Technical and Bibliographic Notes / Notes techniques et bibliographiques

The Institute has attempted to obtain the best original copy available for filming. Features of this copy which may be bibliographically unique, which may alter any of the images in the reproduction, or which may significantly change the usual method of filming are checked below.

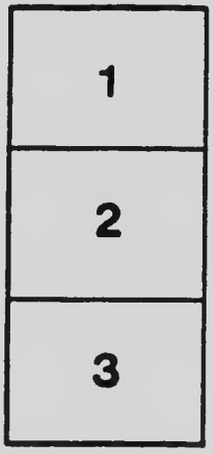
- [x] Coloured covers / Couverture de couleur
- [ ] Covers damaged / Couverture endommagée
- [ ] Covers restored and/or laminated / Couverture restaurée et/ou pelliculée
- [ ] Cover title missing / Le titre de couverture manque
- [ ] Coloured maps / Cartes géographiques en couleur
- [x] Coloured ink (i.e. other than blue or black) / Encre de couleur (i.e. autre que bleue ou noire)
- [x] Coloured plates and/or illustrations / Planches et/ou illustrations en couleur
- [ ] Bound with other material / Relié avec d'autres documents
- [ ] Only edition available / Seule édition disponible
- [ ] Tight binding may cause shadows or distortion along interior margin / La reliure serrée peut causer de l'ombre ou de la distorsion le long de la marge intérieure.
- [ ] Blank leaves added during restorations may appear within the text. Whenever possible, these have been omitted from filming / Il se peut que certaines pages blanches ajoutées lors d'une restauration apparaissent dans le texte, mais, lorsque cela était possible, ces pages n'ont pas été filmées.
- [x] Additional comments / Commentaires supplémentaires:

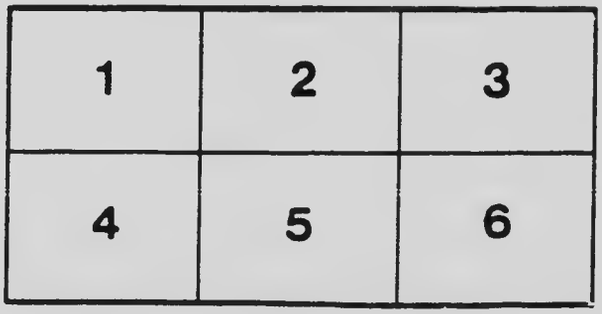
L'Institut a microfilmé le meilleur exemplaire qu'il lui a été possible de se procurer. Les détails de cet exemplaire qui sont peut-être uniques du point de vue bibliographique, qui peuvent modifier une image reproduite, ou qui peuvent exiger une modification dans la méthode normale de filmage sont indiqués ci-dessous.

- [ ] Coloured pages / Pages de couleur
- [ ] Pages damaged / Pages endommagées
- [ ] Pages restored and/or laminated / Pages restaurées et/ou pelliculées
- [x] Pages discoloured, stained or foxed / Pages décolorées, tachetées ou piquées
- [ ] Pages detached / Pages détachées
- [x] Showthrough / Transparence
- [x] Quality of print varies / Qualité inégale de l'impression
- [ ] Includes supplementary material / Comprend du matériel supplémentaire
- [ ] Pages wholly or partially obscured by errata slips, tissues, etc., have been refilmed to ensure the best possible image / Les pages totalement ou partiellement obscurcies par un feuillet d'errata, une pelure, etc., ont été filmées à nouveau de façon à obtenir la meilleure image possible.
- [ ] Opposing pages with varying colouration or discolourations are filmed twice to ensure the best possible image / Les pages s'opposant ayant des colorations variables ou des décolorations sont filmées deux fois afin d'obtenir la meilleure image possible.

This item is filmed at the reduction ratio checked below / Ce document est filmé au taux de réduction indiqué ci-dessous.

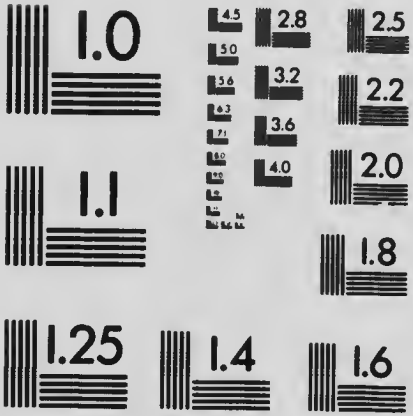
10x		12x		14x		16x		18x		20x		22x		24x		26x		28x		30x		32x
										✓												





MICROCOPY RESOLUTION TEST CHART

(ANSI and ISO TEST CHART No. 2)



APPLIED IMAGE Inc

1653 East Main Street
Rochester, New York 14609 USA
(716) 482 - 0300 - Phone
(716) 288 - 5989 - Fax

BROTHERS of the WILD

Eric Wood

To Byron
From Helen

Christmas 1920.

BROTHERS OF THE WILD

" Mackintosh got upon his feet, the musket raised, and the handkerchief fluttering in the wind " (*see page* 6).

Brothers of the Wild

By
Eric Wood

With Four Coloured Plates by
STANLEY L. WOOD

Cassell and Company, Ltd
London, New York, Toronto and Melbourne

CONTENTS

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

Brothers of the Wild

CHAPTER I

THE MAN FROM THE WASTES

"GREAT guns, lad, that means trouble of some kind—it ain't hunting 'spedition, leastways not game-hunting. Guess we goes out tew see what's afoot, eh ?"

Red Mackintosh, factor of the Hudson Bay Company at Death Point on the Nelson River, slipped into his snowshoes, grabbed up his musket, and made for the door. Harry Newlands, his assistant, followed his example, reaching the snow-clad waste outside the cabin a moment or so after his chief. The cause of that sudden exit in fighting fashion was that there had come to them the crack of several guns, followed by one solitary explosion and, after that, the volley again.

"It's one man against a number, Hal," Mackintosh said, as they slid along on their snow-shoes. "It can't be Injuns, or oughtn't to be, for there's nothin' fer them to come out for jest now—not here, anyway, as there's no feed to be got this way now. Therefore it ain't food forage but——"

"But what ?" Hal asked, something telling

him there was a grim significance behind Mackintosh's loquacity; for if the factor was famed for anything more than for his keen trading instincts, and his sure-shottedness, and his strength of endurance on the trail, it was for his taciturnity. For days on end Mackintosh would not open his mouth, even to young Newlands, between whom and he himself there were strong ties of affection—the affection of a growing youth for a man whom he looked upon as his ideal, and of a man for a youth who promised to become an expert backwoodsman; and that, as far as Red Mackintosh was concerned, was all that counted in life.

"I'd bet the first silver fox we find," said Red, "that it's a man hunt, and some puir divil's in a tight corner. We—— 'Lo, there they are agen, Hal!"

The crack of the muskets sounded once again, and served to urge on the two men in the direction from which the sounds had come. The winter sun, glistening in the snow-crystals, cut off lengthy vision, so that, despite the brightness, it was impossible for them to see very far. It was, therefore, not to be wondered at that they could see nothing of what was happening at a distance which, in any other atmospheric conditions, would have been plain to them—as plain as it was when, a little later, by which time they had made good progress, and the men they sought had also drawn nearer, they saw, still indefinitely, black dots scattered about the snow waste—black dots that moved forward at

what seemed a slow pace. Mackintosh, at any rate, was not deceived by that illusion and, calling to Hal, swept forward, increasing his speed. He increased it still more when, suddenly, the foremost dot, that had seemed to be moving at a pitiably slow rate, went down.

"He's all in!" rapped Red, who told himself that this was the man who was being hunted. But Mackintosh was mistaken as far as his first exclamation was concerned; the man was not all in. What he had done—as the would-be succouring party realized instantly—was to drop on to his knee and open fire. Two of the other black dots dropped too, but they did not rise again to use their weapons, neither did they do what the marksman did immediately after; he got upon his feet again and began to move forward once more.

"Plucked, by gum!" breathed Red. "Say, Hal, what about takin' a pot shot, eh?"

"What about waiting to find out who's in the wrong?" came the panting answer from Newlands. "We don't know, Red, and——"

"By gee, you're right, Hal!" said Mackintosh. "Hurry, then!"

Hurry they did; and the half-mile or so which was all that separated them from the foremost man was soon covered. They brought up within a few yards of him, while, for his part, the man halted in his snowshoes a little earlier, and, incidentally, the other men, of whom the new-comers had counted half a dozen, had shown signs of perturbation at their

appearance. They had in the first place increased their speed, as though anxious to get their man before the others reached him, and had sent in a few more shots which the man had not replied to, and then they had drawn off a little, widening out the crescent formation in which they had been moving.

Red Mackintosh's musket was cocked and raised for the firing when he halted, and the pursued man saw it—saw it and lifted his own, calling out as he did so:

"Don't fire, Red!"

"Radley, by gum!" shouted Mackintosh, and Hal thrilled as he heard the name. Many a time had his chief spoken of this man—John Radley—one of the most intrepid of the Hudson Bay traders, and a man who was filled with the desire to discover while he was engaged in his work, and, therefore, went farther afield than any of his fellow-traders.

There was little time for thought, however, because Radley was now sweeping up towards Mackintosh and gasping out:

"Turn back, Red—must make for your shack. Down!" he exclaimed, as something whistled within dangerous and unpleasant nearness.

Down into the snow the three figures dropped instantly, and well it was for them that they did so, because a volley came whistling in.

"Is this real honest business, Radley?" Mackintosh asked quietly and tensely, his finger crooked round the trigger of his musket.

"You know me, Red!" Radley told him. "And—it's real honest. Pierre le Grand's played the traitor on me, and——" he pulled his trigger as he spoke and one of the men out there on the whiteness dropped; another went down as Mackintosh, evidently quite content to take Radley's word, fired too, and then all the pursuers went to ground to avoid the fire they realized would be coming against them.

So, for what seemed to Hal Newlands an interminable time, the two parties lay, and the youngster sensed that was but the lull before a storm, the breathing space before what was a grim, determined quarrel. From what he heard of Radley he knew that the man was not one to pick quarrels for nothing, but that when once he w[illegible]n, he was in till the very end. Neither Red nor Ra[illegible]ley had spoken after that burst of firing, both had been intently watching the blotches far away, which were the unconcealed portions of the men lying there, buried as far as they could be in the snow even as these three others were buried.

It was Mackintosh who broke the silence. He had shifted his gaze for a brief moment to turn and look at Radley, and as he did so he gave vent to a low exclamation.

"Radley!" he cried. "You're wounded and ——"

Radley nodded—that is to say it seemed so—but, as a matter of fact, what he did was to sag and let go his musket.

"The beggar's all in!" said Red, as he began to crawl over to where Radley lay. A hurried examination showed the man was unconscious, evidently exhausted by his severe struggle forward and the blood that he had lost from the wound in the back.

"Is he——" Newlands began, but Mackintosh shook his head.

"No," he said, "he's not dead, but he'll die, sure thing, unless we kin get him to the post. Listen, lad, you'n me don't know anythin' 'bout this business, 'cept that I'll swear the right's on Radley's side—he said so. But we've got to do something for him, and that can't be done out here in the open without any cover while those fellows are 'way back there waitin' to pick us off. Pierre le Grand's one o' the toughest breeds in the Company's service—an' a downright skunk. But we've got to play up to him—for Radley's sake."

"How?" Hal asked quietly.

"This way," was the reply. "I'm goin' out to see him—you'll keep your gun ready in case of treachery, and you'll have to have your eyes skinned, an' shoot at the least sign of treachery. Get me?"

"I get you!" Hal told him. "But, Red, you'll be picked off as you go!"

"That's got to be risked!" was the reply. "Even le Grand may respec' a flag o' truce. Anyway, we'll see!"

He pulled his handkerchief from his pocket as

he spoke, and grinned a little grimly as he tied it on his musket barrel.

" New sort of white flag, Hal ! "

It was indeed, being a flaming red handkerchief, but Hal could not smile even at that, he was feeling tense, just a little nervy and rather overpowered by the knowledge that in a moment or so the lives of Radley and Mackintosh would be in his keeping.

" Ready, Hal ? " Red asked, and the boy nodded, whereupon Mackintosh got upon his feet, the musket raised and the handkerchief fluttering in the wind.

Hal lay with his eye glued along his barrel, waiting. wondering, and, now that the time for action had come, steady.

" Hallo, there, Grand ! " Mackintosh's voice boomed across the waste. " Wanter speak to you ! Quick ! This is Red Mackintosh ! "

One of the blotches moved slightly, and Hal gripped his musket tighter. Red Mackintosh stood with his left arm raised, and the hand empty, while the improvised flag was held high so that his musket was useless ; he was, in fact, at the mercy of a shot from one of the men out yonder. But the shot did not come. Instead, the moving figure got upon its feet and another " flag " waved in the air.

" 'Lo, Red ! " came the man's voice. " What is it ? Where's that skunk Radley and——"

" Don't know nothin' 'bout your quarrel, Grand ! " shouted Mackintosh. " An' anyways, Radley's no skunk. But I ain't for throwin' words

'bout like this. Will you come over and talk, or——"

"Or what?" was the half sneering answer. "Say, Red, we got you all covered, I guess, or 'tennyrate, we can rush you when we want ter. What's the parleyvous about?"

"Come over an' see," Red said calmly, but Hal could see by the twitching of his face that he was full angry at the breed's words. "My word to you, Grand, that there'll be no shootin' up 'less your crowd plays dirty."

The half-breed did not answer for a moment or so, and Red was content to let him work out what he intended to do. Finally, the man spoke and young Newlands got upon his feet at the words.

"Right, Red," Grand said. "I'll come parley-vous wi' you."

He handed his musket to one of his comrades and Red gave his to Hal, after which Grand walked across the yards of snow and halted before Mackintosh.

"Now what's the high-handed game, Grand?" Mackintosh asked him, and the half-breed leered back at him as he said:

"It's my side to ask what is adoin', Red. You interfere between men and——"

"So would any decent man," rapped Mackintosh, "when there's a bunch snapping at a fellow's heels like a wolf pack. An' besides, Radley's my friend! Now out with the yarn!"

"Don't know why I should," said Grand

sullenly; "but if you will have it here it is—whether Radley's your friend or not! That man stole somethin' o' mine when I trusted him with it and——"

"As sure as the snow's under your feet that's a lie!" snapped Red, and his hands clenched ominously. "Radley never stole anything from any man yet—leave alone from a—a——"

"Say it!" said Grand, and there was a tense anger in his voice and his face paled. "Say it—a breed! I know what you mean, Mackintosh, an' heaven help you if you dare say it!"

Mackintosh laughed cynically, mirthlessly.

"Tain't that I daren't, Grand," he said quietly then, "but after all I'd like to be courteous! And, anyway, it's true what I say. Radley never stole anything or else he's a changed man since I saw him last!"

"I tell you he did!" shouted Grand. "Feel in his pocket and you'll find it—my paper, mine, with Indian writings on it. It's mine—mine, I tell you, Red, and I'm goin' to have it, even if I have to kill of all you white devils! Here, let me get it!"

He moved as if to approach the unconscious Radley, but Red was quick, and got between the pair.

"If you put a hand on him," he said ominously, "I'll smash your face, Grand! Now, listen——"

"I'm listenin' to nothin'," the breed said angrily, "'til I got my paper!"

"Then you'll hear nothin' this side o' the time

when Radley wakes up and tells me his part of the story," was the cool reply. " If you think, Grand, that I'm going to interfere with Radley while he's like that and out here, you've made a mistake. Now, listen, I tell you—oh, all right," as Grand shrugged his shoulders defiantly, " then I'm going to fight it out! Hal——"

Hal was up beside him on the instant, and the factor, with his eyes glued upon Grand's face, reached out a hand to take the offered musket. The breed stepped back a little, and his men behind him came upon their feet.

" Is it fight ? " Mackintosh queried. " I give you one more chance, Grand, and it is this : you and your men there come give me a hand with Radley to my post. We'll try to get him round, and, if he comes, I'll hear the story and—and this youngster here, who knows neither of you, shall be the judge of whose paper it is! What d'you say ? "

The proposal, which was indeed a startling one, seemed to take the power of speech from Grand, and for a little while he merely stared at Mackintosh. Then, his inscrutable face still placid, he said quietly, albeit suddenly :

" I agree, Red ! "

The fact that he did agree served to arouse suspicion at once in the mind of Red Mackintosh, who, however, having made his offer was bound to stand by it, and the result was that before very long the Indians who had been with Grand had come up and, making a hammock out of a pair of blankets,

were presently marching across the snow waste bearing the unconscious man to the fur-trading post, which was reached in a short time.

There Red Mackintosh laid Radley upon his own rough bed, while Grand and the red men were told to go and sit down about the fire that was still going. Hal, acting upon Red's instructions, soon had hot water in a bowl to hand by the time that Mackintosh had unfastened the clothing of the wounded man. Red made a close examination of the wound, which he found to be a bullet hole in the back. He inspected the man's chest, to see if the bullet had made a clean passage, but there was no sign of it having done so.

"It's inside him, Hal," he told Newlands. "And pretty poor chance he's got of l vin' it out up here."

He was bathing the wound now with a solution that he had made up from the medicine chest that was part of the equipment of the post. Rough surgery it was, indeed, for Mackintosh knew no more of the science than the average trader who wrested his living from the wilds, and who had to be ready to do most things that came along. A finger probed into the wound searched for the ball—but did not find it, and although Red had made that experiment as gently as he could, it was so painful to Radley that it caused him to twitch even in his unconsciousness.

"We'll have to get him round now," said Red, after he had padded the wound to stop the bleeding, and thereupon fell to work administering restor-

atives which, after a while, had the desired effect. Radley moved uneasily, opened his eyes, stared at Red, closed them again, then opened them once more—and there was a look that had no recognition in it, simply a vacant stare. Then something happened that changed the look; there came le Grand's voice.

"He's roun', Red?" he asked, but before Mackintosh could answer him Radley's head had turned sharply—at the cost of a spurt of blood that won over the wad, and as his eyes lighted upon the breed, recognition came—recognition and anger and hatred!

"You—fox——" he gasped, and then fell back exhausted.

Grand sprang across the room, but Mackintosh turned on him fiercely and waved him back.

"Keep off!" he said warningly. "Wait—the bargain stands!"

Grand snarled a vicious reply as he fell away, and Hal caught the look of hatred that filled his eyes as the breed leered at Mackintosh.

The work of reviving Radley began all over again, and Mackintosh fought hard with all his rough skill for the life of the man he had succoured. It was as Radley seemed about to come round that Red swung on his heel and rapped at the breed:

"Get out—hide your filthy self!"

For one moment Pierre le Grand, with clenched hands and set lips, looked at Mackintosh, and seemed about to spring on him; there was something in

the factor's face that told him it would go hard, unless he obeyed that command. . . . And the breed, with humped shoulders, slunk by into the small room of the hut. As he did so Radley opened his eyes and lifted himself, painfully, chokingly, on to his elbow and glared about the room. Hal Newlands knew then the meaning of that crisp order of Mackintosh's; he knew that Red had realized that the very sight of the breed would be sufficient to undo the work of the past ten minutes.

"Where—is—he—the breed?" gasped Radley, but Mackintosh put the horn cup to his mouth and made him drink of the spirit it held. Not much—just sufficient to bring a touch of colour to the face that had gone white beneath the tan of it. Radley dropped back on to the rough pillow then, and looked gratefully up at Mackintosh.

"Where is he, Red?" he asked again, but Mackintosh merely said:

"It's all right, Radley, leave the breed to me!"

For a while Radley, seemingly, had not the strength to answer, but at last, after another sip at the cup, the recumbent man said scarcely above a whisper:

"Red—chum—Grand's—after—my—secret—it's mine. It's mine—I—tell—you, Red. He'll swear—it's—his—but——" A spasm of choking stopped him and undid the work that Red was engaged on with wad and wash lotion. He went on again, however, after touching his lips to the cup. "As the God lives—above us—Red—he—lies.

Given—me—by—Sioux—out on—Barrens. Asked —Grand—with—me—partners—read it—couldn't —myself. Grand—read—know—he—did—look—in—his—eyes—but said—couldn't. Then—tried steal—it. Nigh—knifed—me. Stopped—him. He went. Then left myself—was coming—to you. Grand—trailed me—you know—rest—Red."

Radley stopped from sheer exhaustion, and his eyes closed again, so that Hal imagined the end had come. But even as Mackintosh bent over him the man opened his eyes. The words came weak and even more haltingly now.

"It's—yours—Red—in my shirt poc——" And those were the last words that Radley, son of the great wilds, spoke.

Hal Newlands gulped, and his eyes moistened. Half ashamed of the weakness he drew his hand across his eyes, then, catching sight of Red Mackintosh's face knew there was no shame in the tears even of a strong man. For Mackintosh, the taciturn giant, the rugged soul who lived and had always lived in a world of danger, and blood and bare desolation, was dashing away glistening drops as he bent over the form of the man who had been his friend, although the friendship had mostly been one of distance, rarely one of close companionship.

He laid the red handkerchief—the one time flag of truce—over the pain-drawn face, and then, swift as lightning, was round facing the door through which le Grand had disappeared a little while before.

There came a quiet movement, and the breed stood in the doorway. Silence reigned—and Hal felt the tension of it. He wondered what was the next event in this drama of the wild. He was not left long in doubt.

"Grand!" It was Mackintosh's voice, crisp though low in its reverence for the dead man lying on the pallet. "Your man is—dead. Whether you or one of your men killed him I do not know, and it is not for me to mete out justice. But 'way up at headquarters they shall know of this that you have——"

"My paper!" The words cut sharp from the breed's mouth, and the great sacrilege of it stung Hal to the core. "You promised——"

It was evident that Mackintosh was only keeping hold of himself by a tremendous effort of will power, and Newlands felt that at any moment the restraint might go. Nevertheless, Red still held himself in, and when he spoke his voice was as low as ever.

"The promise stands," he said. "What's your yarn?"

The very words seemed to stun the half-breed, as though he had been expecting something very different; but he recovered himself instantly and began to pour out a torrent of words.

"He lied——" he pointed towards the dead man. "I heard him. The paper was mine—came to me from my—my mother. Look at it—'tis my people's writings. Radley stole it from

me while I slept. I followed him. I found him. I want my paper!"

He stepped forward as though he would touch the dead man, but Mackintosh was before him.

"Get back!" the factor said gruffly. "I've something to ask you, Grand!"

"I want——" began the breed, in a half screaming voice, and Mackintosh motioned him angrily to silence.

"That man was my—mate," he said simply. "And now he's dead. Keep quiet—and listen. I want to know how it is that you, partner to Radley, 'way up in the Barrens in your hut, came here with these Indians? Answer me that?"

"What is that to you?" demanded the breed, defiantly. "They are my—my friends!"

"Your people, you mean?" rapped Mackintosh. "Think I do not know who your mother was? She was of these people—these Sioux. Now listen; we've heard your story—and here is the judge. Hal!"

Hal stepped forward at the call, and Mackintosh spoke but two words to him.

"Your verdict!"

There was no attempt on the part of the factor to influence him—no deliberate attempt, at any rate, although there was the subtle influence of Red's personality and his undoubted faith in the truth of what the dead man had said. There was, too, all that Red had told the boy at other times of his old friend—"the whitest man in the North!"

had been Mackintosh's description of him, and in face of that, and in view of the cunning underlying all that the breed had said, Hal had no hesitation in making up his mind.

"The man who told the truth was—Radley!" he said, and, even as he spoke, he felt a thrill pass through him because of the look that Grand gave him. The effect upon the breed was tremendous: he seemed to become a demon, an animal lusting for blood, and his hand swept to his belt where protruded the stock of a pistol.

"Drop that!" barked Mackintosh, springing as he spoke, and he wrenched the pistol from the hand of the breed. "And—get out!"

With the pistol he pointed to the door, and for a moment Hal really thought that Grand would jump for the factor. That did not happen, however: instead, Grand turned on his heel, kicked upon the door, threw a curse over his shoulder at Mackintosh and was gone.

Mackintosh smiled grimly at the breed's words. Then, his face set firmly as he turned to the Indians who had been silent witnesses of the episode:

"Go, follow him!" he told them, and, sullenly, they trailed out of the hut. The last man took the pistol that Red held out to him with: "Give this to Grand—and remember that the Red Fox sleeps with one eye open!"

Hal's heart leapt to his throat as he heard the words, for they were but the echo of what he himself was thinking. He had been wondering

why it was that le Grand had gone out so humbly without making a fight for the paper on which he set such store, and he told himself that it was because the man, cunning, crafty with all the craftiness of the red man's blood that ran in his veins, was sure of his ground. Alone there in the wastes Mackintosh and his assistant would be helpless against Grand and his half-dozen red men, if they chose the right moment to attack, and Hal had half feared that Mackintosh had overlooked the possibilities. It was, therefore, with great relief that he heard Mackintosh's words, and he knew that the Sioux would understand, for Mackintosh, famous among the palefaces as he was, had no less a reputation amongst the Indians, who knew him by the name of Red Fox.

The door clanged back as the last Indian went out, and Mackintosh turned to the youngster.

"An' that's that!" he said simply. He got down to business right away then. "Sorry, lad," he said, "but we've got to let Radley stay here for a while, poor devil. Can't go out to dig him a respectable grave until those skunks have had time to clear—if they do clear. Won't mind—er—sleepin' in the hut with *him!*"

A momentary shudder passed through Hal, but he plucked up and said: "No—not if you're here, Red!"

"Right," was the reply. "Now it's time to get a sleep, but we'll sleep one at a time. We've not done with Pierre le Grand yet!"

CHAPTER II

BESIEGED !

HAL NEWLANDS, tired out from the long trail across the snow, the journey back, and the nerve tension of the moment when Pierre le Grand had tried to convince Red Mackintosh of his right to the paper for which Radley had died, was nothing loath to accept Red's invitation to take the first spot of sleep while Mackintosh himself kept watch lest Grand and his red comrades should attempt to force a way in and secure the precious document.

"You'll take the paper, Red ?" Hal queried, as he got upon his own pallet and looked across at the still form on Red's bed.

"All right, lad," the man replied. "But I'm —not in a hurry," and Hal felt reproved. He himself had been as anxious as any healthy, imaginative youngster might be to see the paper and the Indian writing on it that had brought about the drama of the wilds which had resulted in the death of Radley, and given Mackintosh a legacy that evidently was not likely to prove altogether beneficial. Yet, because Red was willing to wait, Hal was also content to bide the due time to inspect the paper. He dropped off to sleep—his last

waking impression being one of Red Mackintosh sitting beside the dead body of Radley, his head in his hands, and looking at the man whom he had been proud to call his friend.

Hal came back to the world of feeling at the call of Mackintosh; and, jumping out of bed, clad all ready for emergencies, he had a vision of Red standing, axe in one hand and pistol in the other, just near the outer door, on which blow after blow was descending. The zip of steel on wood told the youngster that axes were being used in the attempt to split open the door, but Hal knew that there would have to be much hard work before the stout planks would give way. The fear was that the lock might give.

"What is it, Red?" he asked.

"Just Grand and his crew!" was the reply. "Say, Hal, watch that window!" and Mackintosh pointed to the window on the right-hand side of the hut.

Hal, snatching up his own axe, sprang for the window, which was well boarded up, and as he reached it an axe thudded at the board, which seemed to bend inwards from the blow. It was not glazed, that window, but simply blocked in with wood, held in position by bars of wood placed across and lodging in iron supports. Simultaneously, the window on the other side of the hut was attacked, and Hal had a sense of dread, knowing that while it would be possible for them, perhaps, to look after the door and one

window, it was a big proposition to see to three places at once.

"Red!" he called out, and Mackintosh half turned towards him.

"What is it, Hal?" he asked.

"No good my standing here and——" he stopped, as the board over the nearest window splintered, and the axe edge gleamed in the light of the tallow-lamp. Hal's pistol went up, and he drew a bead on that window, ready for the next happening. Mackintosh, however, had grasped the youngster's meaning and beckoned to him. Loath now to leave his post, Hal, however, obeyed, and Red said when he reached his side:

"We'll stay here, Hal—we can pick off anyone who shoves through either of those windows, and they've got to put their heads in to get at us from there. Also we can guard the door."

It sounded as if the door needed guarding, for the blows were crashing on it, and although Hal had not thought it would happen so soon, the wood was cracking up.

"Stout axes, those, and sharp!" he muttered.

"And a sharp one is this!" said Mackintosh grimly, wielding his own up and down, as though weighing it for the blow that he realized would soon have to be given. Came then a thump, and Hal saw the wooden shield of one window had been knocked out, and now lay on the ground in pieces. A red hand was gripped on the window-ledge and, quick as lightning, Hal fired. The crack of the

pistol filled the hut, but it did not drown the yelp of pain that followed. The hand dropped away and the opening in the wall yawned into the night. For a while there was no reappearance at the window, but there was still the crashing at the opposite one, and still the attack on the door. The latter was now giving way more appreciably, and there suddenly came a crash that sent a shining axe blade well through. At the sight of it Hal leapt, and the keen-edged blade of his own axe went slicing down upon the haft of the other that was about an inch through the wood. A sudden cry, as the axe thudded, and then the blade at the door dropped to the ground.

"Well done, Hal!" the youngster heard Red say as he straightened himself up from the blow, and was just in time to see Mackintosh fire at a head that had appeared, cautiously but foolhardily, at the broken window. It was the head of an Indian, and it went away much quicker than it had come, though whether the shot had got home neither Hal nor Red could say. It was, however, apparently sufficient to give the attackers cause to pause and reason to consider that though there were but two defenders of the hut they were very much alive and standing no nonsense while either of them could hold a weapon.

The silence during the pause was almost as terrible for the defenders as the noise that told of determined attack. What devilry were the men outside plotting? What was to ' the next step?

Hal had been out with Mackintosh at his post for a couple of years cutting his teeth, as it were, in the business of fur-trading, a career that he had chosen for himself when he was left fatherless in England. His mother had enough money to pay his passage to Canada, where he had applied for and obtained a situation with the Hudson Bay Company, and those two years had taught him enough for him to realize that when the red men started in on a thing it was generally a case of keeping at it until they achieved what they set out for. He knew too that with Pierre le Grand to urge them on they would use every effort.

"Eyes on the windows, Hal!" muttered Mackintosh, breaking in on his thoughts. "Listen, youngster, you never know what may happen, so you may as well be prepared. First off: take it from me again that poor Radley wasn't lyin'. Never known him tell a lie yet. Second: that paper, whatever it is about, once upon a time belonged to the Sioux. Radley told me a Sioux gave it to him, but more than that, it has Sioux writing on it—Grand let us know that. Then, again, it's evidently somethin' the Sioux want. Now, however, it's mine—ours, Hal, and——"

"Yours, you mean!" said Hal, but Mackintosh frowned at him to keep his tongue still.

"I say what I mean, lad," the factor said. "That paper's ours and there's somethin' to it. Therefore, if anythin' happens to either of us it's up to the other, as if't was a trust, to see that

the paper is safe and to make use of it. Get me ? "

" I get you," said Hal quietly, at the end of the longest speech Red had ever made to him personally. " And I promise you, Red, that I'll look after it, whatever happens ! "

" Good," was the reply. "And now—— There they are again. Keep steady, lad ! "

Hal kept steady enough as the blows began again on the door and the second window. There was no attempt now to try to get in at the opened window, and both defenders knew what they meant. It meant that the attackers were intending to get both other places open in order to be able to essay entry at all three spots, when, as the traders realized, they themselves might stand but little chance. Already they had this disadvantage, that the red men, having made an opening in the door, could fire through it, which rendered it a very difficult matter for the defenders to keep so close and constant a watch upon the windows; it being necessary for them to shelter themselves.

A ball whistled through the door, and Hal, who had been peering out at one of the windows, heard it pass his head which had evidently been seen from outside. The boy understood immediately that his head had been in the line of the tallow light which had been kept burning, the better to be able to see what was happening.

It was at this moment that Red Mackintosh made a remarkable discovery. He had been looking in

towards the inner room of the hut just a second or so before Hal had peeped out, and he had seen reflected in a large mirror—one of the trade goods used in barter with the Indians for pelts—the door—the door with its hole, and, what amazed him for the moment, an eye at the hole. Then had come the shot, aimed, as Red realized, at the light which was just in front of the mirror—as if the intention were to darken the hut and so make the task of attack easier.

Very quietly he crept to the hole in the door, and, kneeling beneath it, took a look at the mirror. He had known he was taking a risk of being seen from outside, but to his relief he discovered that the light and the mirror were so placed that nothing could be seen from there.

He said nothing, but Hal obeyed the motion of his hand, which beckoned him to take up a position just underneath the hole in the door. Wondering what it meant, Hal did so, crawling round about to avoid being seen. Mackintosh, on his part, had also crept to the spot, and there he whispered to Hal what he had seen.

"Good for us, too, lad!" he said. "I'll go back and watch; when I raise my hand, get up sharp—and fire through the hole."

He did not wait for Hal to signify agreement; he took that for granted, and went back to the position from which he could see the reflection in the glass. Hal kept his eyes glued upon Mackintosh, waiting for the signal. Waiting—waiting——

It came at last, and like a flash Hal was up, his pistol was thrust at the hole, he pulled the trigger and there came, with the crack of the explosion, the howl of a man.

Down the youngster dropped again and reloaded without a word. Mackintosh said nothing either, but he smiled approval at the boy. Then looked back at his mirror, and at the same time saw, as well as heard, the crash of wood falling, and knew that the second window had been forced. The blows had been showering on it and on the door all the time, and now they redoubled on the door itself, as if, having forced the second window, the attackers were bent on completing the destruction of the door before trying to carry out any attempt at entry. That, indeed, was their intention, as the next ten minutes or so proved, for with howls of rage, and shouts of warning of what would happen when they did get in, the red men banged away at the door, which shook and shivered and split.

The blows were now mostly hurled at the places where the hinges were, and at last, with great holes hacked about them, smashing the wood on to which they were fastened, they gave way altogether, and the door fell away from the hut.

"Now for it!" shouted Red, and, to the astonishment of Hal, he went springing out of the door, axe in hand. "No good staying in there to be shot down from all sides!" the man called out, and Hal understood the reason for what had seemed a foolish and reckless action. Quite content to

follow his leader, Hal went sailing out with his axe and found himself mixed up into as pretty a hand-to-hand scrap as he could have dreamed of.

He was conscious of Mackintosh's figure—big fellow that he was—towering above all the others, swinging his axe, crashing it against musket and pistol, pounding it down upon axe blade; conscious, too, of the grim dread of those red men as they found themselves attacked instead of attacking.

But he was aware more than anything else of his own part in that fight. As he issued from the hut he had almost cannoned into a man who had sprung, as it were, from nowhere. Hal had a vision of him leaping at Mackintosh from behind—and the youngster went for him. The pistol that was raised went off, it is true, but the shot went wide because Hal's axe had gone down upon the hand that held it. The red man yelped with the pain and spun round, a shrewd blow that caught him on the knee sent him doubled up on the snow that was all trampled and churned up.

Hal left him there—and somehow the thought came to him to seek Pierre le Grand in that whirling mass. As he dashed for the fight, he looked for the breed, but he was nowhere to be seen amongst the four men who were engaged in the scrap—three Indians and Mackintosh. There had been six red men, Hal knew, but he remembered even then that one had had his hand smashed at the window, another had stopped the ball through the

door, and the third lay on the ground. It was, however, pretty long odds for Mackintosh, and at any moment Grand might join in—unless he had slunk off when Red issued from the hut. The youngster could not understand his absence, and in any case there was little time to ponder over that, for Mackintosh needed help. Hal gave him what he could—gave him the assistance of a strong right arm that knew how to wield an axe, and wield it well, as one of the Sioux found to his cost.

The fellow had been facing Mackintosh, but the great factor had swooped for him, and missed him, so agile was the Indian. Then another had come for Red—who promptly attended to him. That would have been to his cost, but for the fact that Hal had been at hand. The Sioux who had slipped away, leaving the field for his fellow, had at the moment that Hal finished with his first, got to the rear of Mackintosh. With hand upraised ready for the blow, he got the full force of Hal's weapon; his own axe went to earth, and the man, his arm numbed by the blow that had only caught his axe, was at the mercy of young Newlands. What he would have done then Hal did not know afterwards. What he felt at the moment was that he could not strike, to mortal intent, at a man who seemed defenceless—for the red man had evidently placed his weapons somewhere while they were engaged in hacking at the door, and had had no time to recover them. The youngster was saved from the dilemma by Red Mackintosh, who, fortunately, had

knocked his two opponents down—with what result he did not know at the moment. He jumped to where Hal was standing, and as he did so the red man threw up his arms.

"Good!" rapped Mackintosh, and half turned his head as he heard a movement to one side; it was one of the injured men wriggling in his pain. That movement almost cost Mackintosh his life; as it was, the knife that the red man had concealed in his uplifted left hand snagged its way into Red's chest. It would have found his heart, but for the fact that Newlands—gone now was the repugnance to strike hard and true—leapt and brought his weapon down upon the shoulder of the Sioux. That blow, while it served to divert the knife from the vital spot, at the same time helped to drive it home in the place where it did hit, and Mackintosh dropped to the ground under the force of it. The Sioux went down too, and Hal, recovering from the shock of the impact, turned as he heard a step behind him. He was not quick enough, however, for something struck him—something that seemed to him like a great block of wood. He went to earth like a log, with the blue winter night sky above him swimming, and then, suddenly, going black. . . .

CHAPTER III

THE GREAT ACCUSATION

SOMETHING burning his lips brought Hal back to consciousness. He opened his eyes and saw Red Mackintosh leaning over him, holding the horn to his lips.

"'Lo, Red!" the youngster murmured, and he scarcely heard himself speaking for the din and the throbbing in his head. He found that he was inside the hut, and, raising himself, saw to his astonishment that there were several of the Indians there too. He looked questioningly at Mackintosh and the factor smiled grimly.

"Can you sit up, lad?" Red asked him. "Got a nasty knock, but it'll be all right, I think."

"Bit swimmy and jumpy, Red," Hal told him. "But I guess I'll not have to stay in bed!" He laughed a little as he spoke and looked across at the Indians again. They were helping one another wash and bandage wounds, and one of them came across to Mackintosh with a bowl of steaming water and a wad of stuff.

"Clean Red Fox's wound," the Indian said simply, and Hal marvelled more than ever at the change in the situation. What did it mean?

"Thanks," Mackintosh said, and took the bowl,

although he refused to let the Sioux bathe his wound. It fell to Hal to do that, and while he was at the work, Mackintosh told him what had happened; told him in jerky phrases, as though reluctant to have to give way to the necessity for speech at any length.

The sum of the information he had to give was, that he himself had seen Hal's assailant come out of the hut and who was none other than le Grand. He had struck the youngster with a bar of wood; then, before Mackintosh could get up from the ground, the breed had smashed the wood down on his head, and knocked him senseless. What else he would have done Mackintosh did not know, but, as he learned afterwards, one of the Sioux, evidently angered that the breed who had led them into such a mess should have taken no part in the fight, had called him a coward. Grand had turned on him, and the Indian who was wounded in the leg hurled his knife at him. It cut across the breed's face and whipped him into a fury that would have ended in the death of the red man, but for the fact that another of the wounded men, who had managed to crawl to where one of the muskets lay, drew on him. Grand hesitated a moment, then flung the wooden bar at the man, knocked the musket out of his hand, and had gone sweeping away from the hut at a good pace.

"No one follow him?" Hal questioned.

"No one could!" was the reply. "Wasn't one of those fellows able to do that after we'd finished

with 'em! Must have been some time 'fore I came roun' myself, an' I'd lost too much blood to do anythin'."

"What about those fellows?" Hal asked, nodding towards the Indians. "Why are they here?"

"Because they know le Grand's played them dirty!" was the answer. "One of those fellows is Red Feather, a big chief, an' he's swore to get even with the breed. I talked to 'em a bit and told them what I know about Grand."

"And now they're friends?" Hal said. "That means——"

"That we've got to keep 'em till they're well enough to be goin'," was the factor's reply. And Hal knew what he meant; they had all too little food in the hut—just about enough to last them both until the thaw came and the game began to move. The Indians had come but lightly laden, evidently having imagined that they would not have to go far in pursuit of Radley. It was a serious position, therefore, but the law of the wild said that a man must not turn his enemy, leave alone his friend, away foodless while there was anything to share.

"Didn't they say anything about the paper, Red?" Hal asked, and at the words Mackintosh started.

"Not a word!" he said. "An', by gee, I forgot about it myself!"

He got up, and overturned the bowl as he did

so. He was across at the bed on which still lay the dead body of Radley. Hal was at his side and watched him unbutton the leathern jacket, fumble in the pocket of the woollen shirt, and bring out his hand—empty!

For a moment or so he stood staring down at his dead chum, and Hal was as much amazed as the factor himself. They both realized now what had happened and why le Grand had been missing when the fight was in progress. He had evidently climbed in at one of the windows, and having heard Radley tell Mackintosh where the paper was had taken it out, buttoning up the dead man's clothes again. Then, coming out at the end of the scrap, he had dealt, as he thought no doubt for good, with his two enemies, and would have gone off with his Indians, but for the fact that they had resented his not having helped them when they had done so much at his behest.

"It's gone, Hal!" Mackintosh said quietly at last, and, despite his anger at having been fooled by the breed, he yet held himself in hand, in reverence for his dead friend.

"Perhaps Radley made a mistake and the paper's in another pocket!" Hal suggested as quietly, and Mackintosh, acting upon the suggestion, searched every pocket. There were many pieces of paper, but none of them coincided with his description of the piece they sought. Mackintosh placed all the contents of the pockets in a little heap tenderly and sadly.

"We'll send 'em up to headquarters," he said. "They can perhaps find someone who'll like to have 'em. Paper's not there—but—I wonder!"

He turned upon the Indians at the far side of the hut, and Hal was not left long in surmising what had struck the factor.

"Red Feather!" he said. "The paper for which the half-breed and your people came is gone. Either Grand has taken it or one of you! Which?"

Red Feather lying on the floor instantly vowed that neither he nor any of his men had touched the dead body.

"I knew," he said simply, "when that traitor came out of the hut that he had it—but what could I do? He lied to you, Red Fox, when he said that that man there"—he pointed to Radley—"stole the paper, and now he has played the traitor to us—to whom the paper rightly belongs! Well for you, Red Fox, that he has, because no paleface shall have that writing and be safe."

"Why then did you let that half-breed get it?" demanded Mackintosh.

"Because he promised it should be ours when he had it, and we were to pay him well for his work," was the reply of the chief. "Came to us and told us that he had seen the great writing of our fathers, and would help us get it. He——"

"Wait a bit, Red Feather," said Mackintosh. "What's this writing about. Where's it come from?"

"We know not what it is about," said the chief. "Ever since the days of Black Cloud, our people have been told of a secret writing, but none knew where it was but we knew that some day it would be found. Our braves sing even to-day of the writing, and our medicine men tell, that when the great Sioux nation has its paper they will be chief of all the red people, and—and——" he hesitated, looking steadily at Mackintosh as though taking his measure—"when that happens, say our medicine men," he went on at last quietly and tensely but boldly, "we shall sweep the palefaces out of our country! I have spoken, O Red Fox!"

Hal heard the sharp intake of breath as Mackintosh heard and understood the meaning of the chief's words. This was no ordinary affair into which they had dropped. There were big and tragic possibilities in it, and Hal shuddered as he thought of them. Mackintosh's words broke in upon the youngster's thoughts.

"Then we are not friends, Red Feather," the factor was saying, after the surprise had passed from him. "That paper is mine—given me by my brother there. I promised him I would keep it. Some day Pierre le Grand shall give it back to me—even if it costs him his life to do so."

"Then shall we take it from you, Red Fox," was the calm reply. "Till then, it shall be a truce between us, because you, knowing nothing of all this matter, did only that which any man would do for his brother—and the Sioux love the brave man

who risks his life for his brother. But, so surely as the paleface gets the writing, so surely will the Sioux end this truce which I make—unless the paleface gives it up. We shall go hence, when our wounds let us, and trail the traitor."

