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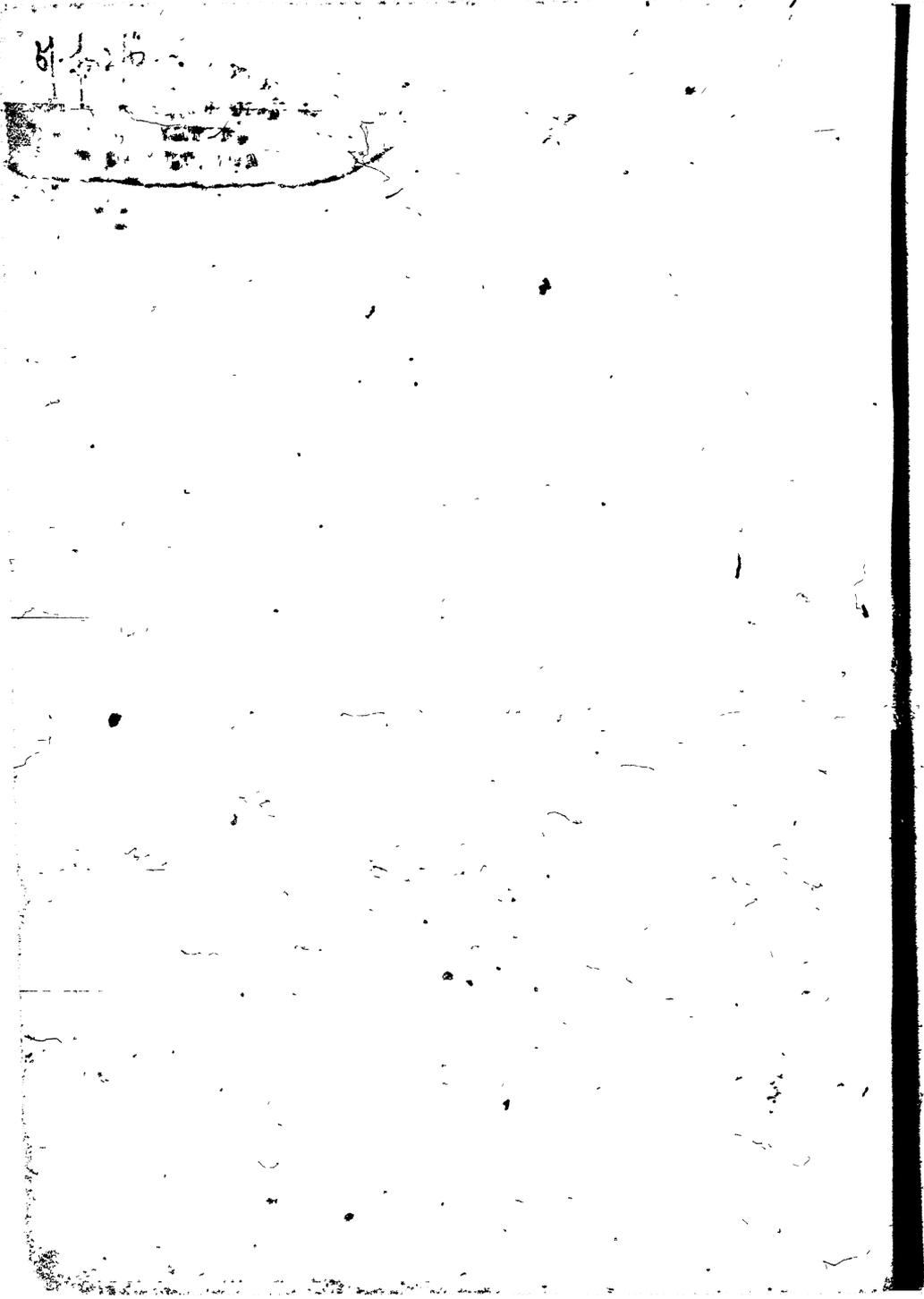
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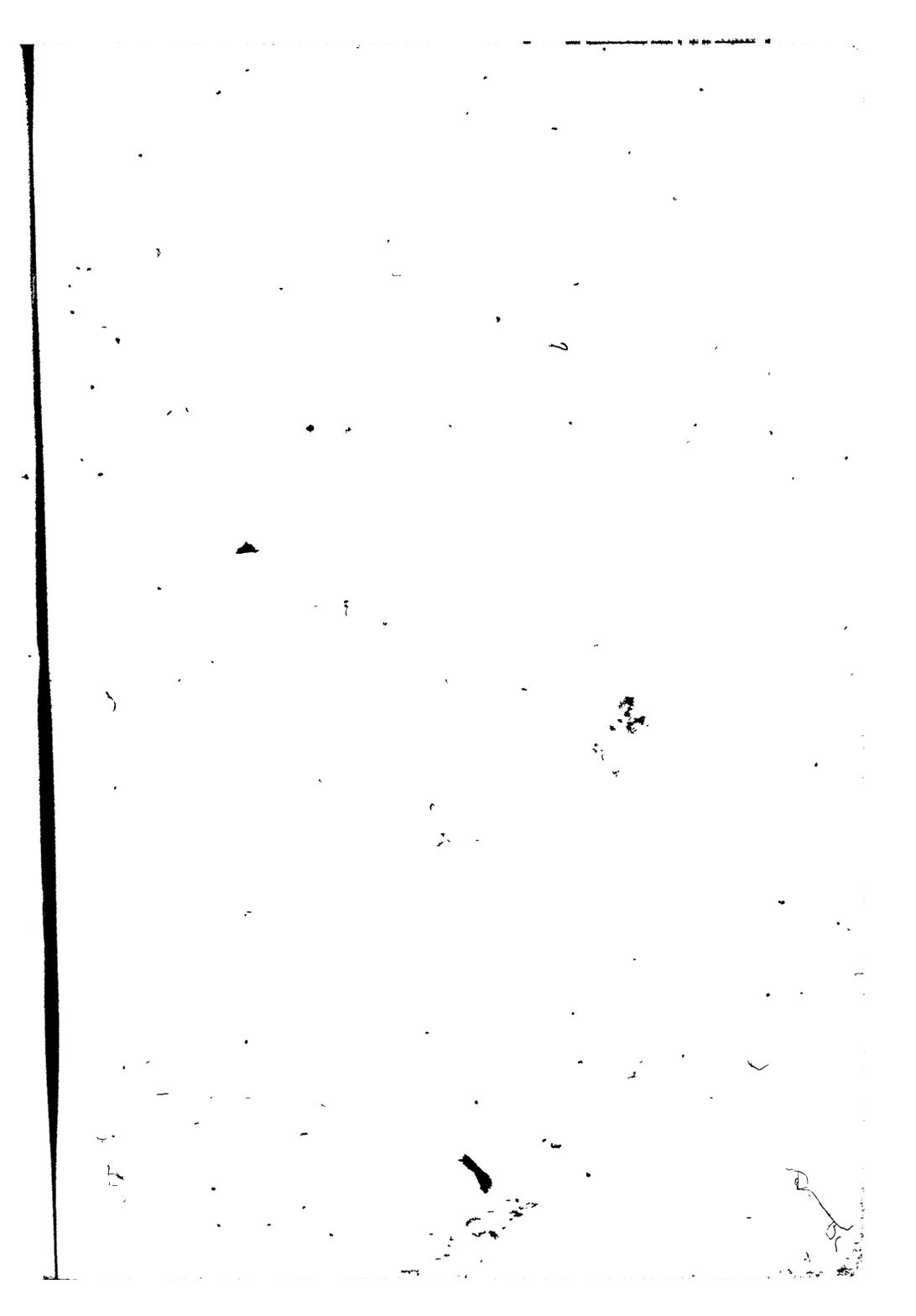
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"The instant the bull caught sight of the boy, he lowered his head, and with a dull rumbling roar rushed fiercely upon him"—Page 306

[Frontispiece

FERGUS MACTAVISH

OR

A BOY'S WILL

A Story of the Far North-West

BY

J. MACDONALD OXLEY, LL.B.

AUTHOR OF "BERT LLOYD'S BOYHOOD," ETC.

WITH TWELVE ILLUSTRATIONS.

London

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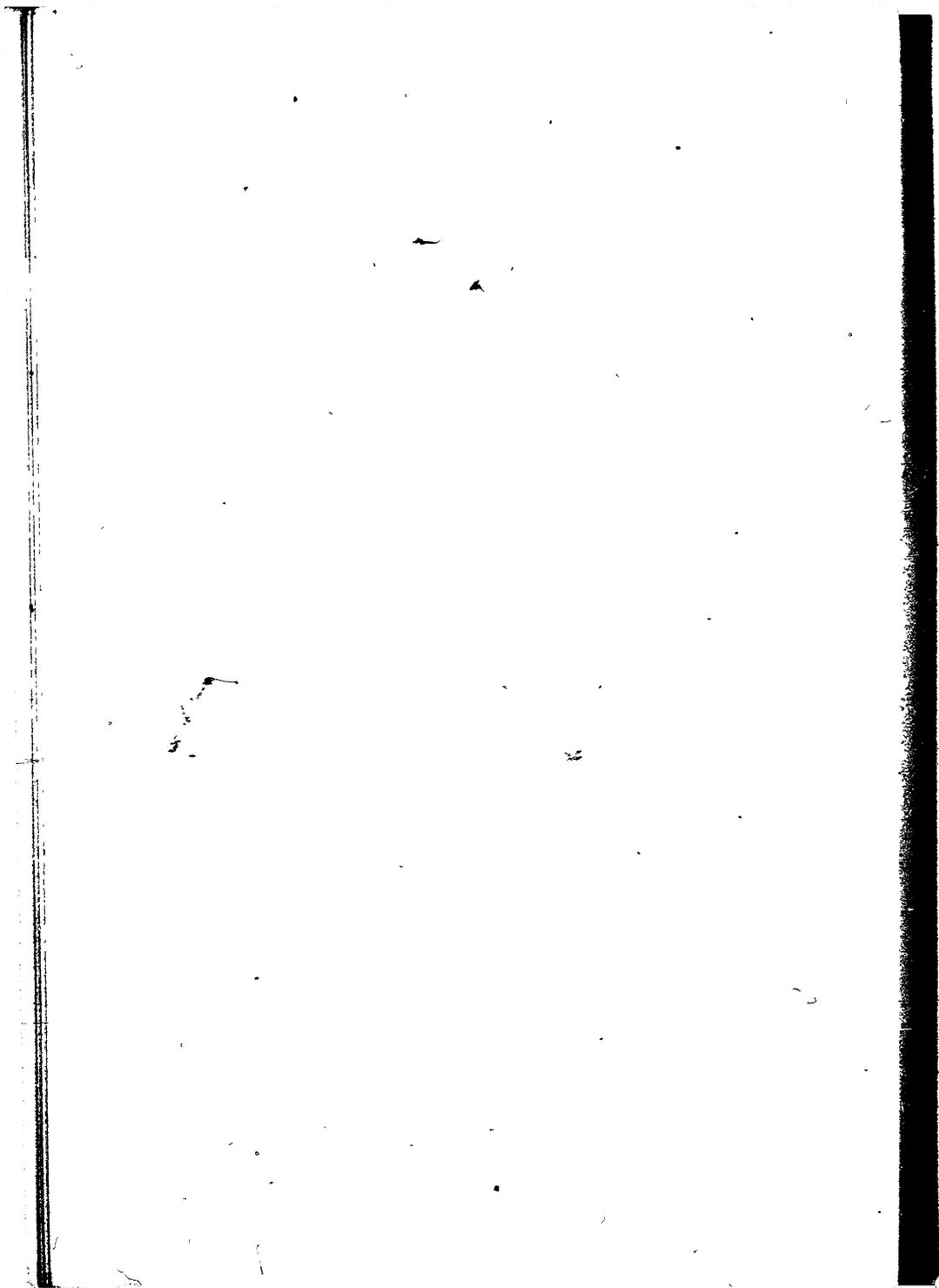
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CHAPTER I.

NORWAY HOUSE.

WHEN Fergus was a wee thing in her arms, Mrs. MacTavish, though fond and happy as ever mother was since Eve, thought him such an odd-looking little fellow that she had less eagerness to exhibit him than mothers are wont to have in regard to their first-born.

His tiny pink face seemed to possess an undue quantity of puckers, and it boasted a crown of undeniably red hair crisped up into comical little curls, from beneath which two bright, brown beads of eyes stared out with such startling aggressiveness that it was not easy to restrain a smile of amusement at the baby's appearance on first making his acquaintance.

This was a cause of considerable concern to Mrs. MacTavish. She worried lest her boy should grow up so very homely as to be placed at some disadvantage in making his way through the world. But her big, warm-hearted, hard-headed husband did not share these tender apprehensions.

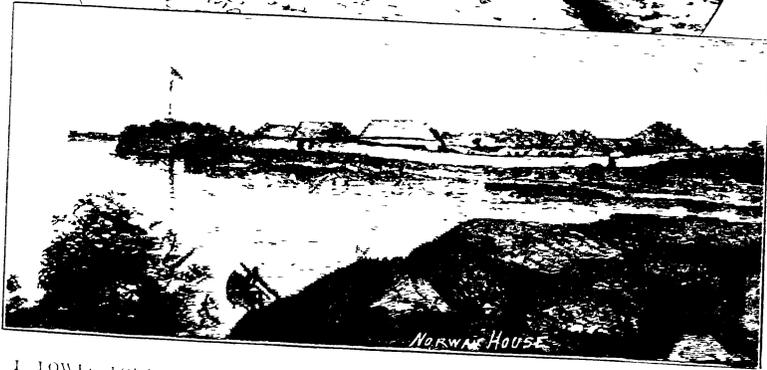
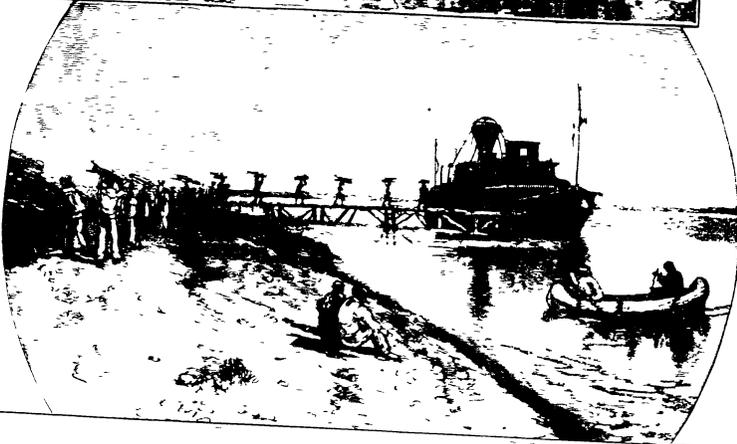
"Tut! Ailie, lass," said he, half impatiently, in reply to her fond forebodings, "ye need nae fash yersel'

about the bairn's beauty. He'll be braw enoo in good time. Why," he went on, with a sly twinkle in the corner of his honest grey eye, "ma mither always said there was not a homelier wean in the Orkneys than my ainsel', and yet surely ye canna say that I'm a bogie to look at noo."

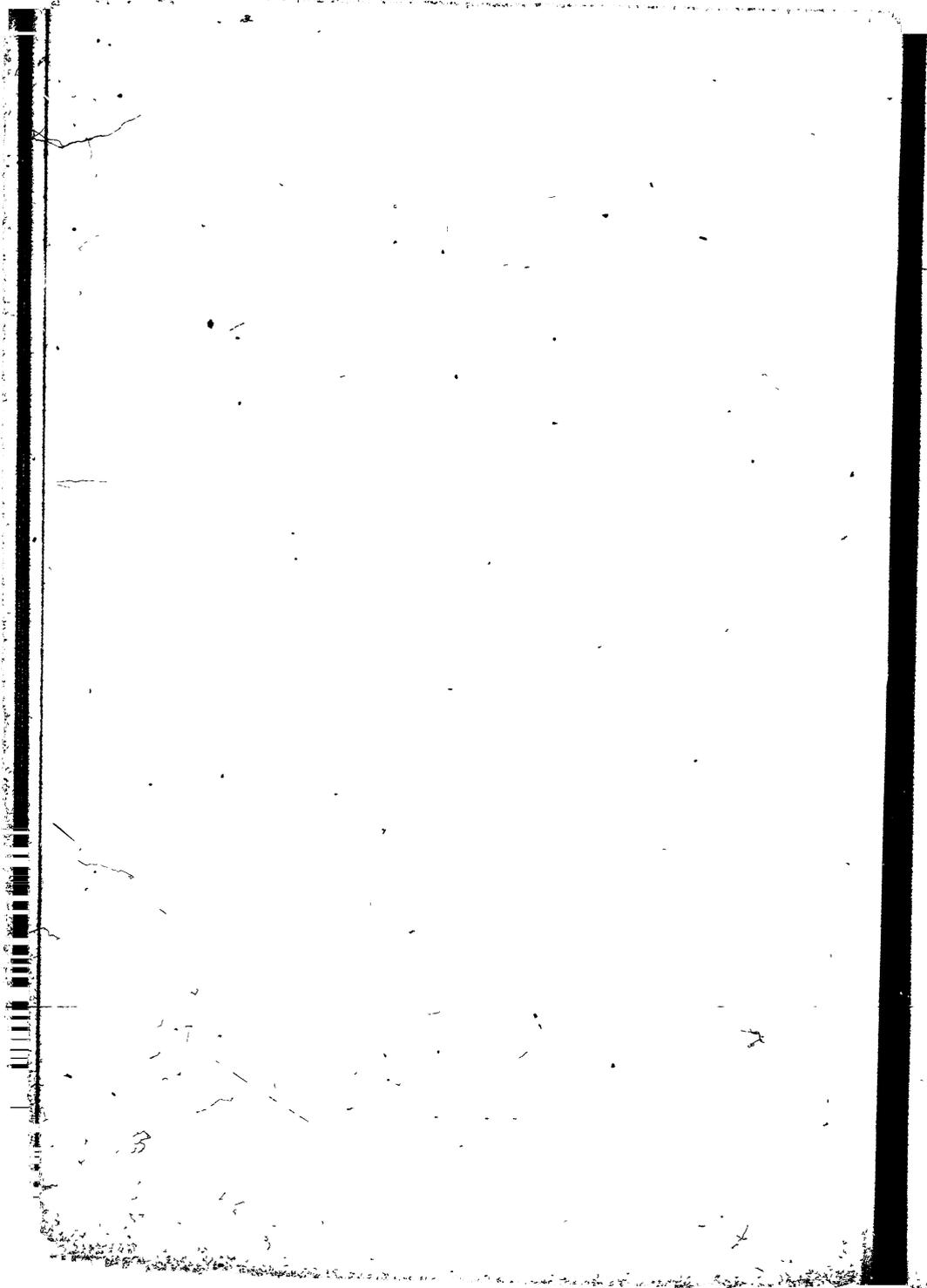
"Indeed, you're not, Dugald, dearie," cried his wife, greatly comforted in heart. "There's not a handsomer man in the West, if it is your ain wife that says it;" and, drawing his shaggy face down to hers, she gave him a kiss of loving pride.

Dugald straightened himself up again, and filled out his chest. He appreciated both the kiss and the compliment. Though he might be the handsomest man in the West in no other eyes than his wife's, still that was something to feel proud about; for this he knew right well, that no man in the West had a bonnier or better wife than he possessed, and that Ailie Stewart, of Kildonan, had refused many an eligible suitor before her blue eyes fell favourably upon him.

It was well for the MacTavishes that they were so content and happy in each other's society. Their home lay far away from the rest of the world, and they must needs depend much upon themselves. Dugald MacTavish was chief trader in charge of the Hudson's Bay Company's fort known as Norway House, at the time of our story one of the most important posts established by that remarkable institution which, for so many decades, held sway



1 TOWER TOTE GAKKY 2 NORWAY HOUSE LANDING 3 NORWAY HOUSE



over the vast territories indefinitely entitled Rupert's Land.

Norway House is not hard to find upon the map. Some hundreds of miles due west of the chain of great lakes which divides the United States of America from the United Provinces of Canada, lies a body of water quite worthy, in point of size, to rank with those inland seas, and connected with them by winding rivers, which formed the only highway between them for more than a century. This body of water bears the name of Lake Winnipeg, and reaches out northward almost halfway toward the icy brine of huge Hudson's Bay.

At the head, Lake Winnipeg, full sixty miles broad where it spreads itself the most, narrows to the proportions of a river, and receives into itself a small sluggish stream known by the name of Jack River, beside whose mouth stands the fort called Norway House.

This word "fort" may perhaps suggest something more imposing than the reality, calling up a picture of ramparts, battlements, and embrasures, frowning with cannon. But that is not what it means in the far North-West. Every Hudson's Bay post is called a fort, whether it be an actual fortress with high stone walls, strong towers, and heavy gates, as were the Upper and Lower Forts Garry, in the days of their glory, or merely a low log hut or two with storehouses adjoining, like many of the outposts.

Norway House was one of the best examples of the

ordinary Hudson's Bay post. It consisted of a number of buildings ranged in the form of a square, and surrounded by a high stockade of stout pickets, with square towers at the corners and well-protected gates. The stockade was pierced with loopholes for guns, and inside, halfway to the top, ran a narrow gallery from which its garrison, in case of attack, could pour a deadly fire without exposing themselves. The buildings inside were all low, one-storey structures, solidly put together of logs, with the exception of the chief trader's residence.

This stood in the centre of the square, and was of two storeys, and much better finished than the others. All were well whitewashed, and the whole effect was one of great comfort and security.

The fort stood upon a rocky eminence, in order to command the country round about. On one side of it lay an extensive garden in thorough cultivation, in which all kinds of useful vegetables, and many beautiful flowers, grew in great abundance. On the other side stretched a smooth, green level, that afforded a fine playground for the residents; and the *voyageurs* and Indians encamped around its edge all summer long.

It will thus be seen that Fergus MacTavish's home had many attractions from the outside. And now for some words concerning the people who lived there. Dugald MacTavish was a notably fine specimen of the Hudson's Bay official. Born in the Orkney Islands thirty-two years before, he had, at the age of

sixteen, through the influence of an uncle already in the service, obtained an appointment in the Company's service. The Board was very favourably impressed with the new recruit. He stood full six feet in his stockings, was broad of shoulder and stout of limb, had a frank, pleasing countenance, with vigour and determination written all over it, a clear, grey eye, and a respectful yet dignified manner. It was just such boys they greatly desired.

"That lad will be a chief factor some day," said the chairman, "if nothing happens to him."

The remark was not intended to reach Dugald's ears, but it did, and his face flushed with pleasure. Providence permitting, a chief factor he would be; and this high ambition had cheered and stimulated him through all the long, dreary years of apprenticeship in the snowy districts of the Mackenzie River and Athabasca, where, besides the few other employees at the post, he saw nothing but squalid Indians and dirty half-breeds the whole year round.

Sober, shrewd, active, enterprising, and, above all, rigidly upright, the accounts of him that reached headquarters were uniformly to his credit. Thus it came about that when the fourteen years of his clerkship were ended, during all which time he had by a series of transfers and promotions been working Eastward, drawing nearer the great forts forming the depots of supplies, the sudden death by drowning of the chief trader at Norway House created a vacancy which he was selected to fill.

No sooner had he settled down into this important and responsible position, than he bethought himself of a help-mate to share its honours and duties with him. Unlike many of his associates, he had not taken unto himself as a companion the dusky daughter of some Cree chieftain, nor as a wife the dark-eyed sister of some half-breed *voyageur*. Rugged as he seemed, there was in him a certain sense of refinement which caused him to recoil from any such alliance. On his way to his first post in the distant North, he had passed through the Scotch settlements at the Red River; and his keen eye had noted more than one bonnie lass whose rosy cheeks and golden tresses had photographed themselves upon his memory, and made the dark skins and raven locks of the girls with whom other clerks were fain to content themselves, utterly devoid of attraction for him.

This was why, the first winter after his appointment to Norway House, he took leave of absence for a while and made his way to Kildonan, where a hearty welcome was ready for one so much to be desired as a son-in-law, particularly when the secret of his coming leaked out. The winter is the time for rest and merry-making in the North-West. The world is buried under snow. The farmer's only duty is to see to his stock, and there is ample time for sociability in the long cold nights.

Dugald MacTavish found himself the object of the best hospitality the settlement could compass, and he enjoyed it all mightily after his long banishment

from such delights. The belle of Kildonan at that time was by general consent a certain Ailie Stewart, the only daughter of a retired Hudson's Bay official.

No sooner had Dugald met her than the question of a choice of a wife was settled, so far as he went. But Ailie did not drop into his hands like a ripe apple from the tree. She had many wooers, and seemed in no hurry to show any marked preference; so that Dugald needed all his determination to persevere in his siege to her heart. However, his good fortune, which had stood by him so long, did not desert him in this matter, and the moment of supreme happiness came when Ailie's softly murmured "Aye, Dugald, I will," put an end to his harrowing uncertainty.

Sorry as Ailie's parents were to part with the light of their house, they took comfort in her having been won by so worthy a wooer; and the wedding was celebrated in the handsomest manner the resources of the village permitted.

Great was the rejoicing at Norway House when the chief trader returned with his winsome bride. No pale-face lady had ever graced the fort before, and the little staff of clerks and other employees looked upon Mrs. MacTavish with hearty approval. Her bright, warm manner confirmed the good impression made by her sweet, pleasant face, and ere she had been installed a week, every man connected with the establishment was her bondsman, ready to obey her lightest or hardest behest with equal alacrity.

If the happiness of the household required anything to make it complete, that want was supplied when, a year later, the possessor of the pink puckers and red curls already referred to, appeared upon the scene. There had been times before this when Ailie MacTavish, her husband being away on one of the long journeys by canoe or dog-sledge which his duties made necessary, found a feeling of loneliness stealing over her, and could not suppress a sigh for the pleasant companionships from which she was cut off.

But when the baby came to brighten her home by its presence, and fill her hands with dear delightful tasks, there was no more loneliness. The days slipped by in unbroken sunshine. Her precious charge thrived famously. None of the perils which beset the cradles of children in the centres of population, seemed to have found their way so far into the wilderness. Measles, whooping-cough, scarlet fever, and all the rest of that troublesome tribe, the little man knew not; and there was nothing to check his rapid growth.

During the course of his first summer, Sir George Simpson, the famous Governor of Rupert's Land, visited Norway House, upon one of his tours of inspection; and this visit gave him part of his name; for he had the honour of being called Fergus George MacTavish, after the great Governor himself. He was called Fergus after Mrs. MacTavish's father, and George in honour of His Excellency; so that his

connection with the Company was as intimate as birth and name could make it.

As Fergus grew older, his appearance decidedly improved; and by the time he had as many years to his credit as fingers upon one of his chubby hands, he was far from being an ill-looking laddie. The puckers had given place to freckles, the bright red hair had toned down into a rich golden brown that nobody need be ashamed of, and the deep brown eyes had taken on a thoughtful expression which well became their owner.

To Mrs. MacTavish these personal improvements were profoundly pleasing, since they went side by side with a sure and steady development in character that promised much happiness for all with whom Fergus' fate might be intermingled. Gifted with a fine, quick temper, a strong will, and a keen sense of justice which made him very determined when he thought he had the right of it, Fergus was not at all the most tractable of youngsters. Nor were his surroundings, aside from home influence, favourable to bringing out the best that was in him. The only boys available as playmates were the dusky, dirty little Indians, or the sly, saucy half-breeds; and among these Fergus found fawning courtiers rather than companions on an equal footing. As the son of the chief trader, he took rank with the boys after the same manner that his father did with theirs, and consequently had his own way to a greater extent than was good for him.

A boy needs a good deal of knocking about in order to produce a healthy symmetrical development. He must learn to give as well as take, to serve no less than to command; and this important lesson Mrs. MacTavish set herself to teach Fergus, since he was not likely to learn it otherwise. After the good old Scotch fashion she had made the Book of Proverbs her boy's "First Reader," and her constant aim was that he should grasp, not only the spelling, but the spirit of its wise teachings. "He that is slow to anger is better than the mighty; and he that ruleth his spirit than he that taketh a city," was often upon her lips. Her practice, moreover, was not a whit behind her preaching. No one ever saw her comely countenance darken with passion, or heard her soft voice rise into shrill accents of anger. Her blood was hot enough. She could feel as deeply as any. But her self-control seemed never to leave her, and there was something in her calm expression and quiet, though firm, tone which wrought obedience as promptly as the sharpest words could have done.

Mr. MacTavish left the management of Fergus very much in his wife's hands. His bachelor life, away from all family experiences, had not fitted him to understand the mysteries of children, and he found he had little patience with his son's whims and waywardness. According to his notions, a child should always do as it was bidden, speak only when spoken to, and, in fact, be a kind of flesh and blood automa-

ton, moving in response to the will of its parents as a boat obeys its rudder.

Now Fergus was not at all that sort of a boy. He had an active, inquiring mind, and might well have been called an animated interrogation point, so constantly was he asking questions. He possessed a strong will of his own, which he did not hesitate to exercise in opposition to that of his parents when he saw fit; and if compelled to yield, he would do so with an expression upon his little face which seemed, to say :

“You are stronger than I am, and I will have to give in; but just wait until I grow up, and then we’ll see who has his own way.”

Mr. MacTavish had not failed to notice this expression, and it greatly irritated him.

“Hech, Ailie,” he would say, “but the bairn glowers at you as if to say ye had nae right to make him do yer will. I’ve misgivings that he’ll gie us much concern when he grows to manhood.”

“Ah! Dugald,” would his wife reply serenely, “don’t ye worry about the brig until ye come to it. Fergus will learn to master himself in good time. Just be patient with the little man, and never let him see you waxing wrathful, and he’ll not fail to follow your example.”

The mother’s faith was not without foundation. There were times when Fergus would show a self-control that, in view of his years, was little short of heroic. One day Mrs. MacTavish, coming quietly

into the room where he had been left alone for some time, witnessed a scene that filled her heart with joy, and photographed itself for ever upon her memory.

It was in the early autumn, and one of the men had brought in a small basket full of fine Indian pears, a rich purple berry of very pleasant flavour, of which Mr. MacTavish was exceedingly fond. Fergus had been given a few of them, and as she was leaving the room his mother said :

“Now, Fergus dear, do not touch the berries. They are for your father.”

When she returned she found him standing in front of the basket, his hands clasped tight behind his back, his face working with contending emotions, while he was saying softly to himself, as though to strengthen a wavering resolution :

“I maun na touch them. I maun na touch them.”

Throwing her arms about him, Mrs. MacTavish kissed him again and again, exclaiming in fervent gratitude and pride :

“God bless my bairnie! It’s His ain Spirit that’s leading him. Ah! Fergus, dearie, but you’ve made your mother happy to-day.”

Fergus, taken by surprise, seemed bewildered, and rather put out by this demonstration. His lip quivered ominously, and his eyes filled. With ready tact his mother created a diversion.

“There’s father coming into the Fort,” she cried, glancing out of the window. - “Run now and tell him we’ve a treat for him.”

And off Fergus darted in glad relief.

This self-won victory gave her great comfort when she had to go through such struggles with her strong-willed boy as took place oncé over a verse in Proverbs. It was the third of the eleventh chapter: "The integrity of the upright shall guide them: but the perverseness of transgressors shall destroy them." Quite a trying mouthful for a little fellow, especially as he was very sensitive and could not bear to have his efforts at the pronunciation of difficult words evoke a smile. He made two attempts to repeat the verse, and failing each time, closed his lips firmly and refused to try again.

Very patiently and clearly his mother went over the words, syllable by syllable, saying:

"Now, then, Fergus, bit by bit, and it will all come to you."

But no; Fergus turned his back upon her, and would not open his tightly shut lips.

"Come noo, dearie, you must na be perverse yoursel'. Just say it after me."

Still no response.

Realising that a crisis was at hand of utmost moment, Mrs. MacTavish laid her hands upon Fergus' shoulders, turned him about so that they were face to face, and, looking straight into his eyes with an expression of profound determination, yet utterly free from any trace of temper, said quietly:

"Fergus, you can say those words after me if you choose to. I'm asking nothing unreasonable of you;

and neither you nor I maun leave this room until you do say them."

The boy looked up at his mother with a strange mingling of doubt and decision in his glance. He doubted whether she really would carry out what she said, and he was quite decided not to yield. Reading his thoughts as though his face were an open book, Mrs. MacTavish lifted up her heart in prayer for help from above. She would keep her word at any cost. She sought for power to keep herself so that, however long the contest should endure, no sign of irritation might escape from her.

On the situation being explained to Mr. MacTavish he fired up at once, and was for taking very summary measures to put an end to it.

"Hoot! Ailie," he exclaimed, "the thing's ridiculous. Just let me have the boy for a spell, and I'll soon make him obedient to orders."

"No, no, Dugald, please don't," his wife entreated. "It is not to break our bairn's will I want, but to bend it aright. Let us be verra patient, and it will all come right in the end."

With considerable effort Mr. MacTavish restrained himself from interfering, and remained a spectator of the struggle.

Mrs. MacTavish did not sulk toward Fergus. There was nothing in her tone or expression to suggest that, in the language of diplomacy, relations were in anywise strained between them. With unclouded cheerfulness she attended to such household tasks as could

be compassed without her leaving the room, and gave her commands concerning the others. When she had leisure she read to him, and was always ready to answer his questions and talk with him. But if the child forgot for a moment how matters stood and made to leave the room, or preferred some request that would entail so doing, her face would take on an expression of unmistakable firmness, and her voice would be very distinct as she said :

“No, no, Fergus, not until ye say yer verse.”

It was in the early afternoon of Monday, when this strange test of wills began. Summer had just come to Norway House, and the day was glorious with grateful sunshine. Confinement to the house in such weather could not fail to be very irksome, and so little Fergus soon found it. Yet the hours passed by, and he showed no sign of surrender.

Sunset came. The evening meal was made ready, but Mr. MacTavish had to take it alone, for his wife and son had theirs sent in to them. When it was bedtime Mrs. MacTavish, ere she tucked the little fellow snugly in, so lovingly entreated him to yield that his lip quivered, and his eyes filled, and she felt sure she had won. But no. He would not open his mouth; and with a heavy sigh she put him to bed, and resumed her weary watch.

The next morning Fergus awoke in excellent humour, “got up on the right side of the bed,” as the homely saying is, and as soon as he was dressed his mother patted his head tenderly, saying :

"Ye'll say yer verse noo, dearie, won't you?"

At once the bright face clouded, and with a determined shake of the gold-brown curls Fergus broke away from her. Very hard did she find it then to keep back the sharp words that sprang to her lips. Had she obeyed the impulse of the moment she would have seized the sturdy little rebel and shaken the breath out of him. But she neither scolded nor shook him.

"Verra well, Fergus," was all she said. "It will be another long day for us both."

From impatient indignation Mr. MacTavish's feelings changed to intense interest. He had witnessed and taken part in many a contest and conflict during his arduous career, but this was something entirely novel. So much was he impressed by his son's strength of will that he felt half inclined to sympathise with him, although happily he did not make the mistake of showing either his admiration or sympathy by word or look. He told about his boy to the other officials, snapping his fingers gaily as he exclaimed, with fatherly pride:

"Hech, man! but he's a queer body. There's no fear that he'll not mak' his way to the top if he keeps on straight."

The second afternoon was waning, and Mrs. MacTavish felt the strain telling upon her. She found it increasingly hard to resist the temptation either to give way for the present, and renew the matter some other time, or to lay hands upon obstinate Fergus,

and by threats or actual punishment compel him to yield.

The little fellow had grown very quiet. His play-things no longer interested him, and his stock of questions seemed exhausted. He was standing by the window looking out longingly upon the square where the other children were playing merrily, and his mother was wondering how it was going to end, and praying for sustaining grace, when suddenly he wheeled about and came toward her. His face was lit up with a radiant smile through which a noble purpose shone, and putting both hands upon her lap, he looked up into her face, saying :

“Mithér, I’ll say my verse noo.”

It was only by a heroic effort that Mrs. MacTavish kept herself from clasping him in her arms in ecstatic delight. But she knew her child better than to do so, and simply said :

“Come then, dearie, let us say it.”

Giving her his whole attention Fergus repeated word for word with admirable distinctness, “The integrity of the upright shall guide them : but the perverseness of transgressors shall destroy them,” and then, as the pent-up feelings of so many hours suddenly found vent, he gave a whoop worthy of a young Cree, and dashed out of the room, while his mother threw herself upon her knees, and lifted up her heart in gratitude to God for the precious momentous victory.

Mr. MacTavish was greatly pleased at this happy

solution of the situation. Outspoken admiration for the patience and self-control of his wife took the place of his secret sympathy with his strong-willed son, and Ailie felt that, trying as the ordeal was, the result richly repaid her. Of course, as will appear further on, Fergus had plenty yet to learn in the way of prompt obedience and self-control, but his mother never lost the advantage she gained by that decisive victory; and the very remembrance of it gave her strength in the future when issues were raised between them which caused her deep concern.

CHAPTER II.

FERGUS' PLAYMATES.

FERGUS had no lack of playmates, either human or canine. A visitor, coming to Norway House in midsummer, might well get the impression that the principal productions of the Fort were children and dogs. As at all Hudson's Bay posts, the majority of the clerks and employees formed connections with women of the French half-breeds or the Indian tribes, and in consequence a numerous progeny, showing in form and countenance a curious blending of national characteristics, pervaded the establishment.

Could Mrs. MacTavish have had things just to suit her own ideas she would have chosen very different companions for her boy. But it is a shrewd saying that we must take the world as we find it, doing our best to improve that of which we do not approve; and Mrs. MacTavish had too much sense to spoil her son by instilling into him any notions of contempt for those with whom he must necessarily come into daily contact.

If Fergus followed in his father's footsteps, it would be among these semi-savage people that his life would

be spent, and the success of his career would in large measure depend upon his skill in dealing with them. The earlier, therefore, he learnt to understand their passionate, capricious, unreliable natures, and the more thorough his knowledge, the more certainly would he be able to command and direct them.

At the same time it was supremely necessary that Fergus should influence his companions, not be influenced by them. He must show them how to improve; they must not teach him to become one of themselves. It was at this point that the care had to be taken; and, accordingly, to inspire the little fellow always to hold that view of the matter, she kept constantly before him the examples of such youthful leaders as David, Alexander the Great, Nelson, and others, whose names shine like stars on the pages of history.

Fergus, it must be said, took very kindly to this notion, and by the time his years equalled the number of fingers upon both hands he had acquired a commanding way with the other boys that was quite amusing to witness. Usually he had little difficulty in securing obedience to his orders. As has been already mentioned, his being the son of the master of the Fort caused the men to be very civil, even servile to him; and their sons learned easily from them, so that for the most part he had pretty smooth sailing.

The dogs, of which Norway House could boast a larger stock even than of children, were of all sizes, shapes, and colours. A city boy knowing nothing of

the North-West, meeting a pack of them in the woods, or out on the prairie, would without doubt have taken them to be either wolves or foxes, or a mixture of the two, and given them as wide a berth as possible.

The original stock had of course been Esquimaux, brought down from the icy North to take the place of horses in the wide West, where, in winter time, they were depended upon for all the travelling. There were some pure Esquimaux still to be seen, recent additions to the pack of hauling dogs brought down from York Factory. If not exactly handsome, they were very striking looking animals. As large as an ordinary Newfoundland, but lighter in build, thickly covered with long coarse hair having an undergrowth of soft warm wool, with short sharp fox-like ears, a massive and somewhat pointed head, dark eyes flashing quickly hither and thither in tireless search for a bite to eat, and a splendid bushy tail curling haughtily up over the back, they were fine types of strength, speed, and sagacity.

Mr. Barnston, who stood next in authority to Mr. MacTavish at the Fort, owned a team of them which was the pride of his heart. He had reared them from puppies himself, and thus made them better behaved than any of the other dogs at the post. In fact, they were model animals in every particular save one: they had just as little conscience about stealing anything that could by any possibility be eaten as the most disreputable of their less cultured companions. The fact of the matter is, the propensity to

steal and devour is as much a part of an Esquimaux dog's character as a bushy curly tail is of his physical make-up. From a mitten to a mattress, from a strap to a buffalo hide, there is nothing to which their digestion is not equal. If a pack of hungry "haulers" were to be let loose in a shoe-store, they would immediately proceed to bolt the entire stock with as much relish as if they really were of opinion that there was nothing like leather upon which to make a good meal.

Fergus cast very longing eyes upon Mr. Barnston's dogs, and his father, in response to his repeated entreaty, had promised him to do his best to obtain an equally fine team the next time he went up to York Factory, when he was relieved of his promise in a way that was highly satisfactory to both Fergus and himself.

Sir George Simpson took quite an interest in the boy whom he had named, and as he passed Norway House on his annual inspection trip to York Factory, never failed to inquire for him, and to congratulate Mrs. MacTavish upon her son's promising progress. He would also bring him presents from Montreal or New York, playthings, the like of which had never been seen in the territories before; or a jaunty cap, or stylish coat, in which the proud little fellow would strut about, looking as important as His Excellency himself.

During his first visit, after Mr. Barnston had filled everybody with envy for his superb dog-team, Sir

George, who loved the young people, was strolling about with Fergus at his side, when they came across Mr. Barnston's dogs, stretched out in the sunshine. The governor's quick eye noted at once the superior quality of the animals, and he enquired of his companion :

"Are those your father's dogs, Fergus?"

"No, sir," replied Fergus, with a sigh of profound regret. "I would they were. Father has nae sae gude dogs as those anes."

Stirring up the beauties so that they might show off their fine points, in spite of their deep growls and gleaming teeth, Sir George looked them over carefully, seeming to be at the same time revolving something in his mind.

"They're very fine creatures, certainly, my boy," said he, "but I believe I could get you even better ones."

"Oh! could you, sir?" cried Fergus, all aglow with expectation. "I'd be sae glad, and I'd be sae gude to them."

Sir George smiled at the boy's eagerness. He had made the remark in a general way, and without especial reference to his companion. But when Fergus took it to himself he at once determined that he should not be disappointed.

"Yes, Fergus; I think I could," he responded, pleasantly. "I want to try the experiment, at all events, and this will be as good a place as any to do it in. So what would you think of a team of Newfoundland and St. Bernard dogs?"

As might be expected, Fergus, for lack of knowledge of either of these canine species, had no opinion to offer, but, having perfect confidence in the Governor, he returned a smile that meant plainly enough :

“Whatever you think, sir.”

Sir George, quite appreciating the situation, laughed as he said :

“Those names don’t mean much to you, Fergus, do they? Well, listen now, and I’ll tell you something about the two finest breeds of dogs in the world.” And thereupon he proceeded to give a graphic description of the grand dogs that come from the bleak shores of Newfoundland and the snowy fastnesses of the Alps.

Fergus listened with open mouth. Sir George, enjoying his eager attention, added anecdotes of those noble animals rescuing persons from drowning in the deep, or perishing in the snow drifts, until the boy was wrought up to the highest pitch of excitement. He felt as though he could give all he possessed, or ever hoped to possess, for a team of such dogs.

“Oh, sir,” he exclaimed, with trembling voice and palpitating heart, “dae ye think you could send me a team of them? I’d be sae gude to them, and I’d be your driver if ye’re ever here in winter time.”

There was the tone of unmistakable sincerity in the Governor’s voice as he replied :

“Well, Fergus, I’ll do my best. You may have to

wait a good while ; but if I can manage it, I will send you a team of dogs that will be equal to if not better than anything in the North. You must get Old Papanakes to break them in properly for you, and then look after them yourself."

Fergus could not contain himself for delight at this promise. With an explosive "Oh, thank you, sir ; thank you," he darted off to tell the good news to his mother, the Governor's eyes following him with a tender, wistful look, for he had no boys of his own then, and he envied Mr. MacTavish his bright, sturdy son.

The Governor's promise took a long time to fulfil, during which Fergus learned the lesson of patience as never before. The way in which Sir George carried out his design was this : He sent orders to England that a couple of St. Bernards should be shipped on the company's vessel in the following spring, and that the vessel should call at Newfoundland, and there procure another pair of dogs, taking all four to York Factory, whence they could easily be forwarded to Norway House.

A whole year, therefore, passed away before the dogs appeared at the Fort, but when at last they did come, Fergus forgot all the weary waiting in his wild delight. Although still somewhat the worse for their long journey, they looked well enough to fill everybody with admiration for their noble bearing and splendid strength. There were two of each sex, so that a whole pack might be raised from them if they

proved well adapted for sledging. The St. Bernards were stately creatures, standing almost three feet high at the shoulder, covered with a dense growth of soft, rich fur in varying shades of brown and white, and carrying their grand heads aloft with a calm consciousness of their good looks that was very impressive.

The Newfoundlands were not quite so tall, but they were every whit as stout of frame, and their raven black hair, curled tightly over their backs, gave them a somewhat sturdier look than that of their European cousins. They both had white breasts, massive heads, and full dark eyes, with a good-natured gleam in them.

Fergus, with good reason, thought he had never in his life seen such splendid creatures as these four dogs. He hugged each one of them in turn as affectionately as though they had been long-lost brothers, and the animals seemed quite to appreciate his little demonstration, rubbing their noses against his cheek and wagging their tails in a way that clearly betokened their readiness for good fellowship.

Mr. Barnston happened to be away when they arrived; but as soon as he returned, Fergus dragged him over to the corner of the Fort, where a kind of temporary pen had been made for his dogs until they should get accustomed to their new quarters, and, pointing to the handsome quartet, cried triumphantly:

“There, Mr. Barnston—what dae ye think of my dogs? Wad ye gae me yer ain in exchange for them?”

Mr. Barnston scanned the creatures critically. Were it a mere matter of good looks, the question as to which team stood first decided itself. His dogs were out of the race. But good looks did not by themselves count for much in the North-West, where the plainest men and ugliest dogs were sometimes of the most value in their own way. So, pursing up his lips, the canny Scotchman said, slowly :

“They’re tolerable, Fergus, tolerable, but there’s no telling what use they’ll be to the train until ye try them. Maybe after then ye’ll be willing to exchange them for my Huskies, and give me something to boot.”

His enthusiasm somewhat dashed by this shrewd remark, Fergus came down from his pinnacle of pride to say, in a hopeful tone :

“Oh! I’m not afraid of that. Just see how big they be, and they’re sae gude-natured that it will na be a bit hard to teach them to haul the sledge.”

“We’ll see, we’ll see, Fergus, when the snow comes,” was the somewhat sceptical reply ; for in Mr. Barnston’s mind it was very doubtful if the big brutes, with all their strength and endurance, would make good sledge-dogs. They undoubtedly seemed heavy and stupid in comparison with the sharp-nosed, keen-eyed Esquimaux, and, although the Newfoundlands were sometimes made to haul light carts in their own country, to no such use were the St. Bernards ever put. However, Fergus’ faith in them was strong, and he looked forward to the winter when the trial could be made

In the meantime his huge pets had to get established in their new surroundings. This was not accomplished without a good deal of disturbance. The whole band of dogs and mongrel curs into the midst of which they had come greatly resented their advent, and made common cause against them. At first this frightened Fergus; and when a fight took place, he would rush frantically off for his father, and beg him to hurry and separate the combatants.

But his father soon taught him to be less concerned.

"It wad be better to just leave them alone, Fergus," he would reply calmly. "Yer doggies maun make their footing for themselves, and it's not much hurt they'll get in doing it."

And so Fergus was led to control himself while his big beauties fought their way to the position of unquestioned supremacy which they presently reached, and from which they were never again displaced.

They achieved this satisfactory result all the sooner, because of the fidelity with which they stood by one another. They invariably went about in couples, and often all four together, and at the first sign of attack joined forces for the defence, displaying a strategic sagacity in meeting the assaults of their more numerous, if smaller opponents, that ere long convinced the latter of the folly of attempting to cope with such doughty antagonists.

The fame of Fergus' dogs spread far and wide, and even at remote Norway House they had many visitors. The Indians got it into their heads that they were

something more than dogs, and looked upon them with feelings in which fear mingled with wonder and admiration, while the officers of the Company, passing to and fro on their trips by canoe and boat brigade, with one mind coveted them keenly.

This much has been said about them because they were destined to play an important part in their young owner's life, and to win great renown for themselves by rendering services of inestimable value, as shall be told in due time.

We come back now to the companions and playmates of Master Fergus who were first referred to. As has been hinted, they were in many respects no less mongrel a collection than the dogs with which they tumbled about all summer long, and which helped to keep them warm in winter time by crawling close up beside them. Some were pure Crees, others half-Cree, half-Scotch, and others again half-French-Canadian and half-Indian.

Fergus found that the Cree boys made the best playmates. They could generally talk English about as well as he could talk Cree, and they had no difficulty in understanding each other. They were for the most part good-looking boys, with well-shaped, wiry forms, regular features, clear, black eyes bright with quick intelligence, and impulsive, affectionate, if passionate natures.

Of the half-breeds, the French were superior to the Scotch. The latter seemed somehow or other to inherit the worst qualities of both parents, and were

apt to be sly, lazy, untrustworthy beings, prone to envy and spite.

The French half-breeds, on the other hand, were of the merry, good-humoured, warm-hearted sort, rash and improvident in the highest degree, but attractive by reason of their very recklessness.

The youngest son of old Papanakes, the best guide, trapper, dog-driver, and canal pilot at the Fort, was Fergus' favourite companion—a preference easy to understand; for so fine a type of Indian boy was not often to be met with. Memotas and Fergus were nearly of an age, the latter having the advantage of a month, for which the Indian made up by being a wee bit the taller of the two. His slight, wiry figure was in perfect symmetry. He had regular features, bright, black eyes that looked straight into yours, a clear, brown skin, and a frank, pleasant expression.

Unlike the other boys, this young Cree did not pay servile court to Fergus. He showed an independent spirit far more to his credit, and that was one of the chief reasons why the Scotch laddie thought so much of him. Memotas had a will of his own which he did not hesitate to assert, and the two playmates had many a contest in which the victory did not by any means always rest with the "pale face." One of their differences of opinion came near proving a serious matter for both.

On the other side of the ridge of rocks upon which the Fort was situated, sheltered by a growth of pines from the northern blasts, stretched a wide expanse of

water called Playgreen Lake. The waters of the Jack River, at whose mouth Norway House stood, lost themselves in this lake, and after the boys became expert in managing a canoe, they were wont to venture out upon the lake, always taking care not to go too far away from shore. One lovely summer day, about a month after the arrival of the dogs, Fergus and Memotas paddled their canoe down the river into the lake, and pushed out toward a little island a few hundred yards from shore.

Not a breath of wind rippled the glassy water as their canoe cut its way through, and they did not take long to reach the island upon which they landed for a ramble. When the sun told them it was nearing midday, they started to return, for midday meant dinner, and they were too hungry to like being late. Half-way across, Memotas suddenly remembered that he had left behind, sticking into a tree from which he had been cutting bark, his hunting knife—a keen blade given him by one of the officers, and very highly prized.

“Me must go back,” he exclaimed. “Me left my knife.” And without consulting Fergus any further, he proceeded to turn the canoe about.

Now they had been on the move all the morning, and Fergus was tired as well as hungry. Moreover, if they read the sun aright, there was no time to spare if they would not be late for dinner. So he answered, rather shortly :

“Tut ! never mind your knife. We can get it after

dinner." And with vigorous strokes he swept the canoe around again.

"No, no," cried Memotas. "Must get knife now. Won't wait till after dinner." And with increased energy he sought to point their frail bark toward the island.

Now he was in the bow while Fergus had the stern, and consequently had more control of the canoe. At the same time no headway could be made in either direction so long as they paddled at cross purposes.

"Haud there!" shouted Fergus as his companion kept on opposing him. "I will na let you go back now; so ye maun just paddle ashore."

His temper thoroughly aroused, Memotas took no other notice of this command than to work away still more energetically in direct violation of it. Fergus was getting very angry.

"Haud there! I tell ye, or I'll gie ye a crack with my paddle that'll make ye do it," he cried.

Memotas looked over his shoulder with a provoking grin, as though to say:

"Try it, if you dare," and kept hard at his paddling.

Then Fergus' temper flamed forth. Rising from his knees he leaned forward, and dealt a blow at his companion with his paddle that certainly would have put a stop to his paddling for a while, had it reached its mark.

But the alert young Cree was not to be taken unawares, even if his back was turned. Almost by instinct rather than sight, as it seemed, he divined

Fergus' intention, and ere the heavy paddle could touch him his own interposed, and he wholly escaped harm.

These sudden movements, however, proved too much for the balance of the cranky craft in which they were made: and just as Fergus' paddle slipped harmlessly off Memotas' the canoe lurched, and went over, pitching its restless occupants out headlong into the cold, deep water!

Now at this time neither of the boys could swim. The summer at Norway House was always too short to warm the waters of the lake sufficiently to make bathing very pleasant, and the Jack River was a small, sluggish stream, not at all suitable for swimming in. Consequently it had not occurred to Mr. MacTavish that he ought to teach his son to swim, and Memotas had never bothered his head about it.

Down they went only a few feet apart, clutching tight to their paddles; and a few seconds later, thanks to the wood in their hands, they were at the surface again, spluttering, splashing, and trying to clear the water from their eyes. Happily they came up so near the canoe that they saw it at once, and were able to get their hands upon it.

But the smooth bottom eluded their frantic grasp, and they soon would have sunk again had not Fergus succeeded in getting hold of the stern, and Memotas of the bow, where they clung in pitiful fright. All their anger was gone now. They had only one thought, and that was to save their lives.

How this was to be done they little knew. They were a hundred yards at least from shore. The water was so cold that they must soon be chilled through, and there was not another canoe in sight.

"Oh! Memotas, we're gaen to drown," groaned Fergus. "I'm sae sorry I tried to strike you."

Memotas was too frightened to answer. He could only hold on desperately, and look earnestly shoreward. Suddenly his face lit up, and he called out:

"Your father! See! He's coming—and the dogs!"

Sure enough at that moment Mr. MacTavish, accompanied by the two Newfoundland dogs, appeared on the crest of the ridge. Instantly he took in the situation, and springing with great bounds down to the water's edge, pointed out the upturned canoe to his sagacious companions, crying:

"Fetch them, gude dogs. Fetch them—quick."

Not a moment did the wise brutes hesitate. Into the chill water they plunged, and made it fairly foam as they tore their way through it with mighty strokes, barking loudly as though to say:

"We're coming! Hold on!" The boys' strength had been failing, but the appearance of the dogs renewed it, and hold on they did until their noble rescuers reached them. Then letting go the canoe they each grasped the collar of a dog, and were thus drawn safely to the shore, where Mr. MacTavish awaited them with keen anxiety.

Rushing into the water he dragged them out one

after another, not forgetting to pat their dripping rescuers warmly, and to say :

“Gude dogs, gude dogs. The Lord be praised for making ye sae sensible.”

The warm sunshine soon restored the boys' vigour, and they were able to tell Mr. MacTavish how it all happened. Verily a more sheepish, penitent pair of youngsters could hardly be imagined, as all limp, dripping, and bedraggled, they made a clean breast of it, Fergus being spokesman, and Memotas murmuring assent to what he said.

Mr. MacTavish listened attentively until all the facts were before him, and then burst out into a hearty laugh :

“Weel, weel, weel, ye hae punished yer ainsels brawly, and it's little I hae to say to you. But,” and here his face grew more grave, “ye 've taugt me one thing by yer foolishness—that I've done very wrong in not seeing that ye learned to swim before this. I maun see to it without delay.”

And so, as a consequence of the upset, Fergus came in for a course of lessons in swimming that continued throughout the brief summer, with the result that before autumn made the water unbearable, he had learned quite well how to take care of himself in case of any such mishap befalling him again.

The dogs received unstinted praise for their intelligence, even Mr. Barnston so far forgetting his attitude of indifference toward them as to join in the chorus ; so that Fergus felt as if it was worth running the risk

he had done, since it afforded his pets such a fine opportunity of winning renown for themselves.

Mrs. MacTavish was disposed to take Fergus' adventure a good deal to heart. That her boy should lose his temper was not of much moment. He could recover that. But that he should come so near losing his life, which could never be recovered, was a very serious matter. It seemed to her as though he ought to be commanded to keep closer at home, and not to venture away without first obtaining permission.

But the chief trader held a different opinion. A life requiring self-mastery and self-reliance in no ordinary degree lay before the boy, and the sooner he learned to think for himself the better.

"Nay, nay, Ailie," said he. "It winna do to have the laddie ay running to you like an unweaned calf. He's learned a lesson he'll not soon forget, and he'll learn others in due time. He maunna be tethered, but just suffered to rin about the pasture 'till he grows canny, like his father. Eh, Ailie?" And the gray eyes twinkled with sly good-humour; for he knew his wife had already come around to his way of thinking.

CHAPTER III.

EARLY EXPERIENCES.

IT was happy, wholesome boyhood that Fergus had at Norway House, full of activity and interest, and admirably adapted to developing manliness and other good qualities of character. With his parents he was on the happiest terms. His father was not one to make much demonstration. He did not wear his heart on his sleeve, but he had a big, warm heart nevertheless, that made itself felt through his grave and somewhat stern manner.

Fergus had the deepest respect for him. He never thought of trying to argue against any of his commands, or attempting to tease him into compliance with his own wishes. Mr. MacTavish would not brook either disobedience or argument. It was not his way to act hastily, or to speak upon impulse. His words and deeds were alike well considered, and his chief failing, perhaps, lay in his profound confidence in his own wisdom. Having by dint of prudence, sagacity, self-denial, and fidelity, made his way up to his present responsible and lucrative position, he naturally had a good opinion of himself, which

the almost autocratic character of his post helped to increase.

In dealing with Fergus he was for the most part considerate and patient enough; but there were times when an unusual fretfulness or contrariness on the boy's part would stir his wrath, and then he did not hesitate to lay his hand heavily upon him. Yet so strong and deep was his love, that while these punishments, painful to both, made Fergus stand somewhat in awe of him, they did not create any barrier between the two, nor prevent the growth of a good understanding that made the son take increasing delight in his father's society as the years passed.

Between Mrs. MacTavish and Fergus there was the most perfect understanding. No mother and son could have loved one another more implicitly than they did. Since only one child had come to her, Mrs. MacTavish had resolved, God helping her, to bring that one up so that he would be an honour to his parents, and a power for good in his own world. The temptation to coddle him, to keep him much to herself, to humour every whim, and indulge every fancy so far as she could, was very great. But she steadfastly put it from her. Fergus would have to make his own way through life, much as his father had done before him; and he must learn to endure hardness in his youth, to rough it like the other boys, to grow sturdy, manly, and brave, in order that he might go forth to his life's work duly fitted in body no less than in mind.

