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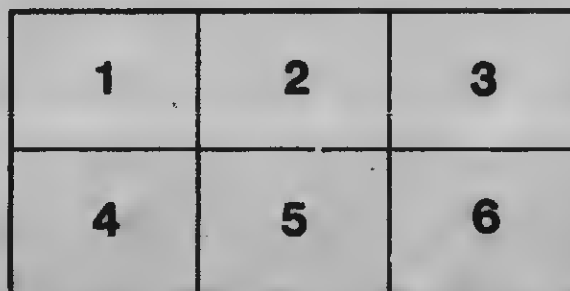
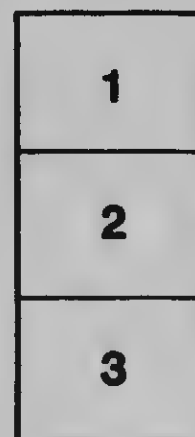
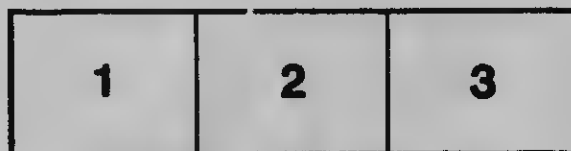
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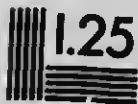
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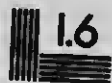
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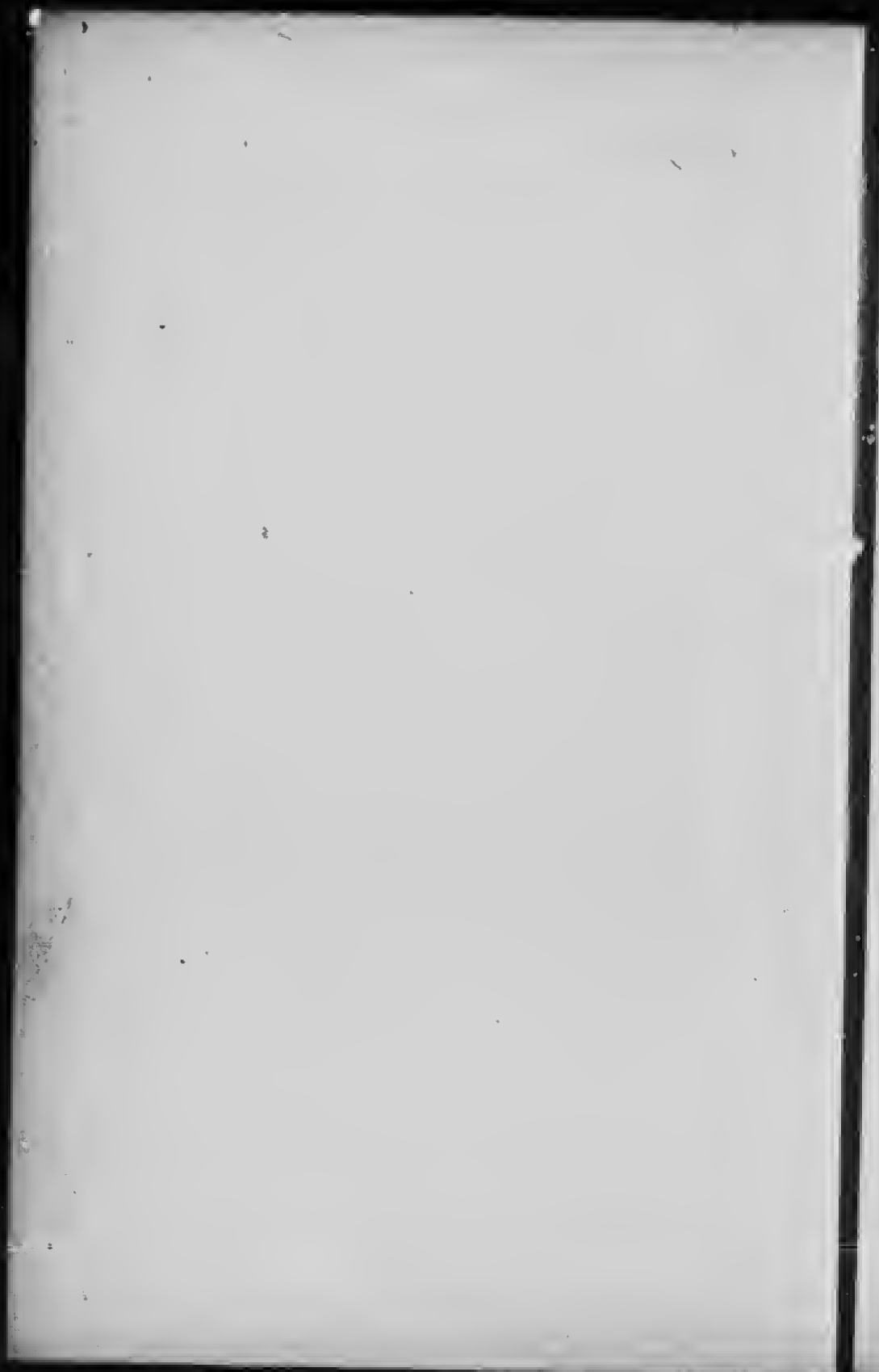
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A HUNT ON SNOW-SHOES

BY

EDWARD S. ELLIS

Author of "The Mountain Star," "The Forest Messengers,"
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The first part of the document discusses the importance of maintaining accurate records of all transactions. It emphasizes that every entry should be clearly documented and verified. The second part outlines the procedures for handling discrepancies and ensuring that all accounts are balanced. The final section provides a summary of the findings and recommendations for future improvements.

A HUNT ON SNOW-SHOES

CHAPTER I

UP THE KENNEBEC

“HARK!”

A low, wailing sound came faintly through the forest of oaks and pines, and borne on the wintry air, reached the ears of the two brothers who, on this moonlight night many years ago, were gliding swiftly over the gleaming surface of the Kennebec, on their ringing skates, which had already carried them full ten miles from their home.

It was Clarence Landon, the elder, who had uttered the exclamation that arrested the laughter and conversation of himself and Sydney.

On the instant they ceased striking out, and the rasping whir of the keen-edged steel grew softer and still softer, until the two came to a stand, side by side.

Still they spoke not, but stood looking and listening.

It was mid-winter, and the ice over which they were skating was fully a foot in thickness, and the surface was like that of a mirror.

The full moon rode high in an unclouded sky, and the sloping banks, surmounted by the sighing pines, cast hardly a line of shadow upon the silent river itself.

The air was nipping and keen, but no wind swept over the icy pathway, except such as was made by the youngsters themselves, as they skimmed along, like swallows upon the wing.

For a full minute they stood in the attitude of attention, while they glanced from side to side, and up and down the stream; and then the elder asked, in a whisper:

“Didn’t you hear it, Sydney?”

“Yes; but not as plainly as you. What do you think it was?”

“The cry of a wolf. This has been a hard winter for all wild animals, and father warned us against them. You know they will attack people when they are hungry, and I shouldn’t wonder if we had a race with them to-night.”

“Hadn’t we better turn about and go home?” asked the younger, as they still remained motionless. “We must be in danger!”

“We are ten miles from the house, and we

have only a little way to go; and then I think we can skate faster than those animals can run."

"Did that wolf seem to be above or below us?"

"Below. So it will be safer to go on; and if the creatures get too many for us, we can wait till daylight before we turn back. They always seem more savage at night than during the daytime."

"All right! Go ahead!" replied Sydney, as they struck out again. "Maybe the wolf has not scented us, and was only signaling to one of his friends."

That was the kind of ice to make a school-boy's eyes sparkle. It appeared as if the water had congealed so quietly and firmly that every particle of impurity was expelled during the process, and when the sunlight shone upon the solid mass, the clear water could be seen far below, as it flowed in silent grandeur.

How the lads enjoyed this rare sport! The steel runners shot over it without that harsh, grating sound which indicates the beginning of a thaw, or the irregular, knobby surface, and they kept far enough away from the banks to escape tripping on the twigs, that sometimes capsize the most skillful skater.

Their movements were smooth, easy and

graceful, and when they checked themselves rather suddenly, the particles of ice flew from their grinding heels like hoar-frost. Not often did they stop themselves thus; for there was a thrilling pleasure in gliding forward at this swift rate of speed, which made them loath to break it.

Now and then, when one lifted a foot rather suddenly, the finely-tempered steel gave out a clear, metallic ring, as if it had struck something harder than itself.

Like expert skaters, their swift, onward motion seemed causeless—that is, the impulse—the work and labor being imperceptible. There was no furious swinging of the arms; no crooking the body forward, as if they were upon the point of falling upon their knees and creeping; no shooting away to the right on one leg, and then off to the left upon the other, followed by an attempt to stand erect, and slide forward from the momentum thus gained.

But the boys sped onward, as if the momentum was in their skates, and their motions corresponded precisely as if each was a part of some delicate but perfectly-working machinery. The creek over which they were skimming in this easy, delightful manner was something over a hundred feet in width, and lined on either

side with forests of oak and pine. The banks were a dozen feet in height, rising almost perpendicularly, as if the creek, in the long course of years, had worn out its way for itself.

As we know, there was not a breath of wind stirring, except such as they themselves created by their swift progress; but the air was biting in its keenness, and Mrs. Landon proved herself a wise and thoughtful mother when she made certain that her sons were not only warmly clothed, but that their ears were well wrapped up and protected against the insidious cold, which will often freeze these appendages without the victim suspecting it.

Even with these coverings, the heavy mittens were now and then raised to the side of the head, and the ears vigorously rubbed, which was all very good; for so long as the ears, or hands, or feet hurt, you may be certain that they are not frozen. It is only when they lose their feeling that alarm need be felt; and a sharp, quick friction of the particular member of the body is the best way to restore the benumbed circulation, and prevent being "nipped."

The near wail of the white wolf of Canada, heard at night in the forest, is enough to startle the bravest hunter, and although the boys felt confidence in their skill on the steel runners,

and in a certain way longed for a trial of speed with these ferocious brutes, yet both were frightened at the prospect of such a test so close at hand.

Scarcely a minute had passed when the alarming cry was repeated directly ahead of them, and so near that both instinctively looked up, expecting to see the frightful creature, while Sydney checked his speed, as if afraid of going further.

"I tell you, Clarence," he said, in an undertone, "I don't like the looks of this. If we go ahead, we've got to dodge that wolf, for he has cut us off."

"What if he has? It is easier to whisk about on skates than for a wolf to catch us in his bare feet. They may run pretty fast, but they can't turn very quickly, and there's where we shall have them, Syd."

"Don't you remember what old Pierre once told us—that when one of these animals gets on the trail of a person, he is sure to bring lots of others? If a hundred or so of them come down on the ice ahead of us, it won't be so easy to dodge them as you seem to think. I would rather turn and go back."

The elder was about to yield to the fears of the younger, when a second cry came to their

ears, from a point fully a half mile to the right, and which seemed to be an answer to the signal they had heard a minute or so before.

This proved there was little choice, so far as the danger itself was concerned, while the nearness of the old Canadian's cabin showed that it was more prudent to keep on than to turn back.

"Look, Clarence—there is the old fellow himself!"

As he spoke the lank figure of an enormous wolf was seen, as he trotted down from the wood upon the snow crust, and leaping upon the ice, ran out directly toward the skaters.

Had they known that he was their only enemy, they could have afforded to smile at this effort; but the echo of that answering howl was still in their ears, and they knew the peril was closing in upon them from every side.

"We can get by him easily enough," said Clarence. "Let us keep straight ahead until we are close upon him, and then do you make a quick turn to the right, and I will turn to the left."

The large, gaunt wolf, that seemed determined to make a feast upon the two lads, trotted out upon the ice until he was nearly in the middle of the stream, when he halted, and turning his head, waited for them to come into his embrace.

So confident did he seem to be of success, that Sydney declared he saw him lick his chops in anticipation.

Straight onward the skaters continued, until they were within a dozen yards, when Clarence shot to one side and his brother to the other; and by the time the amazed animal was able to comprehend the situation, they were fifty feet above him, skimming over the ice like arrows sped from the bow.

With a howl he instantly whirled about, and galloped after them at full speed; and the boys were not long in discovering that it was at a rate that was very nearly equal to their own.

But they held this particular animal in little fear, believing that if he did succeed in coming up to them, they could easily escape by dodging and doubling upon themselves; but ere three minutes had passed, the very danger they held in such dread was upon them.

It seemed, in truth, as if all the wolves in Maine were congregated along the banks of the Upper Kennebec on that wintry night. The howl of this single brute was taken up by scores of others; and they came darting out of the forest, appearing in about equal numbers upon both banks. They did not halt upon coming in sight of the boys, but seeming to understand

that they were their legitimate game, the whole pack came leaping down the brittle crust, and made straight for them.

"Go it, Sid!" called out the elder brother. "We are running the gauntlet, and it looks as if we had a mile of it to do."

There was scarce exaggeration in this, for it was amazing to see these cadaverous creatures bounding down the bank from the woods, like a pack of hounds that were coming in at the death of the deer or fox. It was fortunate that none of these appeared upon the ice at such a distance in advance as to embarrass the boys; for they well knew that dodging one wolf was a very different affair from eluding a score.

By the time the lads had gone a quarter of a mile, this converging of the scattered brutes was ended, and the whole troop were on the ice in their rear, and going for them with a fierceness that threatened frightful results.

It was probable that fully fifty wolves were strung out upon the Kennebec, in full chase of the fugitives. Naturally lank and long-limbed, they are always swift-footed, and especially so when, in the dead of winter, the scarcity of food has made them more ferocious than ever, and given them a courage which at any other time is foreign to their nature.

Every school-boy knows that skating and running upon the ice are two very different things; and yet, if a lad starts carefully, with no skates on his feet, he can soon attain a speed as great as when running upon hard earth; but when it becomes necessary to make a short turn, or stop suddenly, then it is that the real difficulty has to be met. Indeed, a quick turn is out of the question, and the surest way to stop is to fall down and present as much of the body as possible to the friction of the ice.

It is much easier for a quadruped than for a biped to get forward over the frozen current; and the whole pack of wolves, by the time they were fairly in pursuit, had reached their highest rate of speed.

"Let yourself out!" said Clarence, as he glanced over his shoulder at the hungry pack. "They are coming for us like an express engine."

The still air, as they sped forward, cut by their ears like the rush of a hurricane; the wooded banks, with the spotless white and sombre green, were like the sweep of a misty cloud. The boys were doing their "level best," and never had they skated as they did upon this night, when they were working for their lives. They kept side by side, their figures swaying

and their limbs moving in exact correspondence, as they bent every energy to the task. The steel sent out that crisp, metallic ring which is always heard when the air is keenly cold; and it seemed to the lads themselves that they were going at a rate that no living animal could equal.

Precisely what their speed was, it is impossible to say; but however great, a startling fact soon made itself apparent, and that was that among the pursuing wolves were at least a dozen who were going still faster.

The glances which the boys cast over their shoulders showed them a string of brutes that were steadily drawing nearer, and that must soon overtake them. The majority were as steadily falling behind; but not one of them drew off from the pursuit, doubtless believing that by the time the prospective meal was ready, they would be on hand to share in it.

"The only thing we can do is to dodge," said Clarence. "Keep watch on that fellow who has singled you out, and give him the slip."

"Let us separate," replied Sydney, turning more toward the eastern bank, "and they will have to do the same. It will be easier to escape them, and we wont be so likely to get into each other's way."

The elder brother saw the wisdom of this suggestion and instantly acted upon it, so that, a few seconds later, they were fully fifty feet apart, and still shooting ahead at the same tremendous speed.

Without any real cause that can be understood, the major part of the wolves (by which we mean the dozen or so that were gaining upon the fugitives) followed the elder brother, as he deviated from the straight course he had been pursuing, leaving but a couple to harass the younger.

Like a true brother, Clarence was glad of this, for he felt that if his two years did not give him the greater speed, it still gave him greater ability in the way of out-manœuvering these treacherous animals, that were following him up with such persistency.

His new track brought him within twenty or thirty feet of the shore, beyond which line he deemed it unsafe to pass, through fear of the twigs or branches on the ice, over which it is always easy for the skater to trip or fall.

But he was no more than fairly upon his new route, when the foremost wolf was so near that he made a leap at him, and his ravenous jaws snapped close to his neck.

Like a flash the lad shot to the right, and his

pursuer and his comrades went sliding by, their limbs rigid, and their claws grating so harshly on the ice that they checked themselves within a rod or two.

But by the time they resumed the direct trail he was a hundred feet ahead, and looking across, saw that Sydney had executed a similar ruse, and with equal advantage.

"Keep it up," called out the latter, in a cheery voice, "and we shall outwit them, after all!"

The chase now became thrilling, and for a long distance the lads were able to hold their own, with only an occasional turning, the advantage thus obtained being such that the pursuers lost considerable time in regaining it.

But they drew up again, and finally, when Clarence delayed his sudden whirl too long, he found himself unexpectedly brought face to face with the most ferocious wolf of all, whom he could not dodge without running against a second formidable brute.

Not an instant was to lose, and as the only thing he could do, he gathered his strength for the effort, and with a terrific bound went clean over the head of the beast, and shot forward with arrowy swiftness, the half dozen yelping at his heels.

But at this moment came the despairing cry of his brother, on the other side of the stream:

"Oh, Clarence! *one of my skates has broken!*"

CHAPTER II

FLEEING FOR LIFE

AS Clarence Landon heard the wild cry of his younger brother he wheeled again and shot like lightning across the river to his assistance.

The poor lad was in a dreadful strait. He had just made a running leap, almost the same as the one by his brother, except that it was not a vault over the back of a wolf, and as it was a favorite practice with him, he had alighted on one foot. The concussion snapped the wood of his skate in two (for these were the days when the framework was made of wood), totally destroying its usefulness, and leaving him unable to help himself at the most critical moment of his life.

The two wolves, which still clung to the pursuit of him with the pertinacity natural to their kind, were clawing the ice at this instant, in their desperate efforts to regain the direct trail. But before this could be done, the other skater

darted by them like a meteor, and was at his brother's side as he started toward the bank.

"What do you mean to do?" he called.

"Climb a tree—for I can't get along on one skate."

"That won't do; they'll be on you before you can reach shore. Jump on my back. Don't wait another breath. Don't you see them coming?"

Not a second was to be lost. Clarence stooped, and in a twinkling his brother had mounted, with his arms around his neck.

The clamorous wolves were all around them, and not daring to attempt another leap, and seeing the way in front closed, Clarence wheeled about and started up the Kennebec again.

This, he knew was only a temporary escape; for he would need to continue it but a few minutes to place himself in the very centre of the howling pack.

He waited only until he could gain the necessary "lee room," when he made a long, sweeping curve, that carried him almost to the other shore, and again placed him to the north of his relentless pursuers.

And now the young skater seemed to be given supernatural energy and skill; for he was laboring for the life of his loved brother as well as

his own; and taking the centre of the river, where the bright moonlight enabled him to see the way, he shot ahead with a speed, that, until this moment, he had never equaled.

"Can you keep it up, Clarence?" asked his brother, amazed at his wonderful swiftness. "They can't catch us as long as you travel like that."

"I think so, if nothing happens. You must watch the wolves, while I look in front."

Naturally Sydney doubted the ability of his brother to maintain this tremendous effort for any length of time. He knew, too, that if he failed it would be a complete failure, for as long as he could hold his energies he would do so, and then collapse.

But the skater was looking ahead in more than one sense. Hopeful of reaching a point on the river opposite Pierre's cabin, he might well ask himself how the cabin itself was then to be gained; for it was not to be expected that he would be given time to remove his skates, and run a hundred yards in advance of the wolves; and as to making the attempt to flee up the path with the implements on, that was equally out of the question. Consequently his purpose was not only to keep away from the brutes,

but so to gain upon them as to give him this all-important vantage ground.

Sydney looked back repeatedly. The foremost wolf was nearly a hundred yards to the rear, and if he was not losing ground, he certainly was not gaining it.

“If they only had the sense of other creatures—to give up when there isn’t any chance of catching their prey! But I have read that they follow a man or animal for days and nights even when he is out of their sight.”

And so the lad knew they would not withdraw so long as the skaters were on the ice; but in looking at the swiftly-receding trees along the bank, he caught sight of a familiar landmark that caused a new throb of hope.

“The cabin is close by!” he called out, to cheer his brother, who was still pressing forward with the utmost energy and speed. “Keep it up a little longer, and we shall be all right!”

The skater made no reply; his lips were tightly compressed, as if to shut in the strength that must soon leave him. He was looking straight forward, and straining every nerve to make his goal. He knew he was speeding as never before, but for all that he was sure he was never so tardy in throwing the miles behind

him, and it seemed to him that he would never reach that bend in the river, which only needed to be passed to bring him the sight of secure shelter.

But it is reached at last; and as he shoots around the curve his heart throbs faster, as he recognizes the old familiar hut, nestling among the pines, on the sloping bank.

How quiet and still it looked, on this moonlight night—the wrinkled hunter within little dreaming of the frightful peril to which the youngsters were exposed!

But there was no corresponding elation in the breast of Sydney, who was continually glancing back, and compelled to see the shuddering truth that not one, but six or eight wolves were rapidly gaining upon them again.

He forbore telling his brother. He knew he was doing his utmost, and more indeed than he should attempt. Great as was the need, he would not urge him to greater effort. He meant to wait until the pattering feet were close behind them, when he would give the word for his brother to make one of his sudden short turns that had already saved them many times.

The wolves were still barking and howling and their cries sounded loud and clear in the still wintry air.

As Sydney caught sight of the cabin, it occurred to him that he might do some good, too, by using his voice. Perhaps, if it were pitched on a different key, it might rise above the appalling din and reach the ears of the old Canadian, and bring him to their rescue.

He did not wait, but emitted a yell that would have answered for a respectable war-whoop, and he kept it up, interspersing frantic appeals to Pierre to come to their help.

All this time the skater was working with a desperate, almost despairing energy, that did not permit him to look to the right or the left; but through the mufflings of his ears he caught the sounds of the wolves, as they drew rapidly nearer the weakening fugitive. He felt his strength failing, and he had given up all hope of outspeeding his pursuers. He knew that if assistance did not come to them in the next few minutes, they were doomed. This terrific strain could continue but a short time longer.

"Look! look! Clarence! Hurrah! we are saved! Yonder comes Pierre; he knows how to scatter the creatures! Keep up a minute more!"

The sound of the inspiring words, instead of adding power to the overtaxed limbs of the lad, acted like the hammer which knocks away the

prop. Sydney felt his brother sinking, and yielding to his own sympathy, he sprang down to catch him ere he fell.

The wolves were close, but they had ceased howling and snarling, and appeared to be pursuing the fugitives more cautiously, as if they scented mischief in the wind. Clarence was still moving forward, but in a blind, staggering fashion, that was devoid of speed, and as his brother slid from his slack embrace, he did not fall behind, but was just in time to seize his arms as he lunged forward.

"What's the matter, Clarence?" he called. "Don't give up now. The danger is past! Pierre is at hand."

"I tried to save you," muttered the elder brother, as he dropped sideways upon the frozen surface; "but the wolves are coming—they are here—good-by, Syd!"

The pursuing creatures had halted less than a hundred feet distant, and were standing, as if in doubt whether to flee or continue the chase. Sydney was so scared by the condition of his brother that he forgot for the moment that the danger from this source had not entirely passed, and he thought of nothing but of assistance for the insensible form beside him.

Seeing he could not be roused, he lowered him

into an easy position, whipping off his tippet and placing it beneath his head as a pillow, and then called out, in a cheery voice, as he darted away:

“Lie still, Clarence, and rest yourself, and I’ll have Pierre here in a jiffy!”

The poor fellow looked for all the world as if the breath had left his body forever, as he lay limp and senseless on his icy bed. The wolves that had paused so near at hand now turned and scattered before the peril which they had detected none too soon.

One or two howls, as they broke and skurried up the banks, caused the lad to look around, and as he caught the last glimpse of them, he thought:

“They have learned of the skill of Pierre, and dread the crack of his rifle.”

But where was the Canadian? After running a short distance, Sydney paused to look for him, but he was not to be seen.

“I saw him coming down the bank, and what else could have frightened the wolves when we were in their very jaws—”

He suddenly paused as he heard the crunching of the snow-crust, and turning his head he saw, not Pierre, the Canadian, but a huge black bear, that seemed to be tumbling and pitching

down the bank, and then emitting one growl, he started across the ice for the lad, who was so terrified by the unexpected sight that he stood paralyzed and unable to move.

In the flurry of the chase he had mistaken this ponderous animal for the lithe little hunter, and did not discover his error until face to face with him. It seemed now as if the brothers were doomed beyond all doubt; but Sydney roused to the situation the next instant, and with a shout intended to apprise his brother of this new and still more formidable peril, he wheeled to run toward him.

In doing so he forgot for the moment that he was standing upon ice, and he fell flat on his face. The single skate was still on his foot, and in rising this served so to complicate matters that he fell a second time—the double catastrophe driving him almost frantic.

It appeared indeed as if terrors were piling upon them; for when he finally steadied himself on his legs, he saw that the bear was between him and his brother, and was swinging directly toward the latter.

Not a limb or muscle of the unconscious Clarence moved, nor had he any more idea of the danger bearing down upon him than if he were devoid of life; but the younger brother

realized it, and with a cry that could have been heard for miles he sped in the direction of the bear, which was now midway between the lads.

The brute, however, paid no attention to the active youngster, but lumbered toward the one that seemed to be waiting for him. It cannot be said that Sydney had any well-defined plan of escape for himself, or Clarence, when he dashed forward in this impetuous manner. A boy of a dozen years isn't apt to digest such plans beforehand, and least of all when he finds himself caught in such an appalling dilemma as the one we have attempted to describe.

A blind hope impelled him, that by shouting and dashing forward he might scare the bear away, or cause him to pause until Clarence could be aroused, or what was fully as probable, induce the brute to turn and pursue the one that was pestering him.

How, in such an event, the youngster was to secure his own escape, was a problem which he never considered. His only purpose was to prevent those jaws from mangling the fair face and form of his darling brother, and to accomplish that he was ready to give his own life.

But all in vain; a dolphin might as well have tried to check the progress of an ironclad in mid-ocean. The desperate lad shouted and

called the name of his brother in frantic tones, and by hobbling and skating on one foot, managed to keep up a speed equal perhaps to that of the brute.

Thus it was that he was still a goodly distance from the bear when he saw him pause and lower his black muzzle to the face of his unconscious comrade!

CHAPTER III

DANGER ON EVERY HAND

HAD Clarence Landon stirred a limb at this moment, it would have been his last. It was his perfectly motionless position that caused the bear to doubt whether he was alive or dead. Had he suspected he was in the former condition, his first proceeding would have been to place him in the latter; but he seemed only to be waiting for some one to devour him.

All the time that bruin was snuffing about him the distracted Sydney expected to hear the cry that would follow the closing of those massive jaws in his brother's flesh; and, determined that the dreadful brute should be diverted, he hastily unstrapped the skate, and approaching within a few yards, hurled it against the head of the bear.

Good-fortune caused one end to hit him in the eye, and the animal threw up his snout, with a growl and a flirt of his head that showed he

suffered considerable pain for the moment. Not doubting that the end he sought had been accomplished, Sydney turned and ran as fast as he could for the woods.

It was the act of running itself which undoubtedly caused the bear to pursue him; for all through the animal creation the sight of a fleeing fugitive tempts one to the chase.

The animal stared at the retreating lad for a moment, and then perhaps concluded that one youngster was not sufficient to fill the craving hollow within him, and that, as the one was already secured, he was no more than wise to go for the other.

The pause of bruin gave Sydney a start; but he knew that, in a race over the snow, he was no match for the bear, and the most that he could hope to do was to gain time to climb some small tree and place himself beyond his reach.

In clambering up the bank, it was so steep that he slipped and fell, and was on the point of giving up in despair, when a second essay proved more successful, and he made a dash among the oaks and pines. They were all around him, and of all sizes, and he was in too much of a hurry to be particular.

Selecting one that had a smooth trunk, devoid of limbs for some distance above the ground, he

"shinned" up this like a performing monkey, never halting until he was in the very top.

And he was not a moment too soon. A crunching of snow-crust directly beneath the sapling proved that the bear was there before the lad had ceased climbing.

The surface of the snow is always more brittle in the forest than on the open plain, and as the bear lumbered along, it broke beneath his weight. He seemed scarcely to mind it, however; and we have shown how well he progressed.

All very well, so far. An *ursa major* can climb a big tree, but he is nowhere when he attacks a small one, and so long as Sydney could hold on and keep his position in the top, he might laugh at all the bears in North America; but it was a bitterly cold night, and there was no way of kindling a fire or keeping warm at such an elevation. And besides this, there isn't a living boy, in good health, who can sit in one position and keep awake all night; and yet all consider it one of the easiest things in the world to do.

Such a thing as going to sleep never entered the head of Sydney Landon, and in his excitement he was not likely to feel any inconvenience from cold for some time to come. The black,

mountainous mass beneath the tree was enough to keep his mind occupied for the present, especially as he became angry and sullen at the manner in which his prey had slipped from his grasp.

Instead of withdrawing and giving up the chase, the bear continued moving around the tree, turning his nose upward and snuffing the air, as if there was pleasure in catching the odor of his waiting supper.

Now if the senseless Clarence, still stretched on the ice, would only arouse, the prospect would become more encouraging for both lads; for he, doubtless, could divert their common enemy until the younger brother slipped away to Pierre's cabin, or what was still better, secure the help of the trusty old Canadian himself.

In the meantime, what had become of this mighty hunter? Yonder was his cabin, less than a fourth of a mile distant, and a man so accustomed to the chase ought to have been aroused by such a racket as had stirred the echoes for miles.

Sydney was sanguine that some of his shouts had penetrated beyond the border and disturbed the slumbers of the peacefully sleeping citizens in Quebec; but they certainly had failed to rouse Pierre.

In the hurry of his flight, he had not been given time to choose his refuge, and thus it happened that he was on one side of the creek, and the cabin on the other. This made the view more distant, but Sydney himself would have preferred to have it different. But there was no help for it, and as the best thing he could do in the circumstances, he renewed his whooping for the Canadian, whose unerring rifle had brought low so many denizens of the forest.

It was well known that he kept several dogs, and not a bark or howl had been heard from them—all of which indicated that the Nimrod himself was absent.

Sydney was loath to believe this, because their journey to his house was in accordance with an agreement made when they were home on their summer vacation, and fishing in these very waters. Pierre had been down to their house the day before, and was not the one to forget his part of a contract.

But when the boy had shouted himself hoarse, he concluded that there was a slip somewhere, and little prospect of receiving help from the one upon whom they had counted with so much hope.

It is hard to conceive of a situation more trying than was that of the youngster crouching

in the upper branches of the pine. He was cramped and cold, and unable to think of any means of saving himself from freezing to death.

But it was more on account of his brother than for himself that he was in such an anguish of anxiety. From his perch in the sapling he could see the dark, motionless form stretched out on the ice, and a dreadful fear came over him that perhaps, after all, he was dead—killed in the effort to save him from being devoured by the ravening wolves.

Must he lie there until devoured by the prowling beasts of the wood? Was he to be denied even a burial? Was his own agonized cry for help doomed to reach no human ears? Would not heaven hear the prayers which he had uttered so many times on this terrible night?

The lad looked up through the cold branches to the clear sky with its placid moon, and felt that there was one Eye, indeed, that saw him, and that there was one Ear which would not be turned away from the wailing cry which he sent up to it.

One thought distressed him beyond measure. It was the fear that his brother's state was such that he would die unless he received immediate attention, and that he needed only a

slight degree of this to bring him back to health and strength. And there he lay, scarcely a hundred yards away and he unable to go to him, by reason of the impassable barrier that interposed.

Sydney wished that the bear would leave, and still dreaded to have him go; for if he went, and left him free to descend, what more likely than that he would make for Clarence as he lay upon the ice?

"Oh, that Pierre, the Canadian, would come!" was the prayer which went up from the heart of the tortured lad again and still again.

It looked as if the bear had an almost human conception of the situation, and that he was determined to remain under the tree until the fruit dropped into his paws; and such in all probability would have been the result, had matters remained as they were for a few hours longer; but Sydney was not the one to sit still and see his brother perish before his eyes without risking his life to prevent it. He resolved to go to him, if he had to run another race with the bear.

He was in the act of leaning his head out and away from the trunk, that he might gain a better view of where his enemy was, when the

limb from another tree brushed his face, and on the instant a happy thought entered his head.

He had read that some of the tropical forests are so dense that the only way of making one's way through them is by passing from branch to branch.

Why not do so in the present instance, when the limbs of several trees were interlocked with those that supported him?

He had scarcely asked himself the question when he answered it by making the effort.

It was necessary, it would seem, that this locomotion should be managed without attracting the notice of the bear, for it would be the easiest thing in the world for him to keep pace with the lad, as he moved from limb to limb.

Not forgetting this, Sydney reached out and grasped the nearest branch which seemed capable of bearing his weight, and after a few manœuvres, found himself in a tree that was several feet from the trunk up which he had climbed.

His next movement was to take a peep downward to learn how his enemy accepted the situation.

His heart thrilled with a new hope, as he caught sight of a mass of shadow which he took to be him, although the gloom beneath the limbs

was so great that it was hard to distinguish any objects clearly.

At any rate, he was so sanguine of the result of this stratagem that he instantly resumed his efforts, and in the course of a few minutes he was fully twenty feet from his starting-point—far enough, indeed, for him to ask himself whether it were not safe to descend to the ground.

When a boy is freezing and half-dead with anxiety, he is not apt to be very deliberate in his movements, and Sydney took hardly a second glance when he slid down the tree and stood on the snow-crust, which was barely strong enough to hold his weight.

Nothing was to be seen of his old foe—although, for that matter, he might have been within a few yards, and still remained invisible—and the lad stole forward over the snow toward the frozen stream, where his unconscious, if not dead brother still lay.

But the danger was not passed and Sydney had scarcely placed his feet on the ice when he heard the bear after him.

Dreading a repetition of his former experience, he purposely turned above the point where Clarence lay, and aimed direct for the cabin of old Pierre, the Canadian.

He was half way across the creek, when he looked back and saw his foe pitching down the bank, and heading so straight toward him that there could be no mistake as to his intention.

All this was well enough, and could the lad have felt less uneasiness about his brother he would have been in high spirits—for he had secured such a start of the brute that he had no doubt of being able to reach the house ahead of him.

As he ran he kept up his shouting, with a view of reaching the ears of the hunter and his brother, while he glanced frequently aside in the hope that the latter would bestir himself.

The first look at such an awkward, cumbrous animal as the black bear, would lead one to believe that he is incapable of any speed, but it is surprising how rapidly he can get over the ground, when fairly under way.

This portion of the Upper Kennebec, as we have explained, was in reality a creek, barely a hundred feet in width, so that any one could cross it in a very short time, even without the aid of skates. The cabin of the Canadian, however, was a little further up, else Sydney would have been there almost by the time the bear had started; but only half the distance was passed when the sound of the animal's claws on the

ice showed that he was gaining at an alarming rate.

The chilled limbs of the lad were suddenly heated by the thrill of fear that went through him at the thought that, after all, he had committed a fatal blunder in leaving his perch in the tree. The terror of being overtaken by his pursuer was intensified by the possibility that, even if he should succeed in reaching the cabin, there was no guarantee of immediate admittance, and a minute's delay there meant death.

But there was little time for speculation and doubt; the issue was near, and as his blood was warmed by his unusual exercise, he made such speed that he held his own, and in a few minutes scrambled up the snowy bank, and dashed for the low, broad door, whose threshold he had crossed so many times.

It was reached in a second's time, and he threw up his hand to raise the latch. The bright moonlight and the sense of touch told the fearful truth—the latch-string had been drawn in, and he could no more open the door than if it were the entrance to a massive safe!"

CHAPTER IV

A NIGHT OF DREAD

WHEN poor Sydney Landon found the door of the hunter's cabin closed against him, he gave up in despair. He had struggled bravely during the past hour, but there seemed no escaping his fate, and he tottered off to one side, and covering his face with his chilled hands, awaited the deadly embrace of the huge bear.

But heaven had heard his prayer, although he knew it not. When he touched the door something seemed to fall within the cabin; there was a terrific rumpus, like the plunging about of some large animal imprisoned in the house. Then the door suddenly swung inward, and out dashed an enormous dog, with a growl of anger.

Not a second did he pause, but, guided by an unerring instinct, headed for the bear, which was no more than a couple of leaps distant, and

the next instant the two were locked together in a fight unto the death.

This was the watch dog of old Pierre, which he was sometimes accustomed to leave in charge of the cabin during his absence. The fellow was too well taught to venture outside on account of the baying of wolves or the shouting of persons who were strangers to him; but when he heard some one at the door, and detected the growl of a bear almost against the logs, he could stand it no longer. He hastily lifted the latch with his paw, permitting the door to swing backward, and then he plunged out and went for the bear with the fury of a bull attempting to knock the lightning express off the track.

And with the same result. Ferocious, powerful and courageous as was the canine, he was no match for an unusually large bear, and although he might prolong the unequal contest, the issue thereof was as certain as if the unarmed lad had closed in with the purpose of destroying bruin; and while no one could help admiring the pluck of the dog, yet very little could be said of his discretion.

This new diversion inspired the heart of Sydney with hope, and he was wise enough to improve his new advantage to the utmost. Without waiting a minute, he hurried back to the

creek, and sped away as fast as he could go in the direction of his prostrate brother.

Look! Could he believe his eyes? The benumbed skater was stirring; one knee was drawn up; then he turned upon his side and rose partly to his feet, pausing and looking about in the bewildered way of one who is just waking from a long slumber.

"Clarence! Clarence! get up!" shouted the overjoyed Sydney, as he noted these signs of life. "There are wolves and bears all around us, and if you lie there any longer, you're a gone case, dead sure! Come, stir your stumps, old fellow!"

By this time the elder had balanced himself on his skates, and was beginning to straighten out matters in his mind, although all was not yet clear. He stared in a bewildered way at his brother, and asked:

"Where are the wolves that were chasing us a few minutes ago?"

"They were all scared away by a big black bear, just as they were ready to gobble us up, and you gave out completely."

"And what has become of the bear?" asked the brother.

"He left you for me, and we have been waltzing back and forth until he ran against old

Pierre's dog, and they are having it out up yonder by his cabin."

"But I remember hearing you call to Pierre, just as my head began to swim and everything grew dark about me. What became of him?"

Sydney explained the situation as briefly as he could, telling by what a strange concurrence of circumstances he had kept out of the grip of the bear, from whose clutches they were by no means as yet saved.

"It won't take him fifteen minutes to finish old Pierre's dog," said Clarence, fully himself again, "and then he'll begin to inquire for us. If you had skates we would strike for home, as far off as it is; but that won't do, as we should run into the wolves again."

