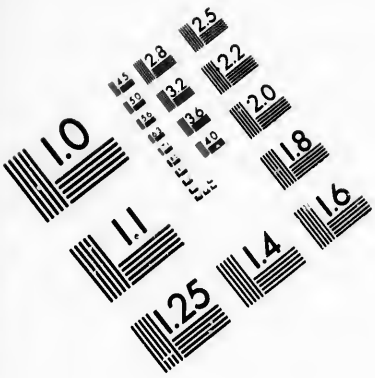

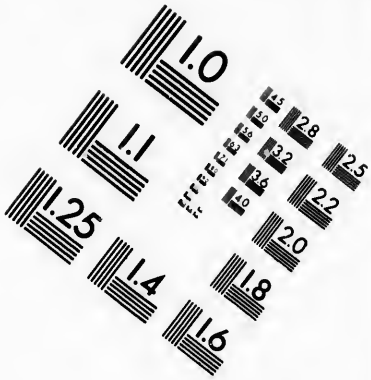

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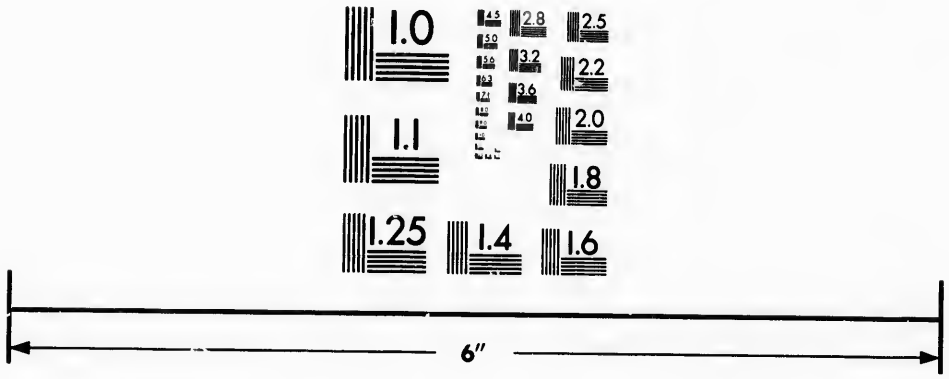

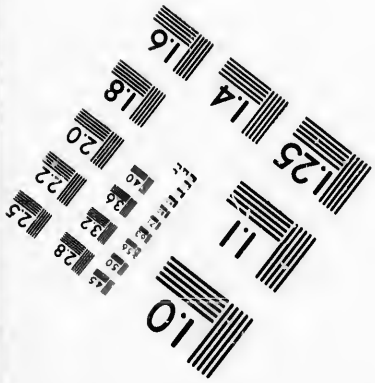

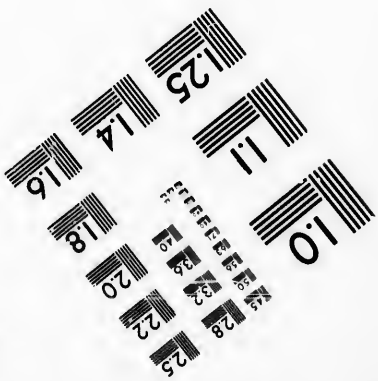

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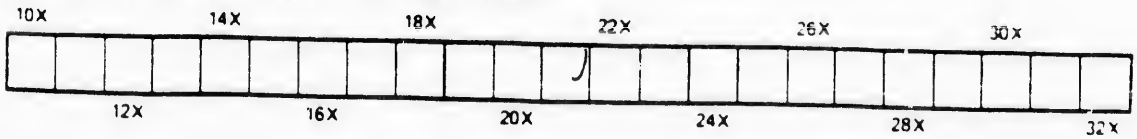

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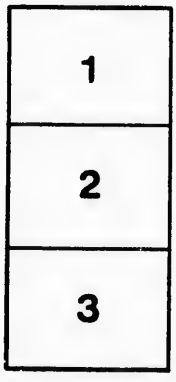

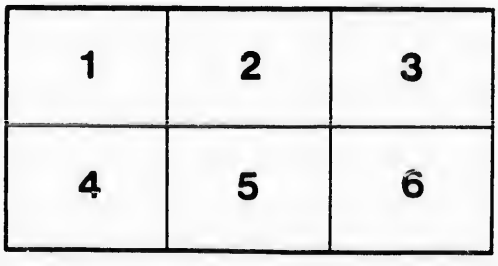

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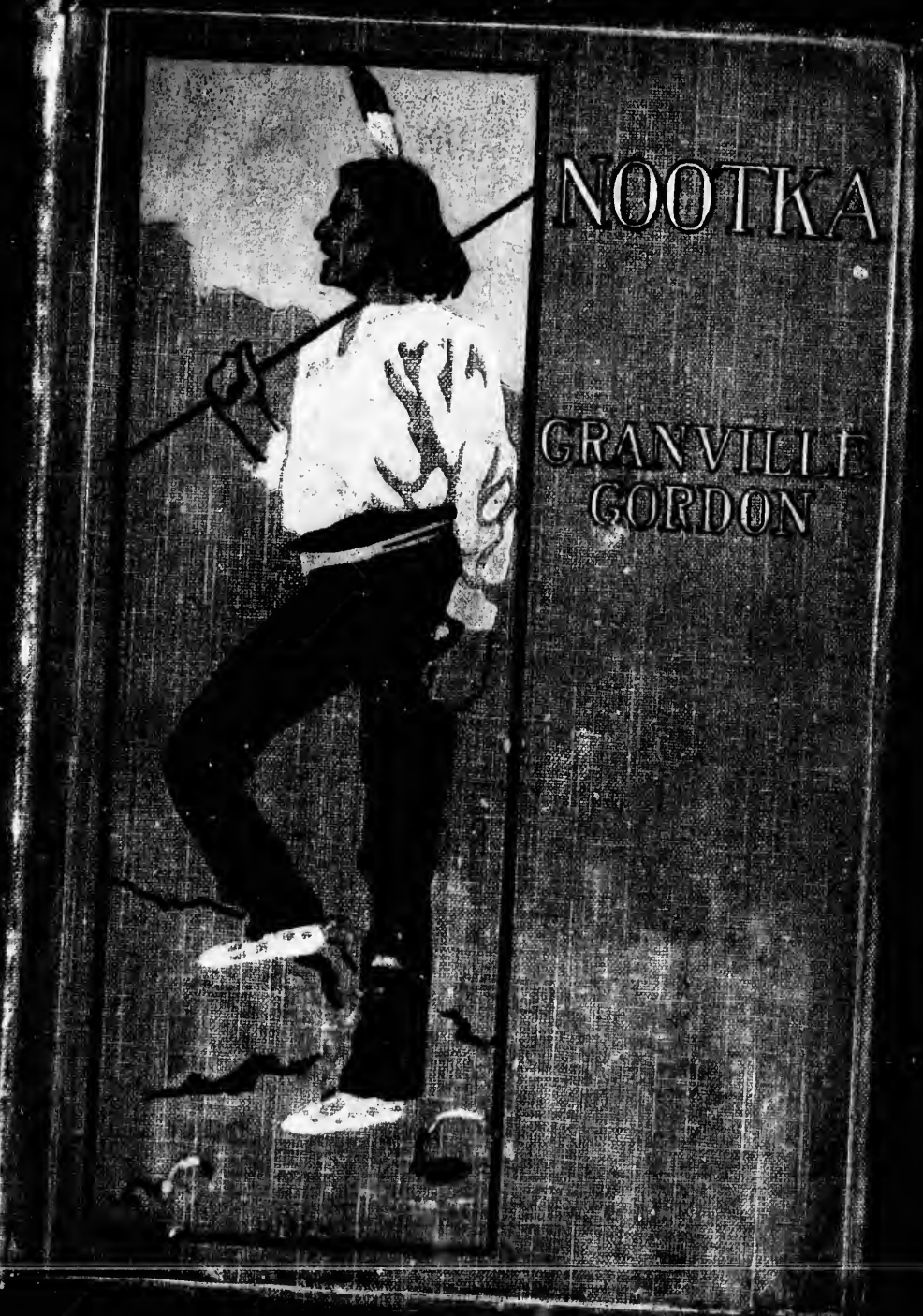

NOOTKA

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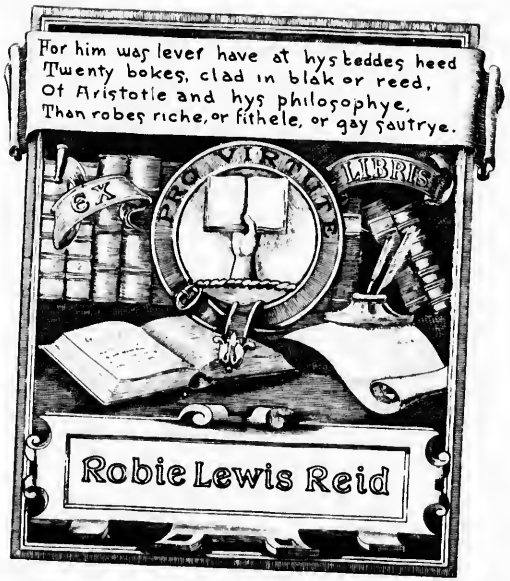

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ABE WILSON.

NOOTKA

A TALE OF VANCOUVER ISLAND

BY

GRANVILLE GORDON

WITH TWELVE FULL PAGE ILLUSTRATIONS
AND MAP

LONDON
SANDS AND COMPANY
1899

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CONTENTS

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

INTRODUCTION

In which it will be seen how I became possessed of this Story

EARLY one wet afternoon in last November I had just finished a game of billiards with the marker at the Turf Club. It was too soon for the usual *habitués* of the club to put in an appearance, and we had had the room to ourselves. The game was over, and I was knocking the balls about, thinking how to spend the remainder of the dismal afternoon, when a member, whom I knew slightly, entered. He looked round, saw there was no one else present, and walked straight to the table, on which he deposited two brown-paper parcels, one a moderate-sized one and the other a small one.

I took no notice of him, and played a nice run through off the red into the left-hand top pocket; the red ball came round and cannoned into the brown-paper parcels, but they did not seem to mind, no more did the member.

The man spoke.

"You dabble in literature, I believe?"

I did not answer at once; his tone was aggressive,

and I have not the sweetest of tempers, and a sarcastic retort rose to my lips.

Dabble, indeed! Was a mixture of Thackeray and Dickens, Shakespeare and De Rougemont, to be called "dabbling"? Still, I am bound to admit that modern critics had long since poked the fire of my ambition till the embers were falling low and colourless; had deluged my happiest efforts with the cold water of their malice and uncharitableness, and those remarks I should have looked upon as insults some time back fell now unheeded on my ears. And where was the good in getting cross?

"Yes," I said carelessly, at the same time playing a dainty "jenny" off the white, "I dabble."

"Well, then," said the other, "there's some stuff for you."

"What do you mean by stuff?" I asked, getting really angry.

"If you'll stop knocking those confounded ivories about I'll tell you."

I stopped, and he went on.

"I've just returned from a trip in Vancouver Island after imaginary wapiti, and there it was I got hold of that stuff"—he pointed to the parcels on the table—"but I'll tell you the way of it as briefly as I can. For two weeks I had been roaming in the dense forest of the interior, cooped up with four dirty Indians; never a living creature had we come across barring a few squirrels, and only once

did we see tracks of wapiti, the beasts that made them we never saw. I was going melancholy mad, likewise provisions were getting short, when we decided to return. We had left our boat at the north end of the Cowichan Lake, a stretch of water some twenty-five miles in length, at the south end of which is a country inn kept by a white man.

"Late one evening we reached the shore of the lake, and I can tell you it was one of the most blessed reliefs I ever experienced when I saw the boat and the evening sun lighting up the calm waters of the lake like——"

"Molten gold," I suggested.

"All right," said he; "but can't you have molten silver?"

"I fear not," I replied; "it would have to be a moonlight scene."

"Well, listen; I have not much time. It was too late that day to think of rowing down the lake, so we camped on the shore; and that evening, just as Tikoo Johnny—he was the head Indian—was cutting some slices of bacon, whilst the other three fellows squatted down jabbering to one another some few paces off, blessed if we didn't hear the cracking of branches and the sound of men approaching. Tikoo Johnny jumped up and listened a moment. 'Think Indians,' he said; 'not sure.'

"In a few minutes six figures emerged from the forest and came towards us: five of them carried

packs, but one carried no pack, only a rifle. What struck me with amazement was the fact that these Indians were unlike any I had seen before on the island — they were a finer race, they were well clothed, they wore curiously plaited straw hats, they looked cleaner, their whole demeanour seemed more civilized. When within a few paces of me the one with the rifle raised his hat and bowed profoundly. 'Johnny,' I cried, 'ask him what he wants.' But before my man, who looked to my mind as though he felt more astonished than I did, could get any words out, the stranger addressed me in pure English: 'If the White Chief would permit us to camp somewhere near here, and give me a few minutes' conversation when his supper is over, I should be much obliged, as I am charged with an important message from the great Chief Wellesley.'

"If I were astonished before, I was more than ever so now. Who the deuce was Chief Wellesley, and why on earth did he want to send me a message? Again, this man was educated. He spoke English; he seemed to like to speak English. Never before had I known an Indian who would speak English unless obliged, although he might know it thoroughly. Do you know, I once had an Indian attached to my camp for three months who pretended he did not know a word of English, and looked absolutely blank when we chatted round the camp fire. Never would he answer except when my hunter addressed him

in Siwash, till one day one of the boys accidentally dropped a hot ember on to his bare foot, and then we found out he knew English. I tell you, I've heard some pithy oaths among the cowboys of the West, but that Indian could have given any one of them a stone and a beating, and what made him go on all the more was that all of us round the camp were splitting our sides with laughter.

"I looked up at the tall figure before me. 'I should like to invite you,' I said, 'to take a bit of supper with me; but you can see for yourself we are reduced to very meagre fare.' The Indian cast a quick eye at the bacon, bowed, and retired to his men, who awaited him a few paces off. He muttered a few words to them, and quickly one of them began fumbling about in his pack. Their backs were towards me, so I could not see what they were doing; but in a few minutes he returned. In one hand he carried a pheasant and in the other a box of sardines. Gracious! I leapt to my feet. Was this show a good old Drury Lane pantomime, and had the good fairies taken pity upon me and sent their messenger to help me, or was I really off my head?

"I jumped to my feet, and, without speaking, began feeling the bird. I thought it was probably full of sawdust, some theatrical dummy-bird; but no, the feathers parted and the flesh yielded to my touch. It was all real; so was the box of sardines.

"I think the Indian saw my astonishment ex-

pressed in my face, for when I looked up he was smiling. 'It is nothing,' he said, 'if the White Chief will please to accept it.' 'On the condition that you share it with me,' I replied. Again the polite Indian bowed.

"By the time supper was ready—and I do not think I ever enjoyed a meal so much after that incessant bacon after bacon—the night had fallen, and it was round the crackling fire that the Indian thus addressed me:—

"'Before delivering my message,' he said, 'I would ask the White Chief not to repeat what I am about to say to the Indians with him; it might lead to unpleasantness in the future.' I willingly promised, and he continued. 'We have known of your movements for the last fortnight.' I started; if ever I had thought myself alone, forgotten, and lost sight of to the world, it was during the last fortnight, but I did not speak. 'But Chief Wellesley did not wish to communicate with you till you were further from the settlement. Had you been alone he would have gladly welcomed you; in fact, he wished very much to speak with you, and several times we attempted to catch your attention; but you would never move without the Indians, and it was impossible, as we do not wish the Indians to know where our settlement is. Therefore there was nothing for it but to wait until you were at a safe distance. Meanwhile you were watched; and at length, when you moved

your camp and went south, I was deputed to follow. I have only now to deliver my message and my trust. The Chief Wellesley told me to approach you, and to say that if you are going back to a place you called Ingland—' I smiled; after all, do we not all pronounce the 'E' as though it were an 'I'?—'he would be greatly obliged and indebted to you if you would take some papers—the story of a portion of his life—and have them published somewhere in Ingland. He told me to say, too, that there might be some expense attached to this, and I am to hand you, in the event of your caring to undertake his wish, a tin of gold-dust of the value of five hundred dollars to defray the expenses.' The Indian paused, evidently waiting my reply.

"'Well,' I answered, 'I can only say I will do my best; but I am not a writer, nor am I in touch with literary people.'

"'If you will do your best it will be sufficient,' said the Indian.

"I went on asking him many questions as to whence he came, who was Chief Wellesley, where he got his clothes and his hat, how he spoke English so perfectly, and many other questions, but it was no good. His replies were courteous, but he invariably answered that he was not at liberty to go into these matters, but that in the manuscript he would hand me would be found as much or as little as the Chief Wellesley wished to tell.

"'But why,' I asked, 'does the Chief Wellesley leave a matter like this to me? He does not know me.'

"'We have described you to him, and he is satisfied,' was the answer.

"There was no use pressing him to tell me more, and as the night was getting on I suggested he should give me the manuscript. He rose and again bowed; then he drew forth an envelope.

"'Will you please to open that and read the contents?'

"I tore open the envelope, within which I found two separate papers.

"The first ran as follows:—

"'DEAR SIR,—I hope you will pardon the liberty I take, but hearing that there is an Englishman in the forest, I seize this opportunity of asking you if you will take the manuscript, which will be handed you with this letter, and lay it before an English publisher. I may say that within it is contained the story of the great turning-point of my life. I have other means of sending these papers to England, but I should now have to wait till the spring of next year, and I know that the breast-pocket of an English gentleman is as secure a deposit place as the hold of a steamer. I must apologize for not being able to ask you to visit me. Had you been alone I should have been truly delighted, but I dare

not allow strange Indians into the settlement for many reasons.

"'Thanking you in anticipation, I have the honour to remain,

"'Your obliged and obedient servant,

"'CHARLES WELLESLEY.

"'*Nootka, October*, 1898.'

"The second paper, on the outside of which was written 'Please sign and return,' went thus:—

"'I , of , hereby solemnly swear that I will take the manuscript handed me this day of October, 1898, and bring it to the notice of some literary man in England, and use my best endeavours in getting it published.'

"I had read the two papers. 'Well,' I cried, 'where is the blessed manuscript?' The Indian pointed to paper number two.

"'Will the White Chief sign?'

"'Oh,' I cried, 'pardon me. Certainly.'

"I had a stylographic pen in my pocket, and started to scribble my name and address as quickly as the light from the flickering fire would allow of. When I looked up the Indian was gone. What noiseless beggars they are. But I had not long to wait. In a few minutes his tall form was by the fire, and in his hands were those two brown-paper parcels." The member pointed to the parcels on

the billiard table. "I gave him a receipt for the manuscript, and one for the tin of gold-dust, and bade him good-night. When I turned in I remember seeing him piling logs on his fire, thirty or forty yards away. When I awoke in the morning they were gone."

The member looked at his watch.

"I 'm late," he said; "will you undertake this job for me, and get this stuff published?"

"What if it is all rot?" I asked.

The member shrugged his shoulders and said, "Give it back to me, and I must try someone else, I suppose."

But it so happened I didn't, and here is the story as it was handed to me.

To this story there is but one alteration I have made, if alteration it can be called. Along with the manuscript were several pencil sketches, inserted more for the purpose of giving an idea of the country, people, etc., than for any pretence at artistic merit; these I have handed over to Mr. Louis Edwards, who reproduced them as herein represented.

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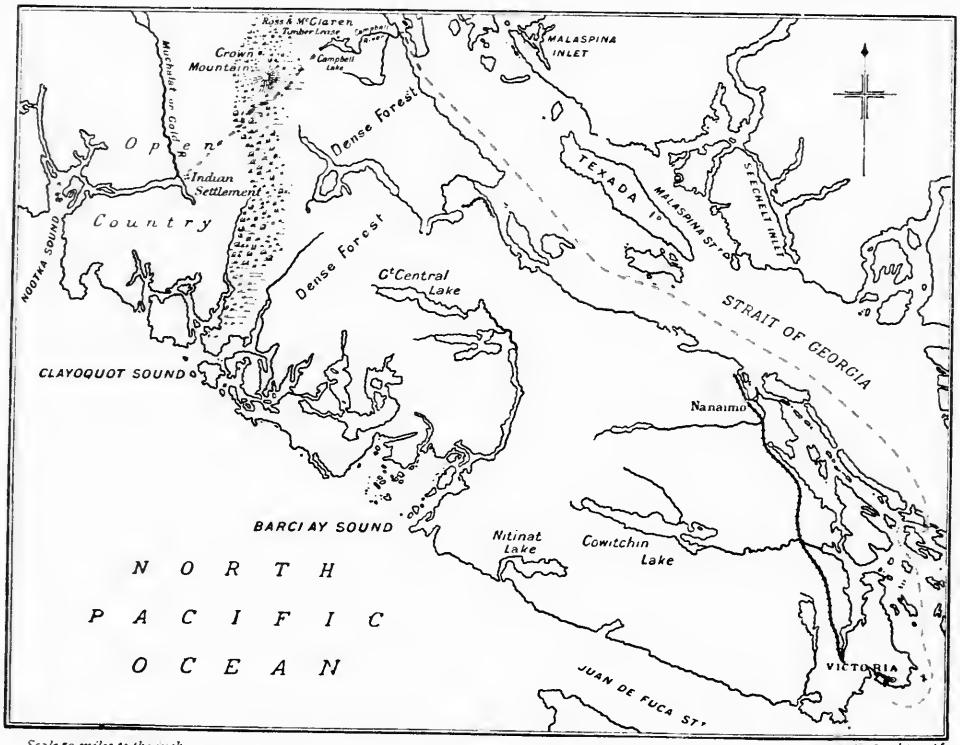

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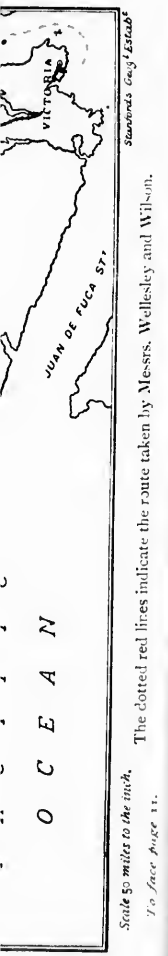

Scale 50 miles to the inch. The dotted red lines indicate the route taken by Messrs. Wellesley and Wilson.

To face page 11.

NOOTKA

A TALE OF VANCOUVER ISLAND

CHAPTER I.

I Go West Again

I DO not think I ever cared much for novels when once I was grown up. As a boy the unparalleled feats of Jack the Giant Killer and the quiet charm of Cinderella had for me, of course, as for all boys and girls, a fascination—a fascination that time was to prove illusive. Poor Jack! It is a sad moment in our lives when we awake to the fact that his doughty deeds were never done, that they were merely the fantastic creations of some ribald writer, and that all those magnificent conceptions we had formed for entering the lonely forest, finding the giant's castle, storming the ramparts, and saving the imprisoned princess from a horrible fate, have been wasted—mere idle imaginings. It is a bitter date in our lives when we step, never to return again, across the threshold of that grand old Palace of Fancy that lies on the borders of Fairyland and

Fact. And in later days how often will Memory carry us back, and once more we will wander by the side of Innocence, that lovely maiden with the great blue eyes, and listen again to those dear old stories she used to whisper in our astonished ears, or be nestled once again in the soft lap of gentle Love—Love that smoothed the hot, feverish forehead; that soothed us in the hour of sorrow; that told us of a pure and holy feeling that we hoped to find, that we longed to find, in the bright world that was bursting on our vision. Let me stop, for the picture conjures up sad memories. Yet, after all, those mythical dreams of childhood, are they all unreal, impossible? Maybe they are, and still they cannot be more unreal than the thousands of vague and problematical theories regarding the Hereafter.

Perhaps it was that sudden discovery that the cherished tales I had heard in boyhood, and learnt to implicitly believe, were only efforts of the imagination, or, to put it simply, downright lies, that made me at once cynical and sceptical. Anyhow, from that moment when in boyhood I made the discovery that I had been "done," when I gazed at last on my loved fairy-tale books with astonishment, with awe, with disgust, I have never opened a printed volume of any sort without a feeling that it was all false, and that I should probably be "spoofed" once more. Of course, in fiction one forgives it, it is part and parcel of the whole thing, and the better the work the greater the lie; but in works of travel—well, I cannot help it, I have never been able to wander through a book of travels without coming to the conclusion the writer was a liar.

And now the reader will doubtless exclaim, What the deuce am I doing, then? Let me then explain, as well as I am able; but I would ask your kind indulgence, as I am not a book-writer, nor, as I have hinted before, much of a reader of them, but situated where I am, far away from the hum and crowd of the world, getting on too in years, I feel that I should like to put on paper the great event that altered the whole course of my life.

It was Tom Fane that started it. I had known Sir Thomas Fane pretty intimately in the old country; many a time we had divided a sweep at the Gun Club, and at billiards we were friendly but bitter antagonists, for half the club, it was well known, considered Sir Thomas the best, and the other half thought I was, and I maintain that it was pardonable vanity if we each cast our vote in with our own side. At pyramids he could beat me easily; he was a fine hazard striker, and, I willingly own it, a more solid player than myself, but I had more "execution," and so had more command over the balls. In short, at individual shots Tom was more sure and steadier, but when I got a break I could make more of it. And so the tussles we had were close and keen, but they were fought without any wrangling or ill-feeling, and when I departed in the early autumn of each year for my usual trip to a distant country in search of big game, and he to his moor in Scotland, we always parted the best of friends.

For two autumns prior to the one in which the incidents in my story are depicted I had made an expedition in search of Rocky Mountain sheep—

the big horn—the wildest beast the sportsman can pursue, and the one dearest to his heart. On the first occasion I outfitted at Banff Springs and went north, but game was very scarce, or we were unlucky, only one good sheep did I get and a few cariboo. I had been led to believe there were elk—wapiti—in the country, but not a sign did we see of them, not even an old track. But there was one redeeming point about that trip: the man who went with me, Abe Wilson, was the nicest hunter and most delightful fellow I ever met in that capacity, quiet and unassuming, with none of the roughness which characterizes so many of the western trappers; he was the most agreeable companion I ever spent two months in the mountains with, and one soon discovers the faults and failings of a fellow-creature if you are boxed up with him alone in the wild, desolate Rockies. It was not his fault sport was bad, simply the game was not there, and I made a mental resolution that if ever I returned Abe Wilson should accompany me on my future trip.

Like the fly that returneth to the jam-pot, even though the jam be gone, I had gone out again in the following year. I had decided on going up from Ashcroft into the Lillooet district, being assured by a friend that sheep were plentiful there; but whether we were too early, or whatever the cause might be, we saw but little game, and in a shooting sense the sport was disappointing.

And so we reach the autumn of the year in which the events occurred I am about to try and chronicle. I was five-and-thirty then, a tall, active man. I wore a short, peaked, black beard, and was, I think,

rather a ferocious-looking person. I am sorry to say also I was of a cynical nature. Early I got to dislike balls and parties, and even dinners bored me—I mean dinner-parties. I got into the bad habit of not calling on people, and perhaps rather avoiding persons I ought to have cultivated; and this, coupled with my constant disappearance for months at a time in my wanderings over the world, led to my being almost lost sight of and forgotten to the world—to my world, that little circle I had been brought up amongst. They had closed up and squeezed me out, as it were, and with my cynical grin I thanked them heartily, but perhaps I was wrong. Anyhow, I bear no one any ill-will now.

August came round, and I sat alone one morning in the club perusing the morning papers. "Prospects of Grouse Shooting" fell on my eye. Why was I not going grouse shooting? The answer was simple. I had no grouse moor of my own, and no one had asked me. Daily the members of the club were becoming fewer and fewer. In the afternoon they were discussing their plans in the smoking-room; in the evening they had flown. In fact, society, like a flock of swallows, was migrating north. A feeling of isolation came upon me. For the last six years I had gone abroad to various parts of the world in search of big game—as I have remarked before—and I suppose I was no longer considered a member of the select flock of swallows, or perhaps it was I was forgotten. Anyhow, I felt rather like a small sparrow-hawk, that must hide away and seek his prey on the outskirts of civilization.

I had written to Abe Wilson that it was extremely doubtful if I should go out West this autumn, and he was not to wait for me if he got another job; still, I daresay I held out some faint hopes of going. I never could make up my mind to do a thing weeks, or even days, in advance. When I had done so as a young man I somehow never felt comfortable, there was always a sensation of being chained down, which was distasteful to me, and seemed to increase as I grew older; and then I grew very chary of accepting invitations some time beforehand to shooting parties or county dances or big functions of any sort, and, of course, the natural consequence was I drifted apart from my circle of acquaintances. Often and often did I argue with myself, and upbraid myself for being so foolish, but do what I would the glitter of society life, that appeared to dazzle so many, seemed to me but a dull, insipid glare. The oily speech and forced laugh of the Piccadilly Plunger or the Drawing-room Daisy jarred on my ears, and something within me ever kept urging me on to wander in the wild, uninhabited parts of the world, away from falsehood and fraud and the unfriendliness of friends, among the quiet nooks and valleys, where God's glorious sun shines yet upon nature the same as it shone in the early days in the garden of Eden.

It was only a few days before I had stood on the platform of a country station waiting for the London train. On one of the wooden benches sat three country damsels. Sturdy and strong and neat they looked, with the glow of health on their ruddy faces, while quietly and demurely they chatted to one another, waiting also for the train. Suddenly there

was a clamour, accompanied with shrill laughter, and out on to the platform flounced some real ladies.

"Portah, get me my luggerdge," cried a high-pitched voice.

They had been to a county dance in the neighbourhood the night before, and these were some of the great young people of fashion—without whom the whole thing would have been a failure—returning to town. Some young dandies were with them, and had any stranger come upon the scene at that moment he would have surely concluded that not only the station belonged to them, but the whole line, that the stationmaster was their polite butler, and the porters their footmen. They talked at the top of their voices, the conversation was idiotic, but the laughter was incessant.

I glanced at the country damsels; with open eyes they were gazing at their "superiors," but what their thoughts were I cannot tell. I remember mine, though. The sight of those high-plumed, tight-squeezed, highly-decorated women took me back some ten or a dozen years to a place that existed before the Trocadero was turned into a music-hall, where music played, and smart gentlemen with chains of office round their necks cleared magic circles, around which Jerry and Janet, and Paul and Polly, and I with a thing like one of these, would occasionally pirouette round and round. And yet one of them was called Lady Emily Something, and another Lady Isabel. Well! I have told the reader I was cynical in those days, and perhaps the world in England has changed since then; but at the time I remember curling my lip and saying to myself,

"These two groups are very different: which, according to nature, are ladies and which mere women?" And this scene came across my mind as I sat ruminating in the club.

Suddenly I jumped up. "I'll go West again!" I cried. "The rifle and the telescope and the glorious desolate mountains, that is the life for me!"

CHAPTER II.

Tom Fane and Myself decide on an Expedition

I HAD been disappointed with the sport I had had in the Rockies the two previous seasons, and so I determined to make my way gradually across the mountains to the Pacific coast and see what a country it was like there.

This is not a book of travel, and so I have no wish to enlarge on the magnificent reception I had at Winnipeg at the hands of the head-waiter of the hotel. He was a Londoner, and probably knew me to be an Englishman at once by my voice and dress; anyhow, he was enthusiastic. Did I know his aunt, Mrs. Smith? Possibly I did. Kept the Whitewash Laundry in Westbourne Grove. Alas! I had not the pleasure; but I knew old Smith, the tobacconist at the corner by Victoria Station. Ah! he was probably a cousin. Some of the Smiths had worked their way south-west, and the few days I stayed at Winnipeg I was made very comfortable by the kind attention of Mr. Smith, the waiter.

I have always had a great respect and regard for the clan Smith. They have always appeared to me to have originally been a lowland clan without the

advantages of the Macintoshes, the Mackenzies, or the Camerons. There never was a chieftain Smith with a tartan and broad lands and turreted castles, who could gather around him a thousand followers and descend with one fell swoop upon his neighbours and kill all the men, and carry off all the women and cattle and other likely goods, and divide them up and fall to to the feasting, and thanking God for His great goodness in delivering the enemy into his hands. No; the original Smith was a quiet, unpretentious individual, who thought only of his wife and his business. And see how the family have grown and prospered; so vast have they become, that it has been found necessary to alter the name somewhat in many instances. The "i" has been changed for a "y," and occasionally an "e" has been added; and then again, we have the Fulton Smiths and the De Vere Smiths. Yet all these are branches of the main Smith tree, descendants of old Smith; and where are the Macintoshes with all their swagger? Why, Smith sells mackintoshes five per cent. off for cash!

Enough of this unseemly digression.

I stayed a day or two at Banff Springs to enjoy the glorious scenery and have a chat with my old hunter, Abe Wilson, and I was sorry to find he had taken a couple of tourists a trip into the mountains, and was not expected back for a fortnight.

The first week in September I found myself in dreamy, delightful Victoria, the capital of Vancouver Island. I am not going to describe Victoria. There is a chemist's shop about a hundred and fifty yards from the club at the corner of the next block on your left, and there is a museum of badly-stuffed beasts

and birds somewhere. But the climate! In case the guide books say nothing on this subject, I feel it right to remark that the climate in Vancouver Island in the autumn months is absolutely heavenly; and I remember remarking to myself. "If only they would cut the trees down and make a golf course, here is the spot to live and die upon."

There were plenty of good fellows at the club who told me where to get fishing and shooting. There were wapiti—elk they are commonly called—in the interior of the island; but it was hard work and lonely getting a shot at them, owing to the dense forest that appeared to cover the whole island down to the very shore of the sea.

I have often wondered how the first white men who found Vancouver ever landed at all for timber. One night I had dined at the club, and was turning over the leaves of the last batch of picture papers from the old country, when a hand descended on my shoulder, and a voice cried cheerily, "Charlie, what the devil are you doing here?"

It was Tom Fane. I knew his voice at once. In a moment I was up and shaking hands with him.

"Doing here, my boy? Nothing at all," I answered.

"Well, of all the restless scamps I ever came across you take the prize," said Tom. "The world isn't big enough nowadays for you wandering beggars."

"But what are you here for?" I retorted.

"Sent the yacht round by sea," he replied. "Joined her at 'Frisco, and now I've come for a cruise along the coast and among all the endless

islands which, as far as I can make out, stretch for hundreds of miles to the north."

"Have you got anyone with you?" I asked.

"Not a soul. I tried to get two or three chaps to come, but no one seemed very keen about it. I think everyone looked upon my trip as rather a wild goose chase."

We chatted for some time, and when my friend left he had made me promise to dine with him the following night on board the yacht.

Tom Fane was a man who did things well. I had never seen his yacht, not being much of a yachting man, but I had often heard men at the club in London speak of her as a beautiful boat; and the following evening, as I stood on the quay waiting for the yacht's boat to take me off, I could not help thinking, as I gazed at her shapely lines, that I should like to be rich and own such a lovely floating home. The sun was sinking behind the inland mountains, and throwing long shadows across the unruffled waters of the harbour as I stepped on the clean, white decks. How neat and trim everything looked! Why is it yachts are kept cleaner and brighter than any other human habitations? The brasswork shone like burnished gold; there was no dust. No, when you come to think of it dust has a poor chance on the ocean, but its evil companion rust has a splendid time, or could have, if not persistently warred against. Such ideas as these flashed through my mind as I stepped aboard, almost instantly to be dispelled by the cheery voice of Tom Fane.

A little while later and we went below, and what a

picture of luxury did that cosy, roomy cabin or state-room, as the steward would call it, present! It was all oak-panelled, with fine artist-proof engravings let in here and there. In one corner stood an old grandfather eight-day clock. At once, when my eye caught this, I became curious. "Surely," said I, "the pendulum of that clock doesn't work correctly when you're at sea?"

"No," replied Tom, laughing, "that's rather a tricky device of mine. The works are ordinary lever ones, and the lower part of the case I've had fitted up to hold 'guns and rifles."

There was only one thing about that cabin that looked untidy; perhaps that was the reason it instantly impressed itself upon me, and yet I think that it was the thing that interested me most. Stuck against the wall, completely hiding one of the engravings, was a large chart of the sea surrounding the coast of Vancouver Island. Towards the north the marks and soundings were fewer, showing the northern portion had been less explored. Fane caught my eye riveted on the map. "What are you thinking of, Charlie?" he queried.

"Oh, nothing of importance!" I answered. "I was just wondering what a devil of a time it must take a vessel to go probing and sounding round an intricate coast like this."

"You were thinking of something else, my boy; you were dreaming, I saw it in your eye."

"What was I dreaming of?" I asked, laughing, "The girl I left behind me?"

"No, that's the last thing a cold, callous creature like you would dream of; but that restless, wander-

ing spirit of yours was imagining itself prowling round the coast of Vancouver Island, now wasn't it?"

"I believe some such thing was in my mind," I answered.

With that we began to discuss the gulfs, the inlets, the rivers, and lakes, and Tom Fane, to my surprise, grew quite enthusiastic. "Why," he cried, "I've got the boat; let's go a voyage of discovery!"

I have said before I was not much of a yachting man; also I had been forming hazy plans in my mind during the last few days, and gradually, while Fane was eagerly talking on, they were developing. I was always a pig-headed fellow in some ways; once I formed a plan nothing on earth would turn me from it, and no one could persuade me to alter it. So whilst my friend was suggesting this, that, and the other I was quietly working out my mode of procedure.

