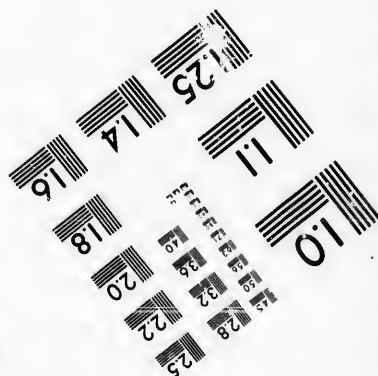
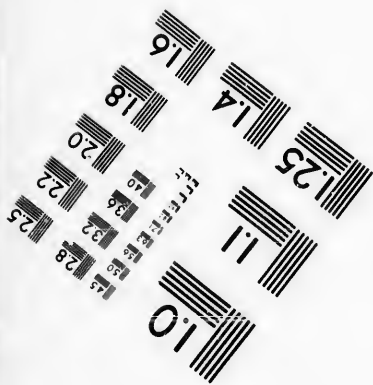
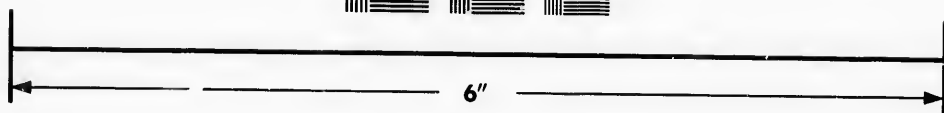
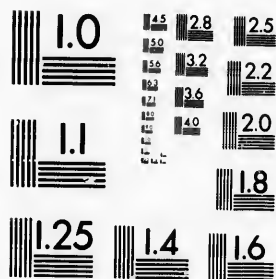


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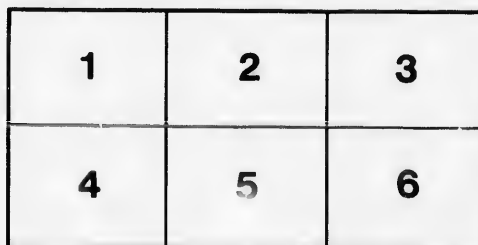
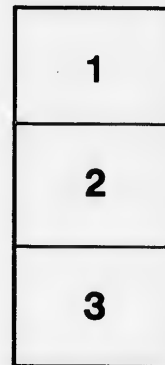
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PORTAGE ON GHOST'S RIVER.

THE
THREE TRAPPERS.

A STORY OF
Adventure in the Wilds of Canada.

BY
ACHILLES DAUNT.

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS.

London:
T. NELSON AND SONS, PATERNOSTER ROW.
EDINBURGH; AND NEW YORK.

1884.

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Preface.

HE writer wishes to point out that, although the incidents which he has introduced into the following pages are such as might be supposed likely enough to occur some years since, the advance of civilization has already rendered them inappropriate to the earlier scenes of the story. There is, for example, now-a-days no danger of being waylaid by Blackfeet near the Forks of the Saskatchewan. The buffalo has become almost extinct. A few scattered herds still survive among the foothills and parks of the Rocky Mountains, but such scenes as that on page 99 are things of the past. Ceaseless, senseless slaughter has at last reduced the once innumerable herds of buffaloes to a straggling handful. It is a question if more than one herd now exists in the United States. As regards the other game-animals mentioned in the story, their numbers are not yet sensibly diminished; and probably for many years to come they will tempt the sportsman to follow them amid the grim

solitudes of plain and mountain. Such characters as Jake are, like the beaver and buffalo, becoming scarce. But occasionally an original of the type turns up. The guides of the present day, such as Oregon Bill, are a very different class to the rude, uncivilized trappers of the past generation. They "do the thing in style," and will cater for their employer as well as house him in a comfortable waggon, so that be game never so scarce, the sportsman will not feed the less daintily. Under this system much of the romance of the old days has departed. But, on the other hand, its advantages are evident. After all, an empty platter is not to be preferred to a full one; and the sportsman seeks health and recreation in the wilderness, not starvation.

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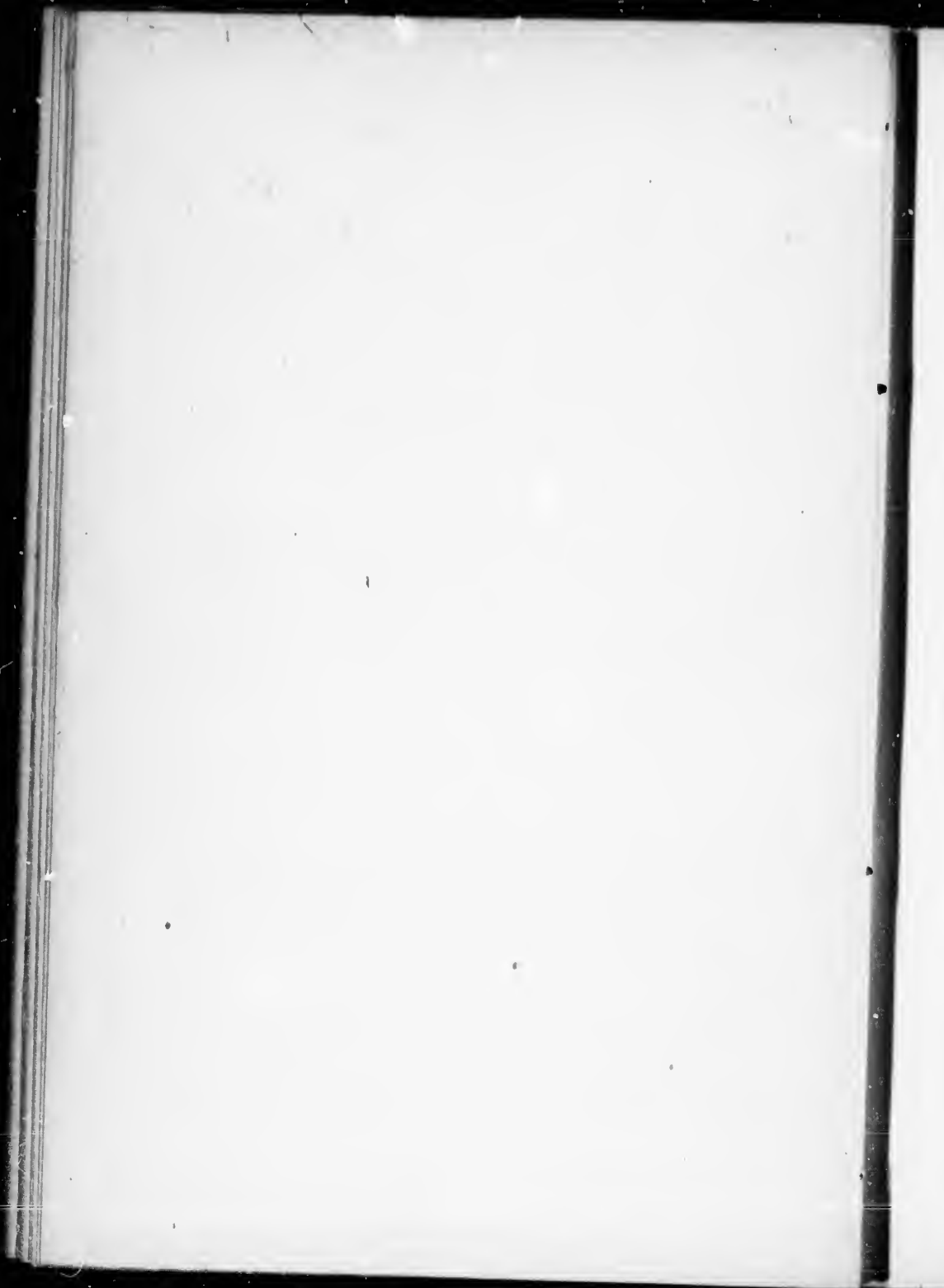
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THE THREE TRAPPERS.

CHAPTER I.

THE NORTH-WEST TERRITORY—THE SASKATCHEWAN—THE THREE TRAPPERS—
A CAMP—THE WOLVERINE AND WAPITI—A SUPPER INTERRUPTED—DIS-
APPEARANCE OF THE WAPITI—DEATH OF THE WOLVERINE.



WESTWARD, towards the setting sun, across the vast prairies of the North-West Territory, beyond lakes and rivers without number, lies a land which even to this day is imperfectly known to the geographer.

This region, which on most maps is represented by a blank, is the country of the Blackfeet, a fierce and dangerous tribe, who have hitherto maintained their independence partly by the natural inaccessibility of their country, and partly by their having abjured the deadly "fire-water" of the whites. This vast expanse of territory is walled in on the west by the giant chain of the Rocky Mountains, whose serrated peaks, covered with the snow which never melts, raise themselves among the clouds, their rough sides shaggy with forests—the home of the bear, the pan-

ther, the wolf, the mountain sheep or "big-horn," and many a valuable fur-bearing animal besides.

To the south the country of the Blackfeet may be said to extend to the head-waters of the Missouri, and northwards to the Upper Saskatchewan, while to the east these savages have often roamed in pursuit of the elk and the buffalo as far as long. 105°.

The hardy employés of the Hudson Bay Company have established trading-posts on the outskirts of this vast territory, and exchange, for the skins of the wild animals which the Indians bring to their forts, powder, lead, blankets, guns, and the various other articles needed by the savages. It is at one of these blockhouses, or forts, that our story opens.

Spring had already relaxed the iron grasp which winter had laid upon the country. The woods and prairies were enamelled with millions of sweet-smelling flowers, bees buzzed to and fro, while the air resounded with the chirp of crickets and of multitudes of birds. Already, too, the phalanxes of wild geese streamed along the sky, returning to their breeding-places far within the Arctic Circle from the southern prairies and the marshes of the Gulf States where they had passed the winter. Everything spoke of returning summer.

In front of Finlay House, as this trading-post of the Hudson Bay Company is called, upon the broad waters of the Saskatchewan, may be observed a canoe of birch-bark swiftly leaving the small cove which

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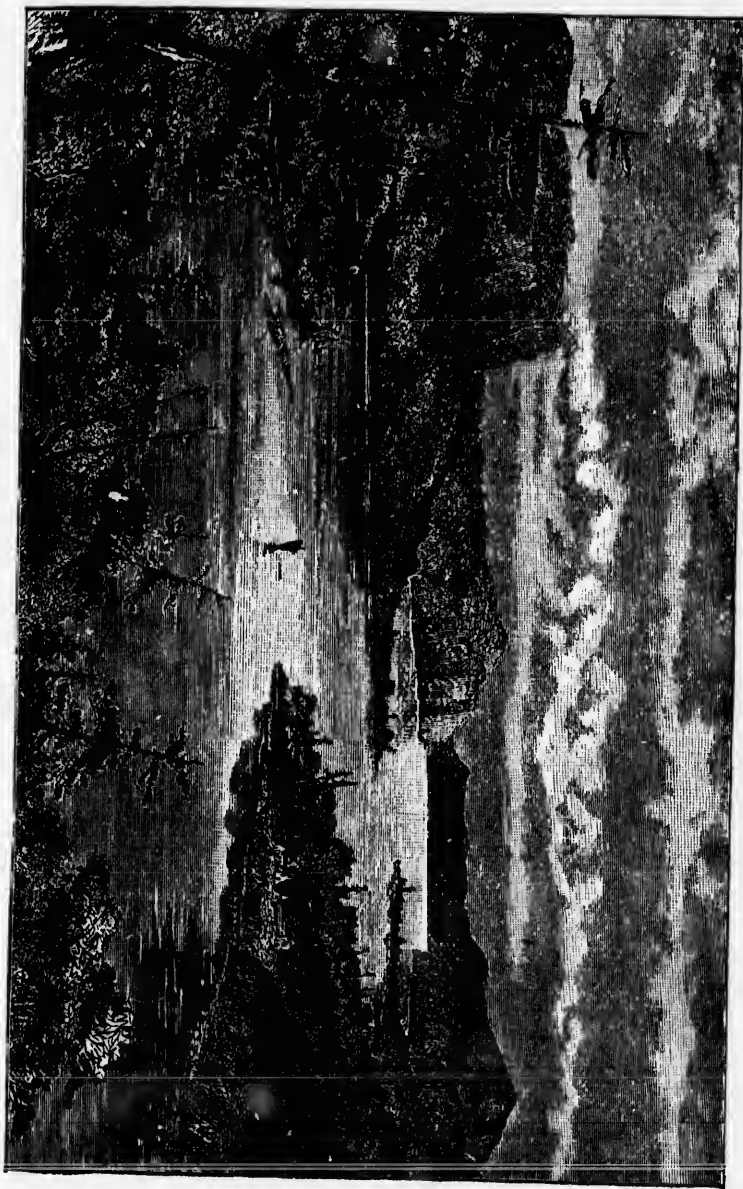
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SCENE ON THE SASKATCHEWAN.

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serves the fort as a harbour, and heading up-stream. It is paddled by two young men, one at the bow, the other at the stern; these are evidently on the sunny side of twenty. Another, apparently a few years older, sits amidships, reclining against a pile of Mackinaw blankets and buffalo robes.

Let us examine these voyageurs a little more closely. He who sits amidships, from his apparent seniority, is entitled to our first attention. His age is about twenty-three, but many a deadly encounter with wild animals or wilder men has stamped his features with a serious and determined air, which makes him appear somewhat older. The corners of his eyes are "crow-footed," and his gaze is searching and steady, quite unlike the glance of one accustomed to the settlements. It is an expression peculiar to the mountain men and hunters of these wild regions. This peculiarity of expression is shared, though in a lesser degree, by his two companions. His features are pleasing and open, and habitual good humour lurks around the corners of his mouth, notwithstanding that the lips are thin and the jaw heavy. His hair, where his coon-skin cap permits it to be seen, appears dark, almost black, and is closely cut; for as our young hunter is now bound on a journey through regions where barbers are as yet unknown (if we except the scalping Redskins), he had taken the precaution of having his hair closely trimmed before leaving the fort. His dress is that of the ordinary

mountain trapper, but being new is much more smart, and is as yet free from the stains with which, a little later, a hunter's life will diversify it. By his side lies his rifle, a fourteen-shot Winchester repeater, a weapon of priceless value in these wild countries, and with which our young hunter can hit "plum-centre" with any of the mountain men themselves.

His companions are similarly armed and equipped. Of these, one is dark-complexioned, the other fair; both are stoutly formed, and are evidently of a build well suited to their calling. Secured to the waists of all three, by broad belts, are handsome cartridge-pouches, that of the elder being made from the skin of the Canada otter, with flaps made from the neck and head of the wood duck; his companions' being made from alligator leather, ornamented with the stained quills of the porcupine. At the belt each wears a six-shot Colt revolver, balanced on the other side by a broad and thin-bladed butcher knife, secured in a sheath of alligator leather. Behind each may be observed a small and beautifully polished steel axe, the curved hickory handle hanging downwards. Their lower limbs are encased in leggings of deer-hide, smoked and softened to the texture of cloth, the seams fringed by strips of the leather itself, mingled with a finer and darker substance, which might be human hair. Three fine bold fellows are these. Their free and piercing glances hover all around—in front, behind, and on either side—in quest of enemy

or of game, as their light craft, impelled by sinewy arms, flies up-stream, the foam cresting against the bows, and the wash threatening to overleap the low gunwale. French Canadians they are, and cousins. The eldest is known by the pseudonym of Pierre au Calumet, from an adventure which once befell him at the fort of that name. His companions are well known in "the trade" although so young, and I have no doubt that to many a trapper are familiar the names of Gaultier l'Aigle and Henri Labiche.

I have said that the bows of the canoe pointed up-stream. The young travellers are on a long and perilous journey—a journey of which dwellers in cities and in civilized communities can scarcely realize the nature. Their destination is the far-distant region round the head-waters of the Bull Pound River, where they intend to camp, and trap the streams which issue from the wild cañons of the Rocky Mountains.

Perilous and difficult as is their journey, they seem in high spirits, and as the light boat glides along, the Canadian boat-song floats ashore—

"Row, brothers, row, the stream runs fast,
The rapids are near, and the daylight's past."

It wanted but an hour of evening when Pierre exclaimed to his companions—

"I say, boys, it's time to camp. We've done an honest day's paddling, and yonder lies 'the spot for camp—wood and water at hand. There's grass too," he added, laughing; "but I guess our horse ain't

peckish, though she does take in a stomachful with us three fellows and our traps!"

Gaultier and Henri both laughed as they secured the canoe to the bank by holding on to a branch, while Pierre stepped ashore and assisted his companions in getting out the cargo. This done, the canoe was carefully lifted from the water and turned bottom up to dry. This precaution preserves the bark in good condition, as well as renders the early part of the succeeding day's paddling much easier, as the canoe, being dry, is much lighter, and is impelled with less exertion.