The one thing upon which she laid stress, which was ever in her thoughts, was that her boy should have pure principles, a quick conscience, and a keen sense of justice. To this end she made it the rule of her life to keep her word to him in the minutest particulars, no matter at what inconvenience to herself. Her word was always as good as her deed, and if by any chance circumstances made it impossible for her to carry out her promise, she explained the matter as carefully to Fergus as she would to her husband, not resting satisfied until she had made it perfectly clear to him, and had been relieved of her obligation.

For his education, Fergus had of course to look to his parents altogether, and happily not in vain. In the abundant leisure of the long winters at the different Forts where he had served, Mr. MacTavish made the most of their small, but well-chosen libraries, and his knowledge, so far as it went, was thoroughly sound, albeit somewhat behind the times,

His wife, too, was well able to second him, or rather to go before and prepare the way for him in their boy's mind. She had thought of being a school teacher before she had decided to be a wife, and had fitted herself for the position as carefully as the resources of the settlement enabled her to do. Consequently Fergus' mind was in no danger of neglect with her to look after it.

Her rule was to devote two or three hours to him every morning the year round, teaching him the

"three R's" and many things besides. For she had rare gifts as a teacher; and whenever his attention flagged, and he grew restless, she would introduce a diversion in the way of a little story or a bit of verse, thus bringing his wandering mind back to her control.

It took a good deal of this harmless guile to keep her pupil at work. His impatient, energetic spirit objected to the necessary restraint, particularly on the bright, warm, summer mornings, and then oftentimes, rather than be constantly checking him, this wise mother would say:

"Come, laddie, and let us have our lessons out-of-doors!"

Fergus' answer was always a whoop of delight; and then off they would go to the nearest clump of pines, and in its balmy shade take up the task again.

But if the boy's attention was hard to keep in the house, where his restless eyes were more likely to be gazing out of the window than fastened upon the book, out in the pine grove it was very much worse. The birds playing chase in the hot, still air, the insects darting hither and thither in the sunlight, the squirrels chattering saucy challenges from the trees, were temptations to inattention not to be resisted; and just when they were in the middle of a lesson in reading or arithmetic, Fergus would shout out suddenly:

"Look, mither! isn't that a braw butterfly?" or "Quick, mither, see that bonnie little squirrel!" And the lesson would have to be begun over again.

Yet Mrs. MacTavish never lost patience. There

was plenty of time, and no need to hurry. Her darling boy would soon enough grow up out of her reach, and enter into the more serious tasks of life, where she could not follow him. Upon only one thing did she insist with unyielding firmness, namely, that at least two full hours should be spent in this schooling every day except Saturday; and then Fergus had a whole holiday.

So when it was evident that the book of Nature was altogether too attractive to permit any interest in the printed pages, she would turn to it, and taking up a flower, a leaf, a bit of stone or wood, talk brightly about the wonders of the Divine handiwork, and show how perfect was God's planning.

To this Fergus always listened with appreciative interest. He had the soul of a naturalist. Nature was full of voices for him, asking him questions that, being unable to answer himself, he promptly referred to his parents; and so eager was he for the right kind of replies, that his father was fain to send to England for a package of books upon botany, geology, and natural history, which, when they arrived, coming down by York Factory, proved a mine of inexhaustible delight to all three of the family, their abundant pictures giving Fergus particular pleasure.

With these books, too, came illustrated editions of the Bible, and of the "Pilgrim's Progress," copies of "Robinson Crusoe," and of "Milton's Poems;" and to the vast delight of the whole staff at the Fort, a number of Sir Walter Scott's works, then filling the

world with their fame—"The Lay of the Last Minstrel," "The Lady of the Lake," "Marmion," "Waverley," "Guy Mannering," and others were in the set. For these the MacTavishes were indebted to Sir George Simpson's thoughtfulness. The "Pilgrim's Progress," and "Robinson Crusoe" were for the boy, in whom he had such an interest; the other volumes were for his parents. And if His Excellency could only have been present when the packages were opened, and have witnessed the joy their contents gave, he would have asked for no other reward.

Between mid-day and the hour for the evening meal, Fergus was master of his time. Unless there were special reasons for limiting him, he could go and come as he pleased. This was the part of the day he enjoyed the most. Memotas and others of the boys were always in waiting for him, and off they would go for a long afternoon of play.

There was never any lack of amusement. In the warm days of summer they had their canoes, in which to paddle up and down the Jack River, or out upon Playgreen Lake, their bows and arrows, with which to play wild hunters in the forest that stretched away indefinitely on every hand, or their games of lacrosse, or ball, for which the grassy plain beside the Fort was excellently adapted.

Then, in the winter time, warmly wrapped up in furs, they had fine tobogganing down the steep sides of the ridge that rose behind the Fort, or merry times running races in snow shoes, or what was even more



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enjoyable, the fun of teaching the dogs to draw the sledges, and then having excited trials of speed over the level surface of the lake.

Of course they had no skating. Skates had no chance in a region where the snow covered the ice as fast as it made. But if Fergus could not skate, he could snow-shoe as well as an Indian, and could go as many miles in one day as he was years old without any difficulty.

Of the two seasons, Fergus liked summer the better by far. One could move about much more freely than in winter, the days were longer, and there was more to be done in them. His rule was to go to bed with the sun, and to get up with it; and, on this account, he had to make up in winter for the comparatively little sleep he took in the summer.

Owing to its commanding position upon the only practicable route between Lake Winnipeg and York Factory, Norway House, so far as the Red River and Mackenzie River departments were concerned, was in a manner the gate to Hudson's Bay. All the furs that were taken throughout those vast districts passed by on their way north to England, while all the goods and supplies for the different posts in boat and canoe came south in return. Consequently, what with the frequent arrival and departure of brigades with their bands of noisy, merry, reckless *voyageurs*, and swaggering clerks in charge, ready for song, or dance, or story, Norway House, in mid-summer, was one of the liveliest places on the continent.

Fergus greatly enjoyed all this excitement and bustle. As the son of the chief trader, he, of course, received a good deal of attention from the visiting officers; and the stories told him by those who came from the prairies of the Saskatchewan, and the rugged fastnesses of the Rocky Mountains, of grand buffalo hunts, of thrilling encounters with huge grizzlies, of narrow escapes from hostile Indians, filled his soul with longing to see for himself the wonders of that region, where the prairies rolled in verdurous billows for a thousand miles, until they broke against the foot hills of mighty mountains towering to the skies, where the clumsy buffalo lumbered on in uncounted myriads, furnishing food and clothing and shelter to whole tribes of Indians, and where the deer, the moose, the beaver, and other animals, hardly known at the Norway House, might be met with in a day's journey.

"I'm going to the Rocky Mountains, father, as soon as I'm big enough," he would say to Mr. MacTavish; and his father, appreciating the spirit that prompted the statement, would reply encouragingly:

"Nae doot ye will, laddie, all in good time; and travel twa miles to yer father's ane, maybe, e'er you're well out of your teens."

The brigades began to arrive soon after Jack Frost had released his grip of the lake and river, and permitted them to move freely about within their banks again. First would come the Portage Brigade

of six or eight York boats, and its band of wild-looking Canadian and half-breed *voyageurs*, dressed out in new light-blue capotes, and corduroy trousers tied at the knee with bead-work garters. The scarlet sashes which encircled their waists, the gaudy feathers and tinsel adorning their hats, and the moose-skin moccasins, bright with bead work, that cased their feet, gave them a very picturesque appearance, which admirably accorded with their sinewy forms, and handsome sun-burned countenances.

They pitched their camp on the edge of their green, and as they lounged about their fires in the evening, puffing clouds of fragrant smoke from the pipes that were hardly ever out of their mouths, Fergus was always a welcome visitor to their circle, and an eager listener to their talk.

After them would come the Isle à la Crosse Brigade, and then the Red River Brigades in quick succession, filling Norway House with noise and merriment, and then passing on to the sea for their respective loads, returning again, a month or so later, to repeat the operation.

The great event of each season was the arrival of the Saskatchewan Brigade, the largest and noisiest of all that halted at the Fort. It usually comprised fifteen or twenty boats, filled with the wildest men in the service. Coming from the boundless prairies and the lofty "Rockies," their manners were as free as the one, and their talk as tall as the other. Their delight was to get hold of the raw recruits, the green

young clerks who had arrived only that summer, and make their eyes bulge out with wonder at their stories, true and untrue, as frequently as not the latter, in which buffaloes, bears, and red men figured prominently.

Their appearance was as romantic as their experiences. They had adopted the Indian style of dress so far as it suited them, and when decked out "in war paint"—that is, in what city folks would call their "Sunday clothes"—a stranger would need to look at them twice in order to be sure that they were not real red men.

When the Saskatchewan Brigade arrived, Fergus forgot all his other friends, and until they struck camp and continued their journey north to the salt water or south to the prairies, as the case might be, he spent all his time in their company.

One of the things they tried to teach him was the use of the lasso, in which many of them were wonderfully expert. Fergus was determined to acquire this useful accomplishment; and the head of the Brigade having presented him with a capital lasso, he practised diligently upon the stumps until, by the time the boats returned, he could occasionally get the rope over one at short range. Then, of course, he was burning with eagerness to show how well he had got on; and his friends were good enough to play the part of wild buffaloes, in order that he might try and lasso them.

They were amusing themselves in this way one

evening when a sturdy young calf strayed upon the green. It belonged to the chief trader's cow, a recent arrival, brought up with no small difficulty from Red River.

"Look there, Fergus!" cried one of the men, pointing to the calf drawing near, innocent of all mischief. "There's something for you to try your lasso on. Let us see what you can do with that calf."

"Aye, that I will," responded the boy, promptly; and off he started, swinging the rope about his head in the most approved manner.

The calf was not at all shy, and permitted him to come quite close before it moved away. As it did Fergus made a throw, but the rope slipped harmlessly off the animal's back, causing it to give a start of surprise, and kick up its heels amid the laughter of the onlookers.

Gathering up the lasso, Fergus crept nearer, and made another fling. This time he had better fortune. By a happy chance the calf threw up its head just as the noose circled about it, and the supple rope settled snugly about its neck.

The moment the creature felt itself caught it started off on the run, and Fergus, too elated at the success of his throw to think what he was about, took a turn of the lasso about his waist in order to afford more resistance to the struggles of his startled captive.

The calf plunged and kicked furiously, and this attracted the attention of the two Newfoundland dogs, who, either because they thought their master

was in danger, or that he was having some fun in which they would like to share, went bounding and barking after the calf, rendering the poor thing perfectly frantic.

The scene that followed was amusing beyond description. The calf, crazed with fright, rushed this way and that over the green, towing Fergus along at the top of his speed, while the big black dogs, one at either side, made fierce snaps at the creature's ears, all the while barking their very loudest.

So long as Fergus could keep his feet he had nothing to fear save loss of breath. But if he were to trip and fall he would certainly be dragged some distance, and possibly hurt. He thought of this himself, and tried to loosen the rope from his waist; but it was too tightly strained, and he gave up the attempt. The best he could do was to hold the lasso tightly with both hands, and keeping an eye to his feet, follow in the wake of the calf wherever the terrified animal chose to drag him.

Meantime the men of the Brigade were convulsed with laughter, and roaring out by way of encouragement:

"Hold on, Fergus, lad! He'll soon tire. Mind your feet! Keep going. Don't let him trip you!" and so on.

Fergus was now thoroughly frightened. He felt as helpless as a fly on a wheel, and the calf, instead of getting tired, as *he* certainly was, seemed to be jumping more wildly than ever. He tried to call

for help, but his breathless condition prevented his making himself understood. He then endeavoured to order off the dogs, but they refused to take the slightest notice of him.

His situation became serious. His breath was gone, and his legs were tottering under him. At length he could keep his feet no longer, and tripping over a thick tuft of grass he fell face forward; still holding desperately to the lasso.

Then the men, who had enjoyed it all so heartily, thought it time to interfere, and with a whoop half a dozen of them sprang up and scattered over the plain, shouting :

“Hold on, Fergus! We’re after you. Keep your grip.”

It was easy enough to cry “Hold on!” but Fergus found it mighty hard work to do so; and the little strength he had was just about leaving him when one of the men, catching up to the calf, threw himself upon its back, tumbling it helplessly to the ground, while another picked up Fergus, and loosed the rope from his waist.

“Eh, my lad, but that was rare sport, wasn’t it? If ye could only have kept your feet a little longer you’d have brought the calfie down for sure,” said the trapper who had picked him up, a broad smile suffusing his bronzed features. Then, noticing that Fergus seemed faint, he added with quick concern: “But are you hurt, Fergus, boy? What’s the matter with you?”

Fergus at first had no breath to answer. But he soon recovered it sufficiently to gasp out, with a heroic attempt at a smile of indifference :

“ No, not much. I ’ll soon be all right.”

He was not much damaged, as it turned out. The lasso had left a red circle around his waist that was painful for a while, and his shins and elbows had suffered by being bumped over the ground ; but otherwise he had escaped injury.

It was a good while before he heard the last of that lassoing experiment. His father thought it a huge joke, and often, when they came across the calf, would give Fergus a nudge, inquiring slyly :

“ Have you got your lasso, laddie ? ”

But neither the rough treatment he had received from the calf, nor the teasing of his friends, in anywise weakened the boy’s determination to become expert with the rope. He only practised the more diligently, and bade fair to become very skilful in due time.

Another accomplishment to which Fergus gave much attention was the handling of a rifle. His father had procured for him a beautiful little weapon that he could easily carry, and which had little or no recoil.

He soon learned to load it properly himself, but his father very wisely would not allow him to do any shooting unless he was in company with some of the men.

Very often in the evenings there would be shooting-

matches on the green. A target had been put up on the side of the ridge, and the men of the Fort would have competitions among themselves or with some of their visitors, in which Fergus took a keen interest. His father was an admirable shot. At two hundred yards he never missed the bull's-eye, and he could be safely trusted to hit the target somewhere at almost any distance his rifle would carry. He was accordingly anxious that his son should be an equally good marksman when he grew up to manhood, and he gave him many a lesson in sighting, in calculating the range, and in allowing for the wind.

Thus was Fergus' boyhood full of interesting, healthful activity, and it might safely be said that year in and year out there was not a happier boy between the Rockies and the Atlantic. From one common cause of discontent he had a fortunate immunity. There were no boys about him whose lot was superior to his, and with whom he might institute comparisons to his own disadvantage. On the contrary, he was the object of a certain amount of envy among his companions because by virtue of his father's position he stood first, and in his case accordingly if there was little temptation to discontent, there was considerable danger of an arrogant spirit being fostered. His nature had certain leanings in this direction too. He was inclined to be very imperious on occasions, and needed some stout opposition by way of discipline. His being an only child prevented his getting this wholesome kind of experience at home ; so that it fell

upon the outside world to teach him that there was a time to give no less than to take, a time to serve no less than to command. And that he did learn this lesson well will appear as the history of his life unfolds itself.

CHAPTER IV.

A TRIP TO YORK FACTORY.

AS Fergus grew older, the range of his ideas and ambitions widened. He longed to see more of the world than was visible from the hill behind Norway House, and began to press his father to let him go with him on some of his frequent journeys north to Hudson's Bay, or south to the Red River.

But Mr. MacTavish was slow in granting his wish. When he journeyed, his manner was to make the shortest possible time between his starting point and his destination. His business was always uppermost in his mind, and he did not welcome very cordially the notion of having a small boy on his hands, who would have to be constantly considered, and who would necessarily be more or less of a drag.

"Time enough, laddie," he would reply to Fergus' coaxing, "yer mither canna spare ye yet. Ye maun bide at hame to keep her company for the present. Ye 'll have plenty of going to and fro all in good time."

But the summer that Fergus was twelve he felt particularly restive, and seemed to fret so much over the long-deferred fulfilment of his desires, that at last

the chief trader thought it time to accede to them, especially as Mrs. MacTavish warmly supported her son. Accordingly he announced that he would take Fergus with him when he went up to York Factory for his annual supply of goods; and thenceforth Fergus counted the days impatiently until the time for setting forth should come.

It was the month of August before the brigade of boats got off, and the week preceding the start was one of intense activity at the Fort. The packages of precious furs gathered during the winter and spring, through trade with the Indians, had all to be examined and put in perfect order; the boats must be minutely inspected, every leak calked, and every weak spot strengthened, and plenty of provisions made ready for the long trip northward.

The boats used in travelling between Norway House and Hudson's Bay were as unlike the light, graceful canoe of the West as they could possibly be; for they were heavy, awkward, blunt-bowed, square-sterned craft, capable of carrying three tons of cargo apiece, besides a crew of ten or twelve *voyageurs*, and three or four passengers.

Fergus would have very much preferred going in canoes, as his father sometimes did when making a special trip in which speed was of the first importance. But he had not the arranging of the matter, and his gladness at being allowed to join the party, swallowed up all other feelings.

Days before they started he had all his preparations

made; a stout skin bag packed with changes of clothing and spare moccasins, his rifle cleaned and cased, a goodly store of ammunition put up; and everything else done that he could anticipate as being necessary.

His mother entered heartily into the spirit of the thing.

"Ye're going to see what I've never seen yet, Fergus, dearie, and that's the great salt sea; and maybe some day ye'll be sailing across it to the country whence your grandfather and grandmither, came. Ah me!" she added, with a half-suppressed sigh, "I'd like well to gae there myself. Mony a bonnie tale they've told me about it. But I maun na repine. The lines truly have fallen unto me in pleasant places, and"—taking Fergus' face between her hands, and imprinting a fond kiss upon his forehead—"you'll have to see the world for yer mither, Fergus."

Fergus straightened himself up and assumed a very important, enterprising air, saying:

"Ay, that I will, mither, if I can. Never fear."

The brigade got away amid much bustle and apparent confusion late in the afternoon of Wednesday. It consisted of six boats, each having a crew of ten *voyageurs*. The only passengers were the chief trader, Fergus, and two young clerks, named Grant and Patterson, on their way to York Factory, to spend the winter at that post.

The day was as fine as heart could wish, and amid cheers from those on shore, and songs from the crews

on board, the boats lined out in procession behind Mr. MacTavish's, and cut their way through the rippling water.

Fergus could hardly contain himself for joy. He bounced about in the boat as lively as a sparrow, now standing in the bow, and looking out very sharply for rocks and shallows, and other perils of navigation, and then throwing himself down in the stern beside his father, and plying him with eager questions as to how far they would go before stopping for the night; how long the men could row without getting tired; how many days they would be in getting to York Factory, and so on, to all of which his father replied promptly and fully:

"Ask as mony questions as ye like, Fergus," said he, smiling upon him affectionately, "and I'll warrant to answer ye as mony as I can. Just keep both yer een wide open, and everything ye dinna understand, be quick to ask about it. There's no better way to learn than that."

The boats being heavily laden, very rapid progress could not be made, and only twelve miles were put behind when the fast-sinking sun gave notice that it was time to camp. The *voyageurs* would simply roll up in their blankets, and sleep in the open air; but for the chief trader there was a roomy tent, which he and Fergus and the two clerks would occupy.

The evening meal was quickly prepared and despatched, and then the crews gathered about the fires of crackling pine, and sang their favourite songs

with a heartiness that sent the echoes reverberating far and wide. "*A' la claire fontaine,*" "*En roulant ma boule.*" Others followed in tuneful succession, the simple music seeming in perfect accord with the wild beauty of the scene.

All this was very delightful to Fergus. For the first time in his life he was cut loose from the common-place surroundings of home, and taking part in the life of the hunter and traveller. The lot of the *voyageur* appeared full of attractions to him. Joining with them as they sang, he watched the curling smoke from their pipes, listened to their soft voluble speech, and admiring their supreme content as they stretched at their ease upon the turf, he found himself wishing that he was one of them. They seemed to have no cares so long as there was plenty of pemmican to eat, and no lack of tobacco for their pipes.

A very interesting class of men were these *voyageurs*. With French and Indian blood mingling in their veins, their natures showed the characteristics of their ancestry. They were as a rule tall, slight, shapely men; with regular, clear-cut features, eyes and hair black as a raven's, and skin as tawny as an Indian's. Abounding in activity and vigour, brave and enduring to a fault, they had the spontaneous gaiety of happy children; and were always ready for a song, no matter how tired they might be. Like children, too, they needed lots of looking after. Their regard for the truth was very slight, and their honesty was not above suspicion. They could be most

provokingly lazy, moreover, when the humour seized them.

But in Mr. MacTavish's hands they were models of good behaviour. He had the reputation of having under him the best disciplined staff in his district; and his *voyageurs* were no exception. They held him in the highest respect. They both feared and loved him. They feared him because he did not hesitate to enforce his commands in a way that made disobedience a dangerous experiment, and they loved him because he never failed to show due consideration for their feelings. He treated them as men, not as mere hirelings to be abused at pleasure. The strictest justice animated all his dealings with them. In their expressive phrase, he was "a man of one word." Whatever he promised he held to, and so his influence among them was supreme. There was no service so severe that any one of them would not gladly undertake for his sake.

On a couch of fragrant cedar boughs, with his bag for a pillow and a blanket rolled tightly around him, Fergus slept the sleep of good health and a clear conscience. He was just in the midst of a pleasant dream, having as it seemed to him been not more than an hour in bed, when his slumbers were broken by his father calling loudly: "*Lève, Lève, Lève!*" That is, "Get up;" and by the time he had shaken the sleep from his eyes, and got out of his blanket, he found the whole camp already astir. Oh, dear! but how sleepy he did feel! What was the use of

getting up so early? It would not be dawn for hours yet, surely. If *voyageurs* had to turn out as early as this every morning it was not so pleasant being a *voyageur*, after all. Thinking he would have time for another nap before breakfast, he threw himself down again, and was just dozing off sweetly, when his father appeared at the tent-door, calling to him:

"Fergus, laddie, are you awake yet? Come out of your nest."

In a very sleepy tone of protest, Fergus replied:

"I'll come out, father, when the breakfast is ready," and turned over to resume his nap.

But instead of leaving him Mr. MacTavish gave a hearty laugh, and with a quick jerk pulled the blanket off.

"Breakfast! Fergus," he cried. "Not a sup of breakfast will there be until we've made a dozen miles. Come, laddie, stir yourself, or the tent will be tumbling about your ears."

Feeling very hungry, sleepy, and cross, Fergus crawled out into the cold, morning air, and gloomily watched the men making ready to start. How differently everything looked in the gray, grim dawn from what it had done the evening before, when the fires were burning briskly and the men singing merrily. There were neither fires nor song now. All the romance of camping out had vanished.

Quite understanding how he felt, his father said kindly to him:

"Just run doon to the water, and dip yer hands and face in it. You'll feel more sonsey then."

Although it sounded more like a suggestion than a command, Fergus knew well enough it was the latter, and although not much in the humour for cold water, did as he was bidden, with the result that he felt a good deal brightened up by his ablutions.

No time was wasted in getting off; and, pulling away as briskly as if they had had a hearty breakfast, the *voyageurs* sent the big boats through the water at such a good pace that by eight o'clock the chief trader's twelve miles had been made, and a halt was ordered for rest and refreshment.

What an appetite everybody had for the morning meal! The *voyageurs* were content with pemmican and flour and tea; but for the passengers there were in addition cured buffalo tongue, biscuits, sugar, butter, and other table comforts, which they greatly relished.

Louis Bonchance, who was responsible for the meals, had far more skill in cooking than was ordinary among his class, and took no small pride in displaying it; so that if the travellers were sure to have a good appetite for their breakfast, they could count with equal certainty upon having a good breakfast for their appetite.

"Well, Fergus, do you feel any better now?" inquired Mr. MacTavish, when the boy's attack upon the substantial fare at last showed signs of slackening.

Fergus gave his belt a hitch that it might fit more

easily around his expanded waist, and with the most amiable of smiles replied that he did feel very much better.

"Just keep on that road then, laddie. A merry heart makes a short journey, ye ken."

"But I'm sure I don't want this journey to be short, father," said Fergus. "I'm enjoying it too much."

"How about the getting up i' the mornings?" asked his father, with a smile.

"Oh, that's all right, father; I'll not take long to get used to that," Fergus responded brightly; and to his credit be it recorded that during the rest of the trip he bounded out cheerfully as soon as the cry of "*Lève, Lève,*" broke in upon his slumbers.

During the course of the morning the boats ran their first rapid, and it was quite an exciting experience. Owing to their bulk and weight they are considerably more difficult to manage than canoes. Every man must thoroughly understand his work, and do it at exactly the right moment, or a smashed boat and ruined freight may be the consequence. From his post in the stern-sheets of the leading boat, Fergus had a splendid opportunity of taking it all in.

As they drew near the rapids the river narrowed, and its banks grew precipitous and rocky. The current increased in velocity, and soon the roar and splash of the troubled torrent became audible. Quivering with half-timorous, half-delighted expecta-

tion, Fergus kneeled upon the thwart, and grasping the gunwale tightly, tried to watch every movement of boat and whirling water at once.

The speed of the current was so great that the oars were no longer needed to send the boat onward, and the rowers unshipped them, but still held them in their hands to use as poles to push off from the rocks, should they happen to strike or ground. Presently they were in the midst of the wild turmoil of water, and then the heavy, clumsy boat seemed to become as light as a feather. This way and that it darted at the bidding of the resistless current, now plunging its bow so deep into the foaming whirls that the spray splashed clear to the stern, and then rising up on the crest of an angry billow that seemed eager to take it down.

"Oh, father! isn't this grand?" exclaimed Fergus, as with dilated eyes and tense muscles he crouched on the seat beside the chief trader, who held the steering oar.

But his father was too absorbed in his critical task to make any response. They were nearing the Cellar now, and his utmost skill would soon be called for. This place they called the Cellar was one of the most dangerous spots on the river. After dashing and whirling about furiously through gravel banks and boulders, the torrent took a sudden leap into a deep pool, which bore some resemblance to the cellar of a house, and thus got its name.

"Sit ye doon, now, Fergus," said Mr. MacTavish,

as the roar of the fall made itself heard. "We're gaen to take a big jump, and ye might fall oot."

"Nae fear, father. I'm all right here," responded Fergus, who did not want to change his position because he had such a good view of everything from where he was.

It would have been better for him had he obeyed at once, for before his father could repeat his command, they were on the brink of the drop. The heavy boat going at full speed shot out half its length into the air, and then dived into the dark pool below.

It struck the water with a shock as though it had been solid rock, and at the same moment careened violently over on the side where Fergus was, the water rushing in over the gunwale.

"Take care! Fergus, take care!" shouted the chief trader, making a grasp at his son, whose danger he perceived.

But he was just a second too late. The sudden shock loosened Fergus' hold of the gunwale, and the careening of the boat threw him off his balance. With a shrill shriek of terror he pitched forward, and vanished in the seething foam.

"My God! the laddie!" cried Mr. MacTavish, throwing down the steering oar and plunging after his son, while the stroke oar of the boat, with quick intelligence, sprang into his place to take charge of the steering.

There was a chorus of startled exclamations from the men as they hurriedly got their oars into place,

and peered anxiously into the water for the first sign of the swimmers. For a moment or two nothing was visible save the whirling froth. Then amid cries of "Voila ! Voila !" Mr. MacTavish's head rose to the surface, and a moment after Fergus appeared some little distance away.

It was well for Fergus that he had learned to swim. He needed all his knowledge now. The water spun round and round in mighty eddies, and seemed to be trying its best to drag him down again ere his father could reach him.

"Keep oop, Fergus! Keep oop!" cried Mr. MacTavish. "I'm coming tae ye."

Fergus heard the cry and turned toward his father, struggling bravely with the furious flood. Half-a-dozen strenuous strokes, and Mr. MacTavish's hand was upon his shoulder.

"Eh, laddie," said he, with a sigh of vast relief. "You're all richt noo. I'll take ye safe to land."

The shore was near, and in another minute father and son were standing upon it, the chief trader having no other thought than fervent gratitude, but Fergus feeling very much ashamed of himself because he knew what had happened was all his own fault.

By this time others of the boats had arrived, and the men crowded around the two dripping figures with eager questions and voluble admiration for their leader's action.

"That'll do, that'll do," said Mr. MacTavish, after he had assured them that both he and his son were

none the worse for their wetting. "We'll make a halt here for dinner. Just let the other boats know; and you, Fergus, get oot yer bag, and put some dry claes on ye."

Fergus started to obey the order, then checked himself, and came back to his father,

"Father, I'm sore sorry that I gave you so much trouble," said he, his eyes filling and his lip trembling. "I should have sat down the instant you told me."

"It's a true word you're saying, laddie," assented Mr. MacTavish, "but I think ye'll not soon forget what your not doing it cost you, eh, Fergus?"

"No, indeed, father, I won't. I'll promise you to keep my seat at the next rapid," responded the boy in a brighter tone, for he saw that his father did not intend to give him the scolding he felt he deserved, and so the matter dropped.

After a longer halt than usual for dinner in order that the dripping clothes might be thoroughly dried before the fire, the journey was resumed. The rule was for the men to row for a space of time called a *pipe*, because they were always allowed a smoke at the end of it. A *pipe* meant about two hours' steady rowing when the weather was at all favourable. At the end of this time the oars were dropped, the pipes lit, and for ten minutes everybody except Fergus gave himself to the enjoyment of the weed.

Fergus had never thought much about smoking before, but its special importance on this boating trip impressed him, and he felt that the others had an

enjoyment which he did not share. With him to think was to act; and when this notion came into his head he at once asked his father:

“Father, may I learn to smoke a pipe like the rest of you?”

Mr. MacTavish looked down into the eager face, and read the boy's thoughts as though they had been printed upon it.

“It's small wonder ye ask me that question, Fergus, seeing we're all puffing about ye like so many chimneys, but do you know, laddie, I'd be richt glad if ye'd never take to the pipe. Mony a bit of siller has it cost me, and I canna say I'm anywise the better mon for it.”

“But, father, all the men smoke; and shouldn't I smoke, too, when I am a man?” argued Fergus.

“It's not easy for me to say ye nay, laddie, when I have to take the pipe out of my mouth to do it,” replied Mr. MacTavish, “but I'll tell ye, Fergus, if ye'll promise me not to touch tobacco until ye are a mon, that is till ye're twenty-one years of age, I'll gie ye my word to say nae more about it; and if ye are bound to smoke then, I'll gie ye the finest pipe that money can buy. What dae ye say, Fergus?”

Fergus thought for a moment, and then with a quick air of decision put his small hand in his father's big palm.

“I'll promise you, father,” he said. “Here's my hand on it.”

“Spoken like a true MacTavish,” cried the chief

trader, his face beaming with pride and pleasure. "Ye make my poor heart glad, Fergus, and right well I know ye'll never break yer word."

For *pipe* after *pipe* all through the long, lovely day, the boat brigade made steady, if not very rapid progress. The country through which they passed was constantly changing in character. From the turbulent torrent where Fergus' mishap occurred, they entered into a series of little lakes dotted with innumerable islets, through which they had to thread their way with exceeding care, startling ducks from their calm security, and sometimes getting within range of regiments of geese floating gracefully upon the still water. Mr. MacTavish's gun always lay ready loaded upon the seat within his reach, and he lost no opportunity of letting drive at these birds, Fergus never failing to follow suit to the best of his ability. Sometimes he would let Fergus have the first shot.

"There, laddie!" he would say, as a flock of ducks or geese paddling about some serene cove, innocent of all danger, would come into view. "Get ye oop to the bow now, and make no noise. Pull gently, there, Baptiste. We'll creep as close as we can."

Quivering with excitement, Fergus would brace himself in the bow and get ready to fire.

"Not yet, laddie, not yet," would his father cry, as he began to take aim when the birds were still too far off. "Ye'll only frighten them, and get naething for your powder."

At last Fergus would get the signal to fire ; and then holding his breath, while his heart thumped away inside his breast like a trip-hammer, he would sight along the barrel for an instant, and pull the trigger.

With wild clamour of quacking and whirring wings, up would dart the ducks, save such as Fergus' shot had persuaded to remain ; and then bang ! bang ! would go the chief trader's double-barrel, and down would tumble three or four of the plump beauties.

At least a dozen fine ducks and two big geese did Fergus succeed in bringing down during the journey, and had, therefore, good reason to feel somewhat proud of himself. The birds made a most welcome addition to the camp dinner, and Mr. MacTavish took care that each boat had its turn in enjoying the treat of roast duck.

There was another kind of bird that gave Fergus great amusement. They had the odd name of "whiskey-jack," however they had come by it, and were the most inquisitive, impudent, graceless little bundles of feathers imaginable. They were of a bluish-gray colour, and about the size of a blackbird. The supreme desire of their lives seemed to be to get the *voyageur's* food ; and as there were always plenty of scraps thrown out after the men had finished their meals, these whiskey-jacks hovered about continually, snapping greedily at every morsel. So daring were they in satisfying their appetite, that they would come up within a few feet of anybody that was eat-

ing, and look up at him with an expression that said as plainly as words :

“Here now, don't be greedy. Give me some of that.”

Baptiste told Fergus that by putting a piece of pemmican in your hand for bait, you could catch one of the saucy little creatures. So he tried the experiment. Taking a tempting bit of pemmican, he went off to one side of the camp, and lying down on the grass, covered his face with leaves, and stretched out his baited palm with the fingers ready to clutch.

He had not long to wait. Whether by scent or sight, the birds soon discovered the bait and darted toward it. For a moment or two they hesitated. There was surely something suspicious about that white hand with its upcurving fingers. It did certainly look like a trap. But then the pemmican. What a juicy morsel! Were St. Anthony a whiskey-jack he could hardly have withstood such a temptation. So with a shrill chirp, that no doubt meant “Here goes,” the boldest of the party made a dash for the bait.

He had it securely in his bill and was about to carry it away rejoicing, when the trap went off, the white fingers closed tightly upon his feet, and he was a prisoner. Then if ever a bird got into a passion he did. He did not seem so much terrified as enraged. He shrieked and stormed and struggled in the most absurdly furious manner. He exhausted his entire vocabulary of opprobrious names upon his captor. He bit and scratched like a tiger-cub until at length

Fergus, who had no idea of killing the frantic little creature, was fain to let it go; whereupon, with magnificent impudence, it flew off to a bough near by, and perching there in supposed security, looked back at him in a way that plainly meant:

"You can't fool me that way again, you big bully."

Fergus caught a good many whiskey-jacks after that in different ways, just for amusement, as he always let them go free after they had screamed themselves hoarse with indignation.

The close of this day found the brigade in a very poor place for camping. After leaving the chain of lakes they had entered the river Sion, a narrow, crooked, sluggish stream, hardly wide enough to admit the passage of the boats, the oars continually getting entangled in the grass and willows that grew on either side of the narrow space of open water.

The sturdy *voyageurs* toiled away until dark, hoping to reach some spot where there would be sufficient dry ground upon which to camp, but the darkness came on before they were successful, and at last a halt had to be made in a willow swamp, where all around was mud and water.

"Hech! but this's a poor place to lodge in," said Mr. MacTavish, smiling grimly. "I wadna care to sleep on that ground. We'll just have to bide in the boats and make the best of it."

No fires could be made. So the party had to content themselves with a cold supper, and then get such sleep as they could stretched out upon the

thwarts of the boats; so that it was upon a rather weary and cross lot of people that the sun rose the next morning, especially as the mosquitoes had been particularly active and enterprising during the night.

Without waiting for dawn the brigade started again, and after a couple of hours' hard work passed out of the muddy Sion into the deep, discoloured Black River, where the going was much better. By the middle of this day they reached the Portage *Haute de Terre*, that is, the height of land which divides the waters flowing south into Lake Winnipeg from those flowing north into Hudson's Bay. Here Fergus saw his first full portage, and was greatly interested.

The first business was to carry over the lading of the boats, and in doing this each crew looked after its own cargo. The goods being put up securely in packs of about ninety pounds' weight, were toted over on the men's backs. Then after a *pipe* and a rest they turned to the boats. In getting them over, the whole brigade devoted itself to each boat in turn. Two-thirds of the *voyageurs* harnessed themselves to the boats in front by means of straps across their breasts, while others took their positions at the sides to hold her steady and lift her when needed, and others still were ready with rollers to put underneath her keel.

Then with much shouting they started off, dragging their clumsy burden over the rude portage path until the opposing waterfall was circumvented, and they could launch her again in the smooth water beyond.

Fergus thought this a very fine performance, and in

his eagerness to help took hold of one of the lines, and was pulling away with all his might when he tripped upon one of the rollers, and might have been run over by the boat had not big Baptiste, perceiving his danger, picked him up as though he had been a kitten, and dropped him into the bow of the boat, from which advantageous position he superintended the remainder of the haul.

During the course of the next day they came to the famous Big Hill Rapids, the most difficult and dangerous on the whole journey. In order to the safe passage of these furious rapids all the lading of the boats had to be portaged to the foot of the turmoil. Then a picked crew of six men, with Mr. MacTavish himself at the steering oar, took down the boats one by one. Fergus begged so hard to run this foaming gauntlet that, after three of the boats had passed through without any mishap, his father consented.

"Ye may come doon just for once, Fergus," said he, "but mind ye, no kneeling oop on the seat. Ye must sit in the middle of the boat and hold fast."

CHAPTER V.

A SIGHT OF THE SALT SEA.

THE passage through the Big Hill Rapids was an intensely exciting one, and there were moments when Fergus wished to the bottom of his heart that he had not left the land. For nearly a quarter of a mile the big broad boat was hurled through and over the water as though it were a mere chip. Baptiste on the bow and the chief trader on the stern were never for a moment still; while in obedience to their sharp commands the oarsmen gave powerful strokes, now on this side, now on the other, and then altogether, according to directions.

For one who did not know the rapids thoroughly to have attempted to run them would mean certain destruction for his boat, and death for himself. Even in the experienced hands of Mr. MacTavish and Baptiste there were possibilities of danger, as was proved by the fact that the boat in which Fergus went down struck a jagged boulder and lost a large piece off her keel, while others were more or less injured, and a halt had to be called at the foot of the Rapids that the necessary repairs might be made.

Amid such incidents the journey was pursued day after day, the weather happily continuing fine, the progress made being satisfactory, and everybody feeling in excellent humour. Presently the Steel River was reached, and once the boats floated out upon this wide, deep stream all difficulties of navigation were at an end. Since leaving Norway House more than thirty weary portages had been made, and rapids innumerable run. Henceforth it promised to be all plain sailing. No more portages, no more rapids.

Mr. MacTavish was in high spirits.

"Noo, Fergus, we can take it easy for a bit," said he. "The wind and the current will do our work for us, and it's little more than a hundred miles to York."

The oars were taken in and laid along the thwarts, the sails, for which there had been hardly any use hitherto, were hoisted, and with a strong favouring breeze the brigade swept down the river, making a very pretty picture in the midst of the unbroken wilderness.

The day had dawned brightly, and the morning had been very fine and warm. As the boats turned curve after curve of the river, flocks of snow-white gulls attended them, seeming to like their company. In graceful flight they sailed about the swiftly moving craft, now dipping lightly in the rippling water, and then rising suddenly in long, rapid circles till they vanished in the azure above.

Fergus wanted very much to try if he could shoot one of these beautiful birds; they came so temptingly

near, and it seemed so easy to bring one of them down. But his father would not hear of it.

"Nay, nay, laddie. Why should you shoot the bonnie things? They're nae good to eat, and surely it's na richt to kill onything for the mere pleasure of it."

Feeling rather ashamed of himself on the case being put in that way, Fergus put down his gun, saying:

"No, father, I don't think it is right. It would have been cruel for me to kill one of those beautiful birds just because they came so near."

"Make this your rule, Fergus; for it's a gude one," said the chief trader: "Never to take the life of ony creetur in empty sport. God didna gie them to us for that, and He canna think weel of ony one that does such things."

"But, father, there's nae harm in shooting ducks or geese when you want to eat them, is there?" asked Fergus, looking a little puzzled.

"Ah! that's a verra different matter, laddie," replied Mr. MacTavish. "They're grand eating, and God has made them for our food. Do ye ken? Ye need never hesitate aboot bringing doon a brace of ducks, or a fine, fat goose. Ye can roast them for your dinner, and gie God thanks for putting sich fine birdies into the world."

"Oh! now I understand you, father, an' I'll try to mind your good rule," said Fergus, "so the gulls have nothing to fear from me."

"Perhaps they mightn't have ony way, Fergus," re-

turned his father, with a smile. "It's nae easy thing to shoot one of them, though they do come so near; but," continued Mr. MacTavish, "dae ye see how strangely they're flying? I'm thinking they're telling us that there'll be bad weather soon."

"Do you think there'll be a storm, father?" asked Fergus, in a tone of some anxiety, not at all relishing the idea of such an event without a roof to cover him.

"I should na wonder, laddie, if we have a bit of a storm before midnight," was the not very reassuring reply. "But we maun take things as they come. We've had marvellous fine weather so far."

As the afternoon advanced, the sun disappeared behind black, threatening clouds; the air became hot, heavy, and enervating; sudden gusts of wind disturbed the dark water and then died away again; the ducks disappeared from the little coves, and the gulls, still wheeling in erratic flight, gave forth shrill, mournful cries that were not pleasant to hear, for they had an ominous sound; the growl of the thunder grew steadily nearer, and the lightning flashed forth from the inky clouds. Suddenly, there came a blaze of lightning that lit up the whole horizon, followed by a crash of thunder which seemed to rend the heavens, and then, with a hiss as of fiercest hatred, the storm sprang upon the boat brigade.

"*A terre! A terre!*" is the cry, as the boats are pointed toward the nearest bank, and the rowers bend double over their oars. The frothing waves dash in their faces, and the heavy boats toss and pitch like

light canoes. Cowering in the stern, Fergus cast fearful glances at the furious elements. Wind and wave, thunder and lightning, seemed to have joined forces for the brigade's destruction. He marvelled at his father's calm, determined face, and the quiet, firm tone in which he issued his commands, and it gave him courage. Surely, if they were in danger of death, he would not be so composed.

On dashed the boats through the water foaming angrily all about them. The bank was reached, and in quick succession the boats were beached. The men leaped out just as the rain came down in a wild deluge, in the midst of which the tents were pitched as fast as hands could do it. But it was labour in vain. Hardly are the tents up than with an exultant shriek the gale charged upon them, tore poles and pins out of the ground, and flung the canvas on the ground. Drenched to the skin, unable to make a fire, and without any protection save that afforded by getting into the lee of a clump of trees, the party was compelled to spend about as miserable a night as could be imagined.

Poor Fergus found it very hard to be patient. He was almost as wet as if he had fallen into the river, and as hungry as a young bear. Yet neither dry clothes nor warm food were to be had. The best his father could do for him was to fish out some biscuits from the stores, and cover him with one of the oil-cloths, under which he alternately dozed and fretted in utter discomfort until daybreak.

Happily the storm spent itself during the night, and the sun rose next morning in unclouded splendour, restoring cheerfulness to everybody. A start was not made at once, as was usual, but several hours were spent in drying the dripping clothes and putting everything to rights. When they did get off the breeze befriended them again, and they made such good headway that by mid-day they passed out of the Steel River into the broad and beautiful Hayes River, whose rapid current would bear them smoothly on to York Factory.

"Hah! hah, Fergus!" said the chief trader, exultantly. "We've not far to gang'noo. We'll be at York Factory for breakfast, if all keeps well."

"Oh—father—how glad I am!" cried Fergus, clapping his hands; for, to tell the truth, he was heartily sick of this long and tedious boat journey; and, moreover, each day that he drew nearer the great salt sea of which he had heard so much, he became more impatient to look upon it.

Once they were well into the Hayes, the boats, instead of going in Indian file as hitherto, were all fastened together, side by side; and then while one man looked after the steering the others could take their ease, as the rapid current and accommodating breeze bore them steadily on to their destination.

At night, too, no landing was made or tents pitched. A cold supper was eaten on board, and when darkness came all but two or three left on watch to see

that the flotilla did not ground, stretched themselves out upon the bales and slept until morning.

Sunrise found them within ten miles or so of York Factory. The nearer they drew to the end of their journey, the higher rose the spirits of the *voyageurs*. They sang and chatted and joked like a lot of noisy children, much to the amusement of Fergus, who had never before seen them so demonstrative.

"What funny fellows they are, father!" said he, looking from boat to boat. "I suppose they're so happy because their work is nearly over."

"That's partly their reason, Fergus; but it's the fine eating and drinking they'll get at York they're thinking most about," replied the chief trader. "They'll be paid their wages, ye ken, and they'll soon make their money rin awa' again, they're such improvident creeturs; but they won't learn to be more canny. I've tried to teach them, and I might as well have talked to the gulls."

"What a pity, isn't it, father?" said Fergus, in a tone of regretful sympathy. "They're such nice men, and they're all sae gude to me."

The finish was uneventful, York Factory was reached in good time for breakfast, and amid shout after shout of triumph the boats were beached in front of the Fort, while the *voyageurs* leaping ashore, hugged one another, and danced about in the most comical fashion, to express their delight at having reached the end of their long and toilsome journey.

A warm welcome was ready for Mr. MacTavish.

and his son. Mr. Frobisher, the chief factor at this important post, and many of his staff of clerks and employees, came down to meet them, and after greetings were exchanged, they all went into the big dining hall where a breakfast, the like of which Fergus had never sat down to before, awaited their attention.

What splendid appetites they had! and what a treat it was to sit down at a table once more, and have all the appointments of civilisation at hand! Fergus had not much to say for himself. Indeed his mouth was too full for utterance during most of the meal, but his eyes and ears were busy, and what he saw and heard greatly impressed him with the grandeur of York Factory. Norway House seemed completely eclipsed; and when he observed the deference his father paid to Mr. Frobisher, he felt quite awed at being in the presence of so great a man.

When the meal was over the two chief officers went off to Mr. Frobisher's rooms for a confab over the affairs of the Company, and Fergus was left to look after himself. But he had no chance to feel strange, for the presence of a white boy of his tender years aroused a good deal of interest, and he found the clerks ready to take him in charge, and help him to feel at his ease. In company with a couple of them he was taken around the establishment and "shown the lions" so to speak.

York Factory, then the most important post of the Hudson's Bay Company, stood upon the bank of the

Hayes River, about five miles from where it mingles its fresh current with the salt tides of the great bay. It was in the form of a large square, containing fully ten acres enclosed within a high, strong stockade, entered through a frowning gate before which a battery of four brass field-pieces stood in threatening array, having a very imposing look even if they were fit only for saluting. Inside the stockade ranged in orderly fashion were the different buildings. In the very centre was the big warehouse containing two years' outfit for the whole Northern department; on either side of it were the visitors' house, and the mess-room. Behind ran a row of small, low buildings, painted yellow, for the labourers and *voyageurs*. To the right hand rose the fine, two-storeyed dwelling of the chief factor, and near by it the comfortable quarters of the clerks, known as "Bachelor's Hall." On the left were the provision stores and the Indian trading shop. Other buildings were scattered about the enclosure, and high above all stood a singular tower painted black, which puzzled Fergus greatly.

"Hech! but that's a queer looking thing," he exclaimed; "and what may that be for?"

"Come up with me to the top, and you'll see," answered Alec Ross, the young clerk who was showing him around.

"That I will," responded Fergus. So up the narrow, rickety stairs they climbed, until they were more than a hundred feet above the ground.

"Now," said Alec, pointing to the east, "what do you see?"

Fergus looked in the direction indicated. His eyes opened to their very widest; his mouth made a round "O," and he caught his breath with a gasp of astonished admiration. Straight before him ran the speedy Hayes River, broadening as it advanced, until five miles away it poured its flood into the mighty bosom of Hudson's Bay. Beginning there and stretching away until they touched the farthest horizon lay the waters of the bay, stirred into gentle ripples by a light breeze, and repeating the azure of the heavens in their depths, while the sun made a broad path of gold through their midst.

"The sea!" murmured Fergus to himself. Then turning to Alec: "That is the sea, isn't it?"

"To be sure," answered Alec, unconcernedly. For it was no novelty to him, as he had had a long voyage across it.

"I'm sae glad," said Fergus. "I've sae lang wanted to see it. The great, salt sea! and over there," pointing toward the eastern horizon, "is Scotland, where my father was born. Oh! how joyfu' I wad be to gae there in a big ship."

"Sin you were as sick as I on the big ship, ye wouldna be sae joyfu'," said Alec, with a smile.

"I wad na mind the being sick awhile sae lang as I gat safe ashore again," returned Fergus, giving smile for smile.

Alec then proceeded to describe one of the storms

through which he had passed on his voyage out; and Fergus, not to be outdone, told of his thrilling experience in the rapids, so that an hour or more passed before they bethought themselves of descending from the look-out.

Just as they came down, they saw Mr. Frobisher and Mr. MacTavish making a tour of the Fort.

"Oh, father," cried Fergus, running eagerly up to him, "I've seen the sea."

"Hae ye indeed, laddie?" said the chief trader, patting his boy proudly on the shoulder. "And what dae ye think of it?"

"I think, father," and here he hesitated for a moment, "I think I'd gie a great deal to be on it in a big ship, and sail across to Scotland."

"Hoot awa, laddie!" exclaimed Mr. MacTavish, while Mr. Frobisher looked on with an interested smile. "But ye're taking a far flight. Dae ye hear that, Mr. Frobisher? Naething less than all the way to Scotland will content him."

Mr. Frobisher gave Fergus an approving look.

"Blood is thicker than water, Mr. MacTavish," said he. "Your boy is longing to see the old land just because you came from it; and no doubt you've talked to him about it. See here, Fergus," he continued, turning to the lad, "the ship will soon be in from England, with the goods. Any day may bring her, now. How would you like to go back in her?"

Fergus, carried away with delight at the idea, was just about to exclaim:

"Verra much indeed, sir," when his eye fell upon his father. He checked himself, and then asked, hesitatingly :

"And wad my father come too?" Mr. Frobisher laughed.

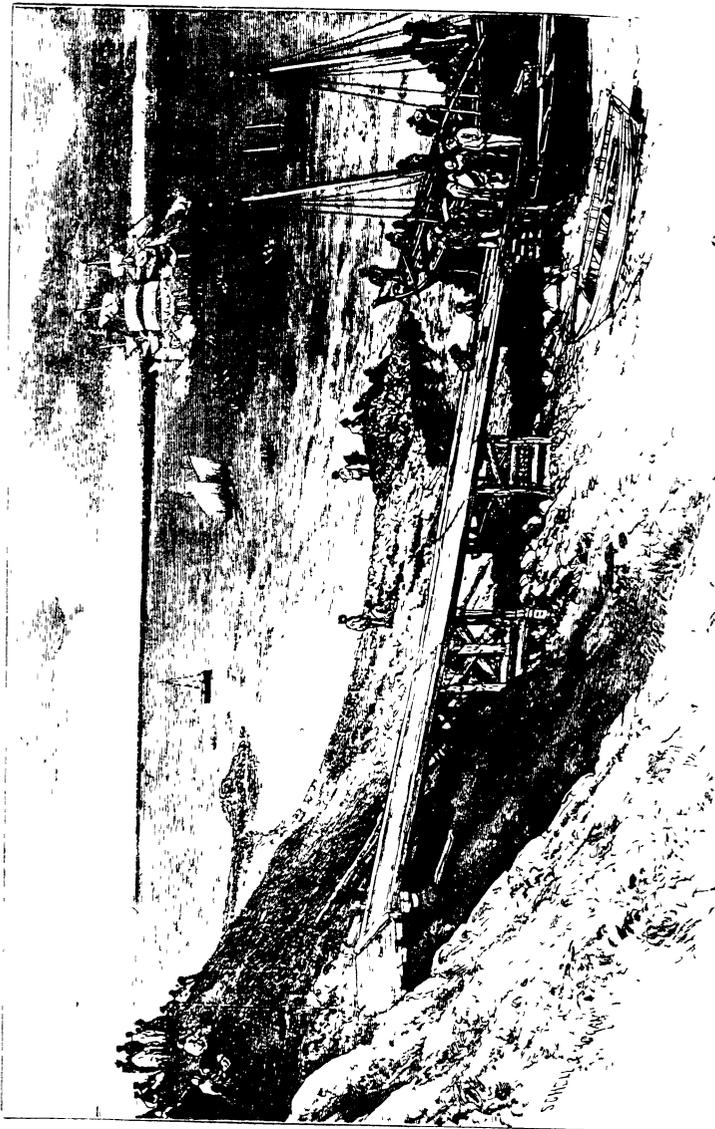
"Oh, no!" said he. "We couldn't possibly spare your father; but you could be put in charge of the captain, you know. He'd look after you right enough."

The glad look left Fergus' face at once. Mr. Frobisher's reply changed the aspect of affairs entirely. The time had not yet come for him to be willing to say "good-bye" to father and mother, and set off on so long a journey alone. With a downcast expression, he made answer :

"I dinna want to gang without my father, sir."

"That's right, my boy. Stick to your father for a while yet," said the chief factor, heartily. "Ye'll have to leave him to strike out for yourself soon enough."

The arrival of the annual ship from England was the subject of supreme interest at York Factory, especially as she was now several days overdue, and some little anxiety began to be felt concerning her. Fergus heard about her on all sides, and his curiosity was excited to the highest pitch. There was a sea-faring element in his make-up, his grandfather having been one of the most intrepid fishermen that ever sailed the North Sea in quest of finny treasures; and among his books there were none he read with such interest as stories of the sea.



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During the next few days, while the ship still failed to put in an appearance, and even Mr. Frobisher began to be worried about her, Fergus spent more time in the "lookout" than anybody else. His was a remarkably tenacious nature. When an idea took possession of him he had little thought for anything else. There were many novelties to interest him at the Fort, but so absorbed was he in thinking about the ship, that he paid small heed to them.

It was therefore only fair that he should have the honour of being the first to sight the eagerly awaited vessel. Monday, the twenty-eighth day of August, dawned bright and clear; and the first rays of sunlight that flashed across the still waters of the bay found Fergus alone on the top of the "lookout," dancing for very joy as he shouted:

"The ship! the ship! I see her."

Down the long flight of steps he plunged at a reckless pace, and up to Mr. Frobisher's door. In response to his vigorous knocking, that gentleman's head appeared at the window.

"The ship's come!" cried the excited boy. "I've seen her."

"You have, eh! Fergus?" answered the chief factor, his face lighting up at the welcome news. "Well done! You shall certainly go off with me in the schooner to meet her."

In a few minutes the good word spread through the Fort and all was activity and bustle. Nobody paid much attention to breakfast. They were too

excited to eat, for the great event of the year was at hand.

With as little delay as possible the schooner, which lay at anchor in front of the Fort, was made ready, and Mr. Frobisher, together with Mr. MacTavish and several of the clerks, went on board, Fergus not being forgotten. The sails were hoisted to a favouring breeze, and away glided the graceful craft down the river to the bay.

Fergus was in the highest state of delight, and not without good reason. Aside from his own craving for the sea, there was everything to make the trip a pleasure. The day was beautiful, the wind blowing steadily from the west, the schooner a capital sailer, and the company in the best of good humour.

The mouth of the Hayes was soon reached, and then the schooner began to pitch and toss among the waves of Hudson's Bay, the breeze freshening as she left the land behind. Presently a school of white whales came up to pay their respects to her, rolling clumsily through the green water, puffing and panting as if they were very much out of breath.

"Why, father!" cried Fergus, full of wonder at these monsters, "what are they? Sic odd-looking creatures!"

"Those are whales, white whales," replied the chief trader. "Maybe ye'll have the chance to see how they catch them before ye leave York."

"Oh, but that wad be grand, father!" exclaimed

Fergus. "It maun be fine sport catching sic fish as those."

Mr. Frobisher overheard their conversation, and turning toward them, said :

"If ye'll wait until I'm through with the ship, I'll promise to give you a day's white whale fishing."

"Verra weel, Mr. Frobisher," responded Mr. MacTavish. "I'd like to see the sport myself, so we'll accept your kind offer."

A couple of hours' smart sailing took the schooner alongside of the advancing ship, and a boat being lowered, Mr. Frobisher and Mr. MacTavish went on board. While they were exchanging greetings with the captain and glancing through their letters from the headquarters of the Company, Fergus was examining the big vessel with the keenest interest.

The *Prince of Wales* was a fine ship of nearly six hundred tons, built in the strongest manner so as to withstand the fierce buffeting that usually befell her in the difficult passage of Hudson's Straits. The little schooner seemed like a mere sailboat beside her, and Fergus, looking up at the lofty masts tapering away into the air, thought he had never before seen anything so imposing. The sight of the masts with their maze of rigging and sturdy spars filled him with a strong desire to climb them. He followed with his eye the rope ladders leading to the trucks and the stays going right to the top, and made up his mind that ere he was many days older, he would climb as close

to the peak as a boy could get. He was sorry his father had not taken him on board with him. He felt like making the attempt right away.

But he had a better sense of propriety than to push his way on deck uninvited; and when his father did appear, it was evident that no time was to be lost in returning to York Factory, so that he was compelled to postpone his ambitious designs until a more favourable opportunity.

Burdened with letters and papers more precious than gold, Mr. Frobisher and Mr. MacTavish returned to the schooner, and all sail was made for the Fort, the ship following at a more leisurely pace and steering for Five Fathom Hole, as her anchoring ground at the mouth of the Hayes River was called.

"Father," said Fergus, the moment he could secure the chief trader's attention, "I wish ye had taken me on the big ship wi' ye."

"And what for are ye sae anxious to gang on board the big ship, Fergus?" inquired Mr. MacTavish.

"I want to get awa' up to the top there," answered Fergus, pointing to where the pennant fluttered gaily in the breeze.

"Then I'm verra weel pleased I didna take ye wi' me," said Mr. MacTavish. "Ye might break yer neck tryin' sich tricks."

"Nae fear o' that, father," responded Fergus, with a confident smile. "I'll take gude care not to break my neck, or onything else."

Now Mr. MacTavish did not like the idea of his

boy climbing to the peak of one of those lofty masts ; and he was just about to lay his commands upon him not to attempt it, when he was called away by Mr. Frobisher, who wished to speak with him, and the matter passed out of his mind. Fergus, who now had a shrewd suspicion that his father would not sanction the enterprise, took care to make no further reference to the subject.

The little wharf at York was crowded with clerks, *voyageurs*, labourers, and in fact the whole populace of the Fort came down to welcome the schooner and hear the news from across the ocean. Those who were lucky enough to receive letters and packets from dear ones at home hurried off to devour their contents, while the unfortunates who had not been thus remembered tried hard to appear unconcerned. Evening had come before the excitement subsided and the current of life resumed its normally quiet flow.

The schooner was to return to the *Prince of Wales* early in the morning ; and daybreak found Fergus awake and dressed, determined not to be left behind. Forgetting all about breakfast he hurried down to the wharf and aboard the vessel, without saying anything to his father. No one made any objection to his presence, and he was soon slipping down the river toward the *Prince of Wales*.

