

CHAPTER I.

IN DESPERATE STRAITS.

IT was almost sunset of an April day in 1885, when Rodney Merton came again in sight of Ft. Qu'Appelle, after the first nights of absence from home that he had ever experienced. He had left his mother's cabin early Monday morning and it was now Wednesday. His eyes brightened as he stopped in the middle of the dusty road and gazed at the little hamlet, with its old log fort surrounded by a high palisade, the new post of the Hudson Bay Company and a cluster of cabins.

Now that he was once more in sight of home—which he mentally declared had never “looked so good” to him before—he felt that he could afford to sit down and rest for a few minutes. This was a luxury which he had allowed himself but few times during the two day's tramp from Grenfell, a distance of thirty-five miles from Ft. Qu'Appelle. His coat was hung on the end of a stick, carried over his shoulder, and his calico shirt was dark and wet with perspiration along the lines of his buckskin suspenders and wherever it touched his heated body, for it was the first really warm day of the late spring.

As the boy turned out of the road and climbed a