"I can't stand this much longer," added Sydney, his shivering form and rattling teeth showing how greatly he was suffering from cold. "If we could only manage to get inside of Pierre's cabin, we should find warmth and comfort there, and nothing to fear from bears or wolves."

"I wish we could," said the elder, with a longing glance in the direction of the log house; "but, if we are out of sight of that bear, we had better keep out of sight. Let's go down to the mouth of the creek, and then move up

stream for a short distance, until he has had time to get away. We will then start back again, and make a reconnoissance, as the soldiers say, and if he isn't very close to the house, we will slip inside and wait for Pierre."

This prudent resolution was acted upon without delay. Clarence skated slowly down the creek until he reached the junction, when he turned northward and continued his course in the same careful manner for several hundred yards, far enough to take him out of sight and sound of anything within or about the Canadian's cabin.

"Put on these skates and exercise yourself till you get warm," said Clarence, as he began unstrapping them. "I am not half as chilly as you are, for all I have been taking a nap on the ice. Go up stream a quarter of a mile, and back; put on all steam, and you will be in better trim when you are here again. By that time, too, it will pay to make an excursion round by the cabin, and see whether there is an opening for two young men like us."

"But suppose the wolves or bear should pay you a visit while I am gone," asked Sydney, "what would you do?"

"Climb a tree, as you did. Come, be off with you!"

The younger brother did not refuse longer to obey him, and he struck off with the same graceful movement that had marked his progress when the two started from home, a few hours before, while Clarence moved slowly about on the ice, in preference to remaining still, and listened and watched.

He was puzzled that in the still night air he heard nothing of friend or enemy. The woods were as silent as if the howl of a wolf had never disturbed them, nor the crack of the hunter's rifle awakened their echoes. He did not wonder at this so much as at the stillness in the direction of the trapper's cabin. It was but a short distance, and it seemed impossible that a dog and bear should be engaged in combat without the sound of the conflict being heard.

"It is over," Clarence whispered to himself, after he had stood awhile and listened, "and what is more, the dog is dead. There has never been one of his kind that could conquer such a bear as Syd says that fellow was. Now if we could only be certain that the conqueror was satisfied and gone, it would be a nice thing for us to crawl into the house and bunk for the rest of the night. I have a great mind to steal down there and take a look for myself."

Without fully considering the danger, the lad

acted upon his self-suggested course. He was chilly, and an uncomfortable feeling remained in his head, caused doubtless by the terrific strain his system had undergone. There was a tremulous, uncertain movement of the legs also which made him uneasy, and caused him to take the exercise as much for the purpose of walking it off as for anything else.

He had no desire to meet the enormous bear, fresh from crunching the dog, and ready to devour a half dozen lads like himself, and he stole carefully along shore, frequently pausing, and listening and looking. Not the slightest alarming sound could be heard, and he was quite hopeful of finding the cabin entirely free from all danger.

Before turning up the creek, he crossed to the other side, where the view was more extended, and was stealing along under the shadow of the trees which stood upon the bank, not dreaming of any danger to his feet, when without the slightest warning he stepped into an air-hole, or rather a long, continuous open space, such as are frequently found even in the arctic regions.

'As he sank beneath the chilling water, a gasping cry escaped him, forced out by the thrillingly cold embrace; but knowing on the in-

stant the nature of his mishap, he threw out his hands and struggled hard to grasp the edge of the ice before he was swept under.

These open spaces, as is well known, generally occur where the current is rapid, and the greatest danger of him who is unfortunate enough to step into one is that he will be drawn beneath the surrounding ice, in which case it is scarcely possible to escape.

Although Clarence was a good swimmer, yet his heavy winter clothing prevented his using his limbs to any advantage, and he found himself unable to stem the current. Had the un-ongeaed space been considerably larger, there is no doubt that he would have been drowned; but the surface of the water was as high as that of the ice itself, and after keeping himself afloat until he was close to it, he had only to throw his arms over the solid ledge, to prevent himself from perishing.

But he was still in the water, and when he made the effort to climb out, was alarmed to find it could not be done. There was nothing upon which he could lay hold to draw himself up, and when he undertook to raise his foot from the freezing current, his garments were so heavy, and he was so weak from over-exertion, that he failed.

“Must I stay here until I freeze to death?” he asked himself, as he still hung on. “Am I so weak that I have no more use of my limbs than this?”

No human frame can resist the paralyzing effects of cold for any length of time, and the lad was assured that if he saved himself it would have to be within a very few minutes.

It seemed that Sydney must be within hailing distance, and the lad now did what his brother had done some time before and used his lungs to the best of his ability; but as there was no response, he renewed his efforts to help himself.

It was the other leg which he tugged at now, and after an excruciating effort, he succeeded in raising the foot upon the edge of the thick ice. Then, by the help of his hand, he forced it a little further—still further—and then, with a desperate wrench, raised himself out of the polar current.

The poor fellow was in a pitiable plight. His garments saturated with water, the temperature below zero, and no human help within call. His only hope lay in reaching the cabin up the creek. There was warmth which would prevent his freezing, and nowhere else could it be found in time to save him.

He must make an effort to reach that shelter, even though he knew the entrance was barred by the ferocious bear that had already persecuted them almost unto death.

It would not do even to await the return of Sydney, who was already overdue, for standing still meant perishing; and with a last despairing effort for life, he made for the mouth of the creek, up which he turned, taking the shortest possible route to Pierre's home, and heeding not whether he ran directly into the embrace of the bear or not.

He had to brush the icicles from his eyes as he pushed on; he felt his coat and trowsers stiffen and crackle as he walked. He seemed burning and freezing at the same time.

He attempted to run, but the most he could do was to shuffle, and his strength failed so fast that by the time he had turned into the creek that gait could not be maintained.

Slower and still slower went his lagging footsteps, and when he reached the bank opposite the cabin, and started up the short path, it required a supreme effort to keep his senses. Still he struggled with all the power at command, and was encouraged by his failure to see anything of the bear. The way at last was open, and he had but to enter it.

But he could not. A thick mist came before his eyes, his breath came short and hard. Human nature had reached its limit. He was still pressing toward the door, when everything seemed to whirl around him, and he sank senseless to the earth.

CHAPTER V

THE PHANTOM CAMP-FIRE

IN the meantime, Sydney Landon found himself involved in a series of adventures which, if not as dangerous as those through which he had just passed, were certainly more inexplicable.

All fears for the safety of his brother were removed, and feeling an uncomfortable chilliness, he struck out with great vigor, not abating his speed until he had gone fully half a mile.

By this time he was warmed up and ready to turn back; but at the moment of doing so, a strange cry reached his ear, causing him instantly to stop, and look and listen.

The sound was faint, but none the less distinct, and came from some point up stream.

There was nothing that imagination could conceive, to which the cry bore close resemblance, but it suggested to the wondering boy the call of a woman or child in distress, apparently at a great distance in the woods.

"There seem to be strange goings on to-night," muttered Sydney. "Some persons would believe the forest was haunted, and—Sh!"

Precisely the same wailing call came floating to his ears, on the still winter night, in which it seemed to linger, swaying back and forth, fainter and fainter, like the dying echoes of a bell. It was impossible to tell whether it was a human voice or the cry of some unknown animal.

There are wild animals in the American wilderness, whose cry has been often mistaken for that of a person in distress; and the panther, more than once, has secured his prey through this very means.

"It's up the river," the youngster added, when he heard the strange sound the second time, "and were it not that Clarence is waiting for me, I would learn what it means."

The Kennebec at this portion was comparatively straight, so that the view by daylight extended several miles. Naturally the lad was peering up the stream, and speculating with himself as to what it could all mean, when he gave a start of alarm.

What was it he saw? Was it some phantasm of the moonlight—some drifting, uncouth

figure of vapor that floated before him—or was there actual life in that indistinct form that came to view on the ice of the Kennebec?

He was never more perplexed in his life. In the first place, he was unable to tell whether it was within a hundred yards, or a half mile away. If it were really a person, then he must be skating over the ice, and the boy was unable to detect the slightest sound; and there was a certain supernatural air about the whole proceeding that both fascinated and scared the lad.

The apparition, if such it might be termed, lasted less than a minute, when the air was cleared again, and the straining vision could detect nothing that bore the slightest resemblance to what had so arrested and startled him a short time before.

It was natural that the young skater should associate that strange cry with the figure, and he was still trying to conjure up some explanation of the matter, when a bright, star-like point of light appeared along the shadowed shore, several hundred yards above him.

It was scarcely more than a point, such as would be made by a lantern carried in the hands of a man, or by the glimmer of a camp-fire when

first caught sight of through the dense undergrowth of the woods.

This decided the debate that had been going on in the mind of Sydney.

"It is so near that I can soon reach it, and I may then learn something of the mystery, and will have quite an adventure to tell Clarence when I go back. I don't think there can be any danger."

The days of wild Indians had long since gone by in Maine, so that the boy gave that phase no thought. There is no lonely part of the country safe against the encroachments of lawless men, and Sydney knew it was not impossible that there might be some near him. Still, it was hardly probable; and then, he felt considerable confidence in his own skill on skates, in case it should become necessary to make a hurried flight.

Softly and slowly he moved over the ice, avoiding all noise and keeping well upon the opposite bank, until he passed a considerable distance, when he made the astounding discovery that he was as far away as when he started!

"Gracious alive! what can it mean?" he gasped, beginning to believe he was really traveling in ghost-land. "That camp-fire seems to

be a regular *jack-o'-lantern*, that runs away from every one who tries to catch it. I wonder if there are a lot of hunters there, who pick up the embers and vamose whenever they see a stranger coming?"

The light gleamed as brightly as ever, and scrutinize it as closely as he could, he detected nothing that indicated it was carried in the hand of any man. Walking, running or skating, it would seem impossible for a person to carry a light in perfect equipoise.

Sydney had come to a dead halt, and was gazing intently in the direction of the phantom camp-fire, eyes and ears strained to their utmost.

"I don't believe there are two hundred yards between us. I ought to pass over that in a few seconds. It is stationary now, and I think I can get near enough to find out something before they have time to get away."

Off he went, like an arrow aimed straight at the star-like point of fire. The distance was passed with great quickness; but when at the other extremity, the camp-fire still gleamed as far off as ever. He could not believe he had really approached a foot nearer.

Nothing had been seen or heard to throw any light upon this extraordinary proceeding, and

Sydney concluded that it was useless to push his explorations further. Even if he had the disposition, it was high time that he rejoined his brother, whom he supposed to be shivering on the ice, near where he had left him.

And so, turning his back upon the perplexing mystery, he started on his return, resolved that if ever a second opportunity offered, he would find out what it all meant.

"I wonder if there are such things as spooks and ghosts?" he muttered, as he glided easily over the ice. "It seems to me I heard father say something at our Christmas dinner, about a part of the Upper Kennebec being haunted. I know he doesn't believe in such things, and I didn't pay much attention to what he said on that account; but every once in awhile something comes to the ears of a chap that sets him to thinking harder than ever. Who can be sure there are no such creatures as spirits?"

If Sydney Landon was still in doubt about the supernatural, he had none about the material, when appearing in the shape of a big black bear. Absorbed in the difficult problem which he had submitted to himself, he came within a hair's breadth of running squarely against the head of the same bruin from which he had escaped with such difficulty.

The brute had been swinging over the ice, in old-fashioned style, when the youngster happened to look up, and saw him barely a dozen yards away, standing motionless, as if waiting for him to glide into his jaws.

A quick, sweeping curve carried the young skater around and beyond the gigantic creature, which instantly turned to resume the pursuit. It did not take him long to swing his huge body around, and he was getting under full headway, when his racing days were ended by the crashing of a bullet through his brain.

Before Sydney had time to learn what it all meant, he heard a well-known shout, and a familiar figure came down the bank on snow-shoes, speeding swiftly toward him.

"Oh, my leetle friend, I am so glad to see you! I have been on a long hunt to-day, and I did not get back zo zoon as I was expecting, and you come while I was away. And that bear, ze *grande* monster, he kill my dog Napoleon, and he runs. I come home and finds his trail, and I takes one vow that I will shoot him, if he runs all the way down to Portland. He goes along over ze snow, till it break through too much, and zen he travel on ze ice, and zen I shoot him. Ough!"

And the indignant Canadian spurned the

fallen brute with his foot, as if he desired to punish him "after death."

It was Pierre, the trapper and hunter, who had made his appearance in this remarkably opportune manner.

He was an active little fellow, with a face like wrinkled parchment, and small, twinkling black eyes, full of life and vigor—though he was certainly over fifty years of age—and as quick and spry as a cat. He carried a gun longer than himself, and had the reputation of being the best hunter ever known in his neighborhood. Not a particle of beard was visible on his face, and his long, thin hair was as black as coal.

He was a general favorite with all who knew him, and showed a great fondness for the Landon brothers, who, naturally enough, considered him one of the greatest men that ever lived.

Pierre, when excited, talked very rapidly, and with a somewhat broken accent, which entirely disappeared with the emotion, and then his language was as correct as that of many an educated gentleman.

"Have you seen Clarence?" asked Sydney, all anxiety on account of his brother.

"Oh, yes; I came up to him just as he pitched

over. He had fallen into an air-hole, and was nearly frozen; but I took him in, stripped off his clothes, rubbed his skin to a blister, poured some boiling tea down his throat, and left him feeling like a fighting-cock, and anxious to start on our moose-hunt to-morrow."

"How delighted I am!" exclaimed the lad, overjoyed by such tidings of his brother. "We have had a pretty narrow escape, Pierre."

"Oh, I suppose," replied the hunter, in an indifferent voice, "you will get used to such things. Clarence told me all about it, and it will do for you to tell the boys when you go back to school. You see, the whole trouble came from trying your trick of landing upon one foot, after making a long jump. I won't read you a lecture on such foolishness, for there is no danger of your doing it again."

"But, Pierre, Clarence didn't tell you *all*," said Sydney, as they moved along side by side. "I have seen a ghost!"

"What is zat?" excitedly asked the Canadian.

And then the youth briefly related what he had seen and heard a short time before.

The old hunter, much to the surprise of the lad, seemed greatly impressed by the account, and when it was finished, shook his head saying,

in an undertone, as if communing with himself:

"I am sorry it has been seen. I thought he had gone. There will be trouble—surely trouble!"

"What do you mean?" asked Sydney, more mystified than ever by the words and manner of his friend.

"Say nothing more about it. Do not tell your brother. Forget what you have seen and heard, and all may be well."

In obedience to this command, the lad held his peace, and a few minutes later the cabin was reached, where Clarence was found as well and in as good-spirits as ever.

Old Pierre was a sort of hermit, living in his log-cabin, near the head-waters of the Kennebec, with no companion, since the death of his watch-dog, except an enormous black hound. Most of his time was spent in hunting and fishing, and as may well be imagined, he never suffered for the want of food and clothing—for living in the woods so many years, he seemed to have learned all about their inhabitants. It would have been a strange thing to have seen Pierre returning empty-handed from a fishing or hunting excursion.

When he preferred to spend a few days in

the house he was never idle. The little room in which he made his home was a perfect "curiosity shop," in its way. He was ingenious and industrious, and his place was crowded with all manner of odd and useful implements.

Suspended on the antlers, at one end of the apartment, were fully a half-dozen guns, most of them of handsome make; but there was one queer-looking musket, with a cumbrous lock and rusty bayonet, that Pierre said was carried by his grandfather through the French and Indian war; and then just below, was a collection of pistols, all flat against the wall, and pointing toward the centre of a circle, thus making a sort of "Round Robin," you might say. Directly overhead, the entire ceiling was hidden by snow-shoes, that were ingeniously hung upon pegs, and they reminded one of the skeleton "shells," as those narrow, sharp-pointed row-boats are termed that often nestle in the upper part of the boat-houses.

Upon another side of the room were piled on the floor great slabs of the mountain ash and pieces of willow. These furnished the material from which the active old man made baskets of the most curious shapes and patterns; besides which he had the knack of extracting thin, tough, white ribbons from the ash,

which he plaited into neat and serviceable bottoms for chairs.

For miles around, the majority of these articles of furniture showed the cunning workmanship of Pierre—so it will be seen that his life was far from being an idle one.

As Sydney followed the lively old fellow into his cabin, the air was found warm and comfortable from the fire that was burning on the hearth.

In the centre of the room was hung a large lamp, which, with the burning logs, made the interior as luminous as it could have been made by any modern supply of chandelier and gas.

There was a faint but appetizing smell of broiling meat, also, that made the mouths of the guests fairly "water."

"I knew you would be here to take supper with me," said their host, bustling about the apartment; "and although we are a little late, I made ready for you."

"I hope you prepared for a couple of hungry boys!" laughed Clarence, "for our skating up the creek has made me feel like one of those wolves that we heard howling to-night. How is it with you, Syd."

"Wait until we are at the table, and I will show you one who is not a whit behind you!"

Pierre did not keep his folks waiting. A huge haunch of venison, crisp, brown and juicy, was placed upon the little table, while snowy bread and golden butter (not quite so golden as during the summer time) were also furnished in abundance; and as the lads took their seats, they both declared that not even their Christmas dinner, flanked as it was by so many delicacies and tit-bits, tasted more delicious.

The Canadian insisted that not a particle of meat must be left; he had provided this especially for their supper, and his feelings would be hurt, and he would be certain that they were dissatisfied with the fare, if they should leave any. By such persuasion he kept them at the table until they were so full that neither could possibly swallow another mouthful.

After supper came the nuts and cider, and all manner of speculation about the morrow's hunt.

Pierre told them that the start was to be made at a very early hour; and as they had a full week at command, all were hopeful of a glorious time.

"And I shall give you the hunt that you have often asked me for," continued the old man, in his cheery, jovial manner. "I shall

put each of you on a pair of snow-shoes, and teach you how to navigate them."

"I don't see what trouble there need be in doing that," replied Clarence. "We have only to remember that we have a pair of very big shoes on, and use a little more muscle."

"Wait and you will see," said the Canadian with a chuckle. "By the time you reach my age you will learn that there isn't anything that comes natural to man except to sin. You have got to learn how to do everything just as you have to learn to talk."

"But what kind of game are you going to give us?" asked Sydney.

"Can't promise positively," replied Pierre, with a wink, and an odd bobbing of his head. "You know that moose ain't so plenty in Maine as they used to be, but maybe—mind, I don't promise—you shall have a sight of one of those big fellows before you get back."

CHAPTER VI

THE MOOSE, OR AMERICAN BLACK ELK

THE night was far advanced, and after a half hour's chat over the adventures of the night—during which no reference was made to the supernatural experience of the younger brother—the lads turned in to sleep.

The old Canadian understood so well how to manage the youngsters that both slept soundly until daylight, when they awoke as fresh, cheerful and vigorous as when they set out from home the evening before.

“Come, my boys,” said the lively old man, “a good hunter never oversleeps himself, and it's time we were off. Your breakfast is waiting.”

Only a few minutes were needed to satisfy their appetites, when each, with a pair of snowshoes in hand, passed out of the cabin, crossed the frozen creek, and halted in the woods beyond to fasten them on their feet.

The snow-shoe of the far North is made of two thin pieces of light wood, tied at both ends, and spread out near the middle, forming a kind of long oval, the interior of which is filled up with a network of deer-skin threads. Strength is given the frame by placing the wooden stays across, and it is fastened "loosely" to the foot by a slight line going over the toe. These snow-shoes are from four to six feet long, and from thirteen to twenty inches wide, notwithstanding which the extreme lightness of their materials prevents them from being cumbersome, and after a little practice walking becomes easy. Frosty weather is the best for snow-shoe traveling, as the snow is fine and dustlike, and falls through the network. In warm weather, the wet snow renders the shoe heavy, and the lines soon begin to gall the feet. On these shoes the Hudson Bay Indians and trappers will make from twenty to thirty or forty miles a day.

"They look like canoes," remarked Clarence, as Pierre stooped down to fasten them to his feet; "and if the bottoms were water-tight, I should think we could walk over the rivers in summer time."

A moment later, the lads and the hunter himself were shod, and all was ready.

"Now, go ahead!" added Pierre, as he straightened up. "Step right off, as though you knew all about it."

Both boys started together, and as might be expected, they had taken hardly a step when they pitched headlong on their faces, and the frantic efforts made to regain their feet only entangled them the more, until Pierre went to their assistance, during which he seemed to believe he had the right to convulse himself with laughter at their expense.

The trouble was that they had attempted to use them as ordinary walking shoes, pushing them straight forward, and the points breaking through the crust, it was impossible to save themselves from falling.

Their guide explained to them that the only way to progress with these appendages was by shoving them out and forward, with a peculiar side-long motion.

Pierre was as much at home on them as the boys were on skates, and after a little patient showing, they were able to make good progress, so that the three moved through the wood at an ordinary walk, the old man keeping himself slightly in advance, and acting as the guide and director in all things while on this hunting excursion.

Towser, the dog, trotted close at their heels, sometimes dashing off for a short distance, or making a little tour of his own among the pines and spruce, but never keeping himself out of sight for any length of time.

Naturally a very intelligent canine, he was so perfectly trained by his master that he seemed always to know his wishes without a word being spoken. They were almost inseparable companions, either at home or abroad, and it was well known that no wealth could buy him from his owner.

He was of a jet black color, of immense size and strength, and was an enemy which the bravest man might well hesitate to attack.

"I have made a sort of pledge to you," said Pierre, as they walked through the wood, "that you should have a moose hunt, and yet I have been sorry, that I ever made such a promise."

"Why do you regret it?"

"Because I don't know whether I can keep it or not. You must know that the moose is very scarce in Maine, and isn't often seen except a good way north of here; but I have been looking around during the last few days, knowing what you expected, and I have seen signs that give me hopes of getting on the track of one."

A HUNT ON SNOW-SHOES

"What were those signs?" asked Sydney.

"In a grove of maples, a couple of miles off, I found a place where one of them had been stripping the trees. Of course that shows that one or more is in the neighborhood; and that stripping was done by a bull-moose, too, that weighs over half a ton."

"How do they strip the trees?" inquired Clarence, the brothers naturally desirous of learning all they could of the habits of this remarkable animal.

"They have a hard pad in the upper part of the mouth, with which they reach up sometimes as high as eight or nine feet, and then scrape off the bark with their teeth, just the same as a black-smith uses a horse-file on a horse's hoofs. Then their upper lip hangs down three or four inches, and they use that to hook in the tender little twigs. And so I've found, in my hunting of animals, that all of God's creatures have a wonderful adaptation, as the philosophers say, for the life that nature intended them to live."

"What is the best time to hunt them, Pierre?"

"There isn't much choice between the early spring and early fall of the year, though it's a little more dangerous in the fall, because

that's their rutting season, and they are more savage than at other times. They are mad at everything then, and if a couple of bulls meet, they go at each other like tigers. They will lock horns together, and jam each other with their fore feet till one goes under. I saw a couple of bulls once reach the opposite sides of an arm of Moosehead Lake, and both were so eager for the fight that they jumped into the water and swam toward each other like a couple of steam-tugs. Well, they met about half way, and rammed their horns together, and the result was two dead moose, and I lived on their meat till I felt the antlers beginning to grow out of my head, and had to make a change of diet."

"How will this snow affect our success?"

"It's favorable," replied the Canadian, as he scanned the crust about him, as if in search of some expected sign. "There has been a little thaw, though not of much account, and the moose can't travel through this very well, because he steps so straight up and down that his hoofs go through, and he cuts the skin off his shanks."

"How is it when there is no crust at all?"

"Then he is safe, for their broad hoofs won't let them settle far, and they can plow."

A HUNT ON SNOW-SHOES

"What do you mean by a moose plowing?"

"When they sink down into the snow, they don't lift their hoofs, but shove them along, just as we do on these snow-shoes, except that we go on top of the snow and they under it. Do you understand?"

"No one can help understanding that," laughed Clarence, "and it struck me what a valuable animal one of them might be if used to go ahead of a locomotive, when it was stopped by a snow-drift."

"You want trained dogs to hunt the moose," continued Pierre; "for if they don't know something about him, they will get in front and try to seize him by the throat, or his *mouflon*—that's his hanging lip—and he cuts them to pieces with those sharp hoofs of his, as quick and clean as you could do it with a hay-cutting machine. But a dog like Towser there will keep snapping at his heels, and when he turns to fight, will whisk out of his reach; and you see all that uses time and gives the hunter a chance to come up and take a hand in the business."

"Do they ever attack persons?"

Pierre gave a laugh before he replied:

"I rather think they do; and more than one hunter has been set upon and killed by them,

when he never dreamed of danger till it was too late. I could not tell you how often I have heard them crashing through the undergrowth, like an elephant run mad, and I have hardly had time to get ready for them when they were upon me."

"And how did you save yourself?"

"I always keep cool and watch my chance. If you stand your ground, the moose is apt to cavort enough to give you time to send a bullet just back of the shoulder, and that is certain to wind up his career; but if he comes head on, you must aim just below that gland that hangs from his throat, and is covered all over with bristles. If you put your bullet there, it means death."

"It seems to me," said Clarence, "that I have heard him called the American black elk."

"That is because his color changes, in old age, from the dusky brown to a black. I have seen an old patriarch the color of Towser."

"They grow to a large size, do they not?"

"I shot one, about twenty years ago, on the northern shore of Moosehead Lake, that weighed fourteen hundred pounds, and he measured nearly eight feet from nose to tail, and five feet from shoulder to hoof; but I have

never seen any other moose that came within a hundred pounds of him."

"What about their horns?"

"Only the males have them, and they shed them every year. It takes five years before they reach their full growth, and then, you know, they are not simple branches, like the limb of a dead tree, but a large part of them is broad and flat. These are called *palms*, and are sometimes a foot wide. The horns of the moose I was just speaking about made a spread of six feet, and weighed between eighty and ninety pounds. They have long ears, but no tail that is worth speaking of. And," added the hunter, starting up as if something unusual had attracted his notice, "that will do for the present. I think we shall soon have something in the way of business."

The remark of Pierre was caused by the action of his hound, which was some twenty yards away, standing motionless, with his head in the air, as if he were staring fixedly at something which held him dumb with amazement.

The lads were about to inquire the meaning of this action, or rather want of action, when their guide raised his finger as a warning for them not to speak.

All three were as stationary as the dog and their eyes were fixed upon him.

This curious tableau lasted several minutes, when it was broken by Towser, who, without any bark or outcry, came toward them at a moderate trot. This proceeding, as a matter of course, was not understood by the boys, but it was clear to the Canadian.

"Do you read the sign aright?" he asked, in a low voice, looking down at the canine, which at the same time was gazing up to him.

A low whine was the reply, when Pierre spoke rather sharply:

"Then go and find out, and show yourself a dog of sense."

And Towser wheeled about, and was off like a shot, disappearing in an instant in the woods, while Pierre interpreted the conversation that had just taken place between him and his dog.

"I don't suppose you boys will believe it when I tell you that dog has scented a trail."

"I see nothing remarkable in that," replied Clarence. "All his race are supposed to have that power in a greater or less degree."

"You don't understand me," Pierre hastened to add. "Of course if a dog shoves his head into the tracks of some animal, he is sure to know of it at once; but that isn't what I mean.

Towser has scented tracks when he wasn't anywhere near and he came back to me to say that he didn't know what animal made them, and to ask me whether he should hunt it up, and you saw me send him off to do it."

This was a strong assertion, and rather staggered the credulity of his listeners; but they accepted it under the belief that the trail discovered by Towser must have been near him, and quite fresh.

"I don't know what animal made it, more than the pup does," added the Canadian, in reply to a question; "but I have a suspicion that it is a moose."

"I suppose Towser will give notice as soon as he strikes the track?"

"If he did," said the guide, as his little bead-like eyes flashed, "I would put a bullet through his head the minute he came within reach, if I had to let the biggest moose in Maine get away to do it."

And then he explained what he meant by the declaration. The moose is one of the most difficult of all animals to hunt, on account of his wonderful sharpness of scent and hearing; and the slightest indiscretion on the part of the hunter, who may have spent hours in creeping into position, often sends the huge animal off

on a twenty mile trot, at a swinging gait which quickly leaves the fleetest pursuer far in the rear.

"I once lost a fine large bull, from knocking away a piece of ice that had caught in my ear," he added. "It was just a quick jerk of the hand, after I had caught the piece in my fore-fingers, when he was off like a shot. He carried away my bullet, but it didn't hurt him any."

"But surely he didn't *hear* that?" said Sydney.

"He either heard or saw the blow, for the bulls feed high, and I sometimes think they can see a fly a hundred yards away. If we take the trail there mustn't be a word said by any of us, not even in a whisper. All you will have to do will be to follow me, and make sure that your shoes don't give out any noise. If he has the cow and calves with him, he is as keen as a blood-hound; when he is stripping off the bark, he will stop every few minutes, and with his mouth full and his head high up in the air, look and listen."

"You discourage us," laughed Clarence. "I don't see how we shall ever gain a shot at one of the creatures, if it is such a delicate matter as that."

"If you will remember all I tell you, you may succeed. The moose always *yards* on the south side of a mountain range, and if we know where his yard is we have got to work our way up to it, with the wind in our faces; for I don't believe there has ever a hunter lived who was able to get within range of the moose when the wind was blowing from him toward the animal, for he will detect his coming when half a mile away, and then the moose is off like a scared locomotive."

Pierre seemed to think he had spent all the time necessary in giving information of the habits of the moose, and that if he told the boys anything more they were likely to forget it all. So he moved forward again, varying his course so as to follow that of the dog, whose paws left only the faintest traces on the icy crust of snow.

Nothing was seen or heard of Towser for half an hour, when he suddenly made his appearance among them, coming from a thick clump of undergrowth, as silently as a spectre.

Pierre addressed several words to him in the French tongue, during which the canine stood as motionless as a statue, and so far as the boys could perceive, gave no sign of comprehending a syllable.

But if they saw nothing of the sagacity of the canine, his master did, and his little eyes sparkled as he said:

"Follow me close, my laddies, and I'll show you game that you have not seen before, and like enough will never see again."

"That means moose," whispered Sydney, as they shoved ahead on their snow-shoes. "I hope he won't start off on his twenty mile tramp before we get a shot at him."

Their guide led them a short distance, when they climbed a long ridge, of gentle elevation, and halted.

"Down yonder," said he, pointing to a portion of the woods, "is a grove of maples, where I have made many a gallon of syrup and pound of sugar. Towser has found the tracks of a moose which leads that way, and I am pretty certain one of the biggest of his kind is in there now, scraping the bark and feeding himself. It is too early in the season for him to have the cow or calves with him, so I think there is the better chance of getting a shot at him."

Standing motionless a few moments longer, Pierre moistened his finger, and raised it above his head.

"There isn't a breath of air stirring, so we



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can approach from any side. Now, boys, I will leave you and go on ahead, so as to make certain where the animal is, and then we will come back and arrange for the hunt. I won't have to go far, and you must not forget to keep perfectly still."

Their guide seemed to flit away like a shadow, and with no more noise. As soon as he was gone, Clarence said, in an undertone:

"See here, Syd, if he comes upon that moose, he will have to shoot him to prevent his getting away, and we shall lose our shot after all. He didn't tell us to wait here until he came back; so I propose that we make a circuit around to the left, to see whether we can't come upon the game ahead of him. It will be a good joke if we bag him while Pierre is trying to show us how to do it."

The younger brother was delighted with the idea, and without stopping to consider what might be the results of such rashness, they set out.

Had they been compelled to travel a long distance to reach their game, they might have taken a portion of the time to think over the step; but unfortunately they had not gone far when they found themselves in dangerous prox-

imity to one of the largest and most powerful moose ever seen in Northern Maine.

The first indication they had of his presence was the sound made in stripping the bark from the trees, while feeding.

CHAPTER VII

A FAILURE

“SH!”

And as Sydney Landon made the soft, rustling sound, he accompanied it by the raising of his forefinger and a sharp look at his brother.

Both stood like statues. The air was clear, and as we know, not a breath of wind was stirring.

It was a peculiar sound, which it is hard to describe—a sort of rasping or scraping, that resembled nothing else which we can call to mind. At the same time there was a rattling of icicles from the bushes upon the snow crust, shaken off by the animal, as he left the bark now and then to browse upon the tender twigs that grew about him.

“I think,” whispered Sydney, “that we can creep up near enough to find out just where he is, and then fire before he sees us or we see him.”

But Clarence remembered that the hunter had declared, when he placed the guns in their hands, that no more absurd thing than the course proposed could be attempted.

"Now," said Sydney, "we must do as Pierre advised; for if we advance from the same point, and he should take the alarm, neither of us will get a shot at him. You move around on the other side, and I will wait here."

Clarence began circling off in the direction indicated, the brothers being on the look-out to shoot the game before their guide could divine their purpose.

Sydney, upon being left alone, took his position behind a large oak, holding his gun with the hammer raised, and ready to fire on the instant the animal should appear.

He had stood thus less than five minutes, when the rasping noise made by the moose suddenly ceased, and all was still.

"He suspects danger," was his conclusion, as he found himself trembling with excitement. "He must have heard Clarence. Sh!"

A tremendous crash, like the falling of a tree, a crunching of the snow, a fierce tearing through the undergrowth, and the moose was coming!

Scarcely able to stand for his excitement, the

lad brought his gun to his shoulder, and waited the moment when he should show himself.

He caught sight of a huge dark body driving through the snow like a locomotive; but the next moment he descried the large head thrown back, with the curving antlers and "palm," making a spread of fully six feet, as he tore ahead with a force that seemed sufficient to crush down any tree that might obstruct his path.

His course was such that it brought him within a dozen feet of where the lad was standing, and keeping his body still concealed behind the trunk of the oak, he took a quick aim.

There was a sharp snap in his eyes, sounding shrill and spitefully quick in the clatter and racket made by the fleeing moose.

It was the explosion of the percussion cap; and knowing that his gun had missed fire, Sydney snatched out another cap from his vest-pocket, and clapped it upon the tube as quickly as he could, and brought his gun to his shoulder again.

It was all done in a twinkling, as it were, but for all that, by the time he was ready to fire, the game was out of sight; but he could tell where it was by the crashing of the undergrowth, or breaking of the snow, and in the

hope that his bullet still might reach him, he aimed toward the point where he judged him to be, and pulled the trigger.

This time the weapon was discharged, and at the same instant came a shout from his brother:

“Look out! don’t fire again!”

And then *bang* went his gun, and directly on the echo of that, was heard the trumpet-like voice of the Canadian:

“Don’t fire again for your lives!”

And as if to make the analogy complete, his gun went off also, while the rattling, tearing clatter, growing rapidly fainter in the distance, proved that the bull-moose was making as good progress as if the shots had not been discharged at him.

A minute later, the hunters all met in the woods, both the boys looking rather guilty, or ashamed, not so much of what they had done, as of what they had failed to do.

“You’re a fine couple!” exclaimed the Canadian. “You may thank heaven that both of you are alive, for you don’t deserve any credit yourselves.”

“Why, Pierre,” said Sydney, “you didn’t tell us to stay where you left us.”

“Because I thought you had sense enough to

do it without being told, and you *did* know, from the way I spoke, that I meant you not to stir till I came back. Your gun missed fire, didn't it?"

"It did when I first pulled the trigger."

"Yes, and that miss is what saved your life. If it had gone off, you would have been as dead as a door-nail this instant."

The lads looked as if they did not know what he meant.

"When you tried to fire the first time, the bull was so near that you would have hit him, if you had aimed with your eyes shut. As to killing him, that is out of the question. As soon as your rifle was discharged, he would have turned square about and come for you, and then what would you have done?"

"Climbed a tree."

"Before you could have gotten a foot off the ground, those broad knife-like hoofs of his would have come down upon you like the guillotine they use in France."

"But if he is so savage, why didn't he make for me anyway?"

"For no other reason than that he didn't see you. Standing behind that tree, and out of his direct path, the noise of the explosion of the cap was drowned by the crouching of his

hoofs, and he heard only the noise made by Clarence."

"But when I did fire, I took a pretty good aim, and may have struck him," said Sydney, loath to admit the total failure he had made.

"I can answer for that," replied his brother, with a laugh, "for the bullet grazed my face, passing so close that it made me wink, and the ball clipped off a twig just beside me."

"And how close were you to the moose?"

"Not near enough to get a glimpse of him. I fired at the noise, rather than at the game."

"And shot so wild that you came very near striking *me*," said Pierre, with a serious countenance. "So you can see that all three of us have come very nigh our deaths; and for no other reason than that you thought you knew more about moose-hunting than did old Pierre, who had brought down a hundred before you were born."

This was severe language, but the boys felt it was just, and they told their guide that if he would forgive this trespass, they would not offend again.

Finally he was restored to good humor, and said:

"I was resolved, when I found out what you had done, to take you back home without hunt-

ing another hour; but the bullet I sent after the moose I know is still in his body, and he is not likely to run more than a dozen miles before he will halt again, and then, if things are managed right, there is a chance of getting him."

The boys were so eager to follow on that the good-natured old hunter could not refuse them.

He said it would compel them to camp out for one night at least; but this only made them the more clamorous, as they were sure the hunt could not be complete unless they spent a night in the woods.

It was now noon, and all three were ravenously hungry; but although their guide had brought a bountiful lunch with him, he said nothing about eating it, and they started forward on the trail of the moose, which was easily enough followed, without the assistance that the hound was ready to give.

The pursuit was kept up until nightfall, but at that time not one of the party had again caught sight of the animal, which, despite the difficulty of traveling, had certainly run a goodly number of miles.

When the shadows of night settled over the wood, and the lads were so exhausted from their long tramp on snow-shoes that they could

hardly shove them over the crest, Pierre informed them that they would have to go into camp, without gaining another shot at their game.

"But we will get it in the morning," he added, with the old sparkle in his bright eyes. "Here and there I have seen drops of blood on the snow, so that I know he is wounded, and is making for a spring about a couple of miles off; but you know he is pretty well scared, and it isn't going to be any child's play to bring him down. Come, the place to camp isn't far off."

And he led the way into a sort of hollow, where there was a dense growth of spruce and pine, and where the shadows were so deep that it seemed midnight had fairly come.

Selecting a spot where the wind could not reach them, in case there should be any disturbance during the night, the snow was scooped out, by the aid of their snow-shoes, until the ground was reached and a space several yards square was cleared away.

In the centre of this a roaring fire was kindled, and then the branches of spruce and pine were laid around and tramped down, until a hard bed or mattress was made, stretched upon which no one could feel the least cold from the snow beneath.

The Canadian then unrolled his huge blanket, and spread it out so that it was ample enough to enfold all three. He explained that, when the time came to sleep, they would bundle up together, so as to gain the advantage of the mutual warmth of their bodies, and with their camp-fire blazing cheerily in front, there was little doubt of their obtaining a refreshing night's rest.

