we to cure it, when we had not a particle of salt? Here was a difficulty which for a moment looked us in the face. Only for a moment, for I soon recollected that there was a way of preserving meat without salt, which has always been much in use among Spanish people, and in countries where salt is very scarce and dear. I had heard, too, that this method was much practised among the trappers and hunters when laying up a stock of buffalo flesh, or of any other animals they might chance to kill. It is called ‘jerking,’ and the meat when thus prepared goes by the name of ‘jerked meat.’ By the Spaniards it is called ‘tasajo.’

“I remembered having read an account of the process, and after instructing Cudjo in it, we immediately set about ‘jerking’ the elk. We first built a large fire, upon which we placed a great many sticks of green wood freshly cut from the tree. This was done so that the fire might burn slowly, and throw out a great volume of smoke. We then stuck several stakes into the ground around the fire, and stretched lines from one to the other. This being done, we took down the quarters of the elk and removed the meat from the bones—cutting it off in thin strips, each of them over a yard in length. These strips we hung over the lines already prepared, so that they might be exposed to the smoke and heat of the fire, although not so much as to cause them to be broiled. The whole process was now ended—excepting that it would be necessary for us to look occasionally to the fire, as well as to see that the dogs and wolves did not leap up and snap off the meat, that hung down from the lines like so many strings of sausages. In about three days the flesh of the elk would be ‘jerked,’ and capable of being, carried to any distance without the danger of spoiling.

“During these three days we all remained very much in the neighbourhood of our camp. We might have procured more game had we gone out to hunt for it, but we did not do this for three reasons:—First, because we had enough for our wants; secondly, we did not wish, under the circumstances, to waste a single charge of ammunition; and, lastly, because we had seen the tracks of bears and panthers by the stream. We did not wish to risk meeting with any of these customers in the dark and tangled woods, which we should have been likely enough to do, had we gone far out in pursuit of game. We were determined to leave them unmolested as long as they should preserve a similar line of conduct towards us; and, in order to prevent any of them from intruding into our camp while we were asleep, we kept a circle of fires burning around the wagon throughout the night.

“During these three days, however, we were not without fresh viands, and those, too, of the most luxurious and delicate kinds. I had succeeded in killing a wild turkey, which, along with several others, had entered the glade, and run close up to our camp before they saw us. He was a large ‘gobbler’—over twenty pounds in weight—and, I need not tell you, proved far more delicious eating than his tame cousins of the farm-yard.

“At the end of the third day, the elk-meat was as dry as a chip; and taking it from the lines we packed it in small bundles, and placed it in our wagon. We now thought of waiting only until our animals should be fairly recruited; and as both horse and ox were up to their eyes, from morning till night, in rich pasturage, and began to fill out about the flanks, we were congratulating ourselves that we should not have long to wait.

“Of how little value are human calculations! Just at that moment, when we were so sanguine of being able soon to escape from our desert prison, an event occurred, which rendered that escape altogether impossible—for years at least, and it might have been, for ever. But I will detail the circumstance as it happened.

“It was on the afternoon of the fourth day after we had entered the valley. We had just finished dinner, and were sitting near the fire watching the two children, Mary and Luisa, as they rolled in joyous innocence over the smooth green sward. My wife and I were conversing about the little Luisa—about the unfortunate end of her father and mother—both of whom, we

believed, had fallen victims in the savage massacre. We were talking of how we should bring her up—whether in ignorance of the melancholy fate of her parents, and in the belief that she was one of our own children—or whether, when she had grown to a sufficient age to understand it, we should reveal to her the sad story of her orphanage. Our thoughts now reverted, for the first time, to our own wretched prospects, for these, too, had been blighted by the loss of our Scotch friend. We were going to a strange land—a land where we knew no one—of whose language, even, we were ignorant—a land, too, whose inhabitants were neither prosperous of themselves, nor disposed to countenance prosperity in others—much less of the race to which we belonged. We were going, too, without an object; for that which had brought us so far was now removed by the death of our friend. We had no property—no money—not enough even to get us shelter for a single night: what would become of us? They were bitter reflections which we drew from thinking on the future; but we did not permit them to torture us long.

“Fear not, Robert,” said my noble wife, placing her hand in mine, and looking cheerfully in my face; ‘*He who has guarded us through the past is not likely to fail us in the future.*’

“Dear Mary,” I replied, roused to new life and energy by her consoling words, ‘you are right—you are right—in Him only let us trust.’

“At that moment a strange noise sounded in our ears, coming from the direction of the forest. It seemed distant at first, but every moment drew nearer and nearer. It was like the voice of some animal ‘routing’ from extreme terror or pain. I looked around for the ox. The horse was in the glade, but his companion was not to be seen. Again the voice came from the woods, louder and more fearful than ever. It was plainly the bellowing of an ox; but what could it mean? Once more it rose upon the air, nearer and more distinct, and sounded as though the animal was running as it cried!

“I sprang to my rifle—Frank and Harry also seized theirs—Cudjo armed himself with the Indian spear; and the dogs, that had started to their feet, stood waiting a signal to rush forth.

“Once more broke out that terrible cry; and we could now hear the

sweeping of leaves, and the crackling of branches, as if some huge animal was tearing its way through the bushes. The birds flew up from the thicket, terrified and screaming—the horse neighed wildly—the dogs sent forth their impatient yelps, and our children shrieked in affright! Again rose, the deep and sonorous roar, filling the valley with its agonising tones. The cane rattled as it yielded to the crushing hoof. We saw the leaves of the thick underwood shaking at a distance—then nearer—then up to the edge of the glade—and the next moment a bright red object appeared through the leaves, and dashed out into the opening. We saw at a glance it was the ox; but what could it mean? Was he pursued by some monster—some beast of prey? No! not pursued, but already overtaken. Look! see what the ox carries on his shoulders! Oh, heavens! what a sight!

“We were all for a while as if paralysed. Between the shoulders of the ox, and clutching him around the neck, was a large animal. It at first sight appeared to be a mass of brown shaggy hair, and part of the ox himself—so closely was it fastened upon him. As they drew nearer, however, we could distinguish the spreading claws and short muscular limbs of a fearful creature. Its head was down near the throat of the ox, which we could see was torn, and dappled with crimson spots. The mouth of the strange animal was resting upon his jugular vein. It was tearing his flesh, and drinking his blood as he ran!

“The ox, as he came out of the thicket, galloped but slowly, and bellowed with less energy than before. We could perceive that he tottered as he ran, still making for the camp. In a short time, he was in our midst, when, uttering a long moan, he fell to the earth with the death-rattle in his throat!

“The strange animal, roused by the shock, suddenly let go its hold, and raised itself erect over the carcass. Now, for the first time, I saw what it was. It was the fearful *carcajou*! Now, too, for the first time, it seemed to be aware of our presence, and suddenly placed itself in an attitude to spring. The next moment it had launched its body towards Mary and the children!

“We all three fired as it sprang forward, but our feelings had unnerved us, and the bullets whistled idly away. I drew my knife and rushed after; but Cudjo was before me, and I saw the blade of his spear glancing towards

it like a flash of light, and burying itself in the long hair. With a hoarse growl, the monster turned, and, to my joy, I saw that it was impaled upon the spear, which had passed through the skin of its neck. Instead of yielding, however, it rushed up the shaft, until Cudjo was compelled to drop the weapon, to save himself from being torn by its long, fierce claws. Before it could clear itself from the spear, I had drawn my large pistol, and fired directly into its breast. The shot proved mortal; and the shaggy monster rolled over, and struggled for some minutes in the agonies of death. *We were saved; but our poor ox, that was to have drawn us out of the Desert, lay upon the grass a lifeless and almost bloodless carcase!*"

Chapter Fifteen.

A fruitless Search for a Trail.

"Our hopes of being able to get away from the oasis valley were thus crushed in a moment. The horse could not of himself draw the wagon, and how could we travel without it? Even could we have crossed the Desert on foot, he would hardly suffice to carry our food and water. But for us to pass one of those terrible stretches of wilderness—by the Spaniards called 'jornadas'—on foot was out of the question. Even the strongest and hardiest of the trappers often perish in such attempts; and how should we succeed—one of us being a delicate female—and having two children that must be carried in our arms? The thing was plainly impossible; and as I reflected upon it, the thoughts of its impossibility filled me with despair.

"But were we never to escape from that lonely spot? What prospect was before us of ever being able to leave it? No human beings might come to our relief. Perhaps no human foot except our own had ever made its track in that remote valley! This was not at all improbable; and indeed a party of hunters or Indians, on their journey across the Desert, might visit the mountain without discovering the valley,—so strangely was it hollowed out of the plain.

"I had but little hope that any caravan or party of traders would pass that way. The Desert that surrounded us was a sufficient barrier against that;

besides, I knew that the mountain was far to the southward of the trails usually followed by the prairie traders. There was but one hope that I could cling to with any degree of confidence: that was, that the Desert might not stretch so far to the south or west as it appeared to do; and by breaking up the wagon, and making a light cart out of it, we might still be able to cross it. I was determined, therefore, first to go alone, and explore the route in both these directions. If it should appear practicable, I could return, and put this design into execution.

“Next morning, having loaded my horse with provisions, and as much water as he could well carry, I took an affectionate leave of my wife and little ones; and, commending them to the protection of God, I mounted, and rode off toward the west. I headed in this direction for a day and a half, and still the waste stretched to the horizon before me. I had made but a short journey, for the path led through ridges and hillocks of moving sand, and my horse sank to the knees at every step. In the afternoon of the second day, I turned back from the attempt, fearful that I should not be able to regain the valley. But I succeeded at length,—both myself and horse almost dead with thirst on arriving there.

“I found my little party all well, as I had left them; but I had brought them no glad tidings, and I sat down in the midst of them with a feeling of despair.

“My next reconnoissance was to be to the south; and I only waited until my jaded horse might be sufficiently rested for another journey.

“Another day passed, and I was sitting upon a log near the fire, reflecting upon the dark future that lay before us. I was filled with despondency, and took no note of what was passing around. When I had sat in this way for some time, I felt a light hand touching me upon the shoulder; and, looking up, I saw that Mary had seated herself upon the log beside me, while a smile of cheerfulness and composure was playing upon her features.

“I saw that she had something in her mind that she was about to communicate to me.

“‘What is it, Mary?’ I asked.

“Is not this a lovely spot?’ said she, waving her hand so as to indicate the whole scene by which we were surrounded. My eyes, along with hers, roamed for a moment over the fair picture, and I could not do otherwise than answer in the affirmative. It was, indeed, a lovely spot. The open glade, with the golden sun streaming down upon its green herbage, and vivid flowers—the varied tints of the forest frondage, now dressed in the brilliant lively of autumn—the cliffs beyond, contrasting with it in colour from their lining of dark-green cedars and pines—and, higher still, the snow-white summit, as it towered against the blue sky, sparkling under the sun, and lending a delicious coolness to the air—all these objects formed a panorama that was indeed lovely to look upon. And there were sweet sounds falling upon the ear—the murmur of distant waters—the light rustling of leaves, stirred by a soft breeze that blew past laden with the aromatic odours of buds and flowers—the music of birds that sang to each other in the groves, or uttered their joyous calls as they flapped their bright wings over the open glade.

“Yes, Mary,’ I replied, ‘it is indeed a lovely spot.’

“Then, Robert,’ said she, with a look of strange meaning, ‘why should we be so anxious to leave it?’

“Why?’ I repeated mechanically after her, wondering at the question.

“Yes, why?’ continued my wife. ‘We are in search of a home—why not make *this* our home? Where can we find a better? How know we that in that land whither we were going, we may find one so good—if, indeed, they give us a home at all?’

“But, dear Mary,’ said I, ‘how could you live away from the world—you who have been brought up in the midst of society and its refinements?’

“The world!’ replied she, ‘what care we for the world? Have we not our children with us? They will be our world, and we can be society enough for each other. Moreover,’ continued she, ‘remember how little we have in that world,—remember how it has used us so far. Have we been happy in it? No, I have enjoyed more happiness here than I ever did in the midst of that society, of which you speak. Think, Robert! reflect before we rashly leave this lovely spot—this sweet home—into which I can almost believe

the hand of God has guided us.'

"'But, Mary, you have not thought of the difficulties, the hardships to which such a life may expose you.'

"'I have,' she replied. 'I have thought of all these while you were absent. I can see no difficulty in our procuring a subsistence here. The Creator has bountifully stocked this singular oasis. We may easily obtain all the necessaries of life—for its luxuries I care but little. We can live without them.'

"Her words produced a strange effect upon me. Up to that moment the idea of *remaining* in the oasis had never entered my mind. I had only occupied myself with speculating on the means by which we could escape from it. Now, however, a sudden change came over my thoughts; and I began to think seriously of following the counsel of my self-sacrificing companion. The harsh treatment we had received at the hands of civilised man—buffeted about by ill fortune—continually deceived, and at every step becoming poorer and more dependent, all had their effect in blunting that desire I should otherwise have felt to get back to the world. I was not averse then to the idea, but rather ready to fall at once into the plan.

"I remained silent for a length of time, casting over in my mind the possibility of our carrying out such a scheme—the chances of our being able to procure subsistence. It was evident there was plenty of game in the valley. We had occasionally seen deer of different species, and we had also discovered the tracks of other animals. There were pheasants and turkeys, too, in abundance. We had our rifles, and by good fortune a large stock of ammunition—for, besides my own, Harry and Frank had powder-horns containing nearly a pound each. But this in time would be expended—what then? Oh, what then? Before that I should find out some other mode of capturing our game. Besides, the valley might contain many other things intended to sustain life—roots and fruits. We had already found some indications of this; and Mary, who was an accomplished botanist, could tell the uses of them all. We should find both food and water. What more could we ask from the hand of Nature?

"As I ran these thoughts through my mind, the project became every

moment more feasible. In fact, I grew quite as enthusiastic about it as my wife.

“Cudjo, Frank, and Harry, were brought into our council; and they, too, received the idea with delight. The faithful Cudjo was contented, as he alleged, with any lot, so long as he might share it with us. As for the boys they were in raptures with the thought of such a free wild life.

“We did not fully resolve upon anything for that day. We were determined not to act rashly, but to reflect seriously upon it, and to renew our deliberations on the following morning.

“During that night, however, a circumstance occurred, which at once fixed my resolution to remain in the valley—at least until some unforeseen chance might enable us to leave it with a better prospect of safety.”

Chapter Sixteen.

The Mysterious Flood.

“Well, my friends, I shall now detail to you the strange incident, which at once decided me to adopt the suggestion of my wife, and make our home in the valley. Perhaps we did not, at the time, contemplate staying here for the remainder of our lives—but only for a few years. However, we resolved to remain for the present, and give our lonely life a fair trial, leaving the future an open question.

“The reason why I had hesitated at all upon the subject was this:—I could not think of settling down with no prospect of improving our condition; for, however much we might exercise our industry, its products could not enrich us beyond the satisfying of our own wants. We should have no market, thought I, for any superfluous produce, even could we cultivate the whole valley. We could, therefore, become no richer, and would never be in any fitter state to return to civilised society—for, in spite of all, a thought of this still remained in my mind.

“Mary, who was of a far more contented disposition than I, still persisted in arguing that as our happiness did not depend upon possessing riches,

we would never desire to leave that lovely spot, and that, consequently, we should stand in no need of wealth.

“Perhaps hers was the true philosophy—at all events, it was the natural one. But the artificial wants of society implant within us the desire of accumulating individual property; and I could not rid myself of this provident feeling. ‘If we could only find some object,’ said I, ‘upon which we might be exercising our industry, so that *our time should not be wasted*, and by which we might prepare ourselves for returning to society, then might we live most happily here.’

“‘Who knows?’ said Mary, in reply to this; ‘there may be objects in this valley that may occupy us, and enable us to lay up the very store you speak of, as well as if we were to continue on to New Mexico. What opportunities should we have there better than here? We have nothing now to begin life with anywhere. Here we have food and land, which I think we may fairly call our own; there we should have neither. Here we have a home; and how know you, Robert, that we may not yet make a fortune in the Desert?’

“We both laughed at the idea; which, of course, Mary had meant only as a jest in order to render our prospects more cheering.

“It was now near midnight, for we had sat up to that late hour deliberating on what we should do. As I have said, we agreed to leave the matter undecided until the morrow. The moon was just appearing over the eastern cliff; and we were about rising to retire to our resting-places, when our eyes fell upon an object that caused us all at the same time to cry out with astonishment.

“I have said, that when we first entered this valley there was no lake here. Where you now see one, was a green sward, with here and there a coppice of trees, forming part of the little prairie in which we were encamped. The stream ran across it, as it still does through the lake; but at this point there were scarcely any banks, as the water flowed over a wide and shallow channel. On previous nights, when the moon was shining into the valley, as we sat around our camp fire, we had noticed the stream winding like a silver thread through the dark-green herbage. Now, to our extreme wonder, instead of the narrow line, a broad sheet of

water glistened before us! It seemed to cover a space of several hundred yards in extent, reaching far up the glade towards our camp. Could it be water, or was it only the *mirage*—the *fata morgana*? No; it was not the latter. We had witnessed this before, on our passage across the great plains. We had witnessed it on several occasions, and it was nothing like what we now saw. There is a filmy, whitish appearance about the illusions of the *mirage* by which the experienced traveller can always distinguish it from the real. But there was nothing of that in the present instance. It was water that spread before us,—for the moon, that had now risen above the cliff, was plainly reflected upon its calm and glassy surface. Yes; it could be nothing but a sheet of water!” But we were determined not to trust to our eyes alone. We all ran towards it—Cudjo, the boys, and myself,—and in a few seconds we stood upon its edge—upon the edge of what appeared to be a large lake, formed as if by some magical influence!

“We had at first regarded the phenomenon only with feelings of wonder; but our wonder was now changed to consternation, when we perceived that the water was still rising! It ran in about our feet while we stood, rippling slowly against the gentle ascent like the influx of a tide.

“‘What could it mean?’ we asked of each other, with looks that betrayed our fears. Was it a flood—an inundation—a sudden swelling of the stream? This it plainly was, but what could have caused it? There had been no rain for several days before, and no great heat to have caused any unusual melting of the snow upon the mountain. What, then, could be the origin of this sudden and singular freshet? What could it mean?

“We stood for some time silent, with hearts beating audibly,—each looking at the others for an answer to this question. The solution seemed to strike us all at the same time, and a fearful one it was. Some terrible convulsion—the falling of the precipice perhaps—had dammed the cañon below; no doubt, had blocked up the great fissure by which the stream found its way from the valley. If such were the case, then, the valley would soon fill with water, not only to cover the ground occupied by our camp, *but the tops of the highest trees!*

“You will easily conceive the terror with which this thought was calculated to inspire us. We could think of no other cause for the strange inundation; nor, indeed, did we stay longer to consider of any, but ran back to the

camp, determined to escape from the valley as soon as we could. Cudjo caught the horse, Mary awoke the children, and brought them out of the wagon, while the boys and I busied ourselves in collecting a few necessary things, that we might be enabled to carry along with us.

“Up to this time we had not thought of the difficulty—much less the *impossibility—of escaping from the valley*. To our horror, that now became clear as the sun at noon-day; for we perceived that the road by which we had entered the glade, and which lay along the stream, was completely covered, and the rising water reached far beyond it! There was no other path by which we could get out. To attempt cutting one through the thick tangled woods would be the work of days; moreover, we remembered that we had crossed the stream on the way to our camp, and that, of course, would now be swollen below, so that to re-cross it would be impossible. We had no doubt but that the valley, at its lower end, was by this time filled with water, and our retreat in that direction completely cut off! *We knew of no other path!*”

“I cannot describe the state of mind into which we were thrown, when these facts became evident to one and all of us. We were about to start out from the camp, each of us carrying our burden; but it was plainly of no use making the attempt, and we let fall the various utensils with a feeling of despair. The water was still rising—*the lake was growing larger!*”

“The wolves howled, driven from their lair by the encroaching element—birds, roused from their sleep, screamed and fluttered among the trees—our dogs barked at the strange sight—and, in the clear moonlight, we could see deer, and other wild animals, rushing, as if terrified, through the open glade. O God! were we to be engulfed, and perish in this mysterious flood?”

“What was to be done? Should we climb into the trees? That would not save us. If the great channel was blocked up below, I knew that *that* would not save us; for its jaws were higher than the tops of the highest trees, and the rising flood would soon wash us from the branches. It might prolong our lives, and with them our despair; but what—‘Ha!’ The thought, heaven-directed, at this moment entered my mind.

“*A raft! a raft! we shall yet be saved!*”

“My companions at once understood my meaning. Cudjo seized the axe, while Mary hastened to the wagon to collect such ropes and cords as were in it. I knew there would not be enough of these for our purpose; and, spreading out the great elk-skin, I proceeded to cut it into stripes.

“There were several logs lying close to our camp. They were the trunks of tall straight trees, that, from time to time, had fallen, and were now quite dead and dry. They were the trunks of the beautiful *rhododendrons*, or tulip-trees, out of which the Indians always make their canoes, when they can get them of sufficient size. This, because their wood is extremely soft and light—weighing only twenty-six pounds to the cubic foot. While busy myself, I directed Cudjo to cut a number of these logs into equal lengths. Cudjo knew how to handle an axe with any man; and the logs were soon of the proper dimensions. We now rolled them together, and, by the aid of our ropes and cross pieces, lashed them firmly to one another; and our raft was completed. Upon this we placed our great chest containing the jerked meat, with our blankets, and such utensils as were necessary to be saved. We laid in no stock of water for the expected voyage—we had no fear about our having enough of that.

“We had been occupied nearly two hours in constructing the raft; but during all this time we had been so busy, that we had hardly looked in the direction of the flood—only to see that it still continued to rise. As soon as our arrangements were completed, I ran down to the water’s edge. After watching it for a few minutes, to my great joy I perceived that *the flood was at a stand!* I shouted the glad news to my companions, who, on hearing it, hastened to join me, and assure themselves by actual observation. For half-an-hour, we all stood upon the shore of the new-formed lake, until we became convinced that its waters were rising no higher. We saw, too, that they did not subside, but remained stationary. ‘It has reached the top of whatever has dammed it,’ thought we, ‘and is now flowing over.’

“‘What a pity, Massa Roff,’ said Cudjo, as we wended our way back to the camp; ‘what a pity we make dat fine raff for nuffin!’

“‘Ah, Cudjo,’ rejoined my wife, ‘we should never regret having performed that which is a work of precaution; and we must remember that the raft—although it may not be required as we intended it—has already far more

than repaid us for the labour bestowed upon it. Remember the misery we were suffering but a short time since, and from which the idea of this raft at once relieved us. Measures of precaution, however irksome, should always be adopted. It is only the slothful and vacillating who either neglect or regret them.'

"Dat's true, Missa—dat's berry true,' said Cudjo, in a serious tone, for he well knew how to appreciate the teachings of his noble mistress.

"It was now very late, or rather very early, and Mary, with the children, returned to their usual resting-place in the wagon. Cudjo and I, fearing to trust to the capricious water, determined—lest it might take another turn, and 'catch us napping'—to keep watch on it till the morning."

Chapter Seventeen.

The Beavers and Wolverine.

"When daylight came, the mysterious flood was still standing at its full height. I call it mysterious, for as yet we knew nothing of what had so suddenly created it. We could think of no other cause than the falling in of the precipice below. I had determined, as soon as the day fairly broke, to make my way through the woods, and remove all doubt—for we still felt some uneasiness in regard to this strange phenomenon.

"Leaving Cudjo with his long spear, and the boys with their rifles, to guard the camp, I set forth alone. I took with me my gun, as well as a small hatchet which we had, to clear away a track through the brushwood.

"I struck at once into the woods, and guiding myself by an occasional glimpse of the sun that had now risen, I kept on in a south-easterly course. It was my intention to get out on the edge of the flood some distance below, when I could then skirt around it. After cutting my way through the brambles to the distance of nearly a mile, I came suddenly out upon the bank of the rivulet; and guess my surprise, on seeing that the stream was not only not swollen, but there was even less water than usual running in its channel! I noticed, however, that the water was muddy, and that green leaves and fresh broken twigs were floating down

upon its current.

“Of course, I now turned my face up-stream, knowing that the dam must be in that direction; but, for my life, I could not imagine how any accident of Nature could have stopped up the channel above. The falling of trees could not possibly have produced such an effect; and there were no high bluffs abutting on the rivulet, that could have fallen into its bed. I began to believe that human hands had been at work; and I looked for the prints of human feet. I saw none, but the tracks of animals were numerous. Thousands of them, at least—great broad feet, webbed like those of a duck, but with sharp claws—were impressed in the sand and mud, all along the banks of the stream.

“I moved forward very cautiously; for, although I could not discover their tracks, I was still fearful that Indians, and of course enemies, were near. At length, I reached a bend in the stream, above which I remembered that the channel was narrower, and ran between banks of a considerable height. I remembered it well—for, on first entering the valley, we had been obliged at this place to draw the wagon out of the bed of the rivulet, and cut a way for it through the adjacent woods. No doubt, then, I would there find the obstacle that had so mysteriously intercepted the current.

“On reaching this bend, I climbed out upon the bank; and, stealing silently through the underwood, peeped through the leaves. A most singular scene was before me.

“The stream, as I had rightly conjectured, was dammed up, at the point where the channel was narrowest, but not by any accident. The work bore the marks of design, as much as if it had been constructed by human hands. A tall tree had been felled across the stream—so that the place where it had been cut through was not detached from the stump, but still held fast by its crushed fibres. On the other side its top branches were buried under rocks and mud, so as to render them secure. Against this tree upright stakes rested; and these again were wattled together, and firmly bedded in rocks that had been collected around their lower ends. Behind these uprights were piled other stakes and branches laid crosswise, and bound together with layers of rocks and mud—so that the whole structure formed a wall of full six feet in thickness—broad along the top, and sloping off toward the water. On the lower side it stood

nearly perpendicular, as the uprights were thus set. The top of this was plastered with mud, and at both sides was left a narrow sluice, or wash, through which the water ran smoothly off, without wearing away the breastwork.

“I have said that the work bore the marks of design, as much as if it had been constructed by human hands. But it was not. The builders of that breastwork were before my eyes, and apparently just resting from their labours.

“There were about an hundred of them in all, squatting over the ground, and along the parapet of the new-made dam. They were of a dark-brown, or rather a chestnut colour; and reminded me of so many gigantic rats—except that their tails were pot elongated and tapering like these. Their backs, however, were arched, and their bodies of a thick rounded shape, similar to animals of the rat kind. Moreover, I could perceive that they were armed with the cutting teeth, which distinguish the family of the *rodentia*, or ‘gnawers.’ These teeth I could see distinctly—as some of the animals were using them at the time, and they even protruded when their mouths were shut. I noticed that there was a pair of them in each jaw, broad, strong, and shaped like chisels. The ears of the animals were short, and almost buried in the hair, which although long was not shaggy, but presented a smooth appearance over all parts of their bodies. There was a tuft of stiff bristles growing out on each side of the nose, like the whiskers of a cat; and their eyes were small, and set high up, like those of the otter. Their fore limbs were shorter than the hind ones, and both had feet with five claws, but the hind feet were broad and large, and completely webbed between the toes. It was they, then, that had made the tracks I had observed in coming up the stream. But the most striking feature of these animals was the tail. This appendage was entirely without hair, of a dark colour, and looking as though it was covered with the well-known substance shagreen. It was about a foot in length, several inches broad and thick, and not at all unlike a cricket bat—except that it appeared heavier and more oval-shaped at the end. The animals were somewhat larger than otters, not so long, but much thicker and heavier in the body.

“I had never seen such creatures before, but I knew at once what they were—for although I had neglected my other studies, natural history had

always been my favourite, and I had made some progress in that. I knew, then, that the strange beings before me were *beavers*—the *castor fibre* of the naturalists.

“The whole mystery was now explained. A colony of beavers had migrated into the valley, and constructed their dam; and this it was which had caused the sudden inundation.

“I remained for some time, after I had made the discovery, watching these creatures and their interesting movements. The breastwork appeared to be quite finished; but this did not follow from the fact that the animals were no longer at work upon it, as it is only by night they perform such labour. In fact, they are rarely seen except by night, in countries where they have been disturbed or hunted; but here they were evidently unaccustomed to man. They appeared to be resting after their night’s work, it is not likely that they had built the whole breastwork during that one night, but had only put on the finishing part which had produced the sudden flood. As the glade above where they had dammed the rivulet was nearly level, a very small stoppage in the stream sufficed to inundate a large extent of ground, as it had actually done.

“Some of the beavers were sitting upon the newly-raised work, gnawing the leaves and twigs that stuck out from the mud; others were washing themselves, disporting playfully through the water; while others squatted upon logs that lay along the edge of the dam, every now and again flapping their heavy tails upon the water, like so many laundresses beating out their wet linen.

“It was a curious and comical sight; and, after having enjoyed it for some time, I was about to step forward to witness what effect my presence would produce, when, all at once, I perceived that some other object had created a sudden commotion among the animals. One of them, who had been stationed upon a log at some distance up the lake, and apparently acting as a sentry, now ran out upon the log, and struck the water three quick heavy flaps with his tail. This was evidently a signal; for, the moment he had given it, the animal, as if pursued, pitched himself head-foremost into the lake, and disappeared. The rest started as soon as they heard it; and looking around for a moment, as if in affright, they all ran to the bank, and plunged simultaneously under the water—each of them

striking a blow with his tail as he disappeared!

“I now looked for the cause of this sudden movement. All at once I perceived, coming around the lake where the sentry-beaver had disappeared, a strange-looking animal. It moved slowly and silently, skulking among the trees, and keeping close in upon the water’s edge. I saw that it was making for the new-built dam, and I remained where I was to watch it. At length it reached the breastwork, and crawled cautiously along it, keeping behind the parapet—so as not to be seen from the lake above.

“I had now a good view of it, and a vicious-looking creature it was. It was not much larger than one of the beavers themselves; and in some points not unlike them; but in other respects the difference was marked. It was of a very different colour—being nearly black upon the back and belly, while a light brown strip traversed both its sides, meeting over its rump. Its nose and feet were completely black, while its breast and throat were white, and a whitish ring was around each of the eyes. It had small ears, with stiff bristles at the nose, and a short and bushy tail. The hair over its whole body was long and shaggy. Its legs were thick and muscular, and so short that, when it moved, its belly seemed to trail along the ground. It appeared rather to crawl than to walk—but this arose from the fact of its being an animal of the plantigrade family; and using its feet to walk upon—which in many other animals, such as the horse, appear to form part of the legs. With the animal in question the feet were long, black, and armed with white curving claws. Its whole appearance was that of a carnivorous creature—in other words, it was a beast of prey. It was the *Wolverene*, the dreaded enemy of the beavers.

“On arriving near the middle of the breastwork, it stopped; and, planting its forefeet up against the parapet, raised its head slowly, and looked over into the lake.

“Although the beaver is an amphibious animal, and spends full half of his time in the water, he cannot remain long, without coming to the surface to take breath; and already the heads of several were seen at different points in the lake. Others, again, had boldly climbed out on the little islets which here and there appeared above water, and where they knew that the wolverene, who is not a good swimmer, could not reach them. None

of them, however, showed any signs of returning to the breastwork.

“The wolverene seemed also to have arrived at this conclusion; for now—apparently careless of being seen from the lake—he looked around him on all sides and above, as if he either intended giving up the pursuit of his prey, or adopting some more effective measure to secure it. At length he appeared to have formed some resolution, and leaping boldly up on the parapet, so as to be seen by the beavers, he walked back again along the water’s edge whence he had come. On getting a good distance from the breastwork, he stopped for a moment; and then, turning away from the lake, ran off into the woods.

“I was curious to see whether the beavers would now return to the breastwork, and I resolved to remain a while longer without showing myself. I waited about five minutes or more, at the end of which time I saw several of them—who had gone to the most distant islets—plunge into the water and come swimming towards me. As I was watching them, all at once I heard a rustling among the fallen leaves near the dam; and on looking I perceived the wolverene making all the haste he could toward the breastwork. On reaching it, however, instead of running out behind the parapet as before, I saw him plant his long claws against a tree, and commence climbing upward, keeping on that side farthest from the lake. The branches of this tree stretched horizontally out, and directly over the breastwork. In a short time the wolverene had reached the fork of one of these; and, crawling out upon it, he laid himself flat along the branch and looked downward.

“He had scarcely settled himself on his perch, when half-a-dozen beavers—thinking from what they had seen that he must have gone clear off—climbed out upon the breastwork, flapping their great tails as they came. They were soon under the very branch, and I saw the wolverene with his legs erected and ears set for the spring. This was my time; and glancing up the barrel of my rifle, I aimed directly for his heart. At the crack, the astonished beavers leaped back into the water, while the wolverene dropped from his perch—a little sooner, perhaps, than he had intended—and rolled over the ground evidently wounded. I ran up and struck at him with the butt-end of my gun, intending to finish him; but, to my astonishment, the fierce brute seized the stock in his teeth, and almost tore it in pieces! For some time I hammered him with huge stones—he all

the while endeavouring to lay hold of me with his long curved claws—and it was not until I got a down-blow at his head with my axe that the fight was ended. A fearful-looking monster he was as he lay stretched before me, and not unlike the carcajou which had killed our ox at the camp, only smaller. I did not attempt to take his carcass with me, as it was a useless burden. Moreover, from the fetid smell which he emitted, I was glad to part company as soon as I had killed him; and, leaving him where he lay, I took the shortest road back to the camp.”

