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COMRADES, THREE!

A Story of the Canadian Prairies

By

ARGYLL SAXBY

Author of
"The Taming of the Rancher;" "Brave Toviak;"
"Braves, White and Red," etc.

WITH SIX ILLUSTRATIONS BY ERNEST PRATER

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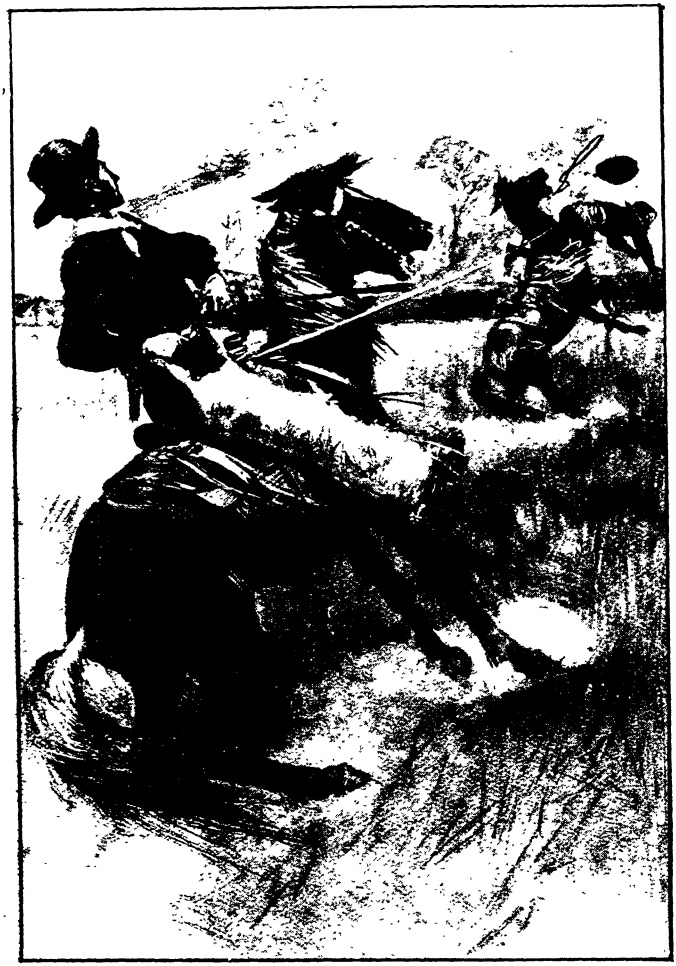

"THE BOY'S MARE REARED STRAIGHT UP ON HER HIND LEGS, THROWING THE RIDER VIOLENTLY TO THE GROUND."

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LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

Dedicated

TO

JESSIE M. E. SAXBY,

MY MOTHER.

COMRADES THREE!

CHAPTER I.

A RACE WITH DEATH.

IT was springtime—that season when the prairie, valley, and woodland each put on a glorious, verdant robe, and when the flowers fairly start out of the ground and laugh with joy that the cold months of winter have passed. The musk-rat and beaver then begin to repair their homes that the ice and flood have tried to wreck. The chipmunks skip from branch to branch in the bush as you pass, and chirrup a joyful challenge to you to chase them. Ducks resume their chatting parties in the creeks; skylarks soar high above the tree tops and circling buzzards; and your broncho raises his head at intervals, with distended nostrils, sniffing the aroma of the living earth, then tugs at the rein with a longing to stretch his limbs across the prairie with the sheer delight of conscious life.

Nowhere in all the world is springtime such

a spring as Canada can boast. It seems but yesterday when the cold white silence of winter wrapped all in a mantle of death. And then to-day it seems that Nature puts forth all her strength, throws aside the clinging pall, and stands upright—strong, fragrant, and smiling in hopeful youth.

Such must be the thoughts of everyone who knows Canada with more than a mere bowing acquaintanceship, and such were Fred Calvert's thoughts one morning as he rode leisurely along the trail that led through the bush by the silver river that flows in the bed of the Wascana Valley.

True, such dreaming thoughts seemed unsuitable for one who was five miles from his ranch, hunting a bunch of bronchoes that had strayed from the home herd during the night. Under such circumstances one might have supposed that an anxious mind would breed more practical thoughts, such as the possible tracks to be found where the moist trail would retain traces of hoof-prints. But Calvert was an English youth whose seventeen years of life on English soil and four on the North-West still retained the Cornishman's love for the beautiful and his love for romance. Though his dress, the broncho, the Mexican saddle, and the lariat, all spoke of the thorough rancher that he had become, there was that in the blue of his eyes that reflected the blue seas that thrash the rugged shores of his

native home. He was a young Cornish giant, every inch of him, clothed in the cowboy's garb that added to his manliness without burying his nationality.

So, for the time, he forgot the quest that had taken him so far from his shanty.

Perhaps he was dreaming somewhat of the pasties and cream that he had forsaken at the call of Johnnie-cakes and maple syrup. Perhaps (and more probably) he was just revelling in the picture that the Master Artist had painted. But whatever his thoughts might have been, they were certainly happy ones, for he just allowed his horse to pursue its way at will, while his lips smiled contentedly and his eyes looked into distance, seeing everything, yet observing nothing.

Following the winding trail, he rounded a cluster of trees, and then his wandering thoughts received a sudden check, for, without any warning, he found himself close to another rider, who was allowing his horse also to move at ease while he sat idly in the saddle with the reins lying loosely on the horse's neck.

The second rider was a boy of little more than fifteen years of age—Stewart Edyvean was his name. He, also, was dressed in the suitable garb of the West, and there was no mistaking the sturdy set of his figure, the honest blue eyes, and the lips that seemed to be ever twitching to let free a laugh—there was no mistaking these

for evidences of a thoroughly British boy, bred in an English public school that had painted him from head to foot with the sign "gentleman." Like Calvert, he, too, seemed to be fascinated by his surroundings, but, unlike the former, he was evidently a novice, for no one but a tenderfoot ever trusts the uncertain temper of the quietest broncho by allowing it the freedom of a loose rein.

So quiet had been Calvert's approach on the soft soil, that his coming had been unheard by the idle horse and rider. Being on the lea-side, even the broncho had not scented the stranger.

Calvert expressed his surprise in a fairly loud "Hullo!" not very vehement, perhaps, but quite sufficiently audible and sudden to startle the idle pair who believed themselves safe from any interruption in their solitude.

At the first sound of the stranger's voice, the boy's mount threw up her head and leaped to one side as though she had been struck by a bullet. The lad made a grab to regain the reins, but the sudden action only added to the animal's fright. She reared in the air, lashed out with her forefeet, then leaped forward with the bit between her teeth, and in another moment was tearing madly across the plain straight for that part where the river had cut its way through the soft soil, leaving naked banks thirty feet deep on either side.

A mere flash of time served the young rancher's mind to grasp the truth, and as quickly he planned actions. It was plain to see that the boy was no adept in baulking the tricks of bronchoes. Plainer still was the truth that the mad creature would only stop its wild course when she was faced by the river bank. That would mean death to rider and steed!

But Bess was under perfect control—a herd horse trained to race or stand at the word.

"On, Bess!" he shouted, and at the sound the mare darted forward like an arrow from the bow. Then with steady deftness he loosened the lasso from the thong that held it at the front of the saddle, and fastened one end to the pommel before him. His spurs dug into the mare's sides, and doubled her paces on the instant. And from that moment began one of those races the like of which is never seen on any course but that which seems to have Death for the winning post.

The boy's horse had a good start of its pursuer, but after the first frantic dash she verged a little from the direct route taken at the outset, thus giving Calvert a chance to gain a few valuable yards in the contest.

From the beginning, the lad managed to retain his seat, and pluckily struggled to control the frightened steed. But these efforts only served to add to the horse's terror, until at

length the boy could do little more than sit tight and hope for the best, intending to throw himself from the saddle as soon as the option of the rocks and torrent was inevitable.

"Now, Bess, now! On! on!" cried Calvert, bending down to give less resistance to air; and the brave mare, seeming to understand the motive of the desperate chase, strained the more in obedience to the words.

A mile more to the river!

The distance between the riders was still considerable, but it was lessening with every stretch of the sinewy limbs.

"Keep it up, Bess! We are gaining every second!"

The spurs sank deep again into the already streaming flesh; a faint murmur of pain came from the brave mare, though her breathing was still sound, and the distance between the riders decreased to fifty yards, though the rush of the river could now be heard above the wind that whistled past the rider in his flight.

"Courage, youngster! Courage!" called Calvert. And in answer, the boy turned a face of horror towards his pursuer.

"What can he do? What can save me now?" were the thoughts that flashed through his mind. But his heart gained a little strength as he saw Bess creeping nearer and nearer—not a speck of foam on her lips; not a pant from the

brave form that would die rather than be beaten in this race for life.

Only some fifty more yards to the river!

"Bend close!" cried Calvert. "Hold on for your life, but clear your stirrups for a fall!"

Though hardly understanding the meaning of the order, the boy bent close to the horse's neck, and clung with the obedience of fear.

Then, for a moment only, Calvert sat upright in the saddle, allowing the reins to hang on the pommel while he gripped the coil of raw-hide lasso in his left hand with the six-foot loop in his right.

One, two, three times the loop was swung above him in the air until it opened wide in a circle. Then came a whizzing sound as the lasso flashed from the deft hand; a sure aim carried the noose over the mad broncho's head; and at a word Bess stopped so quickly that Calvert was nearly jerked from the saddle. Immediately came a sudden tauting of the lariat like the twang of a violin string. But the hide was strong, and Bess knew her work when she felt the strain on the pommel, for she sat back on her haunches, and dug her fore-hoofs into the ground. The boy's mare gave vent to a choking scream, reared straight up on her hind legs, throwing the rider violently to the ground as she did so. Then she came crashing backwards, and fell lifeless with a broken neck—not six yards from the steep bank and rocks of the river.

CHAPTER II.

OLD CHUMS.

CALVERT was only an instant in dismounting. A glance at the prostrate mare had been sufficient to indicate that she was beyond need of help, for her neck had been broken by the terrible tug of the lariat and the backward fall. All the rescuer did was to free the lasso, and then hurry to the boy who was lying motionless on the long grass.

On first sight Fred's heart sank, for the lad's pale face and bleeding forehead, together with the inert position in which he lay, all suggested that the rescue had been in vain.

He knelt down and raised the lad's head to rest on his knee. He felt the heart, and to his joy found that it still beat—very weakly, but still enough to show that life still flickered in spite of the terrible fall that would have dashed the breath out of all but a sturdy Cornish frame.

Taking off his coat and rolling it up to form a pillow, Calvert placed Stewart in as comfortable a position as the circumstances would permit. Afterwards he took his handkerchief and scaled

down the steep bank of the river to soak the linen in the water. Quickly returning, he squeezed a little of the water upon the boy's white lips, and wiped the blood from the wound on the forehead. The touch of the moisture was cool and soothing, and to the young rancher's delight he soon saw the colour beginning to creep back into the sufferer's cheeks.

"That's better, old man," he said encouragingly, and the words seemed to recall the wandering senses, for the eyelids were slowly raised, and two blue eyes looked up vacantly.

"Where am I? What's the matter?" he muttered feebly.

"You're perfectly safe, old chap. You've had a slight accident—not very much, fortunately; and if you just lie still for a while you'll soon be right as a trivet again," was Calvert's answer.

The lad closed his eyes again, and remained silent and motionless for some moments.

"My head—it aches," he said after a time. "Am I hurt? And Dandy—the mare?"

"She has suffered the penalty for her bad behaviour. And serve her jolly well right, too, for she might have killed you. By good luck you've got off with a slight cut on your brow—more blood than cut, luckily."

The light of recollection seemed to be creeping back into Stewart's mind, for his face began to

brighten and lose the recent expression of vacancy.

"Oh, yes; I remember now. Dandy bolted with me, and you came after on your mare like the wind. I remember hearing the river on the rocks—hearing you calling, and seeing you swinging the lariat. After that, everything turned black; but—but surely you saved my life?"

The boy's voice trembled with the force of intense gratitude, and his weak fingers crept forward to grip one of the strong brown hands that was lying on his breast.

Calvert blushed shamefacedly, as most brave chaps do when their bravery is discovered.

"Rot, old man! A good mare under me, and a lucky cast of the lasso—what are these? Don't you worry on that score."

"Still, it was your hand that guided the lasso," the other persisted.

"Humph!" Fred grunted with self-depreciation. "Do you think a Cornishman was going to be beaten in any sort of race without a good struggle for the winning-post?"

The effect of these last words was miraculous, for at the word "Cornishman" Stewart gave a start—thoroughly roused from his stupor.

"Cornishman!" he exclaimed with excitement. "Did you say 'Cornishman'? Why, I'm from Wadebridge!"

"You don't say so?" returned Fred with equal astonishment. "I am from Launceston—an old Dunmere boy!"

"Dunmere!" was the echo. It was indeed a morning of events and surprises. "Why, that's my old school, and my brother Dick's!"

That intimation was an illumination to Calvert, but he was hardly able to credit the coincidence at first.

"Not Dick Edyvean of Trevanson?" he ejaculated.

"Middle stump, first ball!" was the ready confirmation of the surmise.

"Why, then, we're old chums!" was Fred's next remark. "Old Dick Edyvean was my fag when he was a junior, and I think I remember you coming the year before I left. Your name ought to be 'Stewart.'"

"Right—and yours?"

"Calvert—Fred Calvert."

"Who helped Wadebridge to lick Penzance in a cup-tie—nine goals to *nil?*"

"The same," replied Fred, with a little pardonable pride in the admission. "But enough of introductions. Our first business is to get you home. How far is it to your shak?"

"About three or four miles, I should think," was the reply.

Calvert shook his head with mock seriousness.

"I'm not particularly fond of walking," he said

regretfully. "But I suppose what must be cannot be avoided."

Stewart raised his eyes questioningly.

"Why need you walk? You have got your mare, have you not? Or has she bolted?"

At this question Fred could not restrain a light laugh.

"Bolted! Bess bolt! Why, she'd as soon think of flying to the skies. No, no, my son. It was of you I was thinking. Fact is—though you've not had time to notice it—your mare was killed by my lariat, and serve her jolly well right, as I said before, for trying on such pranks with a Dunmere boy."

Young Edyvean's face fell considerably at this announcement. Calvert naturally thought that the lad was mourning for his personal loss, and ventured to express his sympathy. But he was undeceived.

"You needn't be sorry for me!" was the indignant retort. "To me it does not matter a scrap. It was Dick I was thinking about. He will be beastly disappointed when he knows this, for we've not been over lucky since we came West. Yes, he'll feel this loss very much."

But Calvert had comfort at hand.

"I think not," was his brief comment.

"Not? Why, of course he will! We can't afford to buy bronchoes to-day and chuck them away to-morrow. And we've found that setting

up house on the prairie costs a deal more than the emigration pamphlets lead one to believe."

"Still," persisted Calvert, "if Dick is the dear old chap that he used to be, it's my opinion that he'll care less for the death of an old crock than for the safety of his brother. Don't you worry, old man. I know Dick, and you know him, too, by the tone in which you speak of him."

"Dick's one of the best!" interrupted Stewart with genuine enthusiasm, to which Fred rejoined: "There never was a better to my knowledge. But now about this trip. Do you feel well enough to ride my mare if I walk alongside?"

"I think so," said Stewart, and at the same time he made an effort to rise, but immediately fell back faint upon Calvert's arm.

"Come, come!" remonstrated his friend kindly. "You mustn't go playing the fool like that. See; you lie quite still and I'll lift you up in my arms."

Suiting the action to the word, Calvert passed his arms under the lad and managed to raise him. Then he whistled to his mare. A short neigh from near at hand answered the summons, and in half a minute Bess trotted up to her master's side.

"Now, Bess, you must walk very slowly and steadily," said the young rancher as he eased his charge on to the saddle. "You've got

another Dunmere chap for a guest, so be on your best behaviour." Then to Stewart: "How's that, old boy? Quite comfy?"

"All right, thanks," returned Stewart, pluckily trying to overcome the tendency to faintness that refused to be shaken off all at once.

"Then, just sit tight. Bess will walk by me without steering. And if you feel like falling, fall on me. I can stand it."

Talking brightly to make Stewart forget his pain, Fred started Bess on the way. The mare, on her part, seemed to understand the responsibility of her trust, for she moved as easily as a ship on a lake—carefully avoiding badger-holes and anything else that might roughen the path for the comfort of her charge. It was a considerable journey under the circumstances, but Calvert was patient and cheerful, and Stewart was plucky, after the manner of his Cornish forebears.

By and by the travellers came to a bend of the trail by a certain poplar bluff.

Here Edyvean called a halt.

"Our house is just a hundred yards or so on the flat beyond this," he explained. "See! There's Dick through the trees standing at the door of the shanty—on the lookout for me, most likely. I'll ride on ahead, and you can follow after, if you don't mind. It would scare the old boy out of his life if he were to see me

arrive on a strange broncho and leaning upon you."

Without waiting for assent to his wish, Stewart then suddenly "pulled himself together." He gathered up the reins, and with a touch of his heels set the mare cantering round the bluff towards the house.

Dick, who was some five years older than Stewart, had been expecting his brother for some time, and now, as the boy approached, he stepped forward.

"Why, Stewart, what a time you have been! I was beginning to fear that something had happened to you."

"Oh, I'm all right!" returned the boy cheerfully, as he neared his brother. "I've had a wonderful adventure. I met old Calvert of Dunmere—and—he—we——"

The last words were lost in a faint moan. The horse stopped before the door in obedience to a pull on the rein. Then Stewart swayed in the saddle, and Dick had just time to spring forward and catch his brother as he rolled from the mare's back, fainting and deathly white.

CHAPTER III.

CONFIDENCES.

WITH a heart filled with all sorts of strange fears, Dick quickly carried his brother into the house.

Heedless of the horse left unfastened outside —not even observing the unfamiliar animal or its trappings—he gave all his attention to the boy, gently forcing him to drink a little water, and bathing his brow where the dry blood was visible under the fair hair.

The attack of faintness was only slight, however, and soon Stewart was able to sit up and give a rapid account of himself. It was a most disjointed story; but it contained the main facts of the morning's adventure, and included the astonishing tale of the meeting with Calvert.

"If it had not been for Calvert, I should have been killed for certain," he concluded. "Calvert saved my life, and—by the way, where is Calvert?"

With this sudden question the speaker stopped, and Dick, thus abruptly recalled to the knowledge that there were other duties to be attended

to besides those that immediately concerned his brother, hastened to the door and looked out.

And there was the young hero himself! He was standing beside Bess, smoking, while he re-lengthened the stirrup-leathers to suit his longer limbs. Seemingly he was as unconcerned as if saving lives were everyday occurrences with him.

Dick was by his old friend's side in an instant.

"Calvert, old chap! I am glad to see you!" he exclaimed, running forward, and immediately beginning to wring his old friend's hand.

The fervent grip was returned with no lessening of fervency, though the remark that accompanied it was characteristic.

"Sandow's Developer has done wonders in strengthening your power of grip! I remember you were just beginning to take it up when I left Dunmere. Do you still keep it going?"

But Dick's delight at meeting with his old friend left no attention to matters of chaff.

"Come in! Come in! It's like a bit of home to see you again. Why did you stay outside?"

"I thought it probable that Stewart would want to have a bit of a yarn with you about one thing and another before a stranger pushed in his nose. Is he better?"

"He fainted at the door," said Dick. "It was getting him round again, and listening to

his story after that took the time and made me seem so inhospitable. Indeed, until he told me, I never even noticed that he had arrived on a strange horse! I was so excited about his state."

"Naturally," returned Calvert. "But you say that he's all right again?"

"A little weak; nothing more. But come in and have grub with us! It will be dinner-time in half an hour or so."

"Right you are," agreed Calvert, nothing loath to the prospect of a yarn with old chums now that he felt sure that with Stewart's recovery he would not be in the way. "I guess I'd better fix up Bess first in the stable, if you don't mind. If it is to be a case of old Dunmere boys swopping yarns, it will be supper-time before we start out on the trail again."

"I don't care if it be midnight, or to-morrow, or a month hence; you've got to stay now!" returned Dick, laughing. "Besides, I have got to thank you for what you did for Stewart. That will take more than a few minutes!"

"It seems to me that it was Stewart's poor mare that I did for," punned Calvert. "You will not be so ready to thank me for that piece of business, I reckon."

"I am grateful for anything, so long as Stewart is safe," was the honest reply. "He is all that I have in the world. His safety means everything, as far as my happiness is concerned."

There was something wonderfully touching and yet thoroughly manly in the tone with which Dick referred to his brother, that Calvert's bantering manner was immediately checked, and he turned to his companion with a sympathetic look in his eyes.

"I understand, old man," he said quietly. "You are just the same good fellow that I knew at Dunmere—not the least bit of a change in you. Stewart is lucky."

After a comfortable corner had been found in the stable for the gallant Bess, the friends returned to the house. There they found Stewart marvellously bright, considering his recent little adventure. Indeed, he had been more shaken than seriously hurt.

With the readiness of a chef, Dick soon made all the necessary preparations for dinner, Calvert doing his share of potato-peeling and setting the table. Then, after the meal was over and the dishes washed, the three friends sat down to spin their several yarns.

What an exchanging of stories took place! Calvert had naturally the majority of adventures to relate, for he had been in the West upwards of three years. Yet the Edyveans had their share, for is not the first year in new circumstances the one that is crowded with more adventures than any of the succeeding ones? When everything is new, every fresh

experience is an adventure, and the brothers, having to make many a shift for lack of ample means such as had smoothed Calvert's pathway, had known considerable ups and downs during their brief acquaintance with the ways of the new land.

Yes, many were the stories that were related that afternoon. But there was a difference in them. While Calvert had but little to say concerning his ranch that did not chronicle gradual success, it was evident to the young guest that the burden of each tale that the Edyveans told was lacking in that sort of enthusiasm that follows encouraging experiences. Not that either Dick or Stewart intentionally conveyed any impressions other than those of contentment and hope. Not that there was a word of complaint. But there were certain signs in word and tone that gave Calvert the idea that the first nine months or so had not been altogether what the plucky brothers must have hoped for.

There was another matter that Fred could not avoid noticing. There was a certain reticence, or even silence on occasions, that frequently followed any pointed questions regarding school matters in general, and old school friends in particular. He had also tried to fathom the reason why Dick had so suddenly thrown up the prospect of a university career. From his first Junior Form days at Dunmere, it had always

been an understood thing that Dick Edyvean would one day be "Doctor Edyvean." He had always been tacitly considered the future academic star of the College, and it was difficult for the uninformed to understand why such prospects should have been suddenly cancelled in favour of the precarious life of a farmer in western Canada.

The explanation came, however, during that afternoon when, towards tea-time, Stewart was absent feeding his chickens and performing a few of the necessary chores before the night fell. Then it was that Dick turned confidentially to his companion and unburdened his mind of matters that he felt must necessarily be told immediately in order to avoid possible future misunderstandings.

"See here, old man," he began, "there is something that I want to say to you while Stewart is out of the way—something that I am sure you ought to know at once. I have seen by your face that you have been surprised at—at certain things——"

The speaker stopped for a moment and Calvert interposed kindly. "Yes; you are right. Certain little things have caused me to wonder; but, after all, they are none of my business."

"They are your business. That is just what I mean," returned Dick forcibly. "And you have a right to know what these matters are

before you take us as your friends. I do not wish to have any fellow's friendship under false pretences."

"False pretences!" echoed Calvert in surprise, not only at Dick's words, but also at the deeply serious tone that he employed. But the flickering impression that his companion was making game of him was quickly dispelled by the latter's confirming words.

"That is exactly what I mean. It would be 'false pretences' to make you our friend and, perhaps, to take benefit from your advice and friendship, all the time leaving it to chance for you to find out that we are here—under disgrace."

At the last two words, Fred fairly jumped from his chair.

"Disgrace! My dear Edyvean, what can you be talking about? But there; of course this is one of your larks—something got up just to have a game with me, or perhaps to see what stuff I am made of! If that's your idea, then understand that I am not a chap who turns his back upon his chums for any reason. But then the whole thing is preposterous. An Edyvean in disgrace!" And the generous-hearted fellow laughed aloud at the idea, little dreaming that his very faith was making the task of confessing even harder than it would have been before. But Dick set his lip and faced the ordeal.

"Once upon a time, Calvert, I thought as you do now, and would have scoffed at the suggestion just as you do. But time alters possibilities, and gives us reasons for changing our opinions on many things. Still, believe it or not, I am bound to tell you the truth. Stewart and I are indeed in disgrace. We have been kicked out of Dunmere. You must believe me! I am not the fellow to joke on such a subject as that."

If Calvert had been astonished before, he was now so astounded that for a moment or two he could not speak. All he could do was to stand and stare in amazement.

"Even now you don't believe me!" remarked Dick with a sad smile.

"It isn't that," stammered the other youth. "I don't exactly doubt you, but I think that I can't have quite understood you. You mean to say that you were——"

Calvert stopped, reluctant to put the ugly word in its place. Dick completed the sentence for him: "Expelled? Yes. That is just what I do mean."

Again there followed a painful silence.

Do you know what it is to honour your school as a present scholar, dear reader? Of course you do. And so you also know how it makes your blood boil to hear your school miscalled, or to hear of any fellow disgracing it. And when a

fellow has been expelled from school, what does that mean? Does it not mean that he has done something to sully the fair name of the place that you honour as dearly as your own? Of course it does. And would you not feel a sort of antipathy if, in after years, you were to meet the fellow who had brought that mud of disgrace to smirch the name you honoured? That is almost a needless question. Every decent chap would feel like that. He would not, perhaps, turn his back upon such a person, but he would certainly feel that the knowledge would be enough to prevent him and that person from ever becoming fast friends, or even trusted acquaintances. That love for the old school does not die when schooldays are over. It is a sentiment that lives in the hearts of old men. It is a sacred memory that keeps many a young man in a straight road. "For the sake of the old school!" are words that have kept many a young man from doing dishonourable deeds.

Such as these were some of the thoughts that were crowding through Calvert's mind during the silence that followed poor Dick's revelation. Bravely enough he had affirmed that nothing would cause him to turn his back on an old chum. But it is never safe for us to make such bold assertions. We never know the strength of our loyalty until it is tried, and it was a great shock to this young fellow to discover that, on-

his own admission, Edyvean had apparently dishonoured the name of Dunmere.

While Dick had been speaking, Fred had walked slowly to the window and stood there, looking out thoughtfully. During the pause, however, he turned to look at his friend. Dick was now sitting half-turned aside. But his face was quite visible, and Calvert's first thought was that the observable flush was one of shame. But a more careful study revealed something different. It was not shame that he saw there—at least, not shame for an evil deed. It was the sorrow of a sufferer that was manifest—that of a patient sufferer, too; and Calvert's generous nature rushed out in sympathy and forced aside any biassed feelings that had first evidenced themselves in his mind.

"Look here, Dick, old man!" he said impulsively. "I'll own that what you have told me has come as a bit of a blow. But I am sure there is something else that you can tell me—something that would explain everything, and put matters in quite a different light. If you had to leave Dunmere, well—there was some misunderstanding. Of that I am certain. I have said that an Edyvean never did a dishonourable thing in his life, and I stick to it. He always played straight. That is enough for me. Say no more."

At this great evidence of true friendship

which trusts in the face of all things, a smile of gratitude suddenly burst over Dick's face.

"Thanks, Calvert! A thousand thanks! I had almost begun to think that it was going to be too much for you to forgive after all. But it is true what you say: 'An Edyvean never did do a mean trick.' But one did something wrong believing it to be right. For that he had to suffer. Do you remember Warrington's Inn?"

"Indeed I do. It was a regular fester-spot for tempting fellows to gambling and drink. But what of that?"

"Warrington's was 'out of bounds' in your day as well as in mine."

"Expulsion was the penalty for going there," recalled Calvert. Afterwards he added with a sudden, horrible thought, "You don't mean to say—that you—that Stewart——"

"He was discovered going there twice," added Dick solemnly.

"To drink—to gamble?" questioned the elder, in awe at the thought. But Dick gave a cold laugh at the question.

"You little know my brother if you think that could be possible," he responded. "Stewart is too honest for that sort of thing, and no honest fellow drinks or gambles. No; he did neither. All the same he went there secretly, and, when caught, refused to explain why he went. And so—he had to pay the penalty."

"But why? Why?" asked Fred excitedly, for, of course, knowing nothing of the circumstances, the matter was a strange puzzle to him. "If he did not go there for his own purposes, surely there must have been some other side to the question that could have been easily explained to clear his character?"

Edyvean sighed heavily.

"You are right; there was another side to the question, but it was one that he felt in honour bound to keep to himself. I know what that 'other side' was, but I learned it as an unwilling eavesdropper, and consequently I may not betray Stewart's secret until he himself confides in me and gives me permission. Poor kiddie! If the world only knew as much as I do, there is not one who would not say that his was one of the bravest deeds a boy ever did. And you have no idea how plucky he has been over it all! I can see sometimes that he is brooding over the memory of his disgrace, and that he would only be too glad if he could ease the pain by opening his heart to me. But he keeps a straight lip all the time. Not a word does he ever let slip to show that he regrets what he has done; only——"

Dick stopped suddenly in his narrative, feeling that he was nearing dangerous ground, and that he had almost been betrayed into saying more than he had a right to say. But Calvert, in his quiet way, completed the unfinished sentence—

"Only—you think that it would be a load off the youngster's mind if the *other* chap would confess to the world why it was that Stewart allowed himself to suffer in place of the real offender! Eh?"

So quickly had Calvert penetrated the truth of what had puzzled both boys and masters at Dunmere, that Dick was at once startled into an exclamation that was almost an admission.

"*Then you—know?*"

"Know! Not I. That is to say, I know no more than what you have told me. But I know the Edyveans well enough, and it does not take much brain to see that one of that race would not suffer disgrace unless it was to spare a friend. Don't you remember that famous Easter sermon that the Head gave us once, when he said: 'Christ suffered disgrace that men might live honourable lives'? It was the one that was printed in the school magazine." For a moment, then, Calvert paused. He seemed to be searching for some suitable words to express his feelings. Suddenly he turned and threw forward his arms with an impulsive gesture.

"Dick!" he exclaimed. "It is an honour to know such fellows as you and your brother. I can see everything now. Stewart was sent away; you gave up all—the Rattray Scholarship and the university future that you used to dream of—you chucked all your own hopes to

be with him and help him through his trouble! Dear old man, I never knew that such heroes lived outside the covers of books."

Calvert gripped Dick's hands with a true friend's clasp. Edyvean returned the grip no less fervently, but he immediately turned aside as if too much were being made of his part in the tragedy.

"The whole business nearly killed the kid. He took brain fever, and when he recovered the doctors said that he could not live in England. There was enough money to give us a start in a small way here, so—so we came out West to make a home for ourselves."

While Dick had been speaking, the two friends had moved slowly toward the outer door. Here Calvert linked his arm into that of his young host.

"See here, Dick!" he said. "I am not much of a hand at saying what I think in the right way, but I want you to know that I am glad you told me of this. It will make us greater comrades than ever, having this knowledge between us. We are friends for life now, and it will be our business to make this home of yours the best and happiest in the land."

"Thanks, old chap," returned Dick. "I will never forget your kindness. It was a good omen for our friendship when you began this morning by saving Stewart's life." Then he

paused before adding lightly with an attempt to change the subject to a more cheerful vein: "As for the 'home'! To tell you the truth, I don't think that our first attempt has been a particularly successful one, do you? Cattle don't seem to fatten under our direction, and vegetables don't seem to grow as well on my farm as on others that I see around. No doubt all these matters will improve in time. But I thought I knew a little about farming in the 'old country'; now I find——"

"The mistake that you and heaps of other fellows make in supposing that what would do in England was, of course, the proper thing for Canada! That is the grand mistake that hosts of people make. Of course it would have been much better if you had worked for a year or two with an experienced farmer in the district before setting up on your own. Or else you might have done my plan—engaged an experienced Canadian hand to work the affair for you."

"We could have hardly afforded the latter, and although Stewart is rapidly growing strong, it would not have been possible for him to have undertaken regular work for some time after coming out. So we had to do the best we could—making our mistakes, and profiting by our experience."

"How would it be if you were to come over

to my place for a day or two and have a look round?" suggested Calvert. "I could send one of my men over to attend to matters here, and then we three old Dunmerites could have a good time. But here comes Stewart. We'll ask his opinion of my proposal."

"Not a word to him of what I have been telling you," Dick pleaded.

"Of course not," was the reply. "But don't forget, when the time comes for presenting the gold medal to the hero, I want to be present to call 'Three Cheers!'"

CHAPTER IV.

THE WHISKY SMUGGLER.

STEWART was anything but averse to the proposal that Calvert had made, but the brothers had a few chores to attend to before the farm could be left to its own devices, even for a few hours; so it was some time after tea before it was possible to begin the six miles or so that led down the valley to the place where Calvert had squatted.

Perhaps the reader may wonder how it was that, living so comparatively near, the friends had not met until more than nine months had passed. But such occurrences are not uncommon among busy farmers in the West. Unless business leads one to the other, a man may live only three miles distant from a neighbour for years, and then only be known by name. And the Edyveans had but few neighbours. Being thoroughly well occupied with the preliminary work of newcomers, they had had but little time for the pleasures of visiting. Regina, their nearest town, had been the chief point of all their visitations, while accident had restricted

most of their herding-rides to the opposite direction in the Valley. True, Calvert's house had several times been sighted in its secluded ravine, but beyond a passing question concerning the possible inhabitant it had not received further attention.