Pierre brought forth his lunch, and there is no need of stating how speedily it disappeared.

As was the custom of the hunter, upon the completion of his evening meal, his pipe was produced, and as he lay back, and coolly blew the whiffs above his head, he was in the mood to talk.

It was too early for sleep, and the night and surroundings were such as to make the recital of some strange and thrilling adventure the most enjoyable means of passing the time.

"Pierre," said Sydney, from the opposite side of the camp-fire, "you have spent a good many years in hunting and trapping and must have gone through a great many strange experiences?"

"Yes; there isn't any use of denying that. I have spent several years in Oregon, where the Blackfeet are plenty and ugly, and I have

had the edge of one of their scalping-knives feeling around my head for the best place to begin, although I wear my top-knot yet. I was twice down on the Rio Grande, and have hunted with Kit Carson, in New Mexico—but just now an adventure popped into my head which I'll tell you, if you can keep awake until I get through."

"I would like to hear you tell us stories all night," said Clarence, whose eyes sparkled at the anticipated treat, "especially if there are Indians in it."

"There isn't a single Indian in this!" replied Pierre, with a laugh; "but for all that I consider it a great deal worse scrape than if forty howling Sioux were mixed up in it."

"Wild animals, I suppose, then?"

"Not exactly that, either—but listen, and you shall learn for yourselves."

CHAPTER VIII

THE LAND OF DESOLATION

THE bronzed and wrinkled face of the old trapper lit up with a glow that came more from within than from the reflection of the blazing camp-fire in front, as he said:

“It was just twenty-five years ago that I began my third year in the service of the Hudson Bay Company, which, I suppose, you know was organized two hundred years ago, under the direction of Prince Rupert. They have had the monopoly of gathering furs in the British possessions ever since, and they have to-day hundreds of their hunters and trappers roaming over the country, from the Columbia to the Frozen Sea of the north, along the Saskatchewan and Mackenzie; besides which they keep all the natives of these regions at work for them.

“They were pretty easy to me, and always let me hunt where I pleased; and this third win-

ter I took a new route, leading me up the western shore of Hudson Bay, so far north of Fort Churchill that I knew there was no likelihood of my being interfered with by other hunters."

"What made you go in such a desolate region?" asked Sydney.

"I had been there before, and knew the right kind of game was there. I was after the black fox, the scarcest and most valuable animal in British America.

"I put on my snow-shoes, shouldered my traps, and tramped northward for a fortnight, only halting long enough to get food and sleep. At last I struck home, and I can tell you I was in the land of desolation. Looking off to the east, I could see nothing but the ice-fields and green expanse of Hudson Bay, and wherever else I turned my eyes, it was cold snow, with here and there a few glimpses of the dwarfed pine."

"How did you manage to keep a fire going when there was so little wood?" asked Clarence, deeply interested in the narration.

"I was there the better part of two months, and during all that time I never saw or felt the flicker of a flame, and never tasted a mouthful of cooked food. Raw fish, seal and bear's meat—I walked into them, or rather they walked in-

to me, in a way you'd scarcely believe, unless you saw it. But that isn't here nor there. It isn't often I go hungry, no matter where I pitch my tent. I made my home along the edge of Hudson Bay, where I tumbled together a hut from blocks of ice, and kept myself as comfortable as man could wish.

"I told you I was after the black fox. I set three traps, several miles apart, and made the rounds every morning. The first round I made on my snow-shoes, I found a black fox in each of the traps. I remember," added Pierre, with a laugh, "that at the first trap I let out a yell which could have been heard at York Factory; at the second I cracked my throat, and at the third danced a jig in my snow-shoes.

"The next morning I caught three more; but that must have cleaned out the territory. I kept the traps set for nearly a month longer, but never caught a nibble, and from that day to this have been unable to lay hands on one of the prizes. It was easy enough to get the other kinds; but when I looked upon those six black, glossy hides, I knew they were worth a cool thousand dollars, and I can tell you I was elevated, and willing to wait a long time in the hope of adding to them. The trapping probably would have been kept up for six

months, if it hadn't been ended in a way that neither of you could guess if you should keep it up all night.

"You must know that the ice is sometimes piled hundreds of feet deep along the banks of that sea, and it reaches a good way back from the water, so that every night I slept upon the solid ice, far above ground.

"One evening, as I lay down to rest, the wind was blowing unusually hard from the south, and the waves were so strong and rough that they made a terrible thrashing and grinding of the ice. I noted more than one iceberg sweep by me, in the dusk of the night on its way to Baffin Bay, from there, perhaps, to sail on its course down the Atlantic, right against the Gulf Stream."

"How is that?" asked Sydney, with a wondering look. "I thought the ice never cut up such tricks as that."

"That's the way with you youngsters," replied Pierre, with a laugh, in which the elder brother joined him, for he understood it all. "Your fathers spend fortunes in sending you to school, and when you get through, you don't know as much as some old fellows who have never seen the inside of a school-house. The ocean, like the air, has its currents and counter-

currents. Where the surface current flows in one direction, there is one below flowing in the other. Seven-eighths of an iceberg is always under water, and so it is very easy for it to reach through into the lower current, which carries it with it, and gives it something of the appearance of a steamer breasting the winds and waves.

"Well," continued the narrator, "I went to sleep that night (which was not one of those long ones they sometimes have in that part of the world), in my ice-house, wrapped up in my furs, and was as warm as if between two feather beds. As I didn't sport any clock in my mansion, I couldn't be certain of the time, but should judge the night was about half gone, when I was awakened by the tipping and rocking of the ice. I didn't need any one to tell me what that meant, and was out on the roof quicker than lightning.

"There was as bright a moon overhead as there is to-night, and when I crept out, the waves were all around me, and I could just make out the long line of shore, piled with ice and drifted snow, fading out in the darkness. My cabin and a mass of ice about the size of a Hudson River steamer had broken loose and were sweeping out to sea.

"The wind was blowing harder than ever, and the waves kept the pile swaying and rocking in a style that showed there was trouble ahead—for you see I had no way of getting back to the mainland."

"Why didn't you swim?" asked Sydney, all absorbed in the narration.

"There it is again!" replied the trapper, in a pitying voice. "I might have got to shore by doing so, but five minutes later would have turned into an icicle, without any way of thawing out before spring, and it would hardly pay to wait until then.

"Besides that, I hadn't any food—not a single mouthful—that is, of the right kind of stuff. However, that didn't trouble me any, as I have chewed up fox-skins before, and when I'm put to it, can make a dinner off of fricasseed moccasins. Ships are mighty scarce in that part of the world, and I might drift for weeks without being picked up or seen by a living person, which you'll allow isn't the most pleasant prospect in the world. But I was troubled more by the fear that the wind and waves would tear my raft to pieces, all of which, you will understand, was enough to keep my mind busy, and yet there were dangers lying

in wait, and which I was called upon to face, of which I never dreamed.

"I perched myself upon the roof of my house, with my precious fox-skins gathered around me, and was calculating my latitude and longitude in the best way I knew how. I was fully a mile from land, with the wind blowing a tornado from the south, which was just the right direction to carry me northward into Baffin Bay, and most likely would crack my head against the North Pole itself.

"A few minutes after settling in position, it began snowing, and the thin particles cut my face like needles. The wind carried the cold sand almost horizontally against me, so that I crept behind a ledge of ice, drew my half-dozen precious fox-skins over me, and waited for the storm to finish.

"This snow shut out all moonlight, and sight of shore, so that I saw no more than if adrift in the middle of the Pacific. I could hear the dash of the waters against the ice, and from the way it see-sawed and ground together, I expected every minute it would slip apart and let me drop.

"No matter what happened, I was determined to hold on to the fox-skins. They were all stitched together, so as to make one big blanket,

and you can't imagine how proud I felt, many and many a time, with my thousand dollar covering spread over me. I was very careful with it, and never lay upon it except when I was compelled once or twice to do so in Hudson Bay.

"I was stretched out upon my ice-raft in the way just spoken about, when it seemed to me there was a different sound in the air. I raised my head and looked around, but could neither see nor make out what it meant. It was a hollow, rushing, thunderous sound, deep and mighty, as if made by the sweep of some mountain through the air above me, and a fear came over me such as I had not felt for many a long year.

"All at once the misty darkness dimly took shape, and then I knew that an iceberg was forging past, and would probably bear me under as if I were an egg-shell in its path. I could not see the top, nor could any idea be formed of its extent. It moved by with a grandeur and majesty which cannot be described, gradually nearing me, until I could have leaped across the chasm of clear water that intervened.

"Then the relative positions remained the same for several minutes, after which the iceberg gradually receded, growing fainter and more indistinct in the snow-storm, until it

vanished from view altogether; but for several minutes that same hollow roar, like the moaning of the distant sea, could be heard, but the mountain of ice was gone, and I was left alone with my own frail raft of frozen water.

“Shortly after, the snow-storm slackened and the sky began clearing again. The wind was still blowing, and the only hope I had of reaching land lay in the possibility that it might change and waft me in that direction.

“I was debating, as well as I could, how the thing was likely to end, when a grinding, wrenching noise directly under me caused me to leap to my feet.

“My ice-raft had begun breaking up!”

CHAPTER IX

ADRIFT UPON AN ICEBERG

ONE long, dull, splitting creak, and the mass of ice upon which I was floating broke as nearly as possible into halves, and I had to make a big leap to save myself from going into the water; but luckily I did it without falling or losing my furs, and away I went drifting again, directly up Hudson Bay toward the Arctic Ocean.

“When the gray light of morning broke upon the scene, I discovered with no little surprise that I was within half a mile of shore, and floating nearer and nearer. This was caused, not by the change of wind, but by the fact that some distance ahead a point of land ran out into the bay, so as to throw itself across my path as you might say.

“This cape was so covered and piled up with great cakes of ice that for a time I was in doubt whether it was another iceberg or not; but its unbroken connection with the shore, and the

fact that it was 'anchored,' proved the contrary.

"Well, if my raft should only bump against this, my troubles would be over, as I wouldn't mind the task of working my way back again; and maybe you can imagine how I felt as I stood on the ice, watching, and wondering whether I should reach the land or not, for it looked as likely to miss as to strike.

"It was very trying, but to shorten this part of my story, while I stood there with longing eyes and yearning heart, I saw the wind and current carry me within fifty feet of the headland, and then I floated on by it into the widening expanse of Hudson Bay, spreading out before me the very picture of desolation."

"I think, if I was so near as that, I would have jumped overboard, and run the risk of freezing at any rate," said Sydney.

"I have no doubt *you* would have done that very thing; but you see *I* didn't, and by the middle of the day I was so far out in the icy sea that I could not tell the land from the fields of ice that appeared here and there over the waste of waters.

"The wind was still blowing steadily, but not so strong as during the night; but the swaying and rocking of my ice-pile kept me in constant

fear of another break-up, in which case it was hard to see how I was to keep out of the water. But my mind was diverted by the discovery that an immense iceberg, about two miles distant, was slowly approaching me, or I suppose it is more proper to say I was nearing that. It rose several hundred feet in the air, and the whole mass would have covered twenty acres.

"The sun, striking the snow and ice, made it look wonderfully beautiful from where I stood, and it reminded me of the pictures I had seen of turreted castles, and immense cathedrals, and all that sort of thing; and if it hadn't been for the peril in which I stood, I have no doubt my enthusiasm and rapture would have become as great as yours, in similar circumstances.

"I was still watching it, as it moved along with a majesty that cannot be imagined, when the lower portion suddenly struck bottom, and there came a shivering, trembling motion, extending through the whole pile, as if it had been shaken by an earthquake from within; then a dashing of the water high in air; a grinding, crushing, thunderous sound, that resembled the sullen muttering of the coming storm, and then the whole thing broke up into a score of smaller ones, which went floating out to sea.

"As a matter of course," continued Pierre,

"there are no such mountains of ice in Hudson Bay as those that come sailing out of Baffin Bay and down around Newfoundland; for they don't get the chance to form. But I suppose a good deal of the ice floats down from the north, and then is carried back again by the wind, when the current is not strong enough to do it."

"Do you ever find warm weather along the shores of Hudson Bay?" Clarence ventured to ask, as the narrator paused to refill his pipe.

"I told you, awhile ago, that I have been down on the Rio Grande, and you'll allow that they have warm weather there. I was on the Llano Estacado, in the midst of that scorching weather, and yet didn't suffer half so much as I did in the regions I am telling you about, during the summer time. It doesn't last long, but when it does come there are days hot enough to melt a salamander, and the mosquitoes are numbered by billions and trillions, and they go for a fellow like young, herby tigers.

"But you are getting me off my story. I was hungry, and without any means of gaining a mouthful of food; but, as I observed, I had a few extra furs besides the six black ones, which I could chew upon when the worst should come.

"A half-hour later, one of the largest pieces of the iceberg, the upper part being of the size of a respectable meeting house, was within a quarter of a mile, and there was no longer any doubt of our meeting, so I made ready for the smash, when it should come. It was in reality behind me, so that it was running a race, and gaining fast, for the reason that it still had the momentum given it by the violent wind of the preceding night, while my support lost the effect of the wind within a short time after it died out.

"This made it certain I should be overtaken and overwhelmed, unless I could manage to clamber up the side of the larger one, when the collision should come, so I nerved myself for the attempt, which could not long be deferred.

"While I was watching this new iceberg, and doing my best to settle the question whether, when I was overtaken, there was to come a good chance of success, I heard a grinding, crackling noise beneath my feet, and knew on the instant that my raft was breaking up again.

"Catching up my roll of furs and gun, I scrambled over to the big piece that I had fixed upon as my last resort, and managed to get there just as it sloughed off from the rest,

which continued breaking, with now and then a huge chunk toppling over, until there wasn't a piece left large enough to float one of you youngsters, after you had eaten a good dinner.

"By this time, too, my own position was becoming anything but pleasant; for the ice upon which I was crouching was so much lower than the pile that had been supporting me, and brought me so near the surface of the water, that every now and then the freezing spray dashed in my face and over my body.

"My hope was now the iceberg, which kept steadily gaining, and about the middle of the afternoon overtook me. You see I had been waiting and expecting it for several hours, and was ready. I first swung my precious roll of black fox-skins, and landed them upon a ledge, a dozen feet above my head. That was a great deal easier done than throwing myself. I waited until I felt the two masses of ice meet, and mine was beginning to crack, and split and go under, when I made a leap, rifle in hand, caught my arms around a point of ice, and drew myself up out of danger.

"This was a big improvement; but you understand that it didn't light up the future at all. Counting by common sense, it only postponed the catastrophe for a few days; and I can tell

you my feelings were anything but comfortable as I perched myself on the iceberg, and saw the second night shutting in around me. It was water, snow and ice everywhere—no matter in what direction I looked; and even the dull, leaden sky above seemed to be on the point of sending down a flurry of frozen vapor.

“The iceberg, as I called it, like all others, was broken and irregular in outline, and about a hundred feet in height, while the base of it, I suppose, was less than half an acre. It only required some care to climb to the top, where I took my observation.

“Dreary and desolate to the last degree I felt, until I made two important discoveries. Far to the northward could be seen the dim outlines of a ship, sailing slowly along under half-sail, but too far off for me to hope to attract the attention of any one on board. It came to view from behind what seemed to be an island, and I concluded was one of the Hudson Bay ships from England. Indeed, I was certain it could be nothing else, and there was some reason to feel hopeful over its appearance. The vessels always sailed very carefully through Hudson and James Bay, on account of the ice, and there wasn't much likelihood of their pass-

ing before morning, so I had quite a rise in spirits.

"I have tramped over a good deal of the world since then," added the Canadian, as he paused a moment to replenish his pipe, "and I've seen strange sights, that would make any one's blood tingle; but I don't remember that I ever felt such a thrill go through me as I did when that vessel hove in view. A man has got to be in my position before he can understand it. Knowing well enough that half the distance was too great for the men in the ship to see or hear me, I stood on the highest part of the iceberg, waved my hat, and shouted to the vessel that seemed scarcely to stir on the wintry expanse of water.

"Suppose it was one of the Company's vessels outward bound?' My heart sunk within me at the thought; but a minute's reflection convinced me that such could not be the case, for this was not the season when furs and peltries were sent across by water; besides which, had such been the case, I would have seen it earlier in the day.

"It seemed as if I couldn't take my eyes off that bluish-white sail that rested like a cloud against the gray horizon, and I might have sat there all night, staring northwardly in the dark-

ness, had I not been aroused by suddenly learning that there was some one else on the iceberg besides me.

"The first ratification came in the shape of a growl, and turning my head I saw an immense polar bear, about a hundred feet distant. He was standing below and looking up at me as if trying to find out what species I belonged to.

"I had seen those creatures before; but for all that, the sight of this one was startling. He looked as white as snow, and was unusually large, and those creatures are a blamed sight uglier and more troublesome than that black one which made a little rumpus with you last night.

"I would have been in a bad fix if I had been without my rifle, but I held to that as closely as to the fox-skins; and while the polar bear was still looking up at me, with that low, grumbling growl, I hastily overhauled my gun, and found it in prime condition.

"The only thing to be remembered in dealing with these creatures is, that you mustn't throw any shots away. A platoon of soldiers might bury every musket-ball in his body, and do nothing except to make him madder than

ever, while a leaden pill sent to the right spot would settle things on the instant.

“It was hard to tell what shape matters were going to take between us—whether there was to be fight from the beginning, or whether the bear would try to avoid me. I think the polar species is the bravest of all, and are to be feared more than the grizzly bear of Oregon and California, so I made up my mind to watch this customer, who would be glad to tear up my fox-skins, and then serve me in the same manner. I held my rifle ready for all of ten minutes, expecting he would come up the slope after me; but he stood just as motionless as I, until it got so dark I could hardly make out his figure.

“There was to be no comfort on the iceberg while he was there, and I determined to attack him as soon as things could be put in shape. It wasn't advisable to start down and meet him—for besides the ice being so slippery, it was so rough and jagged that I would be very likely to miss hitting the 'bull's-eye,' in which case the old fellow would be upon me before I could reload.

“So as soon as it was dark, I began backing down the other side of the promontory, with the intention of stealing round on his flank. That

sort of work is a mighty sight harder than climbing up, and twice I came within a hair-breadth of rolling into the water.

"It took me an hour or more before I reached the point I was after, and then, when I looked up, nothing was to be seen of the bear. But, of course, he was somewhere about—and would you believe it, while I was following him, the old heathen was following me! I had the advantage, for I crawled on my hands and knees, and he scratched along in his regular way, and was more easily seen than I.

"I was still crouching down, listening and looking, when all at once he came to view, not more than twenty feet distant. He heard me, as I shifted a little to get my rifle in position—but it was too late, and I put the bullet plump through his heart! He gave out an awful groan, that seemed to go far out over the waters, and then sank heavily down, dying without stirring from the spot where he received the shot!

"I had some fear that the mate of this fellow might be upon the iceberg, but it was hardly possible that I should have failed to see it for so long a time; and after re-loading my rifle, I walked up to where my prize lay, and

gave him a shove with my foot, only to find that every spark of life had left him.

“There is a great deal of warmth in a body of that size, and the chance for a bed was too good to be thrown away. So I unrolled my blanket, wrapped it around me, and then nestled as close in beside the creature as possible. I could feel the advantage of doing so; and although the cold wind whistled and howled about the iceberg, I was as comfortable as if stretched out in my own cabin.

“I would have slept soundly, if it hadn't been that my mind was so filled with the ship which I had seen as the sun was going down. I kept dreaming of it, and fancied, every now and then, it was passing by in the darkness. More than once I got up and crawling to the edge of the iceberg, peered out in the gloom, in the expectation of seeing it somewhere near at hand. Then I halloed and shouted, so that they might know some poor fellow was afloat near at hand; but I saw nothing of it, nor was any answer returned to my call.

“That was the longest night I ever spent, although it happened to be of only ordinary length and I slept several hours. It seemed as if the morning would never come, and though I knew better, half believed, more than once, that

I had slept through another day, and was beginning my third night upon the ice.

“But the gray light of morning arrived at last, and as the darkness lifted, to my great joy, I descried the ship not more than half a mile distant. I scrambled back to my look-out, and shouted and signaled as if frantic, as I nearly was. The crew were not long in discovering me, and a small boat left the vessel’s side and rowed toward me.

“The vessel belonged to the Hudson Bay Company, as I had supposed, and was on her way from London to York Factory, with supplies.

“I sold my six fox-skins for twenty pounds apiece, and shortly after left their service, and came down to this part of the country, where I have spent most of the time since.”

CHAPTER X

THE INDIANS

WHEN Pierre had finished his story of his adventures in Hudson Bay, he heaped a large pile of wood upon the fire, and they all bundled up together, with his large blanket wrapped around them, sinking into a deep, refreshing sleep, from which none awoke until the sun was shining.

Even then the warmth of the blanket was so pleasant to the weary lads that they would have been glad to spend a couple more hours within its folds; but their guide "meant business," and springing to his feet compelled them to do the same.

The fire had long since died out, and they made no effort to rekindle it. Such vigorous exercise in the sharp, bracing air, gives a ravenous appetite to any one, and they were glad to hear the trapper declare his purpose of securing a breakfast before resuming their hunt of the moose, which he was certain could be found in a couple of hours.

“And the only way to get our food is to hunt for it,” he said. “We can’t go far without finding some kind of game. I will make a circuit over the ridge yonder, and if you choose, you can go the other way, and we will meet on the top, and so I think we shall have something cooking before long. It will do you good to get your blood in circulation.”

Clarence and Sydney were glad of this opportunity, and having fastened on their snow-shoes, they set off in the direction indicated by their guide, and in a few minutes he and his dog had disappeared from sight.

The Canadian would never have consented to this arrangement had he not felt certain that the moose was not in the vicinity, to be alarmed by the report of their guns, nor was there any danger that he could foresee.

The course taken by the brothers was such as gradually to lead them to higher ground, and they finally reached a point from which they gained an extensive view of the surrounding country.

Off to the westward wound the Kennebec, in and out among the woods, its entire surface frozen to a depth sufficient to bear the weight of a train of cars, while in other directions were patches of cleared land, smooth and white with

the snow that had lain undisturbed for months.

"There is somebody hunting besides us," remarked Sydney, pointing to the northward, where a thin blue spiral of smoke was rising from among the trees.

"I hope they are not after *our* moose," replied Clarence; "for I have set my heart upon getting him."

But the boys were too desirous of securing their breakfast to spend much time in speculation, and glancing only once again in the direction of the strange camp, they moved down the ridge, on the look-out for anything edible.

"Hello!" suddenly called out the elder, who was a short distance in advance; "what does that mean?"

"Some one has taken the trouble to furnish us a breakfast," replied Sydney. "What could be more fortunate?"

So it seemed indeed. The carcass of a deer, fully dressed and ready for the fire, was suspended by thongs among some hickory saplings, so high above the ground that there was no possibility of its being disturbed by wolves or wild animals. It was dry and frozen, and had probably been hanging there for weeks.

"Left by some hunter," was their conclusion,

after they had walked around it several times, and studied the odd-looking body.

"I wonder whether there would be anything wrong in our cutting off a piece and cooking it?" said Sydney, looking wistfully at the tempting prize.

"I should think not, as hunters are very hospitable to one another."

"I tell you what I'll do," said the younger brother. "I will put our names on a piece of paper, and tell where we live, and then, when the hunter comes to claim his food, and finds we have taken a part of it, he can call on father, and he will pay him for it. What do you think of it?"

Clarence thought so well of the plan that he acted upon it without delay. Removing his snow-shoes, he climbed one of the saplings, and after considerable trouble, succeeded in cutting off a large piece from the shoulder of the carcass, which he flung down to his brother.

"Now we will start a fire, and by the time Pierre gets back from his hunt, he will find his breakfast awaiting him."

The boys noticed, as they proceeded to gather their fuel, that the snow was covered with tracks, probably made by wolves and other wild animals in their attempts to obtain the meat

hung at such a tantalizing distance above their reach.

However, that concerned them not, and in a few minutes they had a fire crackling, while the venison, skewered upon long green sticks, was rapidly broiled in the hot blaze.

They took their breakfast very "rare," and were certain it was one of the most enjoyable meals of which they ever had been permitted to partake.

They had fairly finished, and were discussing whether it was not a good plan to take some more, and Sydney had just fastened his card and address into a splinter of one of the saplings which held the remainder of the carcass, when both started and turned their heads at the sound of approaching feet.

"That is too loud for Pierre! Hello! strangers—and Indians, at that!"

Clarence had barely time to utter these words, when three men came striding out of the wood, upon snow-shoes. They were Indians, ragged and uncouth, attired in a half-savage and half-civilized costume and a couple had heavy dirty blankets, and all carried rifles.

One of them was quite corpulent, and all three belonged to that wandering, vagabond class found upon the frontier, and which are only

restrained from evil doing by the fear of the consequences.

It was evident that the mutilated carcass was the property of one or more of this party, and it so happened that they were returning to claim it.

Unconsciously the boys had committed a most flagrant offense, according to the hunters' code; for a true sportsman would have looked upon the suspended carcass of a deer as the sacred property of another, which he would no more have laid hands upon than he would have stolen the furniture from within a church.

As the red men came within a rod or so of the brothers, they paused and stared at them, as if unwilling to believe the evidence of their own eyes.

Clarence began to suspect that something was wrong, and moved toward the party to explain.

The obese Indian was the nearest, and he addressed himself to him.

"If the deer is yours, we will pay you for what we ate; but we were so hungry that it se ned—"

Sydney, who was watching the Indian, saw him at this juncture take a sudden step forward, and as quick as lightning he struck Clarence a

blow with his closed hand which knocked him several feet, his gun flying nearly as far in a different direction.

"Yankee thief!" he exclaimed, in broken English, his swarthy face aflame with passion—"steal Injun deer—me kill!"

Believing that such was the purpose of the red-skins, and burning with fury at the outrage upon his brother, Sydney raised his rifle, with the intention of shooting the scoundrel; but the same Indian bounded toward him like a tiger, and wrenched his gun from his hand with such violence that the lad believed his wrist was dislocated.

Instinctively he recoiled at sight of the wretch coming, and just in time to escape his furious blow, the wind of which he felt in his face.

At this moment the partially stunned lad half rose to his feet, and seeing their lives were in danger, began stealing toward his weapon, lying on the snow-crust, some paces away; but the eagle-eyed Indian detected the movement, and bounding forward, snatched up the gun before he could lay his hand on it.

And so they found themselves unarmed, and in the power of a trio of as abandoned and lawless savages as it is possible to imagine—men

who would hesitate not a moment at the crime of murder when they had a plausible pretext for committing it.

An hour before, the lads would not have believed it possible that in the sovereign State of Maine a party of American Indians would have dared to lay violent hands on them, and yet the head of one was still ringing from the blow he had received, and the other had escaped only by the narrowest chance from a similar chastisement.

Their looks and appearance indicated their sinister purpose, and Sydney, moving to the side of his brother, said:

"I believe, Clarence, they mean to kill us, and for no other reason than that we took a part of the deer. Hadn't you better explain, and tell them we will pay them?"

"That's what I was doing when that big scoundrel nearly broke my head. I'd rather shoot him than a dozen moose. They are a party of wretches and are glad of the chance to kill us."

Nevertheless, as Sydney was not suffering from any physical pain, he hoped that all might still be made right.

Taking several pieces of silver from his pocket, he moved toward the foremost Indian, care-

ful however to halt beyond reach of his arm, and extending the specie, asked:

"Is that enough to pay for the meat we ate?"

The red-skin mumbled something in his own tongue, and eagerly accepted the money, dropping it into his capacious trowsers pocket, where the jingle of the pieces seemed to fill his soul with happiness.

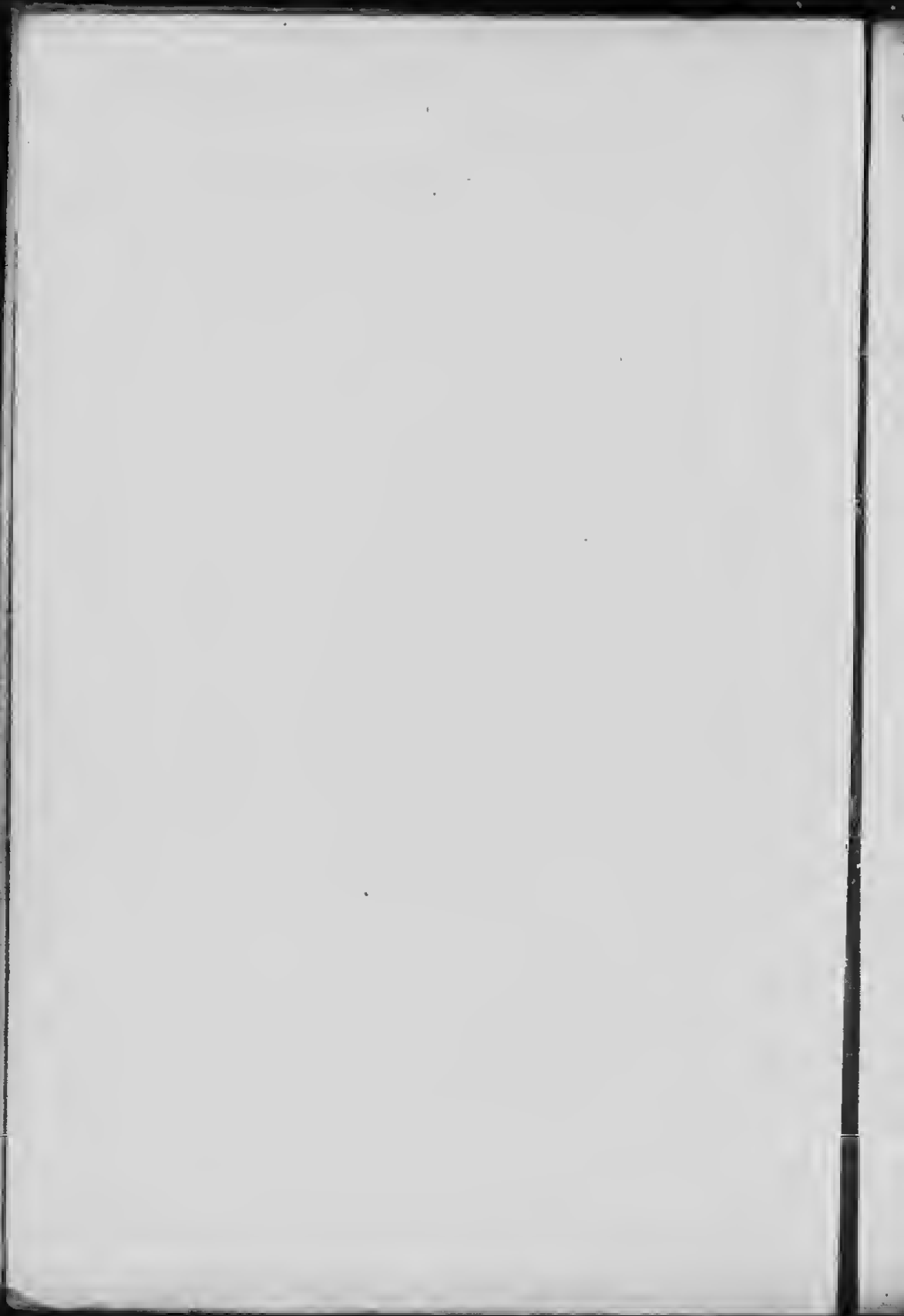
This looked as if the matter was settled, and the lad waited, with some impatience, for their rifles to be handed back to them. When at last he made bold to ask for the weapons, he was not only refused with great rudeness, but the fleshy Indian, who appeared to be a sort of chief or leader raised his knife in a threatening manner, and pointing to the north, ordered them to move away.

Frightened, and angry that they should be treated thus within a comparatively short distance of their own home, the lads had no choice but to obey, and side by side they moved off on their snow-shoes, the three Indians following them closely, and looking as if nothing would please them better than to shoot down their prisoners.

"What do you suppose is the meaning of all



“ He raised his knife threateningly.”



this?" asked Clarence, after they had walked a short distance.

"I think they intend to take us further into the woods and slay us. They are all murderers, as you called them awhile ago, and that dirty, fat Indian has the wickedest looking face I ever saw!"

"I wonder where Pierre is?"

"He is our only hope," said Sydney. "They have our guns, and can do what they please with us, but they won't be able to manage *him* so well. He'll raise a rumpus when he overtakes them."

"I don't believe they know he had us in charge, else they would have been more careful how they treated us. It must have been the smoke of their camp-fire that we saw."

Such proved to be the case, for in a quarter of an hour they came to a spot where the snow had been cleared away, and a large fire that had been burning all night, was still smouldering and sending out a grateful warmth.

The appearance of the camp showed that these Indians had spent some time there. There were spruce branches lying upon the snow where the blankets had been spread, and bones and other refuse lay near at hand.

Clarence noticed a "little brown jug," bot-

tom upward, with the corn-cob stopper out, proving that it contained nothing, and he recalled the smell of villainous whiskey that had almost sickened him when near the Indians, the cause of which was too apparent to need conjecture. The result of the drinking, in the case of all three, seemed to have been that they were made more sullen, ugly and treacherous, and they would have slain their prisoners with no more compunction than they would have driven their hunting knives into the heart of some ferocious bear.

The reason why they refrained from doing so had already been conjectured by one of the lads. The three were not the wild Indians who penetrate deeper in the wilderness as the tide of civilization rolls toward them. They were what might be called "half and half," hunting and fishing until they could procure a little means, when they came down into some of the towns and settlements and spent it all in a "spree," returning to their homes, bloated, and quarrelsome, fighting on the way, and maltreating their squaws and children, who lived somewhere in wretched cabins in the depth of the woods. (In those days Maine was not a prohibition State.)

The Indians knew that they were not beyond the reach of the arm of the law, and there was

too strong a probability of their receiving punishment if they inflicted injury upon their prisoners, whose dress and appearance showed that they belonged to a respectable family.

CHAPTER XI

A PASSAGE AT ARMS

THERE is no doubt that the young moose-trackers would have fared ill, and possibly lost their lives, had not Pierre the guide made his appearance at this moment.

He emerged from the wood with that long, loping gait which he used when in full pursuit of the flying game, and which not one person in a hundred could equal, coming up on his snowshoes with a velocity that threatened to overturn those who were in his way.

The Canadian was in a towering passion, for the carcass of the deer and the trail which he had followed from the saplings had told him the story long before he reached the camp, and he was as angry as he could well be.

His actions showed that the party were no strangers to him. He glared upon all, but singled out the corpulent Indian as the special object of his wrath. Striding up to him, he demanded:

"What do you mean by this, Indian Bill? If you want to steal anybody, steal *me*, instead of a couple of boys. You are a coward, and I will punish you!"

As he spoke, he shook his fist in the other's face, and seemed scarcely able to keep his hands off of him.

But "Indian Bill," as he was termed, was in an ugly temper, and did not take this vigorous reproof very kindly. His swarthy face grew darker still with passion, and blustering up to the wiry old man, he said:

"When a hunter steals the deer of another hunter, the law is that he must be shot!"

"But it hasn't been done—for they are boys, and know nothing of the laws of the chase; and even if they did, you are a lot of drunken loafers, and are no more regular hunters than they are. I don't believe any of you shot and strung up the deer, for you are all too lazy and good-for-nothing for that, and if you dare take up my words, do so!"

Indian Bill accepted the challenge, and throwing down his rifle and whipping out his knife, made straight at the Canadian; but he was not long in finding he was dealing with no boy, such as he had stricken to the earth a short time before.

He aimed a vicious blow at the dauntless old man, who dodged it with the agility of a cat, and gave him a lightning-like thrust in return, that sounded as if it had cracked his skull, and sent him staggering backward to the ground, as senseless as a log.

"Good!" exclaimed Clarence. "I can't help enjoying that, for it resembles so much the blow he gave me, a little while ago, only I guess it was a little harder. Can't we help you, Pierre?"

"Yes—by keeping out of the way," was the reply, as the agile Canadian wheeled about and faced the other two.

"Why don't you come to the help of Bill?" he demanded, as he placed himself in proper attitude, and awaited their approach. "Oh, I see what the matter is!"

The truth was the others were too much under the influence of liquor to be able to assist their fallen leader. They had drunk no more from the "little brown jug" than he, but they were not so case-hardened, and could not stand it so well.

They stood blinking and stupid, only dimly comprehending that there was trouble, in which, from the force of circumstances, they could take no part.

"Come," said Pierre—"I guess the account is settled. Let us take our guns and be off!"

Indian Bill roused himself to consciousness just in time to see the Canadian and the lads walking leisurely away, each carrying his rifle.

It was a fearful blow that the red-skin had received, but it taught him that the old man was master of the situation, and the wisest thing for him to do was, in common parlance, to do nothing.

The guide said nothing until they had traveled some distance.

"As you have both had your breakfast, we can start on the hunt at once. I crossed the trail of the moose, and found he made for a spring on the other side of the ridge which you passed over, awhile ago."

"But have you had any food?" asked Clarence.

The guide smiled as he answered:

"It is a poor hunter that cannot keep up the chase for several days without stopping to eat. I will make my dinner off the moose; and when you get hungry again, it isn't safe to disturb the meat of another hunter, without asking his permission."

"We have learned that," replied Sydney;

“but who are those Indians that got so angry over our mistake?”

“They belong to the old Penobscot tribe, that used to live around the headwaters of the Penobscot; but they are all a set of worthless, drunken vagabonds, and Indian Bill, as he is called, is a bullying loafer, whom I have chastised before. I am double his age, but I shall always be his master as long as we live. Their homes are about twenty miles up the river, and they have been to town on a spree—but come, the day is going, and we are doing nothing.”

And he started on, at a gait which required great effort upon the part of the lads to equal.

This continued for about a mile, when, as their guide believed, they were so close to the moose that the greatest caution was necessary.

The wood was quite open, and they stealthily made their way, without speaking, for some distance when they halted beside a fallen tree.

“Now,” said Pierre, in a whisper to Sydney, “I want you to lie down behind that and wait. Over yonder, and a little in advance, I will station Clarence. I will leave Towser here, so as to help you if you get into trouble. He understands what is expected of him, so you needn’t give him any orders. If both of you will act your part as well as he, all will come right.”

"But what are we to do?" asked Clarence.

"Wait. I will make a circuit around the spring, so as to get right opposite you, and if I find the moose, I will give him a shot that will start him this way. When you see him coming, keep cool and wait until he is very close. Whichever of you is the nearest is to fire the first shot, and you must do your best to put it right behind his foreleg. The minute he is struck, the other must fire at the same point on the other side. I don't think both will miss, but if you do, there will be the mischief to pay. The moose will charge upon one of you; and the instant he starts, climb the nearest tree as quick as lightning, for it is the only thing that will save you. If there should be a fight, Tower will do his best, but a bull-moose will kill a dozen like him if they get before him, and the dog can't do much in the rear. I will station you so that there won't be much danger of your hitting each other, but you must think of that also. Come, my boy."