Chapter Eighteen.

How to build a Log-Cabin.

“I need not describe the joy of my wife and the rest when I returned, and related to them what I had seen, as well as my adventure with the wolverene. The discovery that our new-made lake was nothing else than a great beaver-dam at once decided the question as to our remaining in the valley. Here was a source of wealth to us far greater than would have been any situation in the mines of Mexico—in fact, better than a mine itself. The skin of every beaver in that dam I knew to be worth a guinea and a half. I saw there were at least an hundred of them—there might be many more—and how soon would these multiply into thousands, producing annually four or five young to every pair of them. We could tend them—taking care to provide them with food—and destroy the wolverenes and any other of their enemies, that might exist in the valley. They would thus increase the faster, and we could easily prevent them from becoming too numerous by trapping the older ones, and carefully preserving their skins. After several years thus employed, we could return to civilised life, carrying with us enough of their valuable fur to sell for a smart fortune.

“The prospect of staying where we were was now delightful—the more so, as I was satisfied it was the best thing I could do. Even had I been able to procure a pair of fresh oxen at that moment, I should not have moved a step farther. What Mary had said in jest was now likely to be realised in earnest, *We might yet make our fortune in the Desert!*

“Of course, it was a settled point—we resolved to remain.

“The first thing to be done, then, was to provide ourselves with a house. It would be a ‘log-cabin,’ of course; and putting up a log-cabin was a mere bagatelle to Cudjo. During our residence in Virginia, he had built two or three on my farm; and no man knew better than he how to do the thing. No man knew better than he how to shape the logs, notch them, and lay them firmly in their beds—no man knew better how to split the ‘clap-boards,’ lay them on the rafters, and bind them fast, without even a single nail—no man knew how to ‘chink’ the walls, clay the chimney, and hang the door of a log-cabin better than Cudjo. No. I will answer for that—Cudjo could construct a log-cabin as well as the most renowned architect in the world.

“There was plenty of the right kind of timber at hand—plenty of tulip-trees with their tall straight trunks rising to the height of fifty feet without a branch; and for the next two days the axe of Cudjo could be heard with its constant ‘check—check,’ while every now and then the crash of a falling tree woke the echoes of the valley. While Cudjo was felling the timber and cutting it into logs of a proper length, none of the rest of us were idle. In cooking our meals, scouring the vessels, and looking after the children, Mary found sufficient employment; while Frank, Harry, and I, with the help of our horse Pompo, were able to drag the logs forward to the spot where we had designed to put up the cabin.

“On the third day, Cudjo notched the logs, and on the fourth we raised the walls up to the square. On the fifth, we set up the gables and rafters, which, you know, is done by shortening the gable-logs successively, as you go upward, and tying each pair of them by a pair of rafters notched into them, at the ends, precisely as the wall-logs below. A ridge-pole completed the frame, and that was laid by the evening of the fifth day.

“Upon the sixth day, Cudjo went to work upon a large oak which he had felled and cut into lengths of about four feet each, at the beginning of our operations. It was now somewhat dry, so as to split easily; and with his axe and a set of wedges he attacked it. By sunset, he had a pile of clap-boards beside him as large as a wagon—quite enough to ‘shingle’ the roof of our house. During that day, I employed myself in tempering the clay for chinking the walls and plastering the chimney.

“On the seventh day, we all rested from our labour. We did so because it was Sunday. We had resolved ever to keep the Sabbath. Though the eyes of men could not see us—which I fear is too often the reason for observing the sacred day—we knew that the eye of God was upon us, even in that remote valley.

“We rose as early as usual, and after eating our breakfast, the Bible was brought forth, and we offered—the only sacrifice to Him acceptable—the sacrifice of our humble prayers. Mary had been busy during the week, and our little ones were dressed out, as if for a holiday. Taking them along with us, we all walked down to the lake and some distance around its edge. We saw that the beavers had been as busy in building as we; and already their cone-shaped dwellings appeared above the water—some of them near the shore, and others upon the little islets. There was only one which we could reach, and this we examined with great curiosity. It stood only a few yards from the shore, but at a place where the water was deep on its front side. It was nearly cone-shaped, or rather the form of a bee-hive; and was constructed out of stones, sticks and mud mixed with grass. Part of it was under water, but although we could not look into the interior, we knew that there was an upper story above water-mark—for we saw the ends of the joists that supported the second floor. The entrance was toward the centre of the lake and under the water—so that in going out of and into his house, the beaver is always under the necessity of making a dive. But he does not mind that, as it seems to be rather a pleasure to him than an inconvenience. There was no entrance toward the land, as we had often heard. Indeed, it would be bad policy in the beaver, thus to make a door by which his enemy, the wolverene, could easily get in and destroy him. The houses were all plastered over with mud, which, by the flapping of the tails and the constant paddling of the broad web-feet, had become as smooth as if the mud had been laid on with a trowel. We knew that they were also plastered inside, so as to render them warm and commodious in winter.

“Some of these dwellings were not regular cones, but rather of an oval shape; and sometimes two were placed, as it were, ‘under one roof,’ so as to steady them in the water, and save labour in the building. They were all pretty large—many of them rising the height of a man above the surface of the lake, and with broad tops, where the beavers delighted to sit and sun themselves. Each house was built by its own inhabitants, and

each of them was inhabited by a single pair of beavers—man and wife—and in some instances where there were families by four or five. Some of them who had finished their houses earlier than the rest, had already commenced gathering their provisions for the winter. These consisted of the leaves and soft twigs of several species of trees—such as willow, birch, and mulberry—and we saw collections of these floating in the water in front of several of the houses.

“It was late in the season for beavers to be constructing a new dam. It is generally in spring when they perform that labour; but it was evident that the present colony had just arrived—no doubt driven by trappers or Indians, or perhaps drought, from their last settlement, hundreds of miles away. We conjectured that they must have come up the stream that ran away to the eastward.

“They must have entered the valley some time before we discovered them, as it would have taken them several days to gnaw down the trees and accumulate the materials for the dam that had so suddenly started up to alarm us. Some of these trees were nearly a foot in diameter, while many of the stones—which they had rolled up or carried between their fore-paws and throat—would have weighed nearly a score of pounds.

“It was evident, then, they had arrived late in the season, and had worked hard to get ready for the winter. But Cudjo and I were determined, as soon as we should have finished our building operations, to lend them a hand in laying in their stock of provisions.”

Chapter Nineteen.

The Sagacious Squirrel.

“While we thus stood watching the movements of our beavers, and conversing about the habits of these interesting animals, an incident occurred which very much amused us, and proved that the beavers were not the only animals whom Nature had gifted with extraordinary sagacity.

“Near the middle of the lake stood a clump of tall trees—their trunks immersed for two or three feet under the water. These trees had been upon the bank of the rivulet, previous to the formation of the dam; and they were now surrounded on all sides, forming a kind of timber islet. It was evident, however, that they were destined to decay, as they were trees of the poplar species, and such as could not live with their roots covered with water.

“Among the tops of these trees we observed several small animals leaping nimbly about from branch to branch and from one tree to the other. They were squirrels. They seemed to be labouring under some unusual excitement—as though they had been alarmed by the presence of an enemy. But there did not appear to be any such enemy near them. We noticed that they passed from tree to tree, running down the trunks of each, as far as the water would allow them; and then, after looking outward, as if they intended to leap into the lake, they would suddenly turn back again, and gallop up into the high branches. There were in all about a dozen of them; but the nimbleness with which they passed from place to place, would have led one to believe that there were ten times that number; and the twigs and leaves were constantly kept in motion, as though a large flock of birds were fluttering through them.

“We had noticed these animals before, from time to time, dashing about in the same clump of trees; but not thinking it anything unusual, had paid no attention to their movements. Now, however, it occurred to us that these little creatures—who never take to the water unless compelled by absolute necessity—had been suddenly cut off from their usual range by the forming of the dam, and were held where they were in a state of captivity. This was the more evident, as the trees had been stripped of

many of their leaves, and the bark was peeled from the more tender twigs and branches. It was plain that the squirrels had been living for some time upon short allowance, and were anxious to get off from the place.

“We now saw what was causing the unusual commotion among them at that particular time. Near the clump of trees, but higher up the lake, a small log was floating in the water. It had somehow got into the stream above, and was being borne down by the current. It was at this moment nearing the little island of timber upon which were the squirrels; but it came on very slowly, as the current through the lake was hardly perceptible. It was this log that was causing such a flurry; and the animals evidently intended—should it come near enough—to use it as a raft.

“We seated ourselves to watch their manoeuvres. On came the log slowly and gradually; but, instead of drifting directly for the timber, it was borne by the current in a direction that would carry it at least twenty yards from the trees. The squirrels had gathered upon that side; and now, instead of running up and down the trunks, as before, they all stood upon the topmost branches apparently watching the motions of the log.

“‘Poor little creatures!’ said Mary, ‘they will be unable to reach it, after all. What a pity!’

“Just as she made this reflection, the log floated forward to the point where it was likely to be nearest to the clump in passing. A long branch stretched out in that direction; but, as we calculated, the driftwood was not likely to pass nearer than twenty yards. On this branch, however, the squirrels had now gathered, one behind the other in a long string, and we could see the foremost of them straining himself as if to spring.

“‘Surely, they do not intend,—surely, they cannot leap so far!’ said Mary, as we all stood holding our breath, and watching them with intense curiosity.

“‘Yes, Missa,’ replied Cudjo; ‘de do intend. Gosh! de leap him, too. Dis nigga see ’em in Vaginy leap far furrer. Looky now! Yonder de go—wap!’

“As Cudjo spoke, the foremost squirrel launched out into the air, and the

next moment pounced down upon the log. Then another followed, and another, and another, looking like so many birds flying through the air in a string, until the log was covered with the little creatures, and floated off with its cargo!

“We supposed that they had all succeeded in getting off, but in this we were mistaken. On looking up to the trees again, we saw that there was still one remaining. He appeared not to have got out upon the projecting branch in time,—for the weight of each of those that preceded him, coming down upon the log had pushed it so far off, that he became, no doubt, afraid to venture taking such a long leap. He was now running to and fro, apparently in a frantic state—both on account of his inability to escape, and his being thus left alone. For some time he kept springing from tree to tree, running down the trunks of all to the very edge of the water, and stopping now and again to look hopelessly after his companions.

“At length, we saw him descend a tree, whose bark was exceedingly rough—in fact, crisped outward in great broad pieces, or scales of a foot long, and several inches broad, that looked as though they were about to fall from the tree. For this reason, the tree is known among backwoodsmen as the ‘scaly bark.’ Having descended this tree, nearly to the point where it rose above the water, the squirrel was seen to stop; and for a moment we lost sight of him, where he was hidden behind one of the broad pieces of bark. We thought he had taken shelter there, intending to rest himself. Presently, however, we saw the bark moving backwards and forwards; and from what we could see of the little animal, it was evident he was trying with all his might to detach it from the tree. Occasionally he ran out from the crevice—scratched the bark outside with teeth and claws—and then hurriedly disappeared again.

“These strange manoeuvres were kept up for several minutes, while we all remained upon the shore, watching with curiosity for the result.

“At length, we saw the piece of bark move rapidly outward from the trunk, and hang down suspended only by a few fibres. These were soon gnawed by the teeth of the squirrel, and the broad scale fell into the water. It had hardly touched the surface, when the animal ran nimbly down, and leaped upon it! There was no current at the spot where the

bark fell into the water; and we were in doubt whether it would carry him out from among the trees; but we were soon convinced that our squirrel knew what he was about. As soon as he had fairly balanced himself upon his tiny craft, he hoisted his broad bushy tail high up in the air, by way of a sail; and, the next moment, we saw that the breeze catching upon it wafted the little mariner slowly, but surely, outward! In a few seconds he had cleared the trees; and the wind soon brought him within the influence of the current, which caused his bark to float downward after his companions.

“These had well-nigh reached the breastwork of the dam; and Harry wished very much to intercept them as they got to land. This wish, however, was overruled by his mother, who very justly declared that the little creatures deserved to escape, after having so well amused us by their ingenuity.

“In a short time, they all leaped ashore, and went scampering off among the trees in search of a dinner—for by this time, no doubt, they were sufficiently hungry.”

Chapter Twenty.

A House built without a Nail.

“Next day Cudjo and I went on with our housebuilding. This day was appropriated to roofing it. We first laid a row of the clap-boards, projecting considerably over the eaves—so as to cast the water far out. These we secured near their lower ends by a long straight pole, which traversed the roof horizontally from gable to gable, and was lashed down by strips of wet elk-hide. These we knew would tighten as they dried, and press the pole firmer than ever against the boards.

“We now laid a second row of the clap-boards—with their lower ends riding the upper ones of the first row, and thus securing them. The second row was in its turn secured by a horizontal pole, along its bottom, and at its top by the lower ends of the third row; and so on up to the ridge.

“The other side was shingled in a similar manner; and the ridge itself was secured against leakage, by allowing the clap-boards, on one side, to project upwards, and shelter the ends of those on the other. This gave our cabin quite a chancel sort of comb along its top, and added to the picturesqueness of its appearance.

“Our house was now built and roofed, and we could say that we had finished a house without ever having been inside of it—for as yet it had neither door nor windows. As the spaces between the logs were not yet ‘chinked,’ it looked more like a gigantic cage than a house.

“Our next day was devoted to making the door and window—that is, making the apertures where these were to be. We designed having only one window—in the back.

“The manner in which we opened our doorway was very simple. Having first carefully rested the logs—which were to be on each side of the door—upon firm wedges, we sawed away the parts between. Fortunately, we had a saw, or this operation would have given us a good deal of trouble. Of course, we sawed away the proper size for a door; and thus our doorway, by placing the lintels and posts, was complete. In a similar manner we cut out our window in the back. We then went to work upon one of the soft tulip-trees, and sawed out enough plank to make a door and window, or rather a window-shutter. These we cut to the proper size, and bound them together by slats, and trenails made out of the hard locust-wood. We then hung them—both door and window-shutter—with strips of elk-skin. That night we carried in all our bedding and utensils, and slept under the roof of our new house.

“It was still far from being finished; and the next day we set about building a fireplace and chimney. This, of course, was to be in one of the gable ends; and we chose that looking northward—for we had built our cabin fronting the east. We wedged the logs precisely as we had done with the door, and then sawed away the space between—up to the height of an ordinary mantel-piece. Behind this, and altogether outside the house, we built a fireplace of stones and clay—laying a hearth of the same materials, that completely covered the sleeper—in order to prevent the latter from being burned. On the top of this fireplace, the chimney was still to be erected; and this was done by notching short straight pieces of

timber, and placing them across each other, exactly as we had laid the logs of the house itself. These pieces were put in shorter, as we advanced to the top—so that the top ones might be lighter and more easily supported by those below; and when the whole was finished, and the chinks filled with clay, our chimney tapered upward like the funnel of a little factory. The chimney and fireplace occupied us quite a day, and at night—although it was not very cold—we tried it with a log-fire. It drew beautifully.

“Next day we ‘chinked’ the walls all round with chips, stones, and clay. We chinked gables and all, until not a hole was to be seen that would let a mouse through. The floor still remained; but we intended to lay this with plank, and as we had no means of getting them except by our small saw, and they would require some time to dry, we resolved to attend, first, to several other things that were of more necessity, and finish the floor at our leisure. We carpeted the ground, which was quite dry, with green palmetto leaves, and that rendered it sufficiently comfortable for the present. We now formally entered our new house, which we had built from floor to chimney *without a nail!*”

“Our next care was to furnish our horse with a house—in other words, to build a stable. Not that the weather rendered it at all necessary for Pompo—so our horse was called—to sleep under a roof; but we were fearful lest some beast of prey, prowling about by night, should fancy him—as the carcajou had fancied our poor ox.

“The stable was only a two days’ job—as we built it out of logs already cut, and roofed it with the refuse of our clap-boards. Besides, we had no window nor chimney to make, and we did not chink the logs, as that was not necessary for a stable in such a climate. Our horse would be warm enough without that; and Cudjo had made him a trough by hollowing out one of the tulip-trees.

“From that time forth Pompo was regularly called every evening at sunset, and shut up in his stable. We could not afford to let the carcajou make a meal of him, as in our log-hauling and other labours he was of great service to us.

“As soon as the stable was finished, we set to work and put up a table

and six strong chairs. As I have said, we had no nails; but, fortunately enough, I had both a chisel and auger, with several other useful tools. All of these I had brought in the great chest from Virginia, thinking they might be needed on our beautiful farm at Cairo. With the help of these, and Cudjo's great skill as a joiner, we were able to mortise and dovetail at our pleasure; and I had made a most excellent glue from the horns and hoofs of the elk and ox. We wanted a plane to polish our table, but this was a want which we could easily endure. The lid of our table was made of plank sawn out of the catalpa-tree; and with some pieces of pumice I had picked up in the valley, and the constant scouring which it received at the hands of our housewife, it soon exhibited a surface as smooth as glass. From my finding this pumice-stone, I concluded that our snow-mountain had once been a volcano—perhaps like the peak of Teneriffe, standing alone in the water, when the great plain around us had been covered with a sea.

“Cudjo and I did not forget the promise we had made to the beavers. We could see these little creatures, from day to day, very busy in drawing large branches to the water, and then floating them towards their houses. We knew that this was for their winter provisions. They had grown quite tame, as soon as they found we were not going to molest them; and frequently came out on our side of the lake. For this confidence on their part we were determined to give them a treat they little dreamt of—at least, of receiving from our hands.

“I had noticed a clump of beautiful trees, which grew near one side of the glade, and not far from where we had built our house. Our attention had been called to them by the aromatic fragrance of their flowers, that blew around us all the time we were engaged in building. They were low, crooked trees, not over thirty feet in height—with oval leaves, six inches in length, and of a bluish-green colour. The flowers were about the size of a rose, although more like a lily in appearance, and white as snow. Their perfume was extremely agreeable, and Mary was in the habit of gathering a bunch of them daily, and placing them in a vessel of water.

“I have already said that my wife understood botany, and all botanists take a pleasure in imparting their knowledge to others. She explained to us, therefore, the nature and properties of this sweet-scented tree. It was a species of magnolia—not that which is celebrated for its large flowers,

but another kind. It was the *magnolia glauca*, sometimes called 'swamp sassafras,' but more generally known among hunters and trappers as the 'beaver-tree.' It is so named by them, because the beaver is fonder of its roots than of any other food; so fond of it, indeed, that it is often used as a bait to the traps by which these animals are caught.

"Whether our beavers had already discovered their favourite tree in some other part of the valley, we did not know. Probably they had; but, at all events, Cudjo and I by a very little labour, with our spade and axe, could save them a great deal; and so we set about it.

"In a few hours we dug up several armfuls of the long branching roots, and carried them down to the edge of the lake. We flung them into the water at a place where we knew the animals were in the habit of frequenting. In a short time the aromatic roots were discovered, when a whole crowd of beavers were seen hurrying to the spot, and swimming off again to their houses, each with a root or a whole bunch of them in his teeth. That was a grand festival for the beavers."

Chapter Twenty One.

A Battue of "Black-Tails."

"Of course we could do nothing more for our beavers at present. It was not our intention to trap any of them until they should become very numerous, and then we could obtain annually a large number of skins. Their tails, we knew, were very good to eat—in fact, quite a delicacy—but we could not afford to kill one of them merely for the sake of eating his tail; and the other parts of the beaver's flesh are by no means palatable. Besides, we expected to find enough of game without that, as in every part, where the ground was soft, we saw the tracks of deer and other animals.

"By the time we had fairly furnished our house, the flesh of the elk was beginning to run short, so that a grand hunting excursion was determined upon. It was also to be an exploring expedition, as up to this time we had not visited any part of the valley except that which lay immediately

around our house. Frank, Harry, and myself, were to form the party, while Cudjo was to remain by the house, and guard the female portion of our little community with his great spear.

“Everything being ready, we started out with our three rifles, and took the route up the valley. As we passed along under high trees, we could see squirrels upon all sides of us; some of them sitting on their hind-quarters like little monkeys; some of them cracking nuts; some of them barking like toy-dogs; while others, again, leaped about among the branches. As we advanced upon them, they sprang up the trees, or streaked off along the ground so swiftly that it seemed more like the flight of a bird than the running of a four-footed animal. On reaching a tree they would gallop up it, generally keeping on the opposite side to that on which we were, so that they might be secure. Sometimes, however, their curiosity would get the better of their fears, and when they had climbed as high as the first or second forking or the branches, they would stop there and gaze down upon us, all the while flourishing their light bushy tails. We had excellent opportunities of getting a shot at them, and Harry, who was not so thoughtful as his brother, wished very much to try his skill; but I forbade this, telling him that we could not afford to throw away our ammunition on such small game. Indeed, this was a thought that frequently entered my mind, and made me anxious about what we should do when our ammunition became exhausted. I cautioned both my boys, therefore, not to spend a single shot on any animal smaller than elk or deer, and they promised to obey me.

“When we had gone about a mile up-stream, we saw that the trees grew thinner as we advanced, and then opened into small glades, or spaces covered with herbage and flowers, usually called ‘openings.’ This, surely, was the very place to find deer—much more likely than in the thick woods, where these animals are in more danger from the cougar and carcajou, that occasionally drop upon them from the trees. We had not gone far among these openings, before we saw fresh tracks. They were more like the tracks of a goat than those of a deer, except that they were much larger. They were nearly as large as the tracks of the elk, but we knew they were not these.

“We advanced with great caution, keeping in the underwood as much as possible. At length we saw that there was a large glade before us, much

larger than any we had yet passed. We could tell this by the wide clear spaces that appeared through the trees. We stole silently forward to the edge of this glade, and, to our great satisfaction, saw a herd of deer feeding quietly out upon the open ground.

“Papa, they are not deer,’ said Frank, as we first came in sight of them. ‘See! who ever heard of deer with such ears as those? I declare they are as long as a mule’s!’

“Yes,’ added Harry; ‘and who ever heard of deer with black-tails?’

“I confess I was myself puzzled for a while. The animals before us were certainly deer, as their long slender legs and great branched antlers testified; but they were very different from the common kind—and different, too, from the elk. They were much larger than the red or fallow-deer, though not unlike them in shape and colour. But that which was strange, as my boys had at once noticed, was the peculiarity of their ears and tails. The former were quite as long as the ears of a mule, and reached more than half-way to the tops of their antlers. Their tails, again, were short and bushy, of a whitish colour underneath, but on the top and above as black as the wing of a crow. There were also some black hairs upon their backs, and a black stripe along the neck and shoulders, while their noses on each side were of a pale ashy colour—all of which marks gave them a very different appearance from the Virginian or English deer.

“I have said that I was at first puzzled; but I soon recollected having heard of these animals, although they are but little known to naturalists. They could be no other than the ‘black-tailed deer’ of the Rocky Mountains—the *cervus macrotis* described by the naturalist Say. This was evident, both from their size, the great length of their ears—but more than all from the colour of their tails, from which last circumstance their common name has been given them by the hunters and trappers.

“We did not stop long to examine them. We were too anxious to have a shot at them; but how were we to get near enough? There were seven of them in the herd; but they were quite out in the middle of the glade, and that was more than three hundred yards wide. The nearest of the seven was beyond the range even of my long rifle. What, then, was best to be done?

“After thinking about this for a moment, I saw that an open passage led out of the glade through the trees on the other side. It was a wide avenue leading into some other glade; and I knew that the deer when startled would be most likely to make off in that direction. I determined, therefore, to creep round to the other side, and intercept them as they attempted to run through. Frank was to remain where we first saw them, while Harry would go half-way along with me, and then take his stand behind a tree. We should thus enclose the deer in a sort of triangle, and some one of us would be sure of getting them within range before they could escape.

“I had scarcely got to the edge of the opening when I saw that the herd was browsing in towards Frank. They were every moment getting closer and closer to him, and I watched eagerly for the shot. I knew he would not fire until they were very near, as I had cautioned him not to do so, on account of the smallness of his rifle. Presently I saw the stream of smoke and fire issuing from the leaves; then followed the sharp crack, and then the yelping of our dogs as they broke forward. At the same time one of the deer was seen to spring upward and fall dead in its tracks. The others wheeled and ran, first one way and then another, in their confusion; until, after doubling several times, they made towards the opening where I stood. In their flight, however, they had gone too close to Harry, and as they were running past his stand, the tiny crack of a rifle was heard among the bushes; and another of the black-tails rolled over on the plain.

“It was now my turn; and I prepared myself to make the best shot I could or be beaten by my own boys. So as they came up I let drive at them, to my mortification missing them every one—as I thought at the moment. It soon appeared, however, that I was mistaken in this. Castor and Pollux swept past upon the heels of the herd; and before they had disappeared out of the long avenue, I saw the dogs spring upon the haunches of one that lagged behind, and drag him to the ground. I ran to their assistance, and seizing the wounded animal by one of its antlers, soon put an end to it with my knife. I had wounded it in the flank; and that had enabled the mastiffs to overtake it, which they could not have done otherwise, as its companions were at the time several hundred yards ahead of it. We all now came together, exulting in the fine fortune we had met with, for we had made a regular *battue* of it. We were glad that none of us had missed, and that we had succeeded in obtaining so much good meat, for we were not slaughtering these beautiful creatures out of wanton sport,

but from the necessity of procuring food. Each congratulated the others upon their good shooting, and said nothing of his own—although it was plain that all three of us were proud of our respective shots. To do justice, however, that of Harry was decidedly the best. He had knocked his one over while on the run—no easy matter with these black-tails, who do not gallop regularly as other deer, but bound forward, lifting all their feet together, as you will sometimes see sheep do. This mode of running is one of the peculiarities of their species—which, perhaps, more than any other thing, distinguishes them from the common deer.

“After carefully wiping out, and then reloading, our rifles, we rested them against the trees, and set to work to skin our game.

“While engaged in this operation, Harry complained of thirst. Indeed, we were all thirsty as well, for the sun was hot, and we had walked a good distance. We could not be far from the stream, although we were not sure of its direction; and Harry, taking the tin cup which we had brought with us, set out to find it, promising soon to return with water for our relief. He had only left us but a short while, when we heard him calling back through the trees; and, thinking that some animal might have attacked him, Frank and I seized our rifles, and ran after him. On coming up, we were surprised to find him standing quietly on the bank of a crystal rivulet, holding the cup=full of water in his hand.

“‘Why did you bring us away?’ asked Frank.

“‘Taste this,’ replied he; ‘here’s a pickle!’

“‘Oh, papa!’ cried Frank, after applying the cup to his lips; ‘salt as brine, I declare.’

“‘Salt you may say,’ continued his brother; ‘the sea itself is not so salt—taste it, papa!’

“I did as I was desired; and, to my delight, I found that the water of the rivulet was, what Frank had alleged, ‘salt as brine.’ I say to my delight, for I was greatly pleased at this discovery. The boys could not understand this, as they, being now very thirsty, would much rather have met with a cup of fresh, than a whole river of salt water. I soon pointed out to them the importance of what we had found. We had hitherto been in great

need of salt—for we had not a single grain of it—and had felt the want ever since our arrival in the valley. Only they who cannot get salt, can understand what a terrible thing it is to be without this homely, but necessary article.

“The flesh of our elk, which for many days past we lived upon, had proved quite insipid for want of salt; and we had not been able to make a soup that was in any way palatable. Now, however, we should have as much as we desired; and I explained to my companions, that by simply boiling this water in our kettle, we should obtain the very thing we so much stood in need of. This, as they saw, would be great news for mamma on our return; and the prospect of making her happy, by imparting the information, rendered all of us impatient to get back. We did not stay a moment by the salt stream—which was a very small rivulet of blue water, and evidently ran from some spring that bubbled up in the valley. Not far below us, we saw where it emptied itself into the main stream of fresh water; and, keeping down to the latter, we quenched our thirst, and then went back to our work.

“We made all the haste we could; and our three black-tails were soon skinned, quartered, and hung upon the trees—so as to be out of reach of the wolves while we should be gone. We then shouldered our rifles, and hurried back to the house.”

Chapter Twenty Two.

Catching a Tartar.

“Of course, Mary was much pleased at hearing of the discovery we had made. One of the first requisites of a housewife is a supply of good salt; and that we promised to obtain for her on the morrow. It was our intention to carry the kettle up to the salt stream, and there manufacture the article—as that would be more convenient than to bring the water down to the house. This piece of work we laid out for the next day. Meanwhile, as it was not yet near night, we caught Pompo, and set off again to bring home our black-tails. This required us to make several journeys—as we had no cart by which we could bring the deer all at once, and each of

them was as large as a good-sized heifer. We succeeded, however, in getting all to the house before sunset—except the skins, which we left hanging on the trees for another day. While the boys and I had been engaged at this work, Cudjo was not idle. It was our intention to cure the venison—not by ‘jerking,’ as we had done the elk-meat, but with the salt, which we were about to make on the morrow. For this purpose, we should require a large vessel capable of holding the pickle. We had nothing of the sort; and, of course, we were puzzled for a while as to how we should manage without it. It was early in the day—before we had brought in the venison—that this difficulty occurred to us.

“‘Why could we not leave it in the stream itself?’ asked Harry. ‘The water is very clear, and there are clean hard rocks on the bottom. Why could we not sink the quarters of venison on these rocks, and make them fast, by placing great stones on them?’

“‘Ha, ha!’ laughed Frank, ‘trust the wolves for finding them there. These gentry would soon empty your famous pickle barrel.’

“‘Look yar, Massa,’ said Cudjo; ‘this nigga sees no difficulty ’bout dat. He soon make a place for de meat.’

“‘How, Cudjo?’ inquired Mary.

“‘Why, Missa, same’s dey make de ole dug-out in Vaginny—by hollering out de log.’

“This was the very thing itself. A log hollowed out after the manner of a canoe, or ‘dug-out,’—as Cudjo used to designate that species of craft—would answer the purpose admirably; and Cudjo, having chosen a section of a large tulip-tree, went to work. By the time we had got our last load to the house, he had made a cavity in the tree, that was capable of containing the three black-tails at once. A valuable idea was also suggested by this operation. We remembered the wooden trays, dishes, and other utensils—made in this way—that we had often seen among the negroes on our plantation. These, however rude, we saw answered the purpose well; and we might hereafter supply ourselves in a similar manner.

“After breakfast the next morning, we started for the salt stream. We all

went together, Mary riding the horse, while Cudjo and I carried the children in our arms. Frank and Harry took the kettle upon a long pole between them—each, at the same time, having his rifle in the other hand. The dogs of course followed us, and our house was left to take care of itself. We had hung the venison up on high branches, lest the wolves might take a fancy to it in our absence.

“Mary was charmed with the scenery as we passed along, particularly where the woods began to open, as they did, towards the upper end of the valley. She noticed the various kind of trees as we advanced, and at one time uttered a joyous exclamation, as though she had seen something that pleased her more than common.

“We questioned her as to what it was; but she would satisfy us no farther than by telling us, that she had made a discovery of nearly as much importance as our salt river. We were curious to know what it was, but my wife checked our curiosity by observing, very justly, that as we were happy enough at that time, she might make us too happy; and she should therefore reserve her secret until we got back to our house in the evening. ‘We may then be weary and out of spirits,’ added she, ‘but I have something to tell you that will make you all merry again.’

“I could not help admiring the good sense and patience of my wife, thus reserving pleasant news for a time when they might be more available in producing a happy effect.

“As we were marching through a small glade, talking and laughing in high glee, an animal leaped out of some bushes before us, and ran slowly off to one side. It was a beautiful little creature, about the size of a cat, with dark glossy hair, spotted about the head and neck, and with clear white stripes running along its back. It did not go far before it stopped; and, throwing up its long bushy tail, looked back at us with the playful and innocent air of a kitten. I knew very well what the pretty creature was. Not so the impetuous Harry, who, thinking that here was the very ‘pet’ he wanted, dropped his pole, kettle, and all, and made after it.

“I cried out to him to desist; but the boy, either not hearing me—on account of the yelping of the dogs, who had also started in pursuit—or being too intent on making a capture, ran on after the animal. But the

chase did not last long. The little creature, apparently not the least frightened at the terrible enemies that were so close upon its heels—stood near the edge of the glade, as if to await its pursuers Harry, as he ran, was all the while eagerly scolding off the dogs. He wanted to take the little beauty alive; and he feared that the mastiffs would kill it before he could come up. It looked, too, as if they would, for they were now almost on top of it yelping with open mouths. Just at this moment, the strange animal was seen to elevate its hind-quarters, throw its long tail forward over its back, and give a sudden jerk of its body, as if by way of an insult to its pursuers. But it meant something more than a mere insult. It meant to punish them for their audacity. The effect of that singular movement was at once apparent. The dogs suddenly wheeled in their tracks. Their victorious yelping was changed to a fearful howling; and both of them ran back thrusting their noses into the grass, and capering over the ground as if they had either been stung by wasps, or had suddenly fallen into convulsions! Harry stopped for a moment wondering at this. He did not stop long. The next moment we saw him throw his hands up to his face, and uttering a cry that betokened pain and terror, come running back as quick as he had gone off.

“The pole-cat (for it was a pole-cat—the *mephitis chinga*, or American skunk) after he had discharged the fetid shower, stood for an instant looking over his shoulder, in such a way that we could almost fancy he was laughing. Then jerking his tail from side to side in a frolicsome manner, he made a bound into the bramble, and disappeared.