"Have you got the latest survey map of the island?" I asked at length.

"Thompson!" called Fane.

"Yes, sir."

"Ask Captain Hume if he has a survey map of Vancouver Island."

The steward returned in a few moments with a large map folded up. The map was unfolded and pinned to the "side" of the cabin—I feel it would be wrong to call it the "wall." "Now," said I, "may I suggest a trip?"

"Go on," quoth Tom, as he passed the bottle.

"You will notice, then," I continued, "that almost immediately after you leave Victoria, on the west

coast, civilization and the abode of the white man ceases. According to the chart you have here, the sea-coast has been well surveyed right round the island, but the inland portion, north of Alberni, which is about the centre of the island, is unknown. Now there must be wapiti in those regions to the north, and maybe other game, and as I am very keen to get a shot at one, what I would propose is this: You work your way in the yacht up to the west coast to Nootka Sound; see, here it is"—I pointed to the map, "You will notice a long arm of the sea runs inland some dozen miles in a downward direction to the south-east, up which your boat should be able to pass. If not, you have a steam-launch aboard that would be able to go up. At the end of that arm the Gold River flows in from the north-west, also in a downward direction; in fact, the arm of the sea and the river form a wide 'V.' Meanwhile I will go up the east coast in a trading steamer, and get put ashore somewhere here at the mouth of the Campbell River, where there is a timber-mill kept by Ross and McClaren. From there to the junction of the Gold River with the arm of the sea I reckon it is about fifty miles, and I propose tramping across that bit. You see, if I work north-west by the compass, I must strike the Gold River, and the rest would be plain sailing."

Tom Fane examined the map for some time in silence. "It sounds all right, no doubt, as you put it," he said at length; "but hang it all, it is probably dense timber, through which no pack animal could pass. You can't do it alone, and if you employ Indians, they are shifty beggars to deal with——"

"No," I interrupted, "I don't mean to do it alone, and I don't mean to employ Indians. I know my man." And then I proceeded to tell him of Abe Wilson. "I could wire Abe to-morrow; he was expected home about now, and he could join me here in a few days."

Tom Fane began to grow interested again. "But wouldn't it be an awfully laborious job?" he asked. "You would have to carry everything on your backs, and mightn't you run short of grub?"

"I've tried to reckon that up," I replied. "We could manage eighty pounds apiece, and ought to go ten miles a day, and inside a week ought to be within hail of your boat. We could carry sufficient flour and bacon to last us that time, but probably we should fall in with deer or game of some sort to help us along."

"Well," said Tom, "if you care to risk it, I'm your man. Let us see what the captain thinks of the plan. Thompson, ask Captain Hume to speak to me."

In a few minutes Captain Hume stepped into the saloon. He was a tall, middle-aged man, with a keen, grey eye, and a flavour of Scotland was as apparent in him as onions are in an Italian omelette. Tom Fane briefly repeated our projected scheme. "Now, captain, what do you think of it?" he asked.

The captain looked long at the chart, and scratched his head thoughtfully. "Weel, weel," he replied at last with his native caution, "this coast is gay tricky, and the fogs are arfu' thick at times. We cudna' but move through the day, and would hae to lie up o' nights; but, sir, there's no reason why we should

THE CAPTAIN LOOKED LONG AT THE CHART.

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na mak' Nootka Sound as well as ony ither sound, if it be your wish."

"All right, captain," cried Fane cheerily. "Nootka Sound is our next point when Mr. Wellesley's plans are completed."

I may here take the opportunity of informing the reader that my name is Charles Wellesley.

CHAPTER III.

Abe Arrives

THE following morning I wired off to Abe Wilson to come straight away to Victoria, if disengaged, to go a trip with me into the island. I was not at all sure in my mind that Abe would relish the idea of carrying our own packs, but that I must chance; I could not put the whole programme in a telegram. I had evidently caught Abe at home, for a reply reached me the same evening that he would take the train the following morning, so now we could expect him in a couple or, at the outside, three days' time. I sent Abe's message down to the yacht, where it was received with great satisfaction, for the news had quickly spread on board that the yacht was going a somewhat enterprising cruise in almost unknown waters, and if there is one thing that an Englishman loves it is the spirit of adventure. Yes, that adventurous spirit of her sons has done more for the greatness of England and the vastness of her empire than all the red tape from the offices of public officials, than all the smooth palaverings of courteous diplomatists, than all the wordy warfare of politicians.

One big stumbling-block had been removed, for without Abe I would never have made the attempt

to cross the island. How odd it is that someone crosses our path in life now and again, but not often, and immediately inspires us with faith and confidence. We may get into a London cab, and shiver and shake with fear as we shave the curbstones and slide down the wood pavement; and one day we get a cab with a horse in it that cocks his ears and tools along jauntily and easily, and we feel we could take a lease of that cab for the rest of our natural existence if we could afford it. Is it not the same in the serious affairs of life? Never mind how cynical we are, a presence comes before us one day to whom we bend in respect, whose word we long for and listen to. Never mind how hard we may have grown, a form will sooner or later appear before whom we will become as soft and gentle as little children.

But there was another obstacle to be overcome, and that was our passage up the east coast, and here it was Captain Hume came to the rescue. By enquiring among the shipping men in the harbour he heard of a small trading steamer that was working her way up towards Sitka in about a week's time. We were not long in seeking an interview with the captain; and after a little persuasion he agreed to set us ashore in Discovery Bay, where Ross and McClaren's timber-mill was situated, for one hundred and fifty dollars, which was not excessive, we considered, as we calculated on the chart the distance to be one hundred and fifty odd miles, and the captain reckoned on making fifty miles a day unless fog came on, so that would take us three days if everything went favourably. Fifty

miles a day seems little enough for a steamer to do; but it must be remembered that the whole seaway along the coast is dotted with hundreds and thousands of islands of every conceivable size, which renders navigation at night so intricate and dangerous, that captains seldom, if ever, hazarded the experiment, and ours, I am glad to say, did not mean to. When I put the question to him his reply was curt:

"Guess we'll just lay to."

So far our scheme had worked out with a simplicity I had not bargained for.

"Why, man," said Fane as we strolled down the quay to meet the mail-steamer on the afternoon that Abe Wilson was expected, "we'll be back in three weeks from the day you step aboard that coasting steamer."

"Perhaps," I replied; but somehow I felt we should not.

The mail-boats from Vancouver to Victoria do not run with the punctuality of the Irish mail-boats. Sometimes the Canadian-Pacific Railway mail-train due in Vancouver at one o'clock is hours late, and sometimes fog, which is very prevalent along this coast, delays them; but they do their best to keep reasonable time, and run risks which to my mind are very great. In their progress amid the islands, if fog has descended or ascended, they constantly rely on the echo of the fog-horn to tell them how near they are to rocks. This in itself is ticklish work, and often they find themselves anywhere but where they intended to be when the fog lifts.

But on this particular afternoon the boat was "on

time," as they say in the West, and half an hour before she was due we could see the smoke from her funnel trailing away to the south like a great black comet. As she steamed up the harbour I took my binoculars forth and searched the passengers who now crowded the upper decks.

"See him?" asked Tom.

Abe Wilson was an easy man to distinguish in a crowd.

"Yes," I answered, "I've got him. Do you see a man standing apart from a small group of persons on the upper deck, right in the stern?"

Fane had taken the binoculars. "Is he that great tall chap with a big brown felt hat?"

Wilson had been leaning on the rail, but I could see with my eye now he had stood up.

"Yes," I said, "that's him."

"He looks the sort of chap I'd rather have on my side than against me," mumbled Fane, still searching the vessel with the glasses.

The boat was soon alongside, and we stepped back to allow the motley crowd of impatient passengers to hurry across the gangway as though they were in a terrible hurry to get somewhere, although they well knew they could get no further, and haste has no advantages in Victoria Town; still, it is the proper thing always to be in a hurry when you alight from a train or boat—why I never could make out.

Wilson was nearly the last; he had recognized me standing back among the small crowd assembled from curiosity or to meet friends, and given me a friendly wave of the arm. And now we saw him crossing the gangway, and what a splendid specimen

of a man he was! As I write these lines I see him again crossing that gangway as plainly as I saw him then, but the words blur as I put them down, and a teardrop mingles with the ink. Across his shoulders he carried his Winchester repeater, the barrel of which was stuck through a large bundle tied together in a big red bandana handkerchief; the weather was hot and close, but he wore a thick pea-jacket, merely because it was the simplest way to carry his overcoat; a broad-brimmed, brown felt hat was on his head, and beneath it was a face as brown as the hat, and what a face it was! Every feature as finely cut as any Grecian statue, and from the dark, tanned skin the clear grey eyes shone out with an almost unnatural brilliancy, and when he smiled the whiteness of his teeth astonished you. Of course the deep colouring of the skin enhanced their lightness and brightness; but no man, and certainly no woman, could ever converse with Abe Wilson without being immediately aware of this peculiarity in the man and fascinated by it. He was a tall man too, very tall; but you would not have guessed him six foot three unless you saw him alongside another man, he was put together in such fine proportion.

We elbowed our way to the gangway when we saw him on it, and the next moment he had dropped a big bag he was carrying in his right hand, and extended the same to me. I have said before that Abe Wilson had inspired me with confidence when I first saw him—often I have wondered why. It might have been the face or the whole physique, or was it that hand? Anyhow, when that hand took yours

you felt it was a master hand—that all you had to do, that all you had better do, was to lie quiet and keep calm; so at least I always felt. It was a hand that said to you plainer than any words, "I'm all right, and sound and firm and friendly; but don't try tricks."

I welcomed him gladly. "And now, Abe," said I, "let me introduce you to Sir Thomas Fane, a friend of mine."

Abe took a step forward and extended the hand. Something made me watch Fane curiously. I saw him take the hand, and during the moment he held it I noticed a curious expression pass across his face —a look of awe and incredulity. "Hurrah!" I mentally ejaculated, "I am not alone, not a fool after all; he's recognized the superior touch." Yes, I saw it in his eye, and I was inwardly glad, as sometimes I felt I was feminine and foolish—I, a man of six foot, in the prime of life, feeling a nobody before a great rough uncut western diamond. Yes, diamond; I will always have it—diamond.

Now Fane was not a stuck-up English snob, one of those—and how many they are!—who the instant they inherit wealth or acquire it look upon the rest of their fellow-creatures as ladies and gentlemen simply in the proportion to the sovereigns they own; perhaps a visit to that far western land had widened his views.

I can remember well my strolling with him a long way out of Victoria Town one afternoon, and coming to farmhouses and cultivated land. We stopped at a stile off the main road, and gazed into a field where they were planting hops. The same coin-

cidence attracted both of us—the difference in the appearance of the labourers working in the field. There were Japanese and Chinese and English all mingled together. There were about twenty in all, out of which three or four were English, and smart, strapping young fellows they looked. One of them smoked a wooden pipe, and as he raked away a gleam of sun flashed on the pipe. There was silver on it, a silver-mounted pipe smoked by a common labourer! Not that a silver-mounted pipe is an expensive luxury; but we both noticed it, and it struck us both as odd.

"Come on," said Tom Fane; "let's go and find out what he's doing here if we can."

I was curious and readily acquiesced, and together we strolled across the field. Some of the men looked up, but nobody seemed to evince any surprise, and having bestowed a glance on us, proceeded with their work.

"Don't appear to take us for anything special," muttered Tom, as we approached him with the pipe. "Good afternoon, my lad," said Tom.

The boy, for he could not have been more than twenty, looked up. "Good afternoon, sir," he replied quietly. There was something in the appearance of the lad, something in the tone of the voice, that told us plainly, "English, and a gentleman."

Once the ice was broken he conversed glibly enough, and we soon discovered that he had but recently left Eton, that he was the younger son of a Yorkshire baronet, and that he had come out here believing that wealth was to be had almost for the asking.

"Is the pay good?" asked Tom in a hesitating voice.

"A dollar a day, and find your own board and lodging," answered the lad without looking up.

"And those niggers?" queried Tom.

The colour deepened on the lad's cheek. "They get the same—dollar a day all round."

There was silence for a few seconds, whilst the boy hacked viciously at the weeds.

"I should be very pleased," said Tom, "if you would come and dine with me any time you like, whilst I am here, anyhow. May I suggest to-night? I suppose you can manage to get down to the harbour."

"Thank you, I shall be very pleased," and a pleasant expression crossed the boy's face.

"All right," said Tom. "My name is Fane—Thomas Fane—and you will dine aboard my yacht to-night. Ask for the *Caledonia*, and be on the quay abreast of her at seven o'clock. I'll send a boat off to bring you aboard."

I have mentioned this episode for the simple reason that it shows that a gentleman may be met with in the Far West when little expected, and that the man who drives you from the station to the hotel may be a more polished, educated person than the man who "bosses" the hotel itself.

Now I was certain in my own mind that Abe Wilson had in the early part of his life been accustomed to refinement and a comfortable home somewhere. A long apprenticeship in trapping and hunting in the wild Rockies—years during which his only comrades had been the cowboys and

trappers that gathered round the bar of the wayside saloon when he chanced to come down from a trip—had roughened the external shell of his nature, but within the mechanism was finely wrought, and the balance of his mind true and even. Not that I could ever get him to talk of the past, and I had soon found that to revert to it was very distasteful to him. He could write a good letter too, and at accou· : he was far quicker and cleaner than—well, than I was.

"You 'll come aboard my boat and dine to-night, Wilson," said Fane as we wandered up to the hotel, "and then Wellesley can unfold his schemes, and we 'll show you the maps and get your views on the matter."

"All right, Mr. Fane," replied Abe.

In the West titles are put on one side; people do not seem able to grasp them; at least, they did not at the time I speak of.

CHAPTER IV.

Au Revoir

IT was a party of five that sat down to dinner that night in the cosy cabin of the yacht—Fane, Captain Hume, Wilson, myself, and Henry Whitmore, the lad we had found hoeing weeds in the hop-field. Fane had taken a great liking to the boy, and often had him to dinner and about with him when he could get away.

Almost the instant we entered the cabin Tom started on the subject of the expedition. He had barely greeted us when off to the maps he flew, and pointed to bays and inlets, all the while giving us a lecture which would have gone down admirably with a geographical society. It was really intended for Wilson, because I had been over the course, as it were, with him about a dozen times before, and Whitmore was almost as well acquainted with his propositions and theories as myself. I had thrown myself into one of the comfortable chairs—or should I call it a bunk?—inwardly praying dinner would soon be served for three reasons: firstly, I was very hungry; secondly, I could see Wilson was not listening to a word Fane was saying—he was gazing round and round the cabin lost in amazement; and

thirdly, I knew we should have to go over it all again after dinner.

"Do you think so, Wilson?" Fane had turned to him.

"Think er—er—eh what, sir?"

"Why, I was asking you if you thought there was any chance of the island being inhabited up in the northern portion."

"Oh, I beg pardon, sir."

But here I interposed. "Look here, Tom," said I, "I don't believe Wilson has heard one blessed word you've been saying; he's been gazing round and round the cabin lost in wonderment at the fittings and decorations. So take my tip, old chap, keep some of that breath to cool the soup when it comes, because we've got to go carefully into the whole matter before we part to-night, and it is a jolly sight easier and pleasanter job on a full stomach than on an empty one."

Tom laughed. He was an enthusiastic chap when once he took anything up, and he could fly off at a tangent from one thing to another like a busy bee in a flower-bed.

"She's a nice boat, Wilson, isn't she?"

Fane's pleasant laugh had reassured Wilson, and once more his eyes were roaming round the cabin. "She's a dandy," he answered slowly. "I reckon," he continued, giving a glance at the silver on the dining-table, and then sweeping his arm round as though to indicate he referred to everything he saw, "it's all from the old country."

"Yes," said Tom, "everything is English here." Wilson looked up quickly with a strange, startled

look in his eye. Fane saw it. "Well, everything except you," he added with his short, genial laugh.

Wilson dropped his head. "Yes," he said meditatively, "everything except me."

And now Thompson entered with the soup.

During dinner we unfolded our plans to Wilson, Tom Fane being the principal spokesman.

"And then you and Wellesley," he said toward the end of his description of the proposed trip, "will just pack across the island and join us in Nootka Sound."

Abe looked up at the map thoughtfully, and then at me. "Do you reckon to pack across there, Mr. Wellesley, you and me, and no knowledge of the country?"

"Yes," said I. "I think we could do it all right."

Abe shook his head. "Gimme a country I know, with landmarks and open spaces to see your whereabouts, and I 'm your man; but I 'm derned if I can find my way through a strange region among everlasting timber."

"Come, come, Abe, why do you say it 's everlasting timber? No one has been there, and if we work south-west by the compass we must strike the Gold River, which runs into the top of Nootka Sound."

"Compass!" muttered Abe. "Well, that might do, but I never put much faith in those plaguey things."

Captain Hume laughed aloud. "Yer no a seafaring mon, Mr. Wilson, or ye wudna say yon."

It was very evident that Wilson did not relish the idea of the trip, despite Fane's enthusiasm and my assurances that the matter was an easy one—assur-

ances that I think were a little forced. He listened silently, and ever and anon stole an anxious glance at the map. "'Pears," he said, "no one has ever been in here."

"No one!" cried Tom. "That's the whole fun of it."

"Fun of it? Hanged if I see where the fun comes in," replied Wilson, and in my own mind I was obliged to agree with him.

But there it was. We had all set our hearts on making the expedition; the sailors on the yacht were all ready and anxious to start, while the whole town of Victoria could talk of nothing else. Inwardly I felt I ought to have talked it over with Abe first, but it was too late now. There was nothing more to say; we had stated our plans and proposals, and silence had fallen within the cabin, broken only by the distant footfall of the watch on deck. We were all gazing at the set face of Abe Wilson. Calmly and without moving a muscle he scanned the face of each one of us in turn.

"Well, gentlemen," he said at last, "seems you've kinder fixed this up and got it all pat-like, and as we've all got to take a long trip and a last trip sooner or later, it can't matter to Abe Wilson one way or the other; but you won't mind my saying I reckon you've got an over-estimation of the ease and elegance of this business; but there it is, maybe ye're right, maybe I'm wrong. Still, it's you I'm thinking of, you've got friends and maybe women-folk; but I—well I—ye see I'm used to being lonely, and don't mind it, sorter court it. And there it is, I'm ready."

"Bravo!" cried Tom, rising up and shaking hands with Abe across the table. "Thompson," he called, "bring a bottle of the old port; we'll drink success to the expedition."

There was yet a good deal to do during the few days left to us before the coasting steamer was due to sail. We had to think very carefully of what was absolutely necessary to take, and what we could dispense with.

I had suggested to Abe that we could carry about eighty pounds apiece, and I mind as I said it I noticed the slightest suspicion of a smile flit across his face. It may have been fancy, but it seemed to me that the idea which ran through his mind was that he would probably be carrying the two packs and me as well before the journey was completed. Still, after he had once spoken that first night on which we all dined together on the yacht he had been cheerful, and had entered heart and soul into the undertaking.

There were fourteen pounds of bacon and flour, a small tin pail, a tin coffee-pot, a frying-pan, dried apples, tea, sugar, salt, and a few other necessaries. My pack was to be wrapped in a mackintosh sheet, on which we could sleep at night away from the damp, and I carried it by means of an old pair of trousers corded to the pack with the legs left a little loose, so that I could pass an arm through each trouser-leg, and then hoist it on my back.

Abe's pack was wrapped in a good-sized canvas sheet, which we proposed to convert into a rude tent, and he also used an old pair of trousers to carry it.

There are two good reasons for this: one is, that the legs of a pair of trousers do not cut your shoulders or armpits like straps or cords; and, secondly, you have another garment to put on around the camp-fire or when not on the march.

Abe carried his rifle, and an axe with the pail on top of his pack. I carried my rifle and a small trout-rod, while the frying-pan with the coffee-pot were tied on to the top of mine.

And when everything was completed, we concluded we had sufficient provisions to last us eight days, or ten at a pinch, and I am compelled here to state that the nearer the day came for our departure the less I liked the outlook; for the obvious fact rose before me—supposing we meet difficulties and obstructions that harass and delay us, what shall we do at the end of eight days, or say ten? If any such thought as this crossed Abe's mind—and it must have done—he effectually concealed it.

Fane was jubilant. "Look here, you fellows," he said—it was the day before we were to sail, and we were lunching with him on the yacht—"I've talked it over with the captain, and we've arranged to leave the day after you. You see, it's a nasty coast, and we shall have to feel our way into Nootka Sound, and if I am there a week before you I can while away the time shooting and fishing. By-the-by, Charlie, young Whitmore is coming with me, so I shan't be all alone. I didn't like to ask him outright myself, his people might have been down on me for taking him away from his work, or some moonshine of that sort; but yesterday he told me he couldn't stand it any longer, hoeing away with a lot of

heathens, so I suggested he should come with me till he thought out some other line, and didn't he jump at it."

"I'm glad of that," I answered; "you will have a companion, and I could see the boy was dying to come, from the first moment he heard us discussing the expedition."

"What do you think of Sir Thomas?" I asked Wilson as we sauntered towards the club some half-hour later.

"He's all right," replied Abe quietly, with that peculiar western emphasis on the "right." "But, you see," he went on, "he ain't got to carry no blamed packs through a dog-garned, uninhabitated island, and that's why he can afford to be so derned jolly."

Early the following morning, September 25th, the *Annie Jephson*, which had been lying alongside the quay the last few days taking in stores and goods, steamed slowly away, and from the deck Abe Wilson and myself waved adieu to Tom Fane and young Whitmore, who had come down to bid us farewell.

"Good-bye, Tom," I cried as we moved off.

"Good-bye be hanged!" he called back; "au revoir, it is au revoir!"

I need not weary the reader with a minute description of our voyage to Discovery Bay; a trip in a small second-class trading steamer is at no time the height of luxury or enjoyment, and the scenery through which we passed, though always varying, grew very monotonous—densely-wooded islands lay apparently everywhere. Occasionally on the larger ones, or on the mainland, we caught glimpses of

houses and homesteads, but which was island and which was mainland it was impossible to tell.

At first I was very busy interviewing the captain regarding this matter and similar ones; but soon I wearied of it, and joined Abe, who was leaning on the rail gazing at the distant shore.

"What are you thinking of, Abe?"

"I'm just reflecting," he replied, "that whoever first planted trees in these parts overdid it."

We lay to that night in Cowichan Harbour, which we reached pretty early in the afternoon; but Captain Slingsby had a good deal of cargo to discharge, principaliy goods for the local store. It appeared they were making a railway a little way inland from here that was to run up the coast, and a good number of men were engaged on it. It was a pretty little natural harbour, that was entered at a narrow pass, and broadened out into a round basin about a quarter of a mile wide.

Next morning we weighed anchor at daylight, and when I arose and reached the deck we were running through a narrow channel to the north. We stopped about one o'clock opposite some wooden huts or houses situated on the shore of a pleasant inlet, that the captain told us was called Nanacino Harbour; but we soon hauled the anchor aboard again after sending a boat off with some cases and packets in it, and that night about an hour or so before sundown we dropped anchor in an inlet some fifteen or twenty miles further north. For the last ten miles or so the sea to our right, or on our starboard quarter, whichever you please, had widened out considerably, and the nearest land looked several

miles distant. Signs and the habitations of man were growing rarer and rarer. I pointed this out to Slingsby.

"Guess," he replied, "you'll see nary a living pusson 'twixt here and Cómox Harbour, where there's a small settlement, and which we shall make, if all goes right, by to-morrow evening. That's about four hours from Discovery Passage, and I reckon to be abreast of Campbell River before noon on Thursday."

Campbell River runs into the sea some six miles from the entrance to Discovery Passage, and it was up this river our trip was to begin.

CHAPTER V.

Relics of the Past

IT was a little after ten o'clock on the Thursday morning when we entered Discovery Passage, and at once started getting our packs done up. I had had during the voyage a good many lessons from Abe in the art of arranging my pack and roping it properly—by no means an easy job; and I know of nothing more irritating than having to pull up on the march and re-adjust slipping ropes; it usually means having to undo the whole pack and re-arrange it.

What a glorious morning it was! The tall pines that fringed the shore were reflected in the calm water as in a mirror, while from twenty or twenty-five miles to the west rose a tall peak up into the clear blue sky all by itself, and—what surprised both of us—bare, actually bald. Was it possible that a mountain could reach above the timber line in this country? Apparently it was so.

Captain Slingsby saw us regarding it. "That's Crown Point," he remarked. "It's a well-known landmark to mariners, and many a time when I've been out at sea I've seen it standing up out of the low-lying fog that has hidden the shore from view. Your direct route should lay right past it."

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WE WAVED FAREWELL TO THE "ANNIE JEPHSON."

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"Thank heaven for that!" I exclaimed. "It will be a fine guide for us."

"Providing," chimed in Abe, "we ever see it again when once we are landed."

"Why?" I asked.

"Well, thirty thousand million trees, averaging one hundred and fifty feet in height, do obstruct an ordinary person's vision."

Slingsby laughed, and I relapsed into silence.

Abe was not often sarcastic; he saw I felt a little hurt, and in another second he gripped my arm. "Come along, boss," he whispered; "we'll plant the Union Jack and the Stars and Stripes together on the top of that bald-headed peak if you wish it."

"Here you are, gentlemen," cried Slingsby, as he put the lever to "slow down" and headed his boat towards the shore of the mainland.

In a few minutes more our boat was lowered with the packs carefully stowed in it. We had brought a small boat, as we had some six or eight miles of river and about four miles of lake to pass up before we reached McClaren's timber mill.

Slingsby bade us farewell with a hearty shake of the hand, and the crew gave us a ringing cheer as we each shouldered an oar and struck out for the mouth of the river. Slingsby stood by till he saw us safely over the bar, if there was one, and into the river; and just as we turned a corner that would hide us from sight, a puff of smoke came from the vessel's side, followed by the loud report of the signal gun. It was the *Annie Jephson's* farewell to us for ever.

Near the mouth of the river on the left bank was a rude clearing of a few acres, on which stood three or four wooden huts. Some men engaged in the timber trade were lolling about; it was noon, and, I suppose, the dinner-hour. It is hardly necessary to say they were surprised to see us, and when we told them of our proposed trip they evidently looked upon us as stark, staring mad, or else gold prospectors who were deliberately lying to them to put them off the scent of their real intentions. We tried to find out what the country was like beyond McClaren's mill, but, as far as we could discover, no white man had ever penetrated a quarter of a mile into the interior. Occasionally an Indian appeared and disappeared, but where they came from and whither they went nobody knew and nobody cared. They were silent, sulky beggars, these Indians, so we learnt, and did not speak English nor even ordinary Siwash; very likely they could talk the latter, which is a sort of Indian patois, still they preferred keeping silent. If they wanted anything they made signs for it and then departed.

We found we had a stiffish pull before us, and would have to get out of the boat in one or two places and pull it over the shallows, but that we would get everything we wanted up at McClaren's. How that river did make my mouth water. I longed to get the trout-rod up and have a cast—great big fat fellows darted away in the clear, deep pools as our boat passed up—but it might not be; we must make McClaren's before dark.

It was four o'clock when we rowed up the last pool and entered the lake. We had hoped for a bit

of breeze on the lake, and that we would be able to set the sail, but not a breath of wind was there. Still it was a relief to emerge from the forest into the wide lake; and again the summit of Crown Mountain rose up in the west.

"Hello, Abe, we've not been such a very long time seeing it again after all."

"No," said Abe, smiling; "reckon I slurred that hill."

It was easier work rowing now, there being no current to fight against, and at 5.30 we had beached our boat beside a small wooden boat-house at the foot of a delightful plot of grass; at least, it looked delightful to us after the monotony of the forest scenery.

Of course our boat had been seen long before we landed, and half a dozen men stood looking at us in astonishment as her keel grated on the pebbly beach.

"Is Mr. McClaren among you gentlemen?" I asked, stepping ashore.

"I am McClaren," said a tall man, coming forward.

I soon made McClaren aware of who we were and what we proposed doing, and a pleasanter and kinder host I never knew. His house was a good-sized wooden building, with the usual verandah running round it, standing some fifty yards from the lake at the edge of the grass clearing. A stout, good-natured woman stood at the door as we walked towards it.

Mrs. McClaren was delighted to see us; I really think they were more pleased to receive us than

we were to reach them. After all, *we* had only just left civilization, whereas *they* had not been in touch with it for months. Their stores came up once a month, and a newspaper or two along with them; but it was evident from the questions they both showered on us how pleased they were to get some news from the outside world.

It was a cheery evening we passed there with them. The Chinese cook sent in some deliciously cooked trout with flesh redder than a salmon. That started me.

"Were these out of the lake?" I asked.

"Of course they were." And then McClaren told me of the sort of catches he made. "All with the fly. You just want a bit of breeze on the lake," said he, "and any morning or evening you'll get two or three dozen averaging near on two pounds."

Within ten minutes we had arranged a fishing expedition at cockcrow the following morning.

On the subject of our expedition he was reserved; he evidently did not wish to throw cold water on our scheme, but it was obvious he did not think we were going to do anything smart or profitable.

"It's not for me to suggest, or try and prevent you in any way; you 'pear to have fixed it up, this trip, and yer pals on t'other side will be waiting for yer, likewise you know as much of the interior there as I do, for wild horses won't drag me into it nor any other sens—no, pardon, gents—I won't say that; but, to tell yer the truth, I hate the d——d trees, I loathe them. If you knew the trouble it was to make this bit of a clearing you wouldn't cotton to

no trees. And then they do say a white man went in from here some years back. He was a gold prospector, and had some wild idea nuggets grew in there like mushrooms. Some Indians, so *they* say" —he jerked his thumb to the south and civilization— "brought him this far, but refused to go on. They camped o' top of the lake that night, and in the early morning they was woke by awful cries far away— you can hear far of a still night here. They were so scared, they left with dawn. They left him a boat moored there; they'd taken up a duplicate one towed ahind for him to return by in case they had to return without him. Of course, the boys said it was only wolves howling, but them Indians said they knowed wolves' voices from men's, and they don't say much. Anyhow, the boat's there now; you'll see her maybe at the top of the lake. She's pretty nigh done for as a watertight conveyance, but no one's ever been to take her away."

There was silence as McClaren ceased speaking. Abe had been filling his pipe; he rose, and went to the fire for a light. When he turned his face wore an expression of absolute indifference.

"Guess," he said, puffing away, "it was coyotes them Indians heard."

"Maybe," assented McClaren, "but the boat is there."

Abe turned the conversation into a fresh channel, but I must confess McClaren's story produced a creepy sensation within me, and tired as I was that night, it was some time before I got to sleep. "The boat's there now" kept ringing in my ears. Why had the man never returned? Had the Indians

murdered him? Had he been torn to pieces by wild beasts? Or had he been lost in the great gloomy forest, and slowly starved to death? Thank goodness, when sleep came at last I did not dream any horrors, and with the light of morning the episode almost passed from my mind.

We were up betimes, and while Abe examined the packs and corded them up taut I went for half-an-hour's fishing on the lake with McClaren. The trout rose freely, and played as gamely as any fish I have ever seen. I wished we could have had a whole day at them, but time was precious.

After breakfast we replaced our packs in the boat and bade adieu to our host and hostess; the latter presented Abe with a flask of whisky, and though he demurred some time from accepting it, saying "we were off spirits this trip," she would hear of no refusal.

There was still a mile of lake to be negotiated before we took our plunge into the forest. McClaren directed us to the north-westerly corner of the lake.

"There's a small stream runs in there," he said, "and forms a sandy beach where you can easily land; beyond that I can give you no directions or hints."

"There's just one last little matter, McClaren," I said, as Abe shoved the little boat down the shingle: "we may have to retrace our steps, in which case we should want the boat to get back here with, so let her lie there a fortnight or three weeks; after that take her and keep her, she'll

come in useful for you, and we shall have crossed or——"

"Here's the only other oar," cried Abe with a laugh, handing me the scull. "Come on."

Silently McClaren and his wife waved their handkerchiefs as we pulled across the lake, and once I thought the wife put hers to her eyes, but it may have been fancy.

"They might have given us a bit of a cheer, Abe," I said.

"Reckon they don't get much chance of practising that class of harmony in these parts," he retorted.

Within half an hour we were abreast of the sandy beach McClaren had directed us to. When within a couple of hundred yards of it Abe looked round.

"Hello, what's that?" he cried. I turned also; it was a boat, plain enough, a boat lying on the sand. Neither of us spoke for a minute, and I think the same thoughts passed through the minds of both. McClaren's story of the previous night came back with vivid clearness. It was Abe who spoke first. Did he notice I looked a bit scared, and was that indifference with which he appeared to hear the story only assumed?

"These relics of the past," he said, "ain't kinder gratifying or reassuring, eh, boss? But, then, if a feller's such a thickhead as to wander in here alone, playing hide-and-seek with nobody, what can he expect?" He turned. "Two's different, a vast deal different; that's why I didn't let that yarn of McClaren's weigh with me. As long as a man has

someone to talk to, someone to holloa at, someone to swear at, he can get right along. But get him wandering about alone among these trees with nary a soul to speak to, nary a sound but the harsh howling of beasts and the cracking of timber, and his head 'll go; leastways, that 's my opinion."

CHAPTER VI.

The Dead Prospector

WE moored our boat a few yards from the shore, and poured some tins of water into her so that she might keep watertight; hauled up on the beach, and exposed to the rays of the sun, the planks would soon have shrunk, and caused her to leak badly. Probably the same had been done originally with the old boat, or rather framework, that lay beside us on the sand, until the lake had risen and the moorings given, and she had been washed up; or, more likely still, McClaren or one of his men, vexed at the dilatory proceedings of the owner, had hauled it up with disgust. At the edge of the brushwood, on a little plot of grass, three old poles still stood aloft, tied together about a yard from the top. Abe paused a moment, after mooring the boat, and gazed at them.

"That's where those sneaking Siwashes camped; wonder they even left him the boat! Reckon they thought he *might* get back and round on 'em, or p'raps two boats were too much trouble. Now, boss," he added, "take a good look at that compass, and let's be moving."

With Captain Hume's assistance on board the *Caledonia* we had carefully studied the course we

had to take, and we had reckoned we must keep a point north of west. This should eventually bring us to the Gold River, a few miles above its junction with Nootka Sound; but we had to be careful not to keep too far south, for then we would miss the "V" formed by the river and the sound, which I endeavoured to explain in a former chapter. If we did this we might wander on, and if we did reach the rugged, uninhabited coast beyond, it was any odds on our being starved before we could be found.

And now, as Abe glanced over my shoulder at the compass, his pack already on his back and his axe in his hand, it suddenly struck me how should we know the Gold River? There was no other river on the map, of course not, for the simple reason the interior was unexplored; but it was a well-watered island, perhaps more so than any in the world, full of lakes and rivers. Well, it was too late to turn back now.

I did not mention my thoughts to Abe—one nervous man in a party of two is sufficient. Abe gave me a lift up with my pack. Together we took a long, last look at the green patch where stood McClaren's house. How cosy and inviting it looked amid all the dense growth around! Luckily for us the small stream that flowed into the lake here came from the west, in the very direction we wished to travel, and as it was dead low now, only a little trickling burn, it formed a by no means indifferent pathway; but when I saw around me the dense undergrowth, the prickly scrub, and the thousands of fallen trees, I confess my spirits fell lower still.

While we kept the stream we could, in most instances, crawl under fallen trunks, as the water had hollowed out a course for itself; but I could not help thinking of how we were going to manage when we left it, which must be before long.

No despondency was observable, though, about Abe. He laughed and chatted as he led the way at a good sound pace, considering the weight of the packs and the heat of the day. Occasionally a stroke of his axe severed a branch that blocked our passage under or over a fallen trunk, and having crawled through himself, he would turn and give me a helping hand.

We had been steadily progressing for about two hours and a half, and the bed of the stream was becoming very small and narrow, when suddenly Abe stopped. I followed the direction of his eyes, and saw he was gazing at a post a few yards in front of him.

"What is it, Abe?"

He did not reply, but walked on to the post and bent over it. It was obvious to me now as I stood beside him that the post had been cut by the hand of man. The mark where it had been blazed by an axe was distinct, and when we stooped over to examine it signs of writing in pencil were evident; but it must have been done many years ago, as the characters were almost obliterated. The word "claim" was distinct, "80 yards west by," and John Wat——" That was all we could make out. We rubbed the surface with our hands, but that did more harm than good, as we only rubbed the moss and dirt in the deeper.

"That prospector McClaren spoke of," said Abe in a subdued voice. "Wonder what he thought he 'd found." Abe looked round him, and returned to the rocky bed of the stream, up which he walked with bent head, examining the stones minutely. "Here you are, boss!" he cried.

I had sat down whilst he was making his examination, but now I hurried up to him. He handed me a bit of grey rock, in which little yellow pieces of gold were distinctly visible.

"Well, it 's not much use to us," I said.

"Nor anyone else," continued Abe, jerking the stone away, "and I guess that prospector lived to be sorry he ever found it."

It had been very close all the morning and was now past one o'clock, so we agreed to pause here and partake of some sandwiches Mrs. McClaren had kindly put up for us. We were soon refreshed and ready for the road—or the jungle rather. We had not proceeded more than a few hundred yards when Abe again stopped with a jerk, whilst he dropped the axe softly and seized his rifle. We were at the edge of a small, mossy clearing, or what would have been a clearing but for the trees that had fallen across it. I stood on tiptoe and craned my neck forward. Abe pointed a little to the right, and there lay a dark object. In a second I saw it was a man, and for some reason or another my blood seemed to freeze all over me. Why I cannot think, but in that gloomy forest everything seemed strange and weird.

