

THE UNQUENCHABLE FIRE:

Or, The Tragedy of the Wild.

CHAPTER IV.—(Cont'd)

There came an ominous click from behind. Ralph turned suddenly and seized his brother's arm as he was in the act of raising his rifle to his shoulder. The gun was lowered, and the intense face of Nick scowled at the author of the interruption.

"It's—it ain't a human crittur," he said hoarsely.

"It's a man," retorted Ralph, without releasing his hold.

And the two brothers became silent.

They stood watching for a long time. Neither spoke again; they had nothing to say. Their thoughts occupied them with a strange apprehension while the dogs sprawled in the snow in the spiritless manner of their kind when the labor of the traces is not demanded of them.

And the figure on the hill stood quite still. The silence was profound. No wind stirred to relieve it, and even under their warm furs the two men watched shivering as with cold.

At last the movement they had awaited came. The Hooded Man turned towards them. One long arm was raised, and he pointed away at a tall hill. Then his arm moved, and he seemed to be pointing out certain landmarks for his own benefit. Again, on a sudden, as he fronted the direction where the brothers stood, he dropped his arm, and, a moment later, disappeared on the other side of the hill. It was all so strange in those desolate wastes. The two men remained gazing out across the hollow for some while longer, but as the Hooded Man did not return, they turned back to their dogs and continued their journey.

Nick shook his head in a dissatisfied manner. Ralph said nothing for a while. He was beginning to doubt his own assertion.

The dogs leapt at their breast-draws and the sled moved forward. The two men ran side by side. When Nick at length spoke it was to reiterate his fears.

"Ther' wa'an't no face showed," he said abruptly.

"No," replied Ralph. Then he added thoughtfully "He hadn't no dogs, neither."

"He was alone, seemly. Ther' wa'an't no camp outfit."

Ralph shook his head and brushed away the ice about his mouth with the back of his beaver mitt.

There was a painful atmosphere of disquiet about the two men. Their backward glances spoke far louder than words. Had their mission been in the nature of their ordinary calling they would possibly have felt nothing but curiosity, and their curiosity would have led them to investigate further; but as it was, all their inclinations tended in the opposite direction. The "Dread of the Wild" had come to them.

When they camped at mid-day things were no better. They had seen nothing more to disturb them, but the thoughts of both had turned upon the night, so long and drear, which was to come, and the "dread" grew stronger.

After the noon meal Nick harnessed the dogs while Ralph stowed the chattels. They were on a hillside overlooking a wide valley of unbroken forest. All was ready for the start, and Nick gave a wide, comprehensive glance around. The magic word "Mush," which would send the dogs headlong at their breast harness, hovered on his lips but ere he gave it utterance it changed into an ejaculation of horror.

"By Gar!" Then after a thrilling pause, "The Hood!"

Ralph, standing ready to break the sled out, turned.

"Hey!" he ejaculated; and horror was in his tone, too.

There, in the hazy distance, more than three miles away, was the dim figure of the Hooded Man racing over the snow. His course lay on the far side of the valley, and he was to the rear of them.

Nick turned back to the dogs, his command rang out with biting emphasis, and the dogs and men, as though both were animated by the same overwhelming fear, raced down the virgin trail. And their pace was a headlong flight.

Night came and they camped in the open. The night was blacker and longer, more weary and shadowy than the first, by reason of the "dread" which had now become the "Dread of the Hooded Man." And no thoughts of the White Squaw could hold the men for long, for, at every turn, they felt that their steps were dogged by that other strange creature of the Wild. And when morning came they knew, without looking, that some-

where, coldly surveying their camp, the grey-hooded figure would be watching and waiting for them to move on. And sure enough, as the eager eyes looked out over the snow and forest, the grim, silent figure was there, watching, watching; but no nearer to them.

That night they came to the Moosefoot Reserve, and both men experienced such nervous relief as they had never known. They camped within sight of the Indian tepees and log huts, but they waited for morning before they approached the chief.