Having now but one horse broken for driving or riding purposes, Dick's mare, "Belle," was hitched to the buckboard. She was a beautiful creature, with a coat as black as jet. Calvert could not restrain his admiration of the animal as he trotted alongside on Bess.

"A fellow who can judge horse-flesh well enough to pick that broncho in a purchase ought to do well out here! Of her kind, she is one of the finest that I have ever seen."

Dick smiled his appreciation of the compliment, and Stewart remarked—

"Dick 'broke her in' himself. He wouldn't let Gatti's cowboys do it after seeing the way they handled my poor Dandy."

"You got your stock from Gatti's ranch, did you?" remarked Calvert. "I can understand now why they are such fine animals. Gatti has some of the best bronchoes in the West, but"—here Fred's voice indicated the conscious pride of one who has some valuable information to give—"you should see some of the horses on my ranch! Believe me, I have some animals there that for good points will lick old Gatti's off creation!

Moreover, I have one of the finest, if not the finest broncho-breaker in the North-West. I don't believe in doing anything by halves."

"Is he a Canadian?" asked Dick.

"Not exactly. He is a native of the prairie—a half-breed, with the greater half of his blood that of the Redskin. What Pierre does not know about horses is not worth any man's trouble trying to find out. I'll introduce you later on. Hullo!"

Calvert stopped suddenly in his eulogy, and drew up Bess to a sharp halt. Dick also tightened his driving rein, for with Calvert's exclamation a wild shriek had suddenly rent the still air from the depths of the bush towards the left side of the trail.

"What was that?" exclaimed the latter under his breath.

"It sounded like the cry of some one in pain," decided Stewart. "Listen."

And as the three friends held their breath awaiting the slightest sound, once again the cry was repeated—a shrill, piercing scream that rung through the darkness of the woods (for night had now fallen) and chilled the blood of the hearers with the unearthly dirge.

"What can it be?" Dick again questioned, and as if in answer to his question the cry was once more repeated and echoed by many throats, while at the same moment a fire was seen to

light up the depths of the forest with a bright glow.

"Indians!" was the immediate judgment of Calvert's calmer reasoning.

"But I thought that the Indians were all quiet and harmless!" said Dick, to which the elder boy rejoined—

"True; so did I. But this is something beyond my experience. I have had many dealings with the Redskins, and always found them decent enough beggars. I knew that there was a camp of Blackfeet in this vicinity, and I never thought much about it since there have been no serious outbreaks for years. But I don't like the sound of this. My instinct tells me that there is mischief somewhere."

The fire had by this time increased into a considerable furnace, lighting the bush in all directions, so that the view through the trees greatly resembled the prospect of a great furnace as seen through a tangle of iron bars. The voices, too, had increased in sound and number, and gradually the three watchers were able to discern figures that were dancing about and leaping round the fire as if a tribe of demons had been let loose.

It was a weird and unpleasant sight. For a time the boys remained quite silent observers of the scene, and the hubbub was swiftly increased by the addition of drums, rattles, and empty tin

cans being clashed together—all seemingly with the sole object of swelling an aimless din.

With familiarity, the first feelings of dread passed away, and Stewart suggested approaching through the bush in order to get a clearer view of the proceedings.

Nothing loath, Calvert quickly dismounted and tied Bess to a tree. The brothers immediately followed the example with Belle. Then they proceeded cautiously to pick their way in single file through trees and undergrowth, taking care not to make any sounds that might attract unwelcome notice to their presence.

It was not long before the boys reached a spot where they could be close observers without being observed, among a dense growth of berry and creeper that fringed the encampment. But it was not until that post was reached that the full meaning of the disturbance became plain.

Seated on a huge log, with his back to the fire that blazed in the middle of the camp, was an old man whom Dick whisperingly described as a "Father Christmas gone to seed." Indeed, the title was remarkably apt. He had a long white beard, and flowing hair that wore no covering. Shaggy white eyebrows tried their best to hide a pair of dark eyes that sparkled as they blinked. He was dressed in a faded suit of buckskin, fringed and torn. At his left side lay a heap of furs and needlework of Indian art,

at his right was a wooden keg, over which his arm was caressingly thrown.

Around this strange figure the red men were dancing in a continually revolving circle, throwing themselves about in uncouth postures; sometimes crouching like beasts of prey; sometimes leaping into the air or through the flames—all the time screaming, wailing, or clapping their hands in frenzied clamour.

Now and then the boys would see one of the Indians spring forward and throw some ornament or portion of attire upon the heap at the old man's side. Next, he would hold forth a small vessel which the man would immediately charge from the keg according to the value of the offering. Then would follow a shriek of delight from all beholders as the red man tossed the liquid down his throat and leaped back again to rejoin the moving circle.

The boys watched the scene in awe and silence, until at last Dick exclaimed to his companions: "This is terrible! Who is that awful man? Can he be human?"

There was no need now for caution in tone, as the din was so great that an additional voice was quite unnoticed.

Calvert replied with an exclamation of disgust: "Who is he? A standing disgrace to Englishmen. That's what he is! Reynolds is his name. I saw him once in the hands of the police for

trading whisky to the Indians. He was caught almost red-handed; but he was cute enough to get off."

"And do you mean to say that he is now trading whisky and allowing the natives to strip themselves to buy the spirits?" asked Stewart in wonder that any man could have a nature so low as to profit himself at the degradation of his brothers.

"It is terrible enough and true enough," answered Calvert. "At the present moment he is doing his best to make them mad with drink. The madder they are, the more he will gain."

While Calvert was speaking, one of the Indians suddenly sprang forward to face the place where the boys were hiding. At first they thought that they had certainly been discovered, but a moment afterwards all such fears were set aside, for the Indian was bent on other matters than the scenting of strangers.

He was a veritable giant of a man, and one of importance, judging by robes and feathers. Throwing back his head, he next spread out his arms with an action that seemed to command silence, for instantly the hubbub ceased, as if all were waiting for some feat that was to crown the revels.

Throwing back his ermine robe, the chief tore open his deerskin shirt. Then he seized his large hunting-knife and pulled it from its sheath.

A wild laugh burst from his lips as he waved the shining blade in the air. Then one, two, three times he gashed the flesh on each side of his bosom, and the red blood gushed from the wounds.

A howl of delight greeted this disgusting exhibition of frenzy. Again the dancing and shrieking was resumed, and the debauch momentarily increased in wildness.

For a considerable period the onlookers continued to watch with disgust, though fascinated by the strangeness of the proceedings. They were on the point of leaving, however, when the tumult suddenly ceased for the second time. The boys turned, and Calvert, who knew a smattering of the language, informed them that some of the braves were demanding of the old smuggler some act equally sensational to that which their chief had lately exhibited.

Evidently this was no uncommon request, for the old man seemed neither astonished nor unprepared. Calling loudly, a figure (hitherto concealed from the sight of the English boys by a large tree near the smuggler) rose up in answer and came near to face the man.

He was a small boy—barely ten years of age, but sturdy for his years, as if he were one of the wild things of the prairie that live as Nature bids them.

Our heroes then saw the old man holding a small tankard towards the lad, and, apparently, he was commanding him to drink from it; for although they could not hear the order, they could plainly hear the answer of the boy.

"No; I ain't going to do it, dad! You were drunk last time, and you told me after that if ever you asked me again, I was to refuse. So I guess I'll refuse now, for you're mighty drunk to-night!"

The boy had spoken truly when he had said that the smuggler was drunk. He was so far drunk that he had no respect for either childhood or fairness.

"Drunk, am I?" he cried, furious with anger in an instant. "Well, drunk or sober you'll do as I tell you! Drink this!" And he thrust the tin into the child's hands.

At this moment Calvert felt a tight grip on his arm, and heard Dick's voice speaking hoarsely at his side.

"Say, Fred, I can't stand this! It will kill the poor kiddie if he swallows that stuff! See!"

All the Indians were now crowding round to view the spectacle, and the old man's pride was evidently suffering that he should be defied by a child in the face of all these onlookers.

"Drink!" he fairly shrieked in mad fury. "Drink, or I'll pour twice the amount down your throat with my own hands!"

But the little chap only straightened his back and looked fully into the man's face.

"I guess you'll have to choke me first!" he replied sturdily. "I promised you last time that nothing would make me do it again, and I'd a sight sooner choke than break my word." And with this retort, the boy flung the tin and its contents from him right into the middle of the fire.

An exclamation of fury broke from the old man's mouth. He seized a heavy stick that lay at his hand and jumped for the boy with his right arm raised to strike.

With a common impulse, our three comrades (heedless of the consequences to themselves) sprang up with the intention of immediately attempting a rescue. But just as they were about to make the rush, a cry of agony broke from the smuggler's throat; for the Indian chief was first on the spot, and a powerful grip from the hunter's hand had snapped upon the uplifted wrist from behind. It was evidently a grip like that of an iron vice, for instantly the club fell from nerveless fingers, while the smuggler sank upon his knees and writhed in torture.

The chief's face was set in hard lines. The evil fumes of liquor seemed to have suddenly cleared from his brain and left him calm and steady—and fierce.

"Men fight with men, not with women and

children!" he thundered, still retaining his terrible grip, so that the old smuggler twisted his body in agony. "The white man coward if he strike boy!" Then he turned his head to address his now silent people.

"Braves! Take the papoose to the shelter of the chief's teepee!"

Three or four young men immediately came forward in obedience to their chief's command and carried the child from the scene. And again the Indian addressed the old man—this time in tones of dignified anger.

"White man! Take your furs and your fire-water, and leave the red man in peace! The guest of Black Cloud, you are free from danger. But come not near to us again, or my braves will stone you as a dog from the doors of their tents!"

It is impossible to describe the utter contempt that the chief put into the words with which he addressed the smuggler, or to fitly render in words the absolute disgust with which, as he spoke, he threw the man's wrist out of his grip.

"Take your trade—and go!" was his final order.

Then he drew his robes closely round him and waved his arm with a sign for his braves to retire.

Obediently, and without even a murmur, the men glided away from the scene, one by one,

until only the chief was left alone with the trader. The former gave one more glance of bitter contempt, after which he strode off proudly in the direction of his own tent.

"The boy! What of him?" cried the old man then, as he rose from his knees where he had been cast. The pleader appeared to be almost sober by now, and one might have almost imagined that there was anxiety touched with love in the earnestness of the question.

But the Indian did not deign even to look at the speaker, though he paused for a moment and gave his answer.

"The papoose is safer with the braves of Black Cloud than in the teepee of Chief Fire-water! Until two suns he will rest with them; then he will be returned to the keeping of his father."

CHAPTER V.

CALVERT'S RANCH.

THE three boys watched in silence from their hiding-place, while Reynolds picked himself up, and gathering his ill-gotten belongings, shambled off into the depths of the bush.

Then Calvert made a move in the direction of the tied horses.

"What a horrible old beast that fellow looked!" was Dick's first remark.

"Cowed like a dog, with its tail between its legs," added the graphic Stewart. "But do you think the kid is safe with the Indians?"

"Perfectly," was the answer. "Indians never break their word in friendship or war. And Black Cloud is one of the best."

"He looks it," the younger lad responded strongly. "He is a brick. And the way he twisted up that old rotter was a perfect treat to be seen. I suppose you will report the matter to the police?"

"I am not quite sure about that," replied Calvert. "You see, if we plant the man in prison, who is to look after the youngster?

Old Reynolds is a mystery to all who know him. People who have talked much with him say that he has quite the ways of a gentleman, and from what I can gather, he has been exceptionally well educated."

At this information Dick gave a depreciating grunt.

"There was not much of the gentleman or man of education about him to-night."

"No. That is the strange part of it all," Calvert responded. "But you will meet many wrecks of human life in the West—fellows who have been great guns at home, but here—well, 'wrecks' is the only word to describe them. And I am told that, when sober, Reynolds does many a good deed in his own way. Many a poor squatter owes his first real lift to Reynolds; and it is told of him that he once nursed an entire family of half-breeds through smallpox—took it himself afterwards and nearly died, without any person to nurse *him!* No; I am sure that he is not altogether as bad as he looked to-night. It is the drink that does for him."

"But surely nothing can excuse him selling drink to the Indians?" urged Stewart. "That seems almost to overbalance any good that he may have done."

"No doubt. But at the same time, we cannot judge every man from our standard of right and wrong. There are many men who do not regard

the Indians as human beings like themselves. They like the spirit of adventure, and so take to smuggling for a profession. The enormous profits that the trade brings in shuts, or rather blinds, their eyes to any evil that may accompany. They would hesitate before ruining you or me in such a way; but an Indian—he seems fair game in their eyes. It never occurs to them to think of the matter in any other light than that of money and adventure."

"Our own Cornish forefathers were wreckers and thought it fine sport!" laughed Stewart.

"Exactly," returned Calvert. "And many a rancher is just in the same blind age that our grandfathers were in. Like them, some day the mistake will be seen."

"And for the sake of the kid, at least, someone ought to do his best with Reynolds."

"That is exactly—my—idea," the elder speaker added with unmistakable significance. "And for this reason, the police would be less successful than——"

"Us," again completed Dick.

By this time our cowboy comrades had pushed their way through the scrub and reached the place where they had left their horses, and a brisk run of half an hour brought them to their destination.

On approaching the house, the front door was seen to open, and a large figure filled up the

opening, showing up black against the light from within.

"That's Jock Lauder, my faithful henchman and tutor in ranch matters," explained Calvert, and at the same moment a strong voice called out in a marked Scottish accent—

"Wha's yon? Friend or foe?"

"Friend!" laughed the owner of the ranch, as he jumped lightly from his horse. "Where's Pierre?"

"Here, boss!" replied a voice from within, and immediately another figure appeared in the doorway.

From the darkness it was difficult to discern more than mere outlines, but it was impossible not to be struck with the great contrast that the two figures presented. The one (Lauder) was massive in build, and conveyed a strong impression of great strength; the other (Pierre) was small, almost dwarfed, with limbs misshapen and angular. Beyond the additional facts that the former was the owner of a heavy beard, while the latter was clean-shaven, it was not possible at that distance to gather more; but when Pierre advanced to take charge of Dick's horse, a pair of dark eyes flashed upon the boys with a most unpleasant effect.

"Put up Mr. Edyvean's broncho, Pierre, and Jock can take charge of Bess," Calvert ordered. Then turning to his guests, he added: "And

now, you fellows, come with me, and make yourselves at home."

The hired hands departed towards the stables, and the young rancher led the way indoors.

The first room entered was a large apartment that apparently served the double purpose of dining-room and drawing-room. It was plainly, though comfortably furnished with a large deal table, several wooden chairs, and four latter of the "camp" variety. An interesting array of guns and revolvers hung on one end of the room, together with a lasso, bridles, stock-whip, and driving-whip. But these, interesting and useful as they were, formed but a kind of guard of honour to a trophy in the centre. That was a well-cared-for presentation bat, with the Dunmere arms on the plate—a valued commemoration of a certain "199—not out!"

On the other walls were photographs of school groups and other friends. Two or three shelves of books were evident, as well as a clock that was suspended between golden goal posts. Indeed, the whole apartment was just such a one as might be expected on a ranch, the owner of which was not stinted for money. There was comfort without useless luxury. The result had such a pleasant "Fifth Form study look about it," as Stewart said, that the visitors at once felt quite at home.

"There is a kitchen and some sleeping rooms

at the back," the young host further explained. "These we will explore later on. Of course we all grub in here—that is to say, with the exception of Pierre. He prefers his own peculiar food in his own shanty near the stables. He prefers horses to men, he says, and only favours me with his company when specially requested. But Lauder is quite a different sort. He is as sociable as they make them, and jolly good company too. His other great quality is his ability as a good cook. At that he excels."

"Do you remember our toffee-making over the gas in your study, speaking of cooking?" recalled Dick.

"Most of it was done on your nose on one occasion. That gave away the game to the Head, and earned a long lecture to me about the dignity of prefects," laughed Calvert.

Further reminiscences were cut short by the entrance of Lauder from the kitchen door. He was bearing dishes and cutlery with which to "lay the table," which was scrubbed to such snow-white cleanliness that the absence of a cloth was a pleasant luxury.

As this was the first appearance of the Scot except when in darkness, the Edyveans naturally turned to scrutinise the man, at which it was hardly surprising that Stewart uttered a sudden "Lummie!" for Jock's physiognomy was certainly enough to startle a stranger. Giant

though he looked in the darkness, it was nothing compared with his appearance when light revealed all his proportions. There is only one word to describe his figure and that is "massive." Add to this the fact that he possessed a cataract of red hair in the form of a beard; also a red face and red hair above it. Indeed, at first glance it was not quite plain to see where the hair ended and the face began. Fierce? Certainly—*at a distance.* At close quarters that ferocity was rather belied by a pair of the kindest blue eyes that ever blinked.

Lauder quite confirmed the good name that had been given him as a cook of no mean order. The feast that he had prepared was one that was fit for princes—steak, sweet and juicy, potatoes fried, and the succulent heads of Indian corn boiled in milk. Then came "pies" (open tarts) of the rich wild Saskatoon berry, and a dish of dried apples that had been stewed and flavoured so that the mummy period was obliterated to sight and taste. Finally, "Johnnie-cake," as light as air, served with maple syrup, completed the feast; and Stewart sighed a deep sigh of contentment. The cooking at the Edyvean establishment was still in the experimental state, and even the best of us know what it is to appreciate a good "tuck-in" after a period of experiments—at least, the writer of this narrative does.

After supper, the company dropped into easy-chairs in comfortable attitudes for general talk. Pierre sauntered in with some information about the stock, and was invited to remain for a pipe as soon as he had given Lauder a hand in clearing away the remains of the feast.

"You are an extravagant chap, Fred, if that is a specimen of your daily feed," remarked Dick chaffingly. "Talk of roughing it in the West! Why, you live at the height of civilisation!"

"Bosh!" was the polite rejoinder. "It is as easy to live comfortably and cheaply as to do the reverse. In my opinion that is one of the chief reasons why we hear of so many failures among our countrymen who come out here."

"Because they don't eat enough?" laughed Dick.

"No; because they don't try to be comfortable. Fellows come out from comfortable homes in the Old Country filled with the romantic notion of 'roughing it.' They have read all about that sort of life in Ballantyne and Cooper. It sounds fine in books, and they think that no other life can be right or enjoyable. Well, out they come, and they set up house in a miserable little shanty, bare as a prison cell. At home they could not abide the want of books, pictures on the walls, mats, at least upon the floor, and a few odds and ends around them that makes a home homelike. But once in the

West, they think it would be out of keeping with the life to attempt any of the English notions. Change of country never means change of habits. It is impossible for any fellow to be happy minus all the surroundings to which he has been accustomed. Of course, as long as everything is new, he does not miss these things. But once the novelty has worn off, and he finds that there is precious little romance and much hard work, then it is that he begins to miss all that he has tried to do without. And without trying to supply the want, he at once starts to abuse the country instead of abusing his own stupidity. In the end he chucks up the whole concern, and returns home a failure, and writes to the papers in condemnation of 'that over-rated Canada.'"

"It's a real fine place—the finest in the world!" interpolated Jock, who had by this time finished his kitchen duties and settled down to his pipe. "I'm no' saying but what there's a braw bit o' land no' that far frae Stirling that comes weel-nigh as fine; but even my ain birth-land canna offer all that Canada does. I've been here these five-and-twenty years syne, sae I ken what I'm talking aboot!"

"Twenty-five years!" repeated Stewart. "And have you never been home in all that time?"

"Never," replied the Scot. Then he added, as if with thoughtful confidence: "But I'm

thinking that maybe next year (all being well) I'll tak' a run ower just to see what the puir bits o' bodies are doing shut up in that wee Isle wi'oot a pickle o' fresh air."

To this announcement Calvert gave a hearty laugh.

"The same old story! Why, it is the standing joke of all the ranchers—this of Jock's visit to Scotland! Every year he says the same thing; but when it comes to the point he has a thousand excuses. It's always 'next year,' isn't it, Jock?"

Lauder turned a look of fatherly reproof upon the rash speaker.

"I'd like to ken where this ranch would ha' been if I went jaunting ower the Atlantic. Duty first, pleasure afterwards."

"And right truly you have stuck to that duty!" returned Calvert heartily. "But, by the way, to-morrow morning I want you to go over to Mr. Edyvean's ranch and keep an eye on the place for a day or two. He and his brother are going to visit me."

"Right you are, boss," answered the Scot. "And from what I hear I'm thinking that we'll need to keep a' oor eyes weel skinned. There's a deal o' stir amang the Indians wi' the drink these days, Reynolds having been at his auld games again. And there's no telling what folk'll do when the drink's on them."

"We heard something of that ourselves," said Fred guardedly. "But what do you fear to us from this?"

"Just this: that when a Redskin tastes the drink, he'll no' mind selling the shirt frae his back for whisky. And when his ain shirt has been traded, he'll no' think muckle aboot stealing ither folk's."

The cowboy had been refilling his pipe, and he threw his plug of tobacco to Pierre, who was sitting at the farther end of the room, saying as he did so—

"There's Pierre ower yonder. If you doubt my words, ask him. He kens mair aboot Indians than ony o' us."

The half-breed, thus drawn attention to, grinned an ugly grin as he caught the plug and commenced to pare it with his sheath-knife.

"Indians terrible bad," he said. "Indians drink, steal, kill! Ugh! I spit upon them!"

So bitterly did the half-breed utter these words, and with such evident hatred of the red race, that the listeners felt a sort of shudder as he spoke. There is always something repulsive about a man who will miscall his own blood, and the blood of the red man was plainly thicker in Pierre's veins than that of the white.

This thought was instantly voiced by Stewart, who did not try to conceal his contempt.

"Why, that is abusing yourself, for surely you are quite two-thirds an Indian?"

At this the half-breed turned swiftly upon the speaker with a flash of savage anger.

"Pierre no' Indian! Pierre white—*white!* Pierre hate the red man—he spit upon them! They kill my father; they try kill me."

"You led the police to the hiding-place of one of their braves," commented Calvert with stern significance.

"He killed a white man!" retorted Pierre angrily.

"Just so," rejoined the young rancher quietly. "But rightly or wrongly they had always regarded you as one of themselves, and rightly or wrongly they then regarded you as a traitor."

The half-breed hung his head.

"The work—dangerous," he said, to which Jock could not help adding—

"And weel paid in guid siller!"

It was rather an uneven contest—two against one; but Calvert felt that the strong truth was needed to try to crush out the bitterness that made Pierre nothing better than a revengeful animal, even though he was, as we have been previously told, an excellent cowboy. But he felt that the allusion to the money that Pierre had received from the police for tracking the Indian smuggler was rather too much the needless opening of an old sore. No one was surprised, then, when the half-breed turned to the Scot with an ugly snarl.

"Ugh! You not know the face of torture! You not know the fire lit at your feet, with body tied to tree, and eyes watch, watch, watch tongues of flame as they creep like snakes upon you. See!"

Quick as a flash, the speaker pulled up the leg of one of his loose overall trousers, and exposed a leg that was twisted and much withered like the gnarled trunk of a blighted tree.

It was a revolting sight, and the onlookers all gave gasps of revulsion.

"Ah!" the half-breed resumed. "You see! Pierre's leg once straight, strong! Now——" He left the sentence unfinished, and as such it was more powerful than words.

"Was that the Indians?" asked Stewart, not unsympathetically.

"Indians, and white man—him—Reynolds! Snake! Pierre hate him! Pierre spit on him!"

All the venom of the savage blood was conveyed in the speaker's words. He hissed out his malevolence from between his teeth as though he were a wild beast instead of a man.

"I pity your enemies when they fall into your hands!" said Calvert, seeking to close the matter and divert the conversation into more cheerful channels.

"And I pray each day for that time to come!" returned the half-breed under his breath. Then he rose from his seat and shuffled from the room.

CHAPTER VI.

WHY PIERRE HATED.

THE departure of the half-breed was watched in silence. Then Dick turned to Calvert with a sigh of relief and a shrug of his shoulders.

"I wonder that you can dare to have such a revengeful demon about you," he said. "It makes one's blood run cold to look at him, far less to listen to his threats against those whom he considers to be his enemies."

But Fred did not seem to have been affected in the same manner as his guest.

"Oh, Pierre is not quite as bad as he paints himself. And he is a first-rate cowboy. Isn't he, Jock?"

The Scot nodded his head in agreement.

"There's no' his equal in the land! He kens the beasties' language and speaks to them just as I am speaking to you, sirs."

"I would like to see him at work," Stewart remarked, and Calvert immediately replied: "So you shall. It is my intention to break-in a young horse to-morrow, so you'll have a chance of seeing the art of the dandiest cowboy in the

West. Oh, Pierre has his good qualities, I can assure you! To tell you the truth I am more than convinced that the poor beggar is a little touched, and doesn't know what he is saying half the time when he speaks as he did to-night. One is bound to feel a little sorry for him, knowing what he has gone through, for he came near to being burned to death by the Indians."

"That was no' the doing o' the Indians sae much as that o' auld Reynolds," remarked Lauder.

"True," returned Fred. "But still the redskins were doing the business. To them he was a paid spy. And we've got this to remember, that we have only Pierre's word that Reynolds had any hand in it at all."

"It was Reynolds the police were after firstly, though some way the auld viper was canny enough to wriggle oot o' trouble. Then they tried to nab his messenger, Piapot, and one o' them got shot for his pains. Syne they had to get native help to track the brave that shot the policeman——"

"Yes, yes, yes!" interrupted Calvert laughing. "Your train of reasoning is all very good, and I have no doubt that Reynolds was morally responsible for the whole business. What I argue is, that there is no proof that Reynolds had any hand in the attempt to burn Pierre."

"And meantime," interposed Dick banteringly,

"we are quite in the dark as to what all the argument is about. It may have some very interesting points about it, but suppose you give us the benefit of the whole story."

"Gladly," responded Calvert. "Still I would have liked to have convinced Jock on this one point. I have tried to do so a hundred times before, but he is as stubborn over it as a mule. Indeed, I half begin to think that he is in league with Pierre, because ever since he saved the poor beggar's life——"

At this point, Lauder was suddenly taken with a violent fit of coughing, and began to move his chair with much noise—all with the evident intention of interrupting the conversation at that personal point.

Calvert turned a merry look towards his henchman. He had seen these tactics before, and liked to tease the modest Scot in this harmless way.

But Stewart, scenting a good yarn, was quick to take up Calvert's lead.

"What!" he exclaimed. "Do you mean to say that you saved Pierre from the torture?"

"Weel, you wudna' see even a varmint o' a doggie murdered before your eyes and no put oot a hand to save him!" answered the big man with the big heart, as he turned away his head with shame that he should be praised for a good deed.

"Some people would," replied Stewart. "I have seen even Englishmen torture animals, and laugh over it."

Lauder nodded his head wisely.

"Englishmen! Aye, maybe. But in my country, bonnie Scotland, the smell o' the heather and the sight o' the blue hare-bell put a tenderness for nature into men's hearts that the foreigner frae England kens naething aboot."

This retort caused a general roar of laughter.

"That's one against you, old man!" exclaimed Dick to his brother.

But Stewart was quite equal to a slight contest of wits.

"Let him prove the Scots' tender heart by spinning his yarn!" he said. "Until I hear the story, I am unconvinced."

"That is a fair enough challenge," Dick agreed, smiling as he turned to Jock.

But Jock was in no haste to pick up the gauntlet on such a topic.

"It ill becomes me to mak' a sang aboot mysel'. Besides, I hae preparations to mak' for the morning."

"The night is early yet," said Calvert from the depths of his hammock chair.

"There's no getting out of it!" chirruped Stewart.

Poor Lauder was outnumbered with arguments against him. He had to yield.

"Weel, weel," he sighed, as he began to scrape out the bowl of his ever-present pipe. "You're a masterful laddie, and must hae your ain way."

"Certainly!" Stewart interjected with a humorous air of superiority at which all laughed, including Lauder, who now gave up all further objections, and started on the desired way.

"It's no' a lang tale. That is a blessing. A story that tak's lang in the telling is a wearisome yarn at the best o' times. As to this—it's naething much oot o' the ordinary."

"We'll settle that matter afterwards," said Stewart: and so Jock began his story.

"Nae doot you ken that auld Reynolds is a man that leads an evil life—drinking terrible, and selling speerits tae the Indians. That is against the law, and is punishable by years in gaol. And rightly so, for the Indians are good enough in the ordinary way, but once let them taste the smallest drap o' whisky, and that drap'll mak' the best o' them fair mad. And an Indian drunk is a fearsome creature.

"Weel, the police had been watching this man's goings-on for some time. They kent his trade, but he was ower sly for them to nab. Then they set a Sergeant Woodrow and a constable to watch. But auld Reynolds found it oot, and, instead o' taking the whisky to the Indians himsel', he got one o' Black Cloud's braves to do the dirty work for him. Nae doot

he thought that an Indian would be a match for ony policeman. But there he was just wrang, for the constable sighted the redskin, and gave chase; but when he came up to the man the savage turned upon him and shot him dead.

"As soon as that was done, the Blackfeet camp moved to a little known part o' the bush, and they hid the murderer in a cave that was only kent by themselves, or by them as was born in the woods. Pierre was ane o' the last-named. A grand reward was promised by the police for the man that would lead an officer to the brave's den. That was mair than Pierre could stand. His mither had been married to a French trapper in these parts. He kent every inch o' the ground atween this and the Rocky Mountains—secret spots and all. He coveted the gold, so he led the police to the cave, and the brave was taken. In my mind, Reynolds should hae been taken as weel; but he (cunning auld fox that he is!) kept himsel' oot o' the reach o' the law, and the Indians wouldna' tell on him. They are leal folk, the Indians are, and—weel, that's a' my story."

The speaker stopped suddenly, just like a cantering horse when it is unexpectedly pulled up by the curb. He shut his square mouth tightly, and jammed his pipe between his teeth to indicate that not another word should pass his lips.

The boys had been following with keen interest.

"Well?" exclaimed Dick at the pause.

"What happened to Pierre?" questioned Stewart.

But a great cloud of smoke was the only answer that Lauder would vouchsafe.

"I suppose I shall have to finish the yarn for him!" said Calvert with a smile at the silent Jock. "It's a great fag telling about other people's glories; but Jock is too modest to be tapped. I know that by experience. Well, all this happened before I came West, and so I can only give you the rest of the story as I have gathered it from Pierre. It seems that, after the capture of the braves, the whole tribe of Blackfeet vowed vengeance on Pierre if ever they succeeded in catching him. Their rough idea of right was 'an eye for an eye' no matter whether the cause was a just one to punish or not. Well, in time they did capture him, and he was dragged before their chief. At first they were for shooting him on the spot, but it so happened that Reynolds then appeared on the scene, and he with a jeer suggested that a traitor deserved to be burned. From what followed, I am convinced that Reynolds never meant his words to be taken in earnest (though Pierre will tell you differently); but at any rate the suggestion was enough to rouse these savage minds.

Without waiting for an order from their chief, a score of braves instantly fell upon the half-breed and dragged him screaming and struggling to a tree. There they bound him to the trunk with such reckless ferocity that he only came out of the ordeal with limbs bent and misshapen as you have seen."

"Poor beggar!" uttered Stewart with a shudder.

"Poor, indeed," returned Calvert. "But that was not the worst. Sticks were heaped about him, and these were saturated with oil. I have lately proved to my satisfaction that at this point, Reynolds really did try to interfere; but the Indians were too mad by this time to allow interference from such as he. They crowded round so that the old man was unable to approach, and even forcibly held him back; and he, horror-struck at what had taken place, and unable to bear seeing more, turned and fled from the spot. This has been told me by Black Cloud himself, though Pierre will not listen to it."

"And what happened after they had bound him?" questioned Dick. He was too interested in the story to have any thoughts for side issues at the moment, no matter how important they might be. "Did they light the fire?"

"Ah," replied Fred as he gave a kind look at Lauder who was still sitting stolidly smoking as

though the whole matter had very little interest for him. "That is where good old Jock comes into the tale. Isn't it Jock?"

"Do you no' think that there'll be a pickle o' rain the morn? I heard the wind whistle the noo just like the warning o' rain to come," Lauder remarked with a direct refusal to show any interest in the affair.

But Calvert only laughed at him.

"It may rain in torrents for a week or a year, if it likes, but I am going to finish my story once I have begun!"

"I hope it winna mak' the ground ower saft for the ploughing," remarked Jock; and so Calvert resumed.

"It was just at this critical moment that a certain, good-natured giant of a Scot was exploring that portion of the bush for building-logs. Hearing the sound of voices in anger, and cries of terror, his tender and brave heart was stirred. Picking up a chunk of ash-wood, he plunged through the bush in the direction from whence these sounds had proceeded, and he arrived just in time to see the flames beginning to lick the poor half-breed's legs, while he writhed and screamed in terror and pain.

"The Scot gave a wild war-cry and sprang forward. Laying his club around him like his ancestral claymore, he charged the mob. Quite taken aback, the Indians must have

thought that perhaps they were surrounded by police, for those that did not fall under the blows fled like leaves before an autumn blast. Then the rescuer cut the thongs that bound the victim; but poor Pierre fell unconscious into the Scot's arms. So our hero took him upon his back and carried him to his own shanty, but not without suffering some severe burns himself while he had scattered the fire to liberate the prisoner."

"Ripping! ripping!" Stewart exclaimed when Calvert's pause indicated that the end of the story had been reached. "I won't admit that the Scots have tenderer or braver hearts than the English, but this I'll say, they run them pretty close!"

"It was a mighty plucky act," commented Dick. He spoke quietly, but the words had none the less of the true ring of merited praise.