"You're welcome to stay here until then," said Mackintosh quietly.

The chief thanked him, and so there, amid the scene of the great fight, there was a temporary pact arranged between paleface and red man—a pact that was to lead to many strange adventures and to end in a way that neither of them dreamed of on that day.

Things being settled, Mackintosh and Hal, after a hot drink, set about repairing their broken door and windows. They worked all through the rest of that night in order to get it done, and had the aid of one of the red men, less injured than the others to watch while they worked, lest the half-breed should be lurking somewhere with intent to pick them off. Nothing of the kind happened, however, and they had finished the work just before the winter's dawn. Then they performed the last rites over Radley, whom they buried in a deep snowdrift some distance from the hut.

That done, they had breakfast in the hut, with the Indians sitting there too, partaking of the frugal fare, and then, tired out, they went to bed, to make up for the lost night's rest. They slept on until well after midday, and when they awoke it was to find that one of the Indians had prepared a

meal for them out of the stores that Mackintosh had placed at their disposal.

After dinner Mackintosh whispered to Hal that he wanted to speak with him alone, and when the factor was out of the hut, with his musket slung, Hal followed him. They walked some distance from the hut in silence, and when they were well out of earshot—they had unwittingly gone over the tracks that had been made the night before when they carried Radley to the hut—Mackintosh stopped.

"Hal, my lad," he said, "we're in a bit of a mess."

"We are," Hal agreed heartily. "Tell me, Red, why didn't we take up Grand's trail and——"

"I sure'll never teach you to be a factor," Mackintosh groaned. "Haven't I told ye dozens o' times that no factor ever goes away from his post while the Indians are near?"

"I forgot," Hal said humbly. "But I could have gone and——"

"The right spirit, lad," Mackintosh commended him. "But what d'you think you'd be able to do against that breed? He'd beat you all ends up and lose you in the barrens, for sure!"

Hal smiled ruefully as he realised that Mackintosh was right. It would be a task for an expert tracker to follow the breed without getting into a trap if the quarry should know he was being followed, and Grand would certainly be on his guard against that.

"Reckon you're right, Red," he said. "But what are we going to do then?"

"Jest wait," was the reply. "But that means Grand'll get well away, and it'll be more by chance than anythin' else if we ever find him agen. You bet he won't go nigh any o' the posts where I'm likely to be!"

"But when the thaw comes," Hal suggested, "and the Indians arrive and depart, we can likely enough get a message or so through that will make our friends look out for him—he can be arrested I suppose for the murder of Radley!"

"That's right enough," Mackintosh agreed. "Yet—I doubt if the breed will go near any of the Company's posts. I'm afraid, Hal—afraid!"

There was pent up passion in the factor's voice, and his whole bearing was so different from his customary stolid character that Hal looked at him and wondered. He did not ask the reason for the fear, except that his eyes held a mute appeal, which Mackintosh answered after a while.

"Listen, Hal," he said. "Don't take mueh notice as a rule of things the Indians say, 'specially 'bout their legends, but what Red Feather said makes me mighty scared. I 'member case of red outbreaks brought about by their chiefs urgin' 'em on by swearin' they had messages from the dead tellin' them their people were to wipe out the white men, an' I know these fellers here believe it will come to pass."

"And you think," Hal queried, "that Red

Feather and his people believe that the paper Radley had contained that message, although Grand was cunning enough to keep the information away from them ?"

"I do, lad," Mackintosh told him. "An' there's another thing I believe, or at any rate, think, that that wretched breed has a very good reason for keeping the news to himself for a time."

"What's the reason, Red ?" the youngster asked eagerly ; it was something out of the ordinary for the factor to be loquacious, and clearly proved that he was considerably interested in the matter—was, is fact, shaken out of his taciturnity.

"The reason, as I see it, Hal," the man said, with a furrowed brow betokening his concern, "is that Pierre le Grand, who is half Sioux, even if he is half French, thinks that whereas among the whites he is but one among many, a man to whom no one looks up, among the Sioux he would be, having possession of that paper, a great man, a leader, in fact, of the red men. He's always hated the white men, and you mark my words, Hal, that fiend will one day try to lead the Sioux, and with them the other tribes who can be induced to throw in their lot, in a great and terrible campaign against the palefaces !"

"Then it's up to us, Red," Hal said quietly, after a moment or so of silence, "to get back that paper ?"

"That's so, lad," Mackintosh agreed. "And"—

he pointed out across the snow-wastes—" there's the trail which would take us, if we could go!"

Hal, following the direction of his partner's hand, saw plainly marked on the snow the trail of snowshoes—snowshoes that had gone, not back over the trail made the previous evening, but cutting off at a tangent and heading directly for the forbidding forest looming to the north-west.

" Grand's trail!" the boy breathed; and Red Mackintosh nodded.

CHAPTER IV

HITTING THE TRAIL TO DANGER

THE very fact that he knew the snowshoe trail towards the vast forest was that which had been made by the treacherous half-breed, seemed to inspire Hal Newlands with a desire to go sweeping across the snow in pursuit of Grand, to wrest from him the paper on which, according to Red Mackintosh's theory, so much of fate hung. It might be, of course, there was nothing at all in Mackintosh's idea; the paper on which Grand and the Sioux placed so much store might be nothing more than one of those many cryptic messages which came into the possession of hunters in the wilds and led them on long and wearying ventures in quest of places where, as the Indians were wont to say, temptingly, the rivers ran red or the rocks gleamed in the sunlight.

Hal ventured to suggest such a thing, and Red Mackintosh admitted that that idea might be as probable as his own.

"Anyway, Hal," he said, "it doesn't matter much what the paper contains—it was given to us, and somehow we've got to get it, though how, goodness only knows."

They were going back now towards the hut, at

the door of which they could see one of the Indians. The sight of the man gave Hal an idea.

"See here, Red," he said impulsively. "Those Sioux will be going off soon, and it's certain they'll hunt down Grand—can't I go with them?"

For answer, Mackintosh pulled up short, brought his hand down heavily upon the shoulder of the youngster, and said:

"Look ye, lad, I bin waitin' for ye to say that same thing—I bin afraid ye would, though now—well, I'm glad, cos it shows the stuff you're made of! But, lad, ye can't go—ye——"

"Why not?" Hal asked quietly.

"Ye heard what Red Feather said, eh?" Mackintosh asked him. "There's a truce between us until that day when we get the paper; and d'ye think I'm goin' to send ye with *him!*"

"Then how do you think we can do anything, Red?" Hal asked. "You can't go, so who can, if I can't? The fact is, I'd be willing to go alone—if you'd let me, but——"

"Let me think about it, Hal," Mackintosh said. "There's plenty o' time, because those fellows won't be able to go yet awhile."

"Thanks," was the boy's reply, and somehow he felt right away that Mackintosh's decision would be one pleasing to him. Somehow, too, this question of a man-hunt through a wild and particularly uninhabited country, with the quarry having perhaps weeks' start, did not strike him as being a hopeless affair. In his own mind he was certain

that the red men would try to find Grand, and Hal knew enough of their ways to be confident that they would succeed in getting on his trail without a great deal of difficulty. They counted the half-breed a traitor to them, therefore they would use every effort to get him. Every Sioux, every red man who was not a member of a tribe at enmity with the Sioux, would, at the instigation of Red Feather, be a scout, a passer-on of any information that he acquired, and the half-breed would eventually find himself the centre of a great circle of foes which would gradually close in upon him. So did the red man work, as Hal knew quite well. The great problem was whether Red Feather would countenance the white youth going with him, because the purpose of his journey would be clear enough to the Sioux, and, truce or no truce, the latter was not likely to be favourably inclined to assist a rival, even though the odds would be against Newlands, taking in all the circumstances.

Hal, however, was content to leave all these matters for the fates ; so long as Mackintosh agreed to his going, he felt that other things could no doubt be adjusted. After all, there was the declared truce, and Red Feather, knowing how much of a disadvantage the white youth would be at, might be willing—if only for the sake of a whim—to allow him to accompany the party of red men.

Such thoughts as these were passing through Hal's mind as he and the factor made their way to the hut in silence. Just before they reached it

another red man issued from the place. In the ordinary way there would have been nothing remarkable about that, but what struck both Mackintosh and Hal at the same instant was that the two men were garbed ready for departure. They had on their snowshoes; their muskets were slung at their backs, and in every way they were ready for a journey.

"What's it mean, Red?" Hal queried, and the pair of them hastened to meet the Indians who were now coming along the clearly marked trail.

"Means the fit ones are going right now!" was the reply. "Powwowed while we were out —here's the result!"

Not another word then, until they came face to face with the Sioux, who halted before them.

"You leave the white man's post?" Mackintosh said simply, as though he were quite aware of the natives' intentions.

"It is so, O Red Fox," was the reply of one of the men whose name Hal had learned was Tall Bull. "We go back and——"

"What about Red Feather and the others?" Mackintosh demanded.

"Did not paleface offer shelter?" was the questioning answer, and Mackintosh realised that he was caught in his own trap. He did not, however, intend to be kept there, for, remembering what Hal had been asking him a little while before, he decided that the time had come when he must make up his mind, and, in that moment, it was made

up. Hal's wish to go with the Sioux should be granted.

"Listen!" he said firmly to Tall Bull. "Before ye go ye must come back wi' me to Red Feather. There are things I would say!"

Tall Bull did not answer for a moment or so. He looked from one to the other of his comrades, whose inscrutable faces seemed to tell nothing of what they might be thinking, although Tall Bull must have been able to read there things not evident to the white men. He turned back to Mackintosh presently and said:

"It shall be so!" and swung on his snowshoes and went striding back to the post with the other men, red and white, trailing after him.

"See, Hal, those fellows were going without food!" muttered Mackintosh, and Hal knew that he was alluding to the absence of packs on the men's backs.

"Shows they're in earnest!" was the youngster's reply. He did not ask Mackintosh what his plans were, because he knew that the factor was not likely to tell him out of his own time. It would be revealed when Red thought fit. The boy had not long to wait, either, for as soon as the little party entered the hut, Mackintosh, without staying to take off his snowshoes, plunged right into the matter in hand. Red Feather was sitting propped up against a pile of furs, having a little more first aid to his wounded leg, and he was evidently surprised to see his followers return. He had no

chance to ask them for an explanation, however, for Red Mackintosh gave it instead.

"Red Feather," the factor said, "when I agreed to a truce wi' ye, I meant it, and I did not mean to try any treachery on ye. Do you?"

"Say on!" grunted Red Feather non-committally.

"I could have gone off to-day and got on the trail of le Grand." Mackintosh told him. "But that would have left ye here, unable to go. Therefore, I didna go, neither did I send my brother."

"Say on!" the chief repeated imperturbably, and Hal wanted to laugh out aloud at the seeming nonchalance of the man, and the suggestion in his manner that he was not aware in the least of what Mackintosh was referring to.

"But you," went on Mackintosh, as though he had not noticed the interruption, "send your men on the trail without a word to me."

"Ugh!" grunted Red Feather, shrugging his shoulders. "Is that treachery? Did we bargain in that matter in our truce?"

"No," admitted Mackintosh. "But——"

"Then where is the treachery in sending my men on the trail of the thief who has that which belongs to me—to them and to me?" Red Feather asked.

The red man had called Mackintosh's bluff and the latter knew it. There had been no contract except friendliness until the moment that might

after all not come—when Mackintosh or Hal should obtain possession of the mysterious paper which had been stolen by Pierre le Grand. Hal, listening to the conversation, knew that Mackintosh must have some scheme in his mind, and could not have hoped for any success to result from his bluffing. He was not, however, prepared for the manner of Red's procedure, although he ought to have been, knowing, as he did, the bluntness of the man and his directness.

"Here's where the treachery comes in, Red Feather," he said, and for all the quietness in his voice there was something strikingly forceful in the whole bearing of him as he faced the Sioux. "I have read ye as a man reads the signs of the woods! Ye accepted for all your men the hospitality that I offered, and I know why!"

Red Feather's imperturbability was evidently shaken for once, and he showed it plainly enough as he stared at the factor, who had paused for a moment, as though he wanted his words to sink in, although actually he was playing with the Sioux, was, indeed, still bluffing, and had ceased speaking merely to give Red Feather the opportunity to betray himself. What Mackintosh saw in the Indian's face was sufficient for him; he had his key and went on:

"While I and my brother have been out your men have searched the post, as well they could, knowing that we have had little chance to hide anythin' in any but an open hidin'-place while ye've

been here. The paper is not to be found here, and ye knew already that we had not got it on us because ye searched us while we were unconscious outside after the fight! Ye were taking no risks that the half-breed scoundrel had not really got it, or that we were trying to outwit ye. Is that not so, Red Feather?"

There was a deathly silence when Mackintosh paused again, and the red men stared at him as though they were in the presence of a medicine man who had just performed some weird and mysterious rite. Indeed, the Sioux regarded Mackintosh as something of a medicine man, for by some unknown means to them he had actually told them the very things that they had done and their reason for doing them. Yet, when Red Feather spoke it was not to admit this—he was too crafty to do any such thing.

"Paleface says much thing," was what he said, when at last he broke the silence that had been much more eloquent and significant than his words. "Does the man who knows what has happened know what will happen?"

But for the seriousness of the situation Hal Newlands would have been forced to laugh at the splendid sarcasm of the red man, who had not changed countenance when he spoke and had not shifted his stolid gaze from Mackintosh's face. It was, indeed, a battle of wits, and Hal found himself wondering who would win, despite his utter confidence in Mackintosh who, as he knew, had on

many occasions fought such battles with redskins and won out.

The factor's next words told Hal the answer to his question. They came without a moment's hesitation, scarcely before Red Feather's voice had ceased.

"The man who knows what happened, does know what will happen, Red Feather!" he rapped. "An' here 'tis: this, my brother"—indicating Hal with a jerk of the hand—"goes along the trail when your people go!"

Silence then, followed by muttering grunts on the part of Red Feather's men; followed, too, by a startled exclamation from Hal.

"You mean it, Red?" the boy managed to get out, and his heart leaped when Mackintosh nodded his answer. Then, before Hal could ask anything further, before he could even appreciate what it all meant, the Sioux chief was speaking again.

"It would be a long trail, Red Fox, full of danger," the chief said. "If young man finds treacherous dog and gets paper—what then?"

There was ominous significance in the chief's tones, and both Mackintosh and Hal realized that he was warning them that the truce ended in those circumstances, and that the red men would do their utmost to get from the youngster the precious paper. Even Hal, who under the urge of youth and the desire for adventure so badly wanted to go, felt uneasy; for the first time the grim possibilities

sprang up before him, and they were sufficient to make a less determined youngster hesitate. Hal, however, had little chance to do that—little chance indeed even to think about it, for Mackintosh's next words put him in a position of having to make up his mind on the moment and in circumstances that left him with but one decision.

"We'll let the young man answer!" came the crisp words of the factor in retort to Red Feather's sneering question, and Hal's face flushed deeply as he brought himself up with a jerk.

The words tumbled out of his mouth in a reply that made the factor smile grimly at the Indians who, for their part, could not withhold a murmured chorus of admiration.

"If Red Feather means will I dare go knowing that there are many dangers both on the trail and supposing I do obtain the paper from Pierre le Grand, then I tell him now that I will go, even if I go alone, whatever the risks!"

The words rang clear through the hut; there followed a short silence, then the murmur from the red men, and after that Mackintosh's booming voice crying:

"Well done, laddie!"

Immediately afterwards the Indian chief spoke, and Hal knew that he was booked for the adventure.

"The paleface youth speaks like the brother of Red Fox," the Indian said. "He is brave and boastful, like the braves of my nation. The prophecy that the paleface spoke shall come to

pass—the young man shall go with my people! But he must go soon—now; we have waited too long!"

"Ready, lad?" was all that Mackintosh said, turning to Hal, and the youngster nodded back at him. "Better get some grub then." He turned to Red Feather. "Your men were going without food and——"

"Because we had none," was the reply. "Think you we would steal from you who gave us shelter?"

"But you could have asked," said Mackintosh. "Although we haven't much to spare, what there is these men shall have though." And for the next quarter of an hour or so he and Hal were busy packing up what provisions the factor felt that he could safely spare. "The thaw will be with us in a month, Hal," Mackintosh told the boy while they were thus engaged, "and then the Indians will be coming down. Listen, lad, take care of y'self. Don't try to do too much; don't try to be clever. An' let it be a fair doin' atween ye and Red Feather's men. No tricks—a fair fight and a win to the best man."

"You've trained me too well, Red, for me to do anything else but that," was the reply. "If I get the paper, what am I to do? Come back here or take it to headquarters? That might be safest—and you'll be going up there at the end of the season, of course. If I bring it here, the Sioux, knowing that, might come and raid you and——"

"I leave it to ye, laddie," Mackintosh told him.

"What the circumstances may be no one knows, and you'll be best left to your own discretion."

"Just as you like, Red," Hal agreed.

Everything was now ready and the three Indians had their kits on their backs. Mackintosh strapped Hal's on for him, and then, with a great grip of the hand, looked him in the eyes and said:

"Good-bye, laddie, and God bless you!"

The unwonted emotion in the big man's voice shook Hal a little, but he managed to hold himself under control while he returned the grip and said:

"Thanks, Red, and—good-bye."

He glanced across at Red Feather, who in low tones had been giving his men final instructions and was now looking up at the youngster.

"I am ready!" Hal said, and the chief grunted.

"So are these, my men. Hear me, paleface; on the honour of a Sioux I swear that no harm shall come to you from my men, even if it is you and not they who get the paper!"

Impulsively Hal stepped forward and held out his hand.

"I trust you, Red Feather!" he said, and the Sioux took the outstretched hand and shook it; and two minutes later Hal Newlands was sweeping down the trail in the wake of the three Indians, while Mackintosh stood at the door of the post and looked after him, his usually restful face working with emotion.

"May the good Lord speed him safely!" he muttered as he turned back into the hut.

CHAPTER V

THE CALL OF THE PACK

FOR several days the little party journeyed, the red men keeping to the trail which was generally fairly well marked—fortunately no more snow had fallen, otherwise the task would have been impossible. At places there had been some difficulty in picking it up, as, for instance, when they entered the forest which was dark and gloomy, and, moreover, if it were indeed le Grand—and it could have been none other—who had made the trail, he had done his best to throw pursuers off the scent. Instead of the one trail there were a dozen or more, all starting from the edge of the forest, the imprint of the snowshoes in every case being all one way—a fact which would have puzzled any but expert trackers. The Indians, however, laughed grimly when they saw it, and Tall Bull told Hal that it was an old trick.

"Took off snowshoes and turned them round," he said. "Then walked back over trail in them right way round. Made many trails but"—he shrugged his shoulders—"we find 'em all one trail."

Find them all one trail they did indeed, for each one of those shorter trails leading into the forest came to abrupt endings, which fact baffled Hal,

especially as there seemed no way by which whoever had made them could get to where another ended without leaving his marks beneath him. Yet there were no marks. He was enlightened on this point, however, when he saw Tall Bull at the end of the first trail spring up and catch hold of a low hanging tree branch, and swinging himself from that, catch hold of another a foot or so away, and so to go in that manner to the spot where another trail ended. Hal was there, too, and eagerly asked Tall Bull how he had discovered the method of le Grand's.

"See—so!" exclaimed Tall Bull, springing to catch the branch above him. He dropped to the ground again and pointed to the marks on the snow. Hal saw what he meant—saw that just as Tall Bull's spring had scurried the mark of his own snowshoes, so the snow about those which the half-breed had made was much disturbed.

"Him go right into the forest like so," Tall Bull volunteered. "None these trail lead straight—break off; we go find new one!"

There was no further business of swinging from trail-end to trail-end. Tall Bull had evidently satisfied himself that he had discovered Grand's method. The procedure now was to divide the party into four. Tall Bull and Hal started one from one trail and the other from a second, and worked into the forest, shouting to each other while they did so; another Indian started from the same spot as Hal and worked in conjunction with his comrade, who began from the next trail. Each

man went in almost a straight line until Tall Bull called a halt and told them to close in. Hal had been instructed that when that happened he was to turn sharply to his left and meet Tall Bull, while the other two men did the same thing between themselves. Having met, the two pairs explored the space that they had, as it were, marked off in a square, but there were no signs of footprints on the snow. A similar procedure was adopted in connexion with each of the false trails, and the work took a whole day to carry out. While they were engaged upon it a new factor entered in—one that evidently perplexed Tall Bull. Hal shouted out to him to come over and see a new trail that he had discovered—a trail made by a dog, it was certain.

"The half-breed had no dog, though," Hal said when Tall Bull confirmed his opinion as to the meaning of the marks.

"Maybe wild dog," the Sioux suggested. "See when we find breed's trail."

From what happened Hal imagined that that would be a very long time. He was getting tired as it was, and there was not above an hour to go before twilight when the quest would have to be suspended. As it turned out, however, they were nearer success than he imagined, for within a quarter of an hour of finding the dog's trail, they picked up the track of the half-breed. He had, it was clear enough, dropped down a tree, and Hal could but marvel at the endurance of the man, for he had

evidently travelled by swinging from branch to branch for no less than a quarter of a mile, even if he had gone in a straight line, which he certainly had not done, since the spot where the new trail began was midway between two false trails farther back. He must have "tacked."

"What now?" Hal asked Tall Bull, and the Indian told him they were going to camp there for the night. The Sioux scooped away the snow from the ground, gathered bundles of twigs and branches which they spread on the ground, and flung over them their blankets. Evidently Tall Bull had no fear of le Grand being anywhere near, because he did not hesitate to build a fire, which he did by digging down at the roots of the trees under the snow, and gathering moss with which to start the fire. Very soon a bright blaze was going, around which the four men sat and ate sparingly of their provisions.

If Tall Bull had not been chary of building a fire because he held there was no danger of the half-breed being in the neighbourhood, he was all for taking precautions against some denizen of the forest, attracted by the fire, coming in the night and attacking the little camp. It was therefore arranged that each man should take a watch during the darkness, and Hal's turn fell for the third portion of the night. Nothing had happened, as he was given to understand, while the two other men had been on guard, and as these had gathered enough wood to last during the rest of the sleeping

hours, Hal's duty consisted merely in keeping the fire going, and having his ears and eyes wide open.

He sat near the fire with his musket across his knees, his blanket thrown around him, and his mind thrown back, as it were, to the post where he had left Red Mackintosh more cheerless than ever, and he began to think that after all he had been foolish to want to go upon the trail of le Grand. For the first time he asked himself what hope he had of achieving anything, and whether the task was worth while. Even although Radley had, by his jealous guarding of the mysterious paper, and a guarding that had resulted in his death, suggested that it must be valuable, it appeared on the face of it a mad proposition to risk so much for its possession, and that he was risking a good deal Hal had no doubt. Despite the pledge of Red Feather that no harm should come to him from the Sioux, Hal had no illusions as to the risk attending the adventure, or of the long odds against his being able to do what he wanted to do in view of the determination of the Sioux to become possessed of the paper, quite apart altogether from the peril that might—almost certainly would—ensue from the half-breed's desperation to retain it.

"Suppose I was a mad fool!" Hal muttered. "But—but Red was surely keen, and believed there was something in it all, else he wouldn't have let me come! So now I'm for it I'm going to see it through."

This determination helped to brace him up and cast aside the feelings of despondency—helped also to keep him alert. It was well, indeed, for him, and for the rest of the camp, that he was wide awake, for within an hour of his taking guard something happened that sent a thrill through his being. The deathly silence of the forest was broken by the slightest sound—a sound that his keen ears told him was not made by the rustling of the branches. It came from behind him, and, jumping to his feet on the instant, he turned and faced the direction of the sound, but stepping back as he did so in order to have the fire between him and whatever it might be out there beyond the circle of light thrown by the blaze.

What he saw seemed to make the hair stand erect beneath his tight fur cap. Two—four—six shining, blinking balls of fire. For a moment or so Hal stared at them, as though petrified; then, as one set of these lighted orbs, which he knew must be the eyes of some prowling beast, moved forward, he threw up his musket to his shoulder and fired. The crack of the musket rang and rang again through the forest, to be drowned in the chorus of bays that sprang from the throats of the wolves, as the lurkers proved to be. The shot had gone wide—but it had one good result in that when the Indians, springing from their blankets, hoarsely asked what was the matter the glowing eyes had gone.

Hal told Tall Bull what had happened, and the Sioux, versed in the craft of the woods, was equal

to the occasion. He issued instructions that caused his men to sit down, backs to the fire, and he and Hal did the same, so that they encircled the fire, looking out into the gloom beyond.

"Them come 'gain, paleface!" was what he told Hal calmly. "Loaded more?" nodding at the youngster's musket, and Hal hastily reloaded, having, in the excitement, forgotten to do so. Then the four men sat quietly, tensely, waiting, saying no word, but peering keenly into the darkness. Came presently the howling of the wolves, followed shortly afterwards by a shot that almost made Hal jump to his feet in alarm.

"Got heem!" came Tall Bull's level voice, and the next moment there was a snarling and a scuffling out in the shadows—sounds which told clearly enough what was happening. The surviving wolves were fighting over the carcass of the dead beast, but the scrimmage was too far off for it to be wise to waste shots. The row did not last very long; the wolves were too famished to take much time over their gruesome feast, and, having learnt no wisdom from what had happened, were very shortly afterwards attracted to the fire again. This time there were but two sets of eyes and one set faced Hal; the other, Hawk-Eye, the Indian to the left of him. Both men fired at once, and when the echoes of their shots had died away there was but one sound in the forest, the sound of the moaning of a beast in pain. The watchers waited for a recurrence of what had happened before, imagining that if one of the shots

had gone wide—one certainly had not—the uninjured brute would fall upon the other. But nothing of the kind happened, there only came that dreadful moaning, which ceased but very occasionally. It got upon Hal's nerves, and he wanted to go out and give the poor wounded beast the *coup de grâce*. Tall Bull, however, would have none of that.

"Wait till the light come," he said. "Dang'rous go out there."

Hal realized that the Indian was right, and, sleep now being out of the question, it was a case of sitting there and listening to the howling of the animal. At last the dawn filtered in through the trees, but by that time the crying had ceased, and Hal told himself that the wolf was probably dead. Tall Bull, who had assumed very definite leadership of the expedition, refused permission for him to go and investigate until he considered the light strong enough, and even then he insisted upon accompanying Hal. So together they went, and came presently upon the thing they sought. At least, they came to the spot where they had decided, rightly, that the animal was, but instead of finding a wolf there, what they found was an animal that looked like a wolf, and was really a wolfhound—a grey wolfhound, with a heavy collar round its neck.

"A wolf-dog!" exclaimed Hal, springing forward; but Tall Bull grabbed him and held him back, although it seemed evident that the animal was either dead or unconscious.

"Tak' care," he said. "Wolf-dog goes back to pack—dang'rous as wolf!"

"That's probably the dog whose trail we found!" Hal suggested, as he allowed the Sioux to draw him away for a distance. "I've heard of wolfhounds answering the call of the pack, but—but I wonder whose dog that is!"

"Me know that!" was the astounding reply. "That dog is——"

"Le Grand's?" Hal jerked out.

The Sioux shook his head.

"No, no," he said. "That dog b'long to man who run 'way from Grand and——"

"Radley!" cried Hal.

"Yees," was the reply. "Heem caught by breed—catch heem in rope so"—he threw out his arm as though hurling a lassoo—"man who had writin' saved by dog which spreeng for Grand who could not follow till heem catch dog. Tie heem to tree t'en—go fetch heem 'nother time. Dog seem break 'way—go to wolf pack. Now heem dead!"

"He's not!" exclaimed Hal, as the wolf-dog gave a convulsive shiver; and before Tall Bull could stop him he was over at the animal, a wild idea in his brain. Hal loved dogs, and this animal—strong, powerful, beautiful beast that he was—appealed to him, and he decided to try to reclaim it. The thong rope that he carried at his belt was pulled out as he ran, and, reaching the dog, he dropped on one knee beside it, slipped the rope through the collar and fastened it. Then he tied the other end

to a tree bole and had finished by the time that Tall Bull was up with him.

"What for?" the Indian asked him.

"Reckon Red Mackintosh would like to have his old chum's dog!" was the youngster's reply. "And I'm going to try to reclaim him—he's a fine-looking beast!"

"Ugh!" grunted the Sioux, and he stood by while Hal examined the dog to see where it was wounded. His search showed that the animal had had a bullet pass through the leg, and the marvel was that it had not been killed outright.

"Will you get me some warm water?" Hal asked Tall Bull, and the Indian nodded and went off, to return presently with a pannier of steaming water. Hal washed the wound, looking grateful at Tall Bull who had brought also a piece of dried meat. After a while Hal rubbed snow on the dog's muzzle and nose, and shortly afterwards the animal opened its eyes. Instantly Hal thrust the piece of meat towards it, saying: "Good dog! Good dog!" as he did so. The animal looked up at him with an almost human expression in its eyes, and then, sniffing the meat, set its jaws into it and ate it all up, Hal meanwhile patting its head. When the meal was finished the dog got upon its feet, to Hal's surprise. He had not hoped that the brute would be able to stand, but, actually, it could walk, as it soon proved by straining very feebly against the leash that held it. There was no signs of ferocity about it, and Hal—who did not realise that Tall

Bull was standing with musket ready to fire in case of necessity—patted its head again, and then slipped the rope from the tree.

Then an amazing thing happened. The dog, nose down on the ground, yelped angrily, and began to limp forward, following the trail of snowshoes—one of the trails left by Pierre le Grand.

CHAPTER VI

A CLOSE CALL

THE wolf-dog did not go many steps, because, suffering from loss of blood as it was, it could not keep up, and dropped again to the ground. Hal was at its side immediately, and Tall Bull, who had grunted out an exclamation as he realized that the dog remembered the scent of le Grand, followed him.

"Must save dog!" he said. "May heem want for trail!"

"All right—I shall, if it's possible!" said Hal. "Let's get the poor wretch to the fire!"

The question was how to do so, but the problem was solved by Tall Bull, who ran off to the little camp and came back presently with the other Indians and a stretcher made out of branches and a blanket flung over them. The dog made no resistance to being lifted on to it, and in a little while the band were at the camp fire—where Hal discovered that the two Indians had prepared breakfast while he and Tall Bull were away. The animal was laid down as near the fire as advisable and given a warm drink; after which the four men fell to eating their breakfast, during which Hal asked Tall Bull what he thought they ought to do.

"We carry dog," the Indian told him. "Me go dig herb cure heem!"

After breakfast Tall Bull went out with his tomahawk and came back presently with a big piece of tree-root which he proceeded to pare up and place in a pannier filled with water. He stewed it and produced a pungent-smelling liquid in which he soaked a piece of his own blanket. This he formed into a plug and bandage and bound up the dog's wound.

"Now we go!" he said. "Lift dog on blanket 'gain."

This was done and the four men, each taking a corner, went along the trail, carrying the dog which lay still and made no effort to get off the improvised stretcher. The carrying of the animal meant loss of speed, but Tall Bull did not seem to mind that and as for Hal, he was highly pleased; for this care of the dog meant, as events were to prove, the saving of its life.

It was in such fashion as this that for nearly a fortnight the little party made its way through the forest belt and then across the snow-wastes, always following the trail that was now well marked; and they were grateful that there had been no more snow. But they were even at the end of that time still behind le Grand and, so Tall Bull told Hal, they had not gained anything, chiefly, no doubt, because of the burden they carried.

Hal had christened the dog Greycoat. The animal's wound had healed beautifully, but the

poor beast had lost a lot of blood which kept him weak for many, many days; so that it was all the fortnight before he was able to walk instead of having to travel in the stretcher. Meanwhile Hal and Greycoat had become the closest of friends and the dog showed the utmost delight whenever the white boy approached him. Hal, indeed, had worked to this end, and it was generally he who fed the dog, so that the latter had become accustomed to expect kindness at his hands. Not that any of the Sioux did anything other than kindly towards the animal; but in some mysterious way Greycoat looked upon Hal as his master, and when he was able to walk it was always at Hal's heels that he did so.

"Heem fine dog, your frien'," said Tall Bull.

"He's a beauty," Hal agreed, glowing with pleasure that the man had recognized the dog's attachment. "I'm glad he's recovered, as we've got so far to go!"

From conversations that he had had with Tall Bull, Hal gathered that the Sioux's opinion regarding le Grand was that he was making for a Sioux village where Running Bear, who was looked upon as the paramount Chief of the tribe, held sway; and as the distance separating Hal's party from that place at the end of the fortnight was something like another fortnight's journeying, and the half-breed had what amounted to several days' lead, there seemed little chance of catching him before he arrived.

"Shorter way, which heem may not know," Tall Bull said that evening, when they pitched "camp" in the open, having built up a snow wind-shield under which to take shelter. "Two days and we go that way—after lake, if ice hold."

The lake to which Tall Bull referred lay beyond a patch of forest, and when they arrived in the forest about noon the next day, the Sioux leader, who was well in advance, suddenly held up his hand. When the rest reached him he was pointing to marks on the snow—marks which Hal and the others recognized at once as being those made by caribou.

"Meat!" Tall Bull said significantly; and the others were as pleased as he, since they had been living on the shortest of rations during the last few days. "Our way!" said the Sioux, pointing along the trail. "Going to east where the big thaw comes first!"

It was an important matter that the caribou were about, and it was with renewed vigour that the party went forward. Not for long, however, without coming up against a dilemma—two of them, in fact. First, the caribou trail tailed off more directly east than that made by le Grand; secondly, the clearing that betokened a camp of the half-breed had, so Tall Bull asserted, been the scene of a longer sojourn than had been usual with the other camps. Also, there were certain signs which the Sioux could read, but Hal admitted to himself he would not have understood, which

suggested that the half-breed had left the spot only a few hours before.

"Something 'appeen," Tall Bull said, and he bade the others wait for him while he went on a little exploration along le Grand's tracks. He came back presently, with news that thrilled Hal to the core.

"Heem been lame," he announced. "Limp so!" And he hobbled about so that he made queer marks with one of his snowshoes. "Me see it 'way back there," and he jerked his hand back along the trail. "Not sure then; know now. Breed better t'ough—leetle."

"Well, what have we got to do?" Hal asked. "If we go after the caribou—which we ought, because we want food—we may alarm le Grand by our shots. If we go after le Grand we shall miss the caribou. What do you suggest, Tall Bull?"

"Go both," was the reply, and the Sioux proceeded to outline his plans, which were that while he and Hal followed le Grand the two others should go after the caribou. No one could suggest anything better and Tall Bull's plan was adopted; with the result that in a very short time the two bands parted and Hal and Tall Bull, accompanied by Greycoat, were speeding along the tracks made by the snowshoes. Arrangements had been made for the meat-hunters to follow in their wake as soon as they had achieved success, or, if the quarry were likely to lead too far, to give it up and come

on, because of the necessity for getting across the lake quickly.

The halting trail of the half-breed led on all through the remainder of the light hours; and at dusk Tall Bull decided to camp notwithstanding what seemed to Hal the necessity for making all progress. The Sioux, however, told him that it was better to move only in the daylight; and Hal gave way. They were up early next morning, though, and off directly it was light enough to travel. Before noon they had reached the spot where, so Tall Bull said, the half-breed had camped the night before.

"Get heem now!" he said; and the pair pushed on with all speed—with too much speed, indeed, because it resulted in an accident to the Sioux, who caught his snowshoe in an obstruction and went over. When he tried to rise it was to reveal the fact that he had sprained his ankle. He pluckily got up, however, and tried to go ahead, but it was useless; he could not do so.

"Me done!" he said simply; but there was a fierce light in his eyes. "Wait here, us, for the hunters."

Hal was busy taking off the Indian's snowshoes, with the intention of binding up the sprain; and when he had done this Tall Bull, after thanking him, said:

"We wait now—others come soon."

"But that will mean we shall probably lose le Grand," Hal said, chagrined at the very thought. "If he gets over the lake even a day in advance of

us we'll perhaps not catch him up, because the thaw is setting in rapidly. Shouldn't I go back and find the others, or——"

"Must have meat," was the Sioux's reply. "No fire—noise heard mebbe. How we know how far Grand?"

"Then there's only one other thing to be done," said Hal, "and that is for me to go on after the half-breed. Look here, Tall Bull, I daresay you'd be all right, you know——"

"Me all right," the Indian said. "You go. T'ough breed dang'ous man, and——"

"Have to risk that," said Hal, a little wonderingly that Tall Bull should be so willing to let him go when success would mean that the red men would be the losers. Unless—the thought throbbed through Hal's brain—was this just a ruse on the part of Tall Bull to get rid of him? Was the idea to throw him into single-handed contact with Le Grand, knowing that the odds were so much against him and that, if the half-breed were to kill him, the way would be clear for the Sioux to continue the chase without an unwanted rival? There was nothing in the Sioux's face to help him in coming to a decision on this matter, and Hal, now that he had committed himself to the work, was unwilling to withdraw; he was afraid of being reckoned afraid! "I'll go!" he said abruptly. "Better leave Greycoat with you, in case the others are not back until to-morrow; you'll want some protection during the night."

The Indian shrugged his shoulders, as he touched his musket significantly.

"Me no 'fraid!" and there was a ring in his voice, and a laugh, the laugh of a man who had all his life moved in the hard world of the wilds.

"Anyway, I'll leave Greycoat," said Hal; and he patted the wolf-dog's nose, and the animal whined. "Stay here, Greycoat," Hal told him. "Down!"

The dog went to the ground immediately, and Hal, with a last good-bye to Tall Bull, turned away up the trail. After going some distance he looked back and waved his hand—to see Greycoat standing beside Tall Bull and seeming as though he were having a hard fight to obey the command of his new master. Then Hal was lost amongst the trees. He knew, from what Tall Bull had told him, that there was not a great distance to go in order to get out of the wood and come to the great spreading lake, across which lay the short cut to the Sioux village. There had been a good deal of speculation in the Indian's calculation of crossing the lake, because the thaw had now set in rapidly and it was quite on the cards that it would not be possible to get over the lake. Even the difference of a day was important and if the half-breed had already gone over he would, supposing the lake were thawing, have a tremendous gain on his pursuers, who would have to make a wide detour.

That, however, was in the lap of Fate and would be known when Hal reached the lake, which he did

after several more hours of hard travelling. The trail had led clearly enough, and Hal saw that it went out upon the ice. He saw, moreover, that the ice was thawing. Round the edges it had broken away and the touching of it with his musket stock made it give.

"A pretty fine mess!" Hal muttered. "It's a go d five miles across and Tall Bull reckons it's at least thirty miles long. Goodness knows what it's like farther out, but I guess I've got to risk it—and right away, even although there's only about another half-hour of daylight."

That was a serious part of the business; the light was growing duller every minute and it was no small thing to essay the passage of the lake with the knowledge that the thaw might have weakened the ice in a hundred different places, any one of which he might find, to his undoing. The plain fact, however, was if he waited until the next morning the peril would be greater; it was a case of getting on immediately. There was another disturbing factor. Once he was over, he would be cut off from Tall Bull and the other Indians who would certainly be unable to get across and would have to go right round the lake in order to make the Sioux village—still nearly a hundred miles away; and he would have that long stretch of waste sweeping before him, shared by him and the half-breed with whom he might catch up at any time. That, of course, had been his motive all through; but there is something different be-

tween having a motive and the imminent possibility of reaching it, especially when the occasion is fraught with such possibilities as those that hung upon the meeting of Hal Newlands and Pierre le Grand.

"Got to do it, though—got to do it!" was the burden of the refrain that surged through Hal's mind as he found himself weighing up the chances of fate; and, seeing that his snowshoes were securely fixed, he felt his way gingerly on to the melting ice. It broke, his foot went into the chilling water. He saved himself, however, and went on, the ice becoming firmer the farther he went. That fact served to buoy up his spirits, and he told himself that probably he would have easy passage at any rate until he neared the farther side, where the ice would again be dangerously weak.

And then, just when he imagined that fate was treating him kindly, the great disillusionment came. The trail changed direction. It was somewhere about half-way across the lake, and the marks of the snowshoes turned to the left, went on some distance, and then swung back—towards the bank from which they had originally come!

"What does that mean?" Hal asked himself, as he came to a standstill; but he might as well have shouted his question to the four winds. He could think of no answer—no reason why le Grand should have doubled on his tracks. The one thing that was clear was that those tracks must be

followed; it was useless to go across the lake and leave the enemy behind!

Actually, Hal felt a certain relief at things having turned out in this way, for the simple reason that it meant he would not, after all, be cut off from his red companions; although, as he swung along the trail towards the bank that he had left a little while before, he realized that, on the other hand, the risks were increased considerably, because le Grand was probably somewhere hidden in the forest and knew that he was being pursued.

"Perhaps the beggar's watching me!" the thought rioted through Hal's mind, and a chill of apprehension struck him. Instinctively he unslung the musket that he had been carrying across his back, and examined it to see that it was in order. He was under no delusions now that the time may have come when he would be up against le Grand in real earnest, and his keen young eyes swept down the length of the forest that he was swiftly approaching—although he knew that if le Grand were there, and watching him, there would be no sign of his presence.

Then Hal regained confidence. It came to him that after all, if le Grand knew he was there he would have fired at him long before this; because the white youth, from the moment he had issued from the forest, had presented a beautiful mark and could have been picked off quite easily.

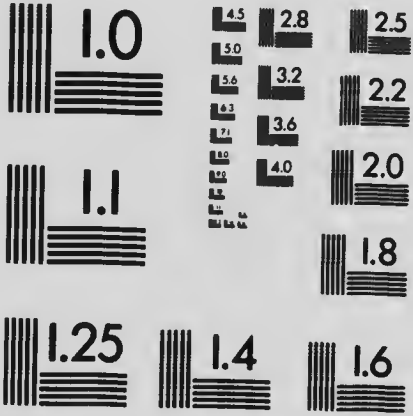
"He'd have had me long before this if he'd been there!" Hal muttered, and then laughed

softly to himself as he thought that, when he found the trail through the forest, it might enable him, if he were careful, to take the half-breed by surprise.

Then, as is so often the case when we imagine that all is rosy and everything is fair seeming, the catastrophe came. When Hal was within a very few yards of the edge of the lake and was beginning to think he would have to look out for the weak spots, he slipped, tried to recover himself, got his musket entangled in his legs and went down to the ice with a crash that was lost in a louder crack; and the next he knew was that he was immersed in chilling water. He dropped like a plummet beneath the surface, a gasping cry dying on his lips as the water filled his mouth. By a miracle, so it seemed to him afterwards, he kept his presence of mind, and, instead of fighting, let himself go down—realizing that by doing so he would probably rise up directly into the hole in the ice again, whereas, if he struggled, he would undoubtedly get away from it and be drowned without chance of escape. Things worked out even as he imagined they might and, a few seconds after dropping into the water, he came up. True, he knocked his head against the ice, but his eyes told him that he was at the hole and he flung up a hand that clutched the edge, even as he jerked his head to one side and emerged through the hole. The ice-edge crumbled at his touch, and he wondered how he was to get out. He knew that he would quickly become numbed and powerless. Fortunately, he knew how

MICROCOPY RESOLUTION TEST CHART

(ANSI and ISO TEST CHART No. 2)



APPLIED IMAGE Inc

1653 East Main Street
Rochester, New York 14609 USA
(716) 482 - 0300 - Phone
(716) 288 - 5989 - Fax

to tread water and gripping and losing the crumbling ice—each touch of it serving to keep him afloat—he tested the strength of the solid mass. Each touch told him the hopelessness of clambering out by such methods.

Quick witted as he usually was, for the time being his keenness was dulled, otherwise it would not have taken him five minutes to make the discovery that he did eventually make, namely, that the musket which he had dropped and now lay within a foot of the opening, was the one thing that was likely to save his life. The instant that thought occurred to him he thrust out his hand and grabbed the musket quickly and in an incredibly short time had it lying across the hole and supporting himself by it.

Stretched as it was beyond the bare edge of the ice it held—but whether it would hold when he tried to get out by it, he could not tell until he tried. It was, however, a case of making an effort at once, before the numbness that he could even then feel creeping up, had secure grip on him.