Suddenly Abe gave a shrill whistle, the man never stirred; then he gave a succession of who-whoops

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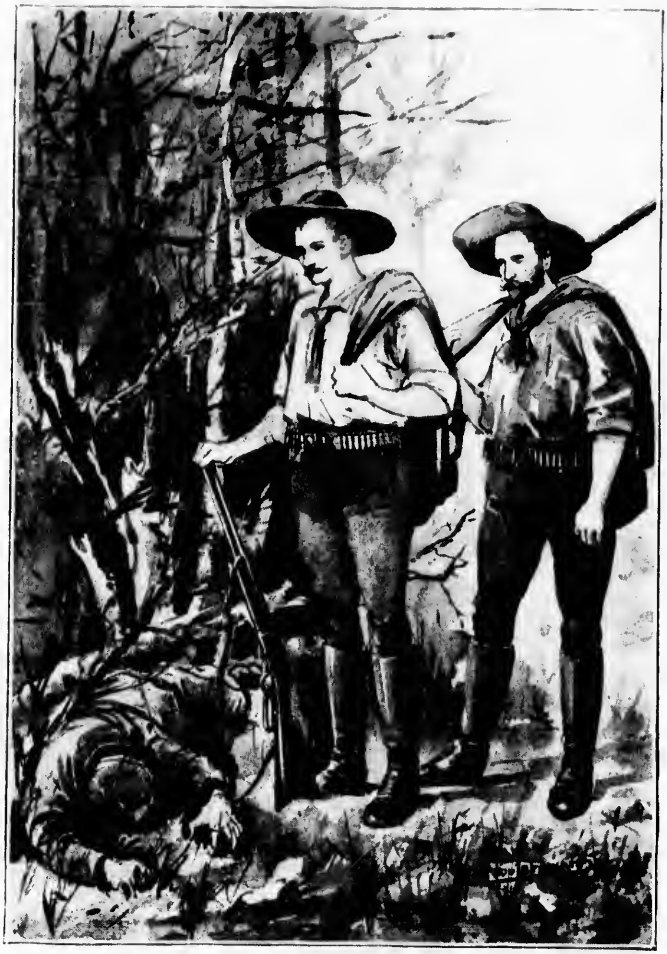

"THOUGHT SO," SAID ABE. "DEAD."

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that would have scared the dwellers in a graveyard, but the man never moved.

"Thought so," said Abe, taking up the axe. "Dead."

We walked quietly towards the form, and surveyed the grim scene without speaking. From the spot where Abe first saw the body the head was hidden from view; but now, when we came closer, it was only a human skull that protruded from an old tattered coat. I stood gazing on some few yards off, whilst Abe went round the body, investigating the affair as it were. There was the framework of an old Gladstone bag lying near, but the leather had all disappeared, eaten away by insects or decayed. In the hollow of a tree lay some blackened stones, showing the man had made a fire here, and close by the tree lay a rusty tin saucepan.

"What do you make of it, Abe?" I asked.

"I call it," answered Abe, picking up some stones by the side of the dead figure and examining them carefully, "a mystery cleared up."

"How?"

"Well, to tell you the honest truth, boss, I didn't swallow that short yarn of McClaren's with anything like relish. I could see the man meant what he was talking of, and was kinder serving it up as light as possible. He didn't like to dissuade us coming in here, yet he didn't want to scare us, and I'm perfectly convinced he thinks we'll never come out. This poor chap here," he continued, pointing to the figure, "is the prospector what owned that boat he spoke of and we saw this morning, and the same man that discovered the claim we've just left. See, here are

some bits of rock with gold in them, samples he meant taking away. It would be late when he got through prospecting and measuring and what not, so he settled to camp here, intending probably to rejoin the Indians in the morning. Do you see what killed him?"

"No," I replied. "He appears to have crawled under some branches as though to avoid something."

"He didn't crawl under any branches," interrupted Abe, "the branches crawled on him, and a mighty quick crawl too. He was caught by a falling tree. See! The trunk of the tree lies across there, and he would be jumping or running to avoid it, but some of the outside branches knocked him down and held him, perhaps broke something. They look old and rotten now, but they were tougher then. Anyhow, he was not killed outright; those Indians heard cries, cries that scared them, and they knew the difference between men's voices and wolves."

"But the distance," suggested I.

"They would hear plain enough," went on Abe. "We are not more than four or five miles from that creek, and all steady uphill; besides, the nights are wonderfully still in these parts, and sound travels a long way."

"Why didn't those blackguard Indians come and see what was the matter?" I asked.

"Well," said Abe, "evidently they had some superstitious dread of entering the forest here, or he would have taken one of them with him to pack in and lend a hand, and then, when they heard those shrieks that night, wild horses wouldn't have dragged them in;

they'd guess the man had fallen among hostile Indians or was being attacked by wolves, and they are not the boys to help one in a tight place. I've seen too much of 'em, and from what I can see of the breed on this island, it's worse than any on the mainland, and I'd a thought that impossible."

From the foregoing it is apparent that Abe, like all western hunters that ever I met, looked upon all Indians with supreme contempt.

There was no good loitering longer round the camp of the dead prospector; the scene was gruesome in the extreme, and yet I think we both felt relieved now that McClaren's weird story was explained and the ghost of the prospector laid, so to speak.

We again consulted the compass, and, there being no longer any stream to follow, plunged into the dark forest, scrambling along as best we could. And it was mighty hard work; every half-hour or so we had to stop—at least, I had—and take the packs from our shoulders, whilst the perspiration poured off us. Fallen trees were everywhere, and our passage was one continued climb or creep; sometimes we got a more friendly trunk than another that had fallen east and west, and so enabled us to walk along it for a few yards, but it was laborious work and dangerous. Fancy a slip and a sprained ankle or broken bone in such a place!

The deep shade was growing denser, and only the western tops of the firs caught the glint of the setting sun, when we came on a more pretentious stream that apparently flowed north and south, or at right angles to our route. We had passed many small

brooks, luckily for us, as it was terribly thirsty work crawling through the forest; but the one we had now struck evidently at times ran in a high spate, as trees and brushwood were cleared away to a considerable distance on either side.

How refreshing it was to get a glimpse of the sunlight on the ground, to hear the murmur of the running water, for never in my life had I known such stillness as that we had been passing through. No bird chirped among the branches, no fox barked, no bones told of the presence of animal life, excepting those of the dead prospector. The crack of a branch broken in our progress vibrated through the gloom with startling clearness; and I felt at such times we should wake something up, rouse up some ugly beast, and then I looked for faces peeping round the trees. Candidly, groping through that forest I had the "jumps"—I confess it now.

Tired as I was, I almost shouted for joy as we wended our way along the pebbly shore, seeking a spot to camp at. We had only traversed a short distance when we reached a grassy slope, and in another second the packs were off our backs. After a few minutes' rest Abe went in search of firewood with the axe; he had not far to go, the reader will suppose, but old rotten branches burn the best. In the meantime I undid the packs and arranged our scant supplies, and soon we had a bright fire blazing, the kettle of water hissing away, and some rashers of bacon spluttering merrily in the frying-pan. Stay; I had forgotten the bread. Time after time I had watched Abe mix the flour and the baking powder and pour the water in and mix it all up, and I had

WE SOON HAD . . . SOME RASHERS OF BACON SPLUTTERING MERRILY IN THE FRYING-PAN.

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tried to do it too, but it would not go right for me; the dough always stuck to my fingers in a helpless, hopeless sort of way, and it never stuck to his at all; and time after time he explained to me what I was doing wrong, but all to no purpose. Perhaps bakers are like poets, "born, not made." Anyhow, I was never intended for one, but Abe's bread was the best I ever tasted.

After finishing supper we rigged up the canvas at the foot of a mighty old pine trunk, and then set to work cutting the ends of branches off young pine saplings, which laid on the ground form a rude sort of mattress. It was almost dark when we had finished this our last task for the night, and sat down to a pipe of peace before the fire.

CHAPTER VII.

Wolves

I MUST not weary the reader with a minute account of our dreary crawl through the forest day after day. It was heart-breaking work, at times it appeared impossible, and often it seemed to me we were hours going a few hundred yards, so thick lay the *débris* of centuries, nay, of all time. Sometimes, though, we came across spaces of open ground, and these in every case were marshy and overgrown with prickly scrub. Here we made better time certainly, but the travelling was very disagreeable, as the pricks of this plant are poisonous; and though they rarely penetrated our clothes, it was difficult to avoid touching them with our hands.

The lie of the land had so far been very hillocky, and often from some steep ascent we got a view of the country before us, always clothed in its dark green coat of pine trees. On our right, from such occasional glimpses, Crown Point always stood out by itself, looking taller and taller as we approached nearer. Now and then we came to the borders of some small lake, round which we had to make a detour, but up till now we had met none of any size, and though our progress had been slow, it had been steady; but on the morning of the fourth day

after leaving McClaren's place, when we were passing the base of Crown Mountain, whose high summit often showed up to our right through the tops of the pines, we came on a rushing, brawling stream that seemed to flow from the mountain towards the south, and completely barred our path. It was too deep and rapid to ford, we found on inspection, and just where we had struck it it flowed deep down a narrow gorge. From bank to bank here could not have exceeded six or seven yards, but six or seven yards of space take some doing.

Abe slid his pack from his shoulders. "Look here, boss," he said, "I 'll go down the stream and prospect for a likely crossing. You might work north a bit above this gorge and see how the land lies there. Take the rod with you, there ought to be trout in that water."

I was not slow to follow his advice. Half our rations were gone, not a sign of a deer or any living thing had we come across; the hard work we were doing demanded a deal of sustenance, yet already we were denying ourselves as much bacon as we dared; in fact, we were rising from each meal hungrier than when we sat down; verily then a few trout would be a godsend indeed.

A couple of hundred yards to the right the rocky gorge ended or began, and above it the river flowed calmly down, forming large deep pools. There were too many trees hanging over to allow of any casting, but I soon got some worms from under the stones and rigged up some bait tackle, and into the stream I went, boots and trousers and all. I had spent many days of my life in the old country fishing

with a keenness I thought then could not be surpassed, but the anxiety which pervaded me that forenoon when I blobbed a worm into a deep likely-looking eddy was different to anything I had ever experienced. My hand trembled with suppressed excitement, and when something snatched the line and ran away with it my heart leapt into my throat, or it seemed so; no rise of trout, no great swirl of salmon, ever thrilled me so before while quickly I paid out the line with my left hand. I remember thinking the fish had snatched the bait and run away with it like a good-sized fish, and then came the agonizing thought, Was it some beastly catfish or brute not fit for food? He had turned up stream. Instantly I struck a rush—a jump, and out of the water went a bar of silver. I had to be hard on him; a tree lay half across the stream a few yards below us; but the tackle was strong, and soon I had him lying on the top of the water dead beat. Sliding my hat underneath him, I was the proud possessor of a beautiful two-pound trout.

In an hour's time I had half-a-dozen, averaging about a pound-and-a-half each.

And now Abe might be getting anxious at my absence, added to which I felt exceedingly keen to know if the fish tasted as well as they looked. I soon had the rod down, and passing a bit of cord through the gills of the fish, I gleefully made my way back.

As I drew near the gorge I heard the crack, crack, of the axe distinctly, and shortly discerned Abe hacking away with all his strength on the

edge of the gorge. What on earth was he doing that for? He did not hear me coming, so intent was he on his work, and I got within a yard of him before I shouted. Lord! the man jumped as though he had been shot; but then, mind you, gay and sprightly reader, he had not heard any cheery halloa for four whole days.

"Guess you startled me, boss. Not accustomed to so much noise in here, you know."

I was looking him straight in the face and smiling. I think he thought I was mad. His eyes wandered from one of mine to the other with a dazed expression on his face, and now it struck me the face was thin and pinched.

"Look!" I cried, holding up my hand, which I had kept behind my back.

For some seconds Abe stared at my catch in evident astonishment; then suddenly he raised his head and his hand and fetched me a smack on the shoulder that nearly took all the breath out of my body.

"By gum, that's good!" he cried. "I reckon it's lunch-time. Yer see, in these primeval forests there's no pertickler time for *déjeuner;* yer just take it when yer can get it, or while yer can get it."

There were three parts of a loaf in the pack, and we soon had a broiled trout apiece. I suppose those trout were good; anyhow, we determined to camp by the river that night and catch some more. And though we lost a few hours, we gained in another way—we got a bit of rest and some good fresh food into us, and I truly believe we would not

have done another four days' work, such as the last, on the meagre supply of bacon left to us. And so thought Abe, and so said Abe.

I was half-way through my trout before I thought of asking Abe why he was hacking at that tree.

"Do you see, Mr. Wellesley"—as the reader will have noticed, Abe very rarely addressed me by name; when he did I always expected something disastrous or unpleasant had occurred, or was about to—"that tree leans slightly across the gorge, and with anything like luck will fall, when I 've cut away sufficient, right across and form a bridge, and then I can just go across and hack off any branches that stick up in the way, and there we are—communication with the civilized world established."

Abe laughed at his little joke. I really believe those trout had got into our heads. Absolutely I had taken little or no thought of how we were going to cross the river.

Abe's plan looked simple enough, though I probably never would have thought of it. Anyhow, new life had entered into us; Abe's efforts at cheerfulness had long since flickered and died out, and for two days or more we had struggled on in a listless, monotonous way.

Déjeuner, as we termed it, being over, it was proposed and unanimously carried by a full board amongst ten billion trees that I should proceed fishing, whilst Abe cut away at the tree.

"Mine's a two hours' job anyway," quoth Abe, "so don't you hurry back on my account."

It was nearing sundown when I got back to camp that evening, carrying a sack on my back with

another dozen-and-a-half of trout in it. The tree had fallen all right, and across the stream I saw the smoke of the camp-fire rising among the trees. Abe had taken the packs across, but he heard me coming, and hastened across the bridge to assist me.

"Give me the sack," he said; "it 's perfectly safe and easy crossing, but some people gets swimmy in the head. I 'll go fust."

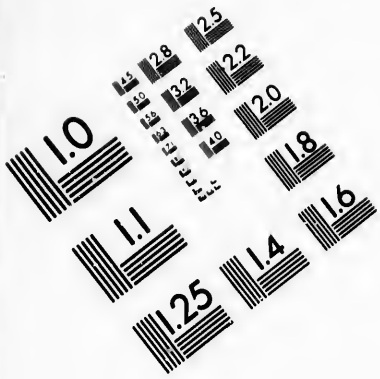
I cannot say I enjoyed crossing the gorge on our new bridge; the trunk was broad enough, but it was round. Still, there were branches left here and there you could catch hold of to steady yourself by, and we were quickly across, safe and sound.

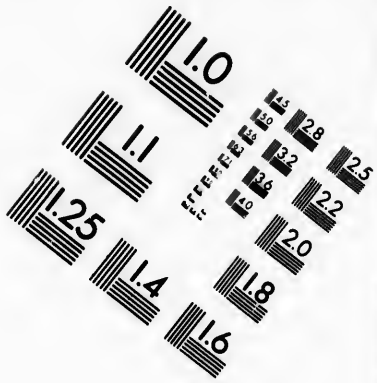
That night, for the first time since our scheme had been unfolded to him, Abe appeared to take some interest in it. We were more than half-way across the island—it was almost impossible we could meet with more unfavourable ground to cross; we could carry sufficient trout to last us anyhow another day, and four days more should easily see us on the shore of Nootka Sound.

After supper, for the first time, Abe produced Mrs. McClaren's flask of whisky and made two tins of hot toddy, and actually proposed "Success to the expedition."

That night we piled logs on the fire, and lay down as usual with our rifles beside us. I do not know how long I had slept, but suddenly I was awakened by a most terrific noise—it sounded like the fog-horn of a steamer.

"Good God! What 's that?" I cried in a stifled whisper.





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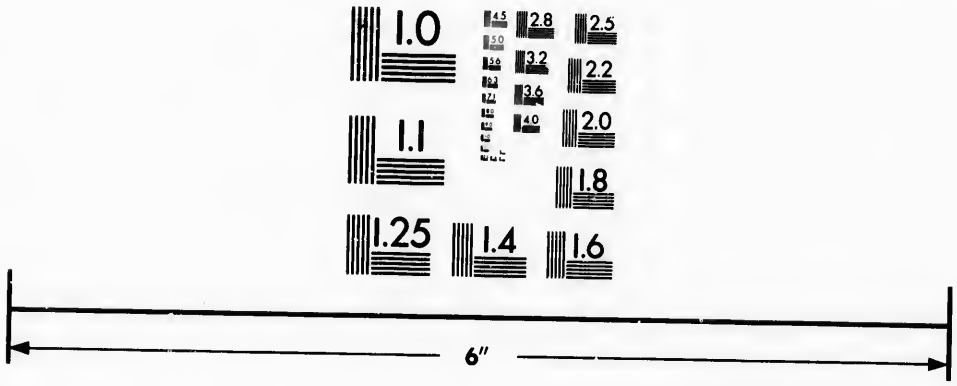

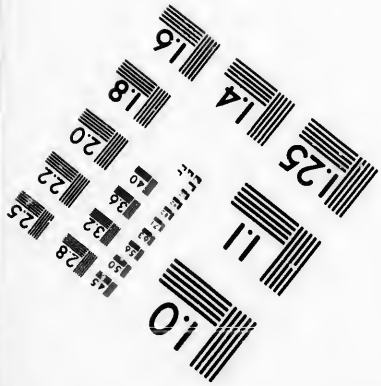

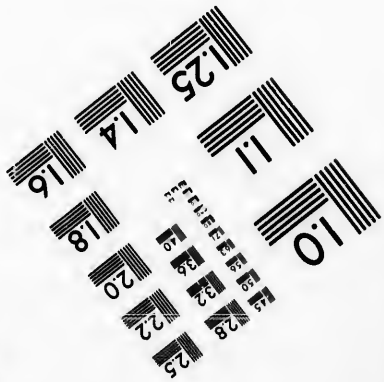

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"Wolves," replied Abe, for he was awake too, "and derned big 'uns, judging from their note. Listen!"

Again the deep howl rang through the silent forest, and almost immediately it was followed by an answering one a long way off.

Abe got up; the fire was falling low, and he added fresh logs. I noticed he carried his rifle in his hand.

"Guess I'll fire a shot, boss, and scare those beggars; they're liable to keep one awake with their grunting," saying which he pulled the trigger. The explosion echoed and re-echoed to the right and to the left of us, and then seemed to roll gradually away.

Abe came back and lay down, and seemed to go off to sleep, but sleep I could not. No sound followed the firing of the rifle, but a cold perspiration had broken out upon my forehead, and the dense solitude seemed filled with creeping beasts. Sometimes I felt that something touched me, and I shivered. It was horrible. Some people, perhaps, are brave in the dark; I am not. And some people can listen calmly, perhaps, to the howling of a great timber wolf; I cannot.

I do not know how long a time elapsed, and I suppose I must have dozed, when suddenly I woke again. The fire had almost died out; a few red embers alone remained. But what were those lights at the entrance of the canvas? A sickening terror was creeping over me, I confess it. The lights moved; they came nearer, and a black form obscured the embers of the fire. I believe I was on the point

of screaming, when a terrific explosion took place, followed by an awful howl. A great form seemed to rush from the entrance and yelped, yelped, yelped away into the distance. I remembered no more.

The day had broken when I awoke, and round my head was a damp cloth, whilst my shirt distinctly smelt of whisky. Abe was outside preparing the breakfast, and already a bright fire was blazing. He heard me move.

"How are you feeling, Mr. Wellesley?"

"Thank God, I'm all right. But what was that last night? Surely I wasn't dreaming?"

"It's just this, Mr. Wellesley: there's wolves in these parts, and they're d——d tame, I reckon. Guess they don't get a square meal once a year."

"Well, but what happened?" I asked. "Did you see that dark form in the opening, and what caused the explosion?"

Abe then explained to me what had taken place. "Well, to start with," he answered, "I was not asleep, as you may have thought, when that wolf paid us his visit. I heard a twig break ten minutes or more afore he showed up at the entrance; it was not an accidental kind of break; it was a clean sort o' snap, and it made me jump, I tell yer, for I knew something was about. I got as far from the edge of the canvas as I could, in case a paw came sneaking in under, and I sat up with the rifle full cock. You were asleep when the twig snapped; I heard you give a bit of a snore, and reckoned it best not to rouse you. After a bit I could distinctly hear the brute moving, and every now and again stopping

and sniffing; he passed the fire once, and had a look at the entrance, and then he went round us just to survey. I didn't like to risk a shot in the dark and likely scare you out of your wits by doing so, and then I thought that when he smelt human flesh he'd slooch off; but dern me if he didn't come round again and come in! The rest you know. The explosion was my rifle, and the yelping came from the d——d coyote; and whether he's dead or whether he isn't don't matter a cuss. But I'd sooner he lived long enough to interview his pals and warn them against entering our shanty without an invitation."

Breakfast was ready by the time Abe finished his story. His calm nerve and apparent unconcern reassured me. The light of day, the whir of the running river, and the friendly hiss of the kettle soon put fresh life into me, though I never again heard the howl of a wolf in that desolate est without a nervous shiver creeping over me.

And now it struck me why had the dead prospector not been torn to pieces by these beasts? I questioned Abe on the subject.

"It's likely," he answered, "there was no game there at the time he pegged out; anyhow, we've seen no tracks or traces of any, and wolves always follow game: where there's no food there's no wolves."

"Then you think we are approaching a game country?"

"Yes," said Abe, as he finished roping the packs, "unless——"

"Unless what?"

Abe put his pack down, leaned on the hatchet, and looked me straight in the face.

"Unless," he said slowly, "they struck our track away back, and are hunting us."

CHAPTER VIII.

Light at Last

FOR two days more we blundered on through the same tangled desolate sort of ground. On the night of the first—the day we left our camp by Trout Stream, for thus we had christened it—it came on to rain, a steady downpour. Far above our heads we could catch occasional glimpses of the clouds chasing each other along, but down in the depths of the forest not a breath of wind was even felt, while not even a dead leaf stirred. The rain fell on the trees and then rolled from their branches, great big drops in one long endless patter. No signs of animal life had we met with, not even another stream where we might have expected fish. Occasionally, especially at night, we heard the howling of wolves, but so far they had not again approached too near the camp; and we had been careful to select a spot to camp at where we might defend ourselves to the greatest advantage should they try to attack us. Also we had piled up an enormous fire outside the canvas at night—it could hardly be termed a tent—while we took it in turns to replenish it. When I say we took it in turns I am almost certain I sometimes dozed off and missed mine, but Abe had a wonderful knack of waking up whenever he wished to, and he never complained or upbraided me.

We were fast drifting again into that melancholy, monotonous condition we were in when we reached Trout River as we listlessly plodded along through the rain on the afternoon of the second day after leaving it, and the sixth since bidding adieu to the McClarens.

For a couple of hours we had been progressing steadily uphill, when Abe suggested we should bear to the left and try and reach the top of the hill while the light lasted. "We may," he said, "get a glimpse of the country ahead and an idea whether the trees or the rations will last the longest."

About four o'clock the sun burst forth; and though the drops continued pattering down from the trees for a long time after, the rain above had ceased. The ground was becoming more bare and rocky as we approached the summit of the hill; fewer trees grew here, and consequently less *débris* blocked our passage. Hot, and wet, and weary, we at length reached the top and found a clearing from whence a view of the country could be obtained. Coming from the gloom, it was some time ere my eye could detect aught but valleys of trees before us. Anon I glanced at Abe; his face, no longer full and tanned, was pinched, and pale, and set, but his eyes were dilated, and gazing fixedly and dubiously into the distance. I followed the direction of his eyes, but nought could I see but everlasting trees and the blue mist hanging above them.

"Surely," said Abe at last, "that's the sea."

And now, as my eyes grew accustomed to the clear far western atmosphere, I saw that what I had mistaken for mist was the long blue line of the ocean.

"And look, Mr. Wellesley, up to the north-west there the country is more open; those hills have little or no timber on them."

For some time we sat and took in the lie of the land, and then descended the hill again till we found a stream and suitable spot for camp. As we went it was decided we should bear to the north-west; once in open country, we could make the river if it existed, which I began to doubt, and the head of Nootka Sound in half a day.

That night Abe went carefully through the meagre lot of provisions left.

"There 's bacon enough for four good meals apiece after to-night, flour for about two loaves, and dried apples that 'll last 'em both out." That was his summary.

That night, as I sat before the fire smoking the final pipe before turning in, I felt very weak and ill. I remember wondering if Moses had felt anything like as I did when he gazed at the promised land afar that he should never enter, and then I laughed. I pretended to be gay, but my head was dizzy, and swam round. The far-off howls of the wolves and the crash of some falling giant fir, grown dead and rotten with the march of centuries, the noise whereof sounded in the still night air like the boom of an eighty-ton gun, were sounds that had hitherto filled me with awe, but now they fell unheeded on my ears.

Abe spoke little; once he got up and went to his pack, from which he drew forth the flask of whisky. It was still three parts full; we had not touched it since leaving Trout River. He mixed a stiff tin

of whisky and hot water for *one*, and brought it to me.

"Come, Mr. Wellesley, swallow this down, and turn in; you're not quite yourself to-night."

The last thing that I remember of that night was seeing Abe sitting up by my side, looking anxiously into the blazing logs, and sometimes casting a quick, fitful glance at me.

I was better in the morning, but I felt I was taxing Abe's strength severely, not taking my turn at the replenishing of the fire through the night, and I said so to him.

"Never you mind that, boss," he answered. "You were right worn out last night, and wanted all the sleep you could get, and now let's try and clear out of this cussed forest before sundown. I've had enough of it, and you've had a trifle too much."

Our packs grew lighter as our provisions grew less, but as I hitched mine on my back that morning it felt very heavy, heavier than it had done since we started. Often I found myself lurching, and sometimes almost dozing, as I stumbled after Abe. Many times he had to pause for me, and assist me over a fallen log, or give me a hand through the thick undergrowth.

Midday came, and we halted by a little rill of water to eat a sandwich, but somehow I did not want mine; I no longer felt hungry; all I longed to do was to lie down and sleep for ever.

For a little time Abe watched me in silence; then he rose, and came over to me and put his hand on my shoulder.

"Mr. Wellesley, for God's sake rouse up; we have but a little way to go now."

"Abe," I whispered, "go on. Get out alone while you can. I'm done, beaten like any old fox. It's no good—let me sleep—it's all I want——"

I believe I uttered some more incoherent sentences, but what happened during the remainder of that afternoon I never remember. This is what I gathered afterwards from Abe. He said he was never so scared in his life, for I dropped my head in my hands, and he thought I had fainted away. Instantly he got out the whisky flask and gave me a strong dose. I shivered and shook after taking the spirit, but it seemed to revive me a little. Then he hoisted my pack on the top of his, and lifted me on to my legs.

"Had I let you lie down," he said, "it's my belief you'd never have risen again."

Then he put an arm under mine, and half lifting, half pulling, he dragged me on through the forest.

I remember, in a dreamy sort of way, seeing the forest grow lighter and the sun shine through the trees, and I heard Abe mutter, "Thank God!" and I wondered why, and then it seemed open, and I saw the sky, but it was nothing to me.

And then suddenly Abe gave a cry of surprise and of hope.

"Rest awhile here, boss. I'll be back shortly, and don't give way. I reckon we're all right now."

When I came to I found Abe shaking me violently by the shoulders.

"Here," he said, "take this; don't get talking."

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ABE GETS AN EASY SHOT AT A FINE BUCK.

To face page 79.

other he fed me with some meat. At first I refused it, and tried to avoid taking it, but Abe insisted, and then I swallowed some morsels of it, and gradually my head appeared to come back to me, and memory to return, but I was too weary to ask questions. Abe fed me and gave me a refreshing drink of water, and then I lay down and gazed up. I saw the stars shining in the purple vault above, and I wondered how they got there.

The sun was shining brightly next morning when I woke, and by the camp fire sat Abe, looking, methought, somewhat anxiously towards me.

"Where are we?" I asked, sitting up.

"Can't say, boss, but we're out of that infernal wood."

And Abe slid the frying-pan on to the embers.

"Hello!" I cried, "what meat is that?" as I glanced towards it, expecting to see a miserable slice of bacon frizzling away to nothing.

"Black-tail deer, boss. Come along; it's all cooked. I'm only just warming it up."

And then he told me how on the previous evening, after emerging from the wood, he came on the fresh track of deer; that he had laid me down with the packs, and gone after them with his rifle; how he soon sighted a small band of them feeding; how he followed slowly on, and making a detour for the wind, got an easy shot at a fine buck.

"I didn't know my finger could shake on a trigger as it did when I fired," said Abe. "Three times I took the rifle from my shoulder; it seemed to be aiming all over the place. Had I missed him, Mr. Wellesley, I truly believe I'd have shot myself.

And it wasn't the best shot I've ever fired; in fact, the least said about it the better."

Needless to say I felt very weak, but, with fresh meat in camp, there was no immediate cause for hurrying on; so it was decided we should remain here another night, and whilst I rested in camp Abe should go forward and explore. I suggested his taking the compass.

"Look here, boss," he replied, "on open ground, I've told you before, and you ought to know, I don't want any instruments to tell me my latitude and longitude, or where I am or camp is. Those things may work well enough in the likes o' that" —and he jerked his head towards the forest—"and I've had enough of forest foolery to last my life, you bet."

It was also decided he should return by the place where he had shot the buck, and bring in some more of the meat which he had hung on a bough away from the wolves.

It was late when Abe got back, and I was very glad to see his form appear in view, for it is lonely work lying by a camp fire alone in an unknown, silent region, especially so in the state my nerves were in.

"Any news, Abe?" I asked, as I placed the kettle on the fire.

"Yes," he answered. "I've made what the *Cheyenne Star* would call a 'startling discovery.'"

"What?"

"Well, boss, if you reckon to call this region 'Wellesley Country,' or anything like that, you're too late; it's already inhabited."

I was too surprised to speak for a moment. "Inhabited?" I gasped. "Have you seen men?"

"No, boss, not yet; but I've seen their footprints."

Instantly it flashed across me, might not Fane have landed with some men and taken a look round? I suggested this to Abe.

"No," he said. "I thought that at first, but these men wore boots, leastways some of 'em did, and the soles had bars across them at intervals of half an inch or so to protect the leather and keep them from slipping. Now sailors wouldn't wear boots of that kind, neither would Mr. Fane, nor any of them. There was the print of moccasins as well. This pointed to Indians, and the conclusion I came to was white men and Indians mixed."

For some time I was silent; I hardly knew whether to be pleased at this information or not.

"What do you think of it, Abe?"

Wilson smiled.

"To tell you the truth, Mr. Wellesley, I'm mighty glad I've seen those footprints, for it's a very short time since that I would have invested all my capital to nothing we never again saw a sign of a man, or a man saw a sign of us."

"Do you think they will be friendly towards us? They might be pirates or savages. You see, no one has ever heard of people living up here."

Abe shrugged his shoulders. "Guess you've got to chance something in these parts," he said somewhat brusquely. "But," he continued in a more cheerful tone, "we've got the pull in this way: we know they are here, or have been; they don't at

present know anything about us, and we ought to get the first stalk. If we get a sight of them, and they look an ugly lot, we can get round them and make the shore. The boat ought to be up shortly, if not already."

Abe talked sensibly after all, and I entirely agreed with what he said when I came to ruminate on the situation. At first perhaps I was inwardly vexed that after all our labour we were not the first in the field. The rest of our task appeared so easy; we were in an open, undulating country, where game abounded; the sea but a march from us, where Fane would be awaiting us. Ah! ah! I smile now when I think of those reflections, and I mind me of the old proverb, "Man proposes, God disposes."

CHAPTER IX.

Friends or Foes

I FELT quite recovered when I woke at the first faint streak of daylight; the crack of the axe and the breaking of the sticks told me Abe was already astir, making up the fire. What a sweet sound that is, the splutter of the camp fire, when you lie in a sort of semi-doze following the deep sleep that comes after a hard day's work! How plainly faces pass before you, and voices of the past ring in your ears, or perchance visions of the future appear to you clearly and truly defined as you wish them to be, not as they probably will be. Many a time since that morning I have dozed and listened to the crackling wood, the same as I heard it that morning. I have seen the tall form push the canvas aside, and heard the voice call out, "Now, then, boss, time you were about"; and I have started and awoke to find it was another fire, another form, another voice.

I may have been still a little weak, but I felt entirely recovered, and certainly breakfast on that morning was the most cheerful meal we had sat down to since leaving Victoria. The sun had risen in a cloudless sky by the time we had the packs ready, and it was with light hearts we hoisted them on our backs and turned our faces to the west.

Half an hour's walking brought us to the summit of a low ridge, from which a glorious view burst on our vision. Some twelve or fifteen miles distant the sea was distinctly visible in places, while the country 'twixt us and it appeared to consist of low hills and fertile valleys, while here and there small clumps of trees broke the monotony. To the north tall, spur-like peaks stood boldly up, but as far as we could see to the south the country seemed to be flat and heavily timbered.

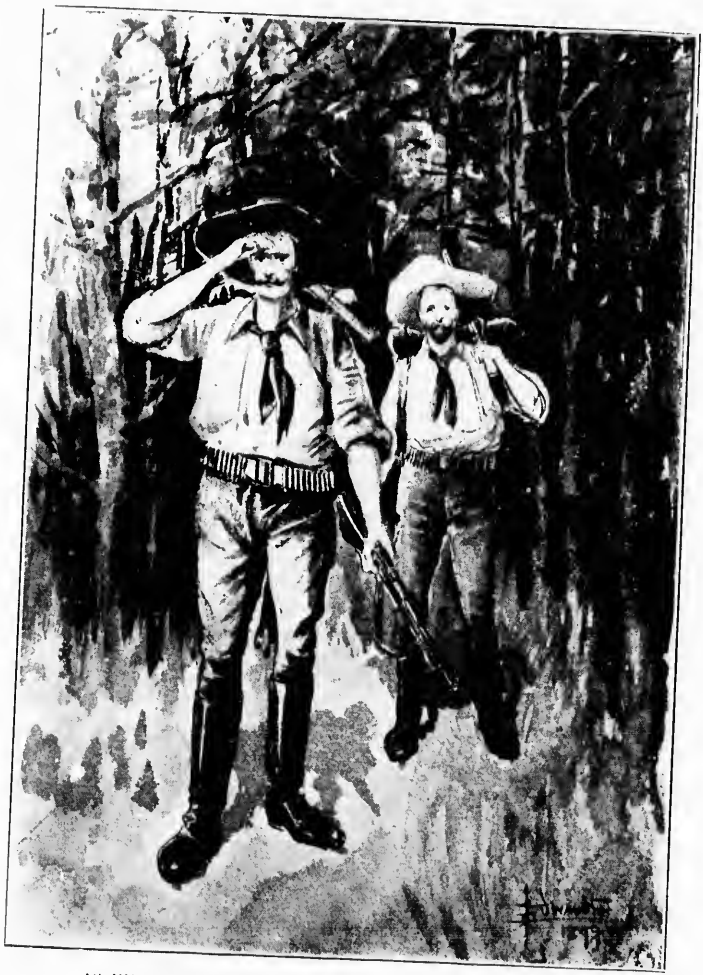
We paused a few minutes to enjoy the view, and see if we could make out any form of man or beast, but nothing was in sight. We walked on another hour, and suddenly, as we were crossing a marshy little valley, Abe stopped. There was no need for him to explain anything, for there plain enough in the soft soil were the great hoof-prints of a band of wapiti. I had seen them too often in Wyoming not to know them at once.

"Passed up in the early morning," said Abe in a low voice. "And look here, boss," he continued, "don't you shoot if we come suddenly on elk or deer! It's only a mile or so to the south of this I saw the footprints of the men, and they might easily be within hearing distance of a rifle shot. We've got meat enough for a couple of days, so let's make the ground good before we start hunting."

I saw the force of his remarks, and trudged on behind him cautiously, and on the alert.

Early in the afternoon, as we were skirting a belt of timber that lay on our left, Abe stopped short again.

"Smoke!" he whispered to my query.



AS WE WERE SKIRTING A BELT OF TIMBER . . . ABE STOPPED SHORT AGAIN.

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I gazed in the direction where he pointed, and there, distinctly over a low ridge about a mile in front of us, rose a thin blue line.

"We 'd best investigate this little affair, as they say in the *Cheyenne Star*, eh, boss?"

The expressions in the *Cheyenne Star* appeared to have deeply impressed Abe, as he was always ready with a quotation from that important, but to me unknown, organ. I acquiesced, and with a curious and uncanny feeling within me I followed him across the flat. Half-way up the ridge Abe halted, sat down, and let his pack slide from his shoulders.

"Leave packs here," he whispered, seizing his rifle.

I nodded, and followed suit. We proceeded very carefully now, and on reaching within a few yards of the ridge crawled to the most elevated point before us, where we should command a view of the further side. The smoke of the fire was now distinctly visible just in front of us. Abe raised himself slowly and peered forward over a rock. For some time he looked right and left, and then raised himself higher. At length he slid back to me.

