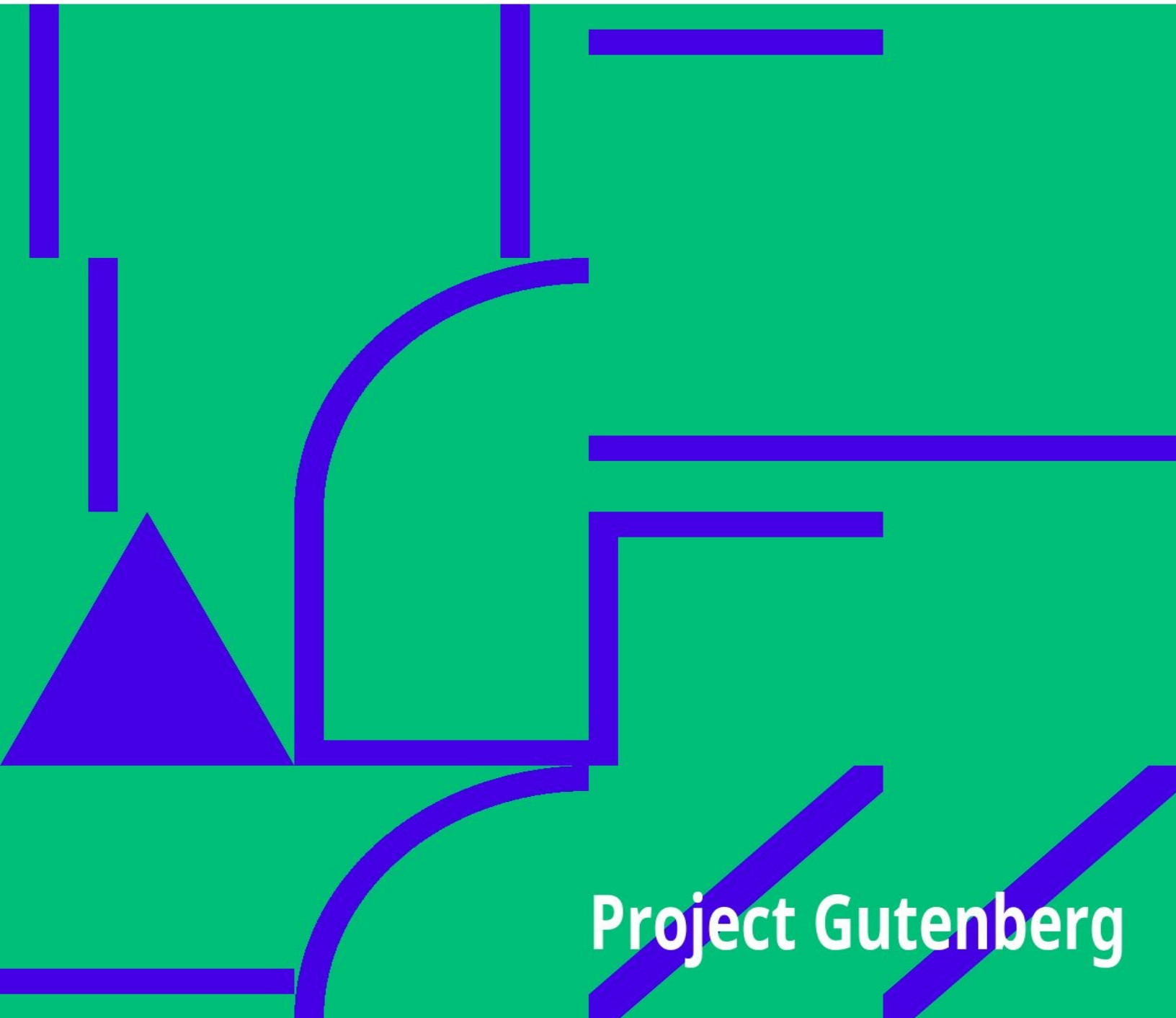
The Buffalo Runners

A Tale of the Red River Plains

R. M. Ballantyne



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Chapter One.

A Tale of the Red River Plains.

Help!

A blizzard was blowing wildly over the American prairies one winter day in the earlier part of the present century.

Fresh, free and straight, it came from the realms of Jack Frost, and cold —bitterly cold—like the bergs on the Arctic seas, to which it had but recently said farewell.

Snow, fine as dust and sharp as needles, was caught up bodily by the wind in great masses—here in snaky coils, there in whirling eddies, elsewhere in rolling clouds; but these had barely time to assume indefinite forms when they were furiously scattered and swept away as by the besom of destruction, while earth and sky commingled in a smother of whitey-grey.

All the demons of the Far North seemed to have taken an outside passage on that blizzard, so tremendous was the roaring and shrieking, while the writhing of tormented snow-drifts suggested powerfully the madness of agony.

Two white and ghostly pillars moved slowly but steadily through all this hurly-burly in a straight line. One of the pillars was short and broad; the other was tall and stately. Both were very solid—agreeably so, when contrasted with surrounding chaos. Suddenly the two pillars stopped—though the gale did not.

Said the short pillar to the tall one—

“Taniel Tavidson, if we will not get to the Settlement this night; it iss my

belief that every one o’ them will perish.”

“Fergus,” replied the tall pillar, sternly, “they shall *not* perish if I can help it. At all events, if they do, I shall die in the attempt to save them. Come on.”

Daniel Davidson became less like a white pillar as he spoke, and more like a man, by reason of his shaking a good deal of the snow off his stalwart person. Fergus McKay followed his comrade’s example, and revealed the fact—for a few minutes—that beneath the snow-mask there stood a young man with a beaming countenance of fiery red, the flaming character of which, however, was relieved by an expression of ineffable good-humour.

The two men resumed their march over the dreary plain in silence. Indeed, conversation in the circumstances was out of the question. The brief remarks that had been made when they paused to recover breath were howled at each other while they stood face to face.

The nature of the storm was such that the gale seemed to rush at the travellers from all quarters at once—including above and below. Men of less vigour and resolution would have been choked by it; but men who don’t believe in choking, and have thick necks, powerful frames, vast experience, and indomitable wills are not easily choked!

“It blows hard—whatever,” muttered Fergus to himself, with that prolonged emphasis on the last syllable of the last word which is eminently suggestive of the Scottish Highlander.

Davidson may have heard the remark, but he made no reply.

Day declined, but its exit was not marked by much difference in the very feeble light, and the two men held steadily on. The moon came out. As far as appearances went she might almost as well have stayed in, for nobody saw her that night. Her mere existence somewhere in the sky, however, rendered the indescribable chaos visible. Hours passed by, but still the two men held on their way persistently.

They wore five-feet-long snow-shoes. Progress over the deep snow without these would have been impossible. One traveller walked behind

the other to get the benefit of his beaten track, but the benefit was scarcely appreciable, for the whirling snow filled each footstep up almost as soon as it was made. Two days and a night had these men travelled with but an hour or two of rest in the shelter of a copse, without fire, and almost without food, yet they pushed on with the energy of fresh and well-fed men.

Nothing but some overpowering necessity could have stimulated them to such prolonged and severe exertion. Even self-preservation might have failed to nerve them to it, for both had well-nigh reached the limit of their exceptional powers, but each was animated by a stronger motive than self. Fergus had left his old father in an almost dying state on the snow-clad plains, and Davidson had left his affianced bride.

The buffalo-hunt had failed that year; winter had set in with unwonted severity and earlier than usual. The hunters, with the women and children who followed them in carts to help and to reap the benefit of the hunt, were starving. Their horses died or were frozen to death; carts were snowed up; and the starving hunters had been scattered in making the best of their way back to the Settlement of Red River from which they had started.

When old McKay broke down, and his only daughter Elspie had firmly asserted her determination to remain and die with him, Fergus McKay and Daniel Davidson felt themselves to be put upon their mettle—called on to face a difficulty of the most appalling nature. To remain on the snow-clad prairie without food or shelter would be death to all, for there was no living creature there to be shot or trapped. On the other hand, to travel a hundred miles or so on foot—and without food, seemed an impossibility. Love, however, ignores the impossible! The two young men resolved on the attempt. They were pretty well aware of the extent of their physical powers. They would put them fairly to the test for once—even though for the last time! They prepared for the old man and his daughter a shelter in the heart of a clump of willows, near to which spot they had found a group of the hapless hunters already dead and frozen.

Here, as far from the frozen group as possible, they made an encampment by digging down through the snow till the ground was reached. As much dried wood as could be found was collected, and a fire

made. The young men left their blankets behind, and, of the small quantity of provisions that remained, they took just sufficient to sustain life. Then, with cheery words of encouragement, they said good-bye, and set out on their journey to the Settlement for help.

The object at which they aimed was almost gained at the point when we introduce them to the reader.

“Taniel!” said Fergus, coming to a sudden halt.

“Well?” exclaimed the other.

“It iss sleepy that I am. Maybe if I wass to lie down—”

He ceased to speak. Davidson looked anxiously into his face, and saw that he had already begun to give way to irresistible drowsiness. Without a moment’s hesitation he seized the Highlander by the throat, and shook him as if he had been a mere baby.

“Iss it for fightin’ ye are?” said Fergus, whose good-nature was not proof against such rough and unexpected treatment.

“Yes, my boy, that’s just what I am for, and I think you’ll get the worst of it too.”

“What iss that you say? Ay, ay! You will hev to bend your back then, Taniel, for it iss not every wan that can give Fergus McKay the worst of it!”

Davidson made no reply, but gave his comrade a shake so violent that it put to flight the last vestige of his good-humour and induced him to struggle so fiercely that in a few minutes the drowsiness was also, and effectually, driven away.

“You’ll do now,” said Davidson, relaxing his grip and panting somewhat.

“Ay, Taniel, I will be doin’ now. An’ you’re a frund in need whatever,” returned the restored Highlander with a smile of appreciation.

About an hour later the travellers again stopped. This time it was

Davidson who called a halt.

“Fergus,” he said, “we have been successful so far, thank God. But we must part here. Half-an-hour will take me to my father’s house, and I want you to go down to the hut of François La Certe; it is nearer than our house, you know—and get him to help you.”

“Surely, Tan, that will be wasted time,” objected the Highlander. “Of all the lazy useless scamps in Rud Ruver, François La Certe iss the laziest an’ most useless.”

“Useful enough for our purpose, however,” returned Davidson. “Send him up to Fort Garry with a message, while you lie down and rest. If you don’t rest, you will yourself be useless in a short time. La Certe is not such a bad fellow as people think him, specially when his feelings are touched.”

“That may be as you say, Tan. I will try—*whatever*.”

So saying, the two men parted and hurried on their several ways.

Chapter Two.

A Lazy Couple described—and roused.

François La Certe was seated on the floor of his hut smoking a long clay pipe beside an open wood fire when Fergus McKay approached. His wife was seated beside him calmly smoking a shorter pipe with obvious enjoyment.

The man was a Canadian half-breed. His wife was an Indian woman. They were both moderately young and well matched, for they thoroughly agreed in everything conceivable—or otherwise. In the length and breadth of the Settlement there could not have been found a lazier or more good-natured or good-for-nothing couple than La Certe and his spouse. Love was, if we may venture to say so, the chief element in the character of each. Love of self was the foundation. Then, happily, love of each other came next. Rising gracefully, the superstructure may be described as, love of tobacco, love of tea, love of ease, and love of

general comfort, finishing off with a top-dressing, or capital, of pronounced, decided, and apparently incurable love of indolence. They had only one clear and unmistakable hatred about them, and that was the hatred of work. They had a child about four years of age which was like-minded—and not unlike-bodied.

In the wilderness, as in the city, such individuals are well-known by the similarity of their characteristics. It is not that they can't work, but they won't work—though, of course, if taxed with this disposition they would disclaim it with mild indignation, or an expression of hurt remonstrance, for they are almost too lazy to become enraged. "Take life easy, or, if we can't take it easy, let us take it as easy as we can," is, or ought to be, their motto. In low life at home they slouch and smile. In high life they saunter and affect easy-going urbanity—slightly mingled with mild superiority to things in general. Whatever rank of life they belong to they lay themselves out with persistent resolution to do as little work as they can; to make other people do as much work for them as possible; to get out of life as much of enjoyment as may be attainable—consistently, of course, with the incurable indolence—and, to put off as long as may be the evil day which, they perceive or suspect, must inevitably be coming.

The curious thing about this race of beings is, that, whether in high or low station, they are never ashamed of themselves—or of their position as drones in the world's hive. They seem rather to apologise for their degradation as a thing inevitable, for which they are not accountable—and sometimes, in the case of the rich, as a thing justifiable.

"I'm glad I did not go to the plains this fall," said La Certe, stirring the logs on the fire with his toe and emitting a prolonged sigh of mingled smoke and contentment, while a blast from the bleak nor'-west shook every blackened rafter in his little hut.

"Heel hee!" responded his wife, whose Indian name—translated—was Slowfoot, and might have been Slowtongue with equal propriety, for she was quite an adept at the art of silence. She frequently caused a giggle to do duty for speech. This suited her husband admirably, for he was fond of talking—could tell a good story, sing a good song, and express his feelings in a good hearty laugh.

“Yes, it will be hard for the poor boys who have gone to the plains, the weather is so awful, to say nothing of the women.”

“Ho,” replied Slowfoot—though what she meant to express by this no mortal knows—nor, perhaps, cares. It meant nothing bad, however, for she smiled seraphically and sent forth a stream of smoke, which, mingling with that just emitted by her husband, rose in a curling harmony to the roof.

Slowfoot was not a bad-looking woman as North American Indians go. She was brown unquestionably, and dirty without doubt, but she had a pleasant expression, suggestive of general good-will, and in the budding period of life must have been even pretty. She was evidently older than her husband, who might, perhaps, have been a little over thirty.

“I should not wonder,” continued La Certe, “if the buffalo was drove away, and the people starved this year. But the buffalo, perhaps, will return in time to save them.”

“Hm!” responded the wife, helping herself to some very strong tea, which she poured out of a tin kettle into a tin mug and sweetened with maple sugar.

“Do you know if Cloudbrow went with them?” asked the half-breed, pushing forward his mug for a supply of the cheering beverage.

“No, he stopped in his house,” replied the woman, rousing herself for a moment to the conversational point, but relapsing immediately.

The man spoke in patois French, the woman in her native Cree language. For convenience we translate their conversation as near as may be into the English in which they were wont to converse with the Scotch settlers who, some time before, had been sent out by the Earl of Selkirk to colonise that remote part of the northern wilderness.

La Certe’s father was a French Canadian, his mother an Indian woman, but both having died while he was yet a boy he had been brought or left to grow up under the care of an English woman who had followed the fortunes of the La Certe family. His early companions had been half-breeds and Indians. Hence he could speak the English, French, and

Indian languages with equal incorrectness and facility.

“You don’t like Cloudbrow,” remarked the man with an inquiring glance over the rim of his mug. “Why you not like him?”

“Hee! hee!” was Slowfoot’s lucid reply. Then, with an unwonted frown on her mild visage, she added with emphasis—

“No! I *not* like him.”

“I know that,” returned the husband, setting down his mug and resuming his pipe, “but why?”

To this the lady answered with a sound too brief to spell, and the gentleman, being accustomed to his wife’s little eccentricities, broke into a hilarious laugh, and assured her that Cloudbrow was not a bad fellow—a capital hunter and worthy of more regard than she was aware of.

“For,” said he, “Cloudbrow is willing to wait till spring for payment of the horse an’ cart I hired from him last year. You know that I could not pay him till I go to the plains an’ get another load of meat an’ leather. You will go with me, Slowfoot, an’ we will have grand times of it with buffalo-humps an’ marrow bones, an’ tea an’ tobacco. Ah! it makes my mouth water. Give me more tea. So. That will do. What a noise the wind makes! I hopes it won’t blow over the shed an’ kill the horse. But if it do I cannot help that. Cloudbrow could not ask me to pay for what the wind does.”

There came another gust of such violence, as he spoke, that even Slowfoot’s benignant expression changed to a momentary glance of anxiety, for the shingles on the roof rattled, and the rafters creaked as if the hut were groaning under the strain. It passed, however, and the pair went on smoking with placid contentment, for they had but recently had a “square” meal of pemmican and flour.

This compost when cooked in a frying-pan is exceedingly rich and satisfying—not to say heavy—food, but it does not incommode such as La Certe and his wife. It even made the latter feel amiably disposed to Cloudbrow.

This *sobriquet* had been given by the half-breeds to a young Scotch

settler named Duncan McKay, in consequence of the dark frown which had settled habitually on his brow—the result of bad temper and unbridled passion. He was younger brother to that Fergus who has already been introduced to the reader. Having been partially trained, while in Scotland, away from the small farm-house of his father, and having received a better education, Duncan conceived himself to stand on a higher level than the sedate and uneducated Fergus. Thus pride was added to his bad temper. But he was not altogether destitute of good points. What man is? One of these was a certain reckless open-handedness, so that he was easily imposed on by the protestations and assurances of the sly, plausible, and lazy La Certe.

The couple were still engaged in smoking, quaffing tea, and other intellectual pursuits, when they heard sounds outside as of some one approaching. Another moment, and the door burst open, and a man in white stepped in. He saluted them with a familiar and hasty "*bonjour*," as he stamped and beat the snow vigorously from his garments.

"What? Antoine Dechamp!" exclaimed La Certe, rising slowly to welcome his friend; "you seem in hurry?"

"Ay—in great hurry! They are starving on the plains! Many are dead! Davidson has come in! He is more than half-dead! Can hardly tell the news! Drops asleep when he is speaking! Luckily I met him when going home in my cariole! Okématan, the Indian, was with me. So he got out, and said he would pilot Davidson safe home! He said something about Fergus McKay, which I could not understand, so I have come on, and will drive to Fort Garry with the news! But my horse has broke down! Is yours in the stable?"

Dechamp was a sturdy young half-breed and an old playmate of La Certe. He spoke with obvious impatience at the delay caused by having so much to tell.

"Is your horse in the stable?" he demanded sharply a second time, while his friend began, with exasperating composure, to assure him that it was, but that the horse was not his.

"Cloudbrow is its owner," he said, "and you know if anything happens to it

he will —. Stay, I will get you lantern—”

He stopped, for Dechamp, observing a large key hanging on the wall, had seized it and rushed out of the hut without waiting for a lantern.

“Strange, how easy some men get into a fuss!” remarked La Certe to his surprised, but quiet, spouse as he lighted a large tin lantern, and went to the door. Looking out with an expression of discomfort, he put on his cap, and prepared to face the storm in the cause of humanity. He held the lantern high up first, however, and peered under it as if to observe the full extent of the discomfort before braving it. Just then a furious gust blew out the light.

“Ha! I expected that,” he said, with a sigh that was strongly suggestive of relief, as he returned to the fire to relight the lantern.

On going the second time to the door he observed the form of his friend leading the horse past—both of them looking dim and spectral through the driving snow.

“Dechamp have good eyes!” he remarked, halting on the threshold. “There is light enough without the lantern; besides—ha! there, it is out again! What a trouble it is! Impossible to keep it in—such a night!”

“Hee! hee!” giggled Slowfoot, who was busy refilling her pipe.

La Certe was still standing in a state of hesitancy, troubled by a strong desire to help his friend, and a stronger desire to spare himself, when he was thrown somewhat off his wonted balance by the sudden reappearance of Dechamp, leading, or rather supporting, a man.

Need we say that it was Fergus McKay, almost blind and dumb from exhaustion, for the parting from Dan Davidson which we have mentioned had proved to be the last straw which broke them both down, and it is probable that the frozen corpse of poor Dan would have been found next day on the snow, had he not been accidentally met by Dechamp, and taken in charge by the Indian Okématan. Fergus, having a shorter way to go, and, perhaps, possessing a little more vitality or endurance, had just managed to stagger to La Certe’s hut when he encountered the same man who, an hour previously, had met and saved his companion further

down the Settlement.

The moment Fergus entered the hut, he looked wildly round, and opened his mouth as if to speak. Then he suddenly collapsed, and fell in a heap upon the floor, scattering flakes of snow from his person in all directions.

La Certe and his wife, though steeped in selfishness, were by no means insensible to the sufferings of humanity when these were actually made visible to their naked eyes. Like many—too many—people, they were incapable of being impressed very deeply through their ears, but could be keenly touched through the eyes. No sooner did they behold the condition of Fergus—who was well-known to them—than they dropped their apathetic characters as though they had been garments.

In her haste Slowfoot let fall her pipe, which broke to atoms on the floor—but she heeded it not. La Certe capsized his mug of tea—but regarded it not; and while the former proceeded to remove the shawl from Fergus's neck and chafe his cold hands, the latter assisted Dechamp to drag the exhausted man a little nearer to the fire, and poured a cup of warm tea down his throat.

Their efforts, though perchance not as wisely directed as they might have been, were so vigorously conducted that success rewarded them. Fergus soon began to show signs of returning animation. A hunter of the western wilderness is not easily overcome, neither is he long of reviving, as a rule, if not killed outright.

They set him up in a sitting posture with his back against a box, and his feet towards the fire. Heaving a deep sigh, Fergus looked round with a bewildered, anxious expression. In a moment intelligence returned to his eyes, and he made a violent attempt to rise, but Dechamp held him down.

"Let me up!" he gasped, "life and death are in the matter—if it iss not death already—"

"Be still, Fergus McKay," said Dechamp, with that firmness of manner and tone which somehow command respect; "I know all about it. Take one bit of bread, one swig more of tea, and you go with me to Fort Garry, to tell the Gov'nor what you know. He will send help at once."

Great was the relief of Fergus when he heard this. Submitting to treatment like an obedient child, he was soon fit to stagger to the sleigh or cariole, into which he was carefully stuffed and packed like a bale of goods by La Certe and his wife, who, to their credit be it recorded, utterly ignored, for once, the discomforts of the situation.

Fergus was asleep before the packing was quite done. Then Dechamp jumped in beside him, and drove off in the direction of the Hudson's Bay Company's establishment, Fort Garry, while our worthy couple returned to their hut to indulge in a final and well-earned pipe and a mug of the strongest possible tea.

Chapter Three.

To the Rescue.

Winnipeg city, with its thousands of inhabitants, now covers the spot to which Antoine Dechamp drove his friend Fergus McKay.

At the time we write of, the only habitation there was Fort Garry, a solitary stone building of some strength, but without regular troops of any kind, and held only by a few employés of the Hudson's Bay Company, who were there only in the capacity of fur-traders.

Here the Governor of the colony received the unexpected guests with hospitality; heard the tale of Fergus with a sympathetic ear, and at once organised a rescue-expedition with dog-sledges and provisions.

While this was being done at the fort, Dan Davidson was similarly employed at Prairie Cottage, the residence of his mother, who, since the death of her husband—a farmer from the Scottish Lowlands—had managed her farm with the aid of her two sons, Dan and Peter; the latter being a youth of seventeen. She was also assisted by her only daughter, Jessie, who was over thirteen years of age, and already esteemed an authority on the subjects of poultry, cookery, and dairy produce. A small servant—a French half-breed named Louise—completed the household of the widow Davidson.

On reaching home, Dan, like Fergus McKay, experienced difficulties that he had not counted on, for his overtaxed strength fairly broke down, and he found himself almost incapable at first of telling his tale of disaster. Then, when he tried to go about the needful preparations for rescue, he found himself unable to resist drowsiness, and if he ventured to sit down for a moment he fell sound asleep at once.

Those who have experienced this condition know how overwhelming and intensely disagreeable it is, especially if resistance to it is rendered imperative by a matter of life or death. Davidson struggled bravely against it of course, but the struggle had already been so long continued that his efforts were now in vain.

Starting up from the supper which Jessie had spread before him, and which he was languidly attempting to eat, he said, almost fiercely, “Where is the wash-tub, Louise?”

The surprised little domestic pointed to the article in question.

“Here; fetch some cold water.”

“It is full,” said Louise with a strong French accent and a pretty lisp.

Without the ceremony even of throwing back his collar Dan plunged his head into the water, and, after steeping it for a few seconds, drew it out refreshed.

His younger brother entered the room at that moment.

“Peter,” he said, drying his head violently with a jack-towel, “have you got the sledge ready, and the provisions packed, and the empty sledge wi’ the buffalo-robes?”

“Ay—all ready,” answered the other, for he was a sprightly, willing youth, who rejoiced in any unexpected demand on his superabundant energies. “But I say, Dan, you are quite unfit to start off again without rest.”

He looked in his brother’s face anxiously, for Dan had seated himself once more to his food, but seemed unable to deal with it properly. “Why, you’ve got the knife and fork in the wrong hands, Dan! You *must* have an

hour’s rest before we start.”

“Impossible,” returned the other with a dazed look, as he seized a mug of water and drank it off. “An hour’s delay may mean death to Elspie and old Duncan McKay.”

“But let *me* start off at once,” returned Peter, eagerly. “I’ve a pretty good guess, from your description, where you left them. Besides, the gale is not so bad now. After an hour’s sleep you will be able to start fresh, maybe overtake me. Jess will be sure to waken you in—”

He stopped, for his brother’s head had bent slowly forward while he was speaking, and now rested on his arms on the table. The worn-out man was sound asleep.

“Just leave him, Peter, and be off wi’ the dogs,” said Mrs Davidson. “Okématan will keep you in the right track. I’ll be sure to wake him in time to catch you up.”

“No, mother, not without his leave,” said the youth, firmly. “Dan! Dan! rouse up, old boy! Shall we start without you?”

“Yes, yes—I’m ready,” said the poor fellow, starting up and swaying to and fro like a drunken man; “but—I say, Peter, I’m done for. I depend on you, lad, to keep me up to the scratch. Lay the dog-whip across my shoulders if I try to lie down. Promise me that. D’ee hear!”

“Yes, I understand,” returned the youth with intense earnestness. “Now look here, Dan, you know me: will you trust me?”

“Of course I will,” answered Dan with a languid smile.

“Well, then; come along, we’ll rescue Elspie—you may depend on that. Okématan and I will look after you and see that all goes right. Come.”

He took his brother by the arm, and led him unresistingly away, followed by the dark-skinned Indian, who, with the usual reticence of his race, had stood like a brown statue, silently observing events.

Jessie Davidson, who was a fair and comely maiden, touched him on the

arm as he was passing out—

“Oh! take care of him, Okématan,” she said, anxiously.

Okématan replied “Ho!” in a sort of grunt. It was an expressively uttered though not very comprehensible reply; but Jessie was satisfied, for she knew the man well, as he had for a considerable time been, not exactly a servant of the house, but a sort of self-appointed hanger-on, or unpaid retainer. For an Indian, he was of a cheerful disposition and made himself generally useful.

When they were outside, it was found that the gale had abated considerably, and that the moon was occasionally visible among the clouds which were driving wildly athwart the heavens, as though the elemental war which had ceased to trouble the earth were still raging in the sky.

“Peter,” said the brother, as they stood for a moment beside two Indian sledges, one of which was laden with provisions, the other empty —“Peter, don’t forget your promise. Lay the whip on heavy. Nothing else will keep me awake!”

“All right! Sit down there for a moment. We’re not quite ready yet.”

“I’d better not. No! I will stand till it’s time to start,” returned Dan with a dubious shake of his head.

“Didn’t you say you would trust me?”

“Yes, I did, old boy.”

“Does it look like trusting me to refuse the very first order I give you? What an example to Okématan! I am in command, Dan. Do as you’re bid, sir, and sit down.”

With a faint smile, and a still more dubious shake of the head, Dan obeyed. He sat down on the empty sledge and the expected result followed. In a few seconds he was asleep.

“Now we’ll pack him in tight,” observed his brother, as he and the Indian

stretched the sleeper at full length on the sledge, wrapped him completely up in the warm buffalo-robes, and lashed him down in such a way that he resembled a mummy, with nothing visible of him except his mouth and nose.

Four strong large dogs were attached to each sledge in tandem fashion, each dog having a little collar and harness of its own. No reins were necessary. A track beaten in the soft snow with his snow-shoes by the Indian, who stepped out in front, was guide enough for them; and a tail-line attached to the rear of each sledge, and held by the drivers, sufficed to restrain them when a stretch of hard snow or ice tempted them to have a scamper.

The road thus beaten over the prairie by Okématan, though a comparatively soft one, was by no means smooth, and the rough motion would, in ordinary circumstances, have rendered sleep impossible to our hero; but it need hardly be said that it failed to disturb him on the present occasion. He slept like an infant throughout the whole night; cared nothing for the many plunges down the prairie waves, and recked not of the frequent jerks out of the hollows.

Hour after hour did Peter Davidson with his silent companion trudge over the monotonous plains—hope in the ascendant, and vigour, apparently, inexhaustible. The dogs, too, were good and strong. A brief halt now and then of a few minutes sufficed to freshen them for every new start. Night passed away, and daylight came in with its ghostly revelations of bushes that looked like bears or buffaloes, and snow-wreaths that suggested the buried forms of frozen men.

Then the sun arose and scattered these sombre visions of early morning with its gladdening, soul-reviving rays.

At this point the rescue-party chanced to have reached one of those bluffs of woodland which at that time speckled the plains—though they were few indeed and far between.

“Breakfast,” said Peter, heaving a profound sigh as he turned about and checked the teams, for at that point he happened to be in advance beating the track.

Okématan expressed his entire concurrence with an emphatic “Ho!” The wearied dogs lay down in their tracks, shot out their tongues, panted, and looked amiable, for well they knew the meaning of the word “breakfast” and the relative halt.

The sudden stoppage awoke the sleeper, and he struggled to rise.

“Hallo! What’s wrong? Where am I? Have the Redskins got hold o’ me at last?”

“Ay, that they have. At least one Red-skin has got you,” said Peter. “Have a care, man, don’t struggle so violently. Okématan won’t scalp you.”

The sound of his brother’s voice quieted Davidson, and at once restored his memory.

“Cast me loose, Peter,” he said; “you’re a good fellow. I see you have brought me along wi’ you, and I feel like a giant refreshed now, tho’ somewhat stiff. Have we come far?”

“I don’t know how far we’ve come, but I know that we’ve been pegging along the whole night, and that we must have breakfast before we take another step. It’s all very well for you, Dan, to lie there all night like a mere bag o’ pemmican enjoying yourself, but you must remember that your brother is mortal, and so are the dogs, to say nothing o’ the Red-skin.”

While he was speaking, the youth undid the fastenings, and set his brother free, but Dan was far too anxious to indulge in pleasantries just then. After surveying the landscape, and coming to a conclusion as to where they were, he took a hurried breakfast of dried meat—cold. The dogs were also treated to a hearty feed, and then, resuming the march, the rescuers pushed on with renewed vigour—Dan Davidson now beating the track, and thus rendering it more easy for those who came behind him.

All that day they pushed on almost without halt, and spent the next night in a clump of willows; but Dan was too anxious to take much rest. They rose at the first sign of daybreak, and pushed on at their utmost speed, until the poor dogs began to show signs of breaking down; but an extra

hour of rest, and a full allowance of food kept them up to the mark, while calm weather and clear skies served to cheer them on their way.

Chapter Four.

Tells of Love, Duty, Starvation, and Murder.

Pushing on ahead of them, with that sometimes fatal facility peculiar to writers and readers, we will now visit the couple whom Dan and his party were so anxious to rescue.

A single glance at Elspie McKay would have been sufficient to account to most people for the desperate anxiety of Daniel Davidson to rescue her from death, for her pretty sparkling face and ever-varying expression were irresistibly suggestive of a soul full of sympathy and tender regard for the feelings of others.

Nut-brown hair, dark eyes, brilliant teeth, and many more charms that it would take too much time and room to record still further accounted for the desperate determination with which Dan had wooed and won her.

But to see this creature at her best, you had to see her doing the dutiful to her old father. If ever there was a peevish, cross-grained, crabbed, unreasonable old sinner in this world, that sinner was Duncan McKay, senior. He was a widower. Perhaps that accounted to some extent for his condition. That he should have a younger son—also named Duncan—a cross ne'er-do-weel like himself—was natural, but how he came to have such a sweet daughter as Elspie, and such a good elder son as Fergus, are mysteries which we do not attempt to unravel or explain. Perhaps these two took after their departed mother. We know not, for we never met her. Certain it is that they did not in the least resemble their undeparted father—except in looks, for McKay senior had been a handsome man, though at the time we introduce him his good looks, like his temper, had nearly fled, and he was considerably shrivelled up by age, hard work, and exposure. The poor man was too old to emigrate to a wilderness home when he had set out for the Red River Colony, and the unusual sufferings, disappointments, and hardships to which the first

settlers were exposed had told heavily on even younger men than he.

Elspie's love for her father was intense; her pity for him in his misfortunes was very tender; and, now that he was brought face to face with, perhaps, the greatest danger that had ever befallen him, her anxiety to relieve and comfort him was very touching. She seemed quite to forget herself, and the fact that she might perish on the bleak plains along with her father did not seem even to occur to her.

"It wass madness to come here, *whatever*," said the poor old man, as he cowered over the small fire, which his son Fergus had kindled before leaving, and which Elspie had kept up with infinite labour and difficulty ever since.

The remark was made testily to himself, for Elspie had gone into the surrounding bush, axe in hand, to find, if possible, and cut down some more small pieces of firewood. When she returned with an armful of dry sticks, he repeated the sentiment still more testily, and added—"If it wass not for Tuncan, I would have been at home this night in my warm bed, wi' a goot supper inside o' me, instead o' freezin' an' starvin' oot here on the plain among the snow. It's mischief that boy wass always after from the tay he wass born."

"But you know that poor Duncan could not guess we were to have such awful weather, or that the buffalo would be so scarce. Come now, dear daddy," said the cheery girl, as she heaped on wood and made a blaze that revived the old man, "I'll warm up some more of the tea. There's a very little left—and—and—it surely won't be long till God sends Daniel and Fergus back to us with food."

Old McKay was somewhat mollified by her manner, or by the fire, or by the prospect of relief held out, for his tone improved decidedly.

"Try the bag again, lass," he said, "maybe you'll find a crumb or two in the corners yet. It will do no harm to try."

Obediently poor Elspie tried, but shook her head as she did so.

"There's nothing there, daddy. I turned it inside out last time."

“Wow! but it’s ill to bear!” exclaimed old Duncan, with a half-suppressed groan.

Meanwhile his daughter put the tin kettle on the fire and prepared their last cup of tea. When it was ready she looked up with a peculiar expression on her face, as she drew something from her pocket.

“Look here, daddy,” she said, holding up a bit of pemmican about the size of a hen’s egg.

The old man snatched it from her, and, biting off a piece, began to chew with a sort of wolfish voracity.

“I reserved it till now,” said the girl, “for I knew that this being the second night, you would find it impossible to get to sleep at all without something in you, however small. If you manage to sleep on this and the cup of hot tea, you’ll maybe rest well till morning—and then—”

“God forgive me!” exclaimed the old man, suddenly pausing, as he was about to thrust the last morsel into his mouth; “hunger makes me selfish. I wass forgettin’ that you are starvin’ too, my tear. Open your mouth.”

“No, father, I don’t want it. I really don’t feel hungry.”

“Elspie, my shild,” said old Duncan, in a tone of stern remonstrance, “when wass it that you began to tell lies?”

“I’m telling the truth, daddy. I did feel hungry yesterday, but that has passed away, and to-day I feel only a little faint.”

“Open your mouth, I’m tellin’ you,” repeated old Duncan in a tone of command which long experience had taught Elspie promptly to obey. She received the morsel, ate it with much relish, and wished earnestly for more.

“Now, you’ll lie down and go to sleep,” she said, after her father had washed down the last morsel of food with the last cup of hot tea, “and I’ll gather a few more sticks to keep the fire going till morning. I think it is not so cold as it was, and the wind is quite gone. They have been away five days now, or more. I think that God, in His mercy, will send us relief in the

morning."

"You are a goot lass, my tear," said the old man, allowing himself to be made as comfortable as it was in his daughter's power to accomplish; "what you say is ferry true. The weather feels warmer, and the wind is down. Perhaps they will find us in the mornin'. Goot-night, my tear."

It was one of the characteristics of this testy old man, that he believed it quite possible for a human being to get on quite well enough in this world without any distinct recognition of his Maker.

Once, in conversation with his youngest son and namesake Duncan junior, he had somehow got upon this subject, not by any means in a reverential, but in an argumentative, controversial spirit, and had expressed the opinion that as man knew nothing whatever about God, and had no means of finding out anything about Him, there was no need to trouble one's head about Him at all.

"I just go about my work, Tuncan," he said, "an' leave preachin' an' prayin' an' psalm-singin' to them that likes it. There's Elspie, now. She believes in God, an' likes goin' to churches an' meetin's, an' that seems to make her happy. Ferry goot—I don't pelieve in these things, an' I think I'm as happy as hersel'."

"Humph!" grunted the son in a tone of unconcealed contempt; "if ye *are* as happy as hersel', faither, yer looks give the lie to your condeetion, *whatever*. An' there's this great dufference between you an' her, that she's not only happy hersel', but she does her best to mak other folk happy—but you, wi' your girnin' an' snappin', are always doin' the best ye can to mak everybody aboot ye meeserable."

"Tuncan," retorted the sire, with solemn candour, "it iss the same compliment I can return to yoursel' with interest, my boy—what*ever*."

With such sentiments, then, it is not remarkable that Duncan McKay senior turned over to sleep as he best could without looking to a higher source than earth afforded for help in his extremity. Happily his daughter was actuated by a better spirit, and when she at last lay down on her pile of brushwood, with her feet towards the fire, and her head on a buffalo robe, the fact of her having previously committed herself and her father to

God made her sleep all the sounder.

In another clump of wood not many miles distant from the spot where the father and daughter lay, two hunters were encamped. One was Duncan McKay, to whom we have just referred as being in discord with his father. The other was a Canadian named Henri Perrin.

Both men were gaunt and weakened by famine. They had just returned to camp from an unsuccessful hunt, and the latter, being first to return, had kindled the fire, and was about to put on the kettle when McKay came in.

“I’ve seen nothing,” remarked McKay as he flung down his gun and then flung himself beside it. “Did you see anything?”

“No, nothing,” answered Perrin, breaking off a piece of pemmican and putting it into the pot.

“How much is left?” asked McKay.

“Hardly enough for two days—for the two of us; four days perhaps for one!” answered the other.

McKay looked up quickly, but the Canadian was gazing abstractedly into the pot. Apparently his remark had no significance. But McKay did not think so. Since arriving in the colony he had seen and heard much about deception and crime among both Indians and half-breeds. Being suspicious by nature, he became alarmed, for it was evident enough, as Perrin had said, that food to last two men for three days would last one man for six, and the one who should possess six days’ provisions might hope to reach the Settlement alive, even though weakened by previous starvation.

The dark expression which had procured for Duncan McKay junior the *sobriquet* of Cloudbrow from La Certe and his wife, deepened visibly as these thoughts troubled his brain, and for some time he sat gazing at the fire in profound abstraction.

Young McKay was not by any means one of the most depraved of men, but when a man is devoid of principle it only requires temptation strong

enough, and opportunity convenient, to sink him suddenly to the lowest depths. Starvation had so far weakened the physique of the hunters that it was obviously impossible for both of them to reach the Settlement on two days' short allowance of food. The buffalo had been driven away from that neighbourhood by the recent storm, and the hope of again falling in with them was now gone. The starving hunters, as we have said, had broken up camp, and were scattered over the plains no one could tell where. To find them might take days, if not weeks; and, even if successful, of what avail would it be to discover groups of men who were in the same predicament with themselves? To remain where they were was certain and not far-distant death! The situation was desperate, and each knew it to be so. Yet each did not take it in the same way. McKay, as we have said, became abstracted and slightly nervous. The Canadian, whatever his thoughts, was calm and collected, and went about his culinary operations as if he were quite at ease. He was about to lift the pot off the hook that suspended it over the fire, when his companion quietly, and as if without any definite purpose, took up his gun.

Perrin observed the action, and quickly reached out his hand towards his own weapon, which lay on the ground beside him.

Quick as lightning McKay raised his gun and fired. Next moment his comrade lay dead upon the ground—shot through the heart!

Horror-struck at what he had done, the murderer could scarcely believe his eyes, and he stood up glaring at the corpse as if he had been frozen to death in that position. After standing a long time, he sat down and tried to think of his act and the probable consequences.

Self-defence was the first idea that was suggested clearly to him; and he clung to it as a drowning man is said to cling to a straw. "Was it not clear," he thought, "that Perrin intended to murder me? If not, why so quick to grip his gun? If I had waited it would have been me, not Perrin, that would be lying there now!"

His memory reminded him faithfully, however, that when he first thought of taking up his gun, Conscience had sternly said,—"Don't." Why should Conscience have spoken thus, or at all, if his motive had been innocent?

There are two ways in which a wicked man gets rid of conscientious troubles—at least for a time. One way is by stout-hearted defiance of God, and ignoring of Conscience altogether. The other is by sophistical reasoning, and a more or less successful effort to throw dust in his own eyes.

Duncan McKay took the latter method. It is an easy enough method—especially with the illogical—but it works indifferently, and it does not last long.

Conscience may be seared; may be ignored; may be trampled on, but it cannot be killed; it cannot even be weakened and is ever ready at the most unseasonable and unexpected times to start up, vigorous and faithful to the very end, with its emphatic “Don’t!” and “No!”

Dragging the body out of the camp, McKay returned to take his supper and reason the matter out with himself.

“I could not help myself,” he thought; “when I took up my gun I did not intend to kill the man.”

Conscience again reminded him of its “Don’t!”

“And would not every man in Rud Ruver justify me for firing first in self-defence?”

Conscience again said “No!”

Here the hunter uttered a savage oath, to which Conscience made no reply, for Conscience never speaks back or engages in disputation.

We need not attempt further to analyse the workings of sophistry in the brain of a murderer. Suffice it to say that when the man had finished his supper he had completely, though not satisfactorily, justified himself in his own eyes. There was, he felt, a disagreeable undercurrent of uneasiness; but this might have been the result of fear as to how the Canadian half-breeds and friends of the slain man would regard the matter in the event of its being found out.

There was reason for anxiety on this head, for poor Perrin was a great

favourite among his comrades, while Cloudbrow was very much the reverse.

Having finished the supper which he had purchased at such a terrible price, the young man gathered his things together, packed the provisions on his back, put on his snow-shoes and left the scene of the murder.

Although a dark night, there was sufficient moon-light to enable him to pick his steps, but he had not advanced more than two miles when he came upon the track of a party that had preceded him. This rendered the walking more easy, and as he plodded along he reflected that the wolves would soon find Perrin's body, and, by tearing it to pieces render recognition of the victim impossible.

Suddenly it occurred to him that if any of the scattered band of hunters should come on the camp before the wolves had time to do their work, the print of his snow-shoes might tell a tale—for snowshoes were of various shapes and sizes, and most of his companions in the Settlement might be pretty well acquainted with the shape of his. The danger of such a *contretemps* was not great, but, to make quite sure that it should not occur, he turned round and walked straight back on his track to the camp he had just left—thus obliterating, or, rather, confusing the track, so as to render recognition improbable. As he walked over it a third time, in resuming his march to the Settlement, all danger on this ground, he considered, was effectually counteracted. Of course, when he reached the tracks of the party before mentioned, all trace of his own track was necessarily lost among these.

That "murder will out" is supposed to be an unquestionable truism. We nevertheless question it very much; for, while the thousands of cases of murder that have been discovered are obvious, the vast number, it may be, that have never been found out are not obvious, however probable.

The case we are now describing seemed likely to belong to the class which remains a mystery till altogether forgotten. Nevertheless Nemesis was on the wing.

While Duncan McKay junior was thus pushing his way over the plains in the direction of Red River Settlement, two poor half-breed women were

toiling slowly over the same plains behind him, bound for the same haven of hoped-for and much-needed rest and refreshment. The poor creatures had been recently made widows. The husband of one, Louis Blanc, had been killed by Indians during this hunt; that of the other, Antoine Pierre, had met his death by being thrown from his horse when running the buffalo. Both women were in better condition than many of the other hunters' wives, for they had started on the homeward journey with a better supply of meat, which had not yet been exhausted.

It happened that Marie Blanc and Annette Pierre came upon McKay's camp soon after he left it the second time. Here they prepared to spend the night, but, on discovering marks of fresh blood about, they made a search, and soon came on the unburied corpse of the murdered man, lying behind a bush. They recognised it at once, for Perrin had been well-known, as well as much liked, in the Settlement.

Neither of the women was demonstrative. They did not express much feeling, though they were undoubtedly shocked; but they dug a hole in the snow with their snow-shoes, and buried the body of the hunter therein —having first carefully examined the wound in his breast, and removed the poor man's coat, which exhibited a burnt hole in front, as well as a hole in the back, for the bullet had gone quite through him.

Then they returned to the camp, and made a careful examination of it; but nothing was found there which could throw light on the subject of who was the murderer. Whether a comrade or an Indian had done the deed there was nothing to show; but that a murder had been committed they could not doubt, for it was physically almost impossible that a man could have shot himself in the chest, either by accident or intention, with one of the long-barrelled trading guns in use among the buffalo-hunters.

Another point, justifying the supposition of foul play, was the significant fact that Perrin's gun, with his name rudely carved on the stock, still lay in the camp *undischarged*.

"See—here is something," said one woman to the other in the Cree tongue, as they were about to quit the camp.

She held up a knife which she had found half buried near the fire.

“It is not a common scalping-knife,” said the other woman. “It is the knife of a settler.”

The weapon in question was one of the large sheath-knives which many of the recently arrived settlers had brought with them from their native land. Most of these differed a little in size and form from each other, but all of them were very different from the ordinary scalping-knives supplied by the fur-traders to the half-breeds and Indians.

“I see no name on it—no mark,” said the woman who found it, after a critical inspection. Her companion examined it with equal care and similar result.

The two women had at first intended to encamp at this spot, but now they determined to push forward to the Settlement as fast as their exhausted condition permitted, carrying the knife, with the coat and gun of the murdered man, along with them.

Chapter Five.

Saved.

Duncan McKay senior was dreaming of, and gloating over, the flesh-pots of Red River, and his amiable daughter was rambling over the green carpet of the summer prairies, when the sun arose and shone upon the bushes which surrounded their winter camp—Starvation Camp, as the old man had styled it.

There is no saying how long Duncan would have gloated, and the fair Elspie wandered, if a hair of the buffalo robe on which the former lay had not entered his nostril, and caused him to sneeze.

Old McKay's sneeze was something to be remembered when once heard. Indeed it was something that could not be forgotten! From the profoundest depths of his person it seemed to burst, and how his nose sustained the strain without splitting has remained one of the mysteries of the Nor'-West unto this day. It acted like an electric shock on Elspie, who sat bolt upright at once with a scared look that was quite in keeping with her tousled hair.

"Oh! daddy, what a fright you gave me!" Elspie said, remonstratively.

"It iss goot seventeen years an' more that you hev had to get used to it, whatever," growled the old man. "I suppose we've got nothin' for breakfast?"

He raised himself slowly, and gazed at Elspie with a disconsolate expression.

"Nothing," returned the girl with a look of profound woe.

It is said that when things are at the worst they are sure to mend. It may be so: the sayings of man are sometimes true. Whether or not the circumstances of Elspie and old McKay were at the worst is an open question; but there can be no doubt that they began to mend just about that time, for the girl had not quite got rid of her disconsolate feelings

when the faint but merry tinkle of sleigh-bells was heard in the frosty air.

The startled look of sudden surprise and profound attention is interesting to behold, whether in old or young. It is a condition of being that utterly blots out self for a brief moment in the person affected, and allows the mind and frame for once to have free unconscious play.

Elspie said, “Sh!—” and gazed aside with wide and lustrous eyes, head a little on one side, a hand and forefinger slightly raised, as if to enforce silence, and her graceful figure bent forward—a petrifaction of intensely attentive loveliness.

Old McKay said “Ho!” and, with both hands resting on the ground to prop him up, eyes and mouth wide open, and breath restrained, presented the very personification of petrified stupidity.

Another moment, and the sound became too distinct to admit of a doubt.

“Here they are at long last!” exclaimed the old man, rising with unwonted alacrity for his years.

“Thank God!” ejaculated Elspie, springing up and drawing a shawl round her shoulders, at the same time making some hasty and futile attempts to reduce the confusion of her hair.

It need scarcely be said that this was the arrival of the rescue-party of which Daniel Davidson was in command. Before the starving pair had time to get fairly on their legs, Daniel strode into the camp and seized Elspie in his arms.

We need not repeat what he said, for it was not meant to be made public, but no such reticence need trouble us in regard to old Duncan.

“Hoot! Taniel,” said he, somewhat peevishly, “keep your coortin’ till efter breakfast, man! It iss a wolf that will be livin’ inside o’ me for the last few tays—a hungry wolf too—an’ nothin’ for him to eat. That’s right, Okématan, on wi’ the kettle; it iss yourself that knows what it iss to starve. Blow up the fire, Peter Tavidson. You’re a cliver boy for your age, an’ hes goot lungs, I make no doubt.”

“That I have, Mr McKay, else I should not be here,” said the lad, laughing, as he knelt before the embers of the fire, and blew them into a blaze.

“Wow! Dan, hev ye not a pit pemmican handy?” asked McKay. “It iss little I care for cookin’ just now.”

“Here you are,” said Dan, taking a lump of the desired article from his wallet and handing it to the impatient man; at the same time giving a morsel to Elspie. “I knew you would want it in a hurry, and kept it handy. Where is Duncan? I thought he was with you.”

“So he wass, Taniel, when you left us to go to Rud Ruver, but my son Tuncan was never fond o’ stickin’ to his father. He left us, an’ no wan knows where he iss now. Starvin’, maybe, like the rest of us.”

“I hope not,” said Elspie, while her sire continued his breakfast with manifest satisfaction. “He went off to search for buffalo with Perrin and several others. They said they would return to us if they found anything. But, as they have not come back, we suppose they must have been unsuccessful. Did you meet any of the poor people on the way out, Dan?”

“Ay, we met some of them,” replied the hunter, in a sad tone. “All struggling to make their way back to the Settlement, and all more or less starving. We helped them what we could, but some were past help; and we came upon two or three that had fallen in their tracks and died in the snow. But we have roused the Settlement, and there are many rescue-parties out in all directions now, scouring the plains.”

“You hev stirred it enough, Okématan,” said old McKay, referring to the kettle of food which was being prepared. “Here, fill my pannikin: I can wait no longer.”

“Whenever you have finished breakfast we must start off home,” said Davidson, helping Elspie to some of the much-needed and not yet warmed soup, which was quickly made by mixing pemmican with flour and water. “I have brought two sleds, so that you and your father may ride, and we will carry the provisions. We never know when the gale may break out again.”

“Or when heavy snow may come on,” added Peter, who was by that time

busy with his own breakfast.

Okématan occupied himself in stirring the contents of the large kettle, and occasionally devouring a mouthful of pemmican uncooked.

An hour later, and they were making for home almost as fast as the rescue-party had travelled out—the provisions transferred to the strong backs of their rescuers—old McKay and Elspie carefully wrapped up in furs, reposing on the two sledges.

Chapter Six.

Discord and Deceit, Etcetera.

It was found, on their arrival at the home of Duncan McKay senior, that Duncan junior had got there before them, he having been met and brought in by one of the settlers who had gone out with his cariole to do what he could for the hunters. The two women who discovered the body of Perrin, however, had not yet arrived, and nothing was known of the murder in the Settlement.

“It iss little troubled *you* wass, what came over us,” remarked old Duncan angrily, on entering his house, and finding his younger son engaged with a pipe beside the kitchen fire.

“An’ how could *I* know where you wass; efter I had been huntin’ for nothin’ for two days?” retorted his son. “Wass I to think you would be stoppin’ in the lame camp till you died? Wass it not more likely that some wan would find you an’ bring you in—as they did?”

“No thanks to you that they did, Tuncan, what*ever*. Where did you leave the other boys?”

“How should I know?” returned the son sharply; “they dropped off—wan here an’ wan there—sayin’ they would try for a buffalo in wan place or another, or, that they would rest awhile; an’ so I wass left by myself. I found it quite enough to look efter number wan.”

“It hes *always* been as much, that, as ye could manitch, Tuncan, even when things wass goin’ easy,” said the old man with a sarcastic laugh, that induced the young man to rise and quit the room.

He went towards a small shop, or store, as such places were styled in the Nor’-West. It fell to his lot in the family arrangements to look after and manage this store. Indeed the youth’s anxiety for the ease and comfort of “number wan” had induced him to select the post as being a part of the family duties that was peculiarly suited to himself.

On reaching the store he went straight to a large roll of Canadian twist tobacco, cut off a piece, refilled his pipe, and, sitting down on a bale began or, rather, continued to smoke. He had not been seated long when the door opened, and the head of a half-breed peeped cautiously in with an uncommonly sly look.

“That you, François La Certe?” said McKay rather sternly, for he knew the man well. “What iss it you will be wantin’ now?”

François wanted many things—things almost too numerous to mention; but, first, he would pay his debts to Cloudbrow.

“Come, that’s something new,” said McKay with a cynical laugh. “You must have come by a fortune, or committed a robbery before ye would be so honest. How much are you goin’ to pay?”

“The sledge that you lent me, I have brought back,” said the half-breed with a deprecatory air.

“So, you call returning a loan paying your debts?” said Duncan.

La Certe did not quite say that, but he thought it bore some resemblance to a payment to account, and at all events was proof of his good intentions.

“And on the strength of that you’ll want plenty more credit, I hev no doubt.”