As he gave his weight to the musket he heard something that snatched away his attention even from his own safety—something that was, he knew even before he saw, the scamper of someone running.

Still clutching the musket, he half turned his head and saw the red-bloused, fur-capped figure of Pierre le Grand rushing across the ice, tomahawk raised and eyes blazing, and now, as he understood

"Still clutching the musket, he saw Pierre le Grand rushing across the ice" (*see page* 76).

that he had been seen, choking out a howl of rage.

"Heavens! This is the end!" sobbed Hal, as he realized that he was at the mercy of the desperate half-breed who, instead of limping as Hal had thought he would be when he did find him, was showing no signs of halting, nor did he seem to have any fear of the ice breaking. It was evident to Hal, even in those terrifying moments, that le Grand had forgotten everything in his wild rage except the fact that one of his enemies at least—one of the men whom he feared—was at his mercy.

Hal could see the flashing teeth in the jaw of the evil face; could see the anger in the wide circled eyes; and he shuddered, but not with the cold, at the sight of the waving tomahawk. A man more matured than he was and more accustomed to the terrors of the wild and the perils of such grim affairs as this with which he was mixed up, could have been excused for giving vent to the gasping cry of horror at the fate that faced him. As he did so he tried to heave himself up by the aid of his musket, dropped back again, however, and stared up at le Grand, as though measuring the distance between them.

When he did so it was to see something else to add to the drama of that terrible few minutes; issuing from the forest at a lolloping pace came Greycoat, with red tongue hanging out and the strong white teeth gleaming.

"Greycoat—Greycoat!" the words screamed

from Hal's throat and in answer came the voice of the wolf-dog—the voice that made the half-breed, then within but a few feet of Hal, come to a standstill and swing round to see what had happened to make the white youth shout in such fashion.

Of what happened immediately afterwards Hal never had any clear idea. He heard a hoarse cry from le Grand; saw the half-breed go slithering across the ice, making for the forest, saw Greycoat, who had been coming straight for the hole, turn aside and dart after le Grand. All this was seen as through a film, the while that Hal fought frantically now to raise himself on to the ice. He had his arm thrown over the musket, and then his body; but the numbness got him and all he could do, as he sagged and struck his forehead on the ice, was to cry: "Greycoat!" and then knew no more until he opened his eyes and found himself lying on the snow at the edge of the lake, with Greycoat licking his face.

"Greycoat!" he sobbed, and the dog thrust his nose into his face as though telling him of his pleasure. Somehow, Hal knew not how, Greycoat must have saved his life and all he could do then was to take the great grey head in his arms and, stolid boy that he was, to cry, hysterically. He did not know—how could he?—that when Hal gave vent to that cry of "Greycoat," the wolf-dog, which had been dashing after le Grand, who was making no effort to attempt to fight and who seemed to be in mortal terror of the dog, turned

and looked at his new master; and then, instead of keeping after le Grand, lolloped across to where Hal lay, half in the water, and half out.

The half-breed, too, taken up with his own desire for safety did not seem to realize that the dog was no longer pursuing him, otherwise things might have been different. As it was, Greycoat reached Hal and pushed his nose into the boy's face. When there came no response, the animal jumped round and round the hole as though he had gone mad; darted in again after a while, and nosed the cold face that was now in the water, the head of the boy having melted the ice at the edge and let him in.

Then the strong jaws of the dog fastened on the collar of Hal's coat, the animal pulled, the boy's head came up, and the body was drawn slowly over the musket until with the exception of the legs still dangling in the water, Hal was lying on the ice. Still Greycoat hauled and at last had Hal right out of the hole. The boy fell there with his left arm crooked and his head upon it—otherwise the devotion of Greycoat would have had no life-saving result. As it was the dog's affection saved the boy's life; for, as a bitch licks her puppies for sheer joy of having them, so did Greycoat lick the white face of his master. The warmth of the great hound as it lay on the boy took away the numbness that had seized him, brought back the flow of blood and revived him so that he opened his eyes.

As the name "Greycoat!" slipped from be-

tween Hal's cold lips, the wolf-dog barked for sheer joy. Hal seized the hound's head and fondled it, with tears in his eyes, tears of gratitude. Forgotten, for the moment at any rate, was Pierre le Grand, and Hal, as he staggered upon his feet, had thought for one thing only; how came it that Greycoat had reached that spot? The only answers that suggested themselves were that the Sioux hunters had either given up the quest for meat or had found their quarry and had pressed on after him.

He cupped his hands and sent a loud cry ringing towards the forest, but there came back only the echo, and though he shouted several times it was with the same result, so that at last he concluded he had been wrong in his surmise.

"Greycoat must have left Tall Bull," was his new decision, in which, indeed, he was right as he was to discover later on. He was more than ever impressed by the devotion of the dog, and a lump rose into his throat as he realized that that devotion had not only been the means of saving him from the tomahawk of Pierre le Grand, but also from death by drowning. for he had no doubt that if Greycoat had not pulled him out of the ice-hole he would have dropped off the musket and been drowned in a very short time.

Came then, the question of the half-breed. What had happened to him? Whither had he gone when, seared at the sudden attack of the dog, he had fled and left his enemy to die by other means

than the hatchet ? Hal, busy trying to restore the circulation which came back slowly and painfully, tried to find a reason for le Grand's return across the lake after having progressed so far, but he could think of no explanation. The fact that le Grand had, as Hal's last vision of him showed, gone sprinting over the lake when Greycoat appeared, suggested that whatever had been the reason for the return, it had been satisfied ; and the problem that faced Newlands now was whether to pick up the trail and follow the half-breed, or to go back into the forest and seek the Sioux whom he had left behind him.

The former course Hal judged to be foolish because, with the twilight well set in and deepening every moment now, there would be far too much risk in essaying the journey over the weakening ice.

" I've had enough of that ! " Hal shuddered as he thought of his narrow escape. " No heroics for me, and I reckon Red would agree ! "

Moreover, he was fairly exhausted as the result of his long journey and the benumbing experience in the ice-cold water, and by the time that he had restored circulation to something like normal, he had decided to get into the forest and build himself a fire for the night.

" Come on, Greycoat ! " he called to the hound, and the great dog pricked up his ears and came to heel as Hal marched slowly over the ice, picking his way carefully, lest he suffer another experience

of near-death. So it was that after an hour or so travelling into the forest Hal had built for himself a fire, with the help of his flint-box which, encased in waterproof covering, had kept the contents dry.

"Don't suppose Grand will dare come back across the lake," he told himself, as he munched at his frugal supper. "So there's no danger from the fire on that account, and it will show where I am if Tall Bull and the other reds come along during the night."

The fact that he had Greycoat with him was sufficient comfort for Hal to allow him to drop off to sleep without any fear, and, with an arm about the neck of the dog, Newlands did indeed fall into a deep sleep of exhaustion, after having piled the fire high with great bundles of wet twigs which made a terrific smoking while they were drying. He had taken the precaution, too, before going to sleep, to clean out his musket and see to the lock and reload, since the old charging was useless through having been soaked when he went into the water.

All his precautions were unnecessary, however, although when he awoke it was with a feeling that there was something serious afoot. It was Greycoat who roused him—Greycoat who sprang from the arm encircling his neck and, standing beside his master, bayed into the deep gloom of the forest beyond the glare thrown by the dying fire. Hal jumped to his feet, grabbing his musket as he did so.

"What is it, Greycoat?" he whispered; and the dog's answer was to bark again, and then, before Hal could seize him, he had gone springing into the darkness, ceasing to bark as he did so.

"Something's wrong for sure!" was Hal's thought, and realizing that where he stood he was an excellent mark for anyone who might be near at hand—if indeed it was a human being whom the dog had heard—he slipped away from before the fire and stood behind the bole of a tree. From there he stared into the gloom in the direction in which Greycoat had gone; and waited tensely, anxiously, with his musket ready for taking action if necessary. Had le Grand come back after all having dared the feat of crossing the breaking ice again? Or had Greycoat sniffed some prowling animal of the night? Or had the Sioux, successful or not in their hunt, pushed on through the night hours in hope of catching up with Hal and the fleeing half-breed? That this latter was quite on the cards Hal realized; it was for that reason, indeed, that he had gone well into the forest and pitched his little camp in the trail that he had followed. Whatever it was he was content to let Greycoat go questing for he knew that if anyone likely to be awkward were at hand, the dog would stand a better chance than himself. The very fact that Greycoat had gone back along the trail served to give Hal some reassurance, for it seemed to him that le Grand at any rate would not be coming that way.

He was not left very long in suspense, however, because presently there came, smashing the dark silence, the crack of a musket, the sudden barking of Greycoat again; then the shouting of men, and Hal understood that those men were the Sioux whom he had left!

A great fear seized him at once—a fear that the shot he had heard might have killed or injured the dog who had found the quarry he scented; probably the red men had been alarmed at the movement they had heard in the forest and one of them had fired, not knowing that it was Greycoat. It was sufficient for Hal, however, that the bark of the dog had contained no hint of pain, and likely enough, since no other shots had followed, and the red men had shouted out in excitement, they had recognized the dog.

"Ah-hoo!" Hal shouted into the night as he left his hiding place and went running along the trail.

Back came the hail of the red men, and a few minutes later Hal was up with them, to find that with thong ropes across their shoulders, the two younger Sioux were carrying Tall Bull in a stretcher made of a blanket. They were coming down the trail, with Greycoat running before them.

"'Lo, Tall Bull!" Hal cried in great pleasure at seeing the Sioux again. "Is the foot so very bad?"

"Heem bad so mooch," said the red man. "I like a papoose, no walk! Where is——"

"Le Grand?" Hal finished for him. "Come down to the fire and I'll tell you!"

Off they started, therefore, and presently reached the fire, the red men carrying Tall Bull as though he were indeed no heavier than the papoose he had likened himself to. They were carrying more than Tall Bull, too, as Hal discovered when they reached camp, and they took from the blanket some fine large portions of caribou meat.

"Found it, then?" Hal said, nodding to the food, and the Indians, as pleased as they well could be, nodded with something like enthusiasm.

"Cook some for heem!" was Tall Bull's command, and while this was being done Hal told them all that had happened since he left Tall Bull sitting at the foot of the tree.

"If it hadn't been for Greycoat I'd have been dead meat by now!" he wound up. "How did he come to leave you, Tall Bull?"

"Heem res'less, smeel paleface trail—want go me see. Tell heem go—an' heem go, see?" was Tall Bull's reply; and Hal realized that, although unable to help himself to any considerable extent if he had been attacked by wild animals in the night, Tall Bull had unselfishly sent the wolf-hound after him.

"Thanks!" was all that Hal could say, as he reached out a hand and grasped that of the Sioux.

"So the fox slip 'way?" Tall Bull asked him quietly, but there was no suggestion in his tone of anger or scorn that Hal had failed to do that for which he had set out.

"Yes, he's gone—and we'll probably have to go right round the lake to get on his track again," Hal said. "I'm sorry, Tall Bull, but it wasn't a job to be done in the dark, that crossing of the lake in its present state."

"T'at's so," said Tall Bull, vigorously. "See what's like in mornin'. Paleface eat now!"

"Rather," was the youngster's reply. He was glad that he had got over his explanation, for, with all a youth's ideas of resolution, he had been badly upset at having to give up the task set him and had felt not a little reluctance to meet the red men again with his tale of failure, even although the failure had not been through his own fault.

He fell to with a will when the Indians served him up with a finely cooked piece of sizzling meat. The red men also ate and while they did so Tall Bull, as though wishing to waste no time, outlined the plan that he suggested for them when they started the next day.

That plan came to this: while Tall Bull and Hawk-Eye stayed in the forest, until he himself was fit to walk again, Hal and Crooked Hand, the elder of the two other Sioux, should go either across the lake, if they found it safe to do so, or else round it. In the former case, of course, they would be able to pick up le Grand's trail and follow easily, but in the latter it was just a matter of getting to the Sioux's village long after him but nevertheless in time to warn Running Bear that the half-breed had treacherously obtained the paper

and that there should be no bartering with him over it.

"All right, Tall Bull," Hal agreed when the Sioux had finished and he realized how fair the red man was being. He could, had he liked, have rendered it impossible for Hal to go, in which case the Sioux would have had a clear field for themselves in the pursuit and frustration of the half-breed; and any likelihood of Hal obtaining the paper would have been out of the question. When he realized this Hal felt thoroughly ashamed of himself for having thought, while he was following Grand alone, that Tall Bull had deliberately sent him on in the hope of his being put out of action by the half-breed. He felt that it was altogether unworthy of him and yet he consoled himself by the thought that after all, knowing what he did of Indian character generally, that had been the more likely course for a red man to have taken with regard to a rival. He remembered all the stories that Red Mackintosh had told him of Indians, and the dictum of the factor that: "There's only one Indian in a thousand who plays fair—but when he does he plays fair right up to the hilt!" And Hal told himself that apparently Tall Bull was one in a thousand.

It was with such thoughts that he dropped off to sleep again after sitting for some time beyond the falling off to sleep of the red men.

When he awoke it was to find that the Sioux, despite their hard toil and the shortness

of their sleep, were up and preparing breakfast. The aroma of fresh meat cooking for the second time within a few hours was gratifying to the youngster, and he did full justice to the meal made ready. There was little time, however, spent over it, for the Indians were anxious to get on with their work, and when they had finished eating, the two Sioux and Hal, at Tall Bull's suggestion, went through the forest toward the lake, to pick up the trail followed by le Grand and to see if it was at all possible to essay the journey over the ice. Hal led them to where he had seen le Grand issue from the forest and then, very gingerly, the three of them, with Greycoat at heel, stepped on to the ice and felt their way out towards the spot where Hal had fallen in. They did not go far, however, because the ice creaked and cracked beneath their weight and it was decided that they must go back. They turned, therefore, but when Hal called upon Greycoat to follow, the dog for once refused to obey. Instead, he went straight along the trail, nose to the ice, and no calling by Hal or the red men would bring him back.

"Reckon he's on Grand's trail," Hal said. "And—look there! What's he up to now?"

The men were by this time on the solid earth again, and stood there staring at the strange movements on the part of the wolf-dog. Instead of going straight across the ice, as Hal had quite expected him to do, the animal had turned aside and was running quickly back towards the forest!

"He's going as straight as an arrow!" shouted Hal. "What's it mean? We'd better go along the edge and see where he lands up! Come on!"

So off down the lake side the three men went, but though they travelled quickly Greycoat was quicker, and when they reached the spot where he had made the edge he was already in the forest and racing inland again. Hal called after him, but the dog took no heed and the youngster went rushing in his tracks—and would have followed a long way had not Crooked Hand called out:

"No go, paleface. Spoil trail. We see!"

Hal turned his head over his shoulder at the cry and saw that the red men were even then examining the trail. He realized that they were right in saying that if he went on he would probably spoil it for them, and although he was anxious to follow Greycoat and see what the dog's action meant, he pulled up and waited for the red men's report.

He knew something of wooderaft himself, but he realized that he was as a babe compared with them. He watched them fascinated as they made their search, grunting the while they did so.

Suddenly Crooked Hand straightened himself.

"Well?" Hal queried. "What is it?"

"Breed go not 'cross lake," was the astounding reply. "Heem go back through forest—that way!" and the red man pointed in the direction that Greycoat had gone.

For a moment or so Hal was too astonished to

speak. He was thinking that the last he had seen of le Grand was when the half-breed was running from the dog and going over the ice away from the forest, and he was trying to find an explanation for both Greycoat's actions and the Sioux's decision.

"Perhaps—probably——" he said at last hesitantly. "Perhaps that trail is the one which the half-breed took when he came back to the forest some time before I arrived."

"No, paleface," was the reply of Crooked Hand. "This trail much new. Me see 'nother trail when we run here. That not so much new."

"But why should he come back?" Hal asked, utterly at a loss to understand it all. "Of course, I know that if the ice was too bad for me it was too bad for him, but even so, le Grand wouldn't have gone this way—he'd have gone round the lake and not away from it, as this trail suggests. Why's he gone into the forest?"

"That we fin' out," Crooked Hand told him. "We go see Tall Bull first."

"All right," was all that Hal could say, for the moment forgetting that Greycoat was not yet back.

He had not come back either when they reached the place where they had left Tall Bull. They had something more to think of than Greycoat, however, when they broke into the little clearing where Hal had built his fire, for there, lying on the ground, with blood staining the white carpet of melting snow, was Tall Bull!

"Great Heaven, what's happened?" cried Hal, springing forward and dropping beside the Sioux, the while the two other red men unslung their muskets and stood, one on each side, alert and keen ready to shoot at the first sign or movement that betokened the presence of anyone.

Hal saw in a moment or so that Tall Bull was dead; he had followed his last trail. He had died as the result of the powerful thrust of a knife in the back, which showed that he must have been attacked suddenly from the rear. He had had no time, evidently, to snatch up his musket or even to send out a call for help, and whoever had done the fell deed must have been waiting and watching for the opportunity to get him alone.

"He's dead!" said Hal at last, with a gulp, as he got to his feet again. He stared, white-faced, at the Sioux whose imperturbability also seemed to be broken by what had happened. "It means that le Grand must be about somewhere and—and—— Look, he's taken Tall Bull's ball-pouch!"

It came to Hal instantly, as he noticed the absence of the pouch in which the Sioux kept his musket balls, that here he had the explanation of le Grand not having picked him off as he hung suspended in the ice-hole the day before. The man had been without ammunition. Now, however, he had obtained some—and at what a price! Moreover, it meant danger to those who still lived—for it was obvious that the murderer could not be far off and was possibly even then watching them,

intending to pick them off as soon as he could do so without risk to himself.

"Quick—we must take shelter!" Hal warned the red men, but they shook their heads and proceeded calmly to examine the spot, seeking for the trail of the man who had committed the crime while they had been away those two or three hours.

"Heem no here," Crooked Hand said, quietly. "Heem shoot us when we come here if heem near."

Hal saw the wisdom in this verdict, but nevertheless, it was with not a little nervousness that he joined with the others in searching for the trail. It was not indeed very difficult to find, for, naturally they began just behind where Tall Bull's inert body lay; and there they picked up the marks of snowshoes. They followed them for a considerable distance, no one saying a word. The trail led for a while towards the east and was fairly well marked. Presently, however, it turned and finally led them back to the trail down which they themselves had come during the early morning hours, and there they met Greycoat, who had made a wide circuit in following the trail that le Grand had made when he left the ice, and so made his way down to the little camp.

CHAPTER VII

THE CAST OF THE DICE

WHEN they struck the old trail again it did not take the red men long—nor Greycoat either for that matter!—to discover that the half-breed had gone still deeper into the forest—a fact which was a puzzle to them all, even as it had been a puzzle why he had ever returned from the lake. The point was, however, that whatever his reason, their task was to follow him. Crooked Hand, on whom the leadership of the party had naturally fallen, decided that there was nothing to be gained by either of them going on the long journey to the village while le Grand was making for the opposite direction, and that it was to their advantage to keep together.

The result was that, after going back to the camping place to bury Tall Bull—which owing to the hardness of the ground took the form of covering him, reverently, with great heaps of brushwood—they packed up their kits and once more took to the trail.

"We'd better go single file—and with good distance between us," Hal suggested, "in case le Grand tries any ambushing tricks, to pick us off!"

Crooked Hand nodded and so they disposed

themselves into a file with ten yards between each man, and with Greycoat—who was all eagerness to be off—in the van, nose to the ground. Crooked Hand was immediately behind the dog, with Hal between him and Hawk-Eye.

Thus began a journey similar in almost every respect to that which these three, together with Tall Bull, had undertaken during the last fortnight: just a constant slogging along over the melting snow during the day, a pitching of bivouac at night and rolling up in a blanket to keep warm. Now there were no fires lit at night because le Grand knew—of that they were sure—that he was being followed, whereas until the end of the first phase of the pursuit, he possibly did not know. A keen look-out was kept all day—and all three men were at a pitch of alertness that, to Hal, at any rate, was a nervous strain—the watch kept at night was as close as any ever kept by an army encamped and surrounded by foes.

Fortunately, the trail held good all through the forest, because there the snow, denied the direct heat of the increasingly powerful sun, could not melt very quickly. It was when they issued from the forest and found themselves, as they knew they would, looking down the sweep of mountain up which they had previously climbed with much travail that they came up against a difficulty.

Down there in the valley was the river across whose ice they had passed days before, and they could see that the ice was breaking up and the

water beginning to flow freely. The breaking up was aided considerably by the water running down the hill as the sun melted the snow. What had been a white mass was now wet slough, down which, at a false step, one might slip and tumble over and over, unable to stop until the river was reached.

"That's made a hash of the trail!" Hal exclaimed, as he looked down.

"Ugh!" grunted Crooked Hand.

It was all he said, until he and his comrade had made a thorough examination, the result of which was, as Hal could tell by their manner, entirely fruitless. As for Greycoat, he had been busy, too, but his quest was just as useless, for the water trickling down the mountain side had carried away any scent of le Grand's trail.

"We lose heem!" Crooked Hand said.

"Then we've had all our work for nothing—and Tall Bull died in the doing of it!" exclaimed Hal, despondently. "We must do something—but what?"

The Sioux shrugged his shoulders again.

"Heem come here—why? Heem cross river? Yes, me t'ink and——"

"But, how and why—goodness knows, I can't think!" said Hal. "How could he cross that river without a canoe? He'd be smashed to pieces by the ice-blocks if he'd tried to swim it! And as you say, why should he go *back?*"

"Me t'ink know that," said Crooked Hand

slowly. "He go back to Red Fox. Me not know why heem go back."

"There's no reason that I know of for him to go back to Red Mackintosh," Hal agreed. "It's quite likely, though, that he hasn't gone back—that he has cut off either to right or left. Anyway, we've lost him and the question is, what are we going to do? Go on to the Post or turn back and make for your village. You're leader, Crooked Hand!"

For a few minutes there was silence between them, but at last the Sioux, who had been looking back and forward along the trail, broke the stillness by saying:

"No tell whether heem go up trail or down," said Crooked Hand. "Meltin' snow—all marks snowshoes go one way!" and Hal understood what he meant.

"You mean that there's no telling whether he's going down the trail with his snowshoes the right way on or whether he's going up the trail with them on the wrong way?" Hal asked, and Crooked Hand nodded. "Then it means that if we all go one way we may miss him—and if we break up one man alone would have a dangerous task?" Hal went on.

"T'at so," Crooked Hand told him. "Must go t'ough. Man who keel Tall Bull mus' die!"

"You're leader now," Hal said, simply. "It's for you to say what we shall do. Shall we all go one way—the way you choose, or shall two of us

go one way and the other go alone in the other direction ?"

"Go two parties," was the answer. 'Me go one way—you two go other, an'——"

"That's not fair," exclaimed Hal; then he laughed grimly as he thought how foolish it was to speak to this man of the wilds as though he were an untrained paleface who had never followed a trail. "I'm sorry, Crooked Hand," he said, simply. "But—I say, let's—let's throw fo[illegible]!"

"The dice ?" said Crooked [illegible]d—and Hal saw the light come into his eyes [illegible] light of the gambler. He knew that all In[illegible] were born gamblers, and nothing delighted [illegible] more than to stake everything they had—he [illegible]ad heard that they would stake their squaws on the throw of the dice which the white men had brought and taught them how [illegible]use. Crooked Hand was even then searching in [illegible]ocket, and produced [illegible] couple of ivory dice—some price, no doubt, given by a trader for a haul of pelts. "[illegible]eady ? [illegible] Sioux asked, and Hal and the other man nodded.

"Highest goes alone!" Hal sa[illegible] and all agreed. For the next few moments [illegible]y were busy throwing the dice of fate—for so it [illegible]emed to be to Hal. Hal threw first—and his total was nine. He handed the dice to the younger Sioux and just as he was about to throw Crooked Hand said:

"The one man go that way!" and he pointed into the forest.

Hawk-Eye nodded agreement and Hal perforce

did the same. It did not matter to him which way he went, but, if he had but understood what was the intention of Crooked Hand he would have been very angry indeed; for Crooked Hand's choice had been occasioned by the high number which Hal had thrown and the fact that although he was not sure, he believed that the man they sought had gone in the direction in which he had decided the pair of trackers should go. That meant, of course, that if Hal's throw were highest, he would go alone, but not into danger!

Fortunately for his peace of mind Hal did not realize this; and he watched breathlessly while Hawk-Eye threw the dice.

"Seven!" Hal said, with a sharp intake of breath, as Crooked Hand picked up the dice and threw them down again. They dropped to the ground and showed—six.

"Then I go alone!" said Hal, with a short laugh, and Crooked Hand nodded. Hal caught a look in his eyes that he did not understand. Then, as he tried to understand it, there came back to him the memory of what he had thought of Tall Bull; he believed that Crooked Hand was secretly exulting over the idea that Hal was going off alone into danger! For a moment he found it difficult to keep back the words that came to his lips for utterance; he wanted to tell Crooked Hand that he had seen through the trick. Then, sheer doggedness, defiance almost, kept him silent. He would show these Sioux that he was not afraid.

"I'll show them that I'm a sportsman, anyway!" he said to himself.

"Mus' go back camp get food," Crooked Hand's voice broke the momentary silence, and Hal, nodding, followed down the trail to where they had left the dead Tall Bull as guardian of the camp.

There was no loss of time now. Crooked Hand divided the meat that was left and gave Hal his proper share. Then, the three of them pooled ammunition and shared it equally, after which Crooked Hand said:

"We go now, *brother*, when we bury Tall Bull."

The emphasis that he placed upon the word made Hal thoroughly ashamed of himself again; he lost all his suspicions, and felt that he had done this man as great an injustice as he had done Tall Bull.

CHAPTER VIII

A LONE HAND

IT was left to Crooked Hand to tell Hal the way that he should go since the lot had fallen to him of making for the Post, and the Sioux told the youngster of the spot where the river, even swelling as it was with the down-run water of the melting snows, was fordable. It meant making a fairly wide detour, but it was the only alternative to swimming, which Hal had no intention of doing. Arrived at the bottom he struck off along the river bank, and, naturally, scanned the ground to see if there were marks of le Grand. There were none, however, so that the youngster knew that even if the breed were going along to the Post he must have started from some other spot : arrival at the ford might possibly enable his trail to be picked up. It was a couple of days' journey to the ford, however, and the going was difficult indeed.

With Greycoat at his heels, Hal went down the mountain, and the last vision he had of the two Sioux showed him them standing on the brow of the mountain waving hands at him. Then, they disappeared in among the trees, and Hal realized that he was embarked again on a lone hand trail with possibly le Grand to encounter.

Although he had been with Red Mackintosh for a good stretch, out in the wilds, this was Hal's first experience of the monotony of travelling day after day through country that seemed to vary so little, and even the variation had a sameness about it, inasmuch as the snow-whiteness of everything was trying to the nerves. As he went along the high bank of the river Hal came to the conclusion that men were fools who left the comforts and amenities of cities for the "grandeur" of the wilds: it was, of course, caused by despondency over the failure of the expedition, coupled with the feeling of isolation which struck deep into the heart, especially during the night hours. It needs a hardy spirit to reconcile anyone to spending a cold, dreary, lonely night in a cave in the rock of a mountain-river, and, when that first night Hal decided to take shelter in the cave, was feeling anything but pleased with life. Not even the presence of Greycoat served to cheer him; he had kept on as long as the light lasted and was utterly tired out—too tired, indeed, to trouble to make a fire.

He dropped off to sleep, with his head on the dog; and it was well for him that Greycoat was there, otherwise exhausted as he was, he might have paid the penalty of not having surveyed his resting place. If he had done that he would have seen the signs outside which showed that the cave had been used by a grizzly as a winter den, and even his little knowledge of woodcraft would have told

him that such a place was a risky lodging for any man, since, even with the coming of the thaw, the bears often only leave their quarters for a short space of time and come back, if not regularly, at least occasionally, to the place where they have passed the winter days.

It was a grizzly's den, and the big brute, with the promptings of spring in her, had awakened and gone for a stroll. She came back—and it was Greycoat who sniffed her afar off. The dog jumped up unceremoniously on the instant, and Hal, striking his head on the gravelly floor of the cave, was aroused instantly in a way that he did not relish.

The fact of Greycoat bounding out of the cave was sufficient to tell Hal that there was something a-doing, and, grabbing up his musket, he sprang towards the entrance of the cave, where he stood, silent, tense, expectant. Came the bark of Greycoat again—came also the hoarse cry that the youngster recognized as that of a grizzly—came, too, the softer sounds that told that the grizzly was a mother and that she had her cubs with her. Instantly Hal understood that he had taken refuge in the bear's den, and knew that trouble was toward. He heard the howl of Greycoat—and, suffering under no delusions now—realized that the grizzly had probably cuffed the dog into insensibility. He was reassured, however, by Greycoat yapping again—and out there in the pale light of the early spring moon he saw Mrs. Grizzly putting

up a gallant fight against the wolf-dog, while her cubs cowered in almost human terror behind her as she placed her huge bulk between them and the leaping, flashing form of the dog.

"The heart, the brain, or the centre of the shoulder, laddie—they're the spots to hit a grizzly!"

Red Mackintosh's words, spoken in describing an encounter with a bear, came back to Hal, but for all the value of them in that moment they might never have been said. To shoot was to risk killing Greycoat, who seemed to be made of springs and was everywhere at once, while the grizzly, apparently such an unwieldy figure, was actually no less agile and not only countered the dog's attacks, but initiated her own, so that more than once Greycoat went springing away before the lashing fore-paws, one blow of which in the right place would have laid the dog dead.

The grizzly gave Greycoat no time for clever manœuvres, but directly the dog retired, was upon him, so that the latter had to spring aside to escape the paws that would have disembowelled him if they had reached him at all: for the grizzly, rearing on her hind legs, stood like a boxer waiting for the attack, and as the dog sprang thrust up a fore-paw with a sweeping movement that would have ripped the body.

"Come off, Greycoat!" yelled Hal, at last, aroused from his fascinated gaze at the encounter; and at the words, the grizzly turned, facing the opening of the cave. That look nigh cost her her

life, for Greycoat, instead of obeying the command of Hal, leapt—and his red jaw missed the bear's throat by only an inch or so. The dog dropped behind—and the cowering cubs went scattering and whimpering into the cover of the strewn boulders, while the grizzly made a run towards the cave.

Hal raised his musket—drew a bead on the expansive chest—and fired. He missed in his excitement—and many a man has lost his life to the grizzly through excitement!—because Greycoat, touching the ground, spun round, and, barking furiously, sprang again, putting the youngster off his aim. If the shot had gone true, it would have killed the dog, which, with amazing speed, had hurled itself at the bear again—to go back howling with pain and anger as the grizzly cuffed him with tremendous strength.

Down to the ground Greycoat went writhing and kicking, so it seemed to Hal, in his death agonies; and the youngster, with his musket unloaded, realized that he was in for a hot time. Recovering from the overbalancing that had followed her blow at the dog, the grizzly lumbered forward—and Hal, knowing that he had no time to reload, reversed his musket, gripped the muzzle of it and swung the weapon up, ready to put up as good a defence as he could.

Then something happened to distract the attention of the grizzly—something that was altogether natural and yet seemed to Hal in that moment of

tense danger to be miraculous. The pair of cubs came gambolling out of their hiding places, and their mother, hearing them, stopped in her progress and turned. Immediately Hal reloaded, but, quickly as he worked and quietly as he tried to do it, the bear heard him, and, as though realizing that she had made a mistake in tactics, fairly tore towards the cave. Hal's musket, however, was raised: and the flash of light and the crack of the explosion seemed to scare the grizzly, even although no harm was caused, because Hal's shot had once more gone wide—with ill-effects upon one of the cubs, which dropped to the ground, whimpered, squealed and died.

The cry that came from the throat of the grizzly as she saw her young one fall, struck chilly into Hal's soul. There was something very human in it and something very human, too, in the way she stooped to pick up the dead cub. Hal felt almost like a murderer, and his hands shook with emotion as he saw once more to his musket. He had just finished when the great grizzly, evidently convinced that her young one was really dead, reared up again, and with a howl of rage, padded towards Hal. Up went the youngster's musket, but the bear was upon him in an instant, a hairy paw stretched out to grasp the weapon. Chill dread now seized Hal, but even in that fear-filled moment he managed to keep his wits, and as the grizzly wrenched the musket Hal went with it, pulling the trigger as he did so. The snarl of rage of the grizzly gave place

to a nerve-racking choke—and the next moment Hal was down on the ground with the bear on top of him.

The breath was wellnigh knocked out of his body as the great weight of the grizzly fell on him, and he believed that the end had come, for, weaponless, since he could not get out his knife, he had little chance of putting up a fight with any hope of success. Nevertheless, he began to struggle for freedom, and then it was that the great surprise came to him: instead of meeting with resistance or attack from the grizzly, all he had to struggle against was the weight of what he realized immediately was a dead bear; the shot fired while the bear held the musket had struck a vital spot and killed the great brute instantly.

"Heavens!" Hal breathed, as he rolled free of the bear and got upon his feet, trembling now as the reaction set in and the full realization came of how narrow an escape he had had. Cold as it was, the sweat was pouring off him—the sweat of a fear that had got right down into his soul. He tried to nerve himself up again, but what brought him back to sanity was the movement of a dark form some yards from the cave. His first thoughc was that here was a new danger, and with it came the urge of self-preservation. He stooped to the ground and groped about for his musket, found it, straightened up, and, with hands steady now, reloaded. All this had taken but a moment or so, and in that short space of time the moving form had come nearer—so near that Hal could see what it was.

And he laughed, almost hysterically, as he saw that it was Greycoat, whom he had forgotten in the stress of the last few minutes.

"Greycoat!" he called, and the dog whimpered back in reply as he came forward, slowly. "What is it, old fellow?" Hal asked, going to meet him.

Remembering now the terrific blow which the grizzly had given the dog he quite expected to find Greycoat badly mauled, and, perhaps, with some bones broken. Hal got him into the cave, gathered some of the dry twigs that littered the floor and lit a fire, in the light of which he examined Greycoat and discovered to his relief that no bones were broken, although the dog had a nasty swelling on his neck where the grizzly had struck him. That blow had evidently knocked Greycoat insensible otherwise he would have taken part in the final stages of the fight. As it was, he was not entirely recovered from the effects of the blow, and lay down beside the fire, with Hal sitting close to him, unable to get any more sleep through the remaining hours of the night.

Several times the boy got up and went out of the cave because of the whimpering of the second of the grizzly cubs, but each time the young bear went scattering away—only to return in search of the mother it had lost and yet afraid to venture into the cave where the firelight gleamed. The crying got upon Hal's nerves and made him feel more than ever like a murderer, but he told himself that what he had done had been in self-defence. Still,

there was something of awe, sitting there in the dark isolation of a cold and dreary night, listening to the cry of a young thing for its mother, and Hal was relieved when the grey dawn began to thrust aside the cloak of night.

He got up and stretched himself, went out of the cave, and saw the cub fast asleep with its head on the dead form of its companion.

"Poor little beggar," Hal said. "He'll die as sure as fate now he's an orphan—unless—by Jove I'll do it, if I can!"

He pulled out the length of thong that was dangling at his belt, noosed it, and, holding it in his hand, crept towards the cub. A deft, swift movement and the noose was on the bear's near hind foot, was drawn tight before the animal, waking at the touch, had time to slip away.

"Got you, old chap!" Hal laughed.

"Got you!" the cub might have retorted if he had been able to speak, for he made a grab with his claws, caught Hal's sleeve and then began to scratch and bite to such good purpose that Hal's hands ran with blood and his untanned jacket was ripped in several places. Hal stuck to him, however, as he stuck to Hal, and eventually the boy succeeded in getting him into the cave. Immediately on seeing the body of his mother the cub dashed for it, but Hal hauled him up by the thong. The cub struggled, but was held fast, though Hal realized that he would be able to do nothing with him while he was in the cave near the dead grizzly.

He therefore took him outside again and tied him to a tree, after which he went back to the cave, ground up some biscuit in his tin platter, and mixed it with some hot water. He took the gruel out to the cub, who for a moment or so regarded it suspiciously, but eventually tackled it. He evidently liked it, for he licked the tin clean and then —with a jerk snapped the rope and went racing off.

Hal was glad to see the last of the cub: and began to think about getting a move on. After a brief meal, he and Greycoat set off, found a fordable place in the evening, pitched camp, settled down for the night, and crossing the river in the morning, Hal was excited beyond measure when Greycoat, nose to ground, went hurrying on in front. Hal realized instantly that Greycoat had probably picked up le Grand's trail!

He went on in the wake of Greycoat, peering at the ground but seeing nothing to help him, because the melting snow had effectually blotted out any marks that the half-breed had made. It was sufficient for Hal, however, that Greycoat seemed to have picked up the scent, although sometimes even the dog was at a loss.

Later, amongst the trees, Hal was able to glean here and there signs of the man he sought. And the signs told him clearly enough that le Grand was not very far ahead—at most a day's journey.

Hal came to a swift decision.

"Another three days to the Post," he muttered. "And le Grand's at least a day ahead—I'm going

on during the night! Greycoat will lead even if I can't see the trail in the darkness."

And it was there that he fell into the trap that le Grand had laid for him, for, as Hal was to discover later, the half-breed had known all the time that he had been followed from the place where he had killed Tall Bull. He had played a cunning game. Always he had been just a little in front of his pursuers, and, after crossing the river, had concealed himself so that he could see whether the three trackers were together still.

When he had seen Hal arrive at the river in the evening, alone except for the company of the dog, le Grand, waiting to see whether the white youth crossed or waited until the morning, slipped off for the forest, knowing that by the morning his trail would be obliterated as far as sight was concerned, although the dog would be able to scent it—which was what the half-breed wanted. He had grasped the situation, or at least, imagined that he had: the red men, so he argued, had gone to their village, and the paleface was going to the Post, evidently having given up the idea of picking up the trail again. He had deliberately broken the trail on leaving the forest at the top of the mountain by going straight down, with a knowledge that the melting snows would wash away his scent so that even the dog would not be able to pick it up again. His scheme was to make the three split up by some means or other, and if the two red men had come in his direction he would have shot them down.

CHAPTER IX

THE FOES THAT HELPED!

WITH the trail easy to follow and with the knowledge that he was within three days' journey of Death Point, Hal was in better spirits than he had been previously, and he made good progress throughout the hours that he travelled, until, tired out as he was, he had to cry a halt and pitch camp in a little clump of trees. He dropped off into a heavy sleep, well wrapped in his blanket, and awoke to the loud, angry barking of Greycoat. Hal flung aside his blanket, grabbed up his musket, and sprang to his feet. Greycoat was baying into the morning twilight, but Hal could see nothing at which to be alarmed.

"What is it, old fellow?" Hal asked the dog in the manner of men who spend a long companionship with a dog in the wilds. For answer, Greycoat went leaping away, silent for a while, then breaking out again into a bark which was drowned a moment later by the crack of a musket. Hal saw the vivid flash of fire as the weapon went off; then there came a wild scuffle, a barking and a snarling from Greycoat: all of which ended suddenly—ended before Hal himself had run more than twenty yards in the direction of the fight.

Came then the voice of a man—the voice, indeed, of Pierre le Grand.

"Hands up—you're covered!"

Hal threw up his hands, but they held the musket that he carried all ready loaded. He had seen the dim outline of a man in the twilight, and he had realized that he had at last found le Grand—or, rather, that le Grand had found him. He knew, too, that the critical moment—probably one of life and death for him—had come, and he was ready to do anything except surrender at the bidding of the half-breed.

He fought against odds, however, because le Grand, expecting the youngster would advance to see what all the bother was, was prepared for him, and immediately reloading after having crashed his musket down on Greycoat's head, he drew upon the white youth. He saw the uplifted musket, and waiting for no further parley, fired.

Le Grand won by a second of time; Hal. taking aim at the shadowy figure some distance away, saw the flash of the discharge even as he pulled his own trigger, and then, there was a rush of wind past his right eye, a hot searing pain ran up his forearm, and his musket dropped to the ground.

"Heavens, he's got me!" he breathed, as he stooped to pick up the weapon, wondering even in that moment of danger how it was that his hand could clutch upon the stock since it was certain that the half-breed's ball had gone right along his arm.

It did not grip it for long, however, and as he straightened himself up the pain caused him to take the musket in his left hand. He found himself faced by le Grand now, who had his own weapon levelled steadily at him.

Le Grand laughed.

"Hands up now, little boy!"

The taunt stung Hal into a blind rage, and he up-swung his weapon as he lunged forward. The half-breed laughed again as he side-stepped, and Hal, stumbling as his left arm brought down the musket, nearly went to the ground by his own volition. Then, he felt himself pushed—kicked, as he knew—and went sprawling in the wet snow. He tried to rise, but as he did so le Grand sprang on top of him, his hands gripped the boy round the throat, and there began a tussle which, owing to the boy's wounded right arm, could but end in one way. Hal fought hard, but he was at a great disadvantage through le Grand being a-top of him, and he felt the breath being slowly squeezed out of him. Le Grand had a grip like steel, which Hal, despite his manful efforts, could not relax. His eyes swam and his brain grew dizzy; he felt himself dropping limp and helpless. He tried to fling the breed from his back, but only succeeded in using up his so-much-wanted strength, and at last, with the hot breath of le Grand upon his cheek, he dropped inert to the ground.

Le Grand shook him as a dog shakes a rat, then letting him go, spurned him with his foot. Pulling

a thong rope from his belt, he proceeded to bind Hal's wrists.

After fixing Hal's hands he saw to his ankles, tying them so that although it would be possible for him to walk slowly he would not be able to run. This done, le Grand got up and turned towards Greycoat, just in time to see the dog get upon his feet, and after standing for a moment or so, to move forward. Like lightning the half-breed reached round for the musket slung at his back, but before he could get it Greycoat was upon him. The half-breed went staggering back before the force of the impact and Greycoat's weight, dropping full upon him, prevented him from recovering, so that he fell to the ground with a clatter and a crash, striking his head upon the lock of Hal's musket.

Greycoat sprang free then and stood, with snarling mouth, as though waiting for his enemy to move again. Le Grand, however, lay still; the blow had been so severe that he had been knocked insensible.

It was at this moment, when Greycoat, seeming to understand that his enemy could do no harm, was sniffing at Hal's face, that there came a long drawn-out baying. The effect upon the wolf-dog was remarkable. His hair seemed to bristle, his ears pricked up, his eyes flashed: his great maw opened, and there issued from it an answering bay.

The wild strain in the dog was answering the cry from the wastes—for the baying that he had heard was that of a wolf, and had called upon the

wolf-nature in him. He looked a picture of real ferocity as he stood there, seemed as though about to go loping in the direction from which the call had come, and then, crouched back on his haunches as a slight movement on the part of Hal attracted his attention. He was lying there, looking into the twilight, occasionally half turning his head to glance at Hal, and springing to his feet when he heard the boy's voice.

"Greycoat!" Hal called, weakly, and with something like terror in his voice, for he had heard the second long-continued howl of the wolf, followed by another and yet another. Greycoat was at his side in an instant and licking his face. Hal shook him away and tried to rise—then dropped back as his movements told him that he was trussed. He tugged at his hands, the pain of the right arm was terrible and he could do nothing—they remained where le Grand had tied them, behind him. He turned his head, searching for le Grand and seeing him at last, lying where Greycoat had thrown him.

Despite his own situation, Hal could not forbear a smile as, with his gathering wits, he reconstructed what he thought must have happened, and he realized that once more Greycoat had saved his life, at least for a while; he shuddered as he thought of how short a time that might be, for the sounds of the baying were coming nearer.

"Good old Greycoat'" he muttered. "But what's the use! Listen!"

Greycoat answered them again and again, and each time Hal shouted at him, knowing that it needed but those answers to make the wolves hurry. The boy, frenzied now, knew that whether Greycoat was silent or baying, the wolves, who must have scented the men, would not turn aside, and that a little while would see them flashing into view.