"Now, lads," continued Pierre, whom the others looked on as the captain of the expedition, "look alive with the axe. There's a dozen rampikes on that drowned land; chop 'em and let's have a fire. I'll start a blaze, and get the meat out."

Presently might be heard the merry ringing of the axes and the crash of falling timber, and after a while Henri and Gaultier staggered to the fire with a donkey load of withered logs and branches, which speedily blazed and crackled, sending up forked tongues which threw a red glare through the surrounding woods, beating back the gloom which had already been advancing from their deep recesses.

Soon as the blaze moderated, the camp-kettle bubbled and hissed upon the huge embers, sending forth a savoury odour of *café noir*, while some venison ribs which they had brought with them from

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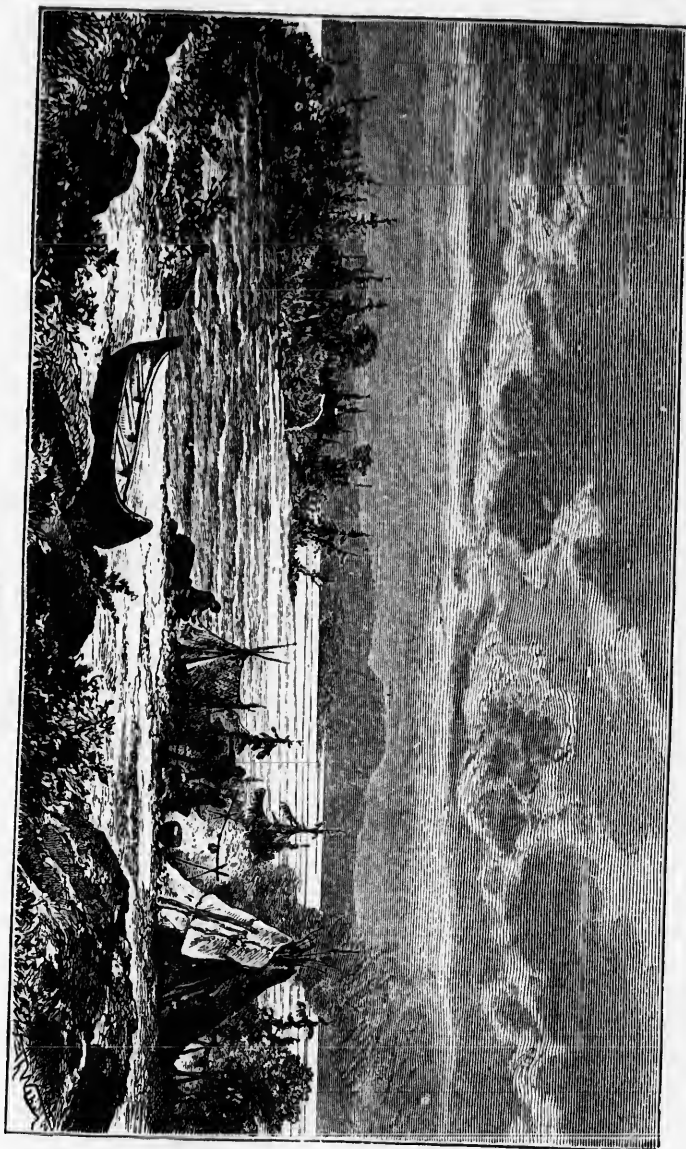
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THE CAMP.

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the fort speedily began to assume an appetizing appearance under Gaultier's manipulation. Gaultier was, in fact, the cook of the expedition, having discovered a talent for transforming even the most unpalatable-looking articles into a stew, fricassée, or hash which would have tickled the jaded palate of the veriest epicure.

The old proverb, "There's many a slip betwixt cup and lip," was never more literally fulfilled than in the case of our young trappers, who are just about to take their evening meal, and repose themselves after the labours of the day.

Henri was about to help himself to a tin pannikin of the steaming coffee, when an exclamation from Pierre arrested his attention. "Voilà," said he, "look there, boys!" pointing towards the river; "there's a buck in the water, and by the way he's swimming there's something the matter with him."

All three now bent their eyes upon the stream, in which, and about fifty yards from where they sat, they plainly saw the head and antlers of a noble deer, as he breasted the current obliquely, making almost straight for the camp. It was evident that as yet he had not seen either the fire or the boys, who quickly seized their rifles, intending to take the buck as he landed, so as to give him the trouble of bringing himself to camp. Scarcely forty yards, however, separated him from the bank, when with a loud snort the animal partly raised himself in the

water, disclosing to the astonished eyes of the party the figure of another animal which lay along its back, the jaws being apparently buried in the side of the buck's neck.

The young hunters gazed upon each other, as if in inquiry; and on again looking towards the water, no trace of either animal remained. In vain they looked upon the fast darkening river—nothing to explain their disappearance presented itself. They therefore reluctantly turned towards the fire; but suddenly Pierre, motioning to them to stand still, bent his ear towards the ground, apparently listening intently. Without a word he noiselessly plunged into the bushes, heading obliquely through them for the river bank. His companions gazed silently after him, neither of them altering his position. Presently was heard the crack of a rifle, followed by the fierce growling of some animal; another rifle-shot, and Pierre's cheery voice called out, "This way, boys; here's the chap to explain the mystery!"

Pushing rapidly through the brushwood, they speedily joined their companion, whom they found standing over the carcass of some animal on the ground, whose hunched and rounded back, shaggy fur, and savage jaws showed him to be the dreaded wolverine.

"It was just like him," said Pierre; "the cowardly brute must have sprung from an overhanging branch upon the buck as it came to water, and the poor,

terrified animal plunged in to get him off its back. I suspect the jugular was cut by the savage beast's teeth, and the buck bled to death while swimming across the river. Anyhow, let's have his hide. Let's raise his hair, boys."

Under the skilful knives of our three hunters, the wolverine was soon divested of his shaggy hide; and bearing this trophy, they once more returned to their fire. Here they found that their venison ribs were burned to a cinder, and the coffee-kettle having capsized was half empty. Their supper, therefore, was a poor one; and hungry and tired, they wrapped themselves in their buffalo robes, and having replenished the fire, they lay down with their feet towards it, and soon fell asleep.

CHAPTER II.

FOREST LIFE—PIERRE'S MORNING HUNT—PARTRIDGE DANCE—NATURAL HISTORY OF THE PRAIRIE HEN—DESTRUCTION OF GAME IN AMERICA—JOURNEY RESUMED—THE TRUMPETER SWAN—PIERRE'S ESCAPE—APPEARANCE OF THE INDIAN—PIERRE'S RUSE—DEATH OF THE INDIAN—PIERRE'S ACCOUNT OF THE SWANS OF AMERICA.



THEY whose lives are passed in the woods and prairies of the Far West sleep lightly. The nerves, strung by a constant apprehension of danger, never relax, nor allow the hunter to be plunged into the heavy sleep which the easy life of the settlements renders possible to the tired merchant or tradesman.

The ordinary sounds of the forest fall unheeded on the ear of the sleeping hunter; but at the snapping of a dried stick under the moccasin of his red-skinned foe, or at a false note in the imitation of some forest denizen's cry, the hunter, watchful even in sleep, will spring to cover, the ready rifle in his grasp, and with keen eye and wary ear await the approach of his enemy, who thus himself is often ambushed and sent to his happy hunting-grounds with a rifle-bullet through his brain.

Thus lightly, and not the less refreshingly, slept

our young trappers. Earliest dawn sees them erect. Pierre has been gone from camp for upwards of an hour, and has not yet returned; Henri brings water from the river in the camp-kettle; Gaultier arranges the fire, at which they sit warming themselves, for the morning is chill, and await the boiling of the coffee-kettle, the contents of which, with biscuits, is to form their breakfast, unless Pierre is fortunate on his morning hunt.

"There's Pierre's rifle!" exclaimed Henri. "I hope he's got something better than these biscuits.—There it is again!" he continued, as three distinct reports fired in quick succession reached their ears. "I hope he's not fallen in with Indians, though it's too near the fort for that, I think."

While they were still excitedly speculating on this point, Pierre was observed walking leisurely towards the camp with a bundle of birds attached to his rifle-barrel. These they recognized at once as the prairie hen, and the hungry hunters welcomed them with eager acclamations. They were speedily divested of their plumage, and, having been cleaned, were spitted on pointed sticks leaning towards the fire at an angle of forty-five degrees. While they are being cooked, we will give, in Pierre's own language, an account of his morning's adventures.

"After leaving you," he began, "I struck back from the river through the woods, and hunted for tracks in a marsh I fell in with. There wasn't a

sign, except some wapiti tracks, which I judged were a fortnight old. This was bad luck, as I knew you would feel precious hungry after your fast last night. However, I held on over a ridge covered with cedar and dwarf birch. Here I found fresh buck sign—some twigs were nibbled and were still wet.

“The wind was all right, blowing from the other side freshly in my face. Just about here the scrub was very poor, the ridge being stony with hardly any soil; so that, seeing a high rock about a hundred yards to my right, I made for it, thinking that from it I might get a view of the beast if he was anywhere within shot.

“Just as I got to the top I saw him feeding half-way up another ridge a quarter of a mile away. I quickly descended from my position, and taking advantage of a clump of spruce in the hollow, I got within one hundred yards of him; but he stood obliquely away from me, offering a bad shot.

“While debating whether to fire, he slewed his head round to nibble at the top of a small bush which was close to him, giving me a chance, which I instantly seized. He fell at the report, but immediately rose again, and made over the ridge with only one antler in his head. I had fired a trifle too high, and the ball cut the horn about three inches from his forehead.

“After this disappointment, I beat back towards the river, and not long after I heard the partridge drumming in a piece of woods near by. I made

towards it, but seemed to be getting no nearer; the farther I advanced, the farther from me it seemed to go. Of course I knew the nature of these birds and their drumming, and so held on.

"Presently I began to see light shining through the trees ahead. 'There they'll be,' said I to myself; and in fact, as soon as I got to the edge of the trees I saw them out on a little prairie at their queer games. There were about a dozen of them in all,—ten of them were running after each other like mad, in a circle. Round and round they kept, until I began to wonder they didn't get dizzy.

"Two others were a little apart, and I saw these were cocks. First one and then the other would spread his wings, fan out his tail, and strut about, with his funny bags filled out like oranges at each side of his neck. The noise they made was wonderful, considering the size of the creatures. Suddenly they set upon each other, beak and nail. They rolled all over the place, the feathers flying from them as they scratched and tore each other. The other birds stopped their dance and began to run about them, stretching their necks, and looking as if they would like to pitch in too.

"Just then it occurred to me that you were in want of meat, and so I sighted at the neck of a big cock who seemed to be 'keeping the ring,' and at the report his head flew ten yards from his body! The rest flew to some trees close by, and by taking the

lowest I managed to bag three more before they took the hint and disappeared over the woods. The two I left fighting were still at it hard and fast, so, quietly stepping towards them, I hit both with a log and made meat of them. Not seeing anything more about there, and as it was getting latish, I just made tracks for camp, and—here I am.”

Thus ended Pierre's morning adventure. The birds having been cooked, and the coffee ready, our young trappers made a much better breakfast than they had previously expected to do. While they are discussing it, we will glance at the natural history of this interesting bird, which they seem to be eating with such relish.

The pinnated grouse, or “prairie hen,” is an inhabitant of the vast plains or prairies which stretch from the Gulf of Mexico far north into British America. Here they may be found in incredible numbers, and are slaughtered in thousands by the pot-hunter in the neighbourhood of the new settlements. Prairie roads and waggon tracks are much frequented by them for the sake of the undigested corn dropped by the passing horses.

In size this splendid bird has but few equals among the feathered game of America, measuring eighteen inches long by twenty-seven inches across the wings. Its bill is short, curved, and stoutly made, the upper mandible being larger, and consequently projecting beyond the lower. The legs are feathered, the toes being coated on the upper surface with numerous

minute scales. It possesses strong crooked claws, well adapted for scratching among the prairie grass in search of food. It seems to evince a partiality for moist situations, especially if the herbage be of a bunchy, tussocky nature; and here they will rarely be sought for in vain.

The general colour of this bird is dark brown, harmonizing with the natural tints of the prairie; but this changes to a lighter colour, approaching to gray, underneath. The colour of the tail feathers is, with the exception of one or two central ones, a chocolate brown; the central feathers are handsomely varied by dark brown markings. From the edge of the mandible to the eye, and backwards to the neck, may be observed a darkly-pencilled line. On raising the wings, a slate-coloured patch of feathers will be seen, which are much in request by the fishing-tackle makers.

The prairie hen pairs in April (or somewhat earlier in more southern latitudes), and it is at this season they emit the extraordinary noise which we have already noticed as having attracted Pierre. This sound is occasioned by the male bird forcing air through a vent in the curious orange-coloured appendages attached to his neck. At this season, too, the large packs, formed during the preceding autumn, separate and divide into smaller ones of from a dozen to twenty birds. In the early mornings their strange booming may be heard; and the hunter, attracted to

the spot, sees on a rock, or knoll, or other elevated position, the male birds showing off before an admiring crowd of hens. It is at these times that they engage in desperate encounters, during which so much in earnest are they that one may approach unperceived and wring the necks of the belligerents.

The hen generally lays from ten to a dozen eggs, much resembling in colour (which is a dull yellow) those of the ruffed grouse. The site selected for the nest is usually the summit of some slight hillock or bank in the prairie; the materials selected being the stalks of the common prairie grass mixed with the leaves of trees (if at hand) or weeds. Towards the beginning of September the young birds are able to fly, and at this time Apicius himself would have nothing to complain of in their flavour. By the middle of October they are strong on the wing, and afford capital sport to the traveller.

It is only of late years that the merits of this fine bird have become generally known. But steam having so much abridged time and space, renders it now possible to the enterprising Yankee to make large shipments of this game to the English markets, and in consequence we see it exposed for sale in the chief towns of the United Kingdom.

The professional hunters of the plains and Rocky Mountains shoot but few of these birds, designating them as "no account trash." In the vicinity of settlements the pot-hunters and purveyors to hotels

trap, snare, and shoot thousands of them, the settlers even throwing them into the hog-pen in those districts where no market is at hand for their sale. This "wilful waste" will certainly make "woful want;" and in many regions formerly noted for the numbers of these splendid birds it has already done so, as they are now utterly destitute of even a single covey.

It is to be wished that the wicked and indiscriminate slaughter of this game-bird was the only evil of the same kind to be complained of in America. But it is not so; and from the buffalo to the squirrel, the trout to the lordly salmon, the snipe to the wild turkey, a clean sweep is being made through the length and breadth of the land. Laws have, indeed, been passed with a view to the repression of this cruel slaughter; but in too many districts they are a dead letter. There are signs, however, that a better spirit is setting in; and we doubt not we shall see by-and-by many species of game, which the foolish apathy of the Americans allowed to be all but exterminated, fostered and reproduced at considerable trouble and expense.

But we have wandered far afield from our young trappers, who, having satiated voracious appetites on the succulent prairie hen, are now about to resume their journey. The canoe is first lifted from the bank and carefully launched, Henri and Gaultier wading into the water for this purpose. The cargo is then replaced, and the three youths stepping in,

bid adieu to the cozy nook in which they have passed the night.

For some hours they continued to paddle, gliding swiftly along now one bank and then the other in search of game; for the half-dozen birds which Pierre had shot only furnished them with a breakfast. They were therefore under the necessity of hunting for their food; for the biscuits and bacon which they had brought with them from the fort they looked on as a sort of reserve supply, only to be eaten in case no game presented itself.

They passed the mouths of several streams which fall into the Saskatchewan from the north. The banks of the river itself became more and more wooded as they approached the "Forks," until soon they found themselves sailing along between tall forests which clad the swelling hills on each side of the broad river.

When passing the embouchure of a stream which joined the main river, Pierre's quick eye suddenly fell upon the figure of a large swan of the trumpeter species, which was just at that instant rounding a bend in the river. As yet the bird had not observed the canoe, being intent on feeding among a mass of floating weed which covered the surface of the water.

Instantly the "way" of the canoe was stopped, and Pierre, seizing his gun, was in the act of sighting, when the sharp crack of a rifle was heard from the woods, and the swan, with a loud houp, attempted to

rise into the air, but fell back and floated dead upon the river.

So sudden and unexpected was the occurrence that none of the youths could repress a cry of astonishment. At the same moment another rifle cracked among the trees on the northern shore, and a lock of hair fell from Pierre's temple, cut by the whistling bullet.

"To the south shore, boys!" cried he; "it's Indians!" A few nervous strokes of the paddles sent the light craft across the bosom of the river and shot it into a small recess, where overhanging branches of willow and birch shielded them from observation.