Yet Lauder's mind seemed to be still absorbed by other affairs.

"I feel certain that we'll hae rain the morn!" was his remark, adding: "I'm off to my bed noo, for I must be up betimes to reach Mr. Edyvean's ranch by daylight."

Jock rose to depart, and all began to make a move to retire.

"By the way," remarked Fred, "it is as well to remember, Jock, that Reynolds *has* been up to his old games again. That may mean trouble for Pierre if he were to get into the hands

of the Indians while they have the drink upon them. So we must keep an eye on the beggar."

Lauder stopped and bent his head thoughtfully.

"Is that so, boss?"

"It is. We saw certain signs to-night as we came along that are a warning."

"I'm thinking that we'll need to tak' a firm hand wi' yon mon and clear him oot o' the land," commented Jock.

"He's done for himself with the chief, I should imagine," said Dick.

At this announcement, the Scot turned a look of renewed interest to the boys.

"Done for himsel'?"

"Yes. He and Black Cloud had a thorough row, and the latter ordered the old man out of his camp for all time."

Lauder's eyes now fairly danced with delight.

"A quarrel? Wi' Black Cloud? Man! that's the finest news we've had this mony a day! When thieves fall oot, then honest folks begin to thrive, you ken! It'll be easy work to drive away the auld reprobate after this!"

The speaker's mind was full of enthusiasm, and his whole face was lit with joy at the thoughts which he expressed.

But Calvert did not respond as readily as Lauder had hoped. He took the matter more seriously.

"You are a good fellow, Jock," he said.

"None has a kinder heart. But I wish you would put that heart straighter in some ways."

Lauder's face fell. He saw that there was something amiss, though he was at a loss to understand how.

"I dinna ken what it is you mean, boss," was his less hearty reply, and Calvert did not delay his explanation.

"Simply this: you let your feelings run away with you. It isn't my way, when a fellow is down, to kick him. *My* way is to give him a lift up again."

Still Lauder seemed to find difficulty in following his young master's drift of reasoning.

"Far be it from me to do other than that same, boss," he said. "But as for this Reynolds——"

"He is just the case in point," hastily interrupted Calvert. "He's down now; with the Indians against him: his trade's gone; this is our chance to give the lift up! No chap is so bad but that some good may not be found in him. Reynolds has been a gentleman. Who knows but that we might not call back the gentleman again?"

"Bravo! bravo!" exclaimed Dick. "Just the very idea that has been in my head all along! If every person gives him the cold shoulder, what better can we expect than—well, what he is?—Hist!"

Dick had suddenly stopped speaking, and turned in a listening attitude to the outer door.

"What is it?" asked Stewart.

"I thought I heard a footstep, but——Hullo!"

The last word came out with a jerk, for just at that instant the door itself was firmly opened. All present started, and well they might, for there, fully dressed in the robes of a Blackfeet chief—the proudest of all chieftians—stood the grand figure of Black Cloud, holding Reynolds's boy by the hand.

CHAPTER VII.

THE REVOLT OF BLACK CLOUD.

THE young ranchers were too taken aback to speak, for the unexpected appearance robbed their words. But the Indian was calm and dignified.

"Huh!" he uttered from the depth of his chest in the red man's form of greeting. "Black Cloud would speak with his white brothers!"

"You are welcome, chief," replied Calvert, recovering from his surprise.

He motioned the Indian to enter, and Black Cloud, with natural good breeding, stepped inside and shook hands with each person in turn before he would consent to occupy a chair. There is still much of the old royal dignity clinging to the Indian of the West, in spite of the many gross habits and tastes that he has unfortunately learned from those of the East, who ought to have taught him better.

The boy still kept by his protector's side, as youngsters will when with a friend among strangers. But his eyes wandered round the room with a curiosity that nothing escaped.

There was no shyness about him, and the onlookers all conceived the same impression that he was unnaturally old for his years.

Tobacco was supplied to the chief. Then, with the brevity and directness of speech peculiar to his race, Black Cloud launched upon the business that had brought him upon such an unusual night journey. Indians do not travel during the night unless on matters of urgency.

"Brother," the chief began, addressing Calvert, "you honoured the red man's camp this night with your presence."

A general gasp and start of astonishment greeted this unexpected announcement. The boys looked at each other, and Lauder looked at the boys, for the Scot could not understand what business could have taken his young master to a Blackfeet camp. But no one spoke, and the chief continued.

"Black Cloud faced his white brothers when the fire-water was guiding his hunting-knife. But the chief could not speak. His eyes were meant to be blind to the presence of his friends. But my braves would have been glad if our brothers had shed their light within the doors of their teepees."

The speaker paused as if he expected, by custom, some acknowledgment of his hospitable suggestion, so Dick filled in the blank.

"We thought it best to remain unseen—to-night."

Dick had not meant to convey any special meaning to his words, but they slipped out before he knew, and Black Cloud turned to him gravely, evidently quite understanding why the boys did not wish to show themselves on such an occasion.

"Black Cloud has respect for the wishes of his white brothers. He—understands. But" (here he turned to Calvert) "the hand that was medicine to Black Cloud's papoose, and brought the little brave back from death to life—that hand is ever welcome as sunlight in the chief's tent. Black Cloud never forgets a kindness. Black Cloud's blood would gladly flow upon the prairie for his white brother's sake!"

Again the Indian paused in order that any who wished might have an opportunity of speaking. But no one seemed disposed to offer remarks just then, so the chief resumed.

"In years that have passed, when tribes warred with tribes, before the axe was buried and the peace-pipe passed among chiefs, the red man had many enemies that reaped our braves from the camp fires. These enemies were fierce; but terrible though they were, my brother, there were none whose arrows were more cunningly poisoned to slay than the foe that threatens us now. Chief Fire-water is

now our enemy, and he of the white beard is his master!"

As Black Cloud's recital continued, his passion increased. With the last words he rose from his seat and threw out his arms dramatically.

"Who can withstand them?" he asked passionately. "They make brave to war with brave, brother to war with brother. Our young men are falling around us like leaves in autumn. What shall we do? We cannot fight. Are we to wait until all our manhood is lost?"

What brave sorrow there was in the appeal that rang out from the strong throat! The orator was no longer speaking directly to his listeners. It sounded more as if, with his face upturned, he was appealing to Heaven for the help that he so sorely needed.

"What shall we do?" he repeated. "To-day the red man has been in the hands of the white beard. He has been stripped of his robes almost as bare as the birch is stripped of her bark for canoes.

"What shall we do?

"This day Black Cloud save papoose from the evil spirit that was in his father. Shall these things be?"

Once more the chief stopped dramatically, and Stewart exclaimed enthusiastically—

"It was one of the finest things I ever heard of, Chief—your rescuing the boy."

But the Indian took the compliment very quietly.

"The papoose is kind, and the chief is grateful; but it was only the right act of a man."

The answer was simply given, and the Indian had no idea that poor Stewart's pride had received a blow at being termed a "papoose." Our young hero knew enough of the ordinary native expressions by this time to understand that "papoose" is the equivalent to the word baby, or the school expression "kid."

"That evil man, Reynolds, must be driven frae the land!" said Lauder, who had been greatly moved by the Indian's story, so much so that Calvert's recent remarks on this matter were forgotten for the time.

"That would be well," responded Black Cloud. "But who shall drive him?"

"There are other ways of driving out an evil spirit save by strength of arm," said Calvert.

Black Cloud nodded with approval, though it is certain that he did not follow the meaning that was in the speaker's mind.

"My brother speaks words of wisdom. But what of the papoose? Who will care for him?"

"I dinna think the bairn will lack for a bite o' food while those o' his ain blood live," remarked Jock.

"It is good," the Indian said. Then he resumed, after an interval of thought: "Brothers!

the red man does not know of the great world as the whiteman, and to-night he has come to seek counsel. The papoose is brave; he is strong of limb, and it does not seem well to the red man that a brave spirit should be lost. Gladly would Black Cloud open the door of his tent to the papoose for all time, but it is not good for the lamb to dwell with the bear—he must be with his own people. He of the white beard has an evil spirit. Would it not be well for the papoose to live in—*this* good teepee—better than to return to the other?"

It was a kind thought, but the impossible dream of a kind heart. The Indian did not know that children may not be taken from their parents even when the latter are wicked or cruel, and Calvert hastened to explain how the matter stood, adding that he understood Reynolds was really very kind to the boy when drink had not misled the mind.

"But could he not remain here for a day or two?" suggested Dick. "We could take him back to his father when we make our intended visit on the return to our ranch."

The suggestion was made in a persuasive whisper, but the keen ears of the Indian heard and understood.

"No!" he exclaimed hastily and with pride. "Black Cloud passed his word to return the papoose after two suns. A chief's word may

never be broken. Sooner would he plunge this knife into his heart than break a promise given, even to an enemy."

To emphasise his words the chief's hand dropped to where it had been accustomed to find the hilt of the long hunting-knife protruding from the sheath that was so gaily decked with coloured beads and feathers. To his surprise, however, he found that the knife was not in its place. The sheath was empty! And immediately the savage straightened himself, and throwing up his arms, cried out in lamentation—

"Sorrow! Sorrow! Sorrow has come to the tent of the red man, for the blade that our chiefs have used as far back as time will carry—it has gone, my brothers! It has gone! Gone is the summer! Winter has come to wrap my young men in the robes of death. Sorrow and woe is at the door of the teepee. The chief's sun has set; the talisman has gone; and now he must bend his head in sorrow to the earth!"

So great was the grief born of the superstition of his race that the poor man was quite overwhelmed at his loss; and the onlookers were much moved as the proud chief (proud no longer) sank to the floor and buried his head in the ermine robe that hung from his shoulders.

"Chief Fire-water has stolen the strength of my people! Woe has surely come upon us!"

he moaned, while his body seemed to shrink yet lower.

Then it was that Jock showed his strength, and his great voice rung out as if it had been the voice of some prophet of old.

"Chief! Why weep you?" he exclaimed in tones that were at once a reproach and a comfort. "Why mourn? Manito" (God) "is still in His sky! What need you fear while He lives?"

It was a wonderful moment. There was instant silence in the room. One could almost hear the beating of the hearts of those who were watching the sorrow of the chief.

Then the broken man slowly raised himself until he stood upright. He threw back his head with an action of strength and spoke firmly—

"Black Cloud is grateful to his white brother. He came to the tent of the white man for help, and that help has been given. He is a warrior again. Black Cloud is no coward. He will fight until he sees the arrow in the heart of his foe, and——"

Here the chief stopped, and paused in the action of listening.

"What is it, Chief?" asked Calvert.

"Did my brother not hear? There was a footfall by the window."

"I heard nothing. Did you fellows?"

Neither Dick nor Stewart had heard any sound from outside, but the Indian held to his opinion.

"The ears of the red man never tell him wrong. A foot passed by that window and stole away into the darkness again."

"I heard nothing," repeated Calvert. At the same time he gave a look towards the others, and read from their eyes the thought that was in his mind. All minds, except Black Cloud's, instantly conjured up the figure of the spy Pierre, though no motion was made to investigate further, as it was not to be desired that the Indian and the half-breed should meet.

"I think you must have been mistaken," Dick said, to which the Indian replied with a courtly bow of great courtesy—

"If my brother says that there was no foot or sound, then the night was empty."

But the redskin's ears had not deceived him. The night had not been empty. Pierre, in his wanderings, had found the hunting-knife that had fallen from its sheath, while the owner had been passing through a thick part of the bush, and he had arrived in time to listen to much of Black Cloud's oratory. And how his heart had leaped when he heard the Indian say that he would "fight until he sees the arrow in the heart of his foe." The savage mind had not understood the metaphor of the language. All he understood was a threat against Reynolds, and now, with

the chief's knife in his hand, and these words in his ears, Pierre was happy, for he saw a way of venting his fierce vengeance on his enemy without fear of a crime being brought to his door.

In secret his hand would be able to strike the blow that his whole being longed to smite—longed with all the intensity of the savage blood that ran in his veins.

"Revenge at last!" was the over-mastering thought. What cared he who bore the blame if only he were left immune from suspicion?

CHAPTER VIII.

RANCH LIFE.

UP betimes soon after sunrise, the friends enjoyed the usual Western breakfast, of which the chief supports are bacon and fried potatoes, washed down with copious draughts of tea. Then Lauder was immediately dispatched to the Edyvean ranch.

"What would you like to do first?" asked Calvert, while he and his guests were loitering over the final cup. "This is going to be holiday for me, so I am at your service."

"It wouldn't be a bad idea to have a look round your ranch so that we can pick your brains," was Dick's wily suggestion, at which Fred laughed heartily.

"My dear old fellow, don't flatter me! If you pick any brains, Jock is the one who will be the loser. He is the manager here, though I take the credit for it."

"It is a fine plan that of yours to have an old hand to direct things," Stewart remarked.

"A good example is worth copying," said

Calvert significantly, to which Dick responded in his usual philosophical way—

"Providing cash allows it. Personally, I think it is rather lucky that cash does not, in our case. I am a bit of a slacker by nature, and I would soon be worse if I had anyone upon whom to shift odd jobs."

Calvert was thoughtful for a few moments, after which he plucked up enough courage to make a suggestion that had been simmering in his head during the night.

"I've got a sort of idea," he began falteringly; "I don't know what you'll think of it, but take it for what it is worth—I have an idea that we might combine our forces and start one 'Dunmere' ranch instead of two. I call mine 'Dunmere,' you know. I have a fair stock of implements, et cetera, to go on with, but I am not well supplied with energy—rather prefer to laze-along, as Dick pretended to like. So you two fellows would buck me up, and we might make quite a good thing out of it. What do you say?"

"It's a ripping idea—from our point of view!" replied Dick with a quiet smile.

"How? What do you mean? Why from *your* point of view more than mine?"

"Because the advantage would be all on our side."

"A wise partnership; that is all," responded Calvert, to which Dick added—

"Including the lifting of lame dogs over stiles, eh? No, no, old chap. You would like us to be dense; but it would not be fair to you. If we shared-in, it would be all 'take' for us and no 'give,' for, of course, our feeble affair is not so well stocked in any way as yours is."

"You are in your first year; I am in my fourth——"

"And so you propose that we unite our first year of failure with your three or four of success?"

Calvert blushed guiltily, for in truth Dick had pierced the mark unerringly. That had indeed been Calvert's idea in the first instance. He wanted to give a leg-up to his friends who had started under such disadvantages, for it had needed no great powers of perception to see the failure of inexperience and lacking advice that was so evident at the Edyveans' ranch.

"Well, well," he commented in disappointed tones, as he rose from his chair and began to remove the dishes from the table in the absence of Lauder. "If you don't care for the idea, there is no more to be said."

But Dick would not drop the matter so carelessly.

"Not care!" he exclaimed. "Why, we should love it! Wouldn't we, Stewart?"

"First rate!" replied the younger boy, who was secretly a little disappointed that the offer had been rejected, not understanding his brother's

motives. "Think of us three running one ranch in the name of the old school."

"Then why not——" began Fred, when he was gently interrupted by Dick.

"Because—I am sure you will not misunderstand me—because it is better for Stewart and me to paddle our own canoe for the present. We want to show the world what we can do *in spite of what people may—have—thought.* Stewart understands me, I think."

Stewart did understand then; so did Calvert, for he could see now what he had not seen before: that Dick wanted everyone to see the good name of Edyvean upheld by the sole efforts of the brothers. So he honoured the spirit by letting the matter rest for the time being.

With the assistance of the visitors, the remains of the breakfast were soon cleared.

"Suppose we have a ride round the ranch in the first place," Fred then proposed. "After that we'll get Pierre to break in that horse I spoke about yesterday. That will be something well worth seeing. It is an education in itself to watch Pierre's art."

This suggestion was eagerly agreed to, at which Calvert let out a loud "Hullo! Pierre!"

"Coming, boss!" was the reply from the vicinity of the stables, and soon the half-breed followed the sound.

"Say, Pierre," said Calvert, "I want you to put

saddles on Mr. Edyvean's broncho and my Bess. Also get Jack for my friend's brother."

"Want me too?" inquired the cowboy.

"In about a couple of hours. We are going to have a ride round for a time, and then if you feel up to handling a lariat in proper style, you can meet us at the Cottonwood Clearing, bringing the home herd with you. Do you feel in form?"

At once Pierre's eyes glistened.

Was there ever a time when the half-breed's fingers did not tingle to feel the coil of the lariat beneath them? The very suggestion was, to him, as inspiring as the dinner-bell after morning school.

"Pierre will be ready, boss," was the answer, and the speaker quickly departed to prepare the horses for the riders.

The first hours of that morning, then, were passed in a way that would not interest the reader by learning a detailed description of the same, though, of course, they were of much interest to the Edyveans. Pigs, poultry, cows, and horses were each visited in turn, and much attention was given to the methods by which Calvert raised his root and cereal crops. Considerable care had also been bestowed by the young rancher to the rearing of feathered stock by means of incubators—an industry that is feebly cultivated in the West, and which still

offers great opportunities of profit to the practical poultry farmer. This feature particularly attracted Stewart, and he decided that no time should be lost in introducing an extensive chicken department to the Edyvean ranch.

As the morning wore on, Calvert guided his friends to the place of appointment known as the "Cottonwood Clearing." This was an open space of short meadow grass on the bed of the Valley, closely surrounded by trees and heavy brushwood. A narrow trail led through a dense avenue into the clearing at one side, and gave a similar exit at the other. It was an ideal spot in which to corner animals for branding and other purposes, for it formed a natural corral, with only two exits that could be easily guarded by a single horseman at either.

Soon after reaching this spot, the clatter of many hoofs was heard approaching on the hard trail. This was accompanied by the wild "whoops" of Pierre, as he drove the band of bronchoes at the canter ahead of him.

Instantly the boys were on the alert, and Calvert assumed the duty of director of proceedings.

"See!" he said quickly to Dick. "Will you and your brother guard the exit so that the bronchoes can't go straight through? I'll stay over here, ready to close up the entrance as soon as the herd is in."

With ready agreement the brothers cantered over to the place indicated, and took up their positions.

Clatter, clatter came the hoofs, nearer and nearer, while Pierre's cowboy cries became louder.

Then in a few minutes after, with a noise like a miniature thunderstorm, a living mass plunged into the clearing with tails streaming, heads tossing, and manes waving—some two hundred animals in all, not one of which had ever known bit or halter.

Following the trail, they made a direct lane for Dick and Stewart, but a simultaneous whoop from the brothers arrested the charge like an electric shock. They stopped, stared at the pair with wild, inquiring eyes through the heavy fringes of forelock, stamped and pawed impatiently with their feet, neighed, looked around, shook their shaggy heads, and generally, in a horsey way, expressed their disapproval of being interrupted so rudely in a very pleasant canter. Then, scenting that something was wrong, they began to trot round slowly and uneasily.

They tried the entrance, but Calvert was there with a stock-whip in his hand. Clearly they were not invited to pass in that direction. So then followed more inquiring neighs and head-shakings. Truly, it was a most mysterious and not altogether polite sort of hospitality. For

remember that horses are the gentlefolk of the animal world. In matters of ordinary courtesy they could give points to many a two-footed master that they have to obey.

"Pierre! You take my place here for a few moments! I want to speak to my friends," called Calvert. Then he rode across the meadow.

"I want to pick out a nice beast for riding purposes," he said. "Which would you suggest?"

The Edyveans carefully scrutinised the herd, but out of so many fine creatures it was a difficult matter to make a decision off-hand.

"I am sure I don't know," Dick replied. "They are all beauties; it is difficult to decide which would be best. What do you think, Stewart?"

But Stewart had already made up his mind.

"I know which I would prefer if the choice were mine," he said with keen interest.

"Which?" asked Calvert with a little peculiar smile at the corners of his mouth that no one seemed to understand at the time.

"Why, that bay over there—next to the cream in the middle of the herd," was the answer. Then he went on enthusiastically: "Look at her clean limbs, and the fine shape of her head! And her chest, too—as strong as a coal barge! Why, she is a perfect picture! Yes; that's the

one that I would choose if it were for myself. Got blood in her, too, if I am not mistaken!"

"And not half a bad choice!" returned Fred. "Still, it would be a pity to be too hasty. Don't you see anything better—the black, for example, or the sorrel? They are both fine beasts."

"Ripping! Still, they don't come up to my bay——"

"*Your* bay!" interrupted Dick with good-humoured derision. "I like that! You've soon cribbed other people's property! I am afraid, old man, that it will be some time before we can introduce blood mares like that upon *our* ranch."

But Stewart was not easily subdued by chaffing.

"Wait until my chickens begin to pay——"

"They are not hatched yet!" interjected Dick.

"And meantime Pierre's fingers are fairly itching to swing the loop of the lasso!" laughed Calvert. "Come now, Stewart! Shall we decide upon the bay?"

"Of course!" was the response.

"Mind, if once the lariat is round her neck we must not take it off again until she is broken in," Calvert said cautiously.

"Why not make your own selection?" was Dick's natural question, to which Calvert replied with humorously exaggerated courtesy—

"Because I want to give my guests the choice." Then he added with decision: "So it is to be

the bay? Right you are! Pierre, I'll come and take your place now. Then you can amuse yourself with that bay mare in the centre of the herd —the one with the white star on the forehead. See! She's looking towards you now!"

"Guess I know bay lady, boss," responded the half-breed.

"Then nab her, and—remember what I told you to do afterwards!"

"Pierre remember," was the reply.

Then Calvert rode over to take up his post, and the art of the half-breed began.

CHAPTER IX.

PIERRE'S ART.

AS the cowboy rode slowly forward, there was a sudden stir among the herd. This restlessness soon increased to a rapid movement of general excitement, for the animals were well aware that danger was at hand, and they turned their heads to face the rider with distended nostrils and suspicious snortings.

Pierre was dressed in the regulation buckskin garments of the cowboy, save a gaudy waistband that betrayed the native's love for bright colours. His mount was a stout little herd pony named Billy. He sat on a heavy Mexican saddle with a raw hide lariat ready fixed to the steel pommel in front. Both horse and rider were keen sportsmen. Billy understood that spirit of the game quite as well as his master, and it was plain to see by his movements (solely guided by the swaying of the rider from right to left or vice versa) that his nerves were on the alert to note every point of the sport. Indeed, both seemed to be guided by one will.

"Now, Billy, you got show them strangers

you very good cowboy!" Pierre said in a scarcely audible tone. "An' when we got bay mare, you stick tight, and listen to Pierre—every word he speak!" And the intelligent animal pricked his ears and listened to the instructions. He understood all.

It was a picture to see the bronchoes now. At last they had fathomed the deep cause of the proceedings. They had heard Pierre talking to Billy in that strain before, and their suspicions were now certain knowledge.

Then followed a general movement, and every horse turned to face the advancing cowboy. Not a head was raised while they packed close to each other in one dense body—all with the object of preventing the deadly lariat from finding its way to one individual among them.

It is extraordinary the intelligence that bronchoes show on such occasions. Even the bay mare of Stewart's choice had apparently heard a whisper of her fate, for she pushed her way into the thickest part of the herd, and showed little more than her shoulders and back.

But Pierre smiled scornfully. He had seen these same tactics a hundred times before, and knew well how to outwit them.

He was now ready for action. His left hand held the coil of the lariat, one end of which was fastened to the pommel; his right hand was

shaking out the noose that was shortly to travel as swift and unerring as a bullet.

This was what the herd had been anticipating, and the sight of it caused a slight stampede round the clearing. But the heads were still carried low, and the number was a compact mass.

At a slight pressure from the rider's knees, Bill pricked up his ears and started off in pursuit at a gentle amble.

Still the frightened bronchoes kept their noses to the ground, and the doomed bay kept hers lowest of all.

Round and round they cantered with Billy at the rear, until the pursued began to become more accustomed to the chase, and, thinking that it was nothing more serious than a little silly exercise, they began to lose some of their suspicions of the cowboy and his lasso.

That was Pierre's opportunity.

Sitting close to his saddle, he raised his right arm and set the noose swinging round his head. The horses started. Matters were now becoming distinctly dangerous! From security they were swiftly startled into fear, and they scattered in all directions, reckless of where they ran or which direction they faced.

At this moment a wild cowboy shriek came from Pierre's throat. A new danger? Was it a wolf? Each horse immediately threw up its head to locate the origin of the sound, and at

the same instant the loop darted from the half-breed's hand—uncoiling in mid-air like a writhing serpent. Next moment the herd had fled helter-skelter like scared chickens to a far corner. But the bay mare was left alone, struggling and plunging in the centre of the clearing—the raw hide taut as a violin string between her neck and the pommel of Billy's saddle, while Billy himself was sitting back on his haunches pawing the ground with his fore-feet. With a steady eye the trained pony was watching the struggles of the captured mare, and never permitting the least slackness in the lariat.

How Billy's eyes flashed with the excitement of the sport! You have seen an expert angler playing a wily trout at the end of his line—now giving him a little length for space to run, now rolling up the reel as the struggles became weaker and fewer? That was Billy's attitude. He knew that it was business to play the captive until it fell exhausted to the ground. You could see that he understood all the tricks of the game as he sat back, veering round as the mare struggled, being all the time careful that the lariat stretched in a straight line along the right side of his neck.

After a time the frantic struggles became less and the panting breath more hoarse, until at last, unable to fight longer against the odds, the bay dropped upon her side.

During these proceedings, there was nothing novel in Pierre's method as compared with the necessarily rough and ready methods of other cowboys. But the touch of real art was yet to come.

Billy's share in the proceedings was nearly done. As the bay mare fell, Pierre slipped from the ground and untied a halter and bridle from the thongs where they had been fixed to his own saddle. With these in his hand, he next approached the prostrate animal. But even then, when riderless, Billy did not permit a bight in the lariat, but remained steadily in his strained position.

Reaching the bay, Pierre deftly slipped on both halter and bridle, tying up the reins, but retaining a firm hold on the yard or two of rope that was attached to the former.

And here was the moment when the half-breed's art became more noticeable. He turned to Billy, raised his hand with a movement that the "sportsman" immediately recognised as the signal to stand up and slacken the lariat. The noose was then quickly slipped from the mare's neck, after doing which Pierre stood silently with the end of the halter rope in his hands waiting until the bay recovered consciousness. Meantime Calvert and the Edyveans left their posts at the entrances to the clearing, giving an opportunity for

escape, of which the herd was not slow to take advantage.

After a time, the animal on the ground began to breathe more freely, and slowly opened her eyes, and it was not long before she was able to struggle up to her feet again, though she appeared considerably dazed by the treatment she had received.

But a horse's strength soon returns under such circumstances as we have been describing, and with a sudden spurt of energy she tried to dart from her captors, and, finding that futile, reared up and pawed the air angrily with her fore-legs. A jerk from the halter rope quickly brought her to earth again, wondering and amazed at the strange experience.

Then Pierre turned to Calvert laconically:

"Ready, boss!"

"Right you are!" returned Fred, after which he looked towards Stewart. "See, old man! Give me your horse's reins. Then go over to Pierre and follow his instructions closely. It is important for the mare to know *you* first!"

"Why me?" asked the lad, opening his eyes with surprise, whereupon his friend laughed.

"Oh, never mind! Just do as I ask, like a decent chap, to oblige me; and don't keep Pierre waiting. Take it as a practical lesson in horse-breaking, if you like. You will never find a better master."

Stewart good-naturedly did as he was desired, but while he was crossing the flat, Dick turned to Calvert.

"I can understand you, Fred," he said quietly though very seriously. "I understand what it all means. But don't do it, old man. It is awfully good of you, but—we can—wait."

"But *I* can't wait!" returned Calvert briskly. "I owe Stewart a big debt, and I cannot wait longer before I pay that debt. I slaughtered his Dandy, you know, and he took it so good-naturedly, thinking more of your trouble at the loss than his own personal want."

"At the same time, you saved his life. That was surely payment enough, if payment were needed?"

"And so, just because I happened to be of use in one way, you want to rob me of giving myself a little pleasure? Come, Dick! You are not going to hinder me from doing this little thing for old time's sake? We shared everything—jam, cream, pasties—at Dunmere. What is the difference now? Besides, it will please Stewart, you know."

Ah, Calvert, already you had learned Dick's vulnerable spot, and you cunningly reached it!

"If you put it in that way, I can say nothing. But it is awfully good of you, all the same."

"Rot!" was the curt response. "Let's cut jawing and watch Stewart at his lesson."

The boy was now beside the half-breed, who was still holding a firm grip upon the halter-rope. He took a handful of salt from his pocket as Stewart approached and gave it to his pupil.

"You speak soft, young boss! You no' think danger! Slip left hand along rope and speak to mare—soft, kind; she understand!"

Stewart did as instructed, and was surprised to find that, as he approached whispering, the bay stood quite still, looking steadily at him and listening with forward ears of intent interest to understand the meaning of the soft words.

"Soft! soft!" whispered Pierre. "Put hand on nose! Stroke gently! . . . Now bend down; breathe into nostrils!"

It all seemed like some dread spell of witchcraft, but Stewart obeyed, all the same.

First he gently approached his hand. The mare started at the first touch. Then she smelt the salt. That was too great a temptation for her to resist. Then finding that she had really nothing to fear, she allowed the boy to extend the caress until he actually touched her ears, she, meantime, enjoying a feast of salt that the other hand provided.

Then Stewart was conscious of Pierre's voice urging the command that he had not heard the first time: "Bend! Give mare your breath!"

It was a strange order; nevertheless, it was

also obeyed. He bent forward and breathed deeply right into the animal's nostrils.

The result was marvellous. No sooner did the mare inhale the boy's warm breath than all traces of fear suddenly left her, and she was calm and trusting. That had been the crowning point of Pierre's lore of the prairie. It is thus that most animals greet each other. To breathe the breath of a horse-friend is as a human's "shake hands." The bay fully understood this salutation. It could mean nothing else than friendship, and in future it need never be feared that she would be other than obedient and friendly to the one who first approached her with the greeting that she understood.

These proceedings had all been watched with great interest by Dick and Calvert. To the former they were entirely fresh, and he could not restrain a cry of admiration when at last he saw the mare standing quite submissively accepting the caresses that Stewart was now freely giving.

"Well, that beats all!" he exclaimed. "Who but a native would have thought of tackling a horse in that way, and using horse customs!"

"Did I not tell you that what Pierre did not know about the ways of horses was not worth any other person's trouble trying to find out?" laughed Fred. Then riding up to Stewart he said: "To-morrow you will have to repeat the

breathing process and the salt-bribing. After that we will put the saddle on her, and she'll go like a lamb. By the way, what name are you going to give her? You must give your new friend an appropriate title."

"I? *My* new friend?" repeated Stewart in astonishment, somewhat taken aback by the question.

"Why, yes!" replied Calvert. "She must have a name of some sort. And she must be yours now, for after all this she will never own any master but you."

"But—I—don't—understand! You mean ——"

"That the mare is a little present for the sake of old Dunmere days."

"Lummie!" was all that Stewart could say in his surprise. But that exclamation showed proof of even more delight and appreciation than even choice phrases might have done.

"Don't you want her?" asked Fred carelessly.

"I'd love to, for she's a real beauty. But, as a present—I can't—can I, Dick?"

Being thus directly appealed to and having previously given his agreement, the elder Edyvean could only smile and shrug his shoulders with the action of: "Don't ask me. *I* can't say anything about the matter."

But Calvert had his own peculiar ways of pressing a gift.

"If you don't want her, Pierre can let her loose among the herd again," he said indifferently, as if the whole matter was of no importance to him. Then he added softly: "Still, it would be a pity after all the trouble that you have taken. Best stick to a good thing while you have the chance, and put pride in your pocket to give others pleasure. That is my advice, and jolly good advice it is, too!"

Stewart needed no further urging after that.

"I say, Calvert, you *are* a brick, and no mistake!" he exclaimed.

"Glad you think so," was the reply. "But you know, human bricks have a way of toppling down if the cement of friendship is not *proved* to be the best. Better accept the new 'Dandy,' if only to prove that we really are chums."

"I don't think that there is much doubt on that score," said Dick, and Calvert irrelevantly replied—

"I guess it is about time to return to the shanty for dinner."

CHAPTER X.

THE SPRITE IN THE RAVINE.

CALVERT'S guests remained with him for three days, during which time they learned much that would afterwards be of considerable value to them.

Calvert's farm, under the direction of Lauder, and aided by Pierre, was a model of its kind. It was a great contrast to the amateur effort that the Edyveans' homestead presented—the latter being a typical example of the way inexperienced people ignorantly attempt to thrive on their ignorance. Some people seem to think that farming is a calling at the command of any person who does not even know the difference between a ploughshare and a whiffle-tree. Failures and discontents at home, they say: "Let's go to Canada and farm!" They never think that it is a waste of time and money to "set themselves up" in the North-West (or any other West for that matter) without training.

I emphasise this point, because it is from this very cause that so many complaints of emigrants arise.

Imagine any sane man setting himself up in practice as a doctor or a lawyer without first undergoing special training.

Yet that is what scores of emigrants try to do; and they turn out to be dismal failures. They bemoan their fate; they blame the emigration agents; they bewail the barren state of the land that will not give an hundredfold for unscientific sowing. It does not occur to them to blame self for a change before they abuse the hospitable land that gives a hearty welcome to all sane persons.

Fortunately, however, for their own future, the Edyveans had not attributed their own lack of success to any other cause than that of ignorance. Of course, the proper thing for them to have done at the beginning was, as we have said, to have lived with some thriving farmer until they had learned more of the "hang of things." But for many reasons this was out of the question, as they felt the necessity of making some sort of home immediately. Unlike the majority of newcomers, they expected to be failures until they had had more experience. Consequently, their meeting with Calvert at this time was a very fortunate occurrence, as it prevented many further errors before greater errors took place. These three days of visiting opened their eyes, and they boldly intended to profit by what they saw.