The thought of that wellnigh sent Hal crazy; given his musket, he would not have minded so much, but, trussed as he was, he knew that he would stand but little chance, even with Greycoat there to fight for him, as he was convinced the dog would, unless—and the thought was terrible—the wolf-strain told, and he joined forces with the wolves.

He rolled on to his back again and struggled into a sitting position. He stared across the melting snows, listening, with nerves all taut and head and heart thumping heavily.

Then the wolves came, breaking out of the wood in their characteristic loping run. There were three of them, and they came to a standstill as they saw the quarry they had scented and found. They sat on their haunches and bayed, as if to scare their intended victims, and, as far as Hal was concerned, they achieved their object. As for Greycoat, he stood, with his lithe body pent for a spring, glaring at them, his great tongue lolling from his red mouth.

"The end!" Hal sobbed, wrestling again with his bonds, although he knew how useless it all was. He stared over towards le Grand, wondering if the

breed were dead, and hoping that he lived—even he, who had brought him to the terrible pass. "If he'd only wake up!" the thought throbbed through Hal's brain, and as if in answer to an unspoken prayer the man moved—just as the three wolves raised again their terrifying bay.

As though he had been shot, le Grand sprang into the air, stood for a moment or so, drawing his hand across his eyes, looking this way and that and at last sighting the wolves. It served to bring him into action immediately and he did two things with startling swiftness. First, he unslung his musket and saw that it was primed: then, he jumped across to Hal and, with knife drawn, said:

"A truce—you my pris'ner after!"

"My word for that, le Grand!" exclaimed Hal, sensing his meaning, and willing to give his word not to try to escape if and when they succeeded in keeping off the wolves.

Le Grand immediately slashed his knife through the thong about his wrists and ankles, and Hal got upon his feet, and, with his wounded arm burning in agonizing pain he forced himself to hold his musket, loaded it, and stood beside le Grand, just as the latter fired at the foremost wolf. His shot went true, as Hal saw, the instant he himself fired at the next wolf. His shot was not so fortunate: although it struck the wolf, it had no fatal result. Instead, it seemed to whip the animal into a fury and, baying viciously, it loped forward, followed by the third wolf. Like a streak of light-

ning Greycoat slipped from Hal's side and before le Grand had had time to reload, the dog was flashing amongst the two wolves.

Fascinated, the two men stared at the fighting animals.

Greycoat had one wolf on the ground and was tearing at his throat, while the other raced round and round, looking apparently for an opening. Presently, Greycoat sprang aside and the racing wolf dodged away from him, and went tearing off for the forest. Hal raised his musket and fired, but his shot went wide as also did le Grand's. Then, before they had time to reload the wolf and Greycoat disappeared amongst the trees.

"Greycoat!" Hal called time and time again.

There was no answer from the dog, no answer of any kind from out the wild waste, except the throw-back of Hal's voice, mocking him.

Le Grand, turning from the wolf which he had shot, looked at Hal and laughed.

"Ready?" rapped le Grand, breaking in on Hal's thoughts, and the white youth realized that whatever the consequences, he must keep the word that he had given.

"The truce is over—and I give in!" he said. Le Grand bound him up again and then, with crude surgery, extracted the bullet from the wounded arm. Then, having eaten, the pair started to march forward.

A halt was called about midday for a brief meal and rest, and then the journey was taken up again,

ending in the evening when le Grand swung round and halted just as they reached the farther edge of the forest belt beyond which, something like two miles or more away, lay the Fur Post.

"Of course you're only little boy." The half-breed taunted Hal as he forced him to sit with his back to a stump and then made him secure to it.

"Tell me where paper is, little boy," Grand said; and Hal looked at him wonderingly.

"Think I'd have come out after you," he said, "if we'd got the paper?"

"Me tell you," Grand said, "me only got half paper, not all—an'—an'——"

"Oh!" was all that Hal could say. He was getting light upon the mystery now. Then Grand started to try and make him reveal the whereabouts of the paper, but, naturally, Hal could do nothing of the kind—even had he been able he would not have done so. Grand waxed madly furious, and his next actions mystified Hal. His keen knife simply hacked into strips the boy's clothing, and left him, bound to the tree naked down to the waist, shivering in the chill night air.

"Tell me now," Grand said then; but Hal could only shake his head.

Then, without another word, le Grand went away squelching through the watery snow. Every sound of it was like a thudding blow to Hal, and every sound was quieter than the previous one, until at last they ceased altogether, and Hal realized that he was alone—alone but for prowling beasts in the darkness.

Hal struggled against his bonds helplessly; even the free play of his hands was of no use. He grew frantic. The only ray of comfort that he received was when suddenly there came the patter of running feet, and Greycoat's nose rubbed against him.

"Good old Greycoat!" Hal sobbed, and even in the depths of his despair an idea came to him. Down at his feet was his own cap. By painful movement he forced his way round the tree until his fingers closed on the cap. He called Greycoat, and after a lot of trouble got the dog to lie down behind him; then, his fingers, cramped and swollen, groped in the unseen and got the cap tucked into the dog's collar.

"Go—Greycoat—go!" Hal said; but the dog seemed not to know what was wanted of him. Presently, however, he sniffed the air, and before Hal realized it, had gone bounding off into the night.

Left alone, Hal passed through an eternity of dread and surprise that was heightened by the howls of the forest-folk.

The biting cold of the wind cut deep into him, and finally, numbed, wild-eyed, a prey to a thousand fears, Hal sagged where he was bound, and dropped off into unconsciousness.

When he left Hal Newlands, Greycoat just loped on through the night, trying to get at the meaning of that bump thrust between his collar and his neck —the cap which Hal had placed there. It was uncomfortable, but Greycoat understood that his master had not put that thing there merely to make

"The boy stood watching the grim fight that was going on before him" (*see page* 126).

him uncomfortable. The dog therefore actually did his best to make sure that it should not fall off. What happened, however, was that Greycoat dropped the cap, and did not discover it until he had gone some distance. The moment he did so he turned in his tracks and went loping back. He found the cap all right and picked it up. Just as he did so there came the familiar crack of a musket, and Greycoat went loping off in the direction from whence the sound had come.

He turned aside, so that he was going straight towards whatever was coming, and as a great dark bulk loomed up before him gave a short yap between the teeth that held the cap. The apparition stopped, bellowed, and Greycoat, realizing that this was a buffalo, against which he would stand no chance in a fight, growled as he sprang to one side; the buffalo turned and went careering off. Then, before Greycoat was a dozen yards away, another musket-shot rang out, there came a great bellow of pain and rage, and then silence.

Greycoat growled angrily.

Red Mackintosh stood stock still as he heard that growl, wondering just what it might portend.

He had got close up to the buffalo after a long chase, and that first shot, which had attracted the attention of Greycoat, had struck the brute, though not fatally.

"Hallo!" cried Mackintosh, as he heard Greycoat. "Who's there?"

There came only that bark of a dog, and Mackin-

tosh was relieved and began to walk in the direction from which the sounds came, and as he did so something leapt past him. Mackintosh dodged and spun round again, and as he did so his foot touched something. Like a flash he was reaching down and had it in his hand.

"A cap! There's somebody here, then!" Red Mackintosh growled, but he had no time for any further thoughts because Greycoat had but one idea in his dog's mind, and that was to get possession of his master's cap.

"My word!" Mackintosh muttered. "That dog's jest smelling round for the cap—an' I bet he was jest carryin' thet! Now I wonder what it means?"

With his backwoodsman's senses keyed up now, Mackintosh tried to find a means to discover what it was all about, and he flung the cap on to the ground.

"Here you are, old fellow!" he shouted, and Greycoat sprang forward and seized the cap in his teeth.

"That dog ain't carrying thet cap fer fun!" Mackintosh told himself.

He moved forward to test the dog, and Greycoat growled at him.

"Now, look here, old feller," Mackintosh said. "I'm not goin' to hurt yer, aw—an'—here, let's try grub on you!"

Within two minutes Mackintosh's keen hunting-knife had slit the hide and cut off a piece of the still warm meat, which, without more ado, he flung

over to where he reckoned the dog was. Greycoat was at it in a moment, and the factor smiled to himself as he realized that his plan was working.

He pulled out his tinder-box, and very soon had a flare going, by which he saw the dog still ravenously eating the meat, and Mackintosh went towards him.

"All right, old feller!" he said kindly, and quite fearlessly he patted the dog's head. Greycoat ceased eating and growled, showed his fangs, and instinctively planted one paw on the cap that lay beside the meat.

Mackintosh made no attempt to touch it, however. He was too wise for that; and, besides, there was no need, because he had seen two things that startled the staid old Scotsman out of his taciturnity. One was that he recognized the dog. "Smudgy!" he cried. "Old Radley's dog!" The second thing that he saw was the cap, and that, too, brought him out of himself.

"It's the youngster's cap!" he cried.

He recognized it by the fire-branded initials "H.N." on the cured skin of which the cap was made.

The problem was how to get to Hal, and Mackintosh began inspecting the ground, to see if the dog's tracks were visible. Here and there he came across them, and finally resolved to go right ahead in them. This idea struck forcibly into Mackintosh, and with the intuition of a man of nature he did not doubt his feelings, even although he could not understand what had happened to bring Hal and the dog together.

Greycoat went with his nose to the ground, and after a while raced past Mackintosh, who grinned as he saw it.

"Now he's off," he said to himself. "He's following his own trail, and I reckon there'll be no more trouble for me!"

Into the wood Greycoat went, Mackintosh hard at his heels, and it was not very far that they went before Greycoat gave vent to growling—he could not bark because of the cap between his teeth.

"Steady, old feller!" said Mackintosh quietly.

However, instead of coming upon an enemy who might be ready, warned by the growl of the dog, his eyes lighted upon a sight that sent the blood coursing through his veins and brought a cry of indignation to his lips.

"Hal! What devil has done this?"

All the stolidity had gone from Mackintosh as he saw Hal, drooping pitiably at the stake, with his head sunk on his chest, and his bare body blue with the cold.

"Hands up, Red!" came a staccato voice.

"The breed, by gar!" rapped Mackintosh, spinning round to see the barrel of a musket pointing out from round a tree and the face of le Grand behind it.

"Got drop on yew, Red!" the breed said with a grin. "Hands up—quick!"

"I'll see you to—to——" Mackintosh began, but the next words of le Grand, cutting in upon his own, brought him up with a start.

"If yew no put up your hands," le Grand said grimly, "me shoot boy!"

"Let him shoot, Red," came the hoarse whisper from Hal behind Mackintosh. "Fight him—for my sake! My revenge!"

"By gar, I would, lad," muttered Mackintosh; "but I'm not for seeing you shot down like that! Look here—le Grand—I——"

"Hands up, *now!*" roared the half-breed.

"All right!" Mackintosh said, but he was fuming and angry at the indignity and his own helplessness.

He flung his hands into the air—and the knife was still in the right one.

"Drop knife, Red!" came le Grand's command, and the weapon clattered to the ground instantly.

As it did so something happened that startled Hal Newlands into painful life, and made Red himself jump. Next instant both of them were vowing vengeance on le Grand—vengeance at which the half-breed laughed.

"Me can now deal with yew!" he said. "Thet *diable* no fight any more!"

The *diable* to which he had referred was Greycoat—Greycoat, whom he had shot as the dog sprang for him.

"You fiend!" Hal cried.

"Ver' nice, little boy!" said le Grand, grinning. "Me tol' you me get dog some day!"

"An' I tell yew now, you dirty breed, that some day I get yew!" rapped Red Mackintosh.

"I'll shoot heem," he said thickly, "ef yew——"

"Shet up!" shouted Mackintosh. "I'm not

takin' any risk with this lad's life—I'm no skunk like yew! Let's hear what yew want!"

"Thet's right, Red," said le Grand with a grin, stepping out from behind his tree. "Me go las' night to Death Point tew see yew. Me want th' half of th' paper." Hal showed the amazement that he felt on hearing this. "But yew no there," Grand went on. "Only Red Feather an' his men. Bad t'ing for theem. They roast 'live an'——"

"Curse you!" shouted Mackintosh. "Yew mean yew've set fire to the Post an'——"

"Yees—an' oh, such beeg fire it make. Roast 'em all, me t'ink!"

Scarcely were the words out of his mouth than Mackintosh sprang for him, pulling out his tomahawk as he did so, and before le Grand had time to throw up the musket and fire the factor was at him.

"Good—for—you, Red!" came Hal's voice. The boy, whipped into almost a fever-heat of excitement, had sprung to tension, and stood watching with awful eyes the grim fight that was going on before him—the fight on the results of which, he well knew, depended his own life, as well as that of Red Mackintosh.

For his part, Mackintosh was calm, with a grim determination, and Hal, catching a glance now and again at his friend's face, knew that it was to be a fight to a finish and without mercy. It was a grimly tragic half-hour, filled with tremendous issues.

And then—the end!

Swiftly, with startling abruptness, it came, but in

a way far different from what either of the three there had expected. Le Grand suddenly swung round on his heel and ran like a madman in among the trees.

"After him, Red!" snapped Hal. "The mighty coward!"

"Can't leave you here like this, lad!" Red was saying then, cutting the ropes through and catching Hal as the boy tumbled forward. "Hold up, son! There, that's better. Sit down and I'll chafe your legs for yew. Don't——"

"But the breed—get him!" Hal said feebly.

"I'll get him all right some day!" was the reply. "But I'm not goin' to chase him an' leave yew to die, lad! Can't make out why the brute hiked it like thet, Hal. Probably——"

"Just a coward, that's all!" Hal said.

"Somethin' more'n thet!" Mackintosh told him; "but what it is I don't know."

For ten minutes he rubbed and rubbed the youngster's chest and back until there was something like life in the boy, and then Red Mackintosh said:

"Better get your shirt on, lad, an' then I'll rub yer legs for ye."

"My shirt's about as much good as my jacket—everything's in strips!"

"The dirty skunk!" rapped Mackintosh, who, without another word, took off his own jacket, shed a thick shirt and a woollen vest. Hal made no protest at this; he realized that he must be clothed, and he

had the shirt over his head when suddenly he heard Mackintosh shout:

"By gar! Now I *know!* Look, lad!"

There, coming into view over the edge of the little rise on which the wood was situated, were two Sioux.

"That brute must 'a' seen 'em through the trees as they were coming down the hill t'other side," Mackintosh said. "They're Red Feather's men, an' he un'erstood that they were out after him fer firing the Post. Sure they'll *git* him!"

"I hope they will," said Hal fervently. "I say, Red, cut some holes in my blanket and make some sort of a covering for me, will you? Then have a look at Greycoat."

The Sioux came running up to the spot wh re the two were standing, and Mackintosh, stepping forward, called out to the foremost man:

"Panther, where go ye?"

"Good is it to see Red Fox!" said the Sioux.

"The man you seek has gone theer!" Mackintosh pointed to the forest. "Find him—and—an', Panther, when you find him, kill not, but bring him to me! I've a debt against him!"

Panther and his companion went off into the forest.

"I think we ought to have gone with them, Red," Hal said; "but I'm afraid I'm too weak for that, and—an'—Red, I couldn't spend another day alone for a while! I——"

"I know, lad," Mackintosh broke in. "I reckon yew've had a deuce of a time, and while I finish

rubbin' back the circ'lation yew kin tell me all about it. Then I'll make some hot grub."

While Mackintosh was thus at work Hal went over the story of what had happened since he had left Death Point with the Indians.

It was when Hal reached the point where he told of le Grand's demand to know where the rest of the mysterious paper was that Mackintosh showed the greatest interest.

"What on earth did the man mean, Hal? I ain't got the paper that Radley had."

"It means, for sure, Red," Hal said excitedly, "that Grand's lost half the paper—and p'haps it's down at the Post!"

"By gar, yes," said Red; "an' we'll ransack th' whole place when we get theer! The thing is tew get theer!"

That was, indeed, a problem, with Greycoat so badly wounded; but, after a good meal, they started off, and finally did reach the Post at Death Point.

"That's what the brute did, Hal!" said Mackintosh, pointing towards the north end of the Post, where holes yawned in the wooden wall and the timbered roof was badly burned. "Those Injuns must 'a' worked like blacks to put the fire out! Hallo—there's Red Feather!"

"Greetings, Red Fox!" the chief said. "The young man, too, returns! With what fortune heem come?"

"Tell you that presently, Red Feather!"

Mackintosh answered. "He's tired—wants some sleep." And it was evident that Hal could not have lasted out for much longer. Within a couple of minutes of getting inside the Post he was on his bed and fast asleep, while Mackintosh set to work to attend to Greycoat again.

"That's better, Smudgy!" Mackintosh said at last to the dog. "Now for some grub for us! How's the leg, Red Feather?"

"Better!" was the short reply, as the factor walked across the hut to prepare his meal. "The young man ill—hurt?" he prompted.

"He is!" said Mackintosh, and while he worked told the chief the story of what had happened.

"My men bring traitor!" Red Feather said calmly.

By the time that the factor had finished his meal, and fed Greycoat, he himself was feeling the effects of the long hunt and the weary night followed by the stiff journey during the morning.

"You will wake me when your men come back, Red Feather?" he asked as he got on to his bed, and the chief nodded.

It was a thudding on the door that awakened Hal, and he sprang up in time to see Red Feather unroll himself from his blanket and Mackintosh spring for the door.

"Who's there?" the factor called out.

"The Panther!" came the reply in a weak voice, and Mackintosh unslung the bar that held the door fast. He swung open the door, and stood gaping for

a moment at the Sioux who stumbled into the cabin, falling full length on the ground.

"Quick, Hal, something hot!" cried Mackintosh, as he laid hold of the Indian and dragged him right into the hut and placed him near the fire, where he began chafing the limbs that he bared. "No, don't talk yet," he said to the Panther, but the Sioux kept up a run of short crisp words, the sense of which Mackintosh managed to get, and by the time that Hal had a steaming pan of tea ready he had obtained the Indian's story. In effect, it was that, after following for a considerable distance the trail made by the half-breed through the forest, they had lost it, and while they were looking for it a knife had been hurled from somewhere. It had struck one of the red men, who had dropped to the earth, and before the other could do anything a second knife had hurtled, cutting deep into the side of the Panther himself. Then there had come the sound of someone crashing through the undergrowth, and the Panther, lying on the ground, urged his comrade, who, after all, was not seriously wounded, to follow.

"Heem go," the Indian said. "Heem no come back. Me wait long time, but he no come. Then me t'ink time get here an' me try. Long way: me weak, lose much blood an'——"

"I should think you have," exclaimed Hal. "My word, what a bloodthirsty brute le Grand is!"

"I wouldn't give much for his chances later on," said Mackintosh as he stripped the clothes off the Indian. "Hallo, this chap's gone off!"

CHAPTER X

THE SILENT MESSAGE

AT first both Red Mackintosh and Hal thought that the Panther had succumbed to his injury, but a rapid examination, if crude, on the part of the factor satisfied them that the Sioux had only fainted through loss of blood; it was evident that while he had been making his painful way to the Post sheer nervous energy had kept him up, but the reaction had set in and left him weak and helpless.

"'Tis a doctor's shop we've got here to-day, lad," Mackintosh said grimly. "Gi' us more hot water an' some o' the sperrit. An' look here, son, yew'll git right into bed; ye're as red as a cockscomb, an' it's a bout o' fever that ye're in for!"

Hal protested against the order, but the factor was adamant and, indeed, Hal himself realized that Mackintosh was right. Despite the sleep that he had had, Hal was in a state of fever, his head throbbed and every limb in his body ached, while the pain of the wounded arm was terrible. After a moment or so of attempting to keep up and assist Mackintosh Hal threw himself on the bed, and following a period of restlessness and of consuming thirst, which Red slaked for him between whiles of attending to the Panther, the youngster

dropped off into a delirious sleep. There he lay for the next three days and nights and several times Mackintosh thought that he would never win through. The factor had a terrible time during those days : there was Red Feather to help in many things, there was the Panther to nurse back to life—and it was only the healthy hardiness of the Sioux assisting the endeavours of the white man that won the fight ; and there was Hal to doctor and to struggle with in the wildest moments of his delirium. During all those hours Mackintosh did not sleep, except maybe to snatch a few moments sitting, all clothed, by the side of Newlands' bed. Between whiles of attending to his patients Mackintosh repaired the damage made by the fire : he hated the clank of his hammer on the nails and the rasp of the saw in the wood, because he was afraid of the effect upon the sick men. Yet, the work had to be done, because the factor had an idea that there would be need for close watch and proper protection against attack.

It was Hal who recovered first, but he was just a weak useless picture of his old self when he did, and he could not help, even had Mackintosh allowed him, in the tending of the Panther who lay for another couple of days tossing about in his fever. All that Hal could do was to lie on his bed and watch and listen while Mackintosh took a few hours' sleep now and again between the times when he must be doctoring his patients.

But at last the Panther recovered consciousness

and Mackintosh knew that his long vigil was at an end, although it would be some while before either of the sick men would be able to do much for themselves. It was particularly hard luck on Mackintosh that Hal should have been rendered incapable of strenuous work at that particular time, because in a little while now the Indians would be coming down the river with their canoes laden with pelts, and it was necessary to begin getting things ready for them. There were the trade goods to be unpacked and sorted out, and there was hunting to be done in order to procure meat with which to give the incoming red men a feast—which was what Red Mackintosh had done ever since he had been in trade with them, and the feast was looked upon by the Indians as a great event in their year. For him to have missed giving it would have done him a great deal of commercial harm, he knew, and he determined that it should be prepared as usual.

"Look here, Red," Hal said to him a day or so after the Panther was about again, and the two whites were out for a short walk—the first Hal had taken since he got up, "I'll be able to manage, I've no doubt, while you go on the hunt. The Indians will be down in about three weeks at the latest—at least the first batch will, and we've got to be ready for 'em. I'd give anything to come with you, but I'd only be a nuisance to you, I know, so——"

"Don't worry, younker!" Mackintosh told

him. "I'll probably be gone on'y 'bout a week and reckon thet'll give us time to get things ready. An' don't yew try to do anythin' wi' gettin' the goods out—leave it till I come back. You'll work better fer a rest now!"

"My arm's a lot better," Hal said, "but I'm not going to play tricks with it yet. I reckon that Red Feather'll be able to look after it for me while you're gone—a case of doctoring one another it'll be, I guess. Red, you've had no end of a rotten time this last week and—and——"

"Ease off thet stuff, lad," Mackintosh said. "'Member it's pretty much my fault, things happening like they did. Ef I'd gi'en that paper up tew le Grand there'd bin nothin' o' all this take place an' sometimes I wish I'd done so 'cos——"

"I've been thinking so, too," Hal said. "After all, Red, that paper, although it was given to Radley by a Sioux, really belongs to the Sioux people, if there's any truth in what we've learned and what we think."

"You're right, son," Mackintosh agreed. "But ef there's any truth in what we've larned and what we think, as yew say, thet's all the more reason why we shouldn't gie it to them. You 'member what Red Feather tol' us thet first day arter the fight, 'bout the time when the Sioux would rise up and sweep the palefaces from the country? Ain't thet good enough fer us to do and best to try tew get thet which thet skunk le Grand's got—ef we kin? I tell ye, Hal, I've heerd o' that tradi-

tion o' theirn an' it 'ud be dead ser'ous ef they got the paper an' it says what we 'spect it does. Thet's why I'm not lettin' Red Feather know that Grand's only got a part o' it: he'd sure be no end upset! An' as soon as he's out'n the hut I'm goin' to have a look 'round fer the paper!"

"You know best, Red," said Hal, after this long speech from Mackintosh. "Didn't know you could talk so much, Red!" he quizzed him.

"Gettin' saucy—therefore gettin' better!" Mackintosh laughed back at him in perfect good nature. "Theer's a time fer talkin' an' a time fer doin', lad," he went on. "Most times folk talk fer the sake of it. I don't!"

"The thing that gets me," Hal said after a while, during which time they had been walking back to the Post, "is how we're going to get the other piece of paper from le Grand. Now the season's in we can't go chasing over the country after him and——"

"There'll be no need to do thet same thing," was Mackintosh's reply, "I know human nature—though a breed's nature ain't human—and le Grand won't need no chasin'—he'll be comin' up ev'ry now an' agen. Trouble'll be, we won't know when he's comin' fer our bit o' paper—thet we ain't got!"

"Perhaps you're right," Hal agreed. "You mean that it's not unlikely that le Grand may come down here again, perhaps with red men, to attack us?"

"Aye," was the factor's reply. "That and

anything else thet a breed may think on. You'll keep a good watch among ye while I'm gone —an' I go to-morrow early."

"I promise you we will," said Hal: and when, the next morning Mackintosh, arrayed for the hunt, set off on his expedition, Hal felt that he had a heavier responsibility resting upon him than he had anticipated. Weak still, it was as much as he could do to help himself, and, but for the fact that Red Feather was able to hobble about, little would have been done. The Panther's position was still serious enough for him to have to remain in bed, and therefore much had to be done for him. Greycoat, too, was a burden, but one that Hal bore gladly. In fact, what work he could do to help the others, the youngster willingly did, but the heaviest burden of all was that placed upon him by the necessity for being prepared against a visit from le Grand. On that matter he kept silent, telling neither of the Indians anything about it, because he realized if he let them know that there was a probability that the half-breed, if he escaped from the one man who had kept on his trail, was likely to come back, their suspicions would be aroused. Hal remembered Mackintosh's search in his pocket after his sleep, and that he imagined the Sioux suspected the real reason for the return of le Grand.

The result was that even when he was supposed to be sleeping Hal was wide awake, listening intently: he succeeded, it is true, in snatching a little sleep during the daytime, otherwise he would

never have been able to keep up during the time Mackintosh was absent.

As day succeeded day, it seemed to him that all the fears they entertained were likely to prove groundless, for nothing happened to disturb the quietness of the cabin. Day by day the invalids improved and Hal began to look forward to Mackintosh's return. Although the factor had allowed that he might be absent for a week, neither he nor Hal had really expected that that would be so, because there was the possibility of Mackintosh getting on the trail of a herd of caribou quite early on, in which case the lone hunt would not last very long. Hal, therefore, was somewhat disappointed that six days had gone by and Mackintosh had not returned. It looked as though he were having very little luck and that the chase was leading him far afield—that is as far afield as his allotted week would allow him to go: for Hal realized that Mackintosh would not, unless absolutely compelled to do so, exceed the week. Moreover, the farther he went the more serious became the problem of getting the meat back to the Post, whereas, if he killed comparatively near to Death Point, it would be possible, as he had suggested before he went, for Hal to give him some sort of a hand in transporting the kill.

Hal's disappointment at the long absence of Mackintosh made him restless and, to occupy himself during the daytime when he was not taking the sleep he must miss at night, he did that which

the factor had told him not to do: he began unpacking the trade goods and getting them into order ready for the bartering period when the Indians came with their pelts. Even this self-imposed task did not serve to drive away the feeling that had come over him that all was not well with Mackintosh. In view of what the factor had said about the almost inevitable certainty that le Grand would use every effort and all craft in order to obtain the half of the paper that he had missed, it was but natural that the youngster should be uneasy in mind. He argued that it was not at all unlikely, if le Grand had evaded his solitary pursuer, that he had made his way back towards Death Point and had lain in waiting for Mackintosh, knowing that the factor at least would be certain to go out hunting.

Hal's frame of mind was not made more comfortable by the fact of the absence of any news of the companion of the Panther—the Sioux who had gone after the half-breed. There was too much uncertainty about the whole matter: and Hal felt that there was too much of the sinister in it.

"If the Sioux had caught le Grand," he argued, "he would have come back here. Failing that it must mean that he's still on the trail or else that the half-breed has won and, knowing le Grand, I'm too much afraid that that is the answer to the riddle. I wish Red'ud come back!"

That wish surged through him almost h[illegible]ly and about midnight of the seventh day of Ma[illegible]n-

tosh's absence, he jumped up from where he was to all intents sleeping, thinking that his wish had come true.

"Coming, Red!" he shouted, in answer to the thud on the door. He sprang across the cabin, while Red Feather and the Panther sat up and looked expectantly. Hal's hand was on the bar when the Sioux chief called out:

"Paleface Hal sure that Red Fox?"

Hal's hand dropped from the bar on the instant and he looked at the Sioux over his shoulder.

"Thanks!" he said, quietly. "I never thought of that! Hello—that you Red?" he called out sharply.

Came in reply a muffled voice that said, "Yes!" but Hal knew immediately that it was not the voice of the factor. He laughed grimly as he sprang across the hut to where his musket stood.

"Who's there?" he called out, but, although he had not recognized the muffled voice as that of le Grand's he felt convinced that it was none other than the half-breed who was outside and who had hoped to obtain admittance by the very obvious ruse that he had tried.

No answer came to Hal's question, which did but confirm him in his suspicion.

"That door'll not open until you say who you are—and when you do speak," he said, "take your hand from your mouth!"

Still no answer in words, but instead, a thunderous crash upon the door—a crash that reminded

Hal of the attempt that le Grand and the Sioux made weeks before to force an entry into the cabin.

"All right, le Grand!" Hal shouted. "It's you, right enough, but I promise you you'll not get in here with a whole skin and——"

There came an answer now and the character of it made Hal go hot and cold by turns, while it caused even the imperturbable Red Feather, cripple that he still was, to get on his legs.

"Li'le boy," the voice of le Grand said, and there was a grim laugh in the tones, "li'le boy, me t'ink you open door queekly. Me come from Red Mackintosh. Heem send me for the paper an'——"

"That's a lie!" shouted Hal. "It's a lie that Red sent you—he wouldn't send a skunk like you!"

Red Feather stared at Hal for a moment, then blurted out:

"What heem mean by paper heem sent for?"

"How do I know?" rapped Hal, but his attempt at evasion was frustrated by le Grand, who had heard the chief's question and, realizing that he could quite possibly divide the forces against him, called out:

"Heem know, Red Feather! Red Mackintosh got the paper, not me: he lie to you. Now me got heem, but he no got paper. Paper is here—me come for et."

"He's lying, I tell you, Red Feather!" Hal

said forcibly to the chief. "Mackintosh would never send him under any circumstances even if——"

"Me know when Red Fox came back with you that heem had the paper," said the chief, there was little of his wonted calmness in the tone of his voice. "Me know before that—me know when the half-breed come an' set the fire to the wigwam: he no come for not'ing! But while I eat the paleface food me no could play like fox in the night. No can I turn on heem friend!"

"I tell you, Red Feather," exclaimed Hal, gulping with emotion as he realized that at any rate he had nothing to fear from a man who was willing to play the game as the chief seemed to be, "I tell you that at any rate, whatever Red Mackintosh may have and know, I have not the paper: he left nothing with me! That on the honour of a paleface!"

"Me take paleface word for eet!" Red Feather said simply, but the howl of rage that went up from le Grand outside almost drowned his words.

"Heem lying, Red Feather!" the half-breed shouted. "That paper mean much to your people, so why you take the white man's side?"

"Because Red Feather know paleface word is better t'an word of man no white an' no red!" was the quick reply that Red Feather flung back at him.

"Me keel you for t'at some day!" cried le Grand angrily. "Me keel you now—me set fire 'gain to the cabin an'——"

"Burn the paper as well!" rapped Hal. "I don't think you'll be as mad as that, le Grand! I'll wager you haven't even seen Red Mackintosh!"

"*Diable!*" cried the half-breed. "Me show you!"

Those inside the cabin heard the sound of running feet and then the crash of an axe on the wood that covered in one of the windows; followed a moment or so later by something that hurtled through and fell with a clatter on the floor.

"From Red Mackintosh!" said le Grand: and Hal knew that he spoke truly when he said that he came from the factor because the thing that lay there was the belt that Mackintosh had worn when he set out on his hunting expedition.

Hal sprang forward to pick it up as though to assure himself that he was not merely imagining it. Nevertheless even before he held the belt in his hands he knew that he was not deceived: it was indeed Mackintosh's and the youngster stood with it in his hand staring at it as though trying to visualize what had happened. He told himself that what he had feared had come true—that le Grand, escaping from his pursuer or perhaps killing him, had come back and lurked near the Post until Mackintosh had gone out and had then tracked him until he was far enough away from the cabin not to arouse alarm there. In his tense frame of mind Hal could not see the weakness in his theory—that if he were right le Grand had either followed Mackintosh a very considerable journey

from the Post or had tarried unduly before coming back. What Hal did not know for a long time afterwards was that in actual fact le Grand had not come back to the Post although he was on his way there when he fell in with Red Mackintosh; and in order to give the sequence of events in their proper order it is necessary for us to follow the factor from the time that he left the Post up to his meeting in dramatic circumstances with le Grand.

For two days Mackintosh travelled without seeing any traces of game although he had struck for the route along which year by year the caribou made their trek for the plains. It was, however, in the afternoon of the third day that he saw the marks that told him he was after all not going to be so unfortunate as it had seemed.

Mackintosh followed—followed well into the night, aided by a bright moon; and the signs after several hours became fresher, so that he knew he was not far behind the caribou, which had evidently begun to nibble the fresh young spring grass showing green through the melting snow.

And then at dawn Mackintosh, swinging round the corner of a long low ridge, saw that for which he had searched so long: with a background of forest and a small stream just a little beyond them, was a herd of caribou grazing.

They were too far away for the factor to fire at them and because he was in the wind it was necessary for him to retrace his steps for a considerable

distance and climb up the side of the ridge. This brought him, as he knew it would, out of the wind, and moreover somewhat nearer to the herd.

Lying full length on top of the ridge Mackintosh watched the caribou for a while. They were like moving dots on the white and black and green of the plain below, and they were yet too far away for effective aim. Nevertheless, Mackintosh had no idea of going out on to the plain, because he knew that the moment he did so, the sentinel caribou would see him and give the alarm. Besides, there was no need for him to do anything more than scramble cautiously from rock to rock to the foot of the ridge, and there to lie hidden for a time, because the movements of the grazing animals were bringing them closer to him. Mackintosh had no fear that they would scent him, because the wind was blowing dead from them to him, and so he could afford to wait for their nearer approach. He had his heavy muskets lying beside him, both double-barrelled, and he knew that he only wanted a fair chance as regarded distance for him to get the bag that he needed.

He lay there for something like an hour, without impatience, because the caribou were coming surely, if slowly.

They did come, but, until part of the herd had passed him, Mackintosh did not move. Then he selected a fine big buck on the edge of the herd, took aim and fired. He didn't wait to see the animal fall, but fired again immediately.

Then, quick as lightning, he had his other musket in hand, knowing that the whole herd would be off in a moment. Before the crack of the first shot had died away, indeed, the herd was in confused dismay and fright, and the second set them crowding together in a stampede. Mackintosh's musket spoke again—and a third buck followed the others to the ground, while a fourth, struck in the right hind leg, limped on after the fleeing herd.

"Fair—good doin's!" exclaimed Mackintosh, knowing that it would be an easy matter to finish off the wounded buck. He made no attempt to fire at the herd, which was well away before he had reloaded, leaving the limping buck to his own devices. The factor came out of his hiding place and went dashing across the plain after the buck, which, despite his wound, was a considerable distance away. A well-aimed shot, however, fired at close quarters when Mackintosh came up, put the animal out of his misery, and the hunter, reloading instinctively, went and looked down upon his trophy, which was the finest of the four.

Mackintosh now realized that he was faced with the problem of getting his kill back to the Post. He had, however, made his plans for doing this, and although it would be hard work, he knew he would be able to do it.

Tired out as he was after the long chase he nevertheless prepared to begin the work, knowing that to leave the dead caribou there was to run

the risk of having them eaten by wolves during the time that he slept.

He hurried over to the stream, on the bank of which trees were growing. His keen axe soon had two or three down, and out of them he constructed crude sleigh runners which he hauled to where the animals lay. Then he proceeded to skin them, and that being done, and the meat dressed, he fashioned a great cover which he fastened on to the runners in such a way that it formed a bag into which he placed those portions of meat that he required. It made a heavy load indeed, but testing it from time to time, as he made it up, Mackintosh built it so that it was within his strength to pull.

He got the load down to the foot of the ridge and then, having built himself a fire and made a good meal, he turned in to sleep in the shelter of his load, knowing that the fire on to which he had thrown a great heap of wet wood, would hold off any prowling animals if they showed upon the scent.

It did not, however, serve to keep off a foe more undesirable than even the most ravenous wolves—and a foe who had the sense to approach in a much quieter fashion than they would have done.

Mackintosh had been asleep for something over a couple of hours, when a man's head appeared over the edge of the ridge above. It remained there for a little time, and the evil eyes in it looked down at the sleeping man. Then, very cautiously, the

new-comer hunched himself on to the top of the ridge and, if Mackintosh had been awake to see he would have had a sight of Pierre le Grand raising his musket to take aim. That musket was one that he had taken from the Sioux who had followed him at the bidding of the Panther when the latter had been wounded. For days the Sioux had held on to the trail of the fleeing half-breed, following relentlessly, but never succeeding in getting up to him. He knew that le Grand was one of the swiftest footed men in the fur-country, and one of the craftiest; for which reason he was continually on his guard against falling into an ambuscade. The red man knew that the half-breed was trying to beguile him, because of the twisting, doubling trail that was made; and it was only the Sioux's own native cunning and clever woodcraft that prevented disaster for so long.

Then the end had come—suddenly, and completely, out of the dense darkness of a forest through which the trail was leading; something had crept up quietly behind the Sioux, who, unable to keep awake after the long man-hunt, had dropped off to sleep, believing that his quarry was a considerable distance ahead of him. There had been a swift movement of the crawling figure—and the Sioux had come to the end of the Long Trail. . . .

Pierre le Grand then took possession of the musket and the food and whatever else the Sioux had on him that was worth taking. Then le Grand, consumed by the fierce desire of obtaining the

paper out of which he had been frustrated, turned back, resolved to go once more to the Post at Death Point, which he hoped to reach before the fur-carrying Indians should arrive. He knew that if he showed himself while they were there, he would stand little chance, because of the hold that Red Mackintosh had over them; they would hunt him down remorselessly. With so many to do it, le Grand realized that he would not find it so easy to make his escape—not even his own famed swiftness would avail him much, because there were certain to be some of the red men with their dog-train who would follow him until they hounded him down.

Therefore the half-breed lost no time after doing his gruesome work in the forest. The possession of the Sioux's musket and ammunition gave him the necessary weapons that he wanted after having lost his own in the fight with Red Mackintosh. Without it he was practically defenceless, and certainly would have no chance at Death Point, where his plan was to lie in wait as close as possible and pick off the inhabitants of the Post one by one as the occasion allowed.

Steering his course by the stars above, he moved on at a fine pace, resting occasionally and then only for very short periods. The flight had taken him many days' journey from Death Point, and time was precious.

Yet not even the need for haste would make him fight down the curiosity which was aroused

after several days' travelling, by a pillar of smoke that rose and eddied above a ridge that he was approaching. With all a backwoodsman's instinct he felt that he must know the meaning of that, especially as he realized that, to all intents and purposes, he was an outcast, and that every man anywhere in the vicinity of Death Point—which, as he knew, was now at most two days' journey away—might have heard of him. It was necessary to know whose fire that was—and le Grand made all speed towards the ridge. When he reached it, it was to clamber up as quickly as possible—his great dread was lest he should dislodge some stone or rock, which, clattering down the side, would most certainly give the alarm to whoever might be beyond the ridge. Yet, for all his fears, le Grand, favoured by the luck that so often holds good for evil-doers, succeeded in reaching the top without accident; and for a moment or so peered over it, in perplexity, trying to distinguish who it was lying there beside the fire. There was something familiar about it, but the face being hidden, le Grand could not for some time identify the sleeping man.

Then he could have shouted with joy as the sleeper moved slightly and the face, till then concealed, was brought into view. A sardonic grin wreathed le Grand's face at that, but for a few more moments he did not move—he stared as though gloating over the fact that he had at his mercy the man who had so far thwarted him in his plans.

At last, however, even the grim pleasure of the half-breed fanatic had had its fill; and le Grand, getting on to the top of the ridge, took aim at Mackintosh.

"Me get heem now!" he gritted between his teeth. "Me no keel him—yet. Smash heem leg!"

He pulled the trigger—and the aim was sure. The next instant Red Mackintosh, awakened by something more than the crack of the musket, tried to rise—only to tumble to earth again, reaching for his musket as he did so. Another shot rang out—and the factor drew his hand in sharply as the ball struck the musket full on the lock, which it smashed hopelessly.

Mackintosh turned to look whence the shots had come—and saw the half-breed looking down at him as he reloaded his musket.

"'Lo!" shouted le Grand with a laugh. "Me got you now, eh?"

"Got me be hanged!" Mackintosh yelled back at him, and rolling over he made to pick up his second musket. A cold sweat came over him then, for he remembered that he had not loaded it after the shooting of the caribou, and he could have kicked himself for a foolish tyro in the wilds.

He knew that he was at the mercy of the half-breed, but, even knowing that, he determined to resort to bluff.

Le Grand was still loading his musket when Mackintosh grabbed his own useless one and,

sitting up, suffering dreadful pain from his wound in the leg, he threw the weapon to his shoulder:

"Drop that, you skunk!" he shouted, "or I'll fire!"

Like a flash le Grand acted: he did not drop his musket, nor throw up his arms, but simply flopped to the ground and lay concealed behind a big boulder.

"Got him scared—if the wretched thing had on'y bin loaded I'd hev had him fer sure!" growled Mackintosh. The half-breed's action, however, had, so Mackintosh thought, given him the time he needed so badly to reload, and he was about to do it when his eyes, still fixed upon the boulder behind which le Grand was lying, saw the edge of the man's fur cap appear round it.

"Tryin' to draw my fire!" Mackintosh thought, "but I'm too old a hand fer that, even if I had the blamed thing loaded!"

Mackintosh, however, was deceived by the half-breed, who, the moment he had dropped to the ground, realized that there must have been something seriously wrong for the factor not to have fired at him when he had had such an excellent chance. What that something was le Grand believed he knew, and, instead of just shoving his cap round the boulder to draw Mackintosh's fire, he suddenly shot the top half of his body round, and his musket was levelled at the sitting man.

"Hands up, Red!" he shouted, and he laughed grimly as he saw that he was right: Mackintosh

was in the act of reloading, which proved to the half-breed what he had supposed to be the case. "Drop thet thing, else I'll blow you to the kingdom to come!" he said.

"Blow then!" Mackintosh yelled back at him, and, having finished his task, he raised his musket and pulled the trigger. There came two simultaneous cracks. The half-breed's cap was shot from his head, a ball whistled past Mackintosh's ears: and the next instant there was another shot. That was Mackintosh's undoing, for, having had no time to load both his barrels, he was at the disadvantage, in that le Grand's musket was double-loaded. Red got the ball clean through the left shoulder and his musket dropped to the ground.

"Thet's got me!" he said grimly, between set teeth.

A shout of triumph issued from le Grand and he jumped from his sheltering boulder and came racing down the side. As he came, he reloaded, and Mackintosh, determined to sell his life dearly, drew his tomahawk and his big hunting knife.

"Come on, you dirty coyote!" he called derisively to le Grand, who did not answer but hurried down. Mackintosh watched him calmly, to all outward appearances, but actually he was fuming at the thought that he was really at the mercy of the half-breed, who could, if he chose, kill him out of hand. He had a plan, however, though it was one that had too much of the element of

chance for peace of mind to accompany it, despite the fact that he was an adept at the thing that he was going to attempt. Nevertheless he waited for his chance. It came — as soon as le Grand was within the required distance, the factor's right arm went up with a jerk, and the knife that it held went whizzing through the air. Came, a second or so later, a cry from le Grand, who halted in his stride and, taken by surprise, wellnigh finished the journey in a tumble over head and heels. What had happened was that the knife had caught him in the thigh and was sticking there.

"Wish it hed bin somewhere else!" cried Mackintosh. "'Twould hev rid the world o' a skunk, anyway!"

He knew that, having failed of his real purpose, he was helpless. The wound in the thigh would not be sufficient to stop le Grand coming nearer: and, even were it so, the half-breed still had his musket, which gave him the advantage. Mackintosh did not dare hurl his tomahawk, for that would have left him altogether defenceless, and all he could do was to wait and see what steps le Grand would take.