"That was a shave!" said Pierre, causing his companions to observe how narrowly the unseen marksman had missed his aim. "I guess we'd better cache here awhile, to see if the savages will show out. It's the Blackfeet, I've no doubt, though they seldom range thus far east."*

For an hour they waited, and patiently watched the north shore through an opening in the bushes. Not a sign of life was visible, except a few pigeons which alighted on the margin to drink. "See," said Gaultier, "those birds hear or see something; they've stopped feeding and are head up." At this moment the birds rose into the air, and the voyageurs could see the bushes on the north bank move slightly once or twice.

* An officer of the Hudson Bay Company was fired at by a Blackfoot Indian some years since near the locality alluded to in the text.

"Now, boys," said Pierre, "the whole thing is as clear as shooting. Gaultier, do you do just as I tell you, and I'll show you a trick that may be of use to you another time. Take a paddle, and go down the bank a little, taking good care to keep out of sight behind the bushes. Put your robe on the paddle, and your cap on top, and let it show slowly just over the bushes. Don't do it standing," he continued. "Lie down behind a log, and then show your decoy. If it draws a shot, let robe and cap fall."

Gaultier quietly left the canoe, and disappeared noiselessly in the bushes. Pierre placed himself, with his rifle in readiness, in such a position as afforded a good view of the opposite bank, without exposing himself to the gaze of any prowler in that direction. Henri stood beside him, also in readiness for whatever might occur.

A deathlike stillness succeeded these preparations, while the two hunters in the canoe anxiously awaited the effect of the stratagem.

Presently a puff of smoke shot out from among the bushes on the other bank, followed by a cry and frantic shaking of bushes from the direction in which Gaultier had hidden himself. The two youths had no time to comment on this, when a loud war-whoop resounded from the northern shore, and a painted savage issued from the bushes, pushing a canoe before him from under their cover. This he launched, and prepared to cross the river.

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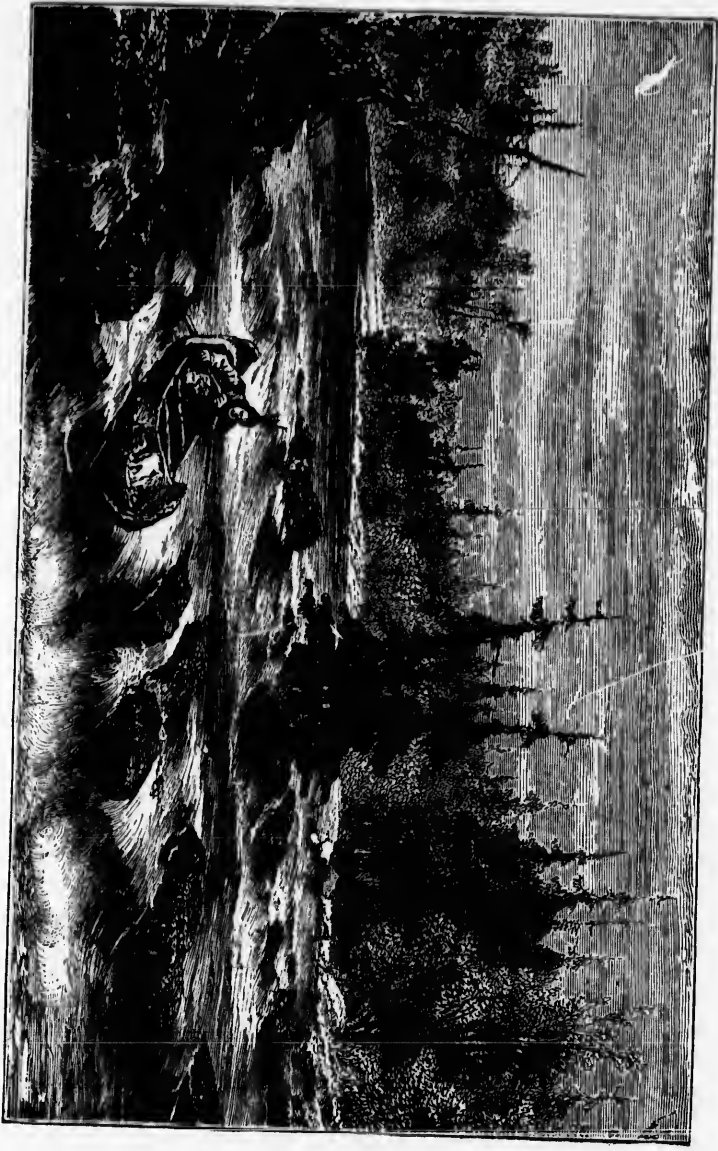
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"Don't be anxious, lad," exclaimed Pierre, laying his hand on Henri's shoulder. "It's a good two hundred and fifty yards to yonder Redskin. Let him come a little nearer; for he must not escape to put his friends on our trail."

The canoe had nearly reached the bank, when, despite the Indian's efforts, it got within the influence of a rapid, which carried it downwards, when Pierre, raising his rifle, drew a bead on the vermilion-painted forehead of the savage. As slowly and steadily he pressed the trigger as if he were only shooting at a target. At the report the Indian sprang from his kneeling position and fell overboard, the canoe capsizing and floating down-stream. Once they thought they saw a hand frantically tossed above the surface of the fast-rushing river; and if so, it was the last they saw of their treacherous enemy, who had so nearly inflicted on one of them the fate which destiny had reserved for himself.

A loud hurrah from Gaultier now proclaimed his safety. They speedily rejoined him, and he gave them his experiences.

"When I left you," he began, "I kept back a bit from the bank, not greatly wishing to have a hole in my skin, if I could help it. I knew there was just the place I wanted to hide in, and show my decoy from, a little down-stream; so I wormed my way like a rattler till I got cached in the nicest kind of hole. Well, then, I just poked out my buffalo robe and cap,

so that from the other side it would look as if some one was skulking through the bushes. Just then I heard the shot, and I must say *that* Indian shoots plum-centre. See here," he added, pointing to a bullet-hole in that part of the robe which would have corresponded with the chest of a human being—"there's his talk—straight to the point, without any circumlocution."

While our voyageurs were fighting their battle over again, Pierre, happening to look across the stream, exclaimed, "Boys, that Indian has got us our dinner. See!"

The youths, in fact, observed that the body of the swan, which had been caught in an eddy at the junction of the two streams, still continued to gyrate near the farther shore. As no other Indians appeared, the boys determined to run the risk of an ambush; so, stepping into the canoe, they paddled across and secured the bird, which, being a splendid cock, weighed nearly thirty pounds. They then landed, and having constructed a roaring fire, they prepared their dinner, of which by this time they stood much in need.

Pierre, having lived longer than either of his companions in the North-West Territory, where, in some districts, during a portion of the year, the Indians and fur-traders depend almost entirely for subsistence on the swans and other migratory birds, was consequently well acquainted with the natural his-

tory of this species. During dinner, therefore, he gratified his companions with an account of the various species of swans which occur in the Hudson Bay Territory.

"There are," he commenced, "at least three species of swans in America. They all attain a great size; but the heaviest as well as largest is the trumpeter, which often attains the weight of thirty pounds, and will measure from sixty-five to seventy inches in length, with an alar spread of upwards of five feet.

"As you may see for yourselves in the specimen we have got, it is white, has black feet and bill, and may also be identified by the copper-colour hue which tinges the head and neck.

"At a distance it can readily be distinguished from either of the other kinds—namely, the hooper, and Bewick's swan—by its greater size, as well as by its note. The habits of all three are much alike, but the trumpeter seems to collect in greater numbers than the others, and also arrives earlier in the season in the fur countries.

"It is hard to fix a latitude below which this bird does not breed. Some say that they have observed its nests as far south as the southern shore of the Lesser Slave Lake, in latitude 59°; but I think cases of this kind are comparatively rare. For my part, I have scarcely seen half-a-dozen such nests in as many years; and the factor at Fort Assiniboine told me that he had not seen a score in the

many years he lived at the fort. The vast majority of them, therefore, breed much farther north, within the Arctic Circle, among the boundless morasses of Boothia Felix and King William's Land. It is probable that many breed in the lakes on the north of the barren grounds along the Great Fish River; but these wild territories and their denizens are as yet imperfectly known.

"The trumpeter, usually arriving somewhat earlier in the north than either of the other species, frequently finds the ponds, lakes, and rivers still frozen, and is then obliged to seek its subsistence at the few places which have remained open—as the rapids, cascades, etc.

"On these occasions the hunters, Indians, or voyageurs often kill great numbers of them. Indeed, there are whole districts in which the Indians live almost entirely on these birds, and on the wild geese and ducks, at the periods of migration.

"In securing the swans the Indians both snare and shoot them. A running noose is arranged at the nest, which is built on the ground. The bird enters at one side, and leaves at the other. The snare is set at the side by which she enters the nest.

"Snares are also extensively set at intervals along the banks of the rivers, extending often for several miles along both sides of the stream. These snares are secured to poles sunk in the bottom of the river.

"In America all migratory birds retreat in a

leisurely way before the cold weather, stopping to feed and rest. Thus they are never much out of condition, and consequently are always well worth powder and shot.

"The trumpeter's eggs are larger than those of either of the other species. A single egg will make a meal for a hungry man, and that with little bread or meat in addition.

"The hooper arrives soon after the trumpeter from the south. It is little inferior in size to the latter, measuring frequently sixty inches in length, and weighing from eighteen to twenty pounds.

"These birds, like the others, seem to dislike salt water. They are very rarely seen on the sea; and, owing to the fact that they only stretch down for their food, and do not dive for it, they are rarely seen far out on large lakes, preferring to frequent the banks, where the water is shallow.

"Those rivers and lakes on the North-West Territory which produce the 'water oats,' or wild rice, are specially favoured by the wild swans, which greedily strip the sedge of its seeds. They also readily feed upon frogs, worms, or small fish.

"Although the swans, from their great weight, cannot readily rise from the water and take swiftly to wing, like other birds, still, when once under way, they fly at a marvellous rate, and under favourable circumstances are supposed to attain the speed of a hundred miles an hour. Indeed, so great

is the difficulty to the heavier birds of taking wing, that, if possible, they will endeavour to make their escape by swattering along the surface of the water, aiding themselves by paddling with their broad webbed feet. If the wind be favourable, they will even enlist its influence by opening their huge wings and disposing them in such a manner as to catch the breeze. They are thus enabled to progress very swiftly—quite as much so as a canoe paddled by two men.

"In addition to their value to the *cuisine*, these birds are also valuable for their skins, which the Indians and trappers dispose of to the Hudson Bay Company for five or six shillings apiece. However, the trumpeter swan is more in request for this purpose than either of the others.

"I remember, a few years ago, being early in the spring—a little before this time—on the Mackenzie River. The frost had not broken up on the lakes, and the water-fowl that had arrived from the south were all herded together at the rapids and falls in countless numbers. My old rifle (I hadn't the 'Winchester' then) had a heap of talking to do, I can tell you. For a fortnight I did nothing but hunt the swans with torches at night in my canoe, and during the day I kept up a constant fire at the fresh birds that kept incessantly arriving.

"Well, boys, at the end of that fortnight I counted three hundred and fifty swans, besides ducks and

other birds. I traded the skins at Fort Resolution, and pocketed nearly eighty-seven pounds. I had a smart time of it too getting off the pelts, and was a sight to look at—all over blood and feathers. If the frost hadn't broken, I might have got as many more; however, I got my share anyhow.

“Among these swans, of course, all three sorts were represented, the smallest one, Bewick's swan, being much scarcer than the others. I don't know what made them come so early either, as usually these are the latest to arrive. They also breed much farther to the north than the others. I have never seen any of their nests, but some of the traders from away up the Mackenzie told me that they build a huge pile, six or seven feet in diameter, and quite two feet in height. The nest itself is on top of this; the eggs are whitish-brown in general appearance, and are blotched with darker patches here and there.

“Bewick's swan is usually found along the Pacific coast, where also the hooper is a visitor. The trumpeter, however, is *the swan par excellence* in the fur countries, and is what the traders and trappers allude to when they speak of these birds.

“Instances of Bewick's swan being seen and shot in Great Britain have frequently occurred; in fact, scarcely a winter passes during which some specimens are not procured in those islands.

“I am sure, boys, you agree with me in thinking these birds a great Godsend to travellers through

this wilderness. Many is the meal they afford to the hungry hunter, who without them would go supperless to bed.

"There are other birds, too, in this region which almost rank equal to the swans—the great gray or Canada goose and its congeners, which cover the rivers and lakes twice a year, and are a welcome addition to a trapper's fare.

"Now I think I have preached myself out about these birds; and as we seem pretty well satisfied with our dinner, we'd better make tracks. I know a nice spot to camp in to-night, and we'll have to do our best to reach it early."

So, leaving the embers of the camp-fire, the three young men re-embarked, and proceeded on their journey.

CHAPTER III.

FIGHT BETWEEN PRONG-HORN BUCKS—PIERRE SHOTS BOTH—APPROACH TO THE "FORKS" OF THE SASKATCHEWAN—FOREST SCENERY—SUDDEN ALARM—THE ATTACK—THE FATAL SHOT—DEFEAT OF THE SAVAGES—HENRI'S DEATH—THE BURIAL.



WE will now pass over the next two days, during which nothing of interest occurred, if we except a singular encounter which they witnessed between two rival bucks of the prong-horn species.

The animals were upon the sandy beach at a point where a sudden bend of the river had hidden them from the travellers until they were close upon them. First one and then the other would retreat a little, and setting his horns, rush at his enemy, who each time received him on ready antlers. The clattering of their horns against each other drowned the slight noise made by the dipping of the paddles, so that the canoe approached unperceived to within one hundred yards of the combatants.

After regarding them for some moments, Pierre raised his rifle, and sighting at them just as they ranged alongside each other, pulled the trigger. To

the surprise of the party, both bucks fell to the shot; but one presently regained his legs, and had almost reached the crest of the bank, when a bullet from Pierre's unerring rifle again laid him low.

An examination showed that the first ball had hit the nearest animal behind the shoulder, and passing out at the opposite side, had severely wounded the second buck, which at that moment had stood almost side by side with his antagonist. The animals were then butchered, and the choicest parts placed in the canoe.

As this was now the fourth day "out" from the fort, the travellers were approaching the "Forks," as they are called, of the Saskatchewan, where the north branch of that stream joins the southern one, and unite into a noble river, which flows majestically onward between tall forests towards the far-distant Winnipeg. As Pierre was determined to reach the Forks that night, they did not halt as usual an hour before sunset, but continued their course.

Before and behind them stretched the broad bosom of the noble river—a magnificent expanse of sparkling water, fanned into gentle waves by the breeze. To the north, the forest lined the shores, many of the trees standing scathed and blighted, relics of fierce forest fires or of lightning.

The southern shore, however, commanded their intensest admiration, for there the woods were varied with many kinds of deciduous trees. The maple and

birch were robed in tender green, and contrasted strikingly with the sombre pines and hemlocks which towered above their smaller brethren. The land, too, was undulating, and swell succeeded swell, clothed to the summit with luxuriant forest.

To Pierre, who reclined on a pile of skins, the motion in their frail craft was productive of a delightful languor, as he dreamily feasted his eyes on scenes the fairest the world can produce.

A gentle ripple, raised by the breeze, which also fanned his temples, lapped against the sides of the canoe, and threatened, in mimicry of the ocean, to wash the decks; but the light boat glided gracefully over them, just as their entrance seemed inevitable.

It was, as we have observed, evening, and both Gaultier and Henri exerted themselves to reach the junction of the rivers in time to construct a camp for the night.

The sun hung, a globe of fire, in the west, hovering above the liquid horizon. The gentle undulations of the river in the far distance seemed to rise and fall against the fiery disc as if impatient to engulf it, recalling the lines of "Hiawatha,"—

"And the evening sun descending,
Set the clouds on fire with redness,—
Burned the broad sky, like a prairie;
Left upon the level water
One long track and trail of splendour."

Despite the efforts of our voyageurs to reach the Forks early, the moon had risen, and was sailing

gloriously in the blue ether. The boys steered the canoe towards the northern shore, which they coasted, sometimes paddling beneath the huge branches of the trees which overhung the water, and which threw a shadow black as Erebus.

Outside, the river glimmered and glittered, the wavelets sparkling as they rose and fell in the soft light; while afar, on the freshening breeze, the ear detected the rush of water over rocks, now so faint as to seem the work of fancy, and again springing into fresh life under the varying impulse of the night wind. The strange cry of the loons resounded over the river, and in it was nothing discordant with the wild scene around. Through the over-arching branches, as "through chinks in a ruin," moonbeams rained upon them, and here and there fell upon and revealed the waves made by otters and musk-rats, as they dived beneath the surface at the approach of the canoe.

Now and then the forest receded from the water's edge, and here long reaches of silvery beach fringed the shore, upon which the moonlight seemed to slumber peacefully. Again they enter beneath the dark shadows of the woods; and how sudden the change! A stray ray falls timidly upon a nodding plume of royal fern upon some gray rock; now a paddle seems to drop diamonds into an abyss of ink; while now and then great patches of foam glide noiselessly past like the ghosts of slaughtered swans.