He had a novel feeling of exultation at thus being off on his own account, somewhat chilled by the occasional hinting of his conscience that he was not

doing right in going without his father's knowledge. But he soon forgot this in the delight of being free to do as he pleased ; and with all a boy's recklessness of the future, he gave himself up to the enjoyment of the present.

CHAPTER VI.

ADVENTURES BY SEA AND LAND.

IN due time the schooner ranged alongside the *Prince of Wales*, and the crew at once began to take on board the goods. Fergus' presence attracted no attention, and being left entirely to himself, he watched the operation of putting the contents of the ship's hold into the schooner's for a while, and then, losing interest in that, bethought himself of carrying into execution his scheme of climbing the main-mast.

Addressing one of the mates who was superintending the lading of the schooner, he asked :

"Please, sir, may I go up the mast?"

Without stopping to look at him the mate answered, off-hand :

"I s'pose so, sonny, so long as you know how to get back again."

Quite confident that he did know how, Fergus climbed from the bulwarks into the main chains, and started up the ratlines at a lively rate. It was all plain sailing so far as the main-top, and crawling through the lubber's hole, instead of getting over the

rim by the futtock-shrouds, he stood upon the main-truck, feeling very proud of himself.

The ascent to the cross-trees he found much more difficult. The shrouds were thinner, the ratlines farther apart, and even his light weight seemed to sway them in a way that was not just comfortable. More than once he paused and debated whether he should not turn back. But his pride came to the assistance of his courage, and he persevered in spite of trembling nerves and tiring muscles, until at length, with a huge sigh of relief he reached the cross-trees, and sat down upon them for a good rest.

Glancing somewhat fearfully downward he was surprised to find how far from the deck he seemed, and he could not help thinking what a dreadful thing a fall from such a height would be. This thought greatly increased his nervousness, and as he looked up at the pennant still soaring away above him at the peak of the main royal mast, he had about made up his mind to retrace his steps, when, happening to turn his eyes down to the deck again, he saw that several of the men were watching him and apparently having a laugh together over his having come to a full stop.

This touched him to the quick. No doubt they were making ready to quiz him as soon as he returned to the deck. He determined that they should have nothing to laugh at him for, and summoning all his strength of mind and body, he addressed himself to the shrouds once more.

There were no ratlines to help him now. Simply the bare shrouds up which he must climb by twisting his legs about them and dragging himself up, hand over hand, as he had seen the sailors do. It was very hard work even for his sturdy muscles. But with most laudable determination he persevered, and at last, by a tremendous effort that demanded his last ounce of strength, drew himself across the main royal yard and clung there, limp, breathless, and exhausted.

He had all but reached the goal he had set for himself. Not more than fifteen feet above him the pennant flapped and fluttered in the fresh morning breeze. And now for the first time he noticed that the shrouds went only half the distance up to it, and that if he should persist in his efforts to reach the tiny flag, he would have to shin up the varnished mast. This, of course, was out of the question, and feeling much relieved at having the matter thus settled, Fergus tried to enjoy the triumph he had achieved.

The view from his lofty eyrie was very fine. Looking landwards he could see York Factory plainly, and far beyond it into the country, then turning seawards the whole expanse of Hudson's Bay lay before him, glistening in the sunshine, while beneath him the *Prince of Wales* rocked gently at her moorings, the busy men upon her deck seeming not much bigger than Fergus himself.

But he soon got tired of the view, and the question of getting down again absorbed his attention. To his dismay he found that neither his nerves nor his

muscles were in fit condition for the descent. He put his feet carefully over the yard and tried to catch them in the shrouds below, but did not seem able to reach them. So he hastily scrambled back to his former position.

Truly he had got himself into an awkward, if not perilous fix. Nearly a hundred feet in the air, and no other way of descent than by a bare rope which he could not reach. With what heartfelt sincerity did he blame himself for his folly, and wish that he were safe upon the deck again! Forgetting all his pride he bent over the yard and called for help at the top of his voice. But there was a brisk breeze now blowing, and it made such a sougling through the maze of ropes that his cries were completely drowned, and he shouted himself hoarse in vain.

Then realising how vain were all his efforts, he turned to God for help and prayed as he had never prayed in his life before.

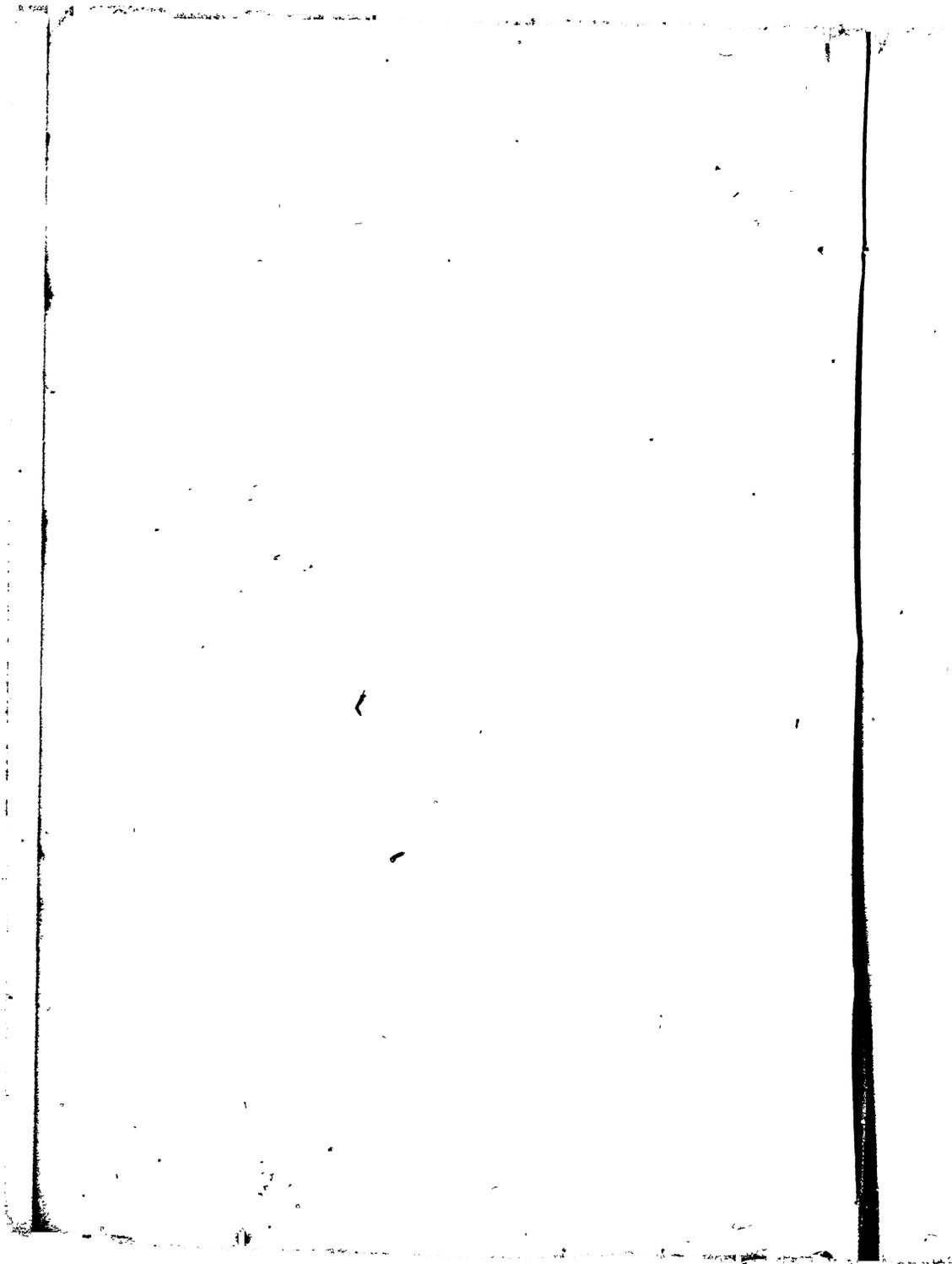
Meanwhile the men on deck, who had been giving him a glance from time to time, began to wonder at his long stay.

"Say, Bill," remarked Tom Forestay to one of his mates after giving a squint skyward, "what can that young 'un be about up there? He seems to have become mighty fond of the main royal all of a sudden."

"Right you are, Tom," said Bill, shifting his quid so as to improve his utterance. "Hark 'ee, I've a notion what's amiss with him. He's got up so high he's afraid to come down. I've known landlubbers



He bent over to get into the hole at the top of the pole —



get into that fix afore. Let's swarm up and give him a hand."

"Ay, ay, my hearty," responded Tom. And with all the ease of expert mariners the two kind-hearted fellows hurried up the rigging like spiders across their webs.

They soon reached the cross-trees, and there paused for a moment, while Bill called out:

"Ahoy there, my lad. What's up wi ye? Can't ye get down?"

For some minutes a faintness had been stealing over Fergus, which in time would undoubtedly have loosened his grip of the yard and sent him headlong to his death. But the rough, cheery voice of Bill Kelson revived him, and in a very weak voice he managed to answer:

"No. I'm afraid I'll fall."

"Just hold on there a bit, then," said Bill, "and we'll bring you down safe enough."

So saying, he made his way to Fergus' side and, grasping the boy in his sinewy hands, lowered him gently down to where Tom could take hold of him. Then without much difficulty the rest of the descent to the deck was easily managed, Fergus arriving there the very picture of limp humility.

"There, sonny," said Bill, with a half-amused, half-reproving expression, "we've got you out of that scrape right enough; but if ye'll take my advice, you won't try it again until ye've learned how to get back."

Fergus had not a word to say in excuse for himself. He thanked his rescuers for their kindness, and the schooner being just about to return with her first load of goods, he got on board and curled up in the bow where he would be out of everybody's way. He dreaded being teased about his exploit which had ended so ignominiously, and all the way back to York Factory was debating whether or not to make a clean breast of it to his father as soon as he met him. Of course, he would much prefer saying nothing at all about it; but then he felt sure it would reach his father's ears somehow before the day ended, and that his father would take it very ill not hearing about it from him first. The result of his deliberations with himself was that he came to the decision to tell his father the whole truth without delay. No sooner had he made up his mind to this than a great weight seemed lifted from him, and the task of confession did not appear so difficult, after all.

The schooner beat her way steadily up to the wharf, and who should Fergus see standing on the end awaiting her arrival but Mr. MacTavish, the anxious expression on his rugged countenance giving way to one of relief when he caught sight of his son in the bow of the approaching vessel.

"Ah, Fergus, laddie! where have ye bin?" exclaimed the chief trader. "I've been sore concerned about ye."

"I've been on board the big ship, father," replied Fergus, looking very downcast. "And I've—I've—"

I—" but he could get no further. The self-restraint which had borne him up among strangers gave way in the presence of his father, and throwing himself into his arms, he fell to weeping with all his might.

Mr. MacTavish drew him aside to where they would be alone, and sitting down, waited for the tears to cease. Then he had the whole story, not even the boy's reason for slipping off quietly being concealed.

"Verily, Fergus, but the Lord's been gude to you, and brought you through great perils, though you were tempting Him. Ye did great wrang in being so set upon your own way; and glad am I that naething waur has happened tae ye. I freely gie ye pardon for deceiving me, but ye maun ask God's pardon for what ye've done, and gie Hím thanks for preservin' yer life." And so saying he laid his hand upon Fergus' head and patted it tenderly, in token that the sky was clear again between them.

Fergus' prayers were longer than usual that night. His escape from a dreadful death had made a deep impression upon him, and again and again he pledged himself to be more obedient and heedful in future.

The next few days at York-Factory were full of work and seeming confusion. After the goods had been taken from the *Prince of Wales* and stowed carefully away in the Fort's big warehouses, the furs that had accumulated during the year had to be sent on board. There were nearly five hundred tons of precious pelts done up in large packs, and their total

worth was not less than one hundred and twenty thousand pounds sterling; so that if the good ship were to be overcome in her inevitable struggle with the icebergs, and to sink beneath the merciless billows of the bay, there would certainly be no dividend for the shareholders of the Company that year.

At length, early in September, this important business was all completed, the *Prince of Wales* was ready for sea, and amid parting cheers from the schooner, which had come down to say "good-bye," the stately vessel glided away, not to return again for a whole year.

As the schooner was making her way back to York, a school of white whales suddenly appeared, bobbing and puffing all about her, and seeming to enjoy her companionship. Mr. Frobisher was at once reminded of his promise to show Mr. MacTavish how these valuable monsters were caught.

"If you can put off your going for a couple of days," said he to the chief trader, "I will keep my word about letting you see a white whale hunt."

"Verra gude, sir," answered Mr. MacTavish. "I've no need to hurry. I can easily bide a few days longer."

So it was arranged that if the following day was favourable there should be a white whale hunt.

The day proved all that could be desired; and right after breakfast two boats built for speed rather than carrying capacity, and each manned by four stalwart oarsmen, went down with the out-going tide to the

mouth of the river, there to await their prey, which would appear with the in-coming tide. In one of the boats was Mr. Frobisher; in another were Mr. MacTavish and Fergus, both of them full of eagerness for the business in hand.

They had to wait an hour before the tide flowed in; but once it was well under way the whales began to make their appearance. They seemed to have little fear of the boats, bobbing up serenely quite near them, and looking both startling and comical with their blunt bottle-noses and smooth, fat bodies; while they from time to time grunted in a fashion irresistibly suggestive of pigs.

A frequent way of hunting them was with firearms, the bodies of those that were shot being afterward towed ashore as they floated on the surface of the water. But in order to make the chase more exciting for his visitors' benefit, Mr. Frobisher had given orders that harpoons should be used instead of guns.

In the bow of each boat was an expert harpooner armed with a long steel harpoon, to which was attached fifty fathoms of stout line. As soon as they were in the midst of the whales, the harpooner got his weapon ready and stood erect, waiting for a good chance to hurl it. The man in Mr. MacTavish's boat had not to wait long. A few strong strokes from the oarsmen brought him within striking distance of a fine big fellow. Bending his arm back to its utmost reach, he suddenly swung it forward and sent the heavy harpoon hurling through the air with such

accurate aim, that it sank nearly half its length into the whale just behind the fore fin.

"He's got him! He's got him!" screamed Fergus, delighted at the success of the stroke.

"He's hit him, laddie, nae doot," said his father, "but he's no got him yet. The fish will make a big fight, if I no mistake."

The stricken monster soon showed that the chief trader had made no mistake, for after plunging and splashing about madly for a moment, he darted off seaward at a tremendous rate, taking the line as fast as it could be paid out.

The harpooner let the line run until about half of it had gone out, and then took a turn around the bow-post in order to check its speed. At once the boat began to move on the track of its prey, and the harpooner, finding that it towed easily and steadily, took another turn on the rope, so that the line ran out no more. Then away went the boat, cutting through the water far faster than the four oarsmen, though they had strained every muscle to the utmost, could have made it go.

The sensation was delightful. Fergus clapped his hands and crowed in sheer enjoyment of it, and Mr. MacTavish leaning back in the stern-sheets in a most composed and comfortable attitude, was evidently no less pleased than his son with this novel mode of progress.

But after tearing along for a couple of hundred yards in this manner, the whale began to tire. The

harpoon had found its way into the vitals, and his strength was fast ebbing, while his blood crimsoned the water about him. He came to a full stop, rose to the surface, rolled about in manifest agony for a moment, and then, as a last effort, dived into the depths.

"He's most done for," said the harpooner. "When he comes up again he'll stay up."

And so it proved. Having remained hidden until utterly exhausted, the poor creature appeared once more, threw himself furiously about in a final flurry, splashing the boat with bloody foam, and then rolled over, an inert mass.

"Hurrah!" shouted Fergus. "We've got him now, haven't we, father?"

"Ay, laddie, there's nae doot about it noo," said Mr. MacTavish. "My sakes! but how big the creetur is!"

It certainly was a very fine specimen of its kind, full twenty-five feet long and at least ten feet in circumference at its broadest part, a prize well worth the taking.

Mr. Frobisher's boat had been equally fortunate, having secured a fish little inferior in size to the other. The whales werē then secured by two lines and thus brought up to York Factory, where they were flenched, their blubber melted down into oil, and their flesh given to the dogs, which highly appreciated it and showed an almost unlimited capacity for it.

A couple of days later Mr. MacTavish and his

brigade took their departure for Norway House. Their boats were heavily laden with stores and supplies of various kinds, being a whole year's stock, and great care would have to be taken on the homeward journey; for the upsetting or sinking of a boat would entail heavy loss.

Fergus felt quite sorry to turn his back upon York Factory. He had spent a very happy fortnight there. Everybody from Mr. Frobisher down had treated him kindly, and each day had been full of interest. He was therefore very glad when the chief factor, in bidding him "good-bye," chucked him under the chin, saying:

"And so you've had a good time up here with us, eh, my lad! Well, I'm glad to know you enjoyed yourself. You must pay us another visit before long."

"Oh! may I, father?" exclaimed Fergus, eagerly. "I'd like to, verra, verra much."

"We'll see, Fergus, we'll see," was Mr. MacTavish's cautious reply. "'Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof,' ye ken."

And so Fergus had to be content with that very indefinite understanding; for he knew there was nothing to be gained by coaxing.

On the morning of a lovely, bright, clear day in September, the Norway House Brigade began its return journey, the *voyageurs* rolling out their favourite songs at the top of their voices as they sent the boats speeding through the opposing current of the Hayes.

Arriving or departing seemed much the same to them. They were always in a state of jolly good-humour. Even when some days later, having left the Hayes for the Steel River with its swifter current, the oars became useless and they had to resort to tracking, there was not a sign of sulks or grumbling. The river banks were steep and composed of clay that made the footing very uncertain. Along these the *voyageurs* had to crawl, dragging the heavy boats by means of track lines, sometimes close to the water's edge and sometimes high up the bank. It was very laborious, harassing work, but they did it amid a running fire of song and joke, as if they thoroughly enjoyed it.

The journey home was very much the same as the trip up, except, of course, that until they reached the Portage *Haut de Terre* they were going up hill instead of down ; and after they passed that portage, it was down hill for the rest of the way.

Fergus had one adventure on the way that created considerable excitement. During the full portages when both goods and boats had to be laboriously transported over land, there was nothing for him to do ; and he generally spent his time roaming about the country in close proximity to the river, shooting at birds or squirrels, or any other small game that he might chance across. In this way he often brought back to camp very welcome additions to the table.

When the Brigade was pushing its arduous way up the difficult Hill River, Fergus had plenty of leisure

time ; and one morning, instead of keeping as close as usual to the bank, he set off across the country, there being a bend in the river around which the men would have to pole the boats inch by inch, taking hours to do it, while the walk overland was a matter of half-an-hour even for a boy.

"Tak' gude care o' yersel', laddie," his father called after him. "Dinna ye try to shoot onythin' bigger than a squirrel. Ye might get yersel' into trouble, and if ye do that, just keep firing off your gun until I come tae ye."

"Aye, I will, father," answered Fergus. "But I'll no do onything rash."

The morning was fine, his road was clear, he had full three hours at his disposal, and plenty of ammunition ; so feeling very big and independent, Fergus left the toiling Brigade for his tramp across the bend. His father watched him until the bushes hid him from sight, and then gave his attention to directing the efforts of his men.

With eyes alert for game, and finger on trigger, Fergus made his way as quietly as possible through the brush. It was not dense, and he had no difficulty in keeping his bearings. Anyway, if he should happen to lose himself for a moment he had only to look for the sun and walk straight toward it, as the Hill River lay due east from him.

Game did not seem at all plentiful that morning ; a solitary squirrel was all he had brought down, and he was beginning to feel rather disgusted, when he

caught sight of a small black animal about the size of a three months' puppy, and not unlike it in appearance.

"Hah!" he exclaimed. "That's something worth shooting, whatever it is," and he at once set off in pursuit.

The creature scuttled off toward the river at a rate that made Fergus put his best foot foremost to keep it in sight. But after running about fifty yards it seemed to get tired, for it stopped short, curled itself up into a furry ball, and started a most piteous squealing. Fergus now recognised the object of his chase. It was a bear cub, about a month old, and a very fine little fellow. He at once made up his mind that he would capture him, if possible, but how to do it single handed would be no easy problem to solve.

The bear had retreated into a kind of nook in the rocks, and by standing at the entrance Fergus could easily enough prevent him from getting out; but if he attempted to go near the little fellow, he snarled and squealed, and showed such unmistakable signs of fighting, that Fergus deemed it wise not to try close quarters in a hurry.

Yet the more he looked at the comical little brute, the stronger grew his desire to possess him. He knew that bears could be tamed if caught young enough, and here was such a chance as he might not get for many a day. The possibility of baby Bruin's mother coming to the rescue of her imperiled darling, and making pemmican of its would-be captor, never

entered his head. He was too busy trying to hit upon some way of effecting his object to think of anything else.

Threats evidently having no influence over the furry cub, Fergus essayed blandishments.

"Poor little thing!" he murmured in his most winning tone, "I winna hurt ye. Come, noo, dinna be fearin' me."

This change of front did seem to have some effect upon Bruin, for he ceased his snarling, and became so still that Fergus was just about to grab him by the neck, when like a flash, the plucky little imp buried his keen, white teeth in the outstretched fingers.

"Ow! ow! ow!" yelled Fergus, thrusting his hand into his mouth and dancing about wildly, his gun falling to the ground with such a shock as to snap the trigger, and send a charge of shot into the bank just beside the bear cub, scaring that unfortunate little animal worse than ever.

It was some moments before Fergus recovered his equanimity, and when he did, his mind was made up not to attempt the capture of the cub without assistance. He then bethought himself of his father's parting injunction—viz., to fire off his gun as a signal of distress. Accordingly he loaded and fired five times as rapidly as he could, and sat down to wait for assistance.

As it happened, the river was not more than a quarter of a mile distant, and the reports were distinctly heard.

"One, two, three, four, *five!*" exclaimed the chief trader, in a tone of concern. "The laddie's in trouble. Hand me my gun there, Baptiste, and follow me with yer ain. Quick!"

Then grasping his trusty rifle, Mr. MacTavish dashed off in the direction whence the shots had come, at a pace that made it no easy task for big Baptiste to keep him in sight. Leaping over the boulders, and crashing through the bushes, every few steps roaring out: "Where are ye, Fergus?" the stalwart Scotchman, guided by his son's shrill "Here, father," soon reached the spot where the boy and the bear cub were watching one another with very different feelings.

Not a moment too soon were Fergus' resources thus increased, for just as his father burst through the thicket to his right with a breathless "What's wrang wi' ye, laddie?" a huge she-bear, in the highest state of fury, appeared at the left, growling out condign vengeance upon the disturbers of her domestic peace.

"Rin tae me, Fergus, rin!" cried the chief trader, levelling his gun. Fergus sprang forward and threw himself at his feet. At the same moment the rifle cracked, and a horrible roar told that the bullet had not missed.

But Mr. MacTavish's rapid run had shaken him up so, that for once his aim failed him, and with only a broken shoulder the maddened bear rushed on to the attack, open-mouthed.

She had covered half the distance between them

while he was vainly endeavouring to reload, and he was about to use his gun as a club, when another shot rang out behind him, and mortally wounded this time, the bear rolled over in an expiring agony.

“Well done, Baptiste!” exclaimed Mr. MacTavish, turning round to grasp the burly *voyageur* by the hand. “’Twas a shot in time, and no mistake.”

CHAPTER VII.

NEW ARRIVALS AT NORWAY HOUSE.

FROM Baptiste Mr. MacTavish turned to Fergus, and lifting him up, gave him a hug worthy of the old bear herself.

"Are ye all richt, laddie?" he inquired with fond anxiety.

"Aye, that I am, father," replied Fergus. "Save for this," holding up his bitten finger.

"And hoo did ye get that, Fergus?"

"From that little rascal," answered Fergus, pointing to the cub which had now emerged from its corner, and was crawling toward its dead mother.

Mr. MacTavish had not noticed the cub before.

"Oh, ho!" he exclaimed. "Is that what gat ye into trouble? Ye were trying to catch the cub, eh, laddie?"

"Yes, father, and I'd like to catch him now, if ye'll help me," responded Fergus.

"Well," said Mr. MacTavish, "he's a bonnie bit of fur; and it wad be a pity to leave him to die—poor mitherless thing. We'll take him with us."

The cub by this time had made its way to its mother, and was climbing about her, and evidently

much puzzled to understand why she took no notice of him. On Mr. MacTavish approaching, it began at once to snarl and whimper, and show fight. But the chief trader was not to be put off by any such nonsense as that. He flung his big cap right on top of the cub's head, and then instantly gathered up the plump, furry little creature in his arms, where, before it could do any harm with claws or teeth, he and Baptiste had it securely bound up in their handkerchiefs.

"Hurrah!" cried Fergus, when the captive was made fast beyond any chance to escape. "Now he'll have to come home with us."

There was a good deal of amusement among the men when the three returned with their prize, and the cook suggested that the cub would make a very nice, tender dinner; but Fergus waxed highly indignant at the idea. He was going to take Bruin back to the fort, and bring him up in the way he should go. So Louis did not press the point.

If Fergus had not been very much in earnest about having a tame bear for a pet, the trouble that cub gave him on the way home might have caused him to fling it ashore in disgust, with the injunction to go off about its own business.

It could not, of course, be kept bound up in the handkerchiefs; so making a collar of one of them, he secured it by a piece of strong cord to the stern thwart, allowing the captive a certain amount of liberty. Of this liberty the little rascal made the most, doing his best to get under people's feet, biting

at everything within his reach, and occasionally winding himself up so tightly in the cord as to be in imminent danger of strangling.

Very much to his credit, however, Fergus succeeded in keeping both his patience and his cub, and in due time, after a prosperous journey, during the course of which not a mishap of any consequence occurred, the Brigade swept up in fine style to Norway House, the *voyageurs* making the welkin ring with their joyous songs, and drawing all the inmates of the Fort down to the landing to welcome them.

Very warm and tender were the greetings Mrs. MacTavish had for her husband and son. She kissed them both, again and again, her eyes brimming with tears of joy. It had been very lonely for her at Norway House during the long weeks of their absence. This first separation from her boy proved hard to bear; and naturally enough she could not keep entirely free from worry, lest some accident might befall him. Many a time had she prayed that God would give His angels charge over Fergus, to keep him in all his ways. And now that he had come back to her safe and sound, the very picture of health and happiness, she checked herself in the midst of her joy to lift up her heart in glad gratitude to God, who had thus answered her prayers.

When the first excitement was over, Mrs. MacTavish, pointing to a lady and gentleman standing at some little distance up the bank, and surveying the scene with expressions of sympathetic interest, exclaimed :

"Oh! Dugald, dearie, but I'm forgetting my manners in my gladness to see you. Come and speak to Mr. Olden. He's been waiting for ye to come hame."

Visitors are always welcome at the Hudson's Bay posts. Their coming is like that of angels—at very infrequent intervals, and when they do appear, the entire establishment is at their command, so delighted is everybody to see them.

Without therefore waiting for any introduction, the chief trader at once went toward the two strangers, his hand extended in cordial greeting. One of his swift, keen glances was sufficient to tell him that they were something quite different from the ordinary run of visitors.

The gentleman was of medium height and athletic build, with a countenance in which the lines of strength and kindness happily blended. He seemed about thirty years of age, and was dressed in a manner that would of itself have attracted attention in that far-away region; for he wore the black broad-cloth and white linen of the city, instead of the coarse homespun and thick flannel of the wilderness.

By his side stood a lady, his wife no doubt, who without being actually beautiful, possessed a face of wonderful attractiveness. The brightest of spirits beamed through her blue eyes, and the sunniest of smiles played about her well-formed mouth, while her golden hair curled back from her broad, white forehead in a decidedly coquettish manner. Yet under-

neath all this winsomeness there were tokens not to be mistaken of those traits of character which belonged to the martyrs of old.

"I am verra glad to see ye," said Mr. MacTavish, giving them a cordial hand-shake in turn. "Hae ye been long here?"

"Oh, no," replied the gentleman in a rich, pleasant voice. "We got here only yesterday; and your good wife has taken the best of care of us," turning with a courteous smile toward Mrs. MacTavish.

"Weel, come awa' to the Fort," said the chief trader, "and we'll have a talk together," for naturally he was curious to learn all about these interesting visitors.

Their story was soon told, and when Mr. MacTavish heard it, he was highly pleased at having such congenial and welcome additions to the very limited society of Norway House; but at the same time, he was shrewdly sceptical as to the success of the enterprise they had in hand, for Mr. Olden and his wife had given up a prosperous, comfortable pastorate in one of the most attractive cities of Canada, with all the opportunities and privileges of such a position, in obedience to the call from the missionary society of their Church, to go into the wilderness and preach the Gospel to the poor, benighted Indians.

The chief trader's heart kindled with admiration for such heroic courage and self-denial. To leave all the honours and enjoyments of a successful pastor's work in the midst of a wealthy and cultivated community, for the sake of bringing the news of salvation

to the wretched, wandering red men, entailing, as the work would, every possible hardship and privation, and no small proportion of peril—this was a kind of Christianity Mr. MacTavish had not met before, and it was with a glowing face and misty eyes that he grasped Mr. Olden's hand in his brawny fist, saying :

“God knows, Mr. Olden, ye've come none too soon ; for that there's ony puir creatures in the warld who need the Gospel more than these Indians, I greatly doubt. But ye'll please excuse me if I feel bound to say that ye must make up yer mind to work verra hard for verra small returns. They're a miserable people, Mr. Olden, a miserable people, and they'll tax yer patience sorely. But,” brightening up as he thought how pleasant it would be for himself and his wife to have such neighbours as the missionary and his wife, “I canna tell ye how glad I am ye've come. The best the Fort can offer you is at your command. Ye are mair than welcome to bide here so long as ye see fit.”

It was now the turn of Mr. Olden's face to glow, and of his eyes to grow misty. He had been assured in advance that a warm and ready welcome would be given him at Norway House, but he was not prepared to find in the chief trader and his wife people of such manifest worth and winning demeanour, nor to have the entire resources of the establishment placed at his disposal. Such good fortune exceeded his utmost hopes, and there was an intense sincerity in his tone as he thanked Mr. MacTavish for his kind words.

"I know the task is a hard one, Mr. MacTavish," he continued, "but I thought that all out before I decided to come. Our churches have for many years been sending the Gospel to Asia, and Africa, and the South Sea Islands, while the heathen were perishing in darkness within the borders of our own country. It was full time we had care for our own savages no less than for those in more distant parts of the world. My wife and I have not allowed ourselves to expect too much. We will do our best, God helping us."

While they were talking Fergus came into the room. He had been too busy looking after the bear cub to pay any attention to the strangers; but having at length got the little animal safely disposed of in a big box, with plenty of dry grass to make him comfortable, he felt free to attend to other matters.

"This is our son, Mr. Olden," said Mr. MacTavish, as Fergus, looking rather shyly at the strange lady, made his way to his mother's side. "Our only bairn, and he's verra precious. Fergus, these are Mr. and Mrs. Olden. They have come as missionaries to the poor Indians, and they are going to stay with us for the present."

Fergus promptly stepped over and shook hands with the new-comers.

Mrs. Olden retained his hand, and drawing him toward her, surveyed him from head to foot with the sympathetic yet critical glance of a mother.

"I envy you your son, Mrs. MacTavish," said she

"and greatly wish I too had a big sturdy boy. But, by the way, where is my daughter Ruth? I have not seen her for an hour."

Inquiry was at once made for the missing damsel, and presently she appeared, having been taken off by one of the young clerks to see the Fort.

"This is *our* only bairn," said Mrs. Olden, "and she too is very precious," adopting Mr. MacTavish's words as she introduced her daughter, a very pretty girl, about ten years old, who "favoured her mother" in so many ways as to seem like a copy in miniature of her.

Mr. MacTavish at once reached over, and catching up Ruth in his arms, gave her a hearty kiss.

"Bless her dear little heart!" he exclaimed; "but she's a bonnie wee thing. Here, Fergus, come here."

When Fergus obeyed, he took the children's right hands and clasped them together.

"Noo, Fergus," said he, quite seriously. "Here is a little playmate for you, and ye maun be verra, verra gude tae her, and tak' the best o' care o' her so that no evil befalls her, nor harm comes nigh her, while she's in yer company."

Fergus blushed a bit at this idea of being made responsible for the care of a lively little sprite like Ruth, and Mrs. Olden came to the rescue by saying:

"Oh! they'll be very good friends, I'm sure, and I'm quite confident that Fergus will not let Ruth get into any mischief or danger that he can help, will you,

Fergus? Suppose now, you take Ruth out, and show her your dogs. She's so fond of dogs."

Fergus jumped at the suggestion, and he and Ruth went gaily off together, leaving their parents to continue their conversation.

Of course, the first visit was paid to the bear cub, and Ruth was so taken with the cute little creature that she was eager to have it up in her arms and fondle it. But Fergus, having a vivid remembrance of Bruin's white teeth, would not allow her to do that, and she had to content herself with admiring the new pet from a distance.

Then Fergus took her off to see his dogs, which had roomy kennels in a corner of the enclosure. He let them loose at once, and they showed the greatest joy at seeing him again, nearly knocking him over in the exuberance of their affection. Ruth was rather frightened at the huge fellows. She had never seen such immense dogs before, and seemed so nervous that Fergus shut them up again, telling her that she would soon get used to them.

As they passed through the Fort, Ruth caught sight of the lookout.

"Oh, Fergus! What is that? Won't you take me up there?" was her instant request.

"Why, yes, come along," answered Fergus; and they at once began the steep ascent.

Ruth's little legs soon tired, and had to have a good many rests before the top was reached; but thanks to Fergus' help she did get there at last, just

in time to see her mother coming out of the chief trader's house and to cry to her exultantly :

"Mother! Mother! Look where I am!"

Mrs. Olden, a little startled at hearing her daughter's voice coming apparently from the sky, looked about for a moment in a bewildered way, and then glancing up at the "lookout" caught sight of Ruth waving her hat from the summit.

"Goodness me!" she exclaimed. "However did the child get away up there? Is she all safe, Mrs. MacTavish?"

"Aye, she's safe enough, Mrs. Olden," replied Mrs. MacTavish. "That's our 'lookout,' and Fergus often goes up there. Won't you come up yourself? You can see a long way all around, and it's very fine."

"I think I will," said Mrs. Olden. And so the two ladies made their way up to where the children awaited them.

They remained for some time enjoying the extensive view, and listening to Fergus' account of his visit to the *Prince of Wales*, and of his thrilling experience in her mainmast. Fergus was a capital teller of a story. He had marked ability, if not actual genius in that direction, and when he had good listeners he would put a great deal of life and colour into his narration.

Having related his narrow escape from a fatal tumble to the vessel's deck, he went on to describe the catching of the white whale, and what fun it was being towed by the wounded monster through the

water far faster than sail or oars could have made the boat go.

"Your boy has great gifts of speech, Mrs. MacTavish," said Mrs. Olden, as they came down the long steps together. "He certainly ought to become a preacher of the Gospel."

Mrs. MacTavish's face lighted up at the compliment to her darling son. She had always thought him no ordinary boy, and it was very grateful to have her judgment confirmed by one so competent.

"I'm verra glad ye think so, Mrs. Olden," said she. "'Every bird thinks her ain nestling the finest,' as they say at home; but I've always thought Fergus had mair than ordinary gifts. As to his being a preacher of the Gospel, his father thinks it best he should go into the service of the Company when he's old enough."

Mrs. Olden said nothing more on the subject then, but Fergus had already made a deep impression upon her, which was strengthened by increased acquaintance. His frank, pleasing, if not precisely handsome countenance, his eager, active mind, his strong will, and his sturdy frame, were all after her own heart. It was a great disappointment to her that she had no boy of her own. Precious as was little Ruth, she could never take the part that it was Mrs. Olden's earnest desire to see a child of hers filling. Having given up all the comforts of civilisation for the sake of carrying the Gospel to the wilderness, Mrs. Olden's zeal for the success of the work was so fervent that, had

Fergus been her son, he would already have been dedicated to the holy undertaking, that perchance he might be able to take up his father's labours when the time came for him to lay them down. Her prayer concerning Fergus henceforth was that the Lord might see fit to lay His hand upon him, as He did upon Samuel.

In the course of a few days the Oldens were comfortably established at Norway House. The chief trader's house was large and well furnished, and two pleasant rooms were placed at their disposal, in which they bestowed their belongings, and felt wonderfully at home.

If Mr. MacTavish could have had his own way they would have been his guests until spring; but Mr. Olden would not consent to that. He insisted upon paying a proper board, although his salary was but a limited one, and after a good deal of amiable discussion a satisfactory basis was at last arrived at, whereby the ladies shared the housework, and Mr. Olden was allowed to pay something in the way of board.

Mr. MacTavish, after this arrangement was concluded, had a sly laugh to himself.

"If the missionary thinks I'm going to put his money in my ain pocket, he's verra mistaken. I'll just put it by safely, and when the time comes I'll gie it back tae him in a way he'll never know;" which admirable resolution Mr. MacTavish faithfully kept by donating every dollar of it toward the little

church that in due time Mr. Olden was able to build not far from the Fort.

The coming of the Oldens was a subject of great interest at Norway House, and many were the misunderstandings concerning them; for the idea of missionary work there was so entire a novelty that it took the people some time to realise its meaning. If Mr. Olden had come as a sort of chaplain to the Fort, that would be easy enough to understand. But that instead of the officials and *voyageurs*, he should have in his mind the miserable, degraded red-skins, who were only tolerated because of their utility as trappers of valuable skins, and purchasers of the Company's goods, this was a notion that men like Mr. Barnston, for instance, found it hard to get into their heads, and they were strongly tempted to think that Mr. Olden must have some other object in view, although he would not admit it.

The young clerks—the occupants of "Bachelor's Hall," as their quarters were called—were inclined to regard Mr. Olden's advent unfavourably. They had matters pretty much their own way, so long as the work was properly done, and were what might be termed rather a "larky lot," upon the whole. So that it was only natural they should not welcome the appearance of a "black-coated parson" in their midst, who would no doubt feel in duty bound to try and convert them all.

Then the Indians, numbers of whom were always hanging around the Fort, hearing that a gentleman

had come from the far East, who had something very precious to give them, and who would ask nothing in return, besieged the house in crowds, asking eagerly for the "black-coat," as they called Mr. Olden, and insisting upon seeing him.

Knowing nothing of the Cree language as yet, Mr. Olden had to speak to them through an interpreter, and he found it not at all an easy task to pacify them. Of course, Mr. MacTavish could have ordered them away at once, and wanted to do so, but the missionary begged him not to do that. It would be an inauspicious beginning of his intercourse with them, and would certainly hinder his winning their confidence.

So with infinite patience he sought to make clear to the ignorant creatures the real purpose of his coming to them, and at last succeeded in sending them away without having aroused their easily excited enmity.

"Noo, what dae ye think o' your congregation, Mr. Olden?" asked Mr. MacTavish, with a quizzical smile, after the missionary had been struggling with one of these troublesome deputations for over an hour. "Are ye willing to admit I was no far from right when I said ye might as well try to make ropes out of the sand down at the river, as to make Christians out of such heathens. If the Gospel were only something to eat, Mr. Olden, there's none of them but wad have it gladly. An Indian's soul is in his stomach, believe me, sir, and ye can't take him any farther than that will lead him."

“You have a poor opinion of your brother in red, Mr. MacTavish,” returned Mr. Olden, gently. “And no doubt you are not without reason for it. But have you ever thought that an Indian must have a soul as well as a white man, and that there is the same eternity before both?”

Fergus was present at this conversation, and listened intently, turning his bright face toward each speaker, but not attempting to interrupt.

“I suppose the poor creatures have souls, Mr. Olden, but I canna think the Lord Almighty has put them on the same footing as ourselves,” said the chief trader. “They’ve been living and dying here without the Gospel for thousands of years, and even if you do find them ready to listen tae ye, and to become Christians, it wull only be a mere handful after a’.”

“Yet Jesus Himself said that one soul was worth more than the world,” responded Mr. Olden, his strong face lighting up, as he looked forward in hope to the victories he aspired to win for his Master.

“True enough, Mr. Olden, true enough,” admitted Mr. MacTavish. “But dae ye really think that in the sight of God the soul of ane of them puir creatures is of the same importance as the soul of one o’ our ainselfs, to put the question straightly?”

A curious expression came over the missionary’s countenance at this question. Its frank simplicity tempted him to smile, albeit the contempt for the Indian that it implied aroused within him the desire to protest.

"The apostle tells us plainly that there is no respect of persons with God," Mr. Olden answered, after a moment's silence.

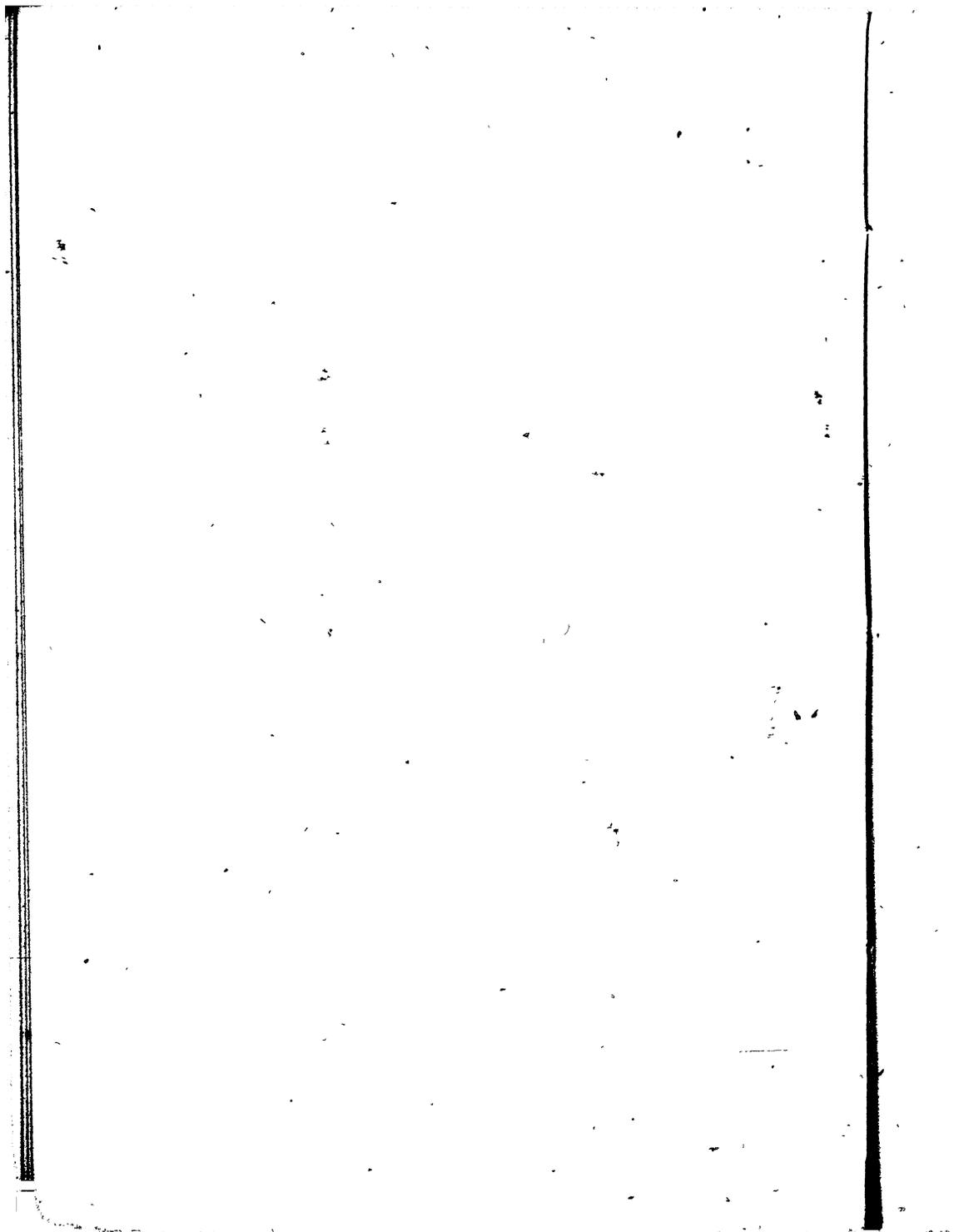
"Aye, I ken that weel enough, Mr. Olden," said the other, "but I confess I canna just apply it to the present case. However, I donna want to discourage you. Yer heart is full of it, I see, and if I'm wrong, and ye're right, I shall be verra glad to acknowledge my error."

Fergus had not lost a word of the discussion. His inquiring mind was a good deal exercised about Mr. Olden. He seemed so different from any other visitor that had come to Norway House since he could remember. His dress, manner, and conversation, all had something impressive about them. The boy was both awed and attracted by the man.

When he clearly understood Mr. Olden's mission, his interest in him greatly deepened. A minister to the Indians! How odd it seemed when there had never been a minister for the people at the Fort! Fergus' parents were of a religious turn of mind. They read their Bible both regularly, and did not neglect private prayer; but they had never felt impelled to enter into any actual religious work. They were negative rather than positive Christians, who found it easier to do right than wrong, and who were content to take care of their own consciences, and to leave other people to do the same. The thought of making any attempt toward evangelising the savages round about them had never entered their heads.

They would as soon have thought of trying to teach their dogs to speak English.

Brought up in this atmosphere, Fergus of course fell naturally into the same way of thinking, and when Mr. Olden came with such different notions, claiming that an Indian's soul was as precious in the sight of God as a white man's, and announcing that he intended to devote his life to making known unto them the Gospel of Christ, Fergus felt bewildered. If Mr. Olden was right, his father was wrong; and somehow or other his heart seemed to be with the missionary, so that he found himself hoping he would turn out to be in the right. The poor Indians did not have much happiness in this world. They often died of hunger, of exposure, of disease. If Mr. Olden could teach them how to get into heaven, what a splendid thing it would be! With these and other thoughts Fergus' brain was busy. The answers would come by-and-by.



CHAPTER VIII.

THE CHILDREN IN THE WOOD.

THE brief and beautiful summer had passed, and autumn was come to Norway House. A big wood fire was welcome in the evenings, and around this the two families would gather, usually with Mr. Barnston, and some of the clerks as an addition to the circle.

There was never any lack of conversation. Mr. Olden had always kept himself abreast of the times, and coming to the far-away Fort right from the midst of civilisation, he was like a living newspaper to the others. They had a thousand and one questions to ask him, and he was ready with a reply.

As they came to know him better, all sense of stiffness or restraint because of the presence of a minister vanished, and the very clerks who had been most inclined to regard him as an unwelcome intruder, were glad of a chance to spend an hour in his society, while Mrs. Olden bade fair to become the friend and counsellor of them all.

Fergus on his part found in Ruth a delightful companion. Slight and delicate as she seemed, she

was in reality wiry and enduring to a remarkable degree for her years, and could run about with him all day long without tiring. They both had their lessons to learn in the morning, but the afternoons were their own, and they were rarely apart.

Mrs. Olden soon came to feel perfect confidence in Fergus, so that she was quite content for him to be little Ruth's guardian. Consequently, when one pleasant Saturday Fergus wanted to take her off on a hunt for the delicious Indian pear berry, which grew in quantities a little way down the river, she made no objection, Fergus promising to be back in good season before dark.

They started immediately after dinner. To save time and walking Fergus took his canoe, but he did not have his gun, as Mrs. Olden would not allow Ruth to be with him then. She dreaded the happening of some accident. A hunting knife was his only weapon, but he hardly needed that as there were no bears or other dangerous animals known to be in the neighbourhood of the Fort, and furthermore two of his big dogs were going with him,—Hercules, a splendid St. Bernard, called "Herc," for short, and Oscar, a noble Newfoundland. They did not of course come into the canoe. They ran along the river bank, keeping up with the light craft as it skimmed swiftly down the current under the impulse of Fergus' strong strokes.

The boy was in great good humour. It was the first time Mrs. Olden had permitted him to take

Ruth out of sight of the Fort, and he felt proud of the confidence reposed in him. A finer autumn day could hardly be imagined, the berries were sure to be at their best, and the whole long golden afternoon was at his command, so that his cup of happiness was about full. Only one thing more could he have wished for—that he had his gun. He would have dearly liked to show Ruth what a good shot he was at short range. But Ruth's mother had put her foot down firmly against that, and he had yielded with a good grace.

The berries were a mile or more down the river, and Ruth keenly enjoyed the canoe trip thither. She wanted very much that Fergus should allow her to help him paddle.

"Do let me try," she coaxed. "I'm sure I could do it."

"I'm sure ye'd upset the canoe, Ruthie," answered Fergus.

"Oh! no, indeed I wouldn't; I'd be *so* careful," pleaded Ruth.

"Ruthie dear," said Fergus, putting on his most serious expression, "I promised yer mither I wad take the best of care of you. Noo, what would I say to her if I allowed you to upset the canoe, and perhaps be drowned?"

Ruth looked at the dark, deep water, with a pretty little shudder.

"I'm sure I don't want to be drowned," she replied, half-pouting, "but I would like to paddle."

"Wait till next summer, Ruthie, and I'll teach you to paddle as well as I do myself," said Fergus, who had a very good opinion of his skill as a canoeist.

"Oh! will you, Fergus?" cried Ruth, delightedly. "I'll be so glad. Now, don't you forget your promise."

"There's no fear o' my forgetting, Ruthie. I'll be ower glad to teach you all I can." And Fergus beamed on his bright little companion, for the prospect of having her for a pupil was full of attractiveness.

In the meantime the canoe was slipping smoothly onward. Herc and Oscar bounding along the bank, paused every now and then at some projecting point to bark out a cheery: "Come along, you folks in the canoe. Don't be so slow." Then they raced off ahead again as if they were bound to be at the destination first.

"Did you ever see such splendid dogs as mine, Ruthie?" asked Fergus, gazing proudly after his huge pets.

"No, Fergus, never. I think they're the best dogs in all the world," was the entirely satisfactory reply.

"I think so too," said Fergus. "Wasn't it kind of Sir George Simpson to send me such beauties? I hope I'll be able to give him a ride behind them in my dog-sledge some time. But ah, Ruthie, won't you love that!—to have the big dogs for horses. Just wait until the snow comes, and then you'll see how they can pull. Why, they could haul us both all day, and not get tired."

Ruth clapped her hands at the notion of being drawn in a sledge by the big dogs.

"Oh! won't that be lovely!" she exclaimed, joyously. "I do so love riding in a sleigh. Father used often to take me with him at home."

And so the young folks chatted away merrily until Fergus called out:

"Here we are, this is the place," and ran the canoe ashore.

They stepped out on the soft sand, and were at once warmly welcomed by the dogs, which were evidently glad to have them within touch. Fergus drew the canoe out of the water, and they made their way up the bank to where the trees clustered thickly.

"Stay here a minute, Ruth," said Fergus. "I want to make sure that this is the right spot. Here, Oscar!" he called to the Newfoundland, "come, lie down, watch! There, Ruth," as the dog promptly obeyed "he'll look after you."

So saying, Fergus dashed into the wood, and was soon out of sight. Ruth did not feel the least nervous at his going off. She sat down beside the Newfoundland, and fondled his huge head, making a pretty picture with the wilderness for a setting.

Presently Fergus returned, out of breath, but triumphant.

"I've found the place," he panted, "and ah, my! what lots of berries there are! Come along, Ruth."

Ruth and her guardian sprang up at once, and

followed him into the woods. They had not to go more than a hundred yards or so before they reached the spot. It was a kind of small glade, at the farther side of which grew a number of trees, in appearance resembling the wild cherry; but instead of the bright red astringent little fruit, so aptly named choke-cherry, they bore a berry as large as a cranberry, and of a rich purple hue.

Fergus broke off a bunch that was richly loaded, and handed it to Ruth.

"Eat them," said he, "and tell me if they're not good."

Ruth picked off several berries and put them in her mouth. She found them so delicious that she could not take time to answer Fergus, but hastened to fill her mouth as full as it could hold. At last, after having disposed of several mouthfuls, she managed to get out:

"What lovely berries, Fergus! I could eat them all day."

The Indian pear is a very fine berry for eating, and is often mixed into the pemmican, making what is called "berry-pemmican," a highly esteemed dainty in those regions. Fergus had brought some baskets in his canoe, and when he had taken the edge off his own appetite, he went back for these, and then the two set to work to fill them, for the folks at the Fort would be sure to greatly enjoy a feast of Indian pears.

Fergus climbed up the trees, and bent down the branches, which were quickly despoiled of their pretty

purple beads. One to the mouth, and two to the basket, was the pickers' rule, and their store grew steadily.

While they were thus engaged, and too deeply absorbed to take notice of anything else, the weather showed signs of a sudden change for the worse. The sun vanished behind a mass of cloud that rapidly extended over the face of the sky, and the wind began to rise and rustle through the trees in rather a threatening way.

Ruth was the first to observe these warnings of an approaching storm.

"It's going to rain, Fergus," said she, looking up anxiously at the sky. "Shouldn't we go home?"

Fergus, intent upon his work, gave a hurried glance skyward.

"In a minute," he answered, "as soon as I have filled this basket;" and he was about to resume picking, when Oscar, who, having no taste for berries, had been amusing himself ranging about through the woods, announced by a series of eager barks that he had found game of some sort. Herc at once rushed off to join him, and Fergus, forgetting everything else in the excitement of the chase, caught hold of Ruth's hand, crying:

"Come along, Ruth, and let's see what the dogs are after."

Ruth, nothing loath, put her best foot forward, and into the forest they plunged, guided by the incessant barking of the dogs.

The ground was not rough, and, helped along by Fergus, Ruth kept up a very good rate of speed for fully two hundred yards. But then both breath and strength forsook her, and quite exhausted she dropped in a heap, saying with a half sob :

"I'm so tired. I must stop."

Reluctant to give up following the dogs, Fergus asked her :

"Dae ye mind if I leave you here a minute, and come back tae ye?"

"Oh, no, Fergus, don't leave me," she cried, her eyes opening wide with terror at the idea of being left alone now. "I'd be so frightened. Please stay with me."

The dogs were barking furiously some distance away. Whatever the animal was, they had apparently either run it to earth, or treed it, and Fergus burned to be with them.

"You'll be all safe here, Ruth," he replied, "and I'll be right back."

Ruth caught his hand, and clung to it tightly, looking up into his face with a most beseeching expression, her lip trembling, and the tears gathering in her eyes as she pleaded :

"Please don't go away, Fergus. Wait till I get a little rest, and then I'll go with you."

Fergus could not refuse her, and muttered :

"Verra weel, the creature will be gone for sure." He threw himself down beside her, not at all in the best of humour.

Poor Ruth, seeing that he was put out with her, almost immediately got up, saying that she was rested and ready to go on, although in truth her little legs felt very tottery under her. Fergus at once brightened up, and seizing her hand, hurried her along to where the dogs were still barking.

But only disappointment awaited them there. Whatever the animal was that the dogs had been chasing, a marten or mink probably, it had made good its escape into a hole between the roots of a large tree, where there was no chance of following it.

Fergus took a stick and tried to explore the hole, but it had a sharp bend in it not far from the mouth, and his efforts were fruitless. There was nothing to do but to call off the dogs, and return to where the baskets were, and thence to the canoe.

It was not easy to get the dogs away. They knew just where their quarry had taken refuge. They also felt sure that it was there still, and they were very much in earnest about making a capture. Fergus called, and whistled; but they, seeming to take it all for encouragement, only barked the louder, and did their best to dig out the animal with their paws.

In the meantime the sky had been growing darker and darker. A storm of wind and rain, such as was not uncommon in the autumn season, could not be far off. Fergus began to feel anxious, and at length, despairing of milder methods with his canine companions, took up the stick which he had been thrusting into the hole, and applied it vigorously to their backs.

This had the desired effect. Herc and Oscar, realising that their young master did not approve of their paying any further attention to the creature imprisoned under the roots, obediently subsided, and followed him as he set out on the return journey.

Still holding Ruth's hand, Fergus walked as rapidly as they could in what he conceived to be the right direction. The sun was no longer of any help as a guide ; but this did not concern him at first, he felt so confident of his course.

After going on for about a quarter of an hour, however, and seeing no sign either of the baskets or the Indian pear trees, he began to feel alarmed. This was surely the direction in which they had come. Yet they must have gone a longer distance on their return journey than they had in following the dogs, and should therefore have found their baskets ere this.

Thinking that perhaps they had passed to one side of the place where they had been picking the berries, Fergus made a little circuit through the trees, but without result. The case was becoming serious, especially as poor little Ruth, wearied with her unwonted exertions, grew fretful, and protested that she could not walk a step farther.

Feeling that the fault was altogether his, Fergus sought to make reparation by attempting to carry her. But he soon found that not much progress could be made in that way, and had to put her down again. Then he tried mounting her upon the St. Bernard, to which the kind brute made no objection.

But that would not work, because he had to hold her on, and he could not do this and guide the dog at the same time, consequently, they zigzagged about in a most confusing way.

All this took precious time. The day was drawing to a close, yet they were apparently no nearer to their baskets than when they started. Fergus tried hard to keep a brave countenance, though he was in a state of alarm bordering close upon panic. Had he been alone he would not have felt so badly; for with two big dogs as protectors, he would be safe enough, and a night in the forest would do him no harm.

But how would it be with tender little Ruth, who, now tired out, had thrown herself down to rest upon a moss-covered stone, and was evidently on the verge of bursting into tears? Could she stand a night in the forest?

As if divining what was in his mind, Ruth looked up anxiously into his face.

"I want to go home, Fergus," she moaned. "Please take me home."

Fergus sat down beside her, and put his arm about her, while the big St. Bernard, scenting trouble in the air, laid his head in her lap as though to say:

"What's the matter? Can I be of any help?"

"I want to get home too, Ruth," said Fergus gently, "but I seem to have lost the way."

Ruth turned upon him quickly with a startled face.

"Oh! Fergus, are we really lost?" she screamed;

and then without waiting for an answer, threw her head upon his shoulder, and burst into tears.

"Don't be scared, Ruth," urged Fergus soothingly. "They'll be sure to come after us from the Fort."

"But I'm so frightened," sobbed Ruth; "and I'm cold, and I want to go home."

By this time Fergus had made up his mind that it was worse than useless for him to try and find the way back to the baskets. He was probably at some distance from them in the wrong direction already, and would only get farther astray by pushing on. Moreover, Ruth was wearied out, and unfit for further exertion. There seemed no other alternative than to remain where they were until assistance should arrive, and this he hoped would not be very long in coming. Their failure to return in good time would be sure to arouse anxiety, and their fathers would doubtless soon be setting out in search of them.