Over their fire they discussed their plans with seriousness. Neither of them could speak the Moosefoot language, but they could talk both Sioux and Cree, and they doubted not but there would be interpreters about the chief.

"We'll see him first thing, I guess," said the eager Nick. "Guess them two black foxes'll fix him good. He'll git a goodish bit o' trade for 'em."

"An' we'll promise him powder, an' slugs, an' essences," said the cautious Ralph. "We'll get his yarn first an' pay after," he added, as he sipped his coffee.

Nick nodded.

"We'll find that crittur, sure," he said.

And he sat gazing upon the pictures his mind conjured up as he watched the flaming logs. In every tongue of flame he beheld the glowing face Victor had told him of, and, as the smoke rolled into the black vault of night, he seemed to see the graceful form of the blue-eyed vision floating in its midst. Ralph was no less ardent. But he was less extravagant.

At daybreak they sought Man-of-the-Snow-Hill's lodge. They found him a grizzled wreck of vast age. He was surrounded by his medicine men, his young chiefs and his squaws. And by the gathering in the smoke-begrimed hut they knew that their approach had been advised.

Perfect silence reigned as the white men entered. An Indian silence; such silence as it would be hard to find anywhere but in the primitive dwelling. The atmosphere of the place was heavy with the pungent odors of Killi-ka-nik. Both men and women were smoking it in pipes of red clay with reed stems, and they passed this sign of friendship from one to another in strikingly solemn fashion. All were clad in the parti-colored blanket, and sat bunched upon their quarters more like beasts than human creatures, yet with a perfect air of dignity which the Indian never loses.

Man-of-the-Snow-Hill alone differed in his dress and attitude. He was wrapped in a large buffalo robe and was stretched out upon a pile of skins to ease his rheumatics, while, spread out before him, were a number of charms and much "med'cine," which had been so set by his wise men to alleviate his ailments. In the centre of the throng a fire smouldered, and the smoke therefrom rose sullenly upon the dense air and departed through a hole in the flat roof. Man-of-the-Snow-Hill blinked his watery eyes as the strangers entered, and passed his pipe to his favorite squaw, a buxom sleepy-eyed beauty, who sat upon his right. Then he grunted intelligently as he saw the visitors deposit their pile of presents upon the floor, and, in the manner of the neche, seat themselves besides it.

Ralph spoke his greeting in Indian fashion.

"How!" he said.

"How!" replied Man-of-the-Snow-Hill, in a thin, reedy voice. And his followers echoed the sentiment in chorus.

Then the aged chief held out his hand in further greeting. And each neche in turn shook the white men by the hand.

The visitors filled and lighted their pipes, and passed their plugs of tobacco to the others. Then Ralph began to speak in Cree.

"We come far to speak with Man-of-the-Snow-Hill," he began.

The watery-eyed chief shook his head, grunting. The squaws laughed, and the med-cine men closed their eyes in sign of not understanding the tongue in which he spoke. Then a young chief harangued his comrades. He could understand the tongue and would interpret. The old chief nodded approval and continued to gaze greedily at the presents.

Now the conversation proceeded quite smoothly.

"We wish to speak with the great Man-of-the-Snow-Hill in private," Ralph said. "We have much to say, and many presents."

The chief blinked with satisfaction and grunted appreciation. His lined face lit up. He waved one shaking arm, and his followers reluctantly departed. All except the interpreter and the chief squaw.

Then Ralph went on. Nick had care of the presents, and on him the cunning old chief kept his eyes. He opened a large bag of beads and emptied some on a spread of cheap print. The squaw's eyes smiled greedily.

"We wish the great chief well," said Ralph, using all the flowery embellishments of the Cree tongue, "and we would live in peace. We have tobacco, beads, skins, prints, and blankets. And we would lay them all at the feet of the great man, the mighty hunter, if he would help us to find that which we seek."

Ralph signed to his brother, and Nick laid out an array of presents and passed them with due solemnity to the old man.

"Ow-ow!" grunted Man-of-the-Snow-Hill, as he waved the things away to his squaw. He was not satisfied, and his eyes watered as though he were weeping.