“No—not plenty,” said La Certe, with the earnest air of a man who is exposing his whole soul to inspection, and who means to act this time

with the strictest sincerity, to say nothing of honesty. “It is only a little that I want. Not much. Just enough to keep body and soul from sayin’ good-bye.”

“But you have not paid a fraction of your old debt. How will you be expectin’ to meet the new one?”

Oh! La Certe could easily explain that. He was going off immediately to hunt and trap, and would soon return with a heavy load, for there were plenty of animals about. Then in the spring, which was near at hand, he meant to fish, or go to the plains with the hunters, and return laden with bags of pemmican, bales of dried meat, and buffalo-robes enough to pay off all his debts, and leave something over to enable him to spend the winter in luxurious idleness.

“And you expect me to believe all that nonsense?” said McKay, sternly.

La Certe was hurt. Of course he expected to be believed! His feelings were injured, but he was of a forgiving disposition and would say no more about it. He had expected better treatment, however, from one who had known him so long.

“A trip to the plains requires more than powder and shot,” said the store-keeper; “where will you be goin’ to get a horse an’ cart? for you can hev mine no longer.”

“Dechamp, he promise to sole me a horse, an’ Mrs Davis’n will loan me a cart,” returned the half-breed, with lofty independence.

“Hm! an’ you will be returnin’ the cart an’ payin’ for the horse when the hunt is over, I suppose?”

Yes, that was exactly the idea that was in La Certe’s brain, and which, he hoped and fully expected, to reduce to practice in course of time—if Duncan McKay would only assist him by making him a few advances at that present time.

“Well, what do you want?” asked McKay, getting off the bath.

The half-breed wanted a good many things. As he was going off in the

course of a few days, and might not be able to return for a long time, he might as well take with him even a few things that he did not absolutely need at the moment. Of course he wanted a good supply of powder, shot, and ball. Without that little or nothing could be done. Then a new axe, as his old one was much worn—the steel almost gone—and it was well-known that a trapper without an axe was a very helpless creature. A tin kettle was, of course, an absolute necessity; and the only one he possessed had a small hole in it. A few awls to enable him to mend his bark canoe when open water came, and a couple of steel traps, some gun-flints, and, O yes, he had almost forgotten a most essential thing—twine to make a net, and some fish-hooks.

“It iss a regular outfit you will be wanting,” remarked the store-keeper, as he handed over the various articles.

O no—not a regular one—only a very little one, considering the length of time he should be away, and the wealth with which he would return. But again he suddenly remembered that he had forgotten something else.

“Well, what iss it?”

Some glover’s needles and sinews for making leather coats and moccasins. Needles and thread and scissors, for it was quite clear that people could not live without suitable clothing. A new capote, also, and—and—a yard or two of scarlet cloth with a few beads.

As he made the last request, La Certe attempted to speak insinuatingly, and to look humble.

“Come, that iss pure extravagance,” said McKay, remonstrating.

La Certe could not, dare not, face his wife without these articles. He pleaded earnestly. “Slowfoot is so clever wi’ the needle,” he said. “See! she send you a pair of moccasins.”

The wily man here drew from the breast of his capote a pair of beautifully made moccasins, soft as chamois leather, and richly ornamented with dyed quills of the porcupine.

McKay laughed; nevertheless he swallowed the bait and was pleased.

He finally handed the goods to La Certe, who, when he had obtained all that he could possibly squeeze out of the store-keeper, bundled up the whole, made many solemn protestations of gratitude and honest intentions, and went off to cheer Slowfoot with the news of his success.

It chanced that Antoine Dechamp, the very man about whom he had been talking to Duncan McKay, had dropped in to see him and his spouse, and was sitting beside the fire smoking when he entered. Displaying his possessions with much pride, he assured Dechamp that he had paid for the whole outfit, and meant to return in the spring a rich man with means enough to buy a horse and cart, and start with the buffalo-hunters for the plains.

“You have a horse to sell—they say?” he remarked to his friend in a careless way.

“Yes—and a good one too,” answered Dechamp.

“Well, if you will loan him to me in the spring, I will pay for him when I come back. It takes all I have to fit me out to start, you see.”

Dechamp did not quite see his way to that—but there was plenty of time to think over it!

“Have you heard,” said Dechamp, willing to change the subject, “there is some talk that Perrin has been killed? George McDermid was out, like many others, huntin’ about for the starvin’ people, an’ he came across the wives of Blanc and Pierre—poor things! they’re widows now, for Blanc and Pierre are both dead. Well, the women had well-nigh given in. I had dropped down, they were so tired, and were crawlin’ on their hands and knees when McDermid found them. I didn’t hear all the outs and ins of it, but there is no doubt that poor Perrin has been murdered, for he was shot right through the breast.”

“Perhaps he shot hisself,” suggested La Certe.

“No—that could not be, for the women have brought his coat, which shows that the ball went in at the breast and came *straight* out at the back. If he had shot himself he must have pulled the trigger with his toe, an’ then the ball would have slanted up from his breast to somewhere

about his shoulders."

"It was a Saulteaux, may be," said Slowfoot, who had been listening with all the eagerness of a gossip.

"There were no marks of Redskins' snow-shoes about," returned Dechamp, "an' the tracks were too confused to make them out. A knife was found, but there were no marks about it to tell who owned it—only it was a settler's knife, but there are lots of them about, an' many have changed hands since the settlers came."

At the time we write of, the colony of Red River of the north was in a very unhappy and disorganised condition. There were laws indeed, but there was no authority or force sufficiently strong to apply the laws, and discord reigned because of the two great fur companies—the Hudson's Bay, and the Nor'-West—which opposed each other with extreme bitterness, carrying fire-water, dissension, and disaster all over the wilderness of Rupert's Land. Happily the two companies coalesced in the year 1821, and from that date, onward, comparative peace has reigned under the mild sway of the Hudson's Bay Company.

But at the period which we describe the coalition had not taken place, and many of the functionaries of the Hudson's Bay Company in Red River, from the Governor downward, seem to have been entirely demoralised, if we are to believe the reports of contemporary historians.

Some time previous to this, the Earl of Selkirk—chiefly from philanthropic views, it is said—resolved to send a colony to Red River. At different times bands of Scotch, Swiss, Danes, and others, made their appearance in the Settlement. They had been sent out by the agents of the Earl, but there was a great deal of mismanagement and misunderstanding, both as to the motives and intentions of the Earl. The result was that the half-breeds of Red River—influenced, it is said, by the Nor'-West Company—received the newcomers with suspicion and ill-will. The Indians followed the lead of the half-breeds, to whom they were allied. Not only was every sort of obstruction thrown in the way of the unfortunate immigrants, but more than once during those first years they were driven from the colony, and their homesteads were burned to the ground.

There must have been more than the usual spirit of indomitable resolution in those people, however, for notwithstanding all the opposition and hardship they had to endure, they returned again and again to their farms, rebuilt their dwellings, cultivated their fields, and, so to speak, compelled prosperity to smile on them—and that, too, although several times the powers of Nature, in the shape of grass hoppers and disastrous floods, seemed to league with men in seeking their destruction.

Perhaps the Scottish element among the immigrants had much to do with this resolute perseverance. Possibly the religious element in the Scotch had more to do with it still.

The disastrous winter which we have slightly sketched was one of the many troubles with which not only the newcomers, but all parties in the colony, were at this time afflicted.

Chapter Seven.

Vixen Delivered and Wolves Defeated.

With much labour and skill had the Davidsons and McKays erected two timber cottages side by side in the land of their adoption.

These two families were among the first band of settlers. They were very different in character—one being Highland, the other Lowland Scotch, but they were more or less united by sympathy, intermarriage, and long residence beside each other on the slopes of the Grampian Hills, so that, on the voyage out, they made a compact that they should stick by each other, and strive, and work, and fight the battle of life together in the new land.

All the members of the Davidson family were sterling, sedate, hearty, and thorough-going. Daniel and Peter were what men style “dependable” fellows, and bore strong resemblance to their father, who died almost immediately after their arrival in the new country. Little Jessie was like her mother, a sort of bottomless well of sympathy, into which oceans of joy or sorrow might be poured without causing an overflow—except, perchance, at the eyelids—and out of which the waters of consolation might be

pumped for evermore without pumping dry. The idea of self never suggested itself in the presence of these two. The consequence was that everybody adored them. It was rather a selfish adoration, we fear, nevertheless it was extremely delightful—to the adorers, we mean—and doubtless not unpleasant to the adored.

The love of God, in Christ, was the foundation of their characters.

Of the McKay family we cannot speak so confidently. Elspie, indeed, was all that could be desired, and Fergus was in all respects a sterling man; but the head of the family was, as we have seen, open to improvement in many respects, and Duncan junior was of that heart-breaking character which is known as ne'er-do-weel. Possibly, if differently treated by his father, he might have been a better man. As it was, he was unprincipled and hasty of temper.

Little wonder that, when thrown together during a long voyage—to an almost unknown land—Elspie McKay and Daniel Davidson should fall into that condition which is common to all mankind, and less wonder that, being a daring youth with a resolute will, Daniel should manage to induce the pliant, loving Elspie, to plight her troth while they were gazing over the ship's side at the first iceberg they met. We may as well hark back here a little, and very briefly sketch the incident. It may serve as a guide to others.

The two were standing—according to the report of the bo's'n, who witnessed the whole affair—"abaft the main shrouds squintin' over the weather gangway." We are not quite sure of the exact words used by that discreditable bo's'n, but these are something like them. It was moon-light and dead calm; therefore propitious, so far, to Daniel's design—for Daniel undoubtedly had a design that night, obvious to his own mind, and clearly defined like the great iceberg, though, like it too, somewhat hazy in detail.

"What a glorious, magnificent object!" exclaimed Elspie, gazing in wonder at the berg, the pinnacles of which rose considerably above the mast-head.

"Yes, very glorious, very magnificent!" said Daniel, gazing into the maiden's eyes, and utterly regardless of the berg.

“I wonder how such a huge mass ever manages to melt,” said Elspie—for the human mind, even in pretty girls, is discursive.

“*I* wonder it does not melt at once,” said Dan, with pointed emphasis.

“What do you mean?” she asked, turning her eyes in considerable astonishment from the berg to the man.

“I mean,” said he, “that under the influence of your eyes the iceberg ought to melt straight away. They have melted my heart, Elspie, and *That* has been an iceberg, I find, till now.”

He seized her hand. It had all come on so suddenly that poor Elspie was quite unprepared for it. She turned as if to fly, but Daniel put his arm round her waist and detained her.

“Elspie, dearest Elspie, it *must* be settled now—or—.” He would not—could not—say “never.”

“O Daniel, don’t!” entreated Elspie.

But Daniel *did*.

“Bray-vo!” exclaimed the bo’s’n with enthusiasm, for he was a sympathetic man, though unprincipled in the matter of eavesdropping.

That cut it short. They retired precipitately from the weather gangway abaft the main shrouds, and sought refuge in a sequestered nook near the companion-hatch, which was, in name as well as in every other way, much more suited to their circumstances. The steersman had his eye on them there, but they fortunately did not know it.

Apologising for this reminiscence, we return to the thread of our story.

Mrs Davidson was seated at breakfast one morning, with all her family around her in Prairie Cottage. She had named it thus because, from one of the windows, there was to be had a peep of the prairies lying beyond the bushes by which it was surrounded.

Old McKay had named his cottage Ben Nevis, either because the country

around was as flat as a pancake, or out of sheer contradictiousness.

“Have they found out anything more about the murder of that poor fellow Perrin?” asked Mrs Davidson. “More than four months have passed since it happened.”

“Nothing more, mother,” said Dan, who now filled his father’s chair. “As you say, four months have passed, and one would think that was time enough to discover the murderer, but, you see, it is nobody’s business in particular, and we’ve no regular police, and everybody is far too busy just now to think about it. In fact, not many people in these parts care much about a murder, I fear.”

“Ah if they went to see Perrin’s old mother,” said Jessie, “it would oblige them to care a great deal, for he was her only son.”

“Ay, her only child!” added Mrs Davidson.

While she was yet speaking, it so happened that Duncan McKay junior himself entered the room, with that over-done free-and-easiness which sometimes characterises a man who is ill at ease.

“Whose only child are you speaking about, Mrs Davidson?” he asked carelessly.

“Mrs Perrin’s,” she replied, with a familiar nod to the visitor, who often dropped in on them casually in this way.

The reply was so unexpected and sudden, that McKay could not avoid a slight start and a peculiar expression, in spite of his usual self-command. He glanced quickly at Dan and Peter, but they were busy with their food, and had apparently not noticed the guilty signs.

“Ah, poor thing,” returned the youth, in his cynical and somewhat nasal tone, “it *iss* hard on her. By the way, Dan, hev ye heard that the wolves hev killed two or three of McDermid’s horses that had strayed out on the plains, and Elspie’s mare Vixen iss out too. Some of us will be going to seek for her. The day bein’ warm an’ the snow soft, we hev a good chance of killin’ some o’ the wolves. I thought Peter might like to go too.”

“So Peter does,” said the youth, rising and brushing the crumbs off his knees: “there’s nothing I like better than to hunt down these sneaking, murderous brutes that are so ready to spring suddenly unawares on friend or foe.”

Again Duncan McKay cast a quick inquiring glance at Peter, but the lad was evidently innocent of any double meaning. It was only a movement, within the man-slayer, of that conscience which “makes cowards of us all.”

“Louise!” shouted Dan, as he also rose from the table.

“Oui, monsieur,” came, in polite deferential tones, from the culinary department, and the little half-breed maiden appeared at the door.

“Did you mend that shot-bag last night?”

“Oui, monsieur.”

“Fetch it here, then, please; and, Jessie, stir your stumps like a good girl, and get some food ready to take with us.”

“Will you tell me the precise way in which good girls stir their stumps?” asked Jessie; “for I’m not quite sure.”

Dan answered with a laugh, and went out to saddle his horse, followed by his brother and Duncan McKay.

“Rescuing seems to be the order of the day this year,” remarked Peter, as they walked towards the stable behind the cottage. “We’ve had a good deal of rescuing men in the winter, and now we are goin’ to rescue horses.”

“Rescuing is the grandest work that a fellow can undertake,” said Dan, “whether it be the body from death or the soul from sin.”

“What you say iss true—whatever,” remarked McKay, whose speech, although not so broad as that of his father, was tinged with similar characteristics. “It will be better to rescue than to kill.”

This was so obvious a truism that his companions laughed, but Duncan had uttered it almost as a soliloquy, for he was thinking at the moment of poor Perrin, whose body had long since been brought to the Settlement and buried. Indeed thoughts of the murdered man were seldom out of his mind.

Meanwhile, far out on the lonesome and still snow-covered prairie the steed which they were going to rescue stood on a low mound or undulation of the plain surrounded by wolves. It was a pitiful sight to see the noble mare, almost worn-out with watching and defending herself, while the pack of those sneaking hounds of the wilderness sat or stood around her licking their chops and patiently biding their time.

They formed a lean, gaunt, savage-looking crew, as they sat there, calculating, apparently, how long their victim's strength would hold out, and when it would be safe to make a united and cowardly rush.

One wolf, more gaunt and rugged and grey than the others, with black lips and red tongue and bloodshot eyes, moved about the circle uneasily as if trying to screw up its craven spirit to the sticking point. The others evidently regarded this one as their leader, for they hung back from him a little, and kept a watchful eye on his movements. So did Vixen, the mare. She kept her tail always turned towards him, looking savagely back at him with her great eyes glittering, her ears laid flat, and her heels ready.

Poor Vixen! Elspie had given her the name when in a facetious frame of mind, as being descriptive of the very opposite of her character, for she was gentle as a lamb, tender in the mouth, playful in her moods, and sensitive to a degree both in body and spirit. No curb was ever needed to restrain Vixen, nor spur to urge her on. A chirp sent an electric thrill through her handsome frame; a "Quiet, Vic!" sufficed to calm her to absolute docility. Any child could have reined her in, and she went with springy elasticity as though her limbs were made of vivified steel and indiarubber. But she was getting old, and somehow the wolves seemed to be aware of that melancholy fact. They would not have troubled her in the heyday of her youth!

An impatient howl from one of the pack seemed to insinuate that the grey old leader was a coward. So he was, but evidently he did not relish being

told so, for he uncovered his glittering fangs and made a sudden dash at the mare.

With a whisk of the tail worthy of her best days, she lashed out behind and planted both her pretty little feet on the ribs of the grey chief with such a portentous whack that he succumbed at once. With a gasp, and a long-drawn wail, he sank dead upon the snow; whereupon his amiable friends—when quite sure of his demise—tore him limb from limb and devoured him.

This was a fortunate respite for Vixen, most of whose remaining strength and pluck had been thrown into that magnificent fling. Old Duncan, had he seen it, would probably have styled it a “goot Highland fling.”

But the respite was not of long duration. Their leader formed but a mouthful to each of the pack.

When done, they returned to encircle their victim again, lick their chops, and wait.

Evening was drawing on, and a sort of grey desolation seemed to be creeping over the plains.

A decided thaw had been operating all that day, rendering the snow soft. If the mare had only known the advantage thus given to her, a successful effort at escape might have been made. When snow on the prairie is frozen with a hard crust on the surface, the light wolf can run easily on the top of it, while the heavy horse breaks through at every stride and is soon knocked up. The case is reversed when a thaw softens the surface, for then the short-legged wolf flounders helplessly in its depths, while the long-limbed and powerful horse can gallop through it with comparative ease. But the good mare, intelligent though she was, did not consider this fact, and the wolves, you may be sure, did not enlighten her. Besides, by that time she was well-nigh worn-out, and could not have made a vigorous run for life even over a good course.

Gradually, a worthy lieutenant of the old grey chief began to show symptoms of impatience, and the hungry circle closed in. Vixen looked up and whinnied slightly. It seemed a pitiful appeal for help from the human friends who had cared for her so well and so long. Perchance it was the

last wail of despair—a final farewell to the green fields and the flowering plains of memory.

Whatever it was, an answer came in the form of several dark specks on the horizon. Vixen saw them, and whinnied again in a decidedly different tone. The wolves also saw them, and moved about uneasily.

On came the black specks, increasing in size as they drew near. The wolves looked at each other inquiringly, moved still more uneasily, appeared to hold a consultation, and finally drew off to a neighbouring knoll, as if to await the result of this unlooked-for interruption, and return to business when it was past.

The intelligence of the lower animals is great—in some cases very great—but it does not amount to reason. If it did, those wolves would not have sat there, in the pride of physical strength and personal freedom, calmly awaiting their doom, while Daniel and Peter Davidson, Duncan McKay junior, Okématan the Cree Indian, another Indian named Kateegoose, and Jacques Bourassin, a half-breed, came thundering down towards them like infuriated centaurs.

At last they seemed to realise the truth that “discretion is the better part of valour,” and began to retire from the scene—slowly at first.

Vixen, recognising friends, trotted off with reviving strength, and a high head and tail to meet them. Seeing this, Dan, who led the party, drew rein so as to allow the steeds to recover breath before the final burst.

The wolves, with that presumption which is usually found to be the handmaid of ignorance, halted, and sat down again to watch the progress of events. Fatal self-confidence! They little knew the deep duplicity of man!

“O you stupid brutes!” murmured Dan to himself, advancing in a somewhat sidling manner as if he meant to pass them. They evidently believed this to be his intention until they saw the six horsemen turn their steeds straight in their direction and charge them at full gallop with a yell that drove rapid conviction to their brains.

Then, with tails between legs and ears flat they fled. But it was too late.

The horses scattered the soft snow with comparative ease. The wolves plunged through it with difficulty. First to overtake them was Peter Davidson. He put the muzzle of his gun to the side of the grey lieutenant, and shot him through the heart. His brother Dan, selecting another of the pack, pointed at the ear and blew out its brains. Okématan, partial to the weapons of his forefathers, sent an arrow through the ribs of a third, while Kateegoose transfixed a fourth. Duncan McKay shot a fifth, and Bourassin knocked over a sixth at comparatively long range, his horse being too poor or too tired to come fairly up with the pack.

There was no wasting of powder, shot, or shaft in this affair. Each man was an expert with his weapon, and cool as the proverbial cucumber, though considerably excited. Loading as they ran, they fitted and shot again, stretching six more of the enemy on the plain. Then they pulled up and suffered the rest to escape, being afraid to leave Vixen out of sight behind them, for that happy creature, following and enjoying the sport as long as she could, found that her powers were too much exhausted to permit of her keeping up with the chase.

“She’s not fit to travel another mile,” said Dan, stroking her glossy neck and allowing her to rub her nose affectionately on his shoulder.

“That iss true, whatever,” assented Duncan. “I think we could not do better than camp on the nearest bluff.”

This was agreed to by all. Provision for one meal, it will be remembered, had been prepared at Prairie Cottage in the morning. A hunter’s meal, when properly divided, makes two or three average meals, and a hunter’s powers of endurance are proverbial. Each man had his blanket strapped to his saddle. Branches of various kinds of trees make a good mattress, and the air of the prairie is well-known to conduce to appetite and slumber.

With such environment it is scarcely necessary to add that the hunters enjoyed themselves, and that Vixen had a restful night, probably without even a dream about hungry wolves.

Chapter Eight.

Stirring Events Described.

The proverbial slip ’twixt the cup and the lip, and the well-known uncertainty of all human affairs, received striking illustration in the person and prospects of our hero, Daniel Davidson, not long after the events narrated in the last chapter.

Up to this period the unfortunate colonists of the Red River Settlement had led a life chiefly of disappointment and disaster. Although everything had been done for them by their patron the Earl of Selkirk with the best intentions, the carrying out of his plans had been frustrated by the feuds of the rival fur companies, the misunderstandings and the jealousies of Indians and half-breeds, and, to some extent, by the severity of the climate. An open rupture took place between them and the North-westers. Encounters between the contending parties occurred, in which several on both sides were killed, and at last the North-Westers, attacking the settlers in force, drove them from the colony and burnt their dwellings and homesteads.

Retreating to the north end of Lake Winnipeg, the colonists found refuge at Jack River—three hundred miles distant. From this place they were ultimately recalled by the Hudson’s Bay Company, which took them under its protection. Returning to Red River, the unfortunate but persevering people proceeded to resume their farming operations. But the prospect before them was gloomy enough. The lawless proceedings of the rival companies had convulsed the whole Indian country, and the evil seemed to culminate in the Red River Colony, to which retired servants of the fur-traders, voyageurs, adventurers, and idlers gravitated as to a centre; so that there was little prospect of their being allowed to prosecute their agricultural operations in peace.

The dissensions at last became so great that a large proportion of the new settlers, including many of the Scotch Highlanders, dispersed to seek a precarious livelihood among the Indians, on the prairies bordering the waters of the Missouri, or to sustain themselves and their families by fishing in the distant lakes, and hunting on their shores.

On the advent of spring, however, most of these returned to the colony, with renewed hope in agriculture, and set to work—every man, woman,

and child—to get some seed into the ground.

But at this point an event occurred which threw the colony into great consternation, and induced vigorous action on the part of Lord Selkirk, which was the first step towards more peaceful times.

The North-West party, consisting chiefly of half-breeds, had augmented to upwards of three hundred warriors. It would be more correct, perhaps, to style them banditti; for they had penetrated through every part of Rupert's Land, set law at defiance, pillaged and destroyed many of the establishments of their rivals, and kept the whole country in a state of ferment and alarm.

One band of these men, numbering between sixty and seventy, advanced upon Red River Colony. They were a motley crew, all mounted on horseback and armed with guns, spears, tomahawks, bows, and scalping-knives, besides which they were painted and plumed *à la sauvage*, and were in the habit when rushing to battle, of yelling like the Red-men whose blood mingled with that of the White-man in their veins.

What was the precise intention of these men at this time it is difficult to say, but it was not difficult to see that peace was not their object.

Governor Semple, of the Hudson's Bay Company, a mild, just, and much respected man, was in charge of the colony at the time.

Daniel Davidson was engaged in a very important conversation with old Duncan McKay at the time the formidable troop of North-Westers swept through the settlements. The old man was seated in the hall, parlour, drawing-room—or whatever you choose to call it—of Ben Nevis House. It was an uncarpeted, unpainted, unadorned room with pine plank flooring, plank walls, a plank ceiling, a plank table, and a set of plank chairs. Ornament was dispensed with in the hall of Ben Nevis House; for although Elspie would fain have clothed it with a little feminine grace, its proprietor would not hear of such proposals.

"Stick as many gimcracks as you like about your own room, Elspie," he had remarked when the first attempt was made, "but leave me my hall in peace. It iss quite pleased with it I am as it iss."

Opposite the door of the hall there was a large open fireplace without a grate. Doors all round the walls of the hall opened into the other rooms of the establishment. Above what would have been the mantelpiece, had one existed, there was a row of tobacco pipes. Old Duncan was a great smoker. Indeed he would have been almost unrecognisable without his pipe. He was smoking when Daniel Davidson visited him, in order to hold the very important conversation to which we have referred.

“It iss as you say, Taniel,” remarked the old man, frowning at his pipe, which was not drawing properly. “Marrit life iss more to be desired than single blessedness, whatever, an’ it is a my opeenion that you will do more work with Elspie helpin’ you, than by yourself. When iss it you will be wantin’ to call me your father?”

The old man asked the question with a somewhat humorous smile, for he was, to say truth, not a little proud of the staid, sensible, and strong young fellow who aspired to his daughter’s hand—besides, the pipe was drawing well by that time.

“As soon as you like,” answered Dan, “or, rather, as soon as Elspie likes. You see, things are beginning to look a little more hopeful now. People who seem to know best—or seem to think they do—tell us that the Nor’-Westers are beginning to see that a colony here won’t interfere in any way with their business; a good deal of seed has been sown, and, if all goes well, we may look for a better year than we have yet had; therefore I don’t see why we should wait any longer.”

“Your observations are ferry true. There iss just wan little word you mention that requires consideration,” returned the old man with a brow wrinkled so as to suggest profound sagacity of thought. “You said ‘if all goes well.’ But supposin’, for the sake of argument, that all does *not* go well—what then?”

“Why, then,” answered the young man with a laugh, “we shall be no worse off than other people, who have to make the best of things as they find them.”

“No doubt—no doubt—that iss the true an’ pheelosophical way to look at the matter. But don’t you think, Taniel, that it would be as well to putt off

till our munister arrives? I would not be havin' my daughter marrit without a munister if I can help it. An' you know his Lordship has promised more than wance to send us wan. He will not be long o' coming now."

"Yes, a minister has been promised again an' again," returned Dan, somewhat bitterly, "an' I suppose he will go on promising again and over again, but I have not much faith in these promises. The Earl has too many agents who are not as true as himself. I would rather not delay my marriage on that account. What ails you at Mr Sutherland?"

"Well, Taniel, I hev nothing to say against Muster Sutherland. He iss a ferry goot man—I will not be denyin' that, but—he iss not an ordained munister."

"What of that?" retorted Dan. "He is an ordained elder of the Church of Scotland, and that is much the same thing. And he is a good, Christian man, respected by every one in the Settlement."

"Well, well, Taniel; hev it your own way," returned old Duncan with a resigned look. "Of course, it would have been pleesanter if he had been a regular munister, whatever; but, as you say, my boy, 'what of that?' So, as things look a little more peaceable than they wass—though not ferry much—I will be—"

He was interrupted at this point by the sudden entrance of Jacques Bourassin with the astounding intelligence that a band of North-Westers had gone up the Settlement to attack Fort Garry.

"Hoot! nonsense, man!" exclaimed old McKay, starting up and flinging his pipe away in the excitement of the moment.

"No—not nonsense!" said Bourassin in broken English; "it be true. I knows it. I come to say that we go to the fort to help them."

"Right, boy, right!" exclaimed the old man, hastily belting on his capote. "Fergus! Tuncan!—Elspie! where are these boys?"

"In the stable, father. I saw them just—"

"Let them saddle all the nags—quick," cried the old man. "Taniel, you

better—”

He stopped; for Daniel had already run out to saddle and mount his own horse.

In a few minutes a cavalcade of a dozen powerful young fellows, headed by old Duncan McKay, and armed with guns, were galloping at full speed in the direction of Fort Garry.

But before this cavalcade had set out, the rencontre at the fort had already taken place, and been fatally decided.

The approach of the enemy had been announced to those nearest the scene of action by the women and children of that part of the Settlement, who were seen running about in frantic alarm trying to hide themselves, and some of them seeking refuge in the fort.

Among these were two brothers named Sinclair. One of them, Archie by name, was a stout healthy fellow of twelve or thereabouts, the other was a thin delicate boy of ten, whose illness, whatever it was, had reduced him to skin and bone, taken all the colour out of his cheeks, and rendered him quite unable to run or play like other boys. They had recently become orphans, their father and mother, who were among the most recent arrivals, having died suddenly within a few weeks of each other. When the alarm of the threatened attack was given, the brothers were amusing themselves on the sunny side of the cottage which had been for only one year their happy home.

In a moment Archie took his brother on his back and scampered away with him to a place near the river, and hid him in a hollow under the bank, where they had been wont to play at grizzly bears and hunters.

Meanwhile Governor Semple, with several gentlemen and attendants, walked out to meet the party of half-breeds and Indians, not to offer battle, but for the purpose of parlance and conciliation. It is admitted, however, that Governor Semple committed a grave error of judgment in allowing his small party to carry arms. They numbered only twenty-eight in all, and, being untrained, could have had no chance in an open fight with such opponents. If the Governor had gone out unarmed with only one or two attendants, he would, it was thought, have appealed

irresistibly to the honour of the party.

As it was, when the Hudson's Bay party drew near they thought the look of their opponents so suspicious that the Governor halted his men, and they stood in a group as if in consultation. Seeing this, the half-breeds divided themselves into two bodies, and commenced firing from behind some willows—at first a shot or two, and then a merciless volley. No fewer than twenty-one of the twenty-eight fell to rise no more, among whom were the Governor himself; Mr Wilkinson, his secretary: Captain Rogers, a mineralogist; Mr White, the surgeon; Mr Holt, of the Swedish navy, and Mr McLean, a principal settler.

Indeed the whole party would have probably been killed and the settlers massacred at that time, but for the courageous interposition of the chief of the half-breeds, Cuthbert Grant, who, at the risk of his life, stood between the settlers and their foes, only one of which last was killed.

When old McKay and his party drew near to the scene, the massacre was completed, and most of his little band—which had been slightly augmented on the way up—turned right-about, and rode away to defend their respective homes.

But the warrior spirit of old McKay and his sons had been roused. They refused to turn tail, and, in company with Dan and Peter Davidson, made a furious charge into a detached party of the half-breeds which they chanced to encounter. They scattered them like sheep, though they did not succeed in killing any. Then they also wheeled round and galloped back to their respective homes.

"Come, Elspie, tear," said the old man as he dismounted, "putt what ye value most in your pocket an' come away. The duvles are down on us, and we are not able to hold out in Ben Nevis. The settlers must choin altogether, an' do the best we can to defend ourselves."

While he was speaking, the Highlander was busy stuffing some of the smaller of his household goods into his pockets—amongst them a large quantity of tobacco.

Meanwhile Fergus hastened to the stable to saddle Vixen for Elspie, while the poor girl ran to her room and secured some small objects which

she valued—among them a miniature portrait of her mother, and a Bible which the good lady had given to her a short time before her death. There was no money, and no valuable documents had to be looked after, so that preparations for fight were soon completed.

Now there was a member of old Duncan McKay's household who has not yet been introduced to the reader, but whose character and influence in the household were such as to demand special notice. This member was an old woman named Peg. Probably this was an abbreviation of Peggy, but we cannot tell. Neither can we say what her surname was, for we never heard it, and no one spoke of the old creature by any other name than that of "Old Peg."

Although Old Peg was by no means feeble—indeed, judged by her capacities, she might have been pronounced middle-aged, for she could walk about the house all day, actively engaged in miscellaneous self-imposed duties, and could also eat like a man and sleep like a dormouse—she was, nevertheless, withered, and wrinkled, and grey, and small. Her exact age nobody knew—and, for the matter of that, nobody seemed to care.

Extreme amiability and self-obliteration were the chief characteristics of Old Peg. She was silent by nature, and deaf as a post—whether by art or nature we know not; probably both. Well, no—on second thoughts, not quite as deaf as a post, for by means of severe shouting she could be made to hear.

Smiles and nods, however, were her chief means of communication with the outer world. When these failed, a yell might be tried with advantage.

No one of the McKay household ever thought of giving Old Peg anything in the shape of work to do, for the very good reason that, being an extremely willing horse, she was always working; and she possessed a peculiar faculty of observation, which enabled her to perceive, long before any one else, what ought to be done, and the right time to do it, so that, when any one bounced round with the sudden intention of telling her to do anything, Old Peg was found to have done it already, or to be in the act of doing it. It is almost superfluous to say that she patched and mended the household garments, washed the most of things washable,

sewed the sewable, darned the sock, and, generally, did-up the whole McKay family. When not engaged in definite or specific work, she had a chronic sock-knitting which helped to fill up and round off the corners of her leisure hours.

Old Peg had been the nurse, consecutively, of Fergus, Elspie, and Duncan junior. She was now equivalent to their second mother, having nursed their first mother to the end with faithful untiring affection, and received from the dying woman a solemn commission never to forsake Duncan senior or his progeny.

No sentiment of a religious nature ever escaped Old Peg, but it was observed that she read her Bible regularly, and was occasionally found asleep on her knees—greatly to the amusement of that irritable old rascal, Duncan senior, and to the gratification of Elspie, who came to the conclusion that the old woman must have learned well off by heart such words as—“Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do; do it with thy might.” “Do good to all men as thy hand findeth opportunity.” “Be clothed with humility.” “Trust in the Lord at all times.” Probably Elspie was right, for she judged of people in the old-fashioned way, namely, “by their fruits.” Her judgment of the two Duncans on this principle, by the way, could not have been very exalted, but we cannot tell. She was much too loyal and loving a daughter and sister to give any sign or opinion.

At the time of the sudden call to flight just described, the McKay family had totally forgotten Old Peg in their hurry. Elspie was the first to miss her.

“Old Peg!” she exclaimed—almost screamed—while Fergus was assisting her to mount Vixen, “where is she?”

“I’ll find her,” said Fergus, “and bring her on in the cart. You be off after father. We’ve no time to lose.”

“Be *sure* you bring her, Fergus,” said Elspie.

“All right; no fear!”

Thus assured, Elspie was about to gallop away after her father—who had started in advance, to overtake and stop the Prairie Cottage family, so

that they might travel in one band—when the clatter of hoofs was heard, and next moment Dan Davidson galloped round the corner of the house.

“I came back for you, Elspie,” he said, pulling up. “Why did you not come on with your father?”

“I expected to overtake him, Dan. You know Vixen is swift. Besides, I missed Old Peg, and delayed a few minutes on her account. Is she with your party?”

“No—at least I did not see her. But she may have been in the cart with Louise. Shall I look for her while you gallop on?”

“No; Fergus has promised to find and bring her after us. Come, I am ready.”

The two galloped away. As they did so young Duncan issued from the stable behind the house, leading out his horse. He was in no hurry, having a good mount. At the same time Fergus came out at the back-door of the house shouting, “Old Peg! Hallo! old woman, where are ye?”

“Hev ye seen her, Duncan?” he asked impatiently.

“It iss seekin’ high an’ low I hev been, an’ it iss of no use shoutin’, for she hears nothin’.”

“I’m sure I saw her in the cart wi’ the Davidsons,” said Duncan.

“Are you sure?” asked Fergus.

“Weel, I did not pass quite close to them, as I ran up here for my horse on hearin’ the news,” replied Duncan; “but I am pretty sure that I saw her sittin’ beside Louise.”

“Hm! that accoonts for her not being here,” said Fergus, running into the stable. “Hold on a bit, Duncan. I’ll go with ye in a meenit.”

In the circumstances he was not long about saddling his horse. A few minutes more, and the brothers were galloping after their friends, who had got a considerable distance in advance of them by that time, and

they did not overtake them till a part of the Settlement was reached where a strong muster of the settlers was taking place, and where it was resolved to make a stand and face the foe.

Here it was discovered, to the consternation of the McKay family, that Old Peg was not with the Davidson party, and that therefore she must have been left behind!

“She *must* be found and rescued,” exclaimed Elspie, on making the discovery.

“She *must*!” echoed Dan Davidson: “who will go back with me?”

A dozen stout young fellows at once rode to the front, and old McKay offered to take command of them, but was overruled and left behind.

Chapter Nine.

Old Peg.

Meanwhile, accustomed to think and act for herself, Old Peg, on the first alarm, had made up her mind to do her fair share of work quietly.

She did not require to be told that danger threatened the family and that flight had been resolved on. A shout from some one that Nor'-Westers were coming, coupled with the hasty preparations, might have enlightened a mind much less intelligent than that of the old woman. She knew that she could do nothing to help where smart bodily exercise was needed, but, down by the creek close by, there was a small stable in which a sedate, lumbering old cart-horse dwelt. The horse, she felt sure, would be wanted. She could not harness it, but she could put a bridle on it and lead it up to the house.

This animal, which was named Elephant on account of its size, had been totally forgotten by the family in the hurry of departure.

Old Peg found the putting of a bridle on the huge creature more difficult work than she had expected, and only succeeded at last by dint of perseverance, standing on three or four bundles of hay, and much coaxing—for the creature had evidently taken it into its head that the old woman had come there to fondle it—perhaps to feed it with sugar after the manner of Elspie.

She managed the thing at last, however, and led the horse up towards the house.

Now, while she had been thus engaged the family had left, and the half-breeds—having combined their forces—had arrived.

Ben Nevis was the first house the scoundrels came to. Dismounting, and finding the place deserted, they helped themselves to whatever was attractive and portable—especially to a large quantity of Canada twist tobacco, which old Duncan had found it impossible to carry away. Then they applied fire to the mansion, and, in a wonderfully short time Ben

Nevis was reduced to a level with the plain. Another party treated Prairie Cottage in a similar manner.

It was when the first volume of black smoke rose into the sky that Old Peg came to the edge of the bushes that fringed the creek and discovered that Ben Nevis had suddenly become volcanic! She instantly became fully aware of the state of matters, and rightly judged that the family must have escaped, else there would have been some evidence of resistance.

Fortunately the old woman had not yet passed quite from the shelter of the bushes. She drew back with a degree of caution worthy of a Red-skin, leading the horse with her. When well out of sight she paused for the purpose of meditation. What was now to be done! As we have said, she possessed decision of character in an eminent degree. She never at any time had taken long to make up her mind; she was not going to begin now, though the position was probably the most perplexing that she had ever experienced. Suddenly she raised her head and laughed.

In the circumstances it would not have been surprising had hysteria seized Old Peg, but there was nothing hysterical in her nature. Calm, cool, calculating courage dominated her every thought and feeling, but the idea of what she was driven to in her old age had tickled her fancy. Leading the big cart-horse close up to a bank, she prepared to mount him —having previously broken off a good strong switch from a neighbouring bush.

Never before in her life had Peg mounted a steed of any kind whatever. She knew the lady's position on horseback by sight, of course, but not by practice. To attempt it even with a side-saddle would have been impossible; but Elephant was barebacked. Fortunately he was fat and broad, and without a visible back-bone. Old Peg at once made up her mind, and, climbing the bank, scrambled on his back in gentleman's position. It was more comfortable than she had dared to hope.

But now an unexpected difficulty met her. Elephant declined to move! She pulled at his bridle, and he turned sluggishly, but he would not advance. Peg administered a sounding whack with the switch. She might as well have hit a neighbouring tree. Elephant's hide was like that of his

namesake, and he had no feelings to speak of that could be touched, or hurt, or worked upon.

In this dilemma the old woman had recourse to a weapon with which her broad bosom was at all times furnished. She drew a large pin, and drove the point into Elephant's flank. The result was instantaneous. Up went his hindquarters, and Peg found herself sprawling on his bushy mane. She held on to that, however, and, gradually working her way back, regained her old position—thankful that she had not been thrown to the ground.

Another result was that Elephant condescended to walk. But this was not enough. Escape at such a pace was impossible. Old Peg prodded him again—this time on the shoulder, for she rightly conjectured that he could not well kick up with his fore-legs. But he might rear! The thought caused her to grasp the bushy mane with both hands and hold on. He did not rear, but he trotted, and poor Old Peg came to the conclusion that there were disagreeable novelties in life, even for her.

When Elephant at length burst out of the fringe of wood and gained the track that followed the course of the river, she was immediately seen by the plunderers, who laughed at the strange rider but did not follow her, with the exception of one man—an Indian, painted and feathered,—who started in pursuit, hoping, possibly, for an easy scalp.

He soon came close up, and, being armed with a bow, sent an arrow in advance of him. The shaft was well aimed. It grazed the flank of Elephant, inflicting a painful wound. This woke up the old horse surprisingly, so that it not only broke into a gallop, but set off at racing speed as it used to do when young. The Indian was badly mounted, and gradually lost ground, whereupon he sent after the fugitives several more arrows which all fell wide of the mark.

The change to Old Peg was as a reprieve from death! The trot had almost dislocated her bones, and shaken her up like an addled egg, and the change to racing speed afforded infinite relief. She could scarcely credit her senses, and she felt a tendency to laugh again as she glanced over her shoulder. But that glance removed the tendency, for it revealed the Indian warrior, in all his paint and feathers and streaming scalp-locks, in hot pursuit, while the whiz of another arrow close past her ear

convinced our heroine that it was not a dream.

The jolting to which the poor old creature was subjected had disturbed her costume not a little. Her shawl came nearly off, and, holding on by one pin, fluttered like a flag of defiance. Her slippers, which were of the carpet pattern, were left behind on the prairie to perplex the wolves, and her voluminous hair—once a rich auburn, but now a pearly grey—having escaped its cap and fastenings, was streaming out gaily in the breeze, as if to tempt the fingers and knife of the pursuer.

A stern-chase is a long one, whether ashore or afloat. Pursuer and pursued went rapidly down the Settlement until they came in sight of the band which had come to rescue Peg. They received her with a wild cheer of surprise and joy, which turned the Red-skin to the right-about, and sent him back to his friends much faster than he had come.

On receiving his report, the half-breeds at once dashed off in pursuit of the settlers, and did not draw rein until they reached the place where the Scotchmen had made a stand. The latter were greatly outnumbered, at least in fighting men, but they showed such a resolute front, that Cuthbert Grant, the half-breed leader, again interfered to prevent bloodshed if possible. After calming his men, and advising forbearance, he turned to Duncan McKay senior, who was the settlers' spokesman, and said—

"If you will go peaceably away out of the colony, we will spare you, but if you show fight your blood be on your own heads, for I cannot restrain my men much longer."

"Iss it sparin' us you will be talkin' of, Cuthbert Grant?" answered the Highlander, with scorn. "Wow! but if it wass not for the weemen an' children that's with us, you would hev a goot chance o' bein' in need o' sparin' yoursels; an' it iss not much o' the blood o' the Grants, either, that's in *your* veins, or ye would scorn to consort wi' such fire-raisin' cut-throats. It iss the fortune of war—whatever, and we can't affoord to leave our weemen an' bairns defenceless. So we accept your terms, if we are not hindered from carryin' away our arms."

"Carry away whatever you like," replied Grant, quietly, "only be off at once, or I'll not answer for the consequences."

Thus the angry Highlander was dismissed, and in the end the unfortunate settlers, being a second time driven into exile, took refuge, as before, at Jack River.

Chapter Ten.

Archie and Little Bill do Wonders.

We change the scene now to the margin of a small lake embosomed like a gem in the great wilderness of the Far North.

It is autumn. The sun is bright, the air is calm and clear. There is a species of warm haze which, paradoxically, does not seem to interfere with the clearness, and a faint zephyr which appears rather to emphasise than break the calm. It sends a soft cat's-paw now and then across parts of the lake, and thus, by contrast, brings into greater prominence the bright reflection of trees and cloudland mirrored in its depths. Instead of being the proverbial "dead" calm, it is, if we may so put it, rather a lively, cheerful calm.

The liveliness of it is vastly increased by hundreds of water-fowl, which disport themselves on the surface of the lake, as if coquetting with their own reflections, or whistle round its margin while busy on the feeding-grounds.

Myriads of mosquitoes were wont there to murmur their maddening career in search of blood, but, happily, at the period we write of, an incidental and premonitory night-frost had relegated these to the graves of their forefathers, or to the mansions of Hiberna—we know not, and care not, which.

We have styled the lake a "little" one, but we must remind the reader that we use the expression in an American sense, and that where lakes are two and three hundred miles long, a little one can well afford to be twenty or thirty miles in diameter, with, perchance, a boundless horizon. The lake in question, however, was really a little one—not more than two miles in length or breadth, with the opposite shore quite visible, and a number of islets of various sizes on its bosom—all more or less wooded,

and all, more rather than less, the temporary homes of innumerable wild-fowl, among which were noisy little gulls with pure white bodies and bright red legs and bills.

On the morning in question—for the sun was not yet much above the horizon—a little birch-bark canoe might have been seen to glide noiselessly from a bed of rushes, and proceed quietly, yet swiftly, along the outer margin of the bed.

The bow-paddle was wielded by a stout boy with fair curly hair. Another boy, of gentle mien and sickly aspect, sat in the stern and steered.

“Little Bill,” said the stout boy in a low voice, “you’re too light. This will never do.”

“Archie,” returned the other with a languid smile, “I can’t help it, you know—at least not in a hurry. In course of time, if I eat frightfully, I may grow heavier, but just now there’s no remedy except the old one of a stone.”

“That’s true, Little Bill,” responded Archie with a perplexed look, as he glanced inquiringly along the shore; “nevertheless, if thought could make you heavier, you’d soon be all right, for you’re a powerful thinker. The old remedy, you see, is not available, for this side of the lake is low and swampy. I don’t see a single stone anywhere.”

“Never mind, get along; we’ll come to one soon, I dare say,” said the other, dipping his paddle more briskly over the side.

The point which troubled Archie Sinclair was the difference in weight between himself and his invalid brother, which, as he occupied the bow, resulted in the stern of the light craft being raised much too high out of the water. Of course this could have been remedied by their changing places, but that would have thrown the heavier work of the bow-paddle on the invalid, who happened also to be the better steersman of the two. A large stone placed in the stern would have been a simple and effective remedy, but, as we have seen, no large stone was procurable just then.

“It didn’t much matter in the clumsy wooden things at Red River,” said Archie, “but this egg-shell of Okématan’s is very different. Ho! there’s one at last,” he continued with animation as they rounded a point of land, and

opened up a small bay, on the margin of which there were plenty of pebbles, and some large water-worn stones.

One of these having been placed in the stern of the canoe, and the balance thus rectified, the voyage was continued.

“Don’t you think that breakfast on one of these islets would be nice?” said Billie.

“Just the very thing that was in my mind, Little Bill,” answered his brother.

It was a curious peculiarity in this sturdy youth, that whatever his invalid brother wished, he immediately wished also. Similarly, when Billie didn’t desire anything, Archie did not desire it. In short Billie’s opinion was Archie’s opinion, and Billie’s will was Archie’s law. Not that Archie had no will or opinion of his own. On the contrary, he was quite sufficiently gifted in that way, but his love and profound pity for the poor and almost helpless invalid were such that in regard to him he had sunk his own will entirely. As to opinions—well, he did differ from him occasionally, but he did it mildly, and with an openness to conviction which was almost enviable. He called him Bill, Billie, or Little Bill, according to fancy at the moment.

Poor boys! The sudden death of both parents had been a terrible blow to them, and had intensified the tenderness with which the elder had constituted himself the guardian of the younger.

When the Scotch settlers were banished from the colony, pity, as well as friendship for their deceased parents, induced the Davidson family to adopt the boys, and now, in exile, they were out hunting by themselves to aid in replenishing the general store of provisions.

It need scarcely be said that at this period of the year the exiled colonists were not subjected to severe hardships, for the air was alive with wild-fowl returning south from their breeding-grounds, and the rivers and lakes were swarming with fish, many of them of excellent quality.

“This will do—won’t it?” said Archie, pointing with his paddle to an islet about a hundred yards in diameter.

“Yes, famously,” responded Little Bill, as he steered towards a shelving rock which formed a convenient landing-place.

The trees and shrubs covered the islet to the water’s edge with dense foliage, that glowed with all the gorgeous colouring for which North American woods in autumn are celebrated. An open grassy space just beyond the landing-place seemed to have been formed by nature for the express purpose of accommodating picnic parties.

“Nothing could have been better,” said Archie, drawing up the bow of the canoe, and stooping to lift his brother out.

“I think I’ll try to walk—it’s such a short bit,” said Billie.

“D’ye think so? well, I’ve no doubt you can do it, Little Bill, for you’ve got a brave spirit of your own, but there’s a wet bit o’ moss you’ll have to cross which you mayn’t have noticed. Would you like to be lifted over that, and so keep your moccasins dry?”

“Archie, you’re a humbug. You’re always trying to make me give you needless trouble.”

“Well, have it your own way, Little Bill. I’ll help you to walk up.”

“No, carry me,” said Billie, stretching out his arms; “I’ve changed my mind.”

“I will, if you prefer it, Little Bill,” said Archie, lifting his brother in his strong arms and setting him down on the convenient spot before referred to.

Billie was not altogether helpless. He could stand on his weak legs and even walk a little without support, but to tramp through the woods, or clamber up a hill, was to him an absolute impossibility. He had to content himself with enjoyments of a milder type. And, to do him justice, he seemed to have no difficulty in doing so. Perhaps he owed it to his mother, who had been a singularly contented woman and had taught Billie from his earliest years the truth that, “contentment, with godliness, is great gain.” Billie did not announce his belief in this truth, but he proclaimed it unwittingly by the more powerful force of example.

Breakfast is a pleasant meal at any time if the operator be hungry, but who shall describe the delights of breakfast when eaten in company with several thousand wild-fowl, in a romantic wilderness with fresh air laden with the perfumes of the vegetable kingdom encircling the person; the glorious sunshine dazzling the eyes; the sweet songs of animated nature thrilling the ears, and the gentle solicitations of an expectant appetite craving within? Words are wasted in such an effort. We feel constrained to leave it—as we have not seldom left many a thing before now—to the reader's more or less vivid imagination.

A blazing fire of pine-logs boiled two tin kettles and roasted two fat wild-ducks. In one of the kettles Archie compounded and stirred robbiboo—of which, perhaps, the less said the better. In the other, Billie infused a small quantity of tea. The roasting ducks—split open, impaled on sticks and set up before the fire—looked after themselves till they began to burn, when they were turned by Archie and again neglected for a few minutes.

It was a glorious meal in all respects, and even Billie, whose appetite was moderately strong, enjoyed it immensely—none the less that he had asked a blessing on it before beginning, and all the more that he sympathised fully with his brother in his possession of an amazing—a shamelessly robust—capacity for food.

"Now, we'll go to work," remarked Archie, wiping his mouth with a sigh of contentment, (he had nothing else to wipe it with!) after finishing the last spoonful of robbiboo, the last limb of duck and the last mug of tea.

Such a remark at such a period in the entertainment caused Billie to laugh.

"Why, Archie, you've been at work this half-hour, and there's nothing left to go to work upon now."

"You know quite well, Little Bill, that I refer to the *day's* work. What is it to be? Provisions must be got if the camp is not to starve, and you and I are bound to do our share. Shall we go to Willow Point and shoot ducks and geese, or cross the lake and trawl for fish?"

"Both," answered the invalid with decision. "We'll do both. We will paddle to Willow Point, and try for jack-fish on the way."

“Just so—the very thing, Little Bill. Are you ready to start?”

Billie professed himself quite ready. Archie took him on his back, replaced him in the stern of the canoe in company with the big stone, and then stepped gently into his own place at the bow, where a common trading gun, with the old-fashioned flint lock and single barrel, rested against the gunwale. Pushing off they soon left Breakfast-isle far behind them, and crept swiftly along by the margin of the reeds.

On the way Billie cast out his fishing-line. It was a strong cod-line, with a great cod-hook attached and a lump of fat pork on it; for Archie, in the fervour of hope coupled with piscatorial ignorance and a sanguine disposition, had strongly advised his brother to err, if err he must, on the safe side, and be prepared for anything, from a great lake-serpent to a fresh-water whale.

No civilised fish would have deigned to give a second thought to the obvious deception which a mass of indigestible pork presented, but fish of the backwoods—especially in the early years of this century—were not suspicious. An enormous pike, or “jack-fish,” coveted that bait and took it. Not only so, but it took the great cod-hook and ten inches of the line besides.

A shout such as Billie had not uttered for many months announced the fact.

“Hi! hold on, Archie! Back water! I say, I’d believe I had hanked the bottom if it didn’t tug in such a lively way!”

“Pay out line, Little Bill!” cried the other, looking over his shoulder with blazing eyes, but unable to render any assistance owing to the small size and crank nature of the canoe. “Stay, I’ll turn about and become steersman, while you play the—whew! It’s a whale! I say—ease off!”

“Ease off!” cried Billie in desperation; “how can I ease off, with only a few yards o’ the line left?”

“Pitch the reel back to me then. I’ll manage it!” cried Archie, who had converted the bow of the canoe into the stern—both ends being alike—by the simple process of turning himself round and sitting with his face

towards his brother.

What Archie had styled the reel was simply a piece of stick with the line wound round it. His brother pitched it to him with one hand while the desperate jerking of the other—indeed of his whole body—told at once of the size and the impatience of the fish.

Unwinding the line in haste, Archie fastened the extreme end of it to two spare paddles and flung them overboard.

“Now, Little Bill,” he said; “you may let him have his head, and if you can’t hold on without risking the line just let it go.”