The presence of the great dogs was an immense comfort to him. They were protectors fit to cope with any possible assailant. If he could only find some sheltered spot in which to hide from the approaching storm, he would not feel so troubled about Ruth.

Just then he remembered having, in the course of the circuit made a few minutes before, noticed a place that looked something like a cave. He could easily find it again. So, leaving both the dogs with Ruth, and explaining to her what he was about, he hunted around for the cave. He soon lighted upon it, and it

proved to be a cavity under a projecting ledge of rock. He quickly brought Ruth there. It was precisely what they needed—a dry, clean nook, where they would be snugly sheltered from both wind and rain.

“My! is ’na this grand?” exclaimed Fergus cheerfully. “Just sit ye doon there, Ruthie. I’m going to try if I canna make a fire to warm ye.”

So saying he proceeded to explore the contents of his pockets. Out came a miscellaneous collection of strings, nails, caps for his gun, bullets, and so forth; and, sure enough, among them were half a dozen matches, then quite a novelty at Norway House, having but recently taken the place of flint and steel and tinder.

“Ah! ah!” he cried, triumphantly; “I thought I had some matches. Noo ther’ for a real fine bonnie blaze.”

There was no lack of dry wood lying near, and, working diligently, he soon had a goodly pile gathered in the cave where the rain could not get at it. Then came the careful building of the fire. In this he was thoroughly expert. He had been making camp-fires for his own amusement ever since he was no older than Ruth.

The first match would not light. The second flickered hopefully for an instant, and went out. But the third fizzled up finely, the dry twigs ignited, the little flames crept about the larger branches, and soon with a most cheering crackle the whole pile was ablaze.

Ruth brightened up at once.

"Oh! Fergus, isn't that nice!" she cried, clapping her hands in delight at the ruddy blaze.

"Aye, Ruth, it's verra gude. Ye won't feel so frightened noo, will ye?"

"No, Fergus; but I hope father will come soon to take me home. I don't want to stay here all night."

"Dinna ye fear, Ruth. He'll come for sure. He's started before this."

"Oh! Fergus, has he? And will he be here before it gets very dark?"

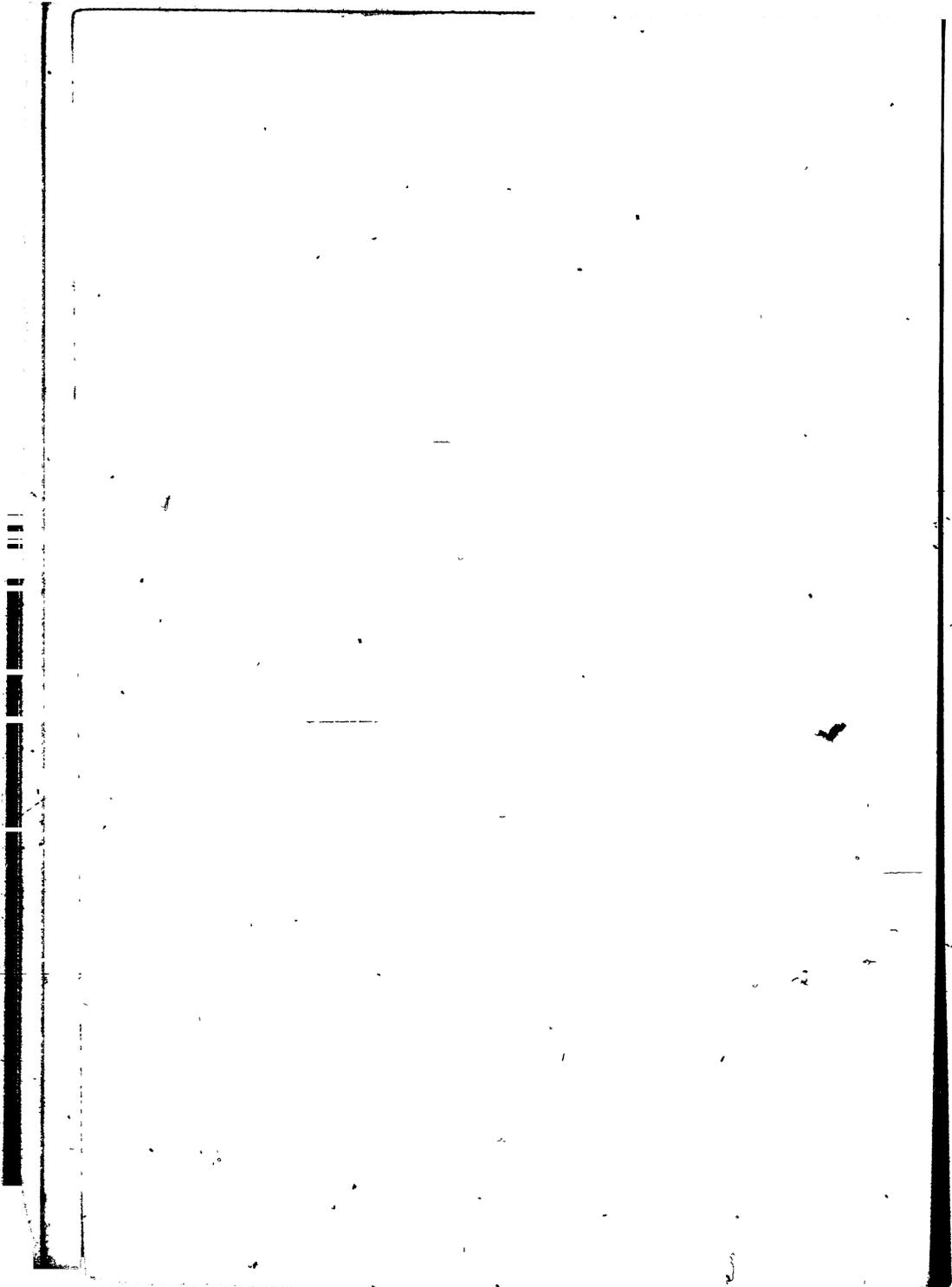
"I'm not quite so sure about that, Ruth; but never mind, the fire will keep us warm, and it will show them where we are."

By this time the dusk had deepened into night, and with the darkness came the rain, falling in heavy drops that would soon have drenched them to the skin, had they been exposed to the storm. But their place of refuge did its duty perfectly; for the wind was at its back, and consequently they were doubly protected. Moreover, the smoke from the fire was blown away from them, so that they could enjoy its warmth and cheer without any discomfort. In fact, had Fergus' companion been a sturdy boy like himself, one of his Indian playmates, for instance, he would have rather enjoyed staying out all night, in spite of the storm.

The dogs had found a corner for themselves, and after blinking at the fire for a few moments in



THE MAN WHO WAS A DOG



luxurious ease, had gone to sleep. Their big warm bodies stretched at full length gave Fergus an idea.

"Are ye sleepy, Ruthie?" he asked. "Wad ye like to go to sleep?"

"I'm very, very tired, Fergus," was the reply. "But how can I go to sleep here?"

"I'll show ye," said Fergus. "Just put yer head down here, and it'll be as warm and soft as any pillow."

Ruth did as she was bidden, and laid her golden curls upon the St. Bernard's thick fur. Herc, disturbed in his nap, raised his head to see who was thus taking liberties with him. But one glance was sufficient, and, thoroughly satisfied, he went off to sleep again.

Ruth closed her eyes, and was about to follow the dog's example, for she was exceedingly tired, when suddenly she opened them again, and sat up.

"Oh! Fergus," she said, "I forgot to say my prayers."

"So you did, Ruthie. Just say them noo."

Ruth got upon her knees, and, with closed eyes and clasped hands, repeated slowly the beautiful prayer:

"Now I lay me down to sleep,
I pray thee, Lord, my soul to keep.
If I should die before I wake,
I pray thee, Lord, my soul to take,
And this I ask for Jesus' sake,"

adding softly: "God bless father and mother, and

Fergus, and all my dear friends ; and help me to be a good girl, and bring me safe home again. Amen."

Never before had that northern wilderness witnessed so lovely a picture as the flashing firelight disclosed—this fairy-like girl kneeling beside the huge dog, and lifting up her heart in perfect faith to her Father in heaven. Young as Fergus was, its strange beauty deeply impressed him, and, yielding to a sudden impulse, he bent over and kissed Ruth's forehead as reverently as though she had been an angel.

"God bless you, Ruthie," he murmured. "Put your bonnie head doon on Herc, noo, and go to sleep. I 'll bide awake, and take good care of you."

CHAPTER IX.

WINTER AT NORWAY HOUSE.

FERGUS' brain was very busy as he sat in the cave listening to the steady dripping of the rain, from which he had found such timely protection, adding a stick of wood every now and then to the fire, and taking many a glance at Ruth, sleeping so sweetly with Herc for a pillow, as though she was in her own cot.

It must be about nine o'clock, he thought, and a search party had set out after them, no doubt, several hours previous. They would of course find the canoe drawn up on the bank, and take their bearings from it. Some of the Esquimaux dogs had wonderful powers of scent, and perhaps would be able to follow their track in spite of the rain. If he had only brought his gun, he could have fired it off in order to attract the attention of the searchers, and he registered a resolution never to go into the forest without it again.

An hour or more passed in this way, and he was beginning to feel very sleepy himself. He nodded off several times, and awoke with a start to find the

fire burning low. His little wood-pile, moreover, was fast disappearing. Another hour would exhaust it, no matter how carefully it might be husbanded. This gave him serious concern; for everything outside the cave was thoroughly soaked by this time. He felt very much depressed, and, for the second time in his life, the thought of appealing to God for immediate help came to him.

He had always "said his prayers" night and morning, regularly; but it had been more as a good habit taught him by his mother than as an actual approach to the Almighty, with a sense of need and dependence. Now the case was very different. No mere repetition of familiar phrases would do. His heart was stirred to its depths.

Moving back into the farthest corner of the little cave, he knelt down, and prayed as he had never prayed before, save, perhaps, when at the mast-head he asked for help. No lack of faith tied his tongue. Like a flood of light and warmth came the conviction of his marvellous privilege, and with all the confidence of a child addressing its earthly parents, he poured out his petitions to his Father in heaven.

"Before they call, I will answer; and while they are yet speaking, I will hear," is the gracious declaration. And Fergus found it to be so, for while he was still upon his knees two rifle shots rang out in quick succession, not far away.

With a beating heart he sprang to his feet, and rushing to the mouth of the cave, shouted with all his

might. His sudden movement startled the dogs, and they jumped up and added their deep barks to his shouts.

Startled out of her sleep, Ruth was at first very frightened, and disposed to cry; but Fergus caught her hand, crying joyfully:

"They're coming! I hear them!" Just as he spoke the two reports were repeated; and again he shouted, and the dogs barked in response. Then bethinking himself of the fire, he hurriedly threw on it the remainder of the wood, and the flames rose up brightly, sending lines of light out into the surrounding shadow.

At the same moment the two reports rang out again, this time less than a hundred yards away, and were followed by a call that reached the excited boy's sharp ears.

"Hello! Fergus, where are you?"

"Here, father!" Fergus shouted back, stirring up the fire so that it might be seen as far as possible.

Mr. MacTavish did not hear his boy's answer, but he did catch a glimpse of the darting firelight, and with a fervent, "God be praised! There they are," he dashed recklessly toward it, Mr. Olden following only a few steps behind him, with half-a-dozen Indians and *voyageurs* bringing up the rear, two fine Esquimaux dogs bounding and barking beside them, as if they would say:

"There are the lost ones. We tracked them for you. Are we not clever animals?"

It took the eager men but a few seconds to reach the cave, at whose entrance stood Ruth and Fergus hand in hand, peering expectantly into the dripping darkness.

"My ain Fergus!" "My darling Ruth!" exclaimed the two fathers in the same breath, as each clasped his own child in a fervent embrace.

Then came the questions quick and fast, while the Indians and *voyageurs* gathered around to listen, and the two big dogs went about from one to the other, putting their cold noses into the men's hands by way of expressing their gladness at seeing them.

Fergus explained how he came to lose himself, with feelings in which a certain sense of pride at being the central figure in so exciting an episode, was tempered by some humiliation that he should lose himself at all, seeing how much practice he had in woodcraft.

"Weel, Fergus," said his father, patting him fondly on the shoulder, "it was not a verra wise thing o' you to rin after the dogs as ye did, for of course it was that led ye astray; but I maun say that under the circumstances ye made the best of a bad business, and took gude care of little Ruth. Dinna ye think so, Mr. Olden?"

"I do indeed," responded Mr. Olden, heartily. "I think Fergus did as well as either of us could have done in the same emergency. At the same time, perhaps it would be as well not to run any risk of the same thing happening again, eh, Mr. MacTavish?"

"Aye, aye, Mr. Olden," answered the chief trader. "No more of this wandering about the woods for the present. Had I thocht ye were going sae far, Fergus, I would never have allowed ye to set out."

Fergus hung his head, and looked confused at this; for, as a matter of fact, he had not made very clear just what he had in view, but had left the impression on the minds both of his own parents and Ruth's, that he was going only a short way from the Fort, whereas they were now fully two miles distant.

The storm showed signs of abating, and while waiting for the rain to stop, Mr. MacTavish told Fergus how they had looked for his return with Ruth in good time before sundown, and how, when he did not appear, and the storm came on, they grew very anxious, and finally made up a party of the best guides at the Fort, and taking two of the Esquimaux dogs as trackers, set out in search of the missing young people.

As Fergus expected, the canoe drawn up on the river bank gave them the first clue. For the rest they had to rely upon the keen scent of their dogs, and they were not disappointed. The sagacious animals worked out the trail slowly but surely, the heavy rain making it much more difficult to trace. Fergus' first shouts had not been heard, but the deep baying of the big dogs had reached their ears, and they knew that they were on the right track. Then they pushed joyfully ahead until their eyes caught the gleam of the fire, and the beloved objects of their search were found.

It was after midnight before they all got back to Norway House; but Mrs. MacTavish and Mrs. Olden, it need hardly be said, were on the lookout for them, and had a fine hot supper ready that was fully appreciated, and in which every member of the search party was invited to share.

Like sensible women, they had not worked themselves into a fever of anxiety, but had waited in hope and faith, sending up frequent prayers for the safety of their darling children.

A right merry party was that which gathered in the chief trader's spacious dining-room, Mr. Barnston, and the young men from "bachelor's hall," having come in to hear all the details. Fergus had to tell the story of getting lost over again, and Ruth put in a word occasionally, to make sure that she had due prominence in the story.

The "wee sma' hours" came before the excitement subsided, but at last the visitors went away, leaving the chief trader's household to themselves.

"Let us join together in giving thanks to God for His loving-kindness and tender mercies," said Mr. Olden.

They all knelt down, and many a hearty "Amen" came from Mr. MacTavish, as the missionary poured forth his thanksgiving, while Fergus listened more intently than he had ever done before, although Mr. Olden had established the custom of family prayer immediately after his coming to the Fort.

The fact was, Fergus' eyes had been opened by his

experience in the cave. He had got a new conception of prayer, and would never think of it in the same way again; for to the depths of his heart he believed that the Omnipotent Ruler of the Universe had condescended to hearken to, and answer his cry for help. The thought almost appalled him, and yet gave him a fearful joy. He wondered if he could ever get on such a sure footing with God as Mr. Olden seemed to have reached. Mr. Olden prayed in so confident, so firm a tone, like one that had implicit faith in the readiness of God to answer.

This was the beginning of some very deep thinking on Fergus' part. Boy as he was, he had a mind in some respects far beyond his years. When a subject interested him he did not soon tire of it, but loved to turn it over and over, looking at it from this side and from that, asking questions of any one likely to give him a helpful answer, referring to his books, if they had anything to the point, and so keeping at it until there seemed nothing more to be learned concerning it.

How this deep thinking bore fruit will appear in due time.

The autumn quickly slipped away, and winter came to Norway House. For the long, cold, dreary months that must be endured before the return of welcome summer, ample preparation had been made. The storehouses were full of dried meat, pemmican, flour, tea, sugar, and other necessaries of life. Huge stacks of white-fish had been accumulated for the

benefit of the Indians and the dogs. Vast piles of firewood were ranged along inside the stockade. All the dwelling houses were banked high with sods, and the doors and windows doubled. Since Jack Frost was bound to come in all his rigour, the garrison of the Fort would do their best to give him a warm reception, and defy him to his face.

Fergus did not regret the advent of winter. The cold could not frighten him ; and the coming of the snow meant all the fun that was to be had out of sledging with his splendid dogs, snow-shoeing over the white billowed plains, or tobogganing down the steep slopes of the river bank. He was eager to give Ruth a ride behind his St. Bernards, and to have trials of speed with Mr. Barnston's famous Esquimaux. If the winter only proved to be a tolerably fine one, and free from heavy storms, all the prospects were that it would be the pleasantest of his life.

By the middle of November the snow covered all the land, the lakes and rivers had put on their armour of ice, and nature lay silent and breathless in the grasp of the frost king. There is nothing uncertain or changeful about the winter season in those sub-Arctic regions where Norway House stands. Once the cold has come, it is simply a question from day to day of how little or how much the thermometer may be below zero. Thirty degrees below were not uncommon. Forty have been recorded, while twenty, fifteen, ten, five, are taken as a mere matter of course.

Under these circumstances furs are necessarily

indispensable for clothing, and everybody who has to move about much in the open air must be covered with them from head to foot. Fergus had a fine set, of which he was very proud. The coat and trousers were of the choicest beaver unplucked, the vest of satiny ermine, and the cap of rich brown mink, with the tip of a silver fox's tail for a plume. On his feet he wore moccasins of thick moose hide with the hair still on, over three pairs of woollen stockings; while his hands were protected by mittens of marten skin with the soft fur on the inside.

Thus accoutred, Jack Frost had no terrors for him. He might indeed, and often did, take a saucy nip at the end of his nose, and turn it into white marble, but a handful of snow breathed upon, and applied to the frozen member, soon made it all right.

Ruth was equally well fitted out. Shortly after their arrival Mrs. Olden had begun to prepare for the winter, and with Mrs. MacTavish's deft assistance had suits for herself and daughter ready in good time. Ruth looked exceedingly well in hers. Her coat was of otter, trimmed with black bear; her cap of silver fox, and her skirt of mink. She might have been a Russian Princess as, thus attired, she stood before Fergus ready for any kind of a romp in the snow-drifts.

"Eh! Ruthie, but you're a bonnie lass," he exclaimed for the charm of her merry blue eyes, clear pink and white cheeks, and rosebud mouth, were not lost upon him.

"And you're a bonnie boy, Fergus," retorted Ruth, dancing around him in high delight at his frank praise.

"Dae ye really think so, Ruthie?" asked Fergus, who was not accustomed to receive many such compliments.

"Of course I do, Fergus," responded Ruth, promptly. "I think you're the bonniest and best boy I've ever known."

"Gude for you, Ruthie. It makes me proud to hear ye say so. Come along now, and let's pay Spitfire a visit. He maun be lonely."

Spitfire was the name Ruth had given to the bear cub, because he was such a cross little creature at first. Latterly, however, he had become much more tractable, and Fergus was beginning to give him some lessons in good behaviour with perceptible results. He had been given a big box in a corner of one of the store-houses, and was allowed an old blanket wherewith to keep himself warm.

The cub seemed quite glad to see them, and rising up on his hind-legs made as though he wanted to shake hands with his young master.

"Dae ye see that, Ruth?" exclaimed Fergus, proudly. "Noo, isn't he a cunning creature?"

"He is indeed, Fergus," said Ruth. "But isn't it a shame to keep him shut up in this old box? I think he'd just love to get out and run about in the lovely white snow. Do let him for a little while—won't you, Fergus?"

Fergus was just in the humour for some excitement, and although he more than half expected that to let the little bear out would create a sensation in the Fort, he at once jumped into the box and, gathering Spitfire up in his arms, carried him out in the open yard and set him down in the snow.

The cub had been so long in confinement that for a few minutes he did nothing but stare about him in a stupid, bewildered way. The bright sunshine made him blink, and he found the snow very cold to his paws.

"Here, Spitfire!" called Fergus. "Follow me. I'll soon make ye warm."

Spitfire turned in the direction of the voice, and, recognising Fergus, moved after him in a slow, hesitating fashion.

"Tut—you sluggard!" cried the boy. "Ye're as lazy as an Indian. Hurry up, I say."

The cub presently did hurry up, but not because of Fergus' "I say." A couple of Mr. Barnston's dogs were lying at the door of his house, and when Spitfire came into view, they darted at him as though they would eat him up, filling the air with their shrill, sharp barks.

For a moment the cub entertained the notion of showing fight. He gathered himself together and snarled fiercely at the dogs charging down upon him. But when they were within a few feet of him, he suddenly changed his mind and, turning tail, made off toward the gate of the Fort at a lumbering gallop that took him over the snow in good style.

All this had happened so quickly that Fergus could not interfere, but now with a shout of:

"Awa' wi' ye, ye brutes!" he rushed at the Esquimaux dogs, and gave each of them a kick with his moccasined foot that sent them back howling to their own quarters; for dogs of that breed are arrant cowards.

This timely interposition did not, however, bring Spitfire's troubles to an end. The sharp barking of the Esquimaux dogs had aroused all the other dogs in the Fort, and, hurrying up to investigate the cause of the disturbance, they caught sight of the bear scuttling away from his pursuers, and with one accord they joined in the chase.

Such a motley, and for the most part, mongrel pack as they were, little wonder if Spitfire's heart stood still with fright. Both the St. Bernards and the Newfoundlands were there, besides nearly a dozen sledge dogs and Indian curs, all barking or yelping to the best of their ability.

"Oh, Fergus," cried Ruth in dismay. "Can't you drive them away? They'll kill poor little Spitfire, if you don't."

Fergus fully realised the peril of his pet, and putting forth all his speed dashed into the middle of the pack, hitting to right and left with a stake he had happily picked up on his way. But the dogs paid little attention to his blows, and the cub was getting close to the gate, which stood wide open. If once he reached the open gate, he would either make good his escape or be killed by the dogs.

Just at that moment Papanakes appeared in the gate, returning from a visit to his traps.

"Stop him! stop him!" screamed Fergus frantically, pointing to the fleeing cub.

The quick-witted old Indian took in the situation at once, and throwing down what he was carrying, prepared to stop Master Bruin in his mad flight. When he was within half-a-dozen feet, Spitfire caught sight of him, and taking him for another enemy instead of a friend, made a desperate endeavour to dodge past him.

So quick was the movement that it took the Indian quite by surprise, and fearing lest the cub should evade him, he flung himself right upon it, flattening poor little Spitfire against the hard snow, and driving every atom of breath out of his trembling body.

The dogs at once gathered round, barking as if they had treed their prey, and rather scared old Papanakes, who was not at all sure that one of the big St. Bernards would hesitate about taking a piece out of him if he felt so inclined. Moreover, Spitfire was squirming vigorously, and doing his best to bite.

The scene was a very comical one, and if his pet had not been in danger, Fergus would have had a hearty laugh over it; but he felt too anxious about Spitfire to laugh. Hurrying up to Papanakes, he took the bear from his hands, and gave him the stake, saying, "Here, drive off the dogs with this."

Mightily glad at being thus relieved, the old Indian sprang up and laid about him so lustily that the whole

pack of dogs turned tail and shrank off howling, leaving Fergus free to get his cub safely back to its snug quarters.

"I'm so glad they didn't hurt dear little Spitfire," panted Ruth, who had been an anxious witness of the whole proceedings.

"But he had a narrow escape, Ruthie, ye see," said Fergus, "and I maunna let him out again until he's a good bit bigger. Poor little creature! he had a big fright, to be sure."

Spitfire nestled in his master's arms as confidently as a kitten, and was thus carried back to his box where no dog could disturb him, while Fergus determined to see that the coast was perfectly clear before giving him another airing.

The snow was now in fine condition for sledging, and the level surface of the river presented a most perfect place for the sport. Fergus' dogs had been too young the previous winter to be thoroughly broken in to harness, and the time had come to complete their education.

Of course, the boy was not equal to this task alone. He might easily have trained any one of the dogs to haul, just as many a boy does in the city; but the training of a team of four was an altogether different matter. He had therefore to call in the assistance of Papanakes, and in so doing, imposed a condition that the old Indian found very hard to understand, to wit, that the dogs were not to be beaten as other team dogs were.

The veteran driver, who in all his long experience had never known of any other way of making dogs do what was wanted than to thrash and pummel and kick them into sullen obedience, had little faith in the educational value of kindness.

"No beat dogs, dogs not haul," was his laconic protest.

"Verra weel, then, Papanakes," answered Fergus. "I'd rather they wouldn't be good haulers, than look like those poor creatures." And he pointed to a number of dogs belonging to the Indians and half-breeds that hung about.

They certainly were a most pitiable looking lot of animals. One had lost an ear, another an eye. Every head was scarred and seamed by cruel blows of whip or stick or boot-heel. Indeed, it was no uncommon thing for one of their brutal drivers, when greatly incensed, to hold down a dog's head and beat it with the butt end of his whip out of all semblance of life.

Now, Fergus could not tolerate the idea of his superb animals being subjected to similar treatment. He was firmly of the opinion that such kind, docile, intelligent creatures could be taught to work well in harness with very little of whip or stick, and he was determined to have his own way in the matter.

The half-breeds have a curious fashion of giving names to their dogs that would grate sorely upon the ears of sensitive teetotallers. Fully one-half the sledge dogs in the Red River District, for instance, are called either "Whisky" or "Brandy," and many

of the remainder bear such names as "Chocolate," "Tea," "Coffee," &c.

Here again Fergus broke away from established custom, and gave names to his dogs to suit his own fancy. The St. Bernards were called Herc and Bruce, and the Newfoundlands, Oscar and Mac. None of the names had any special significance, but they were all easy to shout out, and they did not sound at all like each other, two very important qualities.

In harnessing the dogs into the sledge, Herc, being the biggest, was made shafter or "steady-dog," and Bruce being the brightest, took the lead as "foregoer," with Oscar and Mac in the middle. Bruce promised to be a famous leader. He seemed really to understand everything that was said to him, and to do his best to obey. Herc was equally good in the shafts. But Mac and Oscar needed a lot of teaching. They were a long time getting used to the harness, and in taking it into their woolly heads that they could not come to a full stop whenever they pleased, or dash off at right angles from the track if anything attracted their attention.

Papanakes' patience, if he could be safely accused of having such a virtue where dogs were concerned, was sorely tried by them, and he managed to give them many a rap on the sly, which made him so unpopular with them that Fergus suspected there was something wrong, although he could not catch the Indian disobeying orders.

The dog-sledge, or cariole, was a very comfortable

looking affair. In order to make it, a thin, strong board about nine feet long and sixteen inches wide was steamed and turned up at one end, forming a sort of bow. This was strengthened with wooden braces, and then covered in with rawhide until it looked something like the toe of a slipper. Next a slanting back was fastened on about two feet from the rear of the board, and the rawhide covering extended over it, making the resemblance to a slipper still stronger. The final stage was the decorating, and in this the fancy of the Indian was allowed free rein, their artists taking delight in ornamenting the rawhide covering with mystical emblems in red and yellow pigments, which, no doubt, were potent charms for securing good luck to the owner of the sledge.

Papanakes took a world of pains in the making and decorating of Fergus' cariole. There was no other so handsome at the Fort, and to see our hero on a bright winter's day lying luxuriously back in it wrapped in cosy furs and listening to the merry tinkle of Bruce's bells, while Papanakes ran alongside, urging on the team with crack of whip and startling shout, dog-sledging under such circumstances seemed to be the very ideal of winter travel.

As soon as the dogs were fairly well broken in, Fergus invited Ruth to take a ride with him. They could not very well sit together inside, the accommodation being too cramped; so he tucked her snugly under the furs and jumped on at the back, where there was plenty of standing room.

A well-beaten track ran from Norway House along the Jack River to Playgreen Lake, and as he did not intend to go more than a couple of miles or so, he left Papanakes at home, feeling quite confident of his being able to manage the dogs himself.

He did this altogether on his own responsibility, being anxious to show off a little before Ruth, which, after all, was natural enough for a boy of his age. They started off in fine style, Bruce trotting along the track as steadily as a stage-horse, and the other dogs all pulling well in the traces.

"Isn't this just lovely?" exclaimed Ruth ecstatically, as the cañole undulated swiftly over the smooth road.

"Aye, that it is, Ruthie," responded Fergus, cracking his whip almost as skilfully as Papanakes could do it.

Bruce shook his head and increased his pace, the band of bells upon his back ringing merrily in the keen, clear air. The afternoon was just perfect for a sleigh ride, the cold being only moderate, and not a breath of wind blowing. With so light a load and so good a track, the powerful dogs had an easy task, and a short half-hour brought them to the broad expanse of Playgreen Lake.

Here there were several tracks leading in different directions, but the going was good over the whole surface of the lake, the wind having beaten the snow into firm drifts that looked like suddenly solidified ocean billows. It was Fergus' intention to follow one

of these tracks a little way out on the Lake, and then turn about toward home, but a curious incident introduced a variation that made the ride a good deal more exciting than he or Ruth had anticipated.

They had gone about a mile from the land and he was about turning the dogs around, when Bruce caught sight of a white fox stealing silently over the snow, not fifty yards away. Instantly he forgot the responsibilities of his position as "foregoer." The temptation of a fox chase was too strong for him. With a joyous bark he leaped forward in eager pursuit, and the other dogs, catching the infection, sprang after him.

Then ensued a fox-hunt, the like of which was probably never seen before. The fox, of course, had an immense advantage over the dogs, and, moreover, seemed to understand that fact; for instead of darting off out of sight, it ran along at an easy gait, taking care that the pursuers did not lessen the distance dividing them.

Full of hope the dogs bounded furiously after it, dragging the cariole at a rate that made Ruth dizzy, while Fergus had to drop his whip and cling with both hands to the back of the sledge to prevent himself from being pitched off into a snow-drift. Utterly vain were all his efforts to stop the dogs. He might as well have shouted to the winds.

Turning off from the track, the team sped over the drifts, the cariole rocking up and down like a boat in a short swell. So long as Bruce made no sudden

turn there was little danger of the sledge upsetting ; but what Bruce might do depended entirely upon the fox.

"Haud tight, Ruthie, haud verra tight," cried Fergus. "The dogs will soon get tired."

"I'm holding on tight," gasped Ruth, in a very scared tone. "But I do wish they'd stop."

CHAPTER X.

SOWING THE SEED.

FOR full half-a-mile did the dogs keep up their reckless chase after the crafty fox, which must have been laughing slyly to himself all the while at their vain expenditure of strength. Again and again did the cariole come within a hair-breadth of tipping over. Indeed, more than once Fergus avoided an upset only by quickly throwing his weight to the other side. As white as the snow about her, Ruth clung to the swaying seat, expecting every moment to be hurled out upon her head.

But presently their tremendous exertions began to tell upon even the St. Bernards' mighty frames. Bruce's speed perceptibly slackened. He had no more breath to waste on barking. With drooping head, and tongue hanging out its full length, he doggedly maintained the pursuit, although the fox's lead had increased to one hundred yards at least, and he must soon disappear altogether.

"They are wearying, Ruthie," cried Fergus, joyfully. "They'll no go much farther." And then in his most imperious tone he commanded the dogs to stop.

Bruce's determined gallop wavered, and then fell to a trot, the trot became a walk, and finally he stopped altogether, turned full round, and giving Fergus a look that clearly meant: "Haven't I just been the biggest kind of a fool?" lay down in the snow panting like a steam-engine, the rest of the team immediately following his example.

At once Fergus sprang forward, threw aside the furs, and lifted Ruth out of the cariole.

"There you are, Ruthie," he said, smiling all over his face in his joy that no accident had befallen them. "Not hurt the least bit, and my ✓ but didn't you have a grand ride?"

Ruth shook herself to make sure that she was all right, gave a huge sigh of relief, and then was ready to smile as gaily as Fergus.

"I did have a grand ride, Fergus," she responded. "But I was very, very frightened, you know. I thought I was going to upset ever so many times."

"And I was frightened too, Ruth, not for myself, but for you. But now neither of us is hurt at all, and what a ride we've had! I'm verra certain Mr. Barnston's Huskies couldna' hae gone sae fast as my dogs did just now. I'm just going to have a race with him soon, and try whose team can go the fastest."

"Oh, yes; do, Fergus," cried Ruth, full of glee at the prospect of an exciting race. "And let me be in the cariole, will you?" she added. For by this time the young damsel had recovered her self-possession, and was quite ready for another adventure.

"To be sure, Ruthie, if your father will let you," was the prompt reply. "And now we maun start for home again, if the dogs are rested enough."

The dogs had recovered their wind, but they were evidently a good deal tired, and a slow trot was the best that Fergus could get out of them on the way back to the Fort, so that the early dusk of winter was drawing near by the time the cariole passed through the gate.

The recital of their adventure was listened to with great interest in the chief trader's household.

"Eh! mon, but I wish I could hae seen it," laughed Mr. MacTavish. "The four foolish dogs tugging their hearts out trying to catch a fox that they couldna catch even if they had been loose, and the twa bairns holding on to the sledge for dear life, looking scairt enough, nae doot. It must hae made a fine picture eh, Mr. Olden?" turning to the missionary.

The Oldens did not take quite so humorous a view of the incident as did their hosts. They were not yet fully accustomed to the adventurous life of the North, and were disposed to think that Ruth had been running great risks.

"A fine picture, indeed, Mr. MacTavish," answered Mr. Olden, "but it seems to me there was too much danger of an upset, with possibly serious consequences, to make it altogether pleasant. However, it has ended happily enough, for which God be praised, and Ruth is the richer for an experience that few girls of her age ever had; and if it be her lot to spend her life

in this country, I suppose she may as well begin now to get accustomed to its ways."

When her husband spoke of Ruth spending her life in the North, Mrs. Olden glanced at her and then at Fergus. Mothers think a long way ahead, and there was a thought in Mrs. Olden's mind that went many years into the future. Her love for Fergus grew with increasing knowledge of him, and if his manhood fulfilled the promise of his boyhood, as she felt sure it would, she would not hesitate to commit to him her most precious possession.

Life was not all play, however, with either Fergus or Ruth. Due attention was paid to their education, so that it was safe to say that no young people in the North-West were more soundly instructed than they in the rudiments of the different branches of learning. Shortly after his coming, Mr. Olden offered to be Fergus' school-teacher, and Mrs. MacTavish gladly handed over her pupil, for he had already gone with her nearly as far as she could take him.

Under Mr. Olden, Fergus made rapid progress. The missionary had a positive genius for teaching. Exceeding patience, full sympathy with his pupil's difficulties, and inspiring faith in the value of each lesson, marked his methods, and Fergus soon learned to love him dearly, and to take great delight in carrying out his directions. For three hours every morning Mr. Olden had two pupils with him, both busy with their own tasks, and Fergus, restless, energetic, play-loving chap as he was, rarely found the time too

long, so interesting did his teacher make the work.

The missionary's library not having yet arrived, for it had to be sent to England from Canada, and then come out to York Factory in the Company's annual ship, the supply of books would have been rather scanty but for Sir George Simpson's precious present to Fergus the year before. In this admirably chosen little library were books that suited Mr. Olden's purpose very well, and he quite enjoyed imparting their contents to the two bright scholars under his care.

Fergus, of course, was far in advance of Ruth, but that did not prevent their taking a lively interest in each other's lessons, and helping one another very much in that way, so that there was not a day that Fergus did not feel glad at having so interesting a companion in his work as well as in his play.

Mr. Olden was a very busy learner too. Not out of the same books as his pupils, however, but from the books of flesh and blood in dusky bindings, the need of whose immortal souls had filled his heart with burning zeal to make known to them the Gospel of Jesus.

Losing no opportunity to acquire the Cree language, he had already made remarkable progress, and could make himself understood in conversation with the Indians, although he had still to call in the aid of an interpreter when preaching. For this purpose he had the services of an intelligent half-breed, named Alec

Grant, in whose veins Cree and Highland Scotch blood made a curious mixture, and who had a good command of several of the Indian dialects, as well as of ordinary English.

From an intellectual or moral point of view, Alec was not very much above the Indians with whom he consorted, and from whom he had already taken a wife. He was a long time in understanding the missionary's purpose in preaching, but that did not prevent his being a willing and helpful assistant. Indeed, he quite liked the position of interpreter, for in addition to the presents which Mr. Olden thought it well to make him from time to time, there was a certain amount of importance and dignity connected with it.

The Indian has a passion for oratory. In his eyes the fluent, forcible speaker is highly esteemed; and Alec, as he stood up before the gathering of red men and half-breeds and repeated to them Mr. Olden's simple, earnest, well-ordered discourse, naturally enough took some of the credit for it to himself, and often put an amount of *vim* into it that delighted the missionary no less than the audience.

It was Mr. Olden's custom to preach to the Indians on two evenings in each week, and on Sunday afternoons. At such times he generally had a congregation of from fifty to seventy-five men and women, who listened to him with very commendable gravity and apparent attention. The invariable subject of his sermons, or rather of his talks, for he

did not attempt to preach sermons in the strict sense of the word, was Jesus Christ. Step by step he led his dusky, benighted audience along the story of our Saviour's life, speaking to them so simply and yet so graphically that he soon enlisted their interest in this wonderful "Medicine-man," who could make the blind to see, the lame to walk, and even bring the dead back to life.

So evident was their eagerness to listen, and so regular their attendance, that Mr. MacTavish had to admit that they seemed to be worth talking to, after all, although he was still sceptical as to their being able to grasp the spiritual meanings which underlay the beautiful story Mr. Olden told so well.

"They're gude listeners, I'm fain to confess, Mr. Olden," said he. "Far better than many a congregation of white folk. But dae ye really think ye can ever get them to understand the doctrines of theology and the like?" Mr. Olden's face wore a smile of unruffled confidence as he answered :

"What need have they of the doctrines of theology, Mr. MacTavish? Would to God that we, and those who were before us, had given them less thought! There is surely but one doctrine the poor Indians need know, and that is expressed in the glorious statement: 'For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life.'"

"True, true, Mr. Olden," said Mr. MacTavish, with a half-suppressed sigh. "The greatest and wisest of

men need nae more than that, and it wad nae doubt be better for mony of us if we took a stronger grip at that text than we do." And the chief trader relapsed into a thoughtful silence, which Mr. Olden, did not disturb.

Mr. MacTavish, although from his earliest youth he had held religion in great respect and had been faithful in the outward observance of its forms, so far as he had opportunity, was not in reality a Christian. Without perhaps being aware of it, he was resting upon his own righteousness, and had never been troubled by any promptings to act the part of missionary to others. Mr. Olden's zeal aroused his wonder no less than his admiration. He could not quite understand why any one should sacrifice so much, and enter upon a life of such hardships, in order to bring the Gospel to a lot of squalid, stupid savages. He was a shrewd, keen, practical man of business, and in his opinion, to use a popular expression, "the game was hardly worth the candle." Since the Creator had seen fit to leave the Indians in darkness for so many centuries, it seemed a kind of presumption almost, to interfere now.

Fergus, however, took a very different view of the matter. In his eyes Mr. Olden was a hero, and Mrs. Olden a heroine of the first order. They had left their comfortable home in the midst of civilisation to go out into the wilderness, and carry the Gospel to savages, whom he had been taught to look upon as little better than the dogs that infested their tepees.

No questionings as to whether an Indian could understand a theological tenet troubled his mind. As he listened to Mr. Olden putting his whole heart into the praying, the singing, and the speaking at each little service, he caught the infection of his ardour, and grew eager for some tangible results.

That there would be such results he never for a moment doubted. Mr. Olden could not fail. The red men must be persuaded; and he looked forward to the time prophesied by the missionary, when preachers would come from among the Indians themselves who would bear the glad tidings to camps far beyond Mr. Olden's reach. Alec Grant, he thought, ought to be the first of these. He would make a capital missionary, if he only had the heart for it.

Fergus came more and more under Mr. Olden's influence. Besides the services especially for the Indians, the missionary held a regular church service on Sunday morning, for the officials and employees of the establishment, and a kind of Bible class on Wednesday evening. From none of these meetings was Fergus absent. He was interested in them, both because of the leader and his subject. They were welcome incidents in the quiet routine of the week; and without realising it himself, like another Timothy he was being instructed in the faith once delivered unto the saints by another Paul, who sought to make him wise unto salvation.

Not that he had hitherto been in ignorance of the

truths of the Bible. His first reading book was the Book of Proverbs, and his mother had never failed to read a chapter with him morning and night, so that they had thus gone through the Bible from Genesis to Revelation several times. There was, therefore, no novelty in Mr. Olden's subject. It was his way of presenting it that was novel, and that seized upon Fergus' imagination and kindled his heart.

The Son of Man had been largely an abstraction to the boy. He held somewhat the same conception of him as one might of the King Arthur of Tennyson's Idylls. Christ awakened his wonder, commanded his admiration, touched his sympathy; but the thought of his own personal relation to the Saviour of men had never taken form in his mind. In a vague way he did of course understand that he was under certain obligations to Him, and ought to try and please Him. But this had little or no influence upon his life. Endowed with a frank, pure, affectionate, generous nature, he naturally preferred doing the right ninety-nine times out of the hundred, and if he failed the hundredth time, it was most probably in obedience to some sudden impulse, not because of deliberate choice.

But as he listened to Mr. Olden, there grew upon him an altogether new conception of the Christ. According to the missionary He was no shadowy abstraction, no mere majestic figure in a splendid legend of the past, but an intensely real living person, belonging to the present, and stretching out arms of

infinite love to embrace all mankind—a Saviour of the white man and the red man alike, in whose esteem one immortal soul was worth more than the whole world.

With this Divine personality Mr. Olden seemed on terms of close and familiar intimacy that Fergus could hardly understand. He spoke of Him always as his Master, and evidently regarded Him as no less an actuality than Mr. MacTavish was to the officials who served under him.

All these things made their impression upon Fergus' mind and heart. They were so many seeds falling into soil ready to receive them, where in due time they would bring forth fruit that would abundantly repay the sowing, whether the sower might be permitted to see the result of his labours or not.

In the meantime his life went on much as usual, for while the circle of his thoughts widened, the range of his activities and amusements was not in anywise narrowed. His interest in the missionary and his work did not dull his appetite for fun, and as leader of the boys of the Fort he kept the ball rolling merrily through the winter. What with snow-shoe tramps into the forest, toboggan races down the hill out on to Playgreen Lake, and trials of speed between his dog-team and others, he had amusement enough.

The event of the winter in the way of sport was the great race with Mr. Barnston's team. This came off toward the end of February, and aroused intense excitement.

From the time the snow fell, Mr. Barnston had been chaffing him about his big dogs, of which, to tell the truth, he was half envious. He would hail him with :

“Well, Fergus, how are your elephants getting along? When will you be ready to have a brush with me?”

Fergus was eager enough for the contest, but he allowed himself to be guided by Papanakes in the matter. The old Indian was exceedingly anxious to inflict a crushing defeat upon Mr. Barnston, whose curt, imperious ways had made him very unpopular among the employees; and he was determined that the race should not take place until Fergus' dogs were ready. So when Fergus would come to him flushed with Mr. Barnston's taunts, and impatient for the contest, Papanakes would shake his head very solemnly, and say :

“Bimeby, Fergus, bimeby. Dogs no sense yet. Me teach 'em run better. Then Mr. Barnston nowhere.”

And Fergus, knowing that the faithful creature's heart was set upon victory no less than was his own, would curb his impatience, and consent to wait a little longer.

After the splendid exhibition of speed his dogs had shown in chasing the fox, however, he found it still harder to restrain his ardour, and it was therefore with great joy that he at last obtained Papanakes' consent to accept Mr. Barnston's oft-repeated challenge.

It was arranged that the contest should come off on the first favourable day, and that the race-course should be on Playgreen Lake. After a good deal of discussion, in which Mr. MacTavish was his son's adviser, the plan decided upon was as follows: The teams were to be taken to a point out on the lake about two miles from the land, and then headed straight for home; the first to arrive at the entrance of the Jack River into the lake being the winners. As speed was the point chiefly at issue between the teams, in order that they might do their best without being delayed by having to pick out their way, a double track was tramped upon the snow with snowshoes. Of course, it was anything but a level course. No attempt was made to smooth off its unevenness. The undulations and angles of the drifts were left just as they were, and plenty of care would have to be taken to guard against an upset.

They had to wait a week before a really suitable day came, and were then rewarded by one perfect for their purpose. Fergus' lessons suffered sadly that morning; but Mr. Olden was indulgent, and brought the teaching to a close an hour sooner than usual, in order that his excited pupil might be off to the dogs that engrossed all his thoughts.

It was a beautiful, bright, clear winter's day, not too cold, but just cold enough to fill one with electric energy, and early in the afternoon the entire population of the Fort and of the Indian camps near by, might have been seen moving in groups toward Playgreen

Lake, where they gathered at the mouth of the Jack River. Both Mrs. MacTavish and Mrs. Olden were there, as well as their husbands; and Ruth, bubbling over with intense excitement, was darting hither and thither, looking, in her scarlet ermine-trimmed cloak and cap with nodding plume of fox brush, like a brilliant bird. Fergus had promised to ask permission for her to sit in his cariole, and she was full of the idea, having quite forgotten her fright when the dogs ran away with her some time before.

Fergus was the first to appear. His dogs were in superb condition. Papanakes had spared no pains to fit them for the race. Bruce and Hercules, the big St. Bernards, had coats that shone like polished wood; and you could see their mighty muscles underneath, knotted in great lumps like the arms of a Grecian athlete. Oscar and Mac, the Newfoundlands, had been cleaned and combed until their black curly fur seemed soft as silk, and they too showed that nothing had been neglected to get them ready. Their harness had been rubbed and oiled until it glistened again, the cariole given a fresh coat of paint, and altogether the outfit reflected great credit upon Fergus and his faithful assistant.

A few minutes later Mr. Barnston arrived; and as Fergus anxiously scanned his team he felt a sinking of heart that almost unnerved him. The dogs were all Esquimaux of the purest breed, sharp-nosed, clever-looking creatures, with perfectly-shaped bodies and bushy tails curled closely over their backs. The

"foregoer" was pure white, and his snapping black eyes fairly shone with intelligence. No fear but that he would obey orders and keep to the track, no matter how fast he might be going. The middle dogs were black and white, two fine strong animals, and the "steady dog" was a splendid fellow of his kind, quite as large as either of the Newfoundlands, and their equal in strength.

"Ye'll have to do your best in order to win, laddie," said Mr. MacTavish. "Dinna ye lose yer head. A great deal may happen in twa miles, ye ken; and don't get down-hearted if Mr. Barnston takes the lead o' you at the start."

The chief trader shrewdly guessed that the Esquimaux would be quicker at getting away than their rivals, but that the superior endurance of the latter would tell toward the finish.

"Never fear, father," answered Fergus. "I'll not give up till the race is over, no matter how far Mr. Barnston gets ahead."

Then as everything was in readiness he went to Mr. Olden, and asked if Ruth might sit in his cariole. But greatly to his disappointment, the missionary would not consent.

"No, no, Fergus," said he, decidedly. "Ruth is better here with us. She would only be in your way; and there might be an upset, you know."

So Fergus, who had intended to stand up behind the seat in order that he might be freer to act, had to take one of the Indian boys in Ruth's place.

Amid the expectant murmurs of the crowd which had stretched itself out along the track for fully a hundred yards from the winning post, the competing teams moved off to the place of starting.

Mr. Barnston seemed to be in high feather. If he had the slightest doubt as to the result, he hid it most successfully under a gay exterior. He had many a joke about Fergus' elephants, and pretended to think that in view of their size, only one of the St. Bernard's should have been harnessed, as either of them was about equal in weight to two of his Esquimaux.

Fergus took his raillery in perfect good humour, and made no attempt to answer back. If Mr. Barnston was sanguine, he did not pretend to be more than hopeful, and the less he said before the race, the less he would have to take back if he were beaten.

They reached the starting point, and, after a brief pause to make sure that there was nothing amiss with the harness, the foregoers' heads were turned toward the waiting crowd. Mr. Barnston, smiling confidently, got into his cariole, and adjusted his furs. Fergus fixed the little Indian securely in the seat of his, and got on behind, looking very pale, but steady and determined.

"Are we all ready?" asked Mr. Barnston.

Fergus nodded affirmatively.

"Then off we go," he shouted; and rising from his seat he gave a whoop that would have done credit to a Cree, at the same moment making his long whip crack over his dog's backs with a report like a pistol.

The Indians who had been holding the leaders' heads, instantly sprang aside, and the two splendid teams dashed away on their long race.

The spectators waiting eagerly at the end of the course, looked like dark dots upon the snow, and leading straight toward them was the track, rising and falling in easy undulations, with here and there a sharp, sudden dip, that would tax the skill of the drivers to avoid an overturn.

As Mr. MacTavish expected, the Esquimaux were the quickest in getting away. The instant Mr. Barnston shouted they sprang forward, straining the tough harness as taut as the strings of a violin; and before Bruce had got fairly into his stride, there was a broad stretch of daylight between his nose and the other cariole, which his utmost efforts could not lessen.

Mr. Barnston, looking most provokingly radiant, leaned back in his seat, and turning round, beckoned encouragingly to Fergus.

"Come along!" he cried. "Hurry up your elephants, or I'll have to wait for you."

Fergus made him no reply, but leaning forward, spoke encouragingly to his dogs.

"Gude Bruce, gude Herc, awa' with ye noo. Dinna let the Esquimaux beat ye."

The noble creatures pricked up their ears and strained still harder at the traces. The sight was one of exceeding interest, the two perfectly appointed teams of beautiful animals flying over the spotless

snow, with the bright sun shining upon their glistening harness, and the cold, crisp air, making every nerve tingle in their excited drivers.

Up and down the light carioles pitched and tossed like boats at sea. Fergus found it no easy matter to keep his place, and more than once regretted that he had not imitated his opponent's example and ensconced himself underneath the furs.

One-half the distance had been covered without change in the relative position of the contestants. Bruce seemed unable to get any nearer to Mr. Barnston, but on the other hand, Mr. Barnston was unable to get any farther away from Bruce. Both teams were straining every nerve, and the rate of speed was enough to take one's breath away.

CHAPTER XI.

A TALK ABOUT RACE RUNNING.

AT the end of the course the expectant onlookers were straining their eyes trying to distinguish between the swiftly approaching teams that were now in full view upon the top of a drift, and the next moment out of sight in a hollow. Mr. MacTavish had brought his telescope with him, and peering through it, he gave vent to an exclamation of dismay when he made out what a decided advantage Mr. Barnston had over Fergus.

"What can the laddie be aboot," he cried, "to let Mr. Barnston get sae far ahead? Look ye, Mr. Olden," handing the glass to the missionary. "Dae ye think Fergus can catch up to him?"

Mr. Olden put the telescope to his eye, and looked so long without answering that the chief trader became impatient.

"Well, sir, how seems it to you?" he asked.

"It looks well, Mr. MacTavish. It looks well, or my eyes mislead me," replied Mr. Olden, handing back the glass. "Just take a peep yourself and see if you don't think that Fergus is creeping up on him."

The chief trader aimed the telescope at the competitors, and at once his face brightened.

"Ye're right, sir," he exclaimed, without removing the glass from his eye. "Ye're surely right. The laddie's overhauling him. He'll soon be alongside."

Mr. Olden was right. The fleet-footed Esquimaux had kept up the tremendous pace they set at the start for more than a mile, their big opponents pounding along in their rear, not allowing their lead to increase, but finding it impossible to cut it down. But as the second mile slipped away the pace began to tell; they did not cover so much ground at each bound, and their heads lowered, while their breath came short and quick. Foot by foot the giant Bruce drew nearer the other cariole, despite its driver's loud shouts and sharp snapping of his long whip. Now his nose was on a level with Mr. Barnston's back; a few more strenuous leaps and it had reached the bow of his cariole. Clearly it was but a matter of another fifty yards or so when the great St. Bernard and the white Esquimaux would be side by side.

Then did Mr. Barnston lose all his gay confidence. Springing up he flung his furs aside, and roaring out fiercely:

"Hie on, you rascals! Hie on with you!"

He sent the cruel whip again and again across the backs of his dogs so heavily that it stung through all their thick fur. Startled and smarting they dashed forward. But it was only a spasmodic effort. They could not sustain it, and soon fell back to their former pace.

Not so did Fergus treat his noble dogs. He had a whip in his hands indeed, but they had never felt its lash upon their backs, and never would so long as he was their driver. Cracking it in the air high above them, he called to them, one by one :

“Gude Bruce! Gude Oscar! Gude Mac! Gude Herc! Awa’ with ye noo! We’re gaining on them. We’re gaining on them. Aye, that we are. They’re wearying, doggies; they’re wearying. We’ll beat them yet. Keep at it, ye beauties. Keep at it.”

And so Fergus talked to them, hope rising high within him as slowly but steadily his cariole drew up to Mr. Barnston’s. He felt strongly tempted to shout to his opponent :

“What do you think of my elephants now?” But his better sense kept him quiet ; and a moment later he felt glad that he had not spoken, for a sudden pitch taking him unawares, threw him off his feet. Happily, as he fell he caught the edge of the cariole with one hand and held on pluckily, while the dogs dragged him over the snow until the Indian boy, at the risk of a complete upset, leaned over the back, and grasping his other hand, succeeded in helping him back to his place.

While this was happening his team lost ground again; and there was only a quarter of a mile yet to be run. Mr. Barnston’s spirits rose once more. The race still seemed in his hands.

But he did not realise what splendid stuff there was in Fergus’ team. The moment they were relieved

from the temporary check, and heard his voice again urging them on earnestly, they leaped forward as fresh almost as at the start. No longer was there any doubt as to the result. Foot by foot and yard by yard the powerful creatures gained upon their panting opponents. In one minute they were neck and neck with them. In another they were ahead, and presently there was clear space between Fergus and the white "foregoer." Mr. Barnston might shout and lash with all his strength. It was of no avail. Bounding steadily, strongly forward, Bruce and his grand team-mates bore Fergus on to victory; and amid the cheers of the staff and the whoops of the Indians, he swept swiftly up to the winning post, a winner by more than twenty yards.

Everybody except Mr. Barnston was delighted, and he, in spite of his disappointment, showed that he had the right kind of spirit in him by going up to Fergus at once, and giving him a warm handshake of congratulation.

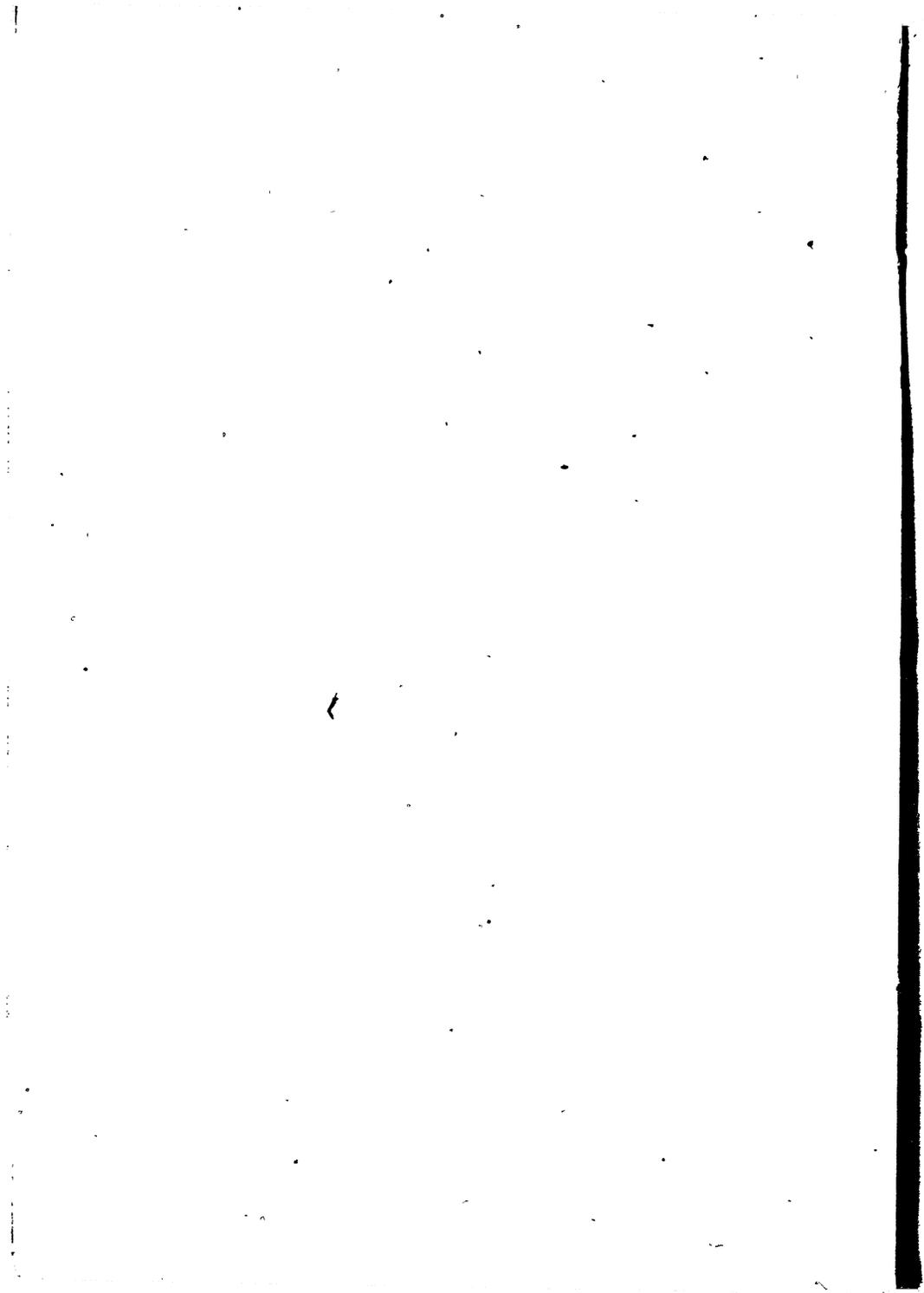
"You beat me fairly, Fergus," said he. "I'm satisfied that my Huskies are not quite equal to your elephants; but I believe we've got the two best teams in the district between us, anyway."

Fergus felt immensely proud of his victory. He gave each of his dogs in turn a hearty hug by way of expressing his delight, and they on their part evidently quite appreciated his caresses. As soon as they got back to the Fort, he had Papanakes prepare a big potful of savoury buffalo beef stew, and getting



"I got by foot, and yard by yard, the powerful creatures gained upon their panting opponents." -- Page 192





four plates from the house he gave his pets the most bountiful feed they ever had in their lives, a regular blow-out in fact, which went far to compensate them for the scanty fare they were compelled to put up with while they were in training for the contest. They quickly polished their plates, and then stretched out upon the old buffalo robes which formed their beds, the most contented, amiably disposed animals in creation.