“Whether the skunk laughed or not, we did—especially Frank, who took this method of retaliating upon his brother for dropping the great kettle against his shins. But we had no time to lose in talk, until we could get some distance from the glade, which was now filled with the suffocating smell; so, calling upon Harry to lay hold of his burden, we hurried as quickly as possible from the spot. The dogs, however, brought the effluvium along with them; and it required unusual scolding and pelting of stones to keep them at a respectful distance. Harry had come off better than I expected—as the animal had directed its battery against the dogs; and he had only received enough of the discharge to punish him for his rashness and disobedience.

“As we continued our journey, I took the opportunity to instruct my

children in the habits of this singular animal.

“‘You have seen,’ said I, addressing myself to Frank and Harry, ‘that it is about the size of a cat, although broader and fleshier in the body, lower upon the limbs, and with a sharper and more elongated snout.

“‘You have seen that it is a spotted and striped animal—and in this respect it also resembles the cat, as these spots and stripes are different upon different individuals of the same species—so much so that no two skunks are exactly alike in colour.

“‘You have witnessed the efficient means with which Nature has armed it against its enemies; and I shall now tell you all the rest that is known of its habits.

“‘It is a *carnivorous* creature—destroying and eating many other beings that have life as well as itself. For this purpose it is furnished with strong, sharp claws, and three kinds of teeth, one of which—termed canine, or tearing teeth—is a certain symptom of its being a carnivorous, or flesh-eating animal. You must know, that the shape of the teeth will always prove this. Animals that feed upon vegetables, such as horses, sheep, rabbits, and deer, have none of these canine teeth. Well, the skunk has four of them—two in each jaw, and very sharp ones, too,—and with these he kills and eats (whenever he is lucky enough to get hold of them) rabbits, poultry, birds, mice, frogs, and lizards. He is very fond of eggs, too; and frequently robs the farm-yard, and the nests of the ruffed grouse and wild turkey—killing these birds whenever he can catch them. The killing, however, is not all upon his side—as the wolf, the horned owl, the wolverene, and the farmer, in their turn, lull *him* whenever they can catch him. He is not by any means a fast runner, and his safety does not lie in his swiftness of foot. His defensive armour is found in the fetid effluvium which, by a muscular exertion, he is capable of ejecting upon his pursuer. This he carries in two small sacs that lie under his tail, with ducts leading outward about as large as the tube of a goose-quill. The effluvium itself is caused by a thin fluid, which cannot be seen in daylight, but at night appears, when ejected, like a double stream of phosphoric light. He can throw it to the distance of five yards; and, knowing this, he always waits till the pursuer has fairly got within range—as the one we have just seen did with Castor and Pollux. The discharge of this fluid rarely fails to drive

off such enemies as wolves, dogs, and men. Sometimes it occasions sickness and vomiting; and it is said that there are Indians who have lost their eyesight from inflammation caused by it. Dogs are frequently swollen and inflamed for weeks, after having received the discharge of a skunk. In addition to the disagreeableness of this odour, there is no getting rid of it after the fluid has once been sprinkled over your garments. Clothes may be washed and buried for months, but it will still cling to them; and where a skunk has been, killed, the spot will retain the scent for many months after, even though deep snow may have been lying upon it.

“It is only when attacked or angered that the animal sends forth his offensive fluid; and when killed suddenly, or before he has had time to “fire it off,” nothing of the kind is perceived upon his carcass.

“The skunk is a burrowing animal, and in cold countries he enters his hole, and sleeps in a half-torpid state throughout the winter. In warm climates, however, he continues to prowl about all the year round, generally at night—as, like most predatory creatures, the night is his day. In his burrow, which runs several yards underground, he lives, in company with ten or a dozen of his companions. The female has a nest in one part, made of grass and leaves, where she brings forth her young—having from five to nine kittens at a birth.

“Strange as it may appear, the Indians, as well as many white men—hunters and others—eat the flesh of this animal, and pronounce it both savoury and agreeable—equal, as they allege, to the finest roast pig. So much for the skunk and his habits. Now to the making of our salt.”

Chapter Twenty Three.

The Salt Spring.

“We had now arrived on the banks of the salt creek; but as we saw the cliff close by, and knew that we must be near the spring which supplied this little rivulet, we resolved to travel on to the fountain-head. A few hundred yards farther brought us to the spring, and it was well worth

travelling a little farther to see.

“Near the bottom of the cliff were several round objects, looking like half globes, or bowls turned upon their mouths. They were of a whitish colour, resembling white quartz rock; and of all sizes, from that of a large baking oven to the size of a wooden dish. In the top of each there was a round cavity—like a little crater of a volcano—and in this the blue water bubbled and boiled as though a hot fire was in the ground underneath them. There were in all nearly twenty of these, but many of them were without the crater-like cavity in the top; and through the latter, of course, no water escaped to the creek. These were old ones, that had ceased to run.

“It was evident that these oven-looking mounds had been formed by the water itself, which had been depositing the sediment that formed them for many, many years. Around some of them there grew beautiful plants and shrubs, whose leaves and flowers hung over, trailing in the water; and from the cliff above long vines crept out, covered with gay scarlet blossoms. Bushes of wild currants grew all around, and the fragrance of their leaves scented the air. It was altogether a sweet, cool spot, and filled us with feelings of enjoyment.

“After we had satisfied our curiosity in examining these objects, we prepared to make our salt. Frank and Harry collected armfuls of dry wood for the fire, while Cudjo erected a crane in his usual fashion. Upon this the kettle was suspended, and filled with crystal water out of one of the natural basins. The fire soon blazed under it, and we had nothing more to do than wait until the evaporation should be completed by boiling.

“For this purpose we chose a spot where the ground was carpeted with a soft green turf; and upon it we all sat down to wait the result.

“I need not say that in this we had a deep interest, amounting, in truth, to anxiety. It might not be salt after all. The water tasted salt—that is true. But so, too, would water impregnated by the sulphate of magnesia or the sulphate of soda. When evaporated we might find one or other of these substances.

“‘What is the sulphate of magnesia, papa?’ inquired Frank.

“‘Perhaps you would know it better by the name of Epsom salts!’ rejoined

his mother, with a knowing smile.

“‘Bah!’ returned he, with a grin upon his face, ‘I hope it won’t turn out that. But what sort of thing, then, is the sulphate of soda?’

“‘That is the scientific name for Glauber’s salts.’

“‘Worse still! I don’t think we stand in need of either. Do we, Harry?’

“‘Not a bit of it,’ responded Harry, also grinning at the thought of these well-known specifics. ‘I would rather it should turn out saltpetre and sulphur. Then we could make lots of gunpowder.’

“Harry was a great shot—as we have seen—and one of his fears was, that our stock of powder would run out.

“‘Do not wish for that, Harry,’ said his mother. ‘Gunpowder we can do very well without. Let us hope for something more necessary to us at present.’

“With such-like conversation we passed the time, while we watched the steaming kettle with feelings of anxious expectation.

“For myself, I had some reliance upon a fact which I had observed years before, and had regarded as singular. It was this. I believe the Creator has so disposed it, that salt, so essential to animal life, is to be found in all parts of the globe, either in rocks, springs, standing lakes, incrustations, or in the ocean itself. No part of the earth, of great extent, is without it; and I had noticed in the interior territories of the American continent—where the sea is too distant to be visited by animals—that Nature has provided numerous salt springs, or ‘licks,’ as they are termed in the language of the country. These springs from time immemorial have been the meeting-places of the wild creatures of the forest and prairie, who resort thither to drink their waters, or lick the saline soil through which these waters run. Hence their common name of ‘licks.’ Here, then, was a valley whose four-footed inhabitants never roamed beyond its borders. I felt confident that Nature had provided for their wants and cravings by giving them everything necessary to their existence, and, among other necessities, that one which we were now in search of ourselves—salt. In other words, but that this was a salt spring, or there existed some other such in the valley, these creatures would not have

been found within it. I took the opportunity to point out this theory to my boys, as well as to show them—what I myself clearly recognised in it—the hand of the Creator. It rendered them confident that, when we had evaporated our water, we should get salt for our pains.

“‘Papa,’ inquired Frank, who was a great naturalist, ‘I should like to know what makes this little rivulet run salt water.’

“‘No doubt,’ I replied, ‘the water you see gushing forth has just been passing through vast beds of rock-salt, and has become impregnated with it.’

“‘Rock-salt! and is the salt we use found in rocks?’

“‘Not all of it, though great quantities are. There are beds of rock-salt found in many countries—in England, and the East Indies, in Russia, and Hungary, and Spain; and it has also been discovered in vast quantities in this very Desert we are now dwelling in. These beds of rock-salt, when worked to supply salt, are called salt-mines. The most celebrated are in Poland, near the city of Cracow. These have been worked for seven hundred years; and there is enough left in them to supply all the world for many centuries yet to come. These mines are said to be very beautiful—lit up, as they are, by numerous lamps. The rock has been excavated by the miners into all sorts of shapes. Houses, chapels, columns, obelisks, and many other ornamental forms of buildings, have been made; and these, when illuminated by lamps and torches, appear as splendid and brilliant as the palaces of Aladdin.’

“‘Oh! I should like so much to see them!’ cried Harry, in a transport.

“‘But, papa,’ inquired Frank, who always sought after information on such subjects, ‘I never saw any of this rock-salt. How is it that it comes to us always crushed, or in great bricks, as if it had been baked? Do they break it fine before it is sent to market from the mines?’

“‘In some of these mines nothing more is required than to crush the rock; in others, however, the rock is not pure salt, but mixed with other substances, as oxide of iron and clay. In these cases it is first dissolved in water, to separate it from such impurities, and then evaporated back again into salt, precisely as we are doing now.’

“What colour is the salt-rock, papa?”

“When pure it is white; but it assumes various colours, according to what substances may be found mixed with it. It is often yellow, and flesh-coloured, and blue.”

“How pretty it must be!” exclaimed Harry; “like precious stones, I declare.”

“Yes, it is a precious stone,” rejoined his brother; “more precious, I take it, than all the diamonds in the world. Is it not, papa?”

“You are quite right,” I replied. “Salt-rock is more valuable to the human race than diamonds; though they, too, have an *absolute* value, besides their value as a mere ornament. There are some important uses in arts and manufactures to which they can be applied.”

“But, papa,” again inquired Frank, determined to know everything he could about the article of salt, “I have heard that salt is made of sea-water. Is it so?”

“Vast quantities of it.”

“How is it made?”

“There are three ways of obtaining it:—First, in warm climates, where the sun is strong, the sea-water is collected into shallow pools, and there left until it is evaporated by the sun’s rays. The ground where these pools are made must neither be muddy nor porous, else the salt would get mixed with the mud and sand. Of course the people who manufacture it in this way take care to choose firm, hard ground for the bottoms of their pools. There are sluices attached to these pools by which any water that may not evaporate is drawn off. Salt is made in this manner in many southern countries—in Spain and Portugal, in France, and other countries that lie around the Mediterranean; also in India, China, Siam, and the island of Ceylon.

“The second way of making salt from sea-water is precisely the same as that I have described—except that, instead of these artificial pools, the evaporation takes place in broad tracts of country over which the sea has spread in time of high springtides. When the sea falls again to its proper

level, it leaves behind it a quantity of water in these tracts, which is evaporated by the sun, leaving behind it fields of pure salt. Nothing remains to be done but to scrape this salt into heaps and cart it off; and at the next spring-tide a fresh influx of sea-water produces a new crop of salt, and so on. This kind is better than that which is made in the artificial pools—though neither of them is equal to the salt of the mines. They are both known in commerce under the name of “bay-salt,” to distinguish them from the “rock-salt” of the mines. Great natural beds of the bay-salt are found in the Cape de Verde islands; also in Turk’s island and Saint Martin’s in the West Indies, and on Kangaroo Island, near the coast of Australia.

“There is still a third plan of making salt out of the sea. That is, by boiling the water, as we are doing; but this makes the worst of all salt; besides, it is far more expensive to manufacture salt in this way than to buy it from other countries. Indeed, this last plan would never be adopted, were it not that some foolish governments force their people to pay a heavy duty for importing salt into their country, thus making it still cheaper for them, costly as it is, to manufacture the article at home.’

“What makes the sea salt, papa?’

“That is one of the phenomena about which naturalists have a difference of opinion. Some of them say there are vast beds of salt at the bottom which keep the water always impregnated. I think this notion is very childish; and they who hold it offer only childish arguments to support it. Others assert that the salt water of the ocean is a primitive fluid—that it was always as it now is—which you will perceive is giving no reason at all, more than saying, “it is salt, because it was salt always.” This is an equally irrational theory. Others, again, believe that the saltiness of the ocean is caused by the flowing into it of salt rivers. These, I think, hold the true opinion; but unfortunately they have failed, as far as I know, to answer the objections which have been raised against it. Your papa has reflected a good deal upon this subject, and believes that he can explain away all the difficulties that oppose this last theory. Probably he may take an early opportunity of doing so; but it will require more time than he can spare at present.’

“Is the sea equally salt at all places?’ inquired the philosopher Frank,

after a short pause, during which he had been busily reflecting on what had been said.

“No; it is more so at the Equator than in the colder regions around the Poles. It is less salt in gulfs and inland seas than in the open ocean. This I believe I can also explain, because it would support the theory regarding the rivers of which we have just spoken. The difference of saltness in different parts of the sea is, however, very trifling.’

“How much salt is there in the sea-water?’

“Three and a half per cent nearly. That is, if you boil down one hundred pounds of sea-water, it will yield you about three pounds and a half of salt.’

“But are there not many lakes and brine-springs that contain a far greater proportion than that?’

“Many. There is a large lake lying in this very Desert, to the north-west of where we are, called the “Great Salt Lake.” The waters of that lake are more than one-third pure salt. There are many springs and rivers that contain a greater proportion than the ocean itself. It is to be hoped that our own little creek here will yield better than it.—But come! let us see how the kettle boils. We had almost forgotten it.’

“We approached our kettle, and lifted the lid. To our great joy, a scum was floating on the top, very much like crystals of ice forming upon half melted snow. Some of it was skimmed off and applied to our lips. Joy! it was *salt*—the pure *chloride of sodium*—equal to the best ever shipped from Turk’s Island.”



Chapter Twenty Four.

The Battle of the Snakes.

“I need not tell you that the announcement was received with joyful acclamations; and that one and all satisfied themselves by tasting of the salt. It had crystallised into small cubes, as salt always does; and it was as white as snow, which proved its great purity. We had put into the kettle—which was a large camp-kettle—about four gallons of water, and when it was fully evaporated, we obtained not less than ten pints of salt, showing that the water of our spring was much more saline than the sea itself.

“When our first kettle-full was disposed of, we re-filled it with water, and again hung it over the fire. We also hung another vessel beside the kettle; and that was our frying-pan, in which several fine steaks of venison, seasoned with the new salt, were cooked for our dinner. We were not unmindful of the thanks which we owed to God for giving us this munificent supply of an article so much needed by us; and as soon as dinner was over, my wife took occasion to bring this subject pointedly forward and we sat for some time conversing upon it.

“All at once we were interrupted by a series of curious incidents, which took place within sight of our fire. Our attention was first drawn to them by hearing loud screams at a short distance from us, which we all recognised as the voice of the blue-jay. There is nothing unusual in hearing this bird screaming half the day—for it is, perhaps, more easily excited than any other feathered creature. But, if you have ever noticed, it utters a very peculiar cry when there’s something unusual ‘in the wind.’ When some much-dreaded enemy is at hand, its note becomes extremely shrill and disagreeable. So it was then; and for that reason it drew my attention, as well as that of my companions.

“We looked towards the spot whence the cry came. We could see the branches of a low tree in motion, and the beautiful sky-blue wings of the bird closing and spreading again as it fluttered through them. We could see nothing else upon the tree—that is, no enemy of the bird—nor on any of the trees near it. On lowering our eyes to the ground, however, we

perceived at once what had set the jay to scolding. Slowly drawing itself along the earth, gliding through the grass and over the dry leaves—without causing even the driest of them to rustle—went a hideous reptile—a snake. Its yellowish body, dappled with black blotches, glittered as the sun glanced from its lubricated scales; while it rose and fell in wavy undulations as it moved. It moved slowly—by vertical sinuosities, almost in a direct line, with its head slightly raised from the grass. At intervals, it stopped—elevated its neck—lowered its flat coffin-shaped head, like a feeding swan—gently oscillated it in a horizontal direction—touched the crisp leaves with its red tongue, as though it was *feeling for a trail*—and then moved on again. In its frequent pauses, as it lay stretched along the ground it appeared cylindrical, as long as the tallest man, and as thick as a man's fore-arm. Its tail ended in a horny appendage about a foot in length, and resembling a string of large yellowish ill-shaped beads, or a portion of its own vertebrae stripped of the flesh, this peculiarity told us its species. We saw before us the dreaded rattlesnake—the *crotalus horridus*.

“My companions were eager to rush forward and at once attack the monster. I restrained them, dogs and all. I had heard—who has not?—of the power of fascination which these reptiles possess. I knew not whether to believe or disbelieve it. Here was an opportunity to test its truth. Would it charm the bird? We should see. One and all of us remained motionless and silent. The snake crawled on.

“The bird followed over-head, pitching itself from branch to branch, from tree to tree, screaming with open throat. Neither of them noticed us, as we were partially concealed where we sat.

“On reaching the foot of a tall magnolia, the rattlesnake—after going once round the tree, and apparently smelling the bark—slowly and carefully wound itself into a spiral coil, close in to the trunk. Its body now presented the appearance of a speckled and glittering cable, as they are usually coiled on the deck of a ship. The tail with its horny appendage protruded beneath, and the flat head peeped over above, resting upon the uppermost ring of the body. The nictitating membrane was drawn over its eyes. It appeared to sleep. This I thought strange, as I had heard that the fascinating power of these creatures lay in the eyes. It soon became evident, however, that the bird was not its object; for the latter,

on seeing that the snake lay still, ceased its chattering and flew off into the woods.

“Believing that the interest of the scene was now over, I was about raising my rifle to take aim at the snake, when a motion on its part convinced me that it was not asleep, but watching. Watching for what? A squirrel, perhaps, for this is the creature’s favourite prey. I looked up into the tree. It had all the appearance of being what is termed a ‘squirrel-tree’—that is, a tree in which squirrels have their nest. Ha! just as I expected—there was a hole in the trunk, high up; and around its orifice the bark was slightly discoloured, evidently by the paws of the squirrels passing in and out. Moreover, on looking to the ground again, I perceived that a little beaten path, like a rat-track, led off through the grass. A ridge-like protuberance that projected from the foot of the tree—marking the direction of one of its great roots—ran right into this path; and, from the discoloration of the bark above it, it was evident that the squirrels usually climbed up or descended along this ridge. The rattlesnake was coiled beside it—so close that no animal could pass in that way without coming within his reach! I felt certain, then, that he was waiting for the descent of the squirrel; and desirous to see what should happen, I muttered some words of caution to my companions, who remained silent as before.

“We sat watching the hole, in expectation to see the squirrel come forth. At length, a little rat-shaped head peeped cautiously out; but in this position the animal remained, and did not seem inclined to trust itself beyond the mouth of its den. It was evidently observing us—which it could easily do from its elevated position—and had no intention of coming down.

“We were about giving up all hopes of witnessing a ‘scene,’ when our attention was drawn to a rustling among the dead leaves in the woods beyond. We looked in that direction. Another squirrel was running toward the tree. It was running at full speed,—now along the fallen logs, now through the grass and dry leaves—apparently pursued. It was pursued; for almost at the same instant its pursuer came in sight—an animal with a long, slender body, twice the length of the squirrel itself, and of a bright yellow colour. It was the *pine-weasel*.

“There were not twenty feet between them as they ran; and both were

doing their best.

“I cast a glance at the rattlesnake. He knew what was coming. His jaws were extended—the lower one drawn back until it touched his throat,—his poisoned fangs were naked and visible; his tongue was protruded forward; his eyes glanced like diamonds; and his whole body rose and fell as with a quick respiration. He seemed to have dilated himself to twice his natural size!

“The squirrel, looking only behind, ran for the tree, and, like a streak of light, passed along the ridge and upward. We saw the snake launch out his head as the other passed him; but so quick had been the action, that it did not seem that he had even touched it.

“‘Good!’ thought we, as we saw the little squirrel sweep up the trunk, and fancied that it was safe. Before it had reached the first fork, however, we observed that it climbed more slowly—then faltered—then stopped altogether. Its hind feet slipped from the bark; its body oscillated a moment, hanging by the fore-claws, and then dropped heavily back into the very jaws of the serpent!

“The weasel, on seeing the snake, had suddenly stopped a few feet from it; and now ran around, doubling its long worm-like body, and occasionally standing erect,—all the while spitting and snarling like an angry cat. It was evidently furious at being robbed of its prey; and we thought for awhile it was going to give battle to the snake, which had recoiled himself on seeing this enemy, and lay with open jaws awaiting the attack. The body of the squirrel—now quite dead—was close up to his coil, so that the other could not snatch it without coming within reach of his dangerous fangs.

“On seeing this, and evidently afraid to encounter such a terrible antagonist, the weasel, after a while, ceased its hostile demonstrations; and, turning to one side, bounded off into the woods.

“The reptile now leisurely uncoiled the upper half of his body; and, stretching out his neck toward the squirrel, prepared to swallow it. He drew the animal out to its full length along the ground, so that its head lay towards him. He evidently purposed swallowing the head first—in order

to take it 'with the grain'—and he commenced lubricating it with the saliva that ran from his forked tongue.

“While we sat watching this curious operation, our attention was attracted to a movement in the leaves over the spot where the snake lay. Directly above him, at a height of twenty or more feet, a huge *liana*, of the trumpet species, stretched across from tree to tree. It was full as thick as a man's arm, and covered with green leaves and large crimson cuneiform blossoms, such as belonged to itself. There were other blossoms mingling with these, for still other parasites—smaller ones—were twined around it; and we could distinguish the beautiful star-like flowers of the cypress vine. Among these an object was in motion—a living object—a body—the body of a great snake, nearly as thick as the liana itself.

“Another rattlesnake! No; the rattlesnake is *not a tree-climber*,—it could not be that. Besides, the colour of the one upon the vine was entirely different. It was of a uniform black all over—smooth and glittering. It was the *black* snake then—the 'constrictor' of the north.

“When we first noticed it, it was wound upon the liana in spiral rings, like the worm of a gigantic screw. We saw that it was slowly gliding downward—for the vine tended diagonally from tree to tree, and its lowest end impinged upon the trunk of the magnolia, about twenty feet from the ground.

“On reaching this point, the snake gradually drew its rings closer together—until they appeared to touch each other, lapping the liana. It then commenced unwinding itself, by the head, which was slowly circled backward around the vine—still, however, creasing closely along it. After a sufficient number of evolutions, the rings had completely disappeared—with the exception of one or two near the tail—and the reptile lay doubled along the liana. These manoeuvres were executed silently and with great caution; and it now seemed to pause, and survey what was going on below.

“During all this while, the rattlesnake had been busily engaged with the squirrel, and thought of nothing else. After licking the latter to his satisfaction, he extended his purple jaws, drew in the head of his victim, and, stretching his long body to its full extent, proceeded to swallow it, tail

and all. In a few seconds, the head and shoulders of the squirrel had disappeared.

“But the glutton was suddenly interrupted in his meal; for, at this moment, we observed the black snake gradually lower himself from the liana, until nothing remained upon the tree but a single loop of his prehensile tail; and his long body stretching downward, hung directly over the other.

“‘Surely,’ thought we, ‘he is not going to encounter the rattlesnake—the most terrible of all reptiles.’ But the constrictor understood *one* chapter of herpetology better than we—for the next moment we saw him drop to the ground; and, almost as quick as thought, appear lapped in sable folds around the speckled body of the ‘crotalus!’

“It was a singular sight to see those two creatures writhing and wriggling over the grass; and it was some time before we could tell how they battled with each other. There was no great difference between them, in point of size. The black snake was longer—by a foot or so—but much more slender in the body, than his antagonist. He possessed, however, an advantage that soon made itself apparent—his activity, which was ten times that of the rattlesnake. We saw that he could easily evolve or wind himself at pleasure around the body of the latter—each time compressing him with those muscular powers which have entitled him to his name ‘constrictor.’ At each fresh embrace, the body of the ‘crotalus’ appeared to writhe and contract under the crushing influence of his sable adversary.

“The rattlesnake had but one weapon, which he could have employed with effect—his fangs. These were already locked in the body of the squirrel, and he could not use them upon his adversary. He could not get rid of that hairy morsel, that, like a barbed arrow, was now sticking in his throat. We could see that the squirrel still remained there; for, as the two reptiles struggled over the grass, its bushy tail was seen waving in the midst of their tortuous contest.

“At length, the battle began to flag. The motions of both combatants waxed slower and slower. We could now see *how* they fought. We could see—strange it appeared to us—that, instead of battling head to head—face to face—the fangs of the ‘constrictor’ were buried in the rattles of the

'crotalus!' Stranger still, the tail of the former rose and fell with a muscular and powerful impetus, whipping the latter to death!

"The contest was soon ended. The rattlesnake lay stretched at full length—evidently dead; while the black constrictor still continued to hug the speckled body, as though it was an object to be loved. This lasted for a moment or so; and then slowly unwinding himself, the conqueror turned round, crawled head to head with his victim, and proceeded to appropriate the prey. The 'scene' was over, and we all leaped to our feet to enact the *finale*. I should have spared the constrictor, after the good service he had done in destroying the rattlesnake; but Cudjo, who hated all sorts of creeping things, was ahead of me; and, before I could come up, I beheld the victor suspended upon his spear!"

Chapter Twenty Five.

The Sugar-Tree.

"In the evening, we returned to our house, carrying with us, on the back of Pompo, a good-sized bag of salt. We had evaporated enough to cure our venison, and to last us for several weeks to come. When it should be used up, we knew where to go for more. There was no danger of the spring going dry. We had noticed, previous to the discovery of the salt creek, that the water of the lake was perceptibly brackish; but we had never reflected on the cause. Doubtless, this fact had prevented us from yearning—as we might otherwise have done—for the valuable substance we had now obtained in such plenty.

"That night, after we had finished eating our supper, Harry, who had been all the day burning with curiosity to know what was the important discovery hinted at by his mother, now reminded her of her promise.

"'Come, now, mamma!' said he, in a challenging tone, 'what is it?—What have you found equal to that fine bag of salt, which you will all please to remember is the fruit of my discovery?'

"'But did I promise to tell you to-night? I said when we should be in low spirits, did I not? We are all happy now!'

“Oh! you said to-night,’ replied Harry. ‘Besides,’ added he, trying to look grave, ‘I *am* in low spirits. I have been so all day—ever since—ever since —’

“Ever since you let the kettle against my shins, and went skunk-hunting,’ interrupted Frank, with a laugh, in which Cudjo joined heartily.

“This allusion to Harry’s morning adventure, which had formed the standing joke of the day, was not at all relished by him; and the look of *mock* gravity which he had assumed now became *real*. His mother—with whom Harry was a favourite—noticed that he was vexed, and that now was the very time to apply the remedy. She soon, therefore, changed the current of his thoughts, by proposing to disclose the secret she had promised.

“Well, then,’ said she, ‘my discovery is this. While we were going up the valley this morning. I saw at some distance over the woods the top leaves of a very beautiful and very valuable tree.’

“A tree!’ cried Harry; ‘what! a cocoa-nut?’

“No.’

“A bread-fruit, maybe?’

“No.’

“Orange, then?’

“No, Harry,’ replied his mother. ‘You must know we are not in that latitude. We are too far north for either bread-fruits, orange-trees, or cocoa-nut palms.’

“Ah!’ exclaimed Harry, with a sigh, ‘those three are the only trees I care a fig for.’

“How, now, if it were a fig-tree, since you speak of figs?’

“Oh! very well,’ replied Harry, ‘figs will do; but I would rather it had been one of the others.’

“But it is not even a fig-tree.’

“Oh! it is not. What then, mamma?’

“That of which I speak is a tree of the temperate zone; and, in fact, grows to greatest perfection in the coldest parts of it. Have you noticed some tall straight trees, with thick foliage of a bright red colour?’

“Yes, mamma,’ answered Frank; ‘I have. I know a part of the valley where there are many of them—some of them nearly crimson, while others are orange-coloured.’

“Those are the trees of which I speak. The leaves are now of those colours because it is autumn. Earlier in the season they were of a bright green above, and whitish—or, as it is termed, glaucous—on the under surface.’

“Oh!’ said Harry, seemingly disappointed with this information. ‘I have noticed them, too. They are very beautiful trees, it is true; but then—’

“Then, what?’

“They are of no use to us—such big trees as they are. There is no fruit upon them, for I looked carefully; and what then? We do not need their timber, I’m sure. We have as good timber as we want in these tulip-trees.’

“Come, Master Hal—not so fast, if you please. There are many parts of a tree which may serve for valuable uses besides its fruit, or its timber either.’

“What! the leaves?’ inquired the impatient Harry. ‘What use can we make of leaves?’

“Come, brother,’ said Frank, in an improving tone; ‘the leaves of some trees are very valuable. What think you of the tea-plant, for instance?’

“Harry felt rebuked, and remained silent.

“We can make no use of the leaves of this tree,’ continued his mother; ‘at least none that I am aware of.’

“The bark, then?’ interrogated Harry.

“No—not the bark either.’

“The roots?’

“I know of no peculiar virtue in its roots more than those of the oak, ash, or any other large timber trees.’

“What then, mamma? It has no flowers, I am sure; nor fruit neither, except little seeds with wings upon them like a spider-fly.’

“Those are its fruit.’

“Oh! what use could we make of them? I have seen just the same, or very like them, growing on the common sycamore.’

“You are right there, for the common sycamore, as you call it, is a tree of the same family. But I did not say we could make any use of these winged seeds. Can you think of nothing else that belongs to every tree?’

“Nothing! Let me see—yes—yes—the sap?’

“Ha! the sap!’ repeated his mother, with a peculiar emphasis.

“What, mother!’ cried Frank, ‘a maple?’

“Yes! a *sugar-maple*! Now, Master Hal!’

“These words produced a startling effect upon the whole company. Frank and his brother had both heard of the famous sugar-maple, though neither of them had ever seen it. The younger members, Mary and Luisa, knew nothing about maples, but the word ‘sugar’ was more familiar to them; and that, in connexion with the joyous looks of the others, at once produced visions of sweetmeats and candy. Cudjo, too, who had never met with the sugar-maple—as it did not grow in the neighbourhood where Cudjo was himself indigenous—nevertheless liked sugar as well as any of them, and greeted the announcement with delight. Nothing was heard for some moments but cries of joy, mingled with the words ‘sugar’ and ‘sugar-maple.’ Greater is the longing which children, or even men,

experience for that which is difficult to obtain; and greater is the delight that is felt upon the prospect of obtaining it.

“After the transport of our little circle had in some degree subsided, Mary proceeded to explain to them the nature of this remarkable tree.

“‘The sugar-maple,’ said she, ‘you may easily distinguish from other trees by its light-coloured bark, and palmate five-lobed leaves, which in summer are of a bright green colour, but in autumn change, as you see, to crimson or orange. It somewhat resembles the English oak in its trunk, branches, and the great mass of foliage which it carries. Its wood is very heavy, and is often used in the manufacture of beautiful articles of furniture, as well as for ships, mills, and other mechanical purposes. But the principal value of this tree is found in its sap; and by the mysterious, but always wise distribution of Nature, it seems to have been given to the people of the temperate and colder latitudes, in place of the sugar-cane—which, as you know, flourishes only in hot and tropical countries.

“‘Each maple,’ continued my wife, ‘will yield annually from three to four pounds of excellent sugar; but to do this, it should be tapped early in the spring—for the sap does not run in the summer or winter. It runs, however, in the autumn—though not so freely as in spring—but we must hope that we shall be able to draw as much from ours as will supply us until spring comes round again.’

“‘But, mamma,’ broke in the inquisitive Harry, ‘when and how shall we get the sap?’

“‘I suppose, Harry, you wish for separate answers to these two questions which you have put so closely together. Well, then—our best time to draw it will be after the very first frost which makes its appearance. It has been found that the sap yields best when the nights are clear and cold, and the days dry and warm.

“‘The manner of extracting the sap, and the process of making the sugar, are both very simple. In the first place, we must make a great many little troughs—one for every tree we intend to tap. These are used to supply the place of vessels, which of course we have not got. The farmers of the United States, who make maple-sugar, also use these troughs—as they

will often have several hundred trees running at the same time, and it would be rather expensive for a backwoodsman to supply himself with so many vessels from either the potter, the tinman, or the cooper. But the troughs, which are easily made, answer the purpose just as well; and Cudjo here is able to make them for us.

“After the troughs nothing more is needed, except a few joints of the cane which grows here all around us. An auger-hole must be bored in each of the trees, about three feet from the ground. Into each of these holes a single tube of cane must be inserted, so as to form a spout to conduct the running sap into the troughs below. We shall then have nothing farther to do, but wait while the sap gathers in the troughs, collect it into our kettle, and boil it over the fire in the same manner as we have done the salt water.

“Now, Master Harry,” concluded my wife, ‘be patient. Hope for an early frost, and you shall have a practical illustration of all these things.’

“Harry had not long to wait. Upon the third night after, a slight hoar-frost covered the ground, and the day following was bright and warm. This was the very time to tap the maples, and so we set about it.