And so, when they were ready for the return home, they were full of gratitude and new hope.

"Thanks so much, old man," said Dick, when the moment came for saying farewell. "We've had a jolly time. You must come over to our place soon and give us the benefit of more advice on the spot."

"Jock's the man to invite, not me," replied Calvert. "You'll find him still at your place, I expect. If I were you I should keep him for another day, and get him to give you a few tips, if you want them. He will tell you more in an hour than I could tell you in a week."

"Thanks. I'll be glad to do that," said Dick.

"And hints about the starting of my hen ranch will be welcome," Stewart added. "The incubator is going to be *my* special line, though I don't suppose it will ever come up to yours."

"Rot!" was the modest answer. "A little common sense is all that is wanted——"

"We've heaps of that!" Stewart interrupted merrily.

"——and patience. How about that?" completed Calvert.

At this question Stewart shook his head lugubriously.

"Found wanting. Ain't got any. All the patience in our family is swallowed up by Dick."

"And all the blarney by Stewart," added the

elder brother. "Now, come along! Mount the new Dandy, and let's get a move on us."

Suiting the action to the word, Dick jumped into the buckboard, while Stewart was as quickly on the back of his latest possession, which was now quite amenable to her new master. There were a few more bantering words of farewell; then the Edyveans started briskly on the homeward trail.

The day was bright, and the boys were cheerful, and the one half of the journey was completed at a rattling pace. Then the trail led to a part of the valley where it narrowed between hills and ravines—through a heavy growth of maple and ash. The road itself was steep and rough, necessitating careful manœuvring by both rider and driver.

On approaching one point where the woodland stretched out a long arm at right angles, ending in a deep and gloomy ravine, Dick suddenly pulled his rein, and pointed into the scrub.

"See!" he exclaimed quickly. "Did you not notice something moving there?"

"Where?"

"Right in the thick of that Saskatoon clump! It seemed to me like a small bear, or perhaps a lynx."

Stewart stared closely for a few minutes in the direction indicated, but failed to observe either bear or lynx.

"Imagination!" was his remark. "I haven't heard of any bears in these parts."

"Still, it might be one, all the same," replied his brother. "Bears have been caught further up the valley. See! There it is again!"

Dick uttered the last words with much excitement, and pointed a little further up the ravine this time.

"Look! Can't you see the branches moving, and a dark figure creeping along the ground?"

This time Stewart's sharp eyes followed his brother's guidance with better results.

"I see," he said. "But that is no bear, Dick. The body is smooth, as far as I can tell for the scrub. Shall we follow it?"

"It might be sport. I have got my revolver as usual, so we need not mind if it is a small bear. At any rate it is not a large one."

Stewart had dismounted by this time, and tied his mare to a tree. Dick soon followed suit, and the two were quickly pushing their way through the bushes on the track of the mysterious creature.

"It seems pretty cute for a bear," Stewart commented after following the zig-zag path that the animal led them. "It does not show much of its body at a time. There it goes again!"

The boys were now thoroughly excited, for just as Stewart had spoken a dark something was plainly visible through the tangled mass of

brush and creepers, though not sufficiently clear to give any definite idea as to the real nature of the animal.

They pushed forward as quickly as the undergrowth would permit. But in an instant the figure had disappeared again, and, by the time the hunters had reached the spot where the creature was last seen, it had entirely vanished from sight.

The brothers stopped for a moment to listen for any sounds to guide them further, but nothing could they hear.

"Seems to me that we have lost him," remarked Dick with disappointment in his voice. He was handling his revolver with a hunter's nervous anxiety, for Dick was well practised in the use of this weapon, having made such shooting a habit for many years.

"A wild goose chase!" laughed Stewart. It took much in the way of disappointment to depress him.

But hardly were the words out of his mouth than both the boys were startled by the cracking of a dry twig close behind them.

"Hullo!" was the simultaneous exclamation.

They wheeled instantly—Dick with his "gun" ready to speak for itself. And there, cowering in the hollow of an ancient maple trunk, the "animal" was found.

But it was not a bear. It was not even a

lynx. It was nothing more exciting than a boy!

"Reynolds' kid!" exclaimed Stewart, and Dick's answering grunt showed that he, too, had recognised the child of the whisky-trader.

The youngster was evidently terrified at the presence of the strangers, for some reason. There was fear written all over his face as he crouched into the hollow. He had the eyes of a hunted thing, and fear flashed its many questions through the unkempt hair that hung over his forehead. He had been wild looking enough on the previous occasions when he had been seen at the Blackfeet camp and at Calvert's ranch, but to-day he looked for all the world as if he had just seen a ghost.

Still it was rather irritating to have such a tame ending to an exciting chase, and Dick could not help showing this in the words that followed.

"Why, what imp's trick is this that you have been playing upon us?" he demanded roughly, at the same time lowering his right arm and replacing the revolver in his hip pocket.

But to this question the boy did not reply. He just crouched further into the hollow, and glared wildly at his discoverers like a dog-pressed hare in a blind burrow.

"He seems to be a bit dottie!" was Stewart's matter-of-fact comment. Then he suddenly

gripped his brother's arm as he cried, "Look out!"

The warning was not any too soon nor the action too ready, for at the same time there was a flash and sharp "bang" from the hollow, and a bullet sang past Dick's head and rattled its way through the woods. The imp had had a revolver concealed in the breast of his shirt (he was wearing no jacket), and Stewart's eyes had been the first to understand the outline which the right hand had darted to grip.

But before the echoes had died through the ravine, the younger lad had sprung forward and gripped the desperate little bravo. He did not pause to consider a possible second bullet that might follow the first. He was too furiously angry at his brother's danger to wait for reason.

At close quarters, the struggle was of course an easy victory for the English lad, for the sprite, though strong for his age, was little more than ten years old. And before Dick could give any assistance, the revolver was thrown through the air, and the little savage locked in a young Cornishman's "wrastlin'" grip. Then he was dragged into the open, and the elder boy gripped the arm that the younger left free.

"What on earth do you mean, you little sinner?" demanded Dick. "A youngster like you to go about flourishing a revolver! You ought to have a good hiding!"

"And he'll get it!" added Stewart angrily.

But the child did not reply. He stood sulky and defiant.

Stewart then gave him a hearty shake.

"Speak!" he exclaimed. "Explain yourself, if you don't want a stick on your back!"

At this the boy began to whine, though it was more with the cunning whine to obtain freedom than that which comes from genuine fear.

"Lemme go! Hands off! You ain't got any right on our section! This ain't your ranch!"

"If you hadn't gone skulking about like a coyote, we would not have come near your 'section,' as you call it," answered Dick, as he gave the boy another shake and then loosened his hold upon him. "Where do you live?"

"What's that to you? Nothing, I guess," was the sullen reply.

"In this ravine?" again questioned Dick, ignoring the last answer.

"I reckon that coons that come spying can find out things for themselves," was all the information forthcoming.

Seeing that the boy was no longer dangerous and seemingly not inclined to bolt for the time being, Stewart also released his hold, and turning to a tree, snapped off a lithe ash sapling.

"It appears to me that a cheeky kid will soon find something that he isn't spying for if he can't speak politely," was his significant remark.

Yet the young savage appeared indifferent to the threat.

"You can lam me all day and all night too, but it would take a hundred of these gads to make me give away the old man," he said. Then after a short pause he turned fiercely to Dick. "What do you want here, anyway? My dad ain't got anything in the shanty."

Stewart dropped his sapling, as on second thoughts it was a useless weapon against one so young.

"We don't want your 'old man,' and we don't particularly want you," he said. "But suppose you tell us what made you carry on so sillily?"

"Shan't tell anything! The dad doesn't want any police, and the police have nothing to do with him!" returned the child stubbornly.

At this Dick broke into a hearty laugh.

"Great Scott! I believe the kid takes us for police!" Then he turned to the boy, "Why, youngster, do you think I look like an officer?"

The question was asked in the lightest of good humour, but the boy received it with the utmost seriousness. He looked steadily at his interrogator for a few moments with critical searching, and the boys noted with amusement that the expression on his face showed rather contempt than admiration.

"Well, now," he began slowly, like an old

man considering some weighty matter, "all the police in these parts have a sight better figure than you; and they're a deal quicker with their guns——"

"Not complimentary, but probably true, for all that," Dick laughed. "But don't you remember us the other night at Calvert's ranch?"

At this question the young-old brow was wrinkled with deep thought.

"Yes—I reckon I can place you—somewhere."

"And so, not being police, you have nothing to be afraid of."

This suggestion of a possible fear was rather unfortunate, as it immediately recalled the pugnacious tendencies that had been almost banished by a spirit of friendliness. Instantly the youngster turned upon the speaker with flashing eyes and at the same time straightened his little figure, looking for all the world like an infant Hercules in anger.

"Afraid!" he echoed, with all the contempt of which he was capable. "Guess I ain't afraid of you—police or no police! If it hadn't been for a rag of shirt catching the trigger-guard, I reckon I'd have pumped both of you full of lead five minutes ago before you had time to wink your eyes!" The words were thrown out with all a young braggart's exaggerated pride, but immediately after they were spoken, a something inside him seemed to waken a more

childish trait. Probably it was a secret longing for friends that he only seemed now to half understand—friends younger than the men he had been accustomed to find around him, and there was a sad burden of that longing as he added: "It would have been as easy as winking, but—I'm glad I didn't do it, now."

"Poor little beggar!" Dick sighed to himself. "What a life his must be!"

But the softened spirit in the child did not remain uppermost for long. Inured to danger from police and their spies, his mind quickly reverted to previous doubts as to the presence of the visitors.

"If you ain't police, who are you, and what do you want?" he asked, and then Dick, recalling the discussion that had taken place with Calvert and Lauder in regard to the possible reclaiming of Reynolds, realised that perhaps the present was the opportunity for which he had sought.

"I want to see your father," was his reply.

Stewart turned to his brother with a look of questioning surprise, but a meaning glance quickly recalled the matter to him in the same light that it had appeared to Dick.

Again the suspicious light flashed into the youngster's eyes.

"My dad? You want to see him?" Then he asked cautiously, and in a half-whisper, "Is it—whisky?"

Without acknowledging or denying the question, Dick merely repeated his previous words.

"I want to see your father. Lead the way to your shanty, and we'll follow."

Taking silence for assent as so many children and weak thinkers do, the lad's mind was set at rest. Customers to his father's trade were no rare persons.

"I guess you've come at the wrong time," he said. "The old man's off somewhere; I don't know where. I've been with the Indians these two days; came back last night. But the house is empty, and the old man's nowhere. I skinned in by a window and took some grub. I pinched one of his guns as well. Now I'm on guard till he comes back. It's just as good that I am, for I sighted half-breed Pierre skulking in the ravine last night. He didn't see me—as well that he didn't, for he'd have skinned me if he caught me. He hates the old man and me. I ain't afraid of many, but I'd sooner meet a grizzly than Pierre any day."

"You're a plucky chap," remarked Stewart at this juncture. "But I shouldn't be afraid of Pierre if I were you. Your father can take care of himself, I suppose, and it wouldn't do him any good to hurt you."

Stewart had meant to be soothing with the child's fears, but as he spoke he saw the boy's face whiten and his lips begin to tremble, though

he set his teeth bravely and tried to control himself.

"If you'd seen Pierre as I saw him last night, boss, you'd have sung different!" he replied in tones of awe. "He was running like a mad beast, and I could see blood in his eyes. He'd have killed me certain if he'd seen me. That's what I saw in his face."

"Ugh! Pierre's the kind that sees ghosts. Most likely he was afraid of your dark ravine," remarked Dick lightly. It was a weak saying, and both the brothers recognised it as such. But he could think of nothing better to say at the moment, for his mind was now full of more dreadful thoughts than even the child had dreamed of. He gave Stewart a warning look not to speak the thoughts that he was sure his brother must be sharing with him after remembering the story that Calvert had told.

"Suppose—we go up to your place and—and have a bite of grub," he then suggested. "We've been out all the morning; and now that you know we are friends you cannot object, even though your father is—absent."

"There ain't much there," returned the boy. "The cow's not milked. I've not been up to the house since last night. Pierre might have come back, you know. It's a sight safer in the bush."

"But there's nothing to fear now that we are three to one!" responded Dick. "And I dare

say there will be grub of some sort to be found."

"Bacon and bread — perhaps a few potatoes——" began the boy, and Stewart, readily falling in with his brother's humour, interrupted cheerfully—

"What better do hungry chaps want? You lead the way, old boy, and I guess, if it's only firewood you've got, there is an appetite in me that is good enough to make a meal of a log!"

"Right, boss!" was the immediately submissive answer. "I reckon you two are the sort that always get your own way."

"Bull's eye, first shot!" was Stewart's rejoinder, and then the Edyveans started up the ravine in the wake of their young, and no longer reluctant guide.

CHAPTER XI.

A TIMELY RESCUE.

LETTING the young boy advance a little way out of immediate earshot, Stewart edged close to his brother.

"What's the game, Dick?" he asked in an undertone. "Do you think that Pierre——"

"Has kept his promise? Yes. That's what is in my mind," replied the elder. "It seems that we are going to be just too late to render the old man any service in this world."

"But perhaps he got frightened and cleared out. Or perhaps the old man gave back as good as was offered."

"We'll find out that in a short time, I have no doubt," Dick said. "But if you remember Pierre's face this morning before we left the ranch, you'll recall that there was something peculiarly happy about it. I thought he seemed particularly jolly. The murder of an enemy would be just the sort of thing to make that kind of man happy."

Stewart gave a shudder of disgust.

"I hope it's not as bad as that," he said. "However, we are in for it now, so we have got

to carry through whatever may be ahead of us."

"And perhaps it may be a false alarm after all!" added Dick with forced cheerfulness. I say "forced," because there was no doubt but that his mind was full of the most ominous forebodings, though he did not wish to let his brother know how much he feared.

The adventurers had just climbed a short steep in the bosom of the ravine, and on turning a bend in the path, they caught sight of a portion of Reynolds' house seen through the trees.

"Well, it is a rum-looking shanty if ever there was one!" was Dick's comment at the first view.

"More like a heap of packing-cases tumbled together than a decent white man's mansion," was Stewart's verdict. Then he suddenly came to a halt and gripped his brother's arm.

"Look!" he exclaimed in tones of surprise, as he pointed towards the stables that stood a little way to the rear of the house.

And well might he be surprised, for two great timber wolves were at the door looking in—one was lying patiently like a huge collie waiting for her dinner; the other was standing at the entrance, with the neck hair bristling, and lips turned back with readiness to bury the white teeth in some victim that the walls of the stable hid from the eyes of the Edyveans.

A ready instinct immediately told Dick that they were on the very threshold of some horror, and as usual his first thought was not for himself. He ran forward a few steps before their young guide had time to observe the scene. The boy had been following the flight of some ducks at the moment, and so his eyes had been skywards instead of towards more vital things.

"See here, Imp!" said Dick hastily. "I forgot all about our bronchoes tied at the foot of the ravine. They'll be fretting by this time. You might go down and bring them up along. You can unhitch the one from the buckboard and leave the vehicle below for the time being."

But the boy was not to be so easily diverted from his own will.

"I ain't a hired hand to run after shags!" he returned sulkily.

"You are our host," replied Dick persuasively. "Surely you will look after your father's visitors."

"I'll hunt up grub for you," said the boy. "What else do you want? But I'm not going to run about the ravine herding other people's bronchoes. Not likely!"

"Not even for a fresh dollar bill?" asked Dick, pulling a crisp note from his pocket, and all the time taking care that the boy's back was turned to the stable.

The boy thoughtfully looked at the outstretched

hand. The temptation was great, and the money drew his will as a magnet to steel.

"Make it two, boss!" he exclaimed with sudden yielding. "Make it two, and the bronchoes will be here inside of half an hour. You may bet your boots on that!"

"I don't mean to bet my boots or anything else," returned Dick with a coolness that he did not feel. He was momentarily expecting to hear a noise from the stable that would tell him that all his caution had been in vain. "I'll bet nothing; but if you want two dollars, you greedy young monkey, here they are!"

Instantly the child snatched at the money.

"That's something like talk!" he exclaimed, and a moment afterwards had disappeared down the path up which the three had just trudged.

Now the Edyveans were at liberty to turn again to the stable.

Being on the leaside while a stiff breeze was blowing from the prairie, the approachers had not been scented by the wolves. And their attention was evidently too much taken up by some object of interest within the stable to observe the very faint sounds that the boys had hitherto made. They were lean brutes, though huge of their kind, and it needed no experienced eye to gather that what they were watching—man or beast—was with the quickly fleeting patience of hungry food-hunters.

On creeping closer, Stewart was the first to notice the sound of a slight moan coming from inside the stable.

"That's old Reynolds, I believe!" he whispered to his brother. "I hope so, for then the—worst that we feared has not happened."

"I hope so, too," returned Dick fervently; but just as he spoke the blood of both the boys ran cold as the moaning sound was suddenly changed to a wild laugh like that of an evil spirit.

"Come on! Come on!" they heard a man's voice cry. "Two to one—two beasts to one! That's good! But my claws can scratch, and my teeth can bite too! Ha-ha! Come on, if you're not afraid! . . . *Ah!*" The last exclamation died away into a pitiful moan again as though the utterer had been seized with a sudden spasm of pain and weakness—at least, that is what it sounded to the boys. And the same impression seemed to be in the minds of the wolves, for the great dog wolf crouched for a spring. His moment had come. The hair on his neck bristled firmer, his ears pricked forward and his mouth gaped. Only a second he sank upon his haunches; then he leapt with a howl straight into the door of the stable.

Simultaneous with the spring, Dick's revolver spoke, and the female that had half risen dropped back upon her tracks from a perfect aim.

"'FIRE STRAIGHT INTO HIS MOUTH! TAKE CARE! WATCH MY HANDS.'"

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Then growls, mingled with wild, mad screams, filled the air with hideous sound.

The brothers rushed forward to the door of the stable, and what a sight met their eyes!

Rolling on the ground were two forms of a man and a wolf—the former clutching desperately at the ears of the latter to ward off the deadly attack; the latter yelping in a vicious frenzy to reach the man's bared throat. It was indeed Reynolds. But his clothes hung from him in rags, the place where he lay was drenched with blood, and as he wrestled with the wolf, the boys were horror-struck to see that his back was covered with the same loathsome crimson. Yes, it was a terrible picture. Of course it was seen in a flash of time, though it takes longer to describe. And to their dying day it is not likely that either of the Edyveans will forget the scene of the wolf, each second gaining nearer to its victim's throat, while the man screamed in terror and showed his teeth, too, in his madness, with evident intent to use these animal weapons if need be. It was no longer a struggle between man and beast. Madness had dehumanised the former, and it was a duel of two animals, of which the wolf was more the conqueror.

To use his revolver at such a time was out of the question. The bullet might as easily reach one of the writhing figures as the other, and Fate, at such times, usually picks out the wrong victim.

With one will, then, the two boys flung themselves upon the vicious wolf, which greeted the attack with a roar of anger. Dick buried his fingers in the animal's throat, while Stewart hung on wherever a hold was possible.

But a half-famished timber wolf is no slight antagonist to tackle in a hand-to-hand struggle, even three to one. His muscles are like steel, and his endurance unbelievable. Moreover, Reynolds was too distracted to give assistance. The desperate hold that he retained was a hindrance to his rescue than otherwise. But at last the boys were able to drag the howling beast from its would-be prey.

Throwing his full weight into the exertion, Dick pressed the wolf upon its back, and sat astride its body, with a tight grip on its throat. Both boy and beast were panting for breath. But the wolf had the more sustaining power of the two.

"Take my revolver, Stewart—hip pocket—quick, while I've got him like this!" Dick cried. "Fire straight into his mouth! Take care! Watch my hands!"

It was but the work of a moment for Stewart to obey the order. There followed a hurried movement on his part, a quick flash of light, a bang, and a wild yelp of pain. Then Dick and his brother stood up to wipe the perspiration from their faces. The wolf lay dead at their feet.

CHAPTER XII.

SERGEANT WOODROW.

"HANDS up!"

A loud voice, well used to tones of command, rapped out these words from the doorway of the stable.

Needless to say, the sudden interruption was considerably startling, and the boys were still more startled when they turned and found themselves staring along the barrel of an army Colt that was held firmly in the right hand of a strapping man dressed in the well-known uniform of the North-West Mounted Police.

"Hands up!" the order was again repeated. "I'm Sergeant Woodrow of the Police, and I don't speak three times!"

Though thoroughly mystified at the stranger's proceedings, the boys had no other course but to obey. Their hands shot up into the air, though Stewart still retained Dick's revolver in his right.

"Young at the trade! But I've drawn a bead on you this time. I'll thank you for that shooter!"

Thus said the intruder roughly as he walked up and plucked the weapon from the lad's fingers and shoved it into his belt.

Being altogether ignorant of the officer's motives, the brothers were rather amused than otherwise at the proceedings.

"What on earth do you mean?" exclaimed Dick. "What do you take us for—horse-thieves?"

"That remains to be found out. I heard voices—a gun; and I see—*this!*"

Being a "dug-out" and free from windows, it was hardly surprising after all that the energetic officer should have slightly erred in his surmises. In his haste he had not noticed the dead wolf near the outer door; in the gloom he had not seen the one on the floor. But what he did see was the apparently lifeless body of old Reynolds, who had rolled over on his face, and from whose back the blood was now streaming through his shirt from a wound between the shoulders. Seeing this, the sergeant's natural conjecture was that there had been foul play. In this he was correct; but his error was in his surmise as to the perpetrators of the deed.

"Now then, young fellows, I guess you'll have to march outside!" he next commanded sharply. "One of you will tie up the other; I'll truss the remaining one myself."

This was too much for Stewart's gravity. The

thought of being mistaken for a brigand amused him immensely.

"Say, police-chap, where on earth were you brought up?" he laughed. "I've done murder, sure enough; but it was only in self-defence!"

"That remains to be proved," returned the officer seriously. He was too old a hand to be thrown off his guard by any affectation of humour.

"Prove it now!" returned Stewart. "Examine the body; it's close here at my feet. I'd pick it up for you to see better if you'd just take down that pop-gun of yours for half a second."

At this Woodrow gave an exclamation of anger.

"I'd advise you to keep your tongue a little better in check, youngster," he said with a dangerous frown, whereupon Dick's patience nearly reached its limit. He lowered his arms from their ridiculous position.

"Quit fooling over the carcase of a dead wolf, officer—for that's what my brother shot—and let us attend to poor Reynolds. The poor beggar is not dead yet, but he is quickly bleeding to death while we are wasting time."

Without waiting for the sergeant's "Yea" or "Nay," Dick stepped over to where the wounded man lay unconscious, and at once began to examine the wound. It was impossible for the officer to mistake the tone of the speaker's voice,

which indicated the utmost contempt for a hasty bungle. His eyes, too, were becoming more accustomed to the dim light of the stable, and a better look at the boys' faces convinced him that he had gentlemen of honour to deal with and no criminals. Woodrow was himself a gentleman by birth and education, like so many of the members of the Force, and he was as ready to acknowledge his mistake as he had been quick to make it. We must not blame him for his hasty conclusions. A policeman in the North-West has very frequently to judge a man guilty until he has proved himself innocent—a reversal of the usual order of affairs in more orderly lands.

"I ask your pardon! I see that I was wrong," he said quietly, as he quickly followed the elder boy's example and bent down to assist in the examination of the old man's condition. "It is not often that I make mistakes like that, but the darkness of the—Great Scott! What a ghastly wound!"

The officer had ripped open Reynolds' shirt, and as he spoke he exposed to view a deep cut some two inches across. It was no wound such as might have been caused by accident or the fangs of a wolf. The boys recognised this horrible fact as well as the sergeant, who rapidly scanned their faces with a look of puzzled questioning.

"We saved him from a coyote," began Dick, not knowing how much he ought to tell of his fears and suspicions at the moment. He had no good evidence against Pierre, whatever he might think; and, Briton-like, he shrank from accusing on mere surmise. Moreover, the wound seemed freshly made, for it was bleeding profusely.

But Woodrow's experienced eye soon explained the last matter.

"The coyote only finished what man began," was his verdict. "That cut was made many hours ago, and a struggle with a wolf probably reopened it."

"Do you think that he has been—stabbed?" questioned Stewart.

"No doubt about it," was the prompt reply. "He was stabbed from behind by a coward's hand!"

The sergeant spoke bitterly; then he turned to Dick with a laugh: "You are cleared now, boys! No Englishman's hand ever struck that blow, and no white man ever handled the knife that did it. It was a dirty redskin. But I'll see to that later. Meantime, one of you might go into the house and see what you can find to make bandages with. This flow of blood must be stopped before we can think of moving him. Anything will do—an old sheet or a towel—anything for first aid."

Stewart was off like a shot, and soon returned

with some necessary linen that he found after a little rummaging.

"I'm a bit of a surgeon—walked Guy's for two or three years before I took to the Police," Woodrow remarked, as he at once proceeded to give the wounded man the benefit of rough-and-ready (though none the less skilful and effective) surgical assistance. But during these operations Reynolds barely showed any signs of life. Indeed, his breathing was so slight that it was almost imperceptible.

Then the policeman stood up.

"That will save his life, I hope !" he remarked, as he eyed his handiwork with satisfaction. "He is still unconscious, and it would be best to keep him where he is for a time. But that is out of the question in this stable. He must be moved. There is a risk of the bleeding starting again, but that is a risk we must take, for he must be carried indoors."

"If there were a loose door or a few planks to make a stretcher with, it would be the easiest way to carry him," suggested Stewart. But no such conveniences being forthcoming, it was decided to carry the patient in his nurses' arms —a feat that was carried out with tenderness and care. Very gently he was raised. Stewart and Woodrow took the head and shoulders, while Dick supported the lower limbs. Then slowly they moved from the stable in the direction of the

house which, fortunately, was only a stone's throw away.

As the bearers went out from the door, Dick caught sight of the "sprite" leading Bess and Dandy up the ravine. At the same instant the boy also observed the strangers. But a mere glimpse of the police uniform was enough to alarm him. He did not wait for anything further, but instantly turned the horses from the trail and dived from sight among the bushes, where he could see without being seen.

Knowing from earlier experience that the child was capable of any rash action in the presence of fancied danger, Dick at once called out to reassure him.

"Here, kid! Come along! There's nothing to be afraid of!"

But no answer was given to his words by either voice or presence.

"Who is it?—Reynolds' youngster?" asked Woodrow.

"Yes. I saw him a little while ago. He was bringing up our horses; but he has vanished again."

A look of pity passed over the officer's face.

"Let him go," he remarked. "He'll learn the truth soon enough. I am told that old Reynolds was always very good to the youngster when not in drink, and they say that the boy was as true as steel to his father. It'll be sad news to learn

that the old man has been almost murdered—perhaps altogether murdered, for all we can tell at present. In any case it will be touch-and-go with him."

"Do you not think that the kid might be able to give you some hint as to the person who made the attack?" Dick then ventured cautiously.

Woodrow gave a hard laugh at the suggestion.

"My dear fellow, you evidently don't know much about the youngster. If *he* knew the man, there would be very little need for me to go on his track. Young Arty Reynolds is well known in the district, and small chap though he is, he is as handy with his gun as the best of us, and he can track like the best tracker in the police. Bless you! if he knew the hand that did this, he'd sneak about like a snake until he put a bullet into the murderer's heart."

"But probably he knows nothing about it?" suggested Stewart; to which the man replied—

"That is my reason for keeping him out of the way at present. If he did know, it would be taking my duty out of my hands, and only give me the trouble of a more slippery eel to spike, instead of a comparatively simple Indian."

"Then you still hold to the belief that the man was an Indian?" Dick ventured.

"No doubt about it!" was the immediate

rejoinder, given in so positive a tone that the lads deemed it best to keep their own counsel of their suspicions for the present. To explain them would only be to speak into ears that were already deaf with self-convinced theories. And perhaps these suspicions *might* be wrong, in which case more harm than good would be done by imparting them.

No further words were passed until the bearers got their patient indoors, and had laid him on a bed in an inner room that opened off the kitchen. Then Woodrow set himself to work to apply his knowledge in restoring consciousness, while the brothers went out to look after their horses, and bring Woodrow's, which had been fastened at a near place which he described.

By the time they returned, they found Reynolds lying apparently asleep, with the sergeant as sick nurse sitting by the side of the bed.

"I have got him round a bit," he explained as the boys tiptoed in. "Suppose you fellows take my place for a bit now while I go and have a look about the homestead. It won't do for me to neglect my work. True, I came here intending to give Reynolds a last warning about his trade, for I have got evidence enough in my hands now to convict him any day and clap him in gaol for several years. But we in the police

try to prevent crime more than fill the prisons; I intended to give him a last chance of reforming. But now, you see, I have lighted on another matter that I did not expect. So I must not waste time in looking for any possible clues."

"Right you are!" agreed the elder Edyvean. "If you want to have a look round, we'll stay here for a bit."

"He is not likely to need any special attention," Woodrow explained, as he rose from his chair. "I have propped him on his left side, as you see. Keep him like that. I'll fix up the horses comfortably while I'm out, for we'll have to wait here for a few hours—at least *I'll* have to, and if you have no special call to take you away, your company would be welcome."

"All serene," returned Dick. "There's no particular hurry for us, is there, Stewart?"

"Not much; only we'd better not be too late." Then the boy turned to explain to Woodrow: "You see, we have been visiting our friend Calvert for three days, and he lent us his man, Lauder, to look after our ranch."

"Calvert!" exclaimed the sergeant with immediate interest. "I know him well. He's one of the best ranchers in the district. We've had many yarns together when my duty has taken me in his district. He is one of the strongest supporters we have against Reynolds' trade."

"Whisky-smuggling," completed Dick. "And a viler trade was never invented. I know that Calvert is against it. He said so to us."

"Ah! he's one of the best, Calvert is!" remarked Woodrow enthusiastically.

"And one of the finest centre-forwards in Cornwall," added Stewart.

Woodrow nodded approvingly.

"Good! That is always the sign of a decent fellow. Good at footer; good at living. To parody an old saying: 'The battles of life are won on the school footer fields.' Let those who despise athletics in a healthy way beware of the Game of Life. Such chaps will lose without one goal to their credit. . . . Well, I'm off to make a few professional notes; if I stay longer, you will put me down as a regular old preacher of a policeman!" And so saying, the officer laughed lightly and strode out of the room.

CHAPTER XIII.

DICK'S SECRET.

AS the sergeant departed, the brothers drew their chairs near to the window, where they could talk quietly without fear of disturbing the patient.

"This is a bad job, Stewart," the elder began. "I wish we had not become mixed up in it."

"To my mind, it looks very suspicious against Pierre," said Stewart.

"And to mine, too," was the rejoinder. "But, of course, we cannot be sure, and it is difficult to know what is best to be done."

"What do you think? Ought we not to explain everything to Woodrow?"

"I think not. You see, we know nothing for certain. All we have to go upon are suspicions, and, as you heard, Woodrow's suspicions are not the same as ours. My own opinion at present is, that we ought to wait until we see how Reynolds gets on. If he recovers, then we can explain to him and let him take what action he thinks best for himself. If he dies, then, of

course, we shall have to tell all that we know or suspect."

"In any case it was fortunate for the old man that your revolver was at hand," said Stewart. "A hand-to-hand fight with two wolves would have been worse to tackle than with one."

"Yes," returned Dick thoughtfully; "I think we may flatter ourselves that we saved his life for him. It was a touch-and-go. If he recovers, I think that his nearness to death ought to make him better—that is to say, if he has any of the man left in him."

"Ugh! Just think how horrible it must have been for the poor beggar lying there unable to help himself, seeing two great hungry wolves waiting until he was weak enough to be pounced upon. I would be sorry for a rat in such a plight, wouldn't you?"

"Indeed I would," Dick replied. And both the boys shuddered as they recalled the scene.

For some time after this brief conversation, the boys preserved silence. To all appearances, Reynolds was now sleeping quietly, for he still lay motionless in the position in which Woodrow had so carefully placed him. But it would have considerably surprised the watchers had they known that, while the eyes were seemingly asleep, the ears had been very keen for some time.

Though furrowed with pain and the results of

a misled life, the close observer might have discerned a wealth of energy and strength in the face that looked so still in sleep, and an examination of the limbs would have been a surprise picture of vigour. Though severely wounded, he had rapidly recovered a certain degree of his normal state. For reasons of his own, however, he did not at first let this consciousness become fully known. In the first place, his natural caution told him that he would have a better chance of finding out the purpose of Woodrow's presence by this pretence; later, he decided that there were other matters of no less importance that it would be well for him to understand also: these referred to the two youths who had rescued him.

And so, you see, he had been listening to every word that had passed in the room from the time when the brothers had returned from looking for their horses. Truth to tell, at first he had very little knowledge of what had passed for some time. The last thing he had recalled was that terrible leap of the dog-wolf. And when he came to understand that it was indeed two boys who had saved his life, he had great difficulty in refraining from speaking his gratitude. For there was still something "of the man still left in him!" The withered heart had yet some tender spots in it, and it was one of those spots that the bravery of the Edyveans had touched.

He moved his lips to speak, but immediately closed them again. The brothers had resumed their confidential talk, and there was some instinct that warned him that what would follow was destined to be of even more interest to him than what had come before.