"Camp in a hollow!" he whispered; "we must get nearer."

Making a slight detour, we crawled over the ridge towards some rocks another eighty yards on, on the further side of which the fire was burning. Again Abe raised his head between two stones, and almost immediately his figure became set like that of a pointer when he scents a covey of grouse.

For a long time he gazed; then slowly withdrawing his head, he touched me on the arm. "Look!"

Cautiously I drew myself up between the two stones, and there, not sixty yards from us, were a party of men. But who were they, and what were they? The longer I gazed the less could I determine. I had earnestly hoped and prayed that if there were men here at all, they would turn out to be Fane's party; that the ribs on the soles of the boots might have been added on board the yacht to enable them to climb rocks more easily, and make their foothold surer. But these were not Fane's men; they looked like Indians, and yet they wore clothes of a sort of grey homespun and odd-looking straw hats. Round the fire they sat with their legs tucked under them, blinking and nodding and smoking little short pipes; but not a word did they utter. Gradually I withdrew my head.

"What shall we do, Abe?"

"Just interview 'em," whispered he. "I reckon they look pretty well dressed and respectable, and I know a little Siwash."*

I confess I did not particularly like the look of these gentlemen, but it was as well to make peace with them if possible. We could not well avoid them, and they would be sure to come on our trail, and then they would stalk us. I thought for some moments, and then nodded to Abe.

"Is your rifle loaded?"

Again I nodded.

"Well, come on."

With one bound Abe leapt on to the rock in front of us, and I followed him.

* Nearly all Indian tribes talk a language called Siwash, while having a distinct language of their own.

"Hi! hi!" he yelled. Gracious heavens! if the situation had not been so serious I believe I should have laughed as never I did before. I remember it shot through my mind if that was the way the staff of the *Cheyenne Star* interviewed people, and what effect it had on those suffering from heart disease.

Never have I seen before or since a party of persons jump as they did. They appeared to be in the air and on to their feet in the twinkling of a flash, and then they stood gazing at us. And now Abe began to jabber some, to me, incoherent words, to which the Indians did not reply. After their momentary scare they had reached down for their spears, whilst one big fellow in the middle carried a gun or rifle.

"Come on, boss," cried Abe, after parleying a few moments; "I think it's all right, but watch that chap with the gun if he puts it up."

We approached to within a few yards, whilst Abe continued to talk and gesticulate, but all the Indians did was to eye us cautiously. Abe ceased speaking at last, and waited for some response.

The big man in the centre shook himself like a huge St. Bernard dog, whilst his eyes travelled from one of us to the other. The silence was growing embarrassing. Then in a low musical voice he spoke:

"Whence come the white men?"

Great Cæsar's ghost! they spoke English. I looked at the man in amazement; Abe burst into a loud guffaw, but thinking this might be considered rude, I hastily intervened.

"Sir," I said, "we are travellers from the far East. This"—I pointed to Abe—"is Mr. Wilson, the great witch doctor of Wyoming. My name, sir, is Wellesley, a somewhat celebrated explorer."

"Whence have you come?"

"Through that blamed wood," chimed in Abe.

I thought the Indians looked at one another in incredulity, and then at us more curiously still.

"White men go not through the forest," said the chief—he was evidently the leader of the party—shaking his head.

I saw they doubted our story. How should we convince them?

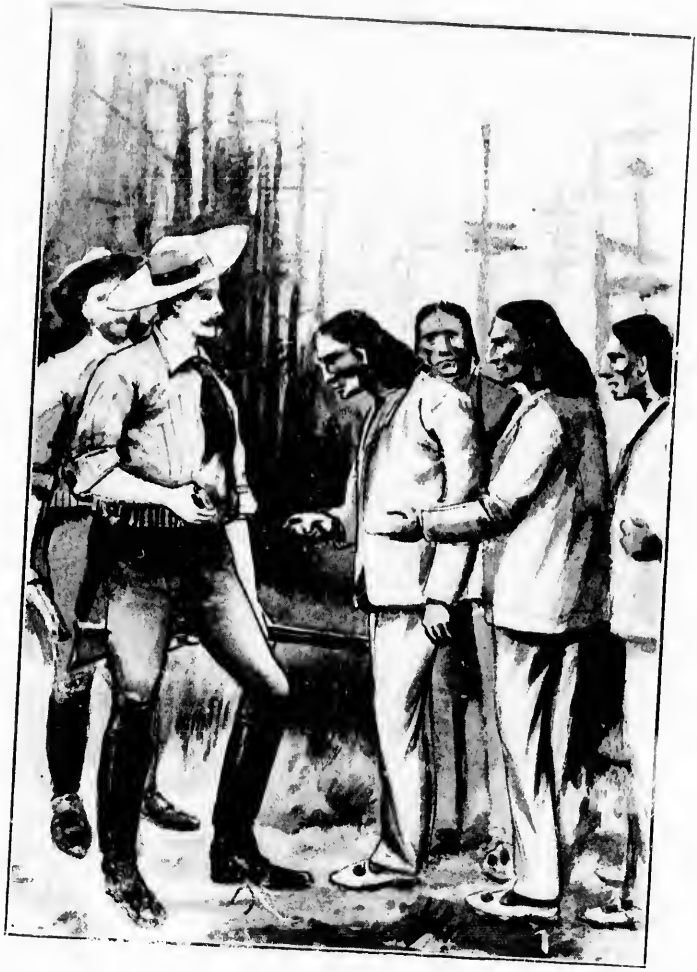
"What is impossible to ordinary white men is possible to us," I answered. "The great witch doctor can go wheresoever he pleases."

An awkward pause ensued. The Indians had squatted down again with their weapons in their hands, motionless and apparently indifferent; only the chief remained standing, his black beady eyes fixed steadily upon us.

For some reason or another, I took out my watch to see the time and avoid the gaze of the Indian. Immediately a cry of surprise arose.

"See!" they cried; "he has a time-tick." And then they crowded round, examining it and chattering to themselves in an unknown tongue like a parcel of young children in a nursery.

It was at once evident that here was a valuable talisman. So interesting did my watch appear in the eyes of these people, that it was some time before the chief could restore order. He had to do what sounded to me like a little Indian swearing



ABE AT ONCE PRODUCED HIS BIG SILVER LEVER.

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before his followers would break away and resume their seats. But at length order was restored, and he spoke again.

"Has the witch doctor a time-tick?" Of course Abe had perceived the importance of possessing a "time-tick," and was pining to give them a show. At once he produced his big silver lever. "Oh—h—h!" went round the circle—an "oh" of pleased astonishment. "The great chief has a time-tick too," said the chief, in a tone of voice that implied there were other swells about as well as ourselves.

Who was the great chief? I wondered. Did he mean himself?

The afternoon was wearing on, so I asked if we might camp with them that night; we might then learn what country we were in and who these people were. The chief readily assented; and when we explained that our packs lay a little way back, two Indians were told off to carry them in for us.

That night when supper was over we heard from the chief a strange story, which filled us with amazement. He told it in the slow, deliberate way peculiar to the Indian, and it would weary the reader to try and reproduce it as we heard it. At the very outset he startled us.

"What is your name, chief?" I asked.

"Walker," was the reply; "and I am not a chief."

I had to nudge Abe hard to keep him from uttering another guffaw. Who ever heard of an Indian in an unexplored country called Walker? We expected him to be called "Slyfox," or "Bigbear," or something of the kind.

"Simply Walker?" I queried.

"John Walker," said he.

And this is the story we elicited from Mr. Walker:

"Our tribe have dwelt for many generations between the forest and the great sea beyond which is nothing, and up to the north for many leagues we have hunted the mighty elk among the great mountains that are there, and no one came near us, neither did we know of other men nor other lands. But one day—many years ago, before I can remember—there came a great ship upon the coast and struck upon the rocks, and the waves washed the men away and drowned them. At length there came from the big ship a little boat, and in it were the great White Chief and the woman his wife, and a few survivors from the ship. And the medicine-man declared he was the son of the sun that had come from the unknown West to teach us the truth of the light and explain its great glory, and our fathers showed him great reverence.

"In time he learned our speech, and he built houses of boards, and he set the woman, his wife, and the captains, his servants, to show us many things and teach us his speech; and another generation has arisen, which has learned much good.

"After a time he found the yellow sand which comes from the wash of the Bigfish river, and he made another ship, and he sent a trusted captain with heaps of the yellow sand, and he was away many days; and when he returned it was in yet another and bigger boat, that puffed and blew forth great volumes of smoke, and even our braves were afraid lest it might be alive and destroy them. But the great chief was overjoyed, and told us not to fear;

and then we found—and this I remember well—that the big ship was full of stores and bales of cloth, all new and strange to us.

"And the great chief with his captains made clothes of the cloth, and all the men and women were given garments and good things; and the medicine-men said, of a truth, he was the son of the sun.

"And ever after that, twice in the year, the big ship sailed away, once in the fall and once in the spring, and took with her packets of the yellow sand, and returned after many days with stores and tinned meats and clothes and other goods; and no one knew whither she went.

"And then in the course of time, whilst I was still a young man, there were born to the wife of the White Chief two lovely daughters, and there was great rejoicing. But one day while the daughters were yet of tender age a great blow fell upon the head of the White Chief, for the woman, his wife, was called back to the land of her fathers, which lieth within the glory of the sun. But time, who healeth the wounds of all, dealt kindly with the chief, and his daughters grew up and taught in the school, and went amongst our people, giving them books to read, and telling them of other lands and people, so that we learnt much and prospered; and on all sides they were beloved and respected.

"But, alas! as we advanced in knowledge, and our children grew up, our eyes were opened to many things, and we learnt that the yellow sand was held in great value, and jealousy began to rankle in the bosoms of some; but only lately has the storm

burst, and the lives of the White Chief and his daughters been threatened. Listen," said Walker, as I interrupted with an exclamation of surprise; "I have but little more to say. There is among our tribe a man called George Harper, who was born in the early days of the White Chief's coming, and who showed great quickness at the learning of letters and writing. So much faith did the chief have in him, that a few moons since he elevated him to the high position of schoolmaster, giving him at the same time the honour of bearing a rifle, an honour only given to five others beside myself. I was also a trusted servant of the chief, having been for many summers his head hunter.

"For some time past I have noticed that strange and secret meetings were being held among the young braves after nightfall, but what was talked about I could not find out, only that Harper was at the head of it. I thought that trouble was brewing, and warned the chief. The following night, the one that came before last night, I was sitting in my hut thinking of retiring to my couch, when a low tap came to the door. I quickly rose and opened it, and George Harper, with a score of young braves armed with spears, passed in. 'What means this?' I asked. 'This,' said Harper, 'we have determined that the White Chief shall rule over us no longer. The yellow sand shall be our property, and the stores divided amongst us, and a chief shall rule of our own people; and we have come to tell you that either you throw in your lot with us, or that you leave the settlement and never return to it on pain of death.' I looked at the faces around

me, hoping to find some look of wavering, but their sullen and angry glances told me they were determined. I asked for time to give them an answer, but was told it must be then and there, and that if I threw in my lot with them I must sign a paper now.

"I felt I was helpless with so many foes around, but I could not bring myself to turn against the chief, who had been always good to me. At last I said so. Harper seemed pleased. 'Where, then, is your rifle?' he asked. By good chance, when I had noticed there were some secret meetings going on, I had hidden it in the hollow of a tree just outside the settlement; but I answered, 'It is at the chief's house, where I left it.' 'Then it will soon be ours,' said Harper.

"Six men watched me all that night, and at the first streak of dawn I was conducted to the outside of the village, where I found twenty other men who, like me, had refused to sign the paper. We were given a fortnight's provisions, and told to make our way through the forest, or wheresoever we would, and that if ever we showed our faces again within the settlement we should be killed. Since then we have roamed on the outskirts of the forest, fearing to penetrate it, for few that have ever done so have returned, and those that have have been more dead than alive. It is said there is a world beyond, but we have no knowledge of it."

"Good heavens!" I cried, jumping up, "are these people murdered?"

Walker shook his head doubtfully. "I warned the

White Chief that something was amiss, and he may have been on his guard; but Harper is wily, and would try to rush him unawares."

"We must go at daybreak," I cried; "we may not be too late."

The Indian looked up, and his twinkling eyes rested on me a moment, and then he shook his head again. "Twenty men against two hundred? It would be death."

I plucked Abe by the sleeve, and led him on one side. "Abe, we must try and rescue these people." I looked into his face. He was gazing into the fire with a far-off look in his eyes. He turned, and that odd, indifferent smile that I had seen before when I suggested the expedition passed across his features.

"Two hundred to twenty, boss!" he said. "Well, I guess I 've landed those odds before now, and if the race ain't over, we 'll have a go."

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To face page 95. JOHN WALKER.

CHAPTER X.

"You have got your Answer"

"I CANNOT believe, father, that they would harm us after all we have done for them." But there was doubt and uncertainty expressed in the speaker's voice.

It is here necessary to leave Abe and myself for a brief space of time, and endeavour to depict to the reader a situation I was afterwards to be made acquainted with.

It was evening, and the last meal of the day had just been discussed. Seated at a well-lighted table were five persons, three elderly men and two girls. Since the last dish had been removed a long silence had fallen on the little party, accentuated by the intense stillness of the far western twilight. Occasionally the sharp bark of a dog from the village below jarred on the ear, and only served to enhance the gloom. It was the eldest of the girls who had spoken.

"I only hope you are right, Hilda," replied a tall, white-bearded old man who sat at the end of the table; "but I have a presentiment that some evil scheme is being concocted, but what it is and who is at the bottom of it I have no idea. Why," he continued excitedly, "hasn't John Walker been up

all day? Why has Harper never called? Why, in short, has no one from the village been near us all day?"

No one answered, and the silence was growing denser. Suddenly the old man rose and rang the bell. Almost instantly it was answered by a tall Indian, clad in the same grey material worn by the members of the band who were introduced to the reader in the last chapter. "Joe!"

"Yes, sir."

"Have you the faintest idea what is up at the village?" This was the twentieth time that day the same question had been addressed to Joe.

The Indian shook his head.

"But you believe something is wrong?"

The Indian glanced round at the anxious eyes that rested on him, and slowly nodded.

"D——n it!" cried the old man, rising and striking the table with his clenched fist; "they 'll find us more difficult to trap than they imagine. You can rely on the other boys?" He turned sharply to the Indian as he spoke. Three other Indians lived in the house, acting as menservants in different capacities.

"Yes, sir," replied Joe. "I know there have been secret meetings in the village of late; Walker told me so; but our boys have never been down there, and know nothing of them. I think we can rely on them."

"Tell them," cried the old man excitedly, "that if I see any sign of mutinous conduct on the part of any one of them I 'll blow his brains out with my own hand. They can't get out; I shall keep the key of the stockade myself. And if there is a con-

spiracy being formed against us, they must fight side by side with us, and if we are successful they will be well rewarded. And now," he added, "see that the magazines in each rifle are filled, the weapons ready. One moment, Joe!" The Indian turned to go. "Would John Walker join in any plot against us?"

"No," replied Joe, "I am sure he would not."

"Well, but that makes it doubly strange. Why has he never come up to the house?"

"Would they have let him?" said the Indian slowly.

An ominous pause followed this remark. Left to themselves, the old man filled his glass and passed it to the men on either side of him. "This is a rum go, Ted Cooper." He addressed a stout, thick-set man on his right—a man who must have been a very powerful fellow in his younger days.

It is hardly necessary to explain that the speaker was the White Chief alluded to by the Indian, John Walker, in the last chapter. His real name was Henry Herbert, and he had been the captain of the ill-fated ship that had been blown out of its course and gone ashore five-and-twenty years before in Nootka Sound. Ted Cooper, the carpenter, and Will Gibson, the boatswain—the thin-faced old man who sat opposite to him at the table—were the only survivors left of the crew of the *Witch of Dundee*.

"It's a rum go, Ted." The remark had to be repeated.

"Blimy if I can make head nor tail of it!" said the carpenter, stroking his chin thoughtfully. "I did think the settlement never was so peaceful. In the

old days, I confess, captain, I allays feared they might rise. It 's my belief it 's all this learning and eddication; I never did believe in it. Ye thinks ye teaches people to leave alone what ain't theirs, but it just acts contrary: it gives 'em notions as how your property ought to be theirs."

"Listen! There 's the stockade bell. Hurry up, Ted; answer it yourself; take your revolver, and don't open the gate on any pretext." Captain Herbert had hardly finished speaking ere Ted Cooper was out of the room. "Girls," added the captain, "keep your revolvers loaded and handy; they may be wanted at any moment, and you 'll have to help us if any serious trouble threatens."

"The Lodge," as Captain Herbert's house was called, was situated half a mile to the north of the village, on a slight eminence. It was a roomy one-storied structure, built of course of wood, and designed by Cooper, who had gradually instructed the natives in the art of building. Evidently the wily carpenter, as he had just remarked, had suspicions that a day might come when the Indians might turn round and endeavour to rend them; and he had taken care to make the place as impregnable as he could with the scant material at his command. All round the house, ten yards from the main building, ran a solid stockade some twelve feet high, formed of thick pine logs; on the top of these were stuck iron spikes, while on the inner side stout boards were nailed at right angles to the logs, against which poles were placed horizontally to strengthen them against being rammed in from without. The site, too, was well chosen. On the west side, at the foot of a precipitous wall of rock, ran the

clear water of the Bigfish river, and right on the very edge of the rock the stockade had been driven in, so that no person could even walk along on the outside. There were two gates opening out of the stockade. One, the main one, faced the south, and from it ran a well-worn path to the village; the other, which was seldom used, was narrower, and faced the east. On the other sides the ground sloped gently downwards, covered in a deep carpet of fine pasture. To the north it soon began to rise again, and rocks and scrub stood forth. A quarter of a mile to the east, across the grass valley, ran a line of low, broken hills parallel with the river, while two miles below the village the Bigfish river ran into the head of Nootka Sound.

"Who are you, and what do you want?" It was the gruff voice of Cooper that spoke at the south gate of the stockade. Dead silence reigned within the room, whilst the occupants listened anxiously.

"I wish to see the White Chief," came the answer.

"Then you can't see him; and what the blue blazes do you mean by coming here after nightfall? The day-time is the proper time to see the White Chief, unless he sends for you, and you know that."

Whilst the carpenter was speaking, Captain Herbert had risen and quietly gone outside.

"Is that your voice, Harper?" he called as Cooper ceased.

"It is," replied the voice.

"Then out with it! What do you want, and what do these meetings mean that I hear of?"

"If the White Chief will open the gate I will explain."

"You dog, you think to enter here and trap me, do you? Explain from where you are. I can hear."

"Does the White Chief refuse to open?"

"I do."

"It is well," continued the Indian in a calm, oily tone. "I am here as the spokesman of our tribe. They have met, and in serious conclave have determined that they will no longer be ruled by a white chief, but by one of their own tribe. Yet my mission is one of peace. The White Chief has taught the Indians many things for which they are grateful, but he has shown them that it is with their property and with their assistance he has grown fat and prosperous."

"I have no wish to argue with you with reference to my position," interrupted Captain Herbert. "You know, no one so well as you, Harper, that but for me you and your tribe would now be in darkness and ignorance. I have endeavoured always to be just and fair, but I see now where I have been wrong: I have erred in teaching you the ways of civilization."

"That may be so," retorted the Indian, "but having set the stone rolling down the mountain-side, you cannot stop it."

"Peace, dog!" cried the old man angrily. "It is you who have set the stone rolling. Let us end this. Why are you here?"

"Be it so," said the Indian. "My orders are to inform you, that if you open the gate and come forth unarmed, you and the two white captains will be conducted to the coast to the eastwards by a route known only to one of us. Then by a certain headland the big boats of the white man sail frequently past,

and by signs the White Chief can attract attention, and so reach again the tribe that he came from, which has surely grown weary of waiting for him."

"You have not mentioned my daughters."

"The track through the forest is filled with fallen timber and prickly scrub," said the Indian. "Would the white man impede his progress with petticoats?"

"Scoundrel!" cried the old man; "do you propose to banish me and detain them here?"

If Mr. Harper had been able at that moment to have peeped into the room where the two girls sat, listening almost breathlessly to the conversation going on without, I doubt if he would have been very keen about detaining them. With her white teeth set, her great grey eyes flashing with scorn, and her hand on the haft of her revolver, Hilda sat gazing at her sister. Mary was a little younger than her sister and somewhat fairer, with a rounder face and a merry twinkle in her blue eyes, and maybe many people would have called her softer and more feminine. Comparisons, they say, are odious; all that need be said is that two lovelier types of English beauty, two grander specimens of the female sex, could not have been found anywhere. They both stood but very little short of six feet, yet in their proportions not a bone seemed displaced, not a feature looked wrong. Do I rave—I who tell this story? Perhaps I do, and some years have passed since I first saw them; and all I can say is, I rave still. When Mary raised her eyes and met her sister's fierce glance, an answering gleam of scorn and decision shone in hers.

The Indian had not replied, and Captain Herbert

repeated the question, "What do you propose to do with my daughters?"

"I have no orders at present concerning the women," replied the Indian sullenly.

"Come," said Hilda, placing her hand on her sister's shoulder, "it's time we had a say in this," and she glided swiftly through the open door into the space before the stockade. A silence had fallen. The old man, boiling inwardly with rage, knew not what to say. Cooper was mentally cursing because there was not enough light to see to shoot the Indian through a loophole, when Hilda's voice fell clear and distinct on the quiet night.

"Are you still there, George Harper?"

"I am here," said the voice, "waiting the White Chief's answer."

"I will answer for him," cried Hilda. "Go back, then, to the tribe, and tell them that three old men and two girls defy them to do their worst; and, mark me, if the worst should come to the worst, and we be overpowered by your treacherous followers, do not think my sister and I will ever fall into the hands of such as you. No!" she cried. "Tell them from me the first Indian hand that is laid on the form of Hilda Herbert will be laid on a figure whence the spirit has departed—a figure they are all welcome to."

"I have no need to repeat the words of the Red Rose," answered the Indian sarcastically; "the tribe can hear themselves. Is this the White Chief's answer?" he continued, addressing Captain Herbert.

"Yes," said the old man sternly, "my daughter's answer is mine. Do your worst."

"That answer means war," said the Indian; "and supposing you are able to prevent us for a time from entering the stockade, it is only a question of time for us to starve you out, and, mind, in that case I cannot be responsible for what will happen, the blood of the braves once roused."

"Away!" cried the old man angrily; "you have got your answer."

CHAPTER XI.

The Indians Agree

"I MUST make you out a greater paragon than you are, Abe," I whispered, as we still stood by the fire that night a few paces from the Indian Walker. "They are scared at the thought of returning; they think the odds against them hopeless. I 'll just lie to them on your marvellous powers on the field of battle till the moon retires in disgust. Friend Walker," I continued, turning to the Indian, who, squatted on the ground, was gazing into the embers with a far-off expression on his face, "the great Witch Doctor commands me to tell you that, having consulted the stars and the 'time-tick'"—I thought it wise to refer to the "time-tick," seeing the deep impression it had produced—"he has determined to rescue the great White Chief and his daughters, if it be not too late, and he implores you to return with us and lend us your aid. He and I are capable of doing this alone, but it would take longer and entail more suffering and suspense on the White Chief and those with him."

Mournfully the Indian shook his head. "Two hundred to twenty?" he said; "it would mean death."

"Tut, man! what do you mean? Have you ever seen the Witch Doctor shoot? Did the enemy dare to charge us, they would melt away before his rifle like the snow before the summer sun."

I had noticed the Indian's rifle was a muzzle-loader of an old type; and though I learnt later that Captain Herbert had a few modern magazine rifles stowed away in "The Lodge," I thought it better to impress on the Indian the superiority of the repeating weapon, and I was right, for afterwards I found out that the half-dozen rifles he, Captain Herbert, distributed among the men who were in the highest position in the tribe were all weapons of an older type, and this I found afterwards was Cooper's doing. "As long as they can bang off and hit something, that is all they want," he had been heard to say. "Don't you be fool enough to give them magazine rifles to syringe the stockade with."

And so it was the repeating rifles lay in the strong-room at "The Lodge," oiled and carefully guarded by Joe, the confidential Indian servant, whilst Captain Herbert always used an old Scotch double-barrel express when he went on a hunting expedition. Consequently even Walker knew not of the merits of a quick-firing rifle.

"The white man speaks strangely or boastfully," said Walker.

"Neither the one nor the other," I replied; "but you shall see the Witch Doctor shoot as soon as it is light, and then you will be convinced that nothing can approach him and live. After that we will hurry on to these persons' assistance."

The Indian looked up quickly, not at me; I think he took me for a mere "gasser"; his eyes rested momentarily on the great form of Abe, who, sitting near, was listening to the conversation with a smile on his face.

"We will see the Witch Doctor shoot in the morning," said Walker; "after then we can see what is best to do."

"Certainly," I cried, "and now to bed! Abe," I whispered, "he wavers. To-morrow morning you must empty your magazine into something as fast as you can. Let her go, and you can pretend you have more cartridges in her when you've done the six; but probably that will sufficiently impress them."

The camp had been astir some time when I woke on the following morning. The incidents of the previous day and the position we were in immediately crowded on my brain, and I quickly jumped into the few necessary clothes that lay alongside me.

Abe and the Indian, Walker, were seated together by a small fire, some distance from the main group, chatting in low voices, when I emerged from the canvas on my way to the stream, there to engage in the usual meagre morning ablutions. The former greeted me with a smile, but the Indian only glanced up quickly, and I could detect that his mind was filled with doubt and uncertainty.

"See, boss," cried Abe, "Mr. Walker has arranged the target."

I glanced in the direction he pointed to, and there, on a ledge of dark rock some fifty yards from the

camp, were placed, at an interval of half a yard, a dozen pieces of white quartz stone, each about the size of a man's hand.

"The exhibition," continued Abe, "will be given after breakfast, so hurry up."

I knew quite well that Abe could knock those stones over at that distance as quickly and unerringly as a scullery maid could shell peas, but then would he be nervous? It was evident from the expression on Walker's face that he half believed we were mere boasters; anyhow, Abe's ability was to be put to a first and final test. The same notion was plainly depicted on the faces of the other Indians, who stood solemnly and silently grouped behind Abe.

"Seated or standing?" asked Abe, turning to Walker with his rifle in his hand.

"As the Witch Doctor chooses," replied the Indian.

Abe threw himself on the ground with his back against a stump, and drew up his left knee.

"Ready?" he called.

"Ready," said Walker.

Bang! whiz! crack! Bang! whiz! crack! Bang! whiz! crack! If the reader chooses to say these words evenly, and not too hurriedly, to himself or herself—alas! in the latter case I feel it will be difficult—gazing at the same time steadily on the pieces of quartz stone which are distinctly visible on the dark ledge of rock, "Bang!" will represent the report of the rifle, simultaneously with which the white stone on the right disappears, "Whiz!" the jerk of the lever which shoots the cartridge out,

"Crack!" the replacing of the lever into position for firing. Six times he fired, and six quartz stones had gone.

Abe jumped up smiling, and for the first time I glanced at the faces round me. With open mouths, and their dark beady eyes almost starting from their heads with amazement, they gazed from Abe to the quartz stones and from what was left of the quartz stones to Abe in utter bewilderment.

Abe walked up to Walker, looking him straight in the face, at the same time quietly slipping fresh cartridges into the magazine, but they were not wanted.

"Do you wish me to go on, Chief Walker?"

The Indian looked at him, and there was almost a suspicion of fear on his countenance.

"For my part, I have seen enough," he answered, and then he left us and went apart, followed by the other Indians.

For some minutes they talked hurriedly and vehemently in their strange tongue, whilst we watched them anxiously, and without speaking. Suddenly the murmur of voices ceased, and Walker, with head erect, and a determined look upon his face, came towards us.

"Witch Doctor," he said, "and you, Explorer"—there was a somewhat disdainful expression in his voice as he spoke the latter word; I was merely a hanger-on: it was Abe he addressed—"I have spoken with those who are with me, and we have agreed that we will lead you to the house of the White Chief, and, with your aid, help to save him from his enemies; but I would again point out we

are twenty against two hundred, and that our foes are led by a man crafty as the fox. If he knew the power of the Witch Doctor's rifle he would not approach us, but would hem us in till we fell for want of food and water. But if it be that we are called back to the glory of the sun and the home of our fathers, it is a great and a proud moment for all of us that we go in the company of the great Witch Doctor."

The voice of the Indian was firm, and a determined air had come upon him.

Abe did not reply in words; he held out his hand, the hand I have spoken of before, and Walker grasped it. Slowly his eyes met the smiling ones of Abe, and the look that came over his face I shall never forget; the magnetic touch had thrilled through him, and Abe Wilson had unconsciously added another slave to his list, who would follow him blindly and unhesitatingly whithersoever he would command.

"Now," said Abe, "let us be moving. How far is it, Walker, to the White Chief's place?"

"Three to four hours," replied Walker, "should bring us to the last ridges overlooking the valley where lie the house of the White Chief and the Indian settlement below, but we should move with care, and have one always ahead to act as scout, for Harper might suspect our return; he is cunning as the fox, and would leave no stone unturned to gain his ends."

All this time I thought it best to play second fiddle; it would, perhaps, be truer to say I was distinctly playing second fiddle. Anyhow, I had the sense to

keep myself in the background, so I merely nudged Abe.

"Speak a few words to the men," I whispered. "They only want a bit of encouragement, and they 'll follow us to h—l."

"The sun," broke in Abe with a quiet laugh.

"All right," I retorted, "either will do for me, for if the one 's as hot as I know the other is, it 's fried liver and bacon we 'd be in half a twinkle."

Abe spoke a few words to the men.

"If you will stick by us and obey orders, we will go right through this Harper and his measly crowd; but if one of you cuts it and turns tail, he 'll spoil the whole show, and we shall only be playing right into Harper's hands and make him laugh. Say, boys, do you want Harper to laugh over this job?"

The Indians shook their heads.

"You wish the skunk kicked out and the White Chief put back to his right place?"

"Ay, ay!" they cried.

"Come along, then; it shall be done."

During our march that morning we learnt much from Walker. After all, only four of the Indians carried rifles, all of a similar pattern to his, and so if we could avoid being rushed we might keep them at bay if we met them on ground favourable to us; but what we hoped to do was to make the White Chief acquainted of our presence unbeknown to Harper and his men.

It was Walker who made this suggestion, which we both pooh-poohed at first till he explained how it might be done. Walker had been Captain Her-

bert's hunter, as has been already remarked, and the reader may also remember that a quarter of a mile from "The Lodge" ran a ridge of low hills; to the east of the ridge again lay a broad fertile plain. It appeared that on an elevated spot on the ridge, which commanded a good view to the north-west and west, Walker had been accustomed to establish himself in the early mornings when a likely westerly wind was blowing, and look out for any deer or elk that might have come out on to the plain to feed. If he saw any he would hoist a white flag or handkerchief. When this was done someone at "The Lodge" would see it and instantly inform Captain Herbert. Then the old man would sally forth with his telescope, and Walker, by means of a code of signals that Captain Herbert had taught him, would tell him what kind of game was there and how far off they were, etc.

It was rather too far for Walker to follow the directions of Captain Herbert without a telescope; and unfortunately the one he always used was kept at "The Lodge," and, of course, he had been obliged to come away without it. Still here was a means of letting Captain Herbert know we were at hand.

"The worst of it is," said Walker, "while I am trying to catch the chief's attention I may be seen by Harper's men."

"Humph!" ejaculated Abe; "that doesn't make it such a good thing as it sounded."

Still it was agreed to make for the signal spot, and if we reached it unobserved we could then discuss the course to pursue.

There were many other points to be discussed, and the time had passed quickly, when, on reaching the summit of a pass between two hills, the Indian halted, and pointing across a rolling, prairie-like looking valley to a ridge of hills some three or four miles from us, said, "Yonder is the ridge from which we shall see the settlement."

CHAPTER XII.

The Signal is Seen

IT is again necessary to transport the reader to "The Lodge" on this same afternoon that Abe and myself are trudging on towards it with Walker and his followers. It was the day following the night that Harper had made his nocturnal call. After he had departed—or rather when the silence of the night was unbroken, for he might have been at no distance from the stockade—it was decided that one of the white men and two of the domestic Indians should immediately go on sentry duty and patrol round the house between it and the stockade, relieving each other every four hours.

Ted Cooper and two of the Indians started sentry duty, to be relieved by Gibson, Joe, and the other Indian.

It had quickly dawned on all of them that an attack on the stockade was little likely to be made, anyhow at present. In the first place, it was almost impregnable to men armed with three or four old muzzle-loading rifles, and for the rest with only spears and knives—nasty enough things at close quarters, but of little use with a high wall of solid logs betwixt the two parties.

Captain Herbert and his two daughters had returned into the house, barred the shutters, and turned up the lamp. Gibson had retired to his room to try and seek a few hours' rest, though it is little likely that any of the dwellers in that house got any sleep that night. Captain Herbert threw himself into a chair by the table, and buried his head in his hands, while the two girls sat upon the further side, casting furtive glances at his hidden face, and then at one another.

Not a word was spoken; each of them wished to say something hopeful, but no gleam of relief could force itself anywhere on the black horizon of their vision. Anon the bent form rocked, and heavy tears forced their way through the old man's fingers. Mary rose and went to her father.

"Father, don't take it to heart like this; they may relent. Walker may come with some of the tribe and help us. They cannot *all* have rebelled against us."

Her hand was on his trembling shoulder, the golden head mingled with his long grey hair; but the grey head only shook in answer.

"Children," he said at last, "may you forgive me; may God forgive me. I ought to have foreseen this years ago. I should have sent you to the land of civilization to mingle and marry among your own people, for I had the means to place you in a good position; but oh, how could I sever myself from the last link that bound me to the world, from the sight of the only faces that could ever make me happy again? When you were but little children, and your poor mother was taken from us, she implored me on

her deathbed never to leave you, said that you would remind me of her, as you do every day of your lives, and I promised. You have never seen those lands of civilization; and as the man cannot care for the fruit that he has never tasted, so you have never cared to leave the place of your birth. I have taught you all I could; we have sent for books that have shown you the ways and history of civilized people; but, alas! we have imprudently shown them also to the tribe, and in a moment, like thieves in the dark, they have turned on us, and this is the reward of kindness."

"Father," cried Hilda, "don't fret so. We should never have left you had you suggested it, and perhaps our case is not so hopeless if we can hold out; but they may fight amongst themselves, and give you a chance of joining one side against the other, or other chances may offer. Anyhow"—and a dark look came into her eyes—"we will stand or fall beside you, and you will not find us wanting when the hour for action comes."

They calmed him down gradually, and got him at last to lie down on the sofa, where they took it in turns to sit by his side through the night.

Dawn came at last, and eagerly they all scanned the ground around the stockade, but no sign of an Indian was to be seen.

"It is as I feared," said Captain Herbert to Cooper as they sat, a silent group, around the breakfast-table. "They'll just wait till our provisions are done and we are starved out. They won't risk their lives by attacking us, and they know there is nowhere for us to go to."

The morning was spent in instructing the Indians in the use of the revolvers and rifles, shooting them off with dummy cartridges, and showing them how to refill the chambers and magazines.

"They're all right," Joe had whispered to Captain Herbert; "they have lived their lives with the White Chief, and if need be they will willingly die with him; they have said it."

This piece of news gratified the old man exceedingly, for he had greatly feared that they might secretly have been approached by Harper or some of his gang, and their minds poisoned against him.

After practising with the arms and portioning them off, to each man a rifle and a belt, on the right side of which was a revolver, and on the left a sailor's short cutlass, they set about soaking some rag in a concoction of tar and petroleum. This was placed in a tin pannikin, and, with the aid of a ladder, fixed on the spikes at the top of the stockade at various intervals. This was done in case a night attack was made. With a long stick, at the end of which some of the inflammable rag was fixed, the stockade could now be lit up in a few moments, and this would illuminate the ground in front of it for some short distance.

Hilda had had a long and earnest conversation with Uncle Ted, as the two girls always called the sturdy old carpenter. She half hoped he might throw some brighter ray upon the scene, or be able to suggest a scheme, however remote, of escape. But though quiet and determined in manner, Cooper's answers to her queries were not reassuring.

"Mightn't we make a detour round the village some dark night and get aboard the steamer?" she had asked. "We might keep them at bay whilst you and father got up steam."

Cooper shook his head.

"They will keep a sharp look-out there," he replied. "They know it is our one and only way of escape. Of course," he added after a pause, "if our straits become desperate we will have to do some desperate thing, and it may be it will be our only chance to cut our way through and try and reach the boat, but I fear me it will be a terribly hard job."

The day wore on. All through the early part of the afternoon the two girls with Joe had been helping Captain Herbert to go over the stores and see what time they were likely to hold out. They had reckoned they could hold out about three weeks with ordinary care, and this fact was at once communicated to the little garrison, but Cooper only laughed grimly, and the stolid faces of the Indians did not change their expression; for after all three weeks is better than three months, infinitely preferable to three years, of wearing anxiety and suspense.

The day had been close and hot, but was growing cooler now as the sinking sun threw long shadows across the valley.

Captain Herbert stood upon the top of the verandah which ran round the house, being on a level with the top of the stockade. From here a view could be obtained of the first two or three houses of the village. Not a soul had been near

them all day. Hilda stood by his side, gazing apathetically in the same direction. In a listless, dreamy manner she let her eyes roam round to the eastern ridge, the curves and bends of which were now thrown into sharp relief by the setting sun. Suddenly she started.