There was, of course, much talk about the race for some time after, and, as was natural, other owners of dog-teams were stirred up to try conclusions with whoever would oppose them, so that every fine day for the rest of the month, there was a contest of some kind that helped to break the monotony of the winter.

In the course of one of the many conversations Fergus and Mrs. Olden had together, she began talking about races, and described to him the different kinds of such contests that she had seen when at home—boat-races, horse-races, foot-races, and so forth. Fergus grew deeply interested. His nature was one that delighted in intense endeavour, and craved excitement. Had his home been in a city, he would certainly have been an enthusiastic member of some athletic organisation, and have been trying hard for prizes and records. But there was little field for such things at Norway House. The officials and clerks were all too much his seniors to be bothered by competing with him except as Mr. Barnston had done; and as for the Indians, they were mostly

a poor lot, and of no use either as companions or competitors.

Fergus was saying something to this effect when Mrs. Olden said :

“There is one race, Fergus, that you can run just as well here, if not indeed better, than if you lived in a large city, where there are so many distractions and temptations from which you are entirely free at Norway House.”

“What race may that be, Mrs. Olden?” asked Fergus, with quick interest.

“The race that St. Paul meant when he said, ‘Let us run with patience the race that is set before us,’” answered Mrs. Olden, looking earnestly into the frank, bright countenance before her.

“But I’m not sure that I just understand what St. Paul did mean, Mrs. Olden,” said Fergus, with a puzzled expression.

This was just the opportunity Mrs. Olden wanted, and she sought to make the most of it.

“Perhaps I can make it clear to you, Fergus,” said she, “if you don’t mind letting me do all the talking for a while.”

Fergus was always glad to listen to the missionary’s wife. She had a bright impressive way of putting things, and her voice was full of music. He sometimes thought that she would make as good a missionary as her husband, if she chose to learn the Cree language, and said so to her once, thereby paying her, she told him, one of the handsomest compli-

ments she had ever received. He now settled himself back in his chair and prepared to give her the closest attention.

"The whole passage, you remember, Fergus," Mrs. Olden began, "is this: 'Wherefore, seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the Author and Finisher of our faith.' What St. Paul had in mind when he wrote those stirring words were the great games which were held every year in different places throughout the Roman Empire, when in those splendid amphitheatres and circuses, the ruins of which perhaps you may see some day, Fergus,—for I have a feeling that your longings to see the wonderful world from which we are now shut out are to be gratified before you are an old man,—races were run by men and horses, amid the wild shoutings of the vast multitude looking down into the arena from the tiers of marble seats. I don't suppose he ever took part in any of those races himself, but no doubt he had seen many of them, and perhaps got just as excited over them as your father got over your race with Mr. Barnston. Now, no runner could ever hope to succeed in those races who had not carefully trained himself for it, just as you trained your dogs for your race.

"The greatest self-denial was absolutely necessary, and plenty of hard work in addition. Besides that,

no competitor would be so foolish as to run in his everyday garments. They would be too heavy and cumbersome. So just the merest shred of clothing around the waist was all the runners wore when they appeared in the arena ready for the struggle. And it must have been intensely exciting to watch them, Fergus. I think I would like to have seen one of those games myself."

"And so wad I," cried Fergus, his face all aglow at the idea. "It maun hae been a grand sight altogether."

"Have you ever thought, Fergus," asked Mrs. Olden, smiling sympathetically at his eagerness, "that there is a race for all of us to run; that this whole world is the amphitheatre, and that the angels of God are the spectators?"

Fergus' brown eyes opened wide. So wonderful a thought had never stirred his brain before, and it was too vast to be grasped at once. He shook his head in a bewildered way.

"No, ma'am," he answered, slowly. "I never thought of that—and is it truly so?"

"It is so, Fergus," replied Mrs. Olden, "and that is just what St. Paul means—that is the race he wants us to run with patience."

The matter was evidently not very clear to Fergus yet, so Mrs. Olden went on:

"The race that St. Paul means is the Christian life, Fergus. We all ought to enter for that race, oughtn't we? And if we do, there are certain conditions that

we must fulfil just as the Apostle said the runners had to do. They had to deny themselves good things to eat, had to take a great deal of exercise whether they liked it or not, and when they were running they could not wear any fine clothes, lest they should become entangled in them, and so lose the race.

“How is it now with us if we would take part in the Christian race? We are to run ‘looking unto Jesus,’ and Jesus has said, ‘If any man will come after Me, let him deny himself;’ so you see we are like the runners of old in that. Then St. Paul says: ‘laying aside every weight,’ by which, of course, he means anything that would hinder us from being good Christians. You remember about the young ruler who came to Jesus to ask what he should do to inherit eternal life, and who claimed to have kept all the commandments from his youth up, which, if it was true, meant that he had done a great deal of self-denial, and so had fulfilled the first condition of the race whose prize is eternal life. But the keen eye of the Master saw that he had a golden weight dragging behind him, and He told him to sell all that he had, and distribute unto the poor; and the young ruler, rather than lay aside the weight, gave up the race, and went away very sorrowful. Now, everybody who takes part in this race has a weight of some kind to lay aside. You have it, and I have it, but, of course, it is not the same with each of us; and do you know, Fergus, one of the most frequent and hurtful mistakes made by those who run is trying to get along while

still holding on to the weight. They cannot bear to lay it aside, they are so fond of it, and they go limping along the Christian course, doing no good to others, and having little happiness themselves. 'Lay aside *every* weight,' are the great Apostle's words; 'and the sin which doth so easily beset us.' Whether that be selfishness, pride, temper, greed, whatever it is, we must shake ourselves free from it if we want to run well, just as the racers in the arena threw off their outer garments."

Fergus was listening with absorbed attention. Mrs. Olden's sweet, simple, earnest talk seemed to him the best sermon he had ever heard in his life. It stirred him deeply.

"But, Mrs. Olden," he said, "are God's angels truly looking down at those who are running the Christian race?"

"They are indeed, Fergus," Mrs. Olden answered. "I believe that God's angels are always near us if we want them to be; and does not St. Paul say, referring to the glorious list he had just given of God's heroes, from Abraham down to the martyrs of his own time, 'Wherefore, seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses,' just as if he could see Abraham, and Jacob, and Moses, and David, and Stephen, looking down upon him while he ran?"

"I wad like so much to see the angels," murmured Fergus, as if speaking to himself.

"Would you, Fergus? Well, so you can, and so you will, if you run this race which has eternal life for

its prize; for remember, it is very different from the contests we have down here. When you and Mr. Barnston raced, one of you had to be disappointed; you could not both win. But in the Christian race there is a prize for everybody who perseveres. There are no disappointments to those who do their best, no matter how many they may be. 'So run that ye may obtain,' wrote St. Paul to the Corinthians, and that is the way you want to run, isn't it, Fergus?"

"Ay, ma'am, it is," answered Fergus, looking very serious.

"Well, Fergus, the sooner you begin the race, the easier it will be for you to run well. Just think about it, Fergus dear, and pray to Him who is the author and finisher of our faith to make your way clear. It is a glorious thing to be taking part in the Christian race."

"And to have the angels looking down at you," added Fergus, upon whose active imagination this thought had taken peculiar hold.

"Yes, Fergus, and not only the angels, but the Creator of the angels and of men, holding out the prize of eternal life to all who run well." And then taking both of Fergus' hands in hers, Mrs. Olden looked earnestly into his eyes; saying slowly: "So run that ye may obtain."

This conversation made a profound impression upon Fergus. It brought the question of religion before him in a new light, and gave it an attractiveness it had never had before. The figure of a race

applied to the Christian life tickled his fancy, so to speak, and appealed to his ambition. He had a long talk with his mother that night, when, as was her custom, she came into his room before he had gone to sleep, to bid him "good-night." He repeated as much as he could of Mrs. Olden's conversation, and then asked abruptly :

"Mother, are you running this race?"

"I hope so, dearie," replied Mrs. MacTavish. "I have always tried to do what was right."

"And is father too, mother?"

"Aye, surely, Fergus; your father is a gude man, if ever there was one." And Mrs. MacTavish's face grew bright with affectionate pride.

"Then, mother, I'm going to begin right away, so that we'll all be in the race together. And just think of it!" he exclaimed, rising up in bed in his enthusiasm at the idea, "the angels of God are looking down at us, and Jesus, the Author and Finisher of our faith, is waiting to give us the prize of eternal life! Oh, mother, isn't it splendid? I'm so glad that Mrs. Olden explained it all to me."

Mrs. MacTavish gazed at her boy with feelings of mingled admiration and awe. She had never heard him talk like that before. She bent down and kissed his glowing face, saying :

"Eh, Fergus dearie, those are big thoughts for you to have, but they're gude ones. It's proud your father and mother will be of you some day, if God spares you to be a man."

Fergus' big thoughts kept him awake for some time after his mother left him, and then he fell asleep, and dreamed that he was one of the competitors in a race which was taking place before a great crowd of spectators, that seemed to him to be angels; and while he was waiting for the signal to start, he gazed eagerly into the crowd, and there were Mrs. Olden and Ruth smiling tenderly upon him. They looked like angels too, and even in his dream this greatly troubled him, for he wondered if they had died, and gone away from Norway House for ever; and such grief did this idea cause him, that he awoke, to find that it was only a dream, after all.

But his new resolution did not vanish as did the dream. That long talk with Mrs. Olden was a crisis in his life. However he might stumble, or perchance slip a step backward in the course of the Christian life, thenceforward he was never out of the race; and many a time the remembrance of the angelic onlookers helped him to victory in hard-fought conflicts with self and sin.

The month of February had ended, and March was just begun, when Mr. MacTavish announced his intention of going down to the headquarters of the Company at Red River. He had some important business communications to make to the chief factor at that post, which could not wait until summer time; and the trip would have to be made before the sun became warm enough to have any effect upon the snow.

As soon as Fergus heard of it, he begged to be permitted to go too; and his father very readily consented. A boy who owned such a team of dogs as he did, and could drive them as well, was certain to prove a good deal more of a help than a hindrance. Ruth would have liked very much to join the party also, but of course that was not to be considered.

A couple of days sufficed to make the necessary preparations. The carioles were thoroughly overhauled, the sets of harness carefully examined, and the best dogs picked from the packs to make up the teams. Much to everybody's surprise, Mr. Barnston offered the chief trader the loan of his fine team of Esquimaux.

"Since Fergus is going to take his elephants," said he, smiling pleasantly, "my Huskies may as well go too. It will do them good. They've been idle nearly all winter: and I know you'll take as good care of them as I would myself."

"Aye, that I will, Mr. Barnston," said Mr. MacTavish, heartily. "And it's verra glad I am to accept your kind offer; for none of my own dogs can compare wi' your bonnie fellows."

Besides the two champion teams, as they might be called, two others would be taken to drag the freight sledges carrying the provisions, and the big buffalo robes for sleeping in at night. Papanakes and Alec Grant were to be the drivers, and they with Fergus and his father made up the party. Speed was Mr. MacTavish's object, and the smaller his party the

more quickly would he get to Red River, and back to Norway House.

The start was made on a most favourable day in the beginning of the second week of March, and the train of sledges presented a very picturesque appearance as it filed out of the Fort and turned toward the South. Mr. MacTavish took the lead, his snow white foregoer trotting along with his head carried high, and his bushy tail curled tightly over his back, the very picture of canine consequence. Next came Fergus, his splendid quartet moving like machines, so regular and even was their gait. Then the two freight sledges in charge of the Indian and the half-breed, both drawn by excellent well-trained teams, that would do their work almost as well as their leaders.

In those far Northern regions a great deal of pride is taken in the fitting out of a dog-team, and as much decoration is bestowed upon the scanty harness as it will bear. Fergus' dogs, for instance, looked as gay as harlequins, thanks to the beads, bells, and ribbons that had been lavished upon them, and the other teams were hardly less adorned, so that there was no lack of either colour or sound, as they trotted along the well-beaten track, leaving rapidly behind the little group that had come out to the top of Flag Staff Hill to see them off.

Fergus was in the seventh heaven of delight. This would be his first visit to the Red River Settlement, and he looked forward with eager expectation

to seeing more of the world than he had ever done before. The more he heard from the Oldens of life in the cities of Canada, the greater was his longing to see it for himself, and a spirit of restlessness was growing within him which would only be satisfied by the realisation of his desire. Mrs. Olden spoke truly when she prophesied that he would surely see some of the wonders of the world, if he grew up to manhood, unless indeed Providence should decree otherwise.

Sitting back in his comfortable cariòle, wrapped in rich warm furs, and cracking his whip gently in the air simply for amusement, as he never allowed the lash to touch the back of one of his dogs, there was not a boy in Canada that might not have envied him; and there certainly was not one with whom, just then, he would have changed places. He felt as happy as a lark at sunrise, and the merry tinkling of the bells seemed the sweetest of music to his ears.

The track was so well beaten all the way down Play Green Lake to Lake Winnipeg, that the dogs needed no guiding; and Papanakes and Alec had an easy time of it, lying luxuriously on top of the baggage, their pipes in full blast, and seeming to enjoy the ride quite as much as Fergus himself.

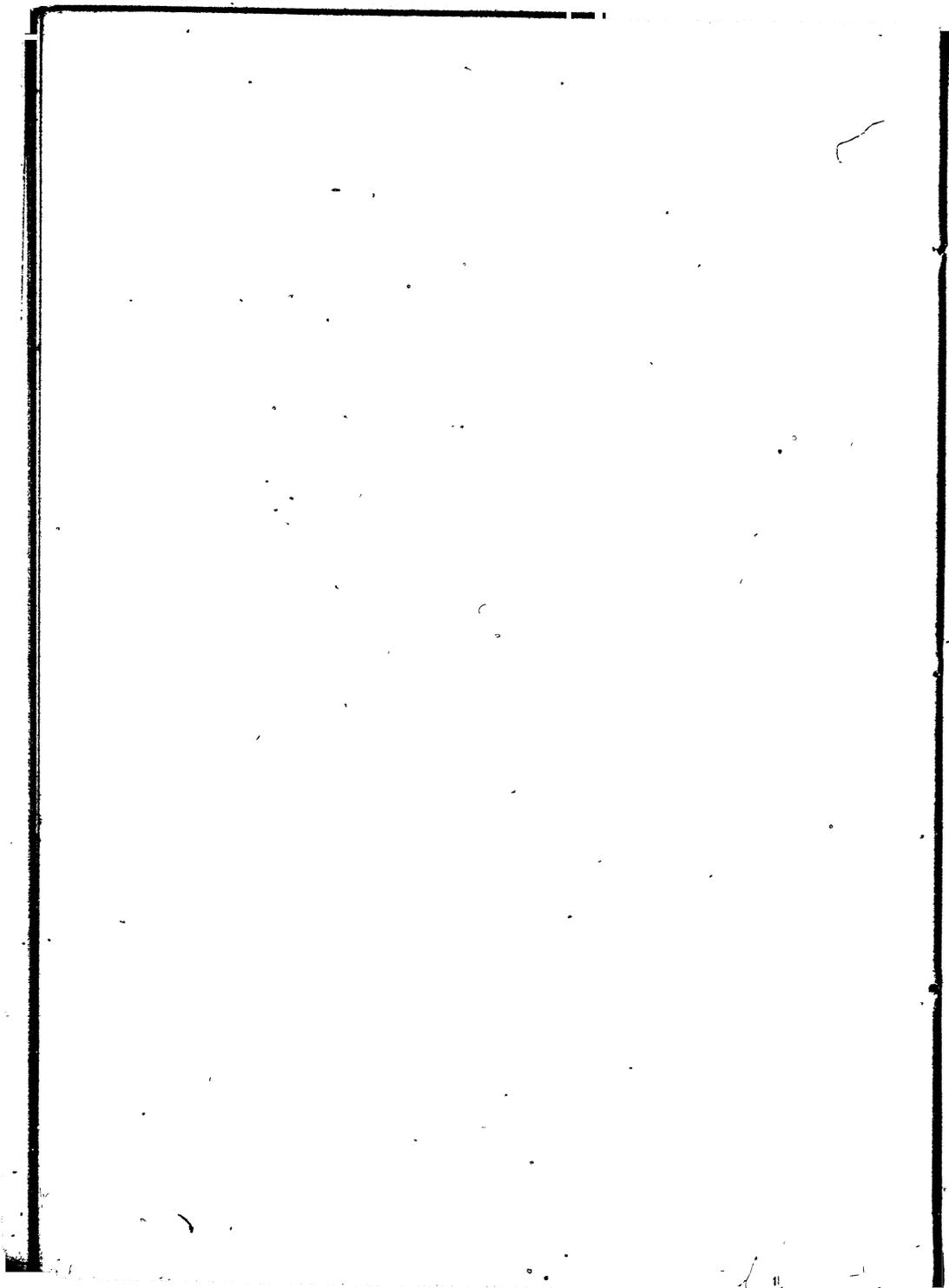
To one whose first experience of travel by dog-sledge was such a setting forth as this, on a fine winter afternoon, when the thermometer was only ten degrees or so below zero, it might well appear to be the very poetry of locomotion. But a further acquaint-

ance with it would inevitably cause a complete change of mind.

When a cruel wind is blowing right in the traveller's teeth ; when the cold is of such intensity that an instant's exposure of the face means the turning of nose and cheek to marble ; when the track is hard and rough, and the undulations of the cariole, as it adapts itself to the inequalities of the surface beneath it, give its occupant the sensation of being dragged over a gravel walk upon a blanket ; or still worse, when the track is completely snowed up, and the poor dogs, almost exhausted and bewildered by the storm, have "struck," and literally "dropped in their tracks," refusing to budge another step until the merciless whip of the driver stings them into spasmodic efforts, painful to witness ;—then all the poetry vanishes, and the traveller heartily wishes himself at the end of his journey.

No thought of this kind bothered Fergus, however, as he shouted gaily to his father :

"Give us a gude lead, father, or I'll run you down," and pretended to whip up his dogs as if to carry out his threat. He saw nothing but pleasure ahead, and the chief trader did not think it necessary to cast any damper upon his spirits by hinting at the certain discomforts and possible dangers that were before them.



CHAPTER XII.

EN ROUTE TO RED RIVER.

THE sledge party kept on steadily across Play Green Lake, and through the strait separating it from Lake Winnipeg, until the vast white plain of this great body of water opened out before them. Mr. MacTavish then turned in toward the shore, and called a halt in a little cove where the woods came close to the ice.

"We'll bide here for the night," said he, getting out of his cariole, "and make an early start in the morning."

Papanakes and Alec at once set to work to loosen the dogs, and to gather firewood. As soon as the dogs were freed from the harness they proceeded to have a good roll in the snow, and then took up their position in a sort of irregular circle about the men, waiting patiently to be fed.

It was not long before a fine fire was crackling away cheerfully, the pot of tea bubbling over it, and the appetising odour of frying pemmican filling the air. As the keen-nosed dogs caught the tempting scent, they began to bark in a short, imperious way

that was very amusing. Had they tongues to speak, they would have said :

“Do be quick with our supper, will you? We’re just starving.”

In order to ensure being allowed to eat their meal without interruption, Mr. MacTavish told Alec to feed the faithful animals first. This was not a prolonged operation. The load of one of the freight sledges consisted of dried white-fish, solely for the dogs; and the moment Alec removed the coverings they crowded about him like a lot of street Arabs begging for coppers. With his hatchet, Alec hacked the fish into lumps that looked big enough to choke the biggest of the dogs; but as each one got his piece there was a sharp snap, a vigorous munching, an eager swallow, and lo! the lump had disappeared, and the dog, like little Oliver Twist, was asking for more. Two pounds a-piece was the regular ration; and when the creatures realised that no more could be got, they curled up in the snow to sleep until they should be wakened for another day’s hauling.

By the time they were fed the tea and pemmican were ready for their masters; and with such appetites as only that keen winter air could create, the four gathered close to the blazing fire, and gave very earnest attention to the simple, but substantial provision of pemmican, tea, and biscuits, which would form the unvarying items on their bill of fare, three times a-day, until they reached Red River.

The biscuits, indeed, were a special luxury that

only those who travelled with Mr. MacTavish were so fortunate as to enjoy. On his voyage out from Scotland, he had become very fond of the ship's biscuit, and remembered it so well that when, many years afterward, it was in his power to gratify his taste by having them brought to York Factory for him by the annual ship, he made arrangements to have half-a-dozen bags sent him every year; and these he religiously preserved for his winter travelling, when they were particularly timely and highly appreciated.

Supper over, a large pile of dry wood was gathered and cut, ready for the fire, the sleeping robes were got out, Mr. MacTavish saw that Fergus was snugly wrapped up in his big buffalo-skin blanket, the men smoked a final pipe, replenished the fire, and then everybody followed the example of the dogs and curled up for a good sleep.

Those who have never slept under the open sky, or whose only experience of it has been a midsummer camping-out, might not easily understand how a human being could be comfortable in an atmosphere ten degrees below zero, with a snow-bank for a mattress, and a buffalo robe for bedclothes. Nevertheless, Fergus slept on as soundly as though he had been in his own cosy bed at the Fort, and did not know until the morning that his big pet, Bruce, had crept quietly over to his side, thereby making him all the warmer.

It was a good while yet to daylight, when Mr.

MacTavish threw off his robe, and roused the sleeping men. Early to bed, early to rise, has no better illustration than in the winter travelling of the North; for among the perils of the journey, especially as spring approaches, is snow-blindness, caused by the sun's rays striking up from the spotless wastes of snow, and to avoid this, those who are prudent do the most of their travelling in the morning and evening, going into camp for the hours of dazzling sunshine.

Ugh! how cold it was! and how reluctant Fergus felt to turn out of his warm robes, and have the sharp air strike him on every side! He almost wished he had not come, and looked so blue and miserable that his father said, jokingly:

"Ye're feelin' the cold, laddie, I see. Aiblins ye're wishin' yersel back at Norway House. Well, it's no too late, ye ken. If ye just turn yer dogs' noses in that direction they'll take ye hame in gude time for dinner. What dae ye say, Fergus?"

Fergus shook himself, and gave a scornful laugh.

"Do you think no better of me than that, father?" he answered. "It's fine I'd look crawlin' back to the Fort with no better excuse than that I couldna stand the cold."

Mr. MacTavish came up, and clapped him affectionately on the back.

"It's but jokin' I was, laddie," said he. "I ken richt weel that ye've nae mair notion of going back than I have."

And Fergus, fully pacified, and with his miserable feelings entirely dissipated, went cheerfully off to see about the harnessing of his dogs.

This harnessing up is not always an easy matter. The dogs can be as provoking and as bothersome to catch as cunning horses in a big pasture, so that sometimes precious hours are lost in the operation, the unhappy drivers calling their tricky animals all the hard names they can remember or invent. It is told of one dog, a sullen, morose, long-legged, white-haired creature, whose ability as a "fore-goer" made him famous throughout the district, that when out of harness he always had a rope some sixty feet long attached to his neck, without which it would have been impossible to catch him. Even then he had to be stalked like a deer, and put off his guard before the rope could be secured. But when once the collar was on his neck, and he had taken his place at the head of the train, he was an unrivalled leader.

There were never any such difficulties with the dogs of Fergus' team. They were always ready for their work. Mr. Barnston's Esquimaux also were models of good behaviour. But the other two teams gave trouble occasionally during the journey, and then all hands would turn to and chase them until they gave themselves up to be harnesssed.

The second day of the trip promised to be as fine as the first.

"Eh, Fergus, but we maun do eighty miles at least ere we roll up in our buffaloes the night," said the

chief trader, rubbing his hands together to warm them after helping to harness.

"Eighty miles, father?" exclaimed Fergus. "Can we go so far as that in one day?"

"Aye, indeed, laddie. I've done it mony a time when the track was gude and the dogs fresh," answered Mr. MacTavish; "and I'll be verra disappointed if we come short of it to-day."

Fergus did a little mental arithmetic, and then said: "Eighty miles a day! Why, father, at that rate it would take us only five days to get to Red River. Wouldn't that be splendid?"

"Nae doubt it would, Fergus," returned the chief trader. "But ye maunna set your heart upon it. There's mony a thing that might delay us; and if we get to Red River in seven days, I'll be verra well content."

"Well, if the days only keep fine all the time, perhaps we'll be able to do it," suggested Fergus, who was greatly taken with the idea of whisking along over the hard snow at the rate of eighty miles a day.

"Maybe, laddie, maybe," answered the cautious veteran of a hundred trips by dog-train. "Did ye ask the Lord's blessing on our journey, Fergus?"

Fergus blushed to the roots of his hair. In his excitement and joy at being allowed to join the party, he had quite forgotten to ask for the Divine blessing upon the journey. Indeed, he had not said his prayers before going to sleep the night before, nor on awaking in the morning.

"No, father, I didn't," he answered. Then looking around, and seeing that the men had not yet quite finished packing up, he slipped away behind the trees, and throwing himself on his knees, opened his heart in prayer to God for His protection and guidance during their absence from home. He had just finished, when he heard his father calling :

"Fergus! Fergus! Where are ye, laddie?"

And answering like Samuel, "Here am I," he came forth from his retiring place with a sweet feeling of security and peace, and not again did he forget his prayers during that journey.

Lake Winnipeg's shores are indented with big bays; and the mode of travelling over its snow-drifted surface was to steer from headland to headland, making as straight a line as possible between the two points. There was no track after once they got well out upon the lake; but when the headland for which they were making was well in sight, this mattered little. The leader in the chief trader's team was a dog of remarkable sagacity, and moreover had had a great deal of experience. So thoroughly did he understand his work, that it was only necessary to point his head in the direction desired, and let him know what was wanted of him, and he would steer as straight a course as a surveyor could under the same circumstances.

Where the headlands were so far apart that the distant one was scarcely visible, this, of course, could not be done; and then it became necessary for Papanakes or Alec to go before on their snow-shoes,

and lay out a track. The way these men would swing along over the snow at a kind of jog-trot for hour after hour without seeming to tire, was really wonderful. From five to six miles an hour were easily made over good, firm snow, and taking turns, they led the train steadily, swiftly, southward, toward the lower end of the lake.

About the middle of the morning, when the sun was brightest, and made everybody's eyes ache, Mr. MacTavish called a halt at a headland that offered plenty of shade from the blinding glare. A big fire was speedily built, the dogs fed, a good dinner dispatched, and then the buffalo blankets were taken out, and all hands rolled up for a sleep, which lasted well into the afternoon.

Mr. MacTavish, as usual, was the first to awaken, and he soon had the train in motion again. He was a model traveller. He needed no alarm clock to warn him of the flight of the hours. It was his boast that he could lie down to sleep, and wake again at any time he might set for himself, whether it would be one or ten hours, and whenever he went out with a party, he always was the first to move, and the last to come to a full stop.

When the sun was well on in its downward path they started again, keeping the same order as at the first. Fergus, eager for his dogs to win a reputation for sense as well as speed, would have liked very much to be allowed to take the lead for a while; but his father did not approve.

"If we had no need to hurry, Fergus," said he, "I wad have no objections, but I do not want to lose an hour between here and Red River, if I can possibly help it. Maybe on our way home you can try your dogs at leading."

And with this half-promise, Fergus was fain to be content.

The afternoon passed away without anything of note occurring. Over the undulating surface of the frozen lake the sledges kept their way from headland to headland, until the sun sank out of sight, and darkness fell upon them. Then a halt was made for tea, and a couple of hours' rest before resuming the journey.

While they were sitting around the fire, all but Fergus enjoying their pipes, the heavens became full of the glory of the Aurora Borealis. It was a wonderful display, the whole sky being ablaze with scintillating bars of light, that flashed and glowed with a splendour of ever-changing colour, and radiance of beauty beyond all power of words to describe, or pigments to picture.

Fergus had seen the aurora many times before, but never had it seemed so magnificent, so awe-inspiring. It was as though the veil that hides the true heaven from mortal eye had been for the time a little withdrawn, permitting a glimpse to be had of the majesty of light that fills the abode of the blest.

"Oh, father! isn't it wonderful?" said he, in an awe-struck tone: "What does it all mean?"

"If you were to ask Papanakes, Fergus," replied the chief trader, glancing across the fire to where the old Indian, seated upon a buffalo robe with his knees drawn up to his chin, seemed to be utterly lost to everything but his pipe and the cheerful blaze before him, "he would tell you that those flashes of light were the spirits of his forefathers rushing out to the battle, or the hunt upon the happy hunting grounds, which are the Indian's notion of Paradise."

"And do the Indians really believe that, father?" asked Fergus, in a tone of surprise.

"Aye, laddie, they do, if I understand them aright. Do you think it strange they should?"

"Well, father, please don't laugh at me; but you know as I was looking up at the sky with all those beautiful lights in it, something came into my mind that was very like what you say the Indians think."

"And what was that, Fergus?"

"Why, you know, father," answered Fergus, somewhat hesitatingly, "in the Bible it says we are compassed about with a great cloud of witnesses, and Mrs. Olden says that God's angels are always watching us; and so I was wondering if those beautiful lights up there could be coming from the angels' wings; for you know, father, they always have wings in the pictures."

Mr. MacTavish leaned over and patted his son lovingly upon the head.

"Those are big thoughts for a young brain, and I canna tell how far from right they be, but nae doot

there's mair o' truth in them than in the notions of Papanakes, for he's no better than a pagan," said he, gazing up at the shafts of coloured flame darting across the blue dome above.

"Poor old Papanakes!" murmured Fergus, musingly. "He's going to be something better than a pagan some day, father, for he loves to listen to Mr. Olden, and he'll learn to be a Christian, you see if he doesn't."

"Maybe, Fergus, maybe; but I'm no verra sure about it," returned the chief trader, still sceptical as to the practical value of Mr. Olden's work. "It's my notion that the truths of the Gospel are oot of the creature's reach; but I may be wrong, I may be wrong."

"Father!" exclaimed Fergus, starting up, "I'm going to ask Papanakes what he thinks about the aurora." And going around the fire he touched the old man on the shoulder, and pointing to the brightly illuminated sky, asked him what he thought it meant.

Papanakes took his pipe from his mouth, rose slowly to his feet, and scrutinised the sky keenly.

"Ugh!" he grunted, in a tone of disgust. "Heap big storm coming. Bad business. Hard work get ahead."

Fergus could not help smiling. He had questioned the old man in the hope of getting some answer from him like that which his father had been telling him, and instead, all he received was a weather prediction.

Papanakes misunderstood the smile. He thought it implied disbelief in the accuracy of his forecast, and his quick ire was roused.

"You no believe me," he cried, indignantly. "Pap-

anakes know what him say, you see. Big storm come before middle of to-morrow, sure."

"What's that you're saying?" asked Mr. MacTavish, his attention being attracted by the Indian's loud tones.

"Papanakes says we're going to have a big storm before the middle of to-morrow," answered Fergus.

"Does he?" exclaimed the chief trader. "I'm verra sorry to hear it. But he's more likely to be right than wrong. There's nae better judge of the weather than Papanakes. We maun take care to find a gude camping place before the storm comes. It maunna catch us oot on the lake. Come noo, let us be off. We've rested lang enough."

The dogs were called and harnessed, the sledges packed, and the train moved off under the scintillating gleams of the aurora, Papanakes trotting on ahead, as of course, the dogs would not be expected to steer straight in the dark. The wonderful skill of the old Indian as a guide was brilliantly shown in the unhesitating way he marked out the track, taking his bearings altogether from the stars, and not a whit bewildered by the aurora, that would have been so confusing to a less experienced eye. Hour after hour he trotted along, the dogs following him with unfaltering step.

It was about ten o'clock when, the train having reached a point covered thickly with firs that offered a sheltered camping place, Mr. MacTavish ordered a halt for the night. Alec soon had a big fire blazing merrily, and the pot boiling in its midst; the hungry dogs were fed, and then their masters fed themselves.

"Do you think the storm will come before morning, father?" asked Fergus, somewhat anxiously, as they sat by the fire; for he did not at all relish the idea of struggling with a snow-storm in that wild region.

"I hardly think so, Fergus; though I canna tell for sure," answered the chief trader. "But ye need na worry about it. We'll get through it all right."

When the chief trader's lusty "*leve! leve!*" aroused the camp some six hours later, the aurora had entirely vanished, and the stars were hidden behind a veil of cloud. The dogs seemed restless; Papanakes and Alec were evidently in no good humour, and altogether the prospects for the day were anything but cheering.

Fergus felt very dull also; but remembering his father's chaffing the day before, he made a noble effort to appear cheerful and unconcerned. As little time as possible was spent in getting breakfast. Mr. MacTavish, who knew every foot of the route, wished to reach a point about thirty miles distant before stopping for the midday rest, and he expected that the going would be none too good, the portion of the lake they had to traverse being one of the most exposed, and pretty sure to be badly drifted over.

Owing, however, to the uneasy state of mind shown by the dogs, the harnessing up took longer than usual, causing both the men to get very much out of temper; and when, at last, the teams did get started, it was evident from the chorus of growls that some mistake had been made in hitching up Mr. Barnston's Esquimaux in the uncertain light.

But whatever was wrong, it could not be made right until they reached their next camping place ; and so, amid much sharp cracking of whips, and volleys of abuse from the two guides, the train moved off into the darkness, Fergus crouching down on his furs, for there was a very penetrating keenness in the air that made him shiver ; but the three men walked on snow-shoes beside their teams, as the track was very rough, requiring them to constantly guard against an upset.

In spite of his care, Mr. MacTavish's cariole caught in a tree stump, and before he could prevent it, pitched over on its side, bringing the team to a full stop.

With a suddenness that gave no chance for interference, the foregoer wheeled about, and snarling fiercely, sprang upon the steady dog, tumbling him over on his back, and gripping him by the throat, while the other two, getting entangled in the traces, began snarling and biting in their turn ; so that in the twinkling of an eye there was a confused jumble of dogs and harness that it would take no small trouble to unravel.

Shouting and swearing at the top of their voices, Papanakes and Alec rushed to the rescue, plying their whips mercilessly upon the tangle of struggling animals. But the lashing only made matters worse, for when the whip fell upon a dog he naturally thought it was one of the other dogs that had bitten him, and redoubled his efforts to bite back.

Mr. MacTavish soon perceived that the confusion was only getting worse confounded.

"Here, Alec, Papanakes!" he roared. "Get awa' wi' ye, and leave the dogs to me. Yer ain dogs'll be fightin' if ye don't watch them."

He spoke not a moment too soon. The other teams, left to themselves, and excited by the din of conflict so near them, would, in another minute, have been at it "tooth and nail" on their own account, and it needed all the efforts of their drivers to quiet them.

At the very first of the fight Fergus had sprung out of his cariole and gone to Bruce's head, where he stood until it was all over, speaking soothingly to his dogs if they showed any signs of restlessness.

Mr. MacTavish found it a hard job to bring any semblance of order out of the chaos; but finally, by dint of patience, succeeded, and then he discovered the cause of all the trouble. The clever, conceited leader had, through an unintentional blunder, been placed in the shafts. The responsibility for this cruel indignity he evidently put upon the shafter who had been promoted to the proud position of leader, and at the first opportunity he had sought solace for his wounded feelings by giving his innocent mate a thrashing.

"Ha! ha!" said the chief trader, with a grim smile. "That's the way of it. The mair haste the less speed. By trying to save a minute at the start we've lost an hour."

After considerable difficulty the tangled harness was straightened out, the dogs put in their proper

places, and harmony being thus restored, the journey was resumed at a quickened pace, in order to make up as much lost time as possible.

The little excitement made Fergus quite forget his dull feelings, and he began to sing in a cheery voice one of the songs he had learned from Mrs. Olden, who was an accomplished musician. The words were the familiar paraphrase of the twenty-third psalm.

"That's richt, laddie," called out Mr. MacTavish. "Sing away like that. It does my heart gude to hear ye."

Fergus' voice was clear and strong, and rising on the still morning air, it sounded remarkably well. The Indian and the half-breed enjoyed the song no less than the chief trader, and were sorry when it came to an end.

"Him sing like a bird," remarked Papanakes, sententiously to Alec, who had come up beside him in order to be nearer the singer.

Encouraged by the evident appreciation of his efforts, Fergus continued them until his list of those he knew by heart was exhausted, and then perforce he had to bring his performance to a close.

But if his burst of song had been brief, it had been very timely. The three men who heard it found their hearts the brighter for it, and pursued their way with lightened step, while Fergus, unconscious of his good office, was regretting that he had nothing more to sing.

About the middle of the morning the clouds began to fulfil their threats by sending down scattering

volleys of snow-flakes, the advance guard of the approaching storm.

"Eh! Fergus. There it comes," said Mr. Mac-Tavish. "And we're nae more than half-way to our camping place. We maun make haste, or we'll have a hard time of it out here on the lake."

Their situation indeed could hardly have been worse for meeting such a storm as might be expected upon Lake Winnipeg. They were just about mid-way between two headlands which formed a great bay. The nearest land was full fifteen miles distant, the clump of pines which crested it being barely visible far to the south. The storm would evidently come from the south-east, and therefore be almost right in their teeth. When once it broke upon them, they would have to fight their way against it until shelter was reached.

All this Fergus saw clearly, and after his singing ceased he had been lifting up his heart in prayer to God for the protection of them all, the sweet words, "Commit thy way unto the Lord," and "He shall direct thy paths," which Mr. Olden so often quoted, coming into his mind with their message of comfort.

Mr. Olden had given him a little sermon all to himself once, upon these two texts which fit so closely together, although they are not to be found side by side in the Bible; and his words had made a deep impression upon him. Here was an opportunity to put them to the test, and he was repeating them softly as he sat in his cariole, when his father spoke to him.

"All right, father," he answered. "Since we must make haste I'm going to help a little. Just give me time to tie my snowshoes." And jumping out of his furs he strapped on the shoes as quickly as Papanakes himself could have done it.

"Now, then," he said. "I'm going to walk, like the rest of you."

"Said like a man," exclaimed the chief trader, looking proudly back at him. "There's nae fear but you'll make your mark, laddie. Yè do my heart good wi' yer bonnie, bright ways."

Taking his bearings carefully while the air was yet clear, Mr. MacTavish said, in an encouraging tone :

"The storm's come an hour sooner than I thought it would. But we're ready for it, and we'll make the point all right. We maun just push on until we reach the land."

More and more thickly fell the snow-flakes, and at the same time the wind increased in violence, not gathering force steadily, but by fitful gusts each sharper than the last, as the tide makes its way up the beach by wave following upon wave, and gaining a little by successive onsets.

Mr. MacTavish yielded the lead to Papanakes, the old Indian's instinct being surer than even his long experience and trained intelligence ; and with heads bent to meet the blast, the four travellers plodded steadily onward at the head of their teams, while the snow-drifts began to form rapidly upon their path.

CHAPTER XIII.

A STRUGGLE WITH THE STORM.

THEY had made about four miles, and were still ten miles from land, when Fergus found his legs feeling very weary. With each step the track grew heavier, and then there was the pitiless, persistent wind to battle against. The poor dogs seemed to be labouring, so that he felt very reluctant to increase their burden by getting into the cariole, and yet he knew he could not keep his place in the train much longer.

Had the track been firm and even, he could have slipped along on his snow-shoes for ten miles without over-exerting himself; but it was very different ploughing through drifting snow as dry as sand, into which the snow-shoe sank at every step, in the teeth of a gale now blowing at the rate of thirty or forty miles an hour.

There was not a stouter-hearted boy of his years in British North America; yet who could blame him if his courage began to wane as the perils of the situation increased? So dense had the snowfall become that the whole air seemed full of the whirling

flakes, and it was impossible to see many hundred yards in any direction. Only now and then, when a gust of especial violence tore the confusing veil asunder for a moment, could a long look ahead be obtained.

At length he could not keep up the pace that Papanakes was setting, and rather than call out for him to walk more slowly, he got on his cariole behind the seat. The feeling of rest was inexpressibly welcome. But his weight at once made itself felt, for the dogs perceptibly slackened speed.

"Now, Bruce," he cried, in a tone of reproach, "wad ye have me left behind? Get up, gude dog. Keep yer place in the train. Surely, ye would na let the freight dogs pass ye by."

Bruce may not have understood the exact words, but he caught their meaning clearly enough, and responded to the challenge by a vigorous spurt that quickly recovered the lost ground. Then, putting forth a steady increase of energy, he kept his place in spite of storm and drifting snow.

It was hard, hard work for both men and dogs. Had they been going overland where they could at times get under the lee of a clump of trees or a sheltering hill, it would not have been so trying a situation. But they were far out on the open lake, exposed to the full sweep of the wind, and compelled to face it in order to reach a place of safety. Well was it for them that they were inured to Arctic cold by long experience, and were in the best of physical condition.

For another hour they toiled on through the storm, Fergus alternately walking, and standing on behind, into his cariole he refused to get, although his father more than once urged him to do so. Not until his strength had utterly left him would he consent to become a helpless burden, and a drag upon the others.

Anxious as he was for the safety of the party, he could not help a feeling of pride at the admirable behaviour of his dogs. The blinding storm bothered them far less than it did the others. They bent their heads low, half-shut their eyes, and kept on steadily at the easy jog-trot which was good for four miles an hour. When Fergus got on the cariole it caused a momentary check, but they quickly adjusted their effort to the increased weight, and went on as steadily as though he were walking beside them.

All this time Papanakes had been marking out the track with entire confidence in the accuracy of his guiding; but presently he began to falter, and show signs of indecision. At last he came to a full stop; and when Mr. MacTavish went forward to find out what was the matter, the old Indian giving his arm a sweep around the horizon, said in a mournful tone:

“Papanakes lost! Not knowed which way to lead. Papanakes' eyes old. Not see like when him young. The storm make him blind. Chief trader must lead train now.”

Mr. MacTavish's heart sank when he heard these words. He had depended upon the veteran guide to extricate them from their perilous position; for Alec,

although bright enough in his way, was still too inexperienced to do anything more than he could do himself. Thinking that perhaps it was only a despondent mood that had come over the Indian, he answered him in the most cheerful tone he could muster :

“Oh, no! Papanakes not lost. Papanakes know too much to get lost. Papanakes only tired—eh, Alec?” turning with a smile to the half-breed.

But the old man was not to be brightened up in that way. He was tired without doubt—very, very tired. His many years were telling upon him, and he could no longer endure such fatigue as he made light of when he was Alec’s age.

“No, no, chief,” he replied, “Papanakes lost, sure, sure.” And he shook his grizzled locks with sorrowful earnestness.

“Can’t you guide us, instead of Papanakes, father?” broke in Fergus, who had been an eager listener, and now spoke with startled face and beating heart.

“I fear not, laddie; I was only lead ye astray. We will rest a bit, and then maybe Papanakes will feel like going on again,” replied Mr. MacTavish.

Accordingly a halt was made, and as everybody was by this time feeling very hungry, the provision bags were opened. The pemmican was frozen hard, so that neither the chief trader nor Fergus could eat a bite of it, although the Indian and half-breed managed to dispose of about a pound each. But the biscuits were all right, and they ate of them

heartily, wishing all the while for a good cup of hot black tea with which to wash them down.

As they were eating, the dogs crowded around with begging looks, and Mr. MacTavish gave orders for them to be fed, although the rule was not to feed them until at the end of the day's work. They evidently much enjoyed the extra meal, and would pull all the better for it when the team started again.

"Just see, father, how the snow's drifting over us," said Fergus, pointing to the little heaps that gathered so quickly about the sledges. "It would not take long to bury us if we were to stay still, would it?"

"No, indeed, Fergus, not very lang, and it wad make a bonnie winding-sheet for us all. But please God, it's not going to bury us this day. We'll reach the land in a couple of hours."

"Father," said Fergus, somewhat bashfully, laying his hand upon the chief trader's arm, "hadn't we better pray to God before we start again? The Bible says: 'Commit thy way unto the Lord, and He will direct thy paths.'"

Mr. MacTavish turned and looked into Fergus' eyes, while his own filled with unbidden tears.

"Eh, laddie," said he, gently, "but ye're a lesson to yer puir father, who does not know how to pray as he should. Will ye na ask God yersel?"

Fergus blushed at his father's request, but did not hesitate to obey it. There was a remarkable simplicity in his nature which helped him to be quite unconscious of himself. The thought of how he looked to others,

as he was doing or saying anything, never entered his mind ; and now that it was put upon him to be the priest of the little party in such imminent peril, his tongue was not tied by any embarrassment because of the presence of the others. It was the feeling of the Divine presence that made him halt and hesitate in his utterance.

Yet in childlike faith the prayer was offered ; Mr. MacTavish and the men listening reverently, and adding a fervent "Amen!" when Fergus had finished.

"Father," said the boy, earnestly, his face illumined by his faith, "God will give us help, won't He? He will direct our paths."

"Surely He will, laddie," answered the chief trader ; and then turning to the Indian, he asked : "Are you ready to lead again, Papanakes?"

The old man brushed the snow from his face, and strove to pierce the bewildering veil of flying flakes that obscured the outlook in every direction. Then he shook his head sadly, murmuring :

"Papanakes no good. Him not know the way at all."

Mr. MacTavish gave a great sigh of disappointment. He had hoped that after the rest and refreshment, the veteran guide's faculties would brighten up, and he would be able to resume his place at the head of the train. But it was very evident that no more help could be expected from him in their dire emergency. However the way to safety was to be found, Papanakes counted for nothing.

Then Mr. MacTavish bethought himself of the dogs; perhaps their instinct would enable them unguided to find their way to the land. The experiment was worth trying at all events. Naturally enough he took it for granted that Mr. Barnston's Esquimaux would be the most reliable under the circumstances. They were accustomed to snow and ice from their birth. They ought not to be at fault in any storm.

Getting the teams into line, with the white Esquimaux at the lead, Mr. MacTavish cracked his whip, and shouted: "Go, dogs! Get up wi' ye!"

The Esquimaux took a few steps in a slow, hesitating way, and then stopped, and looked around. His meaning was clear enough. He was ready to go forward; but he wanted directions. He was waiting for "Haw," or "Gee;" the words for "right" and "left."

But Mr. MacTavish had no idea whether to say "Haw," or "Gee." He hoped that the Esquimaux would decide that for himself. Again and again he urged the dog on, and each time the same thing was repeated. The bewildered animal at first obeyed mechanically, but soon halted, at a loss to proceed without more definite directions.

Then a thought flashed into Fergus' brain. If the white Esquimaux could not lead them to land, perhaps his noble Bruce might.

"Father," he cried, "try my dogs. Perhaps they'll do better."

Mr. MacTavish shook his head doubtfully.

"Your dogs are strangers here, Fergus. I fear me they'll not know what to do."

"But, father, won't you please try them?" urged Fergus.

"Well, laddie, try them yersel'. They'll do better in yer ain hands than in mine," responded his father.

"I will, father," said Fergus; "and I believe Bruce will find the way for us."

So saying, Fergus, went up to the big St. Bernard, and taking his massive head between his hands, he turned it up so that he might look right into his brave brown eyes, and proceeded to talk with him as though he had been a fellow-being.

"Bruce," said he, "we are all in very great danger. We have lost our way, and none of us know how to find it again. We want to get back to the shore. If we don't before night comes, we'll likely be dead before morning. Now, Bruce, don't you think you could guide us to the shore, if you tried? You're a very wise dog, Bruce; and I believe you can, and I'm going to start you off ahead, and we're all going to follow you. So just you start right off, Bruce. Go now, go!"

If ever a dog understood human speech thus addressed to him; Bruce did then. The noble creature listened attentively to every word, and when his young master had finished, and stood to one side, crying: "Go," he threw up his head, gave a short, clear bark, that said plainly, "I understand you," and

dashed off at a rate that compelled Fergus to get on behind, or he would have been left in the lurch. The other teams fell quickly into line, their drivers trotting along through the snow beside them, and the whole train was once more in active motion.

Without the slightest hesitation, or seeming to have any need to look about him, the St. Bernard, holding his head high, and with eyes fixed upon something straight ahead, pressed steadily forward through the storm. The going was very heavy. He sank to the first joint of his leg every step he took, and the cariole, with Fergus upon it, partly plowed through the accumulated snow. But these drawbacks had no effect upon his ardour. By some subtle instinct, beyond the scope of human comprehension, he divined the shortest route to the shore, and thoroughly realised the importance of getting over it as quickly as possible.

He had not gone a quarter of a mile before Mr. MacTavish's doubts as to his ability to save them from a death in the snow drifts had vanished.

"God bless the creature!" the chief trader ejaculated, fervently. "Did ye ever see anything like it? Ye'd think he knew the way as well as if it were the track from Play Green Lake to the Fort. He's taking us straight to the land, I do believe."

Papanakes and Alec had nothing to say. They were both very tired, and found it a hard task to keep up with their teams. They would have been glad if Bruce were not so much in earnest, and were

content to set a slower pace. But they would have died rather than confess it; and so, with both heads bent, and arms squared, they trotted on beside their sledges in grim silence, putting little faith in the St. Bernard's ability to get them out of their perilous position.

Half an hour passed in this way, and still Bruce pressed resolutely forward with unslackened speed. No urging did he need from Fergus. On the contrary, his young master felt it necessary to try to hold him in a little, and would call to him in a quieting tone:

"Easy, Bruce. Easy, gude dog. Ye need na work sae hard. It's a long time yet till dark." But when he spoke it seemed that his words quickened instead of restrained the St. Bernard, and as he had no reins wherewith to hold the animal in check, he was compelled to let him run on as fast as he pleased.

His team-mates heartily seconded his efforts. The two Newfoundlands and huge Hercules had caught the spirit of their leader, whether they shared in his wonderful sagacity or not, and each one took his full part of the work. So tired had Fergus become that he could not even keep his place properly standing on behind, and was glad to get inside, and cover himself up with the furs.

For almost an hour had they been hastening on, and Mr. MacTavish found the tremendous efforts of the day telling so severely upon him, that he doubted if his strength would hold out much longer. Yet he hesitated to get into his cariole, for he knew his

weight would make his dogs go much more slowly on that heavy track, and Fergus' team would soon leave him behind.

"Oh, God!" he groaned. "Give me help, for my strength is failing fast."

He glanced over his shoulder at the two drivers behind him, and saw at once from their heavy, laboured step they were in no better condition than himself.

"Gude Lord!" he prayed again. "Come to the help of Thy puir creatures, for we are in sore straits."

Just at that moment Bruce gave a clear, sharp bark, which sounded like a cry of triumph; and Fergus, standing up in his cariole, waved his hands, shouting joyously:

"I can see the shore, father. There it is, just ahead! Look!"

The chief trader brushed the snow from his face, and peered eagerly into the storm. Sure enough, not a hundred yards away there loomed up a dark rounded mass, which must be the forest-lined shore for which they were making, and upon the reaching of which before dark their lives depended.

"The gude Lord be praised!" he ejaculated, fervently. "It is the shore, indeed; and we're saved."

All weariness was forgotten now. Fergus stood up in his cariole, cracking his whip, and showering praises upon his dogs. Mr. MacTavish sprang forward after him, as briskly as though he had just begun the day's work. Papanakes and Alec lifted

their heads, and with the gloom all gone from their faces, stepped lightly over the yielding drifts, while the dogs joined in a chorus of barking, that showed that they understood the situation quite as well as their masters.

So, like an invading army, they charged up the sloping shore of the lake, and found themselves in the clump of trees that crowned the very headland Mr. MacTavish had appointed as the termination of that day's journey. Bruce's sagacity had shown itself superior to the utmost of human skill and experience.

They were too exhausted to do anything save vie with one another in praising Bruce for some time after they reached the welcome shelter of the wood, where the pines standing close together, shielded them admirably from the baffled blast. But as soon as they had rested their weary limbs a little and regained their breath, they set to work to prepare a camp that would serve them until the storm altogether passed away.

"Come now, men, and you too, Fergus, if you're not clean done oot," Mr. MacTavish said, as briskly as though he did not know the meaning of the word "tired." "Let us get a real snug camp ready before the night comes on us."

All went at once to work with a will. The axes and hatchets were plied vigorously, and in a remarkably short time a really snug camp was constructed out of pine boughs supplemented by the furs from

the carioles. A huge fire was then set going right at the entrance to the camp, the dogs were given a double ration of white-fish, their masters made a hearty meal of pemmican, biscuit, and tea; and so before the night fell upon them, the travellers, relieved in mind and refreshed in body, rolled up in their thick buffalo robes to enjoy the sleep they so greatly needed, while the dogs, as soon as all was still, crawled quietly into the camp, and stowed themselves away wherever they could find an unoccupied corner, thus insuring their own comfort, and adding to the warmth of their human bedfellows.

There was no need to turn out before dawn the following morning. The storm continued all that day and into the following night, greatly trying the patience of the chief trader, and of Fergus, who found the forced inaction very monotonous. Papanakes and Alec were quite content to smoke, and snooze away the hours, so that father and son were left as much to themselves as if they had been alone.

They fell to talking about Mr. Olden, and the business that had brought him to Norway House.

"I canna help thinking that it'll be little better than a wild goose chase, Fergus," said Mr. MacTavish. "They're puir creatures, these Indians, and I greatly doot if they'll ever come to understand the Gospel. Dinna ye think sae yersel'?"

"Why, no, father," responded Fergus, earnestly, for Mr. Olden had inspired him with some of his own enthusiasm; and he had profound faith in the

ultimate success of his mission. "When Mr. Olden is able to talk to the Indians in their own words, you see if they don't soon understand the Bible. Why, already, although Alec has to be his interpreter, Mr. Olden has told them a great deal about Jesus, and they are always glad to hear about Him."

"Possibly, Fergus, possibly," answered the chief trader, shaking his head sagely. "But I'm much mistaken if preaching to the Indians be not like trying to make ropes out of the sea sand. I'm sure ye would na care to waste yer life at it, would ye, laddie?"

Fergus blushed, and his head dropped upon his breast. There was that in his father's tone which plainly implied that he considered Mr. Olden's life wasted, so far as it was devoted to attempting to make Christians out of Indians; and in the face of this he had not courage to give the answer that was in his thoughts.

Mr. MacTavish noticed the boy's hesitation, and it aroused his curiosity so, that he pressed for an answer.

"What may ye be thinking of, laddie?" he asked, somewhat sharply. "Tell me your thoughts."

"I fear you will na like to hear them, father," replied Fergus, slowly.

"Aye, that I will, Fergus," returned Mr. MacTavish. "Oot wi' them noo."

"Well, father," responded Fergus, speaking in a low, hesitating tone, "I have been thinking that I'd

rather be like Mr. Olden, than onything else in the world." And the boy looked up into his father's face with an anxious expression, as if fearing that the answer would displeas him.

The chief trader seemed somewhat puzzled. He did not indeed clearly grasp his son's meaning. So he asked him :

"Dae ye mean, Fergus, ye want to be as gude a man as Mr. Olden, or as gude a missionary?"

Again Fergus was slow in answering; but seeing that his father was awaiting his response impatiently, he summoned up his courage, and with a conscious blush, murmured :

"I want to be a missionary, like Mr. Olden."

The chief trader broke into a laugh which to Fergus' keen sensitiveness had a certain ring of derision that made him wince.

"You want to be a missionary, Fergus!" he exclaimed, "and to these good-for-nothing Indians? Why, laddie, there's not a boy in all Rupert's Land, with prospects s̄ae gude as yer ain. Yer father can do nae little to gie ye a gude start, but Sir George Simpson can do far more; and it's verra plain that he thinks a sight o' you, and does na want to forget that he gave ye yer name. Tut! tut! Fergus, it's sheer nonsense yer talking altogether. And who put such notions as that in yer head. If it was Mr. Olden, I'm not at all obleeged to him."

Fergus, dreading lest his father should form hard feelings against the Oldens, hastened to say :

"No, no, father. It was not Mr., Olden. It just came of itself." He might have added that he had talked about it with Mrs. Olden, and that in her sweet, sympathetic way, she had done much to foster it; but his natural shrewdness taught him to withhold this unless his father drew it out by further questioning.

"Well, then, laddie," said Mr. MacTavish, in a tone half-tender, half-stern: "As it came of itself, it may go of itself. Your father wants you to stick to the Company, and not be running awa' with ideas about making Christians out of the Indians that are not fit for anything better than to bring in furs."

Fergus made no reply; and his father, thinking he had said enough for the present, introduced a sudden change into the conversation, by calling up Bruce, and fondling the big dog that had done them such timely service.

"Ye're a verra sensible creature, Bruce," said he. "Ye found the way to shore for us, when but for you we wad hae left our bodies oot on the ice to be buried in the snow drifts. And now, Bruce, since ye were sae wise aboot that, dae ye think ye could tell us how lang this bothersome storm is gaeing to last? What think ye, Bruce?"

The St. Bernard scrutinised his questioner's fae very closely, as if striving to get from it the meaning he could not find in the words; but, entirely failing to understand either, he made a sound that was remarkably like a sigh, and dropped down into a

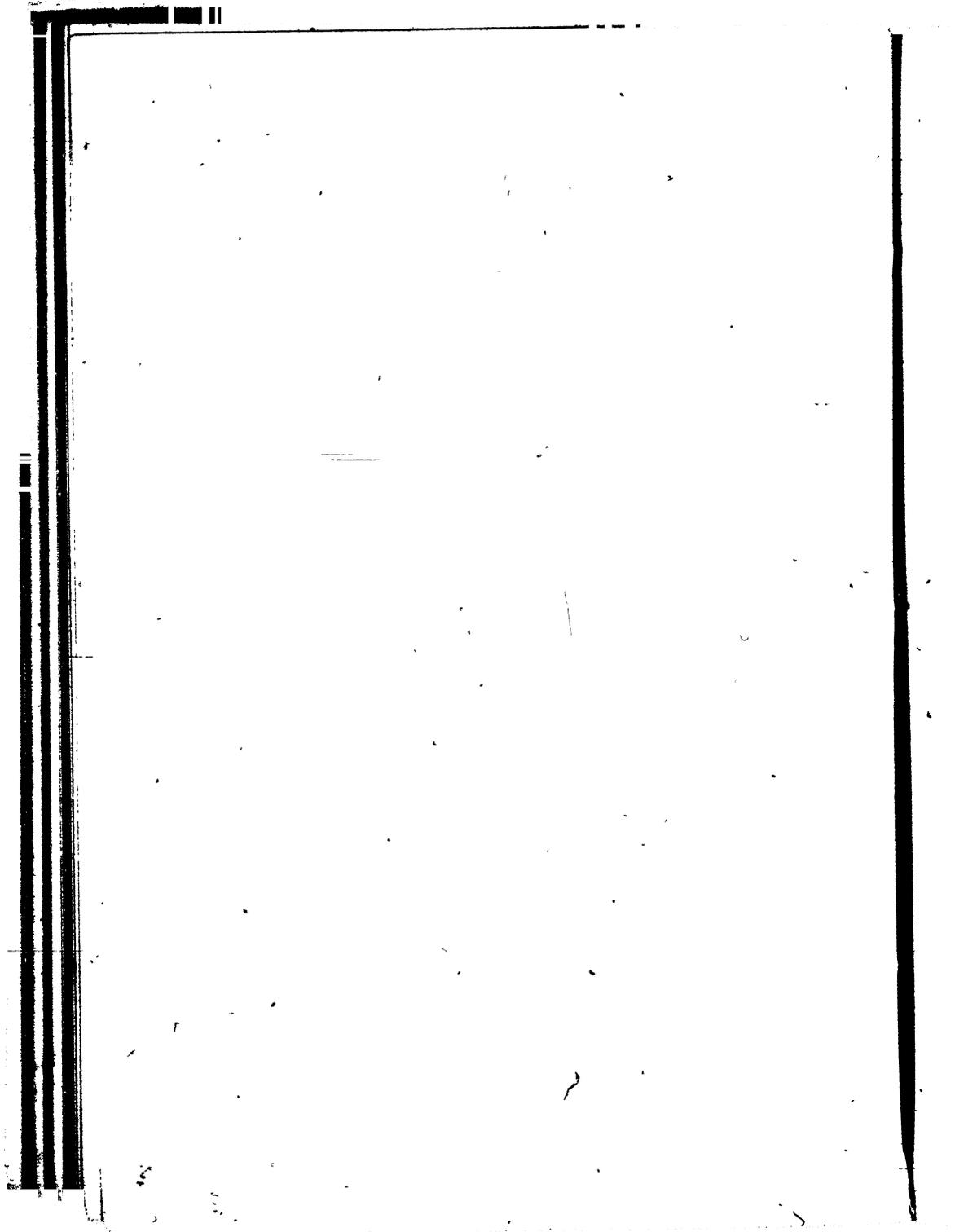
position of ease, as though nothing more could be expected of him.