Whilst examining the contents of the room, Stewart's quick eyes had lighted upon a photograph of a familiar scene of the Cornish coast—a view of the beautiful sandy beach of Poleseath, with the giant headland of Pentire in the distance. He gave a gasp as he recognised it. Dick heard the stifled cry, and turned quickly. He also recognised the picture, and he could not help seeing that his brother's lip was trembling slightly for the sake of the love of his dear homeland.

That was the first time since they had come to the North-West that it had occurred to Dick to question whether his brother was quite happy in the new life. Hearing nothing of complaint, he had hoped that his was the only homesick heart on the ranch. Of course, Cornwall had often been the topic of conversation during these months of their exile. Sometimes it had been in fun; sometimes in tender reminiscence. But Stewart knew how much his brother had sacrificed for him. Hence he had always managed to hide his deeper feelings on this subject, so as to convey the impression that he

was quite contented in the new life. "What's the use of making Dick miserable with my moans? He has taken enough of my troubles as it is," had been the plucky way he had reasoned with himself.

But to-day, the unexpected picture in Reynolds' house had taken him by surprise when he was least prepared, and it was not unmanly in him to feel emotion at the thought of his home.

I would not give a rap for a fellow that would not have felt just the same, and I would think even more of him if there were two or three tears visible as well as a trembling lip.

Dick reached out his hand sympathetically.

"Poor old chap!" he said softly. "Do you miss it as much as that?"

Taken by surprise and at a moment of weakness, Stewart had not the strength to treat the matter lightly as he might have done on another occasion.

"Oh, Dick, sometimes I would just give anything for a peep at the sea again—to hear the birds cry, to climb over the rocks, to plunge into the Horse Pool—*anything* only to see the old place as it was before—before—I——"

The lad stopped. He felt that he had almost said too much. But Dick completed the sentence for him, speaking low, but not so softly but that the man on the bed heard every word.

"Before you did that noble deed for Willie Crewes."

Stewart started, flushed, and turned to his brother with astonishment.

"*Then—you—know?*" he gasped.

"Everything," was the reply. Then Dick went on affectionately: "Stewart, old chap, we have not spoken of this since we left school. I never asked you more than once to confide in me, and at that time you refused. But don't think that I ever mistrusted you. I *knew* that you were incapable of doing a dishonourable act; so I preferred to wait until you could tell me the full story of your own free will. But—it is as well to tell you now—on our last night at Dunmere, I learnt your secret."

"But how—how?" exclaimed Stewart in amazement. "I told no one, and Crewes——"

"I don't suppose he told any person either. Do you remember that last night at Dunmere?"

"I can never forget it. I think it was one of the most miserable that I shall ever spend. I slept in the sick-room. I had been there ever since I took brain fever on that day when Doctor Warren told the school that I was to be expelled."

"Well, that was when I heard your secret," said Dick. "I had come into the room rather late, hoping to have a talk with you on our last night, for I was feeling rather miserable,

and I thought that you might be the same, and glad of my company. But I found you asleep. It was a fine moonlight night, and I was tempted to go over to the window, where I sat down to think a bit. I was behind a curtain, and I suppose I must have fallen asleep, for suddenly I was awakened by hearing voices—yours and Crewes's—in the room. He had entered while I had been sleeping. Of course, my first thought was to let you know that I was present, but, before I decided, I had heard too much of what I was never meant to hear; so I made up my mind that it would be kindest for me to remain hidden, and keep your secret as though it had been never heard."

"That was awfully decent of you," said Stewart, at the same time accompanying the words with an affectionate look at his brother. "You see, it would have been harder on Crewes if he had known that someone else knew of his trouble."

"But what of you? It was surely harder upon you, who had to be his scape-goat?"

The younger boy shook his head.

"I had—you, and—the mater. He had no person. When he asked me to go to Warrington's to pay his bills there, he told me that he knew he was being watched. Besides, he said that the love for drink ran in his veins, and that he would be sure to give in if he went there

himself. He said that his father was a drunkard —had deserted him and his mother for years before she died. He lived with his uncle, you know, and he told me that his uncle was an awfully hard man—that he had promised to drive him out into the streets if ever he was known to touch drink. So how could I do anything else than what I did?"

"He was much older than you. I don't think he had any right to let you take his disgrace," Dick remarked quietly, to which Stewart returned quickly—

"If *I* had been in trouble, would you not have done the same thing?"

"Perhaps," replied the elder brother thoughtfully. All the same he felt that his brother had got hold of the root of true nobility, which is to suffer for the sake of a friend.

"And you know Crewes promised to stick to a clean track if I kept his secret. That was surely worth it all," the younger boy urged as if some strong excuse were necessary to explain his conduct. And Dick, in the same quiet tone, repeated his former thought—

"It was one of the bravest deeds that a fellow ever did. I only hope that Crewes *will* keep to his promise, and not follow the road that his unfortunate father took. Why, what's the matter with Reynolds?"

Dick had suddenly broken off in his speech, for

with his closing words the old man had uttered a gasp of great pain, just as if a knife had been struck into his flesh a second time.

The brothers hurried to the bedside, and saw that the white face was drawn and haggard.

"What is it? Are you suffering?"

The old man's eyes were shut, but he slowly opened them and looked at the boys through a film of agony.

"In great pain—yes; not of body, but—of mind—great pain!"

Dick was readily sympathetic, but he thought that the speaker's mind must be wandering.

"I am sorry," he said. "But you must try to rest, and the pain will be less. You have been badly wounded and need quietness."

"Yes, yes," repeated the old man sadly. "Badly wounded; but the wound in my back is nothing to the wound in my heart. That is terrible! It may never—heal—again."

"You mustn't say that," said Dick. "No sore in the heart is so bad that it never heals. *We* know that, my brother and I. Wounds like that *can* heal if we try rightly."

The words were spoken kindly and in the tone of one who is convinced of the truth of that which he utters. Reynolds felt their strength. Slowly he opened his eyes again and looked first in the face of one boy and then in the other. It was a long questioning look that he gave, as if

he were puzzled by some great problem to which he yearned to supply the answer.

"Say!" he said at length. "Who are you?"

"Friends," answered Stewart readily.

"That I know," said Reynolds quickly. "But there is something else. I seem to know your voices. The Cornish ring is there; but there is something more than that—something more that reminds me of—other days."

Not following the drift of the questioning, Dick replied as he would to one whose mind was wandering.

"Believe me, we are friends, your good friends who will look after you and see that you need for nothing that we can do to restore you to health."

The old man sighed deeply.

"Old Reynolds, the smuggler, has few friends," he said mournfully. "He had many—many good friends—once; true friends they were, too; but he left them. It can hardly be that he has any left anywhere, now!"

Oh, what a pitiful wail there was in the speaker's voice as he uttered these words so pitifully eloquent of the lonely life of a man whose wrong-doing had caused that same loneliness! Stewart felt a lump in his throat, and he then did just what his manly heart prompted him—he knelt by the side of the bed and let his arms creep to the old man's shoulders.

"Don't say that! Don't speak like that! If you need friends we will stick to you in spite of everything!"

It was just the right touch of sympathy and the right tone of affection that was needed to reach the dark cavern in that lonely old heart that was now aching with sad memories.

Reynolds slowly raised his arm and, placing it behind the boy's head, drew the face downwards so that he could look closely into the blue eyes before him.

"So true! So full of honour!" he said, though the words were evidently spoken to himself. "And so you did this for him—you, a boy! And I, a man, have done nothing! Ah, how the good suffer for the wicked!"

The last words faded into a mere whisper, and the speaker sank back exhausted upon the pillows.

CHAPTER XIV.

WOODROW'S CLUE.

HAD the circumstances been different, it is possible that the Edyveans would have given more heed to Reynolds' remarks. As it was they attributed the strangeness of them more to the results of a disturbed brain than to any other nearer motive. It did not occur to them then (as it might under different conditions) to seek for any deeper motives. From the pictures on the walls they had already gathered that he had some connection with Cornwall; from the general surroundings they also conjectured that he was a man of taste and education. Had they known that he was awake and listening to their confidences, they might have had their suspicions aroused. As it was, they gave very little consideration to the matter.

Soon afterwards they heard the quick military step of the sergeant coming back to the house, and in a short time he entered in his usual brisk manner. There was a look of satisfaction in his face, and a ring of triumph in his voice when he spoke.

"I've fixed up the bronchoes all right in the stable," he said; "but I can see no signs of the youngster. I was half hoping that he would turn up, as he might have given me a few ideas to help me on my way. But how's the patient?"

The officer bent over the bed, and looked down upon the old man.

"He's better," replied Dick. "He has been speaking a little, but his mind seems wandering a bit."

"Not unlikely," returned Woodrow. "After what he has gone through it's a wonder to me that he is alive. However, he seems resting quietly now. I think we'd better go into the kitchen and shut the door, so that nothing will disturb him. Later on we'll see about trying to get him to take some nourishment."

Woodrow then led the way into the next apartment. The brothers followed and closed the door gently after them. Then Woodrow turned to them with a smile of triumph.

"You were inclined to doubt me some time ago when I said that a redskin was at the bottom of this affair. Well, see the result of my inspection of the stable!"

As he spoke, the sergeant put his hand into the breast of his tunic and produced therefrom a large Indian hunting-knife. It was a murderous-looking weapon, having a broad blade with two edges. It was also beautiful, for it had a

wonderfully carved ivory handle which was fancifully decorated with bead and feather work in the native fashion. But the blade had lost its lustre. Where it had once shone like polished silver, it had a dull red stain; and the boys involuntarily shuddered as they noted the tell-tale signs of the attempted murder.

"Ever seen that before?" exclaimed Woodrow triumphantly.

But to this question the Edyveans made no reply.

Yes, they *had* seen it before. That was why they were silent. It was not a weapon that would be easily forgotten even though casually seen, but when the peculiar form and its decorations had been indelibly photographed upon their minds three nights before when brandished by Black Cloud in his moment of drunken frenzy, it was unlikely that they would easily forget it.

Not knowing what reply to give, they said nothing. Fortunately, Woodrow was too occupied with his success to note the omission. He did not wait for an answer.

"Ever seen it before?" he repeated. "Well, if you haven't, I have! But I've seen it in hands that were famed for their cleanness; not for such dirty work as sticking a man in the back. I had thought at first that it could only have been some dirty skunk of an outcast red-

skin. But now I know for certain that even the blood of a chief is the same blood of a serpent."

It was with the bitterest accents that the sergeant gave vent to this invective, and to climax his utterances he flung the knife contemptuously from him. It turned swiftly in the air, and then sank quivering and singing into the wooden wall like an arrow hustled from the bow.

"See how it simply lives to stab!" the man exclaimed. "There are some weapons that seem to have very life in them."

"I guess this one had a lively hand to guide it," remarked Dick, turning aside from the knife with disgust.

"Yes, no doubt. Reynolds was a tough customer, and had plenty of enemies. I never heard that he possessed any friends. But even a thrice-double-dyed villain does not deserve such treatment as he got."

"I think his worst enemy was himself," said Stewart, to which Woodrow returned emphatically:

"He has a worse in—Black Cloud! and I guess I'll lay that enemy by the heels when he least expects it."

The boys exchanged quick glances. They had equally followed Woodrow's previous hints, and gathered on whom his suspicions rested; so it was no shock to them to find their own ideas confirmed. At first, of course (as we know),

both Dick and Stewart had shared opinions concerning Pierre's guilt. But the finding of the hunting-knife seemed to dispel this suggestion, for they recalled seeing the weapon in Black Cloud's hand; moreover, they vividly remembered the scene in Calvert's house when the Indian had bemoaned the loss of his treasure. More than likely, they now surmised, his chief sorrow had been the loss of that which might identify him with the crime. That would mean the downfall of the tribe in very truth.

Still, Dick did not find it easy to shake off first impressions, but in the swift glance that passed between him and his brother, he telegraphed silence on that side of the question for the time being. At least, if that was not exactly the message, he managed to convey the suggestion that it would be best to keep their own counsel.

"How can you be sure that the assassin was Black Cloud?" he asked the police officer cautiously.

"That knife is its own evidence."

At this Dick smiled a little incredulously.

"But surely the finding of one man's knife does not necessarily pin the guilt of a crime upon that person?"

"Not in all cases, but in this undoubtedly," was the answer.

"Such evidence would hardly be sufficient to

convince me," ventured Stewart, more for something to say than to carry on such an unpleasant discussion. And the sergeant replied sharply—

"It is quite enough for me, and it will be quite enough for you, my friend, when you have lived longer in the West and know a little more about Indians. *That knife is Black Cloud's*——"

"And so?" interrupted Dick.

"It was his father's, and his father's father's before him! Handed down from chief to chief, it would never be handled by other than a chief with the owner's knowledge."

"But unknowingly?" persisted Dick.

"Impossible," was the retort, given with the slightest degree of impatience that politeness would permit. "Every brave of the tribe knows it as well as he knows the face of the chief himself. A Blackfeet brave would as soon think of using that knife for his own purposes as he would of destroying his totem. It would be sacrilege in either case, and would never enter his mind."

"But suppose he were to lose it; what then?" asked Stewart, referring, in his own mind and Dick's, to the incident at Calvert's.

"Quite improbable, if not impossible," was the reception given to this suggestion. "Indians do not lose things like that; they are much too careful. Yes, take my word for it, Black

Cloud is the man we want, and the man I'll find!"

It was impossible not to feel that there was something a little unfair in the view that Woodrow took of the whole matter. Such, at least, was the Edyveans' opinion. True enough, the circumstantial evidence seemed strong against the chief. But police officials are apt sometimes to jump too hastily to their conclusions based on such evidence; the on-looker does not place much faith in "clues." Moreover, there seemed to be a sort of hang-a-man-without-trying-him flavour in the sergeant's opinions. Healthy-minded English boys naturally detest such reckless judgments. Probably Woodrow would have shared such thoughts if he had not seen long service in a Force that must often act upon the flimsiest evidence, and, in nine cases out of ten, hits each nail in the head by so doing. But he was a Sergeant of Police now, and a professional crime-tracker can no more shake off his spots than the leopard.

Such being their convictions, neither of the brothers offered further comments concerning Woodrow's conclusions, and the sergeant himself changed the topic by suggesting that it was about time for him to give further attention to their patient in the next room.

"It is a pity that we cannot move him to

Regina," he said. "The man needs hospital treatment, or, at least, a certain amount of care that is impossible here. But a thirty-mile drive over the prairie is out of the question, and the weather is not by any means the best for such a purpose."

"I suppose it is not possible for you to remain with him?" Stewart said.

"Quite impossible," was the answer. "Of course if I had come here to arrest him, I could either remain myself or send to barracks for an orderly to take my place. But all my intention was to give the man a warning as to the danger that his trade incurred—a *last* warning, for he has had several before. But he has found out that danger in another way. Perhaps, if he lives through it, he may alter his ways. However, my present business is to lay a trap to catch the owner of that hunting-knife."

Dick looked around the room while Woodrow was speaking. It certainly bore more of the aspect of a lumber-room than that of a living-room for human beings. Apparently, it had not been swept for weeks. There was dirt and neglect in every direction, and a brief glance at the larder did not discover more than the mere elements of dietary.

"Not quite a place for an invalid," Stewart remarked as he followed his brother's scrutiny. Then, addressing Woodrow, he said: "You think

it is quite impossible for him to stand the journey to town?"

"Absolutely. It would probably kill him. On arrival he would be put straight into a mortuary instead of a ward."

A brief silence followed while the boys were absorbed in thought, and Woodrow was rummaging for suitable dishes in which to prepare some food for the invalid. Then Dick crossed the room to his brother's side, and their heads bent close together in conference. But it was not long. Certain words such as "Of course," "It's the only thing to do," reached the sergeant's ears, informing him that it was no debate that was taking place, only a brief discussion of ways and means.

Woodrow had found the dishes and turned to take them outside for washing.

"I see you fellows want to talk, so I'll go and do some housework," he said pleasantly. But Dick stopped him.

"No, no. We were only talking over one or two points of an idea. That's over now, and your opinion is necessary."

"And that is?" asked the officer, half turning, with a quizzical expression on his face.

"Well—we thought that it might be better if Reynolds could be taken to our ranch. It's only three or four miles at the most."

"I knew it!" responded Woodrow enthusi-

astically. "It was just the very thought that was bound to occur to such decent chaps as you. But do you think it is quite fair to yourselves?"

"It would be a shame to leave him here!" returned Stewart hotly, to which Dick added—

"Nor would it be right."

The sergeant smiled appreciatively.

"Few fellows would consider the right or the wrong in such a case," he said. "The majority would think of their own comfort first. Of course, the man is a gentleman by birth."

"And a human being in misfortune," completed Dick. Then he tried to pass off his generous suggestions by lightness. "We might require the services of a friend-in-need ourselves some day!" he laughed. "Kindness is always a good investment!"

Of course the boy did not mean anything so selfish as what his words suggested, and no one took the words at any but their true value.

"If you have any hopes of getting even so much as thanks for your trouble, you had better leave him to his fate," Woodrow said hardly. "Many have tried their hands at converting him to better ways, and have very soon given up the attempts. He returns thanks with curses. I am afraid he is almost a hopeless case."

But this view of the matter earned Stewart's scorn.

"One fellow doesn't help another out of a scrape for the sake of being thanked!" he exclaimed, and Dick looked sympathetically at his brother's scornful face, knowing how well the boy had already proved his creed. But Woodrow took up the matter in a different way.

"That was not exactly what I meant," he said seriously. "But I am bound to warn you that what I *did* mean was that you might get even less than thanks—something worse than ordinary ingratitude."

"In what way?" asked Stewart.

"Well, you remember your Classics? You remember the fable of the Spartan boy who carried home a half-frozen young fox (or wolf, I forget which) in his bosom, and the ungrateful animal repaid the kindness by gnawing the vitals of his preserver? It would be a pity if *you* gave any fox such a chance."

"I understand," responded Dick. "You fear that the influence of Reynolds may be evil if we make him our friend in nursing him?"

"Exactly."

"Then," returned Dick with a proud raising of his head to face the officer—"then set your mind at ease! Captain Edyvean's sons have to live up to the memory of a father who died in saving the life of a stoker who fell among sharks in the Indian Ocean. They have also to make a clean home for the best mother that ever lived!

No fox has teeth sharp enough to gnaw through such protection!"

"Bravo, lad!" exclaimed Woodrow. "You are right—right and solid to the very heart—both of you! With such armour, you are proof against everything. Do as your conscience bids you!"

CHAPTER XV.

SOME HORSE TALK.

THE sick man was moved that evening to the Edyveans' ranch, a rude stretcher being improvised with blankets and poles slung between two horses, which were led at a slow pace. A room at the back of the house that had previously done duty as a combined dairy and store was quickly converted into a comfortable bedroom with the assistance (and, I am afraid, the disapproval) of Lauder, who remained until a late hour to give such aid as might be required of him.

Considering his condition, Reynolds bore the journey well. Though not unconscious, strictly speaking, he was too weak to give much attention to what was going on around him. He neither expressed agreement nor disapproval of the arrangements that were being made for his comfort; but a short time in clean, fresh surroundings, together with suitable food, caused him to exhibit signs of contentment, and rendered all more hopeful of a speedy recovery.

After supper, Woodrow announced that he

must take his departure early in the morning. He agreed to remain for the night, camping in rugs upon a lounge, but he expressed his intention of going out on duty soon after daylight.

"Reynolds is in good hands, and has no further need for me at present," he said. "Later on I may look him up to get evidence. Meantime my business is with Black Cloud."

"Are you going to arrest him on no other evidence but that of the hunting-knife?" asked Dick.

To this question the sergeant did not give immediate reply. He smiled, and shrugged his shoulders with an air of keeping his own counsel.

"Well, well," laughed Dick; "I see you don't want to speak of your plans. Of that I'm not altogether sorry, as we are not likely to agree on the point. However, I hope we shall soon meet again under more pleasant circumstances."

"I hope so," replied Woodrow earnestly. "Meantime, I think I'll go out to the stable and give my broncho a feed, with your permission."

"Certainly," Dick returned. "Stewart will go with you and show you the corn-bin."

Taking a stable lantern in his hand, Stewart led the way for Woodrow, who was carrying a feed-pail.

"That's a fine fellow—your brother," he

remarked. The stable had been reached, and the great broncho had just begun her meal.

"He's the best in the world!" was Stewart's wholehearted rejoinder. "Every chap in the school used to admire Dick!"

"I can understand that," said the man, as he nodded approvingly. "Full of pluck, and true to the very core of his heart. He's just the kind we would like to see in the Force."

The sergeant had spoken in all seriousness, but Stewart received his suggestion with a laugh of derision, which, it is to be feared, was not altogether in good taste, considering the calling of his guest.

"What! Dick become a policeman! Why, I'd just as soon expect to see him become a highwayman!"

"There's not much difference," returned Woodrow dryly. "Both waylay travellers, but the one makes prisoners of the unoffending; the other grabs offenders. By the way, talking of highwaymen reminds me of something else—not quite the same, but somewhat similar, I mean horse-thieves. I suppose you haven't had any dealings with that class since you came out?"

"As one of them?"

"Of course not," laughed the sergeant. "I mean, you haven't been troubled by any—losing any horses, or such like?"

Stewart shook his head.

"There's little enough to tempt thieves to our ranch. A few ordinary bronchoes, an old cow or two, and a dozen or so of hens. These would be slight return for a raid. We are only beginners, you know, and beginners in a very small way."

"I see," Woodrow said quietly. Then he added in his peculiarly significant way: "Still, although only beginners, I see in the second stall to the right a piece of horse-flesh that would be worth much trouble if it could be got away safely."

Quietly as the sergeant spoke, there was something in the tone of his voice that instantly roused Stewart's interest.

"What! you mean Dandy?" Then he gave a slight laugh of derision. "Why, that's only another of the 'beginner's' stock. She's a beauty of her kind, I dare say; but at the same time, she's only a present that Calvert gave me."

But Woodrow held to his opinion stubbornly.

"I don't care whether she's a present or not, but this I do know, that it will pay you to keep a good lock on your stable door if you prize the nag."

"Prize her!" was the echo. "Of course I do! I would not part with her for anything. She was given to me by an old school chum, and——"

"And he gave you the pick of his herd—worth

seven hundred dollars if she's worth a cent," completed Woodrow.

Stewart was dumfounded at this intelligence. True, even his slight experience of horse-flesh had told him that his mare was something out of the common, for her points had at once set her apart from the others, like a swan among ducklings. But his knowledge had not been sufficient to inform him what Calvert knew (and what the keen eye of the police officer had instantly discovered)—viz., that Dandy was one of three thoroughbred blood mares—the only three in the West at that time; the envy of neighbouring ranchers, and, incidentally, the well-noted by a certain set of envious and lawless grabbers. She might be worth anything, ranging from seven hundred to a thousand dollars.

"Seven hundred dollars!" Stewart echoed, aghast at the largeness of the sum named.

Woodrow nodded.

"Possibly a thousand; possibly more," he replied. "And so, if you take my advice, you'll have a good lock put on that door without delay. I don't want to frighten you, and I don't want to mention names, but this much I may tell you: I came here this morning intending to kill two birds with one stone—first, to give Reynolds a hint for the good of his health; second, to scent after little signs in another matter. Not twenty-five miles north from here there

is a gang of coons who call themselves 'ranchers.' Well, ranchers they may be, but they have a strange faculty for increasing their stock just at a time when some distant homesteader has lost his! And they are artists at altering brands. The boss of them can change any into a complex brand that he has officially registered as his. However, they are sure to overreach themselves one of these days. That day will be my chance."

"And suppose they should try to steal Dandy?" asked Stewart in awe. He had not yet recovered from the shock of learning the value of his jewel in the stall.

"Keep a gun in a handy pocket, and if you are sure of your aim, use it!" was the grim advice. "Well, now, my old mare's finished. We'll better bid her 'Good-night.' Come, Slick, old girl! There's no use worrying. There isn't another grain in the pail. You've gobbled the lot!"

The mare raised her head at the sound of her master's address, and whinnied a pleasant reply.

"She understands every word I say," said Woodrow, giving the animal an appreciative caress. "Yes, and though she is not human, she's as good a policeman as any trooper in the Force. Track! Why, I tell you what it is: put her on the scent of a redskin, and she'll follow his spoor across the prairie with the certainty of a bloodhound. Well, good-night, old lady!"

Stewart then took another glance at his prize before he could tear himself away from the stable. It was such a revelation to him to find himself the owner of one of the three coveted treasures of the West. But at last he was reluctantly forced to turn away and follow Woodrow, who was already beyond the stable doors.

"I'll see to getting that lock put on first thing to-morrow," he said, when he rejoined his companion.

"You'll be wise not to lose any time about it. You know the proverb about locking the stable after the horse has gone," was the policeman's answer.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE SMUGGLER TURNED MAN.

IN a few days Reynolds had sufficiently recovered so as to move from his bed and occupy a chair by the kitchen stove for a time. The brothers had nursed their guest as tenderly as any professional from a hospital might have done—not as expertly, perhaps, but with the eager kindness that so often teaches ignorance what is best to be done.

But throughout these days, neither of the boys had broached the subject of the assault in the old man's hearing. He, too, by his reticence had shown reluctance to discuss the matter; so, by common courtesy, both Dick and Stewart respected what was evidently their guest's desire until he should choose to take the initiative.

During this time no signs were seen of the boy Arty. On this account they were all anxious. Dick returned to the ravine and explored it. He found the smouldering remains of a rubbish fire in the yard, which showed that the lad was somewhere in the vicinity. But, for some reason of his own, he remained hidden.

Of course there was no doubt but that Arty was well aware to where Reynolds had gone. To this the old man himself agreed. If the boy had not actually viewed the proceedings of removal from some hidden place of vantage, he was bushman enough to follow tracks, and would soon trace the footprints to the Edyvean ranch.

But the chief cause for anxiety was the question of food. Dick discovered that the little that remained in Reynolds' house had been quickly removed. There was nothing for it but to keep that store replenished, and wait in patience until the mysterious boy chose to reveal himself.

At last he did appear, and that in the darkness of the night. But this is a point of our story where it will be necessary to slightly digress, so the reader will pardon a slight incursion into past history, as such is necessary to avoid any cloudiness that might otherwise appear in the aspect of such plot as this story contains.

Although Arty always spoke to Reynolds as "Dad," and most of the settlers believed the lad to be the smuggler's son, it must be understood that the boy had not a drop of the old man's blood in his veins.

Reynolds was a strange character, as we have already seen. He was, in fact, two persons—one, a money-grabbing smuggler who, under the

influence of drink, would stick at nothing to win a dollar; the other, a thorough gentleman who, when sober, was both kind and noble, as the following little incident will show.

Some eight or nine years previous to the date of this story, he had been accustomed to visit a certain man named Jameson, who lived with his wife and only child in an out-of-the-way bluff country known as Last Mountain. Jameson, like Reynolds, was also an adept smuggler who (again like Reynolds) had known better days in the Old Country. But the greed for gold had pretty well mastered all higher feelings, until he had sunk to the same vicious level as the older man.

On one occasion, when Reynolds was making one of his business visits, Mrs. Jameson came running into the shanty where the two men were sitting, and announced in terror that a terrific bush fire had started some miles to the north, and was now racing before the wind straight towards the homestead.

At such times there is often barely enough time for the unfortunate settler to snatch up a few belongings and flee for safety, leaving property and stock to their fate. This was one of these awful occasions. A quick glance outside showed the fire blazing away with a roaring sound like that of a hundred blast-furnaces carried forward by a hurricane, and the men immediately made off in the direction of a

ploughed field, where they might hope, by the goodness of Providence, to escape a fearful death.

They nearly reached the spot. Suddenly they heard a cry behind them. Looking back they saw Mrs. Jameson standing terror-stricken by the door of the house. Her hair was dishevelled. Horror was plainly depicted on her pale face, and she was waving her arms frantically while she shrieked in despair—

"Arty! Arty! My boy! He is lost! He is in the bush! He will be burned!"

Now, we do not suppose that Jameson was really a heartless man. But few men are masters of their passion at such times as this, and the terrible vision of the roaring furnace seen through the trees—the smoke, the fleeing wild animals, and the general chaos of Nature—probably these sights unmanned him and robbed him of his reason. At any rate, not knowing better, let us be generous and think so, for he only paused a brief moment and stared with mad eyes at these dreadful signs of hungry destruction. Then he gave vent to a wild man's shriek of terror, turned, and rushed more madly reckless than before in the direction of the sanctuary he hoped to reach.

But it was not so with Reynolds. He was at once dreadfully calm. He ran back quickly to the house to where the woman was standing and gripped her roughly by the arm.

"Be quiet!" he ordered fiercely. "If you love your boy and would save him, calm yourself and tell me quickly and plainly where he is!"

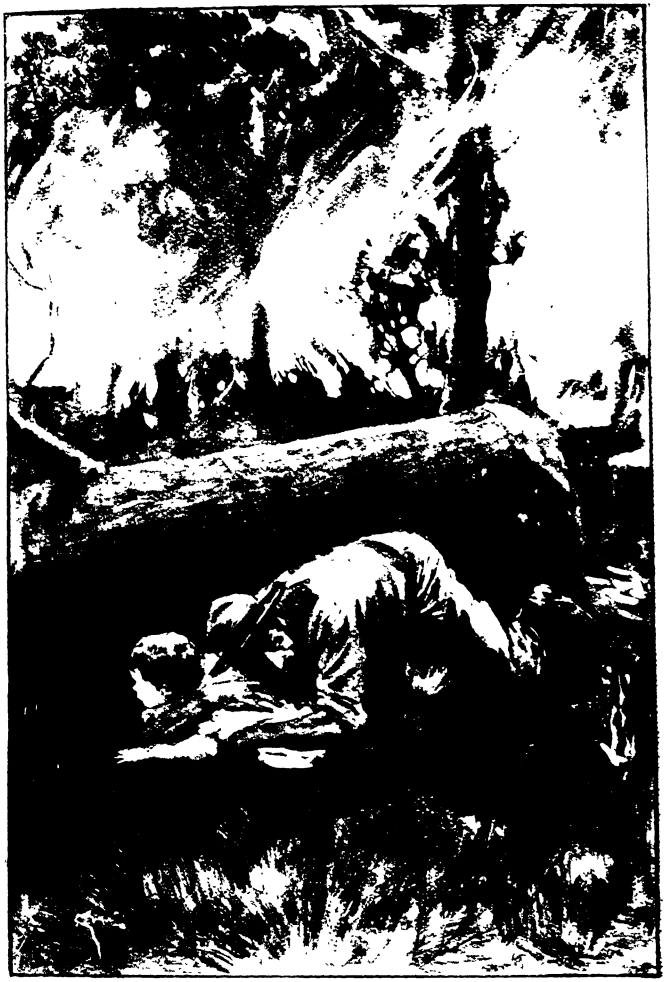
The bullying tone, and the rough action that accompanied it, had their effect in momentarily subduing the hysterical woman.

"Over there!" she answered, pointing a shaking arm towards a thick portion of the bush —right in the teeth of the fire itself. "He went there to play in the little house he has made."

"Then follow your husband for your life!" Reynolds commanded. "If the boy can be saved, I can do it better than you, and there is no need to risk two lives in the attempt. Go!" And without waiting to see that his order was obeyed, he darted off in the direction that the woman had indicated.

And he reached the spot, though not a minute too soon. He found the child sitting on a stone and clapping his baby hands with glee in his innocence, as he watched the flames leaping from branch to branch of the pine trees—not being yet near enough to cause terror by the heat. Poor baby! he thought that the whole scene had been arranged for his amusement.

Then a blast of wind sent the tongues of flame leaping greedily towards him. Reynolds sprang for the boy, picked him up, and roughly threw him down at the leaside of a large log that had



"THEN A BLAST OF WIND SENT THE TONGUES OF FLAME LEAPING GREEDILY TOWARDS HIM."

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but recently been felled. Immediately he cast himself at the child's side and pressed the baby so close to the trunk of the tree that his man's body protected the frail infant from the outer fire.

And when the cruel blaze had passed, Reynolds stood up. A few minutes before he had been a strong man with a flowing black beard and glossy hair. Now such as remained unscorched was snow-white with the ageing of these short moments of unspeakable agony in the roasting furnace. He had veritably passed at one step from strong young manhood into old age.

But the child was unhurt.

Though burned and sore, Reynolds carried the boy through the funereal groves of black ghosts of trees and over the blacker pall of ruined herbage to seek the house. But all they found was a smoldering pile of wood for a dwelling. The remains of the poor mother were afterwards discovered but a little way off among the old trees. The father was never found—not even a trace.

Robbed of both parents and home in one hour, poor little Arty was now as much alone as any poor bird that the storm has blown upon the face of the ocean. The fire had also destroyed every paper by which the boy's relatives might have been traced in the Old Country. So Reynolds carried him over miles of prairie to his own home, and kept him as his own child. There were few settlers in the district at the time, and fewer

ever visited Reynolds' house. When they saw a boy there, as time went on, they never doubted but that he had always lived in that ravine. For all they knew or cared Reynolds' wife might be there as well. The smuggler never spoke about himself or invited people to enter his house. Arty Jameson was seen playing about. The natural inference was that the boy was "Arty Reynolds." He called the old man "dad," and the same old man never saw any reason for disillusioning those whom the true facts did not concern.

And Arty proved to be a precocious imp. Careless in his habits and without realising the evil he was doing to the youngster, Reynolds allowed him to share the risks of the trade that was their living. So the boy soon became a knowing creature of the bush and prairie. He was as expert as any redskin when it came to recognising or following tracks of beast or man, and he developed a special talent for scenting spies or police officers. It was this latter talent that had made him turn in suspicion upon the Edyveans when they cornered him that day in the ravine.