What the half-breed did was to pull out the knife, hold it over his head and shout:

"One more t'ing 'gainst you, Red! Me know how take red man's vengeance. And me take it soon—an' plenty of eet!"

Then he continued his journey, limping badly, but with a set determination that brooked ill for

Mackintosh. He halted within twenty yards of the factor and called out to him: "T'row thet tom'hawk 'way—me no nonsense take now."

"You'll take what you git!" was the grim reply, and Mackintosh threw up the weapon significantly.

Le Grand did not answer in words. With madness writ all over his evil face he rushed forward, clubbed musket in hand. Like a destroying angel he looked—like a destroying angel he moved, swiftly, relentlessly, and as triumphantly. For all his madness he worked with a plan—and that plan he carried out perfectly. The stock of the musket, brought round with a terrific sweep, struck, first, at Mackintosh's raised right hand, which held the tomahawk he would not let go of—until that blow knocked it from his grasp. Then, bringing the musket round again, le Grand swung it at the wounded left arm. It was a cruel blow, aimed deliberately at the spot which would cause the most pain. It took full toll, and Mackintosh rolled aside; as he did so, the stock slid up from the shoulder and caught him on the side of the head, stunning him: and the next moment, le Grand was kneeling over him, quickly trussing his unconscious captive.

"Me got heem now!" he said, fiercely. "Me fin' paper now, too!"

Unceremoniously, roughly, without thought of anything but what he sought, the half-breed literally searched every part of the insensible man—

and was voluble in his imprecations when the search proved in vain. He stamped and raved and cursed; he kicked the unfeeling Mackintosh, tried to shake him into consciousness, but failed for a long time.

At last, however, Mackintosh recovered: and le Grand jumped for him immediately.

"Ze paper!" he screamed, wildly. "Me want ze paper, queekly."

The factor's half-collected wits told him what the half-breed wanted, and it brought full and painful consciousness to him.

"Then find it, dern you!" he said—and le Grand's fury was a terrible thing to behold.

"Me mak' you tell!" he cried, but in his heart he knew that he was up against a man whom no torture would make speak. He was certain that the paper he sought was not on the person of his captive and even in his fury he could think somewhat sensibly, so that he told himself that the paper must be down at the Post at Death Point—probably in the keeping of the young assistant of the factor.

"You no hev paper wi' you," he said, somewhat cooler now. "Lis'n, Red Mackintosh. Eet is at ze Post. Me go to ze Post and get eet from *le jeune diable*—get eet as ze price of your life, see?"

Mackintosh laughed up at him.

"I tell you two things, you devil," he said, quietly. "The first is that if young Newlands had the paper he'd never gie it t'ye. An' the next is thet he ain't got it an' don't know where it is."

"Both lies!" was the half-breed's reply. "Me show you!"

"Go ahead," said Mackintosh calmly, and his words whipped le Grand into a fresh fury. He calmed down after a while and stood looking at Mackintosh for a brief space of time, as though trying to make up his mind what to do. Then, he laughed softly and moved away—to the surprise of Mackintosh, who was more astonished than ever when he saw him clambering up the side of the ridge, to disappear finally over the top.

"What th' deuce's doin' now?" the factor asked himself. He was writhing with pain, and despite his seeming coolness and fearlessness, his mind was filled with anxiety as to what was to happen. There was something to be afraid of in the demeanour of le Grand. . . . And Mackintosh knew that half-breeds of the calibre of le Grand, combining the vices of white men and red, were no sticklers in the matter of cruelty.

He was soon to know what le Grand had in mind, for presently the half-breed came back into view, slithered down the ridge, and, without a word, stooped and lifted the wounded and bound man on to his back. Mackintosh, wondering what it all meant, struggled hard and long, but he was helpless, and le Grand finally put him down on the ground again, leering at him as he did so.

"Ver' well, Red!" he said. "Me no carry you—you no let me. So me pull you like dead meat. See!"

He uncoiled a length of thong from his belt, tied one end of it to the bonds that held the factor's ankles and calmly set off with the other end in his hands, hauling the captive up the ridge, head downwards!

"You like thees?" le Grand called back over his shoulder: but Mackintosh did not answer: he had dropped off into unconsciousness again, and when he came to, it was to find himself enshrouded in darkness—except for a chink of light some distance in front of him.

"What the deuce does this mean?" he asked himself aloud: and his words sounded loud and hollow. Something else sounded too: the voice of le Grand, muffled somewhat.

"So you come roun', eh? Red!" le Grand said. "You ver' comfort'ble theer, till me come back wi' ze paper, eh? Nice leetle cave with big stone to keep you in an' keep wolves out, eh? Ver' nice! Me go to th' Post—an' fetch ze paper or else—*poor li'le boy theer!*"

A wild laugh followed the words, and Mackintosh shuddered involuntarily.

"Goo'-bye, Red!" came le Grand's voice again: and Mackintosh heard his footsteps as he shuffled away.

CHAPTER XI

THE FINDING OF RED MACKINTOSH

THE feelings of Hal Newlands, as he stood holding Mackintosh's belt in his hand, were painful in the extreme. "How had le Grand come by it? What had happened to the factor? Where was he?" These questions throbbed through the youngster's mind—but found no answer except a terrifying conjecture. That was that Red Mackintosh must have met the half-breed, and had been worsted in the encounter—otherwise le Grand could not be in possession of the belt. His thoughts were broken in upon by le Grand's voice, and Hal turned as the half-breed called out: "Dat prove me got Red Mac, eh, li'le boy?"

Hal, as he stood pondering, forgot that the half-breed might have been able to shoot in through the window, but as he turned, he realized why nothing of this kind had happened—or rather understood that le Grand had evidently been cunning enough not to try, for there, with his musket only half an inch or so from the window, stood the Panther. Before Hal could reply to the half-breed, something else happened. Greycoat, whose shoulder was still bad, but who could move about, had been lying before the fire, gazing at the

window, but as le Grand spoke he got up and, with an angry growl, went to the wall, against which he pawed as though he would scratch his way through.

"Me thought me keel that dog!" came le Grand's startled exclamation, and Hal could not, even in that tense moment, refrain from laughing, albeit a little grimly.

"He's not dead yet, le Grand!" he called out. "Reckon it's you who'll be killed and not he and——"

"Me keel you all!" cried the half-breed. "Me burn the place down and—an'——"

"As I said before, lose the paper—if it's here at all," Hal told him; whereupon le Grand waxed impotently furious.

"Me know the paper here—you got eet!" he shouted at last. "Red Mac no got eet—me search heem to skin and no fin', see! You geev eet me, and me tell you where Red Mac is; you go fetch heem!"

"I tell you I haven't got it and don't know where it is!" Hal cried, and as he did so he realized how absolutely hopeless he was to do anything. If he had had the paper, he would have given it up, or, rather, have negotiated with le Grand—anything to save Mackintosh, who, he realized, was probably *in extremis*. The thought of his impotence almost drove him mad, and it was only a sense of the utter foolishness of doing so that prevented him from unbarring the door and making

a bold rush for le Grand. He knew, however, that the instant the half-breed heard him at the door he would be there and would be able to shoot down any who tried to get out.

It was an impasse, out of which there seemed no escape, and Hal tried to think of some way in which to bluff the half-breed. Hal could not do so, however, and he looked appealingly at Red Feather.

"What can we do, brother?" he asked, but Red Feather merely shrugged his shoulders and grunted :—

"Me not know!"

Which wasn't helpful.

"You goin' to give up paper?" came le Grand's voice again, and when Hal vowed once more that he had not got it, the half-breed, mad rage in his voice, said : "Then me set fire to the hut and shoot you as you come out. Then me go keel Red Mac! Oh, me have heem a'right!"

Hal, however, did not place any credence in what le Grand said. He was convinced that the last thing the breed would do was to burn the hut, because what he said was true, that the paper was probably there and its destruction would be as much le Grand's loss as Mackintosh's. The position was, however, that while le Grand remained there, it would be impossible to get out of the hut, and there they would have to wait until the Indians came down the river with their pelts. For his part, Hal did not mind that—they would come, anyway,

and their coming would mean deliverance, but the problem was: what would happen to Red Mackintosh meanwhile? Hal felt sure that wherever he was he was a prisoner, and if not succoured quickly, he would die of starvation, because there were great odds against le Grand having got any assistance unless—and the thought stabbed—the Sioux who had followed him had turned traitor, and was guarding the prisoner. But, whatever the position, Hal was consumed with anxiety. It was a problem to which, as far as he could see, there was no solution except that of waiting; and that was indeed no solution. At last he came to the conclusion that the only course to take was to risk the dash from the cabin.

He touched the Panther on the shoulder, and the Sioux turned to him.

"There's one way, and one only," Hal told him in a low voice. "I'm willing if you will follow it up in case I am shot down, to undo the door and rush for it. I'll go first—you follow, but if you should be out and able to tackle him and——"

"Me go with you!" said the Panther quietly. "You and Red Fox save me—me no 'fraid!"

"Thanks!" he muttered, as he turned and went over to Red Feather, who, on having the plan put to him, agreed to sit near the door and cover the pair as they rushed out.

"You long time!" came le Grand's voice, and Greycoat howled in reply. Hal made no

answer, he was even then at the door, preparing to remove the bar as quietly as possible. But with his hand upon it, he straightened to tense stillness, for there had come—faintly as from a long distance—a long-drawn-out "Ai-ou-ee! Ai-ou-ee!"

For a moment or so Hal stood as though carved in stone, then he swung round with a low cry that was almost a sob of relief.

"The Indians!" he said, and the two Sioux nodded, for they had realized what the cry meant. It was the call of the pelt bringers.

"No need for us to go out yet!" said Hal quietly. "We can wait until they come!"

"Heem know too!" Red Feather, said, pointing to the window. There had been no sound from le Grand since that call had come, and Hal now realized the half-breed would know that the new comers would be friends of Red Mackintosh's, and that when they did arrive at the Post his whole plan would be ruined. There would, therefore, be one course open to him—and that was to flee from the Post—and Hal shuddered as he realized what that would mean. Somewhere, Mackintosh was held captive, and le Grand was the only one who could say where! If he did know what the call might mean he would make off immediately, and so gain a good start—unless—— The sound of a man landing on the ground came from outside, and then, there was the quiet lapping of feet going towards the door. Then, silence again.

"He's waiting, hoping we'll make a rush for it!" Hal whispered; and this was the thing he had dreaded, for it meant that with le Grand close to the door it was impossible to unbar it without being heard; and they could not take him by surprise. The silence of le Grand, following those quiet sounds, was intended to deceive them into thinking he had gone and so lure them out to destruction; and Hal was never so grateful for anything in his life as he was for having heard those muffled sounds. Le Grand was taking a great risk himself in staying, for the longer he remained there, the shorter his chance he could get before the chase began.

That meant, of course, that it would be easier for the pursuers to follow and pick up his trail—for Hal's plan was to enlist the services of the Indians in hunting down le Grand and compelling him to disclose the secret of the whereabouts of Mackintosh.

A good plan—but, unfortunately, one that went awry because le Grand was more subtle than Hal had even suspected him to be. There was a sudden crackling as of someone treading on twigs—and Hal found himself wondering what devilry le Grand was up to. He soon knew—and the character of it was very different from what Hal had imagined, for he had not for one moment expected that the half-breed would do anything so drastic—something that really, if there were truth in what he himself believed, meant a loss as great to him as to Mackintosh.

"What is it?" the youngster asked, turning from the door to Red Feather, and the Sioux's answer was as dramatic as it was terse.

"Fire!" he said.

And Hal realized what he meant—realized even before there came a bursting flash that developed into a flame that swept past the window.

"He's fired the roof!" Hal said, and knew that he was face to face with the fact that if he wanted to save the Post, he would have to take the risk of getting out, with, probably, le Grand lurking near at hand waiting for just that to happen, when he would be able to pick off those who issued from the hut.

But it had to be done—or all the goods in the hut would be destroyed; and, of course, the two Indians and he himself be roasted alive.

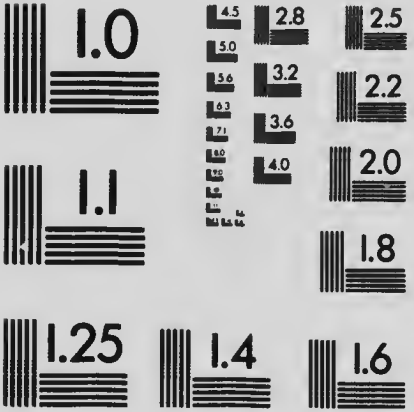
"Come on, Panther!" he rapped; and upswinging the bar from the door, which he opened, dashed through into the night. Hard on his heels rushed the Sioux, while Red Feather, who had got to the door, crouched down with musket in hand, and peered into the night, seeking the figure of le Grand.

But there was no le Grand, of that Hal was certain, because he knew, the moment he dashed into the open, and no shot had rung out, that the half-breed must have gone immediately after firing the thatch of the roof—now blazing merrily.

"Come on!" Hal shouted as he raced round the hut, making for where the wood pile was. He knew that there was only one thing to be done, and that

MICROCOPY RESOLUTION TEST CHART

(ANSI and ISO TEST CHART No. 2)



was to fight the flames and allow le Grand to go—to be followed later. He sprang on to the pile and, hatchet in hand, began hacking away at the thatch. Beside him, a moment or so later, was the Panther, doing likewise, and the pair of them, working enveloped in leaping flames, cut away great chunks of the thatch, which went swooping down to the ground.

Silhouetted against the flames, the white man and the red would have made excellent marks for le Grand — as Hal realized, but didn't stop to ponder on. There was, he knew, the chance that the half-breed, instead of trying to shoot them down when they came out of the hut, had waited until they presented this mark that could not be missed by such a shot as he ; but when the first few moments had passed and nothing of the kind had happened, Hal told himself that the danger was past and that le Grand had probably made off after setting the train of powder by which he had undoubtedly done his fell work.

" We've got to save the Post ! " Hal said, gaspingly ; and the Panther's answer was to ply his axe still more vigorously, and to clamber on to the roof and hack away beyond the edge of fire so that great slabs of the thatch went sliding down.

" You—get—down—" he called out to Hal, " more—fire—from—hut ! "

Hal knew what he meant—he needed no more telling to understand that those flaming heaps on the ground, unless removed, would set fire to the

timber walls. He sprang from the wood pile, and with burnt and blistered hands, dragged them away.

All through the fire-fight Hal's brain was working at the problem of finding Mackintosh, and he prayed that the Indians whose cries came ever and again, and closer each time, would arrive very soon—just to help put out the fire, and then to take up the chase of le Grand.

And they came—came in the middle of the fight. Their canoes, which they had paddled even more swiftly from the moment when the glare of the flames had told them that something was amiss at the Post, swept round the bend of the river ; and immediately with loud cries of encouragement, the Indians drove a number of canoes on the bank and sprang out and raced down to the hut.

" Thank heaven ! " panted Hal amidst the choking smoke of the débris, as he saw the red men's figures flit to and fro, and saw several of them spring to the roof to assist the almost exhausted Panther. Their coming saved the Post, of that Hal had no doubt, because the fire had been gaining despite the efforts he and the Panther had made. The result of the reinforcements was, however, the last portion of the flaming thatch, together with those timbers that had caught fire, were hurled from the hut and the flames stamped out, leaving, instead of the brilliant glare, only an uprising column of smoke that assumed weird shapes in the moonlight.

The red men who had remained with the canoes, had by this time got ashore and were at the Post; and a tall Chipewyan, evidently the leader, advanced and said:

"Where is paleface Red Fox?"

He was scanning the group and it was no wonder that he did not recognize Hal for a paleface, for, smoke-begrimed and smothered in black, Hal was anything but "pale."

"The Red Fox is not here!" Hal said, stepping forward.

"Strong Hand and his people came with——" the chief began, but Hal, knowing that every moment was precious, broke in with a crisp account of the cause of the fire.

"The Red Fox has a foe!" he said. "A foe who holds him prisoner somewhere and came asking for ransom. The call of the Strong Hand men sent the foe into the night, but not before he had set fire to the hut. The helper and the brother of Red Fox thank you for all that your men have done—and crave another kindness in the name of the Red Fox!"

"Speak on, young paleface!" said Strong Hand quietly, "the Red Fox is my friend—and his foes are my foes!"

Hearing that, it took Hal but a few moments to enlist the aid of the Chipewyans, and Strong Hand chose half a dozen of his men to accompany Hal on the quest of le Grand.

"I go, O Strong Hand," Hal said, "and go

in peace because the White Man's lodge is left in his friend's keeping!"

"It is well," Strong Hand replied calmly. Hal, who had been doubtful of the wisdom of leaving the Post, knew that he could do so safely, and that the Chipewyans would respect the trust placed in them. It was necessary before he went, however, to introduce the newcomers to Red Feather and the Panther, and he had been rather worried over that because the Sioux and Chipewyans were not generally the best of friends. As it happened, however, there was no feud existing between the two peoples just then, and Strong Hand greeted Red Feather quite affably—for a red man!

So with an easy mind as far as the Post was concerned, Hal set off with his half-dozen Chipewayans. He had regretted but one thing, and that was that he had to leave Greycoat behind, because the dog was anything but fit for what might well prove a long journey. He realized how useful the dog might have been in keeping them on the trail—but with the Indians accompanying him, Hal did not really feel any concern on that score, especially when they within a very short while succeeded in picking up the trail.

"It's leading to the river!" Hal said presently, for the trail that he himself could not see, after going due north, parallel with the river, suddenly swung westward, and finally ended on the river bank—a good distance up, beyond the point

where the Chipewyans must have been when le Grand reached the river.

"He must have worked it out nicely!" Hal said to himself as he realized that le Grand evidently deliberately set off to strike the river at a place where he would be well away from the Indians. What Hal, however, could not understand was why he was making for the river at all, if his purpose was to cross it—unless he had decided to leave Mackintosh to his fate; for the factor had distinctly said before he left that he was going eastwards.

"Just what I feared!" the youngster muttered, as he stood watching the Indians search the ground for the continuation of the trail, which had ended abruptly some fifteen feet from the bank. He did not say anything to them for a while, but presently having gone back to examine the trail, he called out to Wawatam, the leader of the red men:

"Here—look!"

The Indian went up to him, and Hal, trying to make the best of the red man's small English vocabulary, gathered on occasional visits to fur trading posts, explained what he believed he had discovered. Smaller, shorter marks of moccasins, minus the heel-shape, as though le Grand, who had been walking before, had suddenly taken to running.

"Means he jumped from here," said Hal, halting at the spot where the trail ended so abruptly, "jumped into river!"

The Indian nodded his agreement, and called

his men together. A hurried conversation resulted in splitting up again, and this time three went up the river and three down. Hal went with those down the river towards the Post, and the idea was to see if they could find the spot where le Grand had landed—if, indeed, he had landed on that bank and not crossed to the opposite side. The river was unfordable and wide, so that the likelihood was, as Wawatam suggested, that the half-breed was swimming along the river and would land when he found the best spot at which to hide his tracks; and Hal knew that he was crafty enough to have swum down the river in the direction of the Post in order to put his enemies off the scent.

A musket shot from the successful party was to be the signal for the others to hurry up—always providing that le Grand should not have travelled too far along the river for a shot to carry. In that case, if the unsuccessful party did not come up the other lot were to go off on their tracking, sending a messenger after the others to advise them what had happened.

On the journey out from the Post Hal had scarcely noticed how far le Grand had travelled, but now, going back, he realized that the half-breed had made good progress in the time that had been taken up by fighting the fire; and, moreover, the fact that the river ran a winding course made the journey to the Post much longer than it would otherwise have been if they could have gone in a straight line. The Indians scrutinized every yard

of the ground near the bank and some distance from the edge of the river—especially at places where trees overhung, for they realized that the half-breed would most likely choose such a spot for making his landing, because he would be able to haul himself out without leaving marks on the ground.

But, although they did not, as far as Hal could tell, seem to miss anything, they did not find the traces they sought, not even when, in due course, they arrived at the Post again.

Hal went into the Post and saw Strong Hand.

"So far we have failed, Chief," he said. "Have you heard sounds on the river?"

"None, friend," was the reply. "How should we? Have not my men been busy? See, they even now are building up again the ruins!"

Hal did not need any showing, for he had been watching the Chipewyans who were replacing the burnt timbers, while others were gathering branches from the trees on the side of the river, with which they would presently re-thatch the roof.

"I thank you, Chief, for Red Fox!" the youngster said, earnestly, and Strong Hand shrugged his shoulders and grunted as though what he was doing was what any man would do for his friend.

"Something else we have done, too, young paleface," he said presently.

"What is that?" Hal asked him.

"We have found the trail that the half-breed made when he came hither," was the reply. "I have sent two men to see whither it leads."

"Again I thank you, Chief," Hal said. "And—I think that I, too, shall go on that trail, seeking Red Fox. Can some of your men go down the river still farther in case the half-breed has gone that way?"

"My people are your servants," Strong Hand told him; and the result was that when Hal, refusing to take more than one man with him, went on his new trail, others carried on down the river. The chase for le Grand was getting hot.

As far as Hal's journey was concerned it was like those others on which he had gone since the beginning of those queer adventures following the coming of Radley to the Post. The Indian with him was an excellent tracker and taught him much more than he had ever known before, so that the boy began to be able to do what the red man could do: pick up the little signs that to untutored eyes would have passed unheeded. Travelling quickly, they picked up with the two men whom Strong Hand had sent on, and with joined forces, eventually in the afternoon, after a forced march, reached the ridge where, although they did not know it then, le Grand had imprisoned Mackintosh in the cave on the hillside. It was there, where the soil was different and held no impression of footprints, that they came across their difficulties, and in the end they split up, each man going his different way.

It was left to Hal to make the great discovery that almost caused him to shout aloud with the

joy of it. Standing on the top of the ridge, he looked down on the plain beyond and there he saw the roughly made sleigh that Mackintosh had constructed. Whatever it had contained—and he could guess because of the bones lying clean-picked about it—had been torn to pieces and only the skin remained on the runners. Hal went down that hill at a speed and in a manner that threatened to precipitate him head first, but he reached the foot safely and was soon at the sleigh, hoping to be able to find something to help him get on the track of Mackintosh. He found it, sure enough, and it caused him to give forth an exclamation of dismay.

"Blood!" he said, as he picked up the smashed stock of Mackintosh's musket and saw the red stains upon it which he knew must have been made by other than the blood of the animals that the factor had killed.

The sight of it spurred him to action and it was not long before he had picked up the red-spotted trail that led up the hill—the trail made by the blood of Mackintosh as he was dragged feet foremost by le Grand. Feverish now with excitement, certain that he was approaching the end of his search and fearing what he would find, Hal went, almost doubled to the ground, along the ledge where the trail had ended and begun again. At last it ceased altogether and he saw before him a great heap of branches, evidently recently broken from trees and wedged tightly together. It was a matter

of only a few moments' work to pull the pile to pieces and the youngster saw that behind them was a stone, and behind that a cave.

"Red!" he called crisply. "Are you there, Red?"

The next instant he was in the cave, into which the spring sun was streaming—to show him Red Mackintosh lying bound hand and foot and babbling incoherently as though disturbed by the coming of light and the sound of a voice that had broken in upon his delirious unconsciousness.

"Thank Heaven I have found him; and Heaven grant I'm in time to save his life!" breathed Hal, as he knelt beside the man and slashed the bonds. The water-bottle was brought into use and diluted spirit forced between Mackintosh's lips. Hal watched him with bated breath and with nerves all taut. He sat there for two long hours that seemed like weeks, and in his anxiety forgot all about the Indians who were scouring the neighbourhood in different directions from that in which he himself had gone and been so successful.

It was a trying ordeal indeed and Hal feared that the end of it would be tragic and the relief was so great when at last Mackintosh's eyes opened that the boy sobbed—almost wept, in fact. For one second the eyes held on Hal's face and then closed again: but Newlands, hoping against hope, it is true, told himself that at any rate there was a chance for Red. Water was what the unconscious man needed, and Hal gave him, in small doses,

most of what his bottle contained, with judicious amounts of spirit now and again.

"Must get him into the open air," Hal thought, but he could not bring himself to drag Mackintosh even so short a distance and knew that he must wait until the factor was able at least to hang upon him for support.

That moment came at long last. Once again Mackintosh opened his eyes, and this time he seemed to recognize Hal even in the half-light of the cave. When the youngster spoke Mackintosh answered him, weakly, haltingly, it is true, but the sound of his voice was as music to Hal.

"Hal—knew—you'd—come—if—you—could."

"Of course," said the youngster. "But, Red, don't speak yet—wait a while. Have a drop more of this," and he held the flask to the hot lips again. Mackintosh drank, and would have kept on drinking had not Hal warned him not to overdo it.

"Wanted—drink—for—years—it seems," the factor said. "Where's——"

"No speaking, please, Red," Hal said. "I want to get you out of this cave into the fresh air. Think you can rest on me and walk slowly out?"

"Try," said Mackintosh, and he endeavoured to get to his feet, only to fall back again, with a groan as the wound in his shoulder stabbed him with agonizing pain.

Hal had seen the blood-soaked jacket but in his anxiety to bring Mackintosh back to consciousness, he had not had time to attend to the wound, and,

moreover, what water he had was needed for drink for the time being. He realized now that it was necessary to clean and bind up the wound, but first of all he still felt that he must get Mackintosh out of the cave.

"Look here, Red," he said, "let me help you up—no, don't overdo yourself. Leave it to me."

Red obeyed, and in the end Hal managed to get him on to his feet, and walking an inch at a time, drew him to the opening of the cave and so out on to the ledge, knowing that just round the bend of the rock there was a broadening out where Mackintosh could sit while he attended to the wound, which he could not do in the dim cave.

The factor's breath came in short gasps and the progress made along the ledge was painfully slow, but nevertheless Hal knew that it was best to go thus and to rest ever and anon. His great fear was that Mackintosh would slide back into insensibility and that he would then be faced with the problem of getting him along the narrow ledge. Fortunately, that did not happen, but when they were within a few feet of the bend, there suddenly appeared round it the figure of an Indian, whom Hal recognized as one of the Chipewyans.

For a moment the red man stared at them as though he could scarcely believe that the white youth had made the discovery that he himself had been sure he was going to make in a few minutes, since he had found the grim tokens down on the plain beyond the ridge and had followed the trail

up the hill. Then, with a grunt of satisfaction, he was about to turn aside when there came a slight sound from behind Hal: for one second the Chipewyan stared beyond Hal, who, wondering what was there, turned his head over his shoulder and saw—the muzzle of a musket showing above the top of the ridge, with the head of le Grand behind it.

Hal Newlands' heart stood still at the sight of the aimed musket, for he knew that for all he could do the half-breed had the whip hand. For the moment Hal had forgotten the fact that the Chipewyan was at hand, but the Indian had not forgotten the reason for his own presence; he realized that this man behind the boy must be the one they sought, else why this menacing attitude? All this passed through the red man's brain like a flash, and, quick in action as in thought, he raised his own musket and fired before ever le Grand, who had his eyes fixed on Hal, understood what was happening. Le Grand's cap went flying from his head, and he himself nearly overbalanced. The result was that his shot missed its aim, and before he had time to shoot again the Chipewyan's musket had spoken once more, and with a howl of rage and pain le Grand dropped his musket and disappeared from view.

The Chipewyan grunted and began to turn round carefully on the narrow ledge, intending, as Hal realized, to go round the bend, reach and cross the broad space, and try to cut off the half-breed; and

Hal, tense with excitement, felt that at last they had le Grand at bay.

But, just before the red man turned the bend, Hal felt the body of Red Mackintosh sag badly, and a quick glance at his face told him that the factor had dropped into unconsciousness again—and he knew that, unaided, it would be impossible to get his burden along the narrow ledge. Swiftly he made up his mind what was to be done: le Grand must be allowed to go for the sake of Mackintosh, and Hal shouted crisply to the Chipewyan to come back. The man turned his head, and, seeing how things were, obeyed the call, and in a few seconds was at Hal's side.

Even with his aid Hal found that the task of getting the factor along was no easy one. At every step they took there was the risk of slipping, and the heavy and helpless burden seemed to possess a list to the edge no matter what they did. It took what seemed an endless time to cross that short stretch of rock to the bend, where the difficulties were worse than before. How they managed to get Mackintosh round the bend in safety Hal did not know; and, indeed, the moment came when he thought they never would do so. The Chipewyan was holding the factor as steady as he could with one hand, while with the other, groping along the rock face, he felt his way back. A false step meant being precipitated into the gorge below, and it was the one thing Hal dreaded, both for himself and the rest.

And it happened!

The bend was no easy point to get past, and it was there that the Chipewyan made the false step that sent him sliding away. Knowing that if he held on to Mackintosh disaster would overtake all three of them, the red man let go immediately he felt himself slipping, and the result was that only he went tumbling down off the ledge, leaving Hal to his own devices.

"My word!" Hal exclaimed, as he realized that he must now work alone at getting Mackintosh round the bend. He had gripped the factor the instant he saw the Indian fall, and so stood for a moment or two looking down at the spot where the man had landed.

"He's killed!" Hal said the words through dried lips as he saw the redskin lying heapishly at the bottom and not moving. "What a kettle of fish it is, to be sure!"

There was no time to be wasted in reflections, however, and the youngster, knowing that whatever happened to the Indian could not be helped, and that he could offer no assistance for the time being, began to think of how he was to get Mackintosh away.

To move with him while supporting him was an impossibility in the available space, and Hal, after a few moments, thought and felt that he had found the course to follow—although even that was a hard one, and would certainly not be easy going for Mackintosh. Somehow he allowed the factor's body to droop slowly until it was huddled on the ledge,

and then he laid the body out straight with the head towards the bend. That done, Hal, stooping low, took hold of the factor's jacket-collar with his left hand, while the right felt behind him for direction. Then, very slowly, very gently, he dragged Mackintosh along, inch by inch, round the bend, and at last had him, after an experience that he never wanted to pass through again, lying on the broad space beyond.

Still unconscious, Mackintosh lay quiet. Hal proceeded to endeavour to revive him, all the time wondering how it fared with the Chipewyan and where le Grand was. His mind was indeed filled with chaotic thoughts.

But, for all that, the chief thought was the welfare of Mackintosh, and the need for restoring him to consciousness as soon as possible in order to get down to the Indian, and then to fetch water for the purpose of cleansing the factor's wound. He had no water left, and had to rely upon the little remaining spirit which, fortunately, served to bring round Mackintosh.

"That's better, Red!" Hal said, when the factor opened his eyes. "Shall have to leave you for a little while--that Indian is hurt, and we want water and——"

"Plenty of water, Hal!" Mackintosh said. "I'm like a fire!"

"All right!" Hal told him; and having made him as comfortable as possible, he began to descend the hill. He clambered down to where the Chipe-

wyan was, and found him trying to hobble—a painful process—up the hill, all fruitlessly, for he had sprained his ankle and broken his right arm. Few words passed between the two men, for Hal realized that there was little time to fritter away. He gave the Indian a sip of the spirit, then telling him that he was going to get water and would come back to him, the youngster limbed up the hill again. A glance at Mackintosh showed that he was still conscious, and then, with the three water-bottles, Hal descended the hill and made for the river in the distance, heedless of the fact that le Grand might be lurking near at hand.

As it happened le Grand was not there; he had, indeed, fled when the Indian's shot wounded him, because he knew there were other red men about, and that, unable now to use his musket, he would be at their mercy. Long before Hal reached the river the half-breed had found a way across it, and was hurrying for all he was worth. He knew that for the time being, at any rate, all his plans had miscarried, and he cursed the ill-luck that had attended him. When he had left the Post he had, as Hal had suggested, gone to the river bank, made a flying leap into the water, and waded up the river instead of down to the Post. He had gone for a considerable distance before landing, and when he did so he had so cleverly hidden his trail that the Indians in pursuit had been unable to find it. The result was that he had made his way back to the ridge, fully intending to take up a stand in the cave

with Mackintosh if any of his enemies found him, and there to barter the factor's life for the paper upon which he set such store.

As a result of the half-breed's flight Hal had no opposition, and no attack was made on him when he was filling the water-bottles, and in a very short time he was back on the ridge attending to Mackintosh. The factor was brought round again, and then Hal went down to see the Indian, for whom he could do nothing except bandage the wounded ankle and put the broken arm into roughly-made splints. By the time he had done this the two other Indians had returned, confessing their failure to find le Grand, and showing their astonishment at what they saw. It did not take Hal long to explain to them what had happened, and when he had done so the Chipewyans were for going off after the half-breed again. Hal, however, much as he would have liked this to be done, argued with them that the most essential thing was to get Mackintosh back to the Post, and to do that he must have assistance. There was also the injured Chipewyan to be helped; and in the end the red men, shrugging their shoulders, told Hal that, after all, it was his affair rather than theirs, and that it was for him to command.

"Then make you a litter!" Hal told them; and they hurried off to do as he ordered. Seeing that there were only three to act as bearers, one litter for Mackintosh was all that was possible; the injured Chipewyan would have to be supported.

"What's this business about half the paper, Red?" Hal asked Mackintosh while the Indians were making the litter and could not hear what was being said. "Have you got it with you? Is le Grand right?"

Mackintosh looked up at him and smiled grimly.

"Aye, lad," he said quietly. "I've got it, sure—at least, it's down at the Post hidden in the wood-pile!"

"Great Scott!" exclaimed Hal. "Then we'll have to hurry back, because the Chipewyans are pulling the pile to pieces to mend up the Post! If Red Feather sees it he——"

"He's never seen it yet, Hal," was the reply; "an' if he sees a bit o' paper among a bunch o' wood he'll never 'sociate it wi' the thing that's caused all this trouble. However, it'll be as well fer us to git 'way back as soon as poss'ble, case of accidents."

"It will indeed," said Hal, thoroughly anxious over the matter. "But tell me, Red, how'd you come by that scrap, eh? You didn't tell me that you'd found it when we returned to Death Point."

Mackintosh, suffering as he was, could not help but chuckle as he thought over the discomfiture of the half-breed.

"I've examined the bit I got," he told the youngster, "an' it's creased and worn, an' poor Radley must somehow have torn it in half. When le Grand, the skunk, rifled the dead man's pocket an' foun' the paper, he must 'a' dropped one bit

"The red man stared as though he could scarcely believe that the white youth had made the discovery" (*see page* 177).

an' not noticed it. I foun' it atween the bed an' the wall."

"Then le Grand couldn't have examined his bit for a long time after he left the post," Hal said, "otherwise he'd have doubled on his tracks a good while before he did. No wonder he was mad!"

"You're right, son," Mackintosh agreed, with a grin. "Now hold off. Here come the redskins."

CHAPTER XII

THE PERIL OF THE PLAINS

IT was many, many days before Hal and Mackintosh had a chance to talk further on the subject, for during the journey to the Post the red men were always at hand, since they took turns at helping with the litter, and on arrival at the Post there were several reasons why Hal could not approach the question again. Red Feather, who was alone, the Panther being absent, greeted the pair with his usual phlegm. Hal, in returning the greeting, looked into his face as though seeking a sign that should tell whether he had discovered the secret hiding-place of the paper; but there was nothing to help, and his anxiety was to get outside and look at the wood-pile, although he would have to do that unostentatiously. Meanwhile he was held where he was by the courtesy due to Strong Hand, who was at that moment bending over Mackintosh.

"My brother!" exclaimed the Chipewyan. "Me pleased to see you!"

For Hal the next few weeks were strenuous and full of responsible work, for although Red Mackintosh, after a stern fight with death, won, he was too weak to transact the business of the Post, which

fell upon his assistant. After a fruitless search all thought of le Grand and his paper was banished from his mind. Well for Hal was it that during the winter months, before the beginning of the series of the adventures through which he had passed, Red Mackintosh had tutored him in the art of bargaining, because, day by day almost, fresh parties of Indians came to the post to barter their pelts for muskets, blankets, knives, mirrors and the hundred and one other things that were the stock-in-trade of the fur factors.

By his fair dealing and his resolute bearing Hal made many friends among the redskins and no enemies, so that when, some weeks after the trade began, the Post was cleared of trade goods and chock-full of pelts, Mackintosh, able to move about now, looked across at the youngster one evening as they sat together in the cabin and said:

"Ye've done well, laddie, an' I'm proud of ye!"

"Thanks, Red," Hal said, flushing with pleasure. "But whatever I've done has been because you taught me the way!"

"Some folks yew kin teach an' they'll never learn anythin'," Mackintosh retorted.

"Anyway, it all depends upon the teacher," Hal said. "The most important thing, Red, is that we've done a good season's work, and we——"

"We have indeed!" supplemented the factor. "I guess we've got pelts worth nigh on three thousand pounds—p'haps more. That is to us, mind

ye—Heaven knows what they'll be worth t'other side the sea. You've done very well, son!"

"And the redskins must have done something," Hal put in. "The question is, how are we going to get the stuff along to headquarters?"

"That's easy, laddie," said Mackintosh. "I've arranged with Strong Hand to give us help as far as Four Forks on the Churchill, and then, if I know anything about redskins, I'll get him to come along with us to headquarters. A few promises of blankets and muskets, 'specially muskets, will make him eager. Y'see, Hal, while ye've been swopping things I've been fixing up wi' Strong Hand—thet's why he's hung around so long."

Hal realized then what he had only half suspected, because Mackintosh had said nothing about it before, that the factor during the days when he had been full of his fever had been bartering with the Chipewyans, who had evidently agreed to assist. If Hal had been wiser in the ways of the fur trader—wiser, that is, than Mackintosh had made him, for the method of transporting the harvest of the winter had not arisen before then—he would have known that, according to custom, it was usual for the factors to negotiate with those Indians whose villages were nearest to the headquarters to help in the transportation.

Affairs had been too brisk, and even the rest hours had been too full of incident, for the fur traders to have much time to discuss ways and means, even if Mackintosh had been in a fit state of health to do

so; and Hal, who had been wondering what was to be done now that the influx of Indians seemed to have ended, was relieved to hear the factor's explanation. Behind all the business there had been the idea that the way back to civilization would be a dangerous way, because ever present in the youngster's mind was the thought of le Grand, who, if he had survived the encounter on the ridge, would certainly not have given up all idea of the paper on which apparently so much depended. Of set purpose Hal had not referred to the matter while Red Mackintosh was in a weak state, and it was only when, business being over and the feast in celebration thereof was in preparation, that he mentioned it.

"I thought that had happened, lad!" Mackintosh said quickly, when the youngster told him of the absence of the Panther and the fact that he could not find the paper. "Ah, weel, thet's fate. Red Feather's on'y done what I did; and all I hope is that he ne'er gets t'other piece o' the paper."

"Or that le Grand doesn't get this bit!" Hal said. "As far as we're concerned, I don't see what we're going to do about it. We've got to——"

"Get the stuff up to the Post," Mackintosh put in. "Be easy in your mind 'bout the paper. Le Grand'll thin': we've got it, an' he'll not be thinkin' o' Red Feat er!"

"Which will make the journey up to the fort anything but safe, especially if le Grand manages to get a band of Indians around him," Hal suggested.

"We'll risk them," the factor said. "But anyway we've got Strong Hand with us—and his band kin fight!"

With that prospect before him Hal had to content himself, while Strong Hand's men worked hard at loading their canoes with the pelts, and when all was ready the farewell feast which had been prepared was begun. As a host Red Mackintosh was famed throughout the territory, and the red men did justice to the spread. Indian feasts in those good old days were orgies, not merely as a result of the gluttony of the red men, but because of a religious superstition; it was supposed to be an affront to the Great Spirit to leave uneaten that which was laid before the guests at a feast. The result was that the Indians, of whom there were parties of several tribes, ate until they were gorged, and, drowsy with repletion, dropped off to sleep around the dying fires that had been made here and there outside the cabin and on which the whole carcasses of animals had been roasted.

Speeches had been made by the various chiefs, vowing friendship one with another—a feature of the work of the Hudson Bay Company's factors, often lost sight of, was the creation of friendly relations between tribes only too often liable to be warring. Comradeship with the palefaces, too, was sworn and promises were made to return the next season to do trade with the factor.

Then one by one the pipes went out, and satiated redskins dropped off to sleep where they

sat, leaving at the finish only Mackintosh and Hal awake. They got up from the fire near which they had been sitting and went into the cabin to get the sleep of which they were sorely in need, to awake in the morning ready for the first stage of the great journey up to Fort Prince of Wales, at the mouth of the Churchill River. Puffed of face and heavy yet with over-feeding and too little sleep, the redskins bade farewell to the palefaces and set off in their different directions. The last batch to go was that which placed itself under the leadership of Red Feather, who very solemnly entered the cabin and held out his hand, white man's fashion, for the factor to shake.

"Good-bye, chief," Mackintosh said simply. "The truce still holds!"

It was the first time since his recovery that Mackintosh had said one word to the Sioux in reference to the business that had brought them together, and the suddenness of it for the moment robbed the redskin of his equanimity. He recovered quickly enough, however.

"Till we get the paper!" he said coolly.

"Listen, Red Feather," said Mackintosh, who had decided that the time had come when he must be quite frank with the Sioux. "I know that the Panther has gone away—why? I think I know. You found thet bit o' paper thet I hid, an' you sent him away with it. Thet's fair 'nough, I own, but, chief, as I love the red men I want to ask yew to do nothin' rash whatever the paper says."

"Say on," Red Feather muttered. "My brother always speaks the words of wisdom."

"And my brother always listens to words of wisdom," was the factor's reply. "And this is the wisdom of Red Fox: take no heed if the paper thet carries the curse—has it not brought death enough already?—tells of the goin' of the red men on the warpath against the palefaces who come, not to make war, but to trade peaceably, even as I have done here."

"Say on," Red Feather repeated.

"If there's truth in what we think that paper contains," Mackintosh went on, "then you kin see well 'nough, Red Feather, that if it's acted on there'll be trouble. D'you think my people are going to be swept out? I don't!"

Red Feather looked hard at Mackintosh for a few moments without speaking. Then, reaching out his hand again, he said simply:

"Can the palefaces or the red men fight against the Great Spirit? It is enough, Red Fox, we shall see. Good-bye!"

Hal, who had been standing by listening, suddenly felt himself go hot and cold as he heard that fatalistic statement, and knew that as far as the present was concerned there was no good purpose to be served by arguing with the chief. Mackintosh seemed to be of that mind also, for he calmly took the Sioux's hand and, as he shook it, said:

"All right, Red Feather, as you say, we shall see. But think of what I say. Good-bye!"

Then with a shake of Hal's hand the Sioux turned and left the cabin.

"An' thet's thet, lad!" Mackintosh said heavily when the chief had gone. "The only thing I hope is that the derned paper I had is lost for ever."

"Same here, Red," Hal breathed fervently.

"And now let's ferget it fer a while," Mackintosh said. "I reckon Strong Hand's about ready for us."

The Chipewyans were indeed ready, and within an hour or so Mackintosh and Hal, after having locked up the Post, were in the canoe that set out from Death Point, after all the others of the Chipewyans had gone up the river. In the one immediately in front of them was Strong Hand. As he looked up-river and saw the long line of canoes, every one laden with pelts, Mackintosh turned and said to Hal:

"Me boy, they'll be mighty glad to see us at Fort Prince of Wales! It's been a better season'n I've had for many a long year. Yew've done well!"

"If you say that any more, Red, I'll be getting a big head!" Hal laughed. "But I guess I am glad that we've done so well. How long'll it take us to get back with this lot?"

"'Bout a month, I reckon," the factor told him, "if everything goes all right."

As it happened, everything didn't go all right, although there is no need to describe the whole of that trip up the river, during which at falls the red men had to do portage with their canoes, often for

several miles. All this added to the time taken, but so long as progress was being made and there was no attempt to interfere with the party, Mackintosh did not mind.

Often he and Hal spoke of le Grand and wondered what he was doing—whether he had given up hope of ever getting the companion of the paper that he had, or whether he was intriguing with the Indians to get them to rally round him for the purpose of intercepting the voyagers.