As Pierre started away with Clarence, he halted again.

"One more word. No matter how long you have to wait, you mustn't speak a word to each other, and after the animal starts, don't make any signal. If you do either, the jig is up.

You notice there isn't a breath of air stirring, which is a lucky thing for all of us."

It required but a few minutes to complete the arrangements; and then the old hunter whisked away in the wood, and the boys were left to the weary task of waiting.

Two hours thus passed, with every nerve strung, was a sore trial. Sydney kept his position behind the log, flat upon his face, with Towser stretched out near him, his eyes closed as if he were asleep; but as the brothers were in sight of each other, they ventured upon a few humorous signals as a slight means of relief.

"I am afraid Pierre has made a blunder this time," concluded Sydney, when it seemed to him they had already been waiting half the day. "The moose has either kept on toward the lake that is named for him, or he has gone beyond the spring that Pierre spoke of. Hello!"

Just then he caught the report of a rifle. It was faint but distinct, and he had no doubt it came from the gun of the old hunter. 'As near as the lads could judge, it was all of two miles distant; but it roused their flagging attention, and each looked to his gun to make sure the weapon was ready.

Sydney glanced at the dog, that lay with his nose extended, and eyes closed, and never stirred a muscle.

"I believe he is asleep," he thought, as he reached out his hand and touched him.

Towser did not stir even then, but opened an eye, and gave utterance to a low growl.

Never was canine more wide awake than he.

The lads strained their eyes, and watched and listened. They were able to see for over a hundred yards; but several minutes passed, and not the slightest sound disturbed the stillness.

Suddenly, Towser raised his head and moaned.

"He is coming!" was the thought of the lad, as he raised the hammer of his rifle, and lowered his head until barely able to peer over the trunk.

A few minutes later, his strained ear caught a sound, so indistinct that he was unable to guess its nature or to tell whence it came.

But it steadily drew nearer, and became plainer each moment.

It was the noise of craunching snow, and the sweeping of some large body through the undergrowth.

The moose was coming, with his long, lop-

ing, ponderous stride, that seemed to heed no obstacles in his path; and by-and-by, to their surprise and delight, the boys found he was heading directly toward them, aiming, as it appeared, to pass between the points where they were stationed.

Pierre had certainly carried out his part of the programme with perfection, and could the boys do their part as well?

Sydney was all excitement; but he calmed his nerves as best he could, resolved to follow out his instructions to the letter.

The tearing and crouching became greater, and all at once the lad caught sight of the noble game.

It was the same gigantic bull-moose, with his head thrown back, stalking through the wood like a steam engine.

It was hard for the boys to hold their fire; but they did so, until Sydney believed the critical moment was at hand, when he let drive.

The moose was struck, but not killed; and he wheeled and made for the tree from behind which the shot had come.

He had taken but a step or two, when Clarence, from his station, blazed away, and the enraged brute turned and charged upon him.

The lad didn't wait, but throwing away his

rifle, sprang to a small tree, up which he clambered and placed himself out of danger in a twinkling.

Again the furious moose turned and charged upon the younger lad, who had risen to his feet, but had not taken to a tree.

He stood for a second or two, as if transfixed, and then, as he, too, threw down his useless gun and started for a refuge, he knew it was too late.

The moose was already within twenty feet of him!

CHAPTER XII

IN AT THE DEATH

THE time had come for Towser to take a part in the fight; for unless something should intervene, Sydney Landon was doomed within the next few moments.

The lad did what he could, which was to turn and run with all the speed possible, shoving his snow-shoes over the crust at a faster gait than ever before.

Without turning to the right or left, the infuriated moose made straight for the boy; but before he could reach him, the hound, with a fierce growl, made a leap directly at his throat.

This was a fearful risk for the dog, as it placed him, it may be said, under the broad, sharp hoofs, which are the most powerful means of offense and defense at command of the *cervus* species; but no animal can use those weapons with more frightful effect.

As the hound leaped, the moose threw back his head so as to elude the blow, and rearing up,

he gathered his fore feet beneath him, as if making ready for a spring, and brought them down with tremendous force.

But the active hound knew what was coming, and whisked out of the way like a flash, renewing his attack on the instant upon the haunches of the animal.

The latter seemed for the time to possess almost human intelligence, and knowing it was the lad, and not the dog, that had inflicted his grievous wound, he again plunged for him.

Clarence, who had seen the danger of his brother, hastily descended the tree, and was now engaged in reloading his rifle with all the haste he could command; but at such a time seconds are hours, and a life is gained or lost in the twinkling of an eye.

Sydney did not remain idle, but fully alive to his peril, did everything possible to escape it. He did not dare attempt to climb a tree, for the moose, with his long-reaching antlers, would have pinned him to the trunk ere he could have gone any distance.

There was little time for thought, and as the only thing that could be done, he made a dive for the branches of the fallen tree. These, spread out over a large space on the snow, were heavy and luxuriant, and he had a vague

hope that in attempting to follow him, the bull would become entangled among the limbs.

But the next instant the terrific crashing and grinding told him that the moose was directly on him and about to strike.

Under a branch, the trunk of which was about six inches in diameter, the lad made a plunge, and then looked upward to see what his foe was doing.

It was a frightful sight presented by the enormous moose, with his broad hoofs raised high in the air, and his front smeared with blood that had flown from his own wounds.

The next instant he came down, one hoof grazing one side of the small trunk, and the second gashing the bark on the other side, while the cowering fugitive saw himself lying directly between the two fore legs, fastened as it were by the hairy columns, from which there was no chance of extricating himself.

But his refuge had only saved him for the time. The moose drew back one fore leg, so as to place them both upon the same side, and then lowered his head, with the purpose of dislodging him from beneath his shelter.

But just then old Pierre—who had apprehended this danger from the first, and who,

after firing, had followed on after the fleeing moose arrived on the scene.

He had thrown away his blanket, outer coat, gun and hat, and with his long hunting-knife in hand, he came down with a rush upon the front of the moose, just as it lowered its head to force out the lad from his position.

Seizing hold of the antlers with one hand, the hunter made a quick, circling sweep with the other, drawing the keen-edged knife clean across the throat of the brute, which in his death-pain reared again, with appalling power, to crush his new enemy.

But the old hunter was master of the situation, and dropping his knife—which had completed its work—he caught hold of the immense antlers with both hands and hung on, so that when the head went aloft he went with it, his body and legs sprawling in the air like streamers fluttering from the horns of a bull.

It was not the first time old Pierre had done the same thing, and letting go at the right instant, his own momentum carried him several feet away upon the snow-crust, and out of reach of the moose.

The latter came down, but it was more like a fall than a leap, and his head and antlers struck the branch heavily; there were a few spasmodic

struggles, and then, with a moan that sounded like that of a suffering human being, the great bull moose was dead!

The three hunters gathered around the huge body—the lads panting and excited, but the guide as quiet and unconcerned as if sitting by his own fireside. He had picked up his knife, and with a dexterous cut severed the long hanging upper lip, known among hunters as the *mouflon*.

“There!” he said, as he held it up; “I will show you a meal such as you have never tasted before. There are several delicacies about the moose, that put him ahead of all other animals. There is the marrow, taken smoking warm from the shank, to be eaten like butter; the tongue, juicy and tender; and the part that we eat raw.”

“What part is that?” asked the lads, in amazement.

“It is the last entrail, that is crusted over with suet, and that, in its raw state, is one of the greatest delicacies of the hunt. It is about noon, and we will take our dinner right here. I think Towser has earned a good meal, and we will feed him first. I know what part suits *his* palate.”

The guide cut out a large piece near the

shoulder, where it was plump and free from bone, and then divided it into strips, which he tossed to the hound until he had his fill.

It required but a few minutes for the preparation of their own dinner, and as the day was half gone, the appetites of the lads were as keen as in the morning. True to his promise, Pierre prepared a meal that would have charmed an epicure, and now that the labor and danger of the hunt was over, they ate with a relish such as they could hardly have felt at any other time.

It seemed a pity to leave the noble carcass where it was, and the boys would have willingly undergone a great deal of labor to carry the antlers home; but Pierre said it was out of the question, and so they reluctantly gave over the contemplated pleasure of preserving the trophy of the most memorable hunt in which they had ever engaged.

"We have come a long way from home," said the hunter, "and as there is running water near, we may as well encamp here. At any rate we can be certain of a good breakfast awaiting us at daylight, which we can't be if we go anywhere else."

The preparations were much the same as on

the previous evening, except that Pierre seemed to take pains to gather more fuel than before.

"For don't you see," he said, in explanation, "like as not a pack of wolves will be nosing round here to-night. When the snow is on the ground they are mighty sharp on a trail, and there's nothing so good as a roaring fire to keep them away."

This was no new announcement, and the lads assisted him until there was an abundance of fuel gathered that was more than they would be likely to need before morning. When everything was in satisfactory shape, Clarence and Sydney seated themselves upon the large warm blanket that was spread on the brush, but the trapper remained standing, and moved about in a way that indicated there was some trouble on his mind.

Finally, he beckoned to Sydney to come to one side, beyond hearing of his brother, and then, with an assumption of indifference, he asked:

"Tell me whether you heard or saw anything strange, when I was away this afternoon? You understand what I mean."

The lad knew he was referring to the phantom camp-fire, and the strange sound that had led him up the Kennebec, and he shook his head.

"He hasn't noticed anything? and you haven't spoken about what you saw or heard the other night?"

"Not a syllable."

"Very good. Remember my warning. Things don't look exactly to suit me, and if you youngsters weren't so tired, I'd start home with you this very hour."

"We will go, if you wish."

"No," returned the Canadian, leading the way back to camp; "we won't make a start until morning." And then he added, in a louder voice, evidently intended for the ear of the other: "We'll take a good night's rest in the woods, and leave bright and early. I am going off on a little matter of my own."

His young friends looked at him in surprise, and asked how long he would be gone.

"Several hours at least—possibly all night, but I hope not. I shall have to take Towser with me. But you're in no particular danger; if the wolves should pay you a visit, and be troublesome, you can kindle another fire. There's plenty of wood, and you needn't be afraid of their hurting you so long as you keep up the blaze."

"I suppose there is no danger of our falling asleep," suggested Sydney.

"If you can sleep with a pack of such creatures yelling, snapping and wrangling about you, they'll take you for a couple of stones, and leave you alone. But it's time I was off; and you mustn't be alarmed if I am not back again before sunrise."

And without another word, the old man slung his rifle over his shoulder, shoved his huge snowshoes forward, and followed by his dog, vanished in the gloom.

Naturally, the brothers indulged in speculation as to the cause of their friend taking himself away in this manner; but as it was all conjecture, it is not worth the space to record their words.

Sydney was quite certain that in some way or other, this errand had to do with the apparition which he himself had seen, and which was the cause of so much trouble to the superstitious old hunter; but the youth's lips were sealed, and he was compelled to theorize in this direction without the help of his brother.

As Pierre had intimated that they were likely to receive a visit from their old enemies, the wolves, they gave their principal thoughts to them.

It was decided that each should sleep and watch half the night alternately; but when they

came to divide the time, it was found that neither was able to slumber, and was not likely to be for several hours to come.

"Never mind," said Clarence, when they had canvassed the plan; "we will both sit up for awhile longer, and if the wolves don't come one of us will be likely to drop off. It may be we shall have a call from some bear."

"I rather hope we shall," replied Sydney, "for now we have rifles, which we hadn't the other night, and if we don't kill him the first shot, it isn't likely we can be in much danger, if all animals are afraid of the fire."

"I suppose a carcass like that of the moose would be snapped up by a dozen of them in no time, and would only whet their appetites for us. I never knew of anything human that could compare with them in the way of appetite. I have heard Pierre say he has been followed and pestered for two days by a pack of them—"

"Sh!" interrupted his brother, with a warning movement of his hand. "I think I heard something then. Didn't you catch it?"

"No; what was it like?"

"As if some animal were walking softly over the snow—trying to step without being heard."

There was something in the thought of a wily creature stealing around them in this manner

that startled both. The cat-like footsteps of the burglar have double the terror that he has himself when seen face to face.

Clarence sprang to his feet, and looked off in the gloom, half expecting to see some dreaded form emerge from the darkness and approach.

The spot whereon they had camped was a slight valley-like depression, not so deep as that of the preceding night, but well protected from observation. A few large pines stood near them, and the fire itself had been kindled against the trunk of one, some eight or ten inches in diameter.

On the uplands the wind blew strong, and a portion of it bowed the tops of the trees standing near, making a mournful, sighing sound, that would have oppressed a person with loneliness, but which, in the present instance, drew the brothers closer together, and made them pile on the fuel at a rate which threatened to exhaust the supply before the morrow.

"Can you detect anything?" asked Sydney, when his comrade had stood in the attitude of attention for several minutes.

"No," was his answer, in a low, hushed voice. "It must be that the moon doesn't rise until late to-night, or else the sky is overcast with clouds. I wonder whether you weren't mistaken, Syd?"

"It is possible, but I don't think I was. Sit down. Our guns are loaded, and we have plenty of ammunition. What better fun could we have than picking off twenty or more wolves?"

Clarence resumed his position as near the camp-fire as he could get without scorching himself, remarking, as he did so:

"I wouldn't be so nervous to-night if I were certain there was nothing else but wolves near us; but I have a curious feeling that some other kind of danger threatens. I can't tell what it is, but I wish it were morning, or Pierre were here."

A chilling thrill ran through Sydney as he heard these words; for he recalled what the old guide had told him—that whenever this strange creature was seen or heard it was always a warning of some serious danger coming. Of course this was superstition, and he had been taught to laugh at such idle imaginings, but there was something in the time and circumstances which made it impossible for him to shake off his depression.

He felt uneasy, too, over the absence of their trusty friend, and now that they had been in at the death, and the moose hunt, in one sense, might be considered ended, there was no place

which, just then, had such an attraction to him as his own home—alas! too far away to be reached without a long, tedious tramp over snow and ice.

“You must try to shake off such feelings,” he said, doing his utmost to hide his own alarm. “I don’t see what harm can befall us, except it come in the shape of some wild animal; and what is the use of our guns—”

“Sh! I heard it then, as sure as I’m alive!” interrupted Clarence in a whisper. “Listen!”

Both did so for a minute or two, and sure enough they heard a peculiar sound, apparently quite near, but that which caused it was beyond their straining vision.

It was not the soft “tip, tip” made by a light-footed animal trotting over the snow crust, but something heavier and of longer duration. It was so faint that it was impossible to tell whether it was within fifty or five hundred feet; but it was sufficient to rouse the brothers to the utmost vigilance, and each cocked his rifle, so as to be ready to fire at an instant’s warning.

In this suspense they continued for several minutes; when Clarence, peering in the direction of the carcass of the moose, and over the

head of his brother, added in a cautious undertone:

"I saw something then! Don't stir, and I'll get a shot at it!"

Sydney drew his head down a little, so as to give his brother room, and he, after watching a short time longer with a cat-like vigilance, raised his rifle to his shoulder and sighted it.

Just as he was on the eve of firing, he suddenly lowered his piece, and with a white scared face, gasped:

"I dare not shoot! Look Sydney, and see whether you can tell what that is!"

CHAPTER XIII

THE GREAT MOOSE OF THE UPPER KENNEBEC

WHEN Clarence Landon lowered his gun, and appealed to his brother to look at that which had so alarmed him, the boy was prompt in obeying.

Both saw an object indistinctly, and thus could not be certain of its identity. What had startled the elder was that, while he had taken it for a wild animal, and was on the point of firing, he suddenly perceived that it was walking upon two feet.

It seemed to be passing slowly around the carcass of the moose, as if examining it, and at the moment when it was nearest the camp-fire, and the brothers had caught only a furtive glimpse, it vanished in the gloom.

"I never saw a wild animal walk on two legs before," said Clarence, still grasping his gun, like one who was fearful of an attack.

"It couldn't have been a wild animal," re-

plied Sydney. "Didn't you notice that he wore snow-shoes?"

"No; I never thought of looking at his feet. If he had on snow-shoes, then he must be human, like ourselves. Look—there he is again!"

The creature was now in full view, standing about twenty feet distant, and gazing directly at them, as if studying their nature.

He must have been six feet and several inches in height, a giant in every way, and was clothed, in the long, hairy skin of the black bear, from his shoulders to his feet, the latter, as already shown, being encased in snow-shoes. The head was bare of artificial covering, although a mass of luxuriant hair straggled downward over the shoulders to the waist. The face itself was covered with a long, straggling, grizzled beard, and there seemed to be a phosphorescent gleam in the large black eyes that suggested those of the panther. Besides he held a rifle in one hand, and the handles of a pistol and a large knife protruded from the belt that was gathered about his waist.

Standing thus motionless, with a staring, inquiring expression, it was impossible that the boys should not be agitated by his appearance.

Neither could they fire, for that would have been unjustifiable when they were not attacked.

They could claim no right to take human life except to preserve their own, which for the present was not threatened.

'And so, while he looked at them, they stared at him; and the tableau lasted for a minute or two, when the creature turned on its heels and went off with incredible activity. His shoes could be heard shuffling over the snow, and after the sounds had died out in the distance, a strange, wild, wailing cry was borne back to them upon the wintry air.

Sydney started, for it was the same cry that had reached his ears when skating upon the Upper Kennebec, and which had so alarmed Pierre, the old Canadian.

There was some superstitious fear of the creature which as yet the lad did not understand, but the influence of which was such as to place him in anything but a comfortable frame of mind.

'Again the sound was heard, faint and far away, and then all was still.

"Well!" exclaimed Clarence, with a sigh, as he lowered his gun, "that beats everything yet! I never knew they raised such animals as that in the woods. Suppose he should take a notion to slip up and shoot us, what is to hinder? I tell you, Syd, I feel very much as if I were

camping out in the Sioux country, with redskins creeping up all around us."

"I don't think he will try to harm us, or he would have done so before we saw him; and now he has gone far beyond hearing."

"I hope he will stay there, for such sights are not the most cheerful a fellow can see at night in the woods. But one of us must keep watch."

Naturally the next hour or so was occupied in talking of the strange appearance.

Sydney, in deference to the wish of Pierre, carefully kept back his previous knowledge of the creature; and as nothing more was seen or heard of it during the time mentioned, the boys almost believed they were free from further annoyance.

The younger brother held a lingering fear of future trouble, and he claimed the right of standing guard for the first half of the night. As Clarence began to feel drowsy, the right was conceded; and in a short time the other was sunk in heavy slumber.

Had Sydney Landon been able to walk back and forth over a given beat, he might have kept awake for several hours; but it was out of the question for him to fight off sleep while sitting upon the blanket beside his brother. No

living person, no matter how hard he tries (and we have no doubt that many of the readers of this have made the attempt), can remember the precise moment when he dropped off to sleep. However, it is not probable that Sydney kept awake an hour after his brother, when his head dropped forward, and he became as oblivious as he.

His unconsciousness continued for something like a couple of hours, when he opened his eyes, without knowing the reason why. He noticed that their fire was quite low, and he rose to his feet and threw a lot of fuel on it. As the blaze flamed up, he looked at his sleeping brother, and muttered:

"The night must be nearly gone, and as I have slept almost as long as Clarence, I will try to keep awake for the rest of the time. I will see that our guns are loaded, so that if anything does happen—"

He paused astonished, as he made the discovery that both his rifle and that of his brother were missing.

Clarence had lain down with his arm around his piece, and when Sydney sat down, his own was between his knees. Neither was now to be seen.

"What can it mean?" he whispered. "I

wonder whether Pierre has slipped into camp, and played this little trick on us?"

Just then he caught that same soft rustling sound upon the snow, and turning his head, saw to his amazement and alarm the wild man standing at his elbow, with three rifles grasped under his arm, showing plainly enough where the two pieces belonging to the lads had gone.

While the boy stood quaking, the strange creature burst into a rancous laugh, which shook his tall body from head to foot, and caused Sydney's hair fairly to rise on end.

"Do you know who I am?" he asked, in a sepulchral voice.

It was natural that the youngster should do his utmost to conciliate this terrifying creature, in whose power he knew he and his brother were helpless. He therefore made answer, in as natural tones as he could assume:

"I suppose you are some great hunter, who wanders over the country by night and day.

Again the visitor broke into that curious laugh, which went through Sydney like an electric shock, and turning his piercing eyes upon him, said:

"I am the Great Moose of the Upper Kennebec! You have been tracking and have killed

a poor, harmless moose; but did you find *my* tracks on the snow?"

"Not that I know of. Pierre may have seen them; but if he did, he told us nothing about it, and I am sure we were not hunting for *you*."

"Pierre is a great hunter," said the old man, as if talking to himself. "It isn't often our paths cross each other, but it looks as if they had done so now. Is that boy, lying asleep there, your brother?"

Sydney replied that he was, and that there was a difference of two years in their ages, himself being the younger.

"What is your name?"

This question was properly answered, and the Great Moose asked, rather quickly:

"Are you the children of Fitz James Landon?"

The boy replied in the affirmative, such being the truth.

"He and I used to know each other a good many years ago. Did he ever tell you anything of the Great Moose of the Upper Kennebec?"

"I never heard him mention your name to any one."

"You are sure of that? Ha! ha! ha! ha! he has good reason not to do so. He would like

to forget me if he can, but he cannot. He is afraid of me, and he has good cause. He has kept out of my way a long time, but he did not know enough to keep his *children* away. They have come to me when I was not looking for them, and I shall not let them go. He shall never see them again; you are mine, and you shall go to my home and live with me for a hundred years. Do you hear? 'A hundred years—and when you go back to him, you will both be such old men that he won't know you; and you will tell him that you have been living with the Great Moose of the Upper Kennebec. Ha! ha! ha! ha!'"

What was this language but the ravings of a crazy man?

Sydney saw that he and his brother were in the power of a lunatic, and with no means of escape, unless through the opportune coming of Pierre, the Canadian, who had saved them from a somewhat similar predicament at the hands of the half-civilized Indians.

He did not know how to reply to their captor; but it struck him that a point might be gained by reminding him that he and his comrade were under the special charge of the old hunter.

"We came with Pierre upon a hunt for a

moose, and I am expecting he will return in a few minutes."

"He will not come; you need not expect him, for you will be disappointed!"

A chill passed over the lad, for he believed these words clearly intimated that the crazy man had shot the Canadian, as he probably meant to do with him and his brother.

The former fear, however, was removed the next moment.

"Pierre is a great hunter, and he has brought down many moose; but there is one that he always runs from. He is afraid of the Great Moose, and when he hears him cry in the woods he flees. His hound will tell him that I am by his camp-fire and he will stay away. You need not look for him."

This announcement, in one sense, was a great relief; for poor Sydney would have been unspeakably horrified to have learned that an old hunter like Pierre had fallen by the hand of some crazy assassin.

He could not doubt that the Moose spoke the truth. The trapper, brave as he was, like men of his class, had a strong vein of superstition in his make. Great as was his love for the lads, it would be borne under by his terror of being brought face to face with a being whom

he looked upon as nothing less than supernatural.

"Pierre is a good man," continued Sydney, in a voice that had become more even and confident, "and all who know him love him. Why should he fear you?"

"*Everybody* fears the Moose!" broke out their captor, with his wild laugh, "and is not the moose a terrible animal? When he gets angry at a person he jumps upon him and cuts him to pieces with his sharp hoofs. Pierre is like all other people, and why should he not fear him?"

"When the Great Moose becomes angry all should fear him, but he is not angry with us, for we would not harm him, if we could."

"Because I slipped up and took your rifles away, when you were both asleep!"

"But we saw you before that, and could have fired at you when you had no fear of danger. But why should we wish to hurt you?"

"You couldn't, if you wanted to. If both of you had fired your guns, and aimed at my head, the bullets would not have been felt. I have been shot at hundreds of times. Look here!"

As he spoke, he threw open the heavy bear-skin in front, and showed a number of orifices

made in the sheathing, as it might be turned.

They were small round holes, precisely such as would have been made by rifle-balls, and such the strange creature declared them to be.

“All made by hunters who have become scared at me. I always let them shoot first, and then I take a turn; and when *my* bullets hit them, things are a little different—just a little! Ha! ha!”

The situation of the lad was trying in the highest degree. It is anything but pleasant to stand *tete-a-tete* with a lunatic, beyond assistance from any source, and with the certainty that he is brooding mischief, and has double your own strength.

During all the time that this somewhat pointless conversation was being carried on the lad was wondering how the business was to end. He certainly had good cause to apprehend trouble, and this misgiving was not diminished by the subsequent actions and words of the remarkable creature who held them in his power.

“It is time your brother awoke,” said he, stepping toward him. “I am tired of waiting, and must go before the coming of day.”

Sydney would have been only too glad if he had gone long ago; but, afraid that he might use violence toward his brother, he called out

the name of the latter in such sharp tones that he instantly started up, rubbed his eyes and looked about him.

The scene upon which he gazed was enough to confuse and startle an older person than he; but his brother, with a few words, managed to give him an idea of the situation, while both awaited, with an anxiety that would be hard to describe, the further action of the Great Moose of the Upper Kennebec.

"You have both slumbered for a long time; you have had a bountiful supper; your limbs are young and strong," said he, speaking with a correctness that was surprising; "and now you must make ready to go with me. The night is cold, and the snow crust is frozen so that we can walk with ease. Put on your shoes and be ready."

The very command that had been dreaded, and yet neither dared dispute nor refuse to obey! The large snow-shoes, which, as a matter of course, had been removed upon lying down, were reluctantly fastened upon their feet again, the blanket was thrown over the shoulder of the elder brother, and then they stood looking at their captor, and waiting to receive his further orders.

"Would you like to have your guns back?"

he asked, halting before them in a tantalizing manner. "Shall I turn them over to you?"

Clarence replied that they would be glad to receive them, if such was the wish of the Moose, but at the same time they were not anxious.

"Suppose I give them to you, will you try to shoot me when I ain't looking?"

Both truthfully protested that nothing would induce them to attempt such a thing.

"Besides, if we were wicked enough to do it," said Sydney, "you know it could not do you any harm. That would not make any difference with us at any rate."

"When any one fires at me, I always fire back, and so it will be the best not to give you a chance of losing your own lives."

And with that, he deliberately pointed one rifle after the other into the air, emptying each barrel in succession. This done he passed the weapons back to their respective owners.

"Now I shall keep my eye on you both," said he, sternly, "and if I see either trying to reload his gun, I'll bury my knife in him. I'll leave your ammunition with you, and you understand what I've said, don't you?"

They signified that his meaning was very intelligible, and that they had no purpose of vio-

lating his commands, given with such clearness and force.

“Come, then, follow me over the snow. We have a long way to go before morning, and we must travel fast. We ought to have started an hour ago.”

With which the three moved away from the camp-fire in the wood.

CHAPTER XIV

LIGHTENING THE SLED

IT SEEMED all a dream, as the two lads followed the wild hunter from the hollow in the woods until they reached the uplands, where the wintry wind whistled and howled, and the scene in the dim moonlight was dismal and lonely beyond expression.

"I wonder how far we have to walk?" muttered Clarence, keeping close to his brother. "I think it would have been a deal more pleasant if we had a hundred or two wolves yelping around us all night, than to have been nabbed by this thing!"

"Be careful not to offend him by anything you say, for I have hope that he may not intend us any harm."

"What then does he mean by toting us off in this fashion? Where do you imagine he means to take us?"

"I haven't an idea. It must be he has a home somewhere, and perhaps wants to show us that."

"It can't be that he has a wife or any children. My gracious! suppose there's a tribe of such characters somewhere in the upper part of the State! Won't it be a big exploit for us to discover them? It may be it would be a good thing for Darwin, that the teachers down at school are talking so much about—Helloa! what's up now?"

The Moose had stopped beside a large tree, and near which a small hand sled was resting; something similar to that used by the Eskimos of the Far North.

"What does he mean to do with that?" asked Clarence.

"Maybe he intends to get on it, and make us pull him."

To their surprise, however, the Moose commanded them to seat themselves, and not daring to offend him, the lads obeyed, gathering the heavy blanket about them and making their situation unexpectedly comfortable.

"Are you all right?" he demanded, in his husky voice; and being assured they were, he placed his own loaded gun beside theirs, threw the twisted deer-thong over his shoulder, and then began shoving ahead upon his snow-shoes, dragging the sleigh and its freight after him.

And such traveling the lads had never

dreamed possible. The shuffling movement over the snow increased; the wind whistled by their ears, and cut them so keenly that they drew their blankets close up about their chins to prevent being frost-nipped.

And what a strange appearance the crazy Moose made! His long, powerful legs branched out and danced over the snow, in a way peculiarly their own; his long, heavy bear-skin streamed and fluttered in the wind, as did the luxuriant hair of his head. The latter, together with the shoulders, was thrown far in advance, after the manner of a swift runner, and he never once looked behind him.

After discharging the two guns of the lads, to prevent their use against him, he had deliberately placed his own in their hands, without a word of warning. Surely everything he did was consistent with his character as a lunatic.

Little danger, either of the lads attempting to harm him. It is no trifling thing for a person to take the life of another, and great as they believed their peril, they had no disposition to injure their captor.

For fully an hour did the Moose continue flying over the snow, without abating a jot of his speed, or looking back to see that his luggage was safe. Most of this time he seemed



"The wind whistled by their ears."

to be following some kind of trail that led through an open stretch of woods, where the trees were far apart and devoid of undergrowth.

Occasionally the sleigh grazed the trunk of a pine; but the motion of the curious being suggested those of a bird that sails through a forest without risk of striking the hundreds of limbs and twigs which interpose before him.

Not once did he waver or act as if he were uncertain of the direction he ought to pursue; but after steaming forward for the time mentioned, a gradual slackening of his speed was observable, indicating either that he was near his journey's end, or that his strength was failing—the former supposition being the more probable, and the one believed by the lads themselves.

They were not kept long in waiting as to the meaning of the action of their captor.

A short turn was made to the left, and when they shot down a steep bank and glided out upon the smooth, clear ice of a large stream of water, the Moose continued to act as if unaware of the load he was drawing. Not once did he speak, or appear even to look at them, although it is not to be supposed that he did not indulge in a sly glance, now and then.

When the ice was reached, the leader removed his snow-shoes, and from beneath the roots of a large tree which overhung the water, he drew forth a pair of large skates, which he adjusted to his feet; and then, before they were aware of what he was doing, he had a lighted torch fastened to the lappel of his bear-skin coat, the flame projecting fully a foot above his head, Again the rope was slung over his shoulder, and away he went.

If they had gone rapidly before, it was scarcely a comparison with the velocity now attained. Of all the skaters which the lad had seen, the Moose was certainly the champion. There was a wonderful steadiness in his gait, which prevented the sleigh from wobbling from one side to the other, and the brothers, who, it will be remembered, were no inferior skaters themselves, forgot their peculiar danger for awhile, in their admiration of the skill of this creature, who skimmed over the frozen water as if impelled by some gigantic catapult.

It was a strange picture indeed—this wild man, clothed in bear skin, with the torch streaming from above his head, as he sped toward the north, drawing the sleigh after him, while the two boys crouched close together, and

could only wonder and stare, and wonder and stare again.

When a few minutes had passed, Sydney recalled the phantom camp-fire of a few nights before, and readily understood why it was he had found it impossible to approach it. He doubted whether a locomotive itself could overtake them at the rate they were going, and as to being pursued by wolves, it would have been the merest pastime.

But when the novelty of the singular situation to a certain extent had worn off, the minds of both were busy concerning themselves.

It was not to be supposed that the Moose would take all this pains, and draw them such a distance unless he had some fixed object in view, and that fixed purpose, no doubt, was their destruction.

"Don't you notice," asked Clarence, in a cautious voice, "that he never looks around to see whether we are on the sleigh or not?"

Sydney replied that he had observed this peculiarity, and had been not a little surprised thereat.

"Let's quietly roll off and maybe he won't miss us."

"I don't believe he can fail to do so, and then we shall be in a bad scrape."



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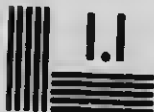
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"We can make him believe it was accidental. Let him think we got into a fight and rolled out. He knows we're brothers, and will expect it."

"It will be better for us to go off one at a time. He won't be so likely to notice it then; and if one succeeds, the other can follow."

"A good idea," replied Clarence. "Just flop out, Syd, and I'll follow you within the next half mile."

"You're heavier than I am, and had better try it first. If he doesn't pay any attention to you, I'll be more likely to get off afterward."

There seemed to be some reason in this, although it was really his devotion to his brother that prompted Sydney to make the suggestion. But time was precious, and daylight could not be far off.

It required little time to prepare for the attempt for Clarence shifting over on the edge of the structure, while he retained a reclining posture on his side.

Still the Moose kept up his tremendous speed, without the least appearance of fatigue, as he seemed fairly to cut the air in front of them.

The shores of the creek were dark and dimly discernible in the gloom upon either hand, and

the whole expanse was more like the wild imaginings of a nightmare than reality.

"I don't know about this deserting you at such a time, Syd," said the elder turning his head to speak. "It doesn't seem exactly the thing—"

Sydney knew that this sort of talk was preliminary to an utter refusal to leave him, and accordingly he ended the matter by giving his brother a slight shove, which destroyed his balance and caused him to fall upon the ice.

Did the Moose observe the trick? Did he not on the instant notice the change in the load he was drawing?

Sydney held his breath, in the intensity of interest and anxiety, with his eyes fixed upon the wild form, speeding so swiftly ahead. With what painful incertitude he watched the head, with the long hair streaming over the shoulders, and the flaming torch adding effect to the strange, unnatural scene!

It was all decided in a few seconds, which seemed like minutes to the anxious brother.

Going at his terrific speed, it required but the briefest time to place a long distance between him and the lad who had taken his chance of escape. This brief period passed, and minute after minute came and went, and

still the dragon coursing along with his chariot never once looking over his shoulder or showed by any act that he was aware of what had taken place.

"Clarence has escaped," thought Sydney, with his gaze still fixed upon that unnatural form. "He has his gun with him, with a good chance of reaching home, or finding Pierre. That cannot fail to help me, whether I succeed in getting away or not."

But it was now time that he made ready to imitate the act of the other. They were already a goodly distance apart, and if he failed, the failure was not likely to endanger the safety of him who was such a distance to the rear.

Laying hold of his gun, the youngster threw one leg over the side of the sleigh, and was about to "follow suit" with the other, when he observed a cessation in the rate of speed that the Moose had maintained so long.

His heart seemed to cease to beat as he moved back in place.

Slower and more slowly went the propelling power, like an engine when nearing a station, and Sydney was wondering what the cause of it could be, and dreading all the time that he had permitted the golden opportunity to go by,

when the Moose suddenly resumed his flight with the same dizzying speed as before.

Fearful that if he waited any longer the chance would be entirely thrown away, the lad "fopped" from the sleigh, and was upon the ice the next instant.

His momentum was so great that he slid several yards before he was able to check himself and rise to his feet.

When he did so, he was dazed and bewildered, and for a few minutes uncertain what direction to take. The frozen creek, over which they had sped, appeared to have contracted, and the tall dark trees at the sides were dense and gloomy, as midnight. The moon, that had lit them so long, was obscured by clouds, and his situation, in every sense except one, was of the most dismal nature.

He had managed to escape the custody of a wild man of the woods, who, under the name of the Moose, doubtless intended to lead them to their destruction; but this partial freedom remained to be perfected.

He was certainly a long way from home, and with little preception of the proper course necessary to reach there.

His loved brother was in equal peril with himself; and what Pierre would do could hard-

ly he guessed—for brave as was the hunter, he was tinged, as we know, with a superstition that made him a coward, where he had often been a hero. It was uncertain, therefore, to what extent he could be counted upon in the serious dilemma in which both lads were placed.

But just now Sydney's first object was to find Clarence, who was somewhere down the creek, on the lookout for him. First, he stood and listened, expecting to hear sounds both up and down stream; for while he hoped he was at no great distance from his brother, who ought to be stealthily making his way toward him, it did seem utterly impossible that the lunatic could remain unaware of the flight of both. He might be so absorbed in some mental freak as not to notice it on the instant, but the youth could not believe his ignorance could continue for any length of time.

Now, however, all was still—save that soft, mournful sighing which, heard at night among the pines, is the most lonely sound in nature. Not even the call of a wild animal reached his ears. F seemed to be standing alone in the midst of a vast solitude, deserted by all save himself, with none to assist and none to make him afraid.

“Ah, if I only had my skates!” he murmured,

as he began moving down stream, "I would soon get out of this dreadful place, and back home. I rather think that if Clarence and I live to reach there, we shall have enough of adventure in the woods to last us our lifetime. Daylight cannot be far off."

He had walked but a short distance, when he fancied he heard a slight sound, but whether it was up or down stream was more than he could determine. He suspected, however, that it was the Moose in pursuit, and naturally was in a flutter of fear until satisfied that he had managed to place a good distance between him and his pursuer.

The sound was similar to that made by a person when moving cautiously over the ice, and it was curious that, with all the pains Sydney took, he was utterly unable to tell the direction whence it came.

Just as he had made up his mind it was from the Moose, in vengeful pursuit, a thrill of hope came to him at the conviction that it was made by Clarence, who was searching for him.

"It may be some wild animal," he said to himself, when the situation had lasted several minutes; "but if so, neither Clarence nor I will be found in quite as helpless a situation as before."

There was great risk in moving forward in this manner, keeping near the middle of the stream, where he was more likely to be seen and where, with all the care possible, he could not fail to make some noise himself.

There was ever that haunting fear, that the Moose was shadowing him—that he was somewhere near at hand, ready to pounce upon him in his own good time, and toying with him as the cat toys with the mouse. When he looked back, he was certain he saw the shadowy outlines in the wintry gloom, as the wild man hovered about him, first on one side and then on the other.

“There he is, too!” suddenly exclaimed the lad, as he discerned an approaching figure, beyond all possibility of mistake. “I wonder whether it *can* be Clarence?”

He gave utterance to a low whistle often used as a signal between them, when at their sports, with the belief that if it was indeed his brother, he would not fail to reply.

But there was no answer, and the shadowy form continued to draw near.

CHAPTER XV.

ALONE IN THE WILDERNESS

SYDNEY LANDON was debating with himself whether to stand still, run, or to fire at the figure so stealthily approaching through the gloom, when, to his inexpressible relief, his signal was returned in a guarded voice.

"Is that you, Clarence?" he called out, in an eager undertone.

"I rather guess it is," was the equally joyful reply. "It seems to me I have been hunting over half creation for you. What made you wait so long?"

"It was only a few minutes. Remember how rapidly the Moose ran."

"He went like a steam-engine; and he must be a fool to let us slip away, after taking us so far. But, Syd, we've got to do some traveling to get out of this scrape. As near as I can calculate, we must be about a hundred miles from home."