As he spoke the captive made another rush—not very frantic indeed, for the pike is a sluggish creature in all waters—but with a steady persistency that meant resolution of purpose. In a few seconds our invalid was compelled to let go, and, the line tightening, the paddles disappeared with a jerk.

Soon after they reappeared, and the boys paddled towards them with a cheer, picked them up and the battle was renewed.

It would be tedious to recount all the incidents of that fight. We can only say that after a struggle that lasted an hour—according to the younger brother; two hours and a half, according to the elder—a pike of about four feet in length was hauled into the canoe.

“That’s enough of fishing for one day,” remarked Billie, wiping his heated brow.

“Quite enough,” assented the other; “shall we make for Willow Point now, Little Bill?”

“Yes. We will try the shooting now.”

In accordance with this plan, the direction of the canoe was changed, and, early in the afternoon, the young hunters found themselves alongside of a low point of rocks which stretched well out into the lake, leaving a deep bay on either side. The extreme end of the point consisted of naked rock, but the greater part of it was covered with a dense under-

growth of low willow bushes.

Here they disembarked, and Archie, as before, carried his brother to the highest part of the low point, where a piece of green sward, free from bushes, formed an attractive resting-place.

“Sit there now, Billie, till I get some brush, an’ make yourself useful by cutting out goose heads. See, here are some branches o’ the right sort ready to hand. No doubt some Redskins have been at work here before us.”

He picked up some pieces of wood which Nature had formed more or less to resemble the heads and necks of geese. By a very slight use of the knife Billie converted these into excellent portraits. When he had finished half-a-dozen of them, his brother had cut and brought to the spot a number of bushy branches about two or three feet high. These were soon stuck into the ground in a small circle so as to resemble a growing bush, behind, or, rather, in the midst of which, they could effectually conceal themselves by crouching.

While this was being constructed the elder brother went down to the edge of the water and made half-a-dozen mud-heaps well within gunshot, which when the artificial heads and necks were attached to them, formed such exact counterparts of geese that the wild birds might well be excused for mistaking them for friends. Indeed tyros at this work have been known to fire at such decoys believing them to be genuine birds.

Even while they were thus engaged one and another flock of ducks and geese passed them on their way to warmer climes; of course sheering off as they passed. But when the arrangement was completed, and the two boys, crouching low, gazed at the horizon with eager looks, the wild birds no longer avoided the spot. On the contrary, seeing the decoys, they rather inclined to pass close to the place.

In flying down a river, or along the margin of a lake, wild birds may diverge a little to follow the sinuosities of bank or shore, but they will not get out of the way of a projecting promontory; they rather make a short cut by crossing over it.

The young hunters had not to wait long.

“There’s a flock of geese coming,” said Archie in a whisper, though the birds were at the moment some miles away. “Take the first shot, Little Bill.”

They had only one gun between them.

“I don’t like to,” said Billie, “that thing gave me such an awful kick last time, and I can’t stand it now.”

“O! there’s no fear, I put in only a small charge of powder-and-shot, on purpose. It won’t kick hard this time. Try.”

“Well, I’ll try,” said Billie, taking the gun.

“Aim well in advance, Bill. They fly fast, and primin’ gets damp sometimes.”

A flock of small geese was approaching. The boys became dumb, but they had remarkably speaking eyes.

Animated by curiosity, the flock descended to observe the decoys. How often that feeling of curiosity has proved fatal—not only to feathered geese!

Little Bill raised his gun. Puff! went the priming. Bang! went the charge. One of the birds, describing a beautiful curve, fell with bursting violence on the ground.

“Well done, Billie,” cried his brother enthusiastically as he leaped over the sheltering brush and ran to secure the prize. “A few like that will give a supper to the whole camp. Now, then,” he added on returning, “you’ll try again.”

“No, Archie. It’s your turn now—and the thing *did* give me a tremendous kick.”

“But I will put in still less powder this time, Little Bill, and less shot too, so you’ll have to be careful of your aim. See, there’s another flock coming—there, take it, and down with you. I do believe they are big fellows.”

Thus encouraged, Billie took the gun and crouched low. His brother was right. It was a flock of the great grey geese of Canada which now approached. The hearts of both boys beat high, for they were not only actuated by what is termed the sporting tendency, but by the desire to contribute their fair share to the general larder of their friends, who were encamped a considerable distance off at the other end of the lake.

“Okématan will open his eyes if we take back a goose or two like these; why, they are swans almost!” whispered Archie, as the birds approached in the form of an angle. “Take the big fat one on the left—the one now squintin’ down at the decoys.”

Billie obeyed, and fired. The result was, in a manner, threefold. First, the boy’s aim was so good that the big fat fellow dropped like a stone not three yards from their position. Second, the hitherto silent and symmetrically arranged flock went into dire confusion and sheered off in trumpeting convulsions; and, third, a scattering shot, having found its billet in the head of another goose immediately behind the first one, caused it to plunge right into the camp, straight for the head of Little Bill. Archie, ignorant of this, was in the very act of leaping over the brush to secure the first goose, and had fortunately got in front of his brother at the right moment when the second goose caught him on the shoulder and knocked him into the poor invalid’s arms.

He was stunned at first, and rose in a few moments in some degree of mental confusion; but he was not much the worse for the accident and greatly rejoiced at his fortunate escape, as well as the splendid shooting, of Little Bill.

It must not be supposed that the brothers continued to shoot at this rate. Comparatively few flocks of geese passed over Willow Point that day, but numerous flocks of wild-ducks did, and before evening had put an end to their work, they had secured a fair canoe-load of game.

That night they lighted their camp-fire among the neighbouring willows; feasted luxuriously on part of the day’s hunt; lay down side by side under one blanket, with the upturned canoe partially covering them; dreamed at first of Okématan, gazing in wonder at their load, and, afterwards, of being knocked head over heels by an enormous grey goose whose

persistent pugnacity was only equalled by its strange incapacity to achieve its murderous ends.

Ultimately Oblivion came to their rescue, and the young hunters fell into a dreamless slumber, with the smoking camp-fire sending an occasional gleam of ruddy light on their recumbent forms, and the dark sky with its hosts of twinkling stars serving for a gorgeous canopy.

Chapter Eleven.

Shows some of the Troubles of Pioneer Colonists.

Okématan was not the only person who opened his eyes on the return of the Sinclair boys to camp next day with their heavily laden canoe. The Davidson and McKay families were much more emphatic in their astonishment, for the boys, they knew, had not hitherto performed any exploits in shooting. They had not supposed them gifted with even ordinary powers as sportsmen, and had imagined that the poor invalid little Bill was utterly helpless. On the other hand, Okématan was not unacquainted with the sudden rise to unexpected celebrity of Indian boys in his tribe, and knew something about the capacity of even cripples to overcome difficulties when driven by that stern taskmaster, Necessity.

The abundant supply of provisions thus unexpectedly received was very acceptable, because during the day on which the boys were absent, a fresh band of immigrants had arrived on their way to Red River, and one party of these, hailing from Switzerland, had come on to the little lake where our Scotch friends were encamped, for the purpose of consulting as to their future movements—for it was evident that it would be dangerous as well as useless for them to proceed to Red River in the existing state of affairs. The leader of the party was a fair-haired youth, who could speak English very well.

The Scotch families were having their mid-day meal around the camp-fires, when the Switzers arrived and introduced themselves. Of course they were made heartily welcome by Mr Sutherland, who acted as spokesman for his countrymen.

“We are unfortunate,” said the leader of the new arrivals, whose name was André Morel. “We hoped that the severe climate would be our only foe to fight with—especially in a land where the people are so few.”

Sutherland—whose sedate and quiet manner was consistent with his position as an elder and spiritual guide of his countrymen at that time—smiled gravely, shook his head, and stroked his chin.

“You will find,” he said, “that whatever part of this world you go to, the passions of man are always more deadly in their consequences than surroundings, or climates, or anything else.”

“H’m! what you say iss ferry true,” remarked old McKay, who was busy picking the drum-stick of a wild-goose at the moment. “If it wass not for the jealousy an’ ill-will o’ the North-Westers we should hev been at this goot hour in our comfortable houses amang the green fields of Rud Ruver.”

“Wheesht! faither!” interposed Duncan junior, “Mr Sutherland wass speakin’, an’ ye’ve stoppit him.”

“An’ what if I hev, Tuncan? Can he not continoo to speak when I hev done?” retorted the old man, resuming his drum-stick.

“You are right, Mr McKay,” said the elder. “But for the unfortunate jealousies of the two Companies, we might have been in very different circumstances to-day. If the North-Westers could only see that the establishment of a colony in Red River would in no way hinder the fur-trade, we could all get along peaceably enough together. But it seems to have been ordained that man shall reach every good thing through much tribulation.”

“I do not agree wi’ you at all, Muster Sutherland,” said old McKay. “There iss many of rich people in this world, who hev all that hert can wush, an’ are born to it without hevin’ any treebulation at all.”

“But I did not say ‘all that heart could wish,’ Mr McKay. I said ‘*every* good thing’.”

“Well, an’ iss not wealth a goot thing, Muster Sutherland?”

“Only if God’s blessing goes along with it,” returned the elder. “If it does not, wealth is a curse.”

“H’m! I wush I had a little more o’ that curse—whatever,” answered the irreverent old man.

“Besides,” continued Sutherland, not noticing the remark, “the rich are by no means exempt from tribulation. They are sometimes afflicted with bad children; not infrequently with bad health, which doctors, at two or three guineas a visit, cannot cure, and many of them are much troubled with poverty!”

“You are talking in ruddles now, Muster Sutherland,” said old Duncan, who, having finished the drum-stick and its duplicate, was preparing his pipe for action.

“It is not much of a riddle, Mr McKay. I suppose you consider a man with ten thousand a year rich, and a man with two hundred poor.”

“Well, yes; I wull not be denyin’ that.”

“Well—if the rich man spends ten thousand and fifty pounds a year and never has anything to spare or to lay by, is he not miserably poor—poor in spirit as well as in purse? For, at the end of the year his purse is empty, and he is in debt. On the other hand, if the man with two hundred a year spends one hundred and fifty, gives away twenty, and lays by thirty every year, is he not rich?”

“Ferry true, Muster Sutherland,” said McKay, with a peculiar smile, as he emitted his first whiff. “I wull not be arguin’ wi’ you, for you always get the best of it. Nevertheless, it is my opeenion that we’ve had treebulation enough in Rud Ruver since we came oot, an’ I would be ferry gled of a luttle prosperity now—if only by way of a pleesant change.”

Recurring to this subject a few days later, young Morel asked Dan Davidson, while they were paddling back to camp together one evening with the proceeds of a day’s hunt: “Has your life in the colony, since the beginning, been as bad as old McKay made it out the other day?”

“Well, making due allowance for the old man’s use of strong language,

his account of matters has not been much overdrawn," answered Dan, who, in virtue of his superior canoe-craft, acted the part of steersman. "You see, when we came out here we expected, like you, that all would be plain sailing, except as regarded climate and ordinary difficulties, but our eyes were soon opened to the true state of things. Instead of the wilderness, with a few peaceful inhabitants living under the mild sway of the Hudson Bay Company, we found another company, apparently as strong as the Hudson's Bay one, in violent opposition. They regarded our coming as likely to ruin their trade, for Lord Selkirk was a share holder in the Hudson's Bay Company, and it was supposed his object in planting the colony was to advance his scheme of monopolising the whole fur-trade of the Far West. I cannot myself see how this colony could injure the fur-trade; but, anyhow, I know that the opposition has affected the colonists very severely, for we have been deceived by the contending parties, and misled, and delayed or thwarted in all our operations.

"At the very outset, on our arrival, a band of the Nor'-Westers, composed of half-breeds and Indians, warned us that our presence was unwelcome, and tried to frighten us away by their accounts of the savage nature of the natives. Then the fear of perishing for want of food induced a lot of us to take their advice, leave the farms allotted to us, and go to a place called Pembina, about seventy miles distant from the colony, there to spend the long and hard winter in tents, according to the Indian fashion, and live on the produce of the chase."

"I should have thought that was a pleasant way of spending the first winter," remarked André Morel, who, besides being young, was strong and enthusiastic.

"So thought some of us at first," returned Dan, "but when we found that the thermometer fell to somewhere between 40 and 50 degrees below zero; that walking in snow-shoes, trapping, hunting buffalo, and shooting, were not to be learned in a few days; and when we saw our women and children dependent sometimes on the charity of Indians, and reduced almost to starvation, we changed our minds as to the pleasure of the thing. However, if the school was rough, it made the scholars all the quicker, and now I think that most of us are equal to the Redskins themselves at their own work.

“When that winter came to an end,” continued Dan, “we returned to Red River, in the month of May, wiser men, thoroughly determined to plant and sow, and make ourselves independent of the savages. But hunger followed us, for fish were scarce that season; so were roots and berries; and, if it had not been for a kind of parsnip which grows wild in the plains, and a species of eatable nettle, I do believe some of us would have gone under altogether.”

“And did your first sowing turn out well?” asked the young Swiss, who having been bred a watchmaker, had only hazy notions as to farming.

“Ay, there was a gleam of prosperity there that led us to hope great things for the future,” answered Dan; “but the gleam did not continue. Why, one fellow, not far from our place, sowed four quarts of wheat, and reaped twelve and a half bushels; but we had terrible trouble to save our crops from the birds. In the Spring and Fall, blackbirds and wild pigeons pass over the prairies on their way north or south, in immense numbers. They pass in such numbers that they could, I do believe, swallow our whole harvest, if they got only a grain a-piece. The berries failed them that year, an’ men, women, and children had to work hard wi’ guns, bird-nets, and rattles, from morning to night, to say nothing o’ scarecrows. We had resolved never to go near Pembina again, but what we saved of the harvest was little more than enough for seed, so we were forced to try it for another winter. Troubles again awaited us there. The half-breeds and Indians—who had been kind at first—became jealous. A plot was discovered to murder two of our party who had undertaken to hunt, so we were obliged to buy our provisions at a high price, and even to barter away our clothing to avoid starvation, and we returned half-naked to the Settlement the following spring. Then, coming upon us in armed bands and superior numbers, they drove us out of the Settlement altogether at last, and we came here to Jack River to spend the winter as we best could. After that we went back and struggled on for some time, but now, here have they a second time banished us! What the end is to be, who can tell?”

“Truly, if such be the country I have come to, I will go back to my native land and make watches,” remarked the Swiss in a tone from which the sanguine element had almost entirely disappeared.

Chapter Twelve.

Round the Camp-Fires.

Had any one been watching the camp-fires of the banished colonists that night, the last idea that would have entered the observer’s mind would have been that of suffering or distress.

The night was brilliantly fine, and just cold enough to make the blazing fires agreeable without being necessary—except, indeed, as a means of cooking food. The light of these fires, shining through the green, yellow, and golden foliage, and illuminating the sunburnt faces of men, women, and children, gave to the scene a strain of the free, the wild, and the romantic, which harmonised well with the gypsy-like appearance of the people, and formed a ruddy contrast to the pure cold light of the innumerable stars overhead, which, with their blue-black setting, were reflected in the neighbouring lake.

Over every fire pots and kettles were suspended from tripods, or rested on the half-burned logs, while impaled wild-fowl roasted in front of it. Food being in great abundance, hearts were light in spite of other adverse circumstances, and men and women, forgetting to some extent the sufferings of the past and the dark prospects of the future, appeared to abandon themselves to the enjoyment of the present.

The children, of course, were full of glee, and not altogether empty of mischief; and there were fortunately no infants of age so tender as to induce a squalling protest against the discomforts of a situation which could be neither understood nor appreciated.

“It iss a pleesant night, whatever,” remarked old McKay, lighting his pipe with a brand plucked from the fire which his family and the Davidsons shared in common; “an’ if it wass always like this, it iss myself that would not object to be a rud savitch.”

“I don’t know that a rud savitch is much worse than a white wan,” growled Duncan junior, in an under-tone.

“What iss that you say?” demanded the old man with a look of suspicion,

for his hearing was imperfect.

“Surely the water must be boiling now, daddy?” said Elspie, by way of checking the conversation.

“I don’t know whuther it iss boilin’ or not,” answered Duncan senior, applying another brand to his pipe.

“Archie, boy!” exclaimed Dan Davidson, “you’re letting that goose roast to a cinder.”

“No, Dan, I’m not—but Billie can’t a-bear meat underdone, so it’s better to blacken the outside than have the inside raw.”

“Who iss that singing? Wheesht, boys,” said Fergus McKay, turning his head a little on one side as if to listen.

There was profound silence for a few moments as a rich manly voice was heard to swell forth from the neighbourhood of one of the camp-fires.

“It comes from the camp of the Switzers, I think,” said Elspie McKay.

“I know it,” said Jessie Davidson, who was seated on a log beside her friend. “It is François La Certe. He came to our meeting-place in Red River, you know, just after Cuthbert Grant and his men left us, and, hearing that we were starting off to Jack River again, he resolved to follow. I heard him tell Slowfoot to get ready to go along with us.”

“I wonder why he came?” said Mrs Davidson, coming out of her tent at the moment, and joining the party round the fire.

“He did not say,” answered Jessie.

“He did not require to say,” remarked Duncan McKay, with a sarcastic laugh. “Every wan knows that wherever there iss a chance of gettin’ ammunition and plenty of victuals for nothing, there La Certe iss certain to be found. He knew that we would be sure to hev plenty at this season o’ the year, an’ that we would not see him an’ his wife sterve when our kettles wass full. Iss not that so, Okématan? You know him best.”

Thus appealed to, the Indian, whose usual expression was one of intense gravity, shut his eyes, opened his mouth, displayed his superb teeth, and uttered a low chuckle, but made no further reply.

It was enough. Those who understood Okématan and his ways were well aware that he thought La Certe uncommonly sly.

The half-breed had indeed followed the expelled colonists in the belief that they would certainly possess plenty of powder and shot—which he had not the means of purchasing. He also knew that the whole of Rupert's Land swarmed with game in autumn and spring, and that the Scotch were an open-handed race when approached in the right way. Putting these things together, he carefully gummed his canoe, put his wife and child into it—also some of the provision which had been supplied to him by Duncan McKay junior—and followed the settlers over Lake Winnipeg to Jack River.

Here, finding that a new party of immigrants had arrived, who were necessarily unacquainted with his little peculiarities, La Certe attached himself to them and made himself agreeable. This he could do very well, for the Switzers understood his bad French, as well as his good tuneful voice, and appreciated his capacity for telling a story.

"Did you never," he said to André Morel, after his song was finished, "hear of how my old mother saved her whole tribe from death one time in the Rocky Mountains?"

"Never," Morel replied with a somewhat sceptical but good-natured smile.

"No! I wonder much, for every one in this land heard about it, an' I thought the news must have spread over Europe and—and, perhaps Africa. Well, I will tell you. Where is my baccy-bag?"

"Never mind, fill your pipe from mine," said Morel, tossing him a little bag of the coveted weed.

"Thank you. Well, you must know that my mother had a beautiful voice—O! much more beautiful than mine. Indeed, I do not joke, so you need not laugh. It was so sweet that men were always forced to listen till she was done. They could not help it."

“Did they ever want to help it?” asked Morel quietly.

“O yes—as you shall hear. Well, one day my mother was living with all our tribe—I say *our* tribe because my mother was an Indian—with all our tribe, in a great dark gorge of the Rocky Mountains. The braves had gone out to hunt that day, but my mother stayed behind with the women and children. I was a little foolish child at that time—too young to hunt or fight. My father—a French Canadian—he was dead.

“We knew—my mother and I—that the braves would be home soon. We expected them every minute. While we were waiting for them, my mother went into the bush to pick berries. There she discovered a war-party of our enemies. They were preparing to attack our village, for they knew the men were away, and they wanted the scalps of the women and children. But they did not know the exact spot where our wigwams were pitched, and were just going, after a feed, to look for it.

“My mother ran home with the news, and immediately roused the camp, and made them get ready to fly to meet the returning men.

“‘But, my daughter,’ said an old chief, who had stayed in camp, ‘our enemies are young and active; they will quickly overtake us before we meet our men.’

“‘No,’ said my mother, ‘I will stop them. Get ready, and set off quickly.’

“She then ran back on her trail—my mother was a tremendous runner—superb! She came to a narrow place where our enemies would have to pass. A very thick tree grew there. She climbed it, and hid among the branches. It projected beyond a precipice and overhung a stream. Soon after that she saw the enemy advancing, step by step, slowly, cautiously, like men who dread an ambush, and with glances quick and solemn from side to side, like men who see a foe in every stump and stone.”

La Certe paused at this point. He was an adept at story-telling. His voice had slowed by degrees and become increasingly deep and solemn as he proceeded.

“Now,” continued he, in a higher tone, “my mother did not fear that they would see her if they looked up when they passed the tree. She was too

well hidden for that; but she was not sure what the effect of her voice would be, for she had never tried it in that way before. However, she was full of courage. She resembled me in that—bold as a lion! She began to sing. Low and soft at the beginning, like a dream of song.

“At the first note the Indians halted—every man; each in the position in which he was fixed. If a foot was up he kept it up. If both feet were down he left them down. The feet that were up came slowly to the ground when the Indians got tired, but no one took another step. My mother’s voice was a weird voice. It sounded as if the place from which it came was nowhere—or anywhere—or everywhere! Slowly the painted heads turned from side to side as far as they could go, and the glaring eyes turned a little further. A creeping fear came over them. They trembled. They turned pale. That could be easily seen through the paint. My mother saw it! She became more courageous and sang out in her most pathetic strain. The Indians wept. That was quite visible. My mother saw it. Her great object was to delay the attack until our men had time to arrive. She tried a war-song, but that was not so successful. It was too commonplace. Besides, in her energy she shook the branches, and that drew attention to the tree. My mother thought that she was in danger then; but fortune favoured her. It always favours the brave. I know this from experience.

“She had just come to a terrific whoop in the war-song when she slipped off her branch and the whoop increased to a death-yell as she went crashing headlong through the branches and down into the stream at the foot of the precipice.

“Water! water!” exclaimed La Certe at this point, holding out both hands. “I can never pass this part of my story without burning thirst!”

A mug of water was handed him.

“Poor fellow—have some brandy in it,” said a sympathetic hearer, hastily getting out his bottle.

La Certe held out his mug impatiently for the brandy, drained the mug, and cleared his voice.

“Was—was your mother killed?” asked the sympathiser, earnestly.

“Killed? No. Impossible! My mother could not be killed because her destiny was not yet fulfilled. No: there was a deep pool right under the tree. She fell into that with a plunge that echoed from cliff to cliff. The Indians were profoundly superstitious. All Indians are not so, but these Indians were. They waited not for more. They turned and fled as if all the evil spirits in the Rocky Mountains were chasing them. They reached their wigwams breathless, and told their squaws that one of the spirits of a mountain stream had sat among the branches of a tree and sung to them. It had told them that the right time for attacking their foes had not yet come. Then it sang them a war-song descriptive of their final victory, and, just after uttering a tremendous war-whoop, it had dived back into its native stream.”

“Well done!” exclaimed an enthusiastic Canadian.

“But what became of your mother?” asked Morel.

“Oh! she swam ashore. My mother was a splendid swimmer. I know it, for she taught me.”

“Was it a long swim?” asked a sceptical sailor, who was one of the emigrants.

“How?—what mean you?” demanded La Certe, sternly.

“I only want to know if she took long to swim ashore out o’ that pool,” said the sceptic, simply.

La Certe cast on him a glance of suspicion, and replied that his mother had found no difficulty in getting out of the pool.

“Is the old lady alive yet?” asked the pertinacious sceptic.

“Of course not. She died long long ago—thirty years ago.”

“What! before you was born? That’s strange, isn’t it?”

“No, but you not understand. I suppose my speech is not plain to you. I said *three* years ago.”

“Ah! that’s more like it. I only missed what you said,” returned the sceptic, whose name was Fred Jenkins, “for I’ve lived a while in France, and understand your lingo pretty well. Pass that goose, Morel, if you have left anything on it. This air o’ the wilderness beats the air o’ the sea itself for givin’ a fellow a twist.”

The remarks of Jenkins, while they did not absolutely destroy the confidence of the Swiss party, shook it enough to show the wily half-breed that he must do something if possible to re-establish his credit. He therefore volunteered another song, which was gladly accepted and highly appreciated; for, as we have said, La Certe possessed a really good and tuneful voice, and these immigrants were a musical people.

While this was going on at the Swiss camp-fires an incident occurred at the fire round which the McKay-Davidson party was assembled, which deserves particular notice.

Old McKay was giving some directions to Fergus; Duncan junior was seated opposite Dan Davidson, smoking his pipe, and Elspie had gone into her tent, when Slowfoot, the spouse of La Certe, drew near.

“Come along, old girl,” exclaimed McKay senior. “It iss some baccy you will be wantin’, I’ll wager.”

Slowfoot did not reply in words, but the smile upon her face was eloquent.

“Come away, then,” continued the hospitable Highlander. “You shall hev a pipe of it, whatever.”

He handed her a large plug of tobacco, and the woman, sitting down close to young Duncan, produced her pipe, and drew out a knife for the purpose of cutting up the tobacco.

“Hallo!” exclaimed Duncan, “where did you get hold o’ my knife?”

He stopped abruptly—a little confused in spite of himself. For the moment he had quite forgotten that the knife had been left in the camp where he had slain Perrin, and the sudden sight of it had thrown him off his guard. It was now too late to unsay the words, but not too late to mislead his

hearers.

“I got it from Marie Blanc,” said Slowfoot with a look of surprise. “Does the knife belong to Cloudbrow?”

“I think it does. I’m almost sure it iss mine. Let me see it,” returned Duncan, taking the knife from the woman’s hand, and examining it with cool and critical deliberation.

“No,” continued he, “it iss not mine, but very like one that I lost—so like that I felt sure at first it wass mine.”

Men who lie, usually overact their part. Duncan glanced suspiciously at Dan to see how he took the explanation as he returned the knife to Slowfoot, and Dan observed the glance, as being uncalled for—unnatural—in the circumstances.

Dan was by no means of a suspicious nature, nevertheless the glance haunted him for many a day after that. Suspicion once aroused is a ghost which is not easily laid. He tried to shake it off, and he carefully, loyally, kept it confined in his own breast; but, do what he would, he could not banish entirely from his mind that Duncan McKay—the brother of his Elspie—had some sort of guilty knowledge of the murder of poor Henri Perrin.

Chapter Thirteen.

Difficulties of Various Kinds overcome.

When the bright warm days and cool starry nights of the Indian summer gave place to the sharp days and frosty nights of early winter—when young ice formed on the lakes and rendered canoeing impossible, and the ducks and geese had fled to warmer climes, and the Frost King had sent his first messengers of snow to cover the wilderness with a winding-sheet and herald his return to the Winter Palace—then it was that the banished Red River settlers began to feel the pinch of poverty and to understand the full extent of the calamity that had befallen them.

We have not space to follow them through all the details of that winter at Jack River. Some died, all suffered more or less; but they had to endure it, for escape from the country to the civilised world was even more difficult and hopeless than escape from the dreaded wilds of Siberia. The men hunted, fished under the ice, trapped, and sustained themselves and their families in life during the long, dreary winter; the only gain being that they became more or less expert at the Red-man's work and ways of life.

Only two of the Indians remained with them to help them over their difficulties—namely, Okématan and Kateegoose, with their respective squaws. These last were invaluable as the makers of moccasins and duffle socks and leathern coats, without which existence in such a climate would have been impossible. They also imparted their knowledge in such matters to the squaws of the white men.

There was one friend, however, who did not remain with the settlers when things began to look dismal around them. This was the amiable, musical, story-telling La Certe. That tender-hearted man could not endure the sight of human distress. If he could not relieve it, he felt constrained to shut his eyes to it and to flee from it. At the first indication of the approach of winter he had come to old McKay with that peculiarly mild, humble, deprecatory expression of countenance with which he was wont to preface an appeal for assistance of some sort.

“What iss it you will be wantin’ *now*?” demanded the old man, rather testily, for he had an aversion to the half-breed’s sneaking ways. “Surely you will not be wantin’ more powder an’ shot efter the supply I gave you last week?”

O no! nothing could be further from the mind of La Certe. He had plenty of ammunition and provisions. He had only come to say that he was going back to—to—Red River.

“Weel, weel,” returned the Highlander, “there is no call for hesitation, man, in tellin’ me that. I will not be breakin’ my heart when ye are gone. I suppose that now ye hev got the best the season can supply, ye think the comforts o’ the Settlement will be more to your taste.”

The remonstrative expression on La Certe’s face deepened. The idea of his own taste or comfort had not once entered his head: but he had a wife and child whom he was bound to consider, and he had a hut—a home—in Red River which he felt constrained to look after. Besides, he had social duties of many kinds which claimed attention.

“I’ve no doubt ye hev,” said McKay, with a short sarcastic laugh, “an’ ye will attend to them too—I’ll be bound. But ye did not come here, I suppose, to take a tender farewell o’ me. What iss it you will be wantin’? Oot wi’ it, man!”

“There is a canoe—” said La Certe, with some hesitation.

“There iss many a canoe!” returned McKay with a peculiar grin.

“True, but there is one on the shore now, close to the flat rock which—”

“My own canoe!” interrupted the other, “what will ye be wantin’ wi’ that?”

La Certe did not wish to appear greedy, but the season was late, and his own canoe was not in a very fit condition to carry a family round the shores of a lake so large as Lake Winnipeg. Would the white father lend his canoe to him? It could not be wanted much longer that Fall, and the one he would leave behind him was an excellent canoe for ordinary fishing and hunting purposes. He would be quite willing to hire the canoe or to pay the full price for it if any accident should happen to it.

“No,” said McKay, firmly. “No, La Certe; your hiring means borrowing, and your payin’ means owin’ a debt for the remainder o’ your natural life. I will see you at the bottom o’ Lake Winnipeg before I will be lending you my canoe.”

La Certe smiled sadly, and gazed at the cap with which his hands played, as if appealing to it for sympathy.

With an aspect of the profoundest resignation he made his bow and left the Presence.

But La Certe was not in the least put out by this failure. He went to his tent, and recounted the interview to his squaw, who, when he entered, was in the act of giving her child, a creature of about four years of age, one or two draws of her pipe, to let it taste how nice it was.

Smoking in calm placidity, the amiable pair discussed the subject. The conclusion they came to was, as usual, harmonious.

“I think he will agree to lend it next time I go to him,” said La Certe, hopefully.

“He will give in,” replied Slowfoot, decidedly.

The four-year-old could not understand the subject, and made no comment; but it howled for another smoke, and got it.

La Certe was wrong, and his wife was right—as usual. Old McKay did not agree to “lend” his canoe the “next time,” or the next again, but he did “give in” at last, more, perhaps, to get rid of the half-breed’s importunity than because of good-will, and sold the canoe to him—on credit.

When that winter was over, the Hudson’s Bay Company again encouraged the settlers to return, under promise of protection, and the spring found the persevering people, in spite of all difficulties and previous failures, busy putting into the ground what little seed they possessed, and otherwise cultivating the soil.

Some of them there were, however, who, after lending a hand in this work, determined to provide second strings to their bows by following the

buffalo-hunters to the plains. These were chiefly the young and strong men, such as Dan Davidson and his brother Peter, Fergus McKay, Antoine Dechamp, and Jacques Bourassin, among many others.

La Certe also went, as well as his squaw and the four-year-old. He managed the thing characteristically thus.

When the half-breeds were making preparations for their spring hunt, he paid a visit to Duncan McKay, who was busy at the time helping his father and brother to rebuild their house. Indeed the edifice was almost rebuilt, for the erection of small wooden houses does not usually take long.

“You’ve come to beg, borrow, or steal, no doubt,” said Cloudbrow, who was worthy of his nickname, for he was as short of temper as Duncan senior.

No, La Certe had come to do none of these things, he said, with a conciliatory smile.

“Well, then, you can’t have come to buy or to ask advances,” growled Duncan; “for you see that our store and all we possessed has been burnt by your precious countrymen.”

La Certe knew this, and professed himself profoundly grieved as well as indignant with his countrymen. No, he did not come to buy or to borrow, but to hire. The McKays had still some horses left, and carts. Could they not spare a horse and cart to him on hire?

“No, we can do nothing of the sort,” said Duncan shortly, resuming his axe and work. “You can go to the Company. Perhaps they will trust you—though they are fools if they do.”

La Certe was regretful, but not cast down. He changed the subject, commented on the building that was going on, the prospects of a good harvest, and finally took refuge in that stale old subject, the weather. Then he said in a casual way—as if it had just occurred to him—

“By the way—that knife that my wife got from Marie Blanc—”

Young McKay stopped, and looked quickly up for a moment, with a slight

flush, but instantly resumed work.

“Well,” he said, quietly, “what about the knife?”

“Would you like to have it—my wife bade me inquire?”

“Why should *I* like to have it?” he asked carelessly.

“Oh! I thought it was yours,” said La Certe.

“You are mistaken. I said it was very like mine. But it is *not* mine—and I have no wish for what does not belong to me.”

“Of course not. Well, I must be going,” said the half-breed, preparing to leave. “I wished much to have your horse and cart, for they are both good, and I would offer you 4 pounds for the trip, which, you know, is double the usual charge, for I never grudge a good price for a good thing.”

“Yes, all the more when you hev no intention to pay it,” said McKay with a laugh. “However, since you seem so anxious, and offer so good a price, I am willing to oblige you this time, in the hope that you are really becoming an honest man!”

The half-breed was profuse in his thanks, and in his assurance that Cloudbrow’s hopes would certainly not be disappointed.

Having thus attained his chief object, our arch-beggar went off to obtain provisions. Those which had been supplied him the previous autumn by young McKay had been quite consumed by himself and his friends—for the man, you see, had a liberal heart and hand.

But his first attempts were unsuccessful. He wanted ammunition. To go to the plains without ammunition was obviously useless. He wanted food—sugar, tea, flour, pork. To go to the plains without these would be dreary work. But men knew La Certe’s character, and refused him. One after another he tried his friends. Then he tried them again. Then he tried comparative strangers. He could not try his enemies, for, strange to say, he had none. Then he went over them all again.

At last, by indomitable perseverance, he managed to wear out the patience of one of his friends, who believed in the restoration of the incorrigible, and he found himself fully equipped to take the field with his hard-working comrades.

It may be remarked here that the buffalo runners generally went on the credit system, trusting to a successful hunt to pay off their debts, and leave them supplied with food for the winter. But, then, most of these men were in earnest, and meant to pay off their debts loyally. Whereas La Certe—good, humorous, easy-going man—had not the slightest intention of paying his debts at all!

Chapter Fourteen.

Treachery in the Air.

At this time the half-breeds of the colony of Red River formed a small party compared with the numbers to which they multiplied in after years, and the band of hunters who annually went to the plains to chase the buffalo was proportionally small. Nevertheless, they were numerous enough to constitute a formidable band, capable of holding their own, when united, against any band of wandering Indians who might feel disposed to attack them. They were a brave, hardy race of men, but of course there were some black sheep among them like La Certe.

About sixty or a hundred miles from the Settlement, the party, under command of Antoine Dechamp, found the buffalo, and preparations were at once made to attack them. It was dusk, however, when the herds were discovered, so that the hunt had to be postponed to the following day.

A small clump of bushes afforded wood enough for camp-fires. The carts were ranged in a circle with the trains outward. Sentries were posted; the horses were secured; the kettles put on; pipes lighted; and noise, laughter, song and story, mingled with the shrill voices of children, were heard far on into the night.

Among the children, if we may venture so to class them, were Archie and Billie Sinclair—though we suspect that Archie would have claimed, and

with some reason, to be classed with the men. They belonged to the camp-fire, which formed a centre to the party composed of Dan and Peter, Fergus, Dechamp, and Fred Jenkins the sailor. The latter, who it was thought had come out to the country by way of a skylark rather than as a settler, had followed the hunters, bent, he said, on firing a broadside into a buffalo. He had brought with him a blunderbuss, which he averred had been used by his great-grandfather at the battle of Culloden. It was a formidable old weapon, capable of swallowing, at one gulp, several of the bullets which fitted the trading guns of the country. Its powers of scattering ordinary shot in large quantity had proved to be very effective, and had done such execution among flocks of wild-fowl, that the Indians and half-breeds, although at first inclined to laugh at it, were ultimately filled with respect.

“I doubt its capacity for sending ball straight, however,” remarked Dan to Jenkins, who was carefully cleaning out the piece, “especially if charged with more than one ball.”

“No fear of it,” returned the sailor, with a confident air. “Of course it scattered the balls about six yards apart the only time I tried it with a lot of ’em, but that was at fifty yards off, an’ they tell me that you a’most ram the muzzle against the brutes’ sides when chasin’ buffalo. So there’s no room to scatter, d’ee see, till they get inside their bodies, and when there it don’t matter how much they scatter.”

“It’s well named a young cannon by La Certe,” said Peter Davidson, who, like the seaman, was out on his first buffalo-hunt. “I never heard such a roar as it gave that time you brought down ten out of one flock of ducks on the way up here.”

“Ay, Peter, she barked well that time,” remarked the sailor, with a grin, “but, then there was a reason. I had double-shotted her by mistake.”

“An’ ye did it too without an aim, for you had both eyes tight shut at the time,” remarked Fergus. “Iss that the way they teach ye to shoot at sea?”

“In course it is,” replied Jenkins, gravely. “That’s the beauty o’ the blunderbuss. There’s no chance o’ missin’, so what ’ud be the use o’ keepin’ yer eyes open, excep’ to get ’em filled wi’ smoke. You’ve on’y got

to point straight, an’ blaze away.”

“I did not know that you use the blunderbuss in your ships at all,” said Dechamp, with a look of assumed simplicity.

“Ho yes, they do,” said Jenkins, squinting down the bell-mouthed barrel, as if to see that the touch-hole was clear. “Aboard o’ one man-o’-war that I sailed in after pirates in the China seas, we had a blunderbuss company. The first-leftenant, who was thought to be queer in his head, he got it up.

“The first time the company was ranged along the deck he gave the order to load with ball cartridges. There was twenty-six of us, all told.

“‘We’ve got no cartridges for ’em, sir,’ whispered the man nearest him.

“‘If you don’t obey orders,’ growled the leftenant ’tween his teeth, ‘I’ll have ye strung up for mutiny every man Jack of you—*load*!’ he repeated in a kind of a yell.

“We had our or’nary belts and pouches on, so we out wi’ the or’nary cartridges—some three, some four,—an’, biting off the ends, poured in the powder somehow, shoved in the balls anyhow, an’ rammed the whole consarn down.

“‘Present—fire!’ roared the leftenant.

“Bang! went the six an’ twenty blunderbusses, an’ when the smoke cleared away there was fourteen out o’ the twenty-six men flat on their backs. The rest o’ us was raither stunned, but hearty.

“‘Take these men below,’ cried the leftenant, ‘an’ send fourteen strong men here. We don’t want weaklings for *this* company.’

“After that we loaded in moderation, an’ got on better.”

“And the pirates—what did *they* think o’ the new weapon?” asked Peter Davidson, with an amused expression.

“O! they couldn’t stand it at all,” answered the sailor, looking up from his

work, with a solemnity that was quite impressive. “They stood fire only once. After that they sheered off like wild-cats. I say, Mistress La Certe, how long is that lobscouse—or whatever you call it,—goin’ to be in cookin’?” Slowfoot gave vent to a sweet, low giggle, as she lifted the kettle off the hook, and thus gave a practical answer to the question. She placed before him the robbiboo, or pemmican, soup, which the seaman had so grievously misnamed.

During the time that the hunters were appeasing their appetites, it was observed that Antoine Dechamp, the leader of the expedition, was unusually silent and thoughtful, and that he betrayed a slight look of anxiety. It therefore did not surprise Dan Davidson, when the supper was nearly ended, that Dechamp should rise and leave the fire after giving him a look which was a silent but obvious invitation to follow.

Dan obeyed at once, and his leader, conducting him between the various camp-fires, led him outside the circle of carts.

A clear moon lit up the prairie all round, so that they could see its undulating sweep in every direction.

“Anything wrong, Antoine?” asked Dan in a low voice, when they were out of earshot of the camp.

“Nothing wrong, Dan.”

“Surely,” continued the other, while Dechamp paused as if in perplexity, “surely there can be no chance of Red-skins troubling us on a clear night like this. I can distinguish every bush for miles around.”

“There is no fear o’ Red-skins. No, I am not troubled about them. It is matters concerning yourself that trouble me.”

“How’s that? What do you mean, Antoine?”

“Is your brother-in-law-to-be, Duncan McKay, coming to join us this spring?” asked Dechamp.

“I believe he is—after he has helped his father a bit longer wi’ the farm. Why do you ask?”

“Well, to say truth, I can’t give you a very good reason for my bein’ anxious. Only I can’t help havin’ my ears open, and I’ve heard some talk among the lads that makes me fear for the young man. They say, or hint, that he knows more about the murder o’ poor Perrin than he chooses to tell. I’ve not been quite able to find out what makes them suspect him, but they do suspect him, an’ it would be well to warn him not to come here, for you know there are many opportunities to commit murder on a buffalo-hunt!”

The incident of the knife, and of Duncan McKay’s significant glance, at once flashed across Davidson’s mind, and he felt a terrible sinking of the heart when the suspicion, once before roused within him, seemed now to be confirmed. He resolved, however, to reveal his thoughts to no one—specially not to Elspie.

“I think it a shame,” he said, “that men should allow such rumours to circulate, when nothing certain has arisen to rouse suspicion. That affair of the knife was clearly explained when young McKay declared that it was not his, though it looked like it. If he knew anything about the murder, would he not have been certain to have told us long ago? And, surely, you cannot suppose that Duncan killed Perrin with his own hand? Speak, Dechamp! Why do you shake your head?”

“I know nothing,” returned the leader. “What right have I to suppose anything? I only know that men’s deeds are often mysterious and unaccountable, and that our men have strong suspicion. For myself, I have no opinion. Duncan McKay is probably innocent, for he and Perrin were not enemies. I hope he is so, but I advise you to stop his coming to the camp just now if you can. His life may depend on it.”

“I cannot stop him,” returned Dan, with a perplexed look. “He is headstrong, as you know, and if he has made up his mind to come, nothing will stop him.”

“Perhaps if he knew his life would be in danger—that might stop him.”

“I doubt it; but I will give him the chance. I will ride back to Red River without delay, and warn him.”

“Good. When will you start?”

“To-night. The moon is clear and will not set till morning. I shall be well on my way by that time.”

“Will you ride alone?”

“No, there may be bad Indians about. I will ask Okématan or Fergus McKay to ride with me. Why did you not speak to Fergus instead of to me?”

“Because he has not been spoken to by any one,” answered Dechamp; “and I would not be the first to put suspicion into his head about his own brother. Besides, your head is clearer; and your interest in Duncan, for Elspie’s sake, is greater than his, no doubt.”

“Well, you may be right, Antoine. At all events if I take Fergus with me I shall send him back before reaching the Settlement, and say nothing whatever about my reason for going there. ‘Pressing business,’ you know, will be sufficient.”

“I’m not so sure of that,” returned Dechamp with a laugh. “Men are apt to want to know the nature of ‘pressing business.’ However, it may be as well to take Fergus. At any rate you cannot have Okématan, for he is not in camp, he left soon after we pitched, and I know has not yet returned.”

“It matters not. Fergus will do better. He is more companionable.”

Returning to camp, Dan Davidson made the proposal to Fergus McKay. That worthy was, as he said, ready for anything, and the two were soon mounted. They were also well armed, for the risk of meeting a party of hostile Indians was not altogether out of the question, though improbable. Each horseman carried his blanket and provision wallet, his gun, a long knife almost equal to an ancient Roman sword, and a cavalry pistol—revolvers not having been invented at that time: at least they had not come into general use. Thus provided for all contingencies, they set forth.

As we have said, the night was clear and fine, so that the plains were open to view in all directions, save where a few scattered clumps of willows and small trees grew like islets in the ocean.

“It iss this that I like better than farming,” said Fergus, as the fresh horses

carried them swiftly and lightly over the prairie waves, and down into the grassy hollows, now swerving to avoid a badger-hole, or clearing a small shrub with a little bound. “I do think that man wass intended to live in the wilderness, an’ not to coop himself up in the cities like rabbits in their holes.”

“Why, Fergus, you should have been born a savage,” said Dan.

“Ay, it iss savitch I am that I wass not born a savitch,” returned Fergus with a grim smile. “What in all the world iss the use of ceevilisation if it will not make people happy? A man wants nothing more than a goot supper an’ a goot bed, an’ a goot shelter over him, an’ it is a not five hunderd pound a year that we will want to buy that—whatever.”

“But surely man wants a little more than that, Fergus. He wants breakfast and dinner usually, as well as supper, and a few comforts besides, such as tea and sugar—at least the women do—besides pipes an’ baccy—to say nothing of books.”

“Oo ay, I will not be denyin’ that. But we’ve no need for wan half the luxuries o’ ceevilisation. An’ ye know ferry weel, Tan, that my sister Elspie would be content to live wi’ you in a ferry small hoose, and the bare necessaries of life, but here you are forced to put off the merritch because our hooses wass burnt, and you are obleeged to wait till you get a sort o’ palace built, I suppose, and a grand farm set a-goin’.”

“Indeed, Fergus, you touch me on a sore point there, but with all your scorn of luxury, I’m sure you’d be the last man to let his sister marry a fellow who could take her only to a hut or a wigwam.”

“You are right, Tan. Yet I hev spent many a comfortable night in a hut an’ a wigwam since I came to Red River. I wish the place wass more peaceable.”

“It will never be more peaceable as long as there are two rival companies fighting for the furs,” said Davidson; “but there’s worse than that goin’ on, for some of the Indians, it seems, are mad at the agreement made between them and Lord Selkirk.”

“Wow! that iss a peety. Where heard ye that?”

“I heard it from La Certe, whose wife Slowfoot, you know, is a Cree Indian. It seems that the Crees have always claimed Red River as their lands; but when Lord Selkirk came to make a treaty with the natives he found some Saulteaux livin’ on the soil, an’ his lordship, in ignorance, gave them an interest in the treaty, though they were mere visitors—an’ indeed don’t even claim to be owners of the soil—their lands lying far to the east of Red River.”

“Well,” continued Dan, guiding his horse carefully down the next hollow, for the moon had gone behind a cloud just then, “when the Crees found out what had been done, they were naturally very angry—an’ I don’t wonder—an’ they threaten now to expel the Saulteaux from Red River altogether, an’ the white men along wi’ them, unless the names of the Saulteaux chiefs are wiped out o’ the contract, an’ the annual payment made to the Crees alone.”

“That iss bad, Taniel, ferry bad,” said Fergus, as they reached the bottom of the hollow and began to ascend the succeeding undulation, “an’ I am all the more sorry to hear it because our goot frund Okématan is a Cree.”

“Ay, Fergus, he is a great chief of the Crees, and a man of considerable influence among his people. I should not like to have him for an enemy.”

“Stop!” said Fergus in a whisper at that moment, laying his hand on Davidson’s arm.

Dan drew rein at once and looked at his friend, but could not clearly see his face, for the moon was still behind thick drifting clouds.

They had just risen high enough on the prairie wave, which they had been ascending, to be able to see over it, and Dan could perceive by the outstretched neck of his companion that he was gazing intently at something directly in front.

“What do you see, Fergus?” he asked in a low voice.

“Do you see nothin’, Taniel?” was the Highlander’s reply.

“Why, yes. I see the plains stretching away to the horizon—an’ dark enough they are, too, at this moment. I also see a few small clumps that

look like bushes here an' there."

"Don't you see the clump that's nearest to you—right foment your nose?" said the other.

"Of course I do," and he stopped abruptly, for at that moment he saw a spark in the clump referred to—a spark so small that it might have been taken for a glow-worm, had such a creature existed there.

"Savitches!" whispered the Highlander. "Let's get into the hollow as fast as we can."

This retrograde movement was soon effected, and the friends dismounted.

"Now, Fergus, what's the best thing to be done?"

"I will be leavin' that to you, Taniel, for you've a clearer head than mine."

"We dare not ride forward," said Dan, as if communing with himself, "an' it would be foolish to make a long détour to escape from something until we know there is something worth escaping from. My notion is that we hobble or picket our horses here, and go cautiously forward on foot to see what it is."

"You'll be doin' what ye think best, Captain Taniel, an' you will find that private Fergus will back you up—whatever."

This being settled, the two men picketed their steeds in the hollow, fastened their guns to the saddles, as being too cumbrous for a creeping advance, and, armed only with their long knives and pistols, reascended the prairie wave. With feet clothed in soft moccasin, and practised by that time in the art of stealthy tread, they moved towards the summit noiseless as ghosts.

On gaining the ridge they sank slowly down into the tall grass and disappeared.

After a prolonged and somewhat painful creep on hands and knees the two men reached the edge of the clump of bushes already referred to.

Before reaching it they discovered, from the sound of voices, that a party of some kind was encamped there; but, of course, as they knew not who, it became needful to proceed with extreme caution. When they gained the edge of the clump, and raised their heads over a low bush-covered bank, they beheld a sight which was not calculated to cheer them, for there, in the centre of the bush, encircling a very small fire, sat a war-party of about fifty painted and befeathered braves of the Cree Indians. They were engaged in council at the moment.

A creeping sensation about their scalps was experienced by the two eavesdroppers on observing that they had passed not a hundred yards from a sentinel who occupied a low knoll on their left.

Neither Dan nor Fergus dared to speak—not even to whisper. Still less did they dare to move; for a few moments after they reached the bank just referred to, the moon came out from behind the clouds and flooded the whole scene as with the light of day.

There was nothing left for it, therefore, except to lie still and listen. But this gave them small comfort; for, although quite within earshot of the war-party, the language spoken was utterly unintelligible to either of them.

Their eyes, however, were not so useless as their ears, for they could clearly see each warrior as he rose to harangue his comrades, and, from the vindictive expression of their faces as well as their frequent pointing in the direction of the buffalo-hunters it was abundantly evident that an attack upon them was being discussed.

At last, after many braves had spoken, a chief of tall and noble mien arose. His back was towards the two spies, but the moment they heard his voice they turned their heads and gazed at each other in speechless amazement, for the voice was quite familiar.

No word did they dare to utter, but Fergus made formations with his lips of a most extravagant nature, which, however, clearly spelt “Okématan.” When he had finished, he nodded and turned his gaze again on the Crees.

Both men now understood that treachery was in the wind, and that a

night attack was highly probable; and, of course, they felt desperately anxious to jump up and fly back to the camp to warn their comrades—for their only fear was a surprise. The half-breeds being far more numerous than the Indians, and well entrenched, there could be no fear for them if prepared.

Just then, as if to favour them, the moon retired behind a huge black cloud.

Without a moment's hesitation Dan began to creep away back, closely followed by Fergus. They gave a wide berth of course to the sentinel, and soon regained the hollow where the horses had been left. Here they breathed more freely.

"Who would have thought this of Okématan?" muttered Dan, as he hastily tightened his saddle-girths.

"The *rascal*!" exclaimed Fergus, in deep tones of indignation.

"You must gallop back to camp at once, Fergus," said Dan, as they mounted. "I will go on to Red River alone."

"What! will you not be coming with me?" asked the Highlander, in some surprise.

"There is no need, for there will be no fighting," returned the other. "Our fellows far outnumber the Red-skins, and when the latter find that we have been warned, and are on our guard, they won't attack us, depend on it. But you'll have to ride fast, for when such fellows make up their minds to strike they don't usually waste time in delivering the blow. My business presses, I *must* go on."

A minute later, and Dan Davidson was galloping towards the Settlement alone, while Fergus made the best of his way back to the camp of the buffalo runners.

Chapter Fifteen.

A Friend in Need is a Friend indeed.

Whether or not Okématan was as thorough a rascal as Fergus McKay thought him will be best shown by harking back, and setting down a little of what was said by some of the Cree braves at the time that Fergus and Dan were eavesdropping.

Standing in a dignified attitude worthy of an ancient Roman, with his blanket thrown toga-fashion over one shoulder, one of the braves looked round on the warrior band with a dark scowl before he began. His comrades were evidently impressed by his looks. Whether owing to a freak of fancy, a spice of eccentricity, or simple vanity, we know not, but this brave had, among other ornamental touches to his visage, painted his nose bright red. The effect on his brother braves was solemnising. It was not so impressive to his white observers, as it suggested to them the civilised toper.

“The great white chief,” began Rednose, with a slow deliberation that was meant to convey a settled and unalterable conviction, “is a fool!”

“Waugh!” exclaimed the audience with emphasis, for the language was strong, and uttered with intense vigour, and that quite accorded with their tastes, so they agreed with the sentiment without regard to its signification. This species of rhetoric, and its effects, are sometimes observed in connection with civilised gatherings.

The great white chief thus irreverently referred to, we regret to say, was Lord Selkirk.

“The great white chief,” continued Rednose, availing himself of the force of emphatic repetition, “is a fool! He is a child! He knows nothing! He comes across the great salt lake from the rising sun, with the air and aspect of an owl, thinking to teach us—the great Cree nation—wisdom!”

“Waugh!” from the audience, one of whom, having a cold in his head, sneezed inadvertently, and was scowled at by the orator for full two minutes in absolute silence. If that Cree warrior—he was on his first war-path—possessed anything akin to the feelings of the Paleface he must have suffered martyrdom.

“Every one knows,” continued the orator, resuming, “that the Crees are wise. They can tell a fox from a buffalo. They understand the difference between fire and water. No Paleface sage needs to come from the rising sun to tell them to eat when they are hungry—to drink when they are dry. But this Paleface chief comes with the eyes of the great northern owl, and says he comes to do us good. And how does he begin to do us good?”