As the days drew into weeks totalling a month, half the time reckoned necessary for the journey, and nothing happened, the traders became, not easier in their minds, but more worried, because they knew that they were nearing the territory of the Sioux.

"That's where the danger is, lad," Mackintosh said. "To-morrow we leave this river an' cut across country to the Churchill River, up which we'll go to the fort. Le Grand'll know this, if he's still on the warpath, an' it's while we're in the plains that he's likely to attack."

"Of course there's a chance that he's dead, or that he's given up the game," Hal suggested; but if he had any hope at all in that it was shaken by what he saw in the factor's face.

"Don't think either's happened, Hal," Mackintosh said quietly. "Le Grand's not one to give up, skunk as he is. An' he's no coward."

"Better get Strong Hand to have a good watch kept from now on," Hal suggested.

"No need to get him to, lad," Mackintosh said,

with a grin. "His crowd and the Sioux are mostly at daggers drawn, and, quite apart from what le Grand may do, it's a certainty thet ef a Sioux sees the Chipewyans in this territory there'll be the deuce to pay!"

"Which is very cheerful," said Hal. "It's a pity Red Feather and the Sioux who came down to the Post hadn't come with us instead of the Chipewyans—pity they lived in another territory and went a different way."

"Red Feather wouldn't have come with us, son, even if he lived up here," Mackintosh told him. "He's mighty glad, I reckon, to get away from us, 'cos he knows that ef le Grand turns up again it'll be against us, since he knows I've got the paper."

"Which seems to me a good reason for Red Feather coming with us; he'd stand a chance of getting le Grand," was Hal's retort, at which the factor laughed.

"No, lad, it ain't!" he said. "Red Feather, you kin gamble on, has other ideas in his head, an' I bet one of 'em is to attack le Grand, and not be attacked by him! Anyway, we're here, an' it's our look out to be kerful."

As it proved, Mackintosh was right in his surmise, although what he had expected did not happen until they had been travelling for two days across the Sioux territory. The Chipewyans had hauled the canoes out of the river and transported them across the land, with runners in advance to see that

the country was clear, for Strong Hand was under no delusions.

"Me know dangers," he said to Mackintosh the first night on which they camped there. "Heem no friend—me lead my bosses ten moons ago and take many horses. Heem no like the Chipewyans."

Mackintosh nodded but said nothing, because he was satisfied that Strong Hand had his sentries placed and was taking all precautions against attack—the attack that did not come that night, but was made on the following.

It was some time after midnight when Hal Newlands sprang up from the ground where he was lying beside the fire. There had come a terrific yelling that had mingled with his dreams, and for the moment, on waking, he was not quite sure whether he was still asleep. Those same cries were going on, but they were increasing, and, more than that, every Chipewyan in the camp was upon his feet, and he knew this was no dream after all.

There was no need for Mackintosh's "It's happened, Hal!" for the Sioux were flooding the camp, and every man an instant later was fighting for his life.

Hal, back to back with Mackintosh, emptied his musket into a dashing, shouting bunch of reds, and then, having no time to reload, reversed it, and used the weapon to amazing good purpose when the Sioux reached him. They fell away before that wide-sweeping, thudding club, but Hal, thinking that the Sioux would reload if he gave them respite,

went for them with a shout. With him there went Strong Hand and a couple of other Chipewyans, these latter armed with tomahawks. The mêlée that ensued was horrifying, but Hal had little time to think of it. It was a case of crashing down his musket, which he preferred to the knife, knowing that he was no match with this weapon for the red men; and although the fight in that spot lasted no more than ten minutes, it was grim enough to satisfy the most bloodthirsty for a lifetime. Two of the Sioux fell beneath the heavy musket-stock, another died at the tomahawk slash of Strong Hand, but the two companions of the chief also went down, mortally wounded, leaving Hal and Strong Hand to face four Sioux.

As it happened the surge of the fight at other parts of the camp had gone against the Sioux, and that before Hal and the chief, seeing their fleeing comrades, lost something of their own courage. Instead of pushing the attack, they hesitated, and in a moment Strong Hand, who had snatched up a tomahawk from a dead man at his feet, sprang forward. His arms worked like balanced weights, and the pair of tomahawks went up and down and back and forth like clubs from which there was no escape. He was a fine figure of a fighter, and Hal gasped with amazement as he saw him. There seemed, indeed, no need for the youngster, but he nevertheless went in—and his leap was evidently just the thing required to break the courage of even the valiant Sioux. One had already gone down, a

second staggered away before a cute sidewise slash of Strong Hand's left tomahawk, and a third, who had hoped to get in at the spring-giver, missed badly as the result of a quick jab from Hal, and he and the other Sioux turned on their heels and tore off into the darkness.

"Ugh!" panted the Chipewyan, hunching his great shoulders. "Come, brother," and he darted off to the other side of the camp, where Mackintosh and a crowd of Chipewyans were surrounding a number of Sioux who were putting up a valiant fight. They were the last of the attackers left in the camp, and among them, as Hal could see by the tall feathered headgear that towered above the rest and was revealed by the flickering light of the fire, was a chief. Hal reached the fighting, shouting group. The head-dress dipped suddenly, and the cries of rage of the Sioux were redoubled, while the shouts of exultation of the Chipewyans reached crescendo, and Hal knew that the chief had gone down either dead or wounded.

But if the Chipewyans thought that their foes would surrender because of the fall of their leader they were mistaken; it was more a case of keeping up the fight, not so much in the hope of winning as of taking whatever vengeance they could. And they took enough in all conscience, for although they themselves were eventually put hors de combat, they had sent many a gallant Chipewyan to the hunting-ground of the brave.

Strong Hand called his men off at last, but they

refused to leave their victims until they had taken the grim, dripping scalps as tokens of their victory, and not even the appeal of Red Mackintosh, who clambered up on to one of the loaded canoes, had any effect.

"No good, Red Fox," Strong Hand told him. "Thirsty for blood now, and they must drink!"

Hal turned aside, sick at heart and weary of the tremendous struggle that had come to so dramatic an end—and sick, too, at the thought of the importance that made it useless for him to long to put a stop to that grim, barbarous, primitive triumph of the red man. As he turned he saw Red Mackintosh make a flying jump from the canoe, a jump that carried him right over the camp-fire and dropped him upon the back of a Chipewyan who, tomahawk in hand, was searching the ground for wounded and dead Sioux who had made the last stand. Hal, realizing instantly what was behind Mackintosh's action, sprang after him, and side by side they stood, weapons in hand, for all the world as though they who had been fighting but a few moments before with the Chipewyans would now fight against them.

"Strong Hand, call them off!" Mackintosh roared. "I want this chief. He is my friend," for Mackintosh had recognized the Sioux as an old acquaintance.

The sound of his voice brought all the Chipewyans up from their grim search, and they watched

Strong Hand walk over to where the palefaces stood.

"I buy his life—three muskets for you when we get to the fort!" shouted Mackintosh; and at the words Strong Hand called out to his warriors, haranguing them for some time. There were many grunts of displeasure from he who vowed he had brought down the chief. He was glaring at Mackintosh, who had knocked the wind out of his body when he had alighted on him.

"Three muskets for him—if the chief is alive!" Mackintosh shouted again; and at that the Chipewyans signified his acceptance of this barter for a man.

By this time the blood-lust of the Chipewyans, broken into by the interruption, had calmed down, and what had before been impossible was now achieved. Mackintosh promised a gift for every wounded Sioux whose life was spared, and the Chipewyans agreed, even going so far as to tend the wounds of their foes.

It was while this was going on and the general clearing up was in progress that Hal came upon something that sent him back to where Mackintosh was trying to revive the fallen chief.

"Look, Red!" he said quietly, and thrust forth the skin cap that he had found trampled on the ground.

Mackintosh looked up at him and then down at the cap. In the glare of the fire near where they were Hal saw the factor's mouth set in a firm line and read the meaning of his eyes.

"Le Grand's, eh, lad?" Red said. "What'd I tell ye?"

"Not sure it's his, of course," said Hal; "but it's not an Indian's, that's certain, and it means that there was someone with them who wasn't an Indian."

"Anyway, lad, he's got nothin' out o' the game, 'cept somethin' he won't like, for the hidin' we've given 'em'll make the Sioux mad with him, an' they won't be anxious ter hev 'nother bang at us. I—hello! this fellow's comin' round!" he exclaimed, as the Sioux stirred uneasily. Hal stood by while Mackintosh finished the work of restoring him and attending to his wounds, attentions for which the Sioux was evidently very grateful and at which he was apparently not a little surprised, until his gathering wits enabled him to recognize the man who was showing this unwonted mercy to an enemy.

"Red Fox!" he exclaimed.

"Yes," said Mackintosh grimly. "And Red Fox wants to know why his brother Kee-lee-taw attacked him!"

Kee-lee-taw hunched himself from the ground where he lay, and for a moment or so sat staring about the camp as though trying to recall all that had happened.

"My people—where?" he asked Mackintosh suddenly.

"Those thet ain't dead, or half dead, hev run away," Mackintosh told him. "They were beaten badly. But I want to know why you attacked me

—your brother—after saving you from the jaws of a bear when you were on'y a papoose!"

"Think you, Red Fox, I lead my people fight *you?*" Kee-lee-taw said vigorously.

Mackintosh made no answer, preferring to wait for the chief to tell his story in his own way.

"They came fight Chipewyans, not Red Fox. ot know Red Fox here. Half-breed no tell. He say Chipewyans come through my country to hunt."

"That all, Kee-lee-taw?" Mackintosh asked; and the chief nodded as though there was nothing more to say in explanation of his attack on the Chipewyans. Hal, listening to the conversation, was able to piece the story together inasmuch as he knew that for a tribe to go hunting in another tribe's territory must be prepared to take the consequences; it was evident that le Grand, in the hope of achieving his own purposes, had roused the Sioux against the intruders.

"That his?" Mackintosh asked Kee-lee-taw suddenly, thrusting the cap forward; and Kee-lee-taw nodded.

"My brother the Red Fox," said the chief, "he know me not attack him if me know?"

"I know that," Mackintosh assured him. "Now listen, Kee-lee-taw. That breed—I know him. His name is le Grand."

The Sioux grunted confirmation.

"My enemy!" Mackintosh went on. "He knew I was wi' th' Chipewyans, and wanted to git

me. The Chipewyans are not huntin'—see, they carry my pelts for me."

"Me see," said Kee-lee-taw seriously. "Foes have we always been—scalps of the Chipewyans hang in my lodge—the Great Spirit——"

"No need for the death chant, Kee-lee-taw!" Mackintosh broke in, for the Sioux had burst into his own language and begun to chant the Sioux song of the warrior who believed that the end had come. "I've bought your life and the lives of your people here. Are you not my brother? Think ye I saved ye as a papoose to see you killed as a chief?"

Kee-lee-taw ceased, and it was evident that he was having difficulty in restraining his emotion. There was silence for a while, during which Strong Hand, who had been listening to the conversation, moved away, only to be called back by Mackintosh, who, breaking the silence, said:

"Listen, O chiefs! The fight is over, the fight thet never would hev happened but fer me. I, Red Fox, friend o' both of ye, would see peace between ye. Great chiefs ye are, an' great good ye can do if ye live at peace. Is it not better thet should be than thet your lodges should be hung with scalps? Listen, I speak medicine; ere many moons pass the day shall come when ye shall find it well that ye are friends together an' o' the palefaces. There be people who work to make enmity 'tween the red men an' the white; my medicine tells me that the white men shall prevail. I, the Red Fox, have spoken!"

Hal Newlands had stood and listened in amazement to the altogether unexpected loquacity of Mackintosh, who had spoken with a fervour that was quite foreign to him; and it seemed clear that the red men were just as much amazed, both at the manner of the words of the factor, whom both tribes knew for a brave man as well as a lover of peace. It was evident that he had impressed them, especially by assuming the rôle of medicine man.

It was Strong Hand who broke the tension and gave the lead to Kee-lee-taw. The Chipewyan sprang forward and, with the encircled Indians listening, began his peace oration. Hal, listening keenly, drinking in every word that was said, reached out a hand in the gloom—the fires, neglected, had burned right down by now—and groped for that of Mackintosh. The factor gripped in silent acceptance of the compliment, a compliment well and truly earned indeed, for Strong Hand was proclaiming his willingness to forgive Kee-lee-taw and his Sioux for their unprovoked attack—willing, too, to live in friendliness and peace. A chorus of agreement rose from the Chipewyans when their chief ended, and Kee-lee-taw lifted his towering body from the ground and stood up—a splendid figure of a man—to make reply.

"Hear me, O Red Fox, and ye, O Strong Hand!" he cried. "I, Kee-lee-taw, who have nothing to forgive and much to regret, take the offer that is made for my people to have and to give peace. Hear, too," he went on, as cries of pleasure arose,

"hear, too, I promise, on the word of a Sioux, to hunt down the enemy of Red Fox, who for his own gain led me to war-paint."

The pressure of Mackintosh's hand as Kee-lee-taw finished told Hal that what the factor had hoped for —indeed, played his hand for—had come to pass: le Grand had lost at least one ally and turned him into a foe.

"Friends we are, for you have spoken peace!" cried Mackintosh, stepping forward; and the Sioux and the Chipewyans, foes but a little while before, danced the dance of peace, while Mackintosh and Hal stood looking on, both pleased at the turn of events.

"Le Grand's overshot this time, Red," Hal said. "He's in for the surprise of his life when Kee-lee-taw gets back to his village!"

"I'd give a lot to be there," was Mackintosh's reply; "but we can't afford the time to go so far out of our way, lad, an', anyhow, we've shoved a spoke in Mister le Grand's wheel!"

Had Mackintosh, however, been the medicine man that he had claimed to be but a little while before he might have been spared an optimism that was to prove groundless before many weeks were past, for, lying out in the darkness, well away from the camp of such dramatic happenings, yet near enough to hear what had been said, was le Grand himself. When the Sioux had attacked he had gone in with them, but had managed to slip off after the first rush, having suffered a narrow escape from an

arrow that had pierced his cap and taken it off his head. He was too wary to risk his own life in a general fight, his object being to pick off Mackintosh if it were possible while the battle was in progress. He had fired several times, but missed, and when he saw that the tide was going against the Sioux he lay where he was, cursing fate.

Crafty as ever, he had not gone off with the Sioux who were fortunate to escape; when he saw Kee-lee-taw fall he realized that he would be no welcome figure at the great lament in the village when the warriors returned. Moreover, he believed he was safer where he was, for it was quite on the cards that the victorious Chipewyans would follow the retreating Sioux, in which case he would be able to get away while the pursuit was in progress. He had seen the commotion in the camp immediately after the fight ended, and had heard Mackintosh's impassioned plea for the life of Kee-lee-taw; he had heard also the rest of the harangues, and was mad with chagrin as he realized how Mackintosh had spoilt the whole intrigue. His fingers itched on his musket, and it was only by a great effort that he refrained several times from taking a shot at Mackintosh, whom he could now quite easily have picked off. Discretion, however, won, for le Grand knew that a single shot would mean that both Sioux and Chipewyans would instantly set off to track down the sharpshooter.

Thus it was that, while the red men danced and the white men were congratulating themselves on

the happy outcome of a business that had begun so badly, the half-breed, quick to devise new schemes to meet his own ends, slipped off into the night, heading for the very place to which Mackintosh himself was going.

CHAPTER XIII

THE VINDICATION OF RED MACKINTOSH

THE jubilation in the camp at last subsided, and there began the solemn work of burying the dozen or more dead men and attending to the wounded, after which those who could rolled themselves in their blankets and went to sleep.

Morning—and the parting: for Mackintosh was in a hurry to get to the fort, while Kee-lee-taw, none the worse for his knock over the head, seemed almost as anxious to be away. The Sioux gathered their wounded, the Chipewyans took up their burdens of pelts, and the two parties separated.

In due course and without incident Mackintosh's party reached the Churchill, where they pitched camp for the night prior to setting off on the long paddle down-river that would eventually bring them to the fort. It was on towards the morning that there was an alarm, which brought out every man from his blanket—to find a Sioux stumbling in amongst them gasping out inquiry for Red Fox.

"What is it?" Mackintosh asked quickly, for he recognized the man as being one of those who had been with Kee-lee-taw. "The half-breed——"

"Gone, Red Fox!" the Sioux panted out in his own tongue. "Kee-lee-taw send me to tell. He

did not return to our village, and none knows where he went. To warn you to be careful, Red Fox!"

"I'll be careful," was the factor's reply, "though I don't think the breed will try anything against us while we're on the river—onless he kin get some other tribes to attack us. Yet we are glad of the warning!"

"I'd give half my share of what we've got, Red, to know what that wretched paper says," Hal whispered when they were alone again, and the Sioux, given food and drink, was fast asleep. "It must be something big to warrant all this fuss."

"And as sure as fate, lad, as I've said afore, le Grand knows what it is," Mackintosh whispered back. "But it's pretty clear that he must hev both bits—an' he's got a long way tew go tew git the bit thet Red Feather's got! Sleep, lad, an' don't worry!"

Mackintosh set the example and slept, as did Hal, until the Indians awakened them for breakfast, after which the canoes were pushed out on to the river, and the last stage of the voyage was begun. Hard work it was paddling against the stream, and the Indians were glad to take their fill of sleep when camp was pitched at night upon the bank. For day after day the voyage continued, and, fortunately, there were no untoward incidents. Once or twice Strong Hand had sent the word along the line of canoes for his men to be ready against emergencies, because in the distance he had seen canoes coming towards them, but each time these had proved to

be carrying friendly Indians coming down from the fort. From them Mackintosh inquired for tidings of the fort, and learned something that was calculated to rob him of his equanimity. Wild, distorted versions of affairs down at Death Point had, by the remarkable methods of communication so peculiar to native tribes, reached the fort, and the fur traders there had formed the opinion that Mackintosh had been fomenting trouble between the various tribes.

"We'll soon put that right when we get there," Mackintosh told Hal grimly; but once more he was doomed to be disappointed in his hopes.

"'Lo, Red!" he was greeted by a weather-worn backwoodsman as at last he approached the gate with Hal, having left the Chipewyans a little distance away. "How's the war?"

"'Day, Roberts." Mackintosh returned the greeting without taking any notice of the gibe. "Had a good season?"

"Oh, fair," said Roberts, who was one of the oldest factors in the company's service. "But I say, Red, old man, there's the deuce to pay up here over you, an' there'll be worse 'fore it's over. No—don't get riled, man," he said, as Mackintosh seemed about to explode. "Let me tell ye, and you'll be prepared."

"I've heerd somethin'," Mackintosh said quietly, holding himself in with difficulty. "Tell this first, Roberts: How'd the yarn start off?"

"Don't know—wasn't here then," Roberts told

him; "but when I got here there was talk o' your hevin' caused trouble among th' Injuns; an' then, to cap the lot, jest after I arrived a breed dropped in, half-dead he was, an'——"

"His name le Grand, eh?" Mackintosh put in; and Roberts nodded.

"You're right, Red," he said. "Le Grand—rotten skunk he is—told a fine tale of ye. Swore there'd been the devil of a row down at Death Point, and thet it had meant the Post was burnt out. You'd set the Chipewyans against the Sioux, who'd worsted your bunch; there'd bin a scrap while ye were comin' 'long wi' a handful of pelts, 'cos you'd had a bad season 'cos the Injuns wouldn't deal wi' ye. So ye set the Chipewyans on the Sioux agin, an' pretty well wiped out the Sioux in Kee-lce-taw's village. Done thet, he says, ter git pelts ye couldn't buy! Oh, yes, Red, there's a warm time comin' fer ye!"

"An' le Grand?" Mackintosh asked quietly. "'Old hard, lad," as Hal stamped on the ground with indignation and cried:

"Come along, Red; let's go drive the lies down le Grand's throat!"

"No need ter git riled, lad. Ain't we got Strong Hand to prove who's the liar? Where's le Grand, Roberts? I'll bet half my share of them pelts," waving his hand to the canoes, "thet he's gone!"

"An' ye'd win, Red," was Roberts's reply. "Went a week ago wi' band o' Sioux, who vowed they'd raise the whole tribe against us!"

"It's begun, lad," was all that Mackintosh said,

turning to Hal. Roberts looked at him in surprise, his eyes asking what was meant. Mackintosh did not enlighten him, but, shouting out to Strong Hand to have the cargoes taken straight into the fort, started off again, with a grim smile playing about his mouth.

Right up into the settlement the trio went, for Roberts insisted upon accompanying his old friend, and Mackintosh stopped for no one. Scores of fur traders greeted him, dozens of red men would have obstructed him, but he walked resolutely forward until he came near to the house of the governor.

"Is Governor Harris here?" he asked Roberts suddenly.

"By Jove, Red, I forgot to tell ye!" exclaimed the other. "Harris ain't here no longer--theer's a new governor come out this spring, an' Harris is e'en now on the high seas for home. Jose Morton's the new governor!"

Mackintosh came up with a start as he heard the name, and he seemed too astonished to speak for a moment or so. Then his fury vent itself.

"Thet derned redskin!" he exclaimed. "By the Lord Harry, Roberts, what's the company comin' to when it can't find clean white men to hold the reins! Morton's one o' the bloodiest-minded fiends o' the North, never played fair wi' no man. I kin see now why le Grand's gone wi'out being compelled to stay till I came, fer Morton ain't never forgi'en me fer hevin' crossed his trail five year agone."

Roberts said nothing; he knew to what Mackintosh was referring. Half a decade ago Mackintosh had worsted Morton, then in the employ of the North-West Fur Company, the great rival of the H.B.C. Morton had been intriguing with the Indians who were clients of the H.B.C., and had achieved a fair measure of success, when Mackintosh arrived and frustrated his scheme. Morton had vowed vengeance, but the Scotsman had cared little for that.

Now, however, the situation was quite changed. By some means or another Morton, who five years before had deserted the North-West Company for the H.B.C., had, during a visit to England, evidently intrigued—probably by reason of his great influence over the red men—so well that he had been appointed governor, and Mackintosh realized that he was indeed in for a hot time.

"Better not speak too loudly, Red," Hal whispered, "there'll be plenty of ears listening for anything you may say now."

"An' a plenty o' tongues to tell what's heard!" said Roberts.

Mackintosh seemed about to explode again, but after a second or so appeared to see the reasonableness of the restraint suggested, and without another word he set his shoulders squarely and strode into the house.

"Tell the governor Red Mackintosh wants to see him!" he said to an Indian servant who had known the factor for many a year. The Indian

looked over his shoulder, and finding no one about, leant forward and whispered:

"He's heard you're here, but he is mad with the teeth that ache. I would wait, Red Fox."

"Wait be hanged!" growled Mackintosh. "Tell him I'm here!"

The attendant shrugged his shoulders and disappeared, to come back in a few moments saying that Mackintosh must wait half an hour, the governor was engaged in business. With the servant there came two soldiers, who significantly took up positions at the door.

"What's thet mean?" Mackintosh demanded of the servant, who, trembling, said that the governor had given orders that Mackintosh was not to leave the house until he had seen him.

"I'll see him scalped first!" roared Mackintosh. But as he essayed to pass the soldiers they flung up their pistols. Mackintosh, fuming with rage, knew that unless he resorted to forcible means he must obey the governor's commands; moreover, he realized that any sign of insubordination to Morton, who after all was his appointed chief, would tell against him very quickly.

He dropped into his usual glum mood, from which Hal could not draw him. The only moment in which Mackintosh opened his mouth was when the servant, sidling into the room, said:

"Come, they are ready, Red Fox!"

"Who's they?" Mackintosh demanded; but the Indian was already walking away, beckoning as

he went. Perforce Mackintosh followed, calling over his shoulder: "Wait until I come back, lad!" The Indian, hearing, halted and said:

"His excellency orders that the young paleface come too," and Hal, wondering what was to be the end of this strange reception of one of the most famous of the company's servants, followed his chief —to find himself shortly standing beside him inside the long council room of the governor's house.

It was a startling sight that met his eyes, but Mackintosh was more indignant than surprised, for seated at the long table down the centre were about a dozen men, all of whom he knew—factors and whatnot of the company—while at the head of the table sat a full-blooded Chipewyan, his long, lank hair, well oiled, hanging about his face from beneath the full headdress of feathers, his body clothed in the beaded buckskins of his tribe.

This was Jose M rton, probably one of the biggest scoundrels ever employed by the H.B.C., a man of whom Hal had often heard from Mackintosh but whom he had never before seen.

"Good day, gentlemen," Mackintosh said with rough courtesy to the men along the table, and Morton crashed his hard fist down on the table as he understood the deliberate passing over of himself.

"By a thousand scalps!" he roared, "'tis a fine thing when the governor of a fort gets no greeting from his own servant! I would——"

"Not all who sit in great men's seats belong to them," came the crisp reply from Mackintosh, and

Hal's admiration of his chief increased a hundred-fold at the words. "There is no carrier of the mail down to Death Point, else might I have known that my good friend Governor Harris was no longer here."

"You know it now—or by gar you shall know it ere many hours are past!" cried the Indian, striking the table.

Mackintosh did not answer; he calmly selected a seat at the end of the table where he was standing and dropped into it. The action infuriated the governor, who thundered out an order for him to get upon his feet again.

"A factor of the company may sit——" Mackintosh began, only to be interrupted by Morton, who said, ominously calm now:

"You are no factor—you are a prisoner arraigned before the court!"

"On what charge?" Mackintosh asked just as calmly; but before Morton could answer one of the men sitting at the table—they had been listening stern-faced to the dialogue between these two foes—leant forward and said:

"'Tis convicting th' man 'fore he is tried, an' I for one will have none of 't!"

"Nor I, McTavish!" cried another; and it was evident that every one of the white men there was of the same mind.

"You seem to have got the wrong court together," Mackintosh said quietly to the Indian, whose face was a very picture of rage. "P'r'aps the

court will tell me the crime I'm accused of—an' p'r'aps bring up th' accuser!"

The assembled factors looked from one to the other, but before either of them could speak Morton was snarling across at Mackintosh:

"Here's the charge. 'Tis brought to us that for months past you and that boy there"—indicating Hal, who was standing white-faced and with hands clenched—"have been causing trouble with the red men. That is against the laws of the company. At one time you have had Sioux hunting down a paleface, at another Chipewyans attacking Sioux, and to-day the company's post at Death Point is a heap of ashes. What say you to all this?"

Mackintosh sprawled his arms upon the table, thrust forward his head, and, staring Morton full in the face, said:

"I say this: that all these things are lies; that there is no man living in Canada who would believe any one of them of me. That is my answer, and the answer that I would give to whoever came here with that story. Lies—every one of 'em. *Where have you sent Pierre le Grand*, the man you call a paleface?"

Morton stared back at him, and there was a look in his eyes that told of suppressed fury, but when he spoke it was in tensely quiet tones, far different from what Hal Newlands had anticipated.

"So you know the source," Morton asked, "and admit it? That is well, for it proves something. Here's what I've done with le Grand: I've sent him

to undo the evil that you have done—sent him to make the peace with my people, that the company may not lose because of your evil."

"And me—what happens to me?" Mackintosh asked him equably.

"That is for the court to decide. Brothers"—Morton addressed the white men who had listened to the accusation, the terms of which they knew only too well beforehand, but which they had hoped that Mackintosh would be able to disprove—"brothers, what is the sentence for the man who has done this evil? Even now people who were once friendly to the company are gathering to the war councils!"

Almost before he had finished McTavish sprang to his feet and, thumping the table, exclaimed:

"I'll no' believe it of my frien' Mackintosh. 'Twere well to wait till the breed returns, an' the two can come face to face—onless Red kin bring witnesses an'——"

"Plenty o' them!" said Mackintosh slowly. He had been waiting for this; he had, indeed, been waiting to see what his fellow-factors would have to say, and it was evident to him that they were all in accord with McTavish. "Outside, wi' the finest consignment o' pelts brought up for many a season, is Strong Hand, the Chipewyan, an' his people, who——"

"Were your allies against the Sioux," put in Morton, with a sneering laugh. "And you think we shall take their evidence for you. The pelts they bring were stolen from the Sioux at the cost of many

a brave. The Chipewyans are my own people, but that shall not save them from——"

"Hev a look at thet!" said Mackintosh, pushing a fine beaded powder-pouch along the table. It had been given him by Kee-lee-taw on parting, and bore the chief's name in Sioux characters, with, on the back of it, "My brother, Red Fox," in the same characters. "Thet'll be somethin' like evidence, I reckon; an' if you want more—send down to Strong Hand, an' hev him bring up the Sioux who's wi' him!"

Morton took the pouch and looked at it angrily, then shoved it away from him.

"'Tis easy to get such things as that," he said. "The half-breed said——"

"A lot o' lies, I reckon," came from McTavish. He refused to be intimidated by the governor, and went on: "I say that we, as a court called to hear th' case against Mackintosh, should hear his witnesses, and thet we must hev Strong Hand and the Sioux here."

A chorus of agreement greeted this statement, and it was impossible for Morton not to acquiesce. The result was that in a short while, during which nothing at all was said in the council chamber, Strong Hand and the Sioux were ushered in.

"I take it that they kin tell their yarn, eh?" Mackintosh asked, and Morton, almost mad with anger, could but agree.

"Strong Hand," Mackintosh said, "these gentlemen—thet's his excellency the governor"—(there

was a smile about his mouth as he spoke) " want you to tell them the real truth—what you know about le Grand an' how I've set red men against red men. Say on."

Strong Hand looked around the room with dull, slumbering anger in his eyes, then he broke forth into a vindication of Mackintosh, ending with : " Ask this Sioux, one of the men who attacked my camp, set on by that traitorous half-breed, to tell you what he knows! I have spoken! "

Then the Sioux, no less impassioned than Strong Hand, told what he knew, and there was so much sincerity in the two stories that it was clear that the factors had been convinced of the innocence of Mackintosh.

Morton's face was a picture of alternating passions as the two red men gave their evidence that was so clear a vindication of Mackintosh, while the white factors could not conceal the pleasure that they felt. Brave, rugged men that they were, they realized that they were likely to incur the displeasure of the governor if their verdict was for Mackintosh. But they were honest men; their loyalty to the great company of which they were proud to be servants told them that if this tyrant were allowed to have his own way there was nothing but disaster awaiting them and the company too. It was, indeed, a trial of strength between white and red, with the red man in the place of chief, who had almost the word of life or death. And they were going to win—for the time being at any rate, for these men had no

illusions about the character of the Indian whom they knew so well; they knew that if he could not achieve his purpose by what he had hoped would be accepted as legitimate means, he would achieve it by other methods. Every one of them was cognizant of the feud between Mackintosh and Morton, and in the days when they had been his fellow-traders had often heard him swear to have his revenge on the Scotsman.

These thoughts were passing through their minds as the Sioux wound up his evidence in favour of Mackintosh, but there was no hesitancy upon the part of the white men. McTavish, as the eldest among them, sprang to his feet, only to be waved aside by Morton, who, as head, had the right to command him to be seated while he himself spoke.

"A good story," Morton snarled viciously. "First, the story of a friend and partner in the crime, and then—the paid story of a traitor to his own people! Is that all your proof, Mackintosh?"

"Proof 'nough fer a man who has not made up his mind a'ready!" came the factor's reply. "An' I'm content tew leave it tew the court. Send down your messengers, an' see if th' post at Death Point is burnt to th' ground!"

McTavish was on his feet again on the instant, and this time he was allowed to speak, because Morton seemed to realize that he had lost the bluff.

"'Tis clear," said McTavish, "thet Red ain't lyin'—leastways, 'tis clear to me an'——"

"To me also!" came a muttered chorus from

the rest of the white men, but the redskins there sat still and silent.

" 'Tis a pity, a great pity," McTavish went on, " thet le Grand ain't here to gie his own evidence. Wi'out thet, wi'out Mackintosh hevin' a chance to question him, this can't be called a fair trial, an' I fer one gie my verdict fer Mackintosh, the whitest man th' company ever had! "

Rough eloquence indeed, it caused the redskins to glower and Morton himself to half rise in his seat. As for Mackintosh, he smiled gratefully at McTavish, while Hal, who had been silent all through, not having been called upon to speak, broke out with:

" A good verdict too, sir! I want to say that whatever happens to my friend Mackintosh must happen also to me, for I have been partner with him through all that has taken place. I would thrust le Grand's lies down his throat an he were here. But he knows better than be here. See, this is what he did for me! " And Hal, whipping off his jacket, revealed the scar on his arm left by the wound inflicted by le Grand many months back. " Tell them, Red, the real reason for it all! "

Mackintosh looked up at the youngster, who more than once had bent down to him and whispered an urging to reveal the truth of le Grand's enmity, but Mackintosh had each time shook his head. " Bide a bit, lad! " he had said the last time, and Hal had been content until then.

What might have happened then it is impossible to say, but at that moment there arose a loud com-

motion outside, a shouting of men in English and Indian dialects, a commotion that suggested trouble. Morton sprang to his feet, and the rest of the men around the table followed his example. Just as they reached the door, having forgotten their "prisoners," it opened, and the Indian servant who had led Mackintosh into the room burst in greatly agitated. Morton bellowed a question at him, and the Indian, cowering in fear, told him that a party of Sioux, led by the chief Red Feather, had arrived, and demanded audience of the governor.

At the mention of Red Feather's name Mackintosh sprang to his feet and gripped Hal by the arm.

"Lad," he said, "'tis in luck we are. Red Feather ain't come fer nothin'."

"Go tell Red Feather that I'll turn the garrison on him!" roared Morton; but scarcely were the words out of his mouth than Red Feather himself appeared at the door. He stalked straight into the room and came up before Morton.

"Where's Red Fox?" he demanded without ceremony.

"Greeting, brother!" Mackintosh called out; and Morton turned on him with a snarl. Red Feather stumped past the fuming governor, who seemed to have so lost control of himself that for the time being he could neither say nor do anything.

"The Great Spirit has sent me in time!" exclaimed the Sioux, grasping Red's hand. "They said, those liars, I would fin' you killed or in prison. I bring the greatest liar—le Grand!"

CHAPTER XIV

THE MAN WHO DISAPPEARED

TO say that the announcement of Red Feather caused consternation amongst the red men who sided with Morton and grateful amazement to Mackintosh and his friends is to state the situation baldly. For a moment or so deathly silence reigned, and then Morton, recovering, bellowed out a volley of imprecations at the man who had dared to invade the place in so unceremonious a fashion. He ordered him out, but Red Feather simply stared at him without moving from Mackintosh's side. Morton, driven almost insane by this defiance, cupped his hands and shouted for the soldiers. It was then that Red Feather acted swiftly, dramatically. He threw up his musket and levelled it at Morton.

"One soldier come me shoot!" he said. "I come help palefaces and save my brother Red Fox. Outside they tell me heem on trial, but they do not let me in. I have hees foe wit' me—man who lies. The great company t'at buys our pelts is fair, even to foes; much more to eets best frien's!"

Morton's fury was terrible to behold, but he seemed to realize that he was cornered and must bow to the decrees of a fate that was stronger than he himself; besides, his crafty mind was working even

in the height of his madness, and he was forming a plan by which to achieve his ends and to punish with seeming justice this threatening chief.

Without a word he strode down the room, back to the head of the table, having banged the door to and locked it. It was not until he was seated that he spoke, and then it was to order the factors to take their seats. That done, Morton, having by a great effort calmed himself, leaned forward and said with a wonderful assumption of dignity:

"Gentlemen, you must forgive my outburst—but in London I have seen even palefaces lose their temper at a less insult than this man has offered me—or, I ought to say, the company that I and you represent. Yet, because he comes to bring evidence that he says will clear the prisoner, he is welcome, and I ask his pardon—if he will ask mine for what he has done."

Quick to realize that he had gained his point, and wishing for no further obstacles, Red Feather made a dignified apology, winding up by requesting that a messenger might be sent to bring in le Grand. To this Morton could but assent, and the terrified servant, who was still in the room, was told to unlock the door and fetch in le Grand.

During the servant's absence the room was electric with expectation. Hal Newlands could scarcely contain himself. Mackintosh stood between him and Red Feather, a smile of triumph on his lips. The white factors conversed in low tones, while the redskins sat imperturbable. Only his clenched fists

drumming the table told of the riot of savage emotion surging through Morton. He jerked upright as the door opened—and there, framed in it, were two Sioux with le Grand between them, his arms tied behind his back and savage rage struggling with fear upon his face. The Sioux prodded him, and the half-breed walked into the room, glared around, and then staggered a little as he saw Mackintosh. The door swung to behind him, and he drew himself up as though determined to be defiant.

"Your excellency!" he cried, "these bonds——"

"Cut free the man's hands!" Morton barked at the servant, who obeyed with alacrity.

"He is my pris'ner," said Red Feather quietly. "I have a score against him. I want him!"

"We deal first with Mackintosh," Morton told him. "Your personal feud has nothing to do with that. Pierre le Grand," he went on, "here is Mackintosh. Give your evidence against him!"

Leering viciously at Mackintosh, le Grand stepped forward and started a long harangue in which he repeated all that Morton had said regarding Mackintosh, and vowed that all over the country the Indians were incensed at his behaviour and were threatening retribution. Very carefully he refrained from a single word about the paper and his own determined quest for it, and with all the cunning of the red man and the assurance of the white he wove such a mesh about Mackintosh that even the white factors became uneasy and glanced from him to

their comrade as if looking for some reassurance from him.

They got little from Mackintosh, for he sat there inscrutable, master of the passion raging within, biding his time, knowing that le Grand, who was so greatly daring and had by it evidently reimposed his hold over Morton and the red men—if that had been necessary—would presently have the ground cut from beneath his feet; for Mackintosh realized that Red Feather had not come from far down south without having good cause.

Hal it was whose honest indignation gave the factors the assurance they wanted, for the youngster sprang forward as le Grand wound up with "that is the tale of the man they rightly call Red Fox!"

"'Tis a lie—the lie of a thief and a murderer!" Hal cried.

"Steady, lad," came Mackintosh's voice, as he grasped Hal and held him back. "Bide a while longer—let Red Feather drive them lies down the villain's throat. We ain't got nothin' tew fear."

Hal sobered on the instant as he realized that after all it was no good for him to take up the cudgels on his friend's behalf when there was a man far better able to wield them, and he stepped back as Morton banged the big table and called on Red Feather to step forward.

The Sioux walked to the bottom of the table, glanced with contempt at the half-breed, and then turned and looked straight at Morton.

Beginning in his own tongue, lapsing into broken

English, Red Feather, with the rough eloquence and long-winded periods so beloved of Indian orators, told the story of le Grand and Mackintosh as he knew it, and further than that, without even asking whether it had yet been mentioned, launched forth into the tale of the secret writing. It is safe to say that not one man in that room took his eyes off the Sioux as he unfolded that story, and Mackintosh and Hal especially could scarcely veil their impatience and interest, for Red Feather was confirming all that Mackintosh had suggested might be behind the letter for which so much had been dared and for which so many men had already given their lives.

"Listen, O men of the great company!" cried Red Feather, after he had hurled back the lies that le Grand had told. "That paper belongs to my people—the great nation of the Sioux! Moons and moons ago, when the palefaces first came from across the great water and mixed with the red men, they did things which could not be forgiven, and my people laid up vengeance in their hearts. And it was told by the medicine man—the great sachem who knew medicine—Black Cloud, that the day would come when the red men, foes then one against the other, should come together and drive the palefaces from the land. They asked him for a sign, those fathers of ours, and he gave it to them: on paper such as the palefaces used he drew the pictures that no man could read. 'In due time,' he said, so the songs of our fathers ran, 'there shall arise a man—a son of the Sioux, a son of the Clouds—who shall read the

mystery, and when that time comes then shall be the time for the great hunt of the palefaces! That man shall lead!' ".

Red Feather paused to take breath, and every man was now alert, tense with suppressed excitement. Even Morton himself could not disguise the interest that he felt, and Hal, looking at him, saw a strange gleam in his eyes, a gleam that he did not like.

"Say on, Red Feather!"—the words came thick and blurred from the lips of Morton.

"What more shall I say?" said Red Feather. "This, the paper that the half-breed"—he slurred the word insultingly, and le Grand glowered at him—"that paper the half-breed got by treachery from the brother of Red Fox. Whence Red Fox's brother got it is nothing—the half-breed said he stole it from him, but the paleface swore 'twas the half-breed stole it. The paleface gave it to Red Fox, and neither knew what it meant——"

"Thet I'll swear, though I did guess!" came the interruption from Mackintosh. "I've heerd thet story o' the Clouds and the great paleface hunt! But tell us, O Red Feather, think ye thet the half-breed knew the story the writing had to tell?"

"Who knows?" said Red Feather. "But this I do know"—and, with true dramatic instinct, he paused—"this do I know: the half-breed claims a Sioux squaw for his mother—a squaw of the line of the Clouds!"

At the words le Grand drew himself up proudly

as though to substantiate the claim thus mentioned for him. The Sioux took no notice of him, but went on, and Hal scarcely heard the words that he spoke, so drumming was his brain as he pieced together this amazing story.

"This also do I know," the Indian went on, "that far and wide has the half-breed spread a tale like to that which I have told. Here and there has the word gone forth and spread like the fire on the plains that the Great Cloud has arisen and the great hunt will begin soon!"

The white factors sprang to their feet, unable to remain seated any longer; the red men seemed to be in the grip of something indefinable. Morton ground his knuckles on the table. Le Grand smiled cynically, and before anyone could interrupt he had exclaimed:

"So shall it be! This fool of a Sioux, who is traitor to his fathers, speaks the truth. I, Pierre le Grand, the Great Cloud, have read the paper of my father of long ago. Soon shall the palefaces be driven into the sea, and the red man claim his own again! What though I lead them not—there are others—and it needs not now the paper to bring the great hunt!"

All was commotion now, and it was something like five minutes before Morton could obtain quiet. Then, standing like some grim monster in the glow of the hurricane lamps, by now lit and hung about the room, he called for a hearing.

"Gentlemen," he said glibly, "it would seem

that our friend Mr. Mackintosh is not guilty, that the half-breed lied, that the half-breed has set tribe against tribe, and out of his own mouth he stands condemned as a trouble-maker, an enemy of the company and the white men who call me brother!" He drew himself up and puffed out with pride as he said this, and there was something ludicrous in it. "Mr. Mackintosh"—he paused as if to allow the attempted courtesy to sink in—"the court has heard and knows you blameless and proclaims you so. Le Grand"—he turned round on the half-breed—"le Grand, where's that paper?"

The question came like a shot from a musket, and there was something in the voice that made Hal stare at him, something that Hal could not define, but which seemed to him to be ominous.

"Ask him," said le Grand, pointing to Red Feather; "he knows so much! Ask him what his friend the Red Fox did with it!"

"Where is it?" thundered Morton at Red Feather, forgetting for the moment that he was not now speaking to one of the men whom he had cowed.

"The paper belongs to the Sioux," was the chief's calm reply, "else why should I hold the half-breed prisoner and not kill him? For he has part of it—the other is safe hidden. Had I not heard that Red Fox was to find trouble when he came here I should not have come; had I not come I should not have found the half-breed, who crept like a snake into my camp and tried to find the paper. It was not there, and my people got him instead. Torture would have

made him tell where his paper was, but I had to hasten here to save my brother, and now I claim my prisoner!"

A deep silence fell upon the company at that, and all eyes were turned on Morton, who was looking from one to the other. Whatever was passing through his evil mind did not show itself on his face, and even when he spoke no one there understood what was behind his words.

"Listen, Red Feather!" he said. "You claim the paper as a Sioux. I claim the prisoner as an enemy of the company. Vengeance shall be done for you and it. Ho—there—the guard!" And at his call the servant sprang for the door and unlocked it. A couple of soldiers came in, and at a command from Morton secured le Grand after a short struggle. He was led away, and to Hal's surprise, as well as to that of the rest of the whites, Red Feather made no protest at thus being robbed of his captive.

"It is well," was what he said. "It is well if, before vengeance is done, I, Red Feather, may know where is the paper of the Black Cloud!"

"It shall be so," was Morton's promise.