The younger brother thought this estimate altogether wide of the mark, as undoubtedly it was; but there was no denying the fact that they were much further than was safe, and at a distance which both were desirous of lessening as much as possible.

They lost no time in talking, but turned back the very moment they recognized each other, and were busily retracing in part the steps taken in the morning.

There was the natural fear that they would be pursued, and they took the precaution to keep near one bank, where the gloom was greater than in the middle, and where, if necessary, they could dodge into the woods, and remain in hiding until daylight.

Both had been thoughtful enough to take their snow-shoes with them, and as they had their guns, and the elder carried his blanket, they were pretty well burdened, but at the same time were prepared to pursue their journey to any extent in the wintry wilderness. They had no doubts of their ability to reach home in time, if they were left alone.

Their anxiety at present was to form a "junction" with Pierre; for without his assistance, this tramp might be prolonged to an indefinite extent.

As nearly all the principal streams of Maine flow southward, or find their way, ultimately to the Atlantic, the probabilities were that they would finally reach their destination by following the course of the one over which they were now journeying, although they were likely to encounter considerable delay in so doing.

But there remained the possibility of being led altogether astray by this course. One-tenth of the surface of the State is water, and into many of the lakes flow streams of considerable size. It might be that they were journeying over one of these and taking a course far different from that which they really meant to pursue.

However, there was no avoidance of the risk, and anything was preferable to remaining still. Accordingly, they kept as close to the bank as they could, and maintained a brisk walk in what they believed to be the southern direction, not forgetting to pause at intervals and listen for their dreaded enemy.

"If I were sure he isn't going to catch us," said Clarence, when this had continued for some time, "I think I should feel like laughing at the picture of his face when he turns round and finds he has been drawing an empty sleigh all this time. If he is a profane individual, then is

the time when he would be likely to indulge—”

“Sh!” interrupted his brother, laying his hand on his arm.

But the other had also heard it—that strange, wailing sound, which had struck the ears of Sydney, a few nights before, when skating over the waters of the Upper Kennebec, and he was no quicker in comprehending its source than was the one to whom it was beginning to become a familiar cry.

“That’s a good way off,” said Clarence, in a scared undertone. “It must be several miles distant when it comes so faintly as that.”

“But he can travel far in a short time, and I shan’t feel safe until we are home. We had some fun while we were after the genuine moose; but now, when a crazy Moose is after us—well, there isn’t quite so much fun in it. It may be that that cry is a signal that he has started on the back track, and is coming; so let us travel, and keep on the look-out.”

The lads felt a certain exhilaration over the success that had attended the attempt to escape from the Moose, and they now strode along at a faster gait than usual, conscious that daylight must be at hand. When they spoke it was in a low voice, and they listened as they walked, their hopes constantly rising as time passed,

and nothing was seen or heard of their captor.

Recalling, as well as they were able, the route followed since their encampment, they were sanguine that the stream over which they were journeying was a tributary of the Penobscot, and ultimately reached the Atlantic. Accordingly they made the best time possible, not pausing for more than a minute or two until they saw by the increasing light that day was breaking.

Strive as much as they might, they knew it was impossible to conceal their trail from the Moose. Accustomed as he was to ranging the forest in all directions, at all seasons, he would follow them as readily as if they were upon skates, and were the first to pass over the glassy surface.

Thus it was that daylight brought with it additional trepidation, and increased their anxiety to rejoin Pierre, the king of the woods. But they were now proceeding at random, as it may be said, doubtful whether every step was making less or greater the distance between him and them.

"I think we would better lie by till night, again, or else get off this creek," suggested Clarence, after they had walked for some time. "This is too plain a road for the Moose to fol-

low, and I can't help feeling every minute as though he is ready to pounce down upon us. Yonder is another stream that puts into this; let's take a turn up that, and hunt out some place where he won't be so likely to find us."

Sydney thought much as did his brother on the question, and they went to the left, moving carefully up the creek which had just come to view. In doing so, they took every precaution to conceal the marks of their feet. They separated, one going on one side and one on the other, and keeping as close to the shore as they could. Not until they had gone several hundred yards did Sydney halt with the question:

"Don't you hear some peculiar sound, Clarence—a dull, heavy roar, like the sweeping of a gale through the forest, a good many miles away?"

The noise alluded to was too distinct to be mistaken, and it had been growing upon them for several minutes, too steadily and evenly, indeed, to be ascribed to the cause mentioned.

"It is not wind," said the younger, when they had listened for several minutes; "it is the sound of falling water; we are near some cataract or cascade."

It was a relief to have some immediate ob-

ject to lead them in a particular course, and they now made that of the waterfall their destination, as they sped forward at a faster rate than usual, not forgetting to look to the rear as well as the front. A short distance in this manner satisfied them that they were right in their supposition, and were in reality quite close to falling water.

A half hour later, and they came to the falls, which were found to be about fifty feet in height, and somewhat less than a hundred feet wide. The water pouring over the crest of the rocks was only a few inches in depth, so that the sheet, as it descended into the lower bed, had a thin and glassy appearance, broken frequently into spray when struck by a gust of wind.

The scene was impressive and the lads stood for some time silently admiring its beauty. It lacked the majesty and grandeur of many of the more celebrated falls of the country; but there was a romantic and picturesque charm, especially when viewed at this time, that would have arrested the attention of the most careless. The sheet was fringed at the edges with ice, and the spray rising, and thrown hither and yon, had congealed into grotesque forms and images. The surface of the stream above was solid down to within a foot or two of where it poured over,

while directly at the base the water was churned into foamy billows, that turned and doubled in upon one another in the most lively, manner imaginable.

The same bitter weather had frozen the water below so rigidly that the lads could move up to within a few inches of where the agitation was so great.

On each side, both above and below, the trees overhung the stream, and were dense and vigorous; so that, when viewed in the soft moonlight of a summer's night, the place must have been enchanting.

But the brothers could not feel poetical or fanciful. They were hungry, and wanted to get home.

There seemed to be no reason why they should pass above the falls, and they concluded to hunt out a camping site upon some point near at hand.

They were in the act of turning away, and had, indeed, approached so close to the shore that they were partly enveloped and concealed by the overhanging pines, when Clarence grasped the arm of his brother, and pointing toward the falls, gasped:

"Look!"

Could they believe the evidence of their eyes?

Hardly a hundred yards away, and upon the very ice which supported them, an Indian, in his own native dress, could be seen slowly walking from one side of the stream to the other!

His manner showed that he had no thought of the lads being so near, for he looked neither to the right nor left, but moved with a deliberate gait, his rifle slung over his shoulder as if he had started out on a hunt—though whither he had come and where he was going could not be conjectured.

The boys remained quiet and stationary until several minutes after he had disappeared, and then they looked into each other's faces.

"I wonder whether we haven't got into Oregon," said Clarence. "I never knew that Maine had so many Indians until we started on this moose hunt."

"He must be one of those half-civilized Penobscots that Pierre told us about yesterday."

"But he looks for all the world like a noble red man of the plains starting out to hunt for scalps. Did you notice how he held his head down, as if in deep thought? I have no doubt he was figuring out how many top-knots it was necessary for him to take to-day, that he might make up some number he has fixed upon. Sup-

pose he runs across our trail?—then there will be more trouble, Syd!”

“I don’t know what it all means,” replied the younger lad, as they began moving down the shore again. “It seems to me we have got out of our latitude altogether, and there is no telling what we shall run against. Let us hunt up some place where we can lie by for awhile, at least.”

This seemed easy enough, on account of the density of the wood on both sides of the creek. They made a landing with great care, aiming to conceal, so far as possible, the evidence of having done so, and a short distance from the stream, reached a spot which suited them.

It was near a small open spring, in a slight ravine, shut in by dense fir-trees on every hand, so that a man might pass within twenty feet without suspecting their existence.

Besides this, they were screened from the wind, which was still keen and searching; and but for their anxiety to get home, they would have been content to make this their head-quarters, while they spent several days in hunting through the surrounding wilderness.

They broke off a number of branches, and threw them upon the snow, the crust of which

was strong enough to bear their weight without the aid of their large shoes.

"Now," said Clarence, when all their arrangements were completed, "if we only had a barrel or two of food, we might keep quiet and comfortable as long as we choose. I have the means of kindling a fire, and I don't think we are likely to be disturbed here. At any rate, I feel safe against the Moose. I imagine that the Indian we saw is one of the vagabond Penobscots, who has dressed up and gone out into the woods to enjoy himself, in the way of fancying he is some great chieftain, leading his warriors to battle. I don't suppose they would hurt us, no matter where we happened to meet."

"Then let us leave the blanket and shoes here, while we start out to get something to eat. It seems to me that, in all my life, I never felt so hungry!"

"That's just what we'll have to do," assented the elder; "and we have had so many ups and downs, during the last few days, that we must manage to avoid getting lost, so that half our time is not taken up in looking for each other. The best plan will be to hunt separately, of course."

Hunger is a caller which cannot be put off, and under its cravings the brothers speedily

planned a hunt for something to eat. It was agreed that they should take different directions, and not wander beyond hearing of the falls. These could be used as a rendezvous, and thus all danger of going astray avoided. Each intended to continue the search until something was secured. If one heard the report of the other's gun followed by a halloo, he was to accept it as evidence that some kind of game had been bagged, and to make his way to him at once. Should an emergency arise, in which it was unsafe to shout or call to each other, they agreed to fall back upon their old whistling signal, which had already been used so many times.

With this understanding the lads separated, hopeful and confident of speedily meeting again before many hours should pass. Clarence hoped there were fish below the falls, which could be secured; and he bent his steps in that direction. He spent an hour in trying to devise some method of persuading them from the water, but was obliged to give it up without any success; and flinging his rifle over his shoulder, he struck off into the wilderness, with the purpose of pursuing the hunt in the same manner as his brother.

He had hardly begun to do so, when he heard

the sound of a rifle some distance to the north, and he paused and listened.

But no halloo came back, and the silence remained undisturbed, except by the dull, never-ceasing roar of the falls.

"That couldn't have been Syd that fired," he said to himself, as he resumed his tramp over the snow, "or if it was, he missed. I don't think game is plenty, and I'm afraid we shall have hard work to get something to eat. I don't think it a bad idea to chew some of this birch that is so plenty all through these woods."

He had masticated only a few mouthfuls, when he was called upon to take part in an altogether different affair.

CHAPTER XVI

"VENGEANCE IS MINE"

CLARENCE was still nibbling at the fragrant birch, when he threw down the branch and caught up his gun, which was leaning against a tree near at hand. A crouching of the snow-crust and rattling of the bushes told him that some animal was approaching. With the hope that it might be another moose, he sprang behind the trunk, cocked his rifle, and awaited the moment when the creature, whatever it might be, should disclose himself.

Nearer and nearer came the noise, and the lad held his rifle ready to fire the instant a fair shot presented itself. He had but a minute or two to wait, when a large, finely-formed buck came to view, his head and antlers well up and back, while he maintained a steady, rapid rate of speed, although his hoofs cut through the snow-crust at every step.

The line of direction which the animal was pursuing was almost straight for the tree be-

hind which the young hunter had taken refuge. Although Clarence wanted him to come quite close, yet he didn't wish it to be too near. The action of the moose, in the case of his brother, had shown him the turn those things sometimes took, and it was better that the deer should keep his distance.

The lad stepped out when the animal was a hundred feet distant, and threw up his arms with a loud shout. The affrighted buck stopped like a flash, and looked at him; and the boy, fearful of a charge, slipped back behind the tree, and peered out.

But the creature had no such purpose, so long as the way was open for him to run. Standing motionless but a moment, he turned at a right angle, and bounded away from the new danger. This was the moment to fire, and the lad, aiming directly back of the fore-leg, pulled the trigger. The deer kept on, as if unharmed; but a few yards away he ran full speed against the trunk of a large tree, and dropped down, stone dead.

Delighted at the unexpected success of his shot, Clarence gave utterance to a joyous shout, and dashed forward. Carrying no hunting-knife, he had a "pocket edition," with which he could easily secure all he wanted for dinner.

"Now we shall have a feast," he exclaimed,

as throwing down his gun, he opened the blade and stood a moment to decide where he should begin. "There's enough meat to keep us going for a week—Hello! How is that? I don't carry a double barreled gun."

This exclamation was caused by the discovery that the buck which he was about to carve had been pierced by two bullets. It was plain that his own had inflicted the fatal wound, as the mark was exactly in the spot he had aimed at, and the animal fell a minute after receiving it.

The other shot was six inches above the wound—too high to reach the heart.

"That must be some of Syd's work. He doesn't know how to aim as well as I, and thought he didn't hit the game."

Again he stooped to sever the luscious slice, and again was interrupted.

This time it was by the approach of some one over the snow. Certain that it was his brother, he turned his head, and saw instead the Indian who had crossed the ice, in full view a few hours before.

"Hello! I didn't expect *you!*" said the astonished lad, straightening up.

"Why you steal my deer?" demanded the red-skin, speaking English with scarcely a fault in the accent.

Recalling the experience of himself and brother, a day or two previous, in a somewhat similar situation, Clarence had no wish to be caught in such a scrape again.

"I saw the deer running and fired. There is the mark of my bullet, and just now I saw that some one else had shot him. I haven't taken a hair from his hide, and if he belongs to you, you are welcome to him; but my brother and myself are hungry, and I hope you can spare enough to make us one good meal."

The red-skin was several paces distant, and still refrained from approaching; but he stood looking intently at the lad, and disregarded the carcass that had brought about this meeting.

Clarence was desirous, above all things, of avoiding any quarrel, and as he uttered the words mentioned, he stepped back, as if to invite the Indian to come forward and claim his property.

But the latter appeared to be more interested in the youngster than anything else, and after staring at him a few minutes longer, suddenly asked:

"Where did you come from?"

The lad replied, giving his residence and stating that he was on his return.

"That is a long way. Why did you come so far from your home?"

Thereupon the boy told, as succinctly as possible, how he and his brother had been on a moose-hunt, with the great hunter Pierre, from whom they had accidentally become separated, and were now seeking to find their way back again.

He could not be certain, but he strongly suspected, from the looks and manner of the red-skin, that he did not believe a word spoken. He had carefully avoided all mention of the lunatic who called himself the Great Moose of the Upper Kennebec, and he was, therefore, astonished to hear the Indian say:

"You have come on ground where there is great danger. The Great Moose kills all white men that come here. You go home. He catch you, and then you never go home once more."

"I am sure I don't want to stay here, nor does my brother. What is the direction we must take to get there as soon as possible?"

The red-skin pointed with his outstretched arm, indicating a course altogether different from the one the lads had believed was the proper one to follow.

"You go that way—go fast as you can—and

mebbe Great Moose won't catch you. Stay not here, for you will be dead."

"The way is quite long, and if you will give me a slice from your deer, it will make our strength greater, and we shall be able to travel much faster."

This was a pretty direct hint, and the Indian accepted it. Striding forward he whipped out his hunting-knife, and with a few dextrous flirts, cut quite a large portion of venison.

While thus engaged he was leaning over the carcass, with his neck and shoulders directly under the gaze of Clarence.

The latter thought nothing of it at the time, but he recalled afterward that the hair of the red-skin looked different from what he supposed all Indians' hair to be. It was black near to the ends, but close to the neck the color was much lighter. It struck him as curious at the time, we say, but he forgot it for the present, when the Indian straightened up and handed him a goodly slice, cut from the side of the animal.

"There, you can make that do for a day or more," he said, as he handed it over.

Clarence thanked him for his timely favor, and after being instructed as to the route to

take, in order to reach home, he bade him good-day, and started toward camp.

The latter was at no great distance, and he was only a short time in reaching the creek, where he paused a few minutes and waited for some signal from his brother.

"He must have heard my gun and call," he thought, "and he ought to be somewhere in the neighborhood. If he is as hungry as I am he wouldn't loiter by the way."

Just then he heard the cracking of a twig behind him, and turned his head, expecting to see Sydney; but no one was in sight, and naught but the dull roar of the falls reached his ears.

"I wonder what that was?" he said to himself, with a vague fear. "It could hardly have been an animal, for if one had come so near I should have seen it."

He stood stationary for several minutes, but nothing more was heard, and he moved on, passing down the bank of the stream and walking to the other side on the ice.

When the shore was reached, he continued on toward the main stream, until he had come to a point nearly opposite the place chosen for their camp, and so far below the falls that there was no disturbance from their roar.

Still nothing was seen or heard of Sydney,

and he concluded that he had gone off on a hunt of his own, or mayhap was waiting for him in the hollow where they had left their blanket and snow-shoes.

Clarence was standing in this attitude, with his eyes wandering absently up and down the opposite bank, when he observed a bright flash, accompanied by a sharp report and at the same instant felt a stinging sensation along the forehead. Instantly he dropped like a log.

But the boy was not hurt, although his actions were those of one who had been pierced by the treacherous bullet. He was stunned for the moment, when he recovered his senses; but yielding to an impulse which he never understood, he lay motionless, and feigned death. He had no thought of what was to be gained by so doing, but there was a vast deal, as he learned within the next few minutes.

As he fell, he lay in such a position that, by slightly turning his head, and "twisting" his eyes to a painful extent, he could look directly at the point where he had seen the flash.

For several minutes he was unable to detect anything unusual; but finally he saw a movement among the undergrowth near the point, and then a man appeared—the same red-skin who had given him the piece of deer's meat,

and who had counseled him to make all haste in getting out of a country which was so dangerous because it was the tramping-ground of the Great Moose of the Upper Kennebec.

The assassin continued to approach, until at the edge of the creek, when he was within a short distance of where the motionless lad lay.

"He is coming to learn whether I am really dead or not," was his thought; "and if I ain't, he will finish me with his knife. It won't do to lie here in this fashion."

He was on the point of leaping up and making off, when the Indian halted. He stood for a minute intently surveying him, and then deliberately turned and walked away.

Now the whole import of his thoughtless strategy flashed upon Clarence Landon. The Indian had made a deliberate attempt to shoot him. Had he failed to do so he would have persevered, and repeating the attempt, would have been certain to succeed. But he had every reason to believe he had succeeded. He had gone, and no further harm was to be feared from him.

With this conviction came a strange revolution in the feelings of the lad.

"What business has he to seek my life?" he demanded, after waiting until he was out of

sight, and as he rose to his feet and hurriedly reloaded his rifle. "I have never tried to harm him, and he has done all he could to kill me, when I have no chance to defend myself. Now he will hunt up Syd, and serve him the same way. I feel like shooting that Indian, and what is more, *I will!*"

He was fully determined, and his white face and compressed lips showed he was in earnest.

He remembered that the Indian, after firing the treacherous shot, had turned and gone directly back again from which he felt certain that he had made his way to the spot where the carcass of the deer lay, and there it was the youth meant to seek him.

He had gone but a short distance when he saw he was on his trail, the snow-crust directly in front showing where his moccasins had pressed. The boy had forgotten his hunger, and everything else. Indeed he thought of nothing but the red miscreant, and his resolve to punish him.

He found that his footprints did not lead directly by the gully in which they had left their belongings, and he turned aside long enough to place the venison where Sydney would be certain to find it in case he returned.

"He always carries a match-safe with him,

and it won't take him long to start a fire and make dinner for us. Just now I don't feel as if I could eat anything until I meet him."

After leaving the gully, the trail became more difficult to follow, and considerable search was required to find it; but a little care enabled the pursuer to do so, and he took pains not to lose it again.

The twenty minutes trail-hunting that he indulged in, on this cold day, served to clarify his senses, and to make him more cautious; but it did not lessen his determination, and he grew impatient at the necessary delay.

"If he isn't *there*, I will still follow him," muttered the pursuer between his set teeth. "I will be like the wolf—I will track him all day, and all night, and stick to it, until I clear from the earth such a wretch as he!"

These were fierce words to come from one so young as Clarence; but it was no idle boasting that led him to pronounce them. It was not exasperation alone at the attempt that had been made against him, but a fear that he had gone to seek his brother, which lent such a venom to his pursuit.

He saw no motive in the act of the Indian beyond a natural malignancy—a certain devilish hatred of another race. It did not occur to the

boy that there might be some cause back of all this—that the wretch might have had a reason for wishing to put him away, other than the general hatred which he held against the Caucasian race.

Clarence's earnestness came near ruining him. He was so anxious to get forward that he came in sight of his man before he was prepared.

He was stooping over the carcass of the deer, and engaged in cutting a slice for his own nourishment. The lad hurriedly stepped back, so as to interpose a screen between him and his victim, and then hastily made his preparations to inflict the punishment the red-skin deserved.

He waited a moment, as the aim was not good, while the Indian held a stooping position. He knew himself too well to run any risk of missing. The distance was too short to give him a pretext for doing so.

All at once the red-skin, unconscious of his danger, straightened up. It so happened that he stood with his face toward the lad, looking down at the venison he held in his hand, and which he seemed to be trimming.

A better view could not be desired, and the boy carefully raised the hammer of his gun and drew the barrel up beside the tree. The next

minute the aim was certain, and he began slowly pressing the trigger.

But at this juncture he lowered his weapon again, and letting the hammer softly down, he turned about and stole away.

And as he did so, he repeated to himself the words:

“Vengeance is mine, and I will repay, saith the Lord.”

CHAPTER XVII

THE PANTHER

THERE can be no question that Sydney Lardon, the younger brother, was as much a-hungered as Clarence, and he set out with a determination as strong as his to secure something in the way of food before he returned.

As one went in the direction of the falls, and the other precisely opposite, it will be understood how it was that, at the end of an hour, they were too far apart to hear each other's rifle when fired.

Sydney found that, without any purpose on his part, he had wandered into a hilly and broken region, where his progress was so much obstructed that he finally paused, with the intention of turning about and retracing his steps.

He had reached the edge of a ravine, fully fifty feet in depth, and of indefinite extent right and left, so that there was very good reason for the halt.

"I don't see that there is any use of going on in this direction," he mused, as he stopped and looked over the dizzy precipice. "There is plenty of snow down there, and it must have drifted in for a long time; but I haven't seen the track of an animal even, and my chance for getting something to eat looks mighty slim."

He was a little reluctant to turn back, for it seemed to him that the broken, wilder country on the other side of the ravine was just the place to find the game for which he was searching. He was more likely to get within striking distance than in the open wood, where one's approach could be detected a considerable way off.

With these ideas, he began moving along the edge of the ravine, without turning back. It was slow locomotion, but he was hopeful of finding some place where he would be able to reach the opposite side, and extend his hunt in that direction.

"I don't want to go back to Clarence empty-handed," he said to himself. "It is hard enough work for either of us to get food, without throwing a chance away— Hello! Now that's good!"

This remark was caused by observing that the chasm was bridged by a tree which had been blown down by the wind, in such a manner that,

while its roots were on one side, its top lay on the other.

The lad lost no time in forcing his way to it, where he paused long enough to make sure it had strength to bear his weight.

The roots were imbedded so firmly on his side of the ravine that there was no possibility of their giving away, and from where he stood, the top seemed equally strong and firm. He would have preferred that it extended a little further over, but after climbing upon the roots, he believed there was no danger in trusting his weight to such a support.

As the trunk at the base was scarcely more than a foot in diameter, and it tapered off to less than half that before the first limb was reached near the other brink, and as twenty-odd feet were necessary to be walked over, it will be understood that the lad had essayed a task of considerable difficulty. It was one, in fact, which he would not have undertaken but for several good reasons.

The mass of snow that lay at the bottom of the ravine was so great that he knew he would suffer no harm in case he should lose his footing, and it would only require a little extra time and patience to make his way out again.

From where he stood he was certain he could

see tracks in the snow on the other side, and he felt such a gnawing hunger that this fact alone would have induced him to incur twice the danger he believed himself called upon to face.

As he stood at the base of the tree, he held nothing but his loaded rifle in hand, so that he resembled a young rope-walker, making ready to give an exhibition to an admiring multitude.

He remembered the danger of dizziness, if he looked directly down while over the ravine, and paused long enough to scan carefully the primitive bridge over which he expected to pass.

It occurred to him even then that this tree had been crossed by something before him. The bark was abraded and torn in places, evidently by the claws of some animal, and he ought to have reflected that it was done by the very kind of animal which it wasn't advisable for him to meet.

However, he had made up his mind, and without pausing to examine matters closely, he started across the chasm.

The second step came within a hair's breadth of precipitating him into the depth below, a piece of the bark slipping and dropping away under his tread. This startled the lad for a moment; but he soon resumed the ticklish business, and was in the very middle when a slight

rustling in the bushes ahead arrested his attention, and caused him to pause so suddenly that he came near losing his balance again.

The undergrowth was dense all around the spot where the head of the tree lay, and the rustling indicated that something was there. The lad had enough sense to understand the fool-hardiness of going on until he gained some knowledge of the nature of the beast that was so close at hand.

Accordingly he sank quietly down until he had one foot upon one side of the log and one upon the other, as if it were a horse that he had settled himself to ride. This made his position secure, and gave him all the chance he desired.

The point toward which he directed his attention was a few feet on the right of the clustering branches of the tree, and for several minutes it remained as undisturbed as the roots behind him.

"It can't be I was mistaken?" he said, to himself. "That's just the place for some wild creature to hide, and he couldn't want a nicer chance to nab me as I came over."

Scrutinizing the spot intently for a minute or two longer, he detected a slight disturbance, as if some animal were shifting its position; and then, while he was still wondering and looking,

he saw two round orbs glaring with a phosphorescent glitter from among the evergreens in front, as if they would illumine the way for him to come across the chasm and walk to his doom.

Sydney needed no telling to understand what this meant. The most ferocious animal of the American forest was crouching there within easy leap of the startled lad.

The youngster was so totally unprepared in mind for meeting a panther, at such close quarters, that he sat stupified, and had the agile brute made his leap at that moment, he would have found the choicest kind of dinner awaiting him, without the danger of receiving a scratch during the obtaining thereof; and this creature, belonging to the feline species, seems to possess every characteristic of the common cat, of which it may be considered an exaggerated edition, showing amazing agility and power, with a ferocity like that of a jungle tiger.

Seeing its prey approaching, it quietly crouched in concealment, and awaited the moment when it should come within reach, and so long as such an issue seemed certain, there was no danger of the panther—or "painter," as he is termed among the backwoodsmen—venturing out to secure his prize.

Couchant in this position, the savage animal probably had no suspicion that he was seen by his prey, and consequently the hesitation of the lad was not understood by the beast.

It needed but a short time for Sydney to comprehend the peril in which he was placed, and then he asked himself what was best for him to do. Those glaring eyeballs offered a tempting mark, and almost any hunter would have accepted the invitation and blazed away. The knowledge that that shot was certain to be the death of the one who fired it, or the one at which it was aimed, might well cause an older person to hesitate before taking the risk.

A short debate led our young hero to decide that the safer plan would be to retreat, and in case he was compelled to fight, to do it from a better position than the one which he then held. With his eye, therefore, fixed upon those threatening orbs, he made a careful hitch several inches backward, and then paused. A moment later he repeated the movement, when a low growl from among the undergrowth notified him that his action was displeasing to the sentinel on duty.

This retrograde motion was such that it engaged hands as well as feet, and the great danger to which the youth was now exposed was

that the panther would make the leap while thus employed, and before he could use his rifle to defend himself.

Sydney remained motionless for some time, both hands grasping his weapon, while he waited to see whether the creature meant to make an attack or not.

The panther, after a little angry growling settled to rest, and then the lad resumed his retreat, but had barely time to move six inches, when a growl warned him that it was useless to think of escaping by such means.

There seemed to be no resource left except to fire directly at the brain of the brute, and Sydney carefully drew his rifle for the purpose of taking aim; but the sagacious creature acted as if he understood the movement; his position was quietly shifted so that both eyes vanished from view on the instant, and the choice was left the lad of firing at random, or of waiting until his enemy showed himself.

The latter course was adopted, although without any election of his own; for while he was waiting and watching, and debating, the panther walked out from the undergrowth, and with the same guttural growl, began advancing toward the trunk with the evident purpose of walking out after his victim.

He was of unusual size, and the lad asked himself whether it was possible for one bullet to slay such a magnificent animal.

The boy maintained his nerve admirably, and sighting at the point directly between the eyes, pulled trigger.

To his dismay his gun missed fire, and he believed that it was all over, and there was no use of trying to escape. Still, as the panther maintained his position, without approaching any closer, the lad's courage revived, and he took a look at the tube of his gun, to find the cause of that useless click, when he expected the spiteful snap of the percussion, and the death-howl of the brute.

A glance showed that the cap had been displaced, and the tube only needed recovering to do its duty. With a trembling hand Sydney hurriedly drew out one of the indispensable articles, saw that it was right, and the next minute he was ready again.

Looking up, he saw that the panther, as if impatient with waiting, had already begun the approach, and was advancing along the trunk with a care and caution that indicated he was fearful the bridge was too weak to sustain his weight—and in this respect he showed a wis-

dom superior to that of the boy, who had ventured so unhesitatingly upon it.

The latter was making ready to perforate the brain of the brute, when, without the least warning, the trunk parted somewhere near its upper portion, and the next instant, tree, panther and boy went spinning downward to the bottom of the gorge.

Had the accident occurred in the summertime, lad and brute would have inevitably been crushed; but there was a drift of snow, fully ten feet in depth, into which they sank out of sight, but without either receiving the slightest harm.

At the moment of going, Sydney felt that his danger was more from the wild animal than from the fall; and when he found himself covered with snow, he lost no time in struggling out to daylight, and in brushing the feathery particles from his eyes. Making sure his gun was in condition to be fired, he stared around for his foe.

A terrific threshing and thumping, several paces off, was flinging the snow in every direction, and the back and head of the animal were seen, like some water-logged vessel laboring in the trough of the sea.

It required but a few efforts by such a mus-

cular creature to free himself of the incubus, and then, catching sight of the lad, he bounded toward him, but half-way, met a bullet that bored its path through his thick skull and brain, and stretched him lifeless, barely giving him time to make one tremendous bound upward, that carried him over the boy, and several feet beyond.

It was by far the best shot that Sydney Landon had ever made, and he scarcely understood what he had accomplished, until he saw the quivering limbs of the panther, and knew that nothing further was to be feared from him.

"That was rather well done!" he exclaimed, naturally delighted. "If old Pierre had seen it, he would have a better opinion of me than when I fired at the moose and missed him."

There remained the unpleasant task of climbing out of the ravine to the hard land above, and Sydney lost no time in setting about it.

As he turned to move off, and glanced at the brute lying near, he was so struck with its immense size that he resolved to carry away some trophy of the exploit, knowing that if he showed Pierre the claws of the panther, he would gain a much better idea of its might than from any description he could give.

He opened his pocket-knife, and cut from the

fore-paws the long curved, cat-like nails, which, when forced out of their sheaths, looked like the claws of a gigantic bird.

These he carefully placed in his pocket, and then, reloading his rifle where he stood, began the laborious task of working his way out of the ravine.

This proved more difficult than he had supposed. The snow was not only very deep, but in the gorge the crust was too weak to bear him, and since he broke through at every step, he made but slow progress.

Thus nearly an hour passed before he reached a point where the configuration of the rocks gave hope of scaling them. At last he succeeded, reaching the top in so exhausted a condition that he was compelled to sit down and rest before continuing his journey.

Sitting thus, awaiting the return of his strength, he was puzzled by hearing a whistle in the wood at no great distance.

At first he took it for a signal from Clarence, and was on the point of replying, when a certain dissimilarity, or peculiarity, aroused his suspicion, and led him to wait until he learned more before making known his whereabouts.

The signaling continued for several minutes, uttered at intervals, and evidently intended for

some one in the neighborhood; but if such were the case, the expected person was absent— for, so far as the lad could judge, there was no response whatever.

“It can’t be that is the Moose returned, and searching for me!” he said to himself, with a vague alarm. “It may be there are more of the Indians somewhere about, and they are calling to one another.”

At any rate, he decided that it was better to prosecute his search for game in some other direction, and he arose and began a stealthy retreat.

CHAPTER XVIII
AN ALARMING DANGER

SYDNEY Landon became uneasy when he discovered that, in the ardor of his hunt, he had gone beyond the sound of the falls, which, it will be remembered, the brothers had agreed should be the means of guiding them to the rendezvous.

Intense listening could not detect the faintest murmur by which to shape his course, and he might have found himself in a serious difficulty, had he not resorted to the simple artifice of retracing his steps. By making his way along the edge of the ravine to where the tree had been stretched across, his trail was found, and he started back over it.

While this was a certain means of extricating himself, it made the progress slow; for the crust of the snow was so hard and frozen that his feet had made a very slight abrasion, or disturbance, in passing over it, consequently the signs were indistinct; besides which, trail-hunt-

ing was a business at which the lad was only the rawest kind of an apprentice.

The plan, however, worked so well that, at the end of an hour, he found himself in a neighborhood where he distinctly caught the sound of the falls, and from which point, of course, it was unnecessary that he should cling to the trail; but before this he had made a discovery which was anything but reassuring. Here and there, where his footprints were a little plainer than usual, others were detected, so near them as to make it plain that some one had been following him.

Connecting this with the signals he had heard when near the ravine, there was enough to render any young man uneasy. He was inclined to think the Moose was somewhere in the neighborhood, and searching for him—although he recalled the Indian whom he and Clarence had seen cross the frozen creek, and knew that nothing was more likely than that there were others close at hand.

Whichever horn of the dilemma he took was not calculated to soothe him; for the question presented itself—Let it be whosoever it may, where was he now?

He had scrutinized the wood through which he was passing, often stopping, and listening,

while he looked right and left, and all around, fearing that some enemy was about to steal upon him.

Most of the forest through which he made his way was quite open, and he was able to keep a good look-out.

Nothing, however, rewarded this vigilance until he was well over the greater part of the journey, when he reached an open space, beyond which quite an elevation was visible; upon whose top he saw the smoke of a camp-fire.

Up the slope the trees were sparse and scattered, so that the broad sweep of snow looked like a vast sheet, scarcely broken by the dark pine, which was so plentiful on the summit.

Nothing of the blaze was to be discovered, but a dark, smoky spiral made its way up through the tops of the trees, gradually dissolving in the clear wintry air above.

By this time noon had come and gone, and Sydney was certain he had never felt such gnawing hunger in all his life.

But for the distance, he would have retraced his steps to the ravine, where the panther lay, and cooked and eaten a piece from his carcass. And it was, no doubt, the prompting of this feeling which led him to hope, more ardently than

was prudent, that a party of white men or friends were encamped upon the hill beyond.

It seemed to him probable that there were wood-choppers in the neighborhood—hardy lumbermen, who were felling trees, and preparing their rafts for the spring freshet, which was to sweep them, rolling, tumbling and plunging downward, to their destination, somewhere along the Atlantic coast.

If such was the case, the lad could count himself very fortunate, for then he could procure food, and feel some security against the Moose, and whatever other dangers the forest might contain.

Such was the "sunny view," but in all his wanderings, during the past few days, he had not caught the sound of a woodman's axe, and his hopes, in this respect, were built upon a slim foundation; but, even if wrong, he saw no reason why any disaster should follow a reconnaissance, and accordingly he went ahead.

He was prudent enough to approach the fire by a circuitous route, and after making the top of the hill, he advanced among the trees with the stealth of an Indian scout.

Listening carefully, he had been unable to hear anything that could reveal who were ahead of him.

The forest was silent, and even the sound of the waterfall had sunk to a low, humming murmur, like the moaning of the distant sea.

The lad was not a little alarmed by the breaking of the ice-crust under his feet. From some cause or other, it was much weaker on the crest of the hill than elsewhere, and at about every third step his feet went through.

It seemed that, whoever was around the camp-fire, must hear him, and he was ready, more than once, to advance boldly and take the risks.

Luckily, however, he did not permit himself to do this, and while yet at a safe distance, he gained a view of the camp-fire.

It was merely a mass of fagots, heaped against a large tree, while two Indians, dressed like the one that he and Clarence had seen cross the creek, were seated on a fallen trunk, smoking their pipes, and gazing abstractedly into the fire before them.

"It beats everything!" muttered the disappointed lad. "Clarence and I are only a short distance from home, and every man we meet is an enemy. After Pierre left us, all our neighbors are wild Indians or crazy men. I don't see any use in our trying to find any one to help

us. I have fooled away too much time already."

Hungry as was the boy, he was not ready to go forward and ask the hospitality of these two red-skins. He had heard Pierre tell of going two and three days without food, rather than imperil his chances for success in some hunt into which he had thrown his energies, and it seemed to him that he ought to be able to stand twenty-four hours in an emergency like the present.

"I wonder how Clarence has made out," he muttered, as he picked his way forward. "It is past noon, and if he hasn't had any better show than I have, I'm afraid we're in for a little more fasting than is pleasant."

After making his way off the ridge and down the slope, the sound of the waterfall grew louder, and as he had made such a devious trail, he had little fear of being dogged by the Moose, or any of the red-skins. It seemed to him that if he or his brother could secure a good dinner, the more prudent course was to start at once for home; and even if the meal was not to be gained, the safer plan was to get out of a neighborhood which offered so little in the way of help.

The air was still crisp and sharp, and as he carried his rifle, his fingers more than once be-

came numb, even when protected by mittens. His feet, too, troubled him, and he was weary from the unusual amount of walking and climbing he had done during the forenoon.

"If my brother hasn't got anything to eat," he said to himself, as he labored along, "why we will lie by and take a rest until dark, and then start home. I don't suppose there's much fun in a moonlight ramble on an empty stomach, but there are a great many worse things."

This was a sensible view of the matter, although it could not compensate for that insatiate gnawing that made itself sensible at every step. It being the dead of winter, he was shut off from all possibility of obtaining fruit or fish. The nearest he could come to it was to break off some of the branches of the birch and chew the bark, which, pleasant as it is at times, is not calculated to go far in the way of satisfying hunger.

Naturally enough the lad paused when he was in the immediate vicinity of the falls, and looked around with some hope of finding his brother. He did not succeed, but he did discover the more unwelcome sight of an Indian, who seemed to be returning from a hunt, as he bore a large piece of venison upon his shoulder, and was walking at a leisurely gait. At the moment

Sydney espied him he was crossing the creek in a diagonal direction, his course being such that he bade fair to come out very near the base of the falls, and directly opposite the point where the lad had concealed himself upon first seeing the dusky stranger. The latter moved in his deliberate fashion, until about two-thirds of the way across, when something on the ice caught his eye, and he paused and looked down. A moment's glance seemed to identify it, and he instantly moved across at a faster gait, and in a more direct line than he had been pursuing. "He has found something!" thought Sydney, who was watching his actions. "It must be the track of an animal. I will follow and see whether there is a chance for me to get any food."

It seemed indeed that there was greater prospect of success than in keeping up the hunt on his hook; for if the red man should come upon some prize in the shape of a deer or moose, he certainly would not be able to carry it all away with him, and thus the lad might obtain a good share after the original owner had disappeared.