From an eyrie high up among the branches of a tree he had also seen his "father" being carried away under the directions of Woodrow and the brothers. The presence of the former was full of ill omen to the youngster. He mis-

judged that the sound of shots in the stable had been the result of a fracas with the police, and that the after-condition of Reynolds was due to a police bullet. That the old man had been arrested he had no doubts, and he determined that the best service he could now do was to remain hidden and destroy all incriminating traces of the illegal business before the police came to take possession of the house and its contents.

That was the reason why Arty had secreted himself during these few days. At a distance he had followed the procession until he learned whither Reynolds was being conveyed. At night he crept to the Edyveans' house and spied through the windows to assure himself that the smuggler still remained in the same place, and he occupied the days in burying kegs and flagons until not a trace of the business could be found. Right in an open (and hence not readily suspected) part of the yard he made the grave of the trade. Then he burned a heap of rubbish on the top of the beaten sod, thus effectually obliterating all traces of his work.

His duties being ended, the faithful little chap could not remain away any longer. He was very fond of the old man and it had been a trial to him to thus remain so long from the side of the sufferer. So one midnight he crept as usual to the window of the room in which Reynolds

lay. The window was slightly opened; he raised it quietly, and as silently as a fox on the prowl he slipped into the apartment and found himself close to the man's bed.

It was very dark, but the boy's bush instinct guided him so as to avoid knocking against any obstacles.

"Dad!" he whispered, laying a hand upon the clothes.

Reynolds had only been slightly dozing and he instantly awakened.

"Dad!"

"Is that you, Arty?" spoke a voice in an undertone.

"Yes, it's me. I've come to you now, for I've fixed up everything at the shanty. There ain't a cork for the police to find!"

The old man give a deep sigh.

"Poor laddie!" he said. "So that is why you have hidden from us all."

"Of course! I wasn't going to let them get the best of us!" was the stout answer.

Again there was a sigh from the bed, and if Reynolds' old partners could have heard it they would have sighed also, though for a different reason. They would have known that their last hope of continuing their profitable trade with such an adept was gone.

"Come here, Arty! Come close to me; I want to speak to you," Reynolds then said.

The boy obeyed, and, creeping upon the bed, nestled into the shelter of the man's arm. The old man winced with pain and gave a slight exclamation, for the wound in his back was still tender and the boy had unconsciously hurt it.

Arty started.

"What's wrong, dad? Did I hurt you?"

"No, no, boy! It was the pleasure of having you back again."

The boy and the man lay together in silence for some time. At last the youngster again spoke in a whisper.

"Say, dad! Do you reckon you're going to—to die?"

"Die?" Reynolds repeated in surprise. Then he added soothingly: "No, sonny. I think not. Why do you ask that?"

"Oh, only this: I was thinking—if you ain't dying, it would be kind of nice to be always away from—well, to be always *here*, and not at the old place."

It was not difficult to understand the boy's meaning.

"No, I am not dying," Reynolds said. "But something *is* dead, Arty. Shall I tell you what? It is your old 'dad' that is dead. Something that he heard spoken by the kind friends who saved his life—that 'something' killed the old 'dad' and gave you a new one—quite new; quite different. Yes," he went on,

"these friends saved my life. They saved me from wolves that would have killed me when I lay helpless in the stable—helpless from a knife-thrust in the back."

"You were—*stabbed?*" questioned Arty in awe, as his thoughts now flew back to his meeting with Pierre.

"Yes; a coward crept up behind me and gave a coward's blow. But—well, it was a punishment to me, and a just one."

As Reynolds came to this part of his story, the boy's frame began to tremble with excitement, and the following words burst out from his lips.

"Dad!" he hissed, "I'll kill the coon that did that! I know who it was! I saw him running down the ravine and there was blood in his eyes. It was—*Say!*" The boy stopped suddenly, and leant a little way from the bed. "Didn't you hear a noise like someone moving outside?"

Both listened quietly for a few minutes.

"Probably a dog, or a stray broncho," suggested Reynolds.

"It sounded like a foot," was the verdict of the boy's better trained ear.

Again both listened, but hearing nothing further, the man resumed.

"I am glad you stopped, Arty. I, too, know the hand that struck the blow. If you saw him

I want you to forget it, for I shall never seek revenge."

"But he meant to kill you, dad!" the child urged in astonishment at this new phase of the man's character. It was so unlike him to passively accept a blow.

"I know that. And if he had succeeded, it would have been just. Now listen to me closely. You are a little man, you have a man's heart. Can you keep a secret like a man?"

"Sure, dad. I guess I've held some secrets pretty close, haven't I?"

"That you have—wrongful ones. But this is something good—quite different from the others. Will you keep it?"

"What do *you* think?" was the prompt answer given in the terse idiom of the West that thus frames an answer in a question.

"Well," resumed Reynolds, "it's just this: as soon as I am better, I am going away for a time. I have work to do in England, and it must be done without any waiting. You see, one of the Edyveans who saved my life has had to suffer terribly through me. He has had his life disgraced through something he did to help someone who—well, who might have been a better boy if I had been a better man. I can't explain it all to you now. But I am going to set things right again. To do this, I must go away for a few months. I have told the

Edyveans that I am going, though I have not told them the reason. They have promised to keep you until I return. You will stay with them, and be good?"

"Right, dad," answered a trembling voice. "It'll be terribly lonesome without you, but I'll do the straight thing. I promise."

"That's a plucky chap! And when I come back, I'll hope to bring another brother to you. Then we'll start a new farm—the three of us—a proper farm with more of the—the old things about it."

"Oh, that'll be fine—fine!" exclaimed Arty gladly.

"And remember—not a word to anyone about—the man who stabbed me. When you are a man you'll understand why."

"I shan't breathe a word," was the boy's pledge. But, at the same moment, a dark figure that had been crouching outside the window now glided away noiselessly into the bush with the movement of a snake, and an Indian curse was hissed from between his teeth—

"Spawn of a serpent!" were the words. "I reckon, varmint, that you not able breathe when old man Reynolds go! A sharp knife in throat stop spy's tongue from speaking. You know hand that stab Reynolds? Hub! We see how long you keep *that* secret!"

And the speaker who hissed these threats was Pierre, the "star cowboy" of Calvert's ranch.

CHAPTER XVII.

HORSE-THIEVES!

WHEN morning came, the Edyveans found that their little household was augmented by two instead of one as before. But this was not for long. Reynolds had warned them that he would not be a lengthy trespasser upon their kindness. He also threw out certain hints that his departure would be for England, where his presence was needed to redeem certain of the errors of his past life. With this the brothers had to be contented, but they refused to take payment for the keep of Arty during the interval.

"If the kid is not worth his bread and butter, no money would make him worth the trouble of looking after," Dick had said. And there the question was allowed to rest.

As the man recovered health the subject of his assault naturally cropped up more than once during the progress of conversation.

Here it was Reynolds who was stubborn.

"There is no need to seek the man, for I know him. If necessary, I could lay my hands upon

him within an hour or two. But what is the need? The evil that we do always falls back upon us. That blow was needed to bring about the events that followed. Without that blow I might never have known how near I came to ruining other lives; I might never have known how people can sacrifice themselves for others."

As he spoke, Reynolds looked very steadily at Stewart. But to the boy, the hint was useless. Not knowing how his confidential conversation with Dick had been heard by the supposedly unconscious patient, he was quite ignorant of any application of Reynolds' words to himself.

Then, in a week or two came the old man's departure. He possessed a few cattle and horses. These he left in charge of the Edyveans. He locked up his house, gave the key to Dick, and afterwards drove in to Regina—the nearest station in the C.P.R. And in truth the boys were sorry to see him go, for, in spite of what they had heard of his evil past, they found him in the present nothing other than a polished and attractive gentleman.

Stewart in particular had developed considerable attachment to the ex-smuggler. The boy's affectionate and impulsive nature had quickly responded to the marked kindness that Reynolds had shown him. Indeed, both the brothers were genuinely sorry when the hour for parting came. But Reynolds assured them that it would

only be for a few months, adding mysteriously: "And when I return I think I shall be able to surprise you more than ever you imagine. Evil deeds bring their own reward of pain; but good deeds, Master Stewart, are bound to bring great recompense—*when we least expect it!*"

A short time afterwards Woodrow suddenly reappeared at the ranch. Still firm in his conviction that Black Cloud had been the assailant, he now came armed with a warrant for the Indian's arrest. He had purposely delayed this final step until such time as he thought Reynolds would be well enough to give evidence in court. Great was his chagrin, however, to find that the chief witness had vanished! Yet the policeman was not to be balked. His evidence was strong against Black Cloud, so he promptly made use of the warrant.

For once, however, it seemed as though the great Woodrow had leaped the brook before studying the ground on the other side. Black Cloud firmly denied any knowledge of the matter. He frankly admitted that the hunting-knife was his, but gave the simple explanation that he had lost it in the bush, and that it had probably been found by some one else, who had made use of it in the cowardly way already described. Not unnaturally this story was scoffed at by most who were familiar with Indian habits; and, in the long run, the whole case against Black

Cloud fell to the ground. Woodrow was furious, as might have been expected, and for once he forgot good taste and respect by announcing openly in court—

"Black Cloud may get clear now. But my time is coming when I'll lay him by the heels for this self-same stabbing!"

And the chief, who was well conversant with English, replied with dignity as he paused on his way out of the court—

"When Black Cloud strikes a coward's blow, he will need no police to seek him. Black Cloud will bring his hands to meet your iron chains!"

As the months went past and the summer began to draw to a close, the Edyveans had so far settled down into ranch life that, but for the presence of Arty, their earlier adventures might have almost been forgotten. The boy had proved quite a success. True to his promise, he was docile, and soon became a useful member of the household.

Under the able tuition of Calvert and Lauder the brothers also began to experience a little of the sweets of prosperity. The ground was worked after the manner best suited to the West. Part of the earlier summer weeks had been spent with Calvert sharing labour and implements so as to store sufficient wild hay for each ranch in anticipation of the long winter. Stewart had also "gone in" for his incubator, and he was soon

able to supply the household with groceries from that source of income.

But it is no man's luck always to have steady bowling so that he can slog to his pleasure and keep the telegraph busy recording his runs. There will be breaks or twists to upset the steadiest eyes and send the balls flying into the air.

Such was the Edyveans' experience.

Acting upon Calvert's advice the brothers had invested a little more of their reserve capital in augmenting their stock with some fifty well-bred horses. They did this in the sound principle that it is not good to have all your eggs in one basket. If crops fail, it is always good to have stock to fall back upon, and vice versa.

Well, the brothers were jogging along quite comfortably, and all their prospects seemed to be as bright as a farmer's prospects ever are, until one morning they rose up to discover that the whole fifty of their new stock had vanished—*and Stewart's treasure "Dandy" gone from the stable as well!*

According to Woodrow's advice, a good strong lock had been put on the stable door, but when the boy went to feed the mare his dismay was great, for the entire lock had been cut out of the door itself, and Dandy was no longer in her accustomed place.

Poor Stewart was distracted.

On his brother's horse he scampered off to Calvert for advice. But there he found consternation equal to his own, for the pick of Calvert's herd had also vanished in the same night.

Fred was no coward, however. He immediately saddled a broncho and started off with Pierre to track the missing herd, while Stewart returned crestfallen to his brother. The tracking proved to be an easy matter, for the dew had been heavy, and the imprint of hoofs was plainly marked.

Pierre led the way at a canter, and it was not long before Calvert and he found themselves on the borders of a ranch kept by a man named Riddell—a Westerner, who enjoyed an evil reputation, together with a band of cowboys as bad as himself.

When the house was reached, and their errand explained, Jake Riddell was all sympathy.

"Lost a bunch of bronchoes, eh? Well, now, that's just what I call mighty hard luck."

"It would be hard luck in the ordinary way," said Calvert, who thought it best to let his suspicions be known without making a direct accusation. "In this case, however, I don't suppose it need worry us very much since we have tracked the animals here, and no doubt they have got mixed up with your herds."

"No doubt," replied Jake with a leering smile.

"Then your critturs are easily found. Say, boys!" (turning to the cowboys who were standing grinning near by) "seen any stray bronchoes while you were rounding-up this morning?"

"Nary a one!" was the prompt answer from the tough-looking cowboy. Then he turned to Fred with a self-confident smile: "P'raps Mister Calvert and his friend would like to have a look around to make sure for himself. But I reckon *he'll see no brands but the Riddell brands on any horse flesh on this ranch.*"

Then Calvert's heart sank. He had lost no time in travelling when his loss became known; but, quick though he was, the Riddells had been quicker. By this time his registered brand had been dexterously cooked to that of the cunningest of horse-thieves, and Fred knew well that it would be a hopeless task trying to claim his own animals, even though he could easily identify them. Riddell would stick to all that carried his brand. To recover them would need the assistance of police. Even then experience has proved that the smart thief usually gets the best of the contest.

So, rather than show fight for the present, Calvert considered it wisest to make a pretence of being successfully outwitted until he could think of a feasible scheme by which to trap his enemy. He sensibly considered that it would throw Riddell off his guard if the impression

were given that a young Englishman is easily fooled.

"Would you care to throw your eye over any of our herds?" Jake had urged with forced politeness.

"I think not," was the reply. "From what your boys say it would not be much use. They would have been sure to have noticed any strangers."

"Certain!" was the sarcastic rejoinder. "They have eyes all round their heads, and they miss nothing. Still, you're welcome to have a look round."

"I don't think I'll trouble you, thanks all the same," said Calvert. "If the bronchoes are not here, no doubt they are not far off. The less time Pierre and I waste in getting on their track, the sooner we'll find them."

"Certain sure; certain sure," retorted Riddell. "And I hope next time you're passing this way you'll look us up. Strangers are always welcome at this ranch."

"Any particular *brand* of strangers more preferable to another?" Calvert could not help replying as a parting shot.

Riddell flashed a sudden look of suspicion upon the speaker as he wheeled to face him. He had a momentary doubt as to the gullibility of his victim.

But Calvert met the look with an even

smile that neither repudiated nor gave him away.

"Any brand that knows its own business and minds it is never objected to," was the ominous reply.

"Then the sooner I toddle off the better," concluded Calvert airily. "As you can guess, I'm full of my own business this morning—and always like to do everything thoroughly. Ta-ta!"

"So-long," growled Riddell with little grace.

CHAPTER XVIII.

STEWART'S GENIUS.

LEAVING the nest of the horse-thieves, Calvert and Pierre rode straight to the Edyveans' ranch, there to report their lack of success.

Naturally the brothers were considerably disappointed, and not a little dejected, for they could ill afford such a loss as this entailed. For Stewart's sake, however, Dick tried to assume a hopeful view, and turn a brave face upon the misfortune. When the occurrence was reported to the police, he said, those who were accustomed to dealing with criminals of this class would probably know how to settle this matter, and no doubt all would come right in the end.

To Stewart, the loss of Dandy was a terrible blow, for he valued the animal so highly on account of its real worth as a possession, and also on account of the giver. It seemed to be the worst of ill-luck. Besides, this was the second horse that he had lost in a few months.

So great was the younger brother's distress, that Dick was moved to propose an instant

expedition to Riddell's ranch in order to make any offer for the return of the one animal at least.

But Calvert, supported by Pierre, voted this course as hopeless.

"It would be quite useless, old man," said the former. "The reputation of Riddell is well known. He and his gang are probably the last of the horse-thieves in this part of the West. Being the last, they apparently do their best to become the worst. Certainly they are as cute as foxes. Most of the settlers for a hundred or so of miles around have had to suffer at their hands at one time or other. No one has ever yet been able to recover their property."

"But if the settlers were to go in a body, could they not force them to give up the stolen animals?" questioned Dick.

Calvert shook his head.

"I am afraid not. You see, so long as the law cannot get at them, the law will protect them. Horses are difficult to identify. One rancher may have animals exactly the same as another. It is only by brands that you can prove a case; and if you cannot actually prove that brands have been altered (mighty difficult when dealing with Riddell!), or prove, by witnesses, that a theft took place, it would be waste time to try."

"What about police?" said Dick.

"Riddell can outwit the best of them. I don't

want to throw cold water, but unless we can nail these fellows by strategy, no police can do it by force. They are a set of foxes, and cleverer than any foxes I ever came across."

During this discussion, Stewart had relapsed into thoughtfulness. He had not lost a single word of what had been said, but all the time his dauntless will had been seeking for some plan by which to regain his property. It is against an English boy's nature to be cheated, and then remain humbly inactive. A healthy-minded lad feels that he must come out top, and six times out of seven he does, providing the cause be a just one.

Many plans cropped up, but each one seemed to have some weak point about it. He was getting a little hopeless after all. Then Calvert used the simile of "foxes." That word flashed a new and daring idea into his mind.

"Foxes!" he exclaimed in excited tones.

"That's what they are," returned Fred. "And they're the most cunning in the West."

"Yet—foxes are caught in traps, are they not—even the cunning ones?" asked Stewart.

"Why, certainly," replied Calvert with a smile, not seeing the drift of Stewart's questioning. "Traps are used unless we shoot them. But the former is the surer method."

Immediately Stewart started up with excitement.

"Then traps must be used for *these* foxes! I can see it quite plainly, and if you'll follow my plans, I believe we can outwit these vermin, cute though they think themselves!"

"A case of Jack-the-Giant-Killer, eh?" remarked Dick with amusement. It was not possible to receive his brother's enthusiasm with the same seriousness as that in which it was expressed. What could one boy, or even three, do to contend with those who had proved equal to the wits of every rancher in the district?

But Stewart was not easily subdued by a little chaffing when once he had an idea fixed in his head.

"You listen to me," he said, "and if my plan isn't a trap with teeth that will grip and hold on as well as the best steel ever made—well, I'll eat my hat!"

In a few rapidly whispered sentences the scheme was revealed. At first the listeners attended with simple amusement to what would probably prove to be but a wild-cat scheme. But as the plot was unfolded, gradually their attention of politeness increased to the utmost interest, until, when the conclusion was reached, their enthusiasm was equal to Stewart's own.

"By Jove! You're a perfect genius, old man!" exclaimed Dick, jumping up and giving his brother a hearty slap on the back.

"He's got the brains of the wiliest old trapper

that ever laid snares in the backwoods ! " added Calvert, with no less hearty appreciation.

Stewart received these compliments with becoming modesty.

" Common sense is a rare virtue—yet it is *sometimes* found."

" You are indeed one of the rarities ! " returned Calvert, laughing. Then he added seriously : " But do you think you could really undertake the risk ? It's worth trying, but at the same time it is a risk. If you were found out, the Riddells would not be over-kind to the chap who tried to fool them."

" I'm going to get back Dandy, and be even with these foxes ! " was Stewart's dogged reply.

CHAPTER XIX.

TRAPPED!

ONE sunny afternoon, about two weeks following the events described in the preceding chapter, Jake Riddell and several of his cowboys were sitting on logs in front of the house, smoking and yarning in the lazy manner of those who work by fits and starts, and who are seldom thoroughly so energetic as after dark, when their purposes are evil.

Jake had three strong supporters. Two of these were Seth Scott and Rob Harley, each of them a reckless rough-rider of the most daring type; the third was Kit Shanner, an old Indian tracker nick-named "Daisy Bell," probably as a sarcastic allusion to his shaggy black hair and generally uncouth appearance.

On this occasion, the talk had become pretty general and uninteresting, until suddenly their attention was directed to a common centre by Daisy.

"Great Scott! What in all creation is that ere coming up the trail?"

"It's nobody belonging to these parts," com-

mented Seth. "The broncho that the coon's riding looks as if it ought to be carried on a stretcher instead of holding up all them trappings."

"Whoever he is, he's not been long out of a band-box," rejoined Daisy. "The saddle's new; the lines is new; the lariat's new; hat new; shirt new; straps new; gun-cases new—all new and yellow, except the kid. He's bright green, I reckon!"

Further comment was curtailed by the arrival of the stranger himself, who by this time had ridden up to the door.

Truly he was an object for criticism! The broncho that he bestrode looked as if it were longing to lean up against the nearest tree and dream of its distant childhood, whilst the rider himself looked too young to have any past to dream about. He was fair-haired, blue-eyed, and high-collared. His whole aspect betokened one who had arrayed himself in the attire of the "bold bad cowboy," peculiar to a Penny Dreadful.

His arrival was greeted by a burst of laughter from the lungs of the four onlookers; but when he descended from his charger on the "off" side (thereby nearly spiking old Jake's eye with the wheel of an enormous Mexican spur), the ranchers (Jake being excepted) fairly rolled about and held their sides with laughter.

But the stranger never smiled. He merely opened his blue eyes with wonder as he regarded the contortions of the cowboys.

"Excuse me, gentlemen, if I intrude," he began mildly, "but do you know of any restaurant where I can obtain a little lunch. I have had quite a long ride to-day, and my horse and I are both a little exhausted. We need something to support us on a day like this."

"Seems to me, kiddie, that ere broncho of yours needs nothing to support him so much as a clothes-prop!" laughed Harley.

"I dare say you are right," replied the youth, after giving a slight scrutiny to the drooping animal. "He does not look quite as fresh as——"

"His owner!" completed Daisy.

Here Riddell remarked with an exaggerated air of politeness—

"There ain't no eating-houses in these parts, but if your pleasure is to rest in our humble mansion, I guess we can raise a tub of hog-feed for both you and that thoroughbred of yours."

"Thanks, awfully," replied the youth, quite unconscious of the chaff. "I am not yet fully familiar with the dishes of your country, as I have but recently come from England; but I have no doubt hog-feed is one of your favourite dishes, and what's good enough for you is good enough for me."

Did he understand the sarcasm of his answer? Evidently that was the thought that flashed through the minds of the cowboys, judging by the quick glances of suspicion that were flashed upon him. But his following remarks quickly dispelled distrust.

"If you will kindly show me to a bedroom where I can wash my hands, I will gladly join you in the dining-room as soon as possible."

Well, even the roughest Westerners are seldom inhospitable to hungry strangers, and the love for coarse teasing did not prevent Riddell's crew from placing before their guest as good a meal as their resources allowed. But while the youth was eating, they sat around and poured out a volley of chaff regarding the peculiarities of their guest; yet he was not quite a fool, as the following incident will show.

"By the way," said Jake at the close of the meal, "I guess you haven't told us your name yet!"

"Like as not it will be something pretty, such as Mary, or Floss, or Fluff," suggested Scott.

"Oh, no!" replied the youth airily, and with a patronising smile. "You are not at all good at guessing. My name belongs to one of the oldest English families—'William Algernon Marmaduke!' But mother simply calls me 'Willie.'"

"Oh, your mother simply calls you Willie, does she?" echoed Daisy with a nasty sneer.

"Then all I can say is, that the mother who called you such a slushy name must have been about as queer in the head as her son!"

The cowboy spoke in about as vilely sneering a tone as it was possible for a man to use. It was not possible that such could fail to penetrate even the thick skin of a tenderfoot. Even Daisy's comrades respected the names of "woman" and "mother." Few men ever sink so low as to scoff at these; and a murmur of disapproval rose when they heard the gibe, and saw how the boy's face flushed.

But although it takes some time to describe the circumstances, the words had hardly passed the speaker's mouth when the youth rose sharply from his chair, and stepped quickly to where Daisy was lolling on a bench, with his feet on the table.

Then followed the rapid flash of a right arm, and a closed fist met the cowboy's temple so firmly that the hulking coward rolled to the ground like a felled ox. It was all done in a moment, and immediately afterwards the boy was back in his seat unconcernedly admiring his new top-boots and spurs.

"Bravo, Marmalade!" ejaculated Jake, as Daisy sat up and began to rub his eye and look around as if wondering from whence had come that baby thunderbolt. "Serve you right, Daisy, say I! And what's more, I'll not have you trying

to pay back any of that score. It was well earned."

So Daisy was forced to pocket his humiliation and retire sulkily to a corner and his pipe.

When the excitement of this little incident had subsided, conversation once more turned upon more general topics.

Then, somehow or other, it leaked out that Willie had passed the previous night with the Edyveans. This information proved of deep interest to the ranchers.

"You've been with the Edyveans, have you?" queried Jake. "Now what sort of coons are they? Did you hear them say anything nice about their dear friend, Riddell? Great chums are the Edyveans and Riddell, you know."

"I *did* hear something said about him," replied Willie thoughtfully. "They praised Riddell very highly."

"Come, that's good news!" resumed the rancher in glee at the success of his ragging. "I reckon this is mighty interesting. Now, come, tell me what it was they said so particularly nice. I'm a—a great friend of Mister Jake Riddell, and it would please me down to the ground to hear the nice things the Edyveans said about him."

Willie was not unwilling to repeat the conversation.

"They said," he began slowly, as he carefully

selected a mild cigarette from a silver case and fixed it in a dainty holder—"they said (if my memory serves me) that Jake Riddell was the finest horse-thief in the North-West, and that, if he got justice, he would one day prove an ornament at a neck-tie party!" *

The result of this little story was electrical. With a furious oath Jake sprang to his feet. He was white with passion.

"What! They said that, did they? Called me a 'horse-thief'! The skunks! I'll teach these Edyveans to gas like that about their betters. Look here, Innocence—*I'm* Jake Riddell, and before the Edyveans are a day older, I wont leave so much as a ghost of a broncho on their blamed homestead. 'Neck-tie party,' indeed! I'll make a party that'll clear every living creature from their ranch, and leave them stark naked for stock—and don't you forget it!"

"I am afraid you will find that rather difficult," remarked the youth. "I heard them say that they were going to brand all their stock to-day, and keep a special lookout for trouble."

"And they'll find trouble sooner than they expect," Riddell retorted gruffly. "Brand or no brand, lookout or no lookout—I know a trick worth two or three of theirs. If I don't have everyone of their cattle in my corral, with the

* Hanging by "lynch law."

brands altered so as to be unrecognisable before morning, you may call me a Dutchman!"

At hearing this threat, Willie sat open-mouthed with admiration.

"What ripping fun that will be!" he exclaimed. "Now I would just love to be one of you, don't you know?—to go riding about, lassoing bronchoes, firing revolvers, and—and all that sort of thing. I always used to tell them at home that there would be no holding me once I got into the West. It's just the life I'm cut out for——"

"Barring sucking a bottle of milk!" interrupted Harley contemptuously. "But we don't want any babies with us——"

"Yes, we do—in this case," snapped Riddell. "We'll take him with us to-night just to show the Edyveans that they need be more careful in future how they talk with strangers about respectable neighbours. And I'll make him my special charge in the raid."

Well, the upshot was that, shortly after midnight, a party of five riders descended under the cloak of darkness from the wooded side of the Edyveans' ranch to where the balance of the young ranchers' herd was quietly resting after having been bunched by Dick.

On reaching the outskirts of the homestead, a halt was made while the riders fitted felt pads to the feet of their steeds so as to reduce to a minimum the sound of their approach, and also

to avoid making such imprints on the ground as might be afterwards noted and identified by an experienced tracker.

Then the riders spread themselves in three directions, forming the three points of a triangle. This was their customary mode of campaign, as it anticipated the possibility of their prey stampeding in any undesired direction, while at the same time it permitted gently closing upon the victims so as to be conveniently driven in a northerly course between the two wings.

So far all had gone well. Willie had been kept under Riddell's own guardianship at one wing; Scott and Harley had gone to the other; while Daisy occupied himself in setting the herd in motion at the rear point.

"I only wish my people at home could see me now!" Willie proudly exclaimed to his guardian. He was glorying in the expedition just as a little boy glories in playing at being a pirate king.

"I'd advise you to keep your jaw shut, or if you *have* to speak, do it quietly," was the growled answer. "If you give us away by cackling too loud, I reckon there'll be precious little chance of your people ever seeing you here or any other place. And don't you be going and getting scared—or crying out, perhaps. We don't want to run more risks than we have to."

But the youth was seemingly in nowise likely to show the white feather.

"Scared! Cry out!" he echoed. "Whatever makes you think I should be frightened? Besides, what need for fear when I have my trusty revolver at my side?" And from its stiff, new leather case the bold speaker produced a large silver-plated weapon that shone like a lamp even in that pitchy darkness.

"Come, Marmalade! Chuck that coon's talk, and stick that toy back in its cradle!" growled Riddell impatiently. "This is time for work, not for fooling. And I hear the boys bringing up the horses now; so keep your eyes skinned and ride close to me, you young idiot!"

Poor Willie seemed amazed at the snubs he was now receiving.

"Why, what on earth have I done now?" he asked in surprised distress. "Don't you also carry a revolver with you for protection at such a dangerous time as this?"

"Not a bit of me," was the reply. "My broncho's slick legs are all the protection *I* need."

"Are they?" questioned the youth with faint sarcasm. "Then" (and he edged his horse close alongside the "slick" one, while his voice suddenly lost its mincing tones and became firm and clear), "then, if your broncho is all the protection you need, see how you'll get out of

this difficulty! *Hands up, Riddell, or I'll shoot you where you sit!*"

And when the rancher turned to inquire the meaning of this new freak on the part of the tenderfoot, he found that he was staring into the business end of Willie's glittering "toy"—held in a hand as firm and steady as a vice.

"Hands up, you vile horse-thief, for the last time!"

Up went the man's hands like a shot. At the same instant Stewart (for, of course, the reader has long since recognised him) blew a shrill whistle that was immediately answered from the bush near at hand.

Then another voice rang out sharply in the darkness.

"Hands up, Daisy, and the rest of you! You are surrounded by armed men like rats in a trap and covered by the best rifles in the West. Move an inch until we have the shackles on you, and you'll never move again till you're carried. You know me—Sergeant Woodrow; and you know that what I say I'll do!"

That was all.

Caught in the very act of stealing by Stewart's cleverly planned trap, Riddell and his friends were soon secured and under escort for Regina gaol.

Law moves quickly in the West where cases are few and judges rusting. Within a week, the

last of the horse-thieves were committed for long terms to Stoney Mountain. Daisy, however, had his term curtailed by turning King's evidence, thus enabling many of the settlers to regain their lost property, and Dandy was once more restored to her accustomed stall.

CHAPTER XX.

THE BLIZZARD.

OWING to the excellent coaching given by Calvert and Lauder, the Edyveans were soon able to avoid many of the causes that had been retarding their success, and as autumn proceeded the brothers began to have their affairs in such order that they could look forward to spring with considerable hope. The "fall"-ploughed ground was ready for spring back-setting, the vegetable garden had been carefully prepared so that a succession of the fruits of the earth could be commenced as soon as the intervening winter had passed. So now they were cheerful as could be, and were only anxious for the time to come when they would certainly see the first-fruits of their judicious labour.

True to his "dad's" wishes and the promise given, Arty Reynolds had quickly become a docile member of the household. Naturally there were several breakings-out. A sparrow takes some time to become accustomed to the restraints of a cage, though in time it may forget the old wild

freedom, and really enjoy the tamer life. But, from the very first, Arty showed himself anxious to be of use, and quick to copy the manners and speech of his elders. Thus he speedily became a favourite with both Dick and Stewart, and was regarded as much a part of the establishment as they were themselves.

Then the winter began to close in, casting its great white blanket over prairie, valley, and woodland. At this time the days were chiefly occupied with felling trees for firing and building purposes during winter and the following summer. It was a little spell of peaceful, happy work after a series of more or less exciting adventures.

But frontier life in the West is seldom without its excitements recurring at intervals to colour what might be otherwise a somewhat monotonous life, and our Dunmere heroes found their experience no exception to the rule.

There are three kinds of adventures in life: those that we seek; those that we meet without seeking; and those that are purposely thrust upon us. Hitherto, the Edyveans had mostly experienced the two former. What led to the incidents that close a period of their life and complete our present story were purely the last-named.

One afternoon early in December, when the weather was already bitterly cold, a certain

young Indian stranger called at the ranch. He spoke English fairly well, and intimated that Fred Calvert wanted the brothers to visit him for a day or two of hunting, as he had seen many antelopes in the district of his ranch.

It seemed rather strange to Dick's mind that his friend should not have written a letter instead of sending a verbal message; but Calvert had spoken quite recently about the possibilities of some deer-shooting, and so Dick did not give the omission more than passing thought.

Unfortunately, however, Stewart was just recovering from a severe cold at the time, and would consequently be unable to join any such expedition. For this reason the elder brother immediately announced his intention of refusing the invitation.

But Stewart would not hear of this sacrifice.

"Not likely!" he said. "Why should you not have a good time just because I happen to have a bit of a cold?"

"It might get worse. Colds are stubborn things——"

"And so are some brothers!" returned Stewart. "No, no, Dick! Off you go! Have a good time, and I'll be all right here for a day or two with Arty to look after me. *You'll* see that I don't freeze to death, won't you, kid?"

"You bet!" answered the youngster enthusiastically. "Stewart and I will be as right as rain!"

So earnestly did they urge that Dick was at last persuaded to follow the Indian, who had ridden off immediately after delivering his message.

"Well, well, I suppose, if you put it like that I must go!"

"'Course you must!" said Arty with decision.

"But there's one thing, Stewart," resumed Dick. "I think you ought to change into the room that Arty sleeps in, and let him have yours. You see, I have kept the stove burning in your room since you were ill, but the kid might sleep too heavily. The kitchen-stove pipe goes through the other room, so you would be fixed all right for warmth."

"Right you are!" responded Stewart cheerfully. "For my part, I think my cold's quite gone. But I'll sleep in the stable if it will set your mind at ease."

"No need for that. A simple change of bedroom will do for the present!" Dick returned with a laugh.

Thus the question was settled.