Poets write of the "sighing of the breeze amid the tree-tops." It is only in the vast forests of the New World that this exquisite melody of nature can be heard in perfection. At times the listener is deceived by it, and likens it to the half-suppressed sighing of mournful spirits. At other times, in conjunction with the tinkling and plashing of the brooks, the air is filled with an undefined wailing, as if nature bemoaned some approaching calamity.

The gloom and mystery which brooded over that great wilderness made the youths pensive and silent. They continued to paddle, each too much wrapped in his own thoughts to disturb the reflections of his companions.

Away from the influences of an over-ripe civilization, nature speaks with her thousand tongues to those who love her: the roar of the waters; the gloom and solitude of the vast forests; the sighing of the wind, as if wearied with endless travel; the silvery moonlight which flecks the forest floor; the fierce lightning which whizzes and crackles through the darkness of a stormy night;—all act on the souls of nature's votaries, and find therein something responsive to their appeal.

With feelings alive to such influences, our young trappers floated onwards. They were looking forward, too, to a speedy termination of their arduous day's work.

Already in the distance appeared what they at

first imagined to be an island in mid-stream; but after a moment's hesitation, Pierre declared it to be the long-wished-for tongue of land, at the point of which both branches of the Saskatchewan unite.

With light hearts they dip their paddles deeper, and shoot out farther from the bank, but still avoiding the centre of the stream in order to escape the strong currents.

The quavering cry of a loon breaks the stillness, which had almost become oppressive. It is answered across the river,

"Boys," said Pierre, "I don't quite like that sound; it doesn't seem the natural thing somehow. There it is again," he continued, "over there by that dead tree which shines so white. Sheer out, boys—farther out towards the middle. If Indians made the sound, 'twas for a signal. There's more of them on the other side too. Hist!—listen!"

At that instant the distant snapping of a twig caught their ears. It seemed as if from the southern shore; but at that moment the distant rush of water over rocks was borne sharply to their ears by a current of air, and rendered the precise direction of the ominous sound uncertain.

"If we can get to the Forks," said Gaultier, "we can easily throw the miscreants off our trail, unless there's a band between the rivers also."

The canoe now floated a few hundred yards from

those tall trees, the shade of which was so earnestly desired by our hunters.

True, they had no positive proof that enemies lurked near waiting for an opportunity of attacking them; but to men skilled in forest signs, whose ears can accurately measure and weigh the pitch and inflection of the notes of any wild creature, it is an easy thing to detect a false note, which would seem perfectly natural to the ears of the uninitiated. It was thus Pierre judged that Indians lurked near; and he further inferred, from their affecting secrecy, that their intentions were hostile.

Before leaving the fort, too, they had learned that several small bands of marauding Blackfeet were out on the plains. They had even been advised to delay their departure for a few days, in order that they might have the advantage of the company of a party which was preparing to start for some of the stations along the upper portions of the river.

They had, however, turned a deaf ear to these hints, preferring the excitement of getting through by themselves to the noisy companionship of a score of voyageurs, who, with their heavy *bateaux*, would take more than twice the time to reach their destination than would suffice them in their light canoe. However, any regrets, if they felt them, were now unavailing. The only precaution which remained to them they made use of,—namely, to keep as near as possible to the centre of the river, which was here

nearly three hundred yards broad. They were thus about one hundred and fifty yards from either bank, at which distance the deceptive light they hoped would render any aim at them uncertain.

Pierre now relieved Henri at the paddle, and under his muscular strokes the canoe forged ahead with increased speed.

The point between the rivers was now only one hundred yards distant, and the young men began to fancy that already all danger was past. But Pierre, whose keen, restless eyes surveyed every object, suddenly called to Gaultier to head for the centre of the southern stream; at the same time he increased his exertions till the light craft fairly flew through the water.

"Pull for your life, Gaultier!" he exclaimed; "the Redskins have launched a canoe from the point!"

In fact, at that instant a canoe paddled by several savages shot out from the deep shadows of the trees and headed as if to intercept them.

Pierre, giving his paddle a broad sheer, directed the canoe towards the southern bank, at the same time paddling with all his might. They hugged the shore, flying past the branches which hung out over the river, several times narrowly escaping shipwreck against snags and boulders which projected from the water.

Despite the exertions of the savages their canoe

fell behind, and the voyageurs with a loud cheer took the lead.

The Indian in the bow of the canoe seeing this dropped his paddle, and, seizing his rifle, fired. A sharp cry of pain burst from the lips of Henri, who sank from his sitting position, while he pressed his hand to his side.

"They've ended my travels," he said faintly; "the ball has gone right through me, I fear."

The Indians were now not more than fifty yards distant, and fancying their enemies were already in their power, woke the echoes with their hideous yells.

Pierre and his companion, however, were determined to sell their lives dearly, and also to avenge the fate of their comrade, whose life-blood was fast flowing and forming a crimson pool at their feet. They therefore shipped their paddles and took their rifles, allowing the canoe to float with the stream.

Now was manifest the advantage of the repeater system of fire-arms, when used by men who rarely fired in vain.

Without taking the rifles from their shoulders, both poured a steady stream of bullets upon the advancing canoe. Three shots only were returned. One of these slightly grazed Pierre's cheek, and another went through his cap. Gaultier escaped unscathed.

Of the five savages in the canoe, four were shot

dead in as many seconds; the fifth sprang overboard, upsetting the canoe, which floated down-stream bottom upwards.

As nothing could be seen of the surviving savage, Pierre and Gaultier turned their attention at once to their dying companion. A glance was sufficient to convince them that his case was hopeless. They placed him in as comfortable a position as their circumstances would allow, and once more taking their paddles, they proceeded up-stream.

They had not advanced fifty yards from the scene of the encounter when a rifle-bullet whistled between Pierre and Gaultier, actually passing through the canoe close to the gunwale. The report echoed from among the trees on the northern shore. At the same moment the war-whoop, in its most appalling form, resounded from the woods. Several shots followed in quick succession; but as the voyageurs were now close to the southern bank, the distance and uncertain light rendered them ineffectual.

"Ay, ay," said Pierre; "yell your utmost. You have already done us sore harm, but four of your braves have gone to answer for it; they'll never draw trigger again.—Gaultier," he continued, "I think we may land now. Those bloodthirsty wretches have no other canoe, so they can't cross with their arms. This poor lad needs looking to, though I do not think he'll need it long—ah me!"

The canoe was therefore steered towards an open-

ing among the bushes, and bearing Henri in their arms, they landed upon a small spot of shingly beach. The skins were lifted out and placed so as to form a bed, upon which they laid their companion.

Pierre, to whom gun-shot wounds were familiar, knew too well that that which Henri had received was fatal. He therefore held out no hopes of recovery. He bandaged the wound, so as to stop in some measure the flow of blood, and moistened the lips of the sufferer, whose sole want, indeed, was water.

Gaultier stood sadly by, leaning on his rifle. Once or twice he tried to comfort the dying youth, by telling him that four of his enemies had been sent before him on that darksome trail on which he was so soon to follow. But it seemed doubtful whether his meaning reached the wandering mind, or otherwise failed to afford the comfort intended.

Pierre, whose feelings and language were often those of a gentleman, felt at present that some other consolation was needed to cheer the departing spirit; but his education and previous life ill fitted him for the task of explaining the grounds of a Christian's hope. However, he did his best; and his strong voice shook with the emotion which overpowered him as he directed Henri to rest his hopes on the merit and mercy of Him who had died in order that he and all other sinners might live eternally.

Gaultier knelt beside Pierre, and both in their rough frontier way besought the Almighty to receive the soul of their dying comrade. The solemnity of the scene thrilled through them, and added to the earnestness of their petitions.

Henri, summoning his remaining strength, gave each of his cousins a hand, and in a voice which weakness had sunk to a whisper, thanked them and bade them farewell. Both youths bathed his hands with their tears, and gave way to their grief with agonizing sobs. Presently Henri, half raising himself, leaned forward, but with a weary sigh fell back into the arms of Pierre.

"He is dead!" exclaimed Gaultier.

"Yes," said Pierre sadly; "his time has run. But," continued he sternly, "*we* are still alive; and every Blackfoot that comes within range of my rifle shall answer for his death."

Nothing now remained but to bury the body of the dead hunter and to depart upon their journey; for to remain longer in that neighbourhood, which evidently swarmed with the enemy, would have been hazardous. With their knives and the paddles a grave was dug in the sandy margin of the river.

The moon had now fallen low in the western sky, and threw long shadows wherever her slanting beams shot level through the pillared vistas of the woods. A cold gray fog covered the water, and drifted slowly past in irregular masses. A chilly

breeze, too, sprang up and hastened the few remaining preparations for departure. The body was gently lifted and placed in the shallow grave, and after a short and earnest prayer the sand was replaced and stamped firmly down. Pierre and Gaultier, taking their rifles, paused a moment over the spot which held all that remained of their companion; then, without a word, each took his place in the canoe, and shooting out into the stream, once more paddled onwards.

CHAPTER IV.

WILDERNESS LIFE—ENEMY LEFT BEHIND—THE OWL AND THE SWAMP HARE—
CONVERSATION ON THE NORTH-WEST TERRITORY—THE ANIMALS FRE-
QUENTING IT—THE COUGARS—DEATH OF A "PAINTER"—PIERRE'S AC-
COUNT OF THE COUGAR—HIS ADVENTURE.



Those capable of receiving its lessons the wilderness is a good school. It makes the most timid self-reliant; it teaches how to bear patiently the difficulties, the dangers, and the multiform vicissitudes which every traveller and hunter has to encounter. It sharpens the perceptions, strengthens both mind and body, and, at any rate, in the case of those possessed of a higher nature than the roughest backwoodsmen, it leads the mind to the Almighty by the contemplation of his works. A sojourn of a few weeks or months in the solitudes of an unexplored or unpeopled country has often done more to form a character, to bring out latent noble qualities, than all the previous years of existence in the artificial atmosphere of modern civilization.

Both Pierre and Gaultier were susceptible of the influences to which their mode of life subjected them.

They loved the green, mysterious forest, with its far-reaching vistas, its pleasant glades and tangled brakes, its many streams, its mossy banks, on which the sunlight played through the branches of the trees above: all this they loved. The subtle essence pervading it, which made them its slaves, they could not define; but their wild, free life had greater charms for them than the ripest civilization offers to the veriest fanfaron of pleasure.

Hitherto the three cousins had always lived together; they had been united by the tie of a common affection for the forest life, as well as by that of their relationship. Pierre and Gaultier, therefore, felt the dreadful blow inflicted on them by Henri's death with feelings of the acutest anguish; but their forest stoicism prevented any outward manifestation of the great grief which inwardly consumed them. To an onlooker they would have appeared callous; but such an opinion would have done the young hunters the greatest injustice.

All that day they paddled westwards, keeping the while a watchful eye on either bank to descry the approach of any danger; but the enemy was apparently left behind, as no indication of his presence was perceptible. Towards evening, as had been customary with them, the cousins landed on the southern bank and made their preparations to camp for the night. The forest, at this spot, receded considerably from the river, leaving an open space of some hundred acres,

which was principally covered with coarse herbage and stunted willows.

Pierre, leaving his companion to make the camp-fire, took his rifle and strolled among the dwarf willows and alders in search of some animal to help the evening meal. For some time his attention had been attracted by a peculiar noise from the edge of the woods. It sometimes seemed to resemble the laugh of a maniac, at others the shrieks of some person being strangled. These sounds, in that wild spot, were well calculated to inspire the listener with feelings of terror; but Pierre was well acquainted with the nature of the creature which uttered them, and instead of being terrified, he crouched forward, availing himself of whatever cover the place afforded. His eye could distinguish nothing with certainty among the gloomy foliage of the trees which surrounded the opening, though for a few minutes he closely scanned the branches. Suddenly the strange noises ceased, and Pierre began to fear that his presence had been discovered, when, unexpectedly, a great brown owl sailed gently into view from under the branches of some spruce trees, and glided obliquely towards the ground behind some scrub at a little distance.

Pierre quickly approached the spot, well screened by the intervening bushes, and soon found upon the ground, engaged in a fierce struggle with another creature, the object of his pursuit. Quickly levelling

his rifle, he fired at the owl, which fell dead to the shot upon the body of its prey. The latter was no other than the swamp hare, which the owl had no doubt seen from the woods.

The previous day Pierre would have scorned to eat an owl while other game was accessible; but the excitement of the night before, and his subsequent long fast, had sharpened his appetite. This large bird, however, is really not bad eating; the flesh is white and succulent, and sometimes affords the hungry trapper a meal when other game is not to be had. The swamp hare, which was too disabled by the contest to attempt escape, was a welcome addition to Pierre's bag; and Gaultier gave his cousin a warm reception on his return to the camp, when the contents of the bag were thrown on the ground.

Their meal was eaten almost in silence; both were occupied by the same sad reflection, that at the last camp Henri was their companion. But though they felt his loss, like brave boys they determined not to allow the recollection of it to weigh unnecessarily upon their spirits; and with this view, after supper, Pierre assumed a more cheerful air, and conversed with Gaultier on various matters of interest to them.

Among other subjects, he gave some useful information with regard to the country through which they were to pass, and with which Gaultier was entirely unacquainted. He said that the region between both branches of the Saskatchewan was much more fertile

than many people supposed—that it contained vast tracts suitable for the various forms of agriculture, and that parts were covered with forest which were formerly supposed to consist of worthless plain. He further stated that the Great American Desert covered a much smaller area on the British side of the boundary than geographers imagined. Parts of this vast territory presented a diversified aspect—pleasantly marbled by woods and prairies; in some districts the former predominated, in others the latter. Most of the game peculiar to the North American continent was here to be found in profusion; bands of the lordly elk pastured upon the openings or sought the shade of the many groves; buffalo roamed in large droves across the prairies, and in the many parks among the Rocky Mountains to the westward. Among these giant hills, too, were to be found the dreaded grizzly, whose hideous form was often to be seen on the ledges of the rocks or in the gloomy bottoms by the streams. The cinnamon, black, and ranger bears were here at home; the panther leaped among the rocks, and the hated wolverine sprang from the overhanging branch upon his prey beneath; the long-tailed deer trotted on the plains, and the big-horn or mountain sheep sprang up the cliffs.

Gaultier listened with glowing pleasure to his companion's account of this happy hunting-ground. He had always sighed for the life of the mountain men,

and he could hardly realize the fact that now at last he was himself to lead this very life, which he had idealized as perfect happiness.

While they were thus conversing, now and then throwing great dry logs on the fire, which sent up showers of sparks, driving back the darkness among the tree-trunks, their attention was aroused by a slight rustling among the brushwood at a little distance. Both hunters instinctively threw more wood on the fire, until it flared and glowed like a furnace, throwing a strong red light upon all sides of the camp.

For some time they sat intently listening; but beyond the gentle splash of the river, or the sighing of a passing gust among the boughs of the surrounding trees, they could hear nothing. They had almost come to the conclusion that their ears had deceived them, when again a slight rustling was audible, this time accompanied by a strange noise, not unlike a deep-drawn sigh, which was answered on the other side of the camp.

The fire had been made in front of a spot where the rank grass which grew among the open brush had attained a height greater than usual. It was from this direction that the first sounds appeared to proceed. In a low voice Pierre called to his companion to face round in the opposite direction. "There are two painters," he continued; "I'll look after one of them, and do you look after the other."

The tall grass on which Pierre kept his eyes fastened seemed to wave now and then, as if it were gently brushed aside by some animal stealing slowly through it, while scarcely a rustle betrayed its snake-like approach. Suddenly even these slight sounds ceased, and all became as still as before.

The crackling of the fire, the distant whoop of the crane from the marshes, the gurgling rush of the river past the banks, seemed to strike with unusual loudness on Pierre's strained ear, and inwardly he anathematized them lest they might render the further advance of the hidden foe inaudible.

All at once he became aware of a small bright point of a greenish lustre among the tangled stalks of grass and weeds; a slight movement to one side, and another became visible. These he knew to be the eyes of the crouching cougar reflecting the glancing firelight.

After some little manœuvring, he got a position which seemed to satisfy him, for after taking a keen look, he slowly brought his rifle to his shoulder; and at the crack, a huge yellow animal sprang with a roar towards the fire, where it lay rolling in the very ashes. Another shot, and it lay still.

A crashing through the bushes, as if made by some beast in flight, at a little distance, relieved the youths from the apprehension of another attack; they therefore turned their attention to the dead cougar, which they dragged from a too close proximity to the fire,

and turned on its back to skin. This they soon effected, both being skilful in the use of their knives.

Gaultier was much disappointed at having been cheated of a shot by the cowardice of the other panther; and, as he knew little of the natural history of this animal, he questioned Pierre, who readily afforded him all the information which he himself possessed.