It was this motive more than anything else that caused him to come forth from his concealment and hurry after the Indian.

By the time Sydney was upon the ice, the red man had vanished in the dense wood on the opposite side, taking very nearly the course which the lads themselves had followed upon leaving the ice a few hours before. Strange that it never occurred to our young friend that there might be something more serious in this business than he had supposed.

Sydney was a little surprised, when leaving the ice again and stepping upon the hard, incruusted snow, to discover that the trail of the Indian was almost parallel with the one made by himself and brother, early in the morning; and furthermore, search as he might he could not detect the slightest traces left by any wild animal, in passing over the same ground.

"Can it be," he asked, in an alarmed tone, "that that Indian has discovered our trail for the first time, and has started to follow it up? If he intends to keep on until he tracks me back to this point, it will be like circumnavigating the globe, but it may get Clarence into trouble."

This possibility added speed to his steps and he hurried on at the same reckless gait, until, upon reaching a more open portion of the wood, he descried the red man moving in his usual leisurely manner, but pursuing precisely

the same direction as the lad, so that there was no danger of his seeing the latter, unless he turned about and faced him.

The deliberate rate at which the enemy was walking served in a great degree to remove the painful suspicions that had hurried the boy, and he used more care himself.

"It must be he is after some wild animal," he added, carefully scrutinizing the red-skin, as he moved forward; "he does not seem to be looking down at the ground, as though he were watching for footprints on the snow. Suppose he had seen our tracks and knew them, he could not be sure they were made by us. There are other persons in the neighborhood, as he well knows, and he has no means of learning that they were made by strangers."

This was consoling in a certain sense, but it did not wholly relieve Sydney himself. He recalled the signaling which he had heard after scrambling out of the ravine, and which undoubtedly concerned him; and he remembered the two red-skins smoking at the camp-fire on top of the ridge—all of which convinced him that matters were not by any means in the shape he would like, and he determined to keep on after the Indian for a certain time, until

he could make sure whether he was hunting a human being or some of the brute creation.

As near as the youth could recall, they were following nearly the same route that had been followed by him when in company with his brother, and this seemed in no way to reassure him; for he recalled that Clarence had taken a different course, so that it seemed the Indian could not be pursuing him.

"It looks as if he were after a wild animal, or else is taking up the trail of both of us at the beginning. If that is what he is driving at, then there isn't much to fear, for if he sticks to mine, he will go over the ravine the same as I, and by the time he can clamber out and get back here, it will be a good many hours later. Before that our fate must be decided one way or the other."

Sydney found himself gaining so rapidly on the red-skin that he fell back a little, and kept the trees between them so as to hide the other from view for a greater portion of the time. He was afraid the savage would turn his head, in which case the pursuer would have to be very active in leaping behind a tree to prevent discovery.

When the woods became more dense, he hur-

ried forward, and all at once found himself within a hundred feet of his man.

At this juncture the actions of the Indian indicated that whatever he was seeking he believed to be in his immediate vicinity. He suddenly paused and stood as motionless as a statue, and Sydney, certain that he had done so for the purpose of taking a survey of his surroundings, whisked behind a tree, and cautiously peered ont.

He was not mistaken, for just then the red-skin, without changing his position, moved his head around as if on a pivot, staring behind in his earnest, searching manner, and sending a thrill through the lad, who believed he had been discovered.

But it was only an ordinary precautionary movement on the part of the savage, who the next moment stepped to one side, and took his position behind a tree, after the manner of a hunter who is prepared to bring down his game. As he did so, he was in full view of the wondering lad, who was unable to tell what it meant. He could see no game, and it appeared to him that from where he stood his view ought to be as extended as that of the one he was watching.

Suddenly he detected a movement in the un-

dergrowth, and the next moment his brother Clarence stepped forth, standing, gun in hand, and looking around, as if wondering at the continued absence of Sydney.

And the latter, with a shock which no pen can describe, realized that it was Clarence whom the Indian was hunting, and against whom he had already raised his rifle and was aiming.

CHAPTER XIX

AIMLESS WANDERINGS

FOR one instant, Sydney Landon stood as if petrified; and then, as he saw the Indian sighting at his brother, he roused himself and uttered a shout of warning, which, if it did not serve its purpose of causing the endangered lad to seek shelter on the instant, stayed the hand of the red-skin.

Almost simultaneous with the shout, Sydney raised his own rifle, and fearful of the consequences of a moment's delay, sighted the savage and fired. The lever slipped around the sheltering trunk like a flash; but quick as he was, the bullet was quicker, and the arm that had poised the deadly rifle was struck at the elbow and shattered.

With a howl of pain and rage, the half-stunned Indian staggered backward, flinging up one arm, and then, as if suddenly roused to his renewed peril, turned and ran like a terror-stricken deer, bounding from side to side after

the manner of a Digger savage, who seeks thereby to divert the aim of his foe.

Only a few seconds of such work were needed, when the wounded and affrighted red-skin vanished in the woods, and the brothers were left alone.

All this had taken place so quickly—the shout, the shot, the cry and the flight following one another with such electric rapidity, that Clarence Landon stood staring and wondering what it could all mean.

“What’s the matter, Syd?” he called, as the younger brother dashed toward him and caught his hand. “What does all this mean?”

“It means that if I hadn’t fired just as I did, you would have been done breathing by this time. Why didn’t you dodge your head when I shouted, and scoot for cover?”

“What made you yell? Were you hurt, or was I in danger of getting shot? Do you mean to say,” he continued, as light began breaking in upon him, “that that Indian was going to fire at me?”

A few minutes seemed to make the elder brother understand in what peril he had stood and what had taken place, and then he related in turn the adventure he had had with the other Indian, from whom he so narrowly escaped.

"I tell you, Syd, they're going for us," he exclaimed, half-earnestly and half-jocularly; for he had been in such distressing anxiety about his younger brother that he could not repress a certain exultation at his unexpected appearance. "I don't know how it is, but these red-skins must be down on boys. When we get back home, and tell father all that has taken place, I think they will be punished. They are in the State of Maine, where the law can reach them, and we haven't done anything to make them want to take our lives."

"I say, Clarence," said the other, snuffing the air, and turning his head in different directions, "it seems to me I smell something very much like meat cooking. I don't believe anybody has ever lived that was as hungry as I am."

"Just come with me," replied the elder, motioning down the ravine, "and you shall have all you can stuff under your waistcoat."

The lad kept his word. The rendezvous previously agreed upon was only a rod or two distant from where they stood, and here the dinner of Sydney had been ready for several hours.

"I thought I would wait and dine with you," he explained; "but you kept away so long, and I grew hungrier and hungrier so fast, that it

couldn't be done; but I made sure you should have plenty."

"Talk about roast turkey, puddings, pies, tarts, desserts, and all such stuff," said Sydney, as he crushed the juicy morsels between his teeth, "I never tasted anything half so delicious as that. There isn't any sauce like hunger, you know, and if a school-boy wants to enjoy his meals, the right way is to go off in the woods, and get lost for several days."

But as hunger became satisfied, the brothers began to consider more seriously than they had yet done the disturbing situation in which both stood.

The afternoon was half gone, and a long distance remained still to be traveled before reaching a point where they could feel any assurance of safety. They were not only in danger of running against the Great Moose, but there were Indians around them, who, despite their own situation in one of the sovereign States of the Union, did not hesitate to attempt their lives.

"Yes; and that chap that I hurt will be back here again, or else he will send some one," said Sydney. "You see he can make some excuse for firing at us now."

"Yes; but how is he going to fire with one

of his arms banged to pieces? I don't think there is any danger of his hunting us; but there are others not far away, and the best thing we can do is to change our quarters."

It will be understood that the boys did not wish to venture upon the ice again before dark, because there would then be less danger of detection. The broad sheet of frozen water was like a great highway, where they ran more chance of being discovered than when going through the woods or "across lots." Still, on account of what had taken place during the day, they could feel no safety in remaining where they were, and as night, at the most, was only a few hours away, they needed to go but a short distance to place themselves beyond reach.

After eating all the dinner needed, there remained a goodly-sized piece, which they carefully wrapped up and took with them. Getting one's dinner in the Maine forests, in the dead of winter, is not such an easy task for a couple of boys that they are apt to repeat the attempt.

"We will strike off in the woods in this direction," said Sydney, after carefully taking the points of the compass, as he pointed to the south. "Then, if we turn to the west, we won't have to go very far before we'll strike the

river, and then we shall save a good many miles, and get out of this dangerous place without going anywhere near the falls."

This certainly was a good plan, and the boys acted upon it without delay. To make less work they fastened their snow-shoes to their feet, and with rifles and blanket struck off toward the south, making only very moderate progress, which grew more tardy as the forest became denser and abounded with undergrowth.

The obstruction from this cause became so great that they were compelled frequently to turn aside, and so shift the direction they had set out to follow that the natural consequence followed, and they lost their reckoning entirely. A perceptible change in the weather contributed to this confusion; the sky becoming so overcast that it was impossible to tell the location of the sun, or to "calculate their latitude" with any certainty at all.

At such times, when one is sure he is following a certain direction, it may be set down as a rule that he is going in the opposite, and when he attempts to pursue a straight line, he never succeeds; unless he uses something beyond his own impressions to guide him.

It is a strange but well known fact, that a wanderer in the wilderness is led unconsciously

but continuously to follow a circle, so that in time he finds himself back at his starting point, at the very time he imagines himself far away. Why such is the case has puzzled many to explain, although there seems to be some reason in the theory that it is because we are either right or left handed, and have a tendency to advance faster with one leg than the other.

Be this as it may, Clarence and Sydney fell into the very error they wished to avoid. There was a wonderful unanimity when they came to compare notes. When one suggested that it was necessary to head off a "point or two," so as to keep the true course, the other found himself of the same opinion, and thus no time was lost in argument or dispute.

"Isn't it about time we struck the river?" asked Clarence, as it began to grow dark, and he paused a moment to rest.

Clarence thought it was just about time the stream was reached.

"We came south, then turned west, which is at right angles to the course of nearly all the rivers of Maine."

The elder brother was too well aware of this geographical fact to venture, at that time, to throw any doubt upon it.

"Then, isn't it strange that we don't see any river, Clarence?"

Clarence declared it was exceedingly strange. Something certainly was out of tune, and that something was neither one of the lads.

"Hark!" suddenly exclaimed the younger, when they had stood a minute listening and looking. "It seems to me I can hear the roar of something like the wind in the woods."

Both listened intently, and became satisfied there was no mistake about it.

A dull and distant undertone was heard, as the faint moaning of the ocean sometimes reaches the ear of the traveler in the desert, when he is far beyond sight of the cool blue waves and breakers.

"The sky looks strange," said the exhausted Clarence, as he so arranged his blanket between his snow-shoes that he could rest himself; "and it may be that some sort of a disturbance is about to come. Perhaps there is a tornado, or hurricane, or earthquake that is getting ready to set things humming. I don't know what we can do in such a case unless to lie still and take the chances."

They remained where they were until rested, during which time the low, solemn murmuring-

like sound neither increased nor diminished in distinctness or in volume.

This naturally led them to believe they were nearing some other falls—a not unreasonable supposition, when one recalls how the cataracts, lakes and rivers abound in this portion of the New England States.

“That shows we are nearing water,” said Clarence, with some gratification, when they had agreed upon this view of the case. “And when we reach it, we can keep on following it until we strike the Lower Kennebec, or the Atlantic, or the civilized regions somewhere.”

“This proves the wisdom of our course,” added Sydney, as he shoved his way over the snow crust. “If we had kept on without any real plan, we might have drifted about in the woods all winter, and never found our way out; but by fixing upon our course before we started, we have saved ourselves from that blunder, and have made a good many precious miles. I think, when we see Pierre again, we shall have to explain how we did it, for it may prove of help to him at some future time.”

The steadily-increasing roar proved that they were approaching the falls, and as they believed, were making good progress homeward.

The wintry night had fairly closed in upon the lads; but there was still a moon, which assisted them materially in making headway through the forest.

"I don't hear anything of wolves," said Clarence. "It must have been that they were so scared by that bear that they're afraid to bother us any more."

"I thought that bears are hibernating animals, as they call them," said Sydney, "and kept asleep all winter, instead of hunting around for food, like that terrible fellow we had such a time with. I meant to ask Pierre about it, but I was so frightened it slipped my mind. But I suppose that once in awhile they come out and rage around, like him, though they are not very plenty."

"Hello! here we are!" said Clarence, as they emerged from the woods and saw the frozen river lying before them; "and yonder are the falls. How beautiful they look in the moonlight!"

They stood for several minutes viewing with admiration the romantic cascade, glimmering and shimmering in the soft, fairy-like illumination, while the roar echoed and re-echoed along the arches of the forest with a profound

depth that made it grateful and pleasant to the ear.

"They are about the height of those we saw to-day," said Sydney, "and resemble them very much."

"The creek below reminds me of that other one," added Clarence, looking searchingly up and down stream; "and the shore seems to look like that one."

"Isn't the likeness wonderful?" added the younger brother.

"I don't know that it is," laughed the elder; "for could it be otherwise when they are the same falls themselves?"

Sydney saw that his comrade had spoken the truth.

After all the pains they had taken, and the tramping of the long, weary miles, they had come back to their starting point, and had their journey to begin over again, to say nothing of the danger into which they now entered once more.

It was dispiriting, after the first flush of excitement, and the boys felt unable to travel further until they had a good rest.

Clarence spread his blanket on the snow, and they sat down to eat the meat which they had brought with them.

All was silent except the murmur of the water-fall, and a feeling of loneliness came over them at the thought of the weary tramping they had undergone, and of the many long miles of tiresome travel that remained before them.

How they longed for their skates, with which to glide over the smooth, glassy ice! How preferable to the exhausting motion upon their snow-shoes; and if they were only steel-shod these precious moonlit hours would not be allowed to pass unimproved, but the rising of the morrow's sun would see them many leagues to the southward, and beyond all peril from Indians and the dreaded Moose of the Kennebec.

"I don't think there is any use of expecting Pierre," said Clarence, after they had finished their lunch, and were making ready to get under way again. "We have been carried over such a devious route, and have doubled on our track so often, that a bloodhound would have hard work to take our trail at that camp-fire, where he left us, and follow us to this point."

"No," assented Sydney; "and we cannot afford to lose any more time. We must manage to place a good many miles between us and these falls by to-morrow morning, or I'm afraid we shall not gain the chance of doing so."

"I think, if we have lost Pierre, we have also lost the Moose, or rather he has lost us, and we needn't have any more fear of him."

"I wish I could feel so, but I don't. It was far to the south of this that he discovered us, and we may run against him when we have no thought of it."

"However, we must hope for the best. Providence has had us in his keeping, and it is too soon to talk of despair—"

"Hello!" exclaimed Sydney, in an excited undertone. "Look at the falls, Clarence! What can that mean?"

CHAPTER XX

A FOOLHARDY ATTEMPT

LOOKING toward the waterfall, the sheet of water was all agleam in the moonlight, as it poured over the ledge, and there was something so enchanting and romantic in its appearance that the brothers, wearied, exhausted and anxious as they were, found their gaze constantly wandering thither, while they sat talking and conjecturing of the future.

And thus it was, while Clarence's eyes were turned in that direction, that he saw something which caused him to start in wonder and utter his exclamation.

Directly back of the sheet of water, appeared a point of light that looked like a star, as it breaks through the dark cloud in the sky.

It shone with such a steady, undimmed light, never flickering or withdrawing, that the boys sat for several minutes looking at it in silent amazement.

Had it vanished as it came, they might have

believed they were deceived—that it was some sudden freak of the moonlight playing upon the sparkling water; but it was too plain to be disposed of in that manner. As it was out of the question to consider it a star, it was inevitable that it was a point of fire—a torch or a lantern—controlled by some person.

The youngsters were still gazing in silent wonderment, when the mysterious light was gone—disappearing as abruptly as it had come.

“Isn’t that strange?” whispered Clarence. “I begin to think we are in the land of wonders, instead of the sober State of Maine!”

“I tell you, Syd, there are some doings here that ought to be looked into. That light there has told me one thing.”

“What is that?”

“There is a cavern or something in the rear of those falls, with people, too. There must be, or else how could that light come and go like that?”

“Those Indians are at the bottom of it all, and you know they are a queer set—and from the way they have acted to-day and to-night, they are a little too curious for us to understand.”

“Syd,” exclaimed the other, starting to his

feet, "I'm going in there to find out something about that light!"

"Better not," was the reply. "We have been in enough scrapes already, and we would better keep out of others while we can."

"I know it is rather risky, but I've a strong suspicion about something, and I think it will pay to look it up. I noticed a place, yesterday, when we were viewing the falls, where I saw anybody could get without trouble."

Sydney naturally protested against the proposed action of his brother, insisting that they had not a minute to spare, and if he took time to grope around in the rear of the falls after dark, he ran great risk, and he was sure they would get into trouble therefrom.

Clarence quieted his brother to a certain extent by assuring him that he knew precisely the ground where he meant to go, and that it would take but a short time to learn all he wished to know. He was quite certain that his suspicion was well-founded, in which case great advantage was likely to come to them.

But the younger brother was certainly the more sensible, and told him that if he went, he would not wait longer than half an hour, when he would make all haste homeward, and tell his parents that Clarence had committed suicide.

Clarence assured him that he was willing for him to do so, and with a laugh and light jest, struck off in the direction of the falls, which, it will be remembered, were close at hand.

He was in earnest when he promised to exercise unusual care, and instead of making the approach over the ice, he turned into the woods and moved carefully over the snow, where he was sure the trees would protect him from sight.

Sydney sat on the blanket, which had been left behind, and watched the figure of his brother until it disappeared in the forest, when he fixed his gaze upon the falls, wondering, and dreading the next act of the drama.

"He generally has a great deal more sense than I," he said to himself, "and I can't understand what has put such a mad scheme in his head. I should think he had had enough of this country, without wanting any more of it. If he gets his head cracked, he hasn't anybody but himself to blame, and I'm certain I shan't wait here all night for him."

The lad's soliloquies were abruptly ended by the reappearance of the star-like point of light which so excited his wonder in the first place. He fancied it was not in the same position in

which he had first seen it, but a little higher and more to the left.

'And this time, instead of remaining stationary, as at first, it had a wavy, uncertain motion, showing that it was held in the hand of some person, and was, therefore, more in the nature of a torch than anything else.

"I hope that that light will tell him all he wants to know," thought Sydney, "without his trying to crawl in behind there. It must be those Indians who are there, and they have shown already what they would like to do with us."

Just then the torch vanished from view, and Sydney strained his eyes in the hope of catching sight of his brother. But the moonlight itself was too faint, and the beautiful sheet of water was thrown into too deep shadow for him to catch the faintest glimpse of the youth, if indeed he were making the attempt to explore the cavern under the fall.

Sydney waited his full half hour upon the blanket, watching and listening, but hearing and seeing nothing further; and then, well aware that he had kept his promise, he still lingered.

Another half hour rolled away, and he was growing more impatient, until he vowed that at the end of ten minutes more he would start.

Ere that time passed, and while he was still peering in the direction of the falls, something came into his field of vision, and turning his head, he saw two of the Indians for whom they had been watching moving up the creek, in the direction of the falls.

They were walking side by side, on snowshoes, and were evidently returning from a hunt, as they seemed to be carrying something, and moved like men wearied with a long tramp.

Their unexpected appearance in this manner, coupled with the absence of Clarence, prompted the younger brother to leap to his feet and start after them. In doing so, he left his rifle lying on the blanket, intending to return in a few minutes.

He took care, in making this venture, to use the same caution as his brother. Indeed, he moved so slowly that the only view he gained was a "dissolving" one—the two red-skins disappearing in the shadow behind the falls at the moment he ventured far enough from the wood to gain a peep at them.

The result of this was the proof that there was some sort of cavity, or opening, in the rear of the falls, in which these men had their retreat; and connecting this fact with the events of the day, it was plain that, from some cause

or other, the red-skins were very jealous about their home being discovered.

There was nothing particularly strange in the fact of their making their quarters in such a place. 'A being who is so much indisposed to work and so much opposed to erecting a house as the American Indian, is always certain to take advantage of everything that nature has done for him. What more inviting residence could he ask than a cavern in the earth, protected against the drifting snow, piercing cold, the cutting wind and the sweep of the deluge? Especially when the entrance to the same was hidden in the curious manner we have described, it was easy to see how attractive it must be to the aboriginal mind.

Thus far the case was plain; but the question as to why these Indians guarded it so closely, against all comers was not so easily answered. The lives of both the lads had been attempted (for he believed the signaling in the ravine meant that) for no other reason than that there was a fear that they might carry the secret away with them.

These half-civilized Indians—the tramps of the border, such as Indian Bill and his comrades, who had maltreated the youths a few days before—were not liable to disturbance

from anybody in the world, and the sensitiveness of these red-skins seemed to say that there was something back of all this, of which, as yet, Sydney himself knew nothing.

And then he recalled the words of his brother—the words which really explained why it was he ventured upon his foolhardy attempt. He had told him he held a certain suspicion—a strong one, too—which, should it prove well founded, would be certain to be of great benefit to both.

This was a strange statement, and one beyond the reach of the youngster's wits. He could not imagine what Clarence meant by his hint. He certainly was in earnest when he made the assertion, and Sydney did not suspect there was the least attempt to deceive him. From his knowledge of his brother, too, he was sure that it would require some powerful motive to lead him into so grave a danger after such an experience as had been theirs during the past three days.

Suddenly Sydney sprang to his feet, with the conviction that he had been waiting in that one spot for all of two hours, and he was resolved not to linger another minute.

He caught up his blanket, but threw it down again.

"Maybe he'll want it more than I," he thought.

And carrying nothing but his rifle, he started over the ice, on another attempt to reach home.

He speedily found that it was no easy matter to get along upon the smooth surface with his broad, canoe-like shoes, which slid altogether too much for convenience; so he removed them from his feet, and fearful of leaving them, lest he should need them before he reached home, he gathered them under his arm, and with his heavy winter clothing and rifle, he had as much of a load as he wished to carry.

When he came to use his feet in the more natural way of walking, he found his ankles were considerably galled from the thongs in the snow-shoes, and that, if compelled to use them soon again, it could not but be painful.

Sydney would not have felt right had he really been deserting his brother, although the latter had acted so much against his wishes. He had promised to return at the end of the half hour. His failure to do so when four times that period had come and gone convinced the younger that he was prevented from keeping his pledge. In other words, he believed he had been made a prisoner by whomsoever the cañon contained, and that it was his duty to bring some

one to his rescue, inasmuch as he was unable to do anything himself.

The boy continued down the creek until he reached the point where it debouched into the larger stream. Here the "roadway" was much broader, and under the moonlight there was greater danger of being seen by any one in the vicinity. Sydney followed his usual practice of keeping close to one of the shaded banks, so that he might take refuge in the dark woods at a moment's warning.

Although feeling keenly the absence of skates, where they could be used to such purpose upon the ice—frozen since the fall of snow—still the youngster was conscious of a self-confidence in the possession of his gun.

"Let the wolves come now!" he muttered, "so they don't come too fast, and there won't be such running as there was the other night; and if any bear chooses to wake up and come out here, I can soon put him to sleep again."

The dark, silent woods on either hand; the moon high-up in the clear, cold sky; the consciousness that many long, long miles lay between him and home, and the knowledge, too, of his personal danger, caused the most depressing feeling of desolation and loneliness gradually to steal over the lad. Looking to the left, as he

moved forward, he could dimly discern the tall, sentinel-like trees, while back and beyond them all was blackness and darkness. It was from these depths that at any moment some ferocious wild animal, white man, or Indian, was liable to leap out upon him; and conjure as much as one may, there are few situations in which a boy can be placed where his courage would be more severely tested than this.

Sydney secured his snow-shoes so that his arms were left free, and he held his loaded rifle grasped in both hands, so that it could be raised and fired at the same instant. The eye and hearing were kept at the highest strain, while he carefully moved forward under the dark shadows along shore.

Hark!

Did he not hear something walking behind him? Was not that soft tip, tip, which sounded upon the ice, made by the feet of man or animal?

The youngster stood still, and looked back in the gloom. All was as still as at first, and naught reached his ear but the soft, mournful sighing of the night wind among the branches overhead.

At first sight he fancied he could see a large form moving to and fro, with an airy, wavy,

motion; but as he peered into the gloom, he became satisfied that it existed only in his imagination.

"All fancy!" he concluded, as he moved forward again; "but things begin to look pokeish. It's enough to scare any chap in our school, to be stealing through the woods on such a night as this."

And then what an entrancing picture came up of his loved home on the Kennebec! It was many miles yet to the southward; but there were his father, and mother, and little sisters, all sound asleep by this time, not dreaming of the great peril in which he and Clarence were placed. Ah, what enchantment distance lent to the view! The tears gathered in his eyes, and his despair almost caused him to sink down, unable to go on.

He was excessively wearied, beyond doubt, and had already walked about as far as he was able; but he still moved slowly forward, on the watch for some suitable place in which to pass the remainder of the night. Although he had started out with the idea of hunting help for his brother, yet the further he went the more uncomfortable he felt. It seemed out of the question for him to be of any use by this course, and every minute made him look upon himself as a

deserter, at the very time Clarence had most need of him.

At this trying juncture, when fatigue or doubt had brought his feet almost to a standstill, he was startled by observing the twinkle of a light through the wood on the left.

CHAPTER XXI

AN UNWELCOME HOST

SYDNEY LANDON was slowly moving over the ice, on this moonlight night, when he suddenly paused, as he caught a gleam among the trees on his left.

It was a pale, steady glow, and did not seem to be a great distance away.

Of course any number of conjectures rose in his mind as to what it meant; but he believed it came from the camp-fire of some party, and whether friend or foe remained to be seen.

Somehow or other, he held strong hope of finding friends here, and hesitating but a moment or two, started ashore and moved toward it.

He had taken only a step or two, when the yielding snow-crust reminded him that he needed the larger shoes, and he hastily donned them. When he resumed his walk, the pain from his chafed ankles almost forced a cry from him; but he persevered, and kept on with

all the caution of an aboriginal scout stealing up to an enemy's camp-fire.

The point to which he was advancing proved hardly a hundred yards from the bank of the river, and when he found himself in the immediate vicinity, he was uncertain what it meant. It still seemed to glow within the bushes or undergrowth, and he could neither hear nor see anything which showed that any human beings besides himself were in the vicinity.

Determined to know what it meant, he moved forward still further, and then made the discovery that he was standing within a few feet of a small cabin, and that the light which he saw was shining through an opening that represented a window.

"That's good!" he exclaimed, the instant he learned this fact. "Indians don't often live in cabins, and this must be the home of some wood-chopper, or settler. Here I will find rest and help."

By the aid of the rather weak light, he was able to locate the door, and after some further groping, he managed to get within reach.

As he applied his knuckles, he noted that it was composed of strong oaken planking—a fact which confirmed him more and more in his hopes.

But his knock, timid at first, and soon louder, brought no response, and after vainly pounding, until his knuckles were sore, he came to the conclusion that whoever lived there had stepped out.

"And is coming back pretty soon," he concluded, "or he wouldn't have left his light burning. If it wasn't so cold I would wait. Let me see whether the latch-string is out."

It was. He grasped the string, which, hanging outside, as is the custom of the border, signified that whoever chose to draw it and pass within was welcome.

With some trepidation, Sydney gave it a gentle pull, when the heavy puncheon door swung inward, and he stepped into a strange apartment.

The cabin in which the lad now found himself was of the simplest description. The room was hardly a dozen feet square, and the floor was of planking, placed close together, with the exception that at one end quite a space showed the earth, and upon this a fire of fagots was burning. At one side of the primitive hearth was a large pile of wood, and on the other a number of furs. The smoke made its escape through a hole in the roof directly overhead, and the ventilation of the apartment was assisted by a small,

square opening, which, as we have already said, answered the purpose of a window. Just beneath this was the rudest kind of stand, and stuck in an ordinary candlestick was a sperm candle, which, however, was not burning.

The light that had guided the youth to this spot was that which came from the fire on the hearth, and which seemed to make the interior of the humble building so visible that there was no need of other illumination.

There was no chair, no clothing, no cooking utensils, nor any other articles of furniture which the boy could see. Even the ceiling, of brush and bark, was devoid of the snow-shoes which any one would have counted upon finding, and Sydney stood a moment, doubtful whether he ought to advance or retreat.

But the thought of turning back again in the cold, wearied as he was, to tramp the night through, was enough to drive him to despair, and he pushed across the room, the door swinging shut behind him, and took a seat upon the soft furs near the fire, and removed his skeleton shoes.

Ah, never was lounge more luxurious to his wearied frame than were these hides from the back of the bear and wolf!

He was in that condition popularly known as

being "too tired to rest," and he recalled the advice of old Pierre—which was to the effect that when his legs were so wearied, he had only to sit or lie down with his heels elevated higher than his head. The lad now tried it, and found his condition as luxurious as heart could wish.

"Oh, if I could sit here for a month without stirring!" he murmured, in the very bliss of indolence; "and if this was only work, wouldn't I make a fortune?"

He was not sleepy, but only tired, and as he sat like a genuine American, with feet up, his mind was actively at work.

Anxious and alarmed about his brother, he was speculating as to who could be the proprietor of the house which he had invaded, and whether he was a friend or foe. It naturally seemed to him that there ought to be something in the room by which a clue to the identity of this person could be gained; but look and search as he might, there was nothing that indicated to a certainty the sex even of such an individual—although, of course, it was not to be supposed that it was feminine.

Sydney's eyes wandered hither and thither, and finally settled on the floor, where he observed a trap-door.

"That hides the secret," he said, feeling a

curiosity to lift the door and take a peep into what might be beneath.

But he knew the danger of doing so. The latch-string, hanging out, said that whoever chose to come was welcome, and the covered place in the floor said just as plainly that no one was to disturb that except the owner.

Sydney's own sense told him this much, and he contented himself with lying back in an easy position upon the furs, and giving his imagination free rein.

"If we live to get back to school, won't we have a big story to tell! The only trouble is I don't suppose half the boys will believe us. Let me see, the first scrape was when the wolves got after us, and my skate broke; then Clarence took me on his back, and kept up the chase. There's Jimmy Clark, and Joe Redfern, and Harry Slack, and Lew Swem—all of those chaps will declare I'm telling them too big a story to swallow. After we persuaded them into the idea that we are speaking the truth, I shall have to strike in on the big bear that came out on the ice and scared the wolves. They'll want to know what waked the bear up; and when I tell them I don't know, I can understand how they will remark '*ha! ha!*' But when we follow it up with the account of the moose, that jumped

down with one hoof on one side of me, and one on the other, and the wild man that put us on the sled, and pulled us for miles over the lake; of our rolling off and starting homeward; my tumbling down the ravine with a panther, and shooting the wild Indian just before he shot Clarence, and then my coming into this cabin; while Clarence himself will have a bigger account of what he saw under the falls—I guess we'll have to string out the story in small doses—for if we should write it out, they would think it was one of those that Baron Munchausen used to tell—”

The youngster paused in his reveries, for a slight noise on the outside told him that, whoever owned the cabin, was close at hand.

Sydney instantly sat upright, and looked toward the door, ready to salute and welcome him, as he came in.

He observed the latch rise, the heavy door swing upward, and the amazed and terrified lad saw the Great Moose of the Upper Kennebec stalk into the room!

For one minute Sydney was unable to speak. Strange that, in all his conjectures, it had never occurred to him that this might be one of the homes of the wild man! The discovery came upon him like a thunderbolt.

But if the boy was astonished, the man was not. He merely glanced at him, turned about, drew in the latch-string, and then advanced to the fire, seating himself near it, and directly opposite the lad, who seemed to be aroused by the act to a sense of propriety. Springing up, he moved away and said, in as courteous a tone as he could assume:

"This is your seat; do you take it, and let me have the floor."

The Moose waved him back, and reaching out, drew a large bear-skin from the bundle, and flung it under him. Then assuming a position of ease, he said, in a commanding voice:

"Sit down where you were; I don't want it. Sit down, I say, and tell me what kept you away so long!"

These words gave the boy the belief that the wild man thought the two boys had been off on a hunt, and that they intended soon to return to him. Could he not help along the deception, and thus disarm the strange being of whatever ill-will he might feel for the attempt on their part? It looked as if the plan could be carried out to perfection; and yet, to do so, necessitated falsifying on the part of the lad. He thought of this, and the instructions of his teachers and parents, and he determined not to

swerve a hair's-breadth from the truth, even though his life might be hanging in the balance. He had faith that if he did his duty, God would see him through.

"We found you were carrying us too far from home," he answered, with hardly a moment's hesitation, "and so my brother and I rolled off the sled, and started back."

"Where is the other?" asked the Moose, his black, glittering eyes roving about the walls and ceiling, as if he expected to find the lad crouching somewhere overhead, or in the corner.

"He is not here," replied Sydney, evasively.

"I see he isn't, and that's why I asked where he is?"

"He is six or eight miles up stream. He went off on a little hunt, and I got tired of waiting for him, so I started for home. I was going along, pretty well tuckered out, I can tell you, when I saw a light shining among the trees, and I came toward it."

"Did you think it was the yard of the Great Moose of the Upper Kennebec?"

"It never entered my head that it could be your home until a few moments ago when you opened the door and walked in."

"And you was astonished, wasn't you? And



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you wouldn't have come in if you knowed you was going to meet me here, would you now?"

Sydney assured him that he most certainly would have given the place a wide berth, no matter how tired he was, had he even suspected its ownership.

Upon hearing this, the Moose broke into a roaring laugh, throwing back his head and emitting a rattling, gurgling sound, that made the alarmed boy shudder.

"I knowed you'd be back again," added the strange being, when he secured the mastery of his emotions;—"I was sure of it; so when I found I was pulling an empty sled, I didn't feel any disappointment. I was just as certain that I would have you both again as if I had you each by the neck."

"What made you so sure?" Sydney ventured to ask, rather timidly.

"Because nothing has ever got away from the Great Moose of the Upper Kennebec, when he has once placed his eye on him. Sometimes I let him wander off, just as a cat does a mouse, but he never gets beyond my reach. Ha! ha! ha! And did you think you were clear of me? Did you really believe you were going to get to your home once more?"

The boy felt impelled to say that he had en-

tertaind rather strong hopes in that direction; and he mentally added that they were not quite so strong at present.

"Where is Pierre?" asked the Moose, in his abrupt manner.

"I cannot tell; he left us the other night, an hour or two before you came, and we haven't seen or heard of him since."

"Shall I tell you where he is, and why he went away?"

The boy answered that he would be glad to hear, for he had no idea himself of the cause.

"He knew I was about, and he got scared, and run off. Ha! ha! ha! Everybody runs when they think I'm coming. Pierre is a brave man, and a great hunter; but he knows if he gets in my way he's gone sure, and so when I'm coming he runs. Ha! ha! ha!"

The statement of the wild man seemed in accordance with circumstances; but for all that the youngster could not believe it. Pierre had some reason of his own for temporarily leaving the boys; but it was impossible for him absolutely to desert them. Sydney well knew that no probable danger could make him do such a base thing.

But it was hardly prudent to let the Moose

suspect his word was doubted, and the guest rather cleverly led the questioning on.

"Why is such a great hunter as Pierre afraid of you?"

"Because *everybody* is afraid of me. Am I not the Great Moose of the Upper Kennebec? Do I not own the State of Maine? Have I not jumped over the top of Mount Katahdin, and dived from one side of Moosehead Lake to the other? When I yell, the women in Quebec catch up their children, and run in the house and bar the doors. Bring all the great hunters in the world down here, and they would be afraid of me!"

This was such "steep" talk that Sydney would have been amused, had not the position of his brother and himself been too serious to permit any such emotion.

"There are some men up the creek, who have their home in a cavern under a waterfall," continued the Moose, with a baleful gleam of his eye, "and they are afraid of me. Some of them ain't as scared when I'm coming as they ought to be, and I'm going up there, in the morning, to teach them who I am. I think they'll come to their senses, after I have shot and killed three or four of them."

Here was a promised new turn to matters.

Sydney did not know whether he wanted the Moose to make a visit to the cavern just then or not. If he should do so, it was more than probable he would come across Clarence and take charge of him; and the question was whether he would then be in greater or less danger.

But it was not likely that this harrowing anxiety would be ended until the brothers were well out of their trouble, and he could only ask Heaven to remain by them.

The wild man continued talking in his aimless, incoherent manner for an hour longer, during which he made no reference to food, or hinted his ultimate purpose in securing possession of the boys.

Finally, he rose to his feet, and took his gun from the corner, where it had been standing, and said he was going off with the purpose of teaching the men under the waterfall that they must be more afraid of him.

He went to the trap-door, raised it up, and looked down, but did not take anything out. Then, as he was moving off, he paused, in his abrupt fashion, and commanded Sydney to give him his pledge that he would not run away, while he was gone.

It was hard to make such a promise; but the

lad could not refuse, and he gave it, with the full intention of keeping the parole in letter and spirit. He did not know, poor lad, how great the temptation to break it would be.

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CHAPTER XXII

UNDER THE WATERFALL

IT WILL be remembered that when Clarence Landon parted from his brother, he told him his motive was something more than idle curiosity. He was led by a suspicion which, if well-founded, would prove of great benefit to both, and it was, in truth, this reason alone which induced him to venture upon an attempt that was attended with great danger.

Clarence believed that, if detected, he would be killed; and yet, for all that, he never faltered nor wavered from the moment he started. He was resolved to do his utmost, let the consequences be what they may.

He kept in the shelter of the dense wood until he reached a point opposite the sheet of falling water, when he carefully removed his snow-shoes, and grasping nothing but his gun, stole forward until he stood within a rod of the place where he had seen the point of light.

Here he waited several minutes, using his

eyes in the meanwhile to the best of his ability, but without discovering anything to alarm him, and he again moved on.

Now came the tug of war. He had studied the structure of the falls when he had the daylight to assist him, and he remembered the steps by which it seemed any one could pass around to the "Cave of Winds," and yet, for all that, the place was strange to him, and at every step he was liable to fall.

The moonlight partially aided him for a few feet, and then all became dark and uncertain. In such circumstances, the best the boy could do was to stoop down and grope his way, using one of his hands and guiding himself solely by the sense of touch.

The rocks were icy and slippery, and his self-imposed task was one before which the stoutest heart might have been appalled.

He could distinguish the roar of the water somewhere beneath him, and a single slip was as likely to send him to death with as much quickness and certainty as could the bullet from a loaded rifle.

It was literally inch by inch, and so slowly and guardedly did he work his way that, at the end of his own appointed half-hour, he had not

progressed more than twenty feet back of the falls.

There was a damp coldness here which penetrated to his bones; the rocks were jagged, and inclined at such irregular angles that he began to fear he had wandered off the track.