“Cudjo had already prepared the troughs—more than twenty of them in all. These he made in the usual manner. He cut the trunks of several tulip-trees—those that were about twelve inches in diameter—into logs of three feet each. These logs he split into two equal parts, and hollowed out the split sides with his chisel and mallet—thus forming rude vessels, but quite good enough for the purpose of holding the sap. The cane tubes were also got ready; and proceeding to the trees—all of us together—we bored a hole in each with our auger, fitted in the cane joints, and propped the troughs underneath. In a short time the crystal liquid began to drip from the ends of the spouts, and then it ran faster and faster, until a small clear stream fell into the troughs. The first that issued forth we caught in our cups, as the sugar-water is most delicious to drink; and it seemed as if our little people, particularly Mary and Luisa, would never say ‘enough.’ Harry, too, was as fond of it as they; and was heard to declare that the sugar-maple was the finest tree of the forest, and quite a match for either bread-fruits, oranges, or cocoa-palms. We had brought the large kettle, and a fire was soon kindled, and a crane erected—just

as we had done when making our salt. In a few hours the kettle was filled with sap, and boiling over the fire.

“Each of us had our separate duty to perform. Cudjo, with his bucket, went from tree to tree, collecting the sap as it gathered in the troughs, while Mary and I kept up the fire, and looked to the ladling. When a kettle of the water was sufficiently boiled down, it was necessary to pour it out into small vessels, that the sugar might crystallise by cooling. For this purpose we used all our plates, dishes, and cups. As soon as it cooled it became hard as a brick, and of a very dark colour. It was then removed from the small vessels, and a fresh quantity poured into them. That part of the sap which would not crystallise was carefully strained from the vessels, and became molasses; and these, let me tell you, are much finer than the molasses that are made from the sugar-cane—much richer in colour, and pleasanter to the palate.

“Frank and Harry had their part to perform—which was to walk about, rifles in hand, and guard the troughs. This was an important matter, for it is a singular fact that wolves, raccoons, badgers, opossums, and, in short, every animal wild or tame, will drink the sap of the sugar-maple, and are so fond of it that they will risk their lives to get at it. As the trees we had opened stood at a considerable distance from each other, our two little sentries were kept constantly relieving one another upon their rounds.

“The sap continued to run for several days; and, of course, we were kept busy during all that time. Had it been in the spring-time, we should have been employed for weeks at it, as it then runs longer and more freely. We were favoured with a smart frost every night, which was a fortunate circumstance, as the water did not gather during the cold hours of the night—otherwise we should have found it impossible to guard the wild animals from our troughs.

“All these nights we slept by the fire, where we had made a regular camp, as is usual in the backwoods of America. We only went to the house when it was necessary to get some article that was needed. We had put up a little tent, made out of our old wagon-tilt, to cover us; and the place we called by the name which is in use among the backwoods farmers—that is to say, a ‘sugar camp.’ We found this out-of-door life very exciting

and agreeable, camping thus in the thick shady woods with the great majestic trees towering over and around us—listening at times to the light breeze, as it rustled their golden leaves—or lulled into a pleasing tranquillity by the songs of a thousand birds. At night, however, the music was not so sweet to our ears. Then we heard the barking of wolves, the mournful ‘coo-whoa-a’ of the great horned owl, and the still more terrifying scream of the cougar. But we kept up a crackling, blazing fire all the night, and we knew that this would keep these fierce creatures at bay.

“At length our work was done. The sugar-water flowed each hour more slowly, and then ceased altogether; and we broke up our camp. When we had returned to our house, and collected our many-shaped loaves—for they were of various forms, according to the vessels in which they had been moulded—we found that all together weighed nearly an hundred pounds! This would be enough for all our wants—at least, until the spring, when we purposed returning again to our grand store-house among the sugar-maples.”

Chapter Twenty Six.

The Stump-Tree and the Bread-Pine.

“That evening, as we sat around the supper table, my wife announced that the last grain of our coffee was in the pot. This was sad news to all of us. Of the little luxuries that we had brought with us from Saint Louis, our coffee had held out longest; and a cup of this aromatic beverage had often cheered us during our toilsome journey across the prairie desert. Often, too, since our arrival in the valley, had it given a relish to our homely meals.

“‘Well, then,’ said I, by way of reply to the announcement, ‘we must learn to do without it. We have now the materials for making soup; what care we for coffee? How many poor people would be glad to be surrounded with luxuries, as we are! Here we have venison of different kinds; we can have beavers’ tails whenever we want them. There are fish, too in the lake and stream; there are hares and squirrels, which we shall trap in abundance, by-and-by; and, in addition to all, we shall dine often upon

ruffed grouse and roast turkey. I wonder, with all these luxuries around us, who is not content?’

“‘But, papa,’ said Harry, taking up the discourse, ‘in Virginia I have often seen our black folks make coffee out of Indian corn. It is not bad, I assure you. I have drunk it there, and thought it very good. Have not you, Cudjo?’

“‘Dat berry coffee dis chile hab drunk, Massa Harry.’

“‘Now, papa?’

“‘Well, Harry, what of it?’

“‘Why should we not use that—the Indian corn, I mean—for coffee?’

“‘Why, Harry,’ said I, ‘you surely do not reflect upon what you are talking about. We have a far worse want than coffee, and that is this very Indian corn you speak of—to make bread. Could I only get a supply of that, I should think very little about coffee or any other beverage. Unfortunately there is not a grain of corn within many an hundred miles of where we are now sitting.’

“‘But there is, papa; I know where there is at least a quart of it; and within less than an hundred yards of us, too.’

“‘Come,’ said I, ‘my boy, you have mistaken some useless seed for corn. No corn grows in this valley, I am certain.’

“‘It did not grow in this valley. It has travelled all the way from Saint Louis along with us. It is now in the wagon.’

“‘What! corn in the wagon?’ I exclaimed, starting up with such vehemence as to frighten my children. ‘Are you sure of that, Harry?’

“‘I saw it this very morning in one of the old bags,’ replied he.

“‘Come!’ cried I; ‘get a torch, Cudjo. To the wagon!—to the wagon!’

“‘In a short time we had reached the wagon, which stood close to the

door. With a beating heart I climbed into it. There was an old worn-out buffalo robe, with the harness of the ox lying upon the bottom. I flung these aside; and underneath I saw a coarse gunny-bag, such as are used in the Western States for holding Indian corn. I knew that it was one of those we had brought with us from Saint Louis, containing corn for our horse and oxen; but I was under the impression that I had emptied out the last of it long before. I took the bag up, and, to my inexpressible delight, found that it still contained a small quantity of the precious grain; besides, there was still more of it, that had been spilled from time to time, and had got into the corners and cracks of the wagon. These we collected carefully and put with the rest—not leaving a single grain that we did not scrape out from the cracks. Then carrying my bag into the house, I turned out its contents upon the table. To our great joy there was, as Harry had affirmed, nearly a quart of the golden grain!

“‘Now,’ said I, ‘we shall have bread!’

“This was a glad sight to my wife. During the preceding days we had frequently talked upon this subject—the want of bread—which is one of our first necessities. We had lived in hope that we should find some species of cereal in the valley that would supply us with a substitute for bread; but up to that time nothing of the kind had appeared. We had gathered the mast from the beech-tree and roasted it. We had collected quantities of locust-pods and acorns. We had also eaten the pulpy fruit of the pawpaw; but all these together we found to be but poor apologies for real bread. This, then, was a discovery of greater importance to us than either the salt or the sugar.

“The winter, in the latitude of our valley, would be a short one. We could then plant the corn—there was enough of it to plant a whole acre. It would come to maturity in six or eight weeks; and we knew that in such a climate we could easily raise two crops in the year—so that before the next winter came round we should have enough and to spare.

“While we stood by the table talking over these pleasant prospects, one of the boys—Frank it was—suddenly shouted out, ‘Wheat! wheat!’

“I looked down to ascertain what he meant. He had been turning over the yellow seeds of the maize, and, among them, had discovered several

grains of wheat. No doubt there had been wheat in the bag before the corn had been put into it; and this was soon confirmed, as, on carefully searching the bag, we found several of the precious pickles still clinging between the seams. After separating the one species from the other with great carefulness—for we did not wish to lose a single seed—we found that our grains of wheat counted exactly one hundred! This, to be sure, was a small quantity to go a-farming with, but we remembered the old saying, ‘Great oaks grow from little acorns,’ and we knew the importance of these small grey seeds. In a couple of years we should have large crops of wheat.

“‘You see,’ said I, addressing my little family, ‘how kind Providence has been to us. Here, in the middle of the Desert, has He furnished us with all the necessaries of life; and now, with a little patience, we may promise ourselves many of its luxuries—for what can mamma not make out of flour and sugar?’

“‘Oh, everything!’ cried Frank, who had grown enthusiastic at the prospect of farming, for he was fond of agricultural pursuits; ‘we can have venison-pasties with our flour.’

“‘And fruit-pies,’ added Harry; ‘there are plenty of fruits. I have found wild plums and cherries, and mulberries as long as my finger, and whortle-berries, too. What delicious puddings we can make.’

“‘Yes,’ said I; ‘now shall we care for coffee?’

“‘No, no!’ cried Frank and Harry in a breath.

“‘Then you shall have it,’ said their mother, with a smile of peculiar meaning.

“‘What! mother?’ exclaimed Harry, ‘another tree?’

“‘Yes, indeed, another.’

“‘Not a coffee-plant?’

“‘No; but a coffee-tree.’

“A coffee-tree! why I thought, mamma, that they never grew, except in the hottest parts of the tropics.’

“That is true enough of the small tree or shrub which produces the coffee you have been accustomed to drink; but not far from us there is a very large tree, whose seed will give us a very palatable substitute. Here is a specimen of it.’

“So saying, she threw down upon the table a large brown pod—of at least twelve inches in length by two in breadth—exactly the shape of a crescent or young moon. It reminded us of the pods of the locust, though differing considerably in shape. Like them, too, when opened—which was forthwith done—it was seen to contain a pulpy substance, in which several large grey-coloured seeds were imbedded. These seeds, she informed us, when parched, ground, and boiled—after the manner of the true coffee—would afford us a beverage nearly as good and quite as wholesome.

“The tree,’ said she, ‘from which I have plucked this pod, grows in most parts of America. You may have observed it here?’

“I have,’ interrupted Harry. ‘Now that mamma has shown us the use of the maples, I have been looking particularly at all the trees; since I find that some of them that appeared scarce worthy of notice, may after all be very interesting.’

“I have observed the tree,’ added Frank, who was something of a botanist as well as his mother; ‘I noticed that its bark is very rough, dropping off here and there in large curling scales. The branches, too, are very odd-looking; they have blunt, stumpy ends, that give the tree a clumsy appearance. Is it not so, mamma?’

“Precisely as you say. Hence its name of “chicot” among the Canadian French, and “stump-tree” in the United States. Its botanical name is *gymnocladus*, which means, “with naked branches;” for during the winter, as you shall find, it will present a very naked appearance. It is also known as the “Kentucky coffee-tree,” because the early pioneers and settlers of that country, when they were unable to obtain the true coffee, made use of its seeds, as we intend doing.’

“‘Oh!’ cried Harry; ‘only think of it—sugar, and coffee, and salt, and plenty of meat, and roast turkey—everything but bread. If we only had bread! Would our corn not grow if we planted it now, papa?’

“‘No; the frost would kill the young plants. We must have patience until spring.’

“‘It is a long time till spring,’ said Harry, with rather a discontented air; ‘and then we must wait much longer while the corn is growing. It is a very long time to wait.’

“‘Come, Master Hal,’ rejoined his mother, ‘I fear you are one of those who cannot be satisfied, no matter how many blessings are heaped upon them. Remember how many are worse off than yourself—how many are without bread, even where it is plentiest. No doubt, at this moment many a hungry boy in the streets of wealthy London is standing by the baker’s window, and gazing at the crisp loaves, with no more chance to eat one of them than you have. He is worse off than you. You have other food—plenty of it—he has none; and, moreover, his hunger is rendered more acute and painful by the sight of the tempting food—separated from his hand only by a pane of glass. Poor boy! that pane of glass is to him a wall of adamant. Think upon this, my son, and learn to be contented.’

“‘Indeed, I am so, mamma,’ replied Harry, with a look of contrition. ‘I did not mean to complain. I was only thinking how nice it would be to have bread, now that we have got both sugar and coffee.’

“‘Ah! now, my good Harry,’ said his mother, ‘since I find you in the proper spirit, I think I must tell you about another curious and useful tree, of which, perhaps, you have not heard.’

“‘A bread-fruit now, I’m sure? No, it cannot be that; for I *have* heard of the bread-fruit.’

“‘Still, it might very appropriately be called a bread-fruit, since, during the long winter months, it furnishes bread to many tribes of Indians; indeed, not bread alone, but subsistence—as it is the only food these improvident people have.’

“‘I am sure I have never heard of that tree.’

“Well, I imagine not, as it is not long since it was discovered and described by botanists; and even now it is but imperfectly known to them. It is a pine.’

“What! a pine with fruit?’

“Did you ever see a pine without it—that is, in the proper season?’

“Then you call those cone-shaped things fruit?’

“Certainly; what else should they be?’

“Oh! I thought those were the seed.’

“So are they, and the fruit as well. In botany we have no such word as fruit. What you call fruit is in some trees the seed. In all species of nuts, for instance, the fruit and the seed are one and the same thing—that is to say, the kernel of the nut is both fruit and seed. So it is with leguminous plants, as beans and peas. In other trees, however, the fruit is a substance covering and enclosing the seed, as the pulp of the apple, the pear, and the orange. Now, with regard to the pines, they are nut-bearing trees, and their seed is at the same time their fruit.’

“But, mamma, you do not mean that any one could eat those rough things that grow upon pine-trees?’

“Those rough things you speak of are the cones. They are only the sheaths that protect the seeds during a certain period of the year. They open as nuts do, and then you will find a kernel inside which is the true fruit.’

“But I have tasted that, too—it is quite bitter.’

“You have tasted that of the common pine, and you say true of it; but there are many species of pine-trees, whose seeds are not only edible, but pleasant to the taste, and wholesome as an article of food.’

“What pines, mamma?’

“Several species are known. Several new ones have been discovered of

late years, and in this very Desert. Perhaps in no part of the world is found a greater variety of these valuable trees, than in the mountainous countries which border upon and lie within the Great American Desert. There is one species in California called "Colorado" by the Spaniards—which means *red*, because their wood, when sawn up, is of a reddish colour. Trees of this kind are the largest in the world; they are often over 300 feet in height! Only think of a tree 300 feet high, when the tallest we saw in the Mississippi Valley was not much over half that. Yet there are whole forests of these upon the mountains of the Sierra Nevada. There is another species almost as large on these same mountains. It has been called by botanists *pinus Lambertiana*. It is more remarkable, however, for the size of its cones, which are of the enormous length of eighteen inches—a foot and a half! Fancy how singular a sight it must be—one of these gigantic trees with cones hanging from its branches larger than sugar-loaves!

"Oh, beautiful indeed!" exclaimed Frank and Harry at the same time.

"But, mamma," added Frank, "are these the sort that are eaten by the Indians?"

"Their seeds are also fit to eat, and in times of great distress the Indians and others resort to them for food; but it is not of them I intended to speak. It is of another kind very distinct from either, and yet growing in the same region. It is a small tree, rarely seen of more than thirty or forty feet in height, and with leaves or needles of a much lighter green than the generality of pines. Its cones are not larger than those of the common sort; but the seed or kernel is oily like the American walnut, and quite as agreeable in flavour. They cannot be otherwise than nutritious, since, as I have said, they form the whole subsistence of many people for months in the year. They can be eaten raw; but the Indians usually roast them. When roasted or parched, and then ground in a mill, or broken in a mortar, they make a species of meal, which, though coarse in appearance, can be baked into sweet and wholesome bread. This tree is called by the Mexicans "piñon," and also by travellers the "nut-pine." The only botanist who has fairly described it has given it the name of *pinus monophyllus*. Perhaps as good a name as any, and certainly the most appropriate—I mean for its popular one—would be the "bread-pine."

“But, mamma, does this tree grow in our valley? We have not seen it.’

“Not in the valley, I think; but I have hopes that we may find it on the mountain. The day we came around from Camp Antelope, I thought I saw a strange species of pine growing up in the ravines. It might be this very one; and I am the more inclined to think so, as I have heard that it grows on the Rocky Mountains—within the latitudes of New Mexico—and also on all the sierras that lie between them and the Pacific. I see no reason why we should not find it upon our mountain, which is, no doubt, a sort of outlying peak of the Rocky Mountains themselves.’

“Oh! then,’ said Harry, ‘shall we not go up to the mountain, and see about it? An excursion to the mountain would be so very pleasant. Don’t you think so, papa?’

“I do, indeed,’ I replied; ‘and as soon as we can make a cart for Pompo, so as to be able to take mamma and the children along with us, we shall go there.’

“This proposal was hailed with delight, as all wished very much to visit the beautiful mountain that rose so majestically above us. It was settled, then, that on the first fine day, as soon as our cart should be constructed, we would set forth, and make a grand pic-nic to the Snow-mountain.”

Chapter Twenty Seven.

The Snow-Line.

“In three days the cart was finished. We had no difficulty in constructing one, as the principal part—that is, the wheels—was already made. We had two pair of them, of course, in our old wagon; and the larger ones, which happened to be in very good order, served our purpose exactly. Cudjo soon attached a body and shafts to them, and Pompo’s harness was put into thorough repair.

“We had not long to wait for a fine day. Every day was fine in the clear, pure climate of our valley; so that, as soon as the cart was ready, we had a day to our liking.

“We set out shortly after sunrise, with our hearts full of anticipated pleasure. Of course we all went—Mary, the children, Cudjo, Pompo, dogs, and all. The house was again left to take care of itself. Mary and the two little ones rode in the cart, upon a soft seat made of palmetto leaves and Spanish moss. Pompo, who appeared to partake of the general happiness, whisked the vehicle along as if there had been nobody in it, and he was only drawing it for his own amusement. Cudjo cracked his great wagon-whip, and every now and then uttered a loud ‘wo-ha;’ while Castor and Pollux galloped gaily from side to side, running their noses into every bush that grew near the path.

“We soon made our way through the valley, and climbed up to the plain. We looked once more upon the Desert that stretched away on all sides; but its dreary aspect no longer filled us with fear. We did not regard it now, and the sight inspired us with feelings of curiosity and novelty rather than of terror. Away to the southward the sun was glancing upon the broad expanse of white sand; and several tall objects, like vast dun-coloured towers, were moving over the plain. They were whirlwinds carrying the dust upward to the blue sky, and spinning it from point to point. Sometimes one glided away alone, until it was lost on the distant horizon. Here two of them were moving in the same direction, keeping a regular distance from each other, and seemingly running a race. There several came together; and, after a short gusty contest, the whole set would break up into shapeless masses of yellowish clouds, and then float onward with the wind, and downward to the earth again. It was an interesting sight to view those huge pillars towering up to the heavens, and whirling like unearthly objects over the wide plain. It was indeed an interesting sight, and we remained for many minutes observing their motions.

“At length we turned our faces toward the mountain, and continued our journey along the edge of the cliffs. The high peak glistened before us, and the sun’s rays falling upon it caused it to appear of a beautiful colour—a mixture of gold and red, as though a shower of roses had fallen upon the snow! We noticed that there was now more snow upon the mountain than when we had first seen it, and that it came farther down its sides. This attracted the attention of all of us; and Frank at once called for an explanation, which his mother volunteered to give, for she very well understood the phenomenon.

“‘In the first place,’ said she, ‘as you ascend upwards in the atmosphere, it becomes thinner and colder. Beyond a certain point it is so cold, that neither men nor any other animals can exist. This can be proved in several ways; and the experience of those who have climbed mountains, only three miles high, confirms it. Some of these adventurous men have been nearly frozen to death. This is a fact, then, in regard to the atmosphere over all parts of the earth; but we may also observe, that under the Equator you may go higher without reaching this extreme cold, than in the countries which lie nearer to the Poles. Another fact, which you will easily believe, is, that in summer you can climb higher before you reach the cold region than in winter. Bear these facts in mind. Now, then, if it be so cold at a certain height that men would be frozen to death, of course at that height snow will not melt. What is the natural inference? Why—that mountains whose tops pierce up into this cold region will most certainly be covered with perpetual snow. It is not likely that anything but snow ever falls upon their summits,—for when it rains upon the plains around them, it is snowing upon the high peaks above. Indeed, it is probable that most of the rain which descends upon the earth has been crystals of snow when it commenced its descent; and, afterwards melting in the lower and warmer regions of the atmosphere, takes the shape of water globules, and thus falls to the ground. These globules, no doubt, are very small when they first emerge from the snow region; but, as they pass slowly downward through clouds of vapour, they gather together and attract others (by a law which I have not time to explain); and, descending faster and faster, at length plash down to the earth in large drops. Whenever it rains, then, at any particular place, you may be almost certain that it is snowing at the same time over that place—only at a point in the atmosphere far above it. I have been convinced of this fact, by observing that immediately after every occasion when it has rained in the valley, there appeared a greater quantity of snow upon the mountain. Had the mountain not been there, this snow would have continued on, and become rain, like that which fell upon the plains, and into the valley.’

“‘Then, mamma,’ interrupted Frank, ‘this mountain must be of great height, since the snow lies upon it all the year.’

“‘Does that follow?’

“‘I think so. You said the snow did not melt because it was cold high up.’

“But suppose you were in a country near the North Pole, where snow lies all the year at the very sea-side, and consequently at the sea-level, would it then prove a mountain to be very high?”

“Oh! I see—I see now. The perpetual snow upon a mountain only shows it to be of great height when the mountain happens to be in warm latitudes.”

“Precisely so. In very warm countries, such as those within the tropics, when you see the snow-cap upon a mountain, you may infer that it is a very high one—at least over two miles in height; and when there is much snow upon it—that is, when the snow reaches far down its sides—it proves the mountain to be still higher,—three miles or more above the level of the ocean.”

“Our mountain, then, must be a high one, since it is in a warm latitude, and snow lies all the year upon it.”

“It is a high one, comparatively speaking; but you will remember, when we first saw it, there was only a small patch of snow upon its top, and probably in very hot summers that disappears altogether; so that it is not so high as many others upon this continent. Taking our latitude into calculation, and the quantity of snow which lies upon this mountain, I should say it was about 14,000 feet.”

“Oh! so much as that! It does not seem half so high. I have seen mountains that appeared to me to be quite as high as it, and yet it was said they did not measure the half of 14,000 feet.”

“That arises from the fact that you are not viewing this one from the sea-level, as you did them. The plain upon which it stands, and from which we view it, is of itself elevated nearly half as much. You must remember that we are upon one of the high tables of the American continent.”

“Here, for a minute or so, the conversation stopped; and we travelled on in silence, all of us with our eyes fixed on the white and roseate peak that glittered before us, leading our eyes far up into the heavens.

“Frank again resumed the discourse, which had been broken off by our admiration of this beautiful object.

“Is it not curious,’ said he, ‘that the snow should lie so regularly, coming down on all sides to the same height, and ending just like the cape of a coat or the hem of a nightcap? It seems to be a straight line all around the mountain.’

“That line,’ rejoined his mother, ‘is, as you say, a curious phenomenon, and caused by the laws of heat and cold, which we have just been explaining. It is called the “snow-line,” and a good deal of speculation has arisen among cosmographers about the elevation of this line. Of course, on mountains within the tropics this line will be at a great height above the level of the sea. As you advance northward or southward to the Poles, it will be found lower and lower, until within the frigid zones it may be said to cease altogether—for there, as we have said, snow covers the whole earth, and there can be no “snow-line.”

“From this, one would suppose that an exact scale might be formed, giving the elevation of the snow-line for all latitudes. But that could not be done. Observation has shown that it not only differs on mountains that lie in the same latitude, but that on the same mountain it is often higher on one side than the other—particularly on those of great extent, as the Himmalehs of India. This is all quite natural, and easily accounted for. The position of mountains to one another, and their proximity or great distance from the sea, will give them a colder or warmer atmosphere, independent of latitude. Moreover, the same mountain may have a warmer climate on one side than the other; and of course the snow-line will be higher on that side which is the warmer, in consequence of the greater melting of the snow. This line, too, varies in summer and winter for a like reason—as we see here upon our own mountain, where it has already descended several feet since the weather became colder. This, you will acknowledge, is all very natural; and you will see, too, that Nature, although apparently capricious in many of her operations, acts most regularly in this one, as perhaps in all others.’

“But, mamma,’ inquired Harry, ‘can we not get to the top of the mountain? I should like to have some snow to make snow-balls, and pelt Frank with them.’

“It would be a very difficult task, Master Hal; and more than either you or I could get through with. I think Frank will escape being snow-balled this

time.'

"But people have climbed to the top of the Himmaleh mountains; and they are far higher than this, I am sure.'

"Never,' interrupted Frank; 'no one has ever climbed the Himmalehs. Have they, mamma?'

"No mortal has ever been so high as the summits of those great mountains, which are more than five miles above the level of the ocean. Even could they be climbed, it is not likely that any animal could live at their top. These inaccessible things seem to have been designed by the Creator to afford us objects for sublime contemplation—objects far above the reach of mortal man, and that can never be rendered common by his contact. Do they not seem so?'

"We had now reached the foot of the mountain, and halting near the entrance of the ravine, we loosed Pompo from his cart, and rested ourselves on the banks of the little stream. After a while we commenced ascending up into the defile in search of the piñons. As we advanced, Mary pointed out the trees which she had noticed on a former occasion. They appeared of a light green colour, much lighter than others that grew near them. We made towards one which stood apart, and was most accessible to us. This we hoped might prove to be the bread-pine tree; and we approached it with feelings of anxiety and expectation.

"In a short time we were under its branches; and if we had had no other test than what we saw there, combined with the delicious fragrance of the tree, we could have told that it could be no other than the piñon. The ground was covered with cones, each of them about an inch and a half in length; but on examining them, we found them all broken open and the seed extracted. Some animal had been there before us, and relished their contents—thus affording a proof that they were good to eat. There were still many of the cones hanging on the tree; and it was not long until we had split some of them open and tasted their ripe seeds.

"It is it!' cried my wife, clapping her hands with delight. 'It is the nut-pine! This will serve for bread until we can grow our wheat and corn. Come, let us gather them,' added she, pointing to a large grove of the same trees

that grew at a short distance; and we all hurried to the grove, and commenced shaking down the cones and gathering them into heaps.

“We had soon collected as many as we wanted, and in the evening we returned to the valley, with our little cart half-full of pine-nuts. On reaching home, some of them were parched and pounded into a sort of coarse meal; and that night, for the first time during many weeks, we had cakes to our supper.



Chapter Twenty Eight.

The Menagerie, Aviary, and Botanic Garden.

“We were busy of course every day, as we had plenty of work to do. We laid a floor in our cabin, and fenced a couple of fields—one to plant our corn in, and the other to keep Pompo from straying off into the woods, and meeting with some animal that might feel inclined to devour him. We also succeeded in killing several red-deer and a couple of elk, which we stored up for our winter provision. We did not find the black-tails very palatable, and most of their flesh went to feed Castor and Pollux.

“Cudjo was the busiest of all of us. He made several household utensils which proved of great service to us. He also constructed for himself a wooden plough, which would serve every purpose—as there was a considerable portion of the ground that was without turf, and could be easily turned. This part had been covered with beautiful flowers, such as sunflowers, red and orange-coloured poppies, and asclepias. It was almost a pity to plough them up.

“With an eye to the future scarcity of our ammunition, we had begun to practise hunting with a weapon which would answer all our purposes almost as well as the rifle—still keeping the latter of course for great occasions. We had found some of the *bois d’arc*, or “Osage orange,” as it is called, growing in the valley. This is the famous bow-wood of the Indians; and taking a hint from these children of Nature, we made three bows, stringing them—as the Indians do—with the sinews of the deer. For arrows, we had the straight cane-reeds; and Cudjo made us a set of barbs out of iron spikes that we had taken from the wagon. With daily practising at a mark, before the winter was over, we were all three able to use our new weapons to some purpose; and Harry, to his mother’s great delight, could bring down a squirrel from the top of the highest tree in the valley. As a marksman, both with the bow and rifle, he was quite superior to Frank, who, instead of feeling jealous, seemed rather to be proud of the skill of his brother. Harry, during all the winter, kept our table loaded with partridges, squirrels—of which there were several species—hares, and wild turkeys; the last of which, being much finer than tame ones, of

course we were all very fond of.

“My wife, too, added largely to the delicacies of our table. During the last days of autumn, she made several botanical excursions—of course, all of us accompanying her by way of guard—and in each of these some useful production was discovered. We found several species of wild fruits—currants, cherries, and a small fruit known as the “serviceberry,” which grew in great profusion. All these fruits were gathered in quantity, and made into preserves. We obtained roots as well—one of which was the *pomme-blanche*, or Indian turnip; but the most interesting of all was the wild potato, which we dug up—for, in fact, it is only upon the table-lands of America where that plant is indigenous. We should not have recognised it as an old acquaintance, but for the botanical knowledge of my wife. Its roots were not larger than wren’s eggs, and we could find so few of them that, in its wild state, we saw it would be of no use to us as an article of food. Mary, however, had hopes, that by cultivation, we might produce larger ones; so we collected all the tubers we could fall in with, and kept them for seed.

“Out of the pods of the honey-locust, we brewed a very agreeable sort of beer; but we were able to extract a still more generous beverage from the wild or fox-grapes that grew in all parts of the valley. While travelling through France, I had learnt how wine was made; and our vintage succeeded to perfection. On the winter nights, as we sat around our cheerful log-fire, Mary was accustomed to deal out to us a measure a-piece of the exhilarating drink. It was only, however, after a hard day’s work or hunting, that we were allowed to draw upon this precious store.

“About this time, a new idea entered into my mind, which I communicated to the others, and with which they all fully agreed. It was this:—To capture as many of the wild animals as we could, and endeavour to domesticate them to our uses. I was prompted to this purpose by various considerations. First, because I saw, although there were several kinds of deer in the valley, there were but few of each kind; and it was not likely that for many years they had been upon the increase. Nature had so disposed it, that these creatures had been regularly thinned off every year by the numerous beasts of prey that prowled through the valley. Now, an additional enemy was added to the number of their destroyers; and I foresaw that, unless some precaution should be taken, the deer

would soon become so scarce and wild, that we should find it difficult to obtain enough for our uses. Could we only kill off the fierce beasts—such as panthers, and wolves, and wolverenes—that preyed upon them, then the whole valley would become our deer-park, and the deer would soon increase to any number we wanted. This, however, we could not do; and, in fact, the beasts of prey were as likely to master us as we them—for none of us were safe in venturing into the thick woods alone; and whenever the boys made a short excursion from the glade, their mother was always in a state of anxiety until they returned. In fact, every hunt we made was attended with considerable danger, as we always fell in with the tracks of wolves, panthers, and even bears; and we frequently saw these animals skulking through the underwood. We knew that in time our powder must run out, and then our rifles would be useless to us. Our bows and arrows would then avail us but little against such thick-hided monsters as these. We only hoped that when we became better acquainted with the habits of these carnivorous creatures, we should be enabled to destroy them in traps, and thus thin them off at our leisure, and without wasting our ammunition. This, of course, would constitute a branch of our employment; and, besides being a work of utility, would furnish us with an excitement not the less agreeable because it was hazardous. Could we, therefore, collect a few of the more useful animals into an enclosed park, they would soon propagate and increase; and then the trouble as well as danger which we experienced in hunting them would be at an end. We knew that our maize-corn, yielding two crops in the year, would enable us to supply them abundantly with food.

“There was still another consideration which had its weight in these plans. I was very fond of the study of natural history—particularly that branch of it relating to quadrupeds—and I foresaw the pleasure of observing the habits of these wild creatures. We should not, therefore, confine ourselves to making ‘pets’ of those animals that might merely serve us for food. We should embrace in our collection all that we could subject to our rule, whether gentle or fierce. In fact, it was our intention to establish a regular ‘menagerie of the Desert.’

“The main object of our industry and prospective wealth—that is, the collection of the beaver fur—would not in any way interfere with these plans. The beavers, in short, would give us very little trouble—as the drying and preserving the skins of those we should trap would only

occupy us a small portion of the year.

“Harry entered with more spirit into my designs than any of the others; for Harry, like myself, was fond of quadrupeds. Frank, on the other hand, was a great bird-catcher; and recommended that we should include birds in our menagerie. To this, of course, we assented freely. Mary had her own designs already shaped out; and these were, to gather all the plants and trees that might be either curious or useful, and to observe what effect cultivation would produce upon them—in short, it was her wish to form a complete ‘botanical garden.’

“To each, then, was given a separate department. Harry and I were designated ‘beast-tamers;’ Frank the ‘bird-tamer;’ while Mary was appropriately styled the ‘tree-tamer.’ To Cudjo was assigned a very important share of the labour. He was to enclose the park for our deer, as well as the grounds for the botanic garden. He was also to make our traps and cages—all of which things Cudjo knew how to do, and how to do them well. Of course, we were to assist him, as well as each other, in carrying out our designs.

“Thus, our plans for the future were interesting to all of us. In our various pursuits, we should be enabled to employ all our idle time. We had no books, either to amuse or instruct us; but we knew that we should derive both instruction and amusement from the study of the greatest of all books—*the book of Nature.*”

Chapter Twenty Nine.