"Father! father!"

"Good God, Hilda! what is the matter?"

Her eyes were dilated, her lips parted, and for a moment she could not speak. Was it a dream? was it a fancy?

"Speak, Hilda," cried the old man. "Are you ill, child? What is it?"

Cooper, patrolling below, looked up and became rooted to the spot.

"It is!" she cried, "it is!" And there was joy in her voice. "See, father, there is something white fluttering at the signal spot."

"Something white? something white?" said the old man, gazing across the valley. What did it mean? A white flag had been Walker's signal, but in the strong shadow his eyes, failing now, could not perceive it. "My glass! my glass! Fetch the glass quick, while the light lasts."

But Cooper had heard Hilda's words, and had quickly run into the house for the telescope.

"Give it to me, Ted," said the old man.

Quickly he adjusted it and leaned it on the parapet. A moment afterwards he muttered, "Great heavens!" whilst his quick breathing and the shaking of the telescope told he was violently agitated.

In a few more seconds he jumped up, and now his arms went this way and that; he touched the top of

his head, he struck his chin, he waved them backwards and forwards.

Cooper and Hilda watched him in silence. It was evident he had seen friends, and now he was talking to them. They both understood the code, and breathlessly watched him.

"We are safe; come at once."

And now he was down again using the glass. "He can't make out my signals; the sun's in the way."

"Who can't?" asked Cooper.

"Walker! Walker!" replied Captain Herbert excitedly; "and white men with him, and twenty Indians! See — listen — one hour after sundown." Again he jumped up, again he gesticulated wildly, and again he looked through the glass. "Right, right!" he cried, as he shut it up with a snap.

Quickly Captain Herbert explained that Walker was there and ready to render assistance, and that two white men were with him. The news flew like wildfire, and within a few seconds all the occupants of "The Lodge" were listening to Captain Herbert's welcome news and gazing across the valley towards the place where the signal spot was, hoping to perceive some movements or signal, but nought was visible. The whole ridge-side was obscured in deep russet brown shadows, while only a few of the higher tops caught the last flicker of the sinking sun.

Ted Cooper had listened to Captain Herbert's rapid explanation as he closed the telescope, and a great wave of hope had rushed into his heart, but that instinctive feeling, the outcome of long habit,

prompted him while his chief was talking to gaze round in the direction where danger lay. He almost uttered an exclamation, but checked himself. Was that a group of Indians there at the head of the village, or was it only the shadows of evening? He looked long and earnestly, but the night grew fast, and trees and rocks became more and more blended together in one dark mass. Perhaps he was mistaken; anyhow, no one else appeared to have noticed anything, but then they were busy listening to the good news. Cooper worried. He was not the man to throw cold water into the pot just as the water was beginning to warm, but it was necessary for the safety of all, not only themselves within the stockade, but of those coming to their assistance, that they should be on the alert and ready to render aid if it should be necessary.

Watching a favourable opportunity, he drew Captain Herbert aside.

"Captain," he whispered, "it is quite possible the tribe know of Walker's presence as well as we do."

The old man started. He had not thought of this possibility.

"Why should you think so?" he asked.

Cooper told him of his suspicions, and added, "Anyhow, we must guard as well as we can against being surprised and rushed."

A meeting of the garrison was quickly and silently summoned, for time was growing short, and Captain Herbert addressed the little group:

"Men, it is possible we may meet foes to-night, as well as friends, and it is necessary we keep cool, and

that you follow the directions I am about to give you. Not only our lives, but the lives of our friends, may depend on it."

It was then arranged that as soon as the hour after sundown had passed—half of it was already gone—and they heard people approaching, the south and east sides of the stockade should be immediately lit up. This was a comparatively easy matter, but Captain Herbert paused; the men were all wanted for sterner service, and he did not like to risk his daughters' lives. Hilda saw the situation.

"Mary and I can do that," she said. "I'll fire the four lights on the east side, and Mary can light the south ones."

The father demurred, but Hilda insisted, and after a few words from Cooper, it was agreed that the girls should light up the stockade, two lights on the south side being deemed sufficient, as if there was a hostile attack it must almost for a certainty come from the east side.

After igniting the tins the two sisters were to meet at the front entrance to the house, and, in case the enemy got into the stockade, hold it with their revolvers till friends could rally round.

Cooper and the three Indians were told off to stand by the eastern door in the stockade, with cutlasses in hand and revolvers, ready to unbar it at a word from Captain Herbert. The Captain took up a position at a loophole a yard or two to the left of the door with his rifle. Joe was stationed at another loophole, to his left again, and Gibson took his stand at one just to the right of the door, both ready to pass their rifles through.

"For God's sake don't shoot friends instead of foes; make sure where you are aiming before you pull."

These were Captain Herbert's last words as each one filed off to his or her post.

Let it not be supposed they felt convinced an attack would be made, but if the Indians were aware of Walker's presence, they well knew he would never be allowed to enter the stockade without a fierce struggle.

CHAPTER XIII.

"Lead Away, Walker"

THE events which have just been recorded in the last chapter I learnt subsequently. The reader left our little band entering the plain, across which rose the low ridge of hills beyond which lay the house of the White Chief and the Indian settlement. At first Walker intended making straight for the signal spot, but quickly he changed his mind.

"It is not safe to risk it," he said in reply to our inquiries. "They might possibly have sentries on the look-out. Let us keep to the edge of the valley, and cross over a few miles further north; we can then come down the ridge with little chance of detection."

This sounded common sense enough; the only thing against it was the loss of time involved. But Walker knew the lie of the land and the ways of his people, and it was not for us to interfere.

We moved on quickly, yet carefully, without seeing any sign of man, and anon reached the watershed of the ridge some four miles above "The Lodge." Occasionally, from some higher elevation than usual, we spied the house in the distance and the huts of the settlement below; but we took care not to show

ourselves on the skyline, and it was late in the afternoon when Walker called a halt, and bade the Indians wait till he returned. Motioning to Abe and myself, he crawled forward some fifty yards till he came to a small hollow at the summit of the ridge. Carefully he raised his head and gazed for some time across the valley; then he motioned us to approach.

"No one in sight," he said. "Look!"

We both peered over the edge. A mile below us two or three of the neat-looking cottages—huts they called them—of the settlement were distinctly visible; a little to the west of them a long waving silvery line marked the course of the river, and as my eye followed on I saw the stream disappear in a small belt of trees, beyond which it broadened out into a wide lagoon, and there to my amazement lay a steamer.

"Fane's yacht!" I cried, as I caught sight of it.

Abe, who had been gazing steadily at "The Lodge," which lay exactly opposite to us, turned his head quickly. "Walker," he called, "what ship is that?"

Walker meanwhile had been busy pulling some bunting from a hole in the side of the rock, which he was now tearing in strips. He paused. "That ship? Why, the ship of the White Chief," he answered. "Whose ship could it be?" And the tone of his voice implied that only ignorant people could have asked such a stupid question. "That is the ship," he continued, "that takes away the yellow dust, and brings back the stores after many days."

I fell to wondering where Fane could be. Out in the distance, clear and distinct in that heavenly atmosphere, islands and headlands and ocean mingled together far as the eye could reach to the southward, and I felt that it was a terribly intricate passage for anyone to find even if this were Nootka Sound below us. On the chart Nootka Sound was described as a wide arm of the sea running inland some eight or ten miles, and it did not depict a rugged, broken coast such as this appeared to be. I was afterwards to learn, though, that, while requiring delicate and careful navigation, the passage was far easier than it appeared from the shore, where broad reaches of water would be hidden by the headlands.

While I was thus ruminating, feasting my eyes on a view that was gloriously refreshing after the sombre experiences in the silent, gloomy forest, I heard Abe talking to Walker.

"What are you tearing that stuff up for?"

"Signal for the White Chief," came the answer.

"Well, but why not fly the derned lot? The more you show, the more chance of its being seen."

"The more chance of Indians seeing too," was the laconic reply. "Risky as it is," continued Walker, "Indian's eyes very sharp."

"But why not make a dash for the stockade now before we can be discovered?"

"Ugh!" And Walker shivered. "White Chief shoot us all from loopholes; take us for the enemy. No, I must speak with him first."

Whilst they were conversing Walker had hauled up on a staff fixed there for the purpose a narrow

strip of white bunting. How long it was we leaned on the bank and gazed across the valley I do not know, but it must have been over an hour. We saw men patrolling round within the stockade, and that they carried rifles, from which it was evident an attack might be expected. A man stood on the verandah looking towards the settlement, and now and again other men came up and spoke to him.

At that distance we could not distinguish their features, but Walker said it was the White Chief that waited so long on the verandah. After a time the tall figure of a girl appeared on the verandah. Why would she not look this way? I am afraid that inwardly I called her bad names, solely, as it were, for her own good.

This waiting and watching, if it appeared dull, was in reality oppressively exciting. Although Walker did not speak, his restless eyes told a plain story. From the settlement to the stockade and *vice versâ* they darted incessantly; it was evident he was fearful lest the Indians should see the signal first, added to which the sun was growing lower and lower on the horizon.

"Why the devil don't they look this way?" I muttered angrily. Abe shrugged his shoulders. Even as I spoke we saw the girl's form turn lazily round towards us. I heard Abe catch his breath up; I saw round the corner of my eye that Walker had started.

For some time she gazed. Good heavens! Could she not see us? The situation was growing too strained for my nerves. "As well be killed by Indians as die of heart disease," was the thought that ran

through my mind. I seized my handkerchief and waved it. We saw the girl start and seize the man's arm and point towards us, and then another man brought a telescope.

Walker, showing as little of his body as possible, and casting furtive glances ever and anon towards the settlement, commenced gesticulating; signalling he called it.

The sun now was just about to drop behind the horizon, and "The Lodge" was right between us and it, making it almost impossible to see the movements of those within the stockade. Time after time Walker shook his head. "Cannot read the White Chief's signal," he muttered.

At length he stopped, and as he did so he threw a last quick glance towards the settlement.

"Ugh!" he ejaculated, and started. Abe turned quickly. I saw his forehead wrinkled and his keen eyes fixed, but though I gazed towards the settlement in the direction they were looking, nothing could I see but the long dark shadows and the few golden spots where the last rays of the sun still rested.

"Indians seen us," muttered Walker.

If I remember rightly I said "D—n!" but if that should offend any reader it can be left out.

Walker stamped on the ground with the air of a man who is just reaching over to seize a goodly pile of money, when someone else grasps it and disappears.

"Come," he cried, "let us go; no time to lose."

"Did you see them, Abe?" I asked.

He nodded.

Hurriedly Walker whispered his plans. "I have told the White Chief to expect us at the east gate one hour after sundown. The Indians will not know this, they cannot read the signals, but they will be moving up even now, and we must fight our way in. The only chance is to move back along the ridge, cross the valley further up, and come down along the riverside from the north. But we have little time. Come on."

We were now back amongst the Indians, to whom Walker spoke rapidly in the native tongue. We saw their faces darken as Walker finished.

"Come along," cried Abe; "lead away, Walker. We'll just go through this Harper lot like winky."

CHAPTER XIV.

"Come; there are others in danger"

IT was dark when we descended on to the plain. Coming down the ridge, the lights in the stockade were clearly visible below us. Oh, what a cheering sight that is after a long, hard day's work, the lights of home! How many a man has staggered along the track, almost done, almost fainting, when, turning a corner of the road, the lights of home have burst upon his vision and filled him afresh with vigour, put new life into him, dragged him home. Still, when you know the house may be surrounded by a lot of persons waiting to cut your throat, those same lights do not shine so pleasantly or so invitingly.

Walker went first with Abe, and myself next, and the Indians in a body behind. We walked as quietly as we could, but owing to the darkness and the rocky nature of the ground, there was a good deal of stumbling and floundering. We carried our rifles at full cock, and I remember expecting to fall every step I took, when the rifle would probably go off and shoot someone.

Walker had warned us that the hostile Indians might jump on us at any moment, but no sound did we hear except our own footsteps and the

murmur of the river, which grew louder each step we took.

We soon reached the edge of the gorge, and Walker turned sharply to the left. It had been decided that we should make our way as silently as possible to the stockade, and if attacked keep together as much as possible and fight our way to the stockade, where we were expected. Quickly we passed along the side of the river bank till "The Lodge" itself loomed before us, while the sharp outline of the eastern edge of the stockade stood boldly out, the ground beyond being faintly lit up by the reflection of the lights within. In the northern side of the house there was no light. I subsequently learnt there was no window on this side; and this had enabled us to reach the stockade in deep shadow.

As yet there had been no sign of anyone and no sound.

Walker paused a moment under the stockade. "We must run round the corner and make for the gate. Keep together. Now!" he whispered some words to the Indians. "Ready?"

"Yes."

I had been lent a short, heavy spear. Grasping this in my left hand, and my rifle by the thin part of the stock ready for instant shooting, I formed up between Walker and Abe, who was on the outside —the left-hand side—and off we started at a run for the corner of the stockade. We reached it; we were in the mellow light; we were, to use the words of poor dear Adam Lindsay Gordon, "going strong and well," when a yell rose on the night air, a yell I

shall never forget, nor will any man who heard it that night. It froze the blood; it staggered the senses; it was a cry of rage, of disappointment, the thirsty howl for blood. I believe I stopped; I heard a voice call above the din, "Come on, boss!" I felt the blood rush back to my heart, while there running towards us was a dark line of infuriated men.

"On for the gate!" cried Walker.

But there was no need to say it; the possibility pointed out in the proverb that the last shall be first was not being discussed nor considered by any one of us.

The position had been grasped by those within, and their rifles rang out as the Indians came within ten or fifteen yards of the stockade, and the cries that went forth told they had gone home. But we were yet about an equal distance from the gate. I remember thinking how light it kept growing. Of course, it was Mary and Hilda lighting up the "flarers," if there be such a word.

And now the gate was opened, and a flood of light shot across the shadow immediately beneath the stockade. We were within five yards of it, but the advancing demons were within five yards of us. I can see those devils now as plainly as I saw them on that night. They were dressed in the same grey homespun that our men wore, but they had painted their faces scarlet and blue and white, and more terrible-looking foes in that lurid light could not be imagined. At us they rushed with spears uplifted. Another volley had been fired from the stockade, and two men rolled over almost at our feet. It was

obvious at this moment we could not reach the gate first.

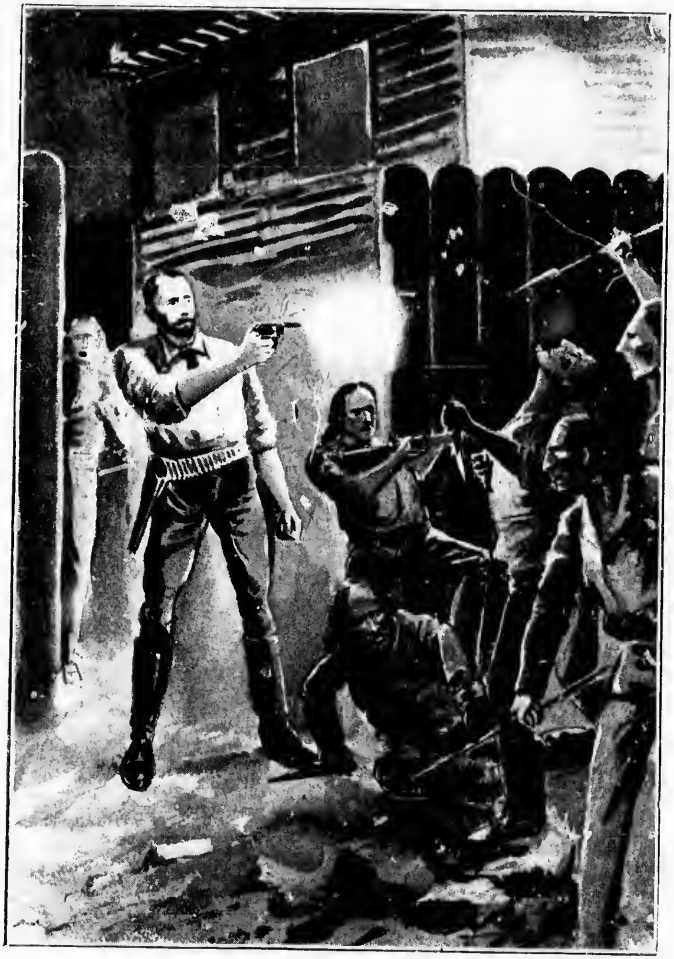
Abe saw it on the outside. Up went his rifle. Bang! whiz! crack! Bang! whiz! crack! The two men running directly for him fell without a sound. I dropped two with my express, whilst the next instant the Indians on our left and behind us were fighting hand to hand.

But now we saw the band, as it were, divided; some were engaging our men, whilst the others were endeavouring to force through the stockade gate. After we fired, they seemed to sheer left and right; in fact, Walker had already fired his old piece into the middle of a black mass of pushing, struggling forms at the gateway.

Abe grasped the position. "Guard the rear, boss!" he cried; and the next moment he dashed upon the Indians crowding the doorway. Clubbing his rifle in his left hand and the axe in his right, he fell on them with a yell of fury.

Walker, in the meanwhile, had not been idle; after firing the two shots he dropped his rifle. There would be no time to load now, and, seizing a spear in each hand—he had been carrying the two in his left—he slipped quickly to Abe's left side. The reason was obvious: only those on the outskirts of the crowd could use their arms to wield their weapons with. I saw through the manœuvres at once, and slipping two cartridges into my express, I stood by to render assistance and guard the rear.

Meantime our own Indians had somehow got isolated from us. I think it must have been at the



HAND-TO-HAND ENGAGEMENTS WERE GOING ON BETWEEN THE FRIENDLY INDIANS AND THE FOE.

To face page 133.

N THE

moment when Abe and I fired and then dashed forward that the enemy divided, and slipping past us on the left, hemmed our men in, where they were now fighting for their lives like cats, with their backs to the stockade.

Thud! thud! rained the terrific blows of Abe on to the heads and shoulders of the jostling crowd in the gateway, whilst ping! ping! came the revolver shots from within.

"Mind where you shoot," yelled a voice from within. "They're coming through."

It was busy work now—awful work when I think of it all in later days. A few on the outside of the pushing crowd had turned on us when they became aware of our presence; but it was for these that Walker and I waited, whilst Abe dropped them indiscriminately.

Suddenly they seemed to realize the situation; with cries of terror those behind redoubled their efforts in the wild endeavour to escape from the fearful strokes of the white giant behind them. Ted Cooper, Joe, and Captain Herbert stood at the doorway, cutting them down with cutlasses; but several had already got past, and hand-to-hand engagements were going on within the stockade between the friendly Indians and the foe.

But now the pressure from behind became too great, and in a moment, head first, anyhow, the remainder of the Indians were precipitated into the stockade. Ted Cooper and Joe were swept off their legs, and Captain Herbert was dashed on one side, but, luckily, no great damage was done. Abe followed, swinging his long arms like a windmill.

"The gate!" cried Walker to me. "Quick! the gate!"

It was wide open, and no one was behind us.

"Pull those bodies out of the way," he cried.

I did; I kicked them out of the way, if I remember rightly. Walker banged the gate to and bolted it, and then hurried off after Abe, who had just thrown himself upon some Indians who were endeavouring to fight their way in at the door of the main entrance on the south side. Who were defending the entrance? I could not see, for the porch hid them; and I was just on the point of following when I chanced to glance to the right. For a second I paused, rooted to the spot. Standing at the top of a few steps, which led to a window, the shutters of which were now closed and barred, stood the tall figure of a beautiful woman. At arm's length in her right hand she held a revolver; at the end of the barrel the smoke still hung, and below lay the dead figure of an Indian; but there were two others in a half-crouching attitude before her, with their spears raised; they appeared to be in the act of springing. But this was not all: between me and the girl an Indian was stealthily creeping, unknown to the woman. My God! What should I do? To fire at the solitary Indian was to hit the girl if I missed, or at that distance my bullet might pass clean through him, but in another moment he would be on her. Positions that take time to explain are frequently impressed upon our mental vision with a rapidity and clearness equal to that of a flash of lightning. It was the case here; there was only one thing to do. I may state, without being considered a braggart, that I was a

THE TWO MEN FELL OVER, AND I SAW THE GIRL TURN.

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good shot, and I think I was almost as quick a shot as anyone I have ever met in the field of sport. I could let my two barrels go almost simultaneously with both gun and rifle, and often I have had my second bird dead ere my first had fallen in the air a couple of yards. I think it was this quickness that made me prefer the old 450 express to the new single-barrel magazine rifles. It was the men facing the girl I must drop, and trust for her to look round in time to see her danger. The lights still burned strong, and they were not ten paces from me. It was the flash of a moment. Bang! bang! The heavy report of my express rang through the stockade like the report of a cannon after the little ping, ping, of the revolvers. The two men fell over, and I saw the girl turn.

"Look out!" I screamed.

She saw the Indian; but he was on to her. I saw her left hand go up, the revolver went off, and together they rolled down the steps. Clubbing my rifle in my hand, I dashed up; the Indian had worked his hand loose, and was feeling for his spear, while his left hand grasped the white neck of the girl. I saw the horror in that face, I saw the staring eyes, but it was only for a moment. I hit. How the stock stood, I know not; the dent is there to this day. Without a sound the Indian fell face downwards over the prostrate figure of the girl. Instantly I lifted her up.

"Are you hurt?" I asked.

She lifted up her left arm, from which the blood was flowing fast. "I don't think it is much," she said, as I pulled out my handkerchief.

It was evident when she drew up her sleeve that the spear had passed right through the fleshy part of the forearm. I bound it up as quickly as I could, for there were still cries and shouts going on on the south side of the house.

"Am I hurting you?" I asked, looking up. I don't think I had seen her face properly before; but now a thrill ran through my whole being, such as I had never experienced in my life. Those great, grey eyes, did they always shine like that? The poor little mouth twitched with pain, but the look in those eyes transfixed me. For a moment I stood spellbound. Was it wonderment? was it surprise? Could it be love that beamed from those brilliant orbs? It was but for a second. Perhaps there was something in my glance that frightened her, for the eyes closed and the colour mounted into her cheeks.

"Come," she whispered softly; "there are others in danger."

My senses returned hastily; I finished binding up the wounded arm. "Can you manage to load up?" I asked.

She nodded.

I hastily slipped two fresh cartridges into my rifle, waited a moment for her to reload, and then together we ran round to the south side.

All this time—and when I say that, it after all means but a few minutes—the din outside and within had been incessant; yells and groans had filled the air within and without the stockade, but it was growing quieter now. Without the yells had ceased, only the groaning continued; while within no longer

was there any shouting, for the simple reason no one left alive had any breath to shout with.

As we turned the corner of the house a gruesome sight met our view, a sight that will haunt me to my last day, and yet at that moment it somehow did not seem extraordinary or unexpected. Figures lay upon the ground, a few striving to raise themselves, the others motionless. As I ran round the corner of the stockade I almost collided with a tall form approaching from the opposite direction.

Instinctively we both jumped back and raised our weapons.

"Hold, boss!" cried a well-known voice. "I was just coming to see after you."

It was Abe, but I had to peer into his face to recognize it; blood and dirt and perspiration had rendered his features almost unrecognizable. "Are you hurt?" I asked anxiously.

"Only a few cracks and prods, but nothing serious, I think," was his answer. "And you?"

I told him I was unhurt.

"Come, then," he said, "let us see what damage has been done."

The fight was over, and beside the porch stood a group of four persons looking curiously towards us.

As we approached them a tall old man—his hat had gone, and his long, grey hair was dishevelled—stepped towards us.

"Gentlemen," he said, extending his hand, "I am deeply indebted to you for your assistance."

In turn we seized the proffered hand.

"Guess we've done nothing, captain, but try to

keep our own skins on. But hadn't we better clear up now, and see how we stand?"

It was Abe who spoke.

"Yes," said Captain Herbert, "let us go inside and ascertain our losses."

It was soon evident that Gibson was missing, and the three Indian servants. Joe and Walker went out and called to them, but no answer came, and a short time later they returned and reported having found the bodies in a corner of the stockade, surrounded by a number of the enemy.

"Gibson's revolver was empty," said Walker, "and Indians too many."

Captain Herbert was evidently shocked on learning that his old friend, who had shared in his hardships and his success for five-and-twenty years, had been killed. But to us who never knew him the news was received silently, I might almost say indifferently.

It is a marvellous thing, a terrible thing, that when blood is flowing, and men are falling, what an indifferent matter life becomes. We see a builder fall from a ladder, or an old lady run over by an omnibus, and we stagger into a chemist's shop or a public-house for a stiff steadier, and dream of the horrid scene for nights, but when comrades fall around and the shouts of an infuriated foe sound on the ears, there comes to the mind of every man worthy of the name a grim and fixed determination to avenge their loss or perish with them.

And there was plenty to do within the house. Only three of us had escaped entirely unscathed: Captain Herbert, Mary, and myself. The former, owing to his original calling as captain in the merchant service,

had a good knowledge of medicine and of how to treat wounds, a knowledge that had been improved with long practice among the Indians, and I may mention here that the respect he inspired the tribe with was largely due to this fact.

The captain had quickly drawn some lint from a drawer, and gone to work bandaging and binding people up. Wounds are not pleasant things to enlarge upon, and though many of the cuts were deep and painful, none of them were dangerous. Abe was the most knocked about, and he had a nasty jagged cut at the back of the ear where a spear had run along. I can never to this day conceive how it was he escaped with his life. I sometimes think the Indians were frightened of him.

Poor Hilda was treated first. How often have I seen women grow faint and turn away at the sight of blood, but she stood right there in the middle of the room, with a figure as firm as a rock, and her arm out whilst her father removed the gory bandage I had tied hastily round, and proceeded to bathe the wound and bind it up with some surgical lint. Her eyes were lowered all the while, except once; just once she raised them. Was it mere chance that they flashed on me? I know not, but they did, only for a second, yet I felt my heart beat strangely.

The ladies retired as soon as Hilda's arm was bound up, and after Abe's wounds had been dressed Captain Herbert commanded Joe to show us to our room.

"Get to rest now," he said, "we will hear your story in the morning, and there is much yet to be done."

It was a pleasant room, with two modern bedsteads in it, that Joe showed us into.

"If there is any trouble in the night, give us a halloa," said Abe as he departed.

I remember noticing there were night-clothes on the bed. Did Abe notice that? Because he never said a word beyond asking me to give him a hand on with his. That night when the light was out, tired as I was, I saw those eyes flash on me again, and I knew, cynic that I was, cold-hearted as I thought myself to be, that I was as hard hit as any man left alive that night.

CHAPTER XV.

"She's coming up"

WHEN I awoke next morning it took me a long time to gather my scattered senses together. Somebody had entered the room, pulled up the blind, and put a can on the washing-table. I heard it jingle, and thought I was in London and my servant had just called me, and then I dozed off again and dreamt I was in the theatre with a lovely woman in the next stall by my side, a woman that I did not know, yet longed to; and the lights in the theatre went almost out, while on the stage lurid fires broke out in various places, dimly showing a dense forest of trees, and then the weird, painted faces of Indians peeped from behind the trees and cautiously approached. But even as I gazed the stalls vanished, the stage disappeared, only the fires and the trees were left, and the Indians still advancing, and I was not seated in a stall, but on a stump. I turned, and the girl was still there, the only person in the audience left; but she had risen, and in her outstretched hand there was a revolver. In a moment I saw it all; we were being attacked. I jumped up, simultaneously the revolver went off, there was a crash, and a voice cried—

Steady, boss! You've sent the candlestick flying. What is it?"

I was awake. "Dreaming of those cussed Indians, Abe; that's what it is," I replied, rubbing my eyes.

It took us a long time to dress. Joe brought us baths and hot water, and repeatedly returned to know if there was anything we wanted, and when we should be ready for breakfast, as everyone else was dressed. We entreated him to ask Captain Herbert to begin without us, for Abe insisted on shaving, and he was so stiff and sore, I had to help him on with his clothing; and when we did at last find our way down the passage into the sitting-room the clean plates and hissing urn told us they were still awaiting us.

Captain Herbert and his daughters were the only occupants of the room when we entered, and a cordial greeting the old man gave us, but I thought the girls seemed a little shy and embarrassed, which was not to be wondered at considering we were the first white strangers they had ever seen.

"That was a near thing last night, Mr. Wilson," said Captain Herbert to Abe, after inquiring how he had slept and whether his head pained him.

"Too close to be pleasant, captain," replied Abe. "By-the-bye," he asked, "what became of the other Indians, Walker's men?"

Captain Herbert shook his head. "I'm afraid they are all done," he said. "An hour after you had gone to rest, Walker, who was on duty, heard a tap on the stockade gate, and three men gave their names; they were instantly let in, but one was so badly wounded, he died during the night. We have

heard nothing of the others, and there has not been a soul in sight all morning."

After breakfast, whilst Abe and Ted Cooper were busily occupied outside in discussing the situation and making plans, I related the story of our expedition to Captain Herbert and the girls. It is the story I have endeavoured to tell in the foregoing pages. Occasionally one or other of the daughters would turn a quick look of incredulity or astonishment upon me, I could not determine which, but they never spoke. And when I told how Abe had supported me through the wood, had in fact literally saved my life when I entreated him to leave me, I saw the tears well up in Hilda's eyes, and a pang of jealousy shot through my breast. Yes, I confess it; but for all that I told my story truly.

Now and again Captain Herbert asked a question, and though they seldom seemed to look at me, I could see by the glances they threw at one another that my story absorbed and surprised them. This is not to be wondered at considering no man had, to their knowledge, ever come through the forest before.

When I ended Captain Herbert rose and paced the floor some moments in deep thought. "It almost seems," he murmured partly to himself, as it were, and partly to us, "that fate directed your footsteps here to assist us, perhaps to save us."

"Both!" I cried, jumping up. "Fane must be here directly, and then it will be all over, bar shouting."

Captain Herbert shook his head. "He is long overdue, and this coast is terribly intricate. He will

very likely have been stopped by fog or accident, and then, thinking you may be running short of food, he may push on with all the speed he can, and then——"

Captain Herbert did not finish the sentence, but gazed dreamily out of the window. His meaning was obvious. If the *Caledonia* had left Victoria when it was arranged she was to, she should have been here near on a week ago, and every day that passed with no tidings of her made the chance of her arriving at all more and more improbable.

I turned and asked Hilda if she would show me round the stockade. Cheerfully she assented. I had not been out of the house this morning, and I was surprised to see so little trace of the fierce struggle of the previous night. The south gate, which stood immediately opposite the front door of the house, was wide open.

"Is that safe?" I asked Hilda as she joined me in the porch.

"Oh, yes," she answered. "There is a man on the verandah above looking out."

I did not like to ask her what had become of the dead bodies, but I heard later that Joe and Walker, with the two Indians that came in after we had retired to bed, had been busy from break of day carrying them out to a small hollow some hundred and fifty yards below "The Lodge," whilst Ted Cooper kept guard from the verandah. In fact, I gathered that Abe and myself were about the only persons that got any sleep that night, much as the others must have needed it.

We went round the east side, and quickly my eye

caught sight of the steps leading to the window where Hilda had stood facing the Indians.

"That was a narrow squeak you had last night, Miss Herbert."

The girl looked quickly up, and then down again; she muttered something that I could not catch. Had I offended her? I quickly altered the subject and talked of Fane's coming, and of how it was only a question of a few days ere the Indians would surrender or be wiped out, but she never answered.

We had wandered round the stockade to the western side, and here we found Abe and Ted Cooper, busy making rope ladders. Catching sight of us, Abe dropped his work and came towards us with a smile on his face. He said something, what I do not remember, but I remember well Hilda looked up, and her eyes met his, and the light seemed to flash from them, and the colour mounted into her cheeks, and she, who had been pensive before and silent, suddenly became gay, and I, who had been gay, as quickly grew secretly morose. But Abe appeared to notice nothing of all this. He showed Hilda how to tie the knots to make the rope ladder, and chatted on about this thing and the other. Then I felt I was not wanted, so made some trifling excuse and left them.

I shall never forget those days, and I shall never forgive myself. They stand out in red letters in the humble story of my life, and they appear to me, whenever I think of the past, as clearly and vividly as large capital letters stand forth among a mass of infinitesimal print. For the first time in my life, for the last time in my life, the green-eyed monster,

jealousy, had seized me in his relentless, poisonous grip, and the man who had stood by me in the hour of need, who had dragged me from destruction, who would now gladly shed the last drop of his blood to help me —and I knew it—was more accursed to me than any other man on earth. I remember a beautiful woman who moved in the best and highest society, once saying to me, "A man is a fool who goes to the wall for a woman," and she had experience enough in God's truth, at least, so the world said, and often I have pondered on that lady's saying, and I have wondered had she, amidst all the intrigues with which her name was connected, found *the* man at whose call she would have to fly, at whose word she would have to submit, whose command she gladly awaited and longed to obey.

I believe that thousands of people flit through their lives, sipping the honey, toying with the bright attractions around them, laughing at the sad entreaties of some poor devil who has been caught in the meshes of their magnetism; they may have been handsome or beautiful, and have floated through the world like brilliant comets, gazed at by all eyes with envy and admiration, leaving a trail behind them of sparkling episodes, till the fires have burnt low, and the body has grown weak, and the brain become dull, and they have passed over the horizon eventually unnoticed, obliterated atoms of nature, who had never learnt the meaning of the word "love," who had never known the only thing worth living for. And I say that at a moment's notice, when we least expect it, when we think our hearts are steeled against the attacks of Cupid, a form may meet us round the corner, may, as

it were, appear before us unexpectedly, to whom we must bow, for whom we must long, perhaps in vain, the love that we never dreamt of. Laugh, cynic; smile, critic—I could have joined you yesterday—but, remember, you may be caught yet.

I am not writing this in any apologetic vein; that I was a fool I know now, but I tell the truth; I tell it to show that mortal men can make idiots of themselves when they little think they are doing so. In the affairs of the heart, though, the woman is quicker than the man. She reads his thoughts, and disguises her own; it is a special privilege of nature. Once or twice during the midday meal I caught Hilda's eyes glancing furtively at me, as I sat silently and—I am bound to admit it—sulkily listening to the conversation.

Where was Fane? That was the absorbing topic of conversation. If he would only come we might lick these Indians yet, or frighten them into surrendering. But Captain Herbert was despondent.

"I fear," he said, "that even if the yacht is afloat and all right, and the skipper finds his way up the sound, Harper and his gang will murder them. They have tasted blood, and nothing will stop them now."

I saw a quick significant glance pass between Abe and Cooper as the old man spoke. "But Fane and his men will be armed," I said.

Captain Herbert shook his head. "I fear," he replied, "they will fall on them unawares."

It was later in the afternoon that Abe called me aside. "Boss," he said, "you saw me busy making rope ladders this morning. Now there's no use

making a fuss when womenfolk are in the camp, but I had a long talk with old Cooper this morning, and we came to the same conclusion Captain Herbert hinted at at dinner; and that is that Mr. Fane will be wiped out if ever he does get his boat up the sound. They'll just pretend to be peaceful, these skunks here"—Abe jerked his thumb towards the settlement—"and then take them by surprise; leastways, that's what Cooper thinks."

I saw the force of his argument. "Well, what can we do?" I asked.

"There is only one chance," continued Abe. "Cooper tells me that the river from the settlement to where it joins the sea, which is about a mile in length, flows very fast and deep, and that the Indians do not keep boats on it nor try to cross to the opposite bank. Their boats all lie in a bay at the head of the sound. Now just below the stockade here the river runs through a narrow rocky passage. But come and see my plans; you'll catch on to 'em better that way than by my talking."

I followed Abe up a rope ladder fixed on to the west side of the stockade, and from the top of it I at once formed an inkling of his scheme.

"You see," he said, "I've got the rope ladder down on to the rocks below here; then I can get along all right to that narrow part some thirty yards down. There, I've got a rope across. See?"

"How the deuce did you manage that?" I asked.

"Oh, that wasn't hard. I tied it round my waist; Cooper paid it away while I swam down and across. But look along the further shore. With the river as low as she now is, a man can easily get along the

shore; and two hundred yards down the gorge ends, and the country is open."

"I see all that; but what good is there in getting there?" I asked.

"If Mr. Fane does come," said Abe slowly, "I go that way to tell him."

Immediately the whole plan was before me; the river would be between him and the foe.

"But how will you reach the yacht?" I queried.

"Let me get somewhere abreast of her; that's all I want, supposing, that is," he added, "she ever comes."

I cannot remember whether it was two or three days that followed, but I know they were days of anxiety and suspense. I did not see a great deal of Abe. I think I avoided him. He spent the greater part of his time teaching Mary how to make rope ladders and tie knots; but it was when Hilda spoke to him that his face brightened up—at least, I thought so. One morning a noise woke me; I jumped up. Abe was sitting up in his bed listening; it came again—a low distant boom.

"By Jove, it's she! She's coming up!" ejaculated Abe.

Simultaneously we both leapt from our couches and rapidly pulled our garments on. Already footsteps were hurrying all over the house, and in another instant Joe knocked at our door.

"Yacht in the sound!" he cried excitedly.

"Right! I know," was Abe's reply, as he pulled his coat on and seized his cap and rifle. "See me over, boss," he cried; "there's no time to lose. Tell them my plan, and hold the stockade till I return. You

mustn't come and look for me. If I don't return, no matter; but you must not risk your life and theirs looking for me."