Here there was a very decided “Waugh!” as though to say, “Ay, that’s the question,” and then a solemn pause for more—during which the man with the cold drew the reins very tight.

“How does he begin to do us good?” proceeded the orator. “By entering into an agreement with *us* for the use of *our* lands—and asking our enemies the Saulteaux to take part in that agreement!”

The sounds of indignation and ferocity that followed this statement are not translatable. After a gaze of unutterable meaning round the circle Rednose went on—

“This, *this* is the way in which the owl-eyed chief of the Palefaces begins to do us good! If this is the way he begins, in what way will he continue, and,”—here his voice deepened to a whisper—“*how will he end*?”

The ideas suggested by his question were so appalling that for some minutes the orator appeared unable to find words to go on, and his audience glared at him in dread anticipation, as though they expected him to explode like a bomb-shell, but were prepared to sit it out and take the consequences. And he did explode, after a fashion, for he suddenly raised his voice to a shout that startled even the sentinel on the distant knoll, and said—

“I counsel war to the knife! The great white chief—the owl-eyed fool!—will not blot from our agreement the names of the Saulteaux chiefs—chiefs! there are no Saulteaux chiefs. All their braves are cowards, on the same dead level of stupidity, and their women are—are nothing, fit for nothing, can do nothing, and must soon come to nothing! What then? The duty of Cree warriors lies before us. We will drive the Saulteaux into Lake Winnipeg and the Palefaces off the face of the earth altogether! Waugh!”

Having thus given vent to the opinions and feelings that consumed him, Rednose sat down, his audience breathed freely, the distant sentinel recovered his composure, and the young novitiate brave with the cold in his head sneezed with impunity.

It would be tedious to recount all that was said at that council of war. The next brave that rose to “address the house” very much resembled the first speaker, both in sentiment and personal appearance, except that he had chosen sky-blue for his nose instead of red. The only additional matter that he contributed worth noting was the advice that they should begin their bloody work by an immediate attack, in the dead of night, on the camp of the buffalo runners.

This advice was hailed with a good many “Waughs,” as well as approving nods and looks, and it seemed as if the plan were about to be carried into action without delay, when, as we have seen, Okématan arose to address the assemblage.

Okématan was a great chief—much greater in the estimation of his tribe than the whites with whom he had been associating in Red River were aware of. He had purposely reserved his address till near the conclusion.

“The Cree warriors,” he said, with an air of quiet dignity that was far more effective than the more energetic tones and gestures of the previous speakers, “know very well that the Cree nation considers itself the wisest in creation. Far be it from Okématan to say otherwise, for he does not know. Okématan is a child! His eyes are only beginning to open!”

He paused at this point, and looked round with solemn dignity; and the braves, unaccustomed to such self-depreciative modes of address, gazed at him with equal solemnity, not unmingled with surprise, though the latter feeling was carefully concealed.

“When the last great palaver of the Cree braves was held on the Blue-Pine Ridge,” continued Okématan, “the chiefs chose me to go to Red River, and learn all that I could find out about the Palefaces and their intentions. I went, as you know. I attached myself to a family named Daa-veed-sin, and I have found out—found out much about the Palefaces—much more that I did not know before, though I *am* a chief of the Cree

nation."

Okématan looked pointedly at Rednose as he said this. After a brief pause he continued—

"The great white chief," (meaning Lord Selkirk), "is *not* a fool. It is true that he is not a god; he is a man and a Paleface, subject to the follies and weaknesses of the Palefaces, and not quite so wise as it is possible to be, but he is a good man, and wishes well to the Indian. I have found weaknesses among the Palefaces. One of them is that their chiefs plan—sometimes wisely, sometimes foolishly—but they leave the carrying out of their plans to other men, and sometimes these other men care for nobody but themselves. They tell lies, they mislead the great white chief, and tell him to do what is wrong.

"So it was when our agreement came to be made. The great white chief found, when he came to Red River, a few families of Saulteaux whom we had permitted to hunt on our lands. He thought the land belonged to the Saulteaux as well as to the Crees. He was mistaken, ignorant; he knew no better, and the Palefaces who did know, did not put light into him; so the names of Saulteaux chiefs were put in the writing. Then the great white chief went away across the great salt lake to the lands of the rising sun, leaving his small chiefs to carry out his plans. Some of these are *very* small chiefs, unfit to carry out any plans. Others are bad small chiefs, that will carry out only such plans as are sure to benefit themselves. It is these men with whom we have to deal. It is these who deserve to be swept off the face of the earth."

A number of emphatic nods and "waughs" at this point showed that Okématan had at last touched a key-note with which his braves could shout in harmony.

"But," resumed the chief impressively, "we cannot sweep them off the earth; we cannot even sweep them off the banks of Red River. We might easily sweep the Saulteaux into Lake Winnipeg if we thought it worth while to try, but the Palefaces—never! Okématan has travelled far to the south and seen the Palefaces there. They cannot be counted. They swarm like our locusts; they darken the earth as our buffaloes darken the plains. They live in stone wigwams. I have seen one of their wigwams

that was big enough to hold all the Crees' wigwams bundled together. If we killed or scalped all the Palefaces in Red River the great white chief would come over the great salt lake with an army that would swallow us up as the buffalo swallows up a tuft of grass.

"Besides," continued Okématan, with a slight touch of pathos in his tone, "there are good and bad men among the Palefaces, just as there are good and bad among ourselves. I have dwelt for many moons with a tribe called Scosh-min. Okématan loves the Scosh-min. They speak a wonderful language, and some of them are too fond of fire-water; but their braves fear nothing, and their squaws are pretty and work hard—almost as hard as our squaws—though they are not quite as good-looking as ours. They are too white—their faces are like buffalo fat!"

A "Waugh," which might be translated "Hear, hear," greeted this statement of opinion.

"Now," continued our chief, "if we swept away all the people of Red River, we would sweep away the good Scosh-min, which would be foolish, and we would gain nothing in the end, but would bring worse trouble on our heads. My counsel, therefore, is for peace. I advise that we should let the buffalo runners and the people of Red River alone; send a message with our grievances to the great white chief; ask him to come back over the great salt lake to put things right, and, in the meantime, wait with patience; attend to our own business; hunt, fish, eat, drink, sleep, and be happy."

Having delivered his harangue, Okématan sat down amid murmurs of mingled applause and disapprobation. It was evident that he had created a serious division of opinion in the camp, and it seemed as if on the impression made by the next speaker would depend the great question of peace or war.

Presently an old warrior arose, and a profound silence followed, for they held him in great respect.

"My braves," said the old man sententiously, "I have lived long, and my fighting days are nearly over. If wisdom has not accumulated on my head it must be my own fault, for I have had great experience both of war and

peace—more of war, perhaps, than of peace. And the opinion that I have come to after long and very deep consideration is this: if there is something to fight for, fight—fight well; if there is nothing to fight for, don't fight—don't fight at all."

The old man paused, and there were some "Waughs" of approval, for the truth contained in his profound conclusion was obvious even to the stupidest Red-skin of the band—supposing that a stupid brave among Crees were possible!

"I have also lived to see," continued the old man, "that revenge is nothing—nothing at all, and therefore not worth fighting for."

As this was flying straight in the face of the most cherished of Red-skins' beliefs, it was received in dead though respectful silence.

"My young braves do not believe this. I know it. I have been young myself, and I remember well how pleasant revenge was to me, but I soon found that the pleasure of revenge did not last. It soon passed away, yet the deed of revenge did not pass away, and sometimes the deed became to my memory very bitter—insomuch that the pleasantness was entirely swallowed up and forgotten in the bitterness. My young braves will not believe this, I know. They go on feeling; they think on feeling; they reason on feeling; they trust to feeling. It is foolish, for the brain was given to enable man to think and judge and plan. You are as foolish as if you were to try to smell with your mouth and eat with your nose. But it is the way of youth. When experience teaches, then you will come to know that revenge is not worth fighting for—its pleasantness will pass away, but the bitter it leaves behind will never pass away.

"What is the meaning of revenge?" continued this analytical old savage. "What is the use of it? Does it not mean that we give up all hope of getting what we want, and wildly determine to get what pleasure is still possible to us by killing those who have thwarted us? And when you have killed and got all the pleasure there is, what does it come to? Your enemy is dead, and scalped. What then? He does not know that he is dead. He does not care that he is dead and scalped. You cannot keep him alive for ever killing and scalping him. But you have made his wife and children miserable. What of that? It was not his wife and children

who opposed you, therefore you have revenged yourself on the wrong persons. He does not know that you have rendered his wife and children miserable, and does not care; therefore, I ask, why are you pleased? If your enemy was a good man, your revenge has only done him a kindness, for it has sent him to the happy hunting grounds before his time, where you will probably never meet him to have the pleasure of being revenged on him there. If he was a bad man, you have sent him to the world of Desolation, where he will be waiting to receive you when you get there, and where revenge will be impossible, for men are not allowed to kill or scalp there. At least if they are I never heard of it—and I am an old man now.

“There is nothing, then, to fight for with the Palefaces of Red River, and my counsel is, like that of Okématan, that we should decide on peace—not war.”

Whatever may have been the private opinion of the braves as to this new and very unexpected style of address, the effect of it was pacific; for, after a little more palaver, the peace-party carried the day—or, rather the night—and, next morning, the Cree warriors went back to their tents and hunting avocations, leaving Okématan to return to the camp of his friends the buffalo runners.

Chapter Sixteen.

An Evening in the Camp.

It was daybreak when Fergus McKay galloped into camp with the startling news that an attack by hostile Indians might be expected that day or the following night. He was, of course, unaware of the fact that the peace-making Okématan had been unwittingly following his tracks at a more leisurely pace.

Some readers may think that the Indian, with his traditional power of following a trail, should have observed and suspected the fresh track of the hunter, but it must be remembered that some hundreds of buffalo runners had passed over the same track a day or two previously, and that

Hawkeye, or Pathfinder himself, would have become helpless in the midst of such trampled confusion. Besides, Okématan had no reason to suspect that he had been followed; still less that the camp of the war-party had been accidentally discovered.

“Now, boys,” said Fergus, after detailing his adventures during the night, “we will hev to give up all notion o’ buffalo runnin’ this day an’ putt the camp in a state o’ defence.”

There was a good deal of grumbling at this, especially among some of the younger men; for they were very keen to commence the sport, and had not much belief in the power of a small band of savages to do them harm. Some of them even suggested that half of their number should remain behind to guard the camp while the other half should go after the buffalo. This proposal, however, was not received with favour, as it would certainly be a matter of disagreement which half was to go out, and which to remain behind!

“Where is Kateegoose?” asked Dechamp at this crisis.

“Stuffin’ ’imself, of course!” said Fred Jenkins, amid a general laugh. “I’ve noticed, since we set sail on this trip, that Kateegoose always turns out at daybreak, lights the galley fire, an’ begins the dooties o’ the day by stuffin’ ’imself.”

“Ay, and I’ve noticed,” observed one of the young hunters, “that it takes a deal o’ stuffin’ to fill him out properly, for he keeps on at it most part o’ the day.”

“Except,” remarked another, “when he stops to smoke what o’ the stuffin’ has been already shoved down.”

“Moreover,” added the seaman, “I’ve noticed that François La Certe always keeps ’im company. He’s a sympathetic sort o’ man is François, fond o’ helpin’ his mates—specially when they’re eatin’ an’ smokin’.”

At this moment Kateegoose, having been called, came forward. He was an ill-favoured savage, with various expressions on his ugly visage which were not so much Nature’s gifts as the result of his own evil passions. Jealousy was one of them, and he had often turned a green eye on

Okématan. There were indications about his mouth and fingers, as he came forward, that justified the commentaries on his habits, and betrayed recent acquaintance with fat pork.

“You hear the reports that have just been brought in?” said Dechamp.

“Kateegoose hears,” was the laconic answer.

“Kateegoose is a Cree,” continued Dechamp; “he knows the spirit that dwells in the hearts of his tribe. What does he think?”

“The thoughts of the Indian are many and deep. He has for many moons watched the behaviour of Okématan, and he has long suspected that the heart of the serpent dwells in the breast of that chief. Now he is sure.”

“But what about your people?” demanded the camp-chief. “They are not at war with us. Are they all villains because one among them turns out to be bad?”

Kateegoose drew himself up with a look of dignity, and pouted his greasy lips as he replied—

“The Crees have always been a brave and true and upright people. They never attack friends until, by their conduct, these friends have become enemies. But the Crees are human. They are not perfect—neither are the Palefaces. There are bad men among them—a few; not many—as well as young men and foolish. Sometimes, when on the war-path, a clever bad man can reason with them till he blinds them, and they are ready to do wrong. It may be so now. Okématan is clever. Kateegoose does not know what to advise.”

“Kateegoose was not asked to advise,” returned Dechamp sternly. “He may return to his tent.”

Thus summarily dismissed, this hanger-on or camp-follower returned to his pork and pipe with a feeling that somehow he had failed to make the exact impression on the leader that he desired. La Certe, however, consoled him, and helped him to continue the duties of the day.

“Come with me, McKay,” said Dechamp, after giving all needful directions

regarding the safety of the camp. “I don’t believe that rascal Kateegoose. He’s a greedy idler, something like La Certe, but by no means so harmless or good-natured. Moreover, I find it hard to believe that Okématan has turned traitor.”

“I agree with you,” said Fergus. “It iss ferry hard to believe that a man who has been so long among us, and got such a good character, should suddenly turn against us—an’ that, too, without provocation. But what will you be sayin’ to what Taniel and myself has seen with our two eyes?”

“It looks bad, I confess,” answered Dechamp, as they paced to and fro in a retired part of the camp; “but you must remember that your two eyes are not your two ears, and that you heard nothing that you could understand.”

“Fery true, Dechamp. But the language of the eye is sometimes as clear and understandable as the language of the ear. No wan could mistake the meanin’ o’ some o’ the warriors when they scowled an’ pointed in the direction of our camp here, an’ gripped the handles o’ their scalpin’ knives and tomahawks. Moreover, Okématan also pointed in the same direction, though I am bound to say he did not grip his knife. Whether he scowled or not I do not know, for he was standin’ wi’ his back to us.”

“Well, I cannot tell. I’m not willin’ to believe Okématan a traitor; but what you have seen is enough to make me put the camp in defence instead of startin’ out to hunt—”

At that moment the sharp click of a gun was heard as a neighbouring sentry put his piece on full cock.

Dechamp and Fergus hastened towards him.

“Have a care, André; don’t be too quick with your gun,” said the former. “I see only one man coming. He can do us no harm.”

As the approaching figure drew near, it was seen to be that of an Indian on horseback. He rode carelessly at a jog-trot.

“It looks like Okématan!” said Dechamp, glancing at his companion in surprise.

“It iss Okématan,” returned Fergus.

Before another word could be spoken, a shot was heard in the camp, and horse and man were seen to roll upon the ground. The latter rose immediately, but the horse lay stiff—evidently shot dead. For a few seconds profound silence followed the incident, as if men were too much taken by surprise to think and act. Then, when the dismounted Indian was seen to walk leisurely, as if unhurt, towards them, there was a hubbub in the camp, while men, women, and boys ran towards the spot whence the shot seemed to have been fired, but no one was to be found there. Only a very faint puff of smoke overhead told where the marksman had stood. It had been a well-chosen spot, where a low bush or two mingled with several carts that had been rather carelessly drawn up, and several horses had been picketed together. These had afforded concealment enough for at least a few moments.

The tent of La Certe was not far from this corner. At the time the shot was heard, the self-indulgent half-breed was inside, recumbent on his back in the enjoyment of a pipe.

“That’s odd,” he said to Slowfoot, who was seated opposite to her lord scraping the remnants of something out of a tin kettle with the point of a scalping-knife. “Somebody’s gun gone off by accident, I suppose. I hear some one at our fire. Look out, Slowfoot, and ask what has happened.”

Slowfoot finished the scraping of the kettle before obeying; then lifted the curtain that closed the opening of their tent, and peeped out.

“It is Kateegoose—loading his gun, I think.”

La Certe got up, with a sigh of regret at the necessity for exertion, and, lifting the curtain-door, stepped out.

“What are they firing at, Kateegoose?”

The Indian did not know. Some one, he thought, might have let off his gun by accident. He thought it wise, however, to be ready, and had just sent the ramrod down the barrel of his gun to make sure that it was loaded with ball. To make still surer that all was ready, the Indian shook the priming out of the pan of his gun, wiped it, and re-primed. Then he

laid the weapon down by his side, and resumed the pipe which he had apparently laid down to enable him to perform these operations more conveniently, and, at the same time, with more safety.

At that moment Dechamp walked smartly towards the fire in front of La Certe's tent.

"Does Kateegoose know who fired that shot?" he asked with a keen glance, for his suspicions had been aroused.

"Some one over there," answered the Indian languidly, as he pointed in the right direction.

"It does not need a medicine-man to tell me that," said Dechamp, sternly. "I heard the shot, and saw the smoke. Have you any idea who fired it, La Certe?"

"I have not," replied the half-breed. "I was lying in my tent when I heard it. Kateegoose was smoking beside the fire. We both thought it was an accident, or some one trying his gun, till we heard the shouting and running. Then I jumped up, seized my gun, and sprang out to see what it was all about. I found Kateegoose equally on the *qui vive*. He was shoving his ramrod down to make sure his gun was loaded when you came up. What is it all about?"

"Only that the horse of Okématan has been shot under him by some one, and that there is a would-be murderer in the camp."

"Okématan! Has the traitor ventured to return?" exclaimed Kateegoose, with an expression of surprise that was very unusual in an Indian.

"Ay, he has ventured," responded Dechamp, "and some one has ventured to fire at him with intent to kill. By good luck he was a bad shot. He missed the man, though he hit and killed the horse. But I shall find the rascal out before long—he may depend on that!"

So saying, the commandant left the spot.

"Do you know anything about this?" asked La Certe, turning full on the Indian.

“Kateegoose is not a medicine-man. He cannot be in two places at once. He knows nothing.”

For a sly man La Certe was wonderfully credulous. He believed the Indian, and, returning to his tent, lay down again to finish the interrupted pipe.

“Kateegoose was trying his gun to see if it was loaded,” he said to his better half.

“That’s a lie,” returned Slowfoot, with that straightforward simplicity of diction for which she was famous.

“Indeed! What, then, was he doing, my Slowfoot?”

“He was *loading* his gun—not trying it.”

“Are you sure?”

“Am I sure that our little child loves tobacco?”

“Well, I suppose you are. At any rate, the child often asks you for a pipe, and gets it too. Hm! if Kateegoose fired that shot he must be a bad man. But our chief is sure to find it out—and—it is no business of mine. Fetch me the tobacco, Slowfoot.”

That same morning, Archie Sinclair was seated beside his brother, Little Bill, in the tent that was shared by Fred Jenkins and several young half-breeds. He was alone with his brother, Jenkins having gone out with the blunderbuss to assist, if need be, in the defence of the camp. He was manufacturing a small bow for his brother to amuse himself with while he should be away “seein’ the fun,” as he said, with the hunters. The instant the sailor left, however, he looked at Billie mysteriously and said, in a low voice—

“Little Bill, although you’re not good for much with your poor little body, you’ve got a splendid headpiece, and are amazing at giving advice. I want advice just now very bad. You’ve heard what they’ve all been saying about this shot that was fired at Okématan, and some o’ the men say they think it must have been Kateegoose that did it. Now, Billie, I am *sure*

that it was Kateegoose that did it."

"Oh!" exclaimed Little Bill, making his eyes and mouth into three round O's. "How d'ye know that? Did you see him do it?"

"No—it's that that bothers me. If I had seen him do it I would have gone straight and told Dechamp, but I didn't quite see him, you see. I was in Lamartine's cart at the time, rummagin' about for a piece o' wood to make this very bow, an' the moment I heard the shot I peeped out, an' saw—nothing!"

"That wasn't much," remarked Little Bill, innocently.

"Ay, but I soon saw something," continued Archie, with increasing solemnity; "I saw Kateegoose coming slinking round among the carts, as if he wanted not to be seen. I saw him only for a moment—gliding past like a ghost."

"It's a serious thing," said Little Bill, musing gravely, "to charge a man with tryin' to kill another man, if that's all you've got to tell, for you know it's a way the Red-skins have of always glidin' about as if they was for ever after mischief."

"But that's not all, Little Bill," returned his brother, "for I'm almost certain that I saw a little smoke comin' out o' the muzzle of his gun as he passed—though I couldn't exactly swear to it."

Archie had overrated his brother's powers in the way of advice, for, although they talked the matter over for some time, they failed to arrive at any satisfactory conclusion.

Meanwhile Okématan, having entered the camp, was met by Dechamp, and led by him to a retired part.

"You have an enemy here, Okématan," he said, inquiringly.

"It would seem so," returned the Indian gravely. "Friends do not shoot each other's horses; and if the poor horse had not tossed his head when the shot was fired, his rider would have bit the dust."

“I fear it looks something like that,” said Dechamp; “but I hope Okématan believes that *I* know nothing of the matter—nor can I tell who the cowardly villain is that did it.”

“Okématan knows that,” answered the Indian, sternly. “No half-breed fired the shot.”

“There is no Indian in the camp but Kateegoose,” rejoined the other, quickly; “surely you don’t think that a man of your own tribe would try to kill you?”

“I know not. Kateegoose hates me. No other man in the camp hates me.”

“It is strange—unaccountable,” returned Dechamp. “If the Indian did it, he shall forfeit his horse and leave the camp. But tell me,”—here the half-breed commandant turned a searching gaze on his companion, “why did Okématan leave us, and spend all night alone on the prairie? Did he spend the night in conversation with the buffalo—or in the company of his departed forefathers?”

No sign of surprise, or of any other emotion, was visible on the countenance of the Red-man as he replied: “Okématan went out to meet a party of his tribe on the war-path.”

Dechamp was not so successful in concealing his own surprise at this answer.

“Does the Cree chief,” he asked, with something of doubt in his tone and look, “choose the hours of night to consult with warriors about secret assaults and surprises on friends?”

“He does not!” answered the Indian, decidedly but calmly—though he was unquestionably astonished at being questioned so pointedly and correctly as to his recent proceedings, and felt that he must have been followed. He was not the man, however, to betray his feelings, or to commit himself in any way; therefore he took refuge in silence.

“Come now, Okématan,” said his companion in a confidential tone. “Don’t let a misunderstanding arise between you and me. What is this that I have heard? You spent last night, as you admit, with a party of Crees on

the war-path. You were seen and heard, and the men of the camp think you have turned traitor, and they are even now expecting an attack from this war-party. Is it true that we are to be attacked?”

“You say I was *heard*,” answered the Indian, looking the half-breed straight in the face. “If so, those who heard must know what I said.”

“Nay, they did indeed hear, but they did not understand, for they know not your language; but they know the language of signs, and, by the looks and gestures of the warriors, they guessed what was said and planned.”

“Is it likely,” asked the Indian in a low voice, “that Okématan would return to your camp alone, and put himself in your power, if an attack was intended?”

“True, true,” returned Dechamp with a hearty air; “and, to say truth, I myself did not—do not—believe you false. If you tell me the truth, Okématan, and give me your word that this report is a mistaken one, I will believe you and trust you.”

The Indian seemed pleased with the assurance thus heartily given, but still maintained his dignified gravity, as he said—

“Okématan *always* tells the truth. He had hoped that the folly of some young braves of his tribe should never have been known to any one; but since it has been found out, he will tell all he knows to his pale-faced brother.”

Hereupon he related all that had transpired at the council of war, and the final success of his own speech, with that of the old warrior, in producing a peaceful solution.

“But are you sure they will follow your advice?” asked Dechamp.

“Yes, Okématan is quite sure.”

“Well, then, as I said, I will trust you,” returned Dechamp, extending his hand, which the Indian gravely grasped; “and I will give you undeniable proof, by giving my young men orders to start after the buffalo at once—without further delay.”

Chapter Seventeen.

The Buffalo-Hunt.

In accordance with the assurance given to Okématan Antoine Dechamp at once gave orders to make preparation for an immediate start after the buffalo—much to the satisfaction of the hunters, especially the young ones.

Buffaloes—or, to speak more correctly, bisons—roamed over the North American prairies at the time we write of in countless thousands; for the Indians, although extremely wasteful of animal life, could not keep their numbers down, and the aggressive white-man, with his deadly gun and rifle, had only just begun to depopulate the plains. Therefore the hunters had not to travel far before coming up with their quarry.

In a very brief space of time they were all drawn up in line under command of their chosen leader, who, at least up to the moment of giving the signal for attack, kept his men in reasonably good order. They had not ridden long when the huge ungainly bisons were seen like black specks on the horizon.

Still the horsemen—each armed with the muzzle-loading, single-barrelled, flint-lock gun of the period—advanced cautiously, until so near that the animals began to look up as if in surprise at the unwonted intrusion on their great solitudes.

Then the signal was given, the horses stretched out at the gallop, the buffalo began to run—at first heavily, as if great speed were impossible to them; but gradually the pace increased until it attained to racing speed. Then the hunters gave the rein to their eager steeds, and the long line rushed upon the game like a tornado of centaurs.

From this point all discipline was at an end. Each man fought for his own hand, killing as many animals as he could, so that ere long the plain was strewn with carcases, and the air filled with gunpowder smoke.

We have said that all the hunters set out, but this is not strictly correct, for

three were left behind. One of these had fallen sick; one had sprained his wrist, and another was lazy. It need scarcely be told that the lazy one was François La Certe.

“There is no hurry,” he said, when the hunters were assembling for the start; “plenty of time. My horse has not yet recovered from the fatigues of the journey. And who knows but the report of the buffalo being so near may be false? I will wait and see the result. To-morrow will be time enough to begin. Then, Slowfoot, you will see what I can do. Your hands shall be busy. We will load our cart with meat and pemmican, pay off all our debts, and spend a happy winter in Red River. What have you got there in the kettle?”

“Pork,” answered Slowfoot with characteristic brevity.

“Will it soon be ready?”

“Soon.”

“Have you got the tea unpacked?”

“Yes.”

“Send me your pipe.”

This latter speech was more in the tone of a request than a command, and the implied messenger from the opposite side of the fire was the baby—Baby La Certe. We never knew its name, if it had one, and we have reason to believe that it was a female baby. At the time, baby was quite able to walk—at least to waddle or toddle.

A brief order from the maternal lips sent Baby La Certe toddling round the fire towards its father, pipe in hand; but, short though the road was, it had time to pause and consider. Evidently the idea of justice was strongly developed in that child. Fair wage for fair work had clearly got hold of it, for it put the pipe which was still alight, in its mouth and began to draw!

At this the father smiled benignly, but Slowfoot made a demonstration which induced a rather prompt completion of the walk without a reasonable wage. It sucked vigorously all the time, however, being

evidently well aware that François was not to be feared.

At that moment the curtain of the tent lifted, and little Bill Sinclair limped in. He was a favourite with La Certe, who made room for him, and at once offered him the pipe, but Billie declined.

“No, thank you, La Certe. I have not learned to smoke yet.”

“Ha! you did not begin young enough,” said the half-breed, glancing proudly at his own offspring.

We may explain here once for all that, although he had lived long enough in the colony to understand French, Billie spoke to his friend in English, and that, although La Certe understood English, he preferred to speak in French.

“What have you been doing?” he asked, when the boy had seated himself.

“I’ve been shooting at a mark with my bow and arrow—brother Archie made it for me.”

“Let me see—yes, it is very well made. Where is brother Archie?”

“Gone after the buffalo.”

“What!—on a horse?”

“He could not go very well after them on foot—could he?” replied the boy quietly. “Dan Davidson lent him a horse, but not a gun. He said that Archie was too young to use a gun on horseback, and that he might shoot some of the people instead of the buffalo, or burst his gun, or fall off. But *I* don’t think so. Archie can do anything. I know, for I’ve seen him do it.”

“And so he has left you in camp all by yourself. What a shame, Billie!”

“No, François, it is not a shame. Would you have me keep him from the fun just because I can’t go? *That* would indeed be a shame, wouldn’t it?”

“Well, perhaps you’re right, Billie.”

“I know I’m right,” returned the boy, with a decision of tone that would have been offensive if it had not been accompanied with a look of straightforward gentleness that disarmed resentment. “But, I say, François, why are you not out with the rest?”

“Oh, because—because—Well, you know, my horse is tired, and—and, I’m not quite sure that the buffalo really have been seen as near as they say. And I can go to-morrow just as well. You see, Billie, there is no need to hurry oneself.”

“No, I don’t see that. I think there’s always need for hurry, specially with men like you. I know the reason you don’t go out better than yourself, François.”

“Yes—what is it?” asked the half-breed with a slight laugh.

“It’s laziness. That’s what it is, and you should be ashamed of yourself.”

The large mild eyes and low voice, and pale earnest face of the plain-spoken invalid were such that it would have been impossible for any one to be offended with him, much less La Certe, whose spirit of indignation it was almost impossible to arouse. He winced a little at the home-thrust, however, because he knew it to be true.

“You’re hard on me, Little Bill,” he said with a benignant look, as he picked a stick from the fire and inserted its glowing end in his pipe.

“No, I’m not hard,” returned the boy gravely. Indeed he was always grave, and seldom laughed though he sometimes smiled faintly at the jokes and quips of his volatile brother and Fred Jenkins the seaman: “I’m not half hard enough,” he continued; “I like you, François, and that’s the reason why I scold you and try to get you to mend. I don’t think there’s such a lazy man in the whole Settlement as you. You would rather sit and smoke and stuff yourself with pork all day than take the trouble to saddle your horse and get your gun and go out with the rest. Why are you so lazy, François?”

“I’m sure I don’t know, Little Bill, unless it be that I’m born to be lazy.

Other people are born, I suppose, to be active and energetic. They like activity and energy, and so they do it. I like repose and quiet, and—so I do that. Not much difference after all! We both do what we like best!”

Little Bill was perplexed. Although philosophical in tendency he had not had sufficient experience in sophistical reasoning to enable him to disentangle the sinuosities of bad logic. But he was a resolute little fellow, and not easily quelled.

“What would happen,” he asked, “if everybody in the world did as you do?”

“Well, I suppose everybody would enjoy themselves. There would be no more fightings or wars, or any trouble of that sort, if everybody would only take things easy and smoke the pipe of peace.”

“Hm! I don’t know about that,” returned the boy, doubtfully; “but I’m quite sure there would not be much pemmican in Red River this winter if all the hunters were like you. I wonder you’re not ashamed, François. Sometimes I think that you’re not worth caring about; but I can’t help it, you know—we can’t force our likings one way or other.”

La Certe was a good deal taken aback. He was not indeed unaccustomed to plain speaking, and to the receipt of gratuitous abuse; but his experience invariably was to associate both with more or less of a stern voice and a frowning brow. To receive both in a soft voice from a delicate meek-faced child, who at the same time professed to like him, was a complete novelty which puzzled him not a little.

After a few minutes’ profound consideration, he put out his pipe and arose quickly with something like an appearance of firmness in his look and bearing.

Slowfoot, whose utter ignorance of both French and English prevented her understanding the drift of the recent conversation, was almost startled by the unfamiliar action of her lord.

“Where go you?” she asked.

“To follow the buffalo,” answered La Certe, with all the dignity of a man

bursting with good resolutions.

“Are you ill?” asked his wife, anxiously.

To this he vouchsafed no reply, as he raised the curtain and went out.

Little Bill also went out, and, sitting down on a package, watched him with his large solemn eyes, but said never a word until the half-breed had loaded his gun and mounted his horse. Then he said: “Good luck to you, François!”

La Certe did not speak, but with a grave nod of his head rode slowly out of the camp. Little Bill regarded him for a moment. He had his bow and a blunt-headed arrow in his hand at the time. Fitting the latter hastily to the bow he took a rapid shot at the retreating horseman. The arrow sped well. It descended on the flank of the horse with considerable force, and, bounding off, fell to the ground. The result was that the horse, to La Certe’s unutterable surprise, made a sudden demivolt into the air—without the usual persuasion—almost unseated its rider, and fled over the prairie like a thing possessed!

A faint smile ruffled the solemnity of Little Bill at this, but it vanished when he heard a low chuckle behind him. Wheeling round, he stood face to face with Slowfoot, whose mouth was expanded from ear to ear.

“Clever boy!” she said, patting him on the back, “come into the tent and have some grub.”

She said this in the Cree language, which the boy did not understand, but he understood well enough the signs with which the invitation was accompanied. Thanking her with an eloquent look, he re-entered the tent along with her.

Chapter Eighteen.

Adventures of Archie and the Seaman.

Meanwhile the buffalo-hunt progressed favourably, and the slaughter of

animals was considerable.

But there were two members of that hunt whose proceedings were not in exact accord with the habits and laws of the chase, as usually conducted on the Red River plains. These were the seaman Jenkins and Archie Sinclair.

A mutual attachment having sprung up between these two, they had arranged to keep together during the chase; and when the signal for attack was given by Dechamp, as before related, they had “set sail,” according to Jenkins, fairly well with the rest. But they had not gone more than a few hundred yards when the boy observed that his nautical friend was hauling at both reins furiously, as if desirous of stopping his horse. Having a gun in one hand he found the operation difficult.

Archie therefore reined in a little.

“Bad luck to it!” growled Jenkins, as his young friend drew near, “the jaws o’ this craft seem to be made o’ cast-iron, but I’ll bring him to if I should haul my arms out o’ the sockets. Heave-to, my lad! Maybe he’ll be willin’ to follow a good example.”

Archie pulled up, and, as the seaman had hoped, the hard-mouthed steed stopped, while the maddened buffalo and the almost as much maddened hunters went thundering on, and were soon far ahead of them.

“What’s wrong, Jenkins?” asked Archie, on seeing the sailor dismount.

“Not much, lad; only I want to take a haul at the main brace. Here, hold my gun a bit, like a good chap; the saddle, you see, ain’t all right, an’ if it was to slew round, you know, I’d be overboard in a jiffy. There, that’s all right. Now, we’ll up anchor, an’ off again. I know now that the right way to git on board is by the port side. When I started from Red River I was goin’ to climb up on the starboard side, but Dan Davidson kep’ me right—though he had a good laugh at me. All right now. Hand me the gun.”

“Do you mean to say, Jenkins, that you never got on a horse till you came to Red River?” asked Archie, with a laugh, as they galloped off in pursuit of the hunters, who were almost out of sight by that time.

“Well, you’ve no occasion to laugh, lad,” returned the seaman. “I’ve bin at sea ever since I was a small shaver, scarce half as long as a handspike, so I ain’t had many opportunities, d’ee see, for we don’t have cavalry at sea, as a rule—always exceptin’ the horse marines.

“Then I’m afraid you’ll find runnin’ the buffalo somewhat difficult,” returned the boy. “Not that I know anything about it myself, for this is the first time I’ve been out; an’ even now Dan won’t let me use a gun; but I’ve often heard the men talkin’ about it! an’ some o’ them have complained that they have found it uncommon difficult to load when at full gallop—specially when the horse is hard in the mouth.”

“I make no manner o’ doubt you’re right, lad, but I’ve got my sea-legs on now, so to speak; leastwise I’ve got used to ridin’ in the trip out here, as well as used to steerin’ wi’ the tiller-ropes in front, which seems to me right in the teeth o’ natur’, though I couldn’t see how it could well be otherwise. But I confess that my chief difficulty is the ordnance, for it interferes a good deal wi’ the steerin’. Hows’ever—‘never ventur’ never win,’ you know. I never expected to take up a noo purfession without some trouble.”

As he spoke, the seaman’s horse—a large brown chestnut—put its foot in a hole, and plunged forward with great violence, barely escaping a fall.

“Hold on!” shouted Archie in alarm.

“Hold on it is!” sang out the sailor in reply.

And hold on it was, for he had the chestnut round the neck with both arms. Indeed he was sitting, or lying, on its neck altogether.

“It ain’t an easy job,” he gasped, while he struggled to regain the saddle, “when a fellow gets hove on to the bowsprit this way, to git fairly back on the main-deck again. But a Jenkins never was beaten in fair fight. That’s all right. Now then, Archie, you’re an obleegin’ cove. Do git down an’ pick up the gun for me. You see, if I git down it’s a tryin’ job to git up again—the side o’ this here craft bein’ so steep an’ so high out o’ the water. Thank’ee; why, boy, you jump down an’ up like a powder-monkey. It ain’t broke, is it?”

“No. It seems all right,” answered the boy, as he handed the gun to its owner. “But if you let it go like that often, it won’t be much worth when the run’s over.”

“Let it go, boy?” repeated the sailor. “It was either let it or myself go, an’ when it comes to a toss up o’ that sort, Fred Jenkins knows how to look arter number one.”

It will be seen from all this that our seaman was not quite so much at home on the prairie as on the sea. Indeed, if the expression be permissible, he was very much at sea on that undulating plain, and did not take so kindly to the green waves of the rolling prairie as to the heaving billows of the restless ocean; but, as Archie remarked, he was fast getting broke in.

The incidents which we have mentioned, however, were but the commencement of a series of disasters to poor Jenkins, which went far to cure him of a desire to excel in the “noo purfession,” and to induce a somewhat violent longing for a return to his first love, the ocean.

“I can’t think what ever could have made you want to come out here,” said Archie, as they continued to follow up the still distant hunters.

“What was it made yourself want to come out, lad?” asked the sailor.

“It wasn’t me that wanted to come. It was father, you know, an’ of course I had to follow,” said the boy in a tone which induced his friend to say hastily, and in a tone of sympathy—

“Ah, poor lad, I forgot you was a orphing. Well, you see, I think it must ha’ bin a love o’ change or a love o’ discontent, or suthin’ o’ that sort, as brought me cruising in these here waters, for I can’t say what else it was. You see I was born a sort o’ ro–oh—”

“Look out! a badger-hole!” shouted the boy.

His warning would have been too late, but the chestnut fortunately leaped over the danger instead of stumbling into it, and its rider was only partially shaken out of his seat.

“It’s well,” he said, when fairly settled down again to an easy gallop, “that the tiller-ropes are stout else I’d ha’ bin over the starn this time instead of out on the bowsprit. Let me see, what was I sayin’ of?”

“Somethin’ about your bein’ born a sort of ‘ro–oh—,’ though what *that* may be I haven’t a notion.”

“Ah! jist so—I was born a sort o’ rover (when this long-legged brute took the badger-hole), an’ I’ve bin to every quarter o’ the globe a’most, but if I’d lived to the age o’ Methooslum I’d never ha’ thought o’ comin’ here,—for the good reason that I knowed nothin’ o’ its existence,—if I hadn’t by chance in a furrin port fallen in wi’ André Morel, an’ took an uncommon fancy to him. You see, at the time, I was—well, I was no better nor I should be; p’raps a deal wuss, an’ Morel he meets me, an’ says—‘Hallo, my lad,’ says he, ‘where away?’

“I looked at him gruff-like a moment or two, for it seemed to me he was raither too familiar for a stranger, but he’s got such a pleasant, hearty look with him—as you know—that I couldn’t feel riled with ’im, so ‘I’m goin’ on the spree,’ says I.

“‘All right,’ says he, ‘I’m with ’ee, lad. D’ye know the town?’

“‘No more than a Mother Carey’s chicken,’ says I. ‘Come along, then,’ says he; ‘I’ll tak’ ’ee to a fust-rate shop.’

“So off we went arm in arm as thick as two peas, an’ after passin’ through two or three streets he turns into a shop that smelt strong o’ coffee.

“‘Hallo! mate,’ says I, ‘you’ve made some sort o’ mistake. This here ain’t the right sort o’ shop.’

“‘O yes, it is,’ says he, smilin’, quite affable-like. ‘The best o’ tipple here, an’ cheap too. Come along. I’ve got somethin’ very partikler to say to you. Look here, waiter—two cups o’ coffee, hot an’ strong, some buttered toast, an’ no end o’ buns, etceterer.’

“Wi’ that he led me to a seat, an’ we sat down. I was so took aback an’ amused that I waited to see what would foller an’ what he’d got to say that was so partikler—but, I say, Archie, them buffalo runners has got the

wind o’ us, an’ are showin’ us their heels, I fear.”

“Never fear,” returned the boy, rising in his stirrups and shading his eyes to look ahead. “They do seem to be leavin’ us a bit, but you see by the dust that the buffalo are holdin’ away to the right, so if we keep still more to the right an’ cut round that knoll, I think we’ll be safe to catch them up. They’re doin’ good work, as the carcasses we’ve passed and the rattle o’ shots clearly show. But get on wi’ your story, Jenkins.”

“Well, it ain’t much of a story, lad. What Morel had to say was that he’d arranged wi’ an agent o’ Lord Selkirk to come out to this country; an’ he was goin’ out wi’ a lot o’ his relations, an’ was beatin’ up for a few good hands, an’ he liked the look o’ me, an’ would I agree to go wi’ him?

“Well, as you may believe, this was a poser, an’ I said I’d think over it, an’ let him know next day. You see, I didn’t want to seem to jump at it too eager-like, though I liked the notion, an’ I had neither wife, nor sweetheart, nor father or mother, to think about, for I’m a orphing, you see, like yourself, Archie—only a somewhat bigger one.

“Well, when we’d finished all the coffee, an’ all the buns, an’ all the etceterers, he began to advise me not to ha’ nothin’ more to do wi’ grog-shops. I couldn’t tell ’ee the half o’ what he said—no, nor the quarter—but he made such a impression on me that I was more than half-convinced. To say truth, I was so choke-full o’ coffee an’ buns, an’ etceterers, that I don’t believe I could ha’ swallowed another drop o’ liquor.

“‘Where are ye goin’ now?’ says he, when we’d done.

“‘Back to my ship,’ says I.

“‘Come an’ ha’ tea to-morrow wi’ me an’ my sister,’ says he, ‘an’ we’ll have another talk about Rupert’s Land.’

“‘I will,’ says I.

“‘Six o’clock, sharp,’ says he.

“‘Sharp’s the word,’ says I.

“An’, sure enough, I went to his house sharp to time next day, an’ there I found him an’ his sister. She was as pretty a craft as I ever set eyes on, wi’ a modest look an’ long fair ringlets—just borderin’ on nineteen or thereaway—but you know her, Archie, so I needn’t say no more.”

“What! is that the same woman that’s keeping house for him now in Red River?”

“Woman!” repeated the sailor, vehemently; “she’s not a woman—she’s a angel is Elise Morel. Don’t speak disrespectful of her, lad.”

“I won’t,” returned Archie with a laugh; “but what was the upshot of it all?”

“The upshot of it,” answered the seaman, “was that I’ve never touched a drop o’ strong drink from that day to this, an’ that I’m now blown entirely out o’ my old courses, an’ am cruisin’ arter the buffalo on the plains o’ Rupert’s Land.”

At this point, their minds being set free from the consideration of past history, they made the discovery that the buffalo runners were nowhere to be seen on the horizon, and that they themselves were lost on the grassy sea.

“What *shall* we do?” said the boy, when they had pulled up to consider their situation. “You see, although I came out here a good while before you did,” he added, half apologetically, “I’ve never been out on the plains without a guide, and don’t know a bit how to find the way back to camp. The prairie is almost as bad as the sea you’re so fond of, with a clear horizon all round, and nothing worth speaking of to guide us. An’ as you have never been in the plains before, of course you know nothing. In short, Jenkins, I greatly fear that we are lost! Why, what are you grinning at?”

The terminal question was induced by the fact that the tall seaman was looking down at his anxious companion with a broad smile on his handsome sunburnt countenance.

“So we’re lost, are we, Archie?” he said, “like two sweet babes on the prairie instead of in the woods. An’ you think I knows nothin’. Well, p’r’aps I don’t know much, but you should remember, lad, that an old salt wi’ a

compass in his wes'kit-pocket is not the man to lose his reck'nin'. I've got one here as'll put us all right on that score, for I was careful to take my bearin's when we set sail, an' I've been keepin' an eye on our course all the way. Make your mind easy, my boy."

So saying, the sailor pulled out the compass referred to, and consulted it. Then he pulled out a watch of the warming-pan type, which he styled a chronometer, and consulted that also; after which he looked up at the clouds—seamanlike—and round the horizon, especially to windward, if we may speak of such a quarter in reference to a day that was almost quite calm.

"Now, Archie, boy, the upshot o' my cogitations is that with a light breeze on our starboard quarter, a clear sky overhead, an' a clear conscience within, you and I had better hold on our course for a little longer, and see whether we can't overhaul the runners. If we succeed, good and well. If not, why, 'bout-ship, and homeward-bound is the sailin' orders. What say 'ee, lad?"

"I say whatever you say, Jenkins. If you're sure o' the way back, as I've no doubt you are, why, there couldn't be greater fun than to go after the buffalo on our own account. And—I say, look there! Isn't that somethin' like them on the top o' the far bluff yonder? A fellow like you, wi' sharp sailor-eyes, ought to be able to make them out."

"You forget, lad, that I ain't a buffalo runner, an' don't know the cut o' the brutes' jibs yet. It does look like somethin'. Come, we'll go an' see." Putting their horses to the gallop, the two curiously matched friends, taking advantage of every knoll and hollow, succeeded in getting sufficiently near to perceive that a small herd was grazing quietly in a grassy bottom between two prairie waves. They halted at once for consultation.

"Now, then, Archie," said the sailor, examining the priming of his gun, "here we are at last, a-goin' to begin a pitched battle. There's this to be said for us, that neither you nor me knows rightly how to go to work, both on us havin' up to this time bin trained, so to speak, on hearsay. But what o' that? In the language o' the immortial Nelson, 'England expec's every man to do his dooty.' Now it seems to me my dooty on the present

occasion is to lay myself alongside of a buffalo an' blaze away! Isn't that the order o' battle?"

"Yes. But don't go for a bull, and don't go too close for fear he turns sharp round an' catches you on his horns. You know the bulls are apt to do that sometimes."

"Trust me, lad, I'll keep clear o' the bulls."

"And you understand how to re-load?" asked the boy.

"O yes, all right. Dan put me thro' the gunnery practice on the way out, an' I went through it creditably. Only a slight hitch now and then. Two or three balls in the mouth ready to spit into the gun—"

"Not all at once, though, Jenkins."

"In course not, lad: one at a time: no ramming; hit the butt on the saddle; blaze away; one down, another come on—eh?"

"That's it," said Archie, eager for the fray. "How I wish Dan had let me have a gun!"

"Safer not, lad. An' keep well in rear, for I may be apt to fire wide in the heat of action."

With this final caution, the mariner put his gun on full cock, shook the reins, and trotted quietly forward until he saw that the buffalo had observed him. Then, as he afterwards expressed it, he "clapped on all sail-stuns'ls alow and aloft, and sky-scrapers—and went into action like a true blue British tar, with little Archie Sinclair full sail astern."

He did not, however, come out of action with as much *éclat* as he went into it, but justice obliges us to admit that he came out victorious.

We cannot do better than give his own description of that action as related beside the camp-fire that night, to a circle of admiring friends.

"Well, you must know," he began, after finishing his supper and lighting his pipe, "that long-legged frigate o' mine that Dan calls a chestnut—

though a cocoanut would be more like the thing, if you take size into account—he's as keen for the chase as a small boy arter a butterfly, an' before I could say 'Jack Robinson,' a'most, he had me into the middle o' the herd an' alongside o' the big bull. Any one could tell it was him, in spite o' the dust we kicked up, by reason o' the side-glance o' his wicked little eye, his big hairy fore'id, an' his tail stickin' out stiff like a crook'd spankerboom.

"In course I was not a-goin' to fire into him, so I gave the frigate a dig wi' my heels—tho' I'd got no irons on 'em—an' tried to shove up alongside of a fat young cow as was skylarkin' on ahead. As we went past the bull he made a vicious dab wi' his horn, and caught the frigate on her flank—right abaft the mizzen chains, like. Whew! you should ha' seen what a sheer she made right away to starboard! If it hadn't bin that I was on the look-out, I'd ha' bin slap overboard that time, but I see'd the squall comin', an', seizin' my brute's mane, held on like a monkey wi' hand an' leg.

"Well, before I knew where I was, the cocoan— I mean the chestnut, had me alongside the cow. I stuck the muzzle a'most into her ribs, and let drive. Down she went by the head, fairly scuttled, an' I could hear young Archie givin' a wild cheer astern."

"'That's the way to go it, Jenkins!' he yelled. 'Load again.'

"But it was easier said than done, I can tell you. You see, I've bin brought up to cartridges all my life, an' the change to pullin' a stopper out o' a horn wi' your teeth, pourin' the powder into your left hand, wi' the gun under your left arm, an' the pitchin' o' the frigate, like as if it was in a cross sea, was raither perplexin'. Hows'ever, it had to be done, for I was alongside of another cow in a jiffy. I nigh knocked out two o' my front teeth in tryin' to shove the stopper in my mouth. Then, when I was pourin' the powder into my hand, I as near as could be let fall the gun, which caused me to give a sort of gasp of anxiety, when two o' the three bullets dropped out o' my mouth, but I held on to the third wi' my teeth. Just then a puff o' wind blew the powder out o' my hand into the buffalo's eyes, causin' her to bellow like a fog-horn, an' obleegin' me to pour out another charge. I did it hastily, as you may well believe, an' about three times what I wanted came out. Hows'ever, I lost a deal of it in pourin' it into the gun; then I spat the ball in, gettin' another nasty rap on the teeth as I did

so, but I'd bit the ball so that it stuck half-way down.

"It was no time to think o' trifles. I gave the butt an extra bang on the pommel to send the ball home, shoved the muzzle right in among the hair an' pulled the trigger. There was a bang that sounded to me as if the ship's magazine had blown up. It was followed by a constellation o' fire-works and—Archie Sinclair must tell you what happened arter that, for I misremember the whole on it. The fire-works closed the scene to me."

Archie, nothing loath, and with glistening eyes, took up the narrative at this point, while the hero of the hour rekindled his pipe.

"The fact is," he said, "the gun had burst—was blown to atoms; not a bit o' the barrel left, and a great lump o' the stock struck Jenkins on the head, stunned him, and tumbled him off his horse."

"That was the magazine explosion and fire-works," explained Jenkins.

"But the queer thing was," continued Archie, "that the buffalo fell dead, and, on examining it, we found that a bit o' the barrel had been driven right into its brain."

"Ay, boy, but it was queerer still that none o' the pieces struck me or my horse 'cept that bit o' the stock. An' I'm none the worse, barrin' this lump on the head, that only serves to cock my hat a little more to one side than seems becomin' to a sober-minded man."

"We were sorry to be able to bring away so little o' the meat," said Archie, with the gravity of an old hunter; "but, you see, it was too late to send a cart for it after we got back."

"Never mind," said Dan Davidson, when the narrative was brought to a close, "you have done very well for a beginning."

"Moreover," added Fergus, "it iss a goot feast the wolves will be havin' on the plains this night, an' so, Archie, I'll be wishin' ye better luck next time."

Chapter Nineteen.

Bright Hopes terminate in Furious War.

Turning once again to the colony at Red River, we introduce the reader to the Scotch settlers in the autumn of the year—at a time when there was some appearance of the commencement of a season of prosperity, after all the troubles that had befallen and surrounded, and well-nigh overwhelmed them in time past.

The Davidson and McKay families had re-established themselves on their farms, rebuilt their houses and planted their fields, and splendid crops of all kinds were now flourishing, ready for spade and sickle.

The soil was found to be excellent. In after years, forty-fold was no uncommon return. In one case, for a bushel of barley sown, fifty-six bushels were reaped; and from a bushel of seed potatoes were obtained one hundred and forty-five bushels! Industry, however, had not at that time been rewarded with such encouraging results, but there was sufficient to indicate cheering prospects in the near future, and to gladden the hearts of the pioneer settlers.

As a good number of these had, under the depressing influence of disappointment and failure in the past, neglected to sow extensively, not a few families were forced again to winter at Pembina, and draw their supplies from the chase to avoid consuming all the seed which alone ensured them against famine. Among these were the Swiss families, most of whom, being watch and clock makers, pastry-cooks, mechanics and musicians, were not well adapted for agricultural pursuits. Perhaps they were as ill-adapted for the chase, but seed takes time to sow and grow, whereas animals need no prolonged nursing—at least from man—and are quickly killed if one can shoot.

The young leader of the Switzers, however, André Morel, soon left his party at Pembina under the care of his lieutenant, and returned to Red River Settlement, bent on mastering the details of husbandry, so as to be able afterwards to direct the energies of his compatriots into a more profitable occupation than the chase.

For this purpose, he sought and obtained employment with the Davidsons in the new and enlarged edition of Prairie Cottage. His sister,

Elise, was engaged by old McKay to act as companion and assistant to his daughter Elspie. Both the curly-haired André and the fair, blue-eyed Elise, proved to be invaluable acquisitions in the households in which they had found a home, for both were lively, intelligent companions, hard workers at whatever they undertook, and were possessed of sweet melodious voices. André also performed on the violin, an instrument which has played a prominent part in the wild Nor'-West ever since the white-man set down his foot there.

"What do you think, Elspie, of my brother's plan, of taking the farm just below this one, after he has had enough experience to be able to work it himself?" asked Elise.

"It will be very nice to have him settled so near us. Do you think he will take the whole of it?"

"I think so. You see, the terms on which the Earl has granted the land are so easy, and the supplies of goods, oatmeal, clothing, and farm implements sent us so generous, that André finds he will have money enough to enable him to start. Then, that strong, good-natured seaman, Fred Jenkins, has actually agreed to serve as a man on the farm for a whole year for nothing, except, of course, his food and lodging. Isn't it generous of him?"