Putting on his furs, while Arty went to hitch-up Bess in the jumper-sleigh, with a plentiful

supply of hay to keep the traveller's feet warm, Dick was soon ready for his expedition. A rifle and shot-gun were also stowed away among the rugs by Stewart, and soon the elder brother was slipping along the trail to the merry music of jingling bells.

During the first half-hour of the journey, Dick found the road in moderate condition, and made fair time. The broncho stepped out well, and the driver's heart was bright with the sunshine of the day and the happy thoughts of anticipated sport.

After a time, however, it was found that the snow had drifted so deeply at a narrow part of the valley that the ordinary trail was impassable for driving purposes. A rider might cross the crevasses and slopes, but with a sleigh it was out of the question. Luckily, the Qu'appelle River that follows the bed of the valley is heavily wooded on either bank, thus preventing the snow from drifting to any extent upon the ice. Dick's ready resource decided that this would provide an excellent road for the rest of the journey, so he turned his broncho in the direction of a convenient "crossing," and was soon jogging along contentedly on a level path in a fairyland avenue of snowladen boughs.

For some time he proceeded in comfort, meeting only an occasional wolf and a few prairie chickens. He congratulated himself upon the

happy thought that had defied the snow-drifts of the upper trail.

Then, with the awful swiftness with which the winter climate of the West suddenly changes from smiles to anger, a cold blast of wind came sweeping round a bend of the river, driving a cloud of powdered snow before it in the traveller's face. At the same time a hissing sound as of escaping steam was heard in the distance coming swiftly nearer and nearer, louder and louder. And in the next moment—barely before the dread signs could be recognised—Dick found himself surrounded by a wild, shrieking blizzard that rendered the atmosphere as cold as the Arctic and as opaque as stone.

Had Edyvean been more familiar with the fickle features of the Canadian winter, he would long before have noticed the "sun-dogs" and other premonitory signs of an approaching tempest, and thus avoided the rancher's greatest dread: being trapped by a blizzard. As it was he could only submit to the results of his ignorance, and try to push onward.

For a little while he continued to drive, but the storm increased in strength and fury until Bess became unwilling to face the blinding snow. Dick was then obliged to get out and lead the animal and endeavour (not often successfully) to keep to the centre of the river beyond the reach of overhanging branches.

But what had begun as a pleasant trip had now evolved into a weary trudge. It was impossible to make much headway, for the wind stole the youth's breath, and progress could only be made after frequent rests. The snow at such times stings the face and eyes like the points of needles, and filters through every crevice of clothing; so Dick's plight may be better imagined than described.

For two or three hours he plodded on. As the crow flies, the road to Calvert's ranch was not great, but the Qu'appelle River is peculiarly serpentine and often lengthens a direct mile into two or three. Dick had not realised this when he took to the ice, but he persevered bravely. Then night came on to add to the painfulness of the position. By that time he felt sure that he must be near the "crossing" that led up to the plain below Calvert's ranch. He stopped several times to investigate the bank, but no sign of a trail could he find. Indeed it was almost a hopeless task under such conditions.

On the wanderer went again, though now he was beginning to drag his feet, and often stumbled with simple exhaustion. Yet he did not give in. He turned once more to explore the river bank. He was not more successful in finding what he sought for, but this time he discovered what was perhaps better considering his present condition

—a deep shelter in the steep slope of the river bank—a large cave that had evidently been formed by a crack in the cliff at a remote time when the district was disturbed by internal fires. Into this cave Dick crept. The opening was just large enough to allow him to enter without much stooping, and, as it was sheltered from the whirling snow by overhanging willows, the weary traveller found that he immediately stepped from turmoil into peace.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE SERPENTS' CAVE.

WAS ever a human being more thankful to reach a haven from any storm than Dick Edyvean was in discovering that cave?

There the cold would still be unpleasantly keen, for the thermometer must have dropped to 30° below zero at the least, but, at any rate, the traveller could congratulate himself in the prospect of being free from snow and wind. His great regret was that the cave was not suitable for harbouring Bess as well. All that could be done was to unharness her, and leave her instinct to find some shelter.

After rummaging about for some time with the aid of a few matches, Dick's luck seemed to be in the ascendant. Evidently the narrow cave was periodically flooded by the spring rains, for a considerable number of dry twigs and fairly substantial logs were found jammed in corners and crevices.

It will not be difficult to imagine the comfort that this discovery was in such a dilemma.

Having a sufficient supply of matches, there was now the prospect of comparative luxury, where, but a few minutes before, unbearable cold (and possibly death) had been the outlook.

Speedily the wood was collected. The dry twigs took very little coaxing to render good service; and soon Dick found himself stretching at ease beside a friendly blaze, while the unfriendly storm raged harmlessly past the mouth of the cave in the dark night.

As time went on, the gratifying warmth began to have a soothing influence on tired limbs and nerves. The heat, following the intense cold, soon commenced to coax sleep, and, while he was barely aware of the fact, Dick gradually sank down upon his side, and fell into a deep slumber. There had been no reason why he should not sleep while the night and the storm lasted. While out in the snow, the tendency to lie down and doze had, of course, followed the excessive fatigue. But Dick had known enough not to yield to what would have proved to be a death-slumber. Now, however, all was changed. Sleep was the best restorative that he could have next to good food. There were sufficient logs in the fire to keep blazing for hours. So he welcomed the temptation, and readily yielded.

Perhaps he slept for an hour; perhaps for

two. But suddenly he was wakened with a start.

"What was that?" he asked aloud, forgetting where he was.

It was a strange sound that had awakened him, and as soon as he roused from drowsiness he leaned up on his elbow to listen.

The sound was repeated, and came clearly to his ears. It was a noise something like that of an old-time watchman's rattle—a danger signal, which, once heard, is unmistakeable, and never forgotten. It was the anger-warning of the deadly rattle-snake!

As the truth flashed into Dick's mind, a cold sweat spouted out of every pore in his body, and at the same time, he started up in horror to a sitting posture to listen acutely. Simultaneous with the movement, the one rattle was multiplied by dozens.

Dick looked around him, and, as he did so, his eyes began to stare and all his muscles to quiver.

From every visible corner of the cave protruded writhing bodies against which the firelight glistened, exposing these figures with awesome indistinctness.

If the boy had been able to see the entire danger—the many dark crevices beyond his sight, he might have been still more horror-struck. As it was he could catch glimpses of glistening eyes

and gliding bodies quite sufficient to unsteady the nerves of the coolest and pluckiest. Innocently he had stumbled upon a serpents' nursing and winter hibernating place. The cave and the fire that he had so eagerly and gratefully welcomed, now proved to be friends even more treacherous than the cold and snow without.

He dared not move, lest by so doing he further attracted the attention of the venomous creatures that were full of life. Evidently they had mistaken the traveller's fire for the return of summer.

What was he to do? It was hardly safe to breathe, as the slightest movement of limb or body seemed to draw an inquiring reptile in his direction.

Once he desperately determined to risk a dash for the open and accept the blizzard as the lesser of two evils. But at that moment a cold, soft body dragged itself over his hand as it lay on the ground; so that thought was dismissed as quickly as it had come.

By this time the snakes were writhing all over the floor of the cave—over his legs, round his arms, and once even passing across his bare throat! Not a muscle did he dare to move at such times. The least tremour might mean the plunging of the fangs into the nearest flesh, and

then—the signal for a general attack followed by death swift and torturing. All that remained for Dick to do was to sit as still as a statue, watching the flames. He now longed for the cold to return—thrice passionately as, two hours since, he had yearned for the warmth.

Well, all night long he remained in that fixed position until every limb was numb and every nerve strained to its utmost. Still the tantalising logs continued to glow. They seemed to refuse obstinately to abate the slightest degree of heat.

But at last the morning broke, and with its coming the blizzard waned and the fire reluctantly began to dwindle. Gladly did poor Dick hail these changes, and gladly too was he assured that, with returning chill, his dangerous companions became less active and retreated to their winter crevices.

Yet the sun was high in the heavens before the last serpent vanished and Dick was free to move. By that time his limbs were so stiff that the first cautious movements were agony. But stiff limbs were better than lifeless! He was thankful enough for the former.

And when at last the young adventurer crept out to the open, how he turned his face to the new clear blue sky and gulped down the fresh air of freedom! He fairly yelled out with delight.

Who would not have done the same on being released from such a nightmare?

And he found Bess calmly nibbling the hay that lay on the bottom of the sleigh! Little did she care for blizzards when not forced to face them. She had simply sought the lea of the river bank, turned her back to the tempest, and patiently waited where her master had left her.

Harnessing was now a short matter, and soon Dick was trotting off to continue his journey with all speed. He found the crossing not far distant, and was soon slipping along the trail to Calvert's ranch.

But his adventures were not yet ended. Indeed they had hardly begun.

Reaching Calvert's house, Dick was rather astonished to find that, while he was certainly received with welcome, he was also received with surprise.

"Glad to see you, old chap!" said Fred. "But what on earth has brought you out in this weather—and alone? Where's Stewart? I thought the valley trail would be quite impassable."

For an invited guest, such a greeting was not quite what might have been reasonably expected.

"For goodness sake, don't chaff at present!" exclaimed Dick with an attempt at self-control

as he threw the reins to Lauder and followed Calvert into the house. "Grub is what I want, first and foremost. I've had nothing to eat since dinner yesterday!"

As he spoke, Dick sank back exhausted upon the nearest chair. His pale face, darkened eyes, and general appearance of collapse amply testified the truth of his words, and filled Calvert with alarm.

"Nothing to eat!" the latter echoed. "Why, I don't understand——"

"And you wait until you bring me food —bread, milk, *anything!*" interrupted Dick, with the irritation of a nerve-racked person.

Without another word, Calvert brought a jug of fresh milk. Dick eagerly grabbed it and gulped down the last drop. Then he gave a great sigh of satisfaction, and smiled more brightly as he returned the vessel.

"Thanks, old man. That's the sweetest drink I ever tasted in my life."

"That's good," returned Fred, as he now began to prepare the necessaries for a meal until Lauder returned to relieve him. "Now spin your yarn while I forage grub. If it's bad news, the sooner it is out the better."

"Oh, it's not very bad except as far as my last night's adventure goes. But that is

over now, and I'll be right as a trivet as soon as I have some of that bacon that you're cutting. You see, when I got your invitation to shoot antelope, Stewart's cold was too bad——"

But Dick got no further, for Fred clapped down his butcher-knife with a bang.

"*My* invitation!" he exclaimed.

"Yes, certainly. It came just after noon."

"Nonsense!" returned Calvert. "Why, man, you must have been dreaming. I sent no invitation!"

It was Edyvean's turn now to be astonished, and he stopped short in the act of peeling off his furs.

"No invitation!" he repeated in amazement, as he turned to Calvert with a mystified look. "Why, you must surely be joking. A young Indian came and said that you had sent him to summon us to a deer shoot. You remember we spoke of this one day when Pierre and Lauder were present, and I thought you had arranged as we then proposed. True, I thought it was a little strange that you did not send a note, but——"

"Look here, Dick," Fred said seriously. "There is more in this than meets the eye—unless, of course, you are having a game with me."

"If that were the case, I would hardly chose

such weather as this to carry out my joke in," returned Dick.

"Very well. Let's have the whole story while I am getting grub ready. Something tells me that some confounded trickery has been at work, though for what purpose I cannot imagine."

Then Edyvean related his adventures from the beginning to the end, and during the narrating, Fred's face continued to grow graver. Lauder had returned from the stable by this time, and he also listened with wrapt attention while he silently assisted the "boss."

"Man! But yon was a terrible adventure wi' the rattlers!" was his comment at the end, to which Calvert rejoined—

"My instinct tells me that greater adventures are still in store for us all. I wonder if this can have any connection with the Riddell affair!"

"Do you ken the Indian that brought the message yesterday?" questioned Jock.

"Never saw him before in my life."

"But maybe ye'd spot the varmint if you saw him again," Lauder then suggested, and Edyvean quickly confirmed the idea.

"Certainly. I looked at him closely, and I noticed in particular that he had a red scar running from the left temple to his ear."

At this announcement, Fred and Lauder exchanged rapid glances of mutual understanding.

"That settles it!" said the former emphatically.

"Settles what?" asked Dick, quite in the dark as to his friend's meaning.

"Settles the point as to whether or not Riddell had a hand in the matter. That Indian is Fox-eye—a great friend of Pierre's, and Pierre has no friendly dealings with the Riddells. Evidently the half-breed has some reason for wishing to get you out of the way for a time——"

"*And Stewart is left behind!*" exclaimed Dick, as he suddenly started up from his chair and grabbed Fred by the arm with the greatest excitement.

"My dear chap, it will not do any good to give way to fear," said Calvert with a calmness that he did not feel, however.

"Fear!" echoed Dick. "Why, man, who knows what may not have happened by this time? If harm was intended, fifteen hours have been free to carry it out. I must start back at once!"

"Laddie! Laddie!" was Lauder's kindly interpolation. "There's no' a bit o' good will come o' worrying on an empty stomach."

"But my brother—Stewart——"

"Is no' to be better off if you starve yoursel'. Take advice frae me: food is the first thought. While you're at that, I'll saddle you a couple o' mares. After that—off you fly as fast as horse-flesh will carry you!"

And so Dick had perforce to agree to the Scot's rough philosophy and Calvert's calm reasoning—both of which his heart told him were good advice. Hunger is no man's friend, but a foe that opposes every effort of brain or muscle.

CHAPTER XXII.

A HALF-BREED'S STRATAGEM.

WE must now hark back a bit to the time when Dick had left the ranch in charge of his brother and Arty.

After they had watched the departure of the elder, Stewart turned indoors with a sigh. It was not that he begrudged his brother the pleasure of hunting antelope with Calvert; but hitherto all their pleasures had been shared, and it seemed an ill-omen that one had left the other behind to-day.

But Stewart was not a chap to go into dumps about small things. He knew that his brother had been perfectly right about the cough, and he laughed pleasantly as he turned to Arty.

"Say, old chap! you heard the 'chief's' orders—that you and I have got to change rooms? I guess we'd better just set about the business at once."

"You'll be a deal warmer in there," replied the lad. "I've been comfy as toast every night."

"Then, come on. We'll get the beds changed

now. Nothing like doing things when you think about them. Besides, I've got some bread to bake afterwards, so we will have a pretty busy night."

While the boys were thus employed, Arty was the first to note the signs of a coming storm.

"Think Dick has reached Calvert's ranch yet?"

Stewart consulted his watch.

"Hardly yet. Calvert's is quite two hours away when the trail is good. But the snow is lying fairly thick in some parts of the valley."

"Then I guess he's got his work cut out for him this trip," commented Arty. "There's a blizzard coming, as sure as eggs are eggs."

Stewart looked out of the bedroom window towards where the sky met the distant hills.

"It's beginning to look grey enough," he remarked, and Arty, coming to his side, said—

"See these sun-dogs!" (He pointed to two rainbow circles of light, with a cross in the centre of each, standing like attendants at each side of the sinking sun.) "See them! That means a blizzard for sure. In half an hour more——*Gee-whiz!* Hear that!" A shrieking blast of wind at that moment struck

the house—the same blast that had greeted Dick during the early part of his drive on the ice.

It was the blizzard sure enough as time proved, for soon it reached the ranch, screaming and whirling round the house just as it had held a witches' Sabbath round the traveller and Bess.

Stewart was naturally concerned for his brother's safety. But Arty's cheerfulness soon coaxed hopeful views. Neither of the boys knew the real state of the trails, and, of course, it never occurred to them that any part would be impassable.

"Don't you worry about the boss! He's fixed all right by this time!" the younger boy announced confidently. "He'd be able to make Calvert's ranch by this time. It's easy driving with Bess in the snow. He'd do it quicker than in a buckboard on a dry trail."

With these assurances, Stewart had to be contented, and beyond a few remarks as to the progress of the storm, the matter was not discussed further.

With night came the bread-making, at which young Edyvean had become an adept. This over, a few arrangements were made in anticipation of the morning, after which the boys went to bed.

Stewart was tired, and soon fell asleep. "Punching bread," which is the Western synonym for kneading dough, is not light work, and when the boy's head was laid on the pillow, he was booked to slumberland for a good seven solid hours.

So heavily did he sleep that he did not hear the window of his room being silently raised an hour or two later; he did not hear two Indians creeping softly inwards; nor did he recognise anything amiss as they bent down to listen to his breathing.

A slight pause followed. Then there was a soft grunt of satisfaction from one of the prowlers. That was also unheard by the sleeper. Indeed, he knew nothing until he was rudely awakened by having the bed-clothes suddenly rolled around him, and roughly drawn over his head to stifle any cries that he might make, after which he was picked up in the lock of powerful arms and carried away.

Unable to move because of the clothes that bound him so tightly, and unable to cry out—hardly able to breathe—Stewart had no idea whence he was being conveyed. The cold wind and some of the snow penetrated the blankets. By that, only, he knew that he was outside, and that the blizzard had not yet ceased. Beyond that, he had no knowledge until he felt him-

self suddenly deposited on the ground, heard a door slammed and locked, by which tokens he judged himself a prisoner.

Slowly the captive managed to unroll the wrappings that bound him like some ancient mummy; then he sat up. But the place was in darkness.

Rising stiffly, Stewart next began to feel his way along the walls. He came against a heap of firewood and what appeared to be a corn-bin. By that he surmised that he was a prisoner in some rancher's outhouse. But whose? Perhaps Riddell had escaped from prison? The very thought sent a cold shiver down the boy's back. But he soon decided that, if such were indeed his plight, fear would not rescue him. All his wits would be needed to save his life, so he took a firm grip upon his nerves, and once more started exploring.

Being in his sleeping-garments Stewart was terribly cold. He wrapped a blanket round his shoulders and began his second journey round the walls. He found the door and gently turned the handle. But of course it was a forlorn hope to anticipate any weakness in the lock. He was well secured in a prison from which there seemed to be no escape.

Unable, therefore, to find any exit, the boy groped his way back to the comparative warmth of the blankets, intending to wait patiently

until he saw what daylight might bring forth.

Just then he heard a voice at his side calling in a whisper—

"*Stewart! Stewart!*"

It was but a tiny voice that called his name, but such as it was Stewart heard it, and started as though it had been a voice from the dead.

"Stewart!" was again repeated. This time he recognised the tones, and he could hardly believe his ears.

"Arty!" he exclaimed.

"Yes, it's me—here—by the door. Come quick—lie down—there's space between the door and floor! Quick! there's very little time, and they might nab me here!"

"They! Who?" exclaimed Stewart excitedly, as he crawled to the door and lay down so as to be on a level with the speaker.

"Pierre and his Indians. I reckon they'd skin me alive if they caught me!"

"But where am I?" questioned Stewart.

"In my dad's outhouse. It's this way—I was wakened up by feeling the wind whizzing through the shanty. I went to your room and found you gone and the window open. Well, then I pretty quick sized things up. It's *me* old Pierre wants, and he's made a mistake and taken you!"

It was difficult to follow the youngster's course of reasoning—he spoke so quickly.

"What on earth should he want *you* for?" asked Stewart.

"Blamed if I know!" was the frank answer. "Perhaps 'cause he hates my dad. At any rate I slipped on some clothes and lit out on the trail before the tracks got snowed up. I followed considerable; then I came to the foot of our ravine. The blizzard had toned down a bit, and I was able to see a light in the old shak. Well, I know dad weren't there, so reckoned that was where they had taken you. Back I went for home, and now I've brought your clothes, and—*this*. Put out your hand and take them."

Stewart did as he was told and felt something being pressed towards him. He grabbed it, and found a heavy Colt's revolver with his fingers.

"Sure it's loaded?" he asked with a sigh of relief, for now he had a friend to aid him in his predicament.

"In every chamber. Think I take guns to play with like toys?" was the contemptuous retort. "And see—here's your clothes! Get 'em on quick, or you'll freeze."

"Oh, Arty, you're a brick!" exclaimed poor Stewart, and his gratitude for the plucky youngster's conduct brought a choking lump into his throat. "You're a brick; and I'll never

forget all you have done for me!" Stewart stretched out his hand and groped until he held a small, cold one under the door. He thought that he heard a sort of baby sob from the outside. Perhaps he was mistaken, for it was quite a stout voice that answered.

"'Taint anything! You and Dick saved my dad's life, and I promised him I'd stick to you. That's all. Now slip into your pants like grease lightning. After that, feel around for a corn-bin. It's half-full, but don't mind that. Dive your arm down till you come to the bottom. You'll find a ring there. Pull, and the bottom will come up. It's a trap-door to a secret passage. When you go down, mind and shut the trap after you, and the oats will fall back so's to hide everything." Suddenly the boy quickened his speaking, and added excitedly: "Quick! Quick! I hear people moving. Slip into the bin! Take your clothes with you and dress in the passage."

Considerable alarm was expressed in Arty's tone.

"Then, for goodness' sake, hide yourself!" exclaimed Stewart, who immediately became infected by the spirit of alarm. It was not for himself he feared so much as for the plucky little chap who had risked so much for his sake. But he received no reply to his urging, so judged that the child had made himself scarce at the approaching danger.

He waited by the door for a few moments, but heard nothing to cause him further apprehension. Then he began to feel round the walls again until he found the bin. Once there, it took little searching to discover the ring that Arty had described. Opening the trap, he quickly descended the ladder that was ready for the purpose. The door closed over his head. Then Stewart breathed more freely, and hastened to dress in the clothes that his brave little friend had brought for him.

The warmth of the garments seemed to restore more of the warmth of courage. How his heart thanked the ready wit and manly pluck that had come to his aid!

After that, the prisoner began to take a blind-man's survey of his surroundings for the second time that night.

Feeling cautiously with his hands, he found that he was in a fairly large cellar, the walls of which were of earth. There were several empty cases stored in the corners, but what they might have contained, of course, Stewart could not conjecture. It would have surprised him if he had known that once they had conveyed household goods from his very native town in Cornwall, and that the owner had but recently sat in Mrs. Edyvean's drawing-room with his son, Willie Crewes, and confessed the whole story of his

(Stewart's) sacrifice for that same son. Of course, cases have not tongues to speak, or they might have told some part of this. They might also have imparted what the darkness concealed: that "CREWES" was written in large black letters on each lid — not "Reynolds," for the latter was only the assumed name of a whisky smuggler; "Crewes" was the real name of a man who had deserted his home and left his son to the not over-tender mercies of an uncle. Yet, as we say, Stewart had no means of knowing all this at present. He merely gave the boxes a passing thought, then passed on.

Groping along the walls, he discovered an opening at one side. This was a narrow passage that led a twisted course. At one part, he came upon a heavy door that blocked the way. It was massive oak, with heavy bolts. These were drawn back, so were no hindrance to the explorer's progress. With caution he pulled it towards him. Noiselessly it moved on its hinges, and by feeling Stewart found that there were bolts on the other side as well, and, so far as he could tell, the passage continued in the darkness as before.

"Evidently a dodge of old Reynolds to make a retreat doubly safe," was Stewart's mental comment. Then a sudden light flashed into his mind. "Bolts on both sides! That

means that the passage can be entered from either end! This door is to cut off pursuit from either end." It had been the boy's fear that the passage might end in a *cul de sac.* Such a contingency would have left him in a worse plight than the former, in the event of his captors choosing to occupy the out-house. There could be no escape from an underground cellar; from a passage the odds were in his favour, and perhaps, in a short time, his present troubles might be at an end.

CHAPTER XXIII.

TRIAL BY TORTURE.

IT was with a lighter heart that Stewart pursued his journey. He groped his way along the twists of the underground passage until he came to another cellar that seemed similar to the first. Here he stumbled against a second ladder. Carefully he ascended, pausing to listen in case he might find himself in a worse plight than the former. But he could hear nothing, so he pushed up another trap, revealing a replica of the secret bin of the outhouse. Stealthily he raised the lid to a chink through which he could peep. It was daylight now, and to his great joy he found himself in a small room that was used for storing harness and implements. There was a door beside him ; but hearing voices through the wooden partition that separated this from the main house, he paused to consider his position before acting rashly. One of the voices he recognised, and he turned to peep through a crack in the woodwork in order to satisfy his curiosity as to the other speakers.

But whatever thoughts Stewart might have

had at first of dashing for freedom, these thoughts were immediately banished by the sight he saw.

Seated near the cooking-stove in Reynolds' kitchen were the half-breed Pierre and two Indians—one of the latter being the scarred messenger of yesterday. At a little distance was the child Arty, tightly bound by a lasso to a heavy chair. The boy's face was pale, but his lips were firmly set and his eyes stared bravely at the men who faced him. By the ugly looks of the captors it was not difficult to gather that the lad was having (and had been undergoing) a torturous time since he had last spoken in alarm to Stewart, and these same evil looks boded no good for what was to follow. The men were speaking in English with the evident intention of adding torture by enabling Arty to understand all they said.

"So you knew Pierre stick knife in Reynolds' back?" Pierre was questioning. Then he gave a short, cruel laugh. "The white boy have eyes like hawk—but he no' see everythings. Pierre see more; hear more. He listen at window. White boy tell old man secret. Foolish white boy! Pierre must keep tongue from speaking what Pierre no' wish him speak!"

What this threat meant one could not gather then, but the savage tone in which it was uttered was enough to tell Stewart that some terrible revenge had already been plotted. Instinctively

he felt in his pocket for the revolver that Arty's forethought had provided. Alas! in his hasty retreat, it had been left on the floor of the wood-shed. And it was too late now to return for it. Pierre had resumed speaking, and who knows what might not happen during the would-be rescuer's absence.

"Did the serpent's spawn think to sleep safe in bed after speaking words like these?" the half-breed hissed out.

"Ah! that was the secret of the kidnapping?" Stewart thought. "I was taken in a mistake for Arty, and he, poor beggar, has fallen into the enemy's clutches after all!"

"Did he think to live long knowing so much?" Pierre demanded.

But to these questions Arty did not answer a word. He sat as still as a statue, and as pale as one of marble. His hands were clenched, and his lips doggedly shut.

"But Pierre have friends," continued the half-breed. "He have friends help him, and they watch, watch, day and night. Then they take spy—though he nearly run away from prison."

Evidently Pierre was too glad to have Arty in his power to question how the lad had managed to escape from a locked room. Having nearly lost him, his delight in the recapture was too great to leave space for side issues. Then

he turned and spoke to his companions in a whisper. What he said evidently pleased them, for they all three laughed as their leader took out a long hunting-knife from the breast of his shirt, and laid it on the table.

"Listen!" he said to Arty, affecting a gentler air. "Pierre is kind. Pierre has some pity for papoose. He will, what you say—bargain with the serpent's spawn. If white boy tell Pierre where old man Reynolds' gold hide, then Pierre no' kill. But, if papoose speak not——" (here the savage brute bent forward to place his face close before the boy's, and, staring straight into the brave young eyes, hissed out his final threat)——"if papoose speak not, then Pierre cut off ears—nose—fingers. Pierre kill! kill! —terrible slow—but—kill!"

It was horrible. The words dripped out like poison from a serpent's fangs.

Still, not a word did Arty utter; not a movement of his face betrayed a sign of fear.

With a burst of passion the half-breed then leaped upright.

"What! You no' speak? You tie tongue when Pierre order? We shall see—we shall see how long a dog is dumb when Pierre say 'speak!'"

Snatching up the long knife from the table, the infuriated man plunged the blade between the bars of the glowing fire. It was red hot in

an instant. He quickly withdrew it, and wheeling upon Arty, gripped one of the lad's arms while, without warning, he pressed the hot metal upon the boy's bare hand.

"Speak! Speak!" the savage shrieked in a perfect frenzy.

A hissing sound and a sickening smell reached Stewart as the knife touched the boy's flesh.

Then the watcher could contain himself no longer. He gave a wild cry to stay the torturer, rushed for the door, and in another moment ha burst into the presence of the terrible men.

CHAPTER XXIV.

BLACK CLOUD'S "REVENGE."

NEITHER Dick nor Calvert spared horse flesh on that journey to the former's ranch. Fred was familiar with the shortest and safest trail for that season of the year, and the distance was covered with speed and safety.

On reaching their destination, however, their worst fears were realised. The door of the house stood open, the stove was cold, and to all appearance the place had been deserted for some hours.

"Stewart! Arty!" Dick called loudly, but no answer was forthcoming. Next he dashed into the room that his brother was to occupy. There he stopped aghast at what he saw. The room was empty; there were few clothes on the bed; the window was wide open, and the snow had drifted to a heap upon the floor.

"Gone! Stewart is gone!" he exclaimed to Calvert, who had followed in closely. "What vile treachery has been at work to take my brother away?"

Fred's heart was aching for his friend's trouble, but he tried to remain calm and collected. He had long since learned that hopeless despair often makes the possible an impossibility.

"Come, Dick," he said quietly, "you must not give way. If the chap is in danger, clear heads are needed to save him, not wild words. You must buck up for Stewart's sake. When the moment of his trial comes, he must find you strong beside him."

These were just the words that Dick needed. To recall to his mind the truth that Stewart's safety relied upon his brother's strength, rescued the elder from the despair that was so dangerously apparent. It might, perhaps, seem heartless in Fred to be so calm at such a crisis, but Edyvean was too true in his own heart to doubt the loyalty of another. Indeed, we often find that the deepest sympathy is that which looks at trouble with the steadiest eye and calmest face.

"Thank you, Fred," Dick said simply, as he turned and held out his hand to his friend. "You are right. Stewart may need all our strength. We must waste none in needless wailing."

Just then the sound was heard of horse's hoofs beating on the trail near the house.

Calvert hurried to the window and looked out.

"Well, if this isn't fortunate!" he exclaimed. "The very man we need—Sergeant Woodrow!"

"Sergeant Woodrow, and no other!" replied the officer as he reined up his steed at the window where the two friends were standing.

"You're just the man we are in need of," said Dick earnestly. "Won't you tie up your broncho and come in?"

"Can't wait. Rode from Regina this morning—duty!" was the answer. "I only called to say 'how-do' in passing, and then I'm on the trail again—going to your ranch, Mr. Calvert, by the way."

"To my ranch?" repeated Fred. "What duty calls you there?"

"Your half-breed, Pierre."

"Pierre—my cowboy?"

"The same. He's been a bit of a scoundrel in his day—was mixed up in the robbery of old Miles Truman, a miser of Moosmir, some years ago. He got off at the trial and his pal was locked up. That pal is now dying in prison and has given evidence that will put Pierre in a cell for some years to come, and now I've come with the warrant—but, Great Scott!" (The Sergeant had just caught a glimpse of the inside of the

bedroom.) "Are you turning your house into a refrigerator with all that snow in the best bedroom?"

The officer asked this question with a touch of humour, but a glance at the two friends told his experienced eye that something was amiss.

"Say, what's the matter?" he questioned seriously.

"Everything," replied Dick. "We are in the midst of trouble and don't know what to do."

"Anything in my line?"

"I am afraid so."

In an instant the Sergeant had slipped from his horse, flung the bridle over a gate-post, and entered the house with business in every movement.

"H'm!" he uttered after a significant glance at the cold kitchen and, afterwards, the deranged bedroom. "Tell me your story as briefly as you can. I see that your brother is not here. Is he concerned——"

"Yes, he and Arty Reynolds—they have disappeared, by foul trickery of that very 'Pierre,' I believe," interrupted Dick.

"Then the sooner I hear the details, the better," was the comment.

Dick then told his story as quickly as he could—right from the first bringing of the supposed message from Calvert to the return and the dis-

coveries of that morning. Sergeant Woodrow listened with close attention. Then he turned to Calvert.

"Mr. Edyvean says that this Indian who brought the message is a friend of Pierre. Do you know him?"

"Slightly. Fox-eye is his name."

"'Fox-eye!'" repeated Woodrow with a raising of his eyebrows. "A fellow with a scar on the side of his face?"

"The same. Do you know him?"

"I should think I do, the skunk! He's a renegade Sioux—one of the worst ever made. I shall be glad to lay my hands on him. I've tried to get a clear case against him for years, but he always wriggled out, just like Pierre. But, Great Scott! If the boys have fallen into their hands, they are indeed among wolves!"

"But what is to be done? We are wasting time talking here," said Dick somewhat impatiently.

"It is never 'waste of time' to get facts clear before you start on a man-hunt. And to know the characters of those you seek is often half the knowledge necessary to trace motive and hiding-place," replied Woodrow.

Then Fred suggested:—

"Surely there must be tracks that we might follow."

"Undoubtedly," was the response. "But not tracks that you or I could find unaided. You forget that a deal of snow has fallen and drifted during the night. It will take more than three of us to find the key to the hiding-place, and it will take more than a white-man's eye and head to see aright and plan the campaign since time is of value."

At this statement Dick's face fell considerably.

"Then we shall lose time in finding such a person. I suppose you will need to return to barracks?"

"I'm not so sure of that," said Woodrow. "There's only one man in these parts who can find a blind trail such as this——"

"And he?" interrupted Dick hastily.

"It is doubtful if he would help us," answered the Sergeant. "You see, I had him lately in my hands——"

"What of that?" Edyvean demanded sharply. "Surely no man would refuse to help us at such a time. Why, even now, poor Stewart and Arty may be suffering—who can tell what?"

"True," returned Woodrow sympathetically. "I am as sorry for you as I can be. But this man was accused by me of attempting to murder Reynolds. I couldn't prove my case; but right or wrong he will always bear me a grudge for

having tried to spot him. Black Cloud is the man I mean. He could find your brother, but—will he?"

"He must! I'll speak to him; I'll beg him; I'll promise him anything. He can't refuse me! He has a tender spot in his heart. He saved little Arty from danger; he'll never refuse me when I tell him that it is the same child and my brother who are in peril."