"I think we ought to know what's goin' to be done wi' the breed!" exclaimed McTavish. "'Tis no light thing thet he's done an'——"

"Another time," was the brusque reply of Morton. "It is necessary to find out how much harm he has done and to do what we can to put it right. That's the first thing to do!"

There was a muttered chorus of agreement with

what seemed a very wise decision, and Morton fairly beamed when he heard it.

"Mr. Mackintosh," he said, "will you do me the honour of supping with me to-night? The company owes you something for your labours!"

"Thanks," was Mackintosh's reply. "To-night I have much to do—there be my pelts outside waitin' to be unloaded and checked, so ef——"

"Then to-morrow," said Morton easily; and without saying yes or no, Mackintosh got upon his feet and went out of the room with Hal and Red Feather. McTavish followed them immediately, and invited the factor and his friends to stay at his log house, an offer which was gratefully accepted by Mackintosh and Hal, but refused by Red Feather, who said that he had other work to do than eat and talk. With that cryptic saying he left them, and Mackintosh, promising McTavish to see him later, took Hal off to where they had left Strong Hand and his men. For the next few hours they were all too busy to discuss matters, except to give Strong Hand a bare outline of what had happened; but at last the pelts were all unloaded and in the storehouses properly checked off. Mackintosh came back from a short absence and announced that he had arranged for Strong Hand and his men to be accommodated comfortably, and then he and Hal set off for the house of McTavish.

"Got your pistol loaded, lad?" Mackintosh asked quietly, as they walked through the darkness; and Hal started at the question.

"Yes. Why, Red?" he asked.

"'Cos I wouldn't trust that black-hearted villain Morton five minutes, lad!" was the startling reply. "Think ye I'd sit at table wi' him? Why, lad, he'd poison me fer sure! I——"

He stopped suddenly and jerked his pistol from his belt as a dark figure loomed out of the gloom.

"Who's that?" he asked crisply.

"Red Feather!" came the reply; and Hal, who had found himself fingering his trigger, breathed more easily.

"What's doin'?" Mackintosh asked, as the Sioux came close to him.

"Listen," whispered Red Feather. "Outside" —and he waved his hand in the direction of the wild country beyond—"outside they say that the half-breed spoke of the governor——"

"Bein' in the plot, eh?" Mackintosh broke in.

"Even so, Red Fox," the Sioux told him. "So I watch, my men and I, to see whither the half-breed goes."

"By the silver fox!" exclaimed Mackintosh, "that 'ud be his game—to let le Grand escape and keep the trouble stirring. Say, brother, where d'ye stand in this?"

"If my brother means am I for the palefaces or not, I am!" was the reply. "Wise words were those spoken by my brother down at Death Point; and I, who have read that paper, know that the great hunt of the palefaces would bring death and worse upon the red men."

"Good it is!" said Mackintosh, grasping the red man's hand; and Hal felt a lump rise to his throat. "I'll put the factors wise to it, an'——"

"Be not hasty, brother," Red Feather advised. "It is well to see how far the governor goes. They say, the whisperers, that the great hunt begins not until the snows come again, so there is time, brother, for much."

A movement behind caused Hal to turn swiftly, and he saw something black spring—something that assumed a terrifying shape in the darkness. He knew instinctively, although he could not see plainly, that it was an assailant, because one arm was lifted high and something glinted in the starlight. Out came the youngster's pistol again, but before he could use it Red Feather had sprung—there was a sharp intake of breath, a choking gasp, the assailant staggered away, and then dropped to the ground. Red Feather bent over him and remained there for a moment or so; then, straightening up, he said quietly:

"Get hence, brothers—the man is dead," and was gone himself into the darkness. Mackintosh and Hal, realizing that they were likely to run into trouble if they remained where they were, betook themselves away, and without a word to each other reached McTavish's house.

"Come in, mon," said McTavish, swinging open the door through which shot a gleam of light. He banged it to after them, and Mackintosh, throwing himself down on the wooden bench beside the table, said:

"Mac, theer's trouble a-brewin'!" and told him what Red Feather had said and what had happened out in the night.

McTavish listened quietly, but there was a dangerous glint in his eyes. He thumped the table in anger when Mackintosh had finished and said:

"Red, that mon's a very devil! If the breed escapes theer'll be the deuce to pay wi' the British factors here—I'll see to thet; an' we'll put Morton in chains, by gar we will!"

"We can't do thet, Mac," Red told him, "not on the word of an Indian. The fools at home wouldn't believe us, an' we'd all get flung out fer sure. We can do better'n that: we kin watch and wait and do our part to stop th' great hunt they talk o'. Ef le Grand gets free, I'm after him, bet your last pelt on thet. And ef I've still any influ'nce wi' the Injuns, I reckon I kin help!"

"Look here, Red," McTavish said, nodding agreement, "how far d'ye think we ought to tell this—shall we let our friends in it?"

"Don't know—yet," was the reply. "Why?"

"'Cos seems ter me thet what yew say yew kin do they all might do: get away fra here an' among the Injuns. Don't see how else we're goin' to stop things happening."

"Thet's a good idea, Mac," Red said. "But we'll think 'bout it 'til mornin', eh?"

It is safe to say that during all the hours of that night, while he and Mackintosh and Hal sat before a log fire, they were thinking and talking of little

else but the grim happenings of the past and the grimmer happenings that were likely in the future as a result of the plot set in train by le Grand. McTavish listened feverishly to the recital of the adventures through which the comrades had passed, and in his turn told of how he himself, on his trip from his post, had heard rumours of unrest, but had not placed much reliance upon them, knowing that such rumours were rife nearly every year. And, after all, there were continual outbreaks of the red man, irruptions of bloodthirsty tribes which were soon quenched.

It was obvious, however, that this affair was a greater one than anything that had been experienced, and both he and Mackintosh knew how strong would be the urge of the prophecy of the great Black Cloud of the long, long ago if once it got spread amongst the red men. It would mean that tribes that were in the ordinary course rivals and deadly foes would join together for the purpose of driving the white men from the land, and the factors understood also how great would be the power of the name of Morton if it got abroad that he was not only sympathetic but would play his part in due time. With hosts of red men amongst the employees of the company, he could work underhandedly and get them to play the traitor at the right moment. The forts dotted about the country could be betrayed to the attacking red men, and the catastrophe would be great and complete—unless steps were found to prevent it.

They put their heads together to try to devise

means to that end, but when the grey light of dawn filtered into the house they had found none and owned themselves up against a big problem that seemed to defy solution.

"It's a case o' tellin' our friends, Mac," Red said at last. "We know our fellows 'll be all right—an' we'll get 'em out as onsuspiciously as we kin. Theer's Strong Hand, too, ye know; I'll hev him and his men away as soon as possible, and get a messenger down to Kee-lee-taw. 'Tween 'em they ought to do somethin', for they're both wi' me, I know thet."

"One thing, if what Red Feather said is right, we've got plenty o' time to work in," said McTavish. "I reckon we'll jest now get abroad, mon, an' see if theer's ony news, eh? Young man, yew look tired—tumble in an' sleep awhile," he said, looking over at Hal, but the youngster vowed that he was not for sleeping yet.

"Ver' weel, lad," McTavish said. "We'll jest gang an' see ef——"

What he was going to say was interrupted by a hullabaloo outside the house. He sprang to the door and swung it open. As he did so the hand that someone had raised to knock it struck the factor, and he staggered back with a growl.

"By gar!" he cried, then stopped and laughed as Henry Simpson, another of the factors, stepped inside with an apology.

"Sorry, Mac," he said. "Opened th' door too soon for me. Heeard the news?"

"Little one can hear of anything wi' that row goin' on," was the reply. "What's it mean an' what's the news?"

"Thet derned half-breed's escaped!" said Simpson, "and the governor's raised the whole place tew look fer him!"

CHAPTER XV

THE PEACE-MAKERS

SIMPSON'S announcement, although it completely verified the suspicions of the men in McTavish's house, for the moment robbed them of all feeling but that of absolute helplessness, for as they glanced one from the other they were thinking of the great baffling problem with which they were faced if they were to do anything to frustrate the plot in which they now had no doubt the governor himself was implicated. It was Simpson who broke the silence—Simpson, who had been staring at the dumbfounded companions as though trying to fathom the depth of bewilderment written large upon their faces.

"Weel," he burst out, "ye all look as if ye'd seen ghosts!"

"So we hev—leastways, I'm seein' 'em," said McTavish. "Ghosts o' to-morrow. But coom in, mon, an' tell us all about it."

He banged the door behind Simpson, who was literally gaping at his friend, evidently thinking he had gone raving mad.

"Out wi' it, Mac," he demanded. "What ghosts an' whose?"

"Mine, an' yours, and heaven knows whose

besides," was McTavish's reply. "There's a great conspir'cy, mon, afoot, an'—an'—but tell us first 'bout the breed."

"What's there t' tell, onyway?" Simpson asked. "Only know thet when the Injun went this morning wi' his grub the breed wasna theer. Smashed a window an' got away—an' a sentry posted nigh at hand had been overpowered; therefore there must have been accomplices. The governor's got the whole town out, an' they's tryin' to fin' the trail an'——"

"They'll ne'er fin' it," said McTavish simply. "Better tell him, eh, Red?" Mackintosh nodded over at him, and McTavish, acting as spokesman, told Simpson what they had learned and what they suspected. When he had finished Simpson exhausted the vocabulary of the fur-trading fraternity in denunciation of le Grand and Morton, and vowed that he was one with McTavish and Red in anything they intended to do. Mackintosh outlined their proposals, with which he agreed, and said:

"I'll get 'round, mon, an' let the fellers know. By gar, I know what ye mean by ghosts o' to-morrow now!"

At that moment there came another uproar, and the four men burst out of the house—to find a rabble of traders and redskins, of women and children—exiles amongst the wastes of the north, living the rough life of pioneers of Empire—coming towards them, with the leading men carrying a limp burden.

They knew instinctively what it was, but, determined to put a bold and unconcerned face upon

matters, they advanced towards the rabble and linked up with it, inquiring the reason for the renewed outcry.

They soon knew—or their informers thought they did—for it was the general opinion that le Grand, having escaped from the lock-up, had met and stabbed the unfortunate man who had been found dead. That hypothesis seemed a very natural one, and to Mackintosh and his comrades it meant that there would be no suspicion cast upon them or Red Feather—at least openly, for Morton would be quick to seize this affair as one to prove that the prisoner had escaped in reality. Everything fitted in beautifully.

"Don't see any of Red Feather's men or the chief himsel'," Mackintosh whispered to Hal, as they allowed the mob to go by.

"They probably went after le Grand very soon following his escape," the youngster suggested. "Remember, Red Feather said he was watching for things!"

"Ay, 'tis likely indeed," Mackintosh agreed. But when, a little later, they arrived at the governor's house, as in duty bound, to make inquiries—without doing that they realized they would arouse suspicion, not of complicity, because Morton could not think that, but of knowledge—it was to learn that the whole band of Sioux with one exception, and that Red Feather himself, had been put under guard.

"What for?" Mackintosh demanded of Morton, who was affability itself towards the factor now.

"That's plain, I reckon," Morton said. "Red Feather wanted the prisoner, y'know. Why? Think I can tell you. Mr. Mackintosh, I know you've a great hold on some of the tribes, and I know you're a great friend of Red Feather's. That's why he brought le Grand here. But don't you see?"

"What?" Mackintosh asked simply, looking Morton straight in the face.

"Red Feather, having cleared you for the sake of his friendship, plays the next part o' the game. If I know anything about the Sioux, few of them are likely to turn against the prophecy of Black Cloud, and it was a trick Red Feather was playing. He's in this plot for the great hunt, depend upon it. He's thick with le Grand, and it was all arranged!"

Morton was looking at Mackintosh piercingly as though trying to fathom his thoughts, but the face of Mackintosh was empty of emotion or expression except of a well-simulated surprise.

"By the silver fox!" he exclaimed, "I never thought o' thet!"

"I did!" proclaimed the governor grandiloquently. "From the beginning I thought of it, and I had Red Feather's men watched. He himself I missed. I knew that if the Sioux were watched they couldn't attempt anything; but somehow Red Feather evidently succeeded. But we'll get him—we'll get both o' them. The best trackers are out, an' they'll bring them both back, be sure of that!

We've discovered already that le Grand escaped on a mustang. Everything all right, Mackintosh—pelts all in and checked up?" he said, switching off suddenly.

"Quite," said the factor, "thanks. By the way, there's somethin' due to Strong Hand an' his men, o' course, an' I've put in my paper for it."

"That will be attended to, of course," the governor told him. "I hear you've had a remarkably good season."

"Thanks largely to young Newlands," Mackintosh said.

"Ah, yes, glad to know you, young Newlands," Morton said affably to Hal, who acknowledged the greeting. 'Better come with Mr. Mackintosh to-night for supper.'

"Thanks," said Mackintosh for both of them, and Morton turned away. "Hal, lad," the factor said, when they were walking off with McTavish, "there's no supper wi' that blackguard to-night. We're gettin' away before the day's gone. I'm not trustin' Morton an inch."

"What about Red Feather's men?" McTavish asked.

"We'll hev to leave 'em where they are—we daren't interfere. We're s'posed to believe what Morton says. Anyway, he'll not do anythin' to 'em 'cept keep 'em prisoners. He ain't got no evidence, an' the factors we leave behin' we'll tell, so thet they kin frustrate Morton's plans if he gets high an' mighty. Better get goin' wi' the news,

Mac! I'm goin' to settle up wi' Strong Hand and tell him to git 'way as soon as possible."

For the rest of the morning they saw nothing more of McTavish, but, business done with Strong Hand, of whom Mackintosh managed to buy a couple of mustangs that he had just procured, they met McTavish at his house and learned something which proved of tremendous service. Mackintosh had planned to get away and take the long trail into the wilds to get into touch with as many Indians as he could in order to try to use his persuasion with them to keep out of the plot. McTavish's news, however, changed the plan, for it concerned le Grand.

"I've got the ball rollin', Red," McTavish said, "an' the men are as mad as hatters. Why, mon, most o' 'em wanted to go beard Morton an' lug him out o' the house an' take the cons'quences; but I got 'em calmed doon a bit, and they listened to reason. Then up cooms Harv Bentley, jest in fra Reindeer Lake wi' his consignment. 'Course I told him quick and asked ef he'd heerd onythin' out yonder. Sure he had, and, what's more, tol' me he'd seen a half-breed goin' hell fer leather t' the west not above twenty miles from here!"

"And his news?" Mackintosh asked.

"Oh, same as mine—plenty o' rumours o' somethin' goin' t' happen."

"I'm out after le Grand as soon as it's dusk!" said Mackintosh. "Hal and me'll go—thet's our part o' the game!"

"Ver' weel," McTavish agreed. "Leave the rest t' us, mon!"

"It's in safe keepin', Mac," said Red earnestly; and when he and Hal, just as twilight was dropping into depth, slid out of camp to pick up the horses that Strong Hand's men had taken out earlier in the day as if for a trial, it was with a feeling almost of optimism that they were going to scotch the great plot that threatened the tenure of the white man in the north.

They found the horses at the appointed place, and having learned what they could from Bentley, made for the spot where he had seen the half-breed. By the time they reached it it was too dark even for Mackintosh to pick up the continuation of the trail. They therefore camped for the night, making a meal off the food they had brought with them. The problem of food supplies did not worry them, for the game season was at its best now, and they could live on the land as they journeyed, even if it lasted for many weeks.

It lasted for many weeks—it ran on into three months, in fact, for although they picked up le Grand's trail when morning came, they eventually lost it at Reindeer Lake, and never found it again. They had used their horses as well as was possible, but having missed the trail, they decided to give them a good rest. For a week they remained on the shore of the lake, and then Mackintosh resolved to put into execution his original plan.

"We'll get among the Injuns, lad," he said to

Hal. "See how the land lays, an' do what we can."

"You're leader," Hal told him. Despite the preying anxiety of it all, Hal was thoroughly enjoying himself, what with the occasional hunting and fishing for food and the exhilarating riding over the plains, besides which there was the fact that they were doing something towards a great end.

To tell in full the story of their wanderings during the next few weeks would be long and tedious because of the similarity of the experiences passed through. Here and there they came into touch with nomad Indians or dropped into wigwam villages, and wherever they went they found the same thing. At first Mackintosh, for all that his name, if not he himself, was known, received but a chilly welcome, which told him that the poison was at work; but the factor, biding his opportunity, tackled the chiefs, and so magnetic was the man's personality, so blameless was his record among the red men, that in the majority of cases before he left he had at least succeeded in planting the antidote to the poison. In some cases he entered into pacts, and Indians who before had been definitely for the great hunt of the palefaces swore over a pipe of peace that they would do nothing against the great company. Hal, as this kind of thing went on, marvelled and at times could not restrain expression of the admiration that he felt.

"Red," he would say, "if the others do as well as you are doing there'll be no uprising. You're a wonder!"

Mackintosh would simply shrug his shoulders and say:

"Ef y'know how to handle the Injun, lad, he's like a bairn in y'r hands. There's them as say there's no good 'tall in a redskin, but I tell ye, lad, theer's mony a white heart beatin' in a red breast!"

It was as they got deeper into the country that they found the work of conciliation harder, and it was not long before Mackintosh, who did his best to discover the reason for this, succeeded in doing so. On the bank of the Athabasca River, at a point to which Mackintosh had never before been, they came upon a village of the Athabascans. The appearance of the palefaces caused a sensation in the village, for the Athabascans were, as Mackintosh knew, not at all friendly disposed towards the white men. Nevertheless, having warned Hal to be careful of how he conducted himself, he went boldly in amongst the wigwams. By the use of his mixed dialects Mackintosh made himself understood and obtained audience of Wolf Fang, the chief whose fame as a mighty warrior and leader of his people—he was supreme chief of the Athabascans—was widespread over the north.

Wolf Fang sat puffing clouds of smoke through which he peered at the two palefaces.

What he said was as Dutch to Hal, and Mackintosh had later to interpret for him. The factor squatted down facing the chief, and Hal followed his example, knowing that he would not be doing wrong in that.

"In peace we come, O Wolf Fang!" Mackintosh said.

"As came the paleface moons ago who stole away my squaw!" came the answer.

"In peace I come—Red Fox never lied to his brothers the red men yet!" Mackintosh said calmly.

"Red Fox!" Almost against his own will, it seemed, Wolf Fang jerked out the words, and there was a world of meaning in his tone which needed no further words to explain the admiration that he felt for the paleface. Mackintosh sat silent for a while, waiting for the chief to speak again, but he too remained dumb.

"I come," Mackintosh began again at last, "to bring an offer of peace from the palefaces on the edge of the great water—the palefaces who buy the pelts that their red brothers gather. Listen, O Wolf Fang! It is said in the lodges of the palefaces that the red men gather to a great hunt—a hunt of the palefaces! Is it not so?"

"Red Fox has spoken!" was the reply.

"In peace I come, therefore, O Wolf Fang. I come to save the red men from the vengeance of the palefaces, which must be taken if the great hunt begins. The palefaces would live at peace, but in their tents are many braves ready if the hatchet lifts and the tomahawk falls. Right across the plains have I come speaking these words, and behind me"—he waved a hand that pointed through the opening of the wigwam—"the red men have driven the hatchet

into the ground as a sign that they will take no part in the great hunt! My work is done when I have told my peace message to you, O Wolf Fang! Know you that the Sioux, the red men whose fathers handed down the secret writing"—Hal, not knowing what Mackintosh was saying, saw the chief start at this point; as for Mackintosh, he paused for the words to soak in, then he went on again as Wolf Fang said nothing—"the Sioux, whose fathers handed down the secret writing that told of the Great Hunt, they too have buried the hatchet. They know that the half-breed who calls himself the son of the Black Cloud long ago would bring death and worse to the red men! I have spoken!"

For all his Indian nonchalance it was evident to Mackintosh that Wolf Fang was having difficulty in preventing himself from showing the surprise that he was feeling; but he succeeded admirably, and after a few moments of silent puffing at his pipe, and looking straight at the paleface, he spoke:

"Red Fox has spoken, but whether he speaks truth or deceit who can tell? This is a matter for the braves—for the medicine doctors. Go, Red Fox, and know yourself safe among my lodges. My messengers shall go fetch the sachems to the council. Ere many suns shall you know whether it is peace or war!"

"It is well. Red Fox takes the word of his brother!" said Mackintosh, getting up.

Wolf Fang called out loudly, and a woman came in. He gave her certain instructions, and she

beckoned the palefaces to follow her. They did so, and were conducted to a tent.

"Food!" Mackintosh said crisply; and the woman nodded and left the tent.

The moment they were alone Hal burst out with his request for information, and Mackintosh gave it.

"I told ye, lad," he wound up, "days agone thet we'd have a tussle with Wolf Fang. The Athabascans are a tough lot and great fighters. They hate the whites—always did—and it only needed somethin' like this affair to stir 'em up to war. It'll be some days before the council can be held, 'cos the sub-chiefs have to be collected. Meanwhile, we've got to keep our eyes open, for I don't trust Wolf Fang."

"What about the horses?" Hal asked.

"We'll have to risk turnin' 'em out, hobbled o' course, an' as near as may be, case we want 'em," was the reply. "Let's go fetch 'em right up now!"

They did so, watched by hundreds of eyes, and when they had got the horses near the tent, which, fortunately, was on the outskirts of the tent town, they found that the food Mackintosh had ordered was ready for them. Fine Indian dishes and plenty. The Indian woman stood just inside the tent watching them, and there was something in her face that made Hal's heart almost stand still.

"Red," he said in English, "we can't eat this! Poi——"

"I know, Hal," was the calm reply. Mackintosh turned to the woman and bade her go, and the

moment she had gone he drew to the flap of the tent. "Lad," he said, "we're not eating it, I know; 'twas only a bluff on my part to let 'em think we were not afraid of 'em. We'll get what we can when we can; this and what else they bring us 'll be buried, d'ye hear! 'Course, they'll be s'prised we ain't dead by to-morrow; but they'll still bring the grub, an'—well, they'll know we ain't eatin' it. But thet won't matter. Good job, though, we got some dried meat left over from what we killed!"

"A very good job," Hal said a little shakily. "I reckon we'll sleep one at a time while we're here. Seems to me, Red, that you may be expecting a lot of things to happen that won't, and after all if Wolf Fang's got any nasty ideas about us it would be an easy matter for him just to set his men on us and wipe us right out without fussing about poison or attacking us while we're asleep."

"'Tain't onlikely he'll do somethin' like thet, lad, afore he's through," said Mackintosh. "But don't worry now—slip in an' git some sleep as a first send-off. I'll do the sentry-turn fer a few hours an' then wake ye!"

It had been a long day, for the pair had determined to reach Wolf Fang's village before camping again, and Hal was dead tired. Therefore he was not averse from acting upon Mackintosh's advice, and was soon fast asleep. Perhaps it was that the Athabascans had poisoned the food and believed that the morning would find their victims dead, but the fact was that that night they were not troubled by

any unwelcome attentions, and Hal and Mackintosh took turns about in watching without there being any apparent need. For over a week they remained in the village, to all intents and purposes boycotted by the Indians, who seemed to take no notice of them. They moved about tending their horses without being molested, and one day they went out of the village and did a little hunting to replenish their stores, bringing back fresh meat in their kits.

Came a day when Mackintosh went to the wigwam of Wolf Fang and, walking right in, asked him when he thought the council would meet. The chief shrugged his shoulders and said he hoped it would be in two, three, maybe four, days, the sachems would be hunting, and it would be difficult to find some of them. He inquired as to the comfort of the palefaces, and Mackintosh told him that they were quite happy and contented, although anxious to get back to the edge of the great water with the news that the Athabascans would remain at peace. Wolf Fang glared at him for a moment, then deliberately turned his back on him. Mackintosh promptly sat down and, pulling out his pipe, proceeded to smoke calmly, determined to force the chief to answer him before he left the tent. For something over an hour this game continued — and Mackintosh won, for Wolf Fang at last turned round, and there was a baleful light in his eyes.

"The Red Fox waits!" he said angrily. "Two days, three, four—who knows? Did not Wolf Fang say?"

"I know," was Mackintosh's reply. "But there is something Red Fox would know," he went on, without waiting for Wolf Fang to speak again. "I asked not the day I came whether Wolf Fang has seen the half-breed who claims to be of the line of the Clouds or how the news of the great hunt reached the Athabascans."

"No half-breed has Wolf Fang seen!" the chief told him immediately.

"Who, then, gave the news?" put in Mackintosh quickly.

"I thought the paleface knew everything," sneered the chief. "The red man's medicine tells him what he wants to know, but that of the paleface—ugh!"

"This does the medicine of the paleface do," exclaimed Mackintosh. "It keeps off the death that lurks in the cooking-pot!"

He had not meant to say this, had not intended to let Wolf Fang know that he had any suspicion of an attempt on his life, but he felt himself amply repaid by the involuntary start that the red man gave, and knew immediately that his fears were not groundless. He was unprepared for the chief's retort, however.

"Let the white man's medicine tell him how Wolf Fang heard of the great hunt!" he said.

"What matters it?" Mackintosh hunched up his shoulders as he spoke. "Know this, O Wolf Fang, Red Fox wants but to find the half-breed—and some day will find him."

Wolf Fang laughed.

Mackintosh was furious, but he realized that he had probably gone as far as he ought, so he held himself in and with what dignity he could turned his back on the chief and walked out of the tent. He went to his own tent and told Hal what had taken place. He was serious as he did so, and more serious when, laying a hand upon the youngster's shoulder, he said:

"Lad, I don't like the laugh of Wolf Fang! I don't know why, but somehow I feel sure that he knows where le Grand is, and I'd bet half o' what's mine up at th' fort thet he's sent to tell the breed we're here!"

"Seems to me a pretty hopeless job to try to win over Wolf Fang," was the boy's reply. "Really, Red——"

"Thet's the reason why we're goin' t' try hard," said Mackintosh. "What's th' use o' winnin' over them as is half-hearted? 'Tis the tough 'uns we want, Hal, lad—an' Wolf Fang's one o' 'em."

Hal could but admire the courage of the factor, and he himself realized how important it was that the Athabascans should be kept out of the plot, which would mean that as far as concerned the stretch of country through which they had passed in the last few weeks there would be very few Indians likely to take part in the threatened war. It was, therefore, with a renewed keenness that Hal prepared to live through the days of waiting, not knowing that there

would be things happen to add something more than keenness to the game.

The first of those happened that very night. It was Hal's turn at watch, and, with what Mackintosh had said about le Grand running through his mind, he was full of attention, listening for the slightest sound or the least movement. He was sitting facing the tent-opening, right in the centre of the tent, with Mackintosh lying a few feet away from him. He had his musket across his knees and his pistol ready to hand. There was an uncanny silence—all was so still and quiet that the boy found himself wishing that something would happen to relieve the monotony. For several nights this kind of thing had been going on: the long hours of watching, with nothing, seemingly, to watch for. It palled and grew more wearisome with each spell.

And when the "something" came it was with such startling suddenness and in such stealth that Hal did not realize it until something dropped over his head. Arms swept round his body, and he was lifted up by a man who must have been a giant for strength and carried bodily, kicking out with his feet and trying to shout the alarm, but knowing that the blanket—as he knew it was by the feel of it on his face—that covered his head deadened the sound. From the time when the blanket had dropped upon him to when he knew that he was out of the tent could not have been more than half a minute, so swiftly had the work been done and so carefully had it all been arranged beforehand. Outside other hands

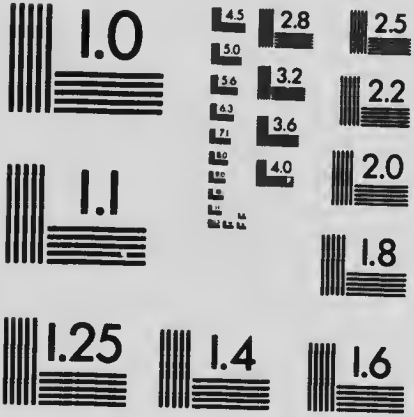
seized him, and he struggled more than ever; then there was a heavy blow upon his head, and—forgetfulness.

Yet, despite the care taken in the whole affair to maintain quietness, it was inevitable that Mackintosh, trained to sleep lightly, should hear something of it, and just as the helpless boy was taken out of the tent the factor was out also, tomahawk in one hand and axe in the other. Instinctively he realized that this was no case for firearms, but a matter for close in-fighting. He was right. Outside, like blotches against the dark background, were a score or more of forms, and Mackintosh sprang for them with a low grunt of rage. A man bending over something on the ground got the first blow and went down; another, springing forward, caught the second; and then Mackintosh was in amongst the rest. They scattered. He followed them for a few paces, and then realizing that he must not leave Hal, whom he had guessed was the bundle on the ground, he backed towards the tent and stumbled over one of the men he had knocked down. When he picked himself up the Indians had returned and were encircling his tent, while beyond them was a moving group making what haste they could, burdened as they evidently were. Mackintosh scarcely needed the glance on the ground to tell him that those men were making off with the kidnapped Hal.

There was no time to ponder over the queer proceeding of taking Hal and leaving his companion unmolested; there must be an explanation, which

MICROCOPY RESOLUTION TEST CHART

(ANSI and ISO TEST CHART No. 2)



would be discovered in good time if the fates were propitious. Mackintosh's immediate thought was to effect the rescue of Hal, and he went running in the direction of the moving group. The circling Indians closed in, but he did not mind that. With a howl of rage he made for them, and, whether it was by design or through fear he did not know, they fell away before him—always, however, keeping their order and presenting a living barrier to his progress. Moreover, others were coming up, and although he did not know it, fresh bearers had taken the place of those who had been carrying Hal.

At last Mackintosh got in among the Indians and gave and received some nasty blows; then the red men fell away again, and Mackintosh was about to make for them once more when a thought flashed through his mind. To the surprise of the red men he no longer followed them, but, turning aside, made a bolt in another direction, and, running like mad, he outstripped those who tore after him and finally burst like a tornado into Wolf Fang's tent.

And there was Wolf Fang sitting with a rough torch burning before him. Mackintosh spoke not a word at his entry, but simply pulled out his pistol and stood there, with Wolf Fang staring almost foolishly at him. It was Wolf Fang, however, who spoke first.

"The man of peace," he sneered, "with a fire-stick!"

"A fire-stick that will speak, Wolf Fang," said Mackintosh determinedly, "unless you give

me back my brother the young paleface! Hear the jackals!"

Outside the whole village was in a turmoil, a turmoil that grew nearer and nearer the chief's tent.

"Call them off, Wolf Fang!" barked Mackintosh, advancing swiftly and pressing his pistol against the chief's head before he had realized the paleface's intention.

For all his courage Wolf Fang trembled and lifted up his voice and shouted something that brought two or three young men running into the tent, those who had first reached it of the hastening mob.

"Go bring the paleface!" whimpered Wolf Fang.

"And bring him alive," said Mackintosh, "or Wolf Fang dies!"

The braves scattered on the instant, and Mackintosh and Wolf Fang were alone again.

"You promised safety," said Mackintosh, "and you steal in like a snake in the grass! I came to bring you peace, and you give me war! To-morrow, Wolf Fang, I go back to the great water and listen to the medicine of the paleface: those who go on the great hunt shall lie rotting on the plains, and their scalps shall hang in the lodges of the palefaces. Tell that, O Wolf Fang, to the half-breed when he comes hence from where he is in answer to your call." It was a shot in the dark, and Mackintosh was watching his captive intently. He knew immediately that he had made no mistake. He determined

to play up to it. "The white man's magic told him, O Wolf Fang, the magic that tells of the end of the great hunt."

Evidently Wolf Fang was impressed, but he was more impressed than ever when Mackintosh, pursuing his tactics, said:

"This also it told, Wolf Fang. All over the plains the red men spoke of a mighty medicine man who dwelt none knew where, but who went from here to there calling to the great hunt in the name of the Clouds! If the red men know not a Cloud from a half-breed the white man's magic does!"

What Wolf Fang would have said to that had to be postponed for a while, and Mackintosh, despite his anxiety for Hal, was somewhat disappointed that the interruption came. Nevertheless it was a welcome interruption, inasmuch as it brought Hal into the tent, staggering between two young braves.

"Go!" roared Mackintosh at the Indians, who, glancing at their chief, accepted his silence as consent and went out, leaving the three together.

"Sit down, lad!" Mackintosh said to Hal, whose head was swimming from the blow that had smashed down on him. As he did so the factor removed his pistol from the temple of the sitting chief. "You have kept your word thus far, Wolf Fang," he said. "Now I am at peace with you, if you will have it so!"

He thrust the weapon in his belt again and stood away from Wolf Fang, taking up his position beside Hal. For a few moments there was a deathly silence,

during which Mackintosh's eyes were fixed upon the inscrutable face of the Athabascan. It was a time fraught with tremendous issues, as both Hal—who had no idea of what had happened prior to it—and Mackintosh knew. As far as Mackintosh was concerned he realized that the critical time had come; it was no case of waiting for the council that had been summoned—the question of the Athabascan's participation in the Great Hunt was to be decided now. The issue had been forced. Decision for war meant now, as it would have meant later on, that neither he nor Hal would be allowed to leave the village.

The pipe that Wolf Fang had been smoking lay on the ground, the torch stuck just beside him was guttering and smoking, and the light from it fitful, uncertain, was trying to the eyes. In every way the scene was a dramatic one. Actually Mackintosh knew that he had Wolf Fang at his mercy if he cared to adopt stern measures, but the factor stood with his arms folded, making no threat to use the pistol in his belt.

Wolf Fang took his eyes from the white man's face. He bent forward, stretching out a hand as he did so. It closed upon the pipe on the ground and picked it up. The left hand reached away a little—and Hal started as he imagined that it was a cunning move on the part of Wolf Fang to find a weapon; but, instead, the coloured fingers picked up something which they rammed into the pipe, and then the chief leant over to the torch, drew at the pipe,

puffed, and with a sudden movement held it out to Mackintosh.

"It is peace, O Red Fox!" he said, and in the very act of taking the pipe Mackintosh dropped to the ground unconscious.

CHAPTER XVI

A TRAITOR'S DOOM!

FOR one moment Hal Newlands stood still, looking with wondering eyes at his companion on the ground; then, as Wolf Fang, standing up now, dropped the pipe that was the symbol of peace and sprang to the assistance of the man who but a moment or so before had been bearding him, the white youth was down on his knees beside Red Mackintosh. The tanned face had paled, the eyes were closed, and the body lay limp. Down the neck, bared still as it was when Mackintosh had lain down to sleep, Hal saw the marks that told him some little bit of what must have happened when the factor came out of the tent and found himself up against the crowd of Indians—a thickening stream of blood was pouring from a wound in the head.

"Water, quickly!" Hal shouted; but Wolf Fang, although he did not understand the words, took in their meaning, and went springing from the tent, to return in a few moments with an earthenware pot of water with which Hal proceeded to cleanse the wound. A nip of brandy forced in between Mackintosh's lips served presently to bring him round, by which time Hal had succeeded in stemming the flow of blood and binding the wound.

The wounded man's eyes roamed round the tent lighting upon Wolf Fang at last, and the chief stepped forward, proffering again the pipe that Mackintosh had been taking when he swooned off. The factor took it now and drew at its stem, and puffing out the smoke, said in dialect:

"Peace it is, Wolf Fang. And it is well!"

"It is well," echoed Wolf Fang. "My brother is ill—wounded. My squaws shall wait on him and——"

"Listen, Wolf Fang!" said Mackintosh, sitting up. "Wait a bit, lad," this to Hal, who was inclined to keep him lying down. "There's big work t'be done yet, an' I reckon I'll be a'right. Listen, O Wolf Fang. There's no time to be lost. You, my brother, at peace with the palefaces, must send and tell your people at once that the Athabaseans will not join in the Great Hunt. Tell them that the strange medicine man who speaks of war is but the half-breed who, O Wolf Fang, my medicine tell me it, would lead to war only that he might become the great sachem over all the sachems!"

"Even as my brother says shall be done," said Wolf Fang; and Mackintosh's eyes brightened as he got upon his feet and turned towards the opening of the tent. Wolf Fang stepped in front of him and motioned him to wait, then he himself went outside, and the two white men heard him haranguing the crowd outside, the crowd that had been murmuring impatiently, evidently wondering what was happening inside.

"He's tellin' 'em thet we're his frien's, Hal," Mackintosh said quietly. "Me lad, we've done th' trick up here an' no mistake 'bout it. Next move's wi' le Grand—an' here I look like bein' laid up fer a bit. One thing, no need fer you to fret; everything's a'right here. Wolf Fang won't play traitor wi' us."

"You're sure of that, Red?" Hal asked.

"Abs'lutely, lad," was the reply. "Hello, here he comes! Hark at 'em!"

Hark at them it was indeed. A great shout went up from the Indians, a shout of pleasure. The next instant Wolf Fang was back, beckoning the palefaces, who went out and stood beside him, blinking in the glare of a hundred torches carried by the Indians. A second shout—it was almost a howl—went up as they emerged, and after it had subsided Mackintosh stepped forward and harangued them after the fashion so beloved of the red man. He whipped them almost into a frenzy of enthusiasm as he told them of the peaceful intent of the white men, the great days coming of much trade and barter. As one man they shouted their determination to be on the side of the palefaces if the Great Hunt began. That was much more than even Mackintosh had hoped—much more, indeed, than he had asked of any of the tribes, his one idea having been to detach them from the conspiracy.

It had been a great effort for Mackintosh to address the Indians, and when he had finished he

had to lean upon Hal on the way back to their own tent, accompanied by Wolf Fang and several women, who, directly the tent was reached, set about tending to his wound and preparing food, food which was very welcome in view of the scanty supplies they had had; food, too, which they ate without any such fears as they had had previously.

Mackintosh was made comfortable, and after awhile dropped off to sleep, having previously given Hal an account of what had happened, and by the time that was done the youngster himself was dozing, for all his interest in the story. He too rolled up in his blanket and slept soundly and without anxiety, the first time since their coming into the village.

For the next three days Mackintosh was confined to the tent, and Hal waited upon him, assisted by the Indian women. Every day Wolf Fang came in to inquire after him, and it was on the evening of the third day that the chief told him that the council which had been called would meet when the last of the sachems invited would arrive. It was not to be a case of debating peace or war, because Wolf Fang's authority was practically supreme, and it would be only necessary for him to announce his decision for it to be accepted, apart, perhaps, from one or two of the fiery younger sachems.

"What about the half-breed?" Mackintosh asked crisply; and Wolf Fang looked at him queerly when he said:

"The great council shall decide that, brother," and went out without another word.

Mackintosh told Hal what had passed between him and the chief, and Hal could only ask:

"What on earth did he mean, Red?"

"Don't ask me, lad," the factor said. "He's keepin' somethin' hidden up thet blanket o' his. But I'm trustin' him, lad, right through!"

"Shall we be allowed at the council, do you think?" Hal asked; and Mackintosh could only say he did not know. The next morning, however, Wolf Fang at his visit told them that after the council had met and discussed matters they would be allowed to attend. This information put Hal at least a-tingle with excitement, for he had never yet been present at a great gathering of chiefs such as was to take place. All day he was impatient; not even the fact that there were scores of strange faces in the village served to distract him from the contemplation of what was to happen. Befeathered, almost resplendent red men on fine mustangs had ridden into the village, and there were great preparations going on evidently for a feast. Mackintosh, who went out of the tent for a little while, smiled as he saw the preparations.

"Goin' t'be a great show t'night, lad," he said

It was indeed a great show. Sitting inside their tent the palefaces could see the circle of chiefs around the biggest fire that glowed in the camp; at other spots there were more fires, around which the rest of the red men were gathered—all feasting what time they were not dancing round the fires and shouting themselves into a frenzy.

After awhile there was a cessation in this pand

monium, and the people gathered about the chiefs, blotting them out of view. But there was a strange silence, broken only by one man's voice, and then another, as the first speaker, Wolf Fang, sat down. Hal could understand nothing that was happening, and Mackintosh quietly interpreted for him. For something like two hours the council went on, and although there were one or two dissentients, the upshot of it all was that Wolf Fang carried the day and the Athabascans were out of the Great Hunt.

When that decision was reached the mad frenzy started all over again, and kept up for an unconscionable time. It ended at last, or rather died down for a time, from the sheer exhaustion of the celebrants, and it was then that Mackintosh got on his feet, saying:

"Reckon they'll be comin' fer us now, lad! Look, theer's someone comin' this way!"

It was Wolf Fang.

"Come, brother, and hear what the sachems say," Wolf Fang said; and the two whites followed him over to the fire where the chiefs were assembled.

Very characteristic of the red men was the introduction that Wolf Fang gave of the palefaces, and after that the serious work of the evening began. Actually, although there was much speaking, there was little said, but the little meant much, for out of the florid sentences and the long periods of the Indian spokesmen there emerged the one great fact that, having taken counsel, they had come to the conclusion

that the best interests of the red men lay in remaining at peace with the palefaces.

"Then, brothers," cried Mackintosh, when they had finished, "you will not take part in the Great Hunt of the palefaces. It is well. But tell me this, you chiefs who know what the winds whisper and the forests tell in soft voices, what of the people who are not of your tribes? Will they who live in the lodges near you join in the Great Hunt if it comes to pass?"

Up sprang Wolf Fang at that, and he was a proud-looking figure of a man as, standing in the glare of the fire, he vowed that every chief there would do all that was possible to win over tribes to the cause of peace.

"When we, the great sachems, say it is peace, then will those who fear us say peace also," he said, and sat down again.

Mackintosh took the proffered pipe of peace and drew at it, afterwards passing it around the whole circle of chiefs. There was need to say but little more when that was done—little, but with tremendous issues to Mackintosh. He bided his time, and then came out with the question that had been trembling on his lips all through:

"Where is the half-breed who calls himself medicine man, the man who calls to the Great Hunt?"

"Out there," said Wolf Fang, waving a hand across the prairie. "He waits to learn what the sachems say. Many braves there are with him, men

whom the law of the red man has cast out. He will learn, and like the flowers of the plains in the wind will his friends scatter from him. Ugh!"

That last expression was sufficient to tell Mackintosh that as far as Wolf Fang was concerned le Grand did not count now, and that the half-breed's day was gone in that part of the country. Mackintosh was content, or seemed to be so, for he said nothing more on the matter. He and Hal sat taking their turns at the pipe that was passed round continually until at last the chiefs began to get up one by one and move off into the darkness to where the tents allotted to them were situated.

A little while and only Wolf Fang and the two palefaces were left together.

Mackintosh got up and walked round the fire to where Wolf Fang sat. He held out his hand to the red man, who took it, and there those two, without a single word, sealed their pact of friendliness.

"Come on, Hal," Mackintosh said then, and they walked away slowly towards their own tent.

"What happened? What did they say, Red?" the youngster asked when they were alone; and Mackintosh told him all that had taken place. Hal could scarcely contain himself for joy over the way in which things had turned out, and even Mackintosh, phlegmatic as he usually was, was for once tense with suppressed excitement.

"We kin reckon thet's done fer le Grand, lad," he said; "an' if the other fellers hev done as well as we hev everythin'll be all right. Which'll upset

Mr. Morton, ef there's any truth in what Red Feather said up at th' fort. Wonder what's happened to Red Feather, by th' way? Reckon he hates le Grand 'nough not to miss a bit o' his trail, an' ef anyone kin fin' the breed it'ull be the Sioux."

"Funny thing that Wolf Fang wouldn't tell where le Grand is," Hal suggested. "But that doesn't matter, I suppose. I hope you're right about Red Feather, but——"

"When Red Feather left the fort thet night, Hal," Mackintosh said, "he went after le Grand. An' thet's 'nough fer me!"

With which assurance Mackintosh rolled himself in his blanket and went to sleep, leaving Hal to do the same.

Hal's anxiety for Mackintosh kept him for several days close at hand to the factor, who, however, presently showed signs of making a very good recovery, a much quicker one than either he or Hal had reckoned on, because the wound was a serious one. It was, they both believed, due to the great care and skill of the Athabascan women, who spared no efforts and who used weird concoctions, both for dressing the wound and for internal administration to the patient.