"Do you know why he is going to serve him for nothing?" asked Elspie, with a quick look and smile.

"No—I do not," returned fair little Elise with an innocent look. "Do you?"

"O no—of course I don't; I can only guess," replied her companion with a light laugh. "Perhaps it is because he knows his services as a farm servant can't be worth much at first."

"There you are wrong," returned Elise, stoutly. "No doubt he is ignorant, as yet, about sowing and reaping and the like, but he is wonderfully strong—just like a giant at lifting and carrying-and he has become quite knowing about horses, and carting, and such things. All that he stipulates for is that he shall board in our house. He says he'll manage, somehow, to make enough money to buy all the clothes he wants."

“What a delightful kind of servant,” said Elspie, with an arch look, which was quite thrown away on Elise, “and so disinterested to do it without any reason.”

“O! but he must have some reason, you know,” rejoined Elise. “I shouldn’t wonder if it was out of gratitude to my brother who was very kind to him—so he says—the first time they met.”

“Did he say that was his reason?” asked Elspie quickly.

“No, he did not say so, but he has said more than once that he feels very grateful to my brother, and it has just occurred to me that that may be his reason. It would be very natural—wouldn’t it?”

“Oh, very natural!—very!” returned the other. “But d’you know, Elise, I don’t like your brother’s plan at all.”

“No! why?”

“Because, don’t you see, foolish girl, that it will take you away from me? You will, of course, want to keep house for your brother, and I have become so used to you, short though our intercourse has been, that I don’t see how I can get on at all without you?”

“Never mind, Elspie, dear. It will be a long while before André is ready to take the farm. Besides, by that time, you know, you and Dan will be married, so you won’t miss me much—though I confess I should like you to miss me a little.”

Elspie sighed at this point. “I suspect that our marriage will not be so soon as you think, Elise,” she said. “Dan has tried to arrange it more than once, but there seems to be a fate against it, for something *always* comes in the way!”

“Surely nothing will happen this time,” said the sympathetic Elise. “Everything begins to prosper now. The crops are beautiful; the weather is splendid; the house is ready to begin to—all the logs are cut and squared. Your father is quite willing, and Dan wishing for the day—what more could you desire, Elspie?”

“Nothing; all seems well, but—” She finished the sentence with another sigh.

While the two friends were thus conversing in the dairy, old McKay and Dan Davidson were talking on the same subject in the hall of Ben Nevis.

“It iss a curious fact, Taniel,” said the old man, with a pleased look, “that it wass in this fery room in the old hoose that wass burnt, and about the same time of the year, too, that you would be speakin’ to me about this fery thing. An’ I do not think that we will be troubled this time wi’ the Nor’-Westers, whatever—though wan never knows what a tay may bring furth.”

“That is the very reason, sir,” said Davidson, “that I want to get married at once, so that if anything does happen again I may claim the right to be Elspie’s protector.”

“Quite right, my boy, quite right; though I must say I would like to wait till a real munister comes out; for although Mr Sutherland iss a fery goot man, an’ an elder too, he iss not chust exactly a munister, you know, as I have said before. But have it your own way, Tan. If my little lass is willin’, old Tuncan McKay won’t stand in your way.”

That night the inhabitants of Red River lay down to sleep in comfort and to dream, perchance, of the coming, though long delayed, prosperity that had hitherto so often eluded their grasp.

Next day an event occurred which gave the poor settlers new cause for grief amounting almost to despair.

Dan Davidson and Elspie were walking on the verandah in front of Ben Nevis at the time. It was a warm sunny afternoon. All around looked the picture of peace and prosperity.

“Does it not seem, Dan, as if all the troubles we have gone through were a dark dream—as if there never had been any reality in them?” said Elspie.

“It does indeed seem so,” responded Dan, “and I hope and trust that we shall henceforth be able to think of them as nothing more than a troubled

dream."

"What iss that you will be sayin' about troubled dreams?" asked old McKay, coming out of the house at the moment.

"We were just saying, daddy, that all our troubles seem—"

"Look yonder, Tan," interrupted the old man, pointing with his pipe-stem to a certain part of the heavens. "What iss it that I see? A queer cloud, whatever! I don't remember seein' such a solid cloud as that in all my experience."

"It is indeed queer. I hope it's not what Fred Jenkins would call a 'squall brewin' up,' for that wouldn't improve the crops."

"A squall!" exclaimed Jenkins, who chanced to come round the corner of the house at the moment, with a spade on his shoulder. "That's never a squall—no, nor a gale, nor a simoon, nor anything else o' the sort that I ever heard of. Why, it's growin' bigger an' bigger!"

He shaded his eyes with his hand, and looked earnestly at the object in question, which did indeed resemble a very dense, yet not a black, cloud. For some moments the four spectators gazed in silence. Then old McKay suddenly dropped his pipe, and looked at Dan with an expression of intense solemnity.

"It iss my belief," he said in a hoarse whisper, "that it is them wee deevils the grasshoppers!"

A very few minutes proved old McKay's surmise to be correct. Once before, the colony had been devastated by this plague, and the memory of the result was enough to alarm the most courageous among the settlers who had experienced the calamity, though the new arrivals, being ignorant, were disposed to regard the visitation lightly at first. McKay himself became greatly excited when the air became darkened by the cloud, which, ever increasing in size, rapidly approached.

"Haste ye, lads," he cried to some of the farm-servants who had joined the group on the verandah, "get your spades, picks, an' shovels. Be smart now: it is not possible to save all the crops, but we may try to save

the garden, whatever. Follow me!”

The garden referred to was not large or of great importance, but it was a favourite hobby of the Highlander, and, at the time, was in full bloom, luxuriant with fruit, flower, and vegetable. To save it from destruction at such a time, McKay would have given almost anything, and have gone almost any lengths. On this occasion, not knowing what to do, yet impelled by his eagerness to do something, he adopted measures that he had heard of as being used in other lands. He ordered a trench to be cut and filled with water on the side of his garden nearest the approaching plague, which might—if thoroughly carried out—have been of some use against wingless grasshoppers but could be of no use whatever against a flying foe. It would have taken an army of men to carry out such an order promptly, and his men perceived this; but the master was so energetic, so violent in throwing off his coat and working with his own hand at pick and shovel, that they were irresistibly infected with his enthusiasm, and set to work.

Old Duncan, did not, however, wield pick or shovel long. He was too excited for that. He changed from one thing to another rapidly. Fires were to be kindled along the line of defence, and he set the example in this also. Then he remembered that blankets and other drapery had been used somewhere with great effect in beating back the foe; therefore he shouted wildly for his daughter and Elise Morel.

“Here we are, father: what can we do?”

“Go, fetch out all the blankets, sheets, table-cloths, an’ towels in the house, girls. It iss neck or nothin’ this tay. Be smart, now! Take men to help ye.”

Two men were very busy there piling up little heaps of firewood, namely, Dan Davidson and Fred Jenkins. What more natural than that these two, on hearing the order given about blankets and table-cloths, etcetera, should quit the fires and follow Elspie and Elise into the house!

In the first bedroom into which they entered they found Archie and Billie Sinclair, the latter seated comfortably in an arm-chair close to a window, the former wild with delight at the sudden demand on all his energies. For

Archie had been one of the first to leap to the work when old McKay gave the order. Then he had suddenly recollected his little helpless brother, and had dashed round to Prairie Cottage, got him on his back, run with him to Ben Nevis Hall, placed him as we have seen in a position to view the field of battle, and then, advising him to sit quietly there and enjoy the fun, had dashed down-stairs to resume his place in the forefront of battle!

He had run up again for a moment to inquire how Little Bill was getting on, when the blanket and sheet searchers found them.

“All right,” he exclaimed, on learning what they came for; “here you are. Look alive! Don’t stir, Little Bill!”

He hurled the bedding from a neighbouring bedstead as he spoke, tore several blankets from the heap, and tumbled rather than ran down-stairs with them, while the friends he had left behind followed his example.

By that time all the inmates and farm-servants of Prairie Cottage had assembled at Ben Nevis Hall, attracted either by sympathy or curiosity as to the amazing fracas which old McKay was creating. Of course they entered into the spirit of the preparations, so that when the enemy at last descended on them they found the garrison ready. But the defenders might as well have remained quiet and gone to their beds.

Night was drawing near at the time, and was, as it were, precipitated by the grasshoppers, which darkened the whole sky with what appeared to be a heavy shower of snow.

The fires were lighted, water was poured into the trench, and the two households fought with blanket, sheet, counterpane, and towel, in a manner that proved the courage of the ancient heroes to be still slumbering in men and women of modern days.

But what could courage do against such overwhelming odds? Thousands were slaughtered. Millions pressed on behind.

“Don’t give in, lads,” cried the heroic and desperate Highlander, wielding a great green blanket in a way that might have roused the admiration if not the envy of Ajax himself. “Keep it up, Jenkins!”

“Ay, ay, sir!” responded the nautical warrior, as he laid about him with an enormous buffalo robe, which was the only weapon that seemed sufficiently suited to his gigantic frame; “never say die as long as there’s a shot in the locker.”

Elise stood behind him, lost in admiration, and giving an imbecile flap now and then with a towel to anything that happened to come in front of her.

Elspie was more self-possessed. She tried to wield a jack-towel with some effect, while Dan, Fergus, Duncan junior, Bourassin, André Morel, and others ably, but uselessly, supported their heroic leader. La Certe, who chanced to be there at the time, went actively about encouraging others to do their very best. Old Peg made a feeble effort to do what she conceived to be her duty, and Okématan stood by, calmly looking on—his grave countenance exhibiting no symptom of emotion, but his mind filled with intense surprise, not unmingled with pity, for the Palefaces who displayed such an amount of energy in attempting the impossible.

That self-defence, in the circumstances, was indeed impossible soon became apparent, for the enemy descended in such clouds that they filled up the half-formed ditch, extinguished the fires with their dead bodies, defied the blanket-warriors, and swarmed not only into the garden of old Duncan McKay but overwhelmed the whole land.

Darkness and exhaustion from the fight prevented the people of Ben Nevis Hall and Prairie Cottage from at first comprehending the extent of the calamity with which they had thus been visited, but enough had been seen to convince McKay that his garden was doomed. When he at last allowed the sad truth to force itself into his mind he suffered Elspie to lead him into the house.

“Don’t grieve, daddy,” she said, in a low comforting tone; “perhaps it won’t be as bad as it seems.”

“Fetch me my pipe, lass,” he said on reaching his bedroom.

“Goot-night to you, my tear,” he added, on receiving the implement of consolation.

“Won’t you eat—or drink—something, daddy dear?”

“Nothing—nothing. Leave me now. We hev had a goot fight, whatever, an’ it iss to bed I will be goin’ now.”

Left alone the old man lay down in his warrior-harness, so to speak, lighted his pipe, smoked himself into a sort of philosophical contempt for everything under the sun, moon, and stars, and finally dropped his sufferings, as well as his pipe, by falling into a profound slumber.

Next morning when the people of Red River arose, they became fully aware of the disaster that had befallen them. The grasshoppers had made what Jenkins styled a clean sweep from stem to stern. Crops, gardens, and every green herb in the settlement had perished; and all the sanguine hopes of the long-suffering settlers were blighted once more.

Before passing from this subject it may be as well to mention that the devastating hosts which visited the colony at this time left behind them that which turned out to be a worse affliction than themselves. They had deposited their larvae in the ground, and, about the end of the June following, countless myriads of young grasshoppers issued forth to overrun the fields. They swarmed in such masses as to be two, three, and—in some places near water—even four inches deep. Along the rivers they were found in heaps like sea-weed, and the water was almost poisoned by them. Every vegetable substance was devoured—the leaves and even bark of trees were eaten up, the grain vanished as fast as it appeared above ground, everything was stripped to the bare stalk, and ultimately, when they died in myriads, the decomposition of their dead bodies was more offensive than their living presence.

Thus the settlers were driven by stress of misfortune once again to the plains of Pembina, and obliged to consort with the Red-men and the half-breeds, in obtaining sustenance for their families by means of the gun, line, trap, and snare.

Chapter Twenty.

Little Bill becomes a Difficulty.

We must now pass over another winter, during which the Red River settlers had to sustain life as they best might—acquiring, however, in doing so, an expertness in the use of gun and trap and fishing-line, and in all the arts of the savages, which enabled them to act with more independence, and to sustain themselves and their families in greater comfort than before.

Spring, with all its brightness, warmth, and suggestiveness had returned to cheer the hearts of men; and, really, those who have never experienced the long six-or-eight-months' winter of Rupert's Land can form no conception of the feelings with which the body—to say nothing of the soul—opens up and expands itself, so to speak, in order to receive and fully appreciate the sweet influences of spring.

For one thing, seven or eight months of cold, biting, steely frost causes one almost to forget that there ever was such a thing as summer heat, summer scents, summer sounds, or summer skies. The first thaw is therefore like the glad, unexpected meeting of a dear old friend; and the trumpet voice of the first goose, the whirring wing of the first duck, and the whistle of the first plover, sounds like the music of the spheres to one's long unaccustomed ears. Then the trickle of water gives one something like a new sensation. It may be but a thread of liquid no thicker than a pipe-stem faintly heard by an attentive ear tinkling in the cold depths far under the ice or snow, but it is liquid, not solid, water. It is suggestive of motion. It had almost been forgotten as a sound of the long past which had forsaken the terrestrial ball for ever.

It does not take a powerful imagination to swell a tiny stream to a rivulet, a river, a lake, a mighty ocean. Shut your eyes for a moment, and, in memory, the ice and snow vanish; the streams flow as in the days of old; flowers come again to gladden the eyes and—but why trouble you, good reader, with all this? We feel, sadly, that unless you have tasted the northern winter no description, however graphic, will enable you to drink in the spirit of the northern spring.

About this time Okématan, the Cree chief, took it into his head that he would go a-hunting.

This last word does not suggest to a dweller in the wilderness that crossing of ploughed lands on horseback, and leaping of hedges, etcetera, which it conveys to the mind of an Englishman. The Cree chief's notion of spring-hunting was, getting into a birch-bark canoe, with or without a comrade, and going forth on the lakes and rivers of the wilderness with plenty of powder and shot, to visit the native home of the wild-goose, the wild-duck, the pelican, the plover, and the swan.

For such a trip not much is essential. Besides the gun and ammunition referred to, Okématan carried a blanket, a hatchet, several extra pairs of moccasins, a tin kettle in which to boil food, a fire-bag for steel, flint, and tinder, with a small supply of tobacco.

On hearing of his intention, Dan Davidson resolved to accompany him. Dan had by that time associated so much with the chief that he had learned to speak his language with facility. Indeed nearly all the settlers who had a turn for languages had by that time acquired a smattering more or less of Indian and French.

"You see," said Dan to the chief, "there is not much doing on the farm just now, and I want to see a little of the country round about, so, if you don't object to my company, I'd like to go."

"The Cree chief will be proud to have the company of the Paleface chief," replied the Indian, with grave courtesy.

Dan wanted to say "All right," but was ignorant of the Cree equivalent for that familiar phrase; he therefore substituted the more sober and correct, "It is well."

"But," said he, "you must not call me a Paleface chief, for I am only an ordinary man in my own land—what you would call one of the braves."

"Okématan is thought to have a good judgment among his people," returned the Indian, "though he has not the snows of many winters on his head, and he thinks that if Dan'el had stayed in the wigwams of his people beyond the Great Salt Lake, he would have been a chief."

“It may be so, Okématan, though I doubt it,” replied Dan, “but that is a point which cannot now be proved. Meanwhile, my ambition at present is to become a great hunter, and I want you to teach me.”

The chief, who was gratified by the way in which this was put, gladly agreed to the proposal.

“There is another man who would like to go with us,” said Davidson. “My friend, Fergus McKay, is anxious, I know, to see more of the lands of the Indian. You have no objection to his going, I suppose?—in another canoe of course, for three would be too many in your small canoe.”

Okématan had no objection.

“Three would not be too many in the canoe,” he said, “but two are better for hunting.”

“Very good. But we will want a fourth to make two in each canoe. Whom shall we invite?”

“Okématan’s counsel is,” answered the chief, “to take a brave who is young and strong and active; whose eye is quick and his hand steady; whose heart never comes into his throat when danger faces him; whose face does not grow pale at the sight of approaching death; whose heart is as the heart of the grisly bear for courage, and yet tender as the heart of a Paleface squaw; whose hand can accomplish whatever his head plans, and whose tongue is able to make a sick man smile.”

Davidson smiled to himself at this description, which the chief uttered with the sententious gravity that would have characterised his speech and bearing in a council of war.

“A most notable comrade, good Okématan; but where are we to find him, for I know nobody who comes near to that description.”

“He dwells in your own wigwam,” returned the chief.

“In Prairie Cottage?” exclaimed the other with a puzzled air. “You can’t mean my brother Peter, surely, for he is about as grave as yourself.”

“Okématan means the young brave who loves his little brother.”

“What! Archie Sinclair?” exclaimed Dan, with a surprised look. “I had no idea you had so high an opinion of him.”

“Okématan has seen much of Arch-ee: has watched him. He sees that he thinks nothing of himself; that he thinks always for the sick brother, Leetle Beel, and that he will yet be a great chief among the Palefaces.”

“Well, now you come to mention it, there *is* something about Archie that puts him high above other boys; and I suppose his unselfishness has much to do with it; but don’t you think he’s too young, and hardly strong enough?”

“He is not young. He is fifty years old in wisdom. He is very strong for his size, and he is *willing*, which makes his strength double.”

“But he will never consent to leave Little Bill,” said Dan.

“Okématan had fears of that,” returned the Indian, with, for the first time, a look of perplexity on his face. “If Arch-ee will not go without Leetle Beel, Leetle Beel must go too.”

It was found, on inquiry, that they were right in their surmise. When the proposal was made to Archie that afternoon by Dan, the boy’s eyes seemed to light up and dance in his head at the prospect. Then the light suddenly went out, and the dancing ceased.

“Why, what’s the matter, Archie?” asked his friend.

“Can’t go. Impossible!” said Archie.

“Why not?”

“Who’s to look after Little Bill, I should like to know, if I leave him?”

“Elspie, of course,” said Dan, “and Elise, to say nothing of Jessie, mother, and brother Peter.”

Archie shook his head.

“No,” he said, “no! I can’t go. Elspie is all very well in her way, and so is Elise, but *they* can’t carry Little Bill about the fields and through the bush on their backs; and Peter wouldn’t; he’s too busy about the farm. No—ever since mother died, I’ve stuck to Little Bill through thick and thin. So I *won’t* go.”

It was so evident that Archie Sinclair’s mind was made up and fixed, and also so obvious that a delicate little boy would be a great encumbrance on a hunting expedition that Dan thought of attempting the expedient of winning Little Bill himself over to his side. He had no difficulty in doing that, for Billie was to the full as amiable and unselfish as his brother. After a short conversation, he made Billie promise to do his very best to induce Archie to go with the hunters and leave him behind.

“For you know, Little Bill,” said Dan in conclusion, and by way of consoling him, “although nobody could take such good care of you as Archie, or make up to you for him, Elspie would take his place very well for a time—.”

“O yes, I know that well enough,” said the poor boy with some enthusiasm; “Elspie is always very good to me. You’ve no notion how nice she is, Dan.”

“Hm! well, I have got a sort of a half notion, maybe,” returned Dan with a peculiar look. “But that’s all right, then. You’ll do what you can to persuade Archie, and—there he is, evidently coming to see you, so I’ll go and leave you to talk it over with him.”

Billie did not give his brother time to begin, but accosted him on his entrance with—“I’m so glad, Archie, that you’ve been asked to go on this hunting expe—”

“O! you’ve heard of it, then?”

“Yes, and I want you to go, very very much, because—because—”

“Don’t trouble yourself with *becauses*, Little Bill, for I won’t go. So there’s an end of it—unless,” he added, as if a thought had suddenly occurred to him, “unless they agree to take you with them. They might do worse. I’ll see about that.”

So saying, Archie turned about, left the room as abruptly as he had entered it, and sought out Okématan. He found that chief sitting in La Certe's wigwam, involved in the mists of meditation and tobacco-smoke, gazing at Slowfoot.

That worthy woman—who, with her lord and little child, was wont to forsake her hut in spring, and go into the summer-quarters of a wigwam—was seated on the opposite side of a small fire, enduring Okématan's meditative gaze, either unconsciously or with supreme indifference.

"Hallo! Oké,"—thus irreverently did Archie address the chief—had any one else ventured to do so, he might possibly have been scalped—"Hallo! Oké, I've been huntin' for you all round. You're worse to find than an arrow in the grass."

It may be said, here, that Archie had learned, like some of the other settlers, a smattering of the Cree language. How he expressed the above we know not. We can only give the sense as he would probably have given it in his own tongue.

"Okématan's friends can always find him," answered the Indian with a grave but pleased look.

"So it seems. But I say, Oké, I want to ask a favour of you. Dan Davidson tells me you want me to go a-hunting with you. Well, I'm your man if you'll let me take Little Bill with me. Will you?"

"Leetle Beel is not strong," objected the Indian.

"True, but a trip o' this sort will make him strong perhaps. Anyhow, it will make him stronger."

"But for a sick boy there is danger," said the chief. "If Arch-ee upsets his canoe in a rapid, Arch-ee swims on shore, but Leetle Beel goes to the bottom."

"Not as long as Arch-ee is there to hold him up," returned the boy.

"Waugh!" exclaimed the Indian.

“Humph!” remarked the boy. “What d’ye mean by ‘Waugh,’ Oké?”

“Okématan means much that it is not in the power of the tongue to tell,” replied the Indian with increasing gravity; and as the gravity increased the cloudlets from his lips became more voluminous.

“Arch-ee hopes, nevertheless, that the tongue of Oké may find power to tell him a little of what he thinks.”

This being in some degree indefinite, the chief smoked in silence for a minute or two, and gazed at Slowfoot with that dreamy air which one assumes when gazing into the depths of a suggestive fire. Apparently inspiration came at last—whether from Slowfoot or not we cannot tell—for he turned solemnly to the boy.

“Rain comes,” he said, “and when sick men get wet they grow sicker. Carrying-places come, and when sick men come to them they stagger and fall. Frost often comes in spring, and when sick men get cold they die. Waugh!”

“Humph!” repeated the boy again, with a solemnity quite equal to that of the Red-man.

“When rain comes I can put up an umbrella—an *umbrella*. D’you know what that is?”

The Indian shook his head.

“Well it’s a—a thing—a sort of little tent—a wigwam, you know, with a stick in the middle to hold on to and put it up. D’you understand?”

An expression of blank bewilderment, so to speak, settled on the chief’s visage, and the lights of intelligence went out one by one until he presented an appearance which all but put the boy’s gravity to flight.

“Well, well, it’s of no use my tryin’ to explain it,” he continued. “I’ll show it to you soon, and then you’ll understand.”

Intelligence began to return, and the chief looked gratified.

“What you call it?” he asked—for he was of an inquiring disposition— “a bum-rella?”

“No, no,” replied the other, seriously, “an um*brella*. It’s a clever contrivance, as you shall see. So, you see, I can keep the rain off Little Bill when he’s in the canoe, and on shore there are the trees, and the canoe itself turned bottom up. Then, at carryin’ places, I can carry Little Bill as well as other things. He’s not heavy and doesn’t struggle, so we won’t leave him to stagger and fall. As to frost—have we not hatchets, and are there not dead trees in the forest? Frost and fire never walk in company, so that Little Bill won’t get cold and die, for we’ll keep him warm —waugh!”

When human beings are fond of each other disagreement seldom lasts long. Okématan had taken so strong a fancy to Archie that he felt it impossible to hold out; therefore, being a man of strong common sense, he did not attempt the impossible.

Thus it came to pass that, two days later, a couple of birch-bark canoes were launched on the waters of Red River, with Dan Davidson in the stern of one and Fergus McKay acting as his bowman. Okématan took the stern of the other, while Archie Sinclair wielded the bow-paddle, and Little Bill was placed in the middle on a comfortable green blanket with the celebrated “bum-rella” erected over him to keep off, not the rain, but, the too glorious sunshine.

Chapter Twenty One.

An Auspicious Beginning and Suspicious Ending.

Let loose in the wilderness! How romantic, how inexpressibly delightful, that idea seems to some minds! Ay, even when the weight of years begins to stiffen the joints and slack the cords of life the memory of God’s great, wild, untrammelled, beautiful wilderness comes over the spirit like a refreshing dream and restores for a time something like the pulse of youth.

We sometimes think what a joy it would be if youth could pass through its

blessings with the intelligent experience of age. And it may be that this is to be one of the joys of the future, when man, redeemed and delivered from sin by Jesus Christ, shall find that the memory of the sorrows, sufferings, weaknesses of the past shall add inconceivably to the joys of the present. It may be so. Judging from analogy it does not seem presumptuous to suppose and hope that it will be so.

“Sufficient unto the day,” however, is the joy thereof.

When the two canoes pushed off and swept rapidly over the fair bosom of Red River, the heart of Archie Sinclair bounded with a feeling of exultant joy which it would have been very hard indeed to convince him was capable of increase, while the bosom of his invalid brother was filled with a sort of calm serenity which constituted, in his opinion at the time being, a quite sufficient amount of felicity.

When we add that the other hunters were, in their several ways, pretty much in the same condition as the boys, we have said enough to justify the remark that their circumstances were inexpressibly delightful.

Proceeding some distance up stream they finally diverged into a minor tributary which led to waters that were swarming with water-fowl and other game.

“This is a grand burst, Little Bill,” said Archie, as he plied his paddle vigorously, and glanced over his shoulder at the invalid behind him.

“Prime!” answered Billie. “Isn’t it?” he added, with a backward glance at Okématan.

“Waugh!” replied the reticent savage.

“Ay, ‘Waugh!’ that’s all you’ll get out of him when he’s puzzled,” said Archie; “though what he means by it is more than I know. You must speak respectable English to a Red-skin if you want to convince him. Why, if he had understood you literally, you know—and obeyed you—he’d have had something to do immediately with the lock of his gun.”

“I have often wondered, Archie,” returned his brother with a languid smile, “what a lot you manage to say sometimes with nothing in it.”

“Ha! ha!—ho! ho! what a wag you’re becoming, Little Bill. But I thank ’ee for the compliment, for you know it’s only philosophers that can say an awful lot without a’most sayin’ anything at all. Look at Oké there, now, what a depth of stupidity lies behind his brown visage; what bucketsful of ignorance swell out his black pate, but he expresses it all in the single word ‘Waugh!’ because he’s a philosopher. If he was like La Certe, he’d jabber away to us by the hour of things he knows nothin’ about, and tell us long stories that are nothin’ less than big lies. I’m glad you think me a philosopher, Little Bill, for it takes all the philosophy I’ve got to keep me up to the scratch of goin’ about the world wi’ you on my back. Why, I’m a regular Sindbad the Sailor, only I’m saddled with a young man o’ the plains instead of an old man of the sea. D’ee understand what I’m saying, Oké?”

The chief, who understood little more than that his own name and that of La Certe were mentioned, nodded his head gravely and allowed the corners of his mouth to droop, which was his peculiar way of smiling—a smile that might have been unintelligible to his friends had it not been relieved and interpreted by a decided twinkle in his eyes.

While they were conversing, the two canoes had rounded a rocky point and swept out upon a lake-like expanse in the river, which was perfectly smooth and apparently currentless. Several islets studded its calm breast and were reflected in the clear water. These were wooded to the water’s edge, and from among the sedges near their margin several flocks of wild-fowl sprang up in alarm and went off in fluttering confusion.

It chanced that just then a trumpet-like note was heard overhead, as a flock of wild geese passed the spot and came suddenly close within range of the canoes which had been concealed from them by the bushes that fringed the river.

Guns were seized at once by the bowmen in each canoe, but Archie was smarter than Fergus. Before the Highlander had got the weapon well into his hands the boy fired and one of the flock fell into the river with a heavy plunge.

Little Bill signalised the successful shot with a high-toned cheer, and the Indian with a low-toned “Waugh,” while Fergus made a hurried and

therefore bad, shot at the scared flock.

“That wass a fery good shot, Archie,” remarked Fergus, as the canoes ranged up alongside of the dead bird.

“Yours was a very good one, too, Fergus,” returned the boy; “only not quite straight.”

The smile on the face of Okématan proved that he understood the drift of the reply, and that this was the style of humour he appreciated so highly in his young friend. We civilised people may wonder a little at the simplicity of the savage, but when we reflect that the chief had been born and bred among the solemnities of the wilderness, and had been up to that time wholly unacquainted with the humours and pleasantries that sometimes accompany juvenile “cheek,” our wonder may perhaps be subdued.

“This would be a splendid place to camp for the rest of the day,” suggested Davidson, while they rested on their paddles after the goose had been secured. “We must lay in a small stock of fresh provisions, you know, if we are to push on to-morrow or next day to our hunting ground. What say you, Okématan?” he added in Cree, turning to their guide.

“The will of the Paleface chief is the wish of Okématan. Let him speak.”

“Well, then, I vote for encamping on the small island over there, in the middle o’ the lake—for it’s far more like a lake than a river hereabouts—that one over which the hawk is hovering.”

“I vote for it too,” said Archie.

“So do I,” chimed in Little Bill.

“I will be sayin’ ditto to that,” put in Fergus.

“Moreover,” suggested Dan, “I vote for roasting the goose at once.”

“Ay, and eating him right away,” said Archie. As the invalid followed this up with a feeble cheer, the proposal was carried into effect without delay.

The islet was low and flat, and so thickly covered with bush that it afforded a most enticing spot for a night-encampment. There was also plenty of dead wood on it, with which to replenish the fire, and various peeps through sundry openings afforded exquisite views of woodland and river with which to charm the eyes. Over all, the sun was pouring his noontide rays in a glorious flood.

We need not waste time in going into the details of the feast that followed: how the goose was delightfully plump and tender—especially tender to teeth that would have scarcely observed the difference if it had been tough—how, in addition to the goose, they had wild-ducks enough—shot earlier in the day—to afford each one a duck to himself, leaving a brace over, of which Okématan ate one, as well as his share of the goose, and seemed to wish that he might eat the other, but he didn't, for he restrained himself; how they drank tea with as much gusto and intemperance as if it had been a modern "afternoon"; and how, after all was over, the Red-man filled the pipe-head on the back of his iron tomahawk and began to smoke with the air of a man who meant business and regarded all that had gone before as mere child's-play.

The afternoon was well advanced when the feast was concluded, for appetites in the wilderness are not easily or soon satisfied.

"I feel tight," said Billie with a sigh and something of pathos in his tone, when he at last laid down his knife—we cannot add fork, for they scorned such implements at that time.

"That's right, Little Bill," said Archie, "try another leg or wing—now, don't shake your head. We've come on this trip a-purpose to make you fat an' strong. So you must—here, try this drum-stick. It's only a little one, like yourself, Billie."

"True, Archie, but I'm too little to hold it. I feel like an egg now."

"Hallo! Oké, are you overcome already?" asked Archie.

"The sun sinks to rest at night and the birds go to sleep. If we intend to hunt we must begin now."

"It's always the way," returned the boy with an air of discontent;

“whenever a fellow gets into a state of extreme jollity there’s sure to be something bothersome to come and interrupt us. Obfusticate your faculties with some more smoke, Oké, till Billie and I finish our tea. We can’t shoot with half-empty stomachs, you know.”

“They must be three-quarters full by this time—whatever,” remarked Fergus, wiping his clasp-knife on the grass.

Just then, Dan Davidson, who had gone to explore the islet, returned with the information that some hunters must have recently visited the same place, for he had discovered the remains of an encampment at the extreme eastern side, which looked as if it had been recently occupied, for bones of wild-fowl were scattered about, the meat on which was neither dried nor decayed.

On hearing this, Okématan rose quickly, put out his pipe, and stuck the tomahawk in his belt. The sluggish good-natured air of contentment with which he had been smoking vanished; the half-sleepy eyes opened, and a frown rested on his brow as he said, shortly—

“Okématan goes to look.”

“May I go with you?” asked Dan.

“No. Okématan goes alone. It is known that a band of Saulteaux have been seen. They are roused just now by the actions of the great white chief and the words of my Nation. Rest here till I come. Go on eating. If they are here they may be watching us now.”

“D’ee hear that, Little Bill? You’ve got to go on eating,” said Archie. “Our guide commands it. If you disobey, the rascally Saulteaux will come down upon us somehow.”

But Archie’s light-heartedness was not shared by his older companions. They knew too well that the disturbed state of the country at the time, and especially the ill-will engendered between the Crees and Saulteaux by the ill-advised action of Lord Selkirk’s agents, rendered an explosion not improbable at any time, and a certain feeling of disappointment came over them when they reflected that the hunting expedition, which they had entered on with so much enthusiastic hope, might perhaps be

brought to an abrupt close.

“If there’s to be any fighting I shall only be in your way,” said the invalid in a tone in which there was much of sadness, though none of fear.

“Not a bit of it, Little Bill,” returned Dan, quickly. “You’ll be in nobody’s way in the canoes. You’re as light as a feather. If we had even to take to the bush, Archie could run with you; an’ when he gets tired, Fergus and I would think no more o’ you than a grasshopper.”

“Iss it carryin’ him you will be taalkin’ of?” said Fergus. “Ay, ay! I would be forgettin’ that he wass on my back if I had him there.”

As he spoke, the Indian returned to the camp with the cat-like tread so characteristic of the Red-man.

“A big band has been here,” he said. “They slept on the island last night, and the signs show that they do not come as friends.”

“Are you sure of that?” asked Dan.

“Okématan is sure of nothing. Even the sun may not rise to-morrow.”

“Had we not better, then, return at once to the Settlement, and tell what we have seen?” said Dan.

“If we did, the Saulteaux would see us and give chase. Their canoes are big and have strong men in them. They would overtake us soon and our scalps would be swinging at their belts to-morrow.”

“Not pleesant to think of—whatever,” said Fergus.

“What, then, do you advise?” asked Dan. “You understand the ways of the wilderness, and we will follow your lead.”

The chief appeared to think for a few moments.

“We will remain where we are,” he said; “only we will send the boys off in one of the canoes, as if to shoot some ducks for us. The Saulteaux will think that we are lazy, idle men, who like to lie in camp and sleep or

smoke while the boys hunt for us. When night comes we will escape in the dark and go down the river to warn the settlers."

"But what if they attack us before night comes on?" asked Dan.

"They will not do that," answered the Indian, gravely. "They know that we are well supplied with powder and shot. They know that some one must lead in every attack, and that such leaders would be doomed to death. Saulteaux do not love death. They prefer life. They will not come till it is dark."

"Ha! ha!" laughed Fergus, who seemed greatly tickled with the latter part of the chief's observation, "fery goot! ho! fery goot!—they do not love death, an' it iss life they will be preferrin'. Ay, ay! It iss the Heelandman that will be of much the same opeenion, only, when fightin' hes got to be done, he's not afraid to do it in daylight."

"He may not be afraid, Fergus," said Dan, "yet I suspect that the Red-man's tactics are often the wisest, for what would be the use of making an attack in daylight, at the cost of several lives, when the attack might be made quite as well, if not better, at night, without the loss, perhaps, of any life at all?"

"I will not be sayin'," returned Fergus, who was of an argumentative disposition, "anything at all about attackin' by day or by night. I will only be remarkin' that the Heelandman iss like the savitch in that he prefers life to death."

"Come along to the fire, Fergus," said Dan, laughing; "I will argue that out with you."

"It will be difficult to argue, then, for there iss no argument in it at all. It is only a statement of opeenion."

"Well, but surely it is possible to controvert your opinion! Besides, we are somewhat exposed where we stand. Even an arrow might reach us from the near bank."

"Never you fear, Tan. They will not be so foolish as to fire now, instead of attack at night. They are sly—whatever."

While the two friends were thus conversing, the Cree chief was arranging the smaller of the canoes for the use of the young hunters—that is, he took out all the lading, making it so light that it would skim over the water like an egg-shell with the slightest impulse of the paddle.

“You’ll have to put a big stone in the stern, Oké,” said Archie, “to make up for Little Bill’s lightness—”

“For your heaviness, you mean,” interrupted the invalid.

“No; I mean what I say, Billie, for you are light-headed as well as light-hearted—a sort o’ human balloon, ready to go up like a rocket at any time—so that even an or’nary man like me weighs you down. Besides, Oké, he steers better than me and I shoot better than him. Also, I like the hardest work, so I always take the bow.”

Arranging things according to directions, the Indian held the canoe steady while the brothers stepped carefully in—for they had learned from experience that the birch-bark canoe, besides being easily broken, is apt to overturn on small provocation.

“Let not Arch-ee go near the river-bank on either side,” said the chief in a warning voice, as he was about to shove the frail bark out upon the glassy water. “The Saulteaux might catch him. And let him not go far up or down stream. Let him keep among the reeds round the island. There are many ducks there. Shoot plenty, as if Arch-ee had no suspicion—no fear of Indians.”

“I say, Oké,” demanded the lad, with what was meant for an overwhelming frown, “do you mean to hint that I *have* any fear of the Indians?”

“Okématan has the belief that Arch-ee never knew fear at all,” returned the chief, earnestly; “that he has the courage of the young buffalo-bull.”

“Well, I’m not quite so sure o’ that,” returned the boy, with a modest look. “I would not myself put it quite so strong, you know. But you’re a wise chief, and I hope you’ve got a lot of brothers as wise as yourself. Good-bye, Oké—shove off. Now, then, mind how you steer, Little Bill.”

Chapter Twenty Two.

Circumventing the Red-Skins.

For some time the brothers paddled about the sedgy shore of the small islet on which the camp had been pitched, now setting up a flock of ducks and then slipping into the heart of some reeds and concealing themselves until a good chance was obtained at a passing flock of geese.

Archie Sinclair soon laid in enough provision to serve the party for a few meals, for his hand was steady and his eye true.

“Little Bill,” he said, looking back after one of his successful shots, “you must take a shot now. We will go right-about-face, and convert the bow into the stern in the usual way. See, catch hold of the gun.”

“No, Arch-ee, as Oké calls you, I won’t; I’m quite content to look on, for your gun kicks like a Mexican mule. Besides, it’s easy work to steer, and seeing you panting and toiling in the bow makes it seem all the easier. Just you keep blazin’ away, old man. But, I say, where shall I steer to now? I’m tired o’ steering among the reeds. Let us push out into the clear water.”

“You heard what Oké said,” objected Archie; “we must keep well clear o’ both shores.”

“I know that,” returned Billie, “but he did not forbid us to try the reeds round the other islands; there’s a much bigger one, not a quarter of a mile up stream. I think there are some beautiful sedges there where geese are likely to live. I’m sure I would choose to live in such a place if I was a goose.”

“O! then, we must go, Little Bill, for I think it would be hard to keep any one out of his native home.”

So saying, he dipped his paddle with vigour, and the light bark shot swiftly over the glancing water.

The sun was beginning to descend towards the western horizon when they drew near to the island, and several flocks of water-fowl had already sprung alarmed from the reeds, when Archie caught sight of a black-and-red-painted visage peering at him from among the bushes.

The boy's heart seemed to bound into his throat and his first impulse was to turn the canoe and fly, but Archie's mind was quicker even than his hand or eye. All he had ever heard or read of the cool stoicism of the Red-man seemed to flash across his memory, and, with a violent effort, he crushed back the shout that rose to his lips. He could not indeed suppress the look of sudden surprise that swept across his expressive face, but he cleverly adapted it to circumstances.

"Look, look! Little Bill," he exclaimed, eagerly, pointing right over the Indian's head at a flock of geese that opportunely appeared at the moment in the far distance. "Crouch, Bill, lie low, I'll call them. Steer a little more to the left and keep her so."

Thereupon he began a vociferous imitation of the sounds with which Indians are wont to call to geese that may chance to be flying past at a distance. The obedient Billie steered as directed, and thus the canoe was slowly sheered off a little from the shore. It was cleverly done. Whether the savage was deceived or not we cannot tell, but he showed no sign of intention to move or act, though he was within easy range of the boys.

"Little Bill," said Archie, in a low voice, such as one might use when anxious not to alarm game, "can you do what you're bid *at once* and *exactly*?"

"I can try," was the quiet answer.

"Well, then, try your best, Little Bill; for our lives may depend on our action now. Keep your eyes fixed on that flock o' geese as long as they're in sight. *Don't* look at the shore, whatever I do or say. Look at anything you like, but *not at the shore*. There's a Red-skin there. I've seen him, though he thinks I haven't. Now, steer right round and go back the way we have just come, only keep always edging a little off-shore."

As he said this Archie raised himself from his crouching attitude, laid down his gun and resumed his paddle, and in his ordinary free-and-easy

tones exclaimed—

“We’ve lost that chance, Little Bill—more’s the pity.”

“Never mind,” answered Billie in the same tone, being resolved to act his part well, “there’s lot’s more where these came from. Better luck next time. Where away now?”

“Keep her just as you go, you’re far enough out now. We should start some ducks here.”

Thus speaking, and with the air of a leisurely man enjoying himself—with infinite contentment on his ruddy countenance, and with much concern in his agitated soul—Archie took the canoe straight past the very spot where the Indian lay concealed. He felt that audacity was the safest line of action, for he knew that if the savage meant mischief, to pretend absolute ignorance of his existence would be less likely to draw a shot than sudden flight—which, however swiftly carried out, could by no means equal the flight of a bullet. Besides, it was of the utmost importance that he should reach the encampment and report what he had seen without the Indian becoming aware that he had been discovered.

In order to effect his purpose, he not only repassed the hiding-place of the savage but actually shot and picked up another duck while still within range of the enemy’s gun. Then he directed his brother to steer still more off the island, but very slowly.

“We’re in no hurry, you see, Little Bill; you haven’t looked at the shore, I hope?”

“Never once.”

“Ha! ha!” laughed Archie in high glee at the success of this his first experiment in backwoods warfare; “you’re a trump, Little Bill!”

“I’d rather be a trump than a trumpet, Archie. If there are more Red-skins about, laughing like that will be sure to rouse them.”

“Never fear, Billie, my boy. You do as I tell ’ee. We must keep up the

game a bit longer yet. It won't do to hurry back till the sun is lower, so we'll go over to that small island there an' have a try for another duck. There's sure to be nobody on such a small island as that. Afterwards we'll drop down in an off-hand, idle-like way to the encampment. It'll be natural to do this when the evenin's beginning to set in, an' so we'll stump them Red-skins at their own game. D'ee understand?"

"Yes. You're a clever chap, Archie."

In pursuance of this deeply laid plan, the brothers crossed over to the small islet referred to, and, after apparently amusing themselves there for a short time, dropped down stream in a leisurely way, reaching the encampment before the evening had fairly set in.

A council of war was immediately held.

"You were right in your guess, Okématan," said Davidson. "The reptiles will be down on us to-night no doubt. What course does the Cree chief advise?"

"Okématan advises that the kettle be boiled, the duck roasted, and a good big supper eaten."

"It iss fery pleasant advice, no doubt," said Fergus with a broad and rather sarcastic grin, "but it iss not warlike!"

"It seems not a bad preparation for war, anyhow," said Dan; "and what after that?"

"The two boys will sleep and rest while food is preparing," continued the chief. "The moon will set before we have done eating, and it will be very dark. The Saulteaux will not attack while the light lasts. When it is quite dark we will go."

"If we fix to leave and they chance to attack at the same time, it iss meetin' them we will be, Okématan," said Fergus.

To this remark the Indian vouchsafed no reply.

"Well, well, Muster Okématan, it iss your own business; you will know

best yourself. I will see to stowin' away my supper—whatever."

By the time supper was over, the moon had descended into a bank of black clouds on the horizon, and profound darkness brooded over land and water. It was a night such as an attacking party would hail as being most suitable for its work, and of course was proportionately unsuitable for the attacked. The Indian chief displayed no more concern about it than if nothing unusual were pending. After supper, however, he directed that the canoes should be launched and loaded. At the same time he gathered together as much wood as he could, and heaped it on the fire.

"You seem determined to give them plenty of light to do their work," remarked Davidson.

"They will wait till our fire burns low," said the chief. "By that time they will think we are asleep. A sleeping foe is not dangerous. They will come—slowly; step by step; with wide eyes glancing from side to side, and no noise, sly as foxes; timid as squaws! But by that time we will be far on our way back to Red River!"

"Ay—if we do not meet them comin' to attack us," said Fergus.

"And how shall we proceed!" asked Dan.

"As we came," answered the chief. "Okématan, with the two boys, will lead. Dan-ell an' Fergus will follow. Come."

Led by their guide, the party passed out of the firelight into the dense thicket by which the spot was encompassed almost completely, so that the only visible sign of the encampment from outside was the forks of flame and sparks which rose high above the bushes.

On reaching the shore they found the two boys holding the canoes, close to the land. So intense was the darkness that they could not see the boys or canoes at all till close beside them. Without uttering a word, or making a sound with their moccasined feet, they stepped into the canoes, pushed gently off and glided, ghost-like, into the vast obscurity.

Chapter Twenty Three.

A Midnight Chase, and Dan in Extremity.

For some time they advanced in absolute silence, dipping their paddles so as to make no noise whatever; Dan following as close as possible in the wake of the chief, for it was one of those nights which people describe as being so dark that one cannot see one's hand before one's face.

On reaching the lower end of the lake-like expansion where the river narrowed suddenly and the stream began to be felt, it was discovered that the enemy was in advance of them—that, anticipating some such attempt at escape, they had stationed an ambush at the narrows to cut off their retreat.

Archie was naturally the first to make this discovery, being in the bow of the canoe. He heard no sound, but suddenly there loomed out of the darkness another canoe close to them—so close that they were on the point of running into it when the sharp-witted boy saw it, and, with an adroit turn of his paddle prevented a collision. Then he ceased to paddle, and held his breath. Not knowing what to do next he wisely did nothing, but left matters to Oké and fate!

As they passed, the steersman in the strange canoe uttered something in a low tone. Evidently he mistook them for his friends.

"Sh!" was Okématan's prompt reply—or the Indian equivalent for that caution.

They glided silently and slowly past, but the suspicion of the strange Indian had obviously been aroused, for the paddles of his canoe were heard to gurgle powerfully. Hearing this, Okématan made a stroke that sent his canoe ahead like an arrow, and Archie, who appreciated the situation, seconded the movement.

"Stop!" exclaimed the strange Indian, in the Saulteaux tongue, but the Cree chief did not feel the duty of obedience strongly upon him just then. On the contrary, he put forth all his strength, but quietly, for he

remembered that Dan Davidson was behind.

As there was now no need for concealment, the pursuer uttered a shrill war-whoop which was immediately answered and repeated until the woods rang with the fiendish sound, while half-a-dozen canoes dashed out from the banks on either side, and sought to bar the river.

“Now, Arch-ee,” said the Cree chief in a low voice, “paddle for your life and be a man!”

“I’ll be two men, if you like, Oké,” answered the boy, whose courage was of that type which experiences something almost like desperate glee in the presence of imminent danger.

The canoe, obedient to the double impulse and the power of the current, was soon out of hearing of the pursuers.

“O! if I only had a paddle I might help you,” said Little Bill eagerly.

“Yes, an’ bu’st your biler, or explode your lungs, or something o’ that sort,” said his brother. “No, no, Little Bill; you sit there like a lord or an admiral, an’ leave men like Oké an’ me to do all the dirty work.”

While he spoke thus flippantly it is but justice to say that Archie was never more anxiously in earnest in his life, and that he strained at his paddle with a degree of energy that made him, perhaps, more than equal to many an average man. So that the canoe forged well ahead of the pursuers and finally got to a part of the river where three islets divided it into several channels, rendering further pursuit in the dark useless if not impossible.

Their comrades, however, were not so fortunate. Left behind by the sudden spurt of his leader, Davidson and his companion exerted themselves to overtake him, but the canoes of the enemy, which were just too late to cut off the retreat of Okématan, were in time to intercept the second canoe. In this emergency Dan swerved aside, hoping to get to the bank before the Saulteaux could discover his exact whereabouts. His intentions were thwarted by the want of caution in his companion.

“Iss it to the land ye are going?” asked Fergus.

“Yes—it’s our only chance,” whispered Dan.

“It iss my opeenion—” murmured the Highlander.

“Hush!” ejaculated Dan.

But the caution came too late. A listening Red-skin overheard the sounds, and, with a sudden dash was alongside of them. He did not, however, know the vigour of the men with whom he had to deal. While he was in the very midst of a triumphant war-whoop, Dan cut him over the head with the paddle so violently that the instrument became splinters, and the whoop ceased abruptly. At the same time Fergus caught hold of the bow of the enemy’s canoe with an iron grasp, and, giving it a heave that might have put Samson to shame, fairly overturned it.

“Ye can wet your whustle now—whatever,” he muttered.

As he spoke, the canoe ran with extreme violence against the invisible bank. At the same moment a random volley was fired from the canoes in rear. Fear lest they should wound or kill a comrade probably caused them to send the whizzing bullets rather high, but for one instant the flame revealed the position of the fugitives, and those who had reserved their fire took better aim.

“Take to the bush, Fergus!” cried Dan, as he grasped his gun and leaped into the shallow water.

The Highlander stooped to lay hold of his weapon, which lay in the bow of the canoe, just as another volley was fired. The act was the means of saving his life, for at least half-a-dozen bullets whizzed close over his head. Before he could recover himself a strong hand grasped his neck and flung him backwards. Probably a desperate hand-to-hand fight would have ensued, for Fergus McKay had much of the bone, muscle, and sinew, that is characteristic of his race, but a blow from an unseen weapon stunned him, and when his senses returned he found himself bound hand and foot lying in the bottom of a canoe. He could tell from its motion, that it was descending the river.

Meanwhile Dan Davidson, under the impression that his comrade was also seeking safety in the bush, did his best to advance in circumstances

of which he had never yet had experience, for, if the night was dark on the open bosom of the river, it presented the blackness of Erebus in the forest. Dan literally could not see an inch in advance of his own nose. If he held up his hand before his face it was absolutely invisible.

In the haste of the first rush he had crashed through a mass of small shrubbery with which the bank of the stream was lined. Then on passing through that he tumbled head over heels into a hollow, and narrowly missed breaking his gun. Beyond that he was arrested by a tree with such violence that he fell and lay for a minute or two, half-stunned. While lying thus, experience began to teach him, and common sense to have fair-play.

“A little more of this,” he thought, “and I’m a dead man. Besides, if it is difficult for me to traverse the forest in the dark, it is equally difficult for the savages. My plan is to feel my way step by step, with caution. That will be the quietest way, too, as well as the quickest. You’re an excited fool, Dan!”

When a man begins to think, and call himself a fool, there is some hope of him. Gathering himself up, and feeling his gun all over carefully, to make sure that it had not been broken, he continued to advance with excessive caution, and, in consequence, was ere long a considerable distance from the banks of the river, though, of course, he had but a hazy idea as to what part of the country he had attained, or whither he was tending.

As the first excitement of flight passed away, Dan began to feel uneasy prickings of conscience at having so hastily sought safety for himself, though, upon reflection, he could not accuse himself of having deserted his comrades. Okématan and the boys, he had good reason to believe—at least to hope—had succeeded in evading the foe, and Fergus he supposed had landed with himself, and was even at that moment making good his escape into the forest. To find him, in the circumstances, he knew to be impossible, and to shout by way of ascertaining his whereabouts he also knew to be useless as well as dangerous, as by doing so he would make his own position known to the enemy.

He also began to feel certain pricking sensations in his right leg as well

as in his conscience. The leg grew more painful as he advanced, and, on examination of the limb by feeling, he found, to his surprise, that he had received a bullet-wound in the thigh. Moreover he discovered that his trousers were wet with blood, and that there was a continuous flow of the vital fluid from the wound. This at once accounted to him for some very unusual feelings of faintness which had come over him, and which he had at first attributed to his frequent and violent falls.

The importance of checking the haemorrhage was so obvious, that he at once sat down and did his best to bind up the wound with the red cotton kerchief that encircled his neck. Having accomplished this as well as he could in the dark, he resumed his journey, and, after several hours of laborious scrambling, at last came to a halt with a feeling of very considerable, and to him unusual, exhaustion.

Again he sat down on what seemed to be a bed of moss, and began to meditate.

“Impossible to go further!” he thought. “I feel quite knocked up. Strange! I never felt like this before. It must have been the tumbles that did it, or it may be that I’ve lost more blood than I suppose. I’ll rest a bit now, and begin a search for Fergus by the first streak of dawn.”

In pursuance of this intention, the wearied man lay down, and putting his head on a mossy pillow, fell into a profound sleep, which was not broken till the sun was high in the heavens on the following day.

When at last he did awake, and attempted to sit up, Dan felt, to his surprise and no small alarm, that he was as weak as a child, that his leg lay in a pool of coagulated gore, and that blood was still slowly trickling from the wound in his thigh.

Although disposed to lie down and give way to an almost irresistible tendency to slumber, Dan was too well aware that death stared him in the face to succumb to the feeling without a struggle. He therefore made a mighty effort of will; sat up; undid the soaking bandage, and proceeded to extemporise a sort of tourniquet with it and a short piece of stick.

The contrivance, rude as it was, proved effectual, for it stopped the bleeding, but Dan could not help feeling that he had already lost so much

blood that he was reduced almost to the last stage of exhaustion, and that another hour or two would probably see the close of his earthly career. Nothing, perhaps, could have impressed this truth upon him so forcibly as his inability to shout when he tried to do so.