Trapping the Beasts and Birds.

“Harry was the first who succeeded in making a capture; and that was a pair of grey squirrels, which he had trapped at the bottom of their tree. For these a large cage was constructed, and they soon became so tame that they would take the nuts provided for them out of our hands. These, of course, were only idle pets; but they added much to our company and amusement, as we watched them in their antics around the bars of their cage, now springing from point to point, and now sitting monkey-like, and

gnawing the nuts as they held them between their fore-paws.

“Shortly after this event, Frank became the hero of the hour; and his achievement was one of considerable importance. For some time, he had been keeping his eye upon the wild turkeys; and for the purpose of securing some of them alive, he had constructed, not far from the house, a species of penn—which is known in America by the name of ‘log-trap.’ This was a very simple contrivance. It was made of split rails, such as Cudjo used for his fences; and these were placed upon one another, so as to enclose a hollow square between them. They were raised about the height of an ordinary fence from the ground, while other rails—heavy ones—were laid over the top, close enough to prevent the turkeys, should they enter, from escaping, but not so near each other as to darken the interior of the trap, and so render it forbidding in its appearance. The entrance was the main contrivance, although it was not an original idea with Frank. It was upon a plan similar to the wire cages used for trapping rats—where the rat can easily find its way in, but has not sufficient cunning to know the road out again. Precisely as the wire funnel is constructed for the rats, Frank had made one of rails for his turkeys; and waited patiently until some of them should enter it. He placed various kinds of seeds and roots within the enclosure; but several days passed, and no birds were taken.

“After some practice, the ‘bird-catcher’ became able to imitate the ‘gobbling’ of the old cock? so exactly that at some distance off in the woods, you could not tell but that it was one of themselves. By this means, he could call the turkeys up to the ground where he himself lay concealed; but the seeds he had baited his trap with were not sufficiently enticing, and none of them would go under the rails. At length, however, he hit upon an expedient, which was sure to succeed, if anything could. He had shot one of the turkeys with his arrows; and taking it into the trap, he carefully propped it up—so that it appeared to be still alive, and busy feeding upon his bait. He then retired to some distance; and, hiding himself among the brushwood, ‘gobbled’ as before. Three large birds soon made their appearance, coming cautiously through the woods. Of course, like all wild turkeys, they were down upon the ground—stalking along just like so many ostriches. At length, they came in sight of the penn, and seeing one of their own kind;—quietly feeding, as they thought, within it—they approached fearlessly, and ran around the

enclosure, seeking for an entrance. Frank lay watching all their movements; and his heart, at this moment, was thumping against his ribs. His anxiety did not long endure. The three great birds soon found the wide funnel; and, without hesitating, ran up it and appeared inside the trap. Frank sprang from his lurking-place; and, running forward, first shut up the entrance by filling it with stones. Then climbing upon the top, he slipped through between the rails; and secured the birds by tying their legs together with a stout thong of deerskin. When he had lifted them out of the trap, he again adjusted everything—leaving the ‘decoy turkey’ quietly feeding as before—and shouldering his prize, he marched off in triumph. His return to the house was greeted with exclamations of joy; and a rail penn was immediately built for the birds, similar to the trap in which they had been caught, but, of course, without the funnel or entrance. The only regret we had was, that the three were all cocks—regular ‘old gobblers.’

“Next day, however, Frank remedied this by making a still more important capture. On returning to visit his trap before sunrise, he saw from a distance that there was a live turkey inside, with a number of smaller birds, which in the grey light appeared like so many partridges. On getting nearer, to his surprise and delight, he found that what he had taken for partridges was a large brood of young turkeys, and that which he had first seen was their mother. The little ones were running out and in, for they could easily pass between the rails, while the mother ran around, thrusting her head out of the penn, and occasionally spreading her wings and flapping upwards, endeavouring to escape in that direction. The young were all making a great ado, and evidently aware that their mother was ‘in the trap.’

“Frank, fearing that the youngsters might get off if he attempted to approach them alone, came back to the house, and summoned Harry, Cudjo, and myself, to his assistance. To make sure of them, we took with us the long canvass tilt of the wagon with a couple of blankets fastened to it at the end. We adopted every precaution, as we looked upon capturing this young brood as a thing of great importance—since we could bring them up quite domesticated, and from them should breed as many more as we pleased. We approached the penn with all due caution; and when near we separated, each of us taking a side. We then advanced upon the trap, completely surrounding it; and, while the birds

ran confusedly from side to side, we stretched the tilt and blankets all around the penn, thus cutting off their retreat. In a few moments we had secured both the old hen and her chicks—amounting, in all, to no less than eighteen of them! This was a capture, indeed; and we immediately hurried back to the house with them, not forgetting to take along with us the ‘decoy turkey’—which, being a fine fat fellow, and killed only the day before, served us for a very good dinner. For the turkey hen and young we built another penn, near to that where we had imprisoned the three ‘old gobblers.’ The one last constructed was made with more care and closer between the rails, so that the youngsters might not get out and wander off.

“Frank again baited his log-trap, and used for a decoy one of the gobblers, which he tied by the leg to a rail. In this way several others were caught; when the birds at length became shy, and kept away from the penn altogether. However, we had now as many as we could feed, until our corn should ripen and be gathered.

“From this time every day saw new additions to our aviary. Frank had procured the bark of the *illex opaca*, or American holly; and this, when macerated in water, and then fermented and cleared of its fibres, made the very best bird-lime. A large cage had been constructed out of bow-wood with the straight reeds of the cane, and divided into many compartments—so that birds of different species should be separated from each other. In a short time the cage was seen to contain specimens of the blue-jay and red-bird, or Virginia nightingale, orioles of several species, and doves of two distinct kinds. There were also several Carolina paroquets; and Frank had succeeded in capturing a bird of a very rare kind, which, I believe, is known to the Indians as the ‘wakon.’ It was the American bird of paradise; and, like those of the Eastern world, had several long feathers growing from its tail, and stretching away gracefully behind it. In the cage were also finches of different varieties, and beautiful bright plumage. Among others were the green bird, the redstart, and the cock of the woods; the little blue bird also, the red-winged starring, and the orange-headed troupiale—which last species migrated in large flocks into the valley. There was a number of small cages, which had been constructed for the smallest of all birds—the humming-birds—and Frank had caught no less than a dozen different kinds of these most beautiful creatures, which he daily supplied with fresh

flowers. Another cage, apart from all the rest, held an inmate that; so far as appearance went, you would have said had no right to be thus distinguished in having a house all to himself. He was of a sober grey colour, somewhat of the wagtail shape, with long black legs, and claws of a dirty hue; and was altogether an ill-favoured bird, not any better-looking than a common house-sparrow. Had you known nothing more about him than his outward appearance, you would hardly have deigned to waste a second look upon him. The moment, however, his black bill was opened, and his lead-coloured throat became expanded in a song, you forgot all about the dull hue of his plumage. You all at once forgot the bright wings of the paroquet, and the beautiful form of the oriole; the red-bird, the blue-jay, and the wakon, were alike forgotten, and you gazed upon this sweet musician with delight and admiration. As you continued to listen, you would notice that he mimicked almost every sound that occurred within hearing. When any of the others commenced to sing, he would catch the strain—as it were, from their lips—and, giving it in a far higher and bolder tone, shame them into silence. This, I need hardly tell you, was the famous mock-bird—the nightingale of America.

“While Frank was daily increasing his stock of winged creatures, Harry was not idle among the quadrupeds. No less than five kinds of squirrels had been caught and caged. These were the grey, black, and red or fox varieties of the tree squirrel, and two species of ground squirrel—one the common hackee, or chipping squirrel; while the other was a new species, which we had caught on the desert plain above, among the roots of the *artemisia* plant. This last was a beautiful little creature, not much larger than a mouse, and striped like a little zebra. It has never—as far as I can tell—been described by naturalists; and on this account, as well as from its peculiar size and beauty, it was a general favourite with all of us, particularly with Luisa and Mary, in whose laps it soon learnt to sleep, like a tamed mouse.

“Besides the squirrels, Harry’s collection embraced a hare and a couple of raccoons. These last were the produce of a night-hunt or two which Cudjo had made with the dogs; and although these fox-like animals were by no means useful pets, yet they gave a variety to our collection, and added to our amusement in the observation of their curious habits.”

Chapter Thirty.

The Biters Bit.

“Our next was a fishing excursion. As I have said, Cudjo had already discovered that our stream contained fish, and had caught several of them. They were something like bass, although differing considerably from the common species. Nevertheless they were very delicious eating, and we were all very fond of them.

“We set forth in the morning, but on this occasion we left Pompo and his cart behind, as we had not far to go—only a short distance down the stream, where Cudjo knew a large pool in which the fish were plenty. We took with us lines, made out of the wild flax that grows in the valley, and which, Mary tells us, is found in all countries that border upon the Rocky Mountains. Our rods were long tapering canes such as grew in abundance around us. For hooks we used pins bent into the proper shape; and our bait consisted of a variety of worms. All these things were carried by Harry and Frank, while Cudjo and I took the younger ones in our arms, and Mary was left free to botanise as we passed along. Castor and Pollux accompanied us of course; and Pompo, as he saw us leave the house, ran neighing around his enclosure, as if quite vexed at our leaving him behind. Cudjo, of course, became our guide, taking us through the woods to that part of the stream where was his favourite fishing-ground.

“After travelling at our leisure about a quarter of a mile, we were all brought to a sudden halt by an exclamation from my wife, who stood pointing at some trees a little to one side of the path.

“‘What, mamma!’ cried Harry, ‘another fine tree? Why, the real bread-fruit and the cocoa-nuts will turn up yet, I believe, in spite of our latitude.’

“‘I am sorry for your sake, Harry,’ replied his mamma, ‘as well as our own, that I have not made the discovery of another fine tree. No, it is quite another thing, and not a very useful discovery. But it may be curious to you; and papa, here, can read you a chapter of natural history upon it. It is in his line. It is a four-footed animal.’

“‘Animal!’ exclaimed Harry; ‘I see no animal. Where is it, mamma?’

“‘Nor do I,’ replied his mother; ‘but I see indications of the presence of one, and a very destructive one, too. Look there!’

“As Mary said this, she pointed to a grove of young cotton-wood trees, from which the bark and leaves were stripped off as cleanly as if they had been gnawed by goats, or scraped with a knife. Some of the trees were quite dead, while others of them were freshly peeled, and only waited for a little time to go to decay also.

“‘Oh, I see what you mean now, mamma,’ said Harry. ‘Some animal has done this—but what one? The beavers cannot climb; and I am sure neither squirrels, raccoons, nor opossums, would take the bark from trees in that manner.’

“‘No; it was none of them. Your papa can best inform you what sort of animal has been so destructive to these young trees, which, you perceive, are of the beautiful cotton-wood species,—the *populus angulatus* of botanists.’

“‘Come, Harry,’ said I, ‘let us first find the animal if we can.’

“We all turned toward the leafless grove. We had not walked many steps in that direction, when the very animal we were in search of appeared on the ground before us. It was quite three feet long, thick, broad in the back, and arched from the nose to the tail. It was of a speckled grey colour, but with the roughest coat of hair that could possibly be imagined. Its head and nose were very small for the size of its body; and its short, stout legs, with their long claws, were scarcely visible under the thick, shaggy hair. Its ears were also buried under the hair; and it looked more like a round tufted mass than an animal. It was down upon the ground; and had evidently perceived our approach, as it was making off through the grass as fast as it could. That, however, was not very fast—not faster than a frog could go—for the animal in question is one of the very slowest travellers.

“As soon as I caught sight of it, and saw that it was upon the ground—and not among the branches, where I had expected to find it—I turned round to secure the dogs. I was too late, for these unreasoning animals

had already seen it, and, forgetful of the lesson which the skunk had taught them, were dashing forward in full cry. I endeavoured to call them off; but, heedless of our shouts, both rushed on the strange creature at once. The latter, seeing them approach, immediately stopped, buried its head under its breast, seemed suddenly to swell upward and outward to twice its natural size—while its rough thick tail was brandished from side to side in a furious and threatening manner.

“We could all now see that that which had appeared to be coarse thick hair was nothing else than long bristling spines, and Harry at once cried out,—

“A porcupine! a porcupine!”

“The dogs, unfortunately for themselves, did not know what it was; nor did they stop to consider, but lashed upon it open-mouthed, as they usually do with any strange animal. They did not hold it long; for the next moment they dropped it, and came running back more open-mouthed than ever—uttering the most piteous howls—and we saw that their noses, lips, and jaws, were sticking full of the sharp quills! Meanwhile the porcupine again stretched himself out; and, crawling to the foot of a tree, commenced climbing up. But Cudjo, who was highly incensed with the treatment which his favourites had received, rushed after; and, knocking down the animal with his spear, soon despatched him.

“Harry, who had grown much wiser since his adventure with the skunk, was rather shy of approaching the porcupine—particularly as he had heard that this animal possesses the power of shooting his quills to some distance, and sticking them like arrows into his enemies. Frank inquired if this were true.

“No,” I replied; ‘it is only one of those fabulous stories which the ingenious French naturalist, Buffon, so much delighted to recount. The porcupine’s quills may be pulled out easily by anything which presses too rudely against them, such as the mouth of a mastiff; and this because they are very slightly attached by their roots, and have a barb upon their tops that takes hold upon any enemy that may attempt to touch them. This is the only defence the poor animal has got—as it is so slow of foot that any of its enemies can easily come up with it. But, notwithstanding its

slowness, most of the fierce creatures find it better to leave the porcupine to himself, and his innocent occupation of “barking” the trees. He generally proves more than a match for any of them; and, in fact, neither wolf, panther, nor wildcat, can kill him—as there is not a spot of his body which they can touch when he prepares himself for their attack. On the other hand, he frequently kills them—only in self-defence, however, as he never attacks any animal, but lives altogether on his simple food, the bark and leaves of trees. The cougar is often found dead in the woods,—his death occasioned by the porcupine’s quills that are seen sticking in his mouth and tongue. So also the lynx has been found, as well as many dogs and wolves.’

“So much of the natural history of this strange animal I related to my companions at the time; but, shortly after, an incident was witnessed by Harry and myself which showed us that the porcupine, notwithstanding his bristling armour, had one enemy, at least, who could master him upon occasions. Although it occurred some months after our fishing excursion, now that we are speaking of the porcupine, I shall relate it.”

Chapter Thirty One.

Battle of the Marten and Porcupine.

“It was in the middle of the winter. A light snow had fallen upon the ground—just enough to enable us to follow the trail of any animal we might light upon. Of course, the snow filled us with the idea of hunting; and Harry and I started out upon the tracks of a brace of elk that had passed through our opening during the night. The tracks were very fresh-looking; and it was evident that the animals had passed in the morning, just before we were up. We concluded, therefore, that they had not gone far off, and we hoped soon to come up with them.

“The trail led us along the side of the lake, and then, up the left bank of the stream. Castor and Pollux were with us; but in our hunting excursions we usually led them in a leash, so that they might not frighten the game by running ahead of us.

“When about half a mile from the house, we found that the elk had crossed to the right bank of the stream. We were about to follow, when, all at once, our eyes fell upon a most singular track or tracks that led off in the direction of the woods. They were *the tracks of human feet—the feet of children!*

“You may fancy the surprise into which we were suddenly thrown. They were about five inches in length, and exactly such as would have been made by a barefooted urchin of six years old. There appeared to be two sets of them, as if two children had passed, following one another on the same trail. What could it mean? After all, were there human beings in the valley besides ourselves? Could these be the footprints of two young Indians? All at once I thought of the Diggers—the *Yamparicos*—the root-eaters,—who are found in almost every hole and corner of the American Desert. Could it be possible that a family of these wretched creatures existed in the valley? ‘Quite possible,’ thought I, when I reflected upon their habits. Living upon roots, insects, and reptiles,—burrowing in holes and caves like the wild animals around them,—a family, or more, might have been living all this time in some unexplored corner of the valley, without our having encountered any traces of them! Was this really so? and were the tracks before us the footmarks of a brace of young Diggers, who had been passing from point to point?

“Of course, our elk-hunt was given up until this mystery should be solved; and we turned off from the trail of the latter to follow that of the children.

“In coming out to an open place, where the snow lay smoothly, and the footprints appeared well defined, I stooped down to examine them more minutely, in order to be satisfied that they *were* the tracks of human feet. Sure enough, there were the heels, the regular widening of the foot near the toes, and the toes themselves, all plainly stamped upon the snow. Here, however, arose another mystery. On counting the toes, I found that in some of the tracks there were five—as there should have been,—while in others there were only four! This led me to examine the print of the toes more carefully; and I now saw that each of them was armed with a claw, which, on account of some hairy covering, had made but a very indefinite impression in the snow. The tracks, then, were *not* the footmarks of children, but those of some animal with claws.

“Notwithstanding that we had come to this conclusion, we still continued to follow the trail. We were curious to see what sort of a creature had made it. Perhaps it might be some animal unknown to naturalists,—some new species; and we might one day have the merit of being the first to describe it.

“We had not far to go: a hundred yards, or so, brought us in sight of a grove of young cotton-woods; and these we saw at a glance were ‘barked’ by a porcupine. The whole mystery was cleared up,—we had been following in the trail of this animal.

“I now remembered that the porcupine was one of the *plantigrade* family, with five toes on his hind feet, and only four on the fore ones. The tracks were undoubtedly his.

“My companion and I were somewhat chagrined at being thus drawn away from our hunt by such an insignificant object; and we vowed to take vengeance upon the porcupine as soon as we should set our eyes upon him. We were not long in doing this,—for as we stole quietly forward, we caught sight of a shaggy animal moving among the branches of a tree about fifty yards ahead of us. It was he, of course. At the same moment, however, another animal ‘hove in sight,’ in appearance as different from the porcupine as a bull from a blue-bottle.

“This creature—tail and all—was not less than a yard and a quarter in length, and yet its body was not thicker than the upper part of a man’s arm. Its head was broad and somewhat flattened, with short, erect ears, and pointed nose. It was bearded like a cat, although the face had more of the dog in its expression. Its legs were short and strong; and both legs and body denoted the possession of agility and strength. It was of a reddish-brown colour, with a white mark on the breast, and darker along the back and on the legs, feet, nose, and tail. Its whole appearance reminded one of a gigantic weasel—which in fact it was—the great marten of America, generally, though improperly, called the ‘fisher.’ When we first saw it, it was crouching along a high log, that ran directly toward the tree, upon which was the porcupine. Its eyes were fixed intently upon the latter; and it was evidently meditating an attack. We stopped to watch it.

“The porcupine had not yet perceived his enemy, as he was busily engaged in splitting the bark from the cotton-wood. The marten, after reconnoitring him for some moments, sprang off from the log, and came running toward the tree. The other now saw him; and at the same instant uttered a sort of shrill, querulous cry, and appeared to be greatly affrighted. To our astonishment, however, instead of remaining where it was, it suddenly dropped to the ground almost at the very nose of its adversary! I could not at first understand the meaning of this artful movement on the part of the porcupine, but a moment’s reflection convinced me it was sound policy. The marten would have been as much at home on the tree as himself; and had he remained among the branches—which were slender ones—his throat and the under part of his body—both of which are soft and without quills—would have been exposed to the teeth of his adversary. This, then, was why he had let himself down so unexpectedly; and we noticed that the instant he touched the ground, he rolled himself into a round clew, presenting on all sides the formidable *chevaux-de-frise* of his quills.

“The marten now ran around him, doubling his long vermiform body with great activity—at intervals showing his teeth, erecting his back, and snarling like a cat. We expected every moment to see him spring forward upon his victim; but he did not do so. He evidently understood the peril of such an act; and appeared for a moment puzzled as to how he should proceed. All this while, the porcupine lay quiet—except the tail. This was, in fact, the only ‘feature’ of the animal that could be seen, as the head and feet were completely hidden under the body. The tail, however, was kept constantly in motion—jerking from side to side, and flirted occasionally upwards.

“What would the marten do? There was not an inch of the other’s body that was not defended by the sharp and barbed quills—not a spot where he could insert the tip of his nose. Would he abandon the contest? So thought we, for a while; but we were soon convinced of our error.

“After running around several times, as we have described, he at length posted himself near the hind-quarters of the porcupine, and with his nose a few inches from the tail of the latter. In this position he stood for some moments, apparently watching the tail, which still continued to oscillate rapidly. He stood in perfect silence, and without making a movement.

“The porcupine, not being able to see him, and perhaps thinking that he was gone, now waved his tail more slowly; and then suffered it to drop motionless.

“This was what the other was waiting for; and, the next moment, he had seized the tail in his teeth. We saw that he held it by the tip, where it is destitute of the thorny spines.

“What would he do next? Was he going to bite off the end of the porcupine’s tail? No such thing. He had a game different from that to play—as we soon witnessed.

“The moment the marten caught the tail, the porcupine uttered its querulous cries; but the other heeding not these, commenced walking backward, dragging his victim after him. Where was he dragging it to? We soon saw. He was pulling it to a tree, close by, with low branches that forked out near the ground. But for what purpose? thought we. We wondered as we watched.

“The porcupine could offer no resistance. Its feet gave way, and slipped along the snowy ground; for the marten was evidently the much stronger animal.

“In a short time, the latter had reached the tree, having pulled the other along with him to its foot. He now commenced ascending, still holding the porcupine’s tail in his teeth; taking good care not to brush too closely against the quills. ‘Surely,’ thought we, ‘he cannot climb up, carrying a body almost as big as himself!’ It was not his intention to climb up—only to one of the lowermost branches—and the next moment he had reached it, stretching his long body out on the limb, and clutching it firmly with his cat-like claws. He still held fast hold of the porcupine which was now lifted into such a position, that only its forequarters rested on the ground, and it appeared to stand upon its head—all the while uttering its pitiful cries.

“For the life of us, we could not guess what the marten meant by all this manoeuvring. *He* knew well enough, as he gave proof the moment after. When he had got the other as it were on a balance, he suddenly sprang back to the ground, in such a direction that the impetus of his leap jerked

the porcupine upon its back. Before the clumsy creature was able to turn over and 'clew' itself, the active weasel had pounced upon its belly, and buried his claws in the soft flesh, while, at the same time, his teeth were made fast in its throat!

"In vain the porcupine struggled. The weasel rode him with such agility, that he was unable to get right side up again; and in a few moments the struggle would have ended, by the porcupine's throat being cut; but we saw that it was time for us to interfere; and, slipping Castor and Pollux from the leash, we ran forward.

"The dogs soon drove the marten from his victim, but he did not run from them. On the contrary, he turned round upon them, keeping both at bay with his sharp teeth and fierce snarling. In truth, they would have had a very tough job of it, had we not been near; but, on seeing us approach, the animal took to a tree, running up it like a squirrel. A rifle bullet soon brought him down again; and his long body lay stretched out on the earth, emitting a strong odour of musk, that was quite disagreeable.

"On returning to the porcupine—which our dogs took care not to meddle with—we found the animal already better than half-dead. The blood was running from its throat, which the marten had torn open. Of course, we put the creature out of pain by killing it outright; and taking the marten along with us for the purpose of skinning it, we returned homeward, leaving the elk-hunt for another day.

"All this, as I have said, occurred afterwards. Let us now return to the narrative of our fishing excursion.

"As soon as the porcupine had been disposed of, we were reminded of the sufferings of our dogs, who had ceased their howling, but required to be relieved of the barbed spines with which their lips were sticking full. We drew them out as easily as we could; but, notwithstanding this, their heads began to swell up to twice the natural size, and the poor brutes appeared to be in great pain. They were fairly punished for their inconsiderate rashness; and it was not likely that they would run their noses against another porcupine for some time to come."

Chapter Thirty Two.

The cunning old "Coon."

"We now continued our journey toward our fishing-ground, Cudjo having hung the porcupine to a tree, with the design of taking it home with him on our return. It was Cudjo's intention to skin it, and eat part or the whole of it,—a species of food, which he assured us, he had often eaten before, and which tasted equal to young pig. None of us were likely to join Cudjo in such a meal; but at all events, thought we, when the quills and skin are removed, our dogs might get a morsel of it as a reward for their sufferings. This was an object, certainly; as, out of our scanty larder, Castor and Pollux did not fare the best sometimes.

"We soon arrived upon the bank of the creek, and close to the pool. This was a long stretch of deep dark water, with a high bank on one side, shadowed over with leafy trees. On the opposite side, the bank was low, and shelved down to the edge—while several logs lay along it, half covered with water, and half of them stretching up against the bank.

"We took the high bank for our station, as upon this there was a spot of smooth grassy turf, shaded by beautiful palmetto-trees, where the children could tumble about. Here Mary sat down with them, while the rest of us proceeded to fish. Of course, we could do no more than throw in our lines, and then wait until the fish should be fools enough to bite. We conversed very quietly, lest the noise of our talking should frighten the fish—though this was only an imagination of our own. We had not been watching our floats more than five minutes, when we noticed, here and there, a slight stir in the water; and, in the midst of the little circles thus made, we could see small black objects not unlike the heads of snakes. At first we took them for these. Cudjo, however, knew better than we what they were, for he had often seen them while fishing in the creeks of Virginia.

"'Golly, Massa!' cried he, as soon as they made their appearance, 'de creek here am full ob de turtle.'

"'Turtles!' exclaimed Harry.

“‘Yes, Massa Harry,’ replied Cudjo; ‘and as dis nigger lib, de am de real soff-shell turtle! Dat’s de meat for dis child Cudjo,—better dan fish, flesh, fowl, or ’possum,—dat am de soff-shell.’

“As Cudjo spoke, one of the turtles ‘bobbed’ up nearly under where we sat; and, from the elongated shape of its head, resembling a snout, and the flexible shell that bent up and down along its edges, as he swam, I saw it was a species of *trionyx*, or soft-shelled turtle,—in fact, it was that known as *trionyx ferox*, the most prized of all the turtle race for the table of the epicure. Here, then, was another luxury for us, as soon as we could catch them.

“I turned round; and was on the point of asking Cudjo how this could be accomplished, when I saw that my float went suddenly down, and I felt a pull upon the line. I thought, of course, it was a fish, and commenced handling it; but, to my surprise, on bringing it to the surface, I perceived that I had hooked one of the turtles, and no doubt the same one which had looked up at us but a moment before. He was not a very large one; and we soon landed him; when Cudjo secured him simply by turning him over upon his back. As I learnt from Cudjo, these creatures will eagerly bite at anything that may be thrown into the water and appears strange to them. Of the truth of this we had a curious demonstration shortly afterwards.

“In a few minutes more, each of us had taken several good-sized fish; and we still continued watching our rods in silence, when our attention was attracted to the movements of an animal upon the opposite bank, and about one hundred yards below where we sat. We were all well acquainted with this animal; and Harry, the moment he saw it, whispered,

“‘Look, papa! mamma! a ’coon!’

“Yes, it was a raccoon. There was no mistaking the broad dark-brown back, the sharp fox-looking face and snout, and the long bushy tail, with its alternate rings of black and yellowish white. The short thick legs, the erect ears, and the white and black marks of the face, were familiar to all of us—for the raccoon is one of the best-known animals in America, and we had it among our pets.

“At the sight of the ‘coon,’ Cudjo’s eyes fairly glistened—for there is no animal that affords so much sport to the negroes of the United States as the ‘coon; and he is, therefore, to them as interesting a creature as the fox to the red-coated hunters of England. Hunting the raccoon is one of the principal amusements which the poor slave enjoys, in the beautiful moonlight nights of the Southern States, after he has got free from his hard toil. By them, too, the flesh of the ‘coon is eaten, although it is not esteemed much of a dainty. The ‘possum is held in far higher estimation. Cudjo’s eyes then glistened as soon as he set them upon his old and familiar victim.

“The ‘coon all this while had seen none of us, else he would soon have widened the distance between us and himself. He was crawling cautiously along the bank of the creek, now hopping up on a log, and now stopping for a while, and looking earnestly into the water.

“‘De ole ‘coon go to fish,’ whispered Cudjo; ‘dat’s what he am after.’

“‘Fish!’ said Harry.

“‘Yes, Massa Harry. He fish for de turtle.’

“‘And how will he catch them?’ inquired Harry.

“‘Golly, Massa Harry, he catch ‘em. Wait, you see.’

“We all sat quietly watching his manoeuvres, and curious to witness how he would catch the turtles; for none of us, with the exception of Cudjo, knew how. We knew that it was not likely he would leap at them in the water, for these animals can dive as quickly as a fish; besides they can bite very severely, and would be sure to take a piece out of the ‘coon’s skin, should he attack them in their own element. But that was not his intention, as we presently saw. Near the end of one of the logs that protruded into the water, we observed the heads of several turtles moving about on the surface. The raccoon saw them also, for he was stealthily approaching this log with his eyes fixed upon the swimming reptiles. On reaching it, he climbed upon it with great silence and caution. He then placed his head between his fore-legs; and, turning his tail toward the creek, commenced crawling down the log, tail-foremost. He proceeded slowly, bit by bit, until his long bushy tail hung over into the water, where

he caused it to move gently backwards and forwards. His body was rolled up into a sort of clew, until one could not have told what sort of a creature was upon the log.

“He had not remained many moments in this attitude, when one of the turtles, swimming about, caught sight of the moving tail; and, attracted partly by curiosity, and partly in hopes of getting something to eat, approached, and seized hold of the long hair in his horny mandibles. But he had scarce caught it, before the 'coon unwound himself upon the log; and, at the same time, with a sudden and violent jerk of his tail, plucked the turtle out of the water, and flung him high and dry upon the bank! Then following after, in three springs, he was beside his victim, which with his long sharp nose he immediately turned over upon its back—taking care all the while to avoid coming in contact with the bill-like snout of the turtle. The latter was now at the mercy of the 'coon, who was proceeding to demolish him in his usual fashion; but Cudjo could stand it no longer, and away went he and the dogs, with loud shouts, across the creek.

“The chase was not a long one, for in a few seconds the steady barking of the dogs told us that poor 'coony' was 'treed.' Unfortunately, for himself, he had run up a very low tree, where Cudjo was able to reach him with his long spear; and when the rest of us got forward to the spot, we found that Cudjo had finished him, and was holding him up by the tail, quite dead.

“We now went back to our fishing; and although we caught no more of the turtles, we succeeded in taking as many fish as we wanted; and returning to the house, Mary cooked for us a most excellent fish dinner, which we all ate with a keen appetite.”

Chapter Thirty Three.

Little Mary and the Bee.

“During the winter we saw very little of our beavers. Through the cold season they lay snug in their houses—although not in a state of torpidity,

as the beaver does not become torpid in winter. He only keeps within doors, and spends most of his time in eating and sleeping; but he goes out of his house at intervals to wash and clean himself, for the beaver is an animal of very precise habits. He is not compelled, however, to go abroad in search of food. As we have seen, he lays up a stock which serves him throughout the cold season.

“For several weeks in mid-winter, the dam was frozen over with ice strong enough to bear our weight; and we visited the houses of the beavers that stood up like so many hay-stacks. We found them so hard and firm, that we could climb upon them, and pounce down upon their tops, without the least danger of breaking them in. In fact, it would have been anything but an easy task to have opened one of them from above; and no animal—not even the wolverene with his crooked claws,—could have done it. We observed that in every case the doors were far below the ice, so that the entrance still remained open to the animals within; and, moreover, when any one stamped heavily upon the roof, through the clear ice we could see the frightened creatures making their escape by darting off into the water. Sometimes we remained to see if they would return, but in no instance did they come back. At the time we wondered at this—as we knew they could not possibly live under the ice, where there was no air. We soon found, however, that these cunning creatures knew what they were about; and that they had already provided means to escape from the danger of being drowned.

“Along one side of the dam there was a bank, that rose considerably above the water; and into this bank they had made large holes, or as they are termed ‘washes.’ These were so constructed that the entrances to them could not be frozen up; and we found that whenever the beavers were disturbed or frightened from their houses, they invariably betook themselves to these washes, where they could crawl quietly up above the surface of the water, and breathe in safety!

“This was the proper season to trap the beaver, as their fur is more valuable in winter than at any other time; but, as I have already said, it was not our intention to disturb them, until they should become very numerous.

“The ice upon the dam was exceedingly smooth, and of course

suggested the idea of skates. Both Frank and Harry were very fond of this amusement, and, indeed, I was rather partial to it myself.

“Skates then must be had, at all cost, and again we had recourse to the *bois d’arc*, the wood of which was sufficiently light and compact for our purpose. Cudjo, with his hammer and a good hickory-fire, soon drew out the shoeing for them, making it very thin—as our stock of iron consisted in what we had taken from the body of the wagon, and was of course very precious, and not to be wasted upon articles designed merely for amusement. However, we knew it would not be lost upon the skates; as we could take it from them, whenever we should want to apply it to a more useful purpose. In a short time, we had three pairs; and, strapping them firmly to our feet with strips of deerskin, were soon gliding over the dam, and spinning around the beaver-houses—no doubt to the great wonderment of such of the animals as came out under the ice to look at us. Mary, with Cudjo and the children, stood watching us from the shore, and clapping their hands with delight.