"The painter," he began, "or, as the books call him, the cougar, is the only animal of the kind we have up in these countries. Down south they have other sorts of cats, such as the jaguar and ocelot; but the beasts called cats up in the fur countries aren't true cats at all, being, in fact, only lynxes. In Texas these are called 'bob-tailed cats.'

"It is a pity that each sort of beast hasn't been given his own true name; but, as you know of course, the buffalo is not a true buffalo, but a bison; the elk is not the same as the European elk, which is our moose. He has, however, a name which prevents confusion, though we are indebted to the Indians for it—the wapiti. The prong-horn is called a goat by the trappers, though he is an antelope. I could mention many other similar instances of misapplication of names, but those I have given are sufficient.

"The cougar, I have heard, ranges away south into South America, where it is very plentiful in some districts. The Spaniards call it 'leon,' or lion, from a fancied resemblance to that animal—a likeness which arises only from similarity of colour. I have

now and again come across painters with spots, but they were always young ones, and on them the markings could only be seen in a certain light.

“As you may see for yourself, the cougar is by no means a handsomely shaped animal. Quite the reverse; and this is the more striking, as nearly all his congeners are remarkable for the graceful form of their bodies and limbs. The back of the cougar appears long and hollow, and the legs are short and stumpy, giving the animal a somewhat heavy aspect. Its length is generally between five and six feet, including the tail, which usually measures about two feet.

“Notwithstanding the rather ungainly air of the cougar, none of its species excel it in climbing. It can mount a tree with wonderful facility, and in doing so it uses its claws, unlike the bear, which ascends by hugging.

“Another of its habits I had personal experience of in rather an unpleasant manner.

“I had been out late one evening after a buck I had wounded, and had followed the animal's tracks, which were marked with blood here and there, down a rocky gorge which was very gloomy, partly because of the failing light, and partly on account of the shadows of some immense trees which threw their branches across the path.

“There was a small stream in the bottom, which was a favourite drinking-place for the game, and towards this the trail led.

"I was bending forward trying to make out the buck's tracks, when I was startled by a kind of smothered roar, followed immediately by some large animal bounding over me, actually knocking my cap from my head as it passed.

"You may imagine how I felt when I straightened up and saw a painter crouching five yards off, its green eyes bent on mine, and every muscle quivering for a spring.

"As it lay before me with its head buried between its fore paws, it did not offer me a certain shot, so with my rifle at the shoulder and my finger on the trigger I moved slightly to one side to get a sight between the eye and the ear.

"The cougar, however, seemed to divine my intention, for it altered its position, and presented the same front to my aim. Seeing no better way out of the difficulty than to risk a shot with its head in that position, I took sight at one of those cruel green eyes, and, after a steady aim, pressed the trigger.

"On doing so I sprang aside to get clear of the smoke, and lucky for me that I did so; for the brute on receiving the ball sprang forward and alighted on the very spot I had occupied, where he lay tearing up the earth in his death-struggles. Of course, seeing he was disabled, I slapped the fodder into old 'Never fail' as quick as I could, and let him have it behind the ear, which stretched him out stiff.

"The treacherous brute had been lying in wait for

the deer or other game to come to the water, and had, I suppose, mistaken me in the uncertain light for a fat buck as I crouched forward. How the buck I was after had escaped it I cannot imagine.

"To lie thus in wait for its prey is a characteristic of the cougar. In mountainous localities it selects a rocky ledge near a stream or a pool, and springs thence on the back of the unsuspecting animal beneath. It seems animated by a fiendish thirst for blood, as it will kill as many animals as it can get within its clutches, and this, too, after having gorged itself to satiety.

"It is a very shy animal; and as it rarely stirs abroad in the day-time, it is very seldom met with even in the wildest districts.

"In the Everglades of Florida, the cane-brakes of Texas, Arkansas, Mississippi, and Louisiana, it is still plentiful, though not so much so as formerly. In the fur countries it is comparatively rare; and when one turns up, it causes quite a sensation among the leather-stockings of the neighbourhood."

Pierre, having exhausted his knowledge of the natural history of the cougar, was now assisted by Gaultier in dragging away the body of the beast from the camp. The youths then heaped fresh fuel on the fire, and disposed themselves to rest for the night.

CHAPTER V.

SUDDEN ARRIVAL—OLD JAKE MAKES HIS APPEARANCE—A SHOOTING MATCH—OLD JAKE'S SKILL WITH THE RIFLE—HIS HISTORY—EMIGRATES TO OREGON—JOURNEY ACROSS THE PLAINS—STALKING ANTELOPES—INDIAN ATTACK—DEATH OF JAKE'S PARENTS—HARD TIMES—REACHES OREGON—LEAVES THE LUMBER-TRADE—BECOMES A FREE TRAPPER—GRIFF EVANS—JAKE JOINS THE PARTY—CHANGE IN THE FEATURES OF THE COUNTRY—BUFFALOES—RETREAT TO THE CANOE—A VAST HERD—BUFFALO HUNT IN A CANOE—WOLVES—HUMP RIBS FOR SUPPER—SATIETY AND REPOSE.



THE next morning, while Pierre and Gaultier were cooking their breakfast, they were astonished by the sudden appearance of a trapper, who issued from the forest and approached them with his rifle cautiously thrown over his left arm, while his finger rested lightly on the trigger.

On perceiving that the youths sat quietly at their fire and manifested no uneasiness, he uncocked his rifle, and called out, "I reckon, strengers, ye're from the fort below now?" To which interrogatory Pierre replied in the affirmative, at the same time inviting their visitor to be seated and partake of their morning meal.

The new-comer was a tall thin man, whose hairless face was bronzed by exposure to the hue of a Red

Indian's; nor did his general appearance greatly differ from that of one of these sons of the forest and prairie.

His clothes were all of buckskin, begrimed by smoke and grease, and polished by use on the more prominent parts of his person. His keen black eyes shot quick, inquiring glances at each of his new acquaintances, as if to ascertain of what mettle they were formed.

At length he broke silence. "I'm dog-gone now, strengers," he began, "but I wur nigh takin' ye fur Injuns—I wur so. Old Plumcentre hyur" (tapping his rifle) "felt as if she'd bust herself a-tryin' to go at ye; but I seed at a glimp ye wurn't Injuns nohow. I never seed the Redskin my old rifle wouldn't fetch if she'd only a chance. I guess now that's a mighty likely looking tool of yourn," he continued, taking up Pierre's rifle and examining it. "What sort o' shootin' stick d'ye call it, anyhow, strenger? I never seed the like o' that before."

Pierre gave the desired information.

"Wal, now, that's some, that is! Do tell! Fourteen shots 'ithout loadin'! I reckon you fear naught that wears ha'r wi' that thur tool. Why, I thought meself considerable safe with my old rifle, but them thur fourteen shots beats all offhand, I reckon."

After breakfast Pierre took up his rifle and proposed that they should each fire a few shots to test the comparative accuracy of their weapons.

"Agreed, strenger," said the new-comer. "I guess

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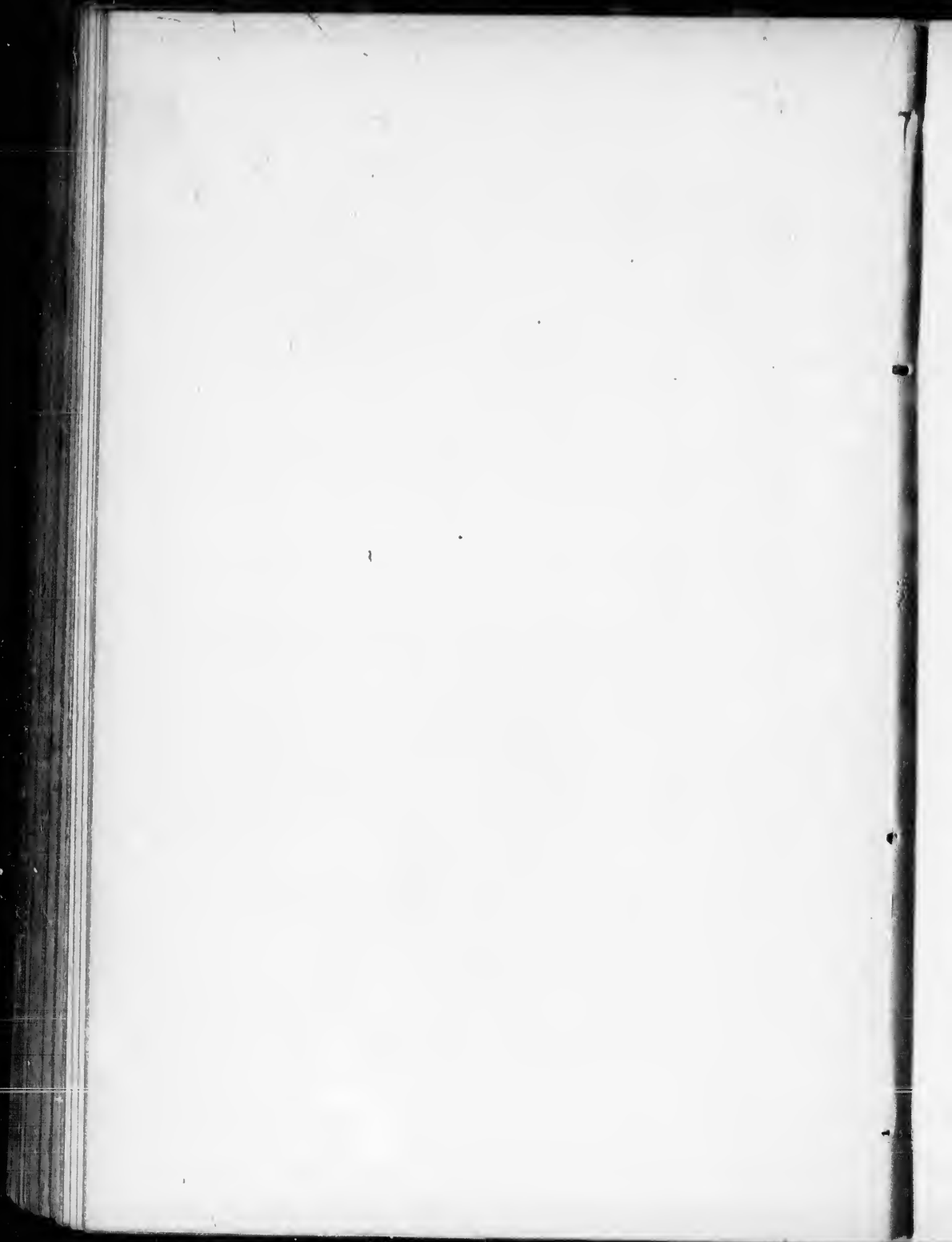
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OLD JAKE. *Page 73.*



my old shootin' iron ain't a-gwine to be beat by any of yer new-fangled notions."

Gaultier took a Winchester cartridge and placed 't in the fork of a small stick, with its base towards the firing-point, at a distance of sixty yards.

The object of the marksman was to explode the cartridge by hitting the cap at its base with a bullet. This was explained to their new friend, who seemed to think that he need not exert the nicest qualities of his skill to prevent his "old shootin' iron" from being beaten by the "new-fangled notions."

The first shot fell to Gaultier's lot. Gaultier was a good shot, but far inferior to Pierre in this respect. He took a keen look at the minute object he was expected to hit, raised his rifle steadily, and fired. The cartridge fell, but an examination showed that the bullet had cut the stick which had supported it a quarter of an inch beneath the mark.

Pierre smilingly observed, "Well done, Gaultier lad! But you took too fine a sight; you should have let your bead stand a little higher in the notch."

The cartridge was again adjusted, and Pierre took his position for a shot. The rifle was raised, and almost simultaneously discharged. A puff of smoke, accompanied by a slight detonation, announced that his aim had been correct. Gaultier ran to the spot, but no cartridge could be found. Pierre leaned on his rifle, his honest face enlivened by a satisfied smile at his success.

It was now the stranger's turn to exhibit his skill. "I don't often waste old Plumcentre's fodder," he remarked; "but I guess I wull do so now, jest to show ye a shot we sometimes make in the mountains when the boys hev a match."

So saying, the old trapper drew his sheath knife and stuck it point downwards in the ground against the stem of a white birch which grew near the spot. Then slowly stepping back sixty paces from the tree, he said, "Wal, I'll wager this old rifle agin a pack o' beaver-skins I cut my ball in two on the edge. What d'ye say?"

Pierre was too cautious to accept this wager, and merely said that if he lost, the beavers were still alive that would have to pay the forfeit.

"Wal, hyur goes, anyhow," replied the trapper, and slowly raising the muzzle of his long rifle he gradually brought it to bear on the mark. A moment of suspense ensued, and then was heard the sharp, whip-like crack, followed or rather accompanied by a sort of dull, ringing sound.

"Hooraw for old Kentuck!" exclaimed the trapper; "you bet she's plum-centre!" And so, in fact, it was. The bullet, to the no small astonishment of the youths, had actually divided on the keen edge of the old fellow's hunting-knife, as was evident from the bullet-hole in the tree on each side of the blade.

"I call that a right clean shot," said Pierre. "I'd give something to be able to beat it."

"Wal, for one as young as you are, yer shootin' ain't much behindhand," replied the trapper; "but for the raal thing, you must get among the mountainy men, I guess. Thur's not a many goin' as can shine with this old coon ither at drawin' a bead on Injun or on game. I've been nigh on forty years in the mountains, and hev seed the time that a ha'r's-breadth ither way in my aim 'ud have lost my scalp."

"You seem to have travelled a great deal," said Gaultier. "I suppose you have often had a brush with the Redskins."

"Young fellur, you may say that. Yes; I've fout a'most all the tribes atween this and the Western Ocean in my day, and a worse set o' prowling skunks these hyur plains and mountains don't hold. I guess we'll jest sit hyur awhile, an' I'll tell ye who I am."

The party accordingly threw themselves on the grass, and Pierre and Gaultier prepared with interest to listen to the story of this curious old stranger.

For a few minutes the trapper seemed wrapped in thought, and appeared to aid his memory by drawing certain cabalistic lines on the ground with the point of his knife. At last he spoke.

"It wur away back in old Missourah this child wur raised. Thur wurn't considerable of a population thar in those days, I reckon; but as the years went on, the old clearin' got rayther crowded, and my father sorter concluded he'd make tracks for Oregon,

which was jest then gettin' talked of as a likely location. So one fine mornin', bright an' airy, we nailed up the door of the old cabin that had sheltered us sin' we wur knee-high to a duck. Mother an' me an' the other young uns wur packed into a waggon, an' off we started, little knowin' whur we was a-gwine to.

"Wal, I guess that wur a journey to rec'lect! We jined another party as wur bound the same way as ourselves, at the town of Independence; an' arter gettin' all sich things as wur needed for the trail acrost the plains, we hitched to our cattle, an' tracked out o' the town, a good half of the pop'lation follerin' us and wishin' us luck an' safe through from the Injuns.

"As fur me, I thort it the finest thing I'd seed yet. I'd got my fust rifle, an' did nothin' but skin round arter chickens an' prairie dogs an' buzzards all day; an' half the nights I'd sit an' listen to the stories at the camp-fire o' fights wi' Injuns an' grizzly b'ars, till I a'most froze for a fight meself.

"The old man's name was Hawken—Mose Hawken—an' they called me Jake, from my uncle, who ye hev heerd tell on for his rifles, I suppose.