In the faint hope that Fergus might be within call, he raised his voice with the full knowledge that he ran the risk of attracting a foe instead of a comrade. The sound that complied with the impulse of his will would have made him laugh if he had not felt an amazing and unaccountable disposition to cry. Up to that period of his life—almost from his earliest babyhood—Dan Davidson's capacious chest had always contained the machinery, and the power, to make the nursery or the welkin ring with almost unparalleled violence. Now, the chest, though still capacious, and still full of the machinery, seemed to have totally lost the power, for the intended shout came forth in a gasp and ended in a sigh.

It was much the same when he essayed to rise. His legs almost refused to support him; everything appeared to swim before his eyes, and he sank down again listlessly on the ground. For the first time, perhaps, in his life, the strong man had the conviction effectually carried home to him that he was mortal, and could become helpless. The advantage of early training by a godly mother became apparent in this hour of weakness, for his first impulse was to pray for help, and the resulting effect—whether men choose to call it natural or supernatural—was at least partial relief from anxiety, and that degree of comfort which almost invariably arises from a state of resignation.

After a brief rest, the power of active thought revived a little, and Dan, again raising himself on one elbow, tried to rouse himself to the necessity of immediate action of some sort if his life was to be saved.

The spot on which he had lain, or rather fallen down, on the preceding night happened to be the fringe of the forest where it bordered on an extensive plain or stretch of prairie land. It was surrounded by a dense growth of trees and bushes, except on the side next the plain, where an opening permitted of an extensive view over the undulating country. No better spot could have been chosen, even in broad daylight, for an encampment, than had been thus fallen upon by the hunter in the darkness of night.

But the poor man felt at once that this advantage could be of no avail to him, for in the haste of landing he had thought only of his gun, and had left his axe, with the bag containing materials for making fire, in the canoe. Fortunately he had not divested himself of his powder-horn or shot-pouch, so he was not without the means of procuring food, but of what use could these be, he reflected, if he had not strength to use them?

Once again, in the energy of determination, he rose up and shouldered his gun with the intention of making his way across the plain, in the hope that he might at all events reach the wigwam of some wandering Indian, but he trembled so from excessive weakness that he was obliged to give up the attempt, and again sank down with feelings akin to despair.

To add to his distress, hunger now assailed him so violently that he would have roasted and eaten his moccasins—as many a starving man had done before him, though without much benefit—but even this resource was denied him for the want of fire, and raw moccasin was not only indigestible but uneatable!

Still, as it seemed his only hope, he gathered a few dry twigs and sticks together, drew the charge from his gun and sought to kindle some mossy lichen into flame by flashing the priming in the pan of the lock. Recent rains had damped everything, however, and his attempts proved abortive. Fortunately the weather was warm, so that he did not suffer from cold.

While he was yet labouring assiduously to accomplish his purpose, the whir of wings was heard overhead. Glancing quickly up, he perceived that a small flock of willow-grouse had settled on the bushes close to him. He was not surprised, though very thankful, for these birds were numerous enough and he had heard them flying about from time to time, but that they should settle down so near was exceedingly opportune and unexpected.

With eager haste and caution he rammed home the charge he had so recently withdrawn—keeping his eyes fixed longingly on the game all the time. That the birds saw him was obvious, for they kept turning their heads from side to side and looking down at him with curiosity. By good fortune grouse of this kind are sometimes very stupid as well as tame.

They did not take alarm at Dan’s motions, but craned their necks and seemed to eye him with considerable curiosity. Even when he tried to take aim at them their general aspect suggested that they were asking, mentally, “What next?”

But Dan found that he could not aim. The point of the gun wavered around as it might have done in the hands of a child.

With a short—almost contemptuous—laugh at his ridiculous incapacity, Dan lowered the gun.

Stupid as they were, the laugh was too much for the birds. They spread their wings.

“Now or never!” exclaimed Dan aloud. He pointed his gun straight at the flock; took no aim, and fired!

The result was that a plump specimen dropped almost at his feet. If he had been able to cheer he would have done so. But he was not, so he thanked God, fervently, instead.

Again the poor man essayed to kindle a fire, but in trying to do this with gunpowder he made the startling discovery that he had only one more charge in his powder-horn. He therefore re-loaded his gun, wiped out the pan and primed with care, feeling that this might be the last thing that would stand between him and starvation. It might have stood between him and something worse—but of that, more hereafter.

Starving men are not particular. That day Dan did what he would have believed to have been, in him, an impossibility—he drank the blood of the bird and ate its flesh raw!

“After all,” thought he, while engaged in this half-cannibalistic deed, “what’s the difference between raw grouse and raw oyster?”

It is but right to add that he did not philosophise much on the subject. Having consumed his meal, he lay down beside his gun and slept the sleep of the weary.

Chapter Twenty Four.

A Desperate Situation.

Awaking next morning much refreshed, but with a keen appetite for more grouse, Dan Davidson sat up and reflected. He felt that, although refreshed, the great weakness resulting from excessive loss of blood still rendered him almost helpless, and he knew that making new blood was a process that required good feeding and considerable time. What, then, was to be done?

He had scarcely asked himself the question when a rustle in the bushes near him caused him to look quickly round and seize his gun. But the noise was not repeated, and nothing could be seen to justify alarm. Still Dan felt that the sound justified caution; he therefore kept his gun handy, and loosened in its sheath the scalping-knife which he always carried in his belt—for eating purposes, not for scalping.

Thus he sat for nearly an hour with an uncomfortable sensation that danger of some sort lurked near him, until he almost fell asleep. Then, rousing himself he proceeded to breakfast on the bones and scraps of the previous night's supper.

While thus engaged he tried to make up his mind what course he ought to pursue—whether to remain where he was until his friends should have time to find him—for he felt sure that Okématan would escape and reach the Settlement, in which case a search for him would certainly be set on foot—or whether he should make a desperate effort to stagger on, and ultimately, if need be, creep towards home. The pain of his wound was now so great as to render the latter course almost impossible. He therefore resolved to wait and give his friends time to institute a search, trusting to another shot at willow-grouse for a supply of food.

He had scarcely made up his mind to this plan when the rustling in the bushes was repeated again. Seizing his gun, which he had laid down, Dan faced round just in time to see the hindquarters and tail of a large grey wolf disappearing in the bushes.

To say that he felt considerable alarm when he saw this is not to stamp him with undue timidity, for he would have rejoiced to have had the wolf in his clutches, then and there, and to engage in single combat with it, weak though he was. What troubled him was his knowledge of the fact that the mean spirited and sly brute was noted for its apparent sagacity in finding out when an intended victim was growing too feeble to show fight—either from wounds or old age—and its pertinacity and patience in biding the time when an attack could be made with safety.

Had this horrible creature discerned, by some occult knowledge, that the sands in his glass were running low? Was it to be his fate to face his glaring murderer until he had not vital power left to grapple with it, or to guard his throat from its hideous fangs? These were questions which forced themselves upon him, and which might well have caused the stoutest heart to shrink from the threatened and terrible doom.

In the strength of his emotion he had almost fired at a venture at the spot where the brute had disappeared; but luckily the remembrance that it was his last charge of ammunition came to him in time, and he had the resolution to restrain himself even when his finger was on the trigger.

Dan now perceived that he must not venture to remain on the spot where he had passed the night, because, being surrounded on three sides by shrubbery, it afforded his grisly foe an opportunity to approach from any quarter, and spring on him the moment he should find him off his guard.

There was a natural bank of earth out on the plain about three or four hundred yards off, with neither trees nor bushes near it. The bank was not more than four feet high, and the top slightly overhung its base, so that it afforded some slight protection from the sun. To this spot Dan resolved to betake himself, and immediately began the journey—for a journey it surely was, seeing that the hunter had to do it on hands and knees, lifting his gun and pushing it before him, each yard or so, as he went along. The inflammation of his wound rendered the process all the slower and more painful, and a burning thirst, which he had no means of slaking, added to his misery.

By the time he had passed over the short distance, he was so much exhausted that he fell at the foot of the bank almost in a swoon.

Evidently the wolf imagined that its time had now come, for it sneaked out of the wood when the hunter fell, and began cautiously to advance. But Dan saw this, and, making a desperate effort, arose to a sitting posture, leaned his back against the bank, and placed his gun across his knees.

Seeing this, the wolf sat down on its haunches, and coolly began to bide its time.

“Ha! you brute!” muttered Dan, “I could easily stop your mischief if my strength wasn’t all gone. As it is, I dare not give you my last shot till you are so close that you can look down the barrel o’ my gun.”

From this point a watch of endurance began on both sides—the brute, of course, unaware of the deadly weapon which its intended victim held, and the man fully aware of the fact that if he should venture to lie down and sleep, his doom would be sealed.

It is impossible for any one who has not had trial of similar experiences to imagine the rush of thought and feeling that passed through the brain and breast of Dan Davidson during the long dreary hours of that terrible day. Sometimes he fell into a half-dreamy condition, in which his mind leaped over forests and ocean to bonnie Scotland, where his days of childhood were spent in glorious revelry on her sunny banks and braes. At other times the memory of school-days came strong upon him, when play and lessons, and palmies were all the cares he had; or thoughts of Sabbaths spent with his mother—now in the church, now in the fields, or at the cottage door learning Bible stories and hearing words of wisdom and the story of the crucified One from her lips. Then the scene would change, and he was crossing the stormy ocean, or fighting with Red-skins, or thundering after the buffalo on the wide prairies. But through all the varied fabric of his thoughts there ran two distinct threads, one golden, the other black. The first we need hardly say was Elspie McKay; the second was that awful wolf which sat there glaring at him with a hang-dog expression, with the red tongue hanging out of its mouth, and from which he never for a moment allowed his eyes to wander.

As evening began to draw on, the situation became terrible, for Dan felt that the little strength he had left was fast sinking. The efforts by which he had succeeded in rousing himself in the earlier parts of the day were

failing of their effect. Then a strange and sudden change occurred, for, while he knew that the end of the trial was rapidly approaching, he began to experience a feeling of indifference—the result, no doubt, of excessive weariness—and almost a wish that all was over. Nevertheless, whenever that wolf moved, or changed its position ever so little, the instinct of self-preservation returned in full force, and Dan, pulling himself together, prepared to defend himself desperately to the last gasp.

While the two were thus glaring at each other, Dan was startled and thoroughly aroused from his irresistible lethargy by a loud report.

Next moment he saw the wolf extended dead upon the plain.

Chapter Twenty Five.

Adventures of Fergus and his Friends.

In order to account for the sudden death recorded in the last chapter, we must turn aside to follow for a little the fortunes of Fergus McKay.

It will be remembered that the vigorous Highlander, after overturning the Indian canoe and running his own canoe on shore, was seized by the neck, while in the act of reaching forward to grasp his gun, and captured.

Now, Fergus was of an unusually knowing and wily nature. He possessed what some would call more than his share of readiness in action and sagacity in counsel, though his ordinary reticence and sluggishness of manner concealed those qualities to some extent.

Being endued, also, with more than the average allowance of that bodily strength for which his countrymen are famous, his first impulse was to exert his powers and show fight, but he had been taken suddenly at a disadvantage and thrown on his back into the bottom of the canoe, and at least three pair of very muscular hands grasped his throat and other parts of his person. That they were strong hands he felt; that they belonged to big strong savages he had every reason to believe—though it was too dark to see—and that scalping-knives and tomahawks were handy to them he knew to be highly probable. He therefore promptly made up his

mind as to his course of action, and at once began to play his part. Making a very feeble resistance—just enough, in short, to deceive—he begged for mercy in soft, rather tremulous and very abject tones. True, his language was English—at least that sort of English to which the mountaineers of Scotland are addicted—but he trusted to the tone and manner of his speech, not to the sense, which Saulteaux, he knew, could not be expected to understand.

“Oh! then, don’t be hard on me. Don’t kill me, goot shentlemen,” he whined. “It iss a poor worthless thing I am—whatever!”

These remarks, and a few similar appeals for mercy, were accompanied with many dismal groans, as his captors were dragging him up the bank of the stream. Pausing for a moment, one of them produced a cord, with which they proceeded to bind their cowardly and unresisting prisoner.

Whether the Indians were deceived by their victim’s tones and manner, and the soft condition of his carefully relaxed muscles, we cannot tell, but it seemed as if such were the case, for some of the brief remarks made by his captors had in them a smack of undisguised contempt, and when the cord was being put round his arms he felt that the grip of his captors was slightly relaxed.

Now or never was his chance! Hurling the men on either side of him right and left, he delivered two random blows in front, one of which happily took effect on a savage chest, the other on a savage nose, and cleared the way in that direction. With a bound like that of one of his own mountain deer, he cleared the bank, and plunged into the river.

In ordinary circumstances an attempt of this kind would have been worse than useless, for the Indians would not only have jumped into their canoes and overtaken the fugitive, but some of them would have run down the bank of the stream to prevent a landing. Some such attempt was indeed made on the present occasion, but the intense darkness was in favour of Fergus, and the searching canoes only ran into each other, while the searchers on land were still more at a disadvantage.

Now, Fergus McKay was as much at home in water as an otter or a musk-rat. Indeed he had been known among his playmates in the old

country as the “Water-rat.” When, therefore, he plunged into the river, as described, he took care to hold his breath as if for a long dive, and drifted with the current a considerable distance as motionless as a dead man. The Indians listened intently, of course; for his coming to the surface; for the breathing, and, it might be, for the splashing that would be natural after such a leap, but no breathing or splashing met their ears, for when Fergus put up his head, far down the stream, he only let out his nose and mouth for a gentle inspiration, and sank again.

“It iss circumventin’ you at your own trade, fightin’ you wi’ your own claymore, that I will be doin’,” he thought, as he rose a second time, and swam softly with the stream.

Fergus had the advantage of being well acquainted with the river in which he was swimming, as well as with the lands in its neighbourhood, and he knew that there was a certain bend in the stream which it would take the canoe of Okématan a considerable time to traverse. By cutting across a narrow neck of land there was, therefore, a possibility of his intercepting the canoe.

The Saulteaux, of course, might have also taken advantage of this circumstance, but they could have done so only on foot, and they knew that without canoes they could not arrest the progress of the fugitives.

Reaching the spot where he wished to land, by intuition almost, the Highlander soon found himself on the bank, squeezed the water out of his garments, and set off as quickly as he dared in such darkness. By good fortune he happened to cross a hunter’s track or path—like a sheep-run—with which he was familiar, and, by following it, was able to advance much more rapidly. In a short time he again came out on the left bank of the river. There he sat down on a boulder to listen. Profound was his attention to every sound—as profound, almost, as his anxiety, for he knew that if the canoe should have already passed he would be obliged to make his way back to the Settlement on foot by a straight course, which meant a slow, toilsome march, scrambling through pathless woods, wading morasses, and swimming across rivers.

He had been seated thus for about half-an-hour, and in his impatience was giving way to despondency, when the plash of water smote upon his

ear. Cocking the said ear attentively, he was rewarded with another smite, and, in a few minutes, distinctly heard the sound of paddles.

He put his hands to his mouth forthwith, and uttered a peculiar cry.

Instantly the sound of the paddles ceased as Archie Sinclair, looking over his shoulder, said—

“Did you hear that, Oké?”

Before Oké could reply, the cry was repeated.

“It is Fer-gus,” said the Indian, answering to the cry, and steering in the direction whence it came. “Are you sure, Oké?”

“Okématan never speaks till he is sure—waugh!”

“H’m! I’m not so sure o’ *that*,” muttered the boy to himself.

A few seconds put the matter at rest, for the voice of the Highlander was heard, as they cautiously drew near, saying—

“Iss it *you*?”

“I think it is!” replied Archie; “why, man, where are you? I can see nothing.”

“Wow! man, but I am gled,” said Fergus; “just follow your nose, Archie, an’ you’ll be all right.”

Another moment, and the canoe was checked by Fergus, who had stepped into the water to prevent its being injured against the stones.

“You better gie me the paddle, Archie, an’ sit beside Little Bill. It iss tired o’ paddlin’ you will be by now.”

“But where is Dan?” asked Archie as he complied with this request.

“That iss more than I can tell you, boy, but he’s safe enough I doubt not, for I heard him gie a cheer as he jamp into the wuds, an’ it’s beyont the power o’ a mortal Red-skin to chase an active man on a night like this.”

Thereupon Fergus gave a brief account of all that had happened after the canoes were parted—as far as he knew it—and then an earnest council of war was held as to what was the best course to pursue in the circumstances. Being the youngest brave, (for Little Bill was ignored in this matter), Archie was invited to give his opinion first. This was well, because, being enthusiastic and irrepressible, he would probably have given his opinion first at any rate.

“My opinion is,” he said, promptly, “that we turn right-about, and go back to find Dan, even though we should have to fight the whole Saulteaux nation!”

“That iss well spoken,” said Fergus with something of sarcasm in his tone; “but as we hev only two guns amang us, a tomahawk, an’ a knife or two, without any claymores at all, I would like to know what we are to fecht with? Moreover, what is to become o’ Little Bill when we are fechtin’? It iss *my* opeenion that we put the command o’ our expeedition in the hands of Okématan, an’ leave him to do what he thinks best.”

“Arch-ee is a true brave,” said the Indian, “but he is young. When the wrinkles of age are on his brow he will be a great chief. Okématan’s heart is with him to turn back and fight, but wisdom says, go to the Settlement, get men, and return as fast as you can.”

“Then the sooner we set about it the better, for when wan’s mind is made up, talk iss only lost time.”

With that he shoved the canoe off into the stream, and paddling was resumed with redoubled vigour.

They proceeded in silence till the blush of rosy day in the east dispelled the intense darkness. Then, pulling ashore, they kindled a small fire, and, while the chief re-gummed the seams of the canoe, which leaked a little, the others prepared and ate a hasty breakfast.

They were still engaged with this meal, and discussing, not very hopefully, the possibility of reaching Red River Settlement and returning in time to render relief to Dan—supposing that he should require relief—when the sound of fast-dipping paddles was heard beyond the bend of the river just below them.

Another moment, and four large canoes, each manned by eight men, swept into view, their red sides glowing in the morning sun, and their occupants driving the water behind them in foam by the vigour of their strokes.

At first it was supposed that this was another band of Indians proceeding, possibly, to join that from which they had just escaped; but the fugitives were speedily undeceived by the appearance of the men as they drew nearer.

“I would be thinkin’ that the man in the bow o’ the first canoe is Antoine Dechamp,” said Fergus, as he stood peering over the bushes at the advancing brigade.

“I’m sure it’s Dechamp. I’d know him a mile off,” said Archie.

“Ay, an’ they hev got sight o’ the smoke of our fire, too,” added Fergus.

“It is Dechamp,” said Okématan, decisively, as he stepped into the open and held up his hand to the new arrivals.

A cheer was raised by those in the canoes when the Cree chief was recognised, and the flotilla, coming on at full speed, soon reached the bank.

Explanations were speedily exchanged, and our fugitives learned that news had been carried to the Settlement of the approach of the very band of Saulteaux whom they had encountered, and a band of fiery young men, led by Dechamp, had come out to meet them for the purpose of asking them whether they meant their visit to be friendly, or whether they wished to measure their strength with the men of Red River; as, if so, a sample had come out for the express purpose of accommodating them!

On hearing the news that Okématan and Fergus had to give, the men—most of whom were half-breeds connected with Cree families—gave a cheer and voted for an immediate advance against the Saulteaux. This, after very brief palaver, was unanimously agreed to.

“You’ll not object to return with us, I suppose?” asked Dechamp of

Fergus.

“Iss it objectin’ to a fecht you will mean?”

“Well—it’s not unlikely that there may be something of the sort going if we meet.”

“Did you ever hear of a McKay objectin’ to a fecht, Antoine?”

Dechamp laughed.

“Well,” he said, “I know Okématan won’t object to turn back, and show us the way to the place where he met the reptiles.”

“Okématan was on his way to seek for help,” said the Indian quietly.

Every one being agreed on this point, the whole band re-embarked, and proceeded on their way up the river. They advanced rapidly, for although the stream was against them it was so sluggish as to be scarcely appreciable, and by keeping near to the banks they were not delayed by it at all.

Towards the afternoon the place where the struggle had taken place was reached, but no Saulteaux were to be seen. They had taken their departure, and, from the fact that several small things belonging to them had been left behind, it seemed not unlikely that they had obtained information of the expedition sent out against them, and had departed in haste.

“It iss of no use,” said Fergus, when this became evident, “for us to keep up a stern-chase after them. They have got too much of a start, so it seems to me, boys, we could not do better than follow up the tracks of Daniel Davidson an’ make sure that he has got clear away from them.”

To this proposal there was much objection at first, for it involved some of the party quitting the canoes and journeying no one could tell how far through the woods on foot.

“Besides,” said one, “Dan is quite able to take care of himself, and if he got off in the dark, as you tell us he did, there’s not a man in the

Saulteaux nation could come up with him either in dark or light."

"That may be all fery true, my frund," returned Fergus, "nevertheless I'm goin' to follow up his track, for it is sure that he took no proveesions wi' him, an' it was too dark for me to see if he escaped wi' his gun. Dan is a strong man, but the strongest man will be findin' himself in diffeeculties without grub. It iss followin' up his trail I will be doin', wi' some proveesions on my back, if wan or two o' you will go wuth me."

"I will go," said Archie Sinclair, promptly, "if some o' you will promise to take care o' Little Bill."

A laugh greeted this offer, and half-a-dozen of the men at once agreed to take good care of the invalid.

"Moreover," said Dechamp, "whoever goes need not go further than the Pine Portage. The party on foot will have found out, before the canoes reach that, whether Dan has got clear off, and they can rejoin the canoes at the Portage. So, Fergus, I'll join your party too. Who else will go?"

Okématan and Jacques Bourassin here stepped forward, but none of the others seemed disposed to undertake the tramp.

"There iss enough of us—whatever," remarked the Highlander as he and the others put some provisions into their wallets and shouldered their guns. "You will be our leader, Antoine Dechamp. It iss yourself that knows the outs an' ins o' the land better than any of us—except Okématan, may be—but I dar' say he's not as weel acquaint wi' the Red River woods as wi' the plains."

The chief bowed a dignified assent to this proposition, which, however, he hardly understood.

Dechamp, being accustomed to lead, accepted the position at once, stepped off on the trail of Dan, which had been made distinctly visible when he went crashing through the underwood the day before. Fergus followed, and Bourassin came third.

"Now, then," said Archie, looking into the chief's face, "come along, Oké. You and I will form the rearguard, which is the position of danger and

honour in warfare o' this sort—at least if it isn't, it ought to be. Take care o' yourself, Little Bill. We'll soon find Dan. Good-bye."

So saying, the rearguard of the column vanished into the forest, and the others, returning to their canoes, began to descend the river.

Archie was nearer the mark than he imagined when he said they would soon find Dan. The distance which it had taken our hero so long to traverse in the dark was comparatively short, and the light was only beginning to fade when they came to the edge of the wood where Dan had spent the night.

Dechamp, of course, was first to come upon his encampment, and the instant he entered it he observed the open space giving a view of the plain beyond. He also saw the wolf sitting on his haunches about two hundred yards off.

Quick as the lightning flash his gun flew to his shoulder. Dechamp was a first-rate shot. He fired, and, as we have seen, the wolf stretched himself in death upon the plain.

Thus was Dan Davidson rescued at almost the eleventh hour.

Chapter Twenty Six.

Home-Coming and Bargaining.

The return of the hunting party to Red River Settlement was an illustration of the uncertainty of all human affairs. They went forth rejoicing in all the strength of youth and manhood; they returned in sorrow, with one at least of the strong men reduced to the last stage of weakness.

We would not be understood to refer to this in a pessimistic spirit. On the contrary, the optimistic view suggests the very same idea of uncertainty, though in a pleasant aspect; for does not many a day that dawns in cloud and rain progress to brilliant sunshine? while equally true it is that many a life which begins in sorrow culminates in joy.

Okématan, who was intensely philosophical and inquisitive, had been carrying on a semi-speculative conversation with Billie on this very subject while descending the Red River towards Prairie Cottage—much to the perplexity of the invalid, who scarce knew how to answer the chief's queries, and greatly to the interest of Archie, who wondered at Little Bill's powers of reply.

"By the way," said Archie, "when you two have settled that knotty point, will you tell me who is to take the news of Dan's accident to Mrs Davidson? We'll have to carry him up to the house, you know, on a blanket 'tween two poles, an' she'll be sure to think that he's dead, or has been killed, an' that'll half-kill *her*, it'll give her such a fright. Somebody will have to go on ahead and tell her."

"I will, if you like," said Billie; "if you'll only carry me up to the garden gate and set me down, I can easily walk up the path."

This proposal had just been agreed to when the whole flotilla of canoes paddled up alongside of the bank close under Prairie Cottage.

It was evening at the time. The Davidson family was at supper, and as the canoes had approached very quietly, with Dan in the leading one, no person stood on the bank to welcome them.

"It's as well they don't know," said Archie, jumping on shore. "Now, Little Bill, come along, and I'll carry you to the gate while they're arranging matters for Dan."

Seated at the foot of the family table was Peter Davidson. He could see the garden path through the window.

"Hallo! mother," he exclaimed, dropping his knife and fork, "there is Little Bill or his ghost coming up the track."

"Impossible, Peter," said the good lady, with, however, a look of anxiety which showed she believed that, or something else, to be quite possible.

"Look for yourself, mother," cried Peter, springing up and running out.

"It *is* Billie," said Jessie, reflecting her mother's anxiety; "what can have

brought them back so soon?”

Peter re-entered at the moment with Little Bill in his arms. He set the boy down and again ran out.

Taking the widow’s trembling hand in both of his, Billie addressed her as “mother,” like the rest of the family.

“Dan has been hurt,” he said, in his soft way, “and he’s come home to get well. They will bring him up directly.”

“Is he too ill to walk?” asked the widow.

“No, not too ill—but too weak,” answered the matter-of-fact Billie. “Indeed he is not ill at all, but he has lost a *heap* of blood, for they shot him.”

Jessie waited to hear no more, but immediately followed Peter, and the small servant Louise followed suit; leaving the widow in a half-fainting condition with the boy. But she did not remain long thus, for just then old Duncan McKay entered by the back-door.

“It will be bad news you’ve been hearin’, Mrs Davidson,” he said, in some surprise, pouring out a glass of water as he spoke, and considerately handing it to the widow.

“Yes—O yes! I’ve just heard that Dan has been shot.”

“Bless my soul!” exclaimed the horrified old man, almost falling into a chair. “Iss—iss he tead?”

“No, thank God—only weak from loss of blood. He’ll be here directly.”

“That iss goot news—whatever; for as long as there’s life there’s hope.”

Trying to comfort himself, as well as his friend, with this truism, the old man staggered out of the house in search of those who had gone before.

Soon a sad procession was seen coming up the path, led by Archie. Four men carried Dan on a rudely-extemporised litter. His bloodless face and lips gave him the appearance of death, but the glow in his eyes told of

still unexhausted life.

“I’ll be all right, mother,” he said feebly, as they laid him on his bed. “I only want food and rest. Thank God—home at last!”

As he spoke, a quiet step was heard, and Elspie, with a face as pale as his own, knelt by his bedside and took his hand.

That touch was the first impulse the youth received towards decided recovery. Old McKay perceived the change in his countenance.

“Yes, yes! ay, ay!” he exclaimed, pacing violently up and down the room, “he wants nothin’ but victuals an’ rest—steaks an’ shops, and plenty o’ whusky an’ water—hot. Don’t be croodin’ about him an’ botherin’ him. Come away, and leave him to his mother, an’ send for the doctor. Has no wan gone for him yet?”

“Yes; Peter has just started. I heard the clatter of his horse’s feet,” said Jessie.

“It iss not the doctor that will put him right, whatever,” muttered the old man, as he left the room, followed by most of the family.

And the doctor himself held the same opinion; for he said, on returning to the reception hall after seeing his patient—

“It will be a considerable time before he recovers, for the fountain of life had been well-nigh drained when he fortunately extemporised that tourniquet. But there’s no fear of him: all that he wants is food, rest, and peace of mind.”

“An’ whusky, doctor,” added old McKay. “Don’t forget the best pheesic; an’ I hev goot store of it, too, in my cellar at Ben Nevis.”

“I’m not so sure about the whisky, Mr McKay,” returned the doctor with a laugh. “I think we shall manage to pull him through without that.”

The other requisites for recovery were applied without stint at Prairie Cottage; for, despite the misfortune which had attended the cultivation of the soil, the Davidsons had a little money, which enabled them to buy

provisions and other necessaries, obtainable from the Hudson Bay Company, and thus tide over the disastrous year in greater comfort than fell to the lot of many of the other settlers.

Thus Dan was well looked after. His brother Peter found the food—at least much of it—on the prairie and in the woods; his sister Jessie cooked it; Louise helped, looked on, and learned; home afforded rest; Elspie supplied the peace of mind—at least as much of it as it was possible for a fellow-mortal to supply; and his mother superintended all. Add to this that Archie Sinclair cheered him with miscellaneous gossip; that Little Bill read to him, or entertained him with serious talk and grave speculation; that André Morel and his sister often entertained him with song; that on such occasions Jenkins, the sailor, frequently amused him with nautical tales; that old Peg sometimes came from Ben Nevis to gaze at him tenderly; and that Okématan came to glare at him more or less affectionately—and we have said enough to warrant the conclusion that Dan Davidson had a pretty good time of it in spite of his weak condition.

Nevertheless Dan was not quite happy. He could not get rid of the memory of Henri Perrin's murder, and the terrible thought that Elspie's brother Duncan had some sort of guilty knowledge of it. These thoughts he buried deep, however, in his own breast, and even tried to forget them. Vain effort! for does it not stand to reason that the thing we strive most earnestly to forget is the very thing which, by that effort, we are fixing with a deeper stamp on memory?

François La Certe was somewhat exercised about the same question, about the same time.

That estimable member of the colony was seated one fine day on the banks of the river fishing for goldeyes—a small fish about the size of a plump herring. His amiable spouse was helping, or rather fishing with him. It was a fine healthy, contemplative occupation; one that admirably suited their tendency to repose, and at the same time filled them with that virtuous sensation which awaits those who know that they are engaged in useful occupation—for were not goldeyes the best of eating?

Branches of trees were their primitive rods, twine their simple lines, grasshoppers their bait, and a violent jerk their method.

“Slowfoot!” said La Certe.

“My husband!” or some such Indian phrase, answered the woman.

“I have been wondering for a long time now why—hi!—no! I thought there was something at my bait—but it was deception. Nothing is so unreal as the bite of the goldeye—when it is not there. It brings to mind the lights in the sky of winter, which dance and shoot—and yet they are not. Hi! ho!—I have him. I was mistaken. I thought the fish *was* not—but it was.”

While speaking La Certe sent a small fish with bursting violence on the grass behind him. Almost at the same moment Slowfoot landed another, with less violence and more coolness.

“What was I saying, Slowfoot?” asked the half-breed, when the hooks had been re-baited, and their eyes were riveted on their respective floats.

“Nothing that any one could remember,” answered his truthful spouse.

“Now I remember—ho! was that another?”

“No, it was not,” answered his matter-of-fact helpmate.

“Where is our child?” asked the father, with that wayward wandering of mind which is a not uncommon characteristic of genius.

“Smoking in the tent,” answered the mother.

“And with my pipe, no doubt,” said the father, laying down his rod and searching in the bag in which he was wont to carry, among other things, his pipe and tobacco.

A cry of pain from the tent in question—which was close behind the pair—apprised the parents that something was wrong. Immediately their first and only one issued with a tobacco pipe in one hand and a burnt finger on the other. It came to the father for sympathy, and got it. That is to say, La Certe put the burnt finger in his mouth for a moment, and uttered some guttural expressions of sympathy. Having thus fulfilled duty and relieved conscience, he exchanged the finger for the pipe-stem, and began to smoke. The spoiled, as well as despoiled, child uttered a howl

of indignation, and staggered off to its mother; but she received it with a smile of affectionate indifference, whereupon the injured creature went back to the tent, howling, and, apparently, howled itself to sleep.

Again La Certe broke the piscatorial spell that had settled down on them, and, taking up the thread of discourse where he had dropped it, repeated his statement that he had been wondering for a long time why Cloudbrow, *alias* young Duncan McKay, was so sharp and fierce in denying that he knew anything about the murder of Henri Perrin.

“Hee! hee!” was Slowfoot’s significant reply.

“Can Slowfoot not guess?” he asked, after attending to a hopeful nibble, which came to nothing.

“Slowfoot need not guess; she *knows*,” said the woman with an air of great mystery.

“What does Slowfoot know?”

The woman’s answer to this was a look of exceeding slyness. But this did not content her lord, who, after repeated questions, and a threat to resort to extreme measures in case of continued refusal, drew from her a distinct answer.

“Slowfoot knows that Cloudbrow *killed* Perrin.”

“Sh!” exclaimed La Certe, with a look of real concern, “I am not yet tired of you, Slowfoot; and if old McKay hears you say that he will shoot you.”

“Slowfoot is not a fool,” retorted the woman: “the old man will never hear her say that. What has Slowfoot got to do with it? She can hold her tongue!”

“She can do that, for certain,” returned her husband with good-natured sarcasm. “In that, as in many things, she excels other women. I would never have married her had it not been so. But how do you come to be so sure?”

“I know the knife,” returned the woman, becoming more literal as she

went on, “and Marie Blanc knows it. Her husband once got the loan of it from Cloudbrow, and she looked at it with care, because she had never seen such a knife before. She knew all its marks. Why does Cloudbrow deny that it is his? Because it was Cloudbrow who killed Perrin. If it had been anybody else he would have known it, and he would have said so—for he was *there*.”

“How know you that he was there?”

“Marie Blanc knows. She netted the snowshoes that Cloudbrow wore, and she saw the footprints.”

“But pairs of snowshoes are very like each other,” objected La Certe.

“Very like. Yes; but did ever two shoes have the same mends in the same places of the netting, where it had been broken, and the same marks on the frames?”

“Never. It will go hard with Cloudbrow if this is true.”

“It will go hard with him whether it is true or not,” returned the woman; “for some of the friends of Perrin believe it to be true, and swear—”

The disappearance of Slowfoot’s float at this moment stopped her swearing, and brought the conversation to an abrupt end. The landing of another goldeye prevented its resumption.

Having caught more than enough for a good supper, this easy-going pair leaned their rods against a tree, and ascended the bank towards their tent, which was an ordinary conical Indian wigwam, composed partly of leather and partly of birch-bark, with a curtain for a door and a hole in the top for a window; it also served for a chimney.

On the way they encountered one of the poor Swiss immigrants, who, having a wife and family, and having been unsuccessful in buffalo-hunting, and indeed in all other hunting, was in a state which bordered on starvation.

“You have been lucky,” said the Switzer, eyeing La Certe’s fish greedily.

“Sometimes luck comes to us—not often,” answered the half-breed. “Have you caught any?”

“Yes, two small ones. Here they are. But what are these among three children and a wife? I know not how to fish,” said the mountaineer disconsolately.

The fact was not surprising, for the poor man was a watchmaker by trade, and had never handled rod or gun till he was, as it were, cast adrift in Rupert’s Land.

“I will sell you some of my fish,” said La Certe, who on all occasions had a keen eye for a bargain.

“Good! I am ready to buy,” said the poor fellow, “but I have not much to spend. Only last week I gave my silver watch for eight gallons of wheat. I meant it for seed, but my wife and children were starving, so we were have no seed and only five shillings to spare.”

“Well, my friend,” said La Certe, “fish is very scarce just now, but you may have five goldeyes for your five shillings.”

“O! that is too much,” remonstrated the Switzer.

“No, no,” interrupted the half-breed, amiably, “by no means—but if you really think it too much fish for the money I will give you four goldeyes!”

“Come, you know I don’t mean that,” returned the other, with a cynical smile. “Make it six, and I will agree. And here is a pinch of snuff in to the bargain.”

He pulled out a box as he spoke, and opened it.

“Ha!” said La Certe, helping himself. “I love snuff, and so does my wife. Do you not?”

Slowfoot answered, “Hee! hee!” and helped herself to as much as a good broad finger and thumb could grasp, after which she sneezed with violence.

“Now, behold! my friend—a-wheesht!” said La Certe, sneezing a bass accompaniment to Slowfoot’s treble. “I will give you a catfish—a whole catfish for—a-wheesht!—for that box and snuff.”

The Switzer shook his head.

“Nay,” he said. “The snuff you may have, but the box was the gift of a friend, and I am loath to part with it. Besides, the box is of little real value.”

“You may have the head of the catfish for the snuff, and the whole catfish for the box,” said La Certe, with the firmness of a man who has irrevocably made up his mind—for there are none so firm of purpose as the weak and vacillating when they know they have got the whip-hand of any one! “And, behold! I will be liberal,” he added. “You shall have another goldeye into the bargain—six goldeyes for the five shillings and a whole catfish for the box and snuff—voilà!” The poor Switzer still hesitated.

“It is a great deal to give for so little,” he said.

“That may be true,” said the other, “but I would not see my family starve for the satisfaction of carrying a snuff-box and five shillings in my pocket.”

This politic reference to the starving family decided the matter; the poor Switzer emptied his pockets with a sigh, received the fish, and went on his way, leaving La Certe and Slowfoot to return to their wigwam highly pleased with their bargain. As must have been noted by the reader long ere now, this like-minded couple did not possess a conscience between them—at least, if they did, it must at that time have been a singularly shrunken and mummified one, which they had managed to keep hidden away in some dark and exceedingly un-get-at-able chamber of the soul.

Commercially speaking, however, they had some ground for satisfaction; for at that time the ordinary price of a catfish, which is a little larger than a haddock, was threepence.

Awakening the juvenile La Certe to the blissful realisation that a good “square” meal was pending, Slowfoot ordered it to fill and light the pipe for the father, while she set about preparing the fish for supper.

Chapter Twenty Seven.

Visit from Sioux brought to a disastrous Close.

Happening to hear of the bargain which we have just described, and being under the impression that it might be good for La Certe's spirit to receive a mild reproof, Mr Sutherland paid him a visit.

The Scotch Elder was, for a long time, the only man fitted to perform the duties of a minister to his countrymen in that out-of-the-world colony, and, being a true man of God, he could not hear of gross injustice, or heartless conduct, without some slight attempt to open the other's eyes to his sin.

It may well be understood that, in the nature of things and the state of the country, the solitary Elder's duties were by no means light or agreeable. Indeed he would have had no heart to cope with them and with the difficulties they entailed, had he not remembered that the battle was not his, but the Lord's, and that he was only an instrument in the all-powerful hand of the Spirit of God. His own weapons were the Word, Prayer, and the name of Jesus.

But it was not given to him to see much fruit of his visit to La Certe at that time. The half-breed, besides asserting himself to be a "Catholic," (by which he meant a Roman Catholic), and, therefore, in no way amenable to Sutherland's jurisdiction, received his remonstrances with philosophical arguments tending to prove that men were meant to make the best of circumstances as they found them, without any regard to principles—which, after all, were not very seriously held or practised by any one, he thought—especially in Red River.

As for Slowfoot, she listened with evident interest and curiosity to the strange teaching and exhortations of the Elder, but when appealed to for some sort of opinion on the various points touched, she replied with an imbecile "Hee! hee!" which was not encouraging.

However, the good man had sown the seed faithfully and kindly. The watering thereof and the sprouting were, he knew, in the hands of the

Master.

Rising to take leave, the Elder put his hand in his pocket and pulled out a large clasp-knife.

“Why, that’s my knife that I lost!” exclaimed La Certe in surprise; “where did you find it?”

“I found it on my table at home, where you left it that time you came to ask for some tobacco. Now, observe, if I did not seriously hold and practise the principle of honesty, I would have made the best of circumstances as I found them, and would have put the knife in my pocket instead of returning it to you.”

La Certe laughed, and Slowfoot said, “Hee! hee!” while the juvenile La Certe availed itself of the opportunity to draw the pipe gently from its father’s hand and have a whiff.

“I have a message to you from the Governor,” continued the Elder, taking a piece of paper out of his pocket.

“For me!” exclaimed La Certe, in surprise.

“Yes. He heard that you are hard up just now, and that you are going up the river a considerable distance to hunt—is not that so?”

“Yes, that is true. We start off to-morrow.”

“Well, then, he gave me this order for some supplies of powder and shot, twine and hooks, with some cloth, beads, and such like for Slowfoot.”

“That is very good of the Governor—very considerate,” said La Certe with a pleased look.

“Very good,” said Sutherland. “Now, La Certe, suppose it true that men are meant to make the best of circumstances as they find them, and that I was a man without any regard to principle, I might have drawn these supplies from the store for you, and used them myself, and you would not have been a bit the wiser.”

Again the half-breed laughed, and admitted the truth of the proposition, while Slowfoot expressed her belief, (whatever it was), in a more than usually emphatic “Hee! hee!”

Returning home from his apparently useless errand, Sutherland met Fred Jenkins with a gun on his shoulder. The seaman was accompanied by Archie Sinclair.

“Well, Jenkins,” he said, heartily, “you must be like a fish out o’ water in these regions. Don’t you feel a longing, sometimes, for the roar of the gale and the smell o’ the salt sea?”

“Can’t say as I does, Mr Sutherland. I’ve bin used to accommodate myself to circumstances, dee see, ever since I was a small shaver; so nothin’ comes exactly amiss to me—”

“O Fred! how can you tell thumpers like that?” interrupted the forward Archie. “Isn’t Elise Morel a miss to you? and Elspie, and Jessie Davidson?”

“Clap a stopper on your mug, you young scape grace!” retorted the seaman, who had some doubt as to whether the boy’s putting Elise Morel’s name first was intentional or an accident. “As I was a-going to say, sir, I was always fond o’ changes, an’ the rollin’ plains come to me as pleasant, though not quite so familiar, as the rollin’ sea.”

“That’s a satisfactory state o’ mind, anyhow,” returned the Elder. “But where away now?—to cater for the pot, I dare say.”

“Well, no, not exactly—though I’ve no objection to do that too in the by-goin’. But we’ve heard a report that a band o’ Sioux are goin’ to visit the Settlement, and as there’s a lot o’ their enemies, the Saulteaux, knocking about, I’ve bin sent to the fort by old McKay to see if they’ve heard about the Sioux comin’, an’ if there’s likely to be a scrimmage, so as we may clear for action, d’ee see?”

“I see; and I hope there will be no need to clear for action. I’m glad to see Archie with you too,” said Sutherland, “but surprised; for I don’t remember when I saw him without Little Bill on his back or at his side.”

“O, as to that, Little Bill has forsaken me,” said Archie, “or I have forsaken him—I’m not sure which—since Dan Davidson’s accident, for he does little else but sit at Dan’s bedside, readin’ to him or talking with him.”

“The dear little fellow could not be better employed,” remarked the Elder.

“The dear little fellow could be *much* better employed,” retorted the boy, with unexpected decision. “He could be rambling about the plains or in the bush with me, getting strength to his muscles and fresh air to his lungs, an’ health to his body—to say nothing of his soul.”

“Why, you are becoming jealous, lad,” said Sutherland, with a laugh.

“No, I’m not *becoming* jealous; I’m jealous already,” returned the boy, with an air that was half jocular, half serious. “However, I’ll exercise patience a little longer, but I’m determined not to let Little Bill be sacrificed for the sake of sick-nursing.”

With this announcement of his unalterable resolve to stand to his guns, and a “Brayvo, youngster!” from Jenkins, they parted and went on their several ways.

It was found, when Fort Garry was reached, that the rumour of a visit from the Sioux Indians was correct, and that some preparation was being made for their reception, as well as precautions against any mischief that might be contemplated, though there was not much to be apprehended on that score, for the Sioux were believed to be among the bravest as well as the most powerful of the nations east of the Rocky Mountains, and less addicted to treachery or cruelty than most other tribes.

Two days later the Sioux made their appearance. They formed only a small band of warriors, but were a wild-looking though fine set of men; erect, muscular, tall fellows, with the free bearing of practised warriors, and in all the paint, charcoal, feathers, and leather-costume, bear-claw collars, etcetera, peculiar to the western wilderness.

Their object, they said, was to smoke the pipe of peace with their enemies the Saulteaux, and to see with their own eyes the wonderful things that by report the Palefaces were doing in Red River.

“The Sioux have heard,” said their principal chief, at a palaver with the Governor, “that the Palefaces are building wooden Wigwams in number like the stones on the shores of Lake Winnipeg; that they are growing much grain; that they have set up many strange things which they compel the wind to work for them, and so grind their grain; that they have great heaps of powder and ball, and big wigwams that are bursting with things that the Sioux love to exchange for the meat and skins of the buffalo and other beasts great and small. We have come to see all this with our own eyes, for most of us are young men who have only heard of such things from our fathers. Waugh!”

Of course everything was said to encourage this laudable desire for knowledge. The visitors were shown over the fort. Food was given to them, and tobacco; then the pipe of peace was smoked with a band of Saulteaux, which chanced to be on a friendly visit to the settlement at the time, after which, as was customary on such occasions, both parties mixed together and strolled about to see the settlers.

One party of them found their way to Prairie Cottage. At some of the houses nearer the fort they had learned the method of lifting the latch of a door so as to obtain entrance. Finding no one outside at the cottage, they entered the central hall with the soft, quiet tread of the panther. As no one chanced to be there, they continued their explorations with childlike simplicity, and thus most unexpectedly found themselves in the bedroom of Dan Davidson, where Little Bill had just read himself and his brother-invalid into a sound sleep. Both wakened up at once, and the boy sat bolt upright in blazing astonishment, but Dan, who had heard of their arrival in the Settlement, received them with a few words of welcome.

Fortunately for all parties, Okématan presented himself just then, having, while at work in the garden, seen the party of Sioux arrive. He did his best to act the host, explaining to the visitors the cause of Dan’s weakness, and, by Dan’s directions, offering them tobacco and pipes.

While they were thus engaged, old McKay entered.

“I saw you comin’, lads,” he said, heartily. “What cheer? what cheer?” he added, shaking hands with them all round.

The Sioux were obviously much pleased with their reception, especially when Mrs Davidson, Jessie, and Elspie, who had been out walking, returned and joined the party.

After showing the Indians everything in the house, old McKay—who constituted himself their guide,—took them out to see the live stock and the farm. He led them first into the garden.

It chanced at this time that there was a “snake in the grass” not far off. This was no other than the bad Indian Kateegoose.

Why some people are what we call naturally bad, like Kateegoose, while others are what we call naturally good, like Okématan, is a mystery the investigation of which we propose postponing to a more convenient season. Of course no sane person will maintain that this mystery frees fallen man from responsibility. If it did, we could no longer hang for murder. It would be the bounden duty of every judge, in that case, to acquit every murderer with “Poor fellow, it was his fate; he could not help it!” and send him away with a pat on the shoulder, and an order for coffee and buns, perhaps, in his pocket. As none but sane persons, however, will read my book, it is not necessary to enlarge further on this head.

Certain it is that Kateegoose was “bad”—obdurately bad—had been so from his very cradle, if he ever had one, which is doubtful, and bade fair to continue so to his grave. Sutherland had button-holed him more than once, but apparently in vain. It is only fair to the savage to say that he listened patiently to the Elder’s remonstrances, and attentively to his exhortations, and assumed an aspect of mild contrition that might or might not have been sincere—as far as appearance went.

Now, it unfortunately happened that among the Sioux braves there was a man who had done Kateegoose a deadly injury of some sort, which nothing short of blood could wipe out. Kateegoose, in familiar parlance, spotted him at once, and dogged his steps through the Settlement, watching his opportunity for revenge. In savage life this dogging process would not have been possible, but in a comparatively crowded settlement, and in the midst of all the surprising novelties that surrounded the Palefaces, it was all too easy; for Kateegoose took care to keep as much as possible in the background, and well under cover of houses,

cottages, carts, stacks, and wigwams; besides which he had painted his face in such a manner, and so modified his costume, that his own acquaintances among the settlers—he had no friends—failed to recognise him. They, in their comparative ignorance of savage life, set him down as one of the visitors, while the visitors, if they noticed him at all, esteemed him one of the cross-breeds of the Settlement.

The only man who saw through the disguise of Kateegoose was Okématan, who could not understand why he had adopted it, and who resolved to keep a sharp eye on him.

The enemy of Kateegoose was one of the younger Sioux chiefs. He led the party which visited Prairie Cottage.

The garden of the Cottage, at its lower end towards the river, approached close to the confines of a thick coppice. It formed the extremity of a belt of woodland which at that time bordered the river. There a small summer-house had been erected by Dan and Peter Davidson for the benefit of their mother and their sister Jessie.

Kateegoose, while dogging his foe, recognised this as a spot very suitable for his fell purpose, as the contiguous wood afforded a ready means of escape after the deed should be done.

While old McKay was conducting the Sioux slowly through the garden, Kateegoose glided swiftly through the thicket to the spot where the summer-house stood, and took up a position behind it, so that the party in making the round of the garden would necessarily pass close to him.

From the window of Dan’s room, Little Bill observed part of these mysterious movements and suspected mischief. Without uttering a word he left the room, opened the front door, and gave a low whistle, which had been set up as a private signal between him and Okématan. In a few seconds the Cree chief was by his side.

“Oké, there’s mischief intended. You’ll have to be quick,” he said, quickly explaining what he had seen.

“Rejoin the party at once,” he added, “and look out—sharp.”

The chief nodded and walked away. So swift, yet so quiet, had been his movements that none of the whites of the party had observed his departure from them. The Sioux, however, had noticed it, and their suspicions were aroused, especially when they saw him rejoin the party, and observed that he walked rather closer to them than before. But they were proud warriors and refused by word, look, or movement, to indicate their suspicions. They carried bows in their hands, arrows in their quivers, tomahawks and scalping-knives in their belts, but they scorned to make any visible demonstration of being on guard in the midst of Paleface friends, though they gave intense and undivided attention to the movements of Okématan.

This concentration of attention on the wrong man was, of course, rather favourable to the designs of Kateegoose, so that, when the party passed the summer-house, he was enabled to spring upon his enemy, unobserved for the first moment, with knife upraised. But the stab from which the Sioux chief could not have escaped was rendered harmless by the prompt action of Okématan, who threw up his left arm, turned the blow aside, and received a slight wound in doing so.

There was no time to repeat the blow. With a yell of mingled defiance and disappointment the would-be assassin leaped the garden fence, bounded into the thicket, and disappeared. A flight of Sioux arrows entered the bush almost the moment after. The young chief and his friends also leaped the fence, and followed in pursuit.

The Sioux were swift and agile undoubtedly, but so was Kateegoose, and he had the advantage of knowing the ground, while the trail—by which, in ordinary circumstances, the Red-man can track his enemy through the forest—was not available there in consequence of its being so mingled up with the crossing and re-crossing of the innumerable tracks of settlers. The result was that Kateegoose made his escape.

The Colonists were very indignant at the perpetration of this cowardly act, for it compromised their character for hospitality; and, if they could have laid hands on the savage at the time, it is not impossible that Lynch-law might have been applied to him. The Governor also was greatly annoyed, and in the afternoon of the following day made the visitors a number of presents, besides providing for them a feast; but all his good intentions

were spoiled by Kateegoose, who had the audacity to come forward and deliberately shoot his foe while the Sioux were at meat. The ball passed quite through the Sioux chief's body, and wounded the man who was next to him. After this dastardly act the villain fled, and again got safe away.

The enraged Sioux, seizing their weapons, would have wreaked their vengeance on the Saulteaux, if they could have discovered any; but these wily savages had cleared away at the first note of alarm, and not one was to be found. To have attacked the whites with so small a party would have been useless as well as unjust. They therefore left the colony in fierce anger.

It chanced that La Certe had pitched his tent the day before on a stream not far-distant from the colony. The Sioux had to pass that way, and, espying the wigwam, turned aside to wreak their vengeance on whomsoever it might contain. Fortunately the owner of the mansion and his wife had gone out fishing in a canoe, and taken the child with them. All that the Sioux could do, therefore, was to appropriate the poor man's goods and chattels; but as the half-breed had taken his gun, ammunition, and fishing-tackle with him, there was not much left to appropriate. Having despoiled the mansion, they set fire to it and went their way.

Returning in the evening, La Certe found his house a heap of ashes, and himself reduced to a state of destitution. This being his normal state, however, he was not profoundly affected. Neither was his wife; still less was his child.

He said no word, but carried the contents of the canoe on shore. His wife, equally reticent, helped him. His child, lighting its father's pipe, sat down to smoke and look on.

They turned the canoe bottom up to serve as a partial shelter; they kindled a huge fire before it; they set up three large fat ducks to roast in front of it, and were soon busy with a simple but satisfying supper. After washing this down with an unstimulating draught of pure water, they put the baby to bed under the bow of the canoe, filled their pipes, and sat down before the ruddy blaze to mingle their hopes, joys, prospects, and sorrows in a halo of smoke—the very personification of primitive

contentment and felicity.

Chapter Twenty Eight.

Very Perplexing Interviews with Little Bill.

Things in the colony had at this time come to what may be styled a complicated pass, for distress and starvation were rampant on the one hand, while on the other hand the weather was superb, giving prospect at last of a successful harvest.

The spring buffalo-hunt had been but partially successful, so that a number of the buffalo runners had to make arrangements to support themselves by fishing during the autumn in lakes Winnipeg and Manitoba.

In these great fresh-water seas there is an unlimited quantity of rich and finely flavoured whitefish, or Titameg, besides other fish. But Titameg are only to be caught in large quantities during autumn, and of course much of the success of fishing depends on weather—one gale sometimes visiting the fishermen with ruin—ruin all the more complete that the nets which may be carried away have in many cases to be paid for out of the produce of the season's fishing.