Mackintosh naturally was anxious to get better as quickly as possible so that he could set off for Fort Prince of Wales again, though there was a hope in his heart that before he went he might be able to meet le Grand. Whether he would come to the

village depended on whether he had sufficient numbers with him to warrant an attack on the Athabascans who had so badly queered him. Of one thing Mackintosh was certain, and that was that while the half-breed remained at liberty there would always be danger of his working trouble with certain of the tribes, who would be a constant source of danger; they would not only interfere with the white factors and trappers, but would also be liable to fall upon Indians friendly to the palefaces.

"It would mean that the north'd never be safe, lad," Red told Hal when they were talking over the matter.

"Then why not get Wolf Fang to capture him?" Hal suggested; but Mackintosh shook his head.

"If Wolf Fang did anything it 'ud likely 'nough mean a scrap, an' thet's jest what we want to avoid, ain't it? No, Hal, it's fer us t' tackle le Grand."

Hal saw the wisdom of the decision, but he was doubtful whether there would be a chance to bring about the desired end.

Hal was in no equable frame of mind, therefore, when, a day or two after the council, he went out to give his horse a little exercise. First he hoped that le Grand would come, even though it might mean war; then he hoped not; but the one thing that stood out clear to him was that, sooner or later, le Grand, finding there was defection on the part of the Athabascans, would make for the coast to reap the benefits of the work for which his

messengers had prepared the ground. Hal's mind was taken up with the question of what might have happened to the other factors who had gone out to circumvent the machinations of le Grand amongst the tribes, and he wondered whether they had been as successful as Mackintosh.

Hal knew that it was uncertainty regarding this that made Mackintosh anxious to get well in order to be able to make the return journey. Nevertheless the youngster could but fall in with the desire of the factor to be at the village if and when le Grand should arrive.

Hal's thoughts were broken in upon suddenly and dramatically. He had been giving his horse the rein, and the animal, glad of the opportunity after being hobbled for several days, went thundering across the prairie to the alarm of a herd of buffalo which came into sight as the horseman swung round a patch of tamaracks. It was too good a chance to miss. Hal unslung his musket, pulled up his steed for a moment to see that the piece was primed, and then urged on the animal again. The thunder of the buffalo hoofs was like music to him and the zest of the hunter made him thrill with excitement. It blinded him to everything else but the chase—and it nearly brought about his undoing. For there was another man intent upon the hunt, a man who had followed the herd from the opposite direction, and by a devious route had got to windward of them, aided by a sheltering forest through which he had led his horse. He had been on the point of firing

when Hal clattered down, and the hidden man, instead of pulling the trigger of his musket, halted and for a moment stared as though he could scarcely believe his eyes.

Then a grim smile cut across his face, and Pierre le Grand told himself that he had one of his enemies in his power. He could have shot him from where he was, but he had other intentions than that. There was still in his heart the desire to obtain the half portion of paper that he believed Mackintosh had, and he told himself that if he could but get possession of the young paleface he would be able to barter with Mackintosh.

Even as Hal thundered past le Grand sprang on to his own horse, unhitching his lariat as he did so. Setting his horse in the direction of the racing hunter, he galloped after him. Hal, in the excitement of the chase, was oblivious of everything else, and it was only when he heard a whistling sound above his head and felt something drop over him, followed by a sharp tug, that he realized that some danger had overtaken him. Then, even before he could turn in his saddle, the end had come. Le Grand, the instant that his lariat settled on his victim, stopped his horse dead, and the pace at which Hal's steed was going and the suddenness of the affair simply jerked the youngster out of his saddle. He went crashing to the ground, where he lay insensible, while le Grand laughed grimly as he realized that his attack had been successful to a degree and with an ease that he had not expected when he set out with the idea

of tracking down the man who had broken all his plans.

Coiling in the lariat as he did so, he rode up towards the heaped-up youngster, but before he reached him a shot rang out. Le Grand's horse reared in alarm, and the half-breed tumbled off the animal's back. The scared horse stood trembling for a moment, then started to run, and Hal—merciful for him was it that he was unconscious—was dragged along the rough ground, merciful for him too was it that that journey was only a matter of half a dozen yards, for a second shot that rang out brought le Grand's horse to the ground, and then there issued from the forest the figure of a mounted Indian, who dashed down to where le Grand lay. Dismounting, he bent over the prostrate half-breed, smiling contemptuously while he rifled the man's pockets, and then went over to Hal.

There was a world of concern in the red man's face as he examined the white youth. He brought his water-bottle into use, and after a little while Hal opened his eyes, stared half-wittedly at the redskin, and then exclaimed:

"Red Feather!"

A rush of emotion went through Hal. The remembrance of the dramatic interruption of his hunt came to him, and although he could scarcely believe his own thought, for a moment he could but imagine that the man who had played the trick on him was Red Feather—the man who had hitherto been so friendly. One thing only could account for it, and

that was that after all he had thrown in his lot with the malcontents. Hal shivered at the thought.

Then Red Feather spoke, and instantly Hal knew that his suspicion had been unworthy.

"My brother!" the redskin said. "Me come in time!"

"How—what do you mean, brother?" Hal asked quickly, sitting up, and then needing no answer from the red man to tell him the truth, for there, not a dozen yards away, lay le Grand himself, and a little beyond him his horse.

Hal stared in amazement, hardly hearing the words that Red Feather was speaking—the words that told of what had happened; but when the red man had finished Hal, getting upon his feet—glad, by the way, to find that he had no limbs broken, though his head throbbed excruciatingly—reached out a hand and said:

"I thank you, brother. The Great Spirit sent you in time. The half-breed——"

"Heem dead!" was Red Feather's reply. "It is the justice of the Great Spirit. Me come seek heem trail, fin' an' lose again; me hear of strange medicine man who speak of the Great Hunt of pale-faces. Many days me seek for heem, then me find heem lodge. Me get there; heem gone 'way. Me pick up trail, and it lead here to my brother. It is well. Where is Red Fox, my brother?"

The Indian switched off from the recital of his own adventures to the inquiry after his friend as though what he had done was of little moment in

comparison with the welfare of Mackintosh, and Hal, knowing that any effusiveness of thanks would be unwelcome, merely said:

"I thank you, O brother. You have saved my life and rid red man and paleface of a dangerous foe. Red Fox lies in the wigwam of Wolf Fang—ill, but growing better every day. He will greet Red Feather well."

"We go see heem," the Indian said. "We leave that traitor to the vultures. Come!"

He indicated his own horse, and Hal knew what he meant. A few moments later the animal, double burdened, was making his way across the prairie towards the village, which was reached in due course, and the astounded Indians, who had been just about to go out to see what had happened to the paleface whose steed had returned empty-saddled, stared at the strange Sioux and his companion. Hal, anxious to get to Mackintosh with the great news, told Red Feather which was the tent, and it was not long before the pair were inside, where Mackintosh had been sitting in great anxiety wondering what had happened, information having been brought him of the return of Hal's horse.

The sight of Red Feather left him speechless for a moment; then he burst out with a joyful exclamation:

"Red Feather, by gar! I'm pleased to see ye, brother!"

White man and red shook hands heartily, and then Hal told Mackintosh what had happened out on

the prairie, while Red Feather himself told again the story of his quest after le Grand.

"Ye did better'n I did, brother," Mackintosh said when he had finished. "I guessed thet new medicine man was the breed, but I couldn't get on his trail. Anyway, he's reached th' end now, an' it's the best thing thet could 'a' 'appened fer all on us, white an' red too. Tell me, brother, how goes the Great Hunt o' the palefaces?"

"The braves go not to the hunt," was the reply; and Red Feather assured Mackintosh that, judging from all that he had seen and heard during the weeks of his long journey, the conspiracy had failed. He himself had worked hard against it, while the white factors from the fort had been as successful as he had. Only a very few tribes were still for the Hunt.

"This have I learned too, O brother," Red Feather said. "The half-breed who called heem-self a son of the Great Clouds went with the great chief's blessing!"

"Morton, by gar! I thought so," said Mackintosh angrily. "Got any real proof o' thet?" he asked the Indian, who nodded.

"All the red men say 'twas so," he said.

"That's no proof," Mackintosh muttered. "But we'll wait till we get to th' fort an' see what he's got to say 'bout it. By the silver fox, we'll hound him out o' the Company! I——" He broke off as Wolf Fang entered the tent, and the next few minutes were taken up with detailing to the

Athabascan what had happened. The chief was naturally more than pleased at what he heard, and told Mackintosh that that very morning he and two other chiefs had held counsel and decided that they would embark on an enterprise to secure le Grand, who had, they heard, been deserted by all those whom he had at first intrigued into agreement with him. A messenger from the village that he had made his headquarters had brought in this news, and the additional information that he had fled from the place, though not before he had learned where Mackintosh was.

"That accounts fer his bein' up about here, lad," Mackintosh told Hal. "Reckon he was hopin' to be able to get one or t'other of us by some means. He'd prob'bly hev follered us back. It's more'n luck thet Red Feather was on his trail."

"Anyway, we've got the best of the game," Hal said. "That wretched paper——"

"By gar, I wonder if le Grand had his bit on him!" Mackintosh exclaimed. "The secret writing, brother"—he turned to Red Feather. "Did ye search th' half-breed?"

For answer the Sioux pulled a much-worn piece of paper from his pouch which he matched with another bit that he took from a pocket under his buckskin.

"Both pieces!" exclaimed Hal, unable to restrain his curiosity to know what was written on the paper that had caused so much trouble and brought so much tragedy to pass.

Very solemnly Red Feather held out the pieces to Mackintosh, saying:

"They are for my brother to do with as he will."

Mackintosh, without hesitation, took them, and Hal wondered what he would do with them. He was not long left in suspense.

"Kin ye read the secret writin', brother?" Mackintosh asked Red Feather, who nodded.

"Then read it fer me," the factor said.

"This I have not read," the Sioux said, indicating the portion that he had taken from le Grand. "I must have time, for it is hard reading. What matters? Some other time will I read it."

"All right," Mackintosh agreed, turning the parchment over in his fingers and noticing that the piece taken from the half-breed had writing on both sides as his own original piece had. It was the first time that he had seen it, and while on one side were Sioux picture characters, on the other was written French. He said nothing for a moment, but thrust both pieces of parchment into his pocket, and then, turning to Wolf Fang, said in dialect:

"The Great Spirit has brought a good end, brother. The Hunt of the palefaces is not to be. I shall go in peace ere many days."

"In peace it shall be," replied Wolf Fang, "and my people shall give the peace feast."

He went out at that, and the uproar that followed on a short harangue that he made to his people was proof to the listeners in the tent that the Athabaseans

were more than pleased that the great disturber of the peace had met his just deserts.

It goes without saying that Mackintosh and Hal were no less pleased, and that during the days that followed they knew a relief that they had not known for a long time previously. It was during these days that Red Feather, at the suggestion of Mackintosh, took the second piece of parchment and deciphered the writing on it, and when he had done so he told what it said. Complete, the whole message was no more than what Mackintosh had imagined it to be—the childish vapouring of some old-time chief, which was to be regarded as a prophecy to be fulfilled when a son of the line of the famous Clouds should read the sage. It was evident that le Grand, having read it, had decided that if he could sufficiently work upon the superstition of the Indians he would be able to assume a position of great power, and probably hoped to obtain an overlordship as the result if the adventure should prove successful.

"A pretty dream, lad," Mackintosh said grimly when Red Feather had explained the whole story as it lay revealed upon the parchment.

"Pretty indeed, Red," the lad answered. "But what I can't understand is why that parchment was ever given to Radley. The redskin who gave it to him must have known——"

"Nothing 'tall!" was Mackintosh's interruption. "Y'see, lad, our friend Red Feather has had to worry it out—sort o' code. No, lad, the feller who gie thet tew Radley, poor de'il, didn't know aught o'

what't meant. But theer was somethin' else he did know—thet!"

Up to that moment he had said nothing about the French writing on the back of the parchment, but now he showed it to Hal, who looked at it uncomprehendingly.

"Ye know French, lad?" Mackintosh asked, and Hal shook his head.

"Sure as anythin' thet's French, Hal," the factor told him. "Ye kin bet your life thet's why 'twas gi'en to Radley, an' we'll fin' out what it means when we git back tew the fort. Anyway, we ain't got anythin' tew worry 'bout now. The big game's over, and we kin go back in peace."

"Thank goodness for that, Red," Hal said. "I've just about had enough of big adventures and things of that sort. When do you reckon you'll be able to start back?"

"Two or three days," was the reply. "I tell ye, Hal, what's happened's been better'n all the red wenches' medicine. We'll let Wolf Fang give his feast—these fellows like thet sort o' thing. An' now I'm tired. Let's tumble in."

CHAPTER XVII

THE SECRET OF THE PARCHMENT

THE great feast of peace prepared by Wolf Fang was held in due course, and there was much characteristic jubilation on the part of the red men. Speeches were made, speeches that told of the redskins' desire to remain always at peace with the palefaces, and Wolf Fang himself wound up the celebration for the Indians by vowing, as he drove a hatchet into the ground, that while he remained head sachem of the Athabascans, loved by his people and feared by his foes, he would preserve the peace and use all his influence to see that neighbouring tribes did the same.

Then it came to Mackintosh's turn, and Hal, to whom he had interpreted what was said, sat looking across the blazing fire at his chief while he stood and spoke in unwonted impassioned tones. Mackintosh had previously told the youngster what he was going to say, and it was a delight for Hal to watch the effect that the words had upon the natives, who were evidently deeply impressed by the white man's eloquence. All through the months that he had lived and worked and faced danger with Mackintosh, Hal had come to learn what a remarkable man he was and how thorough was his understanding of Indian nature.

"Far out across the plains," Mackintosh said, after he had expressed his pleasure at the swearing of peace, "the palefaces' lodges are filled with the things that the red men need and love, brought that the red men may share them with the palefaces. Peace it is and trade that the white men come to bring; and their canoes with the wings of the eagle come across the great water bearing the trade goods to barter for the pelts that the red men gather in the trapping season. This thing I promise, O brothers, that when the next great thaw comes there shall be a lodge of the palefaces nearer than one has been before where the red men shall bring their pelts for barter. Ere the thaw comes messengers shall bring tidings of where the lodge shall be. Ever as the palefaces come farther into the red man's land shall peace and plenty reign. I have spoken!"

There was much shouting of approval when Mackintosh sat down, and Wolf Fang finally assured him that the next great thaw should find the Athabascans ready with the harvest of the wilds.

Then the feast went on to its appointed end, when the red men were gorged to sleep, and the whites, tired out after a long sitting, made their way to their tent.

"Good work indeed we've done, Hal," Mackintosh said, when he had explained much that was still cryptic to the youngster. "If we can only git that fiend Morton out o' the way we'll hev the Company gainin' no end from what seemed a mighty trouble."

"I'm wondering how he'll greet us, Red," Hal said. "One thing, we're not the only ones who've put a spoke in his wheel. What he expected to gain I don't know."

"I'd make a good guess, Hal," Mackintosh volunteered, his mouth set hard and his eyes glinting.

"Yes?" prompted Hal.

"He was intendin' tew make a cat's paw o' le Grand, sure thing," the factor went on. "It 'ud hev bin him as 'ud hev got the sway in the end, an' don't yew see, lad, what a man who knows all 'bout our trade could do ef he was runnin' the other side? Wi' all the redskins joined up an' really ownin' their own country, why it's clear as daylight, ain't it? Only thing is thet the Injuns wouldn't hev stuck t'gether for very long, an' when the news reached home they'd hev been an expedition sent over an', an'——"

"There'd have been a pretty war!" Hal put in. "By the way, Red, I've been thinking. Don't you think that le Grand, who was half French if he was the other half Sioux, must have been able to read that message on the back of the parchment? And if that was the case, there can't be much to it."

"Never thought o' thet, lad," Mackintosh confessed. "Anyway, we'll find out, as I said. Less'n a month'll hev us back at the fort. We start day after t'morrow."

It was, however, not to be a month before they

learned the secret of the parchment with which they were now immediately concerned.

The day following the feast was spent in getting over it, and the day after that, having said good-bye to Wolf Fang, Mackintosh and Hal, together with Red Feather, who had decided to accompany them at least part of the way back, set off on their horses, striking east. They carried sufficient food to last them for some time, and so had no need to hunt and waste time which could be filled in with their journey.

Hal could but contrast the trip back with the trip out: the latter had been filled with anxiety; the former was free of that, and they could give themselves up to the enjoyment of the wonderful summer which painted the plains and the hills in gorgeous colourings. The Indian villages through which they passed were no longer entered with trepidation as to what manner of welcome they would receive. They were hailed as peace-bringers, especially when Mackintosh informed them of the result of the missionary efforts of the palefaces to preserve the peace.

It was something of a triumphal march through the vast wilds, and every day's journey nearer to the fort seemed to provide more reasons for satisfaction.

"Less'n a week an' we'll be there, lad," Mackintosh said one evening as they sat around a camp-fire that they had made and over which they were broiling a bird, shot a little while before.

"And in some ways I shall be sorry when we get there, Red," Hal told him. "Fur trading's all

right, y' know, but too much of it has to be done in the winter and not enough of it in the summer."

"Aye, lad, but it's a bonny life," Mackintosh said. "But I'm tired. Good-night," and he rolled himself in his blanket and was soon asleep, an example quickly followed by his companions.

Hal awoke with a strange feeling of something untoward. He sat up and peered out into the pale night, listening intently, but for a while he could hear nothing and see nothing. Then there came a slight movement as of someone crawling in the long grass.

Hal lay where he was, never moving except to put his hand on the musket lying at his side. The fire had died down to glowing embers, but the light from it was not sufficient to reveal that movement on his part. He waited, nerves taut, wondering whether the unseen were some inquisitive Indian or a prowling beast lured by the fire. Silence fell again and lasted for some minutes—minutes that seemed to Hal to be hours; and, at last, unable to stand the tension any longer, he shifted a little so that he was able to touch Mackintosh. The factor awoke on the instant, but the low-toned voice of Hal whispered him to remain quiet and lay quite still.

"Someone or something out there," Hal said.

"Then what's the use o' layin' here, lad?" Mackintosh asked. "Ef 'tis a man he'd be able to pick us off if he wanted tew; ef 'tis a wild beast it 'ud prob'bly run off ef we got up. 'Lo, there!" he cried, springing to his feet, musket in hand. Hal

was up beside him on the instant, and Red Feather was scarcely a moment behind.

Silence reigned for a few moments, and then there came a shout from the gloom. It was not a full-throated shout, but one as of a man *in extremis;* and Mackintosh, without a thought that it might be a trap of some kind, sprang from beside the fire.

Hal went after him without hesitation, but Red Feather remained where he was, musket in hand, and peering hard in the direction in which they had gone, as though he at any rate had commonsense enough to look, he prepared for emergencies.

"Help!" had come the call, and it came again before ever the two men reached the spot where, at last, they found the man who had called out. He was lying on his face, and with arms thrown out before him as though he had been crawling; but when they reached him he was not moving, for the very good reason that he was unconscious.

"Poor de'il!" exclaimed Mackintosh, stooping over him, but unable to recognize him in the gloom. "Here, lad, a hand to git him to t' fire!"

It took but a very few moments to do this, and when they had him by the fire they proceeded to succour him.

"A Frenchman," Mackintosh said quietly, as he worked at restoring the stranger. "A voyageur, for sure. What's he doing up this way? They mostly work 'way down to t' south more."

Hal, of course, could give no answer to the question, but busied himself getting a warm drink ready

against the time when the stranger should open his eyes—if he ever did so. For the man was in a very bad state. Mackintosh's rapid examination of him revealed the fact that the Frenchman was almost scratched to pieces, and it did not take the factor long to diagnose the cause.

"'Twas a bear did this, lad," he said. "Kin smell the wretched thing even now. Must 'a' bin a rare fight."

"It must indeed!" said Hal, shuddering as he remembered his own battle with the bear when he was on the trail of le Grand in the early days of the adventures through which he had passed.

A few moments later the Frenchman's eyes opened, and he stared about him uncomprehendingly. One thing that he did understand, however, was the drink that Mackintosh held to his lips, and he sipped at it thirstily, feverishly. Hal by this time had water hot, and, although after his drink the stranger dropped off to sleep, Mackintosh was soon busy at bathing and dressing the wounds that showed through the torn clothing.

"Reckon that's made him comfort'ble, Hal," he said at last. "A little longer and he'd have bin all in for sure. Now you roll up agin. I'll watch over him for a little while."

The "little while" lasted till the dawn, when Hal awoke, grumbling at Mackintosh for having allowed him to sleep so long. The factor grinned at him as he said:

"All right, lad, guess you kin hev the job next

time! Fer as I kin see we're goin' to stay here some days till this feller comes round fit 'nough tew ride wi' us."

In which prognostication Mackintosh was correct, because, although the Frenchman after a while regained consciousness, he was evidently unfit to travel, and for several days the travellers remained in the camp. During this time the stranger said but very little beyond expressing his thanks, and agreeing when Mackintosh suggested that he had been brought to this pass as the result of an encounter with a bear which he had, fortunately for him, managed to kill, otherwise the infuriated animal would have completed the work that he had begun.

Then the stranger dropped into taciturnity, not even volunteering the information who he was. Then came the day when Mackintosh believed his patient to be fit to travel by riding on one of the horses.

"See here, stranger," he said. "We're goin' on to Fort Prince of Wales. Don't know who you are or where you're goin'. But I'm Red Mackintosh—Red o' the Hudson; this is my pardner, Hal Newlands; and the redskin is Red Feather the Sioux, and——

"Guess ye've heard on us, pardner!" Mackintosh said, as he saw the look in the Frenchman's eyes.

The Frenchman did not answer for a while, but finally, after staring at them with a frown on his face, he said, in broken English:

"Oui, I of you heard. Not the *jeune homme* mon ami, M'sieu Radley——"

"Radley, by gar!" shouted Mackintosh. "What d'ye know o' Radley, stranger?"

"Not'ing," was the reply. "Only that he was mon ami and—a—what you call it, l'homme blanc! My life he save—rescue me from Blackfeet when we go together in the hunting. I much of the illness have, but Radley he get me to village of the Sioux. Trouble of a lot there. A half-breed——"

"Pierre le Grand?" put in Mackintosh quietly. And the Frenchman nodded, though it was clear that he was mystified that Mackintosh should know.

"It is of the wonderful that you know, M'sieu," he said. "The half-breed," he went on quickly, "lead Indians against the Sioux who the chief of M'sieu Radley save, and the half-breed driven off is. To M'sieu Radley the Sioux give un papier. Later, m'sieu, le Grand an' M. Radley are comrades —partners, is it not?"

The factor was sitting, looking straight at the stranger, without much evidence that he was feeling any surprise. "On the paper, writings strange—but some Français M'sieu Radley of me the meaning ask. Only le Français——"

He stopped as Mackintosh pulled from the pocket in his shirt beneath the tunic the two pieces of parchment.

"Say, stranger, them the French words?" Mackintosh asked, thrusting the paper at the Frenchman.

"Oui, M'sieu. Et is of the strange——"

"See here, stranger," the factor broke in. "Let me tell you the yarn. That paper was given me by Radley, who told me, as he died——"

"Pardieu!" exclaimed the Frenchman, throwing up his hands.

"Yes," said Mackintosh. "He died—killed by that skunk le Grand. He gave me that paper, and swore it was worth something to me. All I know, stranger, is that it's been worth death to a lot o' good men, an' at least one bad one. Pierre le Grand died 'cos o' that paper. Listen, stranger, kin ye tell me what 'tis thet's written there in the French?"

"Oui, M'sieu!" said the Frenchman quietly. "For mon ami I read it, and is it not that I go where the paper points?"

"D'ye mean tew say, stranger," Mackintosh said, with lowering brows, "thet you were takin' advantage o' what ye larned when ye read it fer Radley—the man who saved your life?"

"Pardon!" exclaimed the Frenchman. "Too much of the quickness is it not that you go? M'sieu Radley trust me I tell him of the meaning. He leave me with the people of the Sioux. No more I hear—until but a while I learn that mon ami Radley is dead. So the *nouvelle* travels. What then, M'sieu? I, who would not the same do before, come to see if le papier makes true! Mon ami—is it not so?—you may not have this seen?"

"What hev you seen, then?" Mackintosh rapped out.

"Not yet," was the reply.

"What's the paper say, anyway?" the factor asked immediately. "Guess ye'll tell us thet, stranger? The paper's mine, 'member, gi'en me by th' man who owned it."

"Certainement!" was the reply of the Frenchman as he took the paper. "What it says? Of a river red with gold. Long ago one patriot of la belle France saw it. On the bank of it he found—ah!" the man shuddered and threw up his hands—"the skeleton with un papier in his hand without flesh. Only then the writing of the Sioux on it. But, pardieu, mon patriot find la mort in battle with the Sioux, so le papier says. He on the papier write of the red river, point the way it to, and tell how he die."

"What puzzles me," said Mackintosh, "is why the Sioux ever parted with the paper to Radley?"

"It was of the medicine," said the Frenchman.

"And the beggar didn't know what it meant, I suppose," Hal put in. "Just a superstition that the paper was medicine, and gave it over to Radley as a thank-offering for saving his life. I wish to goodness he'd kept it!"

"And we not find the river of gold?" rapped in Mackintosh. "La, lad, 'tis an ill wind blows nary good to anyone. What if we find this river and can go back to th' fort rich, eh?"

Hal's imagination was set to work at the words, and he toyed with the ideas that rose to his mind.

"Where is the river, though?" he asked after

awhile; and Mackintosh, who had not thought of asking, in the interest of listening to the Frenchman's story, turned and asked the question.

The stranger, who had just informed him that his name was François Brun, told him that, as far as he could calculate, the river was about a day's journey to the south. Then he read to them the French, and Hal listened eagerly.

"An' ye think ye could go 'long wi' us?" Mackintosh asked, when the man was finished. "I know that river, and I know the bridge."

"It is good," said the Frenchman. "I go with you by the back of the horse," and it was, therefore, arranged that next day they would undertake the journey.

It is safe to say that that evening and night Hal, at least, got very little sleep for thinking over the story that Brun had to tell and for dwelling upon the possibilities that stretched out as a result of the explanation of what was on the paper which had brought so much trouble but now promised to make amends. It was only from sheer mental weariness that Hal at last did drop off to sleep—to awake early in the morning ready and eager to be off.

Mackintosh's horse being the best of the three, that was chosen to bear the double burden for the first part of the day; and so, changing about occasionally, the journey was continued until, about nightfall, just at sunset, the little party came in sight of the river that Brun said must be the one referred to. They had been going upward during the greater

part of the afternoon, and came to a halt looking down a deep gorge, at the bottom of which flowed the river.

"A fine view," Hal said, admiring the distant panorama tinted by the setting sun.

"Aye, fine indeed, lad," said Mackintosh. "Reckon I'm too tired, though, tew look at't long, and hungry. What say to grub?"

It being too late to explore the river, the party camped down, and with a good fire going were not very long in appeasing their hunger, and shortly after that rolled themselves in their blankets for sleep.

Next morning Red Mackintosh took the lead, and the little party started off along the high bank of the river. They had taken a route which brought them very near the spot where Mackintosh knew the bridge was, and it was not long, therefore, before they arrived.

"That tree was thrown across by the redskins," Mackintosh told Hal. "The river's got no ford to it fer miles an' miles, an' the Injuns hev fixed up the bridge wi' the guide rope along it."

"Then I reckon I'd want the rope to go across by!" Hal exclaimed, as he stood looking at the crude bridge. Seventy or eighty feet below the river lay, running smoothly at that point, and the sides of the bank dropped sheer for the greater part of the way down, then broadening out to form a kind of beach on either side.

"We've got to get down there," Mackintosh

said, "which ain't goin' to be easy 'less we go along a bit an' see if there's a better place to get down at. Seems tew me it's better tew do that instead of riskin' a broken neck!"

It was agreed to adopt that course, and so they went along until they did find, some mile or more away, a spot where the bank was less steep and it was possible to pick a way down with something like ease. Hal had a little mishap when halfway down. Mackintosh was in front of him, Brun was on top, not strong enough yet to essay the task, and Red Feather was bringing up the rear. Halfway down the youngster's foot slipped. He tried to save himself, but missed the rock projection he had hoped to clutch, rolled over, and went slithering down. His shout of alarm caused Mackintosh to look up sharply, but he was not in time to get out of the way. Hal cannoned into him, and the pair of them finished that journey in a mix-up. They rolled right into the water. Fortunately, both of them could swim, and when they came to the surface they struck for the bank, which they reached safely.

"Sorry, Red," Hal laughed when they were landed, two drenched and dripping woe-begone looking figures, at whom even the imperturbable Indian could but smile when he arrived.

"Ugh!" growled Mackintosh. "Might 'a' been worse! Reckon we'll hev to dry oursel's out. It's a good job we left our tackle up wi' the Frenchman."

Hal was by now stripped, and, having spread out

his clothes, sprang into the river again to enjoy a swim, an example followed quickly enough by Red.

It was while they were doing this that Hal, wading along just near the bank, made the great discovery. Gleaming points at the bottom of the river, which was shallow here, attracted his attention—and he yelled out to Mackintosh:

"I've found it, Red! The paper was right! Come and see!"

It needed no further calling to bring the factor over to where the youngster was; and together they peered down into the water, scarcely able to believe what they saw, for there the whole bed seemed to be carpeted with yellow—and a dipped-in hand brought up gold-filled alluvium.

"Sure, 'tis gold, Hal," Mackintosh whispered; "an' we kin wash it out—'nough to suit me, anyway, lad."

"And there's enough to suit a score of men!" Hal exclaimed. "Why, Red, y'know that the paper said there was gold near that bridge—and if that's so, well, there will be more than we'll want to carry away at one time!"

Red was as excited as Hal himself: he was jerked out of his casual, philosophical mood, and his eyes were gleaming; his whole being was altogether different from that to which Hal had become accustomed. He was trickling the gold sediment between his fingers as a child trickles a heap of pretty beads.

"Say, Hal!" he exclaimed after a moment or two,

"I've got the reason now, lad, why Morton was in wi' le Grand—'twas the gold chiefly. Don't y'see, lad, that if the company went under—if the redskins, wi' le Grand and Morton top dogs, had the undisputed sway, they could do a mighty lot of trade with British merchants when they let it be known that they had more'n furs to sell? An' if it warn't that, well, then, le Grand an' Morton know 'nough 'bout civilized life to know that wi' a little work they could get 'nough wealth to turn them into mighty important people wherever they liked to live!"

"And that's why Morton was so anxious to get hold of you and keep you!" Hal said. "He reckoned he would be able to get the other half of the paper to complete the French message on the back! A nice plot, but——"

"It's no good now!" said Mackintosh. "See here, lad, I'm goin' tew destroy thet paper right away—Red Feather," he called out, and the Sioux, who had been watching them from the bank, stepped a little nearer. Mackintosh waded to the bank and scrambled to land.

"I'm goin' to tear up the paper, Chief!" he said; and then explained that it was very important that no one else should ever get a chance to obtain it. Red Feather told him that it was his to do with as he liked; and Mackintosh, taking it from his pocket, tore it into tiny pieces, which he flung out upon the water.

Mackintosh then asked Red Feather to go up and

bring down their cooking pans with which they were going to collect the gold from the river bed.

Red Feather, who of old knew the craving of the palefaces for the yellow metal, which was used by various tribes for personal decoration, smiled at what he regarded as the childish excitement of his comrades over something which, while they eagerly sought for it, they themselves never wore. It was strange to him that white men should love the metal and yet send it away; it was just the unsophisticated nature of the red man which, while it made him delight to deck his squaws in the shining metal, also made him ignorant of the white man's method of valuing it. However, Red Feather was not out to argue with his comrades—they wanted to obtain the metal, and he was willing to help them in fighting a foe. He went scrambling up the side, and at last came down with the pans that the white men wanted.

The result was that, having shown Red Feather how he could assist, Mackintosh and Hal began to gather the harvest of the river, work which went on for several days, until at last they had obtained as much as they felt they wanted to take with them, or rather, as much as they felt they ought to stay and gather—they knew they ought to be getting along to the fort.

"Good business, lad," Mackintosh said on the fifth evening, "and I reckon we ought to be satisfied."

"I should think so, too," Hal answered, his face

aflush. "Why, Red, we've got a fortune each! D'you know what it means to me, Red?"

"That you're goin' back to the homeland, lad, eh?" Mackintosh said quietly. "Goin' ter see the mother ye didn't want ter leave. Ah, well, lad, I don't blame ye—'tis a hard life, this in the wilds, an' it's well to git away from it 'fore it gets ye too strong. Then ye can't—ye want to stay all the time ye want to get off!"

Hal did not answer; he couldn't. He was thinking of the great full life of the wilds—dangerous at most times, but with a call that it was difficult not to answer; and he was also thinking of the little mother at home. . . . He wondered whether he would, after all, be able to go back to an ordered life again and to stay there. . . . He was brought out of his reverie by the voice of Mackintosh.

"Say, comrade," the factor was saying, "what ye goin' t'dew wi' *your* share—fetch up tew Paris, eh?"

Brun laughed.

"Friend," he said, "why should a man leave this?" He swept his arms out as though to embrace the great wild. "Gold—good it is, and you who the third part have given to me, know that you nevaire will go away, not if you had of the gold all that in the river is. In la belle France I have one leetle sister—wit' the sickness that gnaws the chest. What, then? Shall I not use my gold to bring her here where the wind gives health? Oui, monsieur!"

He was standing looking to the east as though he

could see already the white-sailed ship bearing the little sister over to him.

"Goo'—ni', comrades!" growled Mackintosh huskily. He could not trust himself to speak more—and soon the little band were fast asleep, dreaming . . . dreaming . . . of the great to-morrow. . .

CHAPTER XVIII

"ALL'S WELL!"

WHEN the party was ready to start the following morning, Red Feather sprang a little surprise upon the palefaces.

"Listen, O Red Fox," he said. "I go back to my people and not to the lodges of the palefaces. My people must know that I, their chief, live."

"Jest as ye like, Red Feather," Mackintosh said. "I'd have liked ye to come along wi' us, but ye know best, an' I thank ye, brother, fer all thet ye've done. If ye kin come to the fort later on, I'll be mighty glad to see ye ther. If not, well, I'll be down at Death Point next season."

Hal looked at him as he heard him say that, but he did not ask any question; he realized that Red Mackintosh, at any rate, was not going to desert the North.

"Who knows?" Red Feather was saying. He turned to the Frenchman. "Brother, Red Feather would that you take his horse and——"

There was a chorus of protests at this, but the Sioux was adamant; and at last Brun accepted the gift. In a flash it came to Hal that without doubt Red Feather's decision to go from them had been made chiefly for the purpose of placing his horse at

the disposal of Brun, who otherwise would have been a drag on the progress of Mackintosh and his assistant. He whispered as much to the factor, who merely said with a grunt:

"Reckon that's so, Hal, but we've got to take the horse."

Beneath the gruffness of the tone, Hal detected suppressed emotion. As far as the Frenchman was concerned, there was no suppression—he was giving vent, in characteristic national fashion, to what he felt—to the evident embarrassment of Red Feather. Mackintosh went to the latter's rescue, and got Brun at work putting the finishing touches to the horses.

"Good-bye, Chief," Mackintosh said very earnestly, shaking hands; and the series of farewells being made, the three mounted men struck north-east, while Red Feather began his long lonely march to due east.

"There goes a white man with a red skin," muttered Mackintosh, looking behind and watching the Sioux figure disappear below the brow of the hill. "An' now we'll hurry 'long. I want tew know what's happened at th' fort!"

The news that they got when they did arrive at the fort was startling enough. They had ridden hard, in order to make up for lost time, and fortunately had met with nothing to hold them up. Each day had seen a marked improvement in Brun, and the result was that when they reached the fort the Frenchman was almost as fit as his two companions. They arrived in the twilight, having determined to

push on and not remain outside that night. Long before they reached the walls of the fort they heard sounds that surprised them and made Mackintosh shout:

"Come on, fellow—there's trouble—God grant it ain't the Great Hunt begun after all!"

For the sounds were those made by firearms, and there was a subdued murmur in the distance of men's voices, evidently raised in anger.

Jaded though the horses were, they were forced forward and at last came to a halt before the gate of the fort. Springing off their animals, the three men thundered upon the heavy gate and, despite the noise inside, they were heard.

"Who comes?" shouted a voice above the tumult.

"Red Mackintosh—open—what's the matter?" called back the factor; and the gate swung open immediately. "Tell us, man, quickly," rapped Mackintosh, and the sentry gave the answer that almost staggered the new-comers.

"Just a little affair wi' Mister Governor Morton, that's all," he said. "'N hour ago McTavish an' a few more came in and demanded audience wi' the governor—all the white factors were there; an' th' news got 'round that Morton was in wi' the redskins in a great round up an'——"

"Thet's 'nough," shouted Mackintosh. "Come on," and he went dashing up between the wooden houses towards the governor's quarters. Few people were about until they arrived on the scene of the

fighting, and there they saw a crowd of men firing at the windows of the governor's house, and saw the vivid flashes of firearms coming from the house itself. A bunch of men were engaged on some mysterious operation in the gloom to the right, and just as Mackintosh had singled out McTavish from the crowd something happened that revealed the nature of the work in hand. With a "Heave-o, boys!" the men straightened up and set off at a trot towards the main door of the house, carrying what was a heavy tree trunk, which they were using as a battering ram. Shots whistled, and some of the bearers dropped to the ground; the others kept on—and with a crash the trunk struck the door. Several times this happened, and eventually the door gave way. Then the white men went rushing into the house and Mackintosh, followed by Hal and Brun, went in after them. It was a grim five minutes that ensued, grim and deadly, for the red men whom the governor had with him put up a plucky fight, and Morton himself was no coward, whatever else he was.

Into the very room where the "trial" of Mackintosh had taken place the fight led as the defenders retreated step by step, and at last Mackintosh, who had forced his way into the forefront of the attackers, stood face to face with Morton.

"You treacherous dog!" rapped Mackintosh; and Morton, who had not recognized him before, did then, and sprang for him with an upraised tomahawk. It would have finished Mackintosh there and then but for the fact that Hal had leapt at the same

instant, and the arm that held the weapon dropped helpless as a clubbed musket struck it. Next instant somebody's pistol spoke, and Morton sagged to the floor, and did not move again. The fall of their leader took the heart out of his followers, who, although they fought for a while longer, seemed to realize their hopeless helplessness and at last threw down their arms.

"An' thet's thet, Red," said McTavish, thrusting his pistol into his belt. "Here, fellows, clear up this mess. Morton's dead, an' th' comp'ny an' th' country's well rid o' such carrion. Come on, Red, let's get out and see how things are there. By gar, Red, it's been no end of a time!"

Outside there was still plenty of bustle and confusion, but when the news reached the men that Morton was finished and that the fight was really over, something like order prevailed, although it called for a good deal of persuasion on the part of McTavish to prevent any excess. McTavish seemed to have assumed leadership now, and the next hour or so he was busy with one thing and another, so that the new arrivals had little chance of speaking with him. They accompanied him on his rounds, however, and it was during this that Hal found an old friend, who came leaping out of the gloom with a low bark of pleasure.

"Greycoat!" he shouted, and the dog went nearly mad with joy as he fawned and jumped and nosed at the master who had left him weeks, many weeks before. Hal was little less excited than the

dog. It brought back the memory of days that seemed so far away to have the dog trotting at his heels as they went round the fort, and later, to see him lying stretched at full length on the floor of McTavish's house when the temporary leader of the factors at the fort was sitting round with his friends and talking about the thrilling events that had taken place during the previous weeks.

"What's th' mess, Red?" McTavish asked, as he puffed at his pipe, and Mackintosh told him briefly what had happened.

"'Tis better news than even ours this end, Red," McTavish said. "I was more afraid o' what the Injuns out yonder might do than those out here. Heard, y'know, o' the medicine fellow, but never thought 'twas thet blackguard le Grand. By gar, Red, 's been an affair, eh? Wherever we went we heard thet Morton was in the conspir'cy, an' I tell ye we had the dickins of a fight tew get th' Injuns out of it all. But we did it, an' when we came back t'day we just went an' bearded Morton, the rogue. He got high an' mighty, an' it seems he'd been expecting somethin' of the kind 'cos he'd got a lot of Injuns an' half-breeds up here. Thought we'd not dare anythin' —but we jest told him he'd got tew quit. What did he do? Jest had us pitched out 'fore we knew what was happening—and thet begun the fun. We'd been fightin' fer three hours 'fore yew came. Cleaned up all Morton's Injuns an' breeds that was outside, an' left Morton 'lone a bit. Then we started in on him—an' the rest yew know. . But there's goin' to

be the dickins to pay wi' the home folks, don't worry!"

"Aye, man, I reckon we'll be down fer mutiny an' all sorts o' things," Mackintosh said, with a grim smile. "But it'll be worth it, Ma . Tell ye what, I'm thinkin' o' makin' the v'yage home fer a change—and I know the lad would like it—eh, Hal?"

"I would indeed, Red," said Hal Newlands eagerly. He was thinking of what he would be able to do with the gold that he had discovered. "But we can't get there, Red!"

"Aye, lad, but we can," Mackintosh told him. "Bit o' a journey down th' coast an' 'e'll pick up a ship somewhere or t'other an' then——"

"Miss the next season out there?" Hal said, waving a hand indefinitely.

"Oh, reckon we can send someone to keep our word for us, lad," Mackintosh assured him. "We've smashed th' conspir'cy an' thet's the chief thing—any white man'll do to keep faith fer us till we kin go oursel's 'nother time."

He told McTavish of what he had promised Red Feather and Wolf Fang about the next season's trading, and McTavish nodded as he said:

"Reckon we can fix up thet all right, Red. An' there's no need fer ye t'go down coast fer a ship—there's one due in about a week wi' winter supplies. We kin go in thet an——"

"Yew comin' tew?" Mackintosh asked.

"D'ye think ef there's trouble fer some o' us I'm

goin' t'be out of it?" McTavish asked simply. "I'm comin' wi' ye, Red!"

And when, three weeks later, the good ship *Honeybird*, out from England, set sail for the homeland, McTavish was aboard her with Mackintosh and Hal—and Brun, who was going to fetch over the invalid sister from France. Greycoat was there, too, filled with doggy wonder at the new experience but happy despite all things because he was still with his master.

"'Tis a grreat land, Red," said McTavish, with something like awe in his voice, as, standing on the deck of the *Honeybird*, he looked back at the fort, quickly fading in the west as the ship romped through the sea. "Holds th' heart fast, Red. S'pose they"—jerking a hand towards the east—"swear we shan't come back?"

"They may swear what they like, Mac," said Red fiercely, "but I'm coming."

"So'm I!" McTavish assured him; and Hal, who wasn't consulted, knew that he, too, would have to go back to that land where there was ever-present danger, but also ever-growing pleasure and the urge of life.

And go back they all three did; for, upon their arrival in London, they, being examined by the officials of the great company, were not only acquitted of what sounded very much like insubordination, but were also commended for their actions, which the level-headed business men realized were all to the good of the company.

They went back, these brothers from the wilds, into the wilds they loved so well; and when they went the little mother of Hal Newlands accompanied them to become the foster-mother of a French girl named Brun, whose brother had carried her from Europe to the land of health, the land that did so much for her that within a year or so of her arrival she was as bonny as any of the women pioneers of civilization, and watched with wistful eyes, a few seasons later, well-laden canoes drifting upstream, one of which carried Hal Newlands, going out to keep rendezvous with Redskins. For Hal had been promoted to the position of factor—he was the youngest factor in the company's service in those days; and the man who went with him was Brun, the Frenchman, whose sister stayed at the fort and waited for the return of Hal Newlands, whose adventures in the great wilds had but just begun, if he had but realized it.

Could we but follow them——

Printed by Cassell & Company, Limited, La Belle Sauvage, London, E.C.4
F 35.620