Looking around, the darkness was like that of Egypt. Nothing relieved the impenetrable gloom except when he looked behind him.

There a pale, misty and unnatural light could be discerned, where the moonlight penetrated the sheet of water that poured over the rocky ledge, and it was by the aid of this that he could form some idea of the direction he was following.

Clarence was still stealing forward, with his snail-like movement, his right hand groping in front, like the trunk of an elephant stepping upon the uncertain bridge, when it reached the terminus of the rock or rocks along which he had been creeping.

He gave a gasp as his naked and benumbed hand abruptly slipped over into vacancy. Pausing a moment, he reached down, and then out and across as far as possible. It was the same in both cases—vacant darkness everywhere—seemingly a bottomless abyss, upon the edge of which he was crawling, and over

which he would have passed had he advanced six inches further.

Here, to all appearances, was an end to this curious reconnaissance; for when he brought his rifle around in front and extended it as far forward as he could reach, it still failed to touch anything solid or substantial. There was every reason, therefore, to believe that further advance was impossible.

"I'll have to give it up, after all," he muttered, after making these tests. "I've already been more than a half hour away from Sydney, and he will be worried half to death if I don't soon get back to him. I suppose I shall have about as much trouble in doing that as I had in reaching this place."

It proved worse than that; for as he began his retrograde movement, still feeling every inch of the way, the suspicion that he was passing over a different surface speedily became a certainty.

"I believe I am getting off the track," he thought, as he paused a moment to collect his senses. "This rock is more sloping than that over which I first came, and yet how am I to know whether I have turned to the right or left?"

He thought of the strange situation of the

blind girl during the destruction of Herculaneum and Pompeii, where the one who never possessed eyesight had by far the advantage of those who could see from their birth; for had he been eyeless, his sense of touch would have been so delicate that it would have revealed the slightest deviation in attempting to grope his way back over the route he had used in entering.

The only possible approach to a guide or clue was the dim, misty sheet of water whose roar filled the cavern with its dull sound; and looking at this, the youngster was unable to tell how much he was "out of the plumb."

The opening through which he had come was irregular, and a dozen feet in height and breadth, and looking backward through this from two standpoints separated by a couple of yards, the view of the falls was substantially the same in both cases.

However, this door revealed itself, and so long as it could be reached, it mattered little from what direction he came.

Recalling the full hour he had already passed in the cavern, and shivering with cold and a nameless dread, the lad continued backing toward it at a rate both imprudent and dangerous.

Before he knew it both feet and knees were shoved over the edge of the rock into another fathomless abyss, and he gasped with terror as he felt himself sliding downward. He thought he was gone beyond all hope, and dropping his gun in front, he desperately threw out both hands and clutched at the solid rock, in an instinctive effort to save himself.

He succeeded by a narrower chance even than when he clambered out of the air-hole in the Kennebec; but these few seconds, when he hung suspended over the "bottomless pit," were seconds of such dread that the longest life could not blot out their vivid remembrance.

It seemed to the lad as if he were freezing and burning at the same moment, and when at last he painfully drew himself up again on the flat surface of the rock, he lay on his face for several minutes panting and exhausted, unable so much as to stir a limb.

But youth and health are quick to rally, and in a short time he roused himself to his perilous position. He had hope of being able to find his way to the mouth of the cavern, from which he could easily make his exit; but he worked forward with exceeding caution, and within five minutes came upon the very danger he feared.

He had wandered so far from the right path

that he could discover no way of getting back again. Like the boy who wakes up in the night and finds himself "turned around," every effort that he made to reach the door only led him more hopelessly astray. While the faint picture of the falls, and the dim shape of the entrance showed the proper point for him to aim for, yet by some means or other he had managed to find a place from which he could discover no escape, except by penetrating further into the cavern, with no prospect of a safe return.

It takes a great deal to bring a boy down to hopeless despair, and when Clarence Landon, after turning and turning again, finally paused, with the conviction that he was in the situation of a mariner drifting in mid-ocean with no sail in sight, it cannot be said that he had given over all belief in his final escape from the Plutonian region.

But he was in desperate straits, and he felt it. If he chose to make known his situation, he had not voice enough to drown the roar of the falls, and it was all chance whether or not any one passed that way within twenty-four hours. And what could detection mean but death? He had already been twice fired upon, by some of those who made this their retreat, when he was in the open wood, and now in case he was dis-

covered trying to steal into their house, as it may be said, were they likely to be less lenient with him?

It finally came down to the simple chance of being able to wait where he was until daylight should come to his assistance. Could he do it? No!

It was certainly colder in the cavern than in the outer air. There was ice on the rock, and the penetrating chilliness was more trying than the clear, crisp atmosphere in the woods. He had no blanket with him, and in case he lay for several hours in this place, it was morally certain he would perish.

There seemed to be a remote possibility of fighting off the cold by jumping and swinging his arms; but, after all, such antics rarely save a man from freezing to death in the end.

Clarence was meditating upon the situation, and getting ready for another essay, when a peculiarity in the appearance of the falls caught his attention. It will be remembered that as he looked toward them, they had the appearance of a dim, misty veil, hanging motionless over the entrance to the cavern. The churning and foaming at the base were too low to be seen from where he stood.

It was while he was gazing at them that he

saw a dark figure gliding across the sheet of water and vanish on the other side. It was more like the fitting of a shadow, and was gone so quickly that he could form no conjecture as to its cause. A moment later, it was repeated precisely as before; but this time he was able to detect a semblance to the figure of a man moving in the same direction as the first. Sooner than before, a third form came to view, and this, instead of passing from sight, remained in the field of vision and continued to grow more distinct.

First the head and shoulders of an Indian appeared, then his body, and when his lower limbs were shown, it could be seen that he was slowly climbing the rocks. The meaning, therefore, of what the lad saw was that these three men were entering the cavern—their course being such, while doing so, that he saw them as they eclipsed the pale sheet of water beyond.

As soon as he comprehended this, he tried to learn how near they passed to him, for, could he do that, he would be hopeful of finding his way out.

But again the noise of the falls interfered, and the utmost straining of his ears was unable to detect the slightest sound of a footfall.

Each figure, as it reached a certain point, was

absorbed in the darkness, and as completely lost as if it had fallen down the abyss from which the lad himself had so narrowly escaped, and he could only guess that they had passed by within a few feet—which, so far as it helped him, might as well have been so many miles.

Still he sat wondering, and about-ready to despair, when a giant form stalked out in full view, coming up so suddenly between him and the sheet of falling water, that he uttered an exclamation, expecting it was about to step upon him.

Seen in relief against the misty light beyond, it appeared of gigantic size, and the motion of its arms and legs showed that it was striding forward with a confident step; but, as it began sinking from view the next moment, he understood that it was one of the Indians going out of the cavern.

It speedily vanished, and he watched, expecting others to follow; but no more were seen, and again he was left to conjure up some scheme for getting out of what he might safely conclude to be the most trying dilemma of his life.

“I guess I shall have to make a night of it,” he decided, rising to his feet, with a desperate effort to screw up his courage. “This isn’t as

pleasant a bed as the one at home, but I hope it is the last night I shall have to spend here."

He knew that it must necessarily be the last, but fighting hard against the chill of despair that was creeping over him, he swung his arms and danced until it seemed to him his limbs would be disjoined.

This did well for awhile, but he needed to sit only a few minutes to understand that the relief was but temporary, and that it was utterly impossible for him to sustain life many hours longer.

"I might as well tumble over the rocks as to stay here and freeze to death. If a boy has to die, the sooner it is over the better."

Once more he resorted to the blind, groping process, and, as the only thing he could do, began creeping further into the cavern.

He had gone but a short distance when he became sensible of a decrease in the coldness of the air. Twenty feet more, this was so marked as to surprise him.

"I think, if I should halt here, I could pass the night without any danger of freezing—Hello!"

Something brushed his foot, and he lay still, believing that some one was passing in or out.

He raised his head and looked back, and,

sure enough, he caught the outlines of one of the red-skins, making his way to the outer air.

This proved that, by a piece of good fortune, he had got into the right path, and the probability was that he could continue to progress until something definite was learned.

The contour of the rocks, against which he gazed, was different, and the lad might have felt encouraged to a high degree, had he not become convinced by this time that the proper course for him to pursue was to go backward instead of forward.

He was still moving slowly ahead, and about half ready to repeat his attempt toward retreating, when he was startled by the unexpected appearance of a light in front.

He straightened up and looked. For a second or two he could see nothing but a flickering reflection against the narrow, jagged walls of the cavern, as if it came from some invisible point; but he needed to watch only a few minutes longer when a bull's-eye lantern appeared. The swaying motion showed it was held in the hand of some person; and if further proof had been needed, it was in the shape of a pair of legs, plainly to be seen, as they walked beside it.

These same legs wore the garb of an Amer-

ican Indian, and were coming along the narrow rocky path, and directly toward the spot where the youngster had paused, believing that a discovery was inevitable!

CHAPTER XXIII

THE BULL'S-EYE

CLARENCE LANDON, crouching in the cavern, was certain that the approaching lantern was coming directly toward him, and that discovery must follow. He was equally satisfied that the Indian would do all he could to put him out of the way, the instant he learned of his presence in their retreat. But the youngster had passed through too much peril during the last few days to submit without resistance to such a fate. He therefore grasped his gun, prepared to fight if it should become necessary.

In the meantime the lantern advanced at a rate somewhat slower than at first, on account of the unevenness of the path; and by this time a portion of its light reached the spot where Clarence was trying to keep out of sight. He saw, as he looked around, that he was standing upon broad, irregular steps, protected on both sides by the walls of the cavern, so that if he

varied to the right or left, after advancing this far, no disastrous results could follow. It was only at the beginning that the visitor was in danger of breaking his neck.

The walls of the cavern were, perhaps, twenty feet apart, and stooping as low as possible, Clarence "scooted" to one side, where he backed up against the flinty mass with such force that he was sure he would leave the impression of a big boy when he should come away.

He had not a moment to spare, for the lantern and the leggings were close at hand. The light all about the lad told him that the Indian had only to look in that direction to see him.

But the red-skin did not look, as good fortune would have it. He was too intent upon something further ahead, and had too little suspicion of a strange visitor, to be staring to the right or left. Besides which, a man advancing over such a treacherous path, even with the aid of a light, needed to watch where his feet were going; and thus it was that the moose-tracker found himself crouching against the dark wall, with the Indian and lantern passing to the left.

It was necessary now to think and act quickly,

for the situation of the boy was as critical as it could well be.

"I think I had better scratch out," was his decision, as he stepped from the wall, "for it isn't likely I can get any one else to show the way."

But as he advanced, he caught the light of a fire on the right, and a sudden conviction came over him that, having penetrated to this distance, he would never gain so good a chance of learning the secret that had led him thus far. It needed but a second to settle the question, when he plunged further into the cavern, and steadily neared what was the "central point" of the mystery, his curiosity leading him forward at a speed which threatened discovery every instant.

A few minutes more and he had learned that for which he had been seeking so long. A short distance ahead, the cavern expanded into a broad, lofty-arched dome, and in the centre a large fire was burning, throwing a broad circle of light in every direction. Around this fire were seated fully a dozen men, lounging in all manner of listless attitudes—some smoking, one or two were asleep, and several were engaged in a game of cards. The scene was not exactly aboriginal in its character,; but when it is re-

membered that the Indians had lived long enough in contact with the whites to become "civilized," it will be admitted that their gambling occupation was perfectly natural.

As Clarence stood in the gloom, he noticed several other "points," which might well excite wonder and inquiry. In the first place, they were the owners of an immense amount of property, and a casual glance at the piles of luggage would have led one to suspect that some lady's Saratoga or Narragansett outfit had strayed into this place.

The boxes and chests were heaped upon one another, in almost countless numbers; and from some the contents had partly rolled out, revealing rolls of cloth, silks and satins, while smaller boxes gave grounds for the reasonable belief that some of them contained jewelry of a valuable character.

This was curious enough, to say the least, and might excite surprise upon the part of any one; but there was still more to be seen and explained.

A first glance at these men would have led any one to pronounce them Indians; but a second and more searching look would have raised a doubt on that point. Indeed several had white faces, and others seemed to possess coun-

tenances that had once been white, but were now exceedingly soiled; and it was at this juncture that Clarence recalled the peculiar appearance of the hair and neck of the supposed Indian when he stood over the carcass of the deer.

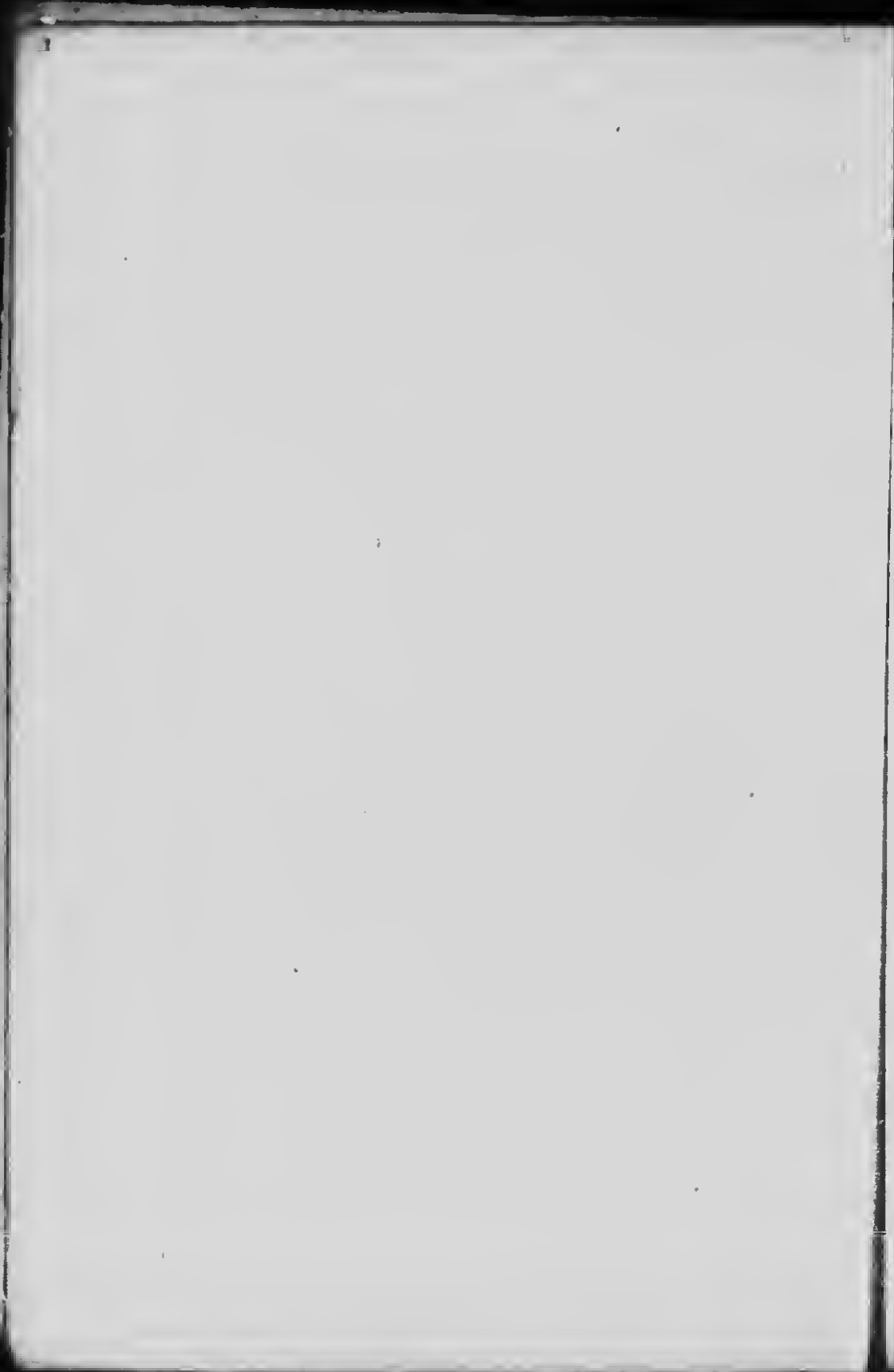
The lad was given some fifteen minutes in which to scrutinize this party, and by the end of that time he had reached the important conclusion that he had entered a den of rogues, who had gathered an extraordinary amount of plunder about them. Furthermore, while they appeared to the outside world as Indians, they were only white men disguised as such.

This conclusion explained a number of things which otherwise would not have been so readily understood. The appearance of these men, hunting through the upper Maine forests, painted and clothed as red-skins, and their broken accent when talking to strangers, were intended to make it appear that they belonged to the Penobscot, or some other tribe of Indians nearly extinct. Scarcely any one meeting them in the wilderness would have the least doubt upon this point.

But they were burglars and housebreakers, who had fixed upon this retreat as the one least likely to be disturbed by the "minions" of the



"He had entered a den of rogues."



law. With ordinary care it was hardly possible—or at least probable—that their hiding-place would be suspected.

Using the cavern under the falls as headquarters, they raided through the lower country, sometimes alone, or in couples, and quite frequently in parties of three or four.

These traveled pretty well to the southward, and no doubt had committed depredations in Portland, Bangor, Augusta and other widely-separated cities. In these places they appeared, so far as they were compelled to appear, in the guise of their own race and color, and then, making a rapid retreat northward, and changing themselves into noble red men, their general plan of operations will be understood.

Clarence Landon had heard of this band at intervals during a year past, and indeed his own home had been once plundered by burglars, who, beyond a doubt, belonged to the same party. He knew, furthermore, that the civil authorities in different portions of Maine had offered rewards for their detection which, in the aggregate, would amount to more than a thousand dollars; and it was the dim belief of the true state of the case that led him to make the dangerous attempt to enter the cavern and learn the truth for himself.

The result was the confirmation of his suspicions. Here was the retreat of the burglars, beyond all question, and here was a collection of plunder the value of which would doubtless enable every member of the gang soon to make a European tour, and waiting until the little affair blew over, return and settle down as prominent and influential members of the commonwealth.

For a time, the lad was so surprised by what he saw that he forgot his own exposed situation, and stood staring at the men, who were no more than a hundred feet from him, and every one of whom was desperate enough to slay him, without a compunction of conscience.

The attempts they had already made to shoot had been with a view of shutting off all possibility of his carrying away the slightest portion of their secret, and the men hunting through different sections of the wood were doubtless guided by the fear that some dangerous neighbors might drop down on them.

The next and natural question, was whether the strange being who called himself the Great Moose of the Upper Kennebec had anything to do with the illegal business.

The wits of Clarence had been sharpened during the last few hours, and it occurred to

him that such a thing was probable. He recalled the words of the first bogus Indian whom he met, and who used the Moose as a means of frightening him out of this neighborhood. This seemed to point in that direction, although the actions of the Moose himself did not favor it; for it will be remembered that he had brought the brothers from a distant point to this locality.

But Clarence could gain nothing by remaining where he was and speculating. He could use his wits as well outside as within the cavern, and recalling the personal peril in which he stood, he turned about, with the intention of working his way to some point of greater safety.

"I wonder what has become of that lantern?" he said to himself, as he carefully picked his way along the cavern. "When Sydney and I first saw it, it was hung up somewhere, and I hope it is there still."

The light to which he alluded had probably been employed as a signal, for it was hardly to be supposed that it was used to guide the lawbreakers in and out of their retreat.

The lad had already known them to enter and leave in the total darkness; but when he had reached the point where he could gain an in-

distinct view of the sheet of water, nothing was to be discovered of the light, and it looked very much as if he was to have the same futile struggle as before.

"If there is any possible way of getting out of this plagued place I'll find it!" he muttered, with compressed lips. "I've learned all I was after; and if I can manage to reach home again, I think there's a good chance of Syd and me making a thousand dollars, and that will be a good help to father and mother, who have had hard enough work to keep us in school."

As he advanced, there was the same decrease in temperature that made him shiver on entering, and the murmur of the falls steadily grew into a sullen, oppressive roar.

His hopes were not a little strengthened by the certainty that, thus far, he had kept in precisely the same path that the man with the lantern had followed.

He recognized the particular shape of the rocks over which he was walking as the same that he had seen by the rays of the artificial light, and it seemed to him impossible that he should go astray, with the "head-light" in view, and such a short distance intervening between him and it.

All would have been well, and doubtless he

would have found his way into the open air with little difficulty, but for the fact that, as he was going out, others were coming in.

He caught a faint shadowy glimpse of a figure, as it flitted across the veil of water, and he stopped, in doubt what was best to do.

If he remained where he was somebody might stumble over him, and if he attempted to retreat further into the cavern nothing was to be gained thereby.

The only prudent course seemed to be to withdraw to one side, and remain quiet until the danger was over. This the boy proceeded to do, and then, with a rapidly-throbbing heart, awaited the result.

There was good reason to hope that they would pass him, as he with the light had done, and such would have been the case, had not one of the men, who held a dark-lantern, suddenly flashed it at the moment when he was no more than two or three feet distant. He had probably stumbled, and took this means of making sure where he was.

The light was brilliant, and was so unexpected by the crouching lad that, as it flared in his face, he made a sudden start, and struck the stock of his rifle against the rock behind him.

The noise was slight, and being made so near the falls, it seemed impossible that it should have caught the ear of the "Indian" so close to him; but it undoubtedly helped the lantern in revealing his hiding-place, and before the poor fellow knew what was going on around him, three men were in front, and one of them holding aloft the bull's-eye, which so filled his countenance with light that he was dazed and bewildered.

"Ho! ho! what have we here?" exclaimed a fellow forgetful of his assumed character, and shouting loud enough to be heard above the din of the falls. "Here's a chick trying to steal into our nest!"

"Don't stand there blabbing, when there may be a dozen others!" added another, gruffly, as he stepped back further in the gloom, like a man afraid of treachery. "Let's find out how many there are."

"Are you alone? or have you some one with you?" demanded the man with the lantern, addressing the terrified Clarence.

"I'm alone," was the reply—"nobody came with me."

At this reply the other two laughed as if they thought their comrade had shown verdancy in proposing his question.

"Take him nearer camp, while we make a hunt and find out how many of these spies have stolen in on us. Hurry off with him, or he will give you the slip!"

The man with the lantern had one hand on the shoulder of Clarence, and he now gave him a wrench that nearly threw him upon his face, and commanded him to move along, under penalty of being shot.

The youth had no choice but to obey, and he walked forward over the rocky path along which he had so recently passed, wondering what was to be the end of this new trouble into which he had gotten himself.

He could feel little doubt of what these men would do with him provided there was no interference to prevent, and what human help could he expect when caught at such disadvantage?

Even if encountered in the wood, these "white Indians" need have little fear of doing their worst with him; for what earthly probability was there of detection?

He had already escaped death so narrowly that, if he should fail now, could even his dearest friends lay it to the fault of any besides himself? Sydney had entreated him not to

make the venture, and he had done it against the protests of his own common sense.

Suppose a search should reveal his body in the depth of some of those yawning chasms, who would dare to say he had not fallen when trying to steal into the cavern? If these outlaws should conclude to fling him there, who was to prove it?

Was there no way of escape other than by the entrance which he had used? Was there no means of retreat which these men held in reserve, to be used in the last emergency, when the officers of the law should force their way under the falls? Suppose there was, of what avail to him? How was he to discover it? and even if he should detect such an avenue, were a dozen desperate, conscienceless men likely to give him an opportunity to use it?

A score of similar questions seethed through the brain of the lad as he moved along the cavern, guided by the bull's-eye lantern of his captor, who kept close behind him, ready to strike him to the earth.

More than once the poor fellow felt a ringing, shrinking sensation, such as comes over a person when he expects a stunning blow, and he ventured to steal a glance at the man, who

seemed in his eyes ten-fold more hideous and terrible than the Great Moose himself.

But his captor said nothing; nor did he make any motion to harm him.

A few minutes later, Clarence was introduced to the set of men whom he dreaded more than any others upon earth.

CHAPTER XXIV

AMONG THE OUTLAWS

THE arrival of young Clarence Landon among the outlaws in the cavern naturally created excitement, his coming being totally unexpected. The men all sprang to their feet, and gathering around his captor, demanded what he meant by bringing the youth to their retreat—a proceeding which, of course, had never been known before.

There seemed to be no leader, and for a few minutes the clamor was such that it was impossible to understand more than a word or two of what was said.

Several drew their weapons and made threatening gestures toward their comrade, whom they judged to have committed the unpardonable breach of discipline; but he managed, after a time, to explain and then they leveled scowls at the boy.

For a time the latter was certain that each second was his last, and he could not under-

stand why it was he was spared. It was certainly through no mercy, but probably on account of the general suspicion that he was the "advance guard" of a force in the vicinity—that he had been sent forward to reconnoitre, and that by keeping him awhile, until they could question him, they would gain information of the highest value to all of them.

Among this forbidding group, Clarence recognized the miscreant who had fired at him, and who doubtless believed, up to this moment, that he had slain him hours before. He showed nervousness when he first caught sight of the lad, and after staring at him a moment, as if to make sure of his identity, he took hold of him, and turned him round and round, to examine his body by the light of the fire.

"Ain't you been shot anywhere?" he asked, when through with his scrutiny.

"Not that I know of, though somebody did fire a shot at me to-day which stunned me for a few minutes, and made me seem like a dead person."

This answer seemed to satisfy the ruffian, who released the lad and stepped back, as if he had no wish to say anything further.

By this time the turmoil had subsided and the two men who had been scouting around the

mouth of the cavern put in an appearance, declaring that no other strangers were inside or around the outside of their retreat.

As the excitement lulled, the men arranged themselves around the lad, and an examination began.

Some were seated, some standing, and a couple lolling on the earth, with their pipes in their mouths—the whole party assuming a listless attitude, now that they had no fear of immediate molestation from outsiders.

Clarence Landon stood in the centre, erect and courageous, but not defiant, his appearance and manner in contrast to those around him.

They took turns in asking questions, each propounding such as occurred to him.

The first inquiries as to his name, age, and errand in that section, were readily and truthfully answered, and then the questions began to cut closer.

“Where is Pierre, the hunter whom you started out with?”

“I have been hunting him ever since, but can't gain a sight of him. I think he must be a long distance away, or he would have found us a good while ago.”

“Where is the brother who came with you?”

“I left him down the creek, but he told me,

if I wasn't back in half an hour, he would leave—and that was hours ago."

After inquiring particularly as to the point where the lads had parted company, one of the men slipped out to hunt the other; so that Clarence was now given this additional distress of mind.

"Nobody sent you here, you say?" continued the examiners.

"No one; and if the Great Moose hadn't drawn us so far on his sled, we should have been a great way from this place. We've seen enough of this country to satisfy us, and are anxious to get home, for it will soon be time to return to school."

"Shouldn't wonder!" grimly remarked one of the men. "I guess that 'ere school can wait a few days for you. We want to get through with you first. What color do you take us to be, younker?"

"I thought you were Indians," replied the boy, looking around upon them, "until I saw some of you with your faces washed."

"Now, young man, we want nothing but the truth from you," scowled one of the most repulsive of the outlaws—"mind that, will you? For if I catch you trying to pull the wool over

my eyes, I'll empty this 'ere six-shooter into you!"

"I have been telling nothing but the truth," was the response of the captive, as he looked in the face of the brutal criminal. "No matter what you ask me, I am not afraid to speak the truth."

"Well, then, I want to know why you came into this place? But first—didn't anybody send you here?"

"I never spoke to but one person, and he was my brother. All that he said was to try to persuade me not to make the trial."

"Why *did* you come?"

"I saw several Indians pass under the falls, and there was a light shining, too, as if to invite me to come in, and I came to see what it all meant. I was trying to find my way out, when I ran against the man with the lantern, who brought me here with him. There is the whole story."

This was said with a readiness that could not fail to impress those around him.

Brutal, case-hardened to the last degree, with crime marked all over their faces, they could not refuse to recognize virtue wherever they came in contact with it.

There was something in the manly, daunt-

less bearing of the boy—who was not afraid to speak the truth, even if he knew it led to death—that compelled the momentary respect of these wretches, and there was a general impression that he was not deceiving them—a fact which they were glad to believe.

“Then there is no one besides you who knows the secret of this place?”

“None that I know of, unless it is Pierre or the wild man.”

“Did you ever hear either speak about us?”

The boy replied in the negative.

“Then all we have to do is to put an extinguisher on you, and there’ll be no danger of anybody bothering us.”

As the miscreant uttered this significant remark, a still more ominous look passed from face to face.

They had extracted all the information possible, and leaving the lad still standing alone, the men began talking among themselves. It was a most trying position, and at any other time he could hardly have borne it; but now his mind was intensely active in proportion as the imminence of his peril increased.

He was asking himself whether it were possible for him to make a dash and get away. The cavern seemed to extend indefinitely under the

bed of the river, and a sudden run might enable him to crawl into some fissure or opening; but, after all, no real advantage could result therefrom, and the attempt would be more likely to hasten than postpone his death.

By-and-by his attention was wholly taken up with the discussion among the outlaws, every word of which he was able to hear, and in which he could not fail to take the deepest interest, since it was a matter of life and death to him.

The proposals were almost as diverse as can be imagined. Some favored shooting the lad where he stood; others thought the more prudent course would be to fling him down one of the many chasms which abounded near the mouth of the cavern, in which case—as we have intimated in another place—it was hardly possible that any criminality could be proven against them.

There were not wanting those who showed their tastes to be purely Indian. They favored the idea of extracting some amusement from the captive who had already been condemned to death, and spoke of starting him through the cavern while they fired in the dark at him, and there was one man who advocated making him run the gauntlet, after the aboriginal fashion, while they peppered him with their revolvers.

Naturally the dispute ran high, and the more they talked and debated, the more confirmed did each become in his own views, until at one time it looked as if a free row were inevitable; but at this critical juncture a genius proposed that they should let the matter rest until morning, affirming that during their sleep each was sure to dream out some scheme that would be an improvement upon all that had been suggested. The proposition was oil poured upon the troubled waters. Almost instantly everything became serene.

This naturally was an immense relief to the youngster; for, boy-like, he considered every hour's delay as almost salvation itself. During the long watches of the night it seemed to him he would be sure to conjure up some way by which his position would be bettered. It had occurred to him, at first, that there might be one or two among the party with whom he could establish some sort of friendship, or whose sympathies possibly could be reached.

But a scrutiny of the visages, as revealed by the camp-fire, showed the folly of any such hope. Mercy among them was one of the unknown qualities.

This decision having been reached, the only question that remained was as to how the pris-

oner should be disposed of for the remainder of the night. This was a small matter. If twelve desperadoes were not able to keep a youngster fifteen years old, they would be ready to retire from the profession.

The first plan suggested was to bind him; but when this was proposed, some one asked why take the trouble when it was easy to arrange the mouth of the cavern so that it was literally out of the question for him to escape, even if left to himself for several days. The inquiry was followed by the withdrawal of two of the outlaws for the purpose of taking this additional safeguard, and then, it may be said, the arrangements were completed.

Up to this time the boy had remained standing, but now, as the indications were that he was to be left to himself for a couple of hours, he ventured to sit down upon the flinty floor, taking care to place himself as far from the outer ring of outlaws as he could without drawing attention to the act. He thought, however, that one of the men eyed him suspiciously, though he said and did nothing.

Thenceforth these characters acted as if he was not with them. They joked and recounted their exploits, laughing over some mishaps that had occurred to one or more of their number

while engaged in their law-breaking operations. Although a short time before they had been on the verge of coming to blows, yet the best nature now prevailed. They became so boyish in some of their demonstrations even, that they indulged in throwing missiles at one another. Several of these struck Clarence, and the frolic made his position so uncomfortable that he moved several times, having the shrewdness to use the pretext to increase still further the distance between him and the camp-fire.

The hours dragged slowly by, and the captive's heart sank more than once at the fear that a number of the men meant not to sleep at all. They appeared to have no wine or liquor and yet they were as hilarious as if half-intoxicated, and now and then broke into snatches of song, which sounded strangely when they echoed back and forth among the recesses of the romantic cavern.

The lad, as he half sat and half reclined upon the floor of his prison, was doing more thinking than he had ever done in so brief a space of time. He noted that the camp-fire burned freely, and the smoke ascended readily, which proved that the cave had some other outlet than that beneath the falls. Looking upward

the vapor lost itself in the gloom, and he could discover no opening through which it found its way into the outer world.

Here was a mystery which he was unable to explain; but he was confirmed in his belief that these men had some other door than that of which he had learned, and his hope was now based on the bare possibility, as it may be called, of getting away from them unobserved, in the dead of night, and hunting until he discovered this means of exit. It being the only hope which he could conjure up, he clung to it with the more persistency.

It was near midnight when the first signs of drowsiness were seen, and one of the criminals stowed himself in some out-of-the-way nook, with the intention of securing sleep. Several others did the same, and in the course of an hour there were only three men who showed any wakefulness. They sat somewhat apart from the others commencing in earnest, low tones, the meaning of which the lad was unable to understand, though he tried the utmost to catch a word or two.

Thinking he would be more likely to learn that which he was seeking, he let his eyes gradually droop and close in pretended sleep. Ordinarily this would have resulted in genuine

slumber, but to-night the youngster's brain was in a feverish condition, and he was never more awake than when the three men, muttering in low tones, believed him to be the most unconscious of all.

The *ruse* succeeded, and Clarence gathered, from the words spoken with more freedom, that the trio believed he had deceived them, that serious danger threatened, so much so that they meant to take their share of the plunder, and leave before the setting of the morrow's sun.

A half hour more was used in arranging their course of action, and then when the night was far advanced, these malcontents stretched out for sleep, soon leaving Clarence the only one around the camp-fire who had full command of his senses.

Still the same insurmountable difficulties were in his path. He might steal away unobserved to the mouth of the cavern, but he had already tried and failed; and since the two men had been there, and taken certain precautions against such an attempt, how could he expect to succeed?

And yet he was doomed to death in the morning, as certainly as if he had been legally tried

and convicted, and this fact gave his wits a preternatural sharpness.

"I see no way of finding the other path of escape," he murmured, after thinking it over for a long time, "and I will try this. If I fail, I cannot be worse off than I am now, and Heaven, I believe, will not desert me in my extremity."

He first raised his head on his elbow, and peered around on the strange-looking group by which he was surrounded. All seemed to be sunk in profound slumber, and he rose softly to his feet. Everything remained quiet, and even the far-off roar of the waterfall appeared to sink to a soft murmur, that was like silence itself.

He had not been deprived of his gun, and he took care to possess himself of that, as he stealthily withdrew from the circle of light thrown out by the camp-fire.

"I don't suppose any of them would stop me, if he were awake," he thought, moving off in the direction of the falls.

For some distance he was able to pick his course without trouble; but when fairly within the impenetrable gloom beyond, the difficulties increased, and at last he paused, entirely lost

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and astray, and without any idea of the right course to take.

It was while standing in this perplexing predicament that he made the startling discovery that he was not alone. Somebody brushed against him, and ere he could retreat, his arm was seized in an iron-like grip, and he was held immovably fast!

CHAPTER XXV
ALONE IN THE CABIN

WHEN Sydney Landon found himself once more alone in the cabin of the Great Moose of the Upper Kennebec, his anxiety of mind amounted to positive anguish. If he was only at liberty to rush out and make his way to the cavern, he might be of assistance to his brother, or at least he could hurry homeward and bring some one to avenge, if he could not prevent his death.

But he had given his pledge to the wild man not to attempt to escape during his absence, and no stress could justify a violation of his parole.

He had been left thus alone for the greater part of an hour, plunged in the deepest melancholy, when he was aroused by a rustling upon the snow-crust outside, followed by a scratching against the door.

"Can it be he has come back?" he whispered, rising to his feet, "or is it some stranger asking admittance?"

The latch-string was hanging outside, but the latch was not raised; and more curious than ever, he walked forward and drew the door inward.

As he did so, an animal bounded into the room, and in alarm the lad raised his gun, with which to defend himself.

But the next moment he saw, to his surprise and delight, that it was the dog belonging to Pierre, the old hunter.

"Why, Towser, where did you come from?" exclaimed Sydney, patting the back of the hound, which leaped up, with its fore-paws against him, wagging its tail and indulging in the most extravagant manifestations of joy. "I hardly thought you and I were to meet again, for it seemed as if you had forgotten me."

And then, when the first flush of excitement was over, it occurred to him that as the canine was there, his master was not likely to be far off.

"Can it be that Pierre has tracked us here? Where is he, Towser? Is he coming at this last hour to help us out of our trouble? Oh, I hope he is not too late! But how much better had we kept together from the first!"

Sure enough, this lament had hardly passed his lips when he heard another rustling upon

the snow-crust. The door swung inward, as before, and Pierre, the old hunter, shoved himself within, upon his snow-shoes.

"You are here, my lad!" he exclaimed.

"But I have had a wearisome tramp after you. I would rather follow a moose over into Canada than to have another such a hunt. Where is Clarence?"

By this time the nimble Frenchman had flung off his snow-shoes, and pushing them to one side, stood before the lad, hardly taller than he.

"Tell me, where is your brother?" he added, with something of his old impatience.

As briefly as possible, Sydney related the facts of their separation, in the earlier part of the evening, with the expressed intention by the other of exploring the cavern under the falls, to find out the truth or falsity of some suspicion he held.

Pierre listened with the greatest interest to the hurried narrative, and when it was finished, exclaimed, with considerable excitement, in his broken language:

"I know why ze leetle man goes zare for. Ze Indians zare am white Indians. Zey steal, and much money is to be paid to him that finds them."

The old man moved hastily about the room, as if to work off his agitation. It was curious to note how speedily he succeeded, and how soon he came back to himself, speaking English with as much freedom and correctness as a native.

Only a few words were necessary to acquaint Sydney with the cause that had led his brother to make the dangerous venture.

Pierre added that if the youth was caught, he would be put to death. He said he had known that these men were white, for a year past, and had suspected the business in which they were engaged; but he had never taken the trouble to track them, and had no knowledge until the present time that they made their retreat in this vicinity. He could easily have learned all about them had he chosen, but he held a natural antipathy to playing the spy upon any one of his own blood, even when there was good cause to suspect them; and then he had come in contact with several, and had received kind treatment at their hands, and he was not the one to show ingratitude.

When Sydney, in answer to a few hurried questions from Pierre, had given him a general idea of their wanderings since their separation by the camp-fire, a few nights before,

the old man as hastily explained where he had been, and what he had done.

His reason for leaving them at the time was to learn something about the Great Moose. The Frenchman had known of the existence of this wild man for many years, and he did hold him in superstitious dread, but not enough so to show any cowardice, or to leave his young friends in the lurch. He had crossed his trail once of twice while on the moose-hunt, and knowing something of his habits, had started off on a reconnoissance, with no intention of staying away for any length of time, and he had reason to believe that he returned within fifteen minutes after the wild man had run off with the boys.