In addition to the buffalo-hunters, who were obliged to support themselves by fishing, there was a large number of idle half-breeds, of a much lower type than these plain hunters, who had to betake themselves to the same pursuit. These were the "ne'er-do-weels" of the colony; men who, like La Certe, with more or less—usually less—of his good-nature, seemed to hold that all the industrious people in the world were created to help or to support them and their families. Of course when the industrious people were unsuccessful, these idlers were obliged to work for their living, which, being unaccustomed to do anything energetic, they found it hard and difficult to do, and generally regarded themselves as the harshly used victims of a tyrannous fate.

There was one thing, however, at which these idlers were very expert and diligent—they begged well, and with persistency. No wonder; for their lives often depended on their persistent and successful begging. The Company and the private storekeepers were always more or less willing

to risk their goods by advancing them on credit. Before the summer was over, most of these people had got their supplies and were off to the fishing grounds, regardless of the future, with large quantities of tea and tobacco, and happy as kings are said to be—but never are, if history be true!

Among these, of course, was La Certe. That typical idler had made the most of his misfortunes. Everybody had heard what the Sioux had done to him, and everybody had pitied him. Pity opens the heart, and that opens the hand; and, when the poor man entered a store with the polite manner of a French Canadian and the humble aspect of a ruined man, he scarcely required to beg. One man lent him a tent. Another lent him a canoe. From the Company's store at Fort Garry he received a fair outfit of nearly all that he could require. Further down the Settlement there was a private store-keeper with a jovial countenance.

"O it was a sad, sad sight!" he said to this man on entering the store—"so very sad to see my tent in ashes, and nothing left—nothing—absolutely!" The jovial man was moved. He gave La Certe what he asked for—even pressed things on him, and also bestowed on him a considerable "gratuity."

Still further down the Settlement the unfortunate man found the store, or shop, of another friend. This man was saturnine of countenance, but moderately liberal of heart. La Certe approached him with an air so pitiful that the saturnine man melted like snow in the sunshine or wax under heat.

"I have heard of your loss," he said, "and I will give you credit *this* time, La Certe, though you *are* so bad at paying your debts. But I won't give you much."

"I do not want much," returned the afflicted man in tones of deep humility —"only a little—a very little."

By asking much more than he required, La Certe obtained as much as he wanted from the saturnine man, and thus he finally started for Lake Winnipeg with a canoe laden, almost to sinking, with the good things of this life.

The fineness of that summer brought forth the fruits of the earth in great luxuriance, and it really seemed as if at last the Scotch settlers were going to reap some reward for all their prolonged perseverance and industry. The long rest, the good feeding, the sunshine of nature, and the starlight of Elspie's eyes had a powerful effect on Dan Davidson's health, so that, by the time autumn arrived and the prospects of a splendid harvest became more certain every day, he had recovered much of his usual strength of body and vigour of mind.

Little Bill also felt the genial influences around him, and, to the intense joy of Archie, became visibly fatter and stronger, while his large blue eyes lost some of that wistfully solemn appearance with which they had been wont to gaze inquiringly into people's faces.

One afternoon Billie, having walked to the summer house in the Prairie Cottage garden, along with Archie, was left alone there at his own request, for, unlike other boys, he was fond of occasional solitary meditation.

"Now mind, Little Bill—you whistle if you want me," said Archie, when about to leave him. "I'll hear you, for I'm only going to the carpenter's shed."

"I will, Archie, if I want you; but I don't think I shall, for I can walk by myself now, quite easily, as far as the house."

But Little Bill was not destined to be left to solitary meditations that day, for his brother had not left him more than a few minutes when a footstep was heard on the path outside, and next moment Fred Jenkins presented himself at the opening of the summer-house. The face of the mariner betrayed him, for he was too honest by nature to dissemble effectively.

"Well, Fred, how are you? You seem a little disappointed, I think."

"Not exactly disappointed, Little Bill, but sort o' ways scumbusticated, so to speak—perplexed, if I may say so. Kind o' ways puzzled, d'ee see?"

There was something very amusing in the manner of the strapping seaman as he sat down beside the puny little boy, with a bashful expression on his handsome face, as if he were about to make a

humiliating confession.

“What troubles you, Jenkins?” asked Billie, with the air of a man who is ready to give any amount of advice, or, if need be, consolation.

The seaman twisted his eyebrows into a complex form, and seemed uncertain how to proceed. Suddenly he made up his mind.

“Was you ever in love, Little Bill?” he asked abruptly, and with a smile that seemed to indicate a feeling that the question was absurd.

“O yes,” answered the boy quite coolly. “I’ve been in love with brother Archie ever since I can remember.”

Jenkins looked at his little friend with a still more complicated knot of puzzlement in his eyebrows, for he felt that Billie was scarcely fitted by years or experience to be a useful confidant. After resting his hands on his knees, and his eyes on the ground, for some time, he again made up his mind and turned to Billie, who sat with his large eyes fixed earnestly on the countenance of his tall friend, wondering what perplexed him so much, and waiting for further communications.

“Little Bill,” said Jenkins, laying a large hand on his small knee, “in course you can’t be expected to understand what I wants to talk about, but there’s nobody else I’d like to speak to, and you’re such a knowin’ little shaver that somehow I felt a kind of—of notion that I’d like to ask your advice—d’ee see?”

“I see—all right,” returned Billie; “though I wonder at such a man as you wanting advice from the like of me. But I’ll do what I can for you, Jenkins, and perhaps I know more about the thing that troubles you than you think.”

“I’m afraid not,” returned the seaman, with a humorous twinkle in his eye. “You see, Billie, you never wanted to get spliced, did you?”

“Spliced! What’s that?”

“Well, I should have said married.”

“O no! I don’t think the thought of that ever did occur to me. I’m sorry, Jenkins, but I really cannot give you advice on that subject.”

“H’m! I’m not so sure o’ that, Little Bill. You’re such a practical little chap that I do believe if you was put to it you’d be able to—see, now. If you happened to want to marry a nice little gal, what would you do?”

“I would ask her,” said Little Bill, promptly.

“Jus’ so; but that is what I have not got courage to do.”

Jenkins laughed at the expression of blazing surprise with which the boy received this statement.

“Have not got courage!” he repeated; and then, after a pause—“Have all the stories you have told me, then, been nothing but lies!”

“What stories, Billie?”

“Why, such as that one about the pirates in the Java seas, when ten of them attacked you and you were obliged to kill four, and all the rest ran away?”

“No, Billie—that was no lie: it was quite true. But, then, these blackguards were cowards at bottom, and they saw that I’d got a brace o’ double-barrelled pistols in my belt, and was pretty well up in the cutlass exercise.”

“And that time when you led a storming party against the fort in South America, and was the only one left o’ the party, and fought your way all alone in through the breach till the troops came up and carried you on with a rush, and—and—was all about that untrue?”

“Not a bit of it, Billie, though I wouldn’t have you think I was boastin’ about it. I only gave you the bare facts, which, like bare poles, is as much as a ship can stand sometimes.”

“An’ that time you jumped overboard in Port Royal among the sharks to save the little girl?”

“That’s a fact, if ever there was one,” said the seaman quickly, “for the dear child is alive this good day to swear to it if need be.”

“Yet you tell me,” continued Little Bill, “that you have not the courage to ask a nice little girl to marry you?”

“That’s exactly how the matter stands, Billie.”

It was now Billie’s turn to look perplexed.

“Who is this nice little girl?” he asked abruptly, as if the answer to that question might help to explain the enigma.

“Well—it’s Elise Morel; an’, mind, not a soul knows about that but you an’ me, Little Bill.”

“But—but Elise is *not* a little girl. She’s a big woman!”

Jenkins laughed as he explained that seamen sometimes had a habit—mistaken, it might be—of calling even big women “nice little gals” when they chanced to be fond of them.

“And are you *really* afraid to ask Elise to marry you?” asked the boy, earnestly.

“I suspect that’s what’s the matter wi’ me,” replied the sailor, with a modest look.

“I always thought that nothing could frighten you,” said Billie, in a somewhat disappointed tone, for it seemed to him as if one of his idols were shaking on its pedestal. “I can’t understand it, for *I* would not be afraid to ask her—if I wanted her.”

At this Jenkins again laughed, and said that he believed him, and that Billie would understand these things better when he was older.

“In the meantime, Little Bill,” he continued, “I haven’t got the heart of a Mother Carey’s chicken. I could stand afore a broadside without winkin’, I believe; I think I could blow up a magazine, or fight the French, as easy as I could eat my breakfast a’most, but to ask a pure, beautiful angel like

Elise to marry *me*, a common seaman—why, I hasn't got it in me. Yet I'm so fond o' that little gal that I'd strike my colours to *her* without firin' a single shot—"

"Does Elise want to marry *you*?" asked Billie.

"Oh, that's the very pint!" said the seaman with decision. "If I could only make sure o' that pint, I'd maybe manage to come up to the scratch. Now, that's what I wants you to find out for me, Little Bill, an' I know you're a good little shaver, as'll do a friend a good turn when you can. But you must on no account mention—"

He was going to have said, "You must on no account mention that I was blabbing to you about this, or that I wanted to find out such a thing," when the sudden appearance of Elise's lap-dog announced the fact that its mistress was approaching.

With a flushed face the bold seaman sprang up and darted out, as if to attack one of those pirates of the Java seas who had made so powerful an impression on Little Bill's mind. But his object was escape—not attack. Lightly vaulting the garden fence, he disappeared into the same thicket which, on another occasion, had afforded opportune refuge to Kateegoose. A few moments later Elise turned into the walk, and stood before the summer-house.

"You here, Little Bill!" she exclaimed on entering, "I am very glad to find you, for I have been alone all the morning. Everybody is away—in the fields, I suppose—and I don't like being alone."

"Was you ever in love, Elise?" asked the boy with a solemn countenance.

The girl laughed heartily, and blushed a little.

"What a strange question, Billie," she said; "why do you ask?"

"Well, it's not easy to explain all at once; but—but I want to know if you want to be married?"

Elise laughed again, and, then, becoming suddenly grave, asked seriously why Billie put such foolish questions.

“Because,” said Little Bill, slowly, and with an earnest look, “Jenkins is *very* anxious to know if you are fond of him, and he actually says that he’s afraid to ask you to marry him! Isn’t that funny? I said that even *I* would not be afraid to ask you, if I wanted you—How red you are, Elise! Have you been running?”

“O no,” replied the girl, sheltering herself under another laugh; “and what did he say to that?”

“He said a great many things. I will try to remember them. Let me see—he said: ‘I haven’t got the heart of a Mother Carey’s chicken,’—(he didn’t tell me who Mother Carey is, but that’s no matter, for it was only one of her chickens he was speaking of);—‘I could stand afore a broadside without winkin’,’—(I give you his very words, Elise, for I don’t quite understand them myself);—‘I could blow up a magazine,’ he went on, ‘or fight the French, as easy as I could eat my breakfast, a’most, but to ask a pure an’ beautiful angel like Elise’—yes, indeed, you needn’t shake your head; he said these very words exactly—‘a pure an’ beautiful angel like Elise to marry *me*, a common seaman, why, I hasn’t got it in me. Yet I’m so fond o’ that little gal that I’d strike my colours to her without firin’ a single shot.’ Now, do you understand all that, Elise? for I don’t understand the half of it.”

“O yes, I understand a good deal of it, though some of it is indeed puzzling, as you say. But how did you come to recollect it all so well, Little Bill?”

“Because he said he wanted me to help him, and to find out if you wanted to marry him, so I paid particular attention to what he said, and—”

“Did he tell you to tell me all this?” asked Elise abruptly, and with sudden gravity.

“O dear, no; but as he wanted me to find it out for him, and said that not a soul knew about the matter but me, I thought the simplest way would be to tell you all he said, and then ask you straight. He was going to tell me something more, very particularly, for he was just saying, in a very solemn tone, ‘You must on no account mention—’ when your little dog bounced in and Jenkins bounced out, leaving the rest of it unsaid.”

“Then he has just left you?” said Elise.

“Just a moment or two before you came up. I think he must have seen some sort of beast in the wood, and gone in chase of it, he bolted in such a hurry, so I don’t know yet what I was not to mention.”

“Now, Little Bill,” said Elise with great seriousness of tone and manner, “you must not tell Mr Jenkins one word of the conversation that you and I have had just now.”

“What! not a single word?”

“Not one. You understand?”

“Yes, but, if he asks me, I must answer something, you know, and I must not tell lies.”

“Quite true, Billie. You must not tell lies on any account whatever. Now, listen. If he asks you about our conversation this morning, you must say that I told you you were never to open your lips about the subject again either to me or to him or to anybody. Mr Jenkins is an honourable man, and will not ask you a single question after that.”

“Then I’m not to tell him whether you want to marry him?”

“How can you tell him what you don’t know?”

“Well, but, I mean that you’re not going to tell me, so that I might tell him?”

“Certainly not.”

“Not a word to him and not a word to you—nor to anybody! Not even to Archie!”

“Yes. That is exactly what you must promise me.”

“This is a very unpleasant state of things,” said Little Bill, with a sad and puzzled countenance, “but of course I promise, for it is your affair, you know.”

It was a notable fact, which Little Bill did not fail to note—but did not dare to mention—that after that date there was a distinct change of demeanour in Elise Morel towards the handsome sailor—whether in his favour or otherwise it was impossible to tell.

Meanwhile, events were pending which were destined to exercise a very powerful influence over the fortunes of the Red River Colony, and, indeed, over the condition of the whole of Rupert's Land.

Chapter Twenty Nine.

The Fishery Disasters.

One fine day, when summer had merged into autumn, and things in Red River appeared to be advancing favourably, and Dan Davidson had recovered his strength, and Little Bill was fairly well, it occurred to Okématan that he would like to go to Lake Winnipeg, and see how the settlers who had gone to the fishery there, were getting on.

You see, the Cree chief was an observant savage, and, before returning to his tribe, had made up his mind to see all the phases in the life of the new Palefaces who had thus come to take possession of the land.

He was a remarkably independent fellow, and as he served the Davidsons for nothing except his food—which he did not count, as he could easily have supplied himself with victuals by means of his line, bow, and gun—he did not deem it necessary to ask leave of absence. He merely went to the house one morning, and announced his intention of going to Lake Winnipeg to fish.

"I will go with you," said Dan, to whom the announcement was made.

"An' so will I," said Fred Jenkins, who chanced to be conversing with Dan at the time—"that is, if they can spare me just now."

"The canoe of Okématan," said the chief, "holds no more than three. He wishes to take with him Arch-ee and Leetil Bill."

“Very well,” returned Dan, “there’s no objection to that, for there is not much doing on the farm at this moment, and Archie has worked hard all the summer, so he deserves a holiday. We will just make up the same party that started last time, only that Fergus and I will take a somewhat bigger canoe so as to accommodate you, Jenkins.”

“Thankee. Though I am big—unfort’nitly—I can stow myself away in small compass, an’ I’ve larned how, when there ain’t overmuch grub, to git along fairly well on short allowance. When d’ee trip your anchor?—I mean, when do ye start?”

“When to-morrow’s sun touches the tree-tops in the east,” said the Indian chief.

“All right, Okématan, I’m your man—after layin’ in a breakfast-cargo.”

According to this arrangement the two canoes pushed off at daybreak the following morning, from the wharf at the foot of the garden of Prairie Cottage, and began the descent of the Red River, which, after flowing between twenty and thirty miles northward, enters the mighty bosom of Lake Winnipeg. Okématan and Archie occupied their old places in the stern and bow of the chief’s canoe, with Little Bill in the middle—this time using a paddle, for his strength had greatly increased. The other canoe was steered by Dan; Fergus acted bowman, and Jenkins sat between them, also wielding a paddle.

That night they encamped on the banks of the river, for their progress had been slow, owing to sundry visits which had to be paid to settlers on the way down.

“Well, now,” observed the sailor, as he stood by the camp-fire smoking his pipe contemplatively, “I find that as circumstances change about in this world men’s minds are apt to go ’bout-ship along wi’ them.”

“That sounds a terribly profound speech, Fred,” said Archie, who was busy at his very usual occupation of whittling an arrow for his brother. “Did your father teach it you, or did you crib it from a copy-book?”

“No, I raither think,” retorted the seaman quietly, “that I got it from your grandmother by the father’s side.”

“What may be the circumstance that has caused your mind to go about-ship just now?” asked Dan, stirring the fire under the robbiboo-kettle.

“Well, it’s in regard to them there canoe-paddles. Although they do seem small, compared with oars, I find they’re quite big enough to do the work, and although I’ve bin trained from a youngster to handle the oar, an’ go like a crab with my back the way I’m pullin’, it do seem more sensible-like to sit wi’ one’s face to the front and drive ahead;—anyhow, it’s more comfortable and satisfactory.”

“Look out, Jenkins!” exclaimed Little Bill, “else your duck won’t be satisfactory—it’s burnin’ now.”

“O, never mind,” remarked Fergus, lighting his pipe. “It iss havin’ it well done he would be fond of.”

“Ay, but not over-done,” cried the seaman, snatching the duck in question from before the blaze and turning its other side—for they used no spits in the Nor’-West in those days, but cooked one side at a time—nay, even carved off and ate part of the cooked side while the other side was roasting.

Next day they came out on the ocean-like expanse of the great lake, and steered along its western shores until they reached the fishery, where numbers of rudely-constructed wigwams and a few tents sheltered the fishing community.

They had just returned from a successful visit to the nets when the visitors arrived, and all was animation and rejoicing at the successful take. Jacques Bourassin was the first man they met on landing, and he was enthusiastic about the prospects before them. Slowfoot was the first woman, and she was quite satisfied—in that amiable state of mental and physical felicity in which it is so easy to believe that “all is for the best.” Her husband soon after appeared. He, of course, was also greatly pleased. He had joined the fishers because he believed that plenty of food, tea, and tobacco would be going amongst them. He was not mistaken.

“You will come to my tent,” he said, in the wealth of his hospitality; “we have plenty of good fish, a very little meat, some tobacco, and oceans of

tea!”

The six visitors accepted the invitation, and were soon made acquainted with all the gossip of the community.

“Does it always smoke?” whispered Little Bill to his brother.

The “it” referred to was Baby La Certe, which had, as usual, possessed itself of its father’s pipe when the mother was not watching.

“I’m not sure, Little Bill, but I think that it does its best.”

It was observed, especially by Fred Jenkins, that the tea-drinking which went on at this place was something marvellous.

“There’s that squaw sittin’ there,” he said, “she’s bin an’ swigged three pannikins o’ tea while I’ve bin looking at her—an’ it’s as black as ink. What’s that brown stuff they put into it, does any one know?”

“That? Why, it is maple sugar,” answered Archie, “an’ capital stuff it is to eat too.”

“Ah, I know that, for I’ve ate it in lump, but it can’t be so good in tea, I fancy, as or’nary brown or white sugar; but it’s better than fat, anyhow.”

“Fat!” exclaimed Little Bill, “surely you never heard of any one taking fat in tea, did you?”

“Ay, that I did. Men that move about the world see strange things. Far stranger things than people invent out o’ their own brains. Why, there was one tribe that I saw in the East who putt fat in the tea, an’ another putt salt, and after they’d swallowed this queer kind of tea-soup, they divided the leaves among themselves an’ chawed ’em up like baccy.”

The evident delight with which these half-breeds and more than half-Indians swallowed cup after cup of the blackest and bitterest tea, proved beyond question their appreciation of the article, and afforded presumptive evidence at least that tea is not in their case as poisonous as we are taught to believe.

But it was not, as Jenkins remarked, all fair weather, fun, and tea at the fishery. After the six visitors had been there for a week, shooting and assisting in the canoes, and at the nets, there came a night when the forces of Nature declared war against the half-breeds and those settlers who had cast in their lot with them at that time.

Jenkins, Okématan, and Archie had been out with their guns that day—the last having been promoted to the use of the dangerous weapon—and in their wanderings had about nightfall come upon a family of half-breeds named Dobelle, a good-natured set, who lived, like La Certe, on the *laissez faire* principle; who dwelt in a little log-hut of their own construction within the margin of the forest, not far from the shore of the great lake.

This family, though claiming to be Christian and civilised, was little better than vagrant and savage. They were to some extent as independent as the brute creation around them—though of course they betrayed the inherent weakness of mankind in being unable to exist happily without tea, sugar, and tobacco. For the rest, their wants were few and easily satisfied. Snares provided willow-grouse and rabbits; traps gave them furs and the means of purchasing guns and powder. Their log-hut was only an occasional residence. Wherever night overtook them they were at home. They camped on the open plains, in the woods, among the rocks, and on the margins of rivers and lakes. Healthy, happy, and heedless, the Dobelle family cared for nothing apparently, but the comfort of the passing hour; regarded the past as a convenient magazine from which to draw subjects for gossip and amusement, and left the future to look after itself.

There were in the hut, when the three visitors entered, old Dobelle, his wife, a daughter of eighteen, another of four, and two sons of twenty and twenty-two respectively.

“It looks like dirty weather,” said Jenkins on entering; “will you let us come to an anchor here for a bit?”

“Give us shelter?” explained Archie, who doubted old Dobelle’s ability to understand nautical language.

“You are welcome,” said the half-breed, making way politely, and pointing to places on the floor where the visitors were expected to squat. For there was no furniture in that mansion; the fire was kindled in the middle of its one room; the family sat around it on deer and buffalo skins, and the smoke alike of pipe and fire found egress at the crevices in the roof.

With kind hospitality Madame Dobelle poured some black tea into cups of birch-bark, and, on plates of the same material, spread before them the remains of a feast of roasted fish.

While eating this, various questions were put as to the success of the fishery.

“Yes—we have been very successful,” said old Dobelle. “No bad weather to speak of, and plenty of fish. Our good fortune is great.”

“But it won’t last long,” said the eldest son, who seemed to be the only growler in the family.

“*N’importe*—we will enjoy it while it lasts,” said the younger son.

“Yes, truly we will,” remarked Madame Dobelle. Whereupon the daughter of eighteen smiled, and the daughter of four giggled.

“What does Okématan think?” asked the host.

Thus appealed to, the chief gave it as his opinion that something was going to happen, for the sky in the nor’-west looked uncommonly black. Having given utterance to this cautious remark he relapsed into silence.

As if to justify his opinion, a tremendous clap of thunder seemed to rend the heavens at that moment, and, a few minutes later, a heavy shower of rain fell.

“Well that we got inside before that came on,” said Archie. “I hope it won’t come on to blow, else we shall be storm-stayed here.”

The weather seemed to be in a lively mood that night, for as the thunder had promptly answered to Okématan’s observation, so now the wind replied to Archie’s remark, by rushing up the natural avenue which

extended from the hut to the lake and almost bursting in the door.

“See to the ropes, boys,” said old Dobelle, glancing uneasily at the roof.

The young men arose, went out, regardless of weather, and secured with additional care a couple of stout ropes with which the tendency of the roof to fly away was restrained.

“Did it ever come off?” asked Archie with some curiosity, as the young men returned and resumed their pipes.

“Yes—twice, and both times it was night,” answered Madame Dobelle, “and we were flooded out and had to camp under the trees.”

“Which was not comfortable,” added the old man. Another clap of thunder seemed to corroborate what he said, and a blast of wind followed, which caused the whole fabric of the hut to shudder. Jenkins looked inquiringly at the roof.

“No fear of it,” said old Dobelle; “the ropes are strong.”

Thus assured, the visitors continued their meal with equanimity, regardless of the storm that soon began to rage with great fury, insomuch that the door required a prop to keep it up and rain began to trickle in through crevices in the roof and drop here and there upon the party. When one such drop chanced to fall on old Dobelle’s nose, his younger son arose, and, fastening a piece of birch-bark to the rafters, caught the drop and trained it with its followers to flow towards an unoccupied place in one corner, which, being accidentally lower than the rest of the floor, formed a convenient receptacle for superfluous water.

At the same time Madame Dobelle made a shakedown of pine-branches in another corner for her visitors, for it was obvious that they would have to spend the night there, even although their own tent was not far-distant.

By that time the storm was raging with unwonted violence. Nevertheless the Dobelle family smoked on in placid contentment. When the time for repose arrived, Madame Dobelle and her eldest girl retired to a box-bed in a corner of the hut which was screened off—not very effectually—by a curtain of birch-bark. The two brothers lay down in another corner. The

three visitors disposed themselves in the third, and, as the fourth was monopolised by the rain-rivulet, old Dobelle lay down on one side of the fire in the centre of the room, while the four-year-old girl reposed on the other.

During the night the accumulation of tobacco-smoke with fire-smoke produced a suffocating effect, but no one was capable of suffocation apparently, for they all smoked on—except Archie, who, as we have said, had not acquired the habit. Even the four-year-old girl, like Baby La Certe, had a pull now and then at its father's pipe, and, from sundry white emanations from the crevices in the bark curtains, it was evident that the ladies behind these were enjoying themselves in the same way during the intervals of repose.

Next morning was fine, and the three sportsmen returned to the fishery to find that the storm had made an almost clean sweep of the nets. It had carried most of them away; torn others to pieces, and almost ruined the whole colony of fishermen; the ruin being all the more complete that most of the nets had been received on credit, and were to be paid for chiefly by the results of the autumn fishery.

La Certe was one of the chief sufferers; nevertheless, to judge from his looks, La Certe did not suffer much! He had brought a considerable amount of provision with him, as we have said, and, finding that one of his nets had been washed ashore, he proceeded very leisurely to mend it, while he smoked and assisted Slowfoot to consume pemmican and tea.

About this time a mysterious message was sent to Dan Davidson from Red River by an Indian, requiring his immediate return. The sender of the message was Elspie McKay; the summons was therefore obeyed at once.

As nothing further could be done at the fishery that autumn, the other members of the expedition, and most of the fishers, returned with Dan to the colony.

Chapter Thirty.

The Trial for Murder.

“Dan,” said Elspie, as, seated in the summer-house after the arrival of the sportsmen, these two held a meeting, “I have called you back to tell you of a very terrible thing which has been said of my dear brother Duncan, and which you must contradict at once, and then find out how it was that the false report arose, and have the matter cleared up.”

“Dear Elspie,” returned Dan, “I think I know what you are going to tell me.”

“Have you heard the report, then?” said Elspie, turning pale, “and—and do you believe it?”

“I have suspected—I have—but let me hear first what the report is, and who it came from.”

“I got it from Annette Pierre, and I am sure she would not have told it me if she did not think it true; but, then, poor Annette is not very intelligent, and she may be—must be—mistaken. She says that it was Duncan who killed poor Henri Perrin, and that some of the half-breeds are determined to avenge the death of their comrade. Now, it cannot be true; and I want you at once to go and ferret out the truth, so as to prove the report false.”

“Have you spoken to Duncan on the subject?” asked Dan.

“No, I cannot bear to let him imagine even for a moment that I could believe him guilty of murder—that I even suspected him of it. But you say you have heard something, Dan—that you suspect something. What is it?”

“It is difficult to say, Elspie dear. I, too, have heard the rumour that has come to your ears, and I have seen—but it is useless talking of our mere conjectures. I will go at once and ferret out all about it if possible. My first business will be to see Annette and get from her all that she knows. Where is Duncan?”

“In the wheat-field. They have begun to shear to-day, and, as the crop is heavy, they will be glad of your help.”

Dan went to the field, after visiting Annette Pierre, and lent good assistance to the shearers, but, like Elspie, he found that he had not courage to say anything to Duncan that would indicate his suspicion. He longed to put the question straight to him, but could not prevail on himself to do so.

Next morning, however, he and Elspie were both saved the necessity of doing such violence to their feelings, by the arrival of two men from Fort Garry. They were members of a sort of police force that the Company had enrolled, and had come to arrest Duncan McKay junior, on the charge of murder!

There was not much of law in the colony at that time, but it was felt that something had to be done in the way of governing a settlement which was rapidly increasing, and in which Lynch and mob law would certainly be applied if regularly constituted authority did not step in. As the murder of Perrin had created great indignation among the half-breeds, and the feeling about it was increasing, the Company resolved to clear the matter up by having the supposed murderer tried. Duncan was accordingly lodged in one of the bastions of Fort Garry, where, when visited by the Governor, he firmly denied his guilt.

The arrest of his younger son on such a charge fell very heavily on poor Duncan McKay senior—more heavily than those who knew him would have expected. It touched not only his feelings but his pride; for was he not a lineal descendant of that Fergus McKay who had been a chief in one of the Western Isles of Scotland—he could not tell which, but no matter—at that celebrated period of Scottish history when the great Norse king, Harold Fairhair, had made a descent on the Scottish coast and received one of the few thorough thrashings that darkened his otherwise successful career?

“O! Tuncan, Tuncan, my boy!” cried the old man, shoving his hands deeper into his breeches pockets, and apostrophising his imprisoned son as he walked up and down in the privacy of his own bedroom. “O that wan o’ the name should come to such disgrace! An’ it’s denyin’ it you will be, whether you are guilty or innocent. O Tuncan, Tuncan! you wass ever notorious for tellin’ lies—an’ a troublesome boy all round—whatever.”

But when the old man went to Fort Garry and visited his son, he stifled his pathetic feelings, and appeared before him with all the offended dignity of an injured member of the great clan McKay.

“Are you guilty, Tuncan?” he asked, sternly.

“No, I’m innocent,” answered the youthful Highlander, with a brow quite as stern and a manner as dignified as the old one.

“You will hev to prove that—whatever.”

“No—they will hev to prove me guilty,” retorted the son.

“I wish I could believe ye, Tuncan.”

“It iss not of much consequence whether ye believe me or not, father. You are not to be my chudge—whatever.”

“That is goot luck for you, Tuncan, for if I wass your chudge I would be bound to condemn you—you wass always so fond o’ tellin’ lies.”

“It iss true what you say, father. It iss a chip o’ the old block that I am—more’s the peety.” At this point the door of the prison opened, and Elspie was ushered in.

“You here, father!” she exclaimed in evident surprise. “I had hoped to see Duncan alone.”

“It iss alone with him you’ll soon be,” replied the Highlander, putting on his hat. “Goot tay, Tuncan, my boy, an’ see that you’ll be tellin’ the truth, if ye can, when ye come to be tried.”

To this the youth made no reply.

“O Duncan!” said the girl, when her father had retired, “how came they to invent such lies about you?”

The tender way in which this was said, and the gentle touch on his arm, almost overcame the stubborn man, but he steeled himself against such influences.

“What can I say, Elspie?” he replied. “How can I tell what iss the reason that people tell lies?”

“But it *is* lies, isn’t it, Duncan?” asked the poor girl, almost entreatingly.

“You say that it iss lies—whatever, an’ I will not be contradictin’ you. But when the trial comes on you will see that it cannot be proved against me, Elspie—so keep your mind easy.”

With this rather unsatisfactory assurance, Elspie was fain to rest content, and she returned home a little, though not much, easier in her mind.

To make the trial quite fair and regular, a jury of twelve men, chosen by lot from a large number, was empanelled, and as many witnesses as possible were examined. These last were not numerous, and it is needless to say that Annette Pierre and Marie Blanc were the chief. But despite their evidence and the strong feeling that existed against the prisoner, it was found impossible to convict him, so that in the end he was acquitted and set free. But there were men in the colony who registered a vow that Cloudbrow should not escape. They believed him to be guilty, in spite of the trial, and made up their minds patiently to bide their time.

It now seemed as if at last a measure of prosperity were about to dawn upon the farmers in that distant land, and, as usual on such occasions of approaching prosperity, Dan Davidson and Duncan McKay senior began to talk of the wedding which had been so long delayed.

“I wass thinkin’, Tan,” remarked the old man one morning, while walking in the verandah with his after-breakfast pipe, “that I will be getting in the crops pretty soon this year, an’ they’re heavy crops too, so that we may look forward to a comfortable winter—whatever.”

“True, and as our crops are also very good, thank God, I begin now to hope that Elspie may see her way to—”

“See her way!” exclaimed McKay with some asperity: “she will hev to see her way when I tell her to open her eyes an’ look!”

“Nay, but there are two to this bargain,” said Dan, good-humouredly. “I would not consent to have her on such terms. She must fix and arrange

everything without constraint from any one—not even from you, Duncan McKay."

"Oh! fery goot!" retorted the old man with a touch of sarcasm; "you know fery well what Elspie will be sayin' to that, or you would not be so ready to let it rest with her. Yes, yes, she is safe to see her way to go the way that you want her to go."

It was a strange coincidence that at the very time these two were conversing on this subject in the verandah of Ben Nevis Hall, Mrs Davidson and Elspie were discussing the very same subject in an upper room of Prairie Cottage. We refrain from giving the details, however, as it would be unpardonable to reveal such matters. We will merely state that the conclusions to which the ladies came were very similar to those arrived at by the gentlemen.

But delay was still destined to be an element in the cup of this unfortunate couple.

When the harvest had been gathered in that year, there came what old McKay called a visitation which, with its consequences, recalls irresistibly the words of our great Scottish poet—"the best-laid schemes o' mice and men gang aft a-gley." This visitation was a plague of mice. The whole colony was infested with them. Like the grasshoppers, the mice devoured everything. The grain after being stacked was almost totally destroyed by them. The straw, the very stubble itself, was cut to atoms. The fields, the woods, the plains, seemed literally alive with this new visitor, and the result would have been that most of the settlers would again have been driven to spend another dreary winter in trapping and hunting with the Indians at Pembina, if it had not been for the fortunate circumstance that the buffalo runners had been unusually successful that year. They returned from the plains rejoicing,—their carts heavily laden with buffalo-robes and innumerable bags of pemmican.

Chapter Thirty One.

Retribution.

Owing to the success of the buffalo runners, the winter passed away in comparative comfort. But, as we have said, some of the settlers who had been ruined by the failure of the fisheries and the depredations of the mice, and who did not share much in the profits of the autumn hunt, were obliged once again to seek their old port of refuge at Pembina.

Among these was the Swiss family Morel. André went, because he did not wish to remain comparatively idle in the colony during the long months of winter. Elise went for the purpose of keeping house—perhaps we should say keeping hut—for André. Fred Jenkins went because he wanted to learn more about Indian ways and customs, as well as to perfect himself in the art of hunting the buffalo—that was all!

There were some who did not believe what the bold seaman said. Elise Morel was one of these—perhaps the most unbelieving amongst them.

Indeed, she laughed quite hilariously when his motive was reported to her by Billie Sinclair the day before they started.

“Why do you laugh so?” inquired Little Bill, who was always more or less in a state of surprise when he got upon this subject with Elise.

“It is not easy to say, Billie,” answered the girl, with another pleasant little laugh, “but it is so funny that a sailor should take such a fancy to come out here, so far away from his native element, and find so much interest in snow-shoe walking and Indian customs.”

“Yes, isn’t it?” responded the boy, “and him such a fine big man, too, who has gone through so much, and seen so many lands, and been in such a lot o’ fights with pirates, and all that kind of thing. I can’t understand him at all. I wish I understood him better, for I like him very much. Don’t you?”

Elise was so much taken up with what she was doing at the time that she could not answer the question, and Billie was in such a wandering state of mind that he neglected to press it!

Daniel Davidson also went to Pembina that winter, because he could not bear to press the subject of his marriage just after the destruction of his and old McKay’s crops by mice—a disaster which told rather heavily on both families. When winter had passed away, he, along with many others,

returned to the colony and made preparations for going out to the plains for the spring hunt with the buffalo runners.

“You will better not be goin’ wi’ them,” said Duncan McKay senior to his younger son, some days before the hunters had arranged to set out. “It will not be safe after your trial, for the half-breeds are mad at you, Tuncan.”

If the old man had been wise enough to have left his son alone, Duncan junior would probably have remained where he was; but the mere offer of advice roused in him the spirit of opposition, and that reference to the half-breeds decided him.

“If all the half-breeds in Rud River wass to go as mad as buffalo-bulls wi’ their tails cut off, I would go,” said Duncan junior, with quiet decision of tone and manner, as he lighted his pipe.

“Ay, it iss that same you would do if you wass to be hanged to-morrow for doin’ it, Tuncan,” returned the old man testily, as he fired cloudlets in rapid succession from his compressed lips.

Duncan junior was equally firm in replying to his sister’s remonstrances later in the day.

“You know, dear Duncan,” she said, “that, although I believe you to be quite innocent, most of the half-breeds are of the opposite opinion, and some of them are very revengeful, especially when they think they have been deceived or unjustly treated.”

“I do not fear the half-breeds,” replied the youth gruffly.

“Of course you don’t, Duncan, but you know that, though most of them are good, trusty men, some are mean fellows, who would not hesitate to shoot you in the smoke and confusion of the hunt. Do give up the idea, for my sake, dear.”

“I would do much for your sake, Elspie, but not this, for it iss showin’ the white feather I am, they will be sayin’, and, as father often says, that iss what must never be true of a McKay.”

Accordingly, Duncan junior mounted his horse, and accompanied Dan, Peter, Fergus, Okématan, Morel, Jenkins, and others to the plains, where they found that the main body of the hunters, under Antoine Dechamp, had arrived just before them. Kateegoose was also there, and La Certe, who once more tried his fortune at the chase under all the advantages of a new cart and horse, a new gun, and a new outfit—all received on credit—to be paid for by the proceeds of the chase, as the creditors, hoping against hope, tried to believe; never to be paid for at all, as the easy-going La Certe more than half suspected—though he was far too honest a man to admit that even to himself.

Of course, Slowfoot was with him—amiable, meek, and silent as ever. And so was Baby La Certe, a five-year-old by that time, and obviously a girl with a stronger penchant than ever for tobacco!

“The buffalo have been found already,” said Dechamp to Dan Davidson, as the latter rode into camp at the head of his party. “Bourassin has just come in with the report that they are in great numbers away to the nor’-west, so we will make a fair start first thing in the morning.”

As he spoke, Dechamp glanced with evident surprise at Duncan McKay.

“Why did you let him come?” he said in an under-tone to Dan, as they were tying up the horses.

“How could I prevent him?” replied Dan.

Next morning all was bustle, eager expectation, and lively conversation in the camp. Archie was there again, promoted to the condition of a full-fledged hunter by the possession of a gun. Little Bill was there also. He had improved so much in health and strength that he was permitted to ride with the runners on a pony; but was to content himself with viewing the battle from afar—that is, well in rear.

“Now, Little Bill,” said Archie, with the seriousness of a grandfather, as they galloped with the hunters over the rolling plains, across which were streaming the first beams of the rising sun, “you must promise me to keep well in rear, and on no account to join in the chase. It’s of no use to go in without a gun, you know, and there is great risk when in the thick of it, that you may come across a bullet or two. You’ll have all the fun

without the danger, Little Bill."

"All right, old boy; I'll do my best."

"Hallo, Archie!" cried Jenkins, galloping up alongside, with the blunderbuss in his left hand, "I've bin lookin' for you, lad. It's not easy to spy out a friend in such a shoal o' queer craft. Are 'ee goin' to sail alongside o' me this bout?"

"Of course I am, Fred. A man that can steer his way by compass over such a sea o' grass is worth holding on to."

"Well, then, heave ahead. We'll hunt in couples. I see they're gettin' into line o' battle, which means that the enemy's in view."

The sailor was right. Buffalo were seen grazing in the far distance, and the cavalcade was getting into line so as to advance in good order.

As on a former occasion, they approached at a slow pace until the animals began to lift their heads and throw inquiring glances in the direction from which the mounted host came. Then the word was given to trot, and, finally, to charge.

The rush on this occasion was even more tremendous than on the former, for there were considerably more men, and a larger herd of buffalo.

The lumbering heavy gait of the latter at the first start did not suggest the racing speed to which the clumsy creatures attained when they were hard pressed. Soon the dropping shots of the fast riders swelled into the rattling musketry of the real fight, and ere long the plain became strewed with dead and wounded animals, while smoke and dust obscured the air.

There was no order maintained after the first onset. Every man seemed to fight for his own hand. Crossing and re-crossing and firing recklessly in all directions, it seemed a very miracle that no fatal accidents occurred. Minor ones there were. Archie and his nautical comrade witnessed a few of these.

"I say, look at Bourassin!" exclaimed the former, pointing to the left with

his nose—both hands being fully engaged with gun and bridle.

The seaman's eye turned in the direction indicated, and he beheld Bourassin's horse stopped by the hairy forehead of a buffalo-bull, while Bourassin himself was in the act of describing a magnificent parabolic curve over the buffalo's back. He alighted on his back, fortunately on a low bush, a yard or two beyond the buffalo's tail.

"Killed!" exclaimed Jenkins, anxiously, as he turned his horse in the direction of the fallen man.

But the seaman was wrong. The hunter did indeed lie flat and motionless for a few seconds—which was just as well, for it gave the bull time to toss off the horse, turn, and leap over the prostrate man in continuing its flight; but in another moment Bourassin was on his feet, soon caught his trembling horse, remounted, and continued the chase.

A little further on they saw Peter Davidson's horse put his foot in a badger-hole, the result of which was that the horse rolled over in one direction, while the expert Peter, tumbling cleverly to one side, rolled away in another direction like a Catherine-wheel. Both horse and man arose unhurt, and, like Bourassin, continued the chase.

"Necks ain't easy broke in this here country," remarked the seaman, as Archie pushed past him in pursuit of a fat young cow.

"Not often. Necks are tough, you see, and ground is mostly soft," cried Archie, as he fired and dropped the cow.

"Who's that away to the right, ridin' like a madman after a calf?" asked Jenkins, overtaking Archie, who was recharging his gun at the gallop.

"Who—where?" cried the boy, looking impatiently round.

"Keep cool, lad! Whatever condition you chance to be in, whether of danger or safety, always keep cool. For why?—it makes you comfortable, or more fit for action, as the case may be. See, the fellow over there half-hidden by smoke."

"Why, that's Duncan McKay. You might know him by his hat."

“I ain’t a good judge o’ hats,” remarked the seaman, as he fired at a bull and missed it. “Ha! that comes o’ firin’ at long range,” he said. “It was at least six yards off, an’ I can’t count on the old blunderbuss beyond five. Better luck next time!”

“Hallo! Jenkins, did you hear that?”

“What?”

“That shriek? I’m sure some one has been hurt.”

“Very likely, lad. There’s many a cropper a-goin’ on just now, an’ we can’t all expect to come off scot-free.”

“The voice sounded like that of Fergus,” said Archie, “but I can see nothing for smoke now. Is that a man on the ground over there?”

“Don’t know, Archie. Out o’ the way, lad; there’s another chance. Must get closer this time.”

The tide of the chase swept on with irresistible fury, and not one of all the band saw that the man who had fallen did not rise.

Following close in rear, and profoundly excited with this new and wild experience of life, came Little Bill, galloping along on his pony.

The poor boy had either greatly benefited by his recent adventures, or a change had taken place in his constitution, for he rode with ease, and found that he could walk considerable distances without the old weary feeling of exhaustion.

As Little Bill passed over the prairie, which resembled a field of battle where, not men, but buffaloes had been the combatants, he came suddenly upon the dismounted hunter, who lay prone upon his face.

“Poor man!” thought Little Bill, pulling up and dismounting, “he seems to have been badly stunned.”

Stooping down he turned the fallen man over on his back with some difficulty, and then discovered, to his consternation, that it was young

Duncan McKay, and that blood was flowing from a wound in his side.

The shock at first deprived Billie of the power to do anything, but in a very few minutes his strong common sense returned, and his first act was to open Duncan's coat and stanch the wound. This he accomplished by means of a strip torn off the poor man's cotton shirt, and the long red worsted belt with which the hunter's capote was bound. Then he took from his pocket a small bottle of water, with which he had provided himself in case of need, and poured a little into Duncan's mouth.

The result of these operations was that the fallen man opened his eyes after a while, raised himself on one elbow, and looked round in a dazed manner.

"What iss it that has come over me?" he asked, faintly.

"You have fallen off your horse, I think," answered the boy, "and I—I'm afraid a bullet has wounded you in the side."

"Bullet! Side!" exclaimed Duncan, looking quickly down at the bandage, and attempting to rise. "Little Bill, you must—"

He stopped; seemed to grow faint, and fell down; but quickly raised himself again on one elbow and looked round.

"Shot!—dying!" he muttered; then turning to the boy—"Stay by me, Little Bill. Don't leave me here all alone."

"No, I won't leave you, unless—perhaps it would be better if I rode back to camp for help."

"True, true. It's my only chance," said the poor man, faintly. "Go, Billie, and go quick. Put something under my head. And—stay—leave your gun with me."

"I'm so sorry I haven't got one, but here is my bottle of water; you may want that, and—"

He stopped, for Duncan had evidently fainted again.

The poor boy was terribly alarmed at this. He had wit enough to perceive that prompt action was needed, for his friend was in very great danger, while the buffalo runners were by that time out of sight in front, and the camp was far behind. In this crisis Billie acted with decision. First making the bandage over the wound more secure, and pouring a little more water into the mouth of the wounded man, he went to a clump of willows, and cut a stout switch, then, remounting, he turned on his track and made straight for the camp as fast as his willing pony could be made to lay hoof to the ground.

Arrived there, to his great relief he found the Cree chief Okématan, for that eccentric individual had, owing to some unknown reason, refrained from joining in the hunt that day. La Certe was also there.

In a few minutes, mounted on a fresh horse, Little Bill was galloping over the prairie, acting as guide to Okématan, while La Certe followed them, driving a cart with a couple of buffalo-robes in it.

That night, instead of rejoicing in the camp of the buffalo runners after their successful hunt, there was uneasiness and gloom, for Duncan McKay lay in his tent dangerously wounded, and it was generally believed that the shot which laid him low had been fired not by accident, but with deliberate intent to kill.

Chapter Thirty Two.

Suffering and its Results.

When the news that young Duncan had been shot was brought to Ben Nevis, the effect on his father was much more severe than might have been expected, considering their respective feelings towards each other.

It was late in the evening when the news came, and the old man was seated in what he styled his smoking-room, taking his evening glass of whisky and water.

“Elspie,” he said, in a subdued voice, on being told, “help me up to my bed.”

This was so very unusual a request that Elspie was somewhat alarmed by it, as well as surprised—all the more so that the old man left the room without finishing either his pipe or glass. Still, she did not suppose that anything serious would come of it. A night’s rest, she thought, would do away with the evils of the shock.

“Dear father,” she said, as she kissed him at parting, “do believe that God is waiting to be gracious: that He really means it when He says, ‘Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.’ And, consider—we have no reason to suppose that dear Duncan’s wound is very dangerous.”

“Goot-night, Elspie,” was all the reply.

Next morning McKay did not make his appearance at the usual breakfast-hour, and, on going to his room, they found him lying speechless in his bed, suffering under a stroke of paralysis.

He soon recovered the power of speech, but not the use of his limbs, and it became evident ere long that the poor man had received a shock which would probably cripple him for life. Whatever may have been his secret thoughts, however, he carefully concealed them from every one, and always referred to his complaint as, “this nasty stiff feeling about the legs

which iss a long time of goin' away—whatever."

In a few days, Fergus returned from the plains, bringing his brother in a cart, which had been made tolerably easy by means of a springy couch of pine-branches. They did not tell him at first of his father's illness, lest it should interfere with his own recovery from the very critical condition in which he lay. At first he took no notice of his father's non-appearance, attributing it to indifference; but when he began slowly to mend, he expressed some surprise. Then they told him.

Whatever may have been his thoughts on the subject, he gave no sign, but received the information—as, indeed, he received nearly all information at that time—in absolute silence.

Fortunately, the bullet which struck him had passed right through his side, so that he was spared the pain, as well as the danger, of its extraction. But, from his total loss of appetite and continued weakness, it was evident that he had received some very severe, if not fatal, internal injury. At last, very slowly, he began to grow a little stronger, but he was a very shadow or wreck of his former self. Nevertheless, the more sanguine members of the family began to entertain some faint hope of his recovery.

Of course, during these first days of his weakness his sister Elspie nursed him. She would, if permitted, have done so night and day, but in this matter she had to contend with one who was more than a match for her. This was Old Peg, the faithful domestic.

"No, no, dearie," said that resolute old woman, when Elspie first promulgated to her the idea of sitting up all night with Duncan, "you will do nothin' of the sort. Your sainted mother left your father an' Fergus an' yourself to my care, an' I said I would never fail you, so I can't break my promise by letting you break your health. I will sit up wi' him, as I've done many a time when he was a bairn."

It thus came to pass that Elspie nursed her brother by day, and Old Peg sat up with him at night. Of course the duties of the former were considerably lightened by the assistance rendered by various members of the family, as well as friends, who were ever ready to sit by the

bedside of the wounded man and read to or chat with him. At such times he was moderately cheerful, but when the night watches came, and Old Peg took her place beside him, and memory had time to commence with him undisturbed, the deed of which he had had been guilty was forced upon him; Conscience was awakened, and self-condemnation was the result. Yet, so inconsistent is poor humanity that self-exculpation warred with self-condemnation in the same brain! The miserable man would have given all he possessed to have been able to persuade himself that his act was purely one of self-defence—as no doubt to some extent it was, for if he had not fired first Perrin's action showed that he would certainly have been the man-slayer. But, then, young McKay could not shut his eyes to the fact that premeditation had, in the first instance, induced him to extend his hand towards his gun, and this first act it was which had caused all the rest.

Often during the wakeful hours of the night would the invalid glance at his nurse with a longing desire to unburden his soul to her, but whenever his eye rested on her calm, wrinkled old visage, and he thought of her deafness, and the difficulty of making her understand, he abandoned his half-formed intention with a sigh. He did not, indeed, doubt her sympathy, for many a time during his life, especially when a child, had he experienced the strength and tenderness of that.

After attending to his wants, it was the habit of Old Peg to put on a pair of tortoise-shell spectacles and read. Her only book was the Bible. She read nothing else—to say truth, at that time there was little else to read in Red River. The first night of her watch she had asked the invalid if he would like her to read a few verses to him.

"You may if you like, Peg," he had replied. "You know it iss little I care for releegion, for I don't believe in it, but you may read if you like—it may amuse me, an' will help to make the time pass—whatever."

Thus the custom was established. It was plain that the old woman counted much on the influence of the simple Word of God, without comment, for every time she opened the Bible she shut her eyes and her lips moved in silent prayer before she began to read.

The invalid was greatly tickled with this little preliminary prayer, and

would have laughed aloud if he had not been too weak to do so. As time went on, however, he became interested in the Gospel narratives in spite of himself, and he began to experience some sort of relish for the evening reading—chiefly because, as he carefully explained to Elspie, “the droning o’ the old wumman’s voice” sent him to sleep.

Meanwhile the other invalid—Duncan senior—progressed as slowly as did his son. The nursing of him was undertaken chiefly by Jessie Davidson—the sympathetic Jessie—who was established as an inmate of Ben Nevis *pro tem*, for that very purpose. She was ably seconded—during part of each day—by Billie Sinclair, between whom and the old Highlander there grew up at that time a strong friendship. For many weeks poor old McKay was confined to his bed, and then, when allowed to rise, he could only walk across his room with the aid of the strong arm of his stalwart son Fergus. To sit at his open window and look out at his garden was his principal amusement, and smoking a long clay pipe his chief solace. Like Duncan junior, old Duncan was quite willing to hear the Bible read to him now and then, by Jessie Davidson and more especially by Little Bill; but the idea of deriving any real comfort from that book never for a moment entered his head.

One day Elspie came to him and said:

“Daddy, Dan wants to see you to-day, if you feel well enough.”

“Surely, my tear. It iss not the first time he will be seein’ me since I got the stroke.”

“He has brought you a present—something that he has made—which he hopes will be useful to you.”

“What is it, Elspie?”

“You shall see. May I tell him to come in and bring it with him?”

“Surely, my tear. Let him come in. It iss always goot for sore eyes to see himself—whatever.”

Elspie went out. A few minutes later there was heard in the passage a strange rumbling sound.

“What in all the world iss that?” said the old man to Little Bill, who happened to be his companion at the time.

“It sounds like wheels, I think,” said Billie.

The door opened as he spoke, and Dan Davidson entered, pushing before him an invalid chair of a kind that is familiar enough in the civilised world, but which was utterly unknown at that time in those regions.

“Goot-mornin’, Tan; what hev you got there? Iss it a surprise you will be givin’ me?”

“It is a chair, sir, which will, I hope, add a good deal to your comfort,” said Dan. “I made it myself, from the memory-model of one which I once saw in the old country. See, I will show you how it acts. Push me along, Jessie.”

Dan sat down in the chair as he spoke, and his sister Jessie, who entered at the moment, pushed him all about the room with the greatest ease.

“Well, well!” said the amused invalid. “Ye are a clever man, Taniel. It iss a goot contrivance, an’ seems to me fery well made. Could Little Bill push it, think ye? Go an’ try, boy.”

Little Bill found that he could push Dan in the chair as easily as Jessie had done it.

“But that is not all,” said Dan. “See—now I will work the chair myself.”

So saying he laid his hands on the two large wheels at either side—which, with a little wheel behind, supported the machine—and moved it about the room, turned it round, and, in short, acted in a very independent manner as to self-locomotion.

“Well, now, that *iss* goot,” exclaimed the pleased invalid. “Let me try it, Tan.”

In his eagerness the poor man, forgetting for a moment his helpless condition, made an effort to rise, and would certainly have fallen off the

chair on which he was seated if Elspie had not sprung to his assistance.

“Come, there’s life in you yet!” said Dan as he assisted the old man into the wheel-chair. “Put your hands—so. And when you want to turn sharp round you’ve only to pull with one hand and push with—”

“Get along with you,” interrupted the old man, facetiously giving the chair a swing that caused all who stood around him to leap out of his way: “will you hev the presumption to teach a man that knew how to scull a boat before you wass born? But, Taniel,” he added, in a more serious tone, “we must hev one like this made for poor Tuncan.”