He was on the top of the stockade now.

"If I reach the yacht all right," he continued. "I'll get them to fire that cannon off just once at sundown." He paused and held out his hand. "Good-bye, Mr. Wellesley, and good luck!" And if the trivial actions of my life are worthy of notice in the book of judgment, it will be known that the grip I gave him then was the grasp of brotherhood and friendship. Petty jealousies were lost sight of, I am thankful to say, in the face of danger.

I watched him swing himself across the river and hurry along the opposite bank. At the end of the gorge he turned and waved his hand. Then over the bank he climbed, and disappeared.

CHAPTER XVI.

"We can Reckon with them another Time"

"FIRE that signal gun every five or ten minutes, please, Captain Hume." It was Tom Fane that spoke.

Three men stood on the bridge of the *Caledonia*, three men who looked anxious and worried. At the vessel's bow a seaman stood, constantly heaving the lead, while at quarter-speed the boat steamed slowly on.

"Are you sure, captain, this is Nootka Sound?" asked Fane.

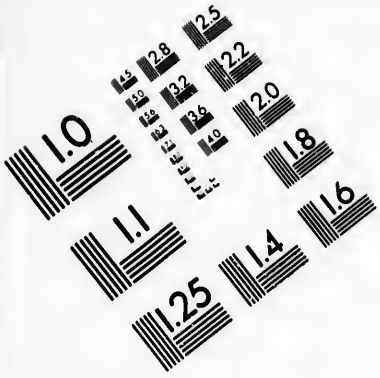
"As sure as mon can be of onything in these forsaken regions," replied Captain Hume; "leastways, it's by far the biggest inlet we've entered yet whativer."

"Supposing they have got through all right," continued Fane, "if they haven't come across game, their provisions cannot have held out."

Whitmore did not answer, and the captain was busy looking ahead through his binoculars.

"Domed if I don't see hooses!" he cried.

"Hooses? hooses? What on earth do you mean?" asked Whitmore.



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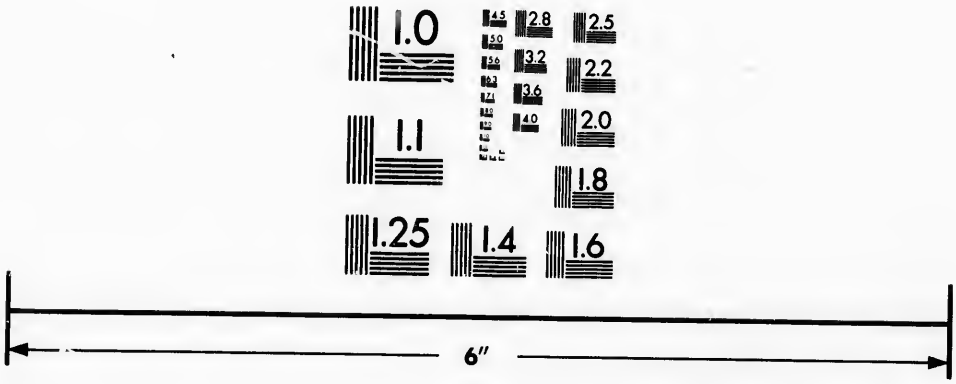

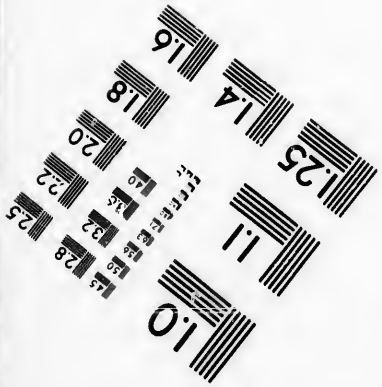

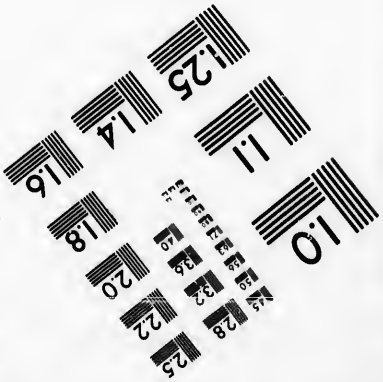

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"Houses," said Fane, as he dashed down to the cabin for his telescope.

There was no doubt about it; through the glasses the wooden huts of the settlement were distinctly visible.

Fane's mercurial temperament rose rapidly.

"They 'll be all right," he cried, "probably staying with the governor, and having a heigho time. What do you think, captain?"

Tom Fane always liked someone to qualify his statements, but the replies of the old Scotch skipper were invariably enveloped in native caution.

"I dinna ken," was his ambiguous and very correct reply.

"Well, I know you dinna ken," went on Fane; "but you can think."

"Ai, ai, Sir Thomas," said the captain, seeing that Fane was a little irritated; "but I have never heerd tell of ony folk living up here."

No more had anyone else; but this made it all the more exciting in Tom Fane's eyes.

And now as they rounded a bend Captain Herbert's yacht came into view, lying at anchor in the bay. Instantly all hands below crowded on deck. A modern-built yacht and houses in this outlandish part of the world—what did it mean? Boats lying on the beach were now distinctly visible to the naked eye; but the curious thing was, that though they had been constantly firing the signal gun, not a soul had appeared on the land. They were still speculating and wondering, and drawing nearer and nearer to the head of the sound, when the sharp crack of a rifle came from the shore about a quarter

of a mile on their left. Immediately all eyes were turned in the direction from whence the report proceeded, and there could be plainly seen the figure of a man waving his arms.

Fane turned the telescope on to him. "By all that's holy, it's Wilson," he cried. "Lower a boat, boys, quick!"

Two or three men sprang into the davits, whilst Fane waved his handkerchief in response.

As the yacht's boat touched the water Whitmore happened to look up the bay.

"Hi, Fane!" he cried as Tom was just going down the ladder; "see, there are two boats full of men rowing in the direction of Wilson all they know."

"Tak' ye revolvers, Sir Thomas," shouted Captain Hume; "I dinna like the look of it."

Whitmore dived into the cabin and quickly reappeared with a couple of revolvers.

"Let me come too," he shouted; "there's lots of room."

In another second the boat was pulling off for shore as fast as half-a-dozen British seamen could push her along.

"Stand in as near as you can, captain," cried Fane.

"A' reet, Sir Thomas," answered the skipper, as he put the wheel hard to port. "Send another man for'ard into the bow, Jenkins," he called to the first officer, "with another lead, and keep them going as fast as they can heave 'em."

The water had been shallowing steadily for some time, and though there was probably a deep passage

somewhere, it was of course unknown to Captain Hume.*

Abe had seen the two large boats filled with Indians shove off from the deep shadow beneath the trees which fringed the shore, where the river joined the salt water. He had correctly surmised the situation. The Indians would have waited for the men from the yacht to land and then have surrounded them or cut them off. The crack of his rifle had altered the whole situation, but the Indians saw through his ruse clearly, and immediately, with angry cries, they obeyed Harper's orders to shove off the two longboats and row across to where Wilson was standing. They would at least cut him off from the yacht. How he had crossed the river they could not tell, but he had crossed it; that was evident. They were experienced rowers, these Indians; in fact, fishing was about their one and only industry or pastime, and they did not need the exhortation of Harper, seated in the stern with his rifle in hand, to urge them to put their b into their work, for each one of them knew that if the man on the shore got on board the yacht it might mean the total reversal of their position.

Meanwhile Abe had hesitated. Should he run back and try to recross the river and reach the stockade? Fane would now surely see that the Indians were hostile, and would be on his guard against surprise. On the other hand, he would know nothing of the beleaguered garrison nor the position

* Now, at the time I am writing this story, that passage down the sound is marked by buoys, and at the corner at the bend of the bay is built a small lighthouse.

they were in. No, he would stop, anyhow as long as he could. And see! it is no such certainty after all but that the yacht's boat may reach the shore first. The Indians have seen her, and are sending their long sweeping blades through the water with all their might and with perfect regularity.

"D—n it! those beggars row well; but it's evident there is a row on, eh, Harry?" said Fane.

The sailors heard him, and with a loud cheer the man rowing stroke brought his oar through the green hissing sea, followed by the others. He was an Irishman, and a fine cheery fellow.

"Come on, bhoys," he cried; "let her go now."

Fane had got his field-glass fixed on the nearer boat, which was rowing direct towards Wilson; the other boat, the one, by-the-bye, that Harper was in, had branched off, taking a more direct course towards the shore. His plan was evidently to land as soon as he could; then the crew would run along the shore and would probably endeavour to cut Abe off.

"They've got some funny faces amongst them," said Fane. "Have a look, Harry, and see if you can make them out."

Whitmore took the glasses. "Why, they are Indians," he said after a short pause, "and their faces are painted."

"Painted!" echoed Fane; "and I believe they only paint when they go on the war-path."

"That's it, Sir Thomas," said one of the sailors.

"Well, then, Harry, load up and look out; there'll be some trouble shortly."

The position of Wilson and the two boats at this moment was that of a triangle, with a distance of

some three hundred yards between the extremities, or, in other words, Abe was about an equal distance of three hundred yards from the rival boats, and the boats were about three hundred yards apart from one another. At the same time, though, the second boat of the Indians was running on to the sands some way below, and the occupants were already jumping out and hauling her ashore. Abe had seated himself with his back against a bit of a tuft, his left knee drawn up, and his rifle ready. Restlessly his eyes ran from one boat to the other, and then to the men who, five hundred yards below, were already starting towards him at a run.

"I can do the boat lot, I guess," he said to himself; "but if these skunks on shore get up before I can turn her, or Fane's boys get here, I reckon I'm done."

It must be borne in mind that the Indians were unaware that Abe had a repeating rifle; they were unaware such things existed, nor did they know who the man was they had to deal with.

They had seen Harper and Walker and the others shoot off their muzzle-loaders, and sometimes hit the mark they fired at, and more frequently not. They did not even know as yet that this man had a rifle at all, and if he had, he would probably fire the two barrels harmlessly at them at too long a range, and before he could load again they would be on him. So they thought, and the triangle was reduced to two hundred yards between the points. The Indian boat was gaining slightly; men and weight were telling. The Indians on the shore,

running all they knew, were now only three hundred yards away. Fane, standing up in the stern, implored and cursed alternately; and the sweat poured from the sailors' faces as they strove to hold their own in an unequal struggle.

"Harry, you ass, why didn't you bring the rifles?" cried Fane in his excitement; "the rotten revolvers are no good at this distance."

Meanwhile the figure of the man on shore had never moved; only his restless eyes went with the rapidity of a cobra's from one group to the other. But now, see, the rifle has gone slowly up. For an instant it rested along his knee. Bang! whiz! crack! Bang! whiz! crack! And the men rowing the bow oars dropped forward, while the oars slipped helplessly through the rowlocks, impeding the other rowers. Two men in the stern jumped up and shouted and gesticulated. The rifle rang out again, and the two men in the stern fell lifeless.

With a loud yell of terror the men in the boat ceased rowing, and the boat listed away broadside on.

That was enough; Fane's boat must beat it now, even if they resumed. But the party on the shore were getting terribly near. Harper was wild with terror and anger, with, as a racing man would say, the greatest certainty of his life fading from his vision, for it was obvious to him that if this stranger got safely to the vessel his plans for starving out the garrison and surprising the crew of the yacht would be exploded, and, what was perhaps worse, his followers would lose heart. The fight of the other night had not filled them with any additional desire

to measure arms with the white men, and already discontent had begun to show itself.

It was this man's death now or his own eventually; thus he felt. And the greatest curs will fight when the situation is like this.

There were two cartridges yet left in Abe's magazine. There was no use firing again on the boat, she had retired from the contest; and there was no time to refill the magazine; in fact, there was little time for anything; the Indians were barely fifty yards from him. Hastily throwing up his rifle, he dropped two of the leading Indians, and, passing the strap over his shoulder, ran for the water.

Fane's boat was still sixty or seventy yards away, and the Indians but a few paces behind as he leapt in. He heard the cheers from the boat; he heard two barrels go off behind him, and some small things fizzed through the water each side of his head. And in another second or two he felt himself seized and lifted into the boat; but again the report of firearms came from the shore. One bullet whizzed over their heads, but the second hit the poor fellow rowing bow oar right between the shoulders, and he fell forward dead.

Mad with rage, Fane and Whitmore emptied their revolvers at the Indians, but beyond apparently wounding one of them, they did not appear to do much damage. And now the Indians seemed to have had enough. They did not like the ping of the revolver bullets; and not all the curses—at least, they sounded like curses—of Harper would get them to leap into the water and make a dash for Fane's boat. He yelled at the men in the other boat and

pointed to the yacht. Presumably he wanted them to cut Fane's boat off, but the men only shook their heads.

"Back her, Mr. Fane," cried Wilson, "and let 's get away from these dogs. We can reckon with them another time."

In a few minutes they had put a wide gap between their enemies and themselves, whilst Fane was showering questions at Abe.

CHAPTER XVII.

Mary's Sob was Forgotten

TO all within the stockade, with the exception of myself, the anxiety of this day was terribly depressing. It was evinced on each countenance, and when anyone spoke, the words were uttered in a low whisper, as though some dear friend had been suddenly taken away to the mysterious world beyond, or as though some great disaster was imminent.

Mary, with pale face and dejected bearing, wandered listlessly about as though watching for someone who was little likely to come. Hilda came and spoke to me sometimes, but I was sulky, and my replies were short; I even avoided her glance. Once, though, I caught her eyes as she raised them to my face, and I thought they seemed sad, even disappointed.

I have said all were depressed except myself. Hardly had Abe disappeared from view, and I was back again within the stockade, when the demon of jealousy returned, and though I struggled with all the will I was possessed of, it wrestled with my mind, it worried at my brain, till I was no longer myself, but once again a fool, an angry idiot.

I have no desire to gloss over my foolish behaviour at that time, nor to try and make excuses for my conduct. I hate myself more for my absurd stupidity than anyone else can ever hate me, and I wish no one to condole with me, but perhaps the reader may at some period of his or her career have been attacked by that demon with all the spite and fury he can command. If he or she has, never mind how far back in the past it be, never mind though the whole scene has changed and that other loves have crossed the threshold of his life or hers, that day when the demon of jealousy first seized him or her in its relentless grip will stand out the most conspicuous landmark in the valley where his life or hers was passed. And the spot there will be marked and remembered by the wild fury of the scene at the time, by the dreariness and desolation that followed.

I really do not believe at that time that I cared whether the Indians triumphed or not; I wanted to fight someone, anyone; I wished only to stand by Hilda, to hold my arm around her and to fight for her, to save her, and if it was not to be to perish with her, and Doré's picture of Paola and Francesca sailing through space to the eternal home of peace rose before my vision, and I gazed into the blue, cloudless ether, half expecting to see them sailing up.

The midday meal passed almost in silence. We had heard the faint report of firearms, and had augured ill of it. It was more likely to mean that Abe had been cut off and had to fight for his life than that Fane's party could have landed and driven the natives off. In the latter case, I thought in my own

mind—but I confess I thought but little on the matter—that there would have been more shooting heard. I may state here that we did not hear the revolver shots, the distance being too great.

In low tones the little party round the table discussed the possibilities of the situation, whilst I fed moodily on, my thoughts far away.

"What do you think of it, Mr. Wellesley?" Captain Herbert had addressed me. He had to repeat the question.

I believe I laughed; I was told so later. Silence fell, and I looked up to know the reason of it.

Every eye was on me; each face wore a distinct expression of displeasure. Mary looked pained and horrified. The blood rushed to my face; I stammered and begged Captain Herbert's pardon; I had been dreaming, and had not heard his remark aright. I mention this to show the sort of state of mind I was in.

It was later in the afternoon. I was wandering round the stockade aimlessly, taking little interest in the proceedings, when I heard a light step behind me that made my heart beat violently, and a hand rested on my shoulder.

"Mr. Wellesley!" I turned quickly. "Are you ill?" The grey eyes were gazing at me anxiously. "Tell me if I can do anything for you; you are not yourself."

I have often thought since how was it possible for any man to look into that face and speak harshly, nor have I ever been able to answer the question. I can only repeat what I said.

"Yes, Miss Hilda, I am ill, as ill as a man can be

who sees the woman that he loves cares for another man."

She dropped her hand from my shoulder; the colour mantled to her cheeks.

"I do not understand you." And her voice was altered.

But I had broken the ice, and I must take the plunge.

"Hilda," I continued, "from the first moment that I saw you I felt that you were the first and the last woman I could ever love. I know how short the time has been, but remember love knows nothing of and cares nothing for time; and hardly had I known it when I learnt that you could care nothing for me, nay, that you loved another."

The girl started back a step, and gazed curiously at me. I believe she thought I was a lunatic. "Who? What do you mean?"

I was in a tight place; I must fire my last shot. "I mean that you love Abe Wilson."

I have said somewhere before, or somebody else has, "that women are quicker in penetrating the affairs of the heart than men are." What the expression of my face was at that moment, I cannot tell, but I saw her eyes wander quickly from one of mine to the other, as though assuring herself of my sanity, and then a great look of pity came into them, and she gently approached me and put her hand on my arm.

"Mr. Wellesley," she said, "I admire your friend as much as everyone who knows him must do, but I do not love him, nor can I imagine why you should think so."

"What?" I exclaimed. "And——"

But she interrupted me. "Mr. Wellesley, this is surely not the time to talk of love when we are all in danger, and death staring us in the face."

But the joy within me was too great to be stifled by her quiet sensible words. "It is, Hilda, it is; say only—say that if we ever escape and are free, I may hope to win you."

She was silent a moment, and when she looked up the tears were welling up in those dear eyes. In another instant she was in my arms, but even then, when the wild throbbing of love convulsed my bosom, a pang of remorse came with it. I had inwardly quarrelled with the man who had saved my life, who had never said a harsh word even to me, and what right had I for doing so? He had as great a right to woo and win Hilda as I had. I could reason now with my arm round that lithe yielding waist, but, alas! when love beckons, men will be blind and impossible. And then I wondered had he noticed my altered manner, and how I hoped he had not. Yet the others had; Hilda had; it was that that made her speak to me, and ask if I were ill. And now I asked her if anyone had noticed anything strange about me.

She hesitated a moment, and her eyes fell. "They thought you odd at dinner, and it was then I determined to ask you on the first opportunity I had what was the matter with you."

"And now you know, darling, will you forgive me? I know I was a brute; I see it all now."

Coyly she raised her eyes, and the look in them was enough. In another second she had slipped

from my grasp. "Go to father," she said, "and cheer him up; there may be hard and terrible work before you yet." But there was a look in those eyes as she spoke, a look that spoke as plainly as any word: "This is not the time to talk of these things, but wait."

I found the old man on the verandah, pacing restlessly to and fro, while, through a pair of binoculars, Cooper was gazing towards the settlement. I instantly began by asserting that in my belief Abe had reached the yacht safely.

"Bless you, Mr. Herbert," I cried, "he's too smart for those niggers, and even if the yacht's crew did not reach the shore in time to render aid, he can swim like a duck——"

Ted Cooper intervened. "The Indians' boats go faster than any man can swim."

Still everything now appeared rosy to me. If I were to die I could do it now more happily, more contentedly, than ever before. Anyhow, I cheered them up, and pointed out that supposing the worst had happened, and Abe had been killed, at least the men on the yacht had been warned of the hostile attitude of the Indians.

I borrowed a Winchester repeater from Joe, and then went and found Hilda and suggested to her the advisability of her loading for me, supposing the Indians tried another attack on the stockade.

"I can fire the express first, and then hand it to you, while you can have the Winchester ready to pass back," I said. I had two reasons for suggesting this; one was that I would be able to get more shots in before they could get to close quarters, and the other

that I could have Hilda beside me and so be better able to protect her.

"It 's my opinion," said Cooper, "the final act will be played within a very few hours. If Wilson has reached the yacht, the Indians will never allow the crew to get here without a hard fight, but it 's my belief they will either lay in wait for the yacht's crew landing, or attack us, which I cannot tell."

I was bound to admit that Cooper's prophecy sounded probable.

"Then," said Captain Herbert, "let us fill up the flarers, and portion arms and ammunition out; we mustn't be caught asleep."

Joe had been busy instructing the two Indians who had come in the previous night in the use of the Winchester. I had passed them once or twice on the north portion of the stockade, very busy loading, and aiming, and snapping, and had stayed a moment to watch them, and I candidly confess I thought they were much more likely to shoot us than any of the enemy.

It is an odd thing how awkward a man not only is, but looks, when first he essays to handle gun or rifle. Still Joe was striving all he could to initiate them into the Winchester's very simple mysteries, and we could but hope for the best.

Mary, though, was the puzzle I vainly endeavoured to make out. Her appearance was dejected; she kept apart from the others; me in particular she seemed to avoid. I felt hurt and sorry; I knew my manner had been brusque, and I wanted to apologize, but somehow she would not give me the opportunity. Hilda was with her, constantly

trying to cheer her up, but it was not till Captain Herbert gave the order for the flarers to be filled full up that she showed any disposition for work of any kind. But as soon as her father gave that order, she started off with an alacrity that astonished me.

Everything had been done now that we could think of to guard against being surprised; even the girls went about with their revolvers loaded and stuck in their belts.

And now the shadows of evening began to creep up and grow across the valley. Captain Herbert, his daughters, Cooper, and myself stood on the verandah watching the light fade and die out, waiting for the promised signal. The stillness had appeared to grow intense. Was it only the natural stillness that came upon the earth with the last faint flicker of evening, or was it that our nerves were strained to such a tension that we could not speak aloud, and caught our breath in short, sharp, silent gasps? My efforts at cheerfulness had long since fallen flat, and now I could not by any possibility have aroused them. Each knew that at any moment the signal must come, which would proclaim Abe's safety. If not, then he must probably be dead, and the Indians between us and the yacht and safety.

The valley was in deep shadow now; only on the higher portions of the ridge, in the direction of the signal spot, hung a few last touches of light. They grew dimmer and duller, and I felt a strange despair creeping over me. And then came a heart-broken sob that made us all start,

a sob of misery that must have touched the heart of any man. Yet no one spoke. It was Mary. We all looked round quickly. She was standing at the back of the verandah, with her head sunk between her hands. Whether anyone would have spoken, what anyone would have done, I know not, for almost immediately there followed, loud and distinct, the boom of the signal gun. Never in the whole annals of the world's history has the sound of a cannon brought to the ears of those who heard it such blessed feelings of relief and of hope; never has any noise so quickly revulsed the feelings of those who heard it. I took my hat off and waved it and cheered, and I think they all followed suit, and Mary's sob was forgotten.

CHAPTER XVIII.

Dead Silence on the Lifeboat

"WHAT do you propose doing, Wilson?" Thus Tom Fane addressed Abe in the cabin of the yacht. The signal gun had just been fired to tell the party in the garrison that Abe had reached the yacht. The lights in the cabin were being lit, and Fane was pacing up and down in a state of feverish excitement as Abe concluded the story of our adventure.

"I hardly know what to propose," answered Abe slowly. "If we land at the head of the bay and try to go up on the east side of the river, we shall have to pass through the settlement, which would mean fighting our way through; and if we were to try and make a bit of a detour and get round the settlement, the lay of the land is unknown to me. Besides, from what I have seen of it, there's a deal of timber all to the south, and those Siwashes" —he referred to the Indians—"would be certain to spot us and cut us off."

They talked long and vehemently, and meanwhile Captain Hume and Whitmore were busy serving out revolvers and cutlasses to the men, for, as Abe said, "any moment they might be needed."

It was a fortunate thing that Tom Fane had come

provided with plenty of arms and ammunition. I verily believe that whenever he went on a cruise he expected to fight some savage tribe or meet with pirates; in fact, I think he started with that idea, and now his dream was about to be realized, and he was in his element.

Still Abe and he could not determine on what course to pursue. Fane was all for going straight through the settlement up to the stockade. "They'll never stand and face us if we only keep together and empty the revolvers on them when they get within range. It will be one charge, Wilson, and all will be over. They'll just run like hares."

Abe shook his head. "You might lose a lot of men, Mr. Fane." Abe was for returning the way he had come and crossing the river by the rope. Of course, if the Indians caught sight of them and intercepted them or followed them, the Indians would have to be defeated and driven off before the rescue party could commence hauling themselves one after another across the narrow neck of river by the rope. Still the enemy would not, in this case, be so likely to take them unawares or throw spears at them from doorways and windows or attack them suddenly from round corners.

But this sounded too tedious and difficult to Fane. Captain Hume had been called in, but he was too diplomatic to oppose his master's scheme; to his mind also it sounded as good as the other. He had a poor opinion of Indian courage from what he had read of their prowess, and he thought that they would quickly make themselves scarce when the revolvers opened on them.

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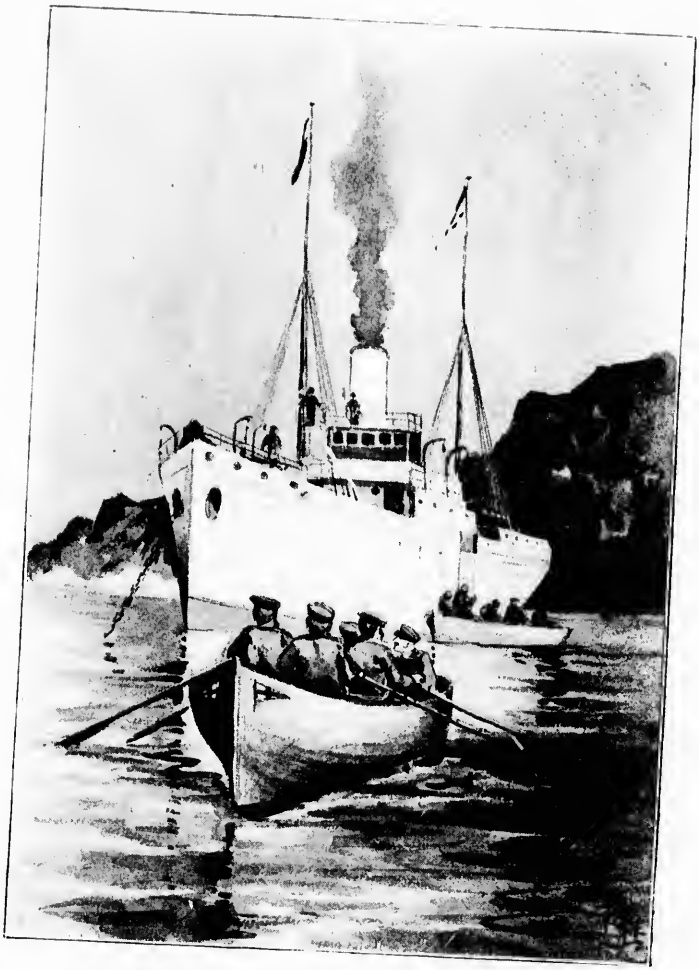

THE BOATS WERE LOWERED AS QUICKLY AS POSSIBLE.

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One point they were agreed on, and this was that a relief party must start at the first streak of dawn. The steward had come in to lay the table for supper, and the question of procedure was still being warmly debated, when suddenly two shots rang out in rapid succession, and echoed away among the hills.

Abe jumped up. "Come on, sir," he cried. "There is no time to lose; the blacks are attacking the stockade."

Instantly all was excitement and confusion.

"How many men can you spare, Captain Hume?" Abe spoke rapidly.

"Some half-dozen of us should hold the ship a'reet?" The skipper looked inquiringly at Abe as he spoke.

"Yes; you five men and the steward will hold the ship all right. How many will that leave us?"

"Just a score," said the skipper.

"Well," continued Abe, "send us off without delay; every moment is precious."

It was odd to note how Tom Fane left the directions and command at once to Abe; and yet it must be borne in mind that it was now night, and Abe alone knew the way to the stockade. Probably Fane saw this at once, and knew—for he was a sensible man—that to argue or suggest was to waste valuable time.

"Get on the bridge, captain," he cried as Abe finished speaking, "and order the boats to be lowered and the men ready as quickly as possible."

Left alone in the cabin, Abe laid his rifle somewhat hesitatingly on the table, like a woman may leave some old love-charm at the pawnbroker's with

the doubtful and sad reflection she may never take it up again. Once he took it up, but instantly laid it down again sharply.

"Lend me a couple of revolvers and a cutlass, Mr Fane. She'll be no use to me here," and he looked tenderly at the rifle on the table.

Fane at once darted away to fetch the weapons. In the few minutes that remained Abe sketched his plans to Fane.

"We'll just row right away to somewhere near where you picked me up this morning, and then, keeping together, run for the gorge."

"All ready, sir," cried a voice from the hatchway.

Fane turned to go.

"One moment, Mr. Fane. There may be fighting before we reach the gorge, and I may fall. Listen; some three-quarters of a mile is the length of the plain from where you picked me up this morning, and there a precipitous rock rises upright at the water's edge. You couldn't pass it in high water, but now there's about a yard of shingle running between the river and the rock; you can't miss it if you keep the river brink; twenty yards further are some flat rocks, and where the river runs narrower a rope is fixed across. Tell them to keep their ammunition as dry as possible, and to swing across it one after the other. If we're hard pressed, I shall wait back there, so when the last man is over fire your revolver; it will be a signal to me." Fane nodded. "One word more. On the further side of the bank is also almost a wall, and a few yards on right down from the stockade hangs the rope ladder. Get up it as quick as you can, but don't

allow more than two on the ladder at a time, for fear of the ropes parting."

"Right!" cried Fane. "I follow you. Come on."

"Tell 'em to make as little noise as possible," said Abe, following him closely; "it will only tell the Indians."

Fane saw the force of this. "Silence, lads, if you please!" he cried in a low voice to the men anxiously waiting in the boats; "we don't want the Indians to know all about us *yet*. Captain Hume, if any boats come alongside, the password is 'Nootka.' Understand?"

"Ay, ay!" cried the captain from the bridge—"'Nootka.'"

A wave of the hand to the skipper, dimly discernible on the bridge, and the boats shot out of sight.

For a long time the steady swing of the oars was audible to the skipper on the bridge, while an occasional shot from the direction of the stockade told that the enemy were there, and, alas! both these sounds were also audible to a band of Indians sneaking along the sea-shore in the direction whence the boats were coming. The fact is, Harper had planned a ruse. He had had a long talk with the tribe, had told them that it was little likely that many of the sailors could be armed with rifles and pistols; he had shown them that to retreat now and sue for peace would only mean death; and then he put his plan before them. Half a dozen men with the four muzzle-loading rifles were to proceed to the stockade, and from cover of the darkness fire at the stockade at intervals and from different quarters. This would most likely draw forth the fire from

those within. Then the men on the yacht, thinking the White Chief was in danger, would hasten to his assistance, and he and the rest of the braves would await them.

The Indians listened to him almost breathlessly. Many of them had been wavering, and most of them wished they had never embarked on this revolution, and had begun to ask themselves what good was to be got by it; but they knew the White Chief to be a stern man of justice, and when Harper pointed out to them that their only chance of life was victory, and showed them the simplicity of his scheme and the apparent certainty of its success, they hesitated no longer, but willingly agreed to stand by him.

Harper accordingly handed his rifle to one of the half-dozen men told off to engage the stockade; a couple of spears would be his weapons; then he sent off sentries to patrol the sea-shore, and the instant they heard the boats coming to run in and warn him while he waited with the other braves on the shore, at the mouth of the river, ready to meet the yacht's crew wherever they might land.

"There 's too little firing going on up at the stockade, and I 've not heard a revolver shot at all. We should hear them with the wind off the land," said Abe.

"What do you make of that?" asked Fane.

"Can't quite make it out; but I 've not heard Mr. Wellesley's 'express' nor yet the Winchesters; those shots all come from the old muzzle-loaders Captain Hewlett portioned out to the Indians."

I may here explain, for the benefit of those uninitiated in the use of firearms, that the report of the

three different weapons just alluded to would differ in every case. The Winchester would be short and sharp, the muzzle-loader louder, and the express loudest and heaviest of all.

Abe's practised ear instantly detected this, and the fact shot through his mind they were not replying from the stockade, consequently the Indians were holding aloof.

Abe and Tom Fane were seated together in the stern. Suddenly Abe turned and whispered in the other's ear, "Stop the boats, sir, stop the boats. It's my belief we are going straight into a trap."

Fane turned in evident surprise. "What do you mean?"

"Stop the boats; I 'll explain."

Reluctantly Fane gave the order to cease rowing. "Well, what is it?" he asked.

"That garrison is in no immediate danger," continued Abe. "The shots we hear are being fired by Indians at a safe distance; they are merely trying to draw us out, Mr. Fane, and when we land we will find a hundred or more of the devils armed with spears, and short work they 'll make of the lot of us."

Fane started; he saw the force of Abe's reasoning. "What shall we do, then?"

"Get back to the ship as fast as you can; I have a plan, I will explain on the way, and I think we may do the double on them yet."

Fane gave the order to return, an order which was received with low grumbles from the men, with very audible ones from Whitmore, seated in the st n of the second boat.

"Harry, don't be a d——d fool!" called Fane angrily. "Do you think that Wilson and myself are cowards? Give way, men," he continued; "we shall be in the stockade to-night, never fear."

His words had at once a salutary effect. The men knew that both their master and Wilson were not the men to turn back, unless for some strong reason, and at once they put their backs to their work with a will.

As they rapidly retraced their way to the yacht the lights aboard made her appear nearer than in reality she was. Abe whispered quickly his ideas to Fane. They were within a hundred yards of the yacht when he ceased speaking.

"By gad, I believe you 're right, Wilson, and we 'll do it."

"Who goes there?" cried a voice from the yacht.

"Friend," shouted Fane.

"Out with the password, then!"

"Nootka!" cried Fane.

"Come alongside," replied Captain Hume from the ship; "but, by the soul of the piper, I thought it was the Indians that had eluded ye."

"Now, then, lads," cried Fane, as he scrambled up the ladder, "make the boats fast and come aboard. I 'll unfold our plans."

He explained how Wilson was of opinion that the firing was merely a ruse on the part of the Indians to draw them out.

"Now," he added, "I will tell you what we intend doing. Mr. Jenkins will take five men with him in the small boat and row back the course we have just come; when within a hundred yards of the

shore he will put about and row along the coast to the westward, looking as it were for a suitable landing-place. If Mr. Wilson's surmises are correct, the Indians will sneak along the shore, probably hidden from sight, ready to pounce on him should he land. It is hardly necessary to say he must not land, but try and keep them following, and draw them away as far as he can, then return to the yacht. Do you follow me, Jenkins?"

"Ay, ay, sir."

"The rest of us will get into the lifeboat—she will easily hold us—set sail, and head for a little above the mouth of the river. We shan't have to do any tacking with the breeze in this quarter?" He turned inquiringly to Captain Hume.

"No, sir, I think she 'll make it a' reet."

"Then we will run her on to the sands, jump out, and hurry along the side of the river; the rest should be easy, providing Jenkins can lure the Indians away. I must ask you to keep dead silence on the lifeboat—sound, as you know, travels far across water, but they have smart ears if they hear the sail."

While the sail was being rigged in the lifeboat Fane ordered the steward to serve some grog round to the men, and he and Abe went below to the cabin. In a few minutes came a knock.

"Come in," cried Fane.

Whitmore entered; he looked somewhat sheepish and abashed.

"I have come, Sir Thomas, to apologize. I ought not to have spoken. I can only say it was the disappointment of the thing at the time, but that is no excuse. I was an ass."

He looked up; Tom Fane was laughing, and Abe's face wore a strange expression of amazed wonder.

"I am glad you've spoken, Harry," said Fane; "and I did not mean to hurt your feelings, but we must have discipline in times like these."

"Quite right, sir," replied the lad, as he took the proffered hand.

CHAPTER XIX.

"You here, Boss?"

THE proceedings of Harper and the tribe I gathered later. It seems that when the scouts, posted along the shore, heard the boats coming, they at once rushed off to apprise Harper of the fact, but whilst they were hurrying off to the mouth of the river to report the news, the boats from the yacht had been stopped, and had turned back without their knowing aught about it; and so it happened that when Harper and his bloodthirsty gang came hurrying along the shore not a sound from the water was audible. The lights on the vessel shone clear and distinct some half-mile from the shore.

"Had they landed?" Harper spoke in the native dialect, and spoke sharply.

"They could not have reached here in the time," replied the scout.

"Then you must have scared them," retorted Harper angrily; but even as he spoke there came the distinct throb of the oars.

"They come!"

But Harper need not have uttered the exclamation; the alert ears of the Indians had instantly detected the sound. The boat drew nearer.

"You said there were two boats," whispered Harper to the scout.

"There were two," was the answer.

"Perhaps something went wrong with one of them —a leak or something—and that is why they put back." So Harper mused, but he was not at all satisfied in his mind. It was odd that two boats should have started and apparently returned, and now only one was coming.

A half-moon had been up some time, giving, though, only fitful gleams of light, owing to some heavy clouds that were passing across the face at the back of a north-westerly breeze.

"They are coming in above us," whispered Harper; "let us move up."

The word was passed down, and noiselessly the Indians crept along in the shadow of the low coast-line. The boat stopped, and a voice was heard saying—

"Steady, lads! I don't know that we can land here. There might be rocks; anyhow it's risky. I think I saw an inlet a little to the westward. Just paddle on easy."