Pierre started at once in pursuit, and aided by Towser, kept the trail to the river, along which they followed it until it was crossed and recrossed by the lads, after they had made their escape from the sled. At this time they had probably gone up the creek, which led them into such a series of adventures.

Finding the sagacity of the dog was baffled, Pierre called him off from the hunt, and took charge himself. He proceeded upon general principles, believing he was capable of tracing the whereabouts of the youngsters by a reason-

ing process of his own. But as is frequently the case, he slipped up completely, and passing below the mouth of the creek up which the boys had gone, he deprived the dog of the clue that might have guided them both to where the lads had gotten themselves in difficulty.

Thus it was that he lost many precious hours in scouting miles down the river, until, convinced of his mistake, he started northward again, in company with Towser. During all this time he had not seen the wild man, nor one of the Indians, nor, indeed, any living person.

He knew that the Moose had run away with the lads, and possibly had slain them; so the old hunter made his chase as close and hot as he could. He was moving northward along the creek, on their left, when a whine from Towser told that he had struck a trail, and a few minutes convinced Pierre that it was the one for which he was searching. He pressed forward with all haste, unable to keep up with the dog, and the result was, he was here with one of the boys, while the other was missing.

"And I have had so much to talk and think about," he added, with a smile, "that I don't know what hunter or wood-chopper owns this house."

"Haven't I told you," replied the boy, in some surprise, "that I am a prisoner here in the hands of the Great Moose, who went off a little while ago in search of Clarence?"

Upon hearing this, Pierre leaped up from the furs upon which he was sitting, and almost exploded with amazement.

"Zunder two, tree times! Is zat zo?"

Sydney explained more fully what is already known to the reader, by which time the volatile Frenchman had cooled down again.

"And this Moose has gone after him! Then, if he should get away from the Indians, the wild fellow will catch him, sure. That is a bad fix, and we must go and get him out of it. Come along, Sydney, and we'll take a hand in this little game!"

As he spoke, he strode in the direction of the door; but the youngster reminded him that he was upon his parole, and could not think of going away during the absence of the Moose, who had exacted the promise from him.

Pierre stared at the boy in wonder, for he was hardly prepared for such moral heroism as this. He saw the lad was in earnest, and it was useless to argue with him.

"Suppose I take you on my shoulders and run away with you? Then you will not be

breaking your word. So don't resist too hard."

But Sydney considered this more dishonorable than a direct violation of his pledge, and denounced it so strongly that the old hunter made no attempt to carry out his threat, but stood several minutes in a quandary.

"You're a queer stick," he said, with a faint sigh. "I suppose I shall have to leave you here, and after I've scared up the other one, I will have to fetch him back. Like enough, though, he has given the robbers his promise to stay up in the top of some tree until he freezes to death, and the only way to get him will be to cut down the tree or shoot him. But when I come back again—which I hope to do very soon—I want you to understand there won't be any more such fooling as this. I leave you here, because I might as well as not; but when you see me again, you can make up your mind there will be some business done."

And with these parting words, the old hunter passed out the door, followed by his dog.

"Both of those boys would die before they would break their word," he mused, as he shoved forward upon his snow-shoes, "and I suppose there is no use in arguing with that youngster that I have left behind. He will

stay there till the Moose comes back, and I shall have to go into the cabin and demand him. Of course the wild man will refuse, and then the fight will begin. He is as strong as two like me, but he isn't any quicker, and I can keep him from closing in on me. I shan't spend half the night in quarreling either. If a shot from my revolver is needed, it will be given."

Since both he and the Moose were aiming at the same point, there was some prospect of their meeting, and the hunter gave his dog a few words of warning, to prevent any error on his part. The sagacious animal no doubt took in the situation as well as his master, and they had hunted so long together, had been in mutual peril so often, and understood each other's ways so well, that any slip by either seemed out of the question.

When the creek—to which we have made so frequent reference—was reached, the brute kept his position slightly in advance, and both hugged the shore, where the dense shade was all the protection they needed.

Still nothing was seen or heard, and in a short time they stood at the base of the falls. There a pause was made, and as the hunter stooped down to remove his snow-shoes, he

placed his mouth close to the ear of his companion and said, in a sharp voice:

"Towser, take a look in behind the falls and let me know whether the way is clear or not."

The dog vanished like a shadow, and his master patiently awaited his return, knowing he would be gone but a few minutes. He returned even sooner than he expected, and frisked around the hunter in a way that any one would have supposed was expressive only of delight. But it meant far more, as Pierre well knew.

"And so there is nothing to keep us back? Well, am glad to hear you say so, and now, Towser, I want you to wait here till I come again. If anybody appears, slip in and let me know;" and with this parting command, the hunter moved cautiously forward in the direction of the falls.

CHAPTER XXVI

A FRIEND IN NEED

CLARENCE LANDON did not lose his presence of mind when the iron-like grip was fastened upon his arm. He made a desperate wrench to free himself, and failing, attempted to club his rifle and strike, when that was also seized, and a familiar voice called out:

“Not so fast, my youngster—not so fast! Why should you try to hurt me?”

“Oh, is that you, Pierre?” gasped the lad; “or am I dreaming?”

“It is I, come at last, when you had made up your mind you were never to see me again. I had a hard time getting in the cavern; for they had turned off the drawbridge—that is, they had moved away a broad, flat stone which spanned a chasm under the falls—and if I hadn't been in this place years ago, and knew all about it, and was feeling for it, I would have fallen through to China. As it was, it took a pretty good jump to fetch it; and if you had

tried to get out there alone you would have gone down the same place. But come, let us vamose; for if I ain't mistaken, you're in a bad scrape. Let me take your hand, and I guess I'll be able to steer clear of that bottomless pit."

The appearance of the old hunter was so unexpected that, even after he had rattled off the above, the dumfounded lad was in doubt whether he was in his sober senses or not; but the aching of his arm told him very plainly that he was not dreaming.

"Have you seen Sydney?" he asked, as they picked their way in the darkness.

"Yes. He's a mile or two down the river, waiting for us. I hope we shall be there in less time than he took to find the shelter."

"I declare if it doesn't seem too good to be true," said the boy. "Ten minutes ago I didn't think my life was worth a pin, and now I am safe."

"Not exactly," replied Pierre. "We have some hard work before us. That confounded Moose is still looking for you, and I'm afraid we shan't get back again till after we have had a row with him."

"You are not afraid of him?"

"No, I am not afraid, though I don't fancy

him; but if it is necessary, I won't hesitate to put a bullet through his brain!" replied the hunter, determinedly.

"Here we are," called out Pierre, who was now compelled to shout, that his voice might be heard above the din of the falls. "We stand upon the edge of the dangerous place that I told you about, and the only way I could get across was to leap."

"How broad is it?"

"Broader than you can jump."

"What shall we do, then?" asked the perplexed lad.

"I will show you. Lay down your gun."

Clarence stooped and obeyed him, wondering what he meant.

"Now I am going to throw you over!"

And with this declaration, he caught the lad beneath the arms, and began swaying him back and forth with the oscillating movement of a pendulum.

"When you land, try to keep exactly where you strike," he added. "All ready?"

The words were yet in his mouth when he hurled him outward. There was a dizzying sensation as he passed through the air, and the next moment the boy struck upon his hands and knees. He made himself as rigid as pos-

sible, and thus escaped sliding into the danger beyond.

"Are you all right?" called out the hunter, his voice sounding faint and distant.

"All right; come ahead," was the cheery reply.

The next instant the old man came down, almost astride of him. A moment only was needed to right themselves, when they started forward again.

They were now so close to the falls that they ceased attempting to speak to each other. The hunter held both rifles under one arm, while he grasped the lad with the other hand. They were upon ticklish ground, and the greatest care was needed in stepping forward. It was only the intimate knowledge of Pierre that enabled him to make any progress at all.

So difficult, indeed, was the path that when directly under the falls, where it seemed scarcely twenty feet separated them from the outside, they spent a full half hour in groping along inch by inch.

The old trapper was one of those men who, naturally excitable, could never be hurried out of his propriety by any one, or in any circumstances.

At the very moment the two were about to

emerge from the entrance there came a sudden rush, and in the dim light, Clarence recognized Towser, the dog.

Some communication passed between him and his master, and the latter hesitated for several minutes.

The roar in this place was too deafening for him to speak, but finally they moved forward, the hunter taking the lead.

A half-dozen steps more, and both stood upon the outside, entirely free from the outlaws' retreat.

Pierre walked on the edge of the ice until he reached the point where his snow-shoes lay, and where his dog had been stationed. Here conversation was easy, and as he refastened his shoes on his feet he remarked, in his indifferent way:

"I don't exactly understand how it is, but while we were in there Towser has seen some one pass by. He didn't come under the falls, or we should have known it."

"Maybe there is another course by which they can get into the cavern!" suggested Clarence.

"I believe you are right. Queer I didn't think of it, but it may have been the Moose,

who is scouting around for some lost school-boy."

It will be remembered that Clarence had left his snow-shoes with Sydney, at the time they separated, and they were found but a short distance from where the man and boy halted.

While they were making ready to move on they exchanged experiences, in a hurried manner, and gained a tolerable idea of each other's wanderings since they separated at the camp-fire, several nights before.

"Don't let your haste make you careless," warned Pierre, when both stood on their feet fully equipped. "Hello—see there!"

Through the sheet of the falls, several lights could be seen dancing and moving about, with a vigor that showed some folks were in a high state of excitement.

"They have found that you have slipped out, and are after you," added the hunter.

"Let us hurry or they will catch us!" said the frightened lad.

"We've got enough leeway now to take care of ourselves. We will move up the bank under the trees and watch them."

They had hardly time to make this movement when four men emerged from behind the falls,

and came out upon the ice, where they stood a moment, as if in consultation.

"Let them find us if they can!" chuckled Pierre.

"But they have a dog," said Clarence, as one of those animals made his appearance.

"So have we, and Towser will attend to him; but that puts a different face upon matters, and I guess we had better move ahead."

Wheeling about, they plunged into the dense wood, through which they traveled with no inconsiderable speed—the hunter, as a matter of course, placing himself at the head, while Towser frisked along at the right, after the manner of one who had the two under his charge.

They had gone but a short distance when a baying sounded behind them, and Pierre paused and listened.

"Did you hear that, my boy? That is the hound, that has got on our track, and he will be here in a few minutes. Towser, can you abate that nuisance?"

Towser replied, in the best language at his command, that he had enough confidence in his ability to make the attempt, and he was given little time for preparation.

"Here he comes!" added Pierre, as the rat-

thing and crashing of the undergrowth told of the approach of some one.

There was a rush, a sharp yelp, and a huge body shot like a ball into view, and sped directly toward the lad, who, in alarm, raised his rifle, for the purpose of shooting him, when Towser made one tremendous leap and caught the hound by the throat, the two rolling over and over in a desperate encounter.

"Don't shoot," called out Pierre, "or you may hit my pup!"

"But what a savage dog he is! He will tear Towser to pieces!"

"He's welcome to do it, if he can. Come on;" said the hunter, in his careless, matter-of-fact manner. "We may as well be improving our time."

"But suppose those men come up before the fight is over?" suggested Clarence; "they will kill Towser."

"If he doesn't wipe out that pup before that I hope they *will* shoot him."

"You are the strangest man I ever met!" returned the boy, as the two walked away in the forest, leaving the two canines rolling over on the snow, and going for each other with the fury of tigers.

They could hear the sounds of the fight for

several minutes, and then everything became quiet.

The battle was ended, one way or other, and Clarence was far more anxious than the owner of Towser to know the result.

The confidence of Pierre was not misplaced; for a few minutes after, his canine was seen trotting at their side as demurely as a lamb.

Had it been daylight, a sparkle would have been seen in the eye of the old Canadian when he remarked:

"I have a suspicion that when those men come to look for their pup, they will find him around in spots. Go ahead, Towser, and keep your eyes and ears open!"

"Pierre, isn't the night nearly gone?" asked Clarence, when they had passed some distance further. "It seems to me that it ought to have ended long ago."

"Daylight will be here inside of an hour," was the reply.

"Don't you think these men will then make the hunt pretty hot for us?"

"Shouldn't wonder if they tried to do so. If they can overhaul us, I hope they will. I ain't thinking about them, but am looking ahead, where the danger lies. I've an idea that the Moose, somehow or other, has got an inkling

that I've been about, and has gone back to his cabin after Sydney."

"What will he do if he has done so?"

"That's hard to tell. He's an ugly fellow, any way, and if any one interferes with him, he's a devil. If he has learned of my being here, he may feel savage toward the youngster; but if he hasn't, there's a chance of finding everything all right."

The night was further spent even than Pierre imagined, and they were still moving through the wood, when a gradual lightening showed that day was breaking. It steadily increased, and by the time they reached the immediate vicinity of the cabin, the night was fairly past.

The two said not a word until they halted side by side among the trees, and in full view of the little building in which Sydney had been left a number of hours before. Pointing thither, Pierre remarked:

"There's where I left the little fellow, and where I hope he is yet. I want you to stay here till I come back. You can take charge of my rifle, as it ain't much use to a man in a close scrimmage.

And without adding any more, the hunter moved off toward the cabin.

Clarence took his station behind a tree, and

watched his friend with an interest which it would be hard to imagine. He saw the little old man shove along in that silent yet seemingly careless fashion, aiming straight at the door of the building—never changing, or increasing his speed, until he stood directly before the entrance, when he reached up his hand, drew the latch-string, and passed in.

During the very few minutes that Pierre was inside the structure, the lad suffered the keenest distress, and his condition was not much improved when the old man came to the door, and holding it open, looked out in a bewildered way, as if he had come across something which he did not understand.

Clarence stepped out from behind the tree, and the hunter, without speaking, beckoned him to join him.

“He has found the dead body of Syd!” was the awful fear of the youth, as he hurried forward to learn the truth. “What’s the matter, Pierre?”

“There’s something here which I don’t understand,” was the answer. “There isn’t any one inside of the cabin!”

“What is there so strange about that?” asked the frightened brother. “You left Syd alone, and he has taken it into his head to leave, and

may at this moment be many miles on his way home."

But Pierre shook his head. He knew better.

"He would not come with me, and he has not gone unless some one has taken him. Clarence, I don't like the look of things."

"Don't keep the truth from me. If you have any belief, tell me what it is."

The trapper made a sign to his dog, and gave him some order by means of a gesture.

Towser began snuffing about the cabin, running round and round, like an animal chasing his shadow. Then he abruptly paused beside his master, and emitted a low whine.

"I thought so," he said to the lad. "The Moose came back while we were in the cavern, and has gone off with Syd!"

"What is the meaning of that?"

"He has found out that I've been here, and has been afraid I would get the boy away from him; so to prevent that, he has taken him off."

"What will he do with him?"

"Nothing, I hope," was the reply; "that is, if we can overtake him in time to prevent. Towser has struck the trail, and it leads toward the river. I think he has taken to the ice again, and we'll change our snow-shoes for skates."

"Where are they?" asked the amazed Clarence.

"I will show you. Come with me inside the house."

Advancing to the trap-door, which has been mentioned in another place, he raised it and pointed downward.

"There's everything a man in these parts is likely to need."

A glance showed that the wild man had indulged in the freak of delving a cellar for his house, and in it was stowed about all the worldly possessions he could claim. It was too dark to see one half of the interior, but Clarence observed snow-shoes, skates, sleds, knives, bows and arrows, and indeed a perfect curiosity-shop in its way.

Pierre reached down, and after some difficulty selected a pair which the boy could use, although they were considerably too large for him. Then he picked out a couple for himself, and handed a third pair to the youngster.

"What are these for?" asked the latter.

"Sydney may need them."

The lad strung them over his shoulder, hoping, as he never hoped before, that the time was at hand when his brother would require them to help speed him homeward. Nothing further

was necessary in the way of preparation, and they came out of the cabin and started at once upon the pursuit.

Towser took the lead now, keeping just in front of the two, with his nose down, after the manner of a canine trailing his prey. They were "moose-tracking" again, in a different manner from when they first started out.

The trail, as they supposed, led toward the river, where the indications showed that both the Moose and his charge had taken to skates instead of calling the sled in use, as had been done upon a somewhat similar occasion a few days before.

"I will take the extra pair," said Clarence, after the situation had been explained to him; "for it is no labor to carry them."

In a few minutes their snow-shoes were cast aside, and away they sped up the river.

CHAPTER XXVII

THE RESCUE AND ENCOUNTER

ONCE more Clarence Landon was gliding over the frozen surface of the Upper Kennebec, with the free, easy, swinging motion of the skillful skater.

It was a sharp, crisp morning, and no snow having fallen since the freezing of the river, the ice had the same crystal-like, glassy smoothness that had tempted him and his brother, a few nights before, to venture so far from home that they were led into the difficulties and dangers which we have attempted to describe.

A certain exhilaration of spirits accompanied this "poetry of motion," and but for the anxiety about the fate of Sydney, the young skater would have found the excursion a delightful one in every respect.

He carried his gun, and Pierre, the old hunter, was with him, so that all personal fear was absent.

Towser, the sagacious and faithful dog, was

a short distance in the rear, but managed to hold his ground, although his friends were going with considerable speed.

The fine white lines seen here and there upon the ice enabled the hunter to judge of the rate of speed with which the Moose and the lad were traveling, and he saw that it was less than his own.

This sort of trailing had its drawbacks as well as its advantages. The smooth surface, clear of all breaks and imperfections, showed the tracks of the skaters with as much certainty as if made in the yielding mud, but there was no telling from their appearance the time when they were made, and Pierre could only guess, from his previous knowledge, that the wild man has passed that way some two or three hours before.

The fear of the hunter was that the Moose meant to carry the lad to some remote point and there put him to death; hence he used greater speed, with the view of preventing such a crime.

He hardly expected to overtake the wild man while gliding upon the ice; but when he reached a bend in the river, he kept closer to shore, and "put on the brakes," until he could make sure

that the course was clear, when he shot forward with the same speed as at first.

Clarence could not free himself of the dread that they themselves were in danger of pursuit by and collision with the criminals who made their retreat beneath the falls, and while Pierre gave his entire attention to the river in front, he kept glancing backward beyond the dog, which seemed to act and feel as did his master.

"Hello! there they go!" suddenly exclaimed the old Frenchman.

The startled lad checked his speed and looked ahead, expecting to see the parties they were following; but the old hunter pointed down to the trail, which had caused his exclamation.

"There! do you see where it leads?" he asked, in a whisper. "We are close upon them. Towser, take a look in front, and be quick about it."

The marks of the steel runners showed that the skaters had left the Kennebec, and turning to the right, had gone up a small creek which wound through the forest, as did the stream over which the brothers had passed on their way to the falls—their view from where they had halted extending hardly more than a hundred yards.

Towser, upon receiving the command from his master, started up the stream like a shot, vanishing almost instantly from sight, while his friends impatiently awaited his return.

"He won't be gone long," said Pierre; "and he'll have something to tell us when he comes back."

In less than ten minutes Towser returned, and then followed the interchange of thought between him and his master, the meaning of which was beyond the ken of the anxious boy.

"It won't do to wait here," exclaimed old Pierre, starting off, like one who had received startling news.

"What's the matter?" asked Clarence, hastening to place himself beside him.

"Not too fast—not too fast!" admonished his guide. "We're close upon them. Keep behind me, and don't speak too loud."

As the hunter showed no disposition to enlighten him, the lad could do nothing but content himself until the critical moment should come.

He was not kept long waiting. A short distance further they reached a turn in the creek, when Towser, trotting at their side, uttered a low whine.

"Here we are," said Pierre. "You may wait again, while I go ahead and settle the business."

There was something intensely exciting in the position of Clarence, who could hardly keep himself from stealing forward to learn the situation.

Pierre now made no further attempt at concealment, but leaving his gun in the hands of Clarence, and making sure that his pistol was at command, skated slowly and easily forward, like one who is doubtful of the strength of the ice over which he is passing.

Towser, in obedience to orders, kept in the background, so that the trapper assumed entire charge of matters.

Just ahead he saw the blue smoke from a camp-fire, close to the edge of the stream.

There the trees were dense and close, and he headed at once for the place. It was not until he reached a point not more than twenty feet distant that he caught the first glimpse of the camp-fire.

He saw the skates lying upon the snow, and he stealthily removed his own, so as to place himself on the same footing as his enemy.

Then he moved forward toward the camp-fire, purposely making enough noise on the snow-crust to be heard by any one within a few rods.

As he did so, he saw a number of sticks piled

together and burning, while the tall figure of the Great Moose was visible upon the other side, as holding his rifle in one hand, he raised his head and glared like a wild beast in the direction of the point whence came the foot-steps.

Pierre was not a little alarmed by his failure to see anything of Sydney; but ere a word passed between him and the wild man, the lad came forward from among the trees, beyond the camp-fire, and called out, as he saw his friend:

"So you have followed me here, Pierre?"

"Yes; and I'm not going to chase you another step!" was the surly answer. "It's all fun enough at first, but we've had enough of it, and it's time you went home!"

When the hunter uttered these and the following words he looked toward the lad, but as he stood a short distance from the Moose, it will be understood that the latter was entirely in his field of vision, and he could not make the slightest movement without being as distinctly seen as if the keen, sparkling eyes of the little Canadian were leveled directly at him. He, in fact, was the one whom the hunter had in view more than he did the other.

Sydney suspected the ruse of his friend, and favored it as well as he could.

"You know father let Clarence and me go off

on a long hunt," he replied, as if trying to justify his conduct, "and he will not expect us back for a day or two yet."

"That don't make any difference. He didn't intend to have any such fooling as this!" added Pierre, with an assumption of anger. "It will take you a couple of days to reach home, and instead of going in that direction, you keep tramping further and further away."

"Maybe I have come further than I ought; but we school-boys don't often get a chance for a frolic, so we have to make the most of it; and then Clarence was just as anxious as I to go on up the Kennebec."

"But he has shown a little sense by starting home again. He has had enough of this tomfoolery, and is tired of waiting for you; so don't keep him any longer."

All this time, as a matter of course, Pierre kept his eye on the wild man, and he was a little puzzled at his manner.

He stood, in all his towering ugliness, staring straight at the hunter, and never once noticing the lad. It seemed as if the strange being did not yet understand the object of the Canadian in venturing to approach his camp, and he was listening to his words, and trying to gain from

them and his manner an explanation of his conduct.

The command of Pierre to Sydney brought matters to a crisis.

The boy stood a moment as if uncertain of his meaning.

"Do as I tell you!" added Pierre, in a low voice, whose earnestness could not be misunderstood. "Go to the creek, put on your skates, and you will find Clarence waiting for you a short distance away."

Sydney instantly moved around to the other side of the camp-fire, so as to interpose it between him and the Moose, and he then strode off, almost on a run, in the direction of the creek.

Up to his time the Moose had neither stirred nor spoken. It was not until he saw the lad actually moving away in the direction of the creek, that he seemed really to comprehend what was going on, and then he interfered very much in the manner that Pierre was expecting.

"Stop!" he thundered, turning his flashing eyes upon Sydney, and striding toward him threateningly.

The boy was so startled that he looked appealingly to the hunter, who was ready.

"Go on, and don't stop again, and if the Moose lays hands on you, I will kill him!"

These words were intended as much for the one as the other, and as the latter obeyed, the former fairly howled in fury.

"You have crossed my path," he said, in his low, frightful tones, "and I will crush you first, and then go on and slay the two youngsters!"

"The Moose knows that when I speak, I speak the truth," said Pierre, looking him in the eye; "and if he seeks to lay hands on me, then I will kill him!"

A maniacal laugh broke from the wild man, as he clubbed his rifle and advanced fiercely upon the old hunter. The latter stood his ground until the blow was ready to descend, when he leaped aside with inimitable dexterity.

Thoroughly exasperated, his enemy turned like a demon upon the trapper, who, seeing there was no escape, whipped out his revolver, and pointing it full at him, fired.

For one moment it seemed as if his shot was without result, and Pierre was about to fire again, when the hideous giant of the woods staggered, threw up his arms and pitched forward upon his face, where he lay limp and motionless.

The Canadian waited a minute or two, to see whether he were really dead, and then, as the

savage did not stir, he believed it was all over, and turned and left him.

Sydney had obeyed the command of Pierre with such alacrity that he was beyond sight when the weapon was discharged, and he therefore saw nothing of the results.

"Sorry I had to do it; but there didn't seem to be any help for it," was the quiet remark of Pierre, as he turned his back upon the scene of his struggle, and followed after his young friends.

By the time he had adjusted his skates, and glided down to the bend where he had left Clarence, the brothers were together, and anxiously awaiting his coming. His presence was proof of the success of his attempt at rescue, and the silence and gloom beyond seemed to say that the career of the wild man, who had fantastically styled himself the Great Moose, was ended.

"Did you shoot him?" inquired Clarence, in awed undertone.

A nod was the reply, and without any further words the trio turned their faces toward the Kennebec, with the dog following close after them. The brothers had seen enough of the wilds of northern Maine, in the depth of winter, and their only wish now was to get home.

Starting out with the purpose of enjoying a skating frolic, and perhaps to gain a shot at a moose, we have shown how a train of circumstances led them forward, and more than once involved them in difficulties and perils from which there appeared to be no escape.

It seemed now as if the dangers were over, and a clear road lay before them. The presence of Pierre itself was an assurance of safety which nothing else could give, besides which Towser was little short of him in that respect.

There remained the shadow of a fear that as they turned southward they might meet some of those outlaws of the cavern, and both the lads spoke of it more than once; but Pierre treated it lightly.

"They ain't in the business of chasing people, and if some of them should take it into their heads, I don't see what chance they would have of doing anything."

"Then you think we have nothing more to fear?" said Clarence, inquiringly.

"I don't say that. There is one thing I don't feel easy over."

Both looked at him, expecting he would answer; but he merely smiled and shook his head. He was not ready, for some reason or other, to

explain what he meant, and they knew better than to question him further.

The day was now so far advanced that Clarence naturally began to think of something in the way of satisfying his hunger.

The younger brother had the advantage over both in this respect, as the Moose had given him an abundant meal before starting on this journey which came so near being his last.

Pierre told the elder to wait until dinner time, when all would have a good appetite, and he promised to see that they were provided with a genuine old-fashioned meal.

As they skated forward at an easy, swinging gait, Sydney told him that on the previous night, a short time after the departure of the Canadian, the Moose came rushing into the cabin in great excitement, declaring that Pierre, the trapper, was on the ground and was hunting for the boys. He said he might get one, but he should not have both; and he appeared to think he could retake Clarence from his custody.

The lad gathered from what he said that he had some retreat near Mousehead Lake, where he felt safe from disturbance, no matter from what source. It must have been a wild, repulsive place; for he intimated that more than one person had met his fate there. It was there

he intended to take Sydney and put him to death, after which he was to return and do his best to capture Clarence; for the manner of the wild man proved that from the first he meant to slay them both. He seemed to hold some vindictive grudge against the father of the lads, and the course he took to satisfy it was characteristic of a wild, irresponsible being. Had he been in the possession of his senses, and still inspired by his malicious hatred, he would have used one of the score of chances already his for the gratifying of his revenge; but he did not, and letting slip so many "golden opportunities," the chance had now gone from his grasp forever.

CHAPTER XXVIII

CONCLUSION

WHEN the trio found themselves in the vicinity of the cabin of the Moose, where Pierre had come up with Sydney, they used great care in passing the point. It was there their trail led to the river, and at this place, if anywhere, they were in danger from the outlaws of the cavern. The guide, therefore, glided close to the other shore, and they put on their best speed. At the same time the sagacious Towser was sent ahead to reconnoitre.

The dangerous point, if such it really was, however, gave no sign, and fairly below that, the lads breathed with more freedom than they had for several days.

Noon was close at hand, and a mile or two further, they turned into a secluded place and made their camp-fire, while Pierre started out with his gun to obtain the wherewithal for their dinner. His skill prevented his being kept away any length of time, and the dinner of

which the three partook was perhaps as thoroughly relished as any meal of their lives.

They enjoyed an exhilarating flow of spirits, although now and then a dark, awful shadow stole over them at the recollection of that pistol shot, a few hours before, and at the picture which their imagination drew of the silent form that lay stretched in front of his own camp-fire in the northern wilderness.

Neither spoke of him, for they knew it would not be pleasing to the hunter. They only referred to the future, and pictured the happiness that would be theirs when they could rejoin their parents, and tell their adventures by the fireside, while Sydney wondered how he was going to make his classmates believe the wonderful yarns he would have to relate, when he should return to school; and he declared it impossible for any two lads, starting out as they did, to meet and pass through such a series of adventures.

They did not linger by the camp-fire, for all three were too eager to place as many miles behind them as possible. They did a good deal of traveling between noon and dusk, and a long time after dark; but too many miles still remained for them to reach home that evening; and old Pierre, who seemed to know every nook

CONCLUSION

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and turn of the river, directed them into a secluded place, where they felt so free from all danger that they lay down to sleep, depending entirely upon the watchfulness of Towser.

The next day, near the middle of the afternoon, they reached the cabin of Pierre from which they had started upon their memorable moose hunt. Here the lads were so used up that they were compelled to lie by for several hours.

As soon as they felt able, they resumed their journey, and at last found themselves safe among their own friends again.

The dangers of their expedition into the Maine wilderness were over; but there remained two incidents which it is proper we should give before laying down our pen.

On the day succeeding their arrival, Pierre called at the house of Mr. Landon, and the two held an earnest talk in private, at the end of which they went off together—the husband telling his wife he would be absent for several days.

The two went to the authorities, where they made known the discovery that young Clarence Landon had made while in the cavern beneath the falls.

There was no doubt that these were the men who had been depredating through the country,

for some time past, and for whose capture a large reward was offered.

The officials stated that there had been many attempts to track them during the previous six months; but beyond the fact that their retreat was somewhere in the forests of the Upper Kennebec, nothing had been learned.

An expedition was at once organized, and placed under charge of Pierre, the Canadian, who was anxious to pilot the officers to the hiding-place of the outlaws.

It would be interesting, had we space, to follow this party through the woods, when they entered upon the exciting business, with the care and caution of a party of scouts venturing into the Indian country.

The criminals were partly prepared for such a visit, and some of them had already succeeded in getting away. There was a hard fight, but the remainder were captured, tried, and sentenced to long terms of imprisonment in the State Penitentiary.

It was decided, after a fair consideration of the question, that Clarence Landon and Pierre, the hunter, were each entitled to one-half the reward; but the Canadian refused to take a penny, and through his insistence the amount was divided between the two brothers, the father

investing it for them until such time as each in turn should reach his majority.

A few days later, Clarence and Sydney returned to school, where, as may be supposed, they told their wonderful adventures over again to their gaping classmates. The younger brother declares that he took particular pains to relate nothing but the simple truth, and yet to this day he is suspicious that they believe he and Clarence had grown into real Baron Munchausens.

A month had passed since the events described, and the rigorous Maine winter seemed to have abated none of its severity. The moose were still herded in their "yards" far to the northward, and Pierre, our old friend, had been upon an expedition, from which he returned with remarkable success.

He was sitting in his cabin, one afternoon, when the weather was milder, engaged in cleaning his gun. He had disconnected the barrel, carefully swathed it out, and was in the act of returning it to its place, when Towser, stretched upon the floor at his feet, raised his head, with a growl.

"What's up now?" asked his master, holding his work suspended.

The dog stood a moment, showing his teeth,

and then, sank down upon the floor again, as if the cause of his disturbance, whatever it might be, had passed.

Stretching out his paws in an easy position, with his nose between them, he gradually let his eyelids close, and in a few minutes was to all appearances asleep, while the wrinkled old trapper resumed his work, which was now nearly finished.

But Towser was given short rest, when he uttered another growl, and rising to his feet, walked to the door like a canine that had given up all idea of slumber for the time.

"Some one is coming," said Pierre, stopping work again. "It isn't often I have visitors, but whoever comes to my cabin is welcome. Hello! I heard a man walking over the snow!"

The old hunter, as no doubt the reader has gathered, was a man who had faced nearly all manner of perils, and there were few scenes from which he was likely to shrink; but never, in all his life, was he so startled as when the door opened, and he saw standing before him the wild man who has been known in this story as the Great Moose of the Upper Kennebec!

At first Pierre thought it was a ghost, and he sat like one petrified, while Towser stood growling and showing his teeth, as if waiting only a

word from his master to leap at the throat of the strange being whom he had seen and known before.

"Why don't you call off your dog?" demanded the Moose, in an angry voice. "Do you keep him to bite your neighbors when they drop in on you?"

These questions recalled Pierre to his senses, and showed him that, incredible as it might seem, he was still face to face with real flesh and blood. He noticed, too, that the wild man appeared considerably changed in dress and appearance from what he formerly had been.

Instead of being attired in skins, he was dressed in heavy, coarse garments, that had an unmistakably civilized cut. Besides, his long, straggling hair and beard had been trimmed, and a sort of coon-skin cap seemed to help civilize him—at least so far as looks went.

He still held his long rifle grasped in one hand, but no other weapons were visible on or about his person.

Had the Canadian failed to recognize him at the first glance, he would have taken him for some ordinary hunter of the woods, who had paused to rest in his cabin. But the last glimpse he had had of him was when he saw him stretched in the snow, as he believed, with the

breath of life gone from his body, sent out by his own pistol; and here he was, a month afterward, standing in front of his door! Who wouldn't be startled under such circumstances?

Pierre had gone back, weeks before, in the hope of finding and interring the body, but he could discover nothing of it. A slight fall of snow had hidden all signs, and he believed the wolves had destroyed it utterly.

The sharp words of the visitor roused Pierre from his stupor, and speaking to the dog, the latter retreated to the corner, where he lay down, with his face toward the door and his eyes on the strange man.

"Come in and sit down," added the Canadian, rising to his feet and pointing to a chair, while at the same time he managed to pass his hand within his coat, and make sure his revolver was at instant command.

"I don't care if I do," said the visitor, suiting the action to the word.

Seated in his chair, with his rifle resting against the wall, he looked steadily at his host a moment, and said:

"Pierre, it is a long time since we saw each other. Let me see, it is ten years and more ago that I met you in Portland, isn't it?"

"I believe it is all that," replied the trapper, uneasy and nervous.

"Ten years—ten years," repeated the visitor to himself. "It is a long time, and I have grown a good deal older. I can feel it; and you have a good many more wrinkles than when I met you last."

"Time spares none of us, Jared," said the Canadian, venturing to pronounce the name of his visitor for the first time in many years; "but you still look strong and well."

"I believe I am," he returned, musingly; "and what a strange lot has been mine! Ten years ago—it must be fully that—Fitz James Landon and I became involved in a law suit, in which I thought he was all wrong and I was all right, though I can see now that it was the other way. He beat me, and I was so wrought up over it that I determined on suicide. I had no relatives in the world, and one night, down at Portland, I walked off the dock on purpose. Instead of falling in deep water, I struck upon some obstruction, and hurt my head in such a way that it robbed me of the little sense I had, and I became crazy—crazy as a loon. From that time until about a month ago I cannot recall the slightest incident. When I came to myself, I was lying on my face in the snow, with my old



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hurt in my forehead bleeding. No one can imagine the thoughts I had, and how the harder I tried to think the more I was puzzled. The tracks in the snow showed that I had had trouble with some one, but I had no more idea of who or what it was than the man in the moon. My dress, and the gray hairs in my head and whiskers, gave me an inkling of the truth, and I started to hunt up some one who could help me out. As luck would have it, I came across a wood-chopper that I had known, and after a long talk with him, I got the thing straightened out, and found I was a second Rip Van Winkle. Then I made my way down to Portland, and found some more friends. I stayed last night with Mr. Landon, and talked with him and his wife till after midnight. They insisted on my making my home with them, for the present at least, and told me to skate up here to see you to-day, and here I am."

And so the mystery was explained. The shot fired by Pierre in self-defense, and which he supposed had been fatal to Jared Muchman, struck the wound in his head in such a manner as really to restore his reason, and as it may be said, bringing him back to life.

The hero of this strange series of adventures had heard nearly everything relating to the

Landon brothers, in which he had taken part, from their father, and it now remained for Pierre to explain that it was he who fired the pistol; and he added that it had caused him the most intense suffering. He told how he went back, all alone, in search of the body, and failing to find it, had suffered the most poignant anguish ever since. His joy, therefore, at learning the marvelous issue of that affray, perhaps can be faintly imagined.

The individual who has figured in our story as the self-named Great Moose of the Upper Kennebec has partly explained his own misfortune. A skillful medical man, who attentively examined the case, said that at the time he was injured by his fall from the Portland dock, a slight fragment of the skull was made to press inward upon the brain in such a way as to cause his mental delusion, and the heaven-controlled shot of Pierre removed this pressure, and reason at a bound recovered its balance.

Jared Muchman lived but a short time after his recovery. He was never able to recall the slightest part of his experience during that terrible decade of insanity; but he died in peace and quietness, carefully tended and watched over by Landon, his wife and Pierre, who felt a peculiar attachment to him; and the old

Canadian often declared that when he took two youthful "moose trackers" on the most memorable hunt of their lives, it brought to him a marvelous experience, and heaven itself ordered the whole series of adventures, so that they terminated in a way that was scarcely short of the miraculous.

THE END.

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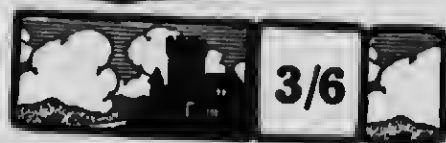
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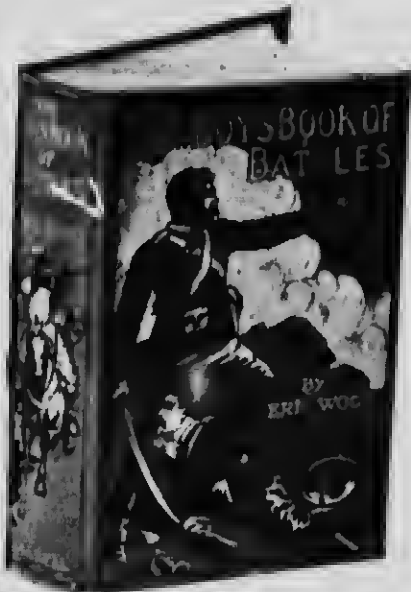
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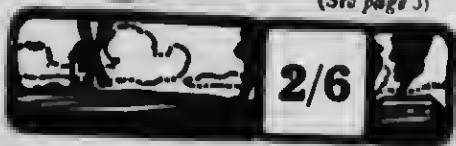
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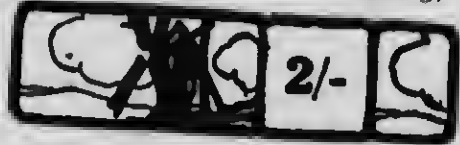
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