As this was the first reference which McKay had made to his younger son since his illness—with the exception of the daily inquiry as to his health—it was hailed as an evidence that a change for the better was taking place in the old man’s mind. For up to that period no one had received any encouragement to speak of, or enter into conversation about, Duncan junior.

“You are right,” returned Dan. “I have been thinking of that, and have even laid in the wood to make a similar chair for him. But I fear he won’t be able to use it for some time to come. Elspie was thinking, if you don’t object, to have your bedroom changed to one of the rooms on the ground floor, so that you could be wheeled into the garden when so inclined.”

“Yes, daddy,” said Elspie, taking up the discourse; “we can put you into the room that corresponds with Duncan’s room at the other end of the house, so that you and he will be able to meet after your long illness. But there is another contrivance which Dan has been making for us—not for you, but for Old Peg. Tell daddy about it, Dan.”

“Like the chair,” said Dan, “it is no novelty, except in this out-o’-the-way place. You see, I have noticed that Old Peg is rather deaf—”

“Well, Tan,” interrupted old McKay with a benignant smile, “it iss not much observation that you will be requirin’ to see that!”

“Just so. Well, I also observed that it gives Duncan some trouble to speak loud enough to her. So I have invented a sort of ear-trumpet—a tin pipe with an ear-piece at one end and a mouth-piece at the other, which I

hope may make things easier."

"Hev ye not tried it yet?" asked McKay.

"Not yet. I've only just brought it."

"Go down, lad, an' try it at wanse, an' let me know what the upshot iss."

Down they all went accordingly, leaving Duncan senior alone.

They found Old Peg in the act of administering beef-tea refreshment—or something of that sort—to the invalid. Peter Davidson and Archie Sinclair were there also, paying him a visit.

"Hallo, Little Bill!" said Archie as his brother entered. "You here! I guessed as much. Your passion for nursing since you attended Dan is outrageous. You do more nursing in this house, I do believe, than Elspie and Jessie and Old Peg put together. What d'ee mean by it, Bill? I get no good of you at all now!"

"I like it, Archie, and I'm training myself to nurse you when you get ill or old!"

"Thank 'ee for nothin', Little Bill, for I don't mean to become either ill or old for some time to come; but, I say, are they goin' to perform an operation on Old Peg's head?"

This was said in consequence of Elspie shouting to the old woman to let her put something into her ear to cure deafness.

"Cure deafness!" she exclaimed, with a faint laugh, "nothin' will ever cure *my* deafness. But I can trust *you*, dearie, so do what you please."

"Shut your eyes, then."

"And open your mouth!" said Archie to Little Bill in a low voice.

Old Peg did as she was bid. Dan, approaching behind her, put the small end of the tube into her right ear—which was the best one—and Elspie, putting her mouth to the other end, spoke to her in her soft, natural voice.

The effect was amusing. Old Peg dropped into her chair as if paralysed, and gazed from one to another in mute amazement.

“Eh! dearie. Did I ever think to hear the sweet low voice o’ Elspie like as it was when she was a bairn! Most amazin’!” she said. “Let me hear’t again.”

The operation was repeated, and it was finally found that, by means of this extemporised ear-trumpet, the poor creature once more became a conversable member of society. She went about the house the remainder of that day in a quite excited state, asking questions of everybody, and putting the end of the instrument to their mouths for an answer. Archie even declared that he had caught her alone in the back-kitchen shoving the cat’s head into the mouth-piece of the instrument, and pinching its tail to make it mew.

It was two days after the occurrence of these incidents that the old woman was seated by Duncan’s bedside, gazing through her tortoise-shell glasses at the well-thumbed Bible, when her patient, who had been very restless, looked up and spoke.

“Can I do anything for ye, dearie?” said Old Peg, putting the trumpet-end into her ear, and handing the mouth-piece to Duncan.

“You—you hear much better now, Old Peg?” said the sick man, in his natural voice.

“Ay, much, much better; thanks to the Lord—and to Mr Daniel.”

“If Daniel had not thought of it,” said the invalid, quite gravely, “do you think that the Lord would hev sent the machine to you?”

“He might or He might not,” returned the old woman, promptly. “It’s not for me to say, nor yet to guess on that point. But this I do know for certain—if the Lord hadna’ thought upon Mr Daniel, then Mr Daniel wouldna’ have been here to think upon *me*.”

Duncan made no reply, and for some time remained quite silent. Then he spoke again.

“Peg, what wass it that you would be reading to me last night—something about a malefactor, I’m thinking.”

“Ay, it was about the robbers that was crucified on each side o’ the Lord. One o’ them reviled the Lord as he was hangin’ there, the other found forgiveness, for he was led to see what a lost sinner he was, and repented and confessed his sins.”

“That is fery strange,” said Duncan, after a few moments’ thought. “Do you think, Peg, that the robber that was forgiven wass a—a murderer?”

“I have little doubt o’t,” answered Peg, “for I’ve heard say that they think very little o’ human life in them Eastern countries. But whatever he was, the blood of Jesus Christ was able to cleanse him.”

“Ay, but if he was a murderer, Peg, he did not *deserve* to be forgiven.”

“My bairn,” said the old woman, with something of motherly tenderness in her tone, “it’s not them that *deserve* to be forgiven that *are* forgiven, but them that see that they *don’t* deserve it. Didna’ this robber say that he was sufferin’ for his sins justly? That, surely, meant that he deserved what he was getting, an’ how is it possible to deserve both condemnation an’ forgiveness at the same time? But he believed that Jesus was a king—able and willing to save him though he did *not* deserve it, so he asked to be remembered, and he *was* remembered. But lie down now, bairn, an’ rest: Ye are excitin’ yoursel’, an’ that’s bad for ye.”

A week or so after the conversation above recorded, Dan brought a wheel-chair for Duncan, similar to the one he had made for his father. As Duncan had been getting out of bed for several days before, Dan found him dressed and sitting up. He therefore lifted him into the chair at once, and wheeled him out into the garden, where a blaze of warm sunshine seemed to put new life into the poor invalid.

It had been pre-arranged that old McKay should be brought down that same day to his new room, and that he should also be wheeled into the garden, so as to meet his son Duncan, without either of them being prepared for the meeting.

“I don’t feel at all sure that we are right in this arrangement,” Elspie had

said; but Dan and Fergus, and Mrs Davidson and Jessie had thought otherwise, so she was overruled.

Archie was deputed to attend upon Duncan junior, and Little Bill obtained leave to push the chair of old McKay. The younger man was wheeled under the shade of a tree with his back to the house, and left there. Then the family retired out of the way, leaving Archie to attend the invalid.

A few minutes after young Duncan had been placed, Little Bill pushed his charge under the same tree, and, wheeling the chair quickly round, brought father and son suddenly face to face.

The surprise was great on both sides, for each, recollecting only the man that *had been*, could hardly believe in the reality of the ghost that sat before him.

“Father!” exclaimed Duncan at last.

But the old man answered not. Some strong feeling was evidently surging within him, for his mouth was tightly pursed and his features worked strangely. Suddenly he burst into tears, but the weakness was momentary. With an effort that seemed to concentrate the accumulated energy of all the McKays from Adam downwards, he again pursed his mouth and looked at his younger son with a stern persistent frown, worthy of the most rugged of Highlanders in his fiercest mood.

Duncan was inexpressibly touched.

“Father,” said he again, “I’ve been a baad, baad son to *you*.”

“Tuncan,” retorted the old man, in a husky but firm voice, “I’ve been a baad, baad father to you.”

“Let us shake hands—whatever,” said the son.

The two silently grasped each other’s hands with all the little strength that remained to them. Then old McKay turned suddenly to his henchman.

“Little Bill,” said he, in a tone that was not for an instant to be disregarded, “shove me down to the futt of the garden—you *rascal*!”

With a promptitude little short of miraculous the Highlander was wheeled away, and thus the momentous meeting was abruptly brought to a close.

Chapter Thirty Three.

Matrimonial Plans and Prospects.

Time passed by, as time is rather apt to do, and still the feud between the rival fur companies continued, to the detriment of the Indians and the fur-trade, the unsettling of Red River Settlement, and the demoralisation more or less of all concerned.

Men who would gladly have devoted all their energies to the arts of peace, became more or less belligerent in spirit, if not in act, and many were forced to take sides in the controversy—some siding with the Nor'-Westers and others with the Hudson's Bay Company.

With the merits of their contentions we do not propose to meddle. We confine ourselves to facts.

One important fact was that our hero Daniel Davidson took the side of the Hudson's Bay Company. Being a stout fellow, with a good brain, a strong will, an independent spirit, and a capable tongue, he was highly appreciated by the one side and considerably hated by the other, insomuch that some of the violent spirits made dark suggestions as to the propriety of putting him out of the way. It is not easy, however, or safe, to attempt to put a strong, resolute man out of the way, and his enemies plotted for a considerable time in vain.

The unsettled state of the colony, and the frequent failure of the crops had, as we have seen, exerted an evil influence for a long time on poor Dan's matrimonial prospects, and at last, feeling that more settled times might yet be in the remote future, and that, as regarded defence and maintenance, it would be on the whole better both for Elspie and himself that they should get married without delay, he resolved to take the important step, and, as old McKay remarked, have it over.

"You see, Taniel," said the old man, when the subject was again

broached, “it iss of no use hangin’ off an’ on in this fashion. Moreover, this nasty stiff leg o’ mine is so long of getting well that it may walk me off the face o’ the earth altogether, an’ I would not like to leave Elspie till this matter iss settled. Tuncan also iss a little better just now, so what say you to have the weddin’ the month after next? Mr Sutherland will be back from the Whitehorse Plains by then, an’ he can tie the knot tight enough —whatever. Anyway, it iss clear that if we wait for a munister o’ the Auld Kirk, we will hev to wait till doomsday. What say you, Taniel?”

It need hardly be said that Dan had nothing whatever to say in objection to this scheme. It was therefore settled—under the proviso, of course, that Elspie had no objection. Dan went off at once to see Elspie, and found that she had no objection, whereupon, after some conversation, etcetera, with which we will not weary the reader, he sought out his friend Fred Jenkins, to whom he communicated the good news, and treated him to a good many unanswerable reasons why young people should not delay marriage when there was any reasonable prospect of their getting on comfortably in life together.

The sailor agreed with effusive heartiness to all that he said, and Dan thought while he was speaking—orating—as one of the American settlers would have expressed it—that Jenkins wore a peculiar expression on his manly countenance. Attributing it to unusual interest in the event, he continued—

“Now, Fred, I want you to be my best-man—”

“Unpossible—quite unpossible,” interrupted the seaman with a grave shake of the head.

“How—impossible!”

“Ab-so-lutely unpossible.”

“But why? Explain yourself, Fred.”

“’Cause it’s only a bachelor as can be a best-man to a bachelor—ain’t it?”

“I believe so, though I’m no authority in such matters; but surely that is a matter of no importance, for *you* are a bachelor, you know.”

“True, that’s what I am to-day, but I won’t be that long, for I am goin’ to be married next month, so I won’t be available, d’ee see, the month after.”

“You—married!—to whom?” exclaimed Dan in amazement.

“Well, that’s a point blank shot right between wind an’ water. Hows’ever, I suppose I can’t go wrong in tellin’ you, Dan, for it’s all settled, though not a soul knows about it except Little Bill, an’ yourself, an’ her brother.”

“But I *don’t* know about it yet,” returned Dan. “Who is it?”

“A angel—pure an’ unmixed—come straight down from heaven a-purpus to marry poor, unedicated, sea-farin’ Fred Jenkins, an’ her terrestrial name is Elise Morel!”

Dan laughed while he congratulated the modest seaman, and admitted the strength of his difficulty.

“D’you know, Fred, I’ve had a suspicion for some time past that you had a leaning in that direction?”

“So have I, Dan, had an uncommon strong suspicion for a very long time past, not only that I had a leanin’ that way, but a regular list to port, an’ now I’m fairly over on my beam-ends!”

“But, surely, it must have come upon you very sudden at last,” said Dan. “How was it?”

“Sudden! I should just think it did—like a white squall in the Mediterranean, or a hurricane in the China seas. This is how it was. I’d bin cruisin’ about her—off an’ on—for a considerable time, tryin’ to make up my mind to go into action, an’ screwin’ my courage up to the stickin’ pint by recallin’ all the fine sentiments that has carried Jack-tars through fire an’ smoke, shot and shell since the world began—‘England expects every man to do his dooty,’—‘Never say die,’—‘Hookey Bunkum,’ an’ such like. But it warn’t no manner o’ use, for I’m an’ outrageous coward wi’ the gals, Dan. So, in a sort o’ despair, I sailed away this very mornin’ into the plantation at the futt o’ your garden, intendin’ to cool myself an’ think over it, when, who should I see almost hull down on my lee bow but the enemy—Elise herself!

“Well, I changed my course at once; bore straight down on her, an’ soon overhauled her, but the nearer I came the more did my courage run out, so I gradooally begun to take in sail an drop astarn. At last I got savage, ‘You’re a fool, Jenkins!’ says I to myself. ‘That’s a fact!’ says su’thin’ inside o’ me.

“Now, if that su’thin’ had kep’ quiet, I do believe that I’d have gone about-ship an’ showed her my heels, but that su’thin’, whatever it was, set up my dander. ‘Now then,’ says I, ‘haul taut the main brace! Up wi’ the t’gall’nt-s’ls an’ sky-scrapers! “England expects,” etceterer!’

“Afore you could say Jack Robinson, I was along side—grapplin’-irons hove into her riggin’, and a broadside fired. The way I gave it her astonished even myself. Nelson himself could scarce ha’ done it better! Well, she struck her colours at the first broadside, an’ somehow—I never could make out exactly how—we was sittin’ on the stump of a tree with her head on my rough unworthy buzzum. Think o’ that! Dan, *her* head—the head of a Angel! Give us your flipper, mate.”

“I congratulate you, Jenkins, with all my heart,” said Dan, grasping the seaman’s flipper, and giving it a hearty shake. “So now, I must look out for another best-man. Morel will do for me, I think, and you can have my brother Peter, no doubt. But could we not manage to have both weddings on the same day?”

“Impossible,” answered the seaman, promptly. “Couldn’t wait.”

“But we might compromise the matter. I might have mine a little sooner and you could have yours a little later.”

Still Jenkins shook his head. “Not fair-play,” he said. “All the advantage on your side. However, we might consider it. Hold a sort o’ drum-head court-martial over it, with Elise and Elspie as judges.”

When the said court-marital—as Dan called it—was held, the compromise was agreed to, and it was finally fixed that six weeks thereafter the two couples should be united in Ben Nevis Hall.

But the current of these parallel streams of true love was not yet destined to run smooth—as the next chapter will show.

Chapter Thirty Four.

A New Disaster.

“I mean to go off to-morrow on a shooting trip to the lake,” said Dan Davidson to Archie Sinclair. “I’ve had a long spell at farming operations of late, and am tired of it. The double wedding, you know, comes off in six weeks. So I want to have one more run in the wilderness in all the freedom of bachelorhood. Will you go with me?”

“‘Unpossible,’ as Jenkins would say,” answered Archie. “Nothing would please me better, but, duty before pleasure! I’ve promised to spend a week along wi’ Little Bill at the Whitehorse Plains. Billie has taken a great fancy to that chief o’ the half-breeds, Cuthbert Grant, and we are goin’ to visit him. I’ve no doubt that Little Bill would let me off, but I won’t be let off.”

“Then I must ask Okématan to go with me,” said Dan.

“You needn’t trouble yourself, for I heard him say that he was goin’ off to see some o’ his relations on important business—a great palaver o’ some sort—and Elise told me this morning that she saw him start yesterday.”

“Morel is too busy with his new farm to go,” rejoined Dan, “and Jenkins is too busy helping Morel. Perhaps Dechamp or Bourassin may be more at leisure. I will go see.”

But on search being made, neither Dechamp nor Bourassin was to be found, and our hero was returning home with the intention of taking a small hunting canoe and going off by himself, when he chanced to meet with La Certe.

That worthy seemed unusually depressed, and returned Dan’s greeting with very little of his habitual cheerfulness.

“What’s wrong with you, François?” asked Dan, anxiously.

“Domestic infelicity,” answered La Certe, with a sorrowful shake of the

head.

“What! surely Slowfoot has not taken to being unkind to you?”

“O no! Slowfoot could not be unkind, but she is unhappy; she has lost her cheerful looks; she does not take everything as she once did; she does not now let everything go anyhow with that cheerful resignation which was once her delightful characteristic. She no longer hands the pipe of peace to our little one—indeed she refuses to let it have the pipe at all, though the poor child cries for it, and comes to me secretly, when Slowfoot is out of the way, to beg for a draw. Then, she scolds me—no, she does not scold. Slowfoot cannot scold. She is too amiable—but she remonstrates, and that is worse than scolding, for it enlists myself against myself. O! I am now miserable. My days of peace are gone!”

“This is all very sad, La Certe,” said Dan, in a tone of sympathy. “What does she remonstrate about?”

“About my laziness! She does it very kindly, very gently—so like her old self!—but she *does* it. She says, ‘Husband; we have gone on this way too long. We must change. *You* must change. You are lazy!’”

“Well, La Certe,” said Dan, “I’m afraid that Slowfoot is right.”

“I know she is right!” retorted the half-breed, with more of exasperation in his manner than his friend had ever before seen in him. “When that which is said of one is false, one can afford to smile, but when it is true what can one say? Yet it is hard—very hard. *You* are full of energy; you love to expend it, and you search for work. It is natural—and what is natural *must* be right. So, I am full of laziness. I love to indulge it, and I search for repose. That is also natural, and what is natural *must* be right. Voilà!”

“Then I suppose your love for repose,” returned Dan, “will oblige you to decline an offer which I thought of making to you.”

“What is that?”

“To go with me on a shooting expedition to Lake Winnipeg for a week or two.”

“O no! I will not decline that,” returned La Certe, brightening up. “Shooting is not labour. It is amusement, with labour sufficient to make after-repose delightful. And I will be glad to leave my home for a time, for it is no longer the abode of felicity.”

This having been satisfactorily arranged, preparations made, and Slowfoot advised of her husband’s intention, Dan went to Ben Nevis Hall next morning to bid farewell to Elspie for a brief period. He found only old McKay in the Hall, Elspie having gone up the Settlement, or down the Settlement—the man did not know which—to call on a friend.

“See that ye will not be long o’ comin’ back, Tan,” he said. “There will be a good many arranchments to make, you see.”

“I hope to be back in three weeks at latest,” said Dan, “if all goes well.”

“Ay, if all goes well,” repeated the old man, thoughtfully. “As Elspie says sometimes, ‘We never know what a day may bring furth.’ Well, well, see that you will not be upsetting your canoe, for canoes are cranky things—whatever.”

In a short time our hero and La Certe found themselves floating once more on the calm breast of the mighty inland sea.

It was afternoon. The circumstances were eminently conducive to the felicity which is derivable from repose, and thus admirably suited to the tastes of La Certe. An unruffled sheet of glassy water lay spread out to the north-western horizon, which not only doubled the canoe and its occupants, but reflected the golden glory of the sun, and mirrored every fleecy cloudlet in the bright blue sky. A mere dip of the paddles now and then served to give impulse to the light, and literal, bark. Genial warmth pervaded the atmosphere, and little white gulls floated almost motionless on outspread wings, or sloped hither and thither with lazy flap, while ever and anon the whistling wings of passing wild-fowl gave promise of occupation to their guns, to say nothing of their kettles.

On their third day out, towards evening, they went ashore on the lee-side of a rocky point where some bushes and trees seemed to offer firewood and shelter.

“This will do,” said Dan, as he stepped lightly out on a shelving rock and held the canoe while his companion took out the lading. “Plenty dry sticks and lots of moss for bedding.”

“Truly, that is so,” returned La Certe. “It is a place in which Slowfoot would rejoice to repose, and the little one to smoke its pipe.”

“You forget,” said Dan. “The little one is no longer allowed that luxury.”

“No, I forgot not. But I reflect that it is possible to give her many a draw on the sly.”

The fire was soon kindled, ducks were roasting in front of it, and the kettle boiling above it. The tea had been infused, and La Certe, while filling his pipe, was blinking good-will at all around, when the notes of a voyageur-song were heard like an echo in the far distance.

Gradually the song grew louder, and soon a canoe rounded the point, and came in sight of the camp-fire. It was what used to be called a north-canoe, of the largest size, made of birch-bark, and contained a crew of ten men.

The song and the paddling stopped simultaneously when the camp was observed, and the men appeared to hold a consultation. Their hesitation, however, was very brief. Suddenly, breaking again into song, they ran the canoe to shore, and landed.

“We are bound for Red River,” said their chief to Dan. “Just come from Canada. We suppose you don’t object to our camping beside you. It is a convenient spot.”

Of course the two hunters had no objection whatever to fraternise with the strangers from Canada, and in a short time another large fire was sending its myriad sparks up into the darkening sky like a gigantic roman-candle.

During supper the strangers made themselves very agreeable. After supper, two of the stoutest of them arose, as if to go into the bush for more firewood. Suddenly these threw themselves upon and seized Dan and his comrade, who were reclining quietly on the ground. Before either

could make even an attempt at self-defence they were overpowered by the Canadians, and held forcibly down, while their arms were securely bound to their sides with strips of deerskin.

“It is useless to struggle, Dan Davidson,” said the chief, when this was being accomplished. “We know you as a bitter opponent of the Nor’-westers, and we intend to carry you where your power to do mischief will be ended.”

“Who are you? and under whose authority do you act?” demanded Dan, angrily.

“Who I am is a matter of no interest to you, Dan. I act under my own authority, and I may just as well tell you, at the beginning, that if you and your comrade choose to submit peaceably, we will treat you reasonably well;—if not, we will find means to quiet you, even though we should be driven to do it wi’ that.”

The man pointed significantly to a gun which leant against a neighbouring tree. His meaning could not be misunderstood.

That night, Dan and La Certe were fastened to a tree by cords which allowed of their moving about freely within a small space, but their arms were not unbound. Here they were allowed to make themselves as comfortable as possible in the circumstances. Their bed, being mossy, was well enough, but the distracted state of their minds—especially Dan’s—may be imagined.

“La Certe,” said Dan, when the camp-fire had burned low, and the stars were shining on them through the leaves, and all was still, save an occasional snore from the Nor’-westers.

La Certe groaned in reply.

Poor Dan was not in a mood to comfort him or anybody else at that moment, and did not follow up his remark.

“La Certe,” he said again, after a quarter of an hour.

“Well?”

“Do you remember John Bourke?”

“Yes, yes. I remember him, but I care not for him. My own sorrows are too great.”

“Do you recollect,” continued Dan, regardless of this despairing remark, “that a good while ago the Nor’-westers took him prisoner, when he was wounded after a skirmish with them, and carried him to Canada—treating him with great barbarity on the way. There he was put in jail, but, as nothing could be proved against him, he was liberated, and then tried to return to his family in Red River, but the Nor’-westers caught him again, imprisoned him, sent him a second time to Canada, and had him tried at the Court of the King’s Bench, although his only crime was that of resisting the North-West Company. He was acquitted, and, after terrible sufferings from which he never quite recovered and a three years’ absence, he rejoined his family in Red River.”

“Yes, O yes! I know it all,” groaned La Certe.

“Well,” continued Dan, bitterly, “his fate is not unlikely to be ours.”

The poor half-breed made no reply to this. For some time he lay quite still, and his comrade had almost fallen into an uneasy slumber, when he was awakened by La Certe breaking out into a soliloquy in which he apostrophised his absent wife.

“O my Slowfoot!” he murmured. “Shall we never meet again on earth? Yes, you are right. I have been lazy! I *am* lazy. I suppose that this is punishment for my sin. But it is hard to bear, and very heavy—is it not?—for only following one’s nature in longing for repose. O! why was I born? Why was our little one born, to enjoy for so brief a time the delights of smoke, and then have it denied her—except on the sly, when with her miserable father, who will never see her more—perhaps.”

He paused for a few minutes, and then broke out again.

“Yes, my Slowfoot—you are right. I must reform. I will cast off my sloth as a garment—even—even though I should go naked all the rest of my days! I will work—energise! I will—”

“Hold your tongue, La Certe, and listen,” said Dan in a low, stern voice.

“I am all attention,” returned the poor man in a similarly low tone.

“Are you game to fight, if you get the chance?”

“Game to fight!” echoed the other—“to fight for my Slowfoot, my little one, my smoke, and my repo— I mean my—my—new—”

“Speak lower, man, and listen to a plan I have in my head.”

Here Dan spoke so low that he could not be heard at all, save only by his companion; but that is of little consequence, for the plan, whatever it might have been, was never carried out.

Next day the Nor’-west party with their two prisoners paddled away towards the mouth of the grand turbulent Winnipeg River, and began to traverse the weary wilderness-route of rivers and lakes, which at that time formed the only direct means of communication between the frontiers of Canada and “Rupert’s Land.”

Chapter Thirty Five.

The Last.

Eagerly, earnestly, doggedly, did Daniel Davidson and François La Certe watch for a favourable opportunity to escape from their captors, but they waited and watched in vain, for their captors were cruel, suspected them of the intention to escape, and were consequently careful to prevent even an attempt being made. They never freed their wrists from strong cords; kept knives and axes out of their way; tethered them to a tree each night, and watched them continually.

Can it be wondered at that, in the circumstances, our unfortunate hero became almost insane? The wedding-day had been fixed before he left Red River; preparations were being made for the great event, and it was pretty well understood that Dan had gone off hunting with the view, chiefly, to be out of people’s way till the day should arrive. They would

scarcely begin to notice his prolonged absence till the day approached. Then, no doubt, when too late, and he should be far on the way to Canada, they would in some alarm send out parties to search for him.

Dan became desperate, but he was gifted with an unusual power of self-control, so that, beyond a very stern expression, his countenance betrayed no sign of the terrible conflict that was raging within—a conflict in which mortal hatred of mankind in general and an overwhelming desire to kill or be killed formed elements. Ah! reader, poor human beings have many and many a time in the past been brought to this terrible condition. God grant that we and ours may never know what it is to tremble on the brink of madness because of the combined influence of gross injustice and horrible cruelty. To do the Nor'-westers justice, they were unaware of the intensity of the pain they were inflicting. They had only captured a powerful enemy, and meant, by keeping a tight hold of him, to render him powerless in the future—that was all!

As for La Certe, they had no intention of taking him to Canada. They only meant to carry him so far on the road, that, when set free, it would be impossible for him to get back to the colony in time to give effective warning to Dan's friends.

One afternoon the voyagers put ashore at one of the numerous portages which obstruct the navigation of that route to Canada, and, after unloading the canoe and lifting her out of the water, they proceeded to carry the lading across to the still water above the rapids which rendered this portage necessary.

Although bound, the prisoners were by no means freed from labour. The cords had been so arranged that they could use the paddle while in the canoe; while, on the portages, although unable to load themselves, they were quite able to carry a load which others placed on their shoulders. On this occasion Dan was first sent off with a load, and then La Certe and some of the others followed. When he reached the upper end of the portage, Dan flung down his load, and, from his elevated position, gazed wistfully down the valley through which the waters of the Winnipeg River roared and seethed among jagged rocks as far as the eye could reach. It was a wild majestic scene, but no thought of its grandeur touched the mind of the poor prisoner. He thought only of escape. His intimate

knowledge, however, of the terrific power of rushing water told him that there could be no escape in that direction.

“Oh! if my arms were only free, I would risk it!” he murmured, as he raised his hands and looked at the powerful thongs of hide with which they were bound—thongs which were always drawn tighter when he landed, to render an attempt at escape more hopeless. Then he glanced at the rushing river beside him. A sheer precipice of full thirty feet descended from the spot on which he stood to the edge of the flood. Just below there was a whirlpool, and beyond that began the first of the series of falls and rapids which were avoided by means of the portage. Half-mad though he was, he did not dream of attempting such a leap with bound hands. He would wait, and continue to hope for a more favourable opportunity, but the possibility of such an opportunity was now growing very faint indeed, for even if he did escape, and had a canoe to use, it was by that time barely possible to accomplish the journey in time for the wedding-day. But although his hope of being in time had pretty well died out, his whole heart was still concentrated on the simple desire to escape.

A rush of despair came upon the poor youth just then, and the idea of ending his misery by taking his own life occurred to him for a fleeting moment, as he gazed wistfully around on water, wood, and sky, and observed the laden and toiling men who were slowly clambering up the steep towards him—La Certe being in front.

Just then an object among the grass at his feet attracted his attention. Stooping, he picked it up and found it to be a scalping-knife!—dropped, probably, long before by some passing Indians or voyageurs, for it was very rusty.

With a bounding heart and a wild rush of blood to his temples, he sprang towards a tree: stuck the point of the knife into it; held the handle with his teeth; sawed the thongs across its edge once or twice—and was free!

His first impulse was to bound into the woods, but the thought of his comrade arrested him. La Certe was already close at hand. Running towards him he said, quickly, “Drop your load! Now or never!” and cut his bonds at once. Then, turning, he sprang towards the woods. But from the

very opening through which he meant to plunge into the tangled thicket, there issued the leader of the Nor'-westers and two of his men. The chief was armed with a gun, which he immediately presented. With the instinct of bush-warriors the two prisoners dodged behind rocks, and made for the higher ground which Dan had recently quitted. Here a sheer precipice barred further progress. There was no way of escape but the river. They ran to the edge and looked down. La Certe shrank back, appalled. Dan glanced quickly round to see if there was any other opening. Then there came over his spirit that old, old resolve which has, in the moment of their extremity, nerved so many men to face danger and death, from the days of Adam downward.

"Now, La Certe," he said, grasping his comrade's hand: "Farewell! Death or Freedom! Tell Elspie my last thoughts were of her!"

Almost before the half-breed could realise what was said, Dan had leaped over the cliff and disappeared in the raging torrent. A few seconds later he was seen to rise in the whirlpool below the first cataract, and to buffet the stream vigorously, then he disappeared a second time. Before La Certe could make out whether his friend rose again, he was seized from behind, and dragged from the brink of the precipice.

Swift as the hunted stag springs from his covert, and bounds over every obstacle with speed and apparent ease, so sprang the chief of the Nor'-westers down the rugged path which led to the foot of the series of rapids, and the lower end of the portage. There was good grit in the man, morally and physically, for he was bent on a rescue which involved considerable danger.

Throwing off his capote, and tightening his belt, he stood on a ledge just below the last fall, intently watching the water.

The fall was not high, but it was deep, and rushed into a large dark basin with terrible velocity, causing the tormented foam-speckled water to circulate round its edges. In a few moments the form of Dan was seen to shoot down the fall and disappear in the basin. The chief stooped, but did not spring until, not far from him, the apparently inanimate form reappeared on the surface and began to circle slowly round among the flecks of foam. Then he plunged, swam out with powerful strokes, and

quickly returned to the shore with Dan in his grasp.

Soon they were surrounded by the other voyageurs, who had left La Certe to look after himself,—not caring much, in the excitement of the moment, whether he escaped or not.

“He is dead,” said one; “he breathes not; and see how his face is bruised and cut.”

“And his chest, too,” said another. “I think his ribs have been broken. Poor fellow! It was a wild, a reckless jump!”

“Keep back, and let him have air,” said the chief, who was doing his best, according to his knowledge, to resuscitate Dan.

Presently La Certe arrived, panting.

“O! he is gone! My comrade, my friend, is dead!” he exclaimed, clenching his hands, and gazing at the pale, bruised face.

“You are wrong,” exclaimed the chief, testily. “Out of the way, man! See! his eyelids quiver.”

And so they did; and so also quivered his lips, and then a sigh came—faint and feeble—then stronger, and at last Dan opened his eyes and thanked God that his life had been spared. But when he recovered sufficiently to realise his true position as being again a captive, the feeling of despair returned.

That night they encamped a mile above the upper end of the portage. At supper the two prisoners were allowed to sit by the camp-fire and eat with their hands free.

“Monsieur,” said the guide to Dan, respectfully, “you see it is impossible to escape. Why compel us to bind you? Give me your word of honour that you will not try, and your limbs may then remain as free as mine.”

“I give you my word of honour,” answered Dan, with a sardonic smile, “that till after breakfast to-morrow I will not try, for I need rest and food; but after that, I give you my word that I will never cease to try.”

With this promise the guide was fain to rest content, and that night Dan and his friend were allowed to sleep untethered, which they did soundly.

Next morning they were roused in gentler tones than usual, and not required to work—as had been the case hitherto—before breakfast. In short, there was an evident change in the feelings of their captors towards them, founded largely, no doubt, on admiration of Dan's reckless courage; but that did not induce them in the least degree to relax their vigilance, for the moment the hour of truce had passed, the chief advanced towards Dan with the thongs to bind him.

For one moment Dan felt an impulse to knock the man down, and then fight the whole party until death should end the matter; but the good-humoured look on his jailer's face, the fact that the man had saved his life the day before, and the certainty of defeat with such odds against him, induced him to quell the evil spirit and to hold out his hands.

"Pardon, Monsieur," said the chief, with the politeness of a French half-breed. "I am sorry you refuse to give me your parole. I would rather see you like the rest of us; but my orders are strict, and I must obey."

Before Dan could reply, a sound struck on their ears, which caused the whole party to listen, immovable and in perfect silence.

It was the wild, plaintive, beautiful song of the voyageur which had floated to them on the morning air, softened by distance to a mere echo of sweet sound. After listening intently for a few moments, the guide said gently: "Voyageurs."

Again they listened to the familiar sound, which increased in volume and strength as it approached, proving that the voyageurs were descending the river towards them. As yet nothing could be seen, for a thickly-wooded point intervened. Presently the song burst on them in full resonant chorus; at the same moment two large north-canoes—in all the brilliancy of orange-coloured bark, painted bows and sterns, red-bladed paddles, with crews of scarlet-capped or bare-headed men swept round the point with quick stroke, in time to the rapid measure.

A cheer was the irrepressible impulse of the men on shore, causing the newcomers to stop and listen.

“Perhaps,” said Dan, “they may be your foes of the Hudson’s Bay Company.”

“That may be so,” returned the Nor’-west Chief, gravely.

The unfurling of an “H.B.C.” (Hudson’s Bay Company) flag proved that it was so, to a certainty, and the depressed Nor’-westers did not cheer again; but the H B C men came on, paddling with wild vigour and cheering hilariously.

“They seem in great spirits,” growled the Nor’-west leader. “We are almost as strong as they, boys, and have the advantage of woods and cliffs. Shall we fight and keep our prisoners?”

“What is that white thing in the bow of the first canoe?” said one of the men.

“It looks like a flag,” said another.

“If so, it is a flag of truce,” observed Dan. “They have something to say, and do not want to fight.”

“That may be trite, but we won’t let *you* be at the conference,” returned the leader, sternly. “Come, four of you, lead them out of earshot. Take your guns, and use them if need be.”

Four powerful fellows at once obeyed the order, and led the prisoners, who had been once more bound, into the woods. Once again Dan was tempted to offer fierce resistance, but he knew that the Hudson’s Bay men were yet too far off to be able to hear shouts—at least to understand the meaning of them—and that it would be useless to resist such a guard. He therefore submitted to be led a mile or so into the woods, and finally was permitted to sit down with La Certe under a tree to await the result of the conference.

They had not to wait long. In less than half-an-hour one of the younger among the Nor’-westers came bounding towards them, waving his cap and shouting.

“You are free, Messieurs—free!” he cried, seizing both prisoners by the

hands. “We are no longer enemies!”

“Free! What do you mean?” demanded Dan, who fancied that the young man must have gone mad.

“The companies have joined!” he cried, excitedly. “They are one! We are all friends now; but come and see and hear for yourself.”

Filled with wonder, and some small degree of hope, Dan and La Certe followed the young man, accompanied by their guards, who were not less mystified than themselves. Arrived at their camping-place, they found that the canoes had brought a Chief Trader—or officer of the Hudson’s Bay Company—who was conveying to Red River, and the interior of Rupert’s Land generally, the good news of a momentous historical event, namely, the union of the two companies.

The important event here referred to, namely, the coalition between the two great rival companies, which took place in 1821, was the death-blow to party strife over the whole of Rupert’s Land, and also inaugurated the dawn of lasting prosperity in the Red River Colony.

“Cut their bonds,” said the Chief Trader, as the prisoners approached.

No touch of the surgeon’s knife ever effected a cure more speedily.

“I congratulate you, young sir,” said the Trader, grasping Dan’s hand: “you are now free, for I understand that your loss of liberty had nothing to do with crime, and the rival companies are no longer opponents; they are friends. Indeed, we have been married, so to speak, and are now one. I am on my way to Red River with the good news.”

“When do you start?” asked Dan, abruptly.

“Well, if you mean from this spot,” answered the Trader, somewhat surprised as well as amused at the eagerness of the question, “I start at once. Indeed, I would not have landed here had I not seen your party. You appear to be anxious. Why do you ask?”

“Because it is of the utmost importance to me that I should be in Red River on a certain date, and I fear that that is all but impossible now.”

Dan then explained, as briefly as possible, his circumstances. Fortunately, the Trader was a sympathetic man. He ordered his crews to embark at once and bade the two captives take a brief, if not an affectionate, farewell of their late captors.

“I cannot promise you to push on,” he said, “at a rate which will satisfy you—or even accomplish the end you have in view—but I will do the best I can, without overworking my men. I fear, however, that you will have to make up your mind to a delayed wedding!”

“If you will only do your best for a day or two,” said Dan, “until we reach the mouth of this river, that will do, for there my own hunting canoe was left; and, once in that, La Certe and I can go ahead and tell them you are coming.”

“Nay, that would be requiting me ill—returning evil for good—to take the wind out of my sails and make my news stale,” returned the Trader, with a good-natured laugh.

“True, I did not think of that,” said Dan. “Then we will say not a word about it until you arrive.”

“Yes, we will be dumb,” added La Certe. “Even Slowfoot shall fail to drag it out of me!”

And thus it was arranged. The (late) Nor’-westers continued their voyage to Canada, and the Hudson’s Bay men resumed their descent of the Winnipeg River.

Arrived at the great lake, the anxious pair did not wait even to rest, but at once embarked in their little hunting canoe.

“I’m sorry you are such an unpresentable bridegroom,” said the Trader, when they were about to separate. He referred to the cuts and bruises with which poor Dan’s countenance was temporarily disfigured.

“Never mind,” returned our hero, with a laugh, “wait till you see the bride; she will more than make up for the shortcomings of the groom. Adieu! —*au revoir*!” They pushed off, and now began a race against time, which, in the matters at least of perseverance, persistency, hard labour, and

determination, beat all the records of bicyclists and horsemen from the beginning of time. Cyclists have frequent down-hills to help and rest them; Dan and his friend had no such aids. It was all either dead level or upstream. Dick Turpin and the rider to Ghent, (we forget his name), only killed their horses. Dan and François nearly killed themselves—not only with hard work and no rest, but with profound anxiety, for the wedding hour was rapidly approaching and they were still far from home!

While these events were transpiring in the wilderness, things were going smoothly enough in the Colony.

“I will be thinkin’,” said old Duncan McKay, one fine evening as he sat in his invalid chair, beside Duncan junior, who was woefully reduced and careworn, despite the attentions of the sympathetic Jessie Davidson, who was seated near him on a rustic seat beside Elspie—

“I will be thinkin’ that Tan an’ La Certe are stoppin’ longer away than iss altogither seemly. Tan should have been here two or three days before the weddin’.”

“He will likely be time enough for his own weddin’—whatever,” remarked Duncan junior. “Don’t you think so, Miss Jessie?”

“I think it likely,” answered the girl with a smile.

“He is *sure* to be in time,” said Elspie, with emphasis.

“We niver can be sure of anything in this world, my tear,” remarked old Duncan, becoming oracular in tone. “How do you know he iss so sure?”

“Because Dan never breaks his word,” returned Elspie, with an air of decision that would have gratified Dan immensely had he been there to see it.

“Fery true, my tear,” rejoined the Highlander, “but there are many other things that interfere with one’s word besides the will. He might tie, you know, or be trowned, or his gun might burst and render him helpless for life, if it did not kill him altogither. It iss an uncertain world at the best—whatever.”

Archie Sinclair, who joined them—with his brother, Little Bill, by his side, not on his back—was of the same opinion as Elspie, but Billie shook his head, looked anxious, and said nothing—for he felt that his friend was running things much too close.

At a later hour that same evening, the other members of the two families—who dropped in to make inquiries—began to express anxiety, and Okématan, who called just to see how things were getting on, shook his head and looked owlish. Old Peg said nothing, but she evidently thought much, to judge from the deepening wrinkles on her forehead.

As for Fred Jenkins, he was too much taken up with Elise Morel to think much about anything, but even he at last grew anxious, and when the wedding morning finally dawned, and no Dan made his appearance, something like consternation filled the hearts of all within the walls of Ben Nevis Hall and Prairie Cottage. Elspie appeared to feel less than the others, but the truth was that she only controlled herself better.

“He only wants to take us by surprise,” she said, and, under the strength of that opinion, she robed herself for the wedding. Only her gravity and the pallor of her cheeks told of uneasiness in her mind.

“Muster Sutherland said he would come soon after breakfast,” observed old Duncan, uneasily. “He should hev been here now,—for we need his advice sorely.”

“Here he iss,” exclaimed Fergus, starting up and hurrying forward to welcome the good old Elder.

Mr Sutherland’s advice was decided, and promptly given. Both weddings should be deferred and all the young men must turn out in an organised search without a moment’s delay!

It was amazing to find that every one had been of exactly the same opinion for some time past, but no one had dared to suggest a course of action which implied a belief that Dan might be in imminent danger, if not worse.

Now that the ice had been broken, however, all the youth of the neighbourhood volunteered for service, and a plan of search was being

hastily formed under the direction of the Elder, when two men in a canoe were seen to paddle very slowly to the landing-place at the foot of the garden. After hauling the end of their canoe on shore, they walked, or rather staggered, up towards the house.

One of them tripped and fell, and seemed from his motions as if he thought it was not worth while to rise again. The other, paying no attention to his companion, came on.

“Pless my soul!” exclaimed old McKay, “it iss Tan—or his ghost—whatever!”

And so it was! Dirty, bruised, scratched, battered, and soaking wet, Daniel Davidson appeared to claim his beautiful bride. And he did not come in vain, for, regardless of propriety and everything else, Elspie ran forward with a little shriek and flung herself into his arms.

“I have kept my promise, Elspie.”

“I knew you would, Dan! I *said* you would.”

“Tan, you rascal! come here.”

The youth obeyed, languidly, for it was evident that he was thoroughly exhausted.

“My poy,” said the Highlander, touched by Dan’s appearance, “you hev been in the watter!”

“Not exactly, father, but last night’s thunderstorm caught us, and we had no time to seek shelter.”

“An’ it iss fightin’ you hev been?”

“With water and rocks only,” said Dan.

“Well, well, go into the house now, and change your clo’es. Dry yourself, an’ get somethin’ to eat, for you are used up altogither.”

Elspie took his hand, and led him away. Meanwhile La Certe, having

gathered himself up and staggered to the front, was seized upon and questioned unmercifully. Then he also was taken into the house and fed; after which both men were made to lie down and rest.

Having slept for six hours Dan awakened, and rose up to be married! Fred Jenkins and Elise were—as the jovial tar expressed it—turned off at the same time.

It was customary in Rupert's Land at that time, as it is customary in many remote lands, no doubt, at the present day, to celebrate every wedding with a feast and a dance. Feasts are very much alike in substance, if not in detail, everywhere. We refrain from describing that which took place in Ben Nevis Hall at that time, further than to say that it was superb. The dancing was simple: it consisted chiefly of the Highland Fling danced by the performer according to taste or imagination.

But that it was eminently satisfactory to all concerned was clearly evinced by the appearance of the whole party—the elegant ease with which Fergus McKay did it; the tremendous energy with which Jacques Bourassin tried it; the persistent vigour with which André Morel studied it; the facility with which Elise acquired it—under Elspie's tuition; the untiring perseverance with which Archie and Little Bill did something like it—for the latter had quite recovered, and was fit to hold his own, almost, with any one; the charming confusion of mind with which Fred Jenkins intermingled the sailor's hornpipe with it; the inimitable languor with which La Certe condescended to go through it; the new-born energy with which Slowfoot footed it; the side-splitting shrieks with which Old Peg regarded it; the uproarious guffaws with which the delighted old Duncan hailed it; the sad smile with which that weak and worn invalid Duncan junior beheld it; and, last, but not least, the earnest mental power and conspicuous physical ability with which Dan Davidson attempted something which Charity personified might have supposed to bear a distant resemblance to it.

The music was worthy of the dancing, for the appointed performer had, owing to some occult cause, failed to turn up, and a volunteer had taken his place with another fiddle, which was homemade, and which he did not quite understand. A small pig with feeble intellect and disordered nerves might have equalled—even surpassed—the tones of that violin, but it

could not hope to have beaten the volunteer's time. That, performed on a board by the volunteer's foot, automatically, beat everything that we have ever heard of in the musical way from the days of Eden till now.

Only four members of the two households failed to take a violently active part in that festive gathering. Jessie Davidson had conveniently sprained her ankle for the occasion, and thus was set free to sit between the wheeled chairs of the two Duncans, and act as a sympathetic receptacle of their varied commentaries. Her mother, being too stout for active service, sat beside them and smiled universal benignity. Her little maid, Louise, chanced to be ill. Peter Davidson's case, however, was the worst. He had gone off in company with Okématan to visit a camp of Cree Indians, intending to be back in time, but his horse had gone lame while yet far from home, and as it was impossible to procure another at the time, he was fain to grin and bear it. Meanwhile Antoine Dechamp had been pressed into the service, and took his place as best-man to Fred Jenkins—a position which he filled to admiration, chiefly owing to the fact that he had never served in such a capacity before.

Late on the following evening La Certe sat by his own fireside, somewhat exhausted by the festivities of the day before, and glaring affectionately at Slowfoot, who was stirring something in a pot over the fire. The little one—rapidly becoming a big one, and unquestionably by that time a girl—crouched at her father's side, sound asleep, with her head resting on his leg. She no longer cried for a pull at her father's pipe.

"Have you heard that Kateegoose is dead?" asked Slowfoot.

"No—how did he die?"

"He was met on the plains by enemies, killed, and scalped."

"That is sad—very sad," said La Certe.

"The world is well rid of him," observed Slowfoot; "he was a bad man."

"Yes," responded her lord; "it is necessary to get rid of a bad man somehow—but—but it is sad—very sad—to kill and scalp him."

La Certe passed his fingers softly among the locks of his sleeping child

as if the fate of Kateegoose were suggestive! Then, turning, as from a painful subject, he asked—

“Does our little one never smoke now?”

“No—never.”

“Does she never wish for it?”

“Slowfoot cannot tell what our little one wishes,” was the reply, “but she never gets it.”

La Certe pondered for some time, and then asked—

“Does my Slowfoot still like *work*?”

“She likes it still—likes it better.”

“And she *does* it—sometimes?”

“Yes, often—always.”

“Why?”

“Because Mr Sutherland advises me—and I like Mr Sutherland.”

“Does my Slowfoot expect me to like work too, and to *do* it?” asked La Certe with a peculiar glance.

“We cannot like what we don’t like, though we may do it,” answered the wife, drawing perilously near to the metaphysical, “but Slowfoot expects nothing. She waits. My François is not a child. He can judge of all things for himself.”

“That is true, my Slowfoot; and, do you know,” he added, earnestly, “I have had hard work—awfully hard work—killing work—since I have been away, yet it has not killed me. Perhaps you will doubt me when I tell you that I, too, rather like it!”

“That is strange,” said Slowfoot, with more of interest in her air than she had shown for many a day. “Why do you like it?”

“I think,” returned the husband, slowly, “it is because I like Dan Davidson. I like him very much, and it was to please him that I began to work hard, for, you know, he was very anxious to get home in time to be at his own wedding. So that made me work *hard*, and now I find that hard work is not hard when we like people. Is it not strange, my Slowfoot?”

“Yes. Your words are very like the words of Mr Sutherland to-day. It is very strange!”

Yet, after all, it was not so very strange, for this worthy couple had only been led to the discovery of the old, well-known fact that— “Love is the fulfilling of the law.”

There was yet another of those whose fortunes we have followed thus far who learned the same lesson.

About the same time that the events just described took place in Red River, there assembled a large band of feathered and painted warriors in a secluded coppice far out on the prairie. They had met for a grave palaver. The subject they had been discussing was not war, but peace. Several of the chiefs and braves had given their opinions, and now all eyes were turned towards the spot where the great chief of all was seated, with a white-man beside him. That great chief was Okématan. The Paleface was Peter Davidson.

Rising with the dignity that befitted his rank, Okématan, in a low but telling voice, delivered himself, as follows:

“When Okématan left his people and went to live for a time in the wigwams of the Palefaces, he wished to find out for himself what they wanted in our land, and why they were not content to remain in their own land. The answer that was at first given to my questions seemed to me good—a reply that might have even come from the wise heads of the Cree Nation; but, after much palaver, I found that there was contradiction in what the Palefaces said, so that I began to think they were fools and knew not how to talk wisely. A Cree never reasons foolishly—as you all know well—or, if he does, we regard him as nobody—fit only to fight and to die without any one caring much. But as I lived longer with the Palefaces I found that they were not all fools. Some things they knew and

did well. Other things they did ill and foolishly. Then I was puzzled, for I found that they did not all think alike, as we do, and that some have good hearts as well as good heads. Others have the heads without the hearts, and some have the hearts without the heads—Waugh!”

“Waugh!” repeated the listening braves, to fill up the pause here, as it were, with a note of approval.

“The Palefaces told me,” continued Okématan with great deliberation, as if about to make some astounding revelations, “that their land was too small to hold them, and so they came away. I told them that that was wise; that Cree Indians would have done the same. But then came the puzzle, for they told me that there were vast tracts of land where they lived with plenty of lakes, rivers, and mountains, in which there was nobody—only fish and birds and deer. Then I said, ‘You told me that your land was too small to hold you; why did you not go and live on these mountains, and fish and shoot and be happy?’ To this they answered that those fine lands were claimed by a few great chiefs, who kept them for their own shooting and fishing, and drove out all the braves with their wives and families and little ones to crowd upon the shores of the great salt-water lake, and live there on a few fish and shells—for even there the great chiefs would not allow them to have all the fishing, but kept the best of it for themselves! Or, if they did not like that, the poor braves were told to go and live in what they called cities—where there are thousands of wigwams crowded together, and even piled on the top of each other,—but I think the Palefaces were telling lies when they said that—Waugh!”

Again there were many “Waughie” responses, mingled with numerous “Ho’s!” of astonishment, and a few other sounds that seemed to indicate disbelief in Okématan’s veracity.

“What,” continued Okématan, with considerable vehemence, “what would my braves do if Okématan and a few of the Cree chiefs were to take all the lands of Red River, and all the buffalo, and all the birds and beasts to themselves, and drive the braves with their families to the shores of Lake Winnipeg, to live there on fish, or die, or leave the country if they did not like it! What would they do?”

Okématan’s voice increased in fervour, and he put the finishing question

with an intensity that called forth a chorus of “Waughs!” and “Ho’s!” with a glittering of eyes, and a significant grasping of scalping-knives and tomahawks that rendered further reply needless.

“Would you not scorn us,” he continued, “scalp us, tear out our eyes, roast us alive?—but no—the Cree Nation loves not cruelty. You would merely pat us on the head, and tell us to go and make moccasins, and boil the kettle with the squaws!

“Then, when I began to know them better, I found that all the Paleface chiefs over the great salt lake are not greedy and foolish. Some are open-handed and wise. I also found that there is a tribe among them, who lived chiefly in the mountain lands. These are very kind, very brave, very wise, and very grave. They do not laugh so loud as the others, but when they are amused their eyes twinkle and their sides shake more. This tribe is called Scos-mins. I love the Scos-mins! I lived in the wigwam of one. He is old and fierce, but he is not bad, and his heart is large. In his house were some other Scos-mins—braves and squaws. They were very kind to me. This is one of them.”

The flashing eyes of the entire party were turned upon Peter Davidson, who, however, had presence of mind enough to gaze at the cloudless heavens with immovable solemnity and abstraction.

“There are two others, whom I look upon as sons. One is named Arch-ee; the other Leetil Beel. Now,” continued Okématan, after a pause, “my advice is that we should teach the Paleface chiefs over the great salt lake a lesson, by receiving the poor braves who have been driven away from their own lands and treating them as brothers. Our land is large. There is room for all—and *our* chiefs will never seize it. Our hearts are large; there is plenty of room there too.

“The Great Spirit who rules over all inclines my heart to go and dwell with the Palefaces until I understand them better, and teach them some of the wisdom of the Red-man. I shall return to Red River to-morrow, along with my Paleface brother whose name is Pee-ter, and while I am away I counsel my braves and brothers to dwell and hunt and fish together in love and peace.”

How it fared with Okématan on his self-imposed mission we cannot tell, but we do know that from 1821—the date of the auspicious coalition before mentioned—the sorely tried colony began steadily to prosper, and, with the exception of the mishaps incident to all new colonies, and a disastrous flood or two, has continued to prosper ever since. Civilisation has made rapid and giant strides, especially during the later years of the century. The wave has rushed far and deep over the old boundaries, and now the flourishing city of Winnipeg, with its thousands of inhabitants, occupies the ground by the banks of the Red River, on which, not many years ago, the old Fort Garry stood, a sort of sentinel-outpost, guarding the solitudes of what was at that time considered a remote part of the great wilderness of Rupert's Land.

The End.

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