Jenkins' voice was as steady as a rock, but I doubt me if his nerves were. He told me afterwards that owing to the deep shadow thrown from the ridge of the coast, it was impossible to tell how far or how near he was from the shore. Several times, too, he thought he heard pebbles clattering about, apparently close by; and so he said to me, in his forcible way, "Dem me, sir, I believe I smelt 'em."

Anyhow, he stood in the stern with a revolver in each hand, giving his orders quickly and clearly, yet

fearing each second to see some dusky figures dash into the water on top of them.

But now a sound became very audible—a sound which filled Jenkins and the occupants of the boat with relief, as any sound does when a man is playing hide-and-seek with a foe in the dark. It was the noise as of one running; and as the moon shone out the men in the boat distinctly saw a figure running with all his might along the top of the bank, and now he shouted. There was an angry, hoarse answer from beneath the bank opposite to them, a muttered confab, and then with fierce and angry exclamations they saw a swarm of human figures dimly top the ridge and disappear on the further side.

Jenkins saw it all. "Ha! ha! ha!" he shouted; "ha! ha! ha! Sold again, you black-headed sons of Satan!" And then, more as a warning to the others than for any other reason, he discharged two shots from his revolver in the direction of the Indians.

It appears that the wily Harper had left some scouts to guard, as it were, his rear in case any cutting-off tactics were resorted to, but the lifeboat, filled with a silent crew and propelled by a noiseless sail, ran right on to the shingle before the scout was aware of her presence; but Abe's quick eye detected a figure running along the bank.

"Quick, boys!" he cried. "We 're spotted."

In the twinkling of an eye each man had jumped into the water up to his waist; they shoved the lightened boat a few yards further in; someone seized a light, triangular anchor or grappling attached to a length of cord, and stuck it in the shingle to hold

the boat if the tide rose and floated her. And, headed by Abe, they rushed for the ridge and the flat beyond.

For a quarter of an hour they hurried on, and the dark line of the river grew dimly visible, while before them, in the occasional intervals when the moon deigned to appear, rose the dark solid mass of rock that marked the approach to the gorge.

They were within two hundred yards of it, a straggling, panting body of men, Abe leading them at a sharp run, when, as the moon burst out from a great black cloud, he turned and looked back over the plain to his left, and the shadowy outlines of men running were there.

"Come on, lads; they are close behind us," cried Abe. "Mr. Fane!" he added.

"Yes."

"Don't wait for me. I can hold the gorge. Fire your revolver when the last man is across. Follow me," he called. And in another instant he leapt from the sward on to the shingle, and, turning round the rock, he halted. "Hurry on, boys!" he cried. "Mr. Fane, the rope is just ahead of you in the narrowest part; fire when the last man is over."

There was no answer. One after another they jumped on to the shingle and hurried past. Two or three figures had crossed the river, and were waiting to give their comrades a hand when a quick step sprang upon the shingle.

Abe had drawn his cutlass, and with set teeth he waited under the shadow of the rock. I do not think the Indian felt anything. Abe was not the man to give people unnecessary pain, nor do I

believe he was drowned, although I saw the body roll into the river. Anyhow, he made no remarks on the matter whatever.

I say I saw him. Yes; for no longer was there any silence. Tom Fane's men were shouting at one another, and pulling and hauling at the rope, and I reached the top of the stockade to see half the number on the rocks one side of the river and half yet the other; and the same moment that my eye saw this it caught sight of the form rolling down the shingly beach into the river. As I watched it, bewildered, astounded, another form rolled over in precisely the same manner, and while I was wondering what it meant, a yell came from the entrance to the gorge, a cry of fury, and I saw how the whole thing stood. They could only pass one by one, and someone was waiting there. And now I think I lost my senses; in this way I stood on the stockade where the rope ladder hung down to the rocks beneath, and I shouted and halloaed. "Come on, Tom! come on, Abe!" And within the stockade rose the cheers of our little garrison. Already a sailor was on the ladder; he reached the top. I seized his hand and hauled him up. "Over, my lad," I cried, "and welcome!"

A hand-grip, and he leapt into the stockade, and another followed. Fane was the last man to come across; the moon was out now, throwing a bright light on to the rocks below. I saw his arm go up, and the report of his revolver echoed down the gorge. And then a tall form darted out from the shadow at the entrance of the gorge and raced for the rope, but a few yards behind came an Indian, and another, and

another. In his right hand the man held a cutlass, and I saw him literally jump for the rope; there was no time to feel for it. At the same moment the clang of a spear as it struck the rock was distinctly audible. Abe—for it was he—had seized the rope all right, and now he was clambering up the rock our side. Fane had waited for him; a shot from his revolver, and the Indian following on close behind let go of the rope, and drifted down the river. A blow from Abe's cutlass, and the rope parted, and two dark forms swung into the shadow on the further side.

And now a yell of rage rose from the Indians. Rapidly clustering on the rocks beyond, I saw their arms go up, and then a shower of spears went hurtling through the air over the narrow chasm. I saw Abe drop, and Tom Fane put his arm round him and draw him back.

"Good God! He's hit!" I cried. But nearly all the others had gathered on the stockade, and anxiously and excitedly were watching the scene below.

It may be asked, why did we not shoot? But it must be remembered that in that imperfect light, when the sights of the rifles were entirely obscured, we were as likely to hit friends as foes. Fane had drawn Wilson a little back; it was safe now; already Cooper had put up his Winchester; there was no need to give any word of command, and the situation was clear to all; and in a second, before they could throw again, Winchester, revolvers, and my express were discharged in the direction of the black group stationed on the further rocks.

What damage we did I hardly know, but it was considerable. With loud yells the Indians scurried back into the shadow of the bank, leaving three figures lying motionless on the rocks.

"One at a time," I cried as I hurried down the rope ladder.

Abe was lying back in Fane's arms with closed eyes, breathing heavily. When I came upon them a few moments later I knelt down and took his hand, but I could not speak; I feared the worst; and I gazed inquiringly up at Tom Fane, but he did not answer; he only shook his head mournfully.

And now the grey eyes opened slowly as though he were waking from a long sleep, and they wandered about for a time till, at length, they rested on mine, and then a look of recognition came into them, and I felt the pressure of my grip returned.

"You here, boss?"

"Yes, Abe; I'm here, but tell me quick, where are you hit?"

"Don't mind me, boss; you just get out as best you can. I'm done, I guess. But I reckoned on it all the while."

The eyes closed, and he seemed to dream away again.

"Let us get him into the stockade, Tom. Time may be precious," I whispered.

There were willing hands enough, and soon we had a chair lowered with ropes attached alongside the rope ladder. We tied him in, and gently they hauled him up, whilst I kept beside him on the ladder, to prevent the chair bumping against the rocks.

He was unconscious when they carried him, and I

heard a woman sob as the light from the porch fell on his features. I turned quickly, and saw that it was Mary, but her face was hidden in her hands. I did not pass in with them; I could be of no use. Captain Herbert knew more of doctoring than any of us; if Abe were beyond his skill, then he was beyond ours.

And now a great feeling of bitterness came upon me. In the hour of triumph, at the moment of victory, the man I had foolishly wronged, the man I had set my heart on making amends to, was struck down. I paced to and fro outside the house with many conflicting emotions rushing through my mind. Was there anything to be done? Surely something could be done. When should I know?

The door opened, and Hilda came out; her face looked very sad and pale. I did not speak, but I presume my face wore an anxious, inquiring expression.

"Father says it is very serious; a spear has pierced his lungs——"

"Did he say anything could be done?" I interrupted.

Hilda shook her head.

I asked the question more for something to say than for any other reason, for I knew well that beyond endeavouring to stop the external hemorrhage mortal man was powerless.

And oh, how small it makes us feel, how weak and inferior, when in the hour of strength and vigour we see the friend by our side cut down, and at a moment's notice rendered limp and silent for ever. At times like these we hardly realize the situation; we feel that it is unreal, that somebody is trifling with our intel-

ligence, that it is impossible; but when we keep on calling, and there is no reply, when the form lies huddled up, and will not move nor answer, gradually the terrible suspicion dawns upon us, that the spirit has flown for ever. And even then it takes days and weeks, and ay, sometimes months and years, before the fact is acknowledged by us. We awake in the morning with his name upon our lips, we expect the door to open and to see the old familiar face, but as the minutes pass and no one comes, gradually we remember—we know it was a dream. We know by the cold grey light of morning that we are on the earth; we must rise and go forth, a bee in the great human hive, to toil and struggle for the honey of existence. But whilst the body slept the spirit had been elsewhere, it had travelled in a beautiful country, it had seen lovely sights, it had heard glorious melody, or perchance it was *vice versâ*, and the country had been barren, the sights dismal, and the sounds harsh and discordant. Yet old figures and faces had been there, sometimes the comrades of our youthful days, sometimes the curs.

CHAPTER XX.

"... *to say Good-bye*"

THE news had spread quickly that Abe was sinking. Within and without the house the men were gathered in little groups whispering. I do not believe that the usually assiduous Joe had as yet bestowed a thought as to how all the new-comers were to be housed. Some food had been placed on the table in the big room at the rear of the building where Captain Herbert had been in the habit of entertaining the head men of the tribe after some function. This apartment was known to all members of the household as the servants' hall.

The sailors had gradually found their way there, had quietly helped themselves to what they required, and then rejoined their comrades.

Hilda had persuaded me to go inside. "You will be thoroughly tired out if you walk up and down outside all night," she said.

In the sitting-room we found Tom Fane, Whitmore, and Cooper. Tom rose as I entered. "Charlie," he said, "this is the cruellest luck I ever heard of. We had all really, though we did not say it aloud, given you up for lost, and I suppose you had thought the same of us, and then at the moment of our meeting,

just as we have outwitted these cussed niggers, poor Abe Wilson is struck down."

I did not answer. The early notions that had been imbued in me of a kindly divine interference in earthly matters had received so many shocks ever since I was able to think for myself, that I candidly confess I had little belief in it; perhaps this was the crowning blow.

Joe had come in to say he had made up beds for Fane and Whitmore. The latter we persuaded to turn in; the lad was pretty well tired out, and could do no good sitting up. But Fane steadfastly refused to go to bed.

"A chair here will do me, Charlie. I shan't turn in till I know the worst of Abe."

How long we two—for Hilda left us soon after Whitmore—sat in the silent room I know not. I had never noticed that the clock on the mantelshelf ticked so loud before, and now I wondered anyone could stand it, it made so much noise.

Tom's head was nodding in the arm-chair by the fading fire, and my thoughts had carried me back to the grand hills and wide undulating valleys of Wyoming, and a day that I remembered well came before me. Abe and I had left camp early one morning, and what a cold, wretched morning it was! The water left in the pail from the night before was frozen solid, and Abe had to cut the meat from the leg of a blacktail deer hanging on the tree with the axe, and I minded how reluctant I was to crawl from my cosy warm fur bag, sleepy as I still was after a long day's sport, but Abe would have it. The truth was, we had seen the evening before as we were

returning to camp, far away in the distance, a vast herd of something. It was too far for Abe's binoculars to tell, and through my more powerful telescope we could only make out a herd of several hundred animals feeding slowly on. I said antelope—for we could make out no horns—but Abe said elk (wapiti); he insisted they carried too much throat for antelopes, and whilst we were still arguing the matter, and passing and repassing the telescope, the light faded over the plain below, and everything became obscured.

Hurriedly we jumped up and on to our horses and made for camp, determined to try and solve the matter the following day.

"Now then, boss, hurry up! Breakfast is ready."

Two or three drinks of coffee chased the cobwebs from my eyes. I was as keen and as ready to be off as Abe; the spare man had been gone some time for the horses, and before I had finished breakfast we heard him coming down the gulch. But then occurred a most annoying thing. The morning was grey and dull; still it was early, and we expected it to clear, when all of a sudden, just as we were ready and preparing to mount the horses, the mist rolled upon us, obliterating everything at a distance of a dozen paces. It was particularly disappointing, because if the band we had seen the previous evening were wapiti it was the very game we were in search of. I had got bear and sheep, but only a small bull wapiti had we seen as yet.

The language that we used might have caused some diversion in a London fog, but it had no effect upon a Wyoming mist. For an hour we sat

round the fire, freezing on one side and roasting on the other, but the mist held on as dense as ever.

I jumped up. "Hang it all, Abe! we can't sit here all day. Let's follow the stream down; we may get a shot at a deer coming down to drink, and we can always find our way back again if we stick to the stream."

Abe did not seem very keen on this, but I pressed him, and at length he consented to go. There was no question of riding; we must tramp it. We trudged on for about an hour, and had gone perhaps a couple of miles, when suddenly a bright gleam shone through the mist in front of us, and in another instant the ground below us lay clear and distinct far as the eye could reach.

It was a phenomenon I had never seen before nor since in such remarkable abruptness, although it is easily accounted for. We must have been camped high in the mountains, and as the day grew the heat of the sun drew forth a vapoury mist from the snow that had fallen in the night; at least I always accounted for it in this manner.

As soon as we found we could see the country before us we left the stream and struck off to our left, making for the edge of the plateau some four miles distant. It was from here we had seen the herd of animals on the previous evening.

It was yet cold and very still, with a good sprinkling of snow on the ground, when we reached the ridge which commanded a view of the vast plain below us. Even as we gazed there broke upon my view the grandest scene of its kind that I shall probably ever see. We stood, as it were, on the

edge of a grey, frozen country, when suddenly the sun burst out, and before us, far as the eye could reach, lay a beautiful green undulating plain, whilst dotted all over it, seemingly everywhere, were groups of cattle, wapiti, and buffalo.

Far away, glinting in the morning sun, lay a low line of red buttes or sandhills that fringed the plain. We were on the Pacific side of the Rockies, but where I know not.

For some minutes I did not speak. I pulled forth my telescope and Abe his binoculars, and together we feasted our eyes on the glorious view. I watched the baby buffalo and the great big, shaggy bulls ; I saw the short-horned cows with their calves grazing almost alongside of them, and then I turned my glass upon a band of wapiti. They were lying down, ten or a dozen cows and one splendid bull. What horns he had! I counted fourteen points distinctly through the glass, and as I watched him, my heart beating high, I heard a shrill whistle, a whistle once heard never to be forgotten, and I saw the big bull rise and answer. I saw him look in a certain direction, and I turned to see the cause—a big, one-horned fellow was slowly approaching. The cows never seemed to take any interest in the proceedings—ladies, please learn a lesson—but the big bull looked very angry. With head thrown back he went for his would-be rival at a steady trot. A few yards from one another, and both lowered their heads and charged. We heard the crash of their horns distinctly in that clear atmosphere. For a minute or two they fought desperately, sometimes receding a few yards and then charging furiously, and trying to press one another

back, and then, just as they had separated for another charge, the one-horned bull suddenly turned tail and trotted off towards the cañon.

The big victor did not pursue him; he was apparently quite satisfied, and with a dignified air he slowly walked back to the group of cows, who had never even risen to view the contest.

I have said the cañon; and here the trouble was, for right below us and winding across the plain ran a deep, narrow gorge, or cañon. The edges were fringed with pine trees, and it appeared to be densely wooded, but to reach the wapiti we must cross it. I looked inquiringly at Abe, and he in turn looked at his watch, and then at the sun, and then at the country around him, a most superfluous waste of time, I thought.

"You mean to have a go, boss?"

"Of course," I said.

Again he looked at his watch. "Well, come on."

I will hasten over our stalk. We got across the cañon, but it was a long and arduous task. We had to drop twelve or fourteen feet sheer down on to loose, crumbling earth, and pick our way carefully to the bottom, where ran a small stream. On the further side we found numerous paths made, either by bear or wapiti, and by keeping to one of them we at last reached the top of the further side.

And now we found that the plain which looked so flat from above was hillocky and undulating, the very ground to cheer a stalker's heart. The thing to avoid was tumbling on to the top of our quarry, but by cautiously proceeding and peeping over every knoll before going on we reached the place where we had

seen them in the morning; but they had moved, and my spirits sank. Still there were wapiti enough about; we could hear them whistling to our right and behind us in the direction of the cañon.

Now Abe stopped and pointed to some tracks. "Quite fresh," he whispered. And a few minutes later, on poking our noses over a knoll, Abe stopped dead and held his hand out; then he beckoned me up. What a sight I saw! Slowly over the next ridge, a couple of hundred yards away, a cow wapiti was moving, and below her, quietly feeding on, were a herd of a hundred or more. The big bull was there, I recognized him at once, and some distance behind were two other fine bulls; two or three lots had probably joined together.

"Don't shoot yet, boss," whispered Abe as I eagerly fingered my rifle. "Let them top the next ridge; we shall get a closer shot."

They soon fed over, and seizing our rifles, we ran for the further ridge.

"I'll leave the big bull to you," said Abe as we ran, "and wait till you fire."

I nodded.

Cautiously we crawled the last few yards to the further top, and there, not a hundred yards from us, the herd were standing. I slid the rifle hastily along over a tuft, but the big bull was feeding with only his haunches to me. I had to wait till he turned broadside. The cow on the top of the ridge looked quickly round. She had got us. Another looked; and now the big bull turned sharply round. There was not a moment to lose. Bang! I saw him jump and stand; bang! and I saw him sink on his knees, and at the

same moment I saw the second best bull roll over to Abe's shot. They were galloping now, and the third bull was rising the top. I was hurriedly endeavouring to reload when again the Winchester rang out, and I saw him start and swerve to the right.

"You 've hit him," I cried. "Come on!"

Hurriedly we ran forward past the two bulls lying dead. From the top of the ridge we saw the herd gallop over the plain, but the bull was not with them.

"There he is," cried Abe. "Look! to the right!" And there he was, sure enough, slowly trotting along, evidently hard hit.

Abe caught up his rifle and dived back across the ridge, running at right angles, trying to cut him off, whilst I followed. It was soon evident it was the poor brute's intention to try and make the cañon some way down below where we had crossed it. For at least an hour we ran and crawled, and crawled and ran, sometimes getting to within two hundred yards of him, when Abe would blaze off; but we were both too blown to take any accurate sight, and still he trotted on at that one even pace. If he reached the cañon he would beat us. My cartridges were done; I had only taken out a dozen. It was a last chance when Abe threw himself on a low, grassy hillock, slid his rifle along, heaved a deep sigh to steady the beating of his lungs, and fired. He rolled over not six yards from the cañon. I don't think I was ever so exhausted in my life. But night was fast coming on; in the excitement of the chase we had lost sight of time. We stood over the third bull and administered the last ceremonies of the stalk.

"We must come back for the meat and the heads to-morrow, boss," and Abe cast anxious glances around him.

The stars were peeping out when we started to make camp.

"How shall we ever cross the cañon?" I said to myself, and the odd thing is, we never did.

Once, and only once, Abe spoke. "Can you give me a light for my pipe, Mr. Wellesley?"

I struck a match. For three mortal hours we walked on, and I would have staked all I was worth he was going in the opposite direction to camp, but I never spoke, and then all of a sudden we turned an angle of the hill, and there before us lay the camp, the cheery fire burning bright, and the spare man reading a greasy old book. He heard us, and he looked up for a minute, and then down again on the book. Abe said never a word, but I could not refrain from raising a cheer, although I afterwards thought it *infra dig.*

But the amazing part of it all is how did Abe manage to walk straight into camp? We had started in a fog, and we had crossed a cañon which we never recrossed. Once I asked him, but he only shrugged his shoulders and said,

"Guess, boss, it's habit."

I mention this episode—it occurred on the occasion of my first trip with Abe—to give the reader some notion of the friendship and respect in which I held him, and although it has taken me long to tell, the whole recollection of it flashed quickly through my mind as I sat practically alone in the sitting-room, listening to the loud ticking of the clock and waiting.

The door of the sitting-room opened quietly, and Captain Herbert looked in. He cast a glance at Fane sleeping in the chair, and then he beckoned to me to come outside.

"Wilson wants to see you——"

"Is there any change?" I interrupted.

"... to say good-bye," added Captain Herbert gravely.

Mary was laying another pillow at his back to prop him up as I entered the room; he heard me, and turned his eyes and held out his hand, which I grasped without speaking. Mary, supposing, I presume, we had some private matters to speak on, passed round the bed as though to leave the room.

"Ask her to stay, Mr. Wellesley, please," whispered Abe. But she heard him, and at once she returned to the further side of the bed and sat down on the chair by his side.

He could speak but little above a whisper now, whilst after a very few sentences he was stopped by violent fits of coughing, accompanied by terrible hemorrhage.

"Boss, you have many times asked me the story of my past, and I have evaded answering. Let me tell it you.

"I was the younger son of a country squire down in Sussex. We had a big house and place, but my father was a poor man for one in his position. I was sent to a public school and received a good education, but somehow no sort of profession could my people find for me, or could I find for myself. Any amount of things were discussed, but all fell through. No one apparently wanted a person of my descrip-

tion. I arrived at the age of twenty a harum-scarum kind of a chap, but a pretty determined sort, I guess. One night—it was after dinner—my father was in a bad temper over rents or debts or something, and suddenly he turned on me. 'How do you think I can keep a lazy dog like you? Why don't you earn your living?' I don't think I answered, but there must have been something in the expression of my face, for I caught my mother's glance watching me anxiously now and again.

"That was the last meal I ever had at home. I slipped out of the house next morning with what few things I thought necessary stuffed in a bag, and before anyone was up I had caught the first train and reached London. From there I made my way to Liverpool, worked my way across to New York on a sailing vessel, and gradually drifted west. For the last ten years, as you know, I've lived by killing meat for camp through summer and the fall, and trapping through the winter. Not a brilliant career when you come to reckon it up."

A long and painful fit of coughing interrupted him; Mary passed her arm round his neck to hold his head up, and with the other hand she held a glass of iced water to his lips. After breathing heavily and laboriously for some minutes, whilst we watched him in silence and sorrow, knowing, seeing, that the end was near, he spoke again:

"I sometimes think I should have done better, Mr. Wellesley, and I sometimes think I might have done worse."

There was another long pause, during which he seemed to doze; then he spoke faintly again:

"I'm giving a lot of trouble here; couldn't we camp outside, boss? I'm afraid Miss Mary will have too much to do."

The eyes had closed; the cough had gone; the breathing was almost indistinct. Suddenly the eyes opened.

"Are you there, boss?"

"Here by your side, Abe;" and I pressed his hand, but the eyes looked vacant and far away. He turned them slowly round till they rested on the white, tearful face of the woman bending over him, and then the lips parted, and a smile of joy lit up the poor wan face. A great sigh escaped his lips, a sigh of pleasure, in which the word "Mary" was distinctly audible, and his head fell back upon the pillow.

CHAPTER XXI.

The White Flag

WHEN I try to recollect what immediately followed the death of Abe my memory fails me. I know that I never slept, but what I did with myself I cannot remember, excepting that I spoke to no one, and if I recollect aright, nobody spoke to me all through the remainder of that night.

The day dawned at last, and the sun rose over the gorge, throwing its golden, gladdening rays upon the world, driving dull care away, coaxing all nature into life and energy, laughing at death and disaster; but I did not notice it.

Round about the stockade I wandered with bent head; but what my thoughts were I know not. Looking back now, they seem to me to have been a jumbled, confused mass that took no definite shape whatever.

The sailors had all risen, and stood in little groups whispering; but as I passed the whispering ceased, and they drew back, touching their caps.

After a time a hand touched my arm, and a voice that made me start said softly, "Father wishes to speak to you."

That voice seemed to bring me back to conscious-

ness; anyhow, from that moment the subsequent events are stamped clearly on my memory.

I turned quickly and met Hilda's eyes gazing anxiously into my face. "I wanted to come and persuade you to lie down, but father said I had better not, that it was wiser to leave you alone."

"He was right, Hilda, and I thank you for your kind thoughts; but I could not have slept, and I do not believe I could have lain down. Now my brain seems clearer. Let us go and see what he wants."

She led the way to the sitting-room and opened the door. Within all was silent, and yet as I crossed the threshold the forms of all the important characters mentioned in this story left alive, with the exception of Mary, stood around. Some glanced up furtively as I entered, and then dropped their eyes to the ground, why I cannot tell, but I remember it. Was it that there was something wild or uncanny in my appearance, or was it that in the presence of death men stand abashed and helpless, and have no words to offer?

Right opposite me, as I entered on the further side of the table, stood Tom Fane, his arms folded across his breast, and a determined expression on his face. At the head of the table stood Captain Herbert. Apparently a colloquy had just been held, or was about to be, and they were awaiting my presence. It was Captain Herbert who spoke first.

"Mr. Wellesley," he said, "we are all of us deeply grieved at what has occurred, and that the man who, if I may say so, saved your life through the forest

and has saved ours here is at the moment of triumph taken from us; but we cannot argue with the decrees of fate, nor alter its decisions: we can only bend our heads in sorrow and humiliation when our friends are taken from us. But we must remember that there are many left within this stockade whom we must assist, both for their sakes and our own.

"Now, the provisions left cannot keep us all in here over two or three days. The Indians will fall back on their old starving-out tactics; if they dared not attack us before, they are not likely to now. I have been talking the situation over with Sir Thomas and Ted Cooper, and we have agreed that we must go for them."

"The sooner the better." I spoke for the first time, and every eye looked up.

There was no need for Captain Herbert to put the question to the vote; the verdict was written on every countenance. He paused a moment, looking round as though waiting for someone to speak, but no one did so.

"Hilda!"

"Yes, father."

"Help Joe to hurry on the breakfast, and tell him to give the sailors as good a one as we can provide; he need not stint the provisions."

The girl quickly left the room, and silently we filed out after her in different directions. I meandered out, and soon got dreaming again of the past, when an arm slipped through mine.

"Cheer up, old man; we'll annihilate those rotten niggers, or follow him; and after all a year or two

in a man's life does not reckon for much in the annals of time."

Tom's conversation—enthusiastic, revengeful, kindly, a mixture of all these—soothed me, and soon I was chatting to him quietly of the voice we should never hear again.

"I never took such a fancy to a man in so short a time before," said Tom. "He was the quietest, most unassuming fellow I ever met, and I'm not sure he wasn't the finest specimen of a man and the best plucked one I ever came across."

Of course I agreed with him; and now as I pen these lines, and years have rolled by, I agree with him more than ever; so we talked on till the voice of Hilda called to us that breakfast was ready.

Towards the end of the meal Captain Herbert said, "Gentlemen, I am too old to act in the capacity of leader in an enterprise of this description; in fact, willing as I would be to do so, or be with you in any capacity, I think I ought to stay back here with the girls, and try to hold the stockade in case you meet with any reverses or have to retreat. Twenty years ago, or even ten, and my old friend, Ted Cooper, would have been as good a man as one could have found for the job; but now I fear me, if it came to any sprinting or quick work, he might not be in the front. I hardly know whether to suggest Sir Thomas or Mr. Wellesley, and I think, gentlemen, I had better leave the matter in your hands."

I immediately suggested Tom Fane, whilst Tom at once did *vice versâ*.

"Why not," said Captain Herbert, "put it to the

vote? There are five of us. Let us each write the name of the man we wish to lead the expedition and put the slips of paper in a hat. I will read them out, and we can abide by the decision of the majority."

This was unanimously agreed to, and I may here state that I wrote down Fane's name, and I afterwards learnt he wrote mine. When Captain Herbert unfolded the slips he reported three votes were for me and two for Fane.

"Thank Heaven!" cried Tom. "I can fight, but I don't want to do any directing or suggesting."

"Very well, gentlemen," I said. "You have done me the honour of selecting me, and I see Sir Thomas does not mind. In one way perhaps you have done wisely, for I am a hard, relentless, and determined man to-day; we have a dear friend's life to avenge."

Whilst Henry Whitmore went out to inform the sailors that we intended to make a sortie and tell Joe to get the repeating rifles ready, we other four men held a conclave in the sitting-room.

At first I was for leaving no one behind in the stockade; I pointed out that if we were overpowered and beaten, then must they be entirely at the mercy of the Indians, but Captain Herbert would not hear of this.

"No," he said; "supposing you get repulsed, some of you, at least, may get back to the stockade, and though the chance is remote, there might still be a chance of getting the women across the gorge and making an attempt under cover of darkness to reach the yacht."

Ted Cooper agreed with him, so I somewhat reluctantly concurred. I feared the Indians might

try a detour and perhaps fire the stockade and murder the old man and his daughters whilst we were engaged fighting elsewhere. Still they knew the ways of these people better than I did, and there was an end of it.

At 11.30 all was ready, and the men formed up outside the porch. Our plan of action had been agreed upon. We were to form into a single line, each man a couple of yards apart from his neighbour, and march steadily down on the village. We calculated on the Indians attacking us, and hoped for it; we had eight repeating rifles, and I carried my express, whilst all the men carried revolvers and cutlasses. Captain Herbert insisted upon us taking all the rifles.

"They are no use here," he said, "and are everything to you."

Most of the sailors knew thoroughly the working of a Winchester, and singling out the best shots among them, we handed them the rifles, five in number, that were over. Fane, Whitmore, and Cooper each carried one, whilst Walker was content with a revolver and cutlass.

I will not dwell on the tender farewell I had with Hilda; she broke down at the last, and I am sure she believed she would never see one of us alive again. I did what I could to comfort her, but I am afraid it was of little avail. Mary, on the other hand, whom I had not seen before all the morning, moved about with a white set face and flashing eyes. I saw her now and then go up and speak in a low voice to the men, and I heard their sharp laugh of derision; she was urging them on.

All was ready, and the gate was unlocked. Ted Cooper was to keep the left with Walker, and Whitmore the extreme right, Fane and myself in the middle. Only two orders had I given: first that no rifle was to be fired till I shot, and secondly no revolver was to be fired till the word of command was given. I was fearful lest the men would empty their revolvers at a long range and allow the enemy to rush us.

Hardly had we gone a hundred yards when a loud yell rose from the direction of the village, and almost immediately followed a hundred or more of the grey-coated Indians. Out they came on to the plain, brandishing their spears and giving out most awful yells, and then at a run they came for us.

"Halt!" I cried. "You with rifles only, present and fire low after me."

They were two hundred yards off then—how slow the seconds pass!—now one hundred. A tall man was in the middle. I brought the bead on him and pressed the trigger; instantly seven other rifles rang out.

"Again, boys!" I shouted, "and aim steady."

Another volley went into them, but still they kept on. I slipped two more cartridges in and quickly fired them, whilst the repeating rifles were going off as fast as the men could jerk out the cartridges. Forty yards off they were now, but at least twenty of their men had fallen.

How ferocious and awful they looked, with their painted faces and the spears poised above their heads.

"Revolvers ready!" and the order went down the

line like an electric current. Thirty yards, twenty yards—I remember at that moment the lad on my right turned his eyes towards me with a jerk.

"Good God! Why don't you cry 'Fire'?"

I saw the remark in his face. Fifteen yards. "Fire!"

In a moment they were rolling over like rabbits. They paused and stopped dead, while volley after volley was poured into them, and then two or three started to run back. Drawing my cutlass, I dashed forward. In the tumult no word of command would have been heard, but our men saw me, and with a wild shout we sprang upon them.

For some moments it seemed as though the denizens of hell had been let loose upon the earth. Men rocked and swayed and cursed and struck, and then the enemy broke, and with loud cries of terror fled back towards the village. Some of our men pursued them, though I halloaed in vain to try and stop them, but the Indians were too terrified to turn and fight.

We had won, but we had not escaped scatheless; one sailor was killed, and two were badly wounded, whilst many had received severe cuts from spears.

I hastily summoned a council of war, and advised our removing our wounded back to the stockade before proceeding. Of the enemy fifty, or nearly half their number, lay dead, and I did not think they would face us again. Fane and Cooper both agreed.

We waited a little time till our men returned from pursuing the flying Indians, when we lifted up the wounded and carried them as gently as we could back to the stockade.

I need not say how overjoyed Hilda and Captain Herbert were to welcome us back. They had witnessed the whole affair from the verandah, and it must have been a most trying ordeal. Mary seemed to take no special interest in the proceedings, but appeared to look on it as a matter of course. An hour or so later, whilst we were still deliberating on what course to pursue, the watch on the verandah reported an Indian approaching the stockade with a white flag in his hand. We all sprang to our feet, for well we knew what that white flag meant—the enemy had had enough, and were seeking peace.

CHAPTER XXII.

"Remember, now it is Peace"

"LET Captain Herbert speak with this man," said Cooper to me. "You see, he is the recognized chief, and if you or I or anyone else treated with him, he, Captain Herbert, might lose prestige with the tribe."

"What 's left of 'em," I muttered savagely.

But Cooper was right. At that moment my terms would have been death to the lot of them.

"I would only suggest to Captain Herbert," I said, "for his own sake in the future, not to be too lenient with these people. He has defeated them almost by a miracle, and he should never give them the chance of rising against him again."

"I know that, Mr. Wellesley. Leave it to me." And Captain Herbert rose to go out.

The Indian had halted about a hundred yards from the stockade and stood waving his flag backwards and forwards, uncertain how to proceed, for as yet no word or sign had been vouchsafed him from the stockade. I do not think he would have come so near had he known the distance modern weapons carry and had he been able to peep within the stockade; for when we got outside the house several of the sailors had slid the rifles through the loopholes,

and amid very audible chuckles were aiming at the solitary individual.

"Here, you fellows, don't shoot," cried Fane.

"We're honly haiming for practice, Sir Thomas," said a burly seaman.

There was no possible chance for treachery, for, as I have before explained, the ground that approach was possible from was all open and exposed.

Captain Herbert ordered the gate to be opened and walked out, whilst Fane and myself, Whitmore and Cooper, followed him. Straight towards the Indian he walked; the latter ceased waving his flag the instant he saw the gate open, and stood upright and motionless. Five yards from the Indian Captain Herbert stopped.

"What do you want?" he asked in a stern voice.

The figure never moved, but his eyes wandered from one of us to the other in a restless, uneasy way. At length he spoke.

"I have been chosen by those braves of the tribe still left on earth to approach the great White Chief and beg for peace and mercy."

"Peace and mercy!" echoed Captain Herbert. "What peace have you been showing me? What mercy was I to expect if you had triumphed?"

"I cannot reply to the words of the White Chief, for there is no answer to be made, and if he desires the lives of those that remain, then must he take them; we will offer no further resistance or defence. I can only say that we were led to believe by the most learned man amongst us, by the man that the White Chief placed most trust in——"

"Harper!" interposed Captain Herbert sharply.

"He it was who informed us that it was distinctly laid down in all the works of good men and great, that a tribe who gave allegiance to a stranger from another country and of another people were considered contemptible in the eyes of the great God of the worlds, who dwelleth in the sun, and that the peace and blessings of an after-life were denied them."

"And where is this Harper, who prated to you this nonsense, that you were fools enough to listen to?" asked Captain Herbert.

"After the battle this morning," said the Indian, "when we had reached the village square and found that we were no longer followed, we at once held a consultation. Harper's power was gone; he himself was silent and morose, and would offer no suggestion."

"Was he in the fight?" asked Captain Herbert. "Through my telescope I watched the men coming up, but could not distinguish him."

"No," said the Indian, "he was not there. He stayed behind in the village; methinks he knew more of the white man's arms and skill in war than he cared to tell us, and this made us all the more angry against him. It was quickly resolved that we should throw ourselves on your mercy, and pray you to deal with us as leniently as you could; and I was deputed to approach you and bring you this message."

For the first time the Indian now moved his arms and drew forth from his pocket a paper, which he handed to Captain Herbert. Having glanced at it, the latter stepped back a few paces and beckoned to us.

"This paper," he said, "corroborates what this man has been telling us, and is signed by half a dozen of their leading men. I think they have received a severe lesson, and I would willingly avoid further bloodshed." He looked inquiringly at us, and we all agreed with him.

"Excepting that villain Harper," said Cooper. "You 'll never have peace with him about; I 'd hang him."

Captain Herbert stepped back towards the Indian.

"Go back to the men of the tribe and tell them that I, who have always been a man of peace, still am the same, but men who listen to rebellious counsels and turn upon their rulers are not to be trusted. Therefore, I require that every man left in the settlement come here in parties of twenty at a time, and lay down his spear, tomahawk, or any other weapon of war; the first party will return to the village before the second starts up, and so on. The man Harper must be at once secured and bound and put in a safe place; I will deal with him later. Thirty minutes from now I shall expect the first batch of twenty men. You can go."

The Indian bowed again, and a look of intense relief passed over his face. He evidently expected a very different message.

"The White Chief is very merciful," he said.

The Indian had turned to go, when Tom Fane called out, "Hi! Hi! wait a minute. Captain Herbert, may I send a message to the yacht? Captain Hume will be in an anxious state all this time about us."

Captain Herbert called to the Indian to wait whilst

Fane hastily scribbled on an odd half-sheet of paper a few words.

"Will that do, Charlie?" he said, handing it to me. "Enemy beaten and suing for peace; will see you towards evening."

"Yes," I answered, "that's sufficient for the present."

Tom handed the folded paper to Captain Herbert, who in turn passed it to the Indian, saying, "Send that note off to the yacht as soon as you get to the village."

The Indian took it, looked at the outside, and hesitated.

"What's the matter?" asked Captain Herbert.

"White men on the big boat carry guns."

"Oh, I see," cried Fane. "But listen to me; when your boat gets within hail of the yacht you will be challenged by those on board. They will call, 'Who comes there?' You reply, 'Friends.' They will then say, 'Give the password'; and you reply, 'Nootka.' See?"