"Very well," said Woodrow with quiet acquiescence. "We cannot do without him. That's clear. We must do our best to get round him. Mount your bronchoes, boys, and we'll head straight for the camp. Got your guns in your pockets? Right. Come along, then, and try what we can do."

As we know, the Blackfeet camping-ground was no great distance. A short canter brought the riders to the spot, and the whole tribe was soon in a clamour of excitement as the boys and the policeman rode up. It was not Woodrow's first visit to the vicinity. On the last occasion it had been to lead away the chief with the "bracelets" on his wrists, and somewhat similar intentions were naturally anticipated by the Indians.

The officer led the way direct to Black Cloud's tent, and then called loudly.

"Black Cloud! Great Chief of the Blackfeet! My friends and I would speak with

you. It is of life and death we come to see you!"

Hardly were the words spoken, than the doorway of the teepee was raised, and the proud figure of the chief emerged, followed by three braves. He looked swiftly at the boys, and then turned to the police officer with a steady, fearless look.

"The customs of my people forbid me to drive the stranger from our tents. You are welcome, Chief-of-the-Burning-Arrow!" *

Woodrow bent his head to acknowledge the welcome.

"When duty does not send us, we are proud to be the guests of Black Cloud," he said. "To-day my white brothers seek you in trouble. Will you help them?"

That question brought a smile of bitter scorn into the chief's face. He folded his ermine robe around him, and raised his plumed head with an action of inexpressible pride.

"What service can be hoped from he who strikes the blow of a coward—*in the back?*" he asked. "Is he, whom you call 'assassin,' the one to help the white man in his need?"

With such biting contempt did Black Cloud make these questions that Dick, seeing an angry flush on Woodrow's cheeks, and fearing a quarrel,

* A reference to Woodrow's fame with fire-arms.

hastened to take upon himself the duty of further pleading.

"O chief, one night when the fire-water was maddening your braves, and an old man—one of us—would have beaten his boy, we saw you leap forward like a good spirit, and fold the child within your protecting arms. That child is again in danger; and my brother, who is dearer to me than life, he is in danger too! Pierre, the half-breed, and Fox-eye have taken them—we know not where. Have pity, chief! If the white man has wronged you, give back good for evil this day!"

Without changing a muscle of his face, Black Cloud had turned to Dick and listened to him in passive silence, while the passionate words poured out. From features, it might have been thought that the utterances had been barely heard. But Dick's desperation had read sympathy in the red man's eyes, and his heart leaped hopefully.

"You will help us, will you not?" he begged.

Then the chief replied solemnly.

"The white man speaks well, and his tongue speaks truth. Black Cloud was indeed wronged when it was said that his hand came like the bite of a cur—from behind. Black Cloud hated Chief Fire-water. Chief Fire-water stole the reason of my braves, and left them poor and

"FOR A CHILD—RED OR WHITE—BLACK CLOUD WOULD GLADLY GIVE HIS LIFE."

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weak. They became as women. But Black Cloud could not kill without looking into the eyes of his enemy!"

A moment the Indian paused. Then he resumed with proud impressiveness—

"But that the white man may know how a red man can show revenge, Black Cloud will do this thing that he is asked. For a child—red or white—Black Cloud would gladly give his life!"

The lips of both Dick and Calvert opened to give vent to a flood of gratitude. But Black Cloud did not wait for thanks. He turned to one of his braves and gave an order for his mustang, after which he summoned a number of his young men and once more addressed Dick—utterly ignoring Woodrow.

"Lead to the place where Pierre has been!" he said quietly. "The bird is not safe when that fox creeps around."

"All that I have you may ask for, and it will be given to you gladly if you restore my brother and Arty in safety," said Dick earnestly.

"Black Cloud does not seek payment for giving a man's service," was the stern and proud retort. "To save a life is but to do as Manito wills; and yet"—the speaker paused and stood a moment in silence while he turned with a thoughtful look towards Woodrow—"and yet there *is* a reward that Black Cloud would seek.

You could pay that, Burning-Arrow? Will you do so?"

Wondering at the Indian's sudden change of manner, the officer raised his eyebrows questioningly.

"I can promise nothing until I know what is asked for," he said.

"Yet it is little—little to you; a great thing to a chief. All I ask is that you bury the thought that Black Cloud could strike a blow from behind!" And then, without waiting for a reply, the speaker turned, mounted his horse, while, followed by a troop of lithe young men on foot, he started the return to the Edyveans' ranch.

CHAPTER XXV.

WILLIE CREWES.

IMPATIENT at the delay, yet more hopeful since the chief's aid had been enlisted, Dick Edyvean hastened in front, and when the house was reached, he at once sprang from the saddle and pointed to the still open bedroom window.

"There, chief! From that room my brother was stolen!" he said.

Black Cloud also dismounted. While the braves stood to one side awaiting instructions, he bent down and began creeping around, scraping up some of the snow in places, and sniffing the air like a hound on the track of blood.

Suddenly there came a gasp of satisfaction.

"Moccasins!" he exclaimed. Then he pointed in the direction of a certain part of the wooded hillside. "Braves! The moccasin leads yonder. Who will be the first to win the prize I offer—this robe of ermine—the robe of a chief who will succeed Black Cloud when he has gone to Manito?"

A general cry of eagerness was the answer, and the chief went on—

"The snow has veiled where the foot has trod upon the plain. But yonder—in the bush—the veil is thin. Black Cloud's robe to the brave who first finds the track of the serpent Pierre or Fox-eye!"

Like so many arrows fired from bow-strings fifty youths and men instantly sprang forward, each one eager to win such a prize. They ran along the side of the hill and, reaching the fringe of the bush, spread out in a line to examine every inch of ground and every broken twig.

At the same moment came the merry tinkling of sleigh-bells near at hand.

"Who comes now?" asked Calvert, turning in the direction of the sound.

"Some fool always comes to interrupt important business!" exclaimed Woodrow with irritation.

Just then the advancing sleigh rounded a bunch of willows, and Dick cried out in surprise—

"Reynolds, by all that's strange! But who's the young fellow sitting with him?"

"Can't say," answered Fred, as he eyed the newcomer critically. "Whoever it is, I wish he had chosen some other day for visiting."

"And this'll be a sad day for Reynolds to return on—to find Arty gone," remarked Dick, whose thoughts were always for others more than for self.

But the watchers were not kept long in doubt.

The sleigh soon reached them, and as it did so, the "stranger" jumped out and ran at once to Dick with outstretched arms.

"Edyvean! Edyvean, old man! I *am* glad to see you!"

Dick had stepped forward towards the stranger, but suddenly he was seen to stop, draw himself up, and place his hands behind his back.

"*Crewes!*" he exclaimed in surprised, more than cordial tones.

"Yes, Willie Crewes, of Dunmere. You haven't forgotten me?"

"No; I have not—forgotten—you—Crewes," replied Dick in a cold, steady voice.

The stranger's outstretched arms fell to his sides, and his eager tones sank sadly.

"Can you not forgive me, Edyvean?" he asked wistfully.

But Dick was unmoved. He spoke with deliberate distinctness.

"Stewart kept his promise to you. How have you kept yours?"

"Faithfully!" was the immediate reply. "I was a cad once, Edyvean. Stewart saved me, and in Heaven's name I have done the straight thing ever since. I have won the 'Rattray'; I have told the Doctor everything. My father can answer for that."

"Yes," said Reynolds, who had come forward by this time. "I *can* answer for that. This is

my boy, Edyvean. When you thought I was too ill to understand, I heard you talking with your brother. I learned all that Stewart had borne for my son's sake, and I determined to go home as soon as possible and let the truth be known, even though it should disgrace Willie before all the world. It was cruel injustice that Stewart should suffer for what was really my blame, since I deserted my boy whom I ought to have guarded. It was cruel injustice——"

"Stewart never thought so," interrupted Dick quietly, and Reynolds quickly returned—

"And that made it all the more cruel. But on the very day of my arrival I found that Willie had confessed all to the Doctor——"

"And what do you think?" interrupted young Crewes eagerly. "In the presence of the whole school, the Head explained the wrong that was done to you both, and announced that, immediately, your name and Stewart's would be engraved on the Golden Roll of Honour in the dear old chapel! Can you—can you forgive me, Dick? My father brought me out all this distance to ask this question of you—and Stewart."

For answer, Dick held out the hands that had been refused.

"I know what my brother would say, Crewes. He will be glad to have suffered a little, since you have kept your pledge. We are friends!"

Crewes at once gripped his old schoolfellow's hands with real gratitude.

"Dear old Dick! Nobody can say how glad I am to hear you say that! I have been hoping for such an answer, but have hardly dared to believe in the hope that was so far beyond what I deserved. Some day I may be able to pay back a little of that debt. When that time comes, you'll find me very ready." Poor boy! he little knew how soon was to come the time for proving his words.

During the latter part of this interview between Dick and Willie, Reynolds (as we must still know him) had been talking with Woodrow and Calvert, from whom they learned the circumstances that had gathered them together that morning.

The old man was at once filled with concern for the safety of the boys, though, as one with whom danger was an old experience, he did not become unduly excited at the news.

"If they have fallen into Pierre's hands, God pity them!" he said. "Pierre hates me, and will hate all who know me. He tried to murder me once——"

The speaker stopped suddenly, for an exclamation of surprise broke from Woodrow, and at the same moment there appeared behind the officer the tall form of Black Cloud gazing at

Reynolds with a calmly triumphant look in his eyes.

"He tried to—to murder—you?" repeated Woodrow in a sort of daze.

"Yes. I had not meant to betray him, for the punishment was a just one, and it brought me to myself. But that is the truth. He stabbed me in the back. I saw him running away. Only Arty knows of this besides myself."

Reynolds paused.

Then a strange thing happened.

Just for a moment the sergeant stood puzzled and in deep thought, and the impassive Indian, who had moved round, also waited in silence and watched the changing expressions in the officer's face.

Next moment Woodrow had stepped forward with military precision.

"Black Cloud," he said, "I wronged you! Will the Red Chief bend his pride to accept the hand that was once raised against him in enmity, but is now given in lifelong friendship?"

And then for the first time a smile broke over the Indian's face—a smile, not of pride, but of love—as he replied—

"There is no chief more brave than he who wronged his friend, yet asks that friend's forgiveness. White brother, Manito smiles upon His world to-day!"

And surely the chief's reverent words were an omen of good, for at the same instant a cry of exultation rang out from the hillside.

One of the braves had won the ermine robe! The trail had been found in the bush where the late blizzard had not been allowed freedom to drift at pleasure as on the bare hill-side. And once the beginning of a track is found, it is only a matter of time before an Indian reaches the lair of a hunted man or beast.

CHAPTER XXVI.

WILL'S "DUTY"

IT was certainly a brave impulse that sent Stewart into that nest of reptiles in aid of poor Arty Reynolds—brave, because what could one boy do against such a foe? How could he hope to vanquish three men in whose veins the hot blood of the roused savage was rushing with torrential force? The result was a foregone conclusion. Though taken by surprise, and, in consequence, less active for the moment, it was of course but a matter of a few minutes more until they had two helpless captives pinioned to chairs instead of one. Stewart gave them a sharp struggle all the same, and the mark of a hammer raised in self-defence left a beauty-spot on the half-breed's face to match that of Fox-eye.

But now Pierre was an utter fiend when the struggle was over, and he stood wiping the blood from his cheek, while he faced the new captive.

"So the white papoose is not the only spy that Pierre knows?" he hissed, and Stewart's

reply was not the soft answer that turns away wrath.

"You're a coward, Pierre—as dirty a coward as ever stepped upon the prairie! You can only face kids like that poor chap, Reynolds. You only attack men—*to strike from behind!*"

It was a chance shot, but it reached its mark. The half-breed gave a cry of wrath at the taunt and struck Stewart on the face with the flat of his hand.

"Ah! You speak so to me—snake—dog—spy!"

"Strike again, Pierre!" retorted Stewart with a laugh, for his hope was by irritating the man to save Arty further torture, for the time being at least. "It's your only chance of hitting a fellow—when his arms are tied!"

"Hit! Hit!" echoed Pierre, now goaded to a fresh frenzy by Stewart's jeers. "Pierre—*kill!* But he not kill quick—he slow—slow! First the tongue—the serpent's tongue shall burn—slow—ever so slow. Then the eyes! And Pierre will laugh and clap hands while spy screams and cries!" And the half-breed once more thrust his knife into the fire, while his companions stood by and watched the scene with silent amusement.

Poor Stewart knew now that he might as well hope for pity from the fire itself as from his savage enemy. But he turned to Arty who was sitting

speechless with horror, and white as though he were already dead. It had not been so difficult to be brave alone, but to see the cruelty practised on another made the thought of his own future too vivid for bearing.

"Be brave, Arty, old chap!" Stewart said. "Let that fiend see how English boys can face danger without whining."

Arty did not answer. He was dumb with fear now, and almost dazed. But he gave Stewart a sad look of gratitude, and steeled his heart to endure bravely whatever might follow.

"Shut your eyes and you won't see him, old boy," Stewart next said with a steady voice, for Pierre was examining the steel to see if it were yet hot enough. "And—keep on saying your prayers all the time. God won't let it hurt so much then, and perhaps He'll send someone to——"

"Hist!"

It was Pierre who uttered this sudden exclamation, as he started from the fire and dropped the knife upon the ground.

"What's that?" he repeated quickly.

Then he ran to the window.

"Indians! Police! White men!" he fairly screamed with all the wild terror of a coward who might now have to face his equals in strength. Then he turned back into the room, trembling and terrified.

"Quick! Quick! The boys!"

He darted to the door that opened at the back of the house, followed by his two companions, who were now as madly frightened as their leader.

They ran a short way up the hill, then Pierre stopped.

"The boys!" he exclaimed. "They know secret—they must not be found alive! Bring them—quick!—big papoose first!"

Not venturing to return to the house himself, for his hunters could be seen far down the ravine among the bushes, he preferred his messengers to take the risk.

Quickly the Indians returned, and as quickly they slashed the cords that bound Stewart's numb figure. Then they carried him to where Pierre now stood by the mouth of a forty-foot well.

"In! In! Put dog in!" Pierre screamed.

At this moment Dick and Crewes, closely followed by the rest of the man-hunters, reached the house.

"There they are—by the well!" cried Crewes, rushing up the hill.

Stewart heard the voices.

"Help! Help!" he called. "Quick!" But the last word was lost in a distant muffled sound, for at the same instant the Indians plunged him into the depths of the dark pit.

Then Pierre gave another yell when he saw his pursuers so close upon him. He turned and ran blindly, heedless of his course. But he charged straight into the giant arms and bear's embrace of Chief Black Cloud.

"Son of a dog, move, and the arms of Black Cloud shall crush thy bones as a shell beneath his heel!" the Indian exclaimed. The half-breed yielded with a snarl to the master-strength. Of course Pierre's friends had also fled. But the place was surrounded by the Blackfeet, and each in his turn was trapped.

Meanwhile Dick, accompanied by Crewes and Calvert, had reached the mouth of the well. A rope was hanging from a cross-beam with a bucket at the lower end.

Without a moment's hesitation Dick bent forward to grip the rope and descend. But Crewes put out a restraining hand.

"This is *my* duty, Edyvean. Let me do this much for him! He did so much for me." And without waiting for an answer, the youth swung himself on the thin rope and commenced the long descent.

"I'm coming, old man!" he called, as he descended. "It's Crewes—Willie Crewes! Can you hear me?"

"Willie—Crewes?" came a muffled echo of wonder from the dark depths.

"Yes; can you hold out?"

"I've got grip of a ledge," came the reply. "It's cold, but I can manage."

Heedless of the cutting of the thin rope that slashed his flesh as he slowly slid downwards, Crewes at last reached the water at the foot of the well.

"Thank God for this, Stewart!" were his words, when he saw the boy up to the shoulders in water, but clinging with his hands to a small projection of stone. "Thank God you are alive, and that I have been able to help in time."

"Is it really Willie Crewes?" questioned Stewart in wonder.

"The same. I've come out with my father, known to you as Reynolds," was the reply, as the elder boy swung himself on the rope to reach Stewart's side. "Your honour is cleared, Stewart. Every person knows that you took my fault on your shoulders. I've told them. Your name and Dick's are on the Roll of Honour now, and, Stewart—*I've kept my promise!*"

And the reply was just as Dick had prophesied—

"Then, I'm glad to have done what I did!"

The work of rescue was not an easy matter. Stewart's right leg had been badly wounded in the fall, and the immersion in the water, together with his recent adventures, had left him almost too weak to grip firmly with his fingers.

Still hanging with one hand to the rope, and supporting Stewart with his left arm, Crewes looked up. Far above him could be seen a circle of faces peering down through a distant circle of light that was the mouth of the well.

"All well!" the rescuer called out cheerfully. "Lower the rope a bit!"

Immediately the rope was slackened from above. Crewes then pressed the bucket with his feet until it sank into the water. Then he helped Stewart to a sitting posture with his feet in the bottom, and twisted the rope so that the sufferer could rest firmly without fear of overbalancing. Next, he took Stewart's place in the water, and held on to the ledge, as he doubted the strength of the rope and the beam to support more than one.

"Pull away!" he cried to those above. "*Bon voyage!*" he said cheerfully to Stewart.

Willing hands and strong arms were applied to the windlass above, and soon the unfortunate boy was raised to the surface. He was considerably exhausted, but in a much better condition than might have been expected after his recent adventures.

Then the rope was lowered again for Crewes.

This time it took longer to get ready, for the lad had no one to help him, and his strength had been considerably sapped by the long immersion in the water. But at last he obtained

a footing in the bucket, and gripped the rope as firmly as his benumbed fingers would allow.

The signal was given to haul away.

Once more the windlass began to creak as the rope tightened with its burden, and for the second time that gloomy hole was being forced to disgorge its prey.

Willie was somewhat heavier than Stewart, so the upward progress was much slower in this case. Care had also to be exercised so as not to put too sudden strains upon the windlass, which was old and not used to meeting such heavy demands upon its power.

At last the youth's head appeared above the rim of the well, and many arms darted forward to give immediate aid in removing the young hero from possible danger.

But just at that moment everyone was startled by hearing an angry cry from Black Cloud, who had been standing with his prisoner, Pierre, at the outside of the circle of watchers. So sudden was the cry that all were too taken aback to be sufficienly alert to prevent what eventuated. Filled with fury at all who had taken any share in frustrating his plans for revenge against Reynolds, Pierre had suddenly snatched a hunting-knife from Black Cloud's side, sprung from the arms that had momentarily relaxed their hold, and then, with one reckless slash, he severed the taut rope at the windlass, and

plunged poor Crewes back again into the black depths of the well. A cry of pain that faded into a pitiful wail with increasing distance came from the poor boy as he struck against the side of the pit in his violent descent into lower darkness—a cry that froze the hearers with a horror impossible to be described. Then all was silence. Not a sound came from the well; not a sound was uttered by those above. At such moments one even ceases to breathe, and the air itself seems to pause in horror when the great instincts of humanity are thus recklessly violated.

CHAPTER XXVII.

PIERRE'S LAST FIGHT.

SO sudden had been the half-breed's terrible act that, for the time being, the onlookers were stunned with horror.

It was only for a moment, however, that this state lasted; but every flash of time is a power in the service of one who has his life to save. Pierre gave a savage cry of exultation, and, by the time any had awakened from their trance, he had leaped upon Woodrow's horse that was standing near by and plunged through the wood of the ravine towards the grassy slope that lay between this and further woodland.

The awakening was terrible. A shriek went up from every Indian's throat, and a volley of bullets made the woodlands echo with the noise of battle.

But Pierre had placed a shield of trees behind him, and was now half across the clearing.

Calvert was the first in activity. He sprang upon his horse.

"Come on, braves!" he shouted. "Catch the fiend, and it will be a hundred pounds to him

who lays him by the heels!" Then he turned to Edyvean. "See, Dick! You've got other work to do. There's poor Crewes. You leave this matter to me——"

"And me!" added Woodrow, who had by this time regained his self-possession. "You'll lend me your horse, Edyvean?"

"Of course," was the reply, as Dick turned hastily to the mouth of the well and called down, "Crewes! Crewes! Are you hurt?"

"A little—but—I can hold on—for a time!" came the weak, but none the less brave reply.

"God be praised! My son lives!" exclaimed old Reynolds fervently.

"God help you and him," added Calvert solemnly. Then to Dick he said, "Don't take any undue risks, old man. Stewart and I cannot have anything happen to you."

"I must go to the one who saved my brother's life," replied Edyvean.

"And I must lay my hands on the fiend who tried to slay it!" responded Fred with sudden energy. "Off you go, Bess!" Then he dug his spurs into the sides of his mare, and hastened to make up to Woodrow and the score of braves who were already swarming along the hillside in pursuit of the fugitive.

On emerging from the ravine, which was

a fork pointing up the hill with a grassy slope between the prongs, Calvert and the police officer just caught sight of Pierre as the latter disappeared into the opposite bush.

Just as the half-breed was vanishing, Woodrow rose in his saddle and tried a quick sight along his rifle. But Dick's horse was not accustomed to police ways. The presented rifle disconcerted her and spoiled the aim so that the bullet sped on a harmless course.

An exclamation of disgust came from the sergeant, for he knew that now the fugitive gained the cover of the trees the chances of speedy capture were considerably lessened. It would be like pursuing a chipmunk among its familiar branches.

"Never mind," said Calvert, as he noticed his companion's chagrin. "With so many of us at his heels, we are bound to find him. He can't reach far with so many on the search."

"That's all you know!" snapped Woodrow, thoroughly out of humour with himself and everybody else on account of his failure. It was not only his failure with the rifle that had put him out, but he was troubled concerning his unprecedented carelessness in not securing Pierre in the first place, and so preventing the incidents that followed. It was an unpardonable error of judgment to trust an unshackled

prisoner even in the strongest hands. And so the sergeant's prestige as one who never fails had received a severe blow.

By this time the pursuers had reached the further fork of the ravine. The Indians had disappeared among the greenery with the swiftness of serpents, and Woodrow's voice now rang out commanding all to spread out and search each bush and hollow.

It was, of course, impossible to ride further. Dick and Woodrow dismounted and hurriedly fastened their horses to trees. The half-breed had naturally deserted his stolen steed as soon as he reached the bush. It was found close to where the fugitive had been last seen.

But of Pierre not a sign was apparent, and not a sound came from the Indians to indicate that they had come upon his trail. Some of the natives came back to examine the place where the horse had been found. They crawled on the ground; they examined every inch of ground, every twig, every blade of grass. But all to no purpose. Pierre had disappeared as completely as if he had suddenly vanished into the air.

"Spread out, you brainless papooses!" exclaimed Woodrow. "Call yourselves braves, and yet you let a skunk like that escape through your fingers! Papooses, women, every one of

you! Cover the ravine with your eyes unless you want to be known as the owls of the prairie!"

Egged on by the taunts (which were hardly fair—but few men are fair when they are angry), the young Indians dispersed once more, and were soon lost to sight among the trees. Then Woodrow turned to Calvert in a quieter tone now that his anger had spent itself a little in words.

"You stay here by the horses, please, while I follow the course of the ravine a little way. I know of a small cave where our man might have taken cover. It is only a chance, but it will not do to neglect anything that may lead to recapture."

"Shall I not come with you?" asked Fred.

"Better not. There is always the chance that he may be concealed close at hand, and it would be folly to leave a horse for his pleasure. I'll not be long. If I find no trace of him, we can then decide what course to take next. It may mean that we will have to burn him out, for I don't intend to leave him all night to his own sweet devices."

So saying, the officer went off on his errand. Calvert remained on guard, as desired, and when at last Woodrow returned, the sergeant had no success to report.

"Not a sign of the varmint! Not so much as a blade of grass out of its place," was his verdict.

"Perhaps he has managed to escape out of the ravine in some other direction," was Calvert's suggestion. But the other man disagreed.

"Impossible. The Indians would have been sure to have spotted him. They were not so far behind him that he could risk leaving the cover of the ravine. To my mind his intention is obvious. He meant to creep down the ravine towards the river and the thick woods. Once there, there would be a possibility of eluding us for weeks, if not for all time. I have sent a bunch of hunters down to the neck of the fork to intercept him there. He cannot possibly escape in the long run. The puzzle is, where has he got to in this short time?"

Yes, it was indeed a puzzle. But it need not have been such a mystery if all the would-be captors had not been steeped in the traditions of the prairie, and confined their searching to the traditional mode of seeking foot-prints. Pierre's disappearance had certainly been complete. Yet it was all simple enough, as was afterwards proved. All he had done was to swing himself from the saddle of the stolen broncho up to the strong branch of a thick maple tree, and thence to the shelter of a curtain of leaves. The half-

breed knew well the people with whom he had to deal, and while expert trackers were smelling every inch of the ground beneath, he was quietly making his way above from tree to tree in the direction of the friendly wood in the bosom of the valley. With the agility of a monkey he did this—still retaining Black Cloud's hunting-knife which he carried between his teeth.

But it was a tiny agent of justice that betrayed the fugitive. Where men's brains failed, a small bird succeeded and gave the alarm. Finding her nest approached by a strange and terrifying creature, she set up a shrill scream of alarm. Every Indian knows that sound, which frequently warns them of the approach of an enemy that might otherwise have come upon them unawares. Instantly they ran in the direction of the sound, looked up, and there just discerned the outline of a dark figure high above their heads, vainly trying to conceal himself among the dense arborage.

Instantly, a howl of anger and satisfaction came from the throats of the discoverers, and Pierre's heart sank, for he knew that it was but a matter of time before he would once again be in the hands of the police officer. Yet he prepared to sell his freedom dearly, and his face distorted with anger as he saw one of the redskins, Yellow Bear by name, leap

for the tree and commence a rapid ascent towards him.

At first the half-breed ran along a thick branch in the hope of finding greater security. But already his pursuers were swarming up on all sides like so many monkeys. He gave a cry of baffled fury, then receded to his former position at the centre of the tree where he would be able to make the most effective resistance against his nearing enemy. There they met, and with the fury of a panther Pierre clinched the young brave. The knife was still between his teeth. As yet he had not ventured to handle it. All his fingers had been required to keep himself from toppling from his perch.

"Ah, son of a dog! You fight for white man—you fight for police!" he roared, as he closed with his foe, and in a moment more the two were grappling wildly with their hands, while their legs were twined around the upright branches to steady themselves.

Hearing the cries, Calvert and Woodrow were soon on the spot—the former with his Winchester ready to carry its death warrant, if need be. Yellow Bear was strong and brave, but he was no match for the half-breed to whose wiry muscles desperation had lent double strength; and just as the white men reached the foot of the tree, Pierre was heard to give a cry of

triumph as he succeeded in burying his fingers in the Indian's throat.

The sergeant raised his rifle to fire, but immediately lowered it again.

"No use. Must wait until the Indian is done for. Then I'll be able to get a bead on the half-breed," was his calm remark. It was the policeman, pure and simple, who was speaking — one whose sole aim was to take his prisoner dead or alive, and at any cost. It is not to be supposed that he was really heartless or indifferent to life in the ordinary way. But there are some men who become so full of the plain duties of their profession that they unconsciously become indifferent to the means by which these duties are accomplished. Woodrow was one of these persons. Such training often makes successful policemen, *i.e.*—successful keepers of order. But it also sometimes rather spoils what we understand by the word Man.

Woodrow's callous remarks came rather as a shock to Calvert.

"What!" he exclaimed with a certain degree of horror. "You don't mean to say that you are going to wait calmly and let that fiend throttle the Indian!"

"I guess that's about what it amounts to," was the reply. "We can't do much for him now; I can't get an aim while they're twisting

about like that, and *I* don't want to shoot the redskin."

This was too much for the Cornishman.

"Well, whatever you may choose to 'guess,' that isn't my way of looking at things! I'm hanged if I'm going to stand by and allow even a redskin to be strangled simply to make a clear target for your rifle."

Hardly were the words out of the speaker's mouth, than the young fellow had sprung for the lower branch of the maple and swung himself up with the ease that had long since been acquired in the "gym." at Dunmere, and from thence he began to clamber rapidly upwards just as the brave had done before him.

"Look out for yourself! He's got a knive!" cried Woodrow warningly. Then he added to himself: "It's a pity that I am only a policeman pledged to take a prisoner at all costs."

But Calvert, in his haste, had no ears for the warning, far less for the after-remarks. All his attention was directed upwards, and all he heard were the wild cries of the half-breed and the choking gurgles from Yellow Bear who was writhing under the terrible grip upon his throat.

By this time the surrounding trees were swarming with Indians, but they seemed too awe-struck with the scene of the desperate fight

to be capable of giving any assistance to their brother.

Higher and yet higher Calvert clambered. He was quite fifty feet above ground, and he was quite breathless when he reached the sway-branch at the shoulder of which the combatants were struggling. Fortunately his approach had been unnoticed by Pierre, and he was able to pause for a brief rest. Then he tried to reach his revolver, but that was an impossibility, for the branch swung as though before the force of a hurricane and all limbs were needed to retain a position.

By this time poor Yellow Bear was beginning to hang limp under the cruel grip that was twisting his throat and rapidly squeezing the life out of an almost lifeless body.

Then Calvert suddenly made his presence known.

"Pierre!" he cried.

Instantly the half-breed started as a man might start at a bullet. A new fear seemed to seize him, and his fingers relaxed their grip of the now insensible Indian, who fell backwards across two friendly branches that saved him from a fall that would assuredly have completed what his enemy had three parts accomplished.

"You, white dog!" Pierre hissed furiously. At the same time his face paled as he saw how completely he had been surrounded and trapped

while his mind had been obsessed with his recent struggle.

"You are as good as taken. You had better give in!" said Calvert. With the cessation of the fight he had managed to steady himself, and his fingers were even on the butt of his revolver that would soon bring the assassin to reason.

But Pierre was not so easily conquered and his answer was swift though unspoken. With a movement as swift as a flash of lightning, he plucked the sharp-pointed knife from between his teeth, and hurled it towards Calvert like an arrow from the bowstring. But in an instant after, he uttered a shriek of agony, for a lithe sprig had caught the handle of the weapon, diverted its flight backwards again, and plunged it straight into the throat of the thrower.* One second he poised upright upon the branch; the next he fell backwards—crashing through leaves and wood, until the life was dashed out of him upon the hard ground right at Woodrow's feet.

It was a horrible end to a horrible life. But perhaps it was just that he, who had years of blood staining his hands, should himself suffer a penalty of violence. Of that we cannot judge, and it is good to know that his last attempt at murder failed. Yellow Bear was soon recovered from his perilous position by his friends, and in

* This incident really occurred within the author's knowledge.

a short time was restored, being little the worse for his adventure. Then the man-hunters returned to Reynolds' homestead, bearing with them a burden that would never more be able to break the laws of God or man.

Thus was Pierre's revenge completed, for it fell back upon himself as evil purposes and deeds always revert to the doer. Revenge on our neighbour usually ends in revenge upon self, just as good deeds seldom fail to bring their own reward.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

COMRADES ALL!

THERE is little more to tell, for the present. Such as there is, it can be given in few words.

When the chase after Pierre was started, leaving the others to help poor Crewes, as well as guard Pierre's two accomplices whom Black Cloud's braves had roped and tied to a waggon wheel, then Arty soon procured a couple of good lariats to replace the rope of the windlass. No time was lost before Dick Edyvean had the lassos in position with a stout bucket at the end. Then he quickly descended to the assistance of his old schoolfellow. He found Crewes very weak. A broken arm and severe gash on the back of his head had been the result of the fall. But the boy was plucky withal, and able to give Dick some little assistance in the matter of rescue. Soon afterwards he was brought to the surface and carried indoors, where his injuries were attended to by his father. Life in the West soon teaches one the elements of surgery, and a doctor could hardly have done better for the lad

than did Reynolds with Black Cloud as an able assistant.

Then Calvert and Woodrow returned, followed by the Blackfeet Braves, and in a short time a waggon was got ready, and the Sergeant (assisted by two Indians) started off for Regina Barracks, together with their two prisoners and the remains of their leader.

Later in the day, the Dunmere friends together with Reynolds and Arty went direct to the Edyvean ranch, though it was not before they had promised a handsome reward to the braves for their services, and expressed their unbounded thanks to Black Cloud—all of which the chief received with a modesty that is akin to indifference. It is always thus with brave men.

And that night, how tongues did wag! Old Reynolds told the whole story of his whole life from its sad beginning up to what, let us hope, would prove to be happier days. Willie Crewes had also his yarn to spin, and in time the evening was devoted to tales and memories of the grand old days at Dunmere.

At last Fred Calvert cleared his throat as if for a speech, and looked at the gathered friends with an important air.

"Now that all these mysteries are cleared up, I have a proposal to make before we turn in for the night. And what is more, you have all *got* to agree to it before you turn in! I have made

up my mind, so I do not intend to have any denial."

"What is it?" asked Stewart, voicing the questions of all.

"Simply this: Let us all combine our forces and start a 'Dunmere Ranch!' Let us make it the largest and best in the West for the sake of the old days that made us chums. Real school chums ought to be comrades for life! Is it not so?"

This proposal was received with enthusiasm, and from that moment began a new era in the lives of our friends that has nothing to do with our present story but which makes a fitting place to end our present one.

And any stranger who visits that part of the West to-day will hear "Dunmere" spoken of in tones of admiration, and, sometimes, envy. It is a model ranch of its kind, and prosperous as only such undertakings can be when guided by friends of single purpose and mutual affection.

Many wonder how such a strong combination ever came into being.

Until they read this book, they will not understand.

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