


THE FUR COUNTRY.

CHAPTER I.

A SOIRÉE AT FORT RELIANCE.

N the evening of the 17th March 1859, Captain Craventy gave a fête at Fort Reliance. Our readers must not at once imagine a grand entertainment, such as a court ball, or a musical soirée with a fine orchestra. Captain Craventy's reception was a very simple affair, yet he had spared no pains to give it *éclat*.

In fact, under the auspices of Corporal Joliffe, the large room on the ground-floor was completely transformed. The rough walls, constructed of roughly-hewn trunks of trees piled up horizontally, were still visible, it is true, but their nakedness was disguised by arms and armour, borrowed from the arsenal of the fort, and by an English tent at each corner of the room. Two lamps suspended by chains, like chandeliers, and provided with tin reflectors, relieved the gloomy appearance of the blackened beams of the ceiling, and sufficiently illuminated the misty atmosphere of the room. The narrow windows, some of them mere loop-holes, were so encrusted with hoar-frost, that it was impossible to look through them; but two or three pieces of red bunting, tastily arranged about them, challenged the admiration of all who entered. The floor, of rough joists of wood laid parallel with each other, had been carefully swept by Corporal Joliffe. No sofas, chairs, or other modern furniture, impeded the free circulation of the guests. Wooden benches half fixed against the walls, huge blocks of wood cut with the axe, and two tables with clumsy legs, were all the appliances of luxury the saloon could boast of. But the partition wall, with a narrow door leading into the next room, was decorated in a style alike