"Before they shoot we say 'Friends.' They ask for password, and we say 'Nootka,'" repeated the Indian deliberately.

"That's it."

When the Indian had departed we strolled back to the stockade.

"I suppose," said I, "there's no chance of them getting aboard the *Caledonia* and holding her."

Cooper and Captain Herbert shook their heads. "They're scared enough," said the former. "You heard what that fellow said about the guns; they never knew till this morning what rifles and revolvers

could do, and they don't want any more of it, added to which they know nothing of engineering work, and couldn't move her a yard."

"Besides," put in Tom, "unless I 'm very much mistaken they 'll have to hand that slip of paper up. Old Hume won't let 'em board."

I will not enter into a long description of the "peace ceremony," but it is necessary to sketch it.

A deal table and a chair were taken out some hundred yards from the stockade, in fact to the spot where we had recently received the Indian with the flag of peace. On the chair sat Captain Herbert with some writing materials on the table in front of him, not that I ever saw him write down anything; perhaps he intended to take notes, and found it was not necessary. On either side of him, all of us from within the stockade, excepting the two women, stood fully armed and ready. I think we must have presented a formidable appearance, for the first batch of twenty halted at a couple of hundred yards' distance, and sent forward the Indian with the white flag, "humbly hoping that the White Chief would spare their lives."

Captain Herbert pretended to be angry at this. "Tell them," he cried, "after the way they have treated me, it is necessary for me to take precautions, but that I am a man of my word, and what I have said I would do I will do."

To an onlooker I daresay the scene would have appeared extremely dramatic, but to me the faces and bearing of the Indians as they approached us were very ludicrous. They glanced along our line with nervous apprehension, too scared to turn back

and almost too frightened to come on. Arrived within twenty yards of us, Captain Herbert bade them halt and deposit their weapons in a heap, after which he ordered them to march back to the village, and tell the next batch to come up.

There were only four batches of twenty men, and some of those were mere boys; but despite the hunted and frightened look upon their faces, I could not help being struck with their superior and intelligent appearance compared with all other Indians I had ever come across.

After the last lot had laid down their weapons Captain Herbert told them on their return to the village to hold a meeting and select six men to represent the tribe, and to send them up to the stockade to confer with him. As soon as that was done they were to set about collecting the bodies of their dead comrades and bury them in the cemetery below the village at the head of the sound.

"I did not think they had lost so heavily," said Captain Herbert to me as we walked back to the stockade. "Poor Abe Wilson must have wrought tremendous havoc amongst them the night you got into the stockade."

Six stalwart Indians soon appeared, marching up from the village, and on reaching the stockade were instantly ushered into Captain Herbert's presence. I do not know what passed between them, as Captain Herbert insisted on holding the interview alone with the Indians; but when they emerged from the house their faces wore an expression of great thankfulness and relief. At first they were somewhat shy and abashed, but after a while they approached, and, with

their hats in their hands, they bowed, they apologized, they deplored the suffering they had caused, and hoped a day might soon come when they might show in some tangible way their devotion to their old chief, and their thankfulness for the mercy and consideration he had shown them. Fane, ever affected by the transient events of the moment, was for "standing them drinks," but Captain Herbert at once put his foot down.

"No, Sir Thomas, that is against the law here."

I think the Indians looked a little sad for a moment, forbidden fruit being always sweetest, but they soon brightened up again.

"And now," said Captain Herbert, "be off down to the village and order a thorough search to be made for that villain Harper."

Yes, Harper was at large. It appeared that while the tribe were arguing as to the advisability of approaching us and seeking peace, he, seeing that his power was gone, that feeling was quickly turning against him, and his life probably unsafe alike in the hands of foes or friends, slipped quietly away, and at present could be found nowhere.

"He shall not escape the just vengeance of the Great Chief, not if I have to wander round the settlement, even into the forest, all the remaining days of my life."

It was the tallest of the Indians that spoke.

And now occurred a curious scene. Some little distance away had stood Walker, watching the scene with a scowling face. The Indian had spoken, and with his fellows was just about to leave the stockade, the gate of which was open, when he happened to

catch sight of Walker. Straight up to him he marched with outstretched hand, bent evidently on a most friendly mission, but Walker reared himself up.

"Dog!" he cried; "dare you to offer me the hand of friendship when the body of the Witch Doctor of Wyoming lies yet unburied here within the walls of this house? If I knew which of you cursed dogs had slain him——" He had seized his rifle and actually cocked it, when Captain Herbert rushed up.

"Walker, Walker!" he cried. "Peace has been proclaimed, and surely a great and noble life has been avenged with the death of half the men of the tribe. Put aside your rifle, and remember I do not forget what I owe to you, and what my children owe to you. Receive the thanks, receive the blessing of an old man, Walker, but remember, now it is peace."

The heads of both the Indians had fallen on their breasts; the one listened with profound emotion, the other with deep shame; and I confess that when I heard the angry words of Walker a great respect for him arose within me.

CHAPTER XXIII.

Tears of Sorrow, Tears of Joy

THAT same evening Fane and Whitmore, with the sailors, departed for the yacht, and I believe Captain Hume was overjoyed at seeing them alive and well, as, from the first, he had had the gravest misgivings as to their fate. I need not say that he heard of the death of Abe with deep and sincere regret; yet when men have put aside their celestial cloaks made of a fabric in the mills of heaven termed "religious fervour," when they have forgotten the laid-down law that in times of peace they boast of, namely, "goodwill on earth," and have allowed themselves to become once again mere animals thirsting for one another's blood, then life and death are looked on very lightly, and perhaps Captain Hume was thankful that they had escaped without greater loss of life.

Tom begged me to return to the boat with him, but I declined; not that we had any fear now of any hostile demonstrations on the part of the Indians, but for many reasons I did not like leaving the little garrison alone, nor did I care for any conviviality at that moment.

Fane sent us up some wine and a few delicacies, which were highly appreciated by old Ted Cooper;

it took a deal to shake the nerve of that hardened old "salt."

On the following morning the sad duty devolved upon us of committing the earthly remains of Abe Wilson to the grave. The whole of the yacht's company, excepting two seamen left in charge, attended, and a sad and impressive ceremony it was. Captain Herbert had come to me the previous night.

"Mr. Wellesley," he said, "our burial-place lies a quarter of a mile to the north, by the edge of the river; you cannot see it for a dip of the hill, but you passed it the night you entered the stockade. There I have made a vault where the remains of my dear wife now lie, where mine are shortly to rest, and where I would suggest this brave friend of ours should repose, unless you have any other proposition to make." I shook my head. "Let it be so, then," continued Captain Herbert, "and I will have the necessary arrangements completed."

A rude pine coffin had been constructed by Cooper, and at noon, borne on the shoulders of eight of the sailors, we slowly followed the remains of my old friend and companion from the stockade. As the *cortége* passed out I was surprised to see all the Indians standing without with their hats in their hands, their brown faces and lank hair contrasting strangely with their grey clothing. In silence they followed us to the little cemetery, and when Captain Herbert addressed us they gathered round in evident awe and reverence.

I noticed with surprise he did not use the words of the English burial service. The coffin being placed

on the planks laid to receive it, he stepped to the head of it and said:

"May it please the God of the world, the great Creator of our universe, that this our brother, who has left us, may be with Him at peace and rest for ever; and we humbly pray that when our time comes to leave the struggling world we may meet him again in the after-life we hope for, but know not of, to thank him for his work on earth."

A murmur of reverence rose from the Indians gathered round, and with a few low muttered words of hope and consolation which I could not gather the coffin was lowered to the vault.

There was one thing that surprised me even at that moment: Mary had not joined our procession, and as I stood beside the vault it struck me, and I looked for her, but she was not to be seen. Gradually and quietly the gathering dispersed, and I was the last to leave the graveside, I and Hilda, who had kindly and thoughtfully waited also.

Slowly and without speaking we walked back, and reaching the end of the plateau beyond which the fall of the ground would shut out a view of the cemetery, I turned back to take a farewell view of the grave. I started; the form of a woman was kneeling by the graveside. For some seconds I did not speak.

"Is there any good in my returning?" I asked Hilda at length. "Can I be of any assistance?"

Hilda shook her head. "I think not," she answered. "Let her alone for a time; I will go back for her shortly if she does not return."

We walked on some time in silence, I surprised

that the death of Abe could so deeply affect Mary, and extremely sorry that it did; still I could not help wondering why it should do so. They had never seemed on anything but ordinarily friendly terms, at least so it had seemed to me, but I saw now that I had been mistaken; the night of his death passed before me, and I remembered how he had died with her name on his lips, though at the time the sad scene had banished the incident from my mind.

When we reached the stockade Hilda stopped. "I will go back to Mary; I do not like leaving her alone."

"Cheer her up as much as you can," I answered, "for she seems terribly cut up."

Hilda shook her head. "I will do all I can, but I'm afraid a long time will pass before poor Mary looks cheerful again."

And I am sorry to say it was so; in fact, I do not think Mary ever was the same again. Oh, woman, how true you are! When once you have given away your heart, rarely do you demand it back, though how often would you be justified in doing so. Often do I think that Nature was scarcely acting fairly—or shall I say, working fairly?—when she formed man to be your companion and, as some say, your master. Master, indeed! I laugh, man as I am. But it is not a necessary or particularly interesting argument, and one that I have often seen lead to trouble.

It was very delightful now that we could wander about at will, especially after being cooped up in the stockade so long. Captain Herbert and Cooper went almost off their heads after going over the *Caledonia;* her sharp smart lines were such a contrast to Captain

Herbert's round rolling-looking boat. (I wrote "boat" to please old Cooper, because I have to read this story to him in the evening, but I meant to write "tub.") And when they saw her internal fittings they could not speak with amazement. The inlaid grandfather's clock, the artists' proof engravings in the cabin, the silver plate, the polished brass, the modern engines, they stared at and examined, but it was a long time before they found their voices.

Fane, ever pleased to give pleasure to others, insisted on our dining on the yacht almost every other night; he had plenty of stores and provisions aboard, as the nature of his trip might mean a prolonged absence, which it did. It was a long time, though, before we could persuade Mary to go; everyone tried their hardest to cheer her up, but beyond an occasional sad effort at a smile we could get little out of her. Still she was a beautiful woman; the pale face, the even features, and the sad expression, though they had considerably altered her, had not detracted from her beauty. Sometimes I thought another person thought her beautiful, but, being a man, I was slow at seeing this; it was to be pointed out to me later.

I think the regard I had for Hilda was apparent to the others from the first, but I do not think I cared to avoid showing my admiration. Anyhow, a few days after Abe's funeral, when we were strolling together along the edge of the gorge on a lovely autumn evening, I determined, as the song says, "to know my fate." I wonder whether she knew my intention, for she kept her head bent, and silently we walked together, and oh, what an ass I felt!

Words rose in my throat, but ere I uttered them they sounded within me foolish and out of place, and I choked them down, but a man determined is a determined man, and at last I stopped.

"Hilda!" She had stopped too, but her head was still bent. "Hilda, darling, don't keep me in suspense longer; say you will marry me."

She came up to me, and she put her hand on my arm softly, the same as she did in the early hours of the morning following the night Abe was killed. "Don't think," she whispered, "that I do not love you, but how can I promise to marry you?" I interrupted her, but she stopped me. "It is like this: you have your home far away, and your friends, and you will wish to return to them, anyhow in time, but I—I must not consider myself entirely, cannot leave father and Mary; father is growing old, and Mary needs a sister's care and devotion."

Even whilst she was speaking a great joy had entered my heart, and I let her wander on for some time in the same strain. She paused, and I took her little hand yet lying on my arm.

"Hilda, my darling, is that all?"

"Yes," she whispered.

"Then let me tell you I have no home far away, and no friends. Here is my friend, and here will be my home, if you but say the word."

And then she gently raised her head, and the great eyes were full of tears and of love.

That evening I called Captain Herbert aside.

"Captain Herbert, I love your daughter Hilda; I have asked her to marry me, and she has said yes."

The old man stopped for a moment, as though shot; he seemed dazed, and passed his hand across his forehead.

"Hilda marry you! But you will go away and take her with you, and I shall never see her again."

Hastily I intervened and told him of my interview with Hilda, of the first portion of it—I fancy I skipped the latter—and when he learnt I was willing to remain and live with them, he became overjoyed and grasped my hand.

"Mr. Wellesley, just as it seemed to me that death and disaster were to crown all the efforts of my life, I find joy, and prosperity, and friends, around me; it is truly marvellous."

"And you consent?" I interrupted again.

"Gladly, gladly," he cried, "and I thank you for the honour you have done us."

When Fane on the following morning heard the news he came to me.

"My boy, I congratulate you; I never knew you had such taste for beauty, but there it is; you were always rather a dark horse, and anyhow I shall be cock of the walk in the club billiard-room, if they haven't elected Roberts or someone of that class in my absence. Still I had been looking forward to a pleasant trip back with you; but don't think you're going to stay here all alone. I shall come back and pay you a visit, and bring you the news, and perhaps a billiard table. What a whacking I'd just give you if you had not touched a cue for a year or so! . . ." And so he chatted on.

Fane and Walker were always wandering about chatting together, and one day the former approached

Captain Herbert regarding a hunt to the northwards after elk. Captain Herbert was only too pleased to lend him Walker for a guide and assist in every way, but, oddly enough, Harry Whitmore did not seem in the least keen about the trip, and appeared rather anxious to be left out, only Tom insisted on his going, and laughed at his flimsy excuses.

"Why," I asked Hilda that afternoon as we strolled down to the settlement, "did not Whitmore want to go on the hunting trip?"

"Do you know," she replied, blushing, "he's in love with Mary."

"Whew! What a stupid I am not to have noticed it! And she?"

Hilda looked at me somewhat reproachfully. "Do you expect women to forget, and in a week?"

I was silent, and the subject dropped.

On all sides the Indians were most cordial and polite, and never in any community had I seen people so well-mannered; it spoke volumes for the way in which they had been brought up.

We passed the big storehouse, which had not been interfered with. Captain Herbert had feared the Indians might have looted it, but Harper during his brief command had seen to that, for it was very necessary that the stores should be given out regularly. And I hardly know what the Indians would have done in the end had they been victorious, as they would not have been able to navigate the vessel to obtain fresh supplies, and perhaps they at the time relied on forcing Cooper to do so.

We entered the schoolroom, then empty, and I could not help being amazed on looking round.

Quaint proverbs were hung upon the walls, such as "Cleanliness is essential, and water is cheap"; "Do to others as you would wish them to do to you"; "Learn not to spit; it is a vulgar habit," etc. But what struck me was the lack of Biblical quotations; I questioned Hilda about this.

"Well, you see," she answered, "the tribe worship the sun, and father has never interfered with their religion. I have often heard him say that it would be the height of folly to do so, also that the sun properly worshipped is as fine a religion as any other," and as I walked slowly home by the side of my betrothed I was not at all sure he was not right.

CHAPTER XXIV.

Farewell to the "Caledonia"

HARPER had not been caught, and I think everyone was pleased it was so. It was supposed he must have either committed suicide or tried to find his way across the island; that he would ever succeed in doing the latter was most improbable, for even if he had had time to scrape together provisions for a few days there was no route known to any habitation of man; in fact, the Indians had a superstitious belief that the forest was haunted, and that no man could penetrate it and live. They had learnt by the maps and books provided to them by Captain Herbert that Vancouver was an island, they had been told and they had read of Victoria town and of settlements along the eastern coast, but though at first it surprised them, they had no wish to learn the truth by personal inspection. As I have hinted, if not stated, before, wild horses would hardly have dragged them into the gloomy depths of the rank, timber-strewn, noiseless forest. The reason was obvious: every now and again in the long history of the tribe a party of young braves had occasionally, in a momentary fit of foolish ardour, determined to pierce through the forest and discover the world beyond, even as Columbus held

the rudder of his vessel firm and steered straight for chaos or the countries beyond the sea; but as a rule they had never returned. A few had come back, lean and starved and scared, and the experiences they gave were not, to say the least of it, encouraging even to the most intrepid explorer. As a rule it was the wolves that did them; at least, after making many inquiries I learnt that nearly every adventurer who had ever returned had reported terrible encounters with these brutes. The truth was, as I subsequently discovered, the majority of the four-footed game on the island frequented the open portions of the north-west, and so the wolves had, I suppose, gradually drawn away from the south and south-west, and dwelling in the fringe of the forest, they descended in packs on deer and wapiti.

Often and often on a still night, when the wind has been blowing from the east, have I heard these deep-voiced devils in full cry after some poor beast, and I have shivered in bed as their ferocious howls grew fainter and fainter in the distance. I know of no sound on earth so appalling as the deep vindictive note of a timber wolf, and it must be remembered that in the early days, when they had not learnt the destructive power of modern weapons, they cared as little for an Indian spear as they did for a wapiti's antlers; not but what they were always cowards, and always will be, but, having settled on their prey, they never leave it, though they wait their chance.

If Harper had entrusted his life to their keeping he had better have remained and been gracefully hanged. And as I write these words it strikes me that it

was by extraordinary luck that Abe and I ever got through the forest, from what I have since learnt of the nature of these beasts, and my belief is that it was the report of the rifle that night when one entered our tent that scared them away, and that had we had simply spears and knives we would have been done.

Tom Fane and Whitmore went off on a fortnight's trip, with Walker and half a dozen Indians carrying the packs, while I remained behind, and, with the aid of Cooper, who was a first-rate architect, started to construct a wooden dwelling for myself.

We chose a site on the edge of the gorge a few hundred yards above the stockade, and, assisted by the Indians, who were very skilled in building, and who worked with a willingness and vigour that surprised me, we had the walls and partitions finished by the time they returned.

At that time I saw little of Mary; she went down to the village early and taught at the school, where the classes had been resumed as formerly.

It would be foolish of me to pretend that the loss of husbands and brothers had not, in many cases, caused great grief among these, after all, simple people; still they knew they were wrong in the first instance, and they felt very deeply and thankfully the leniency that was meted out to them when they were at the mercy of the victors.

Hilda used to come and help us in the construction of "Wellesley House," and often have I sat on a log and watched her tall graceful figure seize up a newly sawn pine plank and place it in its position with an ease which would have done justice to an

English navvy. Scoff, reader, if you wish. You may admire what are termed "delicate" people; for my part, I love to feast my eyes on health and strength, whether it be imprinted on the form of man or woman.

Ah, those were happy days that come back to me with a vividness I could not have believed possible, and often in after-life, when some little domestic unpleasantness may have arisen—and what two people pass their lives together without such things occurring?—I have recalled some little trivial incident of those days, and the anger that had arisen in my breast has been immediately supplanted with a feeling of softness and respect for the woman who whispered "Yes" when I asked her to be my wife, and has ever since given me a wife's love and devotion. Smile again, sceptic, but remember the whole object, the whole pleasure, of life is love, and poor and wretched indeed is he or she who sneers on to the brink of the grave pretending to be thankful they have had no "ties" to worry them. I often think when the sun sinks behind the horizon and the dark hours of the night approach how miserable they must be, how false to themselves, if there be no kind voice to speak to them, no gentle hand to administer to their wants.

* * * * * *

When Tom Fane returned at the end of the fortnight he was in great glee. He and Whitmore between them had got seven or eight wapiti,—and capital heads some of them were,—four black bears,

black-tail deer galore, but of a smaller type than the ones I was accustomed to in Wyoming, and some big white goats with short black horns shaped somewhat like those of the chamois. I was deeply interested; all my old hunting instincts returned to me, and I listened to the description of Fane's exploits with rapt attention, although he took about three days telling them. He was enchanted with the country to the north, the grand scenery, the lofty mountains, and the invigorating air, and certainly all the members of the party looked the picture of health when we welcomed them back at the stockade late one autumn evening.

I felt somewhat sad and depressed when a few days later Fane announced his intention to depart. I had always avoided touching on the subject, although I knew it must inevitably come, and I knew, too, that with his departure the last link that bound me to the old world would be severed.

It was in the evening that he made his announcement. We had been at work on the new house as usual, and I was strolling back to the stockade with Hilda. I suppose I was absent and preoccupied, and I do not think I was listening much to what Hilda was saying, but suddenly I was aroused from my reverie by a voice whispering in my ear in faltering accents, "There is yet time, dear."

Had she read my thoughts? I know not; but the remark was extremely appropriate. Instantly I was recalled to my present position, and the busy, struggling, crowded life of England rose before me.

"Hilda," I answered with a smile, "you seem to have guessed my thoughts. Don't trouble to guess

my answer; I will give it you. I would not go back or endeavour to alter my position if I were offered all Europe."

Fane waited another week, till the day of my wedding was over. He gave me a beautiful present of silver plate, which he had been using on the yacht. I demurred for some time to taking it, but he insisted.

"My dear boy," he said, "it's no particular use to me. I can get all the knives and forks I want at Victoria, but you want a little gleam of something here just to brighten the place up; besides, Charlie, I wish to give it you."

I pressed his hand. I felt his kindness deeply, and I knew that with those bright, comely teapots and trays, etc., Tom Fane would often sit by my side in the days to come, and my cheery, good friend would never be forgotten. To Hilda he presented his gold watch.

"Jewellers' shops, my dear lady, seem scarce in the village. I know it will be useful to you, and I hope it may sometimes remind you of a friend."

As the day for the ceremony and the hour of Fane's departure drew nearer, Harry Whitmore grew more and more depressed. I felt very sorry for him; I talked it over with Hilda, and asked her if she thought I could do any good by speaking to him or Mary, or both, but she shook her head.

"I have talked with Mary," she answered, "and she has told Mr. Whitmore that she cannot marry him; that she is sorry he cares for her, and she can only hope that other scenes and other faces may soon obliterate the memory of her from his mind."

There was nothing to be done. I talked to Tom Fane, and quickly learnt that he had observed the "business," as he called it, as soon as, if not before, I did.

"That's one of the reasons," he said, "I hurried on our shooting trip, and took him with me whether against his will or not. What would his people say if I returned to England and reported having married him to a girl on the north-west coast of Vancouver Island? Besides," he added, "I'm hanged if I'm going to be left alone! Why, the next move will be all the crew wanting to marry the native women and settle in the village, and Captain Hume and I will be left to navigate the yacht home."

This was, perhaps, a little selfish on Tom's part; but, after all, when we reach a certain age we are liable to look upon the love troubles or complications of others with indifference, if not contempt, and I had no further word to say or suggestion to offer.

One afternoon, however, when I was strolling past the stockade on my way to the new building, at the north end round the corner the sound of a man's voice reached my ears.

"And you will hold out no hope?" The words were uttered with deep emotion.

Gladly I would have withdrawn, but it was too late. I heard the answer, "I cannot," and I was upon them.

Two persons looked up, one, Mary, evidently relieved that this interview had been interrupted; the other, Harry Whitmore, miserable and dejected, caring nought what happened.

I apologized in some lame way for having heard a few words that were not intended for my ears, and then Mary slipped away, and I was face to face with Whitmore.

It was a sad, tearful face he turned to mine. "Mr. Wellesley, when I'm gone, don't be down on me before her; don't say you found me hoeing in a field with a lot of dirty niggers; and if—if you can say a word in my favour, oh do, for I'm coming back." He had seized my arm. "I swear before God, nothing shall stop me, if I have to walk it; I 'll come back or perish in the attempt."

I soothed him as best I could; I was sincerely sorry for the lad, and I liked him better at that moment than ever I had before, because I knew him better; but I pointed out to him the foolishness of pressing his suit when the lady had clearly and decidedly refused him.

I did not like to mention poor Abe's name. Whether Mary had told him anything or not, I did not know; but it was for her to do so, not for me. But I verily believe to this day he never knew of her fondness for him, or he would not have been so persistent, for, as he said to me, "if I do not ask her now, what chance shall I ever have?" And I could not answer him.

The ceremony was over, but I suppose, according to the laws of England, I am not married now, and never was, because it was conducted on very much simpler lines than those at present in use in the English book of prayer, and consisted in my placing her mother's wedding ring, which had been handed me by her father, on Hilda's finger, and then our

both signing our names to a simple contract, which lies before me now:—

"We hereby agree together to pass our lives in matrimony, come weal, come woe, till death divide us."

We signed our names, which were witnessed by Thomas Henry Fane and Edward Cooper; and after a few earnest words from Captain Herbert, we stepped forth from "The Lodge" man and wife, to receive three hearty cheers from the sailors and Indians gathered outside.

That afternoon the *Caledonia* weighed anchor, and steamed slowly down the sound.

CHAPTER XXV.

Conclusion

"OO noo Cinderella and Jack the Giant-killer?"

"No, my dear, they were before my time."

"Before oor time? But they 's 'ittle people, oo old man."

"That 's so, my dear; but they always are little people: they never grow up."

My little Hilda of four years old got off my knee and took the picture-book she had been showing me over to her mother for a more lucid explanation.

Yes, another little Hilda and another little Mary had been added to our home since poor Abe was laid to rest, since the *Caledonia* passed slowly down the sound out of sight for ever. Of the old white folks only Ted Cooper — Uncle Ted the children call him—is left. Captain Herbert died suddenly and painlessly one night soon after our first child was born, and it was at Ted Cooper's earnest request I took upon me the reins of government.

With the tribe there has been no disaffection since the rising I have spoken of in the preceding pages; they are happy and contented, and I doubt me if in the whole world a more prosperous, happy community could be found.

I could go on telling of glorious hunts I have had up in the mountains in the north, of the great fat trout that rise so freely through the months of May and June in all the numerous streams; but I took up my pen to tell the story that altered the whole course of my life, and having told it, I feel my task is ended.

The old steamer has been replaced by a new boat, not perhaps so elegant as was the *Caledonia*, but still a good, comfortable ship, and many times I have taken Hilda a trip and given her a peep at the old world; but I think she likes home best, and the odd thing is, that though we were obliged to employ two white engineers when we got the new steamer, and Ted Cooper was growing too old to attend to nautical duties, our existence as a colony seems little known. Twice a year the English papers arrive as our boat returns from Victoria or San Francisco with stores, etc., and regularly I have them sorted and dealt out, one day after another, in order, so that we get our fresh news each day, and what does it signify though it be six or more months old? And I have never seen any notification in any paper of our existence.

It was this desire for secrecy that kept me for so many years from wishing to publish any account of our whereabouts. I had a wholesome horror of any intrusion of prospectors and the riff-raff that invariably accompany any expedition to a newly discovered spot where gold is reported to be deposited; but now it is different. I think I could cope with them if they came; and persons of gentleness and culture we should be only too pleased to welcome.

Mary I soon grew to be very fond of; her sad, gentle face would appeal to anyone, and in time she became bright and active; but Hilda has often told me that she has never shown the same spirit and dash since—since that time of the rising.

One day, some two years after, a trading steamer came up the sound, and I deputed Walker, with half a dozen Indians, to row out and go aboard of her and see what was wanted. We white people never showed on these occasions, for the reason I have just given—fear of discovery.

"Does a Mr. Wellesley live here?" a voice had asked him when he got aboard.

"No, Wellesley gone."

"And the ladies?"

"Gone also."

The face of the white interrogator had fallen. "Good heavens! Am I too late?" he cried. But Walker had recognized the face. He waited till the crew drifted away, till the captain spoke, "Guess there's no good wasting more time here," when he approached the man who had spoken to him and whispered quickly in his ear, "Chief Wellesley here, and the ladies, but crew must not know."

The man started. "I see, I see," he muttered quickly.

And so it came to pass that a white man had his trunks lowered into the Indian's boat, and, making a hasty excuse that he intended residing with the Indians for some time, he bade farewell to the astonished captain, who outwardly wished him a "good time," and inwardly considered him a lunatic; but as time was precious, and the man's mind

apparently made up, he turned his boat's head round and went on his business, whilst I, through my telescope, watched the boat returning.

The reader can imagine that with us all was bustle and excitement, for this was the first visitor that had done us the honour of calling; and evidently he intended staying, since the ship that brought him was going back.

Hilda and Mary stood beside me as I gazed through my glass.

"Who can it be?" cried Hilda. And as she spoke I saw who it was.

Without replying I handed her the glass, and walked slowly down to the head of the bay to meet the approaching boat.

Harry Whitmore—for it was he—looked finer drawn, and his face wore a more set and determined expression, as he took my hand and looked me anxiously in the face. The ladies had not come on with me; I did not expect that they would.

"Well, my lad," I said, "I am right glad to see you and to hear all the news."

Hastily he inquired for Mary, and I told him she was well; but I added, "Whether she will marry you or not is entirely unknown to me."

I think he was disappointed at hearing this. I believe he thought it was a matter we discussed amongst us all day long; anyhow, he grew more silent and embarrassed as we approached the house, especially so when we saw two tall female figures approaching. After all, brothers, I think you will allow that for delicate tact your sisters would take the medal. I, too, was feeling nervous and un-

comfortable, and began wondering what on earth I should say.

Thank Heaven, Hilda spoke first.

"How are you, Mr. Whitmore? I 'm so glad you 've come. Charlie does so want a companion, and you are just in time for a hunt before the 'fall' is over."

Mary quietly shook him by the hand, but I thought there was more colour in her cheek than I had noticed for some time. We were instantly at our ease, and Harry chatted away glibly as we walked on to "Wellesley House."

The matrimonial affairs of others are, I believe, interesting subjects with some people, maiden ladies of a certain age in particular; but I had other matters to engage my attention at that time. Of course I wished Mary would marry the ardent and determined admirer, as he was a good fellow, and I thought would make her happy. On the other hand, if she could not care for him, it would only make her miserable; there was the opposite side of the question. And yet I was very glad when, a few weeks after Whitmore's return, Hilda came to me one day and said—

"Mary and Harry are going to be married."

And I tell you we had a rare round of festivity. We had dances in the big schoolroom, and feasts where the heads of the tribe attended and proposed their health; and I may remark here that I had drifted from old Captain Herbert's set principle, that no intoxicating liquor should ever be supplied to members of the tribe, and as they grew more civilized I imported a light red port in casks—it was

an Australian wine, and much enjoyed by the Indians.

And I may also here state that I had introduced a system of paper currency. What work the Indians did for me or in the settlement they were paid for in neat little bills I had printed for me in San Francisco, and with this paper they came to the store to buy provisions and other necessaries.

During the festivities at this time there was one short speech I remember. I mind of it well because it was the first and last time I ever heard the rising alluded to by the Indians or before them.

It was old Walker who spoke; it was at a supper I was giving in the servants' hall up at "The Lodge," as it was a larger room than I had at "Wellesley House."

All the influential men of the tribe were there, and we had had a merry time until Walker rose, and before I could guess what he was about or stop him, he started with that wild look in his face I noticed about him on the afternoon when he turned on the Indian in the stockade.

"I think," he said, "amidst all this rejoicing, we might spare a little time to pray to the spirit of the Great Doctor that two years since was taken from us." A deadly silence had fallen on the room. I glanced at Mary, and her face had turned very pale, but there was no stopping Walker now. "We must remember," he continued, "that but for him our present respected chief would not be with us now, that but for him our tribe would probably have drifted back into a lawless, disorganized mob, and therefore I say, brother Indians, this is a toast the

tribe must never forget, that you must teach your children to teach their children; it is this: 'Endless happiness to the spirit of the Great Witch Doctor of Wyoming.'"

In silence the Indians rose and held their glasses at arm's length above their heads for some seconds; then they sipped them and sat down. But the hilarity of the evening was over, and soon after the party broke up.

From Tom Fane I hear regularly twice a year. In every letter he talks of coming back in his yacht and paying me a visit, but I do not think he ever will, for as men grow older their pleasure trips, as a rule, grow shorter. He had behaved exceedingly liberally to Harry Whitmore. When he returned him to the bosom of his family in Yorkshire he was only coldly welcomed. They thought when they packed him off to Vancouver they had got rid of him for ever.

In his despair Harry wrote to his old benefactor, saying how unhappy he was at home, and asking if Tom would use his influence in getting him a job of any sort. Fane, in his quick, impulsive way, dashed down to Yorkshire, had a stormy interview with the baronet, in which hard words flew fast and freely, and finished by taking the son back with him to London and settling £500 a year on him for life. Nor was he annoyed when later Harry somewhat hesitatingly hinted at his desire to go back to Nootka Sound and try to marry Mary.

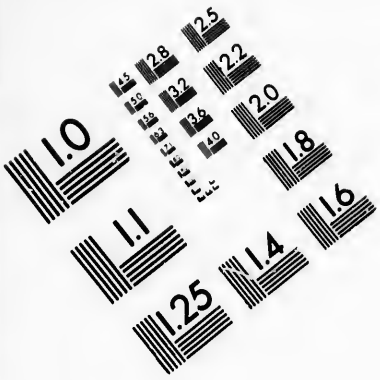
"All right, my lad," cried Tom, "but I must alter that little matter of the £500 I made over to you

for life, and change it to your wife and heirs for ever."

Not that money would have been any consideration, for Mary was rich, is rich now, and always will be, for the gold has never given out.

I often wonder whether in later years Whitmore ever knew or guessed of Mary's attachment to Abe. Personally I do not think he has ever known of it; still he must see that she held him anyhow in great reverence. What does he think when on that autumn day in each year she dresses herself in black and kneels by the vault so long a time? Very likely that she is praying for her father and her mother, but it always happens, so I have noticed, it is the anniversary of the death of Abe Wilson.

One of my chief occupations, of course with the aid of the Indians, has been to cut a path through the forest in a southerly direction, partly from curiosity, partly for something to do. At present we have gone about fifteen miles, always through the everlasting timber, and it now ends at the edge of a small stream. For a year I have not tried to penetrate further, because beyond this some of our party, while out exploring one day, came upon distinct signs of men: there were the teppee poles still standing and the blackened remains of a fire, and I have no wish to receive a visit from some of the unwashed Indians of the south, so I have concealed my pathway as much as possible by cutting trees and causing them to fall across it, and then making detours round in places, and I have passed my spare time of the last year in



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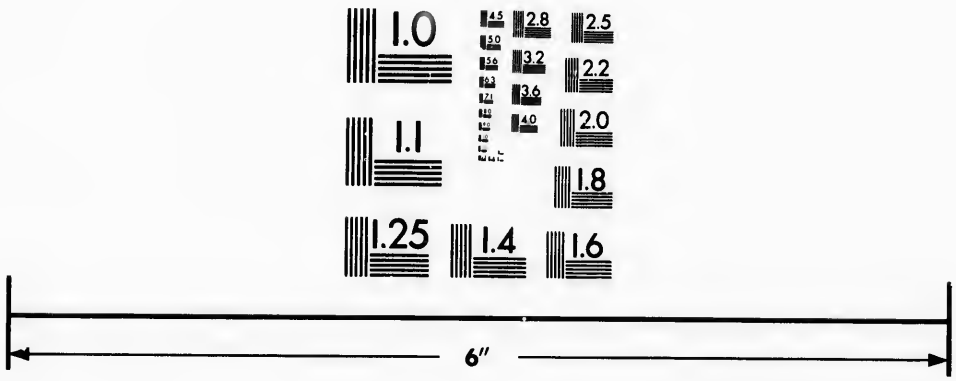

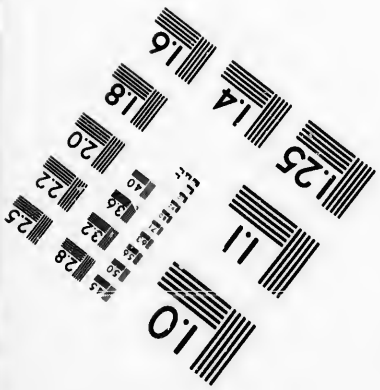

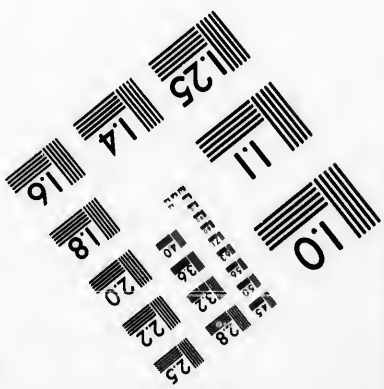

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working out the channel up the sound and marking it out with empty barrels.

In conclusion I should say that the Indians are far less afraid of the forest now than they were when I first came amongst them. Civilization and reading and lectures, illustrated by means of the magic lantern, have expanded their minds, and so "in parties" and well armed they do not so much mind making a trip down the pathway or a short way into the fringe of the timber.

I had written the last words of my story one morning in the fall of the year, and later was strolling about with Hilda and old Walker seeing to some gardening we were busy at outside the house.

"You seem rather dull and preoccupied to-day, Charlie. What is it? Is it because you have finished the story?"

"No, dear, it's not exactly that, but it worries me to think I cannot send it off before next spring to get it published, and I should like to send it to England."

Walker had heard my remark and stopped. "I believe, sir," he said, "there are white men not so very far away." Hilda and I started. "It is like this," he went on. "My son and the party with him returned yesterday from a trip down the path, and at the far end of it they were almost certain they heard a rifle shot, but they were not anxious to look for the parties and so make their own presence known."

"Quite right," said I.

"But," continued Walker, "I have an idea it might be a white man on a shooting trip."

That night I talked it over with Hilda, and we decided to send young Walker with a party and a fortnight's provisions, and if he should find a white man, and an Englishman, to hand him my writings. I need not say what careful instructions I gave him on the following morning before entrusting him with my, to me, precious manuscript.

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