

This piece of intelligence was received with a low chuckle, and all three of the men became suddenly intent upon the buckles of the harness, leaving aunt and nephew to rectify the little mistake which had clearly arisen—not that they had anything to do with it.

“Come in,” said the aunt in kindly tones, scarcely knowing whether it was a boy or a girl that she was welcoming. But when the rough deer-skin in which Forgill had enveloped his charge as the night drew on was thrown aside, the look which spread over her face was akin to consternation, as she asked his name and heard the prompt reply, “Wilfred Acland; and are you my own Aunt Miriam? How is my uncle?” But question was exchanged for question with exceeding rapidity. Then remembering the boy’s long journey, Aunt Miriam drew a three-legged stool in front of the blazing fire, and bade him be seated.

The owner of Acland’s Hut was an aged man, the eldest of a large family, while Wilfred’s father was the youngest. They had been separated from each other in early life; the brotherly tie between them was loosely knitted. Intervals of several years’ duration occurred in their correspondence, and many a kindly-worded epistle failed to reach its destination; for the adventurous daring of the elder brother led him again and again to sell his holding, and push his way still farther west. He loved the ring of the woodman’s axe, the felling and the clearing. He grew