"Eh, but ye're a wise doggie," said Mr. MacTavish, patting his head. "Ye dinna worry yersel' about those things that are beyond yer ken; and it's right ye are too. There'd be a deal more happiness in this world if mony folk wad do the same."

Fergus felt that his father was talking at him while pretending to talk to the dog, and the impulse was strong to say something in reply. But before he could frame an answer in accordance with his feelings Mr. MacTavish got up, saying :

"Man, dear, but this is awful tiresome! I maurr take a tramp around just to keep my blood moving. Come, Fergus, put on your shoes, and we'll go through the wood a bit; may be we'll find something to have a shot at."

So the opportunity passed, and nothing more was said between them on the subject until many days later.



CHAPTER XIV.

RED RIVER AND HOME AGAIN.

THE storm lasted during three days, and then cleared away, leaving a world completely buried in spotless white. A partial thaw marked its close, and the snow that fell then was heavy and moist. With the clearing off came colder temperature, and a crust formed over the snow, which, when the sledges set out at first, was not strong enough to bear the weight of the dogs. They consequently broke through it at every step, thus not only making progress very difficult, but presently the jagged crust cut their feet, and Mr. Barnston's Esquimaux came to a full stop, holding up their paws, and refusing to go on until what they wanted had been done.

"Dogs want shoes," said Papanakes. "Won't go till they get 'em."

"Sure enough!" exclaimed the chief trader. "I was forgetting all about the paur creatures. Did you bring shoes for them, Papanakes?"

The old Indian was too busy searching for something in the load on his sledge to make any answer,

but after a few moments he held up a little bundle tied around with moose-hide; saying proudly:

"Papanakes not forget. Him bring dog shoes every time."

"Gude for you, Papanakes," said Mr. MacTavish. "I'm verra glad ye didn't forget, for the dogs could na gang far without them over this track."

Papanakes' bundle, when untied, proved to consist of a number of pairs of woollen things that looked like tiny thumbless mittens. The moment the Esquimaux saw them they held forth their paws expectantly. With soft thong a dog-shoe was securely tied upon each foot, protecting the leg right up to the knee. Fergus' dogs had never worn them before, but they made no objection to their being put on.

Once the animals were all equipped, their satisfaction was very evident. They capered about in token of their joy, and when the command was given to start again, rushed off in great style, crushing through the crust with gay indifference to its sharp edges.

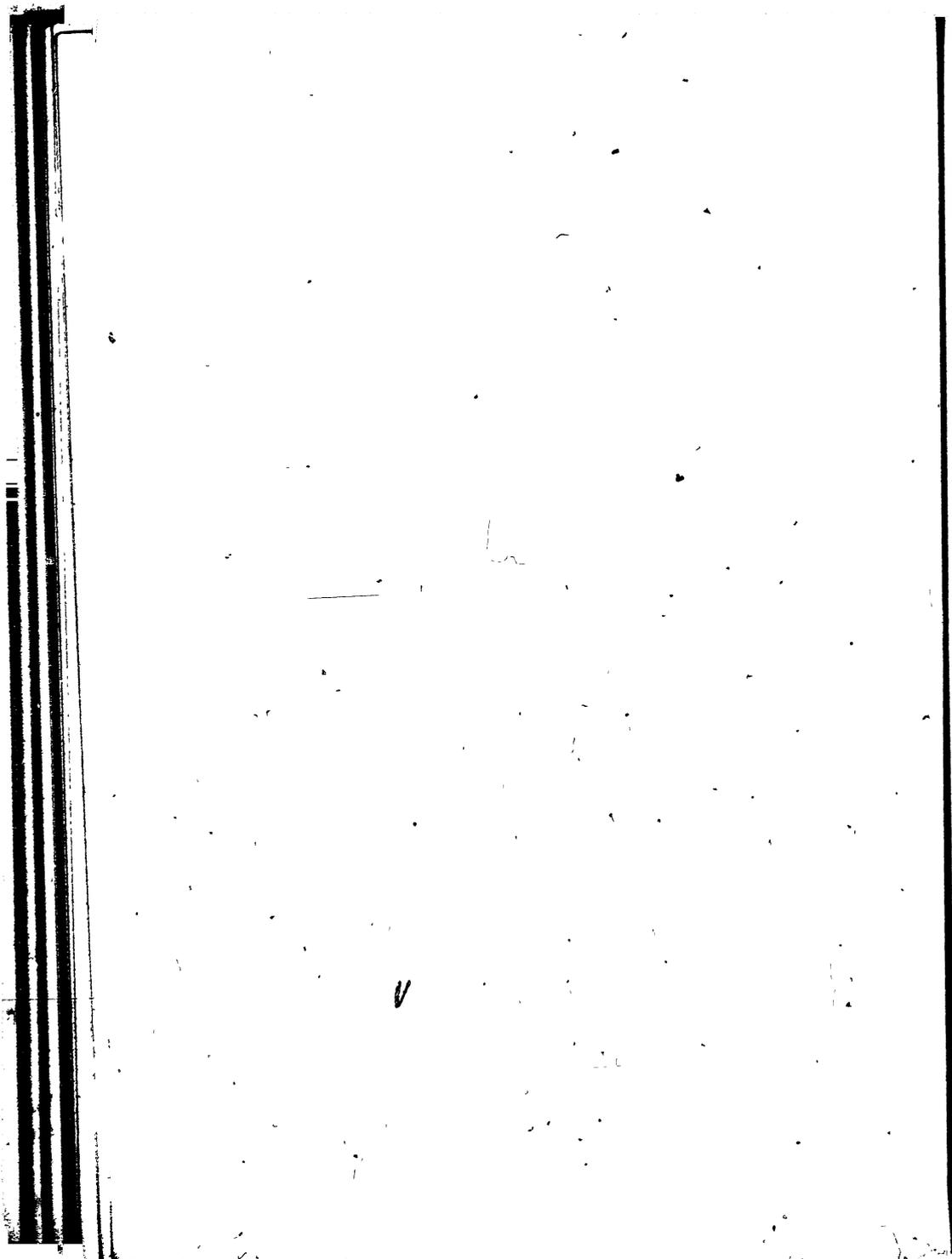
No incidents of special note marked the remainder of the journey to Red River. Owing to the delay caused by the storm, the train took ten days altogether in reaching its destination, instead of six; as Mr. MacTavish had counted upon. But his regret at this was soon forgotten in the pleasure of a meeting with the many friends he had in the settlement.

To Fergus, the little gathering of houses and huts, hardly worthy of the name of village, was an object



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of great interest. He had never seen so many houses or so many people in one place before, and he plied his father with questions concerning both that kept the chief trader busy answering him.

He was particularly impressed by the grandeur of Fort Garry, with its solid stone walls, massive gates, frowning towers, and, most wonderful of all, real cannon standing at the embrasures ready to pour destruction upon any force that might be rash enough to invade.

So engrossed was he in his sight-seeing, that he did not notice that he was creating a small sensation in his own way, as he guided his dogs through the single narrow street and the well-protected gateway into the interior of the Fort. Such a team of dogs as his had never been seen at Fort Garry before, and ere long quite a crowd gathered about his cariole, just as the street urchins gather about a man with a dancing bear.

Indeed, they seemed to have as much respect for the big St. Bernards as the boys have for the bear, none venturing very near, but watching them and their youthful driver with lively interest.

"Just bide here a bit, Fergus," said Mr. MacTavish when they reached the front of the principal building, "while I pay my respects to Mr. Sutherland. Take ye care that the dogs dinna get to fighting with the strange ones here."

"I'll take good care, father," replied Fergus, grasping the handle of his whip firmly, and feeling equal to

thrashing off any number of dogs that might dare show incivility to his pets.

While Mr. MacTavish went in to present himself to the chief factor, his superior officer, and next to Sir George Simpson, the highest official in the service, Fergus had the four teams ranged side by side, and then he, with Alec and Papanakes, mounted guard over them. There were scores of dogs hanging about, many of them gaunt, wolfish-looking creatures, that Fergus would have been ashamed to harness up even to a freight sledge, and from their persistent growls it was evident they were by no means disposed to give the visitors a kindly reception.

Their masters were much more amiably inclined. They were very glad to see the newcomers, particularly when they had such splendid animals to show as were in Fergus' and Mr. Barnston's teams. They crowded about the sledges with welcoming faces, and Fergus soon found himself the centre of a circle of clerks and employees, whose questions concerning affairs at Norway House, and the incidents of the journey down, he took pleasure in answering. His dogs were greatly admired, and he gave a very graphic account of the race between them and Mr. Barnston's, and also of the brilliant way in which Bruce had saved their lives when lost on Lake Winnipeg, the effect being to make himself and his team the talk of the settlement, so that it was no wonder if his young head subsequently got turned a little by the attentions paid him.

Mr. MacTavish was nearly an hour gone, for in the multitude of things he and Mr. Sutherland found to talk about, he kept no account of the time, and not until a halt came in the conversation did he bethink himself of his boy.

"Hoot, man!" he cried, jumping up. "I clean forgot aboot Fergus. The laddie maun be tired waiting for me. Come and see my boy, Mr. Sutherland. I'm verra proud of him."

Fergus' tongue was wagging busily when they joined the group, and as they came up behind him, he did not perceive their approach.

"S—h!" whispered Mr. Sutherland. "Let us listen to what he's saying."

So they joined his audience for some minutes while he rattled away quite unconscious of their presence.

"No wonder you're proud of him," said the chief factor under his breath to Mr. MacTavish as, having moved forward in order to get a good view of him, he looked admiringly upon Fergus' bright, expressive face and listened to his flow of interesting talk. "I would I had a boy like him," and Mr. Sutherland heaved a sigh, for his family consisted of two daughters, and he longed for a son.

Impatient to introduce Fergus to the chief factor, Mr. MacTavish now called out:

"Gude sakes, laddie, but how yer tongue's a-wagging. Come here now till I present you to Mr. Sutherland."

Blushing like a girl at being overheard by his father

who he supposed was still in the house, Fergus broke off what he was saying and advanced toward Mr. MacTavish, who then introduced him to Mr. Sutherland.

"I'm very glad to make your acquaintance, Fergus," said the chief factor, giving him a cordial grasp of the hand, "and welcome you to Fort Garry. Who knows but some fine day you'll be standing in my shoes? You seem a likely lad, and if you make as good an officer of the Company as your father has been, you'll certainly get on well."

Mr. Sutherland's appearance, manner, and words combined to effect a complete capture of Fergus' heart. He thought him the most handsome and attractive man he had ever met. Yet he could not find words to frame a fitting reply, and was making a desperate effort to stammer out something when the chief factor, perceiving his confusion, took him familiarly by the arm, saying:

"But you must be hungry, my boy, and no doubt you would enjoy a good wash before dinner. Come along with me to the house. Come, Mr. MacTavish, there's about time to make your toilet before our dinner will be ready."

Following their host, the father and son soon found themselves in a comfortable room where, for the first time since leaving home, they were able to indulge in a thoroughly good wash, and vastly did they both enjoy the luxury of soap and water and towels galore. They had each brought with them in their carioles a

bag containing a complete change of clothing, and when they had donned their clean garments they felt like different beings, and quite prepared to be presented to Mrs. Sutherland and her two charming daughters.

Very delightful too was it to sit down at a well-appointed table after the week or more of tea and pemmican in the snow drifts, and Fergus did not allow his bashfulness, which hung about him for a while, to in any wise interfere with a proper appreciation of the generous fare before him.

Mrs. Sutherland, seeing he felt a little shy, addressed herself to drawing him out, and her feminine tact soon put him at his ease, so that before the dinner was half through, he was chatting away to her and the young ladies with as nimble a tongue as ever.

They were much interested in his account of the Oldens, and especially of little Ruth. Fergus told with a great deal of spirit of how they two were lost in the woods, and of the trouble their fathers had to find them. He also described the exciting experience they had in his cariole, when his dogs set off in chase of the fox, and such merry peals of laughter did he evoke from his listeners that Mr. Sutherland and Mr. MacTavish, busily discussing, at their end of the table, weighty matters in connection with the Company, were fain to suspend their talk and join Fergus' audience.

"What a sweet little friend Ruth must be!" said Mrs. Sutherland. "I suppose you would be very

sorry if she were to go away from Norway House now, wouldn't you?"

"Indeed I would," cried Fergus, warmly. "We'd all be sorry, wouldn't we, father?" turning to Mr. MacTavish, who nodded assent.

"But you would be more sorry than anybody else, wouldn't you, Fergus?" asked Mrs. Sutherland, who wanted to tease him a little.

Fergus caught her meaning, and a bright blush suffused his cheeks. He did not know just how to answer. So Mrs. Sutherland, smiling, went on: "If you won't object to taking a bit of advice from an old woman, you'd better try to make Ruth so fond of Norway House that she'll never want to leave it. But I mustn't be taking liberties on so short an acquaintance. You were going to tell us about your bear cub. Please go on."

It was late in the afternoon before they rose from the table, and Fergus thought he had never enjoyed a dinner so much in his life. To be the centre of a circle of appreciative listeners was a new experience to him; and put him on his mettle, so to speak. He did his very best to be entertaining, and displayed in a marked degree that faculty of vivid graphic description which had attracted the attention of the Oldens, and caused them to covet him for their missionary work.

His father felt very proud of him. He was greatly pleased at the chief factor's remark about the promising future awaiting him in the service of the Company.

Since Fergus had confessed his drawings toward a life like Mr. Olden's, Mr. MacTavish resolved not merely to discourage and oppose such ideas, but also to counteract them by putting the service of the Company, and the boy's prospects therein, in as attractive a light as possible. He accordingly congratulated himself upon having brought Fergus with him to Red River. Here he would see the Hudson's Bay Company at its best.

The Sutherlands insisted upon the MacTavishes being their guests so long as they remained at Fort Garry, an arrangement that thoroughly pleased Fergus, who had quite fallen in love with the ladies, and felt a profound admiration for the head of the house. He had never known any lack of actual comfort at home, but in this establishment, as befitted that of the most important resident official of the great Hudson's Bay Company, there was a certain degree of splendour which greatly impressed him. He did not fail to appreciate the easy luxury that marked the life of the household, nor the importance given to his father and himself by their being the guests of the chief factor, who was not prone to such hospitality, being a man of rather reserved and distant disposition. Indeed, it was as much on Fergus' account as on his father's that the invitation was given, for Mr. Sutherland had taken a strong fancy to the boy at once upon seeing him, and wanted to have him at hand during his stay.

After they rose from dinner, Fergus said he must

go out and look after his dogs, whereupon the young ladies asked if they might accompany him. They were delighted with his satiny St. Bernards and shaggy Newfoundlands.

“What perfect beauties!” exclaimed Miss Sutherland, in tones of warmest admiration. “I never saw such splendid creatures in my life. Will they let us pat them, Fergus?”

Fergus assured them that the dogs were as good-natured as kittens, and the two girls proceeded to fondle them in a way that would have made some of their admirers, and they had many, for they were the belles of that region, almost wish they were dogs, in order to be the objects of such charming caresses.

Having made sure that his big pets wanted for nothing, Fergus, under the guidance of his fair companions, went the rounds of the Fort and settlement, not returning to the house until nightfall, when the family gathered for the evening meal, and there was pleasant talk and laughter, in which no one took part more heartily than he.

Fergus found plenty to occupy his time at Fort Garry, and the days slipped pleasantly by until his father had attended to the business which had brought him there. Among the attentions he received was an invitation to a dinner given at Bachelor's Hall, as the clerks called their quarters, in honour of the promotion of one of their number to the charge of a post. It was quite a brilliant affair in its way, the big dining hall being gaily decorated, and the most sumptuous

repast the cooks of the establishment could devise being provided. None of the older officials were present. It was a decidedly youthful gathering, and feeling free from all restraint, the guests went in for a royal good time.

Fergus, who had never been in such gay company before, was at first somewhat taken aback by their noisy hilarity, but he soon caught the spirit of the occasion, and entered into the fun as heartily as any of them. Now, up to this time he had been a practical teetotaller, without ever having had any thought about the matter. The use of spirituous liquors, except as medicine, was unknown at his home, and he had never tasted wine in his life. When, therefore, he found his glass filled with a clear brown liquid which had an attractive odour and tempting taste, and saw everybody about him sipping it with great gusto, he naturally enough followed their example.

The wine quickly mounted to his head, and its exhilarating effect was exceedingly pleasant. He felt as if he were treading upon air, and equal to the performance of anything that could possibly be demanded of him. The young men about him, some of whom he met that evening for the first time, seemed to him the finest fellows in the world, and he gravely assured them that if he were only Sir George Simpson, he would give every one of them charge of a post on the spot. All the while he continued to sip more and more of the magic liquid which, strange to say, appeared to have no effect in quenching his thirst,

but, on the contrary, to increase it. There were songs and speeches in plenty, and he did his best to join in both, creating great amusement by his interruptions in the latter, which were taken in good part. Encouraged by the laughter his remarks evoked, he presently essayed to make a speech himself, and did manage to get out some disjointed sentences before his neighbours jerked him back into his chair, where he remained smiling amiably upon all around.

As the night advanced the fun waxed fast and furious, until at last the revellers lost all control of themselves, and when a daring spirit proposed that they should go and serenade the chief factor, there was not one sober enough to realise the folly of the suggestion. Not stopping to put on coat or cap, they all sallied forth into the cold night air and proceeded in noisy disorder across the square to Mr. Sutherland's house, before which they halted, and began to sing one of the familiar brigade songs at the top of their voices.

As it happened, Mr. Sutherland and Mr. MacTavish had not yet retired, although the hour was late for Fort Garry, and the sound of the singing soon reached their ears as they sat in the parlour enjoying a final pipe before bed.

"Eh! What's that?" asked the latter, starting up and listening intently. "Where's the singing going on? I didn't hear it before."

Mr. Sutherland smiled, but made no move to leave his seat. It was not the first time he had received a

serenade, for which honours, however, he shrewdly gave the credit to his daughters. The time of year, to be sure, was somewhat unusual, but the clerks were equal to any foolishness when they set out for a lark.

"It's only the boys from Bachelor's Hall," said he, in an indifferent tone. "They've escorted Fergus home, probably, and are bidding him 'good-night.' They often make as much noise as that. I imagine you and I did pretty much the same when we were their age."

"Oh! is that what it is?" said the chief trader. "They do make a big noise certainly, and to judge by their singing, the most of them maun have a drappie in their e'e. I think I'll just step to the door and tell Fergus to come in."

Taking up one of the lamps, Mr. MacTavish hastened to the door and threw it open. The light revealed a scene he never forgot. Standing in front of him were a dozen or more young fellows bawling out a chorus with little regard for time or tune. Their heads were bare, they were without overcoats, although the cold made him shiver, and every one of them was the worse for wine.

In their very midst he saw Fergus, swaying to and fro as he did his best to join in a song of which he did not know a note. His face bore a tell-tale flush, his eyes were standing out from their sockets, and his hair tumbled about his forehead.

"God help me! the laddie's fou!" exclaimed the chief trader, in horror-struck tones. "Come ye here,

Fergus. Come in with me instantly." And stepping forward, he caught the poor boy by the arm, drew him into the room, and shut the door with an angry bang.

His first impulse was to give his son, old as he was, a sound thrashing, but before he could carry it out Mr. Sutherland, startled by the sharp banging of the door, came into the hall.

"Hello!" said he, not noticing Fergus' condition at first. "You came home in great style to-night." Then observing how matters stood, he added, in a quieter tone: "Ah! I see the clerks have been taking advantage of you, Fergus. They shall hear from me to-morrow. You'd better get off to bed now."

Fergus had not the slightest desire to go to bed. He wanted to rejoin the revellers, whose discordant voices could still be heard as they surged off around the square, and he would have liked to argue the point. But his father, who had not spoken since drawing him into the house, grasped him firmly by the arm and hurried him up to their room, locking the door as soon as they entered.

Then in his sternest manner he commanded him to undress. Finding he was hardly able to manage it himself, he gave him such vigorous assistance that in a few minutes Fergus' head was on the pillow, and it had hardly touched it before he sank into a heavy sleep.

A prey to poignant emotions, Mr. MacTavish was in no mood for sleep. Fergus' foolish conduct cut

him to the quick. He had never before felt so proud of his boy as during this pleasant visit to Fort Garry, for every one seemed to be taken with the lad, and as was natural under such encouragement, Fergus had appeared at his best. No one had seemed more pleased with him than Mr. Sutherland, who had it in his power greatly to advance his interests when he entered the service of the Company, which the chief trader intended should be in the course of another year.

And now in the face of all this, while a guest at Mr. Sutherland's house, the thoughtless boy had disgraced himself and his father by coming home from a dinner intoxicated! No wonder the proud, sensitive Scotchman, in the first flush of his indignation, failed to take into account his son's youth and inexperience, and asked himself what punishment would be adequate in view of the seriousness of the offence. As to one thing, he at once made up his mind, namely, to take his departure from Fort Garry as soon as possible. To remain any longer seemed to him out of the question. The story of the dinner and the serenade would no doubt be told all over the place, and Fergus would be the laughing stock of the whole staff of employees, while if it came to the ladies' ears, they could not fail to be greatly disgusted.

It was late on the following morning when Fergus awoke from the heavy stupor which had succeeded his unnatural excitement. For some time he could not make out where he was, or what was the matter with him. His face burned as with fever, his tongue

was parched and swollen, his head throbbed with excruciating pain. He seemed unable to think or to remember, and tossed about in his bed the very picture of misery. The one clear thought in his mind was to get some water, and, though his legs tottered under him, he made his way to the wash-stand and greedily drank from the ewer. He had just got back to the bed when the door opened and Mr. MacTavish entered the room.

Never before had Fergus known his father to regard him with such an expression as his face now bore. Reproach and sorrow, mingled with disgust, marked his countenance, and the poor boy, still too muddled to recall what had taken place, looked at him with wonder and apprehension. He had not long to wait for an explanation.

"Get ye oop and dress yersel'," said his father, in a tone as stern as though he were ordering him to execution. "We maun leave this place the day."

Fergus put his hand to his aching brow, and gazed at his father in a sort of stupid surprise, but made no move to obey.

"Get ye oop, I say," repeated the chief trader, in even sterner tones than before. "And if ye canna dress yersel', I'll put the claes on ye as I took them off ye last night."

"What is it, father? What's the matter?" asked Fergus, in a startled voice.

"What is it?" echoed Mr. MacTavish, bitterly. "God knows it's matter enough that ye should bring

disgrace upon yersel' and a' belonging tae ye by the doings of the night."

Fergus strove hard to recall what had been the doings of the previous night, but after the pleasant dinner where he had enjoyed himself so much, it was all misty and confused. Not knowing what to reply to his father, he got out of bed and began to dress himself in silence, while Mr. MacTavish stood gazing out of the window, debating with himself how he should begin to make his son realise the full extent of his wrong-doing.

At length, when Fergus had managed with great difficulty to dress himself in some sort of fashion, and quite exhausted with the effort had sank into a chair to rest, the father's wrath broke forth. What he said need not be recorded. He was deeply stirred, and did not spare his son's feelings by attempting to be nice in his choice of words. Poor Fergus was appalled. He had never been spoken to thus before, and his aching head was still too confused to permit him to clearly understand the cause of his father's indignation.

Gradually, however, it broke upon him, and he began to realise what a sorry fool he had made of himself. Falling on his knees before the chief trader, he covered his tear-wet face with his hands, and in a voice half-choked with sobs, asked to be forgiven.

"I didna mean to, father. Indeed I didn't," he cried, in pitiful tones. "I didn't know what I was doing."

Once he had given vent to his pent-up feelings, a reaction began to set in in the father's fond heart, and lifting Fergus back to his chair, he said in a more kindly tone :

"Nae doot ye didn't, Fergus, but the mischief's done for a' that. Just tell me noo how it happened."

Fergus then, as best he could, described the dinner, and how he had partaken freely of the tempting contents of his glass without ever imagining the effect it would have upon him.

Mr. MacTavish could hardly suppress a smile as the boy with perfect candour related all he could distinctly remember of the events of the evening. He was so guileless in his utter innocence of any wrong intent. Yet when he finished there were tears in the chief trader's eyes, and his voice was husky as he said :

"You were not to blame so much, puir laddie, as those whom you were with, and who should have shown you mair kindness than to make sport of you like that."

"It's the first and last time, father, that any one shall ever make sport of me in that way," said Fergus, very seriously. "I've learned a lesson I'll never forget."

Mr. MacTavish drew him toward him and gave him a loving embrace.

"I fear I spoke too harshly tae ye, laddie, but indeed my heart was very sair. Let that be noo. We'll say nae mair aboot it. Come doon, and we'll

tell Mr. Sutherland we maun be going this afternoon."

Fergus shrank from facing the Sutherlands, but his father assured him only the chief factor knew of what had taken place the previous night, and, comforted by this, he went down-stairs where Mr. Sutherland was awaiting them in the dining-room.

"Hello! Fergus," was his cheery greeting. "How does your head feel this morning? Any hints of an ache? And do you feel as if you would like to drink the Red River dry?"

Fergus' pale face grew crimson. The joking manner of his host disconcerted him more than if he had given him a severe scolding, and he was completely at a loss for a response to his chaffing questions.

"Oh! that's all right," Mr. Sutherland went on, just as if Fergus had given an answer in the affirmative. "You'll soon get over that. I gave the clerks a good lecture this morning. Told them they ought to be ashamed of themselves for not looking after you better. But they're a wild lot. Always up to some devilry."

When Mr. MacTavish made known his intention of leaving Fort Garry that day, Mr. Sutherland opposed it stoutly, but all his remonstrances were in vain. Fergus was even more anxious to get away than his father) and so it came about that early in the afternoon, much to the regret of the whole household, the St. Bernards and Esquimaux were again harnessed

up, farewells were exchanged, and then, amid tinkling of bells and cracking of whips, the train drew out of the Fort to begin its long journey northward.

The dogs seemed to understand that they were bound for home. Thoroughly rested by their week's idleness, and full of spirit, they tore along the well-beaten track at the top of their speed.

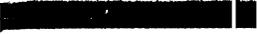
Fergus' spirits, which had been very depressed, began to rise at once. The clear cold air and the rapid motion helped him to feel more like himself, and reviewing the past night in the light and cheer of the fine winter day, the folly he had been led into did not seem so overwhelming as it did at first. He got to see the matter more from the same point of view as Mr. Sutherland. The clerks observing his freshness, his innocence of all worldly ways, had, with a surprising lack of the true spirit of hospitality, taken advantage of him for their own amusement. There certainly had been no intentional wrong on his part. Thinking it over in this way, his heart grew lighter. While the cariole sped over the hard-beaten snow, he uttered a simple prayer for full forgiveness, and added a solemn vow never to knowingly expose himself to temptation again. Others might play with fire by sipping wine, but as for him he would be a Nazarite as long as God gave him life.

The journey home was accomplished in seven days of successful travelling. No storm delayed the onward march of the train. The dogs, as eager to get back as their masters, behaved themselves to perfec-

tion. The days were bright and the nights brilliant with moonlight.

On the afternoon of the seventh day, the white Esquimaux were pattering gleefully over the frozen surface of Playgreen Lake, and ere the sun sank out of sight behind the western hills, Norway House loomed into sight. Then all attempt at order was forgotten. Cheering his dogs on to their utmost exertions, Fergus drew up beside his father and challenged him to a race to the Fort gate. Promptly the chief trader responded. Alec and Papanakes, catching the infection, put the whips to their dogs, and in a minute all four teams were scampering over the level lake amid cracking of whips and volleys of shouts, entreaties, and vociferous abuse from the different drivers, for the half-breed and Indian drivers never say a kind word to their animals.

Attracted by the noise, a number of the people at the Fort rushed out to see what was the matter. One glance was sufficient to tell them, and with cheers of joy they hastened to meet the racing teams. On came the four sledges, Fergus and his father neck and neck, the other two close behind. Straining every nerve they swept up the bank like a whirlwind, and dashed into the midst of the delighted crowd to be overwhelmed with exuberant welcomings.



CHAPTER XV.

THE VISIT OF THE GOVERNOR.

VERY joyous was the welcome of the travellers by Mrs. MacTavish and the Oldens. Their absence had been greatly felt by everybody in the Fort, but of course, particularly by their own dear ones. Traveling, either in winter or summer, is always beset with dangers in the far North-West. In the summer there are storms and rapids which may swamp boats or wreck canoes, and in the winter there are the ever-present pitiless cold, and the terrible blizzard.

When Mr. MacTavish told the story of their wonderful escape from the blizzard that blinded, and did its best to bury them too, with Fergus helping to fill in the details, there was many a sympathetic shudder from the little group, listening with breathless attention, and when he had finished, Mr. Olden impulsively broke forth into singing "Praise God from whom all blessings flow," in which the others, fully appreciating the situation, joined with all their hearts.

While the story was being told Ruth crept over to Fergus' side, and twined her arm in his. The thought

of his being buried in the snow, away off in Lake Winnipeg, filled her little heart with horror, and after the doxology was sung, she whispered shyly :

“Oh! Fergus, I’m so glad you didn’t get lost in the dreadful snow-storm. And wasn’t dear big Bruce splendid to find the way like that? I’m just going to give him such a great hug, and kiss him too for doing it.”

“Suppose you give me the hug and kiss instead,” Fergus suggested, slyly.

“I will if you want me to,” answered Ruth, promptly. And suiting the action to the word, she threw her arms about his neck, drew his face down to hers, and gave him a most affectionate kiss, much to the amusement of the older folks.

“What dae ye think of our winter travelling noo?” the chief trader asked of the missionary after they had settled down again to resume the conversation. “Does what I told you make you think ye’d better have bided in your own comfortable parish, where ye need never run sich risks o’ life, instead o’ coming oot into this wilderness?”

Mr. Olden smiled, and shook his head. He did not know how much more anxious than before Mr. MacTavish was to make out the uselessness of his undertaking. He thought the question was simply some more of his good-humoured scepticism.

“Not a bit of it, Mr. MacTavish,” he replied. “We thought that all out before we started, didn’t we, dear?” turning to his wife, who responded with a radiant smile of assent. “We knew we would have

to endure hardness as good soldiers of Jesus Christ, and we are ready for whatsoever comes to us in the path of duty. As for myself, dear friend, if God saw fit to bring my work thus to a close, I cannot conceive of any more beautiful way to go to Him than out of the snow-covered wilderness, lying down to sleep on the purest, loveliest thing that He has created." He paused for a moment, and then added, as if saying it to himself, "Wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow."

▲ Mrs. Olden gave a little shudder, but her voice was firm and sweet as she said :

"For my sake, husband dear, I hope that that will not be your manner of leaving us. I would like to think that we will both be spared many, many years, until, by God's grace, this wilderness has begun to blossom, and to give promise of the fair fruit of Christianity. That time will come, Mr. MacTavish, doubt it as you may. The great heart of God goes out in love to the poor Indians no less than to us; and if those whose privilege it is to enjoy the Gospel in the midst of civilisation will only do their duty in the matter, there will ere long be missionaries for every tribe in the North-West."

"Won't that be splendid!" exclaimed Fergus, his face aglow at so inspiring a prophecy; for he conceived of all missionaries being just like the Oldens, and was delighted at the thought of every Indian tribe having men and women of their kind to teach them how to love and serve God.

Fergus was going on to say something more, but happening to glance at his father, he observed that his face bore a frown of disapproval, and remembering their talk in the camp beside Lake Winnipeg, he checked himself.

His mother, little imagining how ill-pleased the chief trader would be at her remark, then took up the conversation.

"Indeed it will be splendid," said she, "and I greatly wish I could do something to bring the good time nearer. Ye've a grand work to do, Mr. Olden. Were I a man there's nothing I would rather be than a missionary."

"Well, my dear Mrs. MacTavish," said Mr. Olden, laying his hand upon Fergus' head, "since you cannot be a missionary yourself, would you not like to see this boy whom God has given you take the place it would have been your joy to fill?"

The frown on the chief trader's face was growing darker, although no one noticed it save Fergus.

"I would that, indeed," answered Mrs. MacTavish, "an' it were the desire of his ain heart as it is of mine."

"Dinna speak sich foolishness, Ailie," Mr. MacTavish broke in with a suddenness and sharpness of tone that startled everybody. "Our laddie is gaeing into the service of the Company, and ye needna be puttin' notions in his head about wasting his life trying to make Christians oot of these miserable Indians."

A bombshell breaking in their midst could hardly have been more of a surprise than this outbreak of the chief trader's was to everybody but Fergus. There was a degree of temper and determination manifested in his voice, for which the placid conversation which had preceded seemed to offer no justification whatever. The Oldens looked at one another inquiringly, as though to say: "What does this mean?" "Why is he so excited?" And Mrs. MacTavish, her eyes brimming with sudden tears, for she could not remember the day when her husband had spoken so harshly to her before, said, with quivering lips:

"I didna know ye thocht it such foolishness, Dugald dear; and I shall say nae more aboot it sin' ye are not pleased."

Realising that he had been too abrupt, and touched by his wife's evident feeling, Mr. MacTavish, in a much gentler tone, sought to make some amends.

"Did I speak too sharply, Ailie? Well, I didna mean to, but dinna mind that. Our Fergus is going into the Company next year maybe, for he'll be full sixteen years then, ye know; and if God is gude to him and he is gude to himself, perhaps ere you and I leave this world we'll see him higher up than ever his father has got. So say nae more aboot his being a missionary."

The Oldens felt they had no part in this conversation, and when Mr. MacTavish had finished speaking, Mrs. Olden, with ready feminine tact,

changed the current of the talk by asking the chief trader some questions about Fort Garry and the Sutherlands, who had been very kind to them on their way to Norway House.

Mr. MacTavish gladly accepted the opportunity, and presently the tongues of all were wagging as freely again as though nothing had occurred to disturb the peaceful atmosphere. But Fergus kept what had been said in his heart, and never knelt down to pray without a petition that God would change his father's mind.

Although Mr. MacTavish was not himself conscious of it, there was henceforth a certain change in his manner toward the Oldens, which caused the missionary to feel all the more anxious to establish a home of his own, and be no longer dependent upon the chief trader's hospitality. It was not that Mr. MacTavish took any actual dislike to either Mr. or Mrs. Olden. Although he continued stoutly sceptical as to the practical value of the enterprise to which they had consecrated their lives, there was no falling off in his respect and admiration for the character of each. The feeling that, all unknown to himself, created a kind of barrier between them, was one of jealousy as to their influence over his son. Upon the question as to Fergus' future they represented the side to which he was resolutely opposed; and although he never for one moment imagined that they, after what had been said, would strive in any way to cross his desires or designs, still, no matter how silent they might be,

their very presence could not fail to exert an influence which would help to keep alive the notions whose expression by both Fergus and his mother had aroused his anger.

During the winter Mr. Olden had not been idle. Seeing clearly that Norway House was in many respects unsuited for a centre of operations, while at the same time it would be expedient to remain somewhere within convenient reach of it, he had explored the whole neighbourhood, and made diligent inquiry of those who had long been familiar with the locality, with the result that he had selected as the site of his station an island in Playgreen Lake, about two miles from Norway House.

This choice had many advantages. The situation of the island was remarkably pleasant. Its soil was known to be rich and productive. At that distance from the Fort the mission would be entirely undisturbed by the boat brigades in summer, and dog-trains in winter, which often turned the place into a pandemonium with the wild revelry of the *voyageurs* and guides, who would pawn the very clothes they wore in order to purchase the drink that was the bane of their lives, and which was always to be had in plenty at the Company's posts. In other ways, too, the island commended itself to both Mr. and Mrs. Olden, and they awaited with impatience the coming of spring, when they would be able to begin operations.

Fergus shared their impatience, although in his case the causes were different. He always found

those Northern winters cruelly long, and wearied for the summer, so beautiful, and alas! so brief. This spring he felt particularly restive. The new thoughts which since the coming of the Oldens had stirred within him produced an activity of mind unknown to him before. His life hitherto had been just what any ordinary healthy, hearty boy's would be, situated as he was. Thanks to Sir George Simpson's annual gift of books, his intellect had by no means been suffered to lie fallow. On the contrary, he possessed a knowledge of history, geography, and the other elements of a sound education that would have been creditable to the average city boy of his age, who had enjoyed the advantages of regular schooling.

Under the stimulating influence of the Oldens, the range of his mind had greatly enlarged. The great conception of his having a life work to do had seized upon him, and thrilled him with a novel sense of personal significance. Whether, as his father wished, he should enter the service of the Company, or whether, as he himself preferred, he should set about fitting himself for following in Mr. Olden's footsteps, in either case his whole heart must go into the matter, for upon him lay the chief responsibility for the issue.

Thus all having their own reasons, the chief trader, his son, and his guests counted the days until the warm sun would release the bonds of winter and set all nature free. Meantime the sun seemed to be in no particular hurry to meet their wishes. The weeks

crept slowly by, and still the snow and ice obstinately lingered. Would the signs of winter never depart?

At length, as if repenting of its dilatoriness, and anxious to make amends, the summer came with a rush. The last drifts of discoloured snow vanished from the sheltered hollows; the ice on Playgreen Lake, honeycombed and rotten, broke up and disappeared, permitting the long-imprisoned waters once more to rejoice in the sunlight, and make music with the rippling laughter of their waves upon the shore; the woods donned their gay garb of green, and the glades their grassy mantle. It was as though nature had broken forth into a broad smile of good humour, which found a ready response in the hearts of every one at Norway House. To Fergus, no summer had ever been more welcome, and, as would in time appear, no summer would be more eventful.

"I hope father will be going up to York Factory again," said he to his mother, one day, "and will take me with him. I don't want to spend the whole summer here."

"Ye'd like to be a great traveller, wouldn't ye, dear?" said his mother, with a half-suppressed sigh at the thought of his leaving her for long periods of time; "and I canna blame you. It's little o' the big world ye can see from Norway House, or even from York Factory, for that matter."

"Indeed, I would like well to see the world a bit, mother," responded Fergus. "And Mrs. Olden said," he continued, his face lighting up as he recalled the

pleasant prediction, "that I was sure to travel a great deal if I lived to be a man."

"Do you ever feel 'sorry, Fergus dear," asked Mrs. MacTavish, with a very thoughtful expression, "that ye werena born in a big city like Montreal, or London even, instead of out in this wilderness, where, saving the people of the Company, there's naething but Indians and half-breeds?"

"No, mother, I don't," replied Fergus, promptly. "I'm glad I was born here, and I'm sure no boy in the big cities has had a better time than I have. But when I'm a man I want to go to the big cities, and be in them a good long while."

"Perhaps, some day Mr. Olden will be going back to the city he came from," suggested Mrs. MacTavish, "and then ye might go with him. Would ye not like that?"

"Aye, but I would, mother," responded Fergus, eagerly. "I only wish he was going back this summer."

But, of course, Mr. Olden had no idea of returning to his Ontario home that summer, nor for many summers to come; so that Fergus' prospects were not very promising, so far as they depended upon him. This Fergus knew well enough, but he did not know that before long he would be setting forth on a journey, in the course of which he would see a great deal more of the northern wilderness than he had before, for the opportunity came in a most unexpected manner.

A few weeks after the conversation just mentioned,

the great event of the year at Norway House took place, namely, the annual visit of His Excellency the Governor, Sir George Simpson. He arrived one fine afternoon toward the end of June, and the post was thrown into a state of the liveliest excitement by the sight of his two magnificent canoes rounding the point that hid Norway House from the Lake.

Sir George always travelled in the utmost state circumstances would permit. He held very exalted opinions of both his office and himself, and required at the hands of his subordinates as much deference as if the rude and sometimes squalid Forts were the Court of St. James. Hence, his visits were always looked forward to with a good deal of trepidation. Everything at the post was put in the best order possible. Everybody, from the head official down to the dogs, was on his best behaviour; and there was a general sigh of relief when the great man took his departure, particularly if he had discovered nothing to stir his ire during his visit.

His retinue consisted of his private secretary, his valet, his cook, and sixteen Iroquois Indians, the finest canoemen in the entire service, not one of them under six feet in height, and all superb specimens of strength and endurance. They had two canoes of the kind known as *canotes de maitre*, huge affairs of the best birch bark, thirty-five feet in length, five feet wide amidships, and two feet and a-half deep, capable of carrying a ton of cargo besides their eight paddlers, and half as many passengers.

These canoes were decorated to an almost fantastic extent, and fitted up in the most luxurious style. Fergus never got quite accustomed to their sumptuousness. They always filled him with a sort of awe, which, however, he took pains to conceal from Ruth, to whom, after Sir George had gone up to the Fort, he proudly pointed out their splendour and beauty, and had much to say about the famous governor who had been so good to him.

Ruth had many questions to ask. She was as profoundly impressed as Fergus could wish.

"And is Sir George a greater man than your father, Fergus?" she innocently inquired. "Can he make him do anything he wants him to?"

She had got so accustomed to see the chief trader exercise unquestioned sway at the Fort that no more effective proof of the governor's greatness could have been given her than that he might order Mr. MacTavish about.

"Aye, that he can," answered Fergus; "and not only father, but Mr. Sutherland too."

"How nice it must be to be able to order everybody else about just as you please, and not to have any one to order you about!" said Ruth, with a most pathetic little sigh; for, like all children abounding in animal spirits, she came in for a good deal of parental restraint, and consequently often imagined that she had to stand rather more discipline than was at all necessary.

Fergus gave her a very sympathetic smile. The

sage sentiment which she had just expressed was one he was prepared to heartily endorse. He, too, did not have his own way by any means, as much as he liked ; but if he were only Sir George Simpson, who would there be to say no to him ?

“ I just wish I were the governor,” he exclaimed, almost unconsciously.

“ And what would you do if you were the governor ?” inquired a voice behind him, in a tone of kindly interest.

Fergus wheeled about with a start, and there was Sir George himself, regarding him with an amused expression, he having returned for something he had left in his canoe.

Fergus blushed from chin to forehead, and hung his head in embarrassed silence.

“ Come, now, Fergus, don't be afraid to confess it,” said Sir George, with a smile of friendly encouragement. “ What would you do if you were the governor ?”

Without venturing to look up, Fergus murmured in a tone scarcely audible :

“ I was just thinking that if I were the governor there would be no one to order me about, and I could do as I liked.”

Sir George gave a gentle laugh, and patted Fergus on the shoulder. “ It's not doing what you like, but doing what is best, that brings real happiness, my lad. I can easily guess how your thoughts were running, and I don't blame you. It's never so pleasant to

obey orders as to give them. But, remember this, Fergus: it's only by obeying orders faithfully, that we can learn to give them rightly. If I had not learned that lesson well, I would never have been governor." And then, with one of his kindest smiles, the great man went on his way.

The incident impressed Fergus deeply. The idea that Sir George Simpson should ever have had to obey orders from other people came upon him with great force.

"Ruth," said he, in a very serious tone, "if the governor didn't always have his own way, we needna grumble at having to obey our fathers and mothers, need we?"

But Ruth was in no hurry to assent to this. Whatever the governor might say, it was a great bother not being allowed to do as one pleased, and she was too honest to pretend she thought otherwise.

Having admired the canoes, and their stalwart dusky crews, to their hearts' content, the two young people went back to the Fort, where they found Sir George holding a kind of informal levee before the chief trader's door. He was evidently well pleased with the general appearance of affairs at the post, and in excellent humour. The Oldens he had known before, having met them when they were on their way north-westward, and through his kindness their journey had been greatly expedited, as he gave orders that all possible assistance should be rendered them by the officials of the Company. Having asked Mr.

MacTavish a number of questions about the state of things at the Fort, and having received satisfactory replies, he then turned his attention to the missionary :

“And now, Mr. Olden,” said he, “let me ask you something about your enterprise. What are the prospects with regard to it?”

“Very good, indeed, Sir George,” answered the missionary. “I have been preaching to the Indians with the aid of an interpreter ever since I got settled here, and I may say with truth that they’ve heard the Word of God gladly.”

“But I suppose you’re learning the Cree language, and will soon be able to speak to them directly?” continued the governor.

“Oh, yes,” replied Mr. Olden. “I have been hard at work all winter, and I can get along in some sort of fashion already. Before next winter I hope to speak quite fluently.”

“And are you fully satisfied”—the governor’s face bore an expression half of wonder, half of admiration, as he looked into the missionary’s earnest, hopeful countenance—“that the game will be worth the candle—that these poor pagans can ever be changed into respectable Christians?”

“Sir George,” answered Mr. Olden, his face becoming transformed by the heroic fixedness of purpose that inspired him, “were the entire possessions of the Hudson’s Bay Company mine, I would without a moment’s hesitation pledge them to be forfeited if the Gospel fail to win as glorious victories in this great

North-West as it has ever done in any other part of the heathen world."

Pleased with the missionary's sanguine enthusiasm, and yielding to the generous impulse it stirred within him, Sir George asked :

"And have you decided where to establish your mission station? Would you like to remain here at the Fort?"

"We have been most kindly dealt with here, Sir George," replied Mr. Olden, looking gratefully toward Mr. MacTavish. "Mr. MacTavish could not have done more for us than he has, and we've had a very happy winter. But upon careful consideration I am convinced that it would be better for the mission not to be at the Fort itself, but a little way from it, and so I have chosen that island, just out there in the lake, for the site of our station. It has many advantages."

"I think you have done wisely, Mr. Olden," said Sir George. "Do you intend to begin building right away?"

"I have already got out the timber that will be required, Sir George," answered the missionary; "and I'm going right ahead, so as to have our home furnished before winter. Next summer, God willing, we will build a little church to hold our services in."

"Very good, indeed," said Sir George, heartily. "I'm glad to have the opportunity of sharing in so excellent an enterprise. Will you please accept from me the amount of fifty pounds, as my own subscription,

and on behalf of the Company I promise you an annual grant of the same sum to assist in carrying on your work."

How the faces of the missionary and his wife beamed with delight and gratitude at this munificent declaration, so entirely unexpected, yet so providentially welcome! Springing from his seat, Mr. Olden seized the governor's hand, and clasped it between both of his.

"Sir George," he exclaimed, "I cannot put into words my gladness and gratitude, but the Lord Himself will reward you for thus helping on His glorious cause. 'This is the Lord's doing, and it is marvellous in our eyes,'" he added, reverently.

Sir George seemed quite touched, but sought to pass it off by saying, in a tone of assumed indifference:

"Tut! tut! It's I that ought to be grateful for the opportunity of helping a little in so good a work."

Fergus had been listening to this conversation with intense interest, and when Sir George announced his beneficent intentions he had hard work to resist the temptation to give a hearty cheer. Fifty pounds seemed such an immense sum of money. Why, surely it would alone be sufficient to build the house for the missionary; and then fifty pounds more every year! That was good news indeed! His admiration for the governor rose to fever heat. He thought him the greatest, kindest man in all the world, and wondered if he would ever come to be anything like him; for oh! how splendid it was to be able to do so much

good, to have the power to confer such benefits on others.

Mrs. MacTavish now appeared, to announce that supper was ready.

"I, for one, am very glad to hear it," said Sir George, offering his arm to Mrs Olden with as much grace as if they were in a London drawing-room ; and, following in his wake, the others took their seats at the table.

In making ready for her distinguished guest, the chief trader's wife had taxed the entire resources of the establishment, with the result of providing a repast fully worthy of the occasion. Sir George was in great good humour. The pleasant sense of having done a good deed, the evident admiration he commanded, the abundant store of tempting dishes, and the keen appetite for them his long paddle up the river had given him, all combined to put him in the best of spirits, and with story, joke, and shrewd, sharp repartee he proved himself the prince of entertainers. So thoroughly did he put the others at their ease, that they too appeared at their best. Neither the chief trader nor the missionary had ever heard each other talk so well. And the same was to be said of their wives. There was, in fact, a general loosening of tongues, which surprised no one more than it did the possessors of those tongues. The conversation never flagged for a moment, though they sat two full hours at the table, and darkness was drawing down ere they rose from their seats

Fergus discreetly confined himself to listening, but enjoyed the flood of facile talk as much as anybody, although one thing that happened in the course of the supper made him feel rather uncomfortable for a while.

Sir George was very fond of his wine, and always carried a goodly supply in his canoe. Soon after they sat down to table he despatched his servant for a bottle of his favourite beverage, and when it arrived pressed the others to join him in disposing of it. The MacTavishes were glad enough to accept, but the Oldens courteously refused. Turning then to Fergus, Sir George said :

“Fergus, my man, you’ll have a drop, won’t you? It’s only claret. Try a sup in some water.”

The instant he spoke to him, there flashed into Fergus’ mind the recollection of that experience at Fort Garry, the shame of which it seemed to him he would never forget, and to which no reference had been made by either his father or himself since their return. The blood mounted hotly to his face. He cast one appealing, pitiful glance at his father, who, until then, saw nothing significant in the governor’s genial request, and then hung his head, quite unable to make any reply.

Sir George looked at him in surprise; and all the others, save the chief trader, were greatly puzzled to understand why a simple invitation to sip a little wine should throw him into such confusion. Mr. MacTavish hastened to his rescue, saying in an off-hand way :

“Don't press the laddie, Sir George. He doesna like the wine, and he's afraid to offend you by refusing it.”

Accepting this clever explanation, which was accurate enough, and yet did not betray the boy's secret, Sir George said, with a good-humoured laugh :

“All right, Fergus, let the bottle pass. You'll never be the worse for doing so, though I confess to having a great liking for the stuff myself.”

Then starting off the conversation again, the incident was soon forgotten, and the chief trader's suggestion satisfying the curiosity of the others, Fergus, greatly to his relief, heard no more about the matter.

The following morning Sir George made a thorough inspection of the establishment. The furs that had accumulated during the winter were overhauled, and their value computed ; the goods in store were examined, and suggestions made as to future supplies, the books were looked into ; the clerks were questioned as to their knowledge of the business, and their liking for the life ; all who had any complaints to make, or grievances to ventilate, were attentively heard, and their statements noted by the private secretary, who was always at the governor's elbow. And finally, after a hard day's work, carried through with that celerity and thoroughness for which Sir George was renowned, the great man lifted the chief trader into the seventh heaven of delight by pronouncing everything entirely satisfactory, and stating that he would recommend him for an immediate increase

of salary, and for promotion to Red River at the first opportunity. He even hinted that that promotion might not be very long delayed, as Mr. Sutherland was understood to be desirous of retiring from active work at an early day, having amassed a comfortable fortune during his two score years of faithful service.

Nor did the governor's bestowal of favours end there. Not content with making the hearts of the MacTavishes and Oldens overflow with joy—for of course the wives shared in the husbands' joy to the fullest—he next turned his attention to Fergus.

It was in the evening, and after a supper quite equal to the one of the day before, they were sitting at the door enjoying the refreshing coolness, Sir George and his happy host filling the air with fragrant smoke, when Fergus came up, attended by his quartette of splendid dogs. A finer type of hearty, handsome, happy boyhood than he presented, as flushed and panting after a frolic with his pets he brought himself to a full stop before the group, was not to be often seen. Sir George hailed him at once with :

"Halloo! Is this Daniel and his lions? Will your animals bite?"

"No, indeed, sir," answered Fergus, laughing merrily. "They're as kind as kittens. But aren't they beauties, sir?" he asked, looking up eagerly into the face of his benefactor.

"They are beauties, Fergus," responded Sir George. "I was not mistaken when I thought you would make

a good master for them. Sit down now beside me, and tell me something about them."

Delighted to obey, Fergus threw himself down at the governor's feet, the big dogs gathered about him, and, with Bruce's head in his lap, he proceeded to tell, in his own bright, graphic way, about the exciting race with Mr. Barnston's Esquimaux, and the thrilling story of their narrow escape from death in the blizzard on Lake Winnipeg.

Sir George listened with profound attention. The teller of the story impressed him even more than the story itself, and when Fergus had finished, and he had thanked him for being so interesting, he took the boy's head in his hands, and looking into his face, asked :

"Fergus, how would you like to go with me to the Rocky Mountains?"

CHAPTER XVI.

WESTWARD WITH SIR GEORGE.

FERGUS' answer came as quickly as his lips could frame the words :

"I wud like it above all things, Sir George."

Then bethinking himself that he was not the only one to be consulted, he added, in a quieter tone :

"If father and mother are willing."

"Would you have any objections, Mr. MacTavish?"

Sir George asked of the chief trader. "I think the trip would be a good thing for the boy, and he can return to you by the autumn boat brigade from Red River."

Mr. MacTavish glanced interrogatively at his wife. She smiled her assent, and so he answered at once :

"I'll be verra glad indeed for the laddie to go with you, sin' ye are kind enough to ask him. He's been wanting to travel for some time past. You see he reads a good bit in the books ye've sent him, and naturally it makes him curious to see more of the world."

But it was not only paternal sympathy with Fergus' desire for travel that made his father so glad to give his consent. He thought to himself that if anything would clear the boy's mind of the foolish notions

about being a missionary, which had so possessed him of late, it would surely be such an experience as now opened before him, and it seemed to him nothing short of providential that it should have been offered.

"Very well, then," said Sir George, evidently well pleased at the acceptance of his invitation. "Can you get Fergus ready by the morning, Mr. MacTavish? I must start as soon as possible after breakfast."

"Oh, yes, Sir George," answered Mrs. MacTavish. "It willna take me long to pack up his bag."

"There now, Fergus," said the governor, patting the boy's head, "you see the way's all clear, and I'm to have the pleasure of your company for the next three months."

If ever there was an excited, happy boy it was Fergus that evening. He hardly knew what to do with himself. He tried to assist his mother in the packing, but only succeeded in putting everything into confusion, so that, finally, Mrs. MacTavish was compelled to laughingly order him to leave her to manage it herself, whereupon he ran out of the house, and, calling his dogs, raced around the square with them, shouting and capering for very excess of joy, until at last, completely exhausted and breathless, he dropped on the doorstep to recover himself.

Hardly a wink of sleep did he get that night, and when he did fall into a nap, it was to dream of buffaloes, wild deer, mountain lions, and other animals of the far West, concerning which he had heard many

wonderful stories from officials of the Company who had spent years in that region.

The next morning, however, he was not in quite so jubilant a mood. The thought of saying "Good-bye" to his parents, his home, his dogs, and his other pets for several months tempered his joy somewhat, and when the time of parting came his heart felt quite heavy.

Sir George had his canoes launched promptly after breakfast, and the MacTavishes and Oldens accompanied him as far as the island, upon which the mission station was being constructed, where a landing was made for a brief inspection of the place.

"You have a pretty spot here, Mr. Olden," said Sir George, surveying the site with evident approval. "And I believe you will find it greatly to your advantage being removed a little distance from the Fort. You will be less likely to be disturbed, and you will have more control over your congregation. But," he added, holding out his hand, "I must not linger. Good-bye; may your best hopes be fulfilled, and remember, if at any time I can be of any further assistance to you, do not hesitate to call upon me. Good-bye, Mr. MacTavish. I'll see that your faithful service is not overlooked." And thus with parting words that reflected the kindly, generous spirit of the man, he stepped into his canoe, saying:

"Now then, Fergus, kisses all round."

Fergus, with misty eyes and trembling lips, went around the little group, and every one gave him a loving kiss of farewell, his parents adding a passionate

embrace, for they would miss him sorely during his absence. When he came to Ruth he threw his arms about her neck, and gave her rosy lips such a fervent salute that it reached even Sir George's ears, as he sat waiting for the farewells to finish.

"Oh, ho!" he said to himself, with an amused chuckle. "There was more than mere good friendship in that kiss. Well—what could be more fitting? They're a bonnie pair of young folks, certainly."

Fergus took his seat beside the governor. The command to push off being given, the eight stalwart Iroquois bent to their paddles, and the huge canoe shot off down the river as smoothly and swiftly as a loon in quest of its prey, the other canoe following close in its wake.

For some time Fergus kept perfectly silent. The novelty of his situation, the fascinating prospect that opened out before him, the inspiring onrush of the canoe through the smooth water, and the feelings of delight at going away on such a trip, and regret at leaving his loved ones which divided his heart, took away all disposition to talk. He was quite content to be quiet, and look about him.

Sir George regarded him with an expression of kindly curiosity. The boy was an interesting study to him. He was so thoroughly transparent and sincere, a veritable young Nathaniel in whom there was no guile. Yet, as the keen-eyed governor clearly saw, this rare simplicity of character implied no lack of strength. On the contrary, it was founded deep in a strength no less rare. Fergus was as determined as

he was frank. He never had anything to conceal, but he had plenty to stand fast to.

"There is the stuff of which martyrs are made in that boy," said Sir George to himself, and then aloud :

"A penny for your thoughts, Fergus."

Fergus, startled from his reverie by the question, looked slightly confused as he answered :

"I'm afraid I canna tell you even for a penny's sake, Sir George. I was thinking of so many things at once."

"Had a certain pair of blue eyes, and a cluster of golden curls, any place among the many things?" asked Sir George, smiling quizzically.