“With these and such-like innocent recreations, we passed the winter very agreeably. It was but a very short winter; and as soon as the spring returned, Cudjo, with his wooden plough, turned up our little field, and we planted our corn. It occupied nearly an acre of ground; and we had now the pleasant prospect that, in six weeks’ time, we should gather about fifty bushels. We did not neglect our hundred grains of wheat, but sowed that carefully in a corner by itself. You may fancy that it did not take up much ground. Mary had also her garden, with beds of wild potatoes, and other roots, which she had discovered in the valley. One of these was the species of turnip already mentioned as the *pomme-blanche*, or Indian turnip. She had found wild onions too, which proved of great service in soup-making. In her garden were many others of which I only know the names; but three of them, the ‘kamas,’ the ‘kooyah,’ and ‘yampah’ roots are worth mentioning, as thousands of the miserable Indians who inhabit the American Desert subsist chiefly on them. The widely scattered tribes known as the ‘Diggers,’ take their name from the fact of their digging for, and living upon, these roots.

“The flowers now came out in full bloom; and some of the openings near the upper end of the valley were a sight to behold. They were literally covered with beautiful blossoms—*malvas*, *cleomes*, *asclepieae*, and

helianthi. We frequently visited this part, making pic-nic excursions to all the places of note in our little dominion. The cataract where the stream dashed over the cliff, the salt spring, and such-like places, formed points of interest; and we rarely failed in any of these excursions to draw some useful lesson from the school of Nature. Indeed, Mary and I frequently designed them, for the purpose of instructing our children in such of the natural sciences as we ourselves knew. We had no books, and we illustrated our teachings by the objects around us.

“One day we had strayed up as usual among the openings. It was very early in the spring, just as the flowers were beginning to appear. We had sat down to rest ourselves in the middle of a glade, surrounded by beautiful magnolias. There was a bed of large blue flowers close by; and Frank, taking little Mary by the hand, had gone in among them to gather a bouquet for his mother. All at once the child uttered a scream, and then continued to cry loudly! Had she been bitten by a snake? Alarmed at the thought, we all started to our feet, and ran for the spot. The little creature still cried—holding out her hand, which we at once perceived was the seat of the pain. The cause of it was evident—she had been stung by a bee. No doubt she had clasped a flower, upon which some bee had been making his honey, and the angry insect had punished such a rude interference with his pleasures.

“As soon as the child had been pacified by a soothing application to the wound, a train of reflection occurred to the minds of all of us. ‘There are bees, then, in the place,’ said we. We had not known this fact before. In the autumn previous we had been too busy with other things to notice them; and of course during the winter season they were not to be seen. They were just now coming out for the early spring flowers.

“It was natural to infer, that where there were bees there should also be honey; and the word ‘honey’ had a magic sound in the ears of our little community. Bees and honey now became the topic of conversation; and not a sentence was uttered for some minutes that did not contain an allusion to bees or bees’ nests, or bee-trees, or bee-hunters, or honey.

“We all scattered among the flowers to assure ourselves that it really was a bee, and not some rascally wasp that had wounded our little Mary. If it was a bee, we should find some of his companions roaming about

among the blossoms of the helianthus.

“In a short time Harry was heard crying out, ‘A bee!—a bee!’ and almost at the same instant Frank shouted, ‘Another!’ ‘Hya—hya!’ cried Cudjo, ‘yar’s de oder one—see ’im!—biz-z-z. Gollies! how he am loaded with de wax!’

“Two or three others were now discovered, all busily plying their industrious calling; and proving that there was one hive, at least, in some part of the valley.

“The question now arose, how this hive was to be found? No doubt it was in some hollow tree—but how were we to find this tree, standing as it likely did among hundreds of others, and not differing from the rest in appearance? This was the question that puzzled us.

“It did not puzzle all of us though. Fortunately there chanced to be a bee-hunter among us—a real old bee-hunter, and that individual was our famous Cudjo. Cudjo had ‘treed’ bees many’s the time in the woods of ‘Ole Vaginnny,’ and cut down the trees too, and licked the honey—for Cudjo was as sweet upon honey as a bear. Yes, Cudjo had ‘treed’ bees many’s the time, and knew how—that did Cudjo.

“We should have to return to the house, however, to enable him to make ready his implements; and as the day was now pretty far advanced, we determined to leave our bee-hunting for the morrow.”



Chapter Thirty Four.

A Grand Bee-Hunt.

“Next day we had a warm, sunshiny day—just such an one as would bring the bees out. After breakfast we all set forth for the openings, in high spirits at the prospect of the sport we should have. Harry was more eager than any of us. He had heard a good deal about bee-hunters; and was very desirous of knowing how they pursued their craft. He could easily understand that, when a bee-tree was once found, it could be cut down with an axe and split open, and the honey taken from it. All this would be very easily done. But how were bee-trees found? That was the puzzle; for, as I have before observed, these trees do not differ in appearance from others around them; and the hole by which the bees enter is usually so high up, that one cannot see these little insects from the ground. One might tell it to be a bee’s nest, if his attention were called to it; for the bark around the entrance, like that of the squirrel’s, is always discoloured, in consequence of the bees alighting upon it with their moist feet. But then one may travel a long while through the woods before chancing to notice this. Bee-trees are sometimes found by accident; but the regular bee-hunter does not depend upon this, else his calling would be a very uncertain one. There is no accident in the way he goes to work. He seeks for the nest, and is almost sure to find it—provided the ground be open enough to enable him to execute his manoeuvres. I may here remark that, wherever bees take up their abode, there is generally open tracts in their neighbourhood, or else flower-bearing trees—since in very thick woods under the deep dark shadow of the foliage, flowers are more rare, and consequently the food of the bees more difficult to be obtained. These creatures love the bright glades and sunny openings, often met with in the prairie-forests of the wild West.

“Well, as I have said, we were all eager to witness how our bee-hunter, Cudjo, would set about finding the bee-tree—for up to this time he had kept the secret to himself, to the great tantalisation of Harry, whose impatience had now reached its maximum of endurance. The implements which Cudjo had brought along with him—or as he called them, the ‘fixins’—were exceedingly simple in their character. They consisted of a

drinking-glass—fortunately we had one that had travelled safely in our great mess-chest—a cup-full of maple molasses, and a few tufts of white wool taken from the skin of a rabbit. ‘How was he going to use these things?’ thought Harry, and so did we all—for none of us knew anything of the process, and Cudjo seemed determined to keep quiet about his plans, until he should give us a practical illustration of them.

“At length we arrived at the glades, and entered one of the largest of them, where we halted. Pompo was taken from the cart, and picketed upon the grass; and we all followed Cudjo—observing every movement that he made. Harry’s eyes were on him like a lynx, for he feared lest Cudjo might go through some part of the operation without his seeing or understanding it. He watched him, therefore, as closely as if Cudjo had been a conjuror, and was about to perform some trick. The latter said nothing, but went silently to work—evidently not a little proud of his peculiar knowledge, and the interest which he was exciting by it.

“There was a dead log near one edge of the opening. To this the bee-hunter proceeded; and, drawing out his knife, scraped off a small portion of the rough bark—so as to render the surface smooth and even. Only a few square inches of the log were thus polished and levelled. That would be enough for his purpose. Upon the spot thus prepared, he poured out a quantity of the molasses—a small quantity, forming a little circle about the size of a penny piece. He next took the glass, and wiped it with the skirt of his coat until it was as clear as a diamond. He then proceeded among the flowers in search of a bee.

“One was soon discovered nestling upon the blossom of a helianthus. Cudjo approached it stealthily, and with an adroit movement inverted the glass upon it, so as to inclose both bee and flower; at the same instant one of his hands—upon which was a strong buckskin glove—was slipped under the mouth of the glass, to prevent the bee from getting out; and, nipping the flower stalk between his fingers, he bore off both the bee and the blossom.

“On arriving at the log, the flower was taken out of the glass by a dexterous movement, and thrown away. The bee still remained, buzzing up against the bottom of the glass—which, of course, was now the top, for Cudjo had held it all the while inverted on his palm. The glass was

then set upon the log, mouth downwards, so as to cover the little spot of molasses; and it was thus left, while we all stood around to watch it.

“The bee, still frightened by his captivity, for some time kept circling around the upper part of the glass—seeking, very naturally, for an egress in that direction. His whirring wings, however, soon came in contact with the top of the vessel; and he was flung down right into the molasses. There was not enough of the ‘treacle’ to hold him fast; but having once tasted of its sweets, he showed no disposition to leave it. On the contrary, he seemed to forget all at once that he was a captive; and thrusting his proboscis into the honeyed liquid, he set about drinking it like a good fellow.

“Cudjo did not molest him until he had fairly gorged himself; then, drawing him gently aside with the rim of the glass, he separated him from his banquet. He had removed his gloves, and cautiously inserting his naked hand he caught the bee—which was now somewhat heavy and stupid—between his thumb and forefinger. He then raised it from the log; and turning it breast upward, with his other hand he attached a small tuft of the rabbit wool to the legs of the insect. The glutinous paste with which its thighs were loaded enabled him to effect this the more easily. The wool, which was exceedingly light, was now ‘flaxed out,’ in order to make it show as much as possible, while, at the same time, it was so arranged as not to come in contact with the wings of the bee and hinder its flight. All this did Cudjo with an expertness which surprised us, and would have surprised any one who was a stranger to the craft of the bee-hunter. He performed every operation with great nicety, taking care not to cripple the insect; and, indeed, we did not injure it in the least—for Cudjo’s fingers, although none of the smallest, were as delicate in the touch as those of a fine lady.

“When everything was arranged, he placed the bee upon the log again, laying it down very gently.

“The little creature seemed quite astounded at the odd treatment which it was receiving; and for a few seconds remained motionless upon the log; but a warm sunbeam glancing down upon it soon restored it to its senses; and perceiving that it was once more free, it stretched its translucent wings and rose suddenly into the air. It mounted straight

upward, to a height of thirty or forty feet; and then commenced circling around, as we could see by the white wool that streamed after it.

“It was now that Cudjo’s eyes rolled in good earnest. The pupils seemed to be dilated to twice their usual size, and the great balls appeared to tumble about in their sockets, as if there was nothing to hold them. His head, too, seemed to revolve, as if his short thick neck had been suddenly converted into a well-greased pivot, and endowed with rotatory motion!

“After making several circles through the air, the insect darted off for the woods. We followed it with our eyes as long as we could; but the white tuft was soon lost in the distance, and we saw no more of it. We noticed that it had gone in a straight line, which the bee always follows when returning loaded to his hive—hence an expression often heard in western America, the ‘bee-line,’ and which has its synonym in England in the phrase, ‘as the crow flies.’ Cudjo knew it would keep on in this line, until it had reached the tree where its nest was; consequently, he was now in possession of one link in the chain of his discovery—*the direction of the bee-tree from the point where we stood.*

“But would this be enough to enable him to find it? Evidently not. The bee might stop on the very edge of the woods, or it might go twenty yards beyond, or fifty, or perhaps a quarter of a mile, without coming to its tree. It was plain, then, to all of us, that *the line in which the tree lay* was not enough, as without some other guide one might have searched along this line for a week without finding the nest.

“All this knew Cudjo before; and, of course, he did not stop a moment to reflect upon it then. He had carefully noted the direction taken by the insect, which he had as carefully ‘marked’ by the trunk of a tree which grew on the edge of the glade, and in the line of the bee’s flight. Another ‘mark’ was still necessary to record the latter, and make things sure. To do this, Cudjo stooped down, and with his knife cut an oblong notch upon the bark of the log, which pointed lengthwise in the direction the bee had taken. This he executed with great precision. He next proceeded to the tree which he had used as a marker, and ‘blazed’ it with his axe.

“‘What next?’ thought we. Cudjo was not long in showing us what was to

be next. Another log was selected, at a point, at least two hundred yards distant from the former one. A portion of this was scraped in a similar manner, and molasses poured upon the clear spot as before. Another bee was caught, imprisoned under the glass, fed, hopped with wool, and then let go again. To our astonishment, this one flew off in a direction nearly opposite to that taken by the former.

“‘Neber mind,’ said Cudjo, ‘so much de better—two bee-tree better than one.’

“Cudjo marked the direction which the latter had taken, precisely as he had done with the other.

“Without changing the log a third bee was caught and ‘put through.’ This one took a new route, different from either of his predecessors.

“‘Gollies! Massa!’ cried Cudjo, ‘dis valley am full ob honey. Three bee-trees at one stand!’ and he again made his record upon the log.

“A fourth bee was caught, and, after undergoing the ceremony, let go again. This one evidently belonged to the same hive as the first, for we saw that it flew toward the same point in the woods. The direction was carefully noted, as before. A clue was now found to the whereabouts of one hive—that of *the first* and *fourth* bees. That was enough for the present. As to the second and third, the records which Cudjo had marked against them would stand good for the morrow or any other day; and he proceeded to complete the ‘hunt’ after the nest of Numbers 1 and 4.

“We had all by this time acquired an insight into the meaning of Cudjo’s manoeuvres, and we were able to assist him. The exact point where the bee-tree grew was now determined. It stood at the point where the two lines made by bees, Numbers 1 and 4, met each other. It would be found at the very apex of this angle—*wherever it was*. But that was the next difficulty—to get at this point. There would have been no difficulty about it, had the ground been open, or so that we could have seen to a sufficient distance through the woods. This could have been easily accomplished by two of us stationing ourselves—one at each of the two logs—while a third individual moved along either of the lines. The moment this third person should appear on both lines at once, he would

of course be at the point of intersection; and at this point the bee-tree would be found. I shall explain this by a diagram.

“Suppose that A and C were the two logs, from which the bees, Numbers 1 and 4, had respectively taken their flight; and suppose A B and C B to be the directions in which they had gone. If they went directly home—which it was to be presumed they both did—they would meet at their nest at some point B. This point could not be discovered by seeing the bees meeting at it, for they were already lost sight of at short distances from A and C. But without this, had the ground been clear of timber, we could easily have found it in the following manner:—I should have placed myself at log A, while Cudjo stationed himself at C. We should then have sent one of the boys—say Harry—along the line A D. This, you must observe, is a *fixed* line, for D was already a *marked* point. After reaching D, Harry should continue on, keeping in the same line. The moment, therefore, that he came under the eye of Cudjo—who would be all this while glancing along C E, also a fixed line—he would then be on both lines at once, and consequently at their point of intersection. This, by all the laws of bee-hunting, would be the place to find the nest; and, as I have said, we could easily have found it thus, had it not been for the trees. But these intercepted our view, and therein lay the difficulty; for the moment Harry should have passed the point D, where the underwood began, he would have been lost to our sight, and, of course, of no farther use in establishing the point B.

“For myself, I could not see clearly how this difficulty was to be got over—as the woods beyond D and E were thick and tangled. The thing was no puzzle to Cudjo, however. He knew a way of finding B, and the bee-tree as well, and he went about it at once.

“Placing one of the boys at the station A, so that he could see him over the grass, he shouldered his axe, and moved off along the line A D. He entered the woods at D, and kept on until he had found a tree from which both A and D were visible, and which lay exactly in *the same line*. This tree he ‘blazed.’ He then moved a little farther, and blazed another, and another—all on the continuation of the line A D—until we could hear him chopping away at a good distance in the woods. Presently he returned to the point E; and, calling to one of us to stand for a moment at C, he commenced ‘blazing’ backwards, on the continuation of C E. We now

joined him—as our presence at the logs was no longer necessary to his operations.

“At a distance of about two hundred yards from the edge of the glade, the blazed lines were seen to approach each other. There were several very large trees at this point. Cudjo’s ‘instinct’ told him, that in one of these the bees had their nest. He flung down his axe at length, and rolled his eyes upwards. We all took part in the search, and gazed up, trying to discover the little insects that, no doubt, were winging their way among the high branches.

“In a few moments, however, a loud and joyful exclamation from Cudjo proclaimed that the hunt was over—*the bee-tree was found!*”

“True enough, there was the nest, or the entrance that led to it, away high up on a giant sycamore. We could see the discoloration on the bark caused by the feet of the bees, and even the little creatures themselves crowding out and in. It was a large tree, with a cavity at the bottom big enough to have admitted a full-sized man, and, no doubt, hollow up to the place where the bees had constructed their nest.

“As we had spent many hours in finding it, and the day was now well advanced, we concluded to leave farther operations for the morrow, when we should fell it, and procure the delicious honey. With this determination, and well satisfied with our day’s amusement, we returned to our house.”

Chapter Thirty Five.

A Rival Honey-Robber.

“Now, there were some circumstances to be considered, before we could proceed any farther in the matter of the bees. How were we to get at the honey? ‘Why, by felling the tree, and splitting it open, of course,’ you will say. Well, that would have to be done, too; but there was still another consideration. It is no very difficult matter to fell a tree, and split it up—that is, when one has a good axe—but it is a very different affair to take the honey-combs from some eight or ten thousand bees, every one of them with a sharp sting in his tail. We had no brimstone; and if we had

had such a thing, they were well out of the reach of it, while the tree stood; and after it should be felled, we could not approach them. They would then be furious to a certainty.

“But Cudjo’s knowledge of bee-hunting extended farther than to the mere finding of the tree. He knew, also, how to *humbug* the bees, and rob them of their sweet honey. That was a part of the performance that Cudjo understood as well as any other. According to his directions, then, two pairs of stout buckskin gloves were prepared. We chanced to have one pair already, and Mary soon stitched up a second, of the kind generally used for weeding thistles—that is, having only a thumb, and a place for all the fingers together. One pair of the gloves Cudjo intended to use himself—the other was for me. Of course, the rest were to take no part in the robbery, but only to stand at a safe distance and look on.

“In addition to the gloves, a couple of masks were cut out of elk-hide, and with strings fitted to our faces. These, with our thick deerskin overcoats, would protect us against the stings of all the bees in creation.

“Thus accoutred, then, or rather taking these articles along with us, we set out for the bee-tree. Of course, everybody went as usual. We took with us the axe to cut down the tree, and several vessels to hold the honey.

“On arriving at the glade, we loosed Pompo out of the cart; and picketed him as we had done the day before. It would not do to bring him any nearer the scene of action, as the bees might take a fancy to revenge themselves by stinging him. We then took our ‘fixings’ from the cart, and proceeded to the tree. In a few moments we stood by its foot.

“On looking up we observed that there was an unusual commotion among the bees. They were whirring in large numbers around the entrance of their nest, and swarming out and in. As the day was very still, we could hear them buzzing loudly. What could it mean? Were they going to hive?

“Cudjo thought not. It was too early in the season for that. And yet their actions were strange. He could not understand it.

“‘Dey look, Massa,’ said he, after gazing at them for some moments, ‘dey

look zackly like some varmint war a-vexin' ob 'em.'

“So did they, but no ‘varmint’ appeared to be near their hole; and no animal, however thick in the skin, would have ventured into it, as we thought. The orifice was not over three inches in diameter, and we knew that neither squirrel, marten, nor weasel, would have dared to put a nose into it. What, then, could have so excited them?

“We observed that it was a warm day—the warmest we had had up to that time—and, probably, the heat had set them a-going. With this explanation, therefore, in the absence of a better, we remained satisfied; and commenced making our preparations to fell the tree.

“It was not likely to be a difficult job. The tree, as I have said, was a hollow one; and near the ground its trunk was nothing but a mere shell, which we could easily cut through. So Cudjo went lustily to work with his axe; and the white sycamore chips were soon flying in every direction.

“He had hardly made a dozen strokes, when we were startled by a singular noise, that sounded something like a ‘cross’ between a growl and a snort!

“Cudjo immediately suspended his blows; and we all stood gazing at each other with looks that betokened surprise and terror. I say *terror*—for the noise had something terrible in it; and we knew it could have proceeded from nothing else than some large and fierce animal. Whence did it come?—from the woods? We looked anxiously around us, but no motion could be observed in the bramble. The underwood was thin, and we could have seen a large animal at some distance, had such been there.

“Again the horrid sound echoed in our ears. It appeared to issue out of the earth! No—*it came out of the tree!*

“‘Golly!’ exclaimed Cudjo, ‘it am a bar, Massa Roff! I know him growl.’

“‘A bear!’ I ejaculated, catching the thought at the same moment. ‘A bear in the bee-tree! Run, Mary! Run for the glade!’—and I hurried my wife and children from the spot. Harry and Frank both wished to remain with their rifles, and I could hardly get them off. I induced them to go, at

length, by telling them that they must stay near their mother and the little ones, to guard them in case the animal should come that way. All this occupied but a few seconds of time, and then Cudjo and I were left to ourselves.

“It was evident that a bear was up the hollow of the tree, and hence the flurry among the bees. Cudjo’s axe had disturbed him—he was coming down!

“What was to be done? Could we not close up the hole? No—there was nothing—we should be too late!

“I seized my rifle, while Cudjo stood by with his axe. I cocked the piece, and made ready to fire the moment his head should appear. To our astonishment, instead of a head, a shapeless mass of shaggy, black hair made its appearance, which we saw was the rump and hind-quarters of the animal. He was coming down tail-foremost—although not a bit of tail was to be seen, for he had none.

“We did not stop to examine that. I fired as soon as his hips made their appearance, and almost at the same instant Cudjo dealt them a hearty blow with his axe. It was enough to have killed him, as we thought, but to our surprise the hind-quarters suddenly disappeared. He had gone up the tree again.

“What next?—would he turn himself in the hollow, and come down head-foremost? If so, my rifle was empty, and Cudjo might miss his blow, and let him pass out.

“All at once my eye fell upon the two great deerskin coats, that were lying on the ground close by. They would be large enough, properly rolled, to fill the mouth of the cavity. I threw aside my rifle, and laid hold of them. Cudjo assisted me. In a second or two, we had gathered them into a hard ‘clump,’ and wedged them into the hole. They fitted it exactly!

“We saw blood streaming down as we stuffed in the coats. The bear was wounded. It was not likely, then, that he would trouble us for a while; and as one watched the coats, the other brought up great stones, which we piled against them, until we had made all secure.

“We now ran around the tree, looking up the trunk, to assure ourselves that there was no opening above, through which he might creep out and come down upon us. No—there was none, except the bee-hole, and that was not big enough for his nose, sharp as it was. Bruin was fairly ‘in the trap.’

“I knew that Mary and the rest would be uneasy about us; and I ran out to the glade to make known our success. The boys cheered loudly; and we all returned together to the tree, as there was now no danger—no more than if there hadn’t been a bear nearer to us than the North Pole.

“We had him safe, so that there was no fear of his escaping. But how were we to get at him?—for we had determined to take his life. Such a fierce creature as this must not be allowed to get off; as he would soon have settled with one of us, had he met us on anything like equal terms. I had thought, at first, he might be a grizzly bear, and this had terrified me the more—for the killing of one of these fierce animals with a shot is next to an impossibility. When I reflected, however, I knew it could not be this; for the ‘grizzly,’ unlike his sable cousin, is not a tree-climber. It was the black bear, then, that we had got in the tree.

“But how were we to reach him? Leave him where he was, and let him starve to death? No, that would never do. He would eat all the fine stock of honey; if, indeed, he had not done so already. Moreover, he might scrape his way out, by enlarging the bee-hole. This he could do with his great sharp claws. We must therefore adopt some other plan.

“It occurred to us that it was just probable he might be down at the bottom, poking his nose against the coats. We could not tell, for there was no longer any growling. He was either too angry, or too badly scared to growl—we could not say which. At all events, he was not uttering a sound. He might, nevertheless, be as close to us at the moment as he could get. If so, our plan would be to cut a small hole in the tree above him, so that we might reach him with a bullet from the rifle. This plan was adopted, and Cudjo set to work to make the hole.

“In a few minutes the thin shell was penetrated, and we could see into the cavity. Bruin was nowhere visible—he was still up the tree. The ‘taste of our quality,’ which he had had on his first descent, had evidently robbed

him of all inclination to try a second. What next?

“Smoke 'im!” cried Cudjo; ‘dat fotch 'im down.’

“The very thing: but how were we to do it? By pushing dead leaves and grass through the hole Cudjo had cut, and then setting them on fire. But our coats—they might be burned! These we could first remove, putting great stones in their place; and we proceeded to do so. In a few minutes that was accomplished: the grass and leaves were stuffed in; some tufts were set on fire and thrust through; more rubbish was piled on top, until it reached up on a level with the hole; and then the hole was closed with a bundle of grass, so as to prevent the smoke from escaping.

“In a few moments we saw that everything was progressing as we had intended it. A blue rope of smoke came oozing out of the bee-hole, and the terrified bees swarmed out in clusters. We had not thought of this before, else we might have saved ourselves the trouble of making the gloves and masks.

“Bruin soon began to give tongue. We could hear him high up the tree snarling and growling fiercely. Every now and then he uttered a loud snort, that sounded like an asthmatic cough. After a while his growls changed into a whine, then a hideous moan, and then the sounds ceased altogether. The next moment we heard a dull concussion, as of a heavy body falling to the earth. We knew it was the bear, as he tumbled from his perch.

“We waited for some minutes. There was no longer any stir—no sound issued from the tree. We removed the grass from the upper hole. A thick volume of smoke rolled out. The bear must be dead. No creature could live in such an atmosphere. I introduced my ramrod through the opening. I could feel the soft hairy body of the animal, but it was limber and motionless. It was dead. Feeling convinced of this, at length, we removed the rocks below, and dragged it forth. Yes, the bear was dead,—or, at all events, very like it; but, to make the thing sure, Cudjo gave him a knock on the head with his axe. His long, shaggy hair was literally filled with dead and dying bees, that, like himself, had been suffocated with the smoke, and had fallen from their combs.

“We had hardly settled the question of the bear, when our attention was called to another circumstance, which was likely to trouble us. We perceived that the tree was on fire. The decayed heart-wood that lined the cavity inside had caught fire from the blazing grass, and was now crackling away like fury. Our honey would be lost!

“This was a grievous *finale*, after all—in short, a complete disappointment to our hopes, for we had calculated on having honey on our table at supper.

“What could we do to save it? But one thing, that was evident:—cut down the tree as quickly as possible, and then cut it through again between the fire and the bees’ nest.

“Should we have time for all this? The fire was already high up; and the draught, since we had opened the holes below, whizzed up the cavity as through a funnel.

“Seeing this, we closed them again; and Cudjo went to work with his axe, cutting all around the tree. And the way he did ply that axe! he seemed to have a wager against time. It was beautiful to see the style in which the chips flew!

“At length the tree began to crack, and we all stood out from it, except Cudjo, who understood which way it would fall, and was not afraid of being crushed. Not he! for Cudjo could ‘lay’ a tree wherever it was wanted to the breadth of a hair.

“‘Cr–r–r–ack!—cr–r–r–r–ash!’ said the great sycamore, and down it came, shivering its branches into an hundred sticks as it fell.

“It had scarcely touched the ground, when we saw Cudjo attack it at another point with his axe, as though it were some great monster, and he trying to cut off its head.

“In a few minutes more he had laid open the cavity, close to the combs; and, to our great satisfaction, we saw that the fire had not yet reached them. They were well smoked, however, and completely deserted by the bees; so that we used neither our masks nor gloves in gathering the honey. Bruin had been before us, but he had not been long at his meal

when we intruded upon him, as only one or two of the combs were missing. Enough was left. It was evidently a very old hive, and there was honey enough to fill all the vessels we had brought with us.

“We bundled the bear into the cart—as his hams and skin were worth the trouble—and leaving the old sycamore to burn out, we turned our faces homeward.”

Chapter Thirty Six.

The Battle of the Bucks.

“The main object we had in view was not yet accomplished. With the exception of our flock of turkeys, none of the pets we had tamed could contribute to our support. We wished to capture some of the deer species, and for this purpose we had thought of various expedients. We had seen the fawns once or twice following their mothers; but we had failed in coming up with them, although we had made several hunting excursions for that purpose. At length, however, instead of a fawn, we very unexpectedly captured a couple of old bucks, of the red-deer species. The circumstances of this capture were somewhat singular; and I shall detail them minutely as they occurred.

“We had gone out one day, Harry and myself, in search of the deer, and in hopes that we might be able to start, run down a fawn with the dogs, and take it alive. For this we had muzzled both, so that they should not tear the fawn when they came up with it—as I had often seen greyhounds muzzled at home for the same purpose. We went up the valley, where we should be most likely to fall in with the objects of our search; but not knowing how soon a deer might start out of the bushes, we walked along very silently and slowly, watching the woods before us, and listening to every sound. At length we arrived near the edge of a small opening, as we could tell by the clear breaks through the branches. It was in these glades or openings that we usually fell in with the deer; and we advanced with increased caution, each of us holding a dog in the leash which we had made for them. All at once a singular noise reached our ears, evidently coming from the glade. It sounded as if several large

animals were stamping furiously over the firm turf; but in the midst of this there was a constant cracking of some hard substances, as if half-a-dozen men were playing with eagerness at the game of single-stick. Every now and then we could hear a strange sound, short and fierce, like the snorting of a horse. Of course, Harry and I stopped in our tracks the moment we first heard these singular noises. Our dogs cocked their ears, and wanted to spring forward; but we held them both tightly on their strings, while we listened. For the life of us, neither I nor my companion could guess what was going on in the glade.

“‘What can it be, papa?’ said Harry.

“‘I haven’t the slightest idea,’ replied I.

“‘It must be animals,’ said he, ‘and a good many of them, too, to make so much stamping. Papa, is not that the snort of a deer? I think I have heard deer make just such a noise.’

“‘Maybe it is. Perhaps it may be elk; but what can cause such a commotion among them, I wonder?’

“‘What think you,’ suggested Harry, ‘if they are fighting with some animal—a panther, or perhaps a bear?’

“‘If so,’ said I, ‘our best plan would be to get back the road we came, and that as speedily as possible. But I do not think it is that. They would not stand to fight such creatures. Both elk and deer trust to their heels rather than horns to escape from bears and panthers. No, it is not that; but let us creep forward, and see what it is, anyhow. Hold fast to your dog. Come!’

“‘We crouched forward with the utmost caution, taking care not to tread upon the dry leaves and dead branches that lay across our track. We saw before us a thicket of pawpaws; and we made towards this—knowing that the broad green leaves of these bushes would screen us. We were soon among them; and a few paces farther through the thicket brought us in full view of the glade. There we saw what had caused all the strange noises, and which still continued as loud as ever.

“‘In the middle of the glade there were six red-deer. They were all bucks,

as we could easily tell from their great branching antlers. They were engaged in fierce and terrible conflict—sometimes two and two, and sometimes three or four of them, clumped together in a sort of general *mêlée*. Then they would separate again; and going some distance apart, would wheel suddenly about, and rush at each other with furious snorts—first striking forward with their forefeet held close together, and then goring one another with their sharp horns, until we could see the skin torn open, and the hair flying from them in tufts. Their eyes were flashing like fire, and their whole actions betokened that the animals were filled with rage and fury.

“I saw at once what all this meant. It was now the rutting season; and these chivalrous bucks were engaged in desperate combat about some fair doe, as is their yearly habit.

“They were too distant for either Harry’s rifle or mine; and thinking they might fight themselves a little nearer, we determined to remain where we were, and watch. The combat continued to rage furiously. Sometimes a pair of them came together with such violence that both went rolling over to the earth; but in a moment they would up, and at it again, as fiercely as ever.

“Our attention was particularly directed to two of the combatants, that were larger and older than any of the others—as we could tell from the greater number of points upon their antlers. None of the others seemed a match for either of these two, who had at length singled each other out as worthy antagonists, and fought separately. After goring and stamping a while, they parted—as if by mutual consent—and walked backward until they had got at least twenty yards from each other. Then setting their necks, and putting all their energy into the rush, they dashed forward, and met head to head, like a couple of rams. There was a terrible crashing among their antlers; and Harry and I looked to see whether a pair of them had not been knocked off in the concussion; but it appeared not. After this, the two struggled for a while, and then suddenly paused—still head to head—as though by a tacit agreement, in order to take breath. For some moments they stood quietly in this attitude, and then once more commenced struggling. After a while they stopped again, still keeping their heads together, so that their red expanded nostrils steamed into each other. We thought that they fought quite differently from all the

rest; but our eyes were now drawn to the others, who were getting nearer us; and we prepared our rifles to receive them. At length several came within range; and, each of us choosing one, we fired almost simultaneously. At the double crack one of the bucks fell; and the other three, on perceiving the common enemy, immediately desisted from their mutual warfare, and bounded off like lightning. Harry and I rushed forward, as we had fired; and thinking that the deer which we had missed—it was Harry's miss that time—might be wounded, we unmuzzled the dogs, and let them after. Of course, we had stooped down to perform this operation. What was our surprise, on looking up again, to see the two old bucks still in the glade, and fighting, head to head, as briskly as ever!

“Our first thought was to reload our pieces, but the dogs had been let loose; and these, instead of pursuing the other deer, dashed forward at the bucks, and the next moment sprang upon their flanks. Harry and I rushed after, and you may guess that our surprise was still further increased when we saw the bucks, instead of separating, still struggle head to head—as if their desperate hostility for each other had rendered them reckless of every other danger! When we got forward to the spot, the mastiffs had brought both of them to their knees; and now for the first time we perceived the true cause why they had continued their singular combat—because they could not help themselves—their *antlers were locked in each other!* Yes,—held as firmly as if they had been lashed together by thongs cut out of their own hides. Indeed, far more firmly, for after we had beaten off the dogs, and secured the animals from the chance of escaping, we found their horns so interlocked—one pair within the other—that we could not separate them with all our efforts. We had sadly wronged the poor old bucks, in believing them so desperately pugnacious. Their hostile feelings for each other had long since ceased—no doubt the moment they found themselves in such a terrible fix—and they now stood, nose to nose, quite frightened-like, and ‘down in the mouth,’ as if vexed at the mess they had got themselves into by their bad behaviour.