"We wur ten in the party 'thout countin' the weemen an' childer an' helps. First, thur wur father an' the fellur as had jined us—his name wur Jackson; thur wur four teamsters an' a guide; an' the rest wur hunters wi' their waggons a-goin' west to the mountains. A right smart lot we wur, I kin tell

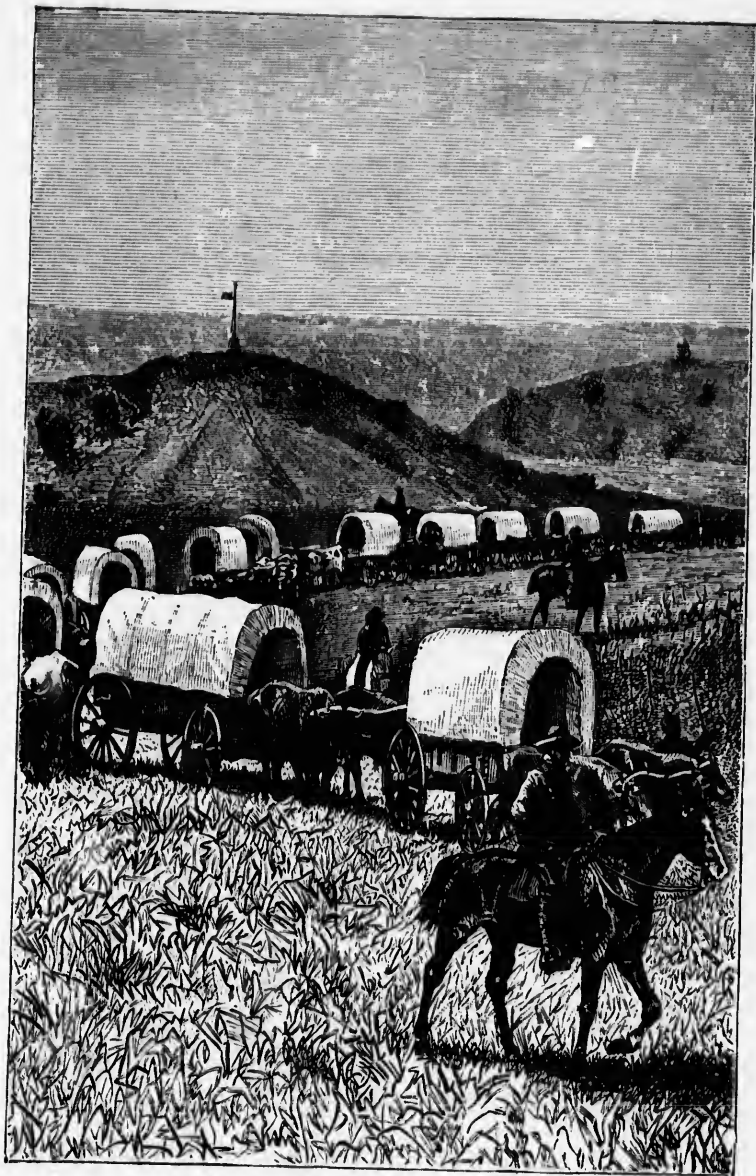
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EMIGRANTS CROSSING THE PLAINS.

ye; an' a hard nut to crack we proved for the Redskins when we fell in wi' 'em.

"Nothin' partickler happened for the fust few days out. We crossed the Big Blue an' tuck the Santa Fé trail, which wur as plain to be seed as Pike's Peak or Chimbly Rock, Bill Bent an' the traders hevin' passed a short time before.

"The trail led through the fust peraira I'd comed acrost; an' I reckon I hain't seed many as kin hol' for beauty agin that same one fur twenty-five miles to Elm Grove. 'Twur a sweet piece o' ground fur huntin' when the buffler ranged thuraway; but I guess they'd bin druv west'ard before my time.

"Wal, fur days an' days we kep' the road, keepin' our eyes skinned fur Injun sign, an' givin' a wide berth to the clumps an' groves o' timber whur the savages mout lie in ambush. We begun to think that thur wurn't any o' the varmints hangin' about the trail; an' the hoss guard o' nights, as often as not, used to hobble the cattle an' make thurselves snug at the fires, instead o' keepin' watch. The hunters said the Kansas Injuns wurn't on the war-path, an' that they wur the only ones in them parts. So we all thort ourselves safe enough.

"One day I left the trail on my Injun pony to hev a look about for meself. I behoped I mout get a shot at a deer; an' I thort how proud I'd be, ridin' in to camp wi' the meat packed on my saddle.

"I tuck a bee-line north from the trail, intendin'

to go two or three mile away, an' then to ride parallel, so as to be able to strike the trail agin torst evenin', by takin' the back track south.

"I hed got about a matter o' a mile away from the waggons, when I seed a small flock o' goats (which you'd call antelopes) feedin' in a little hollow under the crest o' a swell in the peraira. I slipped off my pony in the flappin' o' a beaver's tail, an' hopped him out o' sight below the swell. I then sloped along, keepin' well below the top o' the rise, till I judged I hed got to the proper place to hev a peep over. So I crep' up on hands an' knees, an' jest parted the grass atop to squint through.

"Sure enough, thar they wur—elegant, 'ithout a notion anything wur wrong. The wind wur right, so I jest watched 'em a bit out o' curiosity before shootin'. All at oncest the critturs stopped feedin', an' threw their heads up wind, an' crowded clost up together. 'They'll be goin' now,' thort I; an' wi' that I tuck sight at the biggest o' the lot an' let drive.

"I hed hardly pulled the trigger when the hull drove wheeled round an' came tearin' torst me. I wurn't so green as not to know thur wur somethin' up wind that the critturs smelt; but I wur so excited at seein' the buck I'd aimed at lyin' kickin' on the ground, that I never stopped to think o' what I wur best to do. So I gev one mighty hurraw at the goats, an' tears down the hill wi' my empty rifle in one hand an' my knife in t'other.

"I never got to that thur goat. I wish I'd never seed the crittur. I'd jest got about half-ways when a band of about a hunderd Redskins a-hossback came screechin' over the top o' the opposite rise, and wur a-tearin' down on me as fast as thur hosses cud go. I guess 'twur no time to make a mistake; so I wheeled about an' put like a quarter-hoss back over the swell torst whur I'd left my pony grazin'.

"I reckon my scalp began to feel loose jest about then; but luck wur in my favour. I got straddled at last; an' the way I kem up to the waggons with the Injuns a-whoopin' an' a-yellin' at my heels wur a sight to see, I guess. The waggons wur coralled at oncest, an' the Redskins seein' this, pulled up jest out o' rifle-shot, and had a palaver among thurselves.

"What they wur sayin', o' coorse, we didn't know; but arter a little while the hull lot set off full gallop an' wur soon out o' sight. The green-horns amongst us wur sayin' how lucky we wur they'd taken 'emselves away; but the old hands larfed, though 'twur no larfin' matter, and said we'd hear more o' them before mornin'. We made camp straight away, an' made everything ready agin the time the varmints 'ud come back.

"The hunters spent the time castin' bullets an' cleanin' out thur shootin' irons, tellin' all the while about the deviltries o' the savages, an' how they treated thur pris'ners, to kinder encourage the raw hands an' git thur dander riz.

"Thur wur a sharp look-out kep' torst evenin', an' the hosses wur tied to the waggons to prevent their bein' stampeded. The weemen an' the childer wur put into one o' the waggons, all 'cept me, as I'd begged the old man to let me take part in the scrimmage, seein' as I had a rifle.

"Thur wur some o' us as wur raal grit and wur spoilin' for a fight; an' thur wur others, as I reckon, wished to be anywhur else jest then, an' these wur the fellurs as hed talked the biggest before Injuns had been sighted.

"I rec'lect that night well, I guess, though it is nigh forty yeern ago. I wur a right smart chunk o' a lad too, bein' about fifteen, an' rayther for'ard for my age.

"Wal, to make a long story short, night kem at last, an' wi' it sure enough kem the Injuns. They thort to surprise us, I reckon, but they wur disappointed. They kem a-whoopin' an' a-screechin' right up to the waggons, hopin' to start the hull cavayard; but the hosses wur well hitched, an' cudn't break loose nohow.

"The fires hed bin put out at nightfall, so thur wur no light to gi' the Redskins an aim. But they cud make out the camp, an' they kep' firin' torst it; an' one o' thur random shots throwed my old mother, who wur in one o' the waggons which we had thort the safest place about.

"This made the old man savagous as a meat-axe, an' he swore he'd rise Injun ha'r if he lost his'n.

a-tryin'; an' 'twur all could be did to keep him from tearin' out amongst the red skunks an' gettin' scalped slick.

"Wal, I reckon they kep' frin' an' whoopin' an' screechin' all night, an' jest as day wur a breakin' they comed up clost a-tryin' to force thur way atween the waggons. I guess this wur jest what we wanted. Thur wur light enough now to draw a bead, an' we gev 'em goss, you bet. Ten rifles an' ten pistols spoke out, an' thur wur an' Injun throwed on his tracks a'most fur each one.

"I hed noticed the chief a-comin'—a big fellur he wur, wi' an eagle's feather in his scalp-lock, an' ridin' a fine mustang. I tuck sight at him when he wurn't twenty yards off, an' throwed him cold. His hoss got mixed up with ourn, an' one o' the men lassoed him before he could git away.

"The ground wur kivered wi dead Injuns, an' thur wur four o' us as hed gone under.

"Them Redskins wur raal brave. Three times they comed on, an' each time we seed a lot o' thur saddles emptied.

"Seein' as they wur gettin' the worst o' the bis'ness, they toted thurselves right off; an' when they got away about five or six hunderd yards, they wheeled round an' fired a last volley at us.

"My father wur outside the waggons to get a clur sight at 'em, when he wur tumbled over wi' the very last shot they fired.

"Hyur I wur left, 'ithout ither father or mother—alone, I may say, in the wilderness, fur the other little uns wurn't o' no account, seein' they wur so young.

"O' coorse, as soon as the Injuns clurred off, we buried the dead; an' a sad sight that wur, I reckon! Howsomedever, we got it done at last, an' hitched up our teams an' started.

"Now I ain't a-gwine to tell ye all that happened to us on the road. We wur right badly used, I guess, an' hed to eat our moccasins more'n oncest. But all things have an end, an' so hed our journey.

"I got a good job at a lumber-mill on the Willamette, an' stuck to it for a hull year; but 'twurn't the life for me. I craved for the mountains an' the woods, I did; an' so one day I jest packed my possibles, not forgettin' a couple o' pounds o' the best powder as ever flashed lead through life, an' with a raal Jake Hawken rifle, tuck to the mountains, an' lived the life o' a free trapper.

"I made a considerable pile at it too, fur beaver wur fetchin' a high price in those days; but 'twur no go, I reckon, eyther. I lost the hull lot o' dollars at euce one night to Sacramenty, an' wur afoot agin. Then I detarmined to walk on t'other leg fur the future, an' so I did.

"I hev lived ever since in the old Rockies, only goin' to the settlements fur lead an' powder an' sich things as I needed; but I hain't played a deck o'

cards sin' that night. 'Twur a lesson this child didn't need twice, I reckon.

"I cud tell ye o' a hunderd scrimmages wi' the Injuns, but I dessay ye'll hev some fur yerselves before long.

"I wur thinkin' now o' goin' east to Fort Garry on some bisness o' my own; but I ain't in a hurry. Whurever I ur, *that's* hum to me."

The old trapper paused in his narrative, and Pierre seized the opportunity of telling him of their recent adventure with the Indians, and of the tragic event which had deprived them of their companion. The old man listened, now and then asking a question whenever a circumstance did not appear clear to him. At length he exclaimed,—

"I know the band as has did this; they ur the varmints as raised Griff Evans' ha'r on Soda Creek a month agone. Ye see Griff wur an out an' out good shot, an' prided hisself to that p'int that as long as he'd got his rifle he'd not b'lieve the thing lived as cud hurt him. He wur too ventursome, an' wur jumped while asleep in his camp. *He* never knowed what happened to him before he wur scalped. These hyur Injuns are White Wolf's band sure as shootin'."

"Do you think," said Pierre, "that we are in any danger of falling in with them again?"

"Wal, I dunno that exactly. They mout ha' gone down to the fort to trade, an' if so, you bet they'll

say nothin' o' hevin' seen you; but if they're gone that away, we'll not see 'em again, I reckon, unless ye're mighty cur'ous about meetin' 'em."

Gaultier proposed aside to Pierre that they should ask old Jake to join them on their hunt, and take his own share of the profits. The old fellow's answer to this proposition was characteristic.

"Wal, young fellurs, I don't care if I does. Ef ye're scalped by the Redskins, I reckon I'll make somethin' out o't, as no doubt thur'll be peltry a-goin'; an' ef it's t'other way (which ain't likely), ye'll make a raise by me. I've a pile o' my own, I guess, but thur's time enough to tell ye whur I've cached it when I feels the knife around my old top-knot. Ef ye knowed whur that cache wur, maybe ye'd scalp me, 'thout waitin' fur any Injuns to do it."

"Indeed," said Pierre, "we'll be so pleased to have your company, that we'll look for nothing further at present. Besides, your experience will be useful in keeping us out of any Indian scrapes."

"Wal, my exper'ence 'ull do no harm; I think I may safely say that, young fellur. So, now we've jined company, might I ax whur ye're a-goin'?"

"We meant to trap the head-waters of the Bull Pound and its creeks," said Pierre. "I suppose you know where that is?"

"I rayther guess I do, seein' as it's thur I'm arter comin' from," replied Jake. "Ye-es; I've made a bee-line hyur all alone be m'self. It's a plaguy long

way thur, but I reckon it'll be easier nor walkin' to go in yer canoe."

"And hadn't you a horse?" asked Gaultier.

"Ye-es, I hed a hoss; but I hed to eat the crittur—I hed so. I wur three weeks in the sand flats, whur neither bird nor beast wur to be found; an' so I guess I hed to shoot the crittur or starve meself, which I wurn't likely to do while I hed five hunderd pounds of hoss-meat fur the shootin'. It rationed me till I got to game. No; Jake Hawken ain't a-gwine to cave in that way neither. Thur'll hev to be hard doin's, you bet, when *he* goes under."

It was therefore agreed between the parties that they should continue their journey and trap in common, the produce to be equally divided among them. Jake told them that he had made a successful hunt the previous season, and had sold his peltry at good prices at one of the Fur Company's forts.

Gaultier had never previously been so far west as he now found himself, and he was therefore daily on the outlook for the buffalo, which he had supposed plentiful on all the western prairies.

During the week which followed their meeting with Jake, they journeyed as rapidly as possible. The features of the country had changed—the forests had given place to vast open prairies, with detached clumps of timber studded over them, like islands in an ocean of verdure. Here game was plentiful, but as yet they had seen no buffalo.

One day, during the noon halt, and while they were eating their dinner (which consisted of tender loin of elk), they were suddenly startled by a rumbling sound which seemed to resemble distant thunder. The two boys ascribed it to this; but Jake, laying his ear close to the ground, listened intently for a few seconds, and then sitting up, calmly said, "It's buffler."

"Buffaloes!" exclaimed Gaultier.

"Buffaloes!" cried Pierre, both springing to their feet and seizing their rifles.

"Ho, boycees!" said Jake. "What's the hurry? They'll be some time a-comin' yit, I reckon; they're two miles off. This child don't stir from hyur till he's chawed this hyur meat; he don't now."

Controlling their impatience, the youths stood by, watching their imperturbable companion calmly eating his dinner. Meantime the distant rumbling momentarily grew louder and louder; and now individual sounds, bellowings and lowings, could be distinguished.

All at once Jake cast aside his reserve, and desiring the youths to launch the canoe, he began to ascend the sloping bank which had interrupted the view in the direction from which the buffaloes were approaching.

When he got to the summit, he looked earnestly in this direction for a moment, and then came rushing down the bank, exclaiming, "Git into the canoe! in

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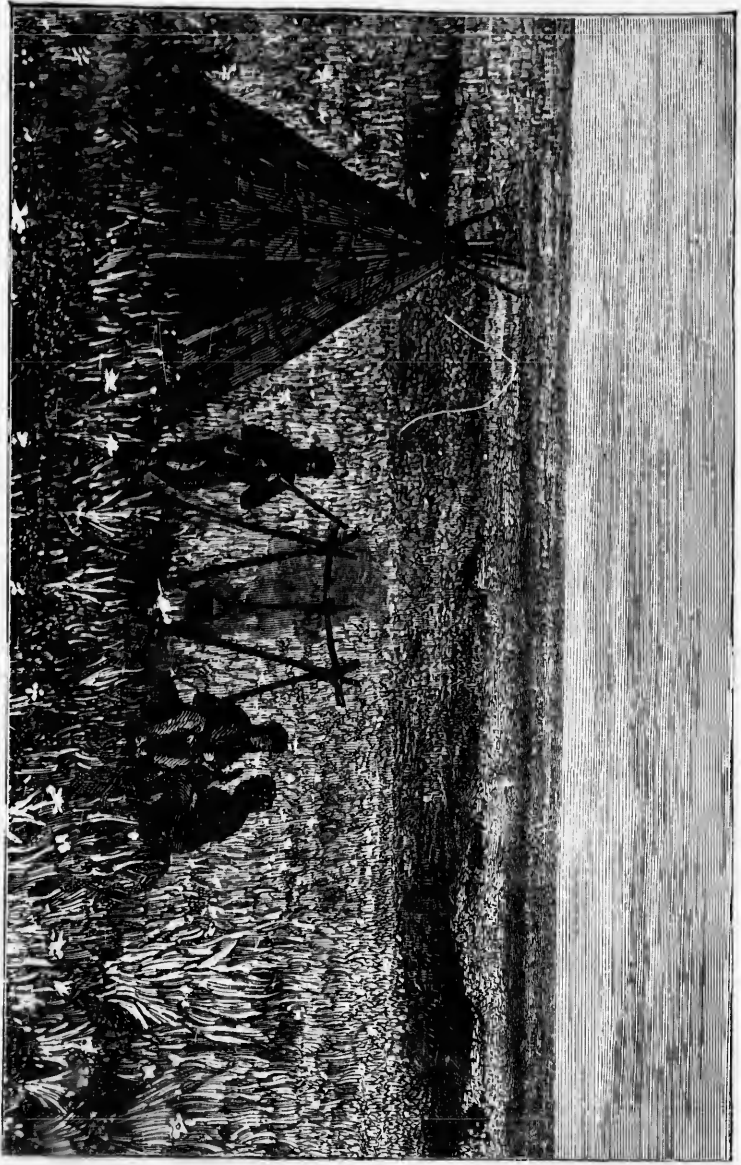
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wi' ye, I tell ye! Thur's ten thousand o' them bufler; an' ef we don't put out o' hyur, we'll be trampled to shucks as sure as beaver medicine."