Fergus blushed as deeply as Ruth herself could have done; for the truth was, she had been uppermost in his thoughts at the moment the governor spoke to him.

"Ah! ha! Fergus," laughed Sir George, shaking his forefinger at him, "your cheeks have betrayed you. Well, never mind an old man's teasing. 'There's nothing half so sweet in life as love's young dream,' the poet tells us, and he's right, no doubt."

"See there, sir. Isn't he a beauty?" Fergus exclaimed suddenly, pointing off to the right, where a superb eagle was dashing down from the heavens in quest of a fish for his dinner.

Sir George looked in the direction indicated, and, catching up his rifle, which he always kept ready beside him, took aim at the swooping bird.

"See if I can hit him," he said, and pulled the trigger.

At the crack of the rifle, the eagle dropped as if shot through the heart. But ere he was more than

half-way to the water he recovered himself, spread out his mighty pinions, and with a harsh scream of jeering triumph, sailed off out of range, while two feathers, cut from one of his wings by the bullet, zig-zagged their way downwards.

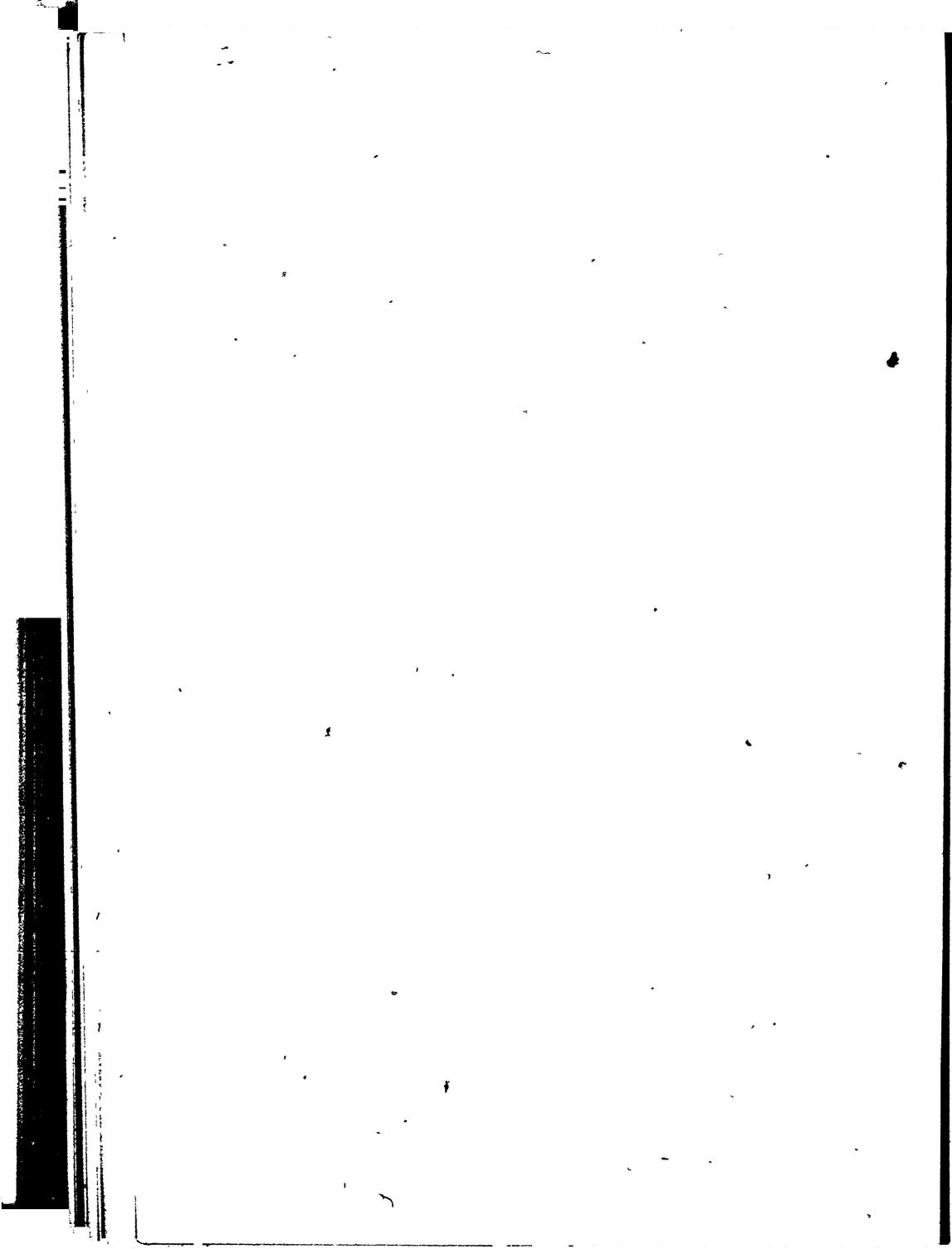
“A clean miss, as I’m a Scotchman!” exclaimed Sir George, looking a good deal put out. “But, after all,” he added, “I’m not sorry. Why should I want to take that creature’s life? Simply to show off my skill as a marksman. Now that’s a poor reason, Fergus, isn’t it? How little we sportsmen think of the pain we inflict merely for our own amusement! I hope you’ll never be cruel in that way, Fergus. Do you never take the life of beast or bird, except for some good reason.”

“I will not, indeed, sir,” answered Fergus, well pleased at the new turn in the conversation. “I would hate to kill anything merely for the sake of killing it.”

The brawny Iroquois, with strong steady stroke, soon brought the canoes out into the broad bosom of the lake, and thenceforward they coasted the western shore, cutting across the bays from headland to headland, until late in the afternoon a good site for a camp presenting itself, Sir George gave orders to land and have dinner prepared.

In the course of an hour the skilful cook had a delicious dinner ready, and with the keenest of appetites, the governor, his private secretary, and his youthful guest sat down to do it justice. After dinner was over the two men smoked and chatted, while Fergus roamed around, enjoying the cool evening air,





and talking with the Indians, the most of whom could speak English fluently.

When the night settled down upon them, Sir George retired to one tent, the private secretary, Mr. Wadham, and Fergus to another, the servants and Indians rolled up in blankets, and soon there was not a person awake in the camp.

Before daybreak next morning Sir George was up, and his commanding shout of "*leve! leve!*" startled the sleepers into activity again. And so it went on from day to day, the weather continuing faultlessly fine, until Red River was reached, and here Sir George was to remain for a few days before taking up his journey westward.

Fergus would have preferred not to revisit Fort Garry. The serenade experience was still too fresh in his memory, but being in the governor's suite, he had of course no option in the matter. The Sutherlands greeted him very warmly, and the young ladies congratulated him upon having so won Sir George's favour. He again became an inmate of their hospitable home, and so forgot his disturbing recollections.

After a few days' stay, the governor once more set out. He had a larger party now, several of his subordinates on their way back to their posts, having been invited to join him, as he often wished to have some of them in his canoe in order to discuss the Company's affairs. Fergus would then take his place with Mr. Wadham, and the two came to be very friendly.

The private secretary took a strong hold upon the boy. He was essentially a man of the world, one who believed in having a good time while young, and leaving all serious thought for the period of grey hairs. London-bred, widely travelled, unusually well informed, sharp and shrewd of mind, and easy of manner, he deeply impressed Fergus, to whom he seemed one of the most fascinating men he had ever known. The cool, indifferent, almost *blasé* air, with which he accepted all the inevitable mishaps and inconveniences of canoe travelling, filled Fergus with admiration. He thought him an example well worth imitating from many points of view.

Mr. Wadham, on his part, was no less well pleased with Fergus. His perfect frankness, untutored heartiness, activity of mind, and alertness of body, made him a very interesting companion. Nor was the private secretary unobservant of the admiration with which Fergus regarded him, and this of course served to increase his liking for him. So they got along famously together, and Fergus, who as a matter of fact found the company of Sir George somewhat of a restraint upon his youthful impetuosity, was very glad to spend the most of his time in Mr. Wadham's society.

Growing very confidential as they journeyed on day after day, Fergus told much about his home life, and opened his heart with unreserved candour to his genial companion, even confessing his desire to be a missionary, although his father's design was that he should go into the service of the Company.

“Well, I must say I’m with your father in that matter, Fergus,” said Mr. Wadham. “I think it would be a great pity for a chap of your spirit and mettle to take to preaching. There are plenty to do that business for us, who wouldn’t be worth their salt to the Company, nor of much account at anything else, for that matter.”

Mr. Wadham’s conception of a clergyman was by no means a high one, and it found expression in terms by no means complimentary to the cloth. But to Fergus, whose idea of a minister of the Gospel was illustrated by manly, enterprising, big-hearted Mr. Olden, his words came with a shock. According to Fergus’ way of thinking, it was only the very best men who ought to go into the business of preaching. Far from thinking himself too good for it, as his companion suggested, the question with him was, Was he good enough?

He said something like this, causing Mr. Wadham to smile in a superior way as he answered :

“Stuff and nonsense, Fergus. Where did you pick up such old women’s notions? The sooner you get rid of them, and take a common-sense view of things, the better. It would be a sheer waste of unusually good material for you to take to preaching. I don’t wonder your father gets put out at your proposing such a thing.”

Having said thus much, he did not pursue the subject any further then, but brought it up again at different times that summer, seeming bent upon

shaking Fergus' resolution, and to this end bringing to bear upon it argument, ridicule, and appeals to ambition by turn, with all the adroitness of an experienced advocate. The reason he took such an interest in the matter was, that the firmness of Fergus' stand piqued him. He did not look for so much determination in a boy of fifteen, and found a somewhat similar interest in seeking to overcome it that an angler feels in striving to land a huge salmon.

In spite of it all, however, Fergus stoutly held his ground, though often finding it very difficult to do so without seeming to be merely obstinate, instead of held by strong conviction. Mr. Wadham was so fertile in resource, so subtle in his reasoning, so courteous throughout, that it appeared little short of positive rudeness not to agree with him.

Fergus felt this, and his resolution was sorely tried thereby. But he did not trust solely in himself. Under no circumstances was his daily communion with God neglected; and from this source came the strength which enabled him to keep true to his purpose, without falling into any breach of good manners.

The weather continued wonderfully fine even for midsummer in the North-West. Day after day the party journeyed on by the network of streams and lakes that spreads itself across the prairies, portaging at frequent intervals in order to make short cuts, or to reach another water. From dawn to dark the sun shone with unclouded splendour, and when night

came, the stars glittered in the infinite azure above like diamonds set in *lapis lazuli*.

The prairie scenery delighted Fergus. It was so soft, so rich, so bountiful, compared with the rugged wilderness of trees and rocks in which he had his home. The sward was bestrewn with brilliant flowers, of which he was at every opportunity picking great bouquets, much to the amusement of the others, who did not share his intense admiration for what seemed to them little better than weeds. But he did not mind their good-humoured chaffing. The amazing wealth of verdure and bloom met a long-unsatisfied craving for the beautiful. He revelled in it; and no amount of ridicule could cool his enthusiasm.

But there were more wonders than the flowers to be seen out upon those prairies, and the greatest of them all were the buffaloes, that were often met with in huge herds coming down to drink at the water-side. The sight of them set everybody tingling with eagerness to use their guns, but Sir George would not permit a halt long enough to organise a regular hunt until certain business of importance he had to attend to at the posts was disposed of. So that, during the first few weeks, the ardent hunters had to content themselves with bringing down an occasional buffalo for the benefit of the larder.

At length, when the party had reached Chesterfield House, on the South Saskatchewan, to the vast delight of all, the governor was pleased to announce that a halt of several days would be made in order to

permit a regularly organised buffalo hunt, in which he would himself join.

Immediately the whole establishment began buzzing like a bee-hive just about to swarm. Indian scouts, on fleet horses, were dispatched to locate a herd that would be worth attacking. Guns were carefully examined, to make sure that there was nothing amiss, hunting-knives sharpened to their keenest edge, saddles and bridles selected and fitted, and nothing forgotten that would tend to the success of the hunt.

Fergus knew nothing about riding, and was ruefully making up his mind to stay at the Fort while the rest of the party went out, when the official in charge came to his rescue by procuring for him an Indian pony, thoroughly trained in buffalo running, and with a gait so easy and so sure a foot, that he would be as safe and comfortable upon his back as any of the others on their horses, while the sagacity of his pony would ensure his missing none of the fun.

In the evening the scouts returned with the good news that they had sighted a splendid herd of buffaloes not many miles from the post, on a rich bit of bottom land that they would not be likely to move from for some days. This was precisely what the hunters desired, and everybody went to bed that night in high hopes of having great sport on the morrow.

At daybreak the party set out, under the guidance of the scouts, for the field of action. The best of good humour prevailed, and the cool morning air rang with laughter as the horses jogged on at an easy

pace, through the dense dew-laden herbage. Fergus, riding with Mr. Wadham just behind Sir George, was in a tumult of conflicting emotions. The whole thing was wondrously novel to him. So strange did it seem, that he at times half thought it must be a dream. The cavalcade of horsemen; the tall, sinewy red men, so different from those of the far North; the glorious prairie, rolling off as far as the eye could see, in soft undulations, bespangled with flowers; the cloudless sky, up which the sun had already begun to climb; and most of all, the being mounted himself upon a steed whose easy run was as pleasant almost as the rocking of a canoe in a merry breeze;—Fergus found rare enjoyment in all of these, and he was constantly thinking to himself how much he would have to tell his parents and the Oldens on his return.

“What’s the state of your pulse this morning, Fergus?” asked Mr. Wadham, with a smile of approval at the manly bearing of the boy beside him. “Going a little faster than usual, isn’t it?”

“Nae doot it is, sir,” responded Fergus, smiling back. “It’s my first time, ye ken.”

“Your first time? So it is, to be sure,” exclaimed Mr. Wadham. “I wish I were you, for it’s an old story with me.”

“Mayhap ye wadna like to feel as nervous as I do, Mr. Wadham,” said Fergus, speaking in all sincerity; for, in truth, his heart was fluttering at quite an unusual rate.

“Do you really feel nervous, Fergus?” asked Mr.

Wadham. "Well, I must confess you manage to hide it pretty well. But I don't wonder that you feel in that way, and you needn't be ashamed if your feelings happen to get the better of you when you come to close quarters with the buffaloes. They're ugly brutes at the best of times."

Fergus gave an uneasy laugh.

"I'm no verra anxious to come to close quarters wi' them. I shall be verra well content to bide a little way off, and let those who know all about it do the hunting."

"A very wise way of looking at the matter, my boy," answered Mr. Wadham. "You're a chip of the old block without mistake, as canny at fifteen-as some other folks are at fifty."

Fergus coloured with pleasure at the secretary's compliment, and was about to make some reply, when Sir George turned and beckoned him to approach.

"You've never hunted buffaloes before, have you, Fergus?" he asked.

"No, sir; but I've often wanted to," replied Fergus.

"Well, then, I'll look after you, to see that you don't get into any mischief," said the governor, with a smile. "You just keep close to me, and you won't miss any of the sport."

After a couple of hours' riding the Indian guides gave the word for perfect quiet on the part of all, and for another half-hour the little cavalcade moved as silently as shadows across the prairie, the leaders keeping a sharp lookout for the black dots that would indicate the presence of their prey.

Presently they halted, and gave whispered orders for the disposition of the various members of the party. They were within half-a-mile of the place where they had marked the herd the previous afternoon, and extreme caution was necessary to prevent the wary creatures getting a hint of their proximity before due preparation had been made for the hunt. In a few minutes the line of attack was organised in the following manner :

The two most experienced and best mounted Indian hunters took their place at either wing, the rest of the party lining out between them in the form of a half-circle, at the centre of which was Sir George, with his secretary on his right and Fergus on his left. The governor was in high feather. He dearly loved a good buffalo hunt, and the prospects were promising for one of more than ordinary interest.

Hardly daring to breathe, and guiding their horses with the utmost caution, while at the same time holding their guns ready for immediate action, the hunters moved up the slope until they had all reached the top. For an instant they paused there, in order to take in the scene before them. It was one well calculated to stir to its depths the heart of the most experienced buffalo hunter. In a sort of meadow lying between two swelling slopes, and having through its centre a narrow stream, was gathered one of the finest herds of buffaloes imaginable. Huge shaggy bulls, plump cows, and clumsy calves cropped the rich herbage, or stretched themselves at ease in

its green depths. There could not have been less than a thousand of them in all, and with few exceptions they appeared to be in prime condition.

Fergus gazed upon them with mingled admiration and apprehension. They were such grand creatures that he admired them as a matter of course. The bulls looked so terrible in their ponderous bulk that he could not help fearing them. He had been told many stories of thrilling escapes from their overwhelming onset. Who knew but that before this hunt was over, some one of the party, perhaps he himself, would have to flee for his life?

But he had no time for pursuing such thoughts, for with a whoop that rang all along the line, the hunters charged down upon the astonished, startled herd. In an instant every animal was upon its feet. At first the bulls seemed disposed to stand their ground, but as the line of attack came closer to them, they suddenly changed their minds, and plunged off after the cows and calves already in full flight.

Fergus would have been very well content to remain a spectator of the slaughter. He could not use his gun with any accuracy upon horseback, and as he had already said, he had no desire to get into close quarters with the monarchs of the plains. But in making up his mind to this he had not reckoned with his pony, and now, whether he liked it or not, he found himself, owing to its ardour, one of the leaders in the wild charge.

CHAPTER XVII.

BUFFALO AND BEAR.

KEEP close to me now, Fergus, my boy," said Sir George, as they dashed on side by side. "Don't let the buffaloes separate us."

"I'll do my verra best, sir," answered Fergus, thinking all the time that it was going to be no easy job.

So fine a start had the hunters secured before the buffaloes fairly realised their danger, that rapidly as the lumbering animals moved when once they did get under way, they were not long in being overtaken, and then the slaughter began. Each rider singled out his victim, either a fat cow from whose plump carcase juicy steaks might be cut, or a mighty bull, whose shaggy head he desired to humble in the dust.

Fergus, feeling sure that he could not possibly manage both his pony and his rifle at once, made up his mind not to attempt the feat, and gave his whole attention to his clever little steed. As already mentioned, the pony had been thoroughly trained to buffalo hunting, and now that he was in the midst of it, he seemed as much excited as the yelling Indians. In spite of Fergus' frantic efforts to restrain him, he

took the bit in his teeth, laid back his ears, and, with neck and tail almost in a straight line, carried his unwilling but helpless rider right into the herd of terrified creatures, leaving Sir George, who had a much more manageable mount, away in the rear.

"Bless my heart, if the boy's pony hasn't bolted!" exclaimed the governor, somewhat anxiously. "I hope the little brute can keep his feet. If he stumbles now, it will soon be all over with him and Fergus."

Bracing himself firmly in his saddle, and pulling upon the reins with all his might, Fergus did his best to check the pony, and thus free himself from the dangerous companions that hemmed them in. But he might as well have sought to check a locomotive. The pony was all on fire. He knew his business, and he was doing it. Had he been able to speak, he would, no doubt, have been shouting as loudly as the bit in his mouth permitted him to do:

"Fire away, now! Bring down your buffalo! Then load up, and fire again!"

Fergus' position was one of real peril. In front, on either hand, and at his rear, the affrighted animals, with heads almost touching the ground, tongues lolling from their mouths, and bloodshot eyes protruding from their sockets, galloped madly forward, taking no account of the inequalities of the ground, but wholly occupied with one thought,—escape from the merciless pursuers, the sharp crack of whose rifles rang in their ears.

Were the pony to trip, or one of the buffaloes ahead

to fall right in his path, and thus bring him down, there would be no pause on the part of those behind. Straight ahead they would plunge, trampling horse and rider beneath their hoofs until there would be scarce a vestige of them left to mark the place where they had fallen.

Fergus fully realised this, and he prayed to God to help him, for he could not help himself. They were drawing near the little stream which divided the meadow. The vanguard of the herd was already splashing through it, and Fergus wondered if the bottom was very muddy, and if his pony could get through all right. The next moment they reached the water, by much tramping turned into liquid mud. The speed of the buffaloes around him, and of his pony, now perceptibly slackened, and taking courage from this he pulled still harder upon the reins. To his delight the wilful animal seemed to yield a little. Shouting "Whoa, pony! whoa!" in his most commanding tones, he put forth all his strength upon the bit. Hurrah! the pony no longer had it between his teeth. In scrambling through the mud he had lost it, and was now under his rider's control.

Of course, it was utterly impossible to turn round until entirely free from the herd, and there were anxious moments until at last this was safely accomplished, when with a fervent "Thank God!" Fergus wheeled his now subdued and well-blown steed round, and sought to make his way back to the other side of the stream. But his dangers were not

altogether over. There were some still awaiting him. He was so occupied with freeing himself from the panic-stricken fugitives and regaining control of his pony, that he had not observed a new peril in his path. In the rear of the herd there had been an old bull that had found the fording of the stream a difficult task for his ponderous bulk, and he did not succeed in getting across until the whole herd had swept by. As soon as he did reach *terra firma* again, he set off after the others, and of course almost immediately encountered Fergus making his way back. The instant the bull caught sight of the boy he lowered his head, and with a dull rumbling roar rushed fiercely upon him. His roar was the first intimation either horse or rider had of his proximity.

“God help me!” cried Fergus, in terror at the startling onset. “What an awful creature! What shall I do?”

Happily, however, he had not to think for himself. Although the bull's charge was so unexpected that he was within a few yards of the pony before the latter realised his presence, the clever little steed swerved to one side with a quickness that baffled the furious monster, letting him thunder harmlessly past. At the same time so sudden was the movement that Fergus had the narrowest possible escape from being unseated, and only saved himself by falling forward upon the neck of the pony, and grasping desperately at his mane.

“The Lord ha' mercy!” he exclaimed. “How near

I was to fallin' to the ground right at the buffalo's feet!"

Not a whit daunted by his disappointment, but, if possible, still more enraged, the bull wheeled about, and repeated the charge. But this time his intended victims were ready for him, and instead of meeting him they made off as fast as a fleet pony could go in the direction taken by the other hunters, their baffled antagonist lumbering along obstinately in their rear.

In the meantime Sir George, Mr. Wadham, and others had done all the execution they desired, and having extricated themselves from the confusion of the hunt, were retracing their steps, seeking to identify the animals they had brought down. Toward them came Fergus, galloping for dear life, and shouting at the top of his voice:

"Look out! He's after me. Shoot him! Shoot him!"

There was something so comical in the appearance of the lad, bare-headed and terrified, skimming over the prairie on his fleet pony with a huge buffalo bull rolling after him, that a smile came into everybody's face.

"The boy's having plenty of excitement, Wadham," said Sir George. "More than he bargained for, I imagine."

"That's an ugly-looking customer he has in tow, sir," answered the private secretary. "My rifle's loaded. I'll go ahead, and see if I can't bring him to a full stop."

Putting spurs to his horse Mr. Wadham dashed ahead, and as he passed Fergus shouted reassuringly :

“All right! I’ll finish him for you.”

Making a slight detour so as to flank the bull, he urged his horse close to its side, and before the animal could turn upon him sent a bullet into it just behind the right shoulder. Almost at once the huge creature faltered, staggered forward a few more paces, and then fell, the life-blood mingling with the foam dropping from its jaws. A vain attempt to rise, a moment’s balancing upon its knees, a convulsive shudder through all the mighty frame, and then the end came. With one last low roar, more like a moan than any other sound, this monarch of the prairies rolled over dead.

“Neatly done, Wadham!” cried Sir George, dropping his bridle rein in order to clap his hands together. “I never saw a better piece of work in my life. Did you, my boy?” turning to Fergus, who had pulled up just in time to see the finishing of his fierce pursuer.

“No, indeed, sir,” panted Fergus. “It was just splendid.”

“And how many buffaloes did you bring down?” asked Sir George, with a smile that showed the kind of answer he expected.

“Not one, sir,” answered Fergus, hanging down his head.

“I suppose you found it too hard a job to look after your pony and use your rifle at the same time, wasn’t that it?” queried the governor.

"Yes, sir," responded Fergus, promptly, very grateful for the kindly tact which relieved him of the necessity of explaining why it was that he could lay claim to none of the trophies that lay scattered over the prairie.

"Never mind, my boy," said Sir George, with kindly encouragement. "You have plenty of time yet to learn buffalo hunting, and I'll wager that before you're twenty you'll be so good a hunter that Wadham will have to look to his laurels. Come, now, let us see what we've secured to-day."

The hunt had been eminently successful. No less than twelve fine animals had been killed, and the work of skinning and cutting them up was begun without delay. Fergus had nothing to do with this, so while it was going on he rode slowly along the stream until he reached a place where the water had not been disturbed, and there refreshed himself and his pony.

It was late in the afternoon when the party returned to the Fort, laden with the choicest portions of their prey. Mr. Wadham presented Fergus with the horns of the big bull that was so anxious to give him a toss with them, in order that he might have a suitable trophy of his first buffalo hunt.

The following day the canoe journey was resumed, the direction being steadily westward, though many a roundabout river curve had to be followed. Fergus was often invited to a seat in Sir George's canoe. The governor took pleasure in drawing him out, and encouraging him to express his opinions upon what

he had seen and heard in the course of his life. As might be expected, the talk in time came round to the subject of Fergus' future, and Sir George, having naturally taken it for granted that he would follow in his father's footsteps, was a good deal surprised to discover that the boy had different thoughts concerning himself.

"Do you really mean it, Fergus?" he asked. "A fine manly lad like you, with the prospects in the Company that you have, to want to turn your back on them for the sake of being a missionary to the Indians—I confess I can't understand it."

Fergus hardly knew how to answer him, for although he could see that the governor regarded missionary work with far more respect than his secretary did, still the boy was shrewd enough to perceive that it would not be easy to express his own convictions without seeming to imply that in his opinion the career of a missionary was far more honourable than that of an official in the great Hudson's Bay Company, and this could hardly be pleasing to the head of the institution. After a few moments' silence he ventured to say:

"I am really in earnest, Sir George. I do want to be a missionary to the poor Indians verra much indeed."

"But your father doesn't want you to," objected Sir George.

"No, sir; he does not," answered Fergus, with a half-suppressed sigh.

"And you wouldn't think of doing what he doesn't approve of, would you, Fergus?"

"No, sir; I wadn't. If my father wanna let me I maun just do his will."

"That's the right way to talk, my boy," said the governor, patting him approvingly on the shoulder. "Just stick to that, and you'll never go far wrong. Your father's a good man, Fergus, an excellent man—one of our very best officials, and I would like to see you grow up so as to take his place when his time comes to retire."

Poor Fergus felt himself to be in sore straits. He could not honestly say anything that would seem like assent to Sir George's kind words, for although he knew well enough that so long as his father continued in his present mind there was no chance of his obtaining the desire of his heart, still he permitted himself to cherish the hope that the way would be opened somehow, even though he might have to wait patiently for it. Noticing his confusion, Sir George forbore to press the subject then, and turned the conversation into another channel.

They were now making good headway up the South Saskatchewan, and drawing nearer the Rocky Mountains Fergus so eagerly longed to see. The weather continued exceptionally fine, and there were no portages to delay them, so that their progress was rapid. These were days of unclouded happiness for the young lad, something novel presenting itself before every sunset, and new scenes of beauty filling his memory with pictures that would not soon fade. He was a warm favourite with the whole party. Even

the taciturn, reserved Iroquois manifested in little acts of attention their liking for him, while Sir George and Mr. Wadham were as father and brother to him. The governor congratulated himself upon having brought him, for he was certainly a very bright addition to the company, and withal never seemed to be in anybody's way.

Against the Saskatchewan's gentle current the canoes pushed their way until the meeting of the waters of the Bow and Belly rivers was reached. Here a halt of a couple of days was made, in order to try for some of the deer that were plentiful in the vicinity. Fergus determined to acquit himself with more credit as a hunter of deer than he had done as a hunter of buffaloes, and fortune favoured him in the field; for while Sir George and Mr. Wadham both failed to secure a buck, Fergus, by a lucky shot, laid low a superb fellow, whose noble antlers he insisted upon the private secretary accepting in return for the buffalo horns.

Refreshed by their two days' rest, the crews of the canoes once more took up their paddles, and turning their graceful craft up the Bow River, entered upon the last stage of their journey to the Rockies, so far as they were concerned. A short visit was paid to Crowfoot Fort, an unimportant post, and a longer stay was made at Fort La Jonquiere, a more notable establishment situated near the site of the present town of Calgary.

This was as far as the canoes could go, so they were



THE CAVALRY AT THE BATTLE OF THE BULL RUN

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exchanged for horses, and once more Fergus had to try his luck in the saddle. A well-broken, well-behaved mustang was allotted him, and feeling much more at home on its back than he had upon the fiery little pony in the buffalo hunt, he kept his place in the cavalcade.

They had not journeyed far before the mountains rose into view like serrated clouds along the western horizon, becoming more and more distinct with each mile of advance. Fergus' heart thrilled with joy at the sight. How inspiring they were in their solemn, silent majesty! What wonderful colours adorned their mighty flanks, and how grandly their snow-capped peaks soared into the infinite azure!

He could talk of nothing else. He had a thousand questions to ask of Mr. Wadham concerning precipices and glaciers and waterfalls, and the other features of mountain scenery, to which the secretary was ever ready with answers to the point, and full of information, for there was little about either plain or mountain of which Mr. Wadham did not know. He had been making annual tours throughout the vast territory for more than ten years past, under the most favourable circumstances for acquiring knowledge concerning it, and he had not wasted his opportunities. So that Fergus could hardly have had a better instructor, unless it were Sir George himself. Moreover, the governor did not deem it beneath his dignity to let Fergus have the benefit of his vast experience.

A couple of days' riding brought them to the foot

hills, where it was proposed to remain for a week, Sir George being anxious to add another grizzly bear skin to the numerous trophies of the chase that enriched his home at Lachine, and having been informed at the Fort that a bear of enormous size had his den somewhere in the vicinity.

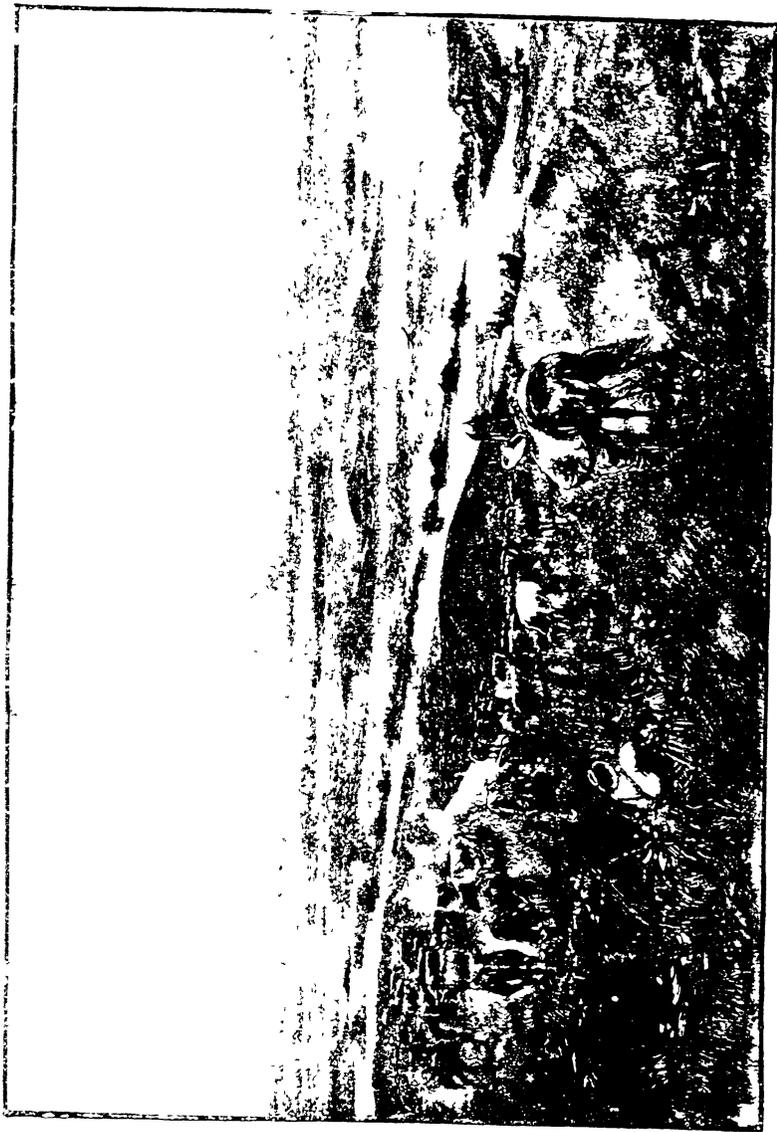
"It would not do for you to leave the Rockies without having called on old Ephraim, Fergus," said the governor. "He is the genius of the place, you know, and would no doubt feel deeply slighted if we fail to pay our respects."

"I wad greatly like to see him, sir," replied Fergus. "Father has often told me about the grizzlies. He came verra near being killed by one once when he was away out here."

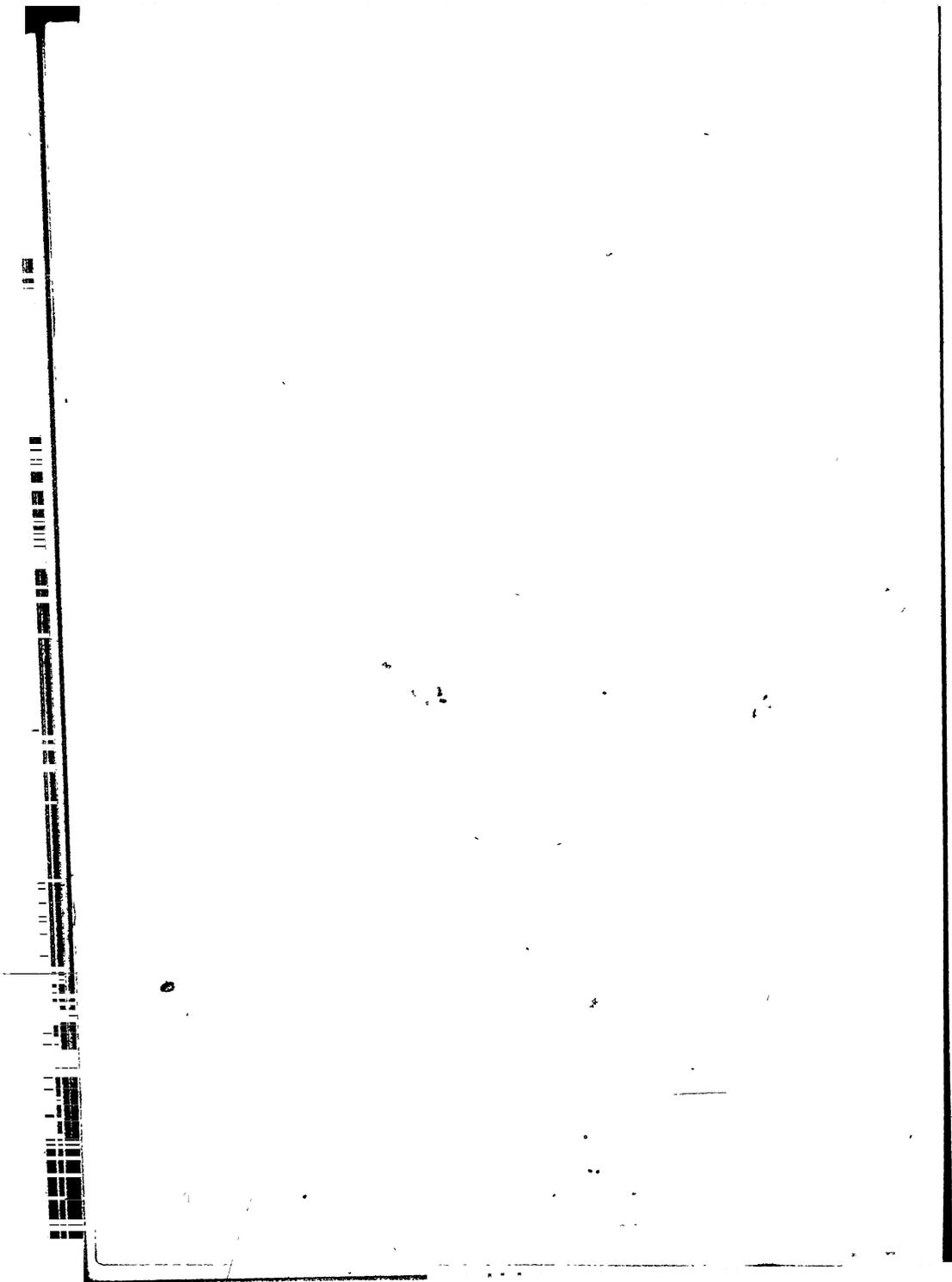
"So he did, to be sure," said Sir George. "I remember hearing about it at the time. He had a narrow escape indeed. We must take good care that his son doesn't get into any such danger."

"Oh, I'll be verra careful, sir," said Fergus. "I'm verra anxious to see the big bear, but not to get close to him as father did. He didn't start to run soon enough, and so the grizzly got hold of him, and but for the Indian that was with him he would have been killed."

"Be sure, then, that if the bear comes anywhere near you to show him how you can run, Fergus," said Mr. Wadham. "It's no use trying to argue with a grizzly. He won't pay attention to anything except a bullet in the right place."



The mountain peak in a view from the summit of Mt. Everest.



A good site for the camp having been selected, the horses were hobbled and turned loose, and preparations made for a week's stay, if necessary. Early the following morning the Indian hunters were despatched to look for signs of bear, while the others of the party gave themselves up to a day of leisure and lounging that was very welcome after the continuous and rapid travel of the past ten weeks.

Sir George and his secretary read and smoked and talked in the shade of their tents, but Fergus' restless spirit could not let him take matters so easily, and he spent the day roaming about the neighbourhood, taking good care, however, not to wander out of sight of the camp. He longed for the companionship of his dogs. How delightful it would have been to have them bounding along at his side, or making dashes of exploration into the nooks and crannies of the foot hills! With four such protectors he need hardly fear even a grizzly.

On his return to the camp he said something of this to Sir George.

"Ah!" replied the governor, "I would be very sorry to see your splendid dogs try conclusions with old Ephraim. He would tear them limb from limb in the twinkling of an eye. They would not know how to fight him. Only bear dogs are of the slightest good, and they often pay for their bravery with their lives."

When Fergus heard this, he felt very glad that his huge pets were not with them, and shuddered

at the thought of their being torn to pieces by a grizzly.

"Dear old Bruce!" said he, half to himself, "no grizzly shall ever get his claws into you."

"Not likely, Fergus," laughed Mr. Wadham. "So long as he stays in the Hudson's Bay District, at any rate. But here come the Indians. I hope they have some good news for us."

The Indians came up with an important expression upon their dusky countenances that was very promising.

"Well, Mekasto," said Sir George to the leader of the trio, a tall fine-looking Indian brave, and a famous hunter, "what have you to tell us? Good news I hope."

The report was entirely satisfactory. They had located the haunt of the great grizzly, and, still better, had found fresh tracks showing that he was at home, and no doubt ready to receive visitors.

"Ah, ha, Wadham," said Sir George, rubbing his hands together gleefully, "that's most satisfactory. We ought to have fine sport to-morrow."

The party that set out the following morning was strong enough to inspire respect in the breast of the most pugnacious bear. It consisted of Sir George, Mr. Wadham, Fergus, and the factor of Fort La Jonquiere as principals, the three Indian hunters, each having a pair of lean yet business-like looking hounds at heel, and as many half-breeds from the Fort, carrying provisions, &c. Nine men, a boy, and six

dogs, all come out to kill one bear! The odds certainly seemed against the animal, yet a grizzly had been known to put to flight quite as many assailants, and it would not do to take victory for granted.

Mekasto led the way up into the heart of the foot hills, striding along at a pace that taxed Fergus' powers as a pedestrian to the utmost. But of course he would not let on that it did so, and kept his place right manfully, even if he had every now and then to break into a run in order to close up the gap that was constantly threatening to open between himself and the rest of the party.

Happily for him, Sir George was rather short-winded, and at frequent intervals called a halt, in order to give himself an opportunity to regain his breath. Otherwise Fergus would have been compelled to drop out, and make his way back to camp.

The sun was high in the heavens before they got into the neighbourhood of the bear's stronghold, and as it was of the utmost importance that they should begin the fight feeling thoroughly fresh and fit, the governor directed that lunch should be eaten before the dogs were started. A cool mountain spring bubbled up near by. They made no fire, but contented themselves with a cool repast. Then the men had a pipe, the rifles were carefully inspected, the hunting-knives loosened in their sheaths, and following close in Mekasto's footsteps the party set forth.

The utmost quiet was preserved by all, and their steps were chosen with exceeding care. A stumble

a cough, an exclamation might reach the keen ears of the bear, and bring him out in a fury of indignation at their daring to invade his territory, before they were quite ready to receive him. In breathless expectancy the hunters stole forward. Sir George and Mr. Wadham looked as cool as though they were after nothing more important than partridges; the Indians were instinct with eagerness, and had hard work keeping back their lean hounds; the half-breeds seemed rather anxious, and Fergus could almost hear his heart beat. He was to see a great grizzly at last, and perhaps help to kill him. No wonder his pulses thrilled with excitement, and he kept his finger upon the trigger of his gun, ready to pull it at the shortest possible notice.

They had glided quietly along in this way for nearly a quarter of a mile, when, at a signal from Mekasto, the hounds were loosened and at once dashed eagerly forward, sniffing fiercely here and there. Some anxious minutes passed while they hunted for the scent. Then a triumphant bark from the oldest of the pack, a very ugly but wonderfully clever dog, announced that tracks of the bear had been found. Away he went as hard as he could run, the other dogs following close behind, and after them ran the hunters, holding their rifles in readiness for immediate use.

The trail led into a sort of ravine with a stony bottom and jagged precipitous sides.

"Keep close to me, Fergus," said Sir George, as

they ran. "Don't run away from me, as you did on the buffalo hunt."

"Not if I can help it, sir," responded Fergus, earnestly, for in truth his one thought was to keep close to the governor. He did not actually feel afraid. Their party seemed too strong and well armed for even the most terrible grizzly to do them any harm. But the whole affair was very novel to him, and he could not help some nervousness.

Presently the barking of the hounds changed in tone, and as Sir George noted the change, he exclaimed exultantly :

"They've found him. They've got him at bay. Now for a tussle."

Hurrying on, they turned a corner formed by a projecting ledge, and then there broke upon their sight a scene that was startling enough to stir the heart of the most case-hardened hunter. The ravine ended suddenly in a kind of *cul-de-sac*, and against the farther end stood the object of their pursuit—a grizzly of gigantic size and appalling aspect as he faced the dogs that barked furiously before him, darting at his sides, and trying to get at him in the rear.

"By Jove, Wadham!" cried Sir George, in a tone of mingled wonder and admiration, "what a magnificent brute!" Then, turning to Fergus, he said, in a lower tone: "That's old Ephraim himself. Keep your eye on him, and don't let him get his claws on you."

Fergus could only nod his head in token of assent, for words failed him. He was simply struck dumb.

Never before had he seen so terrible a monster. His first impulse was to wheel about and rush down the ravine as fast as his young legs would carry him. But he did not yield to it. Instead of that, he drew himself up firmly, breathed an earnest prayer for Divine protection, set his lips close together, and tightening his grasp on his rifle, faced the grizzly with so determined an aspect that Mr. Wadham noting it, nudged Sir George, saying in an undertone :

“Just look at the lad! He’s of the right sort! He’s the kind of apprentice the Company wants.”

Just then the bear, hitherto entirely engrossed with the dogs, caught sight of its human assailants closing in upon it. Giving vent to a hideous growl, it lowered its head, and, breaking through the ring of dogs as though they had been flies, charged straight down the ravine. There was no need for Mekasto or Sir George to give the command to fire. Each man levelled his gun instinctively, and at the same moment pulled the trigger. Almost like one the different rifles spoke, and their leaden utterances went whistling through the air to bury themselves in the huge, hairy carcass of the bear. Fergus alone of the party did not fire, the reason being that he was so taken up with watching the bear’s shambling yet swift approach that he quite forgot to put a bullet into him. It proved a few minutes later to be a happy circumstance that he had reserved his fire.

So close was the range, that not one of those who fired altogether missed, although some of the bullets

did very little harm. Others, however, found their way deep into the mighty frame, inflicting wounds that would have at once disabled any other animal than a grizzly. But instead of disabling this monster of strength and endurance, they only acted as spurs to fiercer effort.

Halting for an instant in sheer bewilderment at being stung in so many places at once, he suddenly swung round upon the dogs that had been hanging on to his flanks, and with one fell swoop sent two of them yards away, writhing in the agonies of death.

In the meantime the hunters were hard at work recharging their guns. But those were the days of muzzleloaders. The breechloader was yet unknown, and it took a perceptible time for even the most skilful marksman to load again. Moreover, as is generally the case, the more the hurry, the less the speed. Consequently when, after paying his respects to the hounds in the manner stated, the bear faced about again, and despite the fact that the blood was streaming from several places, bore down upon the men with undiminished vigour, his assailants were not ready for him.

They made no pretence of awaiting his charge, but at once proceeded to scramble up the sides of the ravine with the utmost possible haste. In this movement all succeeded well enough except Sir George. As it happened, the side of the ravine nearest where he stood rose quite steeply, and at the bottom was a gathering of loose stones upon which he slipped when

he attempted to spring up. The infuriated grizzly noted this, and paying no attention to the others, made straight for the governor.

"Great heavens!" cried Mr. Wadham, who had reached the top of the bank with little difficulty. "Sir George is not up, and look at the bear!"

Sir George's position was certainly one of extreme peril. The bear was within twenty yards of him, and lumbering forward with furious bounds. The bank behind him was not to be climbed. To try any other point would be to throw himself into the grasp of the bear; his gun was loaded, but not capped, and his cap-pouch had somehow swung round out of reach. There was nothing for it but to draw his hunting-knife and defend himself with it as best he might.

Now a single man, however big and strong, armed only with a knife, however keen, is a very poor match for a grizzly bear with his blood up; and this grizzly had his blood up to fever point. He was, in fact, in the most bloodthirsty of tempers, and nothing but a bullet in his brain or through his heart would be sufficient to bring him to a full stop. But who was to fire that bullet? The rest of the party, having gained a place of safety, were now hard at work finishing the loading up of their guns. Fergus alone was ready to fire. What could he do to save Sir George?

CHAPTER XVIII.

A GLAD HOME-COMING.

THE point in the side of the ravine where Fergus, not without difficulty, scrambled up, was some little distance away from Sir George's position, but the moment he reached the top he hurried over until he stood just behind and above the governor. He fully realised the extremely critical nature of the situation, and the need of immediate action if he would save Sir George from terrible injury if not death.

Now although as a horseman Fergus had still much to learn, as a marksman he was more than ordinarily sure. His keen vision, steady nerves, and strong self-control stood him in good stead when he held a rifle. In this present emergency he rose to the occasion as could hardly have been expected of one of his years. The thought of delivering his kind friend and benefactor banished all nervousness. There was no time to take careful aim, yet it was no shot at random that he fired. Instinctively he chose the best possible place that presented itself at the time, and at the crack of his rifle a bullet winged its

way with deadly accuracy to the spot just at the base of the brain where the spinal cord joins the skull.

The moment he was struck the bear gave vent to an awful sound, half-roar, half-scream, and then pitched forward upon his nose, rolling right up to Sir George's feet as dead as one of the stones upon which his huge carcase lay limp and bleeding.

Letting the knife with which he had intended to defend himself to the last drop from his hand, Sir George turned round, and looking up to the top of the bank cried:

"Who fired that shot?"

"I did, sir," replied Fergus. "I'm coming down, right away," and so saying he recklessly scrambled down to the governor's side.

He had hardly touched the ground before Sir George's arms were flung about his neck, and he was receiving an embrace that fairly squeezed the breath out of him.

"My noble boy!" exclaimed the governor. "From what an awful death you saved me! How can I ever be thankful enough. Never will I forget the service you have done me." And then the fervent embrace was repeated.

By this time the rest of the party had gathered round, and Fergus, a little to his embarrassment and still more to his gratification, became the object of their praise expressed as heartily as they knew how. Even the taciturn braves were moved to grunt their approval of his timely shot, while Mr. Wadham

seemed as proud of his exploit as if he had been his own brother.

Sir George was deeply moved by his narrow escape. "Never before was I in more imminent peril," said he, solemnly. "That awful brute seemed to be right upon me. I thought I could feel his hot breath, and I knew my knife would be of no use. What was the matter with your rifles? Why didn't some of you fire, too?"

The others hastened to explain what had prevented them from being of any service, and then Sir George turned to Fergus again.

"And so you were the only one ready, Fergus. I'm thankful to God you were, and that your skill with the rifle did not fail you. Where did you hit him. He fell the moment your bullet struck him."

"I think I hit him in the neck, sir, just at the back of his head," answered Fergus.

The huge body was examined, and there, sure enough, right at the base of the brain was the wound, marked by a few drops of blood which had oozed out upon the rough fur.

"By my faith, but that was a marvellous shot!" exclaimed Sir George, clapping the boy warmly upon the back. "Not one of us could have done better—or perhaps as well. You have good reason to feel proud. Here, Mekasto, off with old Ephraim's skin. Do it as carefully as you would for yourself. It's Fergus' prize, and he must take it home with him to show them there what a hunter he is. Ah, my

boy!" he added, laying his hand affectionately on Fergus' shoulder, "you're just the kind of lad we want in the Company, and we can't have too many of you."

In all the course of the struggle between what in some strange, instinctive way he felt to be a Divine purpose concerning him, that it was not only his duty but his highest privilege to fulfil, and the constant promptings of ambition, pride and self-gratification, there was no more critical moment than when Sir George thus addressed him.

Flushed with delight at having rescued from a hideous death the man who had conferred so many favours upon him—the greatest man in all the North-West—palpitating with pride at the success of his shot and the unstinted praise of the whole party, and assured of the kindly interest and influence of the governor should he decide to enter into the service of the Company, his future at that moment, so far as it rested with himself, hung in the balance. Had Sir George gone on to ask of him a promise that he would renounce all those romantic notions about being a missionary, and like a sensible young fellow make up his mind to begin his apprenticeship with the Company at once, there is little doubt that he would have yielded. But evidently Providence did not intend it so. The factor of Fort La Jonquiere at that moment broke in with a question as to whether they would all wait for the Indians to finish the skinning of the bear, or return to camp and send up one of the horses for the heavy skin.

"We needn't wait," replied Sir George, his attention thus called away. "We'll saunter back to camp at our ease, and a horse can come up for the skin."

Neither that afternoon nor during the homeward journey did Sir George again make reference to the matter, seeming to take it for granted, as indeed did also Mr. Wadham, that the subject required no further discussion.

It was midsummer when the little party left Fort Garry. It was midsummer when they returned, and there they broke up, Sir George and Mr. Wadham, after a positively affectionate farewell, continuing their journey eastward to Montreal, while Fergus had to wait until, joining some party bound northward, he could turn his face toward the beloved home from which he had been so many months absent.

"Take the best of care of yourself, Fergus," was the governor's parting injunction. "You may look for me at Norway House next summer. My kindest regards to your father and mother and the Oldens. Good-bye. God bless you."

Sir George's eyes were a little misty as he spoke. The young Scotch lad had got nearer the heart of the sharp, stern autocrat than ever one outside of his own kin had done. No reasonable favour that it lay within his power to grant would he have refused him. There were even moments when he thought of proposing to adopt him. But he dismissed the idea as out of the question, knowing that the MacTavishes would no more consent to part with their only son

than he would to go out from his home for the sake of the most glittering prospects in the world.

The month of October was drawing to a close, and the MacTavishes had, as they themselves would express it, long been wearying for their boy. Not only did they miss him sorely, not only did the days seem strangely quiet and dull and long without him, but Mrs. MacTavish, motherlike, could not help worrying not a little from time to time as she reviewed all the possibilities of peril in such a journey as that in which he was engaged. Perils by water and perils by land, perils from beasts and perils from men, many a night she lay awake, unable to sleep for thinking of them, and finding her only comfort in renewed committal of the keeping of her darling to God.

It was no use telling her anxiety to her husband. "Hoot, Ailie!" he would say, "awa' with such foolish notions. Ye canna keep the boy tethered at hame by yer apron strings. He maun learn to make his own way in the world, and who can teach him better how to begin than Sir George himself?"

At the same time, although the chief trader thus thought to make light of his wife's apprehension, he was not entirely free from something of the kind himself, as the days slipped by without bringing sign or word of Fergus.

"It's verra strange," he would mutter under his breath; "I canna understand it. The laddie should have been hame the first 'o' the month, and it will soon be the last, and there's naething about him."

Again and again through the day would he ascend Flagstaff Hill and look out across the lake, in the hope of descrying a boat or canoe that might be bearing Fergus toward him, and every time he came away disappointed his anxiety deepened, although he carefully concealed from his wife the fact that he felt any concern at all.

The very last day of October came, and still no Fergus. Mr. MacTavish spent most of the day upon the hill. It was a dreary day. A storm was brewing to the eastward, and would no doubt break out before midnight. His spirits were at their lowest ebb. A harrowing presentiment of approaching ill held his heart in its grasp, and refused to be shaken off. About the middle of the afternoon he was called away from the hill by a matter requiring his attention for a little while. When he returned he found his wife in his place, peering across the dark, troubled waters of the lake, with pale, anxious face. He did his best to seem at his ease. But the self-restraint, so well maintained hitherto gave way, and gathering his wife in his arms, he said in broken, husky tones :

“Ailie, dear ; the gude Lord grant that nae harm has befallen oor only bairn.”

Mrs. MacTavish clung close to her stalwart husband, and in a voice scarcely audible, whispered :

“Dugald, let us pray to Him.”

They knelt together on the rocky summit, and the chief trader poured forth his soul in passionate, pleading prayer for the safe and speedy return of their son.

He wrestled with God as Jacob did with the angel. It was many minutes before the strong voice ceased, and rising to his feet, leaving his wife still upon her knees, Mr. MacTavish once more swept the surface of the lake with his keen vision.

Instantly he gave a glad shout.

"Ailie, look! look!" he cried. "A sail that is, surely. There! There!" And with finger quivering with excitement, he pointed due south to where a bit of white, no larger seemingly than the palm of his hand, broke the monotony of sombre waves tossing sullenly beneath the leaden sky. With breathless eagerness they watched it as it seemed to flutter toward them like a leaf driven by the wind.

"A sail it is, Ailie!" cried Mr. MacTavish, in joyful tones. "It's one of the boats; and nae doot oor laddie is aboard."

Mrs. MacTavish's face grew bright at the words.

"God grant it may be. But can they get to us before the dark?" she added, in a tone of some anxiety.

"Surely, Ailie, surely," answered the chief trader. "They should be at the beach within the hour."

"But the wind's not in their favour," urged his wife. "And they may be kept back."

"Ye're right, Ailie, ye're right, my own lass," said Mr. MacTavish. "I maun get a light to guide them. Bide ye here, and I'll rin back to the Fort and bring up twa lanterns."

Away dashed the chief trader down the hill, while his wife fastened her gaze upon the boat beating its

way up sturdily toward the Fort, and followed its every movement with a prayer for the safe landing of those on board.

In a wonderfully short time Mr. MacTavish returned with a big lantern in each hand, their light giving a welcome gleam through the growing dusk.

"Noo, Ailie," said he, handing her one, "you just bide here, and I'll go down to the beach and guide them to the landing."

The white sail could barely be made out as Mr. MacTavish went down to the beach, and soon the deepening darkness shut it out from sight altogether; but the two lanterns sent their guiding rays far out over the waters of the lake, and presently from out the gloom there came a lusty hail of:

"Norway House, ahoy!"

To which the chief trader responded, with a stentorian voice:

"What boat is that? Who's on board?"

Hardly had his challenge gone forth, than there came back across the waves a voice that sent a thrill of indescribable joy through his whole being.

"Father, I'm on board!" it cried.

There was wonderful gladness expressed in Mr. MacTavish's tone, as he shouted back:

"Fergus, my ain, dear boy! Have you come back at last?"

A few minutes later the boat struck the beach, and without waiting for her to be hauled up, Fergus leaped out into his father's arms.

Very fervent were the greetings exchanged between father and son, and then Fergus, looking about him, asked :

“ And where is mother, father ? ”

But the question was scarcely asked before a light step came swiftly up, and with an exclamation of “ My darling Fergus ! ” his mother’s arms were thrown around his neck, and he was strained to her heart.

There was a general thanksgiving held in the chief trader’s house that night. The news of Fergus’ safe return quickly spread, and the officers and clerks, from Mr. Barnston down, crowded in with their greetings and congratulations. Even old Papanakes made bold to present himself with few words, but with an unmistakable gladness in his dusky countenance that told how dear Fergus was to him.

How proud the MacTavishes were of their boy ! He had grown perceptibly taller during his long outing, and his face was tanned a rich brown by the summer suns, so that he looked, as his fond mother put it, “ as handsome as a picture. ” And how his tongue ran on, while they plied him with questions about his trip across the prairies !

The explanation of his being so long over-due was simple enough. He had been waiting at Red River for a chance to come home, and day after day had passed without any opportunity presenting itself, until at last Mr. Sutherland, moved by the boy’s evident uneasiness of mind, and appreciating how his parents must be longing for him, and perhaps

worrying about him, ordered three of his men to take him up in a boat, without any further delay.

So Fergus' home-coming was quite in keeping with his setting forth. The boat and its crew were at his service, and Mr. Sutherland had impressed upon the men that their one business was to get him in good order and condition to Norway House in the shortest time possible.

They executed their commission faithfully, wasting none of the precious hours of daylight, but pushing on regardless of wind or weather, and bringing their passenger to his destination just in time to escape a storm, which, if it had caught them out on the lake, would assuredly have brought their voyage to a disastrous conclusion.

It was far into the night before Fergus found his way to bed. He had so much to tell, and the others had so many questions to ask. Of course, he did not forget the buffalo hunt, and the thrilling chase of the grizzly, making his own part in the latter clear enough, yet not being unduly boastful about it.

"Ah, Fergus, laddie!" said his father, patting him proudly on the head. "But that was a grand shot! And it's a good friend ye made by it. Sir George thought verra weel o' you before, but he'll be thinking a hundred-fold better o' ye noo. And he never forgets, Fergus. He never forgets. There's nothing in reason that he'd refuse ye after that."

It was the chief trader's way to take a very practical view of things. He never forgot to be the

shrewd, hard-headed, canny Scotchman that nature and experience had made him. And so when he heard from Fergus of the governor's timely rescue from certain death, his first thought was that of pride at his son's brilliant exploit, and his second of what a claim had been thus established upon the gratitude of the great man who held the fortune of many hundreds of his fellow-men in his hands.