Then Ralph went on.

"We have come on the long trail" through the mountains. And we seek the White Squaw of the Moosefoot Indians."

The chief remained quite calm, but his bleared old eyes shot a side-long gleam at the speaker, in which there was little friendliness. No other movement was allowed to give evidence of disquiet. It is part of the up-bringing of the neche to eschew all outward signs of emotion.

The Sun-dance, when the Braves are made, is the necessary education in this direction. Ralph saw the look, but failed to take its meaning. The squaw watched the white men with keen interest. Nick was groping about in the depths of a gunny sack.

Ralph plunged into the fantastic story which he and Nick had prepared. The language of the Cree helped him, for the natural coloring of the Indian tongues is as flowery as that of any Eastern race.

"We come from beyond the mountains, from the hunting-grounds of forest and river where the great fathers of the Moosefoot Indians once dwelt. We come to tell the White Squaw that the land cries out for her, and the return of the children of the Moose. We come to speak with her of these things, for the time has come when she must leave her forest home and return to her own land. Man-of-the-Snow-Hill show us the way. We have many presents which we will give him."

"It is well," said the great man, closing his eyes until the water oozed from between the compressed lids. "The white men are the friends of the Moosefoot people, and they have many presents. Have they fire-water?"

Nick produced some bottles of essences, and the great man reached for them greedily. But the other withheld them.

"What will Man-of-the-Snow-Hill do for the fire-water?" Ralph asked.

The interpreter passed the word. "He will send his favorite squaw to guide the white men," he answered at once. "He can do no more."

A dozen bottles of vanilla essence passed over to the chief. A number of other presents were handed to him. Then without a word the squaw arose and accompanied the white men out.

And without further delay the brothers continued their journey. Fleet of foot, untiring, silent as only an Indian can be, the squaw led the way. North, north; always north, over hill, through forest and deep white valley. On, on, with the best speed which a dog-train can attain. The superstitious dread which had hitherto so afflicted the white men had lulled in the companionship of the dusky beauty of the Moosefoot Reserve. Night came on swift and silent, and camp was pitched on the edge of a dense primeval forest.

(To be continued.)

THE MANUFACTURE OF STEEL

INFLUENCE OF VANADIUM UPON IRON.

Making Steel is Worth More to the World Than Making Gold.

In the days of the mediaeval alchemists it was believed that it was possible by means of some undisclosed laboratory operation to convert the baser metals into gold. With the development of modern chemistry this belief was shown to be baseless, at least in the sense in which the older workers held it, says Cassier's Magazine.

At the same time there has been evolved as a result of the work of the more recent chemists and metallurgists a transmutation in the properties of that most widely used material which is of far more real value to the world than any formula for making gold could ever be.

The discovery that iron containing a certain proportion of carbon constituted steel transformed society and created modern civilization; without steel we should relapse into barbarism. To-day it is known that in addition to carbon there are other elements the addition of which will impart to steel certain properties

INCREASING IMMENSELY

its value as a material of construction and of operation.

Among the substances which were formerly classed as the "rare" elements there are several which were rare only because there was not sufficient use for them to provide an incentive to discover natural sources of supply.

Thus vanadium, known as an element for a hundred years, estimated as having a value many times that of gold and used solely for a few artistic purposes in coloring fabrics, has within a few years risen immensely in importance because of the knowledge which has been acquired of the valuable properties which it imparts to steel, while at the same time it has fallen in cost to a point about one-half that of silver because the very demand has revealed hitherto unknown deposits.

The influence of vanadium upon steel may well be regarded as a triumph of modern metallurgy, and

VANADIUM STEEL

has become one of the most important of the so-called alloy steels. The older steels, now known broadly as "carbon" steels in distinction to the various alloy steels, had certain fairly well ascertained properties together with determinate limitations.

They could be made ductile within certain limits of strength or strong within certain approach to brittleness, but when both strength and toughness were demanded it was realized that something else in addition to carbon was essential. That something has been shown to be vanadium.

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