“Harry and I, after much pulling and hammering, found it quite impossible to make two of them. The antlers, which, as you know, are elastic, had bent with the terrible concussion we had witnessed; and it was far beyond our strength to bend them back again. In fact, nothing but a machine of horsepower could have accomplished that. I sent my

companion, therefore, after Cudjo and his handsaw—at the same time directing him to bring the horse and cart, for the carcass of the buck we had shot, as well as some ropes for our captives. While he was gone, I employed my time in skinning the dead animal, leaving his live companions to themselves: I had no fear of their being able to escape. Cowed and sullen as both of them looked, it was well for them—since we did not mean to butcher them—that we had arrived upon the ground as we did. Otherwise their fate was a settled one. The wolves, or some other of their numerous enemies, would have treated them worse than we intended to do; or even had they not been discovered by these, their doom was sealed all the same. They might have twisted and wriggled about for a few days longer, to die of thirst and hunger, still looked in that hostile embrace. Such is the fate of many of these animals.

“Cudjo soon arrived with the necessary implements; and, after hobbling both the bucks, we sawed one of the branches from their antlers, and set them asunder. We then put all three into the cart, and returned triumphant to the house.”

Chapter Thirty Seven.

The Pit-Trap.

“Cudjo had already completed our deer-park, which consisted of several acres, partly woodland and part of it being in the glade immediately adjoining the house. It was enclosed on all sides by a ten-rail fence, with stakes and riders, so that no animal of the deer species could possibly leap out of it. One of its sides lay along the lake; and a trench had been cut, so as to admit a small pond of water within the enclosure. Into this our bucks were put, and left to enjoy themselves as they best might.

“The next anxiety of Harry and myself was to procure a doe or two to keep them company. There was no likelihood that we should capture a pair of does as we had just done the bucks—since the does or this species of deer are without the great antlers. How then should we get hold of one? That was what puzzled us, and set all our wits to work.

“As we sat around the log-fire in the evenings we talked the matter over and over again. We might shoot one that had the fawns following at her heels; and we knew we could then easily take them—as these affectionate little creatures always remain by their mother, even after she has fallen by the bullet of the hunter’s rifle. But this was a cruel expedient; and mamma, who of course overheard us planning the thing, at once entered her protest against it. So, too, did Frank, for he was of a very gentle nature; and, as you might say, could not endure to see a fly killed, except when strict necessity required it. Yet, withal, this same Frank, and mamma, who were entomologists, as well as ornithologists and botanists, had killed many a fly—as might be seen by looking at a large frame hung against the wall, where all sorts of flies, and moths, and great bright butterflies, were impaled upon the sharp thorns of the locust. I am afraid that neither mamma nor Frank could have defended the point very gracefully with so contradictory an argument hanging against the wall. Harry and I, however, did not contemplate the adoption of this plan—as we knew that the fawns would be a long time in growing up, and we wanted an old doe or two at once.

“‘Can we not trap them?’ asked Harry. ‘Why not take them in a trap, as Frank did the turkeys?’

“‘I am afraid you would not easily get deer into such a trap as that where the turkeys were caught.’

“‘But, papa,’ continued Harry, ‘I have read of other kinds of traps. One I remember well. It is made by building a large enclosure just like our park, only leaving a gap; and then having two fences that run out from this gap far into the woods, and opening like the legs of a pair of compasses. The deer are driven between these two fences, and into the gap, when the hunters follow and close them in. I think that looks very easy to be done. How if we try it?’

“‘It would not do at all. In the first place, it would take us several weeks to split rails enough to make the fences sufficiently long; and, secondly, we should require men, and dogs, and horses more than we have, to run the deer in the right direction. All this we might manage, it is true, by undergoing a great deal of trouble; but I think I know a sort of trap that will serve our purpose better.’

“Oh, you do. I am glad. What kind, papa?’

“You remember where we noticed so many deer tracks running between two large trees?’

“Yes, yes, near the salt spring. You said it was a path used by the deer and other animals, when they went to lick the salt from the rocks below.’

“Well—between those two trees let us dig a pit, and cover it over with branches, and grass, and leaves. Then we shall see. What think you?’

“Oh, a pit-trap! that’s the very thing!’

“Next morning, with our spade and axe, Cudjo, Pompo, and the cart, we set forth. We were soon upon the ground, and commenced operations. We first marked out the size of the pit—which was to be eight feet long, and to extend in width from tree to tree, as near to both as we could conveniently get for the great roots. Cudjo then set to work with his spade, while I handled the axe and cut off the spreading roots as they were laid bare. Harry, meanwhile, employed himself with the hatchet in getting long slender saplings and canes to cover in the pit. We threw the earth into the cart, and hauled it off some distance into the woods—taking care not to spill much of it around the place. Fortunately the ground was very soft and easily dug up, so that in about five hours’ time we had excavated a square hole, at least seven feet deep. This would do, thought we. No deer could leap out of that hole, we were certain.

“We now placed the saplings across the top, and over these a thin stratum of cane-reeds, and above all this a quantity of long grass and withered leaves—so as to make it look as like as possible to the rest of the surface around it. We then removed the clods, and other marks of our work, put our implements into the cart, and started off home again. Of course we could do nothing more than wait, until some unlucky deer should drop into the pit.

“By sunrise on the following morning, we paid a visit to our trap. As we drew near, we saw to our great joy that the top was broken in.

“We have caught something, papa,’ said Harry as we ran eagerly up to the ground. What was our astonishment, on looking into the pit, to see

lying along the bottom the naked skeleton of an animal, which we knew at once was that of a deer! We knew this by the horns, as well as pieces of the torn skin that were strewn all over the ground. All around the inside of the trap there were evidences of some terrible struggle that had taken place during the night; and the reeds and grass that had fallen in along with the animal were sprinkled with blood, and trampled down upon the bottom of the pit.

“‘What can it be?’ inquired Harry, as we stood gazing at this unexpected picture. ‘Ha! papa, I’ll wager it was the wolves!’

“‘No doubt,’ replied I; ‘it must have been they. The buck has fallen in during the night; and they have just leaped down upon, and made a meal of him.’

“‘Isn’t it too bad,’ said Harry, in a tone of vexation, ‘that we should have constructed so fine a trap just to accommodate those rascally wolves? Isn’t it too bad?’

“‘Have a little patience,’ said I, ‘we shall see what can be done to punish the ravenous brutes. Run back to the house, and bring Cudjo, with his cart and tools—be sure you tell him to bring the large basket.’

“In a short time Cudjo came with his spade and cart, and we get freshly to work upon the pit. It was now so deep that we had to use the large willow-basket which Cudjo had made some time before. This we slung upon a thong of deer’s hide; and lowering it into the pit, we filled it with the earth, drew it up again, and emptied it into the cart. It was somewhat laborious work; and Cudjo and I took turns about with the basket and spade. After a couple of hours or so, we had added four feet to the depth of our pit, which made it twelve in all. Of course we cut the sides as nearly perpendicular as we could—if anything a little hanging over. We covered it as before, putting fresh leaves and grass on the top of all.

“‘Now,’ said we to one another, as we marched off, ‘let us see the wolf that will leap out of that, should he be only fool enough to drop into it. He may kill the deer while he is in, but we shall do the same for him in the morning.’

“Next morning we started forth again, big with expectation. Our whole

party went,—Frank, Mary, and the little ones,—as they were all eager to see the trap, and whether we had taken anything. Cudjo brought with him his long spear, while Harry and I carried our rifles. Frank armed himself with his bow. We were prepared for the wolves every way.

“As we drew near the trap, Harry, who had gone a few paces in advance of the rest, came running back to announce that the top was broken in, and that there was some animal inside. This was great news; and we all hurried forward, filled with the excitement of expectation. We were soon upon the spot, and looking down into the pit. The hole that had been made through the grass covering was not a very large one, and it appeared quite dark inside; but in the midst of the darkness we could distinguish the shining eyes of animals. There were more than one pair—there were several—all looking up at us and glittering like coals of fire! ‘What sort could they be?’ asked we of one another. ‘Were they wolves? Yes, they must be wolves.’

“Putting the rest to one side, I knelt down, and stretching my neck over the hole, looked steadily in. I was not long in this position until I counted no less than six pairs of eyes; and, to my great surprise, these eyes were of various shapes and colours. The trap appeared to be full of animals of all sorts!

“At this moment the thought entered my head that there might be a panther among the rest; and as I knew that he could easily spring out, I became somewhat alarmed, and hastily rose to my feet. I directed Mary to get into the cart along with the children; and we then led them off to some distance out of the way, until we should assure ourselves as to what sort of creatures were our captives. We returned to the trap, and cautiously removing a quantity of the grass so as to admit the light, we again looked down. To our great delight the first animal we could distinguish was the very one for which we had made the pit—a red doe—and still better, among her legs we saw two beautiful spotted creatures of a light cinnamon colour, which we at once recognised as fawns. We then looked around the pit for the others whose eyes I had seen; and there, crouching in the darkest corners, we saw three bodies of a reddish-brown colour, closely squatted like so many foxes. But they were not foxes—they were wolves, as we knew well—three wolves of the barking or prairie species. They were not likely to bark much more, although they

howled a bit, as Cudjo reached them with his long spear, and finished them in a trice.

“Mary was now brought back; and Cudjo, descending into the pit, secured the doe and fawns which were soon hoisted up, and put into the cart. The wolves were also flung out and dragged off to some distance; and the trap was again put in order for farther captures after which we all returned to our house, pleased with the valuable addition we had made to our stock. We were not much less pleased at having destroyed the three wolves—for these animals were very plenty in the valley, and ever since our arrival had caused us much annoyance. A piece of meat could not be left outside without being carried off by them; and even since the capture of our two bucks, they had several times chased them through the park, until the noise made by the snorting of the latter had brought our dogs, and some of us along with them, to their rescue.

“But the most curious circumstance connected with this affair was, why these wolves had left the doe and her fawns unmolested. They could have killed the three in a moment’s time, yet not a hair was ruffled upon any of them! This strange conduct on the part of the wolves puzzled us all at the time; and we could not offer even a probable conjecture as to its cause. We found it out afterwards, however, when we became better acquainted with the nature of these animals. We found that of the wild creatures that inhabited our valley, the prairie wolf was by far the most sagacious of all. Even sly Reynard himself, who has been so long famous for his craft and cunning, is but a stupid when compared to his own cousin, the barking wolf. This we proved satisfactorily, when we endeavoured afterwards to trap these animals. We first tried them with a ‘cage-trap,’ similar to that which Frank had used in taking his turkeys. We baited it inside with a nice piece of venison; but although we saw tracks all around, and particularly on that side nearest to the bait, not one of the wolves had cared to venture up the funnel-shaped entrance. We next laid a bait with snares around it, made out of the sinews of the deer. We found the bait gone, and the snares gnawed to pieces, as though the rats had done it; but we knew by the tracks that it was no other animals than the prairie wolves. Our next attempt was with a ‘figure-of-four’ trap. It was constructed with a large shallow crate, made of split rails, and set leaning diagonally with its mouth downwards. It was held in that position with a regular staying and triggers—just as Frank and Harry used to set their

traps to catch small birds. The bait was placed underneath upon the staving, in the most tempting manner we could think of. On returning to examine our trap in the morning, we saw as we came near that it was down. We have caught one of them at last, thought we. What was our astonishment to find, on the contrary, that there was no wolf under the trap, and, moreover, that the bait was gone! This was easily explained. A large hole had been scraped under the trap, which, running for some distance underground, came out upon the outside. But the most singular part of the business was, that this hole had evidently been burrowed before the trigger had been touched, or the trap had fallen! We could tell this, because the hole was made from the outside, and through it the animal had most likely entered. Of course, in laying hold of the bait, the trigger was sprung, and the trap fell; but it was of no use then, as the wolf had only to crawl out through the subterranean road he had made, dragging the meat along with him!

“We again tried the ‘pit-trap’—although we still had the one which we had made near the salt springs, and in which we afterwards from time to time caught deer and other animals, but no wolves. We made another, however, at a different part of the valley, near some caves where we knew the wolves were in great plenty. We baited this, first placing some venison upon the covering of leaves, and afterwards putting one of our live bucks into the pit; but in both cases the bait remained untouched, although we had sufficient evidence that wolves had been around it all the night.

“We were very much chagrined by these numerous disappointments, as we wanted to thin off the wolves as much as possible. We occasionally shot an odd one or two; but we as often missed them; and we could not afford to waste our powder and lead upon them. Cudjo, however, did the business at last, by constructing a trap such as he said he had often caught raccoons with in ‘old Vaganny.’ This was arranged something on the principle of the wire mouse-trap; and the spring consisted in a young tree or sapling bent down and held in a state of tension until the trigger was touched, when it instantly flew up, and a heavy log descended upon whatever animal was at the bait, crushing or killing it instantly. By means of Cudjo’s invention we succeeded in taking nearly a dozen of our skulking enemies in the course of a few nights, after which time they grew so shy, that they would not approach anything at all that looked like

a 'fixture,' and for a long while we could trap no more of them.

"Of course all these incidents occurred afterwards, but they convinced us that it was owing to their great sagacity, why the three we had killed in the pit had left undisturbed the doe and her fawns. They were no doubt the same that had eaten the buck on the night before. They had found him in a shallow pit, out of which, after making their supper upon him, they had easily escaped. Returning again next night, they had watched until the doe and her fawns came along and dropped into the pit; and then, without dreaming of any change in the circumstances of the case, the wolves had leaped in after. But the increased descent down which they had pitched, convinced these wary animals that they had 'leaped without looking,' and were 'in the trap' themselves; and, guessing that whoever had made that trap would soon be alongside, they were as much frightened as the poor doe. In this state we had actually found them—cowering and crouching, and more scared-like than the fawns themselves. You will think this a very improbable relation, yet it is quite true. An equally improbable event occurred not long after. Frank caught a large fox and a turkey in his trap; and although they had been together for some hours, not a feather of the turkey was plucked by its affrighted neighbour!

"I have also heard of a panther, who, by the sudden rising of a flood, had found himself upon a small islet in company with a deer; and although at any other time his first instinct would have led him to pounce upon the deer, yet the poor thing was allowed to run about without its fierce companion making any attempt to molest it. The panther saw that he and the deer were equally in peril; and a common danger among the wild animals—as among men—frequently changes foes into friends."

Chapter Thirty Eight.

The old "Possum" and her Kittens.

"The next adventure which befell us was near having a more serious termination. This time Frank was my companion, while Harry remained at home with his mother. Our errand was to procure some of the long Spanish moss that grew upon the live-oaks in the lower end of the valley. This moss, when smoked and cleansed of the leaves and pieces of bark that adhere to it, makes most excellent stuffing for bed-mattresses—in fact, almost equal to curled hair—and for this purpose we wanted it. We did not take the cart, as Cudjo had Pompo in the plough, preparing a large tract for our second crop of corn. We only carried with us a couple of raw-hide ropes, intending to bring home good burdens of the moss upon our rock.

"We travelled on down the valley, looking for a tree with moss upon it, that we could climb. At length, almost close to the foot of the cliff, we chanced upon a very large live-oak, with low branches, from which the long, silvery moss was hanging down in streamers, like the tails of horses. We soon stripped off what was on the lower branches; and then, climbing up on these, proceeded to rob the others, that were higher, of their long stringy parasites.

"While thus engaged, our attention was attracted to the chirping and chattering of some birds in a thicket of pawpaws close to our tree. We looked in that direction, and we could see down into the thicket very plainly from where we stood among the branches. We saw that the birds making the noise were a pair of orioles, or 'Baltimore birds,' as they are often called, from the fact that, in the early settlements, their colour—a mixture of black and orange—was observed to be the same as that in the coat-of-arms of Lord Baltimore. Frank and I conjectured that they must have a nest among the pawpaws, for they had scolded us as we were passing through but a moment before. But what were they scolding at now? asked we of one another—for the birds were fluttering among the broad green leaves, uttering their shrill screams, and evidently under great excitement. We left off gathering our moss, and stood for a moment

to see what it was all about.

“Presently we noticed a strange-looking object in motion along the ground, and close in to the edge of the thicket. At first sight we knew not what to make of it. Was it an animal? No—it could not be that. It had not the shape of any animal we had ever seen: and yet we could see legs and tails, and ears and eyes, and heads—heads, indeed!—there seemed to be a head sticking out of every part of its body, for we counted half a score of them as it moved along. It moved very slowly, and when nearly opposite to us it stopped, so that we had a good view of it. All at once the numerous heads seemed to separate from the main body, becoming little bodies of themselves with long tails upon them, and looking just like a squad of white rats! The large body to which they had all been attached we now saw was an old female opossum, and evidently the mother of the whole troop. She was about the size of a cat, and covered with woolly hair of a light grey colour. She had a snout somewhat resembling that of a pig, though much sharper at the point, and with whiskers like a cat. Her ears were short and standing—her mouth very wide, and, as we could see, full of sharp teeth. The legs were short and stout, and the feet with their keen claws seemed to spread out upon the ground more like hands than feet. The tail was very peculiar; it was nearly as long as the body, tapering like that of a rat, and quite naked. But the greatest curiosity in the structure of this creature was a pouch like opening which appeared under her belly, and which showed that she belonged to the family of the *marsupialia*, or pouched animals. This, of course, we had known before. The little ‘possums’ were exact pictures of their mother—all having the same sharp snouts and long naked tails. We counted no less than thirteen of them, playing and tumbling about among the leaves.

“As soon as the old one had shaken them all off, she stepped more nimbly over the ground—going backwards and forwards, and looking up into one of the pawpaws that grew above the spot where she had halted. In this tree the orioles were now fluttering about, chirruping wildly, and at intervals making a dash downward, until their wings almost swept the nose of the opossum. The latter, however, appeared to take all this very coolly; and evidently did not care for the imbecile efforts of the birds to frighten her off, but continued her survey without paying any attention to their manoeuvres. On looking upward, we discovered the object of her search—the nest of the orioles—which was hanging like a large purse, or

rather like a distended stocking, from the topmost twigs of the tree.

“After a few moments the old 'possum seemed to have made up her mind; and, approaching the spot where the young ones were scrambling about, she uttered a short sharp note that brought them all around her. Several of them ran into the pouch which she had caused to open for them. Two of them took a turn of their little tails around the root of hers, and climbed up on her rump, almost burying themselves in the long wool; while two or three others fastened themselves about her neck and shoulders. It was a most singular sight to see the little creatures holding on with ‘tails, teeth, and toe-nails,’ while some peeped comically out of the great breast-pocket.

“We thought she was going to move away with her cargo; but, to our astonishment, she walked up to the pawpaw, and commenced climbing it. When she had reached the lowermost branch—which grew nearly horizontal—she halted; then, taking the young ones, one by one, in her mouth, she caused each of them to make a turn or two of its tail around the branch, and hang head downwards. Five or six of the ‘kittens’ were still upon the ground. For these she returned, and taking them up as before, again climbed the tree. She disposed of the second load, precisely as she had done the others—until the thirteen little 'possums hung head downwards along the branch, like a string of candles!

“It was such a comical sight to see these monkey-looking little creatures dangling by their tails, that my companion and I could not restrain our laughter as we gazed upon it. We took care, however, not to laugh aloud—as we were anxious to observe the further movements of the old 'possum, and we knew that if she should hear us it would spoil the sport at once.

“As soon as she saw the young ones all fairly suspended, she left them, and commenced climbing higher up the tree. We noticed that she caught the branches in her claws, exactly as a human being would have done with his hands, hoisting herself from limb to limb. At length she reached that branch upon which hung the nest, far out at its top. For a moment she stopped and surveyed it. She was evidently in doubt whether it would carry her weight without breaking, and so were we. Should it break, she would have a smart fall to the ground—for the tree was one of the

highest, for a pawpaw, we had ever seen; and there were no other branches below to which she could clutch in case of falling.

“The nest, however, full of eggs no doubt, tempted her on; and, after a moment’s pause, she started along the branch. When about half-way up it—holding on both with tail and feet—the slender sapling began to creak and bend, and show symptoms of breaking. This, with the screaming of the birds—that now flapped against her very nose—seemed all at once to cow her; and she crept down again, going backwards along the limb. On reaching the fork, she paused, and looked about with an air that showed she was both vexed and puzzled. All at once her eyes rested upon the branch of an oak-tree, that stretched out over the pawpaw, and directly above the orioles’ nest. She looked at this for a moment—as if calculating its height from the nest; then seeming to make up her mind, she ran nimbly down the pawpaw, over the ground that intervened, and up the trunk of the oak. We lost sight of her for an instant among the thick leaves; but the next we saw her crawling out upon the branch that overhung the pawpaw.

“When she had reached a point directly above the nest, she flung herself fearlessly from the branch, and hung to her whole length—suspended by the tail. In this position she oscillated back and forward, with gaping mouth and outstretched claws, endeavouring to seize hold of the nest; but, with all her efforts, and no doubt to her great mortification, she was unable to reach it. She hung for several minutes, clutching, now at the nest, now at the leaves of the pawpaw, and evidently tantalised by the thought of the delicious eggs so near her very nose. We could see that she had lowered herself to the last link of her tail—until only a single turn of it sustained her upon the limb—and we expected every moment to see her fall to the ground. Her stretching was all to no purpose, however; and at length, uttering a bitter snarl, she swung herself back to the limb, and came running down from the oak.

“She seemed to have given up her purpose in a sort of angry despair; for climbing up the pawpaw, she hurried her young from the branch, pitching them somewhat rudely to the ground. In a short while she had gathered them all upon her back and into her pouch; and commenced retreating from the spot—while the orioles changed their terrified screaming into chirrups of victory.

“Frank and I now deemed it proper to interfere, and cut off the retreat of the ‘old ’possum;’ so, dropping from our perch, we soon overtook and captured the whole family. The old one, on first seeing us approach, rolled herself into a round clump—so that neither her head nor legs could be seen—and in this attitude feigned to be quite dead. Several of the youngsters, who were *outside*, immediately detached themselves, and imitated the example of their mother—so that the family now presented the appearance of a large ball of whitish wool, with several smaller ‘clews’ lying around it!

“On finding, however, that we were not to be cheated, and being pricked gently with the point of an arrow, the old one unwound herself; and, opening her long jaws, snapped and bit on every side of her, uttering all the while a sharp noise, like the snarling of a poodle.

“Her snarling did not avail her, for in a few minutes we had muzzled her securely, and made her fast to one of the saplings—intending to take the whole family with us when we returned to the house.”

Chapter Thirty Nine.

The Moccason Snake and the Orioles.

“We now climbed back into the live-oak, and recommenced flinging down our moss. We were chatting gaily about the curious scene we had just witnessed. Frank was remarking how lucky he had been in thus finding the nest of the orioles—as he wanted young birds of that species, and he could return for them whenever they were hatched. All of a sudden, these birds—that since the defeat of the ’possum had remained perfectly quiet—again commenced screaming and chattering as before.

“‘Another ’possum!’ said Frank; ‘maybe it’s the old father coming to look after his family.’

“We both stopped, and looked down. We soon discovered what was causing this new commotion. Slowly gliding over the grass, and glittering as it went, was a long monster-looking object. It was a huge serpent—a snake of the most venomous kind—the dreaded ‘moccason.’ It was one

of the largest of its species; and its great flat head, protruding sockets, and sparkling eyes, added to the hideousness of its appearance. Every now and then, as it advanced, it threw out its forked tongue, which, moist with poisonous saliva, flashed under the sunbeam like jets of fire. It was crawling directly for the tree on which hung the nest. Frank and I stood still where we were—determined to watch its movements, as we had done those of the opossum. On reaching the root of the pawpaw, it stopped for a moment, as if to consider.

“Do you think it is going to climb up to the nest?” inquired my companion.

“No,” I replied, “the moccason is not a tree-climber. If it were, the poor birds as well as the squirrels would have little chance; but it cannot climb. Look at it! it is only making pretence—to frighten the orioles still more, if possible.”

“As I said this, the snake had drawn its body closer to the tree, and raised its flat head up against the trunk, throwing out its tongue as if it was licking the bark.

“The orioles, evidently believing that it was about to climb up, had now descended to the lowest branches, fluttering from one to the other, and screaming all the while either with rage, or terror, or both combined.

“The snake, seeing them approach almost within range of his hideous maw, gathered himself into a coil, and prepared to strike. His eyes scintillated like sparks of fire, and seemed to fascinate the birds; for, instead of retiring, they each moment drew nearer and nearer, now alighting on the ground, then flapping back to the branches, and anon darting to the ground again—as though they were under some spell from those fiery eyes, and were unable to take themselves away! Their motions appeared to grow less energetic—their chirping became almost inaudible—and their wings seemed hardly to expand as they flew, or rather fluttered, around the head of the serpent. One of them at length dropped down upon the ground—within reach of the snake—and stood with open bill, as if exhausted, and unable to move farther. We were expecting to see the snake suddenly launch forth upon his feathered victim; when, all at once, his coils flew out, his body was thrown at full length, and he commenced retreating from the tree! The birds, apparently

released from the spell that had bound them, flew up to the higher branches, and ceased their screaming!

“For a while, my companion and I stood silent, wondering at this unexpected termination of the scene.

“‘What can have driven him off?’ asked Frank, turning to me with a look of inquiry.

“Before I could make any reply, an object appeared upon the edge of the thicket which attracted the attention of both of us. It was an animal about the size of a wolf, and of a dark grey or blackish colour. Its body was compact, round-shaped, and covered—not with hair, but—with shaggy bristles, that along the ridge of its back were nearly six inches in length, and gave it the appearance of having a mane. It had very short ears, no tail whatever, or only a knob; and we could see that its feet were hoofed, not clawed as in beasts of prey. But, whether beast of prey or not, its long mouth, with two white tusks protruding over the jaws, gave it a very formidable appearance. Its head and nose resembled those of the hog more than any other animal; and, in fact, it was nothing else than the *peccary*—the wild hog of Mexico. As it came out from the long weeds and grass, we saw that two smaller animals, of a dark reddish colour—two young peccaries—were following at its heels. Like the opossum, it was a mother and her brood.

“The three soon drew near the pawpaws; and the orioles seeing them, once more set up the scolding concert. But the old peccary paid no attention to the birds. They were nothing to her; and she passed on with her nose to the ground, occasionally stopping to pick up a seed or a nut.

“In going away from the thicket, she crossed the track by which the serpent had retreated. All on a sudden she stopped, tossed up her nose, and scented the air. The fetid smell of the moccason had reached her, and seemed at once to rouse all her energies. She ran for some moments from side to side with her nose to the ground, and lifting the trail like a hound. She first followed it back to the tree, but there was a double trail—that by which the snake had come, as well as the one he had just made in retreating—and this for a moment puzzled her. She took the wrong trail at first, and galloped nimbly out upon it; but, almost in the

same breath, returned to the tree, and then started upon the other.

“During all these manoeuvres, the snake was crawling off as fast as he could—which at best was only a very tardy gait, for the moccason is but a slow traveller. We could see that he kept as much as possible under the grass, occasionally raising his flattened head, and glaring behind him. He was making for the cliffs, that were only about a stone’s throw distant.

“He had got scarce half-way, when the peccary running up the fresh trail almost trod upon him; and, seeing the object of her pursuit, she suddenly stopped, erected her long bristles, and uttered a shrill grunt. The snake, finding that he was overtaken, threw himself into a coil, and prepared to give battle; while his antagonist, now looking more like a great porcupine than a pig, drew back, as if to take the advantage of a run; and then halted. Both for a moment eyed each other—the peccary evidently calculating its distance,—while the great snake seemed cowed, and quivering with affright. Its appearance was entirely different from the bright semblance it had exhibited but a moment before, when engaged with the birds. Its eyes were less fiery, and its whole body seemed more ashy and wrinkled.

“We had not many moments to observe it, for the peccary was now seen to rush forward, spring high into the air, and pounce down with all her feet held together upon the coils of the serpent! She immediately bounded back again; and, quick as thought, once more rose above her victim. The snake was now uncoiled, and writhing over the ground. Another rush from the peccary—another spring—and the sharp hoofs of the animal came down upon the neck of the serpent, crushing it upon the hard turf. The body of the reptile, distended to its full length, quivered for a moment, and then lay motionless along the grass. The victor uttered another sharp cry—that seemed intended as a call to her young ones—who, emerging from the weeds, where they had concealed themselves, ran nimbly forward to the spot.”

Chapter Forty.

The Battle of the Cougar and Peccaries.

“Frank and I were rather pleased with the result of the encounter; though I do not see why we should have taken sides with the peccary, who would have eaten the birds—could she have caught them—and their eggs, too, just as fast as the snake would have done. And why should we have taken the part of the birds either, who, in their turn, had devoured many a butterfly as bright and beautiful as themselves? But so it is. From time immemorial, the poor snake—who is comparatively a harmless animal, and whose deadly powers have been greatly exaggerated—has been hated and persecuted by man more than any other creature; thus fulfilling in a remarkable manner the prophecy of the Sacred Book.

“We began to consider what plan we should take to capture the animal. We desired very much to get possession of the young ones, as we knew they would be a valuable addition to our stock, and would serve us in the place of real pigs—though their flesh does not taste much like pork. It is more like that of the hare. In fact, it is not eatable at all, unless certain precautions are taken immediately after the animal is killed. There is a glandular opening on the back, just above the rump, that has been improperly called a navel. In this opening, there is a substance that emits a strong smell of musk; and if the whole part be not cut out, in less than an hour after the animal has been killed, the flesh becomes so impregnated with the musky odour, that it is quite unpalatable. If the gland, however, be removed in time, peccary-pork is not bad eating—though there is no lard in it, as in the common pork; and, as we have said, it tastes more like the flesh of the hare.

“But my companion and I did not think of these things at the time. We only thought of how we could capture the young peccaries.

“It was plain that, while the mother was with them, the thing would be impossible. We knew that we dared not encounter the fierce brute. Even had we had our dogs with us, she would have been more than a match for both of them with her sharp tusks, and long crocodile-shaped jaws. In fact, the most courageous dog will lower his tail, and run from the attack of this animal; and if, on the contrary, he should await it, it would only be to have a leg snapped off, or his side ripped open. It was plain, then, as long as the old one was there to guard them, we could never lay our fingers upon the ‘shoats.’ What was to be done? Should we send a rifle bullet at the mother? Frank thought this would be cruel, and so it would

have been. Still I knew that the peccary was a fierce animal, and not much entitled to the mercy we would have shown to a deer, or any harmless creature like that. I knew, moreover, that there were a good many of them in the valley—for we had seen their tracks in the mud—and it was exceedingly dangerous to come in contact with them. Indeed, hunters and others have been often surrounded, and torn in pieces by them. Such, then, being the case, I felt that it would not be wise to let any of them escape, whenever we could destroy them—else they might at some time destroy one of ourselves. With these thoughts in my mind, I paid but little attention to the remonstrances of Frank; but, bending down from the branch, on which we stood, I reached for my rifle. I could just lay hold of the muzzle, as it leaned against the tree; and, drawing it cautiously up, I prepared to fire.

“During all this time, the peccary had been busy with the carcass of the snake. After killing it, she had bitten off the head; and, holding the body between her forefeet, she had peeled off the skin with her tusks and teeth as adroitly as a fishmonger would have skinned an eel! She had just finished this operation as I got hold of the gun; and was now tearing up the white flesh, and throwing it in small pieces to the youngsters—all the while uttering low grants, that betokened her satisfaction and enjoyment.

“I raised my rifle, and was about to take aim, when an object caught my eye, which caused me to lower it again with a feeling of terror. The peccary was about fifty yards from the tree upon which we stood; and about twenty yards beyond, another animal, of a far different character, was seen coming out of the jungle. It was about the size of a vealed calf, but shorter in the legs, and much longer in the body. It was all over of a deep red colour, except the breast and throat, which were nearly white. Its ears were erect, short and blackish; its head and muzzle cat-shaped; and its whole body somewhat resembled the figure of a cat—except that its back, instead of being arched, was hollow, and sunk away below the level of its gaunt muscular shoulders.

“It would have been a fearful thing to look at, even had we not known what it was; but we did know, and that rendered the sight of it still more terrifying. It was the ‘cougar!’

“Now, for the first time, since coming upon the spot, we felt fear. We knew

that the peccary, savage as it was, could not climb the tree; and hitherto we had deemed ourselves secure. We were now no longer so. We knew that the cougar could ascend a tree with the agility of a squirrel, and was as much at home among the branches as upon the ground itself. I knew all this; and I turned to my companion, and whispered him to remain motionless and silent.

“The cougar came on with stealthy tread. His eyes, as we could see, were set upon the unconscious peccary; and his legs were strained down as he moved—so that one would have fancied he was crawling upon his belly. His long tail, stretched away behind him, was gently waving from side to side—exactly after the manner of a cat when stealing through the stubble upon the basking partridge.

“All this time the peccary was greedily devouring the snake, wholly unconscious of the danger that was gathering over her. The ground, for some distance around her, was clear of weeds and brushwood; but a large tree stood near; and its long, horizontal branches stretched out, casting their shade upon the spot she occupied. On reaching the margin of the weeds, that had hitherto partially concealed him, the cougar suddenly stopped, and appeared to deliberate. He knew that, unless he could spring suddenly and unawares upon the back of his victim, he would have to encounter those terrible tusks, the effects of which he saw exhibited at that moment on the carcass of the great reptile. He was still too distant to reach the peccary with a single spring; and he appeared to be considering how he might get a little nearer without being discovered.