And so, in fact, it was. Scarcely had the three trappers taken their places in the canoe, and shoved off from the shore, when the crest of the bank which sloped back from the river for a little distance was crowned by a surging mass of animals plunging madly onwards, as if flying from some terrible and imminent danger.

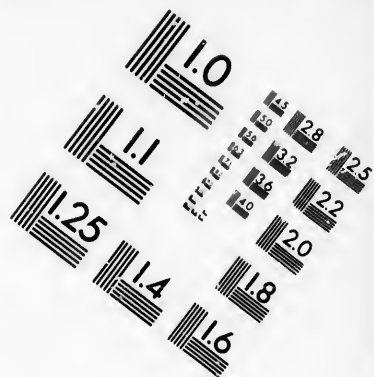
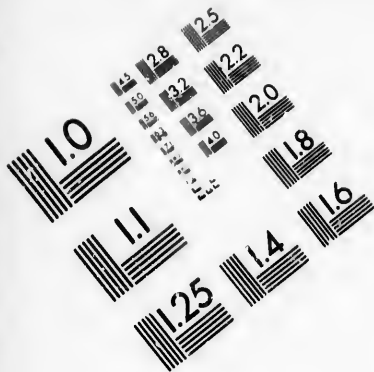
"Hooraw!" yelled Jake. "Gi' it 'em, lads! Hyur's fur hump ribs for supper." So saying, he levelled his long rifle, and at the report a fine cow, which had been a little detached from the main body, rolled over, struggled to her legs, and again fell, when she lay vainly trying to rise, at the water's edge.

Gaultier and Pierre each singled out a victim, and kept up a perfect fusilade with their Winchesters.

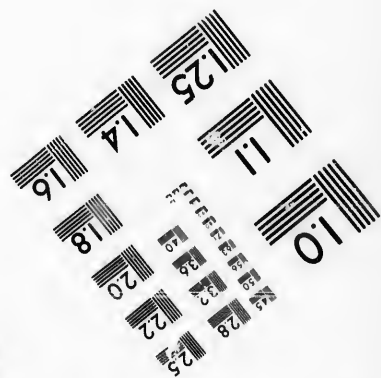
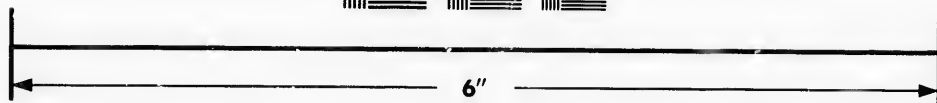
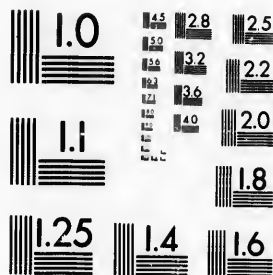
The leading buffaloes, seeing the enemy in front, attempted to turn back, but were forced forward by the resistless multitude behind; so, swerving to one side, they plunged into the river at a point some hundred yards farther up the stream. The water here was deep and still, and nothing could be seen of the swimming animals except their heads.

The herd behind continued to crowd over the ridge faster than those in the water could swim, so that the stream was soon filled with a plunging, lowing mass of terrified animals, who completely stretched from





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bank to bank, and up and down the river to a considerable distance.

In their excitement, our trappers did not observe that they had become encircled by their game, until a sense of the danger they ran of being swamped in their frail bark forced itself on their attention.

A dozen huge bulls were snorting and ploughing the stream in close proximity to the canoe, causing it to dance like a cockle-shell on the agitated water.

One of these animals seemed determined to attack them, for he swam straight towards the boat, his small eyes glowing viciously among the coarse matted hair which covered his forehead. Old Jake was the first to perceive the danger.

"Hullo, boyees! old fur an' leather means mischief, I tell ye; but hyur's a stopper fur him." As he spoke, his long rifle was at his shoulder; but a dull click answered the pull of the trigger—the rifle had missed fire.

Pierre and Gaultier, however, got their Winchesters to bear on the forehead of the bull, which was now hardly five yards away. The two reports seemed one; and as they echoed over the river, the buffalo reared himself frantically from the water, and turning on his side, floated dead with the current.

The reports of the rifles and the wild yells of old Jake effectually scattered those buffaloes which were in too close proximity to the canoe, so that the trappers

breathed more freely as they found themselves again in a position of safety.

They ceased firing, too, as they were averse to indiscriminate slaughter, and they had already procured meat enough to last them for a considerable time—longer, in fact, than it would keep. Gaultier was in high feather with his success, for he had shot several buffaloes himself, and he received old Jake's encomiums on his skill in that bashful manner which shows that the praise affords genuine satisfaction.

"Ye'll make a fust-rate mountain man, I guess, young fellur, ef ye sticks to the life," he remarked. "Ye made them thur buffler come raal han'some, ye did. I guess old Eph'm hisself ud hev to do his tallest tearin' ef he wants ye to go under."

The drove of buffaloes had now all crossed the river, and the trappers were about to land to skin and cut up the meat, when their attention was attracted towards a number of wolves, which had followed the herd to pick up any dead or decrepit animal, and which were at this moment unceremoniously helping themselves, as fast as their voracity enabled them, to several of those buffaloes which had fallen on the bank.

This was too much for Jake's patience to endure. "The varmints," he exclaimed, "ur a-gwine to spile our meat; but I guess old Plumcentre 'ull hev a word to say agin that."

So saying, Jake levelled his rifle at one of the

largest of the pack, and at the report the brute doubled up and lay still.

Pierre and Gaultier, too, picked out their own victims, and each succeeded in bringing a wolf to the earth. The former quite won old Jake's heart by making a succession of brilliant shots at these slinking brutes, who betook themselves back over the ridge out of sight as fast as their legs could carry them.

"Them thur rifles o' yourn air great weapons, sure enough," Jake observed. "Whur did ye git 'em?"

Pierre replied that they had purchased them at New Haven, Connecticut, a short time previously—in fact, that they had been bought for this very trip. Jake's affection, however, for his own well-trying piece was not to be weakened by any comparison between it and the breech-loaders.

"She's saved my life more'n oncest," he said, "an' many's the grizzly she's throwed in his tracks. I'm not a-gwine to part wi' the old gun yet. We've bin man an' wife, I may say, for twenty year; an' while she shoots true, she an' I'll stick together."

The old man was now in his element. He was "among the meat" once more; and over the camp-fire that night many a hairbreadth escape and perilous adventure did he tell to his attentive audience, while the massive ribs sputtered on the embers, and the juicy "fleece" was transferred "hot and hot" to his capacious stomach.

Long strips of meat were suspended in front of the prodigious fires which the trappers had constructed in order to "jerk" it, and thus preserve it during the journey.

It was late that night before they lay down to rest. Despite the noises made by wolves, who were snarling and fighting over the carcasses of the buffaloes which lay along the river bank, the two youths at length fell into a sound sleep, leaving old Jake to keep the first watch, during which he solaced himself with one more rib and one more slice from the succulent hump.

CHAPTER VI.

ARRIVAL AT CHESTERFIELD HOUSE—JAKE FINDS OLD ACQUAINTANCES—DEPARTURE FROM CHESTERFIELD HOUSE—JAKE'S SYSTEM OF MORALITY—ANTELOPES—OLD JAKE MAKES A SUCCESSFUL STALK.



It is not our purpose to detail all the adventures which befell our three trappers on their way to the Rocky Mountains. Their days were generally spent in nothing more exciting than in paddling the canoe, if we except an occasional hunt on the plains or in the forests near the river.

They spent some days at Chesterfield House, where Pierre and Gaultier were the guests of the factor, while Jake met several of his old acquaintances, whose hearty greetings and quaint ideas afforded the boys no small amusement.

"Hullo, Jake, old coon," exclaimed one of these, "give us yer paw. I thort ye'd gone under that time the Blackfeet tuck Elk Biddle's scalp. Hooraw fur you, old hoss! Whar hev ye bin? Hev ye made a raise o' Blackfoot ha'r, to squar the loss o' mar' an' peltry?"

Jake replied, "Wal, I did. I got back my old mar',

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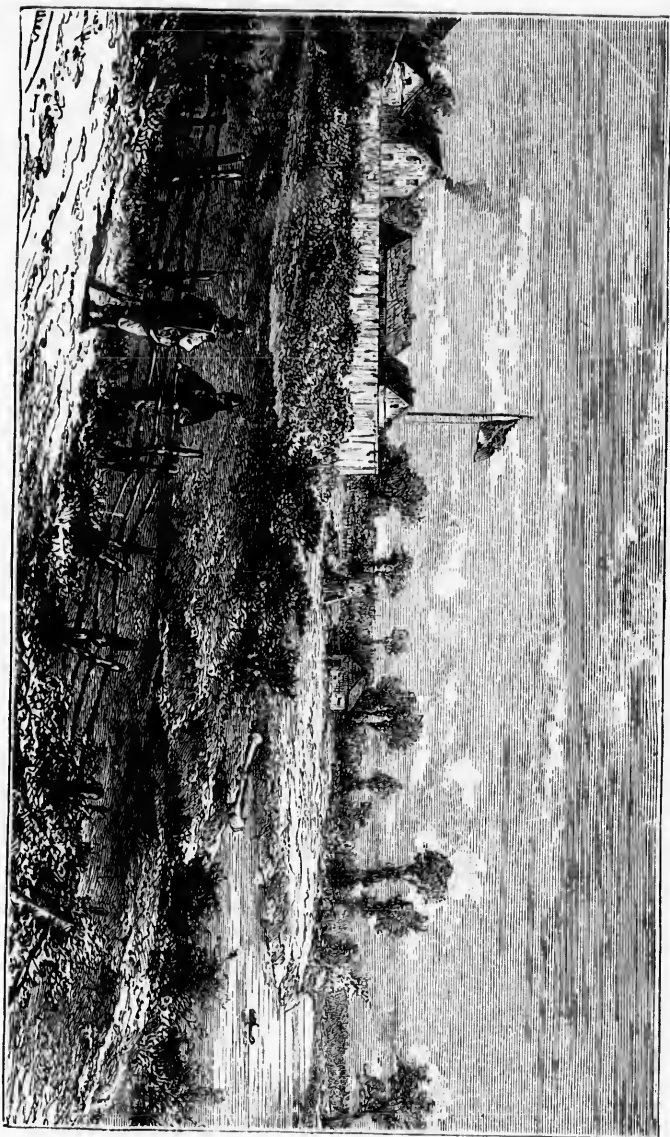
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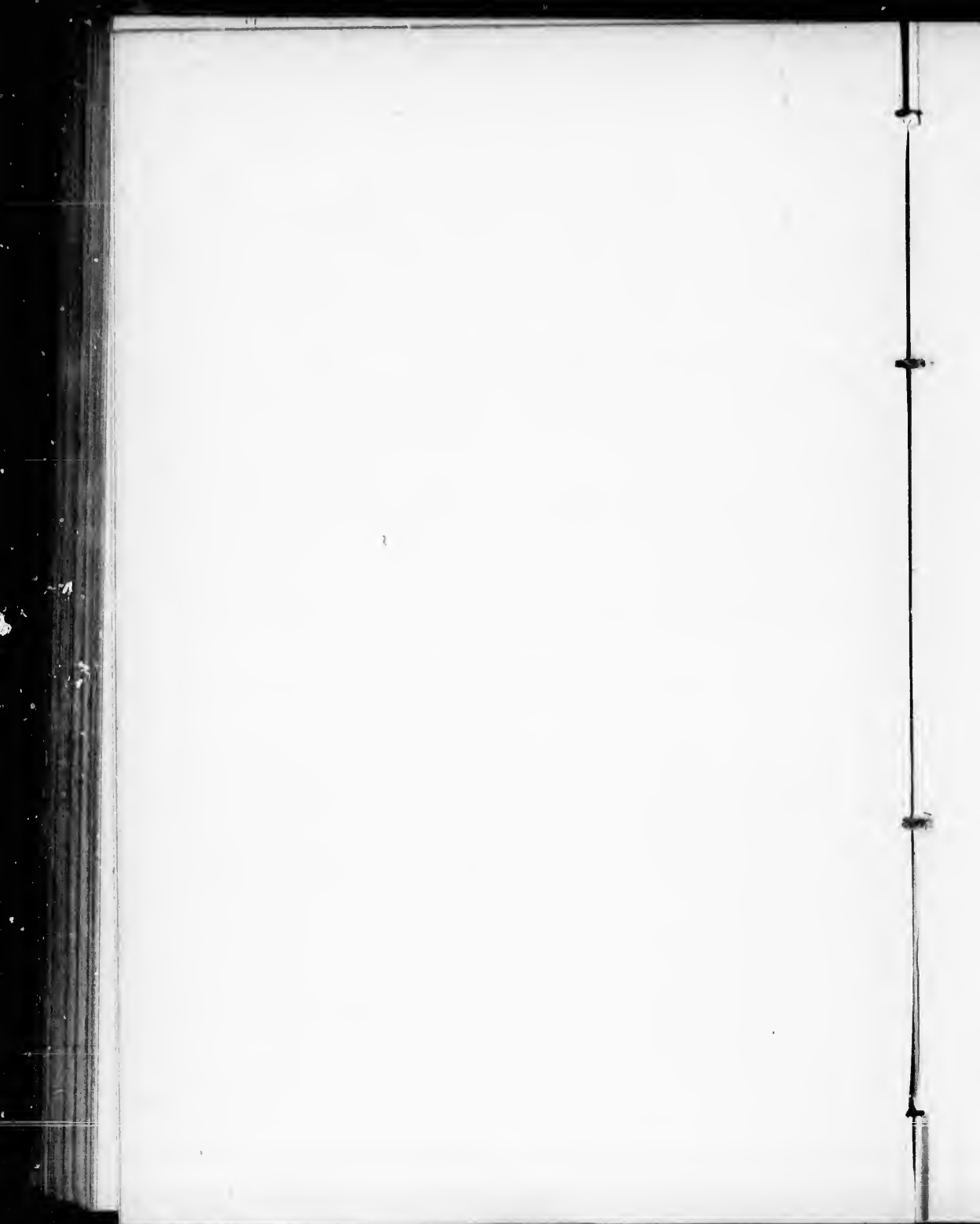
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I reckon, and tuck the scalp o' the niggur as raised her. Thur's some o' that varmint's ha'r on my old leggin's yit. 'Tain't healthy fur them skunks to play thur pranks on me, I guess!"

"'Tain't so, you bet," replied his friend.

The reunion of these former comrades was celebrated in true mountain fashion, and furious were the orgies which ensued. The produce of a whole season's hunt was spent in whisky, which these wild fellows drank as if it were water.

On the fourth day after arriving at the fort, our three trappers took their departure. The employés and hunters gathered on the river bank to see them off, and woke the echoes with a cheer as the light canoe once more cleft the broad waters of the Saskatchewan.

For the first few miles the voyageurs spoke little; they probably felt sad at leaving behind them the last vestiges of civilization which they were destined to see for many a day. But however Pierre and Gaultier (whose comparative refinement made them more susceptible to such ideas) might have felt, Jake was not one to be long cast down by any circumstance. He seemed to be muttering to himself occasionally, as if debating some knotty question.

At length Pierre ventured to ask the old fellow what he was thinking of.

"What ur I a-thinkin' ov, is it? Wal, this ur what this coon's a-thinkin' ov. I wur a-thinkin' how I could 'arn two pound o' 'bacca an' a pound o' powder."

"Why," said Gaultier, "whom are you to earn them from, and what for? I thought you filled your horn as well as your tobacco pouch before leaving the fort?"

"I did so, young fellur," replied the trapper. "I guess I ain't a greenhorn to leave old Plumcentre 'ithout her fodder; but I reckon thur's no harm in 'arnin' more ef it can be come by. Now, ye seed Bill Bucknall at the fort—him as had bin a'most scalped by them Blackfeet, when the boyees kem in time to save him? Wal, he's described to me the very niggur as wur nigh liftin' his ha'r; an' he's promised me the powder an' the 'bacca ef I brings in that ar Redskin's scalp. That's what I wur a-thinkin' on, young fellur. I reckon two pounds o' 'bacca ud keep my old jaws a-waggin' half the winter."

This extraordinary declaration caused the youths such a fit of laughter as effectually dispelled the melancholy which had begun to steal over them.