Not that he desired or expected anything for himself. His whole concern was for Fergus, the joy and pride of his life. How bright his prospects in the Company's service would be with Sir George's influence assured. Mr. MacTavish indulged in the building of some lofty and imposing castles in the air that night as he sat by the fire enjoying his last pipe after his wife and Fergus had retired. He pictured his boy rising rapidly step by step from clerk to chief factor, and then, perhaps—who should say impossible—was not Sir George himself a plain clerk once?—reaching in the fulness of time the dizzy height of the governorship!

It was a brilliant day-dream, and the chief trader's furrowed face seemed to take on some of the light of the leaping flames as he gave his fancy full play.

"Ah, Fergus, my son," he murmured. "Ye maun clear yer head of all these foolish notions of yours about following after Mr. Olden. Leave that for those that have nae sich chances as Providence has put in your way."

And so saying he knocked the ashes out of his pipe,

covered over the fire with ashes, and went to his bed without a disturbing doubt in his mind that matters would all turn out just as he wished.

Bright and early the next morning the Oldens made their appearance, their faces full of gladness at seeing Fergus once more. While he was away their new home out on the island had been completed, and they had taken possession, the necessary furniture for making it comfortable having come from England by way of York Factory.

Mr. and Mrs. Olden greeted the young traveller as affectionately as if he were their own son, but Ruth hung shyly in the background until Fergus, exclaiming in a tone of feigned reproach: "Why, Ruthie, aren't you glad to see me?" caught her face in his hands, and imprinted a sounding kiss upon each of her plump, rosy cheeks, very much to the amusement of the elders.

"Did you learn that at Red River, Fergus?" asked his father, while Ruth, breaking away from his grasp, darted behind her mother, blushing like a young peony.

"Why, no, sir," answered Fergus, laughing. "I didn't need to learn it. I always knew."

Of course, he had to fight his battles with bear and buffalo over again, and the morning slipped by while he was doing it, and telling Mr. Olden all he could about the different tribes of Indians he had seen, and what sort of beings they appeared to be. The missionary was even more deeply interested in the

Indians than in the wild animals of the prairies and the mountains. He looked forward to the day when the Gospel of Jesus Christ would be sent to every tribe throughout the whole North-West, and he was eager to learn all he could about the red men of those distant regions. The results of his own labours at Norway House had been such as to fill his heart with hope, and to furnish him with strong arguments wherewith to confront the incredulity of the chief trader.

Mr. MacTavish noted his lively interest, and it reminded him of the necessity of guarding against Fergus being again carried away by missionary enthusiasm, to the frustration of all his brilliant worldly prospects. He thought it well, accordingly, to have a few words in private with Mr. Olden during the afternoon, in the course of which he repeated his unalterable opposition to his son's entering upon any other career than that awaiting him in the Company's service, and asked of the missionary his assurance that he would not try in any way, directly or indirectly, to influence Fergus toward going into the missionary work.

Mr. Olden had of course no other alternative than to comply. Mr. MacTavish was requiring no more than his right as a parent. Until his boy reached his majority his destiny lay in his hands, and to endeavour to influence him in a direction counter to that the father had chosen, would be an unwarrantable interference in another's concerns.

"I will certainly do as you wish, Mr. MacTavish," he said, with a half-suppressed sigh. "It would ill become me to do aught to thwart your plans for your boy, however strongly I may be of opinion that he is fit for a more exalted position than that now filled by Sir George. You may smile, Mr. MacTavish. I don't expect you to agree with me. But I believe that in the eyes of Him who rules above, the humblest missionary now toiling away in some obscure field of work, where he has little thanks and less honour, stands far higher than any of those whom the world calls great, and delights to honour. It is the approbation of Heaven, not the empty applause of earth that I covet for Fergus. I believe him to have qualifications for rare usefulness in the Master's vineyard. But I have no right to take his case into my own hands as you have into yours. And of this I am confident, that if the Lord requires him, He will in His own blessed way enlist him in His service."

The chief trader was more impressed by Mr. Olden's eloquent earnest words than he cared to admit, so with a somewhat abrupt "As you please, Mr. Olden. Ye may be richt, but my mind's unchanged," he dismissed the subject, and did not refer to it again until the Divine hand was laid upon him, as will in due time appear.

He was very glad the mission station had been removed to the island. Fergus would not now be brought into such constant contact with the missionary as when the latter lived at Norway House, and

there would be good opportunity for his very unpractical, even if praiseworthy, ideas about his future to change into the direction his father so much desired.

Fergus was glad on his part also of the removal of the missionary and his family to the island, because it gave him another home, and that meant much in a region where society was almost unknown. So soon as the ice made on the lake, and he could once more harness Bruce and Herc and the others of his matchless team into the cariole, hardly a day passed that he did not pay the Oldens a visit, staying with them to dinner or tea, and then flying home again as fast as his big pets could drag him.

The energetic missionary had done wonders during the summer. A strong, snug cottage, and a tiny barn, in which some day or other he hoped to put a cow, had been built for himself, and quite a cosy little chapel for holding service in. Everything, of course, was very simple and plain; but it was sufficient for the purpose, and Mrs. Olden, with a woman's wondrous art, had managed to give an exceedingly comfortable homelike air to the cottage. Nor was the little church neglected. Brightly coloured pictures, illustrating the life of Christ, helped to hide the roughness of the walls, and here and there were touches that revealed a woman's hand.

All this was not lost upon the Indians. They found the bright, well-warmed church very attractive on the dark, cold autumn evenings, and flocked in to fill the seats whenever the ringing of the bell

announced that service was to be held, so that Mr. Olden could always count upon having a good congregation.

His efforts on their behalf were not confined to preaching them sermons. He undertook to teach them also; and every morning the church held a score of boys and girls, to whom he gave instruction in the three R's, and in singing also. They were a rather noisy set of youngsters, but fairly bright, and many of them very anxious to learn, so that the missionary's patient labours were not without encouragement. Ruth helped him to the best of her ability, and Mrs. Olden generally managed to find time to give the girls a lesson in the science of the needle.

No sooner had Fergus settled down at home, than he became possessed with a desire to be Mr. Olden's assistant in the school. It would give him occupation for the mornings all winter long, and he felt sure he would enjoy it. But, very much to his surprise and disappointment, his father firmly objected, giving as his reason that he would be better employed taking lessons from Mr Barnston in the keeping of accounts, and other work, such as would fall to his lot when he began his clerkship the following summer. The more he knew at the start the quicker would be his progress upward in the service.

Fergus felt strongly impelled to once more make known to his father his positive disinclination to take a clerkship with the Company, and his no less posi-

tive desire to be allowed to prepare himself for work as a missionary to the Indians. But there was something in his father's look and tone that tied his tongue.

The fact was, Mr. MacTavish had anticipated a protest from his son, and probably an animated argument; and he determined to stave it off, if possible, by assuming that somewhat stern, imperative manner which Fergus noticed, and which led him to keep silence. This silence was misunderstood by the chief trader. He interpreted it as implying that the change he desired had taken place in Fergus' mind, and that he no longer cherished his former notions. Of course he greatly rejoiced at this, and his manner underwent so sudden a change that Fergus was completely mystified.

Thus both father and son missed each other's mind, and thereby made it more difficult to arrive at a mutual understanding at a later day, when the question came up again between them.

CHAPTER XIX.

IN PERIL OF THE PLAGUE.

WHEN Fergus told of his disappointment to Mr. Olden, the wise, faithful man of God took care to say nothing that would give the impression of his siding with the son as against the father.

"Let it be as your father says, Fergus," were his words. "He wants you to get a good start in the Company, and he's quite right in saying that, with this in view, your mornings will be far better spent in Mr. Barnston's office than in my school. Although I need hardly say how glad I'd be to have you with me, and how much help you could give me."

"But, Mr. Olden, I don't want to be a clerk in the Company. It's a clerk with you I'm wanting to be, and I do wish my father wadná say me nay," protested Fergus.

"Fergus dear," replied the missionary, laying his hand lovingly upon the boy's shoulder, and looking into his earnest eyes, "your father must be sole judge in the matter. You know how dearly he loves you, and how he wants to do only what he thinks best for you. If it be the will of God that you should spend

your life in His service, He will open up the way in good time. Be obedient, Fergus, and be patient. I warmly sympathise with you in your longing to work in the vineyard of the Lord. It is the grandest work a man can do, and I would rather see you there than governor of the Hudson's Bay Company. But your father wishes it to be otherwise, Fergus, and his will is law for you. Just do as he bids, and leave the rest to God. He knows the end from the beginning, and He will give you the desire of your heart in good time, if He sees it to be best."

Much soothed and comforted by the missionary's counsel, Fergus took his place at a desk in the office, and applied himself diligently to learning how the accounts of the Company were kept. He soon became very much interested in his work. It had many attractions for his active, inquiring mind; and when from time to time his father inquired as to the progress he was making, Mr. Barnston always had entirely satisfactory reports to make.

Mr. MacTavish very wisely asked no work of him during the afternoon, and he was free to enjoy himself as he pleased. He found no difficulty in putting in the time. If the day was fine, and not too cold, he would harness up his dogs and take Ruth out for a ride in his cariole, burying her in furs until there was nothing visible but a very pink nose and a very bright pair of eyes, while he ran alongside, or stood on behind, according as the going might be bad or good. If Jack Frost was biting too sharply to make

it pleasant for Ruth to be out, he would put a hatchet and hunting-knife in his belt, strap on his snow-shoes, and accompany Papanakes as he went the round of the traps he was always setting out to catch the fur-bearing animals that abounded in the neighbourhood.

The old hunter and he were firmer friends than ever. The Indian took a very keen pride in his pupil. It would be a long time before the echoes of that wonderful shot which saved Sir George would die away, and in his heart Papanakes claimed some of the credit of the feat. For he more than any one else had taught Fergus how to handle a rifle.

There was a newer and deeper bond, however, which now united the old Indian and the young Scotch lad. While Fergus was away with Sir George the Spirit of God had found a way into Papanakes' heart, and he had been soundly converted. All his degrading superstitions and pagan notions were gone from him, and he rejoiced in the light and liberty of a child of God. It had made a great difference in the old man. The restless scowl, worn for so many years, had vanished from his face, and had been replaced by a look of good humour and peace. His habitual taciturnity also had in large part left him. His heart was full of the love of God, and he was always ready to tell the story of his conversion in a simple yet eloquent way that was more effectual than he knew. Mr. Olden indeed found him a decided help in his work. He was a bright example of the blessed results of the Gospel the missionary had travelled nearly two

thousand miles to preach, and at the services in the little church on the island many a dusky-faced hearer, turning from the preacher to look at Papanakes, whose eager, attentive eyes said "Amen" to each sentence in the sermon, and remembering what a sullen, ill-tempered, revengeful man he had been before the Master had changed his heart, was the more ready to respond to the speaker's earnest appeals.

Papanakes had lost no time in telling Fergus of his conversion, and the unaffected joy shown by his young friend at the news made him love him more than ever. They were brothers now, though they were of different race, and there was not a drop of blood in the Indian's veins that he would not gladly shed to save Fergus from harm.

Of this he gave convincing proof one afternoon when they were out together on the round of the traps. A wolverine had been giving them a great deal of trouble by stealing the bait after the traps had been set, and even "making raggles" of the minks and martens that might happen to be caught in them. Now, the wolverine is the most difficult of all creatures to trap. It possesses almost supernatural sagacity, and seems to take a malicious delight in proving its superiority to all the wiles of the hunter.

But Papanakes determined to leave no means untried to capture the rascal that was causing him so much trouble, and as fast as one snare failed, he invented another. Finally success seemed to have crowned his efforts, for on coming to the trap which

he had especially prepared for his tormentor, it had disappeared altogether.

"Ah!" exclaimed the old Indian, delightedly, digging in the snow to make sure that the trap was gone from its place. "We got him sure. Him no go far. We find him soon."

It was not so easy a matter to find the wolverine after all, for there had been a fall of snow since he had got away with the trap, so that his track was completely obliterated. But this did not dismay Papanakes. Astonishing as the animal's strength might be, he could not go very far with one of his legs in a heavy iron trap.

"You go that way; me go this," said the Indian. "When you find him, you shout. Me come to you."

"All right, Papanakes. If I see anything of him I'll shout, you may be sure." And holding his rifle in readiness to fire at the first warning, he went off in the direction Papanakes had indicated.

The underbrush was pretty thick round about, and every yard of the way required to be carefully scrutinised, so that it was slow work, and the two searchers did not get any great distance apart. Presently Fergus came to a dense clump that seemed to him just the place in which the object of their hunt might be hiding. He went carefully around it, and sure enough, to his great delight, he discerned some marks in the snow that looked very like those which the trap being dragged along would make.

Now, undoubtedly his proper course would have

been to shout for Papanakes at once. But he did not do so, and for two reasons. In the first place, he was afraid of starting up the wolverine to fresh exertions in retreat; and, in the second, the temptation to deal with the animal single-handed came over him, and he did not resist it.

With his finger upon the trigger of his rifle he pushed aside the thick pine boughs, and peered eagerly into the dark shadow they made.

Suddenly there came a fierce growl from the dusky recess, and like a flash a great grey body sprang at him with gleaming eyes and snapping teeth.

Taken completely by surprise, for he expected to find a slow, heavy wolverine, not a quick, active wolf, Fergus, without bringing his gun to his shoulder pulled the trigger, and at the same moment shouted for Papanakes at the top of his voice.

The report of the gun, followed immediately by the sharp cry for help, rang out upon the clear winter air, and startled the old Indian, who was intent upon following up what he thought was a promising trail. With a significant grunt he wheeled about, and dashed at the top of his speed to Fergus' aid.

He arrived not an instant too soon. The trap had caught a huge timber wolf instead of the wolverine for which it was intended, and this plucky brute, one of whose forepaws had been caught in it, after enduring the agony for some hours, had deliberately gnawed his paw off just above where the merciless steel jaws cut into the bone, thus gaining his freedom at the cost

of a foot. He was resting after this desperate piece of surgery in the thick of the pine covert when Fergus disturbed him, and undaunted by his sufferings he had instantly hurled himself upon the daring intruder.

So sudden was his onset that Fergus had no chance to aim his rifle, so that the bullet merely grazed the wolf's shoulder, doing the creature no harm, and imbedding itself in a tree trunk near by. Before the boy could club his gun the brute was upon him, knocking it out of his hands, and tumbling himself backward upon the snow.

The snow was not very deep under the trees, but Fergus was encumbered by his snow-shoes, and could not regain his feet. Springing upon his chest the wolf made a snap at his face, but he warded it off by smiting the gaping mouth a sharp blow with his clenched fist, causing the infuriated brute to dodge back for an instant.

But it was only for an instant. With a hideous snarl he repeated his attack, and just at that moment Papanakes came up. His gun was loaded, but he dared not fire lest in his haste he might injure Fergus. For the same reason he did not try to club the wolf. There was a better way still, he thought. Uttering a whoop that rang through the forest like the report of a gun, he dropped his rifle, and, throwing himself upon the animal, tore him away from Fergus. Then gripping his throat with his sinewy fingers, he set himself to the task of throttling the wolf to death.

It was a tremendous struggle. The wolf fought

madly for his life. He could do nothing with his teeth. The Indian had his head in his own grasp. But his paws were free, and with them he tore fiercely at his antagonist, ripping the strong buckskin garments as though they had been paper. Well was it for Papanakes that the creature had only one fore-paw available, or he might have been sorely scratched by the keen claws.

In the meantime Fergus had picked himself up and was dancing round the struggling pair, hunting-knife in hand, watching for a chance to bury it in the wolf's body. But before the opportunity presented itself, the brute's struggles became manifestly weaker. That merciless grip was closing his windpipe; a few moments more and it was all over with him. The Indian had conquered. With a grunt of proud satisfaction the old man loosened his hold, rose to his feet, and then to make assurance doubly sure, drew his knife, and cut the wolf's throat.

"Him berry big wolf," said he, complacently, regarding the great grey body. "Me find trap now." And off he went in search of the trap as though the killing of a timber wolf in a hand-to-hand struggle were quite an every-day occurrence with him. Fergus could not help a smile at the veteran's nonchalance.

"Dear old Papanakes," said he to himself. "It wad take a great deal to mak' him lose his head."

In a few minutes a shout of joy from the Indian announced that the trap had been found, and presently he appeared, dragging it after him by the

chain. It was quite uninjured, and still clasped in its steel jaws the wolf's foot frozen hard.

"Please open the trap for me, Papanakes," said Fergus. "I want that foot for a keepsake."

Papanakes prised open the pitiless teeth, and made them give up their prize, which Fergus picked up and put into his pocket, saying :

"You'll prepare this for me so that it will keep, when we get back to the Fort, eh, Papanakes?"

The old hunter smiled his assent, and then proceeded to remove the skin from the wolf, while Fergus watched him to see how it was done. Papanakes was very expert at the business, and did not take many minutes in stripping the ugly creature of his reddish grey pelt, being careful not to detach the head, so that a striking trophy might be made out of it.

"Dis yours, now, Fergus," said he, when his task was completed. "Me cure it so it will keep good all time." And rolling it up into a bundle, he threw it on his back for transportation to the Fort.

On their return the wolf skin was pronounced the largest ever brought to Norway House, whereat, of course, both Fergus and Papanakes felt very much pleased, and the whole incident served to make them faster friends than ever.

Thus in varied employment and engagement the winter passed swiftly, Fergus growing more and more content to follow his father's will, until it seemed as if he had come to regard it as the Divine will, and to resign all thought of a missionary career.

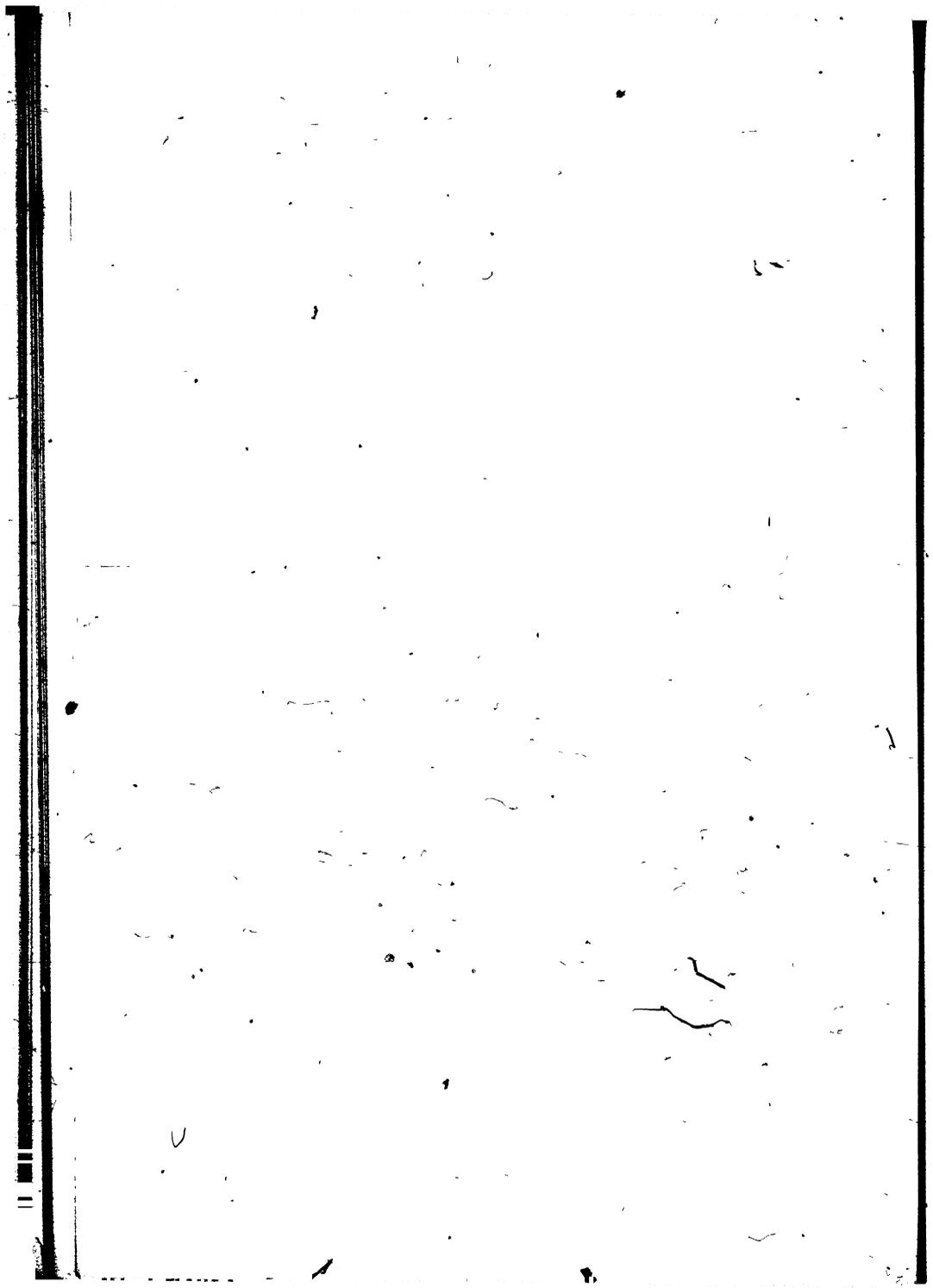
It was one of the most peaceful and prosperous winters in the history of the post. Not the slightest dispute of any kind had arisen between the officials and the Indians in their dealings. A larger quantity than usual of fine furs had been brought in. The profit and loss account would show an eminently satisfactory balance on the right side when the governor made his annual inspection. Altogether, the present aspect of affairs was most gratifying, and the future prospect most pleasing, when suddenly the dark shadow of a great peril fell upon Norway House, and blotted out the sunshine for many harrowing days.

Among the bands that came with furs to exchange for goods and ammunition was one from the far western edge of the district that depended upon this post. They were Crees, but of a poor class, and held much in contempt by the other bands. For that very reason, perhaps, Mr. MacTavish was inclined to show them a little extra kindness, and on this occasion allowed them to pitch their tents close under the lee of the Fort, and to have somewhat more freedom inside. Little did he imagine how his tenderness of heart was to be rewarded.

They had been in camp about a week, had bartered all their furs for goods, begged until everybody's patience was exhausted, and were about to take their departure, when for the first time they made known the fact that in their tepees were several sick, for whom they would like some of their white brother's medicine.



INDIAN CAMEL - Fig. 35



This came to Fergus' ears, and moved by sympathy for the sufferers, he posted off to get Mr. Olden, who had a well-equipped medicine chest, the contents of which he understood very well how to use.

Mr. Olden promptly responded to the call, and putting several remedies in his pocket, returned with Fergus to the Cree encampment. The old chief seemed very glad to see them, and led them at once to a squalid tepee, saying as he went :

"Her berry sick. Medicine man no good. Medicine man sick too. What good being medicine man if get sick too?" and he shook his grizzled head as though to imply that his faith in Indian medicine men was a thing of the past, and that he was quite ready to let the white medicine man try his skill.

The tent was so dark and full of smoke that neither the missionary nor Fergus, when they entered, could make out much more than that at the farther side somebody lay stretched out upon a bed of buffalo robes, and turned a pair of pleading, pathetic eyes toward them.

"Stay by the door a moment, Fergus," said Mr. Olden, "until I see what is the matter."

Advancing to the sufferer's side he knelt down by the rude couch, while the chief threw a handful of dry bark upon the fire, which then blazed up brightly, making the sick person's countenance distinctly visible for the first time. It was that of a girl of about eighteen years of age, and when the missionary looked upon it he gave a start and involuntarily

shrank back as though he dreaded being too near. Rising to his feet, he turned toward Fergus, and said in a quiet, yet commanding tone :

“Don't remain here another moment, Fergus. Go right outside the encampment, and wait for me. I will join you in a few minutes.”

Fergus, though much startled and surprised, obeyed at once, and at the farther edge of the cluster of tepees awaited the explanation of Mr. Olden's strange conduct.

It was not long before the missionary appeared. But instead of coming right up to Fergus, he halted when still some yards away, and said :

“Don't come any nearer, Fergus. Stand there, and I'll tell you what I mean. *That poor girl is dying with the smallpox!* God only knows whether or not you and I have caught the dreadful disease already. I earnestly pray that we have not. But we must be extremely careful. If it gets into the post who knows what the consequences will be? God grant that you have escaped the contagion. I was longer in the tent than you, so it would be best for you not to come near me. Go on ahead of me to the gate. We must give warning of the danger, and see what is to be done.”

Feeling very strangely at Mr. Olden's ominous words, Fergus went on to the gate, and as it happened, his father was just coming out. Before they got near one another, Mr. Olden called to him to stop, and then told him what had just occurred.

The chief trader at first was in a passion of indignant wrath. The artful concealment by the Indians of their having the awful plague in their midst seemed to him, as indeed it was, the blackest ingratitude. He had treated them with unusual kindness, and in view of their manifest poverty, had added some substantial gifts to what they were entitled to in the way of barter.

For a moment he completely lost his self-control, and a habit of his youth that had been under strict restraint ever since Fergus came to him broke forth for the first time. To the amazement of his listeners, a volley of curses was poured upon the Indians. Fergus was horrified. He had never before heard an oath issue from his father's lips, and a strange chill went to his heart, while a look came into his face that was not lost upon the man whose righteous wrath had led him into error.

But the missionary could better appreciate the situation. It was not so much a time for reproof, as for wise, sympathetic counsel.

"You are right to be angered, Mr. MacTavish," said he, gently. "The Indians have behaved very badly, and only God can tell where the mischief may end. But it is prayers, not curses, that are needed now, dear friend, and the best advice that your clear brain can give. Let us kneel just here, and together entreat the guidance of our loving Father in this great emergency."

Brought back to himself by these wise words,

instinct with serene faith in omnipotent love, the chief trader recovered from the fury which had possessed him, and with the tears springing to his eyes, sank upon his knees in the snow, while the missionary lifted up his voice in earnest petition for the help and direction of God.

It was a strange scene, as the three knelt apart before the gate, with the glory of the westering sun falling full upon their faces upturned to the heavens. Into the heart of the wilderness had come such a faith in the verity of the loving-kindness and tender mercy of the Lord, that the snow-covered plain was changed into the ante-room of the Almighty.

When Mr. Olden ceased, and they rose from their knees, the face of the chief trader was completely transformed. All signs of anger had left it, and had been replaced by a look of quiet self-control, of grave serenity. He and his were committed to the Creator's care. He could say, with assuring confidence: "The eternal God is my refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms."

Still keeping a goodly distance apart, the two men held counsel together as to what was the best course of action to pursue; and after various plans had been discussed, it was decided that Fergus should go home with his father, and be isolated in his own room until it could be known whether or not the contagion had affected him, and that Mr. Olden should not go home, but take up his quarters in the little church, where all necessary comforts could be provided for him from

his own house, and he could remain until his case declared itself.

This plan was carried out just as arranged. The father and son went home, to break the news as gently as possible to the mother, who, after the first shock had passed, hid her anxious heart beneath a composed, hopeful face. Fergus entered upon his imprisonment in his own room, the end of which no human eye could foresee, and the chief trader then hastened to have the needful precautions taken for the protection of the residents at the post.

The Indians were ordered off to the woods, every room which they had entered was thoroughly fumigated, the furs they had brought were immediately burned, and minute directions given as to what should be done in the event of any sign of the smallpox manifesting itself among the employees. Mr. MacTavish placed Mr. Barnston in as full charge of the post as if he himself were absent from it, and then shut himself up in his house, with his wife and son, to abide the issue of events.

No sooner did Papanakes hear of what had happened, and of what the missionary had decided to do, than the noblest instincts of his nature displayed themselves as they had never done before. Well did he know the dreadful disease which now threatened Norway House. Twenty years ago it had decimated his own tribe, leaving him the only survivor of his own family. But this harrowing experience did not daunt him now. The beloved

missionary must have some one to wait upon him—to be his messenger, and maybe his nurse. Why should Mrs. Olden hazard her life when he, Papanakes, was ready to fill the place?

With eager feet, he hastened off to the island, dragging behind him a toboggan laden with all his possessions,—his blankets, his robes, his rifle, his hunting knife and hatchet—just as though he were changing camp. And so he was. For he was determined to stay by Mr. Olden's side until the peril should be past.

The tears of gratitude filled Mr. Olden's eyes when the Indian appeared, and in his own succinct, positive way, stated the purpose of his coming.

"Me stay with missionary. Me not afraid of small-pox. Smallpox no touch me." And there was a glint of pride in his eye at the recollection of his passing unscathed through that awful visitation of twenty years ago.

"God bless you, Papanakes!" cried Mr. Olden, taking the old man's hand between both of his and pressing it warmly. "How glad I am you've come to me! I could not wish a more faithful attendant, and my dear wife will be content now not to expose herself and darling Ruth. Truly the Lord is already answering prayer."

Papanakes' dusky face gleamed with happiness through all its wrinkles. He had anticipated some opposition, and this prompt and cordial acceptance of his offer was a delightful surprise. In it his shrewd

sense recognised a loving trust on the part of the man whom he regarded as the best of all men that was wonderfully sweet to his soul. It seemed like a foretaste of that after life revealed to him by the missionary in which there would be no distinction of race or colour, but all would stand alike in the presence of Him who was no respecter of persons.

Mrs. Olden at first found it hard to consent to yielding her place to Papanakes. Who, indeed, could blame her for such a feeling? But, as her husband put it to her, speaking from an open window in the church, why should their only child be exposed to the danger of the contagion, as must be the case, unless, indeed, Papanakes were put in charge of her while Mrs. Olden went into quarantine with her husband? This, of course, was out of the question. Mrs. Olden could not help a smile at the very idea of it. So, reluctantly, and yet fully convinced that it was the best thing to be done, she fell in with the arrangement, and, like Mrs. MacTavish, concealing her keen apprehensions behind a calm exterior, sought to make poor little Ruth understand the situation without being terrified by it.

How full of anxiety were the days that followed, and alas! how surely were the worst fears in both homes realised! Neither Mr. Olden nor Fergus was to escape the noisome pestilence. On the ninth day after the visit to the plague-smitten encampment, Fergus' skin grew hot and dry, and his pulse ominously quickened.

All desire for food left him, and racking pains attacked him in the head and back.

He faced his fate with unflinching fortitude, for there was strength given him from on high. Among other things Mr. Olden had found time to say to him was this :

“If it please God that the disease should fasten upon you, Fergus dear, commit your whole case to Him, and do not permit yourself to worry as to the result. Be not afraid for the pestilence that walketh in darkness, nor for the destruction that wasteth at noon-day. My firm conviction is that God has a work for you to do, and that your time is still afar off. Think only of recovery. Strengthen your heart in the Lord from hour to hour, and He will surely perfect that which concerneth you.”

Fergus believed all this devoutly, and his steadfast composure was a wonderful comfort to both his father and mother. They deemed it a good augury, and it strengthened their hearts.

On the third day of his illness the dreaded spots of red appeared on his face and hands, and in his bright boyish way he sought to make light of them.

“Look, mother!” said he, holding up his hand all dotted over with points of crimson, “I’m spotted just like a leopard. I fear it’s small gain to my good looks.”

Mrs. MacTavish found it very hard to keep back the tears, but under pretence of arranging the window curtain she gained time to recover her self-control, and to answer in the same cheerful tone :

"You must not look in the mirror, Fergus darling, until the spots are all gone, or you might be frightened at yourself."

"Oh, mother, is it sae bad as that?" responded Fergus. "I'm verra glad Ruthie canna see me. I wadna like to frighten her. But," he asked with a sudden change from jocularly to sincere concern, "how is Mr. Olden to-day? Have you had word from the island?"

Mrs. MacTavish would have been glad to evade this question, but her son's eyes were eagerly watching her face, and she felt bound to answer him frankly.

"He's not at all well, Fergus. Nae doot the small-pox has taken him too. But God will take care of him, as He is taking care of you, dearie."

"Dear old Papanakes!" exclaimed Fergus, who had been told of the Indian's devotion. "How glad he must be that he can help Mr. Olden! He loves him so. I truly believe he thinks him the best man in all the world."

"He is one of the best, indeed, Fergus," said Mrs. MacTavish, adding with a sigh that would not be suppressed, "I'm fairly wearying to see him. He always does me good. How glad am I that e'er he came to Norway House!"

"And I'm sae glad too, mother," said Fergus, giving her a grateful look, for he loved to hear the missionary praised. "Oh! mother, mother!" he broke forth after a brief silence during which he had been thinking

deeply, "canna I be a missionary too? I dinna want to go into the Company."

For some time Mrs. MacTavish made no reply, but continued to look into her son's face, while her own countenance showed that a great struggle was going on within. The truth was that she had always felt more sympathy with his desire to be a missionary than her husband had. She was of a much more religious nature. Mere worldly success had not the same importance in her eyes that it had in his, and in response to Fergus' sudden appeal, so far as her own feelings went, she was quite ready to say :

"Ay, Fergus, ye can, if the good God spares you to us."

But she was an intensely loyal wife. Her husband's will was her law. Never had he required of her aught that conflicted with her conscience, and she gave him unswerving obedience. In this matter there was no doubt about his will. He had already marked out his son's future, and he regarded the "missionary notion," as he called it, as simply a romantic idea of boyhood. It would not, therefore, be right for her to say anything that would seem like a committal of herself to contrary views. Yet she feared to speak in a decidedly negative way, lest she should stir Fergus up to argument, and that was to be most carefully avoided in his already feverish condition.

"I scarcely know how to answer you, dearie," she said at last, in her tenderest tone. "Whatever is God's will is sure to be done, you know. Let us wait

a little while, Fergus. Dinna worry yersel' about it now. It will be all right, ye needna fear."

Although the words were indefinite enough in themselves, Fergus thought he caught in his mother's tone a note of sympathy with him in the great desire of his heart, and he threw his head back upon the pillow with a sigh of contented resignation, as though to say :

"Verra weel. I'll wait. I believe ye're on my side, my mother. *It will* be all right yet."

At the end of the first week of his illness the fever had left him, but the repulsive eruption was at its height, and he suffered intensely. The red dots spread and swelled and brought an intolerable itching. So strong was the temptation to tear at his tormented skin with his nails that, at his own request, his hands were fastened to his waist so that he could not use them, thus adding a fresh discomfort to his many miseries.

At times his mind would wander, and his parents, sitting beside his bed as he tossed to and fro, had such a revelation of his love for them as never before. His heart was exposed like an open book, but its pure pages held nothing they need hesitate to read. What did appear most plainly was the depth of his desire for a missionary life. Again and again he referred to it. Sometimes he conceived himself to be arguing with his father on the subject, and the earnestness with which he pleaded his cause was profoundly moving.

Mr. MacTavish felt it deeply, though he kept his own counsel. It was no easy thing for him to give up the great ambition of his life, even though he no longer could dismiss his son's longings for another career as a romantic notion of boyhood.

The days dragged wearily along amid unrelieved anxiety. Fergus' splendid constitution was making a brave stand against the fell disease, but the issue still hung in the balance. He was never left for one moment alone. Everything that love could do to soothe and strengthen him was done. Sleep came to him only in broken snatches. The torment of the itching was too great to allow of sound repose. The poor boy was in grievous case indeed. A few days more, and the question of life or death would be settled, and these days were anxious ones indeed.

CHAPTER XX.

OUT OF THE VALLEY OF THE SHADOW.

IN the meantime, how had matters been faring at the mission station? So far as Mr. Olden was concerned very much the same as at Norway House. The smallpox symptoms manifested themselves the day after they came to Fergus, and the disease had run its course in precisely similar fashion. Except that his wife's tender care was denied him, he lacked no comfort that his own home could afford. Papanakes watched over him with sleepless, untiring solicitude. The room was kept as warm and as neat as the old man could make it, and every direction given by Mr. Olden or his wife carried out with the most scrupulous accuracy.

It was beautiful to see the look of loving eager sympathy that never left the Indian's face. This waiting upon the missionary was the purest pleasure of his life. He never for one moment contemplated any other termination to the illness than triumphant recovery, and there was positive inspiration in the way this faith manifested itself in every word and act.

"Ah, Papanakes," Mrs. Olden would exclaim to

him when he came to the window to talk with her, his face full of serene hopefulness, "what a comfort you are to me! What would I do without you, and how can I ever be grateful enough to you?"

And the old man would smile as with a consciousness of superior knowledge, for though he would make no reply, in his heart he was saying:—

"You need not trouble yourself about that, Mrs. Olden. I am not doing this in order to be thanked for it. I am doing it to please myself, because it makes my heart happy to do it."

Fortunately too for Mrs. Olden, there was no ground for serious apprehension in her husband's case. He was blessed with a superb constitution. He had been in perfect health when the contagion fastened itself upon him. He possessed sufficient knowledge of medicine to use to the best advantage the excellent supply of remedies he had at hand, and what was most important of all, he never for a moment lost his self-command. The fever and suffering, although equally severe with him and with Fergus, did not succeed in affecting his mind, and he continued composed and patient, awaiting with sweet trustfulness the revelation of the Divine will concerning him.

Through Papanakes he was kept posted as to how it was going with Fergus from day to day, and gave directions for his treatment which were very helpful to his anxious parents. His one great trial was that he could not look upon the faces, nor hear the voices

of the wife and daughter who were so dear to him. But the knowledge of their safety, for so far there were no signs of the spreading of the pestilence, made this trial the easier to bear, and no murmuring passed his lips.

With Fergus the critical stage of the illness had been reached. The fever had spent itself, the painful pustules on his face had shrunk and dried up, the delirium had entirely departed, but oh! how weak he had become. His life seemed to be hanging by a single thread, and his parents could not bear to leave him for a moment, lest he should pass away during their absence.

He had come to the valley of the shadow of death, and his feet were treading the narrow path that led down into its mysterious depths. He perfectly understood his situation, but showed no signs of fear. His faith had triumphed over all human weakness. He was continually repeating the twenty-third Psalm, and especially that wonderful fourth verse: "Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for Thou art with me; Thy rod and Thy staff they comfort me."

"That verse is for me, mother," he would say, "just as much as if King David was thinking of me when he wrote it, and I am sae glad there is such a verse, for I dinna fear any evil, mother. It will be all right whatever happens, eh, mother dear?"

Poor Mrs. MacTavish! It was not easy for her to make him an answer in the same cheerful tone. Her

heart trembled at the very thought of parting with the boy she idolised. Surely, she argued to herself, it could not be God's will that one so bright, so good, so loving, the only child that had come to them, should be taken away just when life was opening out before him so full of promise. Not that her faith forsook her. There was no rebellion in her aching heart, only passionate pleading for her darling's recovery. If the blow must fall she would receive it with head bowed in submission. But must the blow fall? Could not the destroying angel stay his hand even yet?

With tremulous lips and misty eyes she bent over her boy, whose handsome face was now so pitifully marred by the brown blotches the pimples had left behind.

"It will be all right, dearie, whatever happens; but you know we want it to happen only in the one way." Then, unable to control herself any longer, she covered her face with her hands, and burst into tears, saying through her sobs:

"Oh, Fergus, darling, ye maunna leave us. We canna live without ye."

Fergus' eyes filled up, and his lips trembled at the sight of his mother's emotion.

"My ain dear mother," said he, soothingly. "I dinna want to leave ye even to go to heaven. You have always been sae gude to me, and I love you and father sae dearly. I have been a very happy boy all my life, haven't I, mother?"

"Indeed you have, dearie, and you've made us very happy too," responded Mrs. MacTavish. "And we want you to grow up to have a long and happy life as a man. Ye wad like that, wadn't ye, Fergus?"

Just then Mr. MacTavish, who had been seeking some much-needed rest, came into the room, and going over to the bedside, pressed his cool hand upon Fergus' flushed forehead.

"How good that feels, father!" said the young sufferer. "Ye're always sae gude to me."

"Nae better than ye'll be tae me, Fergus, when I'm an old man, and you're caring for me," returned the chief trader in as confident a tone as though there could be no doubt of his son reaching a good old age, and looking after him in his declining days.

Fergus visibly brightened at his father's words. They suggested a pleasant picture of the way in which he would be able to prove how fond and faithful a son he could be.

"I dinna like to think of your getting old and helpless, father," said Fergus, with an affectionate smile. "But I suppose there's nae helping that, and if God lets me live it's glad I'll be to take the best of care of you."

The talk went on in this way for some time, until at last Fergus grew tired, and fell asleep with his parents watching by his bedside like guardian angels.

Although Mr. MacTavish had from the first stoutly put away from his mind all thought of Fergus' illness having a fatal termination, there were times when even his strong heart was troubled, and he had to

contemplate so mournful a possibility. And now, as by the fading light of the day he studied his son's disfigured face, and saw how frail and weak he had become, a great terror seized upon him. It seemed as if his boy were slipping from his grasp in spite of all his efforts to retain him. He could almost imagine the angel of death standing by the bedside, with determined face and outstretched dart ready to strike, and in his supreme agony of mind he felt that there was nothing that he could give up, even to his own life, which he would not gladly surrender if only Fergus might be restored to health.

In the stress of his emotion he involuntarily uttered a groan that awakened Fergus from the light slumber into which he had fallen, and, starting a little, he inquired :

"What's the matter, father?" in a tone of some concern.

"Naething at all, my boy," replied Mr. MacTavish, striving to appear quite at his ease. "I just gave a bit of a grunt, that was all."

Satisfied with the answer, Fergus closed his eyes, and seemed to be dropping off into slumber again. But presently he roused up to ask about Mr. Olden, and whether Mrs. Olden or Ruth had been attacked by the smallpox.

Mr. MacTavish was glad to have only good news to tell. Both Mrs. Olden and Ruth were in the best of health, and the missionary had already shown signs of convalescence.

"He sent word by Papanakes that he'd be over to see you soon, unless you got well first, Fergus," added the chief trader, with a smile of fond encouragement.

"Oh, father, how glad I'd be to see him!" exclaimed Fergus, his face brightening at the idea. "I'm fairly wearying for him."

"Dinna ye think your mother and me gude enough company, Fergus?" asked Mr. MacTavish, in a bantering way.

"Aye, indeed, that I do," was the prompt retort. "But, you know, I love Mr. Olden dearly too. Ye dinna mind that, I'm sure, father."

"No, my boy, not a bit. We arena jealous. I was but teasing ye a bit," answered his father.

Fergus then lay silent for a while. It was evident he was thinking deeply, and so as not to disturb his thoughts, his parents did not speak either to him or to one another.

After some minutes' silence he seemed to gather himself together for a great effort. Evidently he was about to say something to which he attached special importance. With throbbing hearts his parents awaited his words. Turning towards his father, he began with a tremor in his tone that showed how deep was his emotion:

"Father, I'm verra, verra ill, am I not? Ye canna tell me for sure whether I'll get well again or no?"

Mr. MacTavish made as though he would say something here, but Fergus hastened on:

"Now, father, if I do get well it will be because

we've all asked God about it, and He has answered our prayers, winna it?"

Mr. MacTavish nodded assent, and the boy proceeded :

"Then, father, if God gives me back my health and strength, wadna it be only right for me to spend them in His work, instead of going into the service of the Company?"

The question could not have been more simply or squarely put. This, then, was the thought that had been on his mind, and which he had kept back until it would be no longer suppressed. Evidently his whole heart was behind the question, and there was something pathetic beyond description in the eagerness with which he awaited his father's reply.

That reply did not come at once. After a searching look into his boy's face, Mr. MacTavish threw himself back in his chair in an attitude of intense thought, and a stillness fell upon the three so profound that they might almost have heard the beating of each other's heart. Mrs. MacTavish's fingers played nervously with the fringe of the plaid shawl that draped her shoulders; Fergus, with his eyes fixed upon his father, seemed scarcely to breathe as he awaited his answer. The old clock above the plain mantelpiece ticked on in solemn, steadfast indifference to the varied emotions of those before it. At last the chief trader spoke :

"Fergus, my son," said he, in a quiet tone that hid a victory hardly won, "it's a hard question you hae

asked of me. You're my only bairn, and I had thought ye wad grow up to take my place in the Company, and maybe, if Providence was kind, rise higher than I ever can. Ye wad hae far more to help ye, Fergus, than e'er I had. My heart was in it—ay, my heart was in it, and it's nae light thing for me to gie it a' up noo. There was naething wrang about it; surely it was an honest ambition. But what can I say?" He went on after a slight pause, during which it was evident he had difficulty in keeping his self-control:

"Ye're in the hands of God now. We canna tell His will concerning you—and maybe this is His way o' tellin' me that He wants you for His service."

Fergus' face brightened at this. His father noticed it, but continued in the same quiet tone:

"God knows I dinna want to run downright contrary to His will. But when ye talked aboot being a missionary I wasna sure that it might not be a notion that ye wad soon get over. But I see your heart is in it, and maybe ye are called by God to it, just like Samuel and David. Well, Fergus, I maunna say I'm not sair disappointed at giving up a' my bonnie plans for you—that wad be saying mair than the truth. But I willna stand in your way any longer. If the Lord gie ye back yer health and strength again, you may have your will, and may God's ain blessing be with ye."

Having thus spoken, the chief trader buried his shaggy face in his hands for a moment, and then

lifting it again, passed his palms across his cheeks as though wiping something from them. It was a characteristic gesture with him, and signified that that was the end of the matter. He had declared his mind, and however keen might be his regret at giving up what he had so fondly cherished, there would be no reversal of his decision.

Fergus' face glowed with joy. His father's full consent had been won at last. He could hardly speak for a moment. The revulsion of feeling had been rather too much for him in his weak state. But presently he said in a broken way :

"Oh, father, I'm sae glad—sae glad. Now I know that I'll get well again. Just see if I don't."

Then his head fell back upon the pillow, and his eyes closed, and although his lips continued to move, no sound came from them. He was completely exhausted by the stress of emotion.

Mrs. MacTavish sprang from her chair with an exclamation of alarm. But her husband laid his hand soothingly upon her arm :

"Dinna be scairt, Ailie. He's only weary. Let him sleep a bit, and he'll be a' richt."

The chief trader was correct. It was simply weariness, not any change for the worse in his condition. He at once fell sound asleep, and slept for many hours.

When he awoke there were cheering signs of improvement. His eyes were brighter, his voice firmer, his pulse stronger. His parents hardly dared

say to one another how hope was springing up in their hearts, lest it should after all be baffled. But when the following morning Fergus' symptoms were still more favourable, they felt it no longer necessary to restrain themselves, and rejoiced with him and with each other over the welcome change, not forgetting to lift up heart and voice in devout thankfulness to God for having given their darling back to them. Thenceforward there was no pause in Fergus' progress toward complete recovery, and at the end of a month only the brown blotches on the face remained to tell of his narrow escape from the fell pestilence.

True to his word, Mr. Olden came to see him long before he was able to venture out himself, and they had a little thanksgiving service together over the tender mercy of their Divine Father, and over the way being now open for Fergus to fulfil the purpose that was so dear to the missionary and to himself.

"Do you remember, Fergus," said Mr. Olden, "how I told you to be patient, and not to oppose your father's will, for if it was God's will that you should be a missionary instead of a chief trader, or maybe a governor, He would certainly bring it to pass in His own good way, and at His own time? There is no use in our trying to hurry up God, Fergus. We are apt to be so impatient, you know—to think our own concerns of so much importance, worthy of such prompt attention at the hands of Providence—and, perhaps we never find it quite so hard to wait as when we are very

clear in our minds that what we propose will be for the glory of God and the good of our fellow-men. Ah! Fergus, this waiting for God to bring things to pass just as we want them, it is a lifelong lesson. Maybe we will never learn it perfectly. And yet how often we are fain to laugh at ourselves for needless worrying because the Lord would not be good enough to make clear to us to-day what was to happen the day after to-morrow."

Fergus knew well enough that the missionary meant this little sermon quite as much for himself as for his listener, and the consciousness of this shared responsibility was therefore not so embarrassing.

"You make me feel ashamed of myself, Mr. Olden," said he. "For indeed I was o'er impatient, but it is all right now, and I'm verra-happy."

They had a long talk together over his future. It would be very different now from a clerkship in the Company. He would have to go away for a course of study and training, and then there would be no more of the open life of the wilderness until he returned to it as his field of labour.

But there was plenty of time yet for all this to be arranged. His health must be perfectly restored first, and not until autumn came round again need he bid good-bye to Norway House. When discussing ways and means some days afterward, the chief trader suggested that the best plan would be to await Sir George's annual visit, as then perhaps he might offer to take Fergus back to Montreal with him, and make

arrangements there for his entering upon the course of study to be desired in view of his entering the ministry.

This plan commended itself to everybody's approval, and in the meantime, while awaiting its fulfilment, Fergus was given full permission to take any part in assisting the missionary at his work that Mr. Olden might see fit to intrust him with.

The summer that followed was a very happy one for Fergus. He was constantly with Mr. Olden teaching in the school, accompanying the missionary on his trips inland or down the lake to preach the Gospel at Indian camps far from Norway House, and sometimes even preaching little sermons himself to the younger red folk, when none but they were there to hear him.

His parents had not so happy a summer. Mr. MacTavish could not help sharp twinges of regret from time to time at the frustration of his plans, and Mrs. MacTavish looked forward to the approaching separation between herself and her darling boy with a shrinking that refused to be overcome. A large part of the sunshine of her life would go with him, for much as she loved her husband she was necessarily unable to share in his chief interests to any great extent, and since Fergus had grown up she had found ever-increasing delight in his companionship.

Never did summer seem to pass so quickly. It was a particularly fine season, and Fergus ever after looked back to it as one of the brightest periods in his life.

The thought of going away from Norway House to see the civilised world, and to learn its ways, gave him a certain sense of dignity, while at the same time it led him to prize the more highly what might be his last opportunity for many a year of enjoying the glorious out-door life that had been his almost from the cradle.

Dear old Papanakes was much in his company. As soon as Mr. Olden was strong enough to resume his work, and to go out in quest of Indians who did not come to hear him at the mission station, his faithful attendant gave him to understand that he proposed henceforth to be with him in health as well as in sickness, and that wherever he went he would go also. To this the missionary had not the slightest objection. On the contrary, he was only too glad to have the loving service of the best hunter, canoe-man, and guide in the district. It meant a vast saving of time and thought on his part, and a corresponding gain to his work.

The two men and the young lad were the closest of friends. They talked much together on the subject that was nearest their hearts, the Indian saying least, but listening with grave attention, and not hesitating to ask a question when the conversation went beyond his depth. They had some thrilling adventures together, too, during that summer, more than once being in peril of their lives, and escaping as it seemed only through the direct intervention of Providence.

"Ah! Fergus dear," said Mr. Olden after one of

these exciting experiences, when a sudden storm caught them in a small canoe far out upon the lake, and almost overwhelmed them, "sure am I that God has some great work for you. He has given His angels charge over thee to keep thee in all thy ways. I can never be glad enough that your father has consented to your going into the missionary work."

The conviction that God had honoured him by calling him to a place among His workers was very strong with Fergus himself, and it filled him with a strange sense of elation that savoured not of pride nor self-conceit, but rather of awe mingled with gratitude for the signal favour God had thus shown toward him.

He looked forward to the coming of Sir George with feelings in which were mingled pleasure at the thought of seeing his kind friend again, and apprehension as to just what he would think of his giving up all ideas of going into the service of the Company. Mr. Wadham's polished chaffing was also in his mind. He knew he could not altogether escape that, and he felt half ashamed of himself because of the sensitiveness that made him shrink from meeting the sarcastic secretary.

It was early in September before the governor made his appearance. He had left Norway House to the last of his tour, and when he arrived was not in very good humour, owing to the fact that the returns made by the different districts were not altogether satisfactory, there being a marked falling off as compared with the preceding year.

Observing that he was out of sorts, Mr. MacTavish had not intended to say anything about Fergus until Sir George should have time to rest, and possibly gain a happier mood. He quite anticipated the governor's disapproval, and would indeed have welcomed it did he not feel himself to be under a most solemn obligation to stand true to his expressed assent.

In the evening they were all sitting together in the chief trader's parlour, Sir George, Mr. Wadham, Mr. and Mrs. Olden, and the MacTavishes. Sir George, still in a somewhat grumpy mood, although he had done justice to an excellent dinner, was asking a number of questions about affairs at the Fort, and unhappily the answers the chief trader had to give did not tend to make the great man more amiable, as the smallpox visitation had seriously interfered with business for a time, and the returns from the post were not much better than those which had been received from the forts in the West.

After this had gone on for some little time, Sir George, as if to change a subject which he did not find quite agreeable, addressed himself abruptly to Fergus with the question :

"Well, my young man, I suppose this is your last summer's idling. You're going to begin your clerkship in the Company this winter, are you not?"

The sudden question completely disconcerted Fergus. He had been expecting that his father would explain how matters stood, and thus break the ice for him, so to speak. But now, in the presence of

all, he was called upon to break the ice himself, and he was in sore straits as to just how to begin. The colour mounted to his forehead, His tongue seemed to be tied, and the air of the room grew strangely oppressive.

Sir George noticed his confusion, and mistaking the cause of it, proceeded to rally him upon what he conceived to be a disinclination on his part to begin work in earnest.

"Oh, ho!" said he. "You look as though you did not altogether like the idea. Haven't you had enough play? You're quite a young man now, you know."

Fergus at this found his tongue, and managed to answer in a low, hesitating tone:

"'Tisna that, Sir George. I dinna want to play any more. But, if you please, sir, I'm no going to be a clerk at all."

A look of lively surprise came over the governor's face at these words, and turning from Fergus to his father, he asked with an accent having more than a hint of asperity:

"Is the boy speaking right, Mr. MacTavish? Surely you have no idea of letting him have his own way about that foolish missionary notion—a mere bit of boyish sentiment on his part, I take it."

The explanation could no longer be delayed, and with his wife's assistance the chief trader proceeded to tell the whole story from the start, Fergus all the time intently scanning Sir George's rugged countenance to note the effect of the narration upon him.

Sir George listened with grave, courteous attention. However little weight he might be disposed to give to the arguments and influences which had swayed his subordinate, there could be no doubt of the latter's sincerity, and for his sake he would show no lack of respect for his conduct in the matter.

Nevertheless, it was plain the story failed to convince him. He took a hard, common-sense view of the whole affair. Fergus had been impressed by Mr. Olden, as well he might be. He had conceived the idea of taking up the same life-work. During his illness this idea had filled his mind to the exclusion of other things. Thanks to a fine constitution and the best of nursing, he had been brought back to health, and now he must needs imagine that God had spared his life solely because He wanted him for a missionary. A highly creditable but altogether illogical conclusion, there being not the slightest connection between the two things.

Sir George said all this in a tone utterly free from offence, but full of clear conviction as to his having precisely the right view of the matter. Mr. Wadham said nothing, but it was evident he heartily concurred with Sir George.

Realising that the chief trader, unused as he was to the arts of discussion, would be hard set to answer the governor, and would therefore be very glad to be relieved of the responsibility, Mr. Olden asked, with a deferential bow :

“ Might I venture, Sir George, to make the other

side of the case a little fuller than Mr. MacTavish has done? Possibly it may then appear to you in a different light."

"I shall be very glad to give you my attention, Mr. Olden," replied the governor, setting himself back in his chair as though to say, "Now, go ahead."

The missionary then reviewed the history of his coming to Norway House, and what had followed thereupon. He told with kindling eyes and glowing cheeks of what wonderful victories the Gospel had already won, and of the brilliant promise of the future—how the poor red men, hitherto left to die in dog-like ignorance of the Saviour of mankind, heard the Word gladly, and would ask him with piercing reproach: "Why did you not bring this good news before?" He declared the change wrought in Papanakes, and told of his heroic fidelity when he, Mr. Olden, was smitten with the smallpox. And then, calling Fergus to him, and putting his hand upon his head, he said:

"This boy, Sir George, I believe with all my heart is a chosen vessel of the Lord. He has received as indubitable a call as Samuel of old. Worthy and honourable as the service of the Company is, you will, I am sure, pardon me, sir, if I venture to assert that the service of the Lord is more worthy and honourable still. The boy's heart is in it. He will never be happy—never be aught but a distorted growth in any other field; but as a bearer of the glad tidings to the Indians of the great region over which

you have charge, he will realise the best that is in himself, and the best that God has for him."

As Mr. Olden spoke with a fire and eloquence born only of intense earnestness, a marked change took place in Sir George's countenance. Little by little his features lost their hard expression. It was evident that the matter was presenting itself to him in a different light, and, if not quite convinced, he was at least ready to admit that there was much to be said on the other side.

When Mr. Olden had finished, Sir George rose up, knocked the ashes out of the pipe that had gone out while he was listening so intently, and proceeding to refill it from his tobacco pouch, said in a thoughtful tone:

"There's a great deal in what you have said, Mr. Olden, and I shall take pleasure in thinking it over."

When they parted for the night, Mr. Olden whispered in Fergus' ear:

"We must pray a great deal for Sir George. He can help us very much if he comes over to our side."

In the morning what the governor would have to say was awaited with intense interest, and when he did make known his mind, Mr. Olden ejaculated under his breath:

"Verily, thou art a God that hearest prayer!"

Sir George's announcement was most satisfactory. He would no longer oppose Fergus' preference for the life of a missionary over that of a fur trader. On the contrary, he would further his interests in that

direction just as he had purposed doing in the other. If Fergus would accompany him to Montreal, he would see to his having the best obtainable educational advantages, and otherwise being thoroughly well looked after, in order that he might make fitting preparation for the life-work he had chosen.

So it all came about just as had been hoped. A few days later, amid the tears and prayers and blessings of his parents and the Oldens, Fergus set out with Sir George for the city of Montreal. The voyage thither was smoothly and swiftly accomplished, and ere the first snow fell he had entered upon the course of study which would occupy his attention for the next four years.

How he won honour after honour at college, not missing the esteem of his instructors, nor even the warm regard of his fellow-students; how he was ordained to the Christian ministry, and then, to his unbounded delight, appointed assistant to Mr. Olden at Norway House; how joyous was the meeting there after the long years of separation; how in due time he came to have a snug home of his own upon the island, with Ruth for a loving, happy helpmate; how the good work among the Indians extended far and wide throughout the wilderness until there were many mission stations, shining like lighthouses amid the gloom of paganism; how he tenderly cared for his parents as old age crept upon them, and made

smooth their pathway to the river's brink, cannot be told in these pages.

His was a long and beneficent life, not without its share of shade as well as of sun, but underneath its trials and troubles lay the peace that passeth all understanding, undisturbed as are the ocean depths by the storms that rage above. And never for one moment had he cause to call in question the wisdom of his answer, when to the Divine summons he replied :

“ Here am I, Lord, ready to do Thy will.”

THE END.