“All at once, his eyes rested upon the over-stretching branches—a sudden change took place in his attitude; and, turning slowly and silently, he crawled back among the weeds. We could see that he was making a *détour* to get upon the other side of the tree from that occupied by the peccary. Presently we saw him approach the trunk, and the next moment spring up more like a streak of red light than a living animal. We could hear the rattle of his claws on the loose bark, as he passed upward; and the peccary, too, seemed to have heard it, for she threw up her head with a grunt, and stood for a moment listening.

“‘Only a squirrel, perhaps!’ thought she, and again resumed her occupation.

“The cougar now appeared coming from behind the trunk; and, after looking cautiously about him, commenced crawling out along the branch. On reaching one of its forks, he gathered himself like a cat; and then, with a terrific scream, sprang down upon the back of his victim. His claws were buried in her neck at the first dash; and his long body covered hers—his hind-legs and tail warping around her. The frightened animal uttered a shrill cry, and struggled to free herself. Both rolled over on the ground—the peccary all the while gnashing her jaws, and continuing to send forth her strange sharp cries, until the woods echoed again. Even the young ones ran around, mixing in the combat—now flung sprawling upon the earth, now springing up again, snapping their little jaws, and imitating the cry of their mother. The cougar alone fought in silence. Since the first wild scream, not a sound had escaped him; but from that moment his claws never relaxed their hold; and we could see that with his teeth he was silently tearing the throat of his victim.

“The combat did not last long—only a few moments. The peccary soon ceased to struggle, and lay upon her side—still in the embrace of her terrible adversary—who had now torn open the veins of the neck, and was, silently and cat-like, lapping the warm blood.

“With all the hostility which we felt for the cowardly cougar, we did not deem it prudent to interfere. We knew that he would serve us just as he was doing the peccary, if he only knew that we were so convenient to him; and we therefore remained perfectly still, not daring to move even a limb. He was not thirty yards from us, for the struggle had brought both him and his victim nearer to our tree. I could have shot him as he lay crouching in the enjoyment of his red meal; but I knew too well the uncertainty of killing such a muscular and powerful animal with a rifle bullet; and I resolved to let him finish his feast, and take himself off if he would, without any hindrance on our part.

“We were not allowed much time to think about it; for the combat was hardly over, when strange voices reached our ears, coming from the woods, apparently on all sides of us. They had reached the ears of the cougar, too; for the fierce brute started suddenly to his legs, and stood listening, and, as we thought, somewhat alarmed. He seemed to hesitate a moment, looking around him and down at the fresh-killed animal. Then, as if suddenly forming a resolution, he buried his teeth in the throat of the

dead peccary; and, swinging the carcass over his long back, commenced retreating.

“He had made only a few steps, when the noises that had been all this time growing more distinct were heard upon the very edge of the underwood; and, the next moment, several dark objects bounded out into the opening. We saw at a glance they were peccaries. There were twenty or thirty in all. They had been summoned by the cries of the one that had been killed. They came from every side, rushing simultaneously forward, and uttering their shrill grants as they ran.

“They had got between the cougar and trees, before he could reach the latter; and, in fact, they were upon him on all sides, almost in the twinkling of an eye. They formed a complete circle around him; and with their long bristles erected, their gnashing jaws, and shrill notes, they presented a most formidable array.

“The cougar, seeing that his retreat was cut off—at least, so long as he carried the carcass—flung off his burden, and leaped upon the foremost of his advancing enemies, striking it to the ground with his huge paws. He had not time to turn himself, however, when several others fastened on him from behind; and we could see the red fur fly from his sides, torn up by their sharp tusks. Now came the struggle in earnest. For a short while the cougar kept his antagonists at bay—striking them down and tearing them with teeth and claws; but at length the whole herd closed upon him, and we could see the blood streaming from his torn flanks. He now seemed to fight as if wishing to make his way through them and escape; but the peccaries, as active as himself, hemmed him in their midst, surrounding him with a dense mass of bodies and snapping jaws. Twice or three times, the cougar sprang into the air—as if to leap beyond the circle of his antagonists—but at the same time several of these were also seen to rear upward, and intercept him in the spring. At length, by a desperate effort, he succeeded in clearing himself; and dashed out from among them, striving to escape. What was our horror, on perceiving that he ran directly for the tree upon which we were standing!

“With a feeling akin to despair, I cocked my rifle; but, before I could bring it to bear upon his body, he had passed up the tree like a flash; and lay crouching not twenty feet above our heads, and glaring down at us! So

close had he been in passing, that his claws brushed my arm, and I could feel his warm breath upon my face! The peccaries had followed to the foot of the tree, and there stopped—being unable to climb it. Some of them ran around, gazing upward. Others tore the bark with their teeth; and all of them uttered their shrill screams of fury and disappointment.

“For some moments, Frank and I stood terror struck. We knew not what was best to be done. There, above, was the terrible cougar, his eyes glaring like balls of fire at ourselves, who were within reach of a single spring! We knew not the moment he might leap down upon us. Below, again, was an enemy, equally terrible, in the peccaries. They would have torn us to pieces in an instant, had we attempted to descend to the ground. No wonder, then, we were terrified at the dilemma in which we were so suddenly placed. No wonder it was some moments before I could gather resolution enough to act.

“At length, however, I bethought myself that of the two enemies the cougar was certainly the worse. We were safe from the peccaries so long as we remained upon the tree, while we were at the mercy of the other, go where we would. I resolved, therefore, to direct my energies toward the destruction of the latter.

“All this time, the cougar had remained where he had first perched himself in an upper fork of the tree. He would, no doubt, have attacked us sooner had he not dreaded the peccaries below; but he feared that by springing at us he might precipitate himself amongst them; and this kept him for the moment quiet. I knew very well, however, that as soon as the animals at the foot of the tree should take their departure, our fate would be sealed.

“My companion was unarmed. He had brought with him only his bow and arrows. These had been left at the foot of the tree, and were already crunched in pieces by the peccaries. I put him behind me, therefore—so that he should be out of the way of the cougar in case I should only succeed in wounding the latter, and it might spring upon us. All this was done in silence, and as gently as possible, so as not to startle the monster that lay above us, glaring and growling.

“As soon as I was ready, I brought up my rifle slowly and with great

caution. I steadied myself on the limb of the tree, and took aim directly for the head of the cougar—which was the only part of him I could see for the moss. I pulled trigger. The smoke for a while blinded me, and I could not tell the effects of my shot; but I heard a rustling noise—as of some heavy body falling through the leaves and branches—then a dull sound as of the same body striking against the earth—and the next instant louder screams, and a sudden rushing among the peccaries. I looked below. I saw the red body of the cougar struggling in their midst; but it did not struggle long, for in a few moments it was tossed upon their snouts, and mangled by their long fierce tusks.”

Chapter Forty One.

Besieged in a Tree.

“I now believed that we were safe. Both Frank and I experienced that happiness which men feel who have been suddenly snatched from the jaws of death. ‘The peccaries,’ thought we, ‘will soon disperse and go off into the woods, now that their enemy has been destroyed.’ To our consternation, however, we soon found that we were mistaken; for, instead of retiring after they had glutted their vengeance upon the cougar, they again surrounded the tree, looking fiercely up at us, tearing the bark as before, and uttering their wild cries. It was evident they were determined to destroy us if they could. It was a strange way to thank us for delivering over to them their enemy!

“We were upon the lower branches, and they could see us distinctly. We might easily have climbed higher, but that would have served no purpose, as they could not reach us where we were. They could only destroy us by keeping us in the tree, until we might perish by hunger or thirst; and from what I had heard of the nature of these animals, I knew that it was not improbable that they might do this.

“At first I was determined not to fire at them, thinking that after a while their fury might subside, and they would disperse. Frank and I, therefore, climbed a little higher; and concealed ourselves, as well as we could, in the thick tufts of the moss.

“After remaining thus for above two hours, we saw that it was all to no purpose—for the peccaries, although they had become more quiet, still formed a dense circle around the tree, and appeared determined to carry out the siege. Some of them had lain down—intending, no doubt, to take it as coolly and easily as possible—but not one had as yet left the spot.

“I grew impatient. I knew that our people would be uneasy about our long absence. I feared, moreover, that Harry and Cudjo might come in search of us; and they, being on foot and not able to climb quickly enough to a tree, might fall victims to these fierce creatures. I determined, therefore, at length to try what effect a shot or two might have upon the herd.

“I again descended amongst the lowermost branches, to make sure of my aim, and commenced firing. Each time I selected an animal, aiming as nearly as I could for its heart. I fired five times, and at every shot one of the peccaries was seen to bite the dust; but the rest, instead of being frightened by the fearful havoc I was making among them, only trampled over the bodies of their dead companions, grunting more fiercely than ever, and rushing against the trunk with their hoofed feet, as though they would climb up it.

“As I returned to load my rifle for the sixth time, I found to my consternation that I had but one bullet left! This I rammed into the gun, which I again discharged among the peccaries, and another of them lay stretched upon the ground. But all to no purpose was this slaughter—the animals seemed to be quite regardless of death.

“I knew of no other method to drive them away, and I now returned to the upper branches where I had left my companion, and sat down beside him. We could do no more than wait with patience—in hopes that the night might call off our strange besiegers. Although we could hear them below us, still uttering their wild cries, and scratching against the trunk of the tree, we now paid them no more attention, but sat quietly upon our perch, confiding in the hand of Providence to deliver us.

“We had been seated thus but a very short while, when all at once we became conscious that there was a bitter smoke rising around us. At first we had taken it for the smoke which had been produced by the firing of the rifle and which had hung for some time about the tree. Now we knew

it could not be that, for it was growing thicker and thicker, and we noticed that it had a smell very different from that of burnt powder. Moreover, it produced a stifling, choking sensation, causing us to cough, and rub our eyes with the pain. On looking downward, I was unable to see either the ground or the peccaries; but I could perceive a thick cloud rising up all around the tree. I could hear the voices of the fierce brutes, loud as ever; but they appeared to be scattering outward, and their cry was different to what it had hitherto been. It now occurred to me that the moss had caught fire from the wadding of my rifle; and this soon proved to be the fact, for the smoke all at once became illuminated with a bright blaze that seemed to spread almost instantaneously over the surface of the ground. We saw that it did not fully envelope the tree, but burned on that side where we had thrown down large quantities of the moss.

“My companion and I scrambled out on the branches to the opposite side—going as far as we could to avoid the smoke. We feared, all the while, that the hanging mass, or even the tree itself, might catch fire, and force us to leap into the midst of our enemies. Fortunately, however, we had clean stripped those branches that hung directly over the blazing heap; and as yet the flames did not mount high enough to reach the others.

“When we had crawled beyond the blinding smoke, we could distinguish the peccaries, standing in a thick mass at some distance from the tree, and evidently somewhat terrified by the fire. ‘Now,’ thought I, ‘we shall be delivered from them. They will go off far enough to enable us to escape through the smoke;’ and with this intention, I commenced reconnoitring the ground in the direction in which the thick clouds were carried by the wind. I concluded that none of the animals had gone in this direction; and I saw that if we could leap down without being seen, we might make off through the trees. We were about descending upon a lower limb to carry out this purpose, when a sound like the distant yelping of dogs broke upon our ears. It filled us at once with a terrible foreboding. We knew that it must be our own dogs; and we knew that Harry or Cudjo, or perhaps both, would be coming close upon their heels. I knew that the dogs would soon be killed by the herd, and then poor Harry—he would be at once torn in pieces! This was a fearful thought, and Frank and I paused a moment, with palpitating hearts, to listen. Yes, it was the dogs! We could hear them yelping and barking at intervals, and evidently coming nearer. The next moment we could plainly distinguish voices, as of people

following upon the track of the dogs. The voices could be no other than those of Harry and Cudjo coming in search of us. I was irresolute how to act. Should I allow them to come on, and while the dogs might keep the peccaries engaged for a moment, shout out and warn them to take to the trees. It then occurred to me that I might leave Frank where he was, and by making a sudden rush through the smoke, get nearer to Harry and Cudjo and give them warning before the peccaries could get up. Fortunately their voices sounded in the right direction, and I might reach them without being pursued at all.

“I did not hesitate a moment after forming this resolve; but, handing my empty rifle to Frank, and drawing my knife, I dropped down among the smoking heaps of half-burnt moss. I ran off the moment my feet touched the ground; and, after going a distance of an hundred yards or so, I came in sight of the dogs, and the next moment of Harry and Cudjo. But at the same instant, on glancing back, I saw the whole herd of the peccaries rushing after me with shrill cries. I had barely time to shout to Harry and Cudjo, and swing myself up to a branch, when the animals were around me. The others, seeing me climb, and also perceiving the cause, made to a tree; and the next moment I had the satisfaction of seeing both of them mount into its branches. The dogs, on the contrary, ran forward to meet the herd, and give them battle. This did not last long, for as soon as they had encountered the sharp teeth of the peccaries they ran howling back to the tree where Harry and Cudjo had taken shelter. Fortunately for the dogs, poor brutes! there were some low branches, to which, by the help of Cudjo, they were able to spring up. Had it not been so, they would soon have suffered the fate of the cougar; for the peccaries, fiercely enraged in their short encounter with them, pursued them hotly, and surrounded the tree into which they had been lucky enough to climb.

“I was now left to myself. From the position I occupied I could not see Harry, Cudjo, or the mastiffs; but I could see the black herd that was around them. I could hear all that passed—the howling of the dogs—the voices of Harry and Cudjo—the vengeful notes of the peccaries, all ringing together in a wild concert. Then I heard the crack of the little rifle, and I saw one of the animals tumble over upon the ground. I heard the shouts of Cudjo, and I could see the blade of his long spear lunging down at intervals among the dark bodies below. I could see that it streamed with blood; and that numbers of the animals were falling to the earth. Again

came the crack of Harry's rifle, again the loud barking of the dogs, and again the shouts of Cudjo, as he stood upon the lowermost branches, and plied his terrible weapon. And thus for some minutes raged the battle, until I could see the ground fairly strewn with black and bleeding forms. Only a few of the peccaries remained upon their feet; and these at length, becoming alarmed by the fearful slaughter of their companions, turned away from the tree, and fled into the thick underwood. It was plain that they were defeated, and would not again molest us; and, feeling confident of this, we all descended from our trees, and made our way to the house as quickly as we could—so as to relieve the anxiety of my wife.

“Although we often afterwards met a few of the peccaries in our hunting excursions—and had the fortune to capture some of their young—they never from that time offered to attack us, but always endeavoured to escape. It is the nature of this animal to fight bravely with an enemy until conquered, when it will in future always run at his approach. In fact, there appeared to be but one herd of them in the valley; and as that had been nearly destroyed, we found them afterwards both scarce and shy.

“Next day we returned, well armed, for our opossum and her young, which in our hurry we had quite forgotten. We found, to our mortification, that the cunning animal had gnawed off her fastenings, and escaped, with her whole brood.”

Chapter Forty Two.

An Adventure with Dusky Wolves.

“During that year we raised two crops of corn. Neither one of them required as much as two months to bring it to maturity. When we gathered our fall crop we found that we had twenty times the full of our cart—enough to serve us for a whole year, as well as to feed our animals in the winter.

“Our second year was spent pretty much as the first. We made our sugar in the spring, and planted a large quantity of corn. We added to our stock of pets both deer and antelope; and among other animals we caught an

old she-wolf, with a large brood of wolf-puppies at her heels. I need hardly tell you that we were constrained to kill the old one on account of her savage disposition, but the young ones we kept and reared. They grew up quite as tame as our own dogs, with whom they fraternised as if they had been of the same species.

“During the summer and winter we had several adventures in the trapping and killing of wild animals; but one of these adventures was of such a singular and dangerous character, that you may feel interested in its narration.

“It occurred in the dead of winter, when there was snow upon the ground; and, in fact, it was the severest winter we experienced during our sojourn in the valley.

“The lake was frozen over, and the ice was as smooth as glass. Of course, we spent much of our time in skating about over its surface, as it gave us health and a good appetite. Even Cudjo had taken a fancy for this amusement, and was also one of the skaters Frank was fonder of it than any of us, and was, in fact, the best skater in our community.

“One day, however, neither Cudjo nor I had gone out, but only Frank and Harry. The rest of us were busy at some carpenter work within doors. We could hear the merry laugh of the boys, and the ring of their skates, as they scoured over the smooth ice.

“All at once a cry reached our ears which we knew betokened the presence of some danger.

“‘O Robert!’ ejaculated my wife, ‘they have broken through the ice!’

“We all dropped what we held in our hands, and rushed for the door. I seized a rope as I ran, while Cudjo laid hold of his long spear, thinking that that might best help us. This was the work of a moment, and the next we were outside the house. What was our astonishment to see both the boys, away at the farthest end of the lake, still upon their feet, but skating toward us as fast as they could drive! At the same time our eyes rested upon a terrible object. Close behind them upon the ice, and following at full gallop, was a pack of wolves! They were not the small prairie wolves—which either of the boys might have chased with a stick—but of a

species known as the 'great dusky wolf of the Rocky Mountains.' There were six of them in all. Each of them was twice the size of the prairie wolf; and their long dark bodies, gaunt with hunger, and crested from head to tail with a high bristling mane, gave them a most fearful appearance. They ran with their ears set back, and their jaws apart, so that we could see the red tongues and white teeth.

"We did not halt a moment, but rushed onward for the lake. I flung down the rope, and seized hold of a large rail as I ran, while Cudjo hurried forward, brandishing his spear. Mary, with presence of mind, turned back into the house for my rifle.

"I saw that Harry was foremost; and that the fierce pursuers were fast closing upon Frank. This was strange, for we knew that Frank was by far the best skater. We all called out to him, uttering confused shouts of encouragement. Both were bearing themselves manfully, but Frank was most in danger. The wolves were upon his heels! 'O God! they will devour him!' I cried in my agony, expecting the next moment to see him torn down upon the ice. What was my joy at seeing him suddenly wheel, and dart off in a new direction, with a shout of triumph! The wolves, thus nimbly eluded, now kept after Harry—who in turn, became the object of our anxiety. In a moment they were upon him; but he, already warned by his brother, wheeled in a similar manner; while the fierce brutes, carried along by the impetus of their race, swept to a considerable distance upon the ice before they could turn themselves. Their long tails, however, soon enabled them to veer around in the new direction; and they galloped after Harry, who was now the nearest to them. Frank, in the meantime, had again turned, and came sweeping past behind them—uttering loud shouts, as if to tempt them from their pursuit of Harry. They heeded him not, and again he changed his direction; and, as though he was about to skate into their midst, followed the wolves. This time he shaved up close behind them, just at the moment Harry had made his second angle and escaped.

"At this juncture we heard Frank calling out to his brother to make for the shore; while, instead of retreating, he poised himself upon his skates, until Harry had passed; and then dashed off, followed by the whole pack. Another slight turn brought him nearly in our direction.

“There was a large hole broken through the ice close by the shore; and we saw that, unless he turned again, he would skate into it! We thought he was watching the wolves too intently to see it, and we shouted to warn him. Not so: he knew better than we what he was about. When he had reached within a few feet of the hole, he wheeled sharply to the left, and came dashing up to the point where we stood to receive him. The wolves, following in a close clump, and too intent upon their chase to see anything else, went sweeping past the angle; and the next moment plunged into the broken ice!

“Cudjo and I ran shouting forward, and with the heavy rail and long spear commenced dealing death amongst them. It was but a short, though exciting scene. Five of them were speared and drowned; while the sixth succeeded in crawling out upon the ice, and was making off, frightened enough at the cold ducking he had got. I thought he was going to escape us, but at that moment I heard the crack of a rifle from behind; and the wolf tumbled over, howling like a shot hound. On turning around, I saw Harry with my rifle, which Mary had brought down during the encounter, and which she had intrusted to Harry as a better marksman than herself. The wolf was still only wounded, kicking furiously about upon the ice; but Cudjo now ran out, and, after a short struggle, finished the business with his spear.

“That was a day of great excitement in our little community. Frank, who was the hero of the day, although he said nothing, was not a little proud of his skating feat. And well might be, as, but for his manoeuvres, poor Harry would undoubtedly have fallen a prey to the fierce wolves.”

Chapter Forty Three.

Taming the Great Elk.

“In the third year our beavers had increased to such numbers, that we saw it was time to thin them off, and commence laying up our store of furs. They had grown so tame that they would take food from our hands. We had no difficulty, therefore, in capturing those we intended to kill, without giving alarm to the others. For this purpose we constructed a sort of penn, or bye-pool, with raised mud banks, near the edge of the lake, and a sluice-gate leading into it. Here we were accustomed to feed the animals; and whenever a quantity of roots of the swamp sassafras was thrown into the pool, a large number of the beavers crowded into it—so that we had nothing else to do but shut down the sluice-gate, and catch them at our leisure. We accomplished all this very quietly; and as none that we trapped were ever allowed to go back and ‘tell the tale,’ and as at all other seasons the trap was open and free, of course the surviving beavers, with all their sagacity, never knew what became of their companions, and did not even appear to suspect us of foul play, but remained tame as ever.

“In our first crop of skins we laid by, at least 450 pounds worth, with more than 50 pounds worth of ‘castoreum.’ In our second year we were enabled to do still better; and the produce of that season we estimate at 1000 pounds. Wanting a place to dry and store our furs, we built a new log-cabin, which is the one we are now living in. The old one became our store-house.

“The third year of our trapping was quite as productive as the second; and so with the fourth and fifth. Each of them yielded, at least, 1000 pounds worth of furs and ‘castoreum;’ so that our old cabin now contains 4500 pounds of property, which we have taken care to keep in good condition. Besides, we estimate our livestock in the dam, which we can trap at any time, at 2500 pounds more; so that, you see, we are worth in all 7000 pounds at this moment. Do you not think, my friends, that we have realised the prediction of my wife, and *made a fortune in the Desert?*

“As soon as we began to collect these valuable furs, a new train of thought was suggested to us—when and how we should bring them to a market.

“Here was a grand difficulty that stared us in the face. Without a market in which to dispose of them, our furs would be of no more use to us, than a bag of gold would be to a man dying with hunger in the middle of a desert. Although surrounded with plenty for all our wants and necessities, we were still, in a manner, imprisoned in our little valley oasis. We could no more leave it, than the castaway sailor could leave his desert island. With all the animals that were subject to us, none of them were beasts of burden or draught—that is, except Pompo. He was old at the time that these reflections first occurred to us; and when we should be ready to leave our valley in a few years more, poor Pompo would be still older; in fact, barely able to carry himself, let alone a whole family of people, with several thousand beaver-skins to boot.

“Although quite happy where we were—for we were always too much occupied to be otherwise—these thoughts would intrude upon us every now and then, and they gave us a good deal of anxiety.

“As for Mary and myself, I believe we should have been contented to remain where we were, and lay our bones in this lovely, but lonely spot. But we had others to think of—our children. To them we had a duty to perform—the duty of their education. We could not think of bringing them up ignorant of the world; and leaving them to such a wild and wayward fate as would be theirs. These reflections, I have said, at times pressed heavily upon us.

“I proposed to my wife that I should take Pompo, and endeavour to penetrate the settlements of New Mexico—where I could obtain either mules, horses, or oxen. These I should bring back to our valley, and keep them until we required them for carrying us out of the Desert. Mary would not listen to this proposal. She would not consent that we should be separated. ‘We might never,’ said she, ‘see each other again.’ She would not allow me to go.

“Indeed, when I reflected seriously on this matter I saw that it would have been useless for me to make the attempt. Even could I have crossed the

Desert in safety, where was the money wherewith to purchase these animals? I had not enough to buy either ox or ass. The people of New Mexico would have laughed at me.

“Let us be patient,’ advised my wife. ‘We are happy where we are. When the time arrives, and we are ready to go forth, trust that the hand which brought us here *can* and *will* guide us safely back again.’

“With such words of consolation my noble wife always ended our conversation on that subject.

“I looked upon her words as almost prophetic; and so they proved in this case, as on many other occasions.

“One day—it was about the fourth year of our sojourn in the valley—we were talking on this very theme; and Mary, as usual, had just expressed her firm reliance upon the hand of Providence to deliver us from our strange captivity, when our conversation was interrupted by Harry, who came running into the house breathless with haste, and with looks full of triumph.

“Papa! mamma!’ cried he; ‘two elks—two young elks—taken in the trap! Cudjo is bringing them on in the cart,—two beautiful young elks, about as big as year-old calves.’

“There was nothing very new or strange in this announcement. We had captured elk in the pit-fall before; and we had several of them in our park—old ones. It was the fact of their being ‘young elk,’—a sort we had not yet taken—which had put Harry into an unusual state of excitement.

“I thought nothing of it at the moment, but went out along with Mary and the children to have a look at our new pets.

“While Cudjo and the boys were engaged in putting them into the park, all at once I remembered what I had read of, but which had hitherto escaped my memory—that the great American elk is capable of being trained as a beast either of draught or burden.

“I need hardly tell you, my friends, that this thought at once led to a series of reflections. Could these elk be trained to draw a wagon?—to *draw us*

out of the Desert?

“I lost no time in communicating my thoughts to my wife. She, too, had read of this—in fact, in a London menagerie, had seen the elk in harness. The thing, therefore, was practicable. We resolved to use every effort to make it so.

“Let me not weary you, my friends, with details. We set to work to train our young elk. No man knew better than Cudjo how to break a pair of oxen to either plough or cart; and when the elk had grown big, Cudjo yoked them to the plough, and turned up several acres of ground with them. During the winter, too, many a good load of dead-wood did Cudjo make them ‘haul’ up to the wood-pile that supplied our fire. In short, they worked, both in the plough and cart, as gentle as oxen.”

Chapter Forty Four.

Catching the Wild Horses.

“We had accomplished a great object. Nothing remained but to train a sufficient number of elk for our purpose. We trapped several fawns; and Cudjo proceeded in breaking them as he had done the others.

“At this time, however, an event occurred which verified my wife’s prediction still more clearly, and proved that the hand of God was over and around us.

“One morning, a little after daybreak, and just before we had risen, we were all thrown into a state of consternation by a noise that came from without. It was the trampling of hoofs—of many hoofs; and there was no difficulty in perceiving that horses were about the house. Their neighing proved this—for Pompo had neighed in his stable, and we could hear a dozen of them uttering their loud responses.

“‘Indians!’ thought we: and we gave ourselves up for lost.

“We all ran to our arms. Harry, Frank, and I, seized hold of our rifles, while Cudjo betook himself to his great spear. I opened one of the

windows, and looked cautiously out. Horses they were, sure enough, but no horsemen! There they were—in all nearly a dozen of them—white, black, red, speckled and spotted like hounds! They were dashing about through the open ground, neighing, snorting, rearing at each other, and tossing back their long flowing manes, while their tails swept away behind them in beautiful luxuriance. There were they, without bridle or saddle, or any other sign that the hand of man had ever touched them. And never had it. I saw at a glance what they were. They were *mustangs*—the wild horses of the Desert.

“We were not long in resolving how to act. It was evident they had come up the stream from the eastern plains; and, seeing the valley, had been tempted by its greenness, and had strayed into it. Our design, then, was at once formed, and that was to prevent them from getting out again.

“This could be accomplished very easily, by closing up the road which led down to the valley; but, then, how were we to get to it without giving them the alarm? They were playing directly in front of the house, and we could not pass out of the door without showing ourselves. This would at once set them off in a wild gallop, and we should never see more of them. We knew they would not allow us to approach them—for we had seen several bands of them while crossing the prairies, and these would not allow our hunters to get within less than a mile of them. This is a curious fact—that the horse, which you would suppose to be the natural companion of man—once he has escaped from captivity, and goes wild, becomes more shy of man than any other animal, and more difficult to be approached. He seems to have an idea of what is wanted with him, and is determined not to return to slavery. I have never seen a drove of wild horses, but the thought occurred to me, that there was some old ‘runaway’ among them, who told the rest how he had been used, and cautioned them to keep clear of us. Certain it is, that the wild horse is the wildest of all animals.

“How, then, were we to get out, and circumvent the drove? That was soon decided. Telling Cudjo to take his axe and follow me, I climbed out at the back window of our cabin; and keeping the house between us and the horses, we crept along past our store-house and stable, until we got into the woods in the rear. We skirted through the timber, and soon reached the point where the road runs out of the valley. Here Cudjo set

lustily to work with his axe; and in half an hour we had felled a tree across the track, completely blocking it up. We took care to make it secure, by adding several rails, in such a way that no horse without wings could have leaped over it. This done, we gave ourselves no farther concern about being seen by the mustangs; and, shouldering our implements, we marched leisurely back to the house. Of course, the moment the wild horses saw us, they galloped off into the woods; but we did not care for that, as we could easily find them again. And find them we did. Pompo was saddled and bridled; a lazo was made out of raw-hide ropes; and in less than three days the whole *caballada* of wild horses—eleven in all—was shut up in our park.

“Now, my friends, I fear I have quite tired you with our adventures. I might relate many more, and perhaps, at some future time, may do so. I might tell you how we caught and tamed the wild sheep and the antelopes;—how we captured the young buffaloes on the upper plains, and tamed them, and made cheese and butter from their milk;—how we reared up the kittens of the cougar and the cubs of the black bear;—how the wild geese, and swans, and cranes, and pelicans, migrated to our lake, and became quite tame with us;—how Cudjo and I with our horses made a journey across the Desert to the ‘Camp of Sorrow,’ as we called the place where our friends had been massacred;—how we picked out two of the best of the wagons, and with the gunpowder which we took from the bomb-shells and many other useful articles, returned again to our valley. These, and many other adventures with wolves and wolverenes, with panthers and peccaries, and porcupines and opossums, I might detail to you; but no doubt you are already wearied with the length of my story.

“It is now nearly ten years since our arrival in this valley oasis. During all that time, we have lived contented and happy; and God has favoured our efforts, and crowned them with success. But our children have grown up almost wild, as you see,—with no other education than that which we ourselves have been able to impart to them; and we are anxious on their account once more to return to the civilised world. It is our intention then to proceed to Saint Louis in the spring. For this purpose, we have everything ready—our wagons, and horses, and furs—all except those which we intend to trap in the ensuing winter. I know not whether we may ever return to this sweet spot—though it will be always dear to us from a thousand memories. That will depend upon circumstances arising in the

future, and which we cannot now foresee. It is our intention, however, on leaving the valley, to throw open their bars and set all our captives free—to let them return once more to their wild independence.

“And now, my friends, I have but one request to make of you. It is late in the season. You have lost your trail; and, as you all know, it is very perilous to attempt crossing the prairies in winter. Remain with me, then, until spring; and let us all go together. The winter will be a short one; and I shall endeavour to make it pass pleasantly for you. I can promise you plenty of hunting adventures; and, when the proper season arrives, we shall have a grand *battue* of the beavers. Speak, then! What say you to remain?”

I need hardly tell you, my young reader, that we at once accepted the proposal. Our friend McKnight, would of course remain on account of the little Luisa; and as for the rest of us, we knew well the hardships we should have to encounter, should we travel the great plains during winter. We knew that in that latitude, as Rolfe had said, the winter would be a short one; and therefore we should not lose much time by staying until spring. The strange wild life which we should lead, had charms for all of us, and we willingly consented to remain.

As Rolfe promised, we had many hunting adventures; and among the rest, the *battue* of beavers—nearly two thousand of which were trapped and taken.

As soon as spring arrived, we made ready to set forth. Three wagons were prepared—two of them loaded with furs and valuable castoreum. The third carried the females—while Rolfe and his sons rode upon horseback. The walls of the deer-park were broken down, and the aviaries thrown open; and, after distributing plenty of food to the numerous pets, we left them to themselves, and took our departure from the valley. We struck northward for the old trail; and on reaching it, turned our faces for Saint Louis—where we arrived in the month of May; and where Rolfe soon after sold his furs for a large sum of money.

It is now several years since that time; and during the interval, I—the

writer of this little book—living in a distant country, heard nothing more about Rolfe or his family. A few days ago, however, I received a letter from Rolfe himself, which gave me the gratifying intelligence that they were all well, and in excellent spirits. Frank and Harry had just finished their college studies, and had come out accomplished scholars and sterling men. Mary and Luisa—Luisa was still one of the family—had returned from school. Besides this, Rolfe’s letter contained some *very* interesting intelligence. No less than *four* marriages were in contemplation in his family. Harry was about to wed the little “dark sister,” Luisa. Frank had come to an understanding with a fine young lady, the daughter of a Missouri planter; and the fair-haired, blue-eyed, rosy-lipped Mary had enslaved a young “prairie merchant,” one of those who had spent the winter with us in the valley oasis, and who had been very gallant to Mary all along the journey homeward. But who were to be the fourth couple? Ah! that question we must leave for Cudjo and his “lubbly Lucy” to answer.

Rolfe’s letter farther informed me, that it was their intention—as soon as the marriage festivities were over—to return to the valley oasis. All were going together—McKnight, new-married couples, and all. They were to take with them many wagons, with horses, and cattle, and implements of husbandry—with the intention of settling there for life, and forming a little patriarchal colony of themselves.

It was a pleasant letter to read: and as I perused it over and over, and reflected on the many happy hours I had passed in the company of these good people, I could not help thanking the fate that first led me to the *Home in the Desert*.

The End.

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