"Why, Jake," said Pierre, "you surely wouldn't shoot an Indian you had no grudge against, and whom you have never even seen? It would be murder."

"Wal, that's jest the marrow o' the matter," answered the old hunter. "I hain't niver seed the varmint, sure enough, an' so I owes him no grudge; but when I does see the skunk, I reckon I'll let him go jest for oncest. That'll squar the matter, won't it?"

"How do you mean?" inquired both the youths.

"Ye're the greatest goneys I iver sot eyes on!" exclaimed the astonished trapper. "Why, don't ye see, ef I lets that niggur go, as long as he's walkin' I'll be out of my 'bacca; that'll be grudge enough, I reckon. You bet, I'll be chawin' soon arter meetin' him a second time."

As old Jake's theory of morality was too subtle for the youths to comprehend, they remarked that they hoped he would not make any rash attempt which might involve them as well as himself in serious danger.

"Thur's no fear," replied the trapper; "I only wants that one niggur, an' I ain't a-gwine to go it one-handed among the hull tribe. I'll wait till I hev him handy."

The youths endeavoured to dissuade the old fellow from his purpose, but for some time in vain. He could not be got to understand that any moral guilt was attachable to the shooting of a mere Indian, the more especially when, as in this instance, the individual Redskin had attacked his friend Bucknall, who came near losing his scalp in the encounter.

The offer of tobacco and powder was, no doubt, a powerful incentive; but the trappers and mountain men of the west, generally speaking, are no more troubled in conscience by having killed an Indian than by having killed a buffalo.

"But surely, Jake," said Pierre, "you must allow

that an Indian, however savage he may be, is still a man; and that to kill a man for no other reason than to earn some powder and tobacco, is a hideous crime, for which you would have to answer to the Almighty."

"Ugh!" exclaimed the incorrigible old sinner; "ye talks like one o' the black-robe missioners as makes it wrong to drop a deer o' a Sunday. I've bin, man an' boy, all my life in the plains an' in the hills, an' niver yit did this coon hear tell o' its bein' wrong to shoot a Redskin, 'ceptin' allers a friendly tribe. When Injuns ur a-streakin' it in thur paint acrost the plains, I tells ye, young fellurs, that ef ye don't drop *them*, *they'll* drop you. Thur ain't no two tunes to ~~that~~ that song, I guess!"

"But," resumed Pierre, "in the present instance you mean to take an Indian's life, not in self-defence, when alone it would be excusable, but only to earn a miserable wage of a little powder and tobacco. Come, Jake, your conscience, I know, will tell you that this is wrong. Remember that if the Indian is a savage, he is so through no fault of his own. He is only what his bringing up has made him. And if *he*, in his utter blindness, massacres his enemies and is cruel and treacherous, *you*, who are a white man and of a superior race, ought not to imitate his bad example."

"Wal, mister," said the hunter gruffly, "ye ought to hev bin a missioner. Thur's not a many on the plains as carries a rifle ud think an' talk like that;

an' I'd advise ye to sell yer rifle an' buy hymn-books an' black clothes, an' run a mission among the Black-feet. Jest tell *them* not to rise the ha'r o' the whites, an' not to murder and do wuss to thur weemen. Tell 'em it ain't accordin' to the Bible; an' see what *they'll* say! Onccommon lucky you'd be ef they didn't begin right straight away on yerself. He! he! he!" And here the old fellow chuckled merrily, as if this termination to a missionary career was peculiarly funny.

"This is all very well, Jake," replied Pierre; "but two blacks don't make one white. If the Indians do wrong, that is no reason that we, who know better, should do wrong also. So, while we keep company, I hope you will not be so wicked as to wantonly injure or kill any of the savages we may fall in with. Of course, if they attack us, our duty will then compel us to defend ourselves, in which case their blood will be upon their own heads. It often troubles me at night," continued Pierre, "when I lie awake, to think of the blood I have shed, although I am thankful I never shed it except in self-defence. Still, it is an awful thing to take the life of a fellow-creature—to hurry him before the throne of God without an instant's warning, with the stains of a life of crime, perhaps, upon his soul. I sometimes think I'll leave the woods and plains altogether, and go where I can live in peace, where I will not be exposed to the necessity of ever shedding a fellow-creature's blood."

Pierre spoke with much feeling, and as he ceased, old Jake, to whom he had particularly addressed himself, seemed very uneasy.

At length, after coughing and looking this way and that, the old hunter exclaimed, "May I be considerably blamed, young fellur, ef ye ain't right! I feels it hyur," laying his hand to his heart, "that all ye've said is true. It reminds this old coon o' when he wurn't more'n knee-high to a duck, the old mother used to say, 'Jake, never turn evil for evil; but when others injure you or speak ill of you, forgive them. You will need forgiveness some day yourself, and this is the way to 'arn it.' Them's a'most her very words. I rec'lects 'em as well as ef they'd bin said yesterday, though it's a grievous long time ago now. But I guess they've bin choked up an' kivered this many a day."

"It is never too late to mend, Jake," said Gaultier; "and we all need the lesson. Pulling the trigger every day on all kinds of game, one soon gets the feelings blunted, and then it almost comes as easy to shoot a man as anything else."

"Jest so," said Jake; "that's jest it. I feels it wrong all as you say, an' I hope I can change afore it's too late. But the boyees'll never b'leeve it. No; they'll never swaller that old Jake's gev up raisin' Injun ha'r an' thinks it wrong."

"Never mind them, Jake," said Pierre; "the approbation of your own conscience will be recompense

enough for being laughed at by those who know no better."

"That ur as true as Scriptur', I guess," said Jake, "an', young fellurs, I'll take yer advice. But," continued he, "supposin' the varmint as tuck Bill's ha'r turns up among more o' the same sort, an' they attacks us, maybe it wudn't be wrong to throw him in his tracks then?"

"Well," said Pierre, "if he attacks you, and you kill him really and honestly because you cannot otherwise save your own life, it will not be wrong. But I would not scalp him afterwards. You ought not to mutilate a dead body, and certainly not for such a reason as you give."

"Wal, mister," replied the old trapper, "I don't altogether hold wi' ye thur. 'Tain't to harm the niggur as I does it; *he* don't want his scalp whur he's a-gwine to, an' the thing ur o' some good to this child. So, though I promise not to kill the niggur, 'ceptin' I can't help it, I'll jest take his ha'r, ithout thort o' wrong, more'n I'd feel at takin' his rifle or hoss."

The boys, content with the result of their remonstrances, now allowed the subject to drop. Subsequently, however, Pierre again recurred to it, and finding how utterly ignorant the old hunter was of the ordinary truths of Christianity, he spent many an hour each day in unfolding, to the best of his ability, the doctrines of the Christian faith, to which the trapper listened, at first with irritable impatience,

but soon with interest, which deepened day by day. He could scarcely be got to believe the great mystery of the redemption; but when assured that this was the belief of all Christians, he exclaimed, "Wal, this beats all! the Lord has done all this for *me*, an' I find it hard to gev up my evil ways for *him*! Young fellurs, talk to me no more o' this; but I'll go to the mission arter our winter hunt, an' become Christianized, fur a pagan I ur, as sure as shootin'."

The youths having sowed the good seed now left it to the mercy of Providence. Our story has no concern further with this subject, but we may say here that old Jake kept his word, and at the mission edified many by the sincerity of his conversion.

One day the party agreed to halt a few hours for a hunt. Some prong-horns had been seen, and Gaultier proposed that they should try to stalk them.

Jake and Pierre were nothing loath to change their fare of buffalo beef for some tender steak of antelope. They therefore moored the canoe to a tree, and shouldering their rifles the three trappers ascended the bank, looking cautiously over its summit.

The country beyond was partly prairie and partly timber, which stood about in "mottes," or islands. Among these, and at some distance, were half-a-dozen prong-horns, quietly grazing.

The wind was, fortunately, blowing from the game towards the hunters, so that, as yet, the animals were ignorant of the danger which threatened them.

Pierre proposed to the others that he should steal forward alone and try to get a shot; but old Jake, who seemed to underrate Pierre's experience, objected to this, and stated that he knew how to "fool the goats;" and he forthwith proceeded to enlighten his companions.

He crawled forward through the grass, keeping a sharp eye the while on the motions of the antelopes, stopping when they ceased feeding, and again advancing when they buried their snouts in the rich herbage. The two youths, scarcely venturing to peep through the tops of the long grass, lay anxious spectators of the game.

Old Jake combined the patience of the cat with the facility of a snake in crawling unseen upon the prey. He availed himself of every bush to make a still further advance; but at length a perfectly level open expanse of sward intervened between him and the antelopes.

To cross it unseen would, even for him, have been impossible, while the distance to the game was still too great to render a shot advisable; but old Jake was equal to the occasion.

Taking advantage of the well-known curiosity of the antelope tribe, he waited until the animals were looking in his direction, when he waved his hand rapidly in the air, and instantly withdrew it.

The prong-horns were not slow to observe the uncommon apparition. They immediately ceased feed-

ing, and gazed intently in the direction; but the old trapper was too acute to gratify their inquisitiveness all at once. He therefore lay still for a minute or two, and waited until the animals were again about to feed before repeating his signal.

The antelopes evidently thought that here was some mystery which needed elucidation. They all gazed earnestly, and then trotted forward a few yards.

Again Jake waved his hand, and again the curious beasts made a further advance. He then waved a red handkerchief, which extraordinary apparition thoroughly aroused their curiosity.

They fearlessly advanced to within one hundred yards of the hidden trapper, who might now be seen carefully raising his rifle and getting it to bear on the buck leading the little band. A puff of white smoke, a sharp crack, a frantic leap, and the graceful animal falls upon the plain, while his companions scour away with the speed of the wind.

Old Jake raised his lank form, and carefully reloaded his rifle—which every true hunter does before advancing a yard after firing. He then went forward to the fallen antelope, and having cut its throat, he threw it over his shoulders, and returned to the two youths.

"Wal," he said, as soon as he had got within speaking distance, "that ur the way to fool them thur goats. They ur mighty cur'ous, and allers must see

clost up what they can't edzac'ly make out. I reckon this un got more'n he bargained fur."

As it was now the hour at which they ordinarily halted for dinner, they constructed a fire, and soon the tender loin steaks of the prong-horn were hissing and sputtering on the embers, while the fragrant odour of *café noir* diffused itself around the camp.

CHAPTER VII.

JAKE'S ACCOUNT OF THE WONDERS OF THE FAR WEST—THE COUNTRY ASSUMES
A NEW ASPECT—ARID PLAINS—ARTEMISIA—GRIZZLY BEARS—GAULTIER'S
IMPRUDENCE—PURSUED BY A GRIZZLY—DEATH OF THE BEAR—CAMP.

FOR the next few days little of interest occurred to our trappers. They had now reached the junction of the Askow river with the Saskatchewan, which it enters about two hundred miles from the mountains.

This was cheering to both Pierre and Gaultier: the latter had never previously been farther west on the Saskatchewan than Cumberland House; while Pierre's acquaintance with the region they were henceforth to traverse was wholly at second-hand. They therefore listened with interest to Jake's account of its wonders—of the vast quantities of game which were there to be found; the immense forests on the mountains, the snow-capped summits of which shot into the heavens to the height of many thousand feet; the dark lonely valleys walled in among the hills, and which had never been entered by man, except, perhaps, by some wandering Redskin; the sparkling lakes and tumbling cascades; the grim

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FOREST IN THE NORTH-WEST.

precipices, and barren tracts almost devoid of life or of vegetation. These and other marvels did Jake describe, and the realities lost nothing of interest or of terror in his descriptions.

"Boyees," he said, sweeping his hand towards the west, "that ur the country to tickle the fancy ov a mountain man! Thur's game enough to feed an army among them hills; an' thur's a sight o' beaver, too,—I've made ten pack o' beaver in a season thur, but I lost the hull on't wi' them Blackfeet. Ye-es, it's a great place, I reckon, 'ceptin' fur them Injuns. One has to keep his eyes skinned thur, I guess, or one's ha'r'll git loose mighty quick.

"But them woods ur grand, an' no mistake! Thur's miles an' miles o' the mountains kivered wi' the tallest trees ye ever sot eyes on; thur's old pine thur two hunderd an' fifty feet high, an' as thick as the butt-end o' a meetin'-house steeple. Hunderds o' miles north an' south the range, espec'hly torst the States border, the timber's thunderin' big—not a big tree hyur and thur, mind ye, but a'most every tree is a raal snorter. The darkness o' them woods on a bright day ud need a candle to see in. Then the valleys atween the hills, each o'm wi' its lake stuffed full o' trout, ur the sweetest places on airth, I reckon, fur a trapper to end his days peaceable in.

"Thur's game a plenty an' fish, an' ef you've a likin' fur the thing, thur's a'most every kind o' fruit that grows. Thur's elk an' white tails ur, an'

beaver; bufflers from the eastern plains makes thur way in; thur's cinnamon an' black b'ars, silver-tips and grizzlies o' the largest size; mountain lions, an' all sich game.

"A heap o' peltry ud be got thur ef a fellur only stayed long enough to make a pile. Fur six hunderd miles I knows that range o' hills. Thur's not a man a-livin' on it; not a Redskin eyther, fur the most o' it, 'cept the war-parties o' the Blackfeet that scurries round now an' agin.

"I've seed a thousand elk together in the Bull Pound valley—an' many a troop as big. When I've bin all alone be meself o' nights at my fire, I've heern the screechin' o' the painters from the skirts o' the timber on the valley sides answerin' each other all around, an' the howlin' o' the strongwood wolves as they chased the deer in the black darkness, ay, an' I've heern the carcajou, an' the snort o' old Eph'm, jest as ef they thort the circus ud be short-handed 'ithout 'em.

"They wurn't much afeerd o' my fire eyther. An' o' stormy nights they wur so bold that I often hed to shin it up a tree out o' thur way. They'd come clost up, and I'd hear 'em a-pokin' round in the brush, an' git the glint o' thur eyes now an' agin when the light o' the fire ud shine 'em.

"It makes a fellur feel right down lonesome to be in sich diggin's, I tell ye. Often when I've waked up o' nights, I've seed the wolves a-settin' round the

fire dozin' an' hob-nobbin' at each other, till I've scattered 'em wi' a mighty screech an' throwin' a lighted brand among 'em. They'd only slink away behind the edge o' the shadder, an' by-an'-by they'd be thur agin. I got skeered o' the horrid critturs when I'd git the shine o' thur hungry eyes an' see thur long white teeth as they snarled at the firesticks I throwed at 'em. Them places ur in a state o' natur', as I may say; by-an'-by the crack o' a rifle'll be well enough known among the beasts out thur.

"Thur's other parts, hows'ever, whur things ain't so easy. I've bin a'most starved fur somethin' to chaw, an' hev tuck to grassjumpers afore now. Ye-es, thur's not the thing that lives as I hain't closed my old teeth upon in these hyur mountains, I reckon."

But we will not follow old Jake's minute and somewhat prolix description of the wonders of this region. We prefer to unfold them for ourselves as we accompany our trappers on their journey to the mountains.

We have said that the party had reached the junction of the Askow river with the Saskatchewan. The country here assumed a new aspect. Lakes as salt as the ocean glittered in the sunlight, their margins thickly incrustated with a saline efflorescence; streams strongly impregnated with soda joined the river, their banks presenting, in their bare and parched appearance, a strong contrast to the luxuriant vegetation which characterized the Saskatchewan. The

plains appeared more sterile ; huge fissures opened in the thirsty soil, and threatened to engulf the unwary traveller.

They had, in fact, entered upon the northern extension of the Great American Desert, where hardly any game is to be had, and where, to use the expressive words of a well-known writer, "the very wolves have to lean against the sand-banks to howl," such is their emaciation from perpetual famine.

There are oases, however, in this land of desolation. At one point a group of small hills with precipitous sides lifted their scarped summits some three hundred feet above the arid plain. Isolated hills of this kind are not uncommon. Such, on a gigantic scale, are the Tetons, and the celebrated Buttes near the Arkansas. Dwarfed brushwood, principally the artemisia, clothed their steep sides, and formed a sort of covert which, although lugubrious enough in itself, presented a pleasing aspect contrasted with the desolate region around.

The atmosphere, too, appeared to have undergone a change. It seemed filled with luminous particles which danced and glittered in the lurid rays of the setting sun ; strange objects appeared and disappeared in a weird or magical manner ; rocks seemed to float in mid-air ; trees hung point downwards, dipping their tops in the cool waters of sparkling lakes.

These fantastic objects flitted before our trappers, inspiring Pierre and Gaultier with feelings of awe.

They felt as if they had left the world of reality far behind them, and were advancing into regions inhabited by gnomes or goblins, who might at any moment appear and resent the intrusion of mortals on their mystic domains.

These feelings were heightened when, casting their eyes towards the base of one of the "buttes" already mentioned, several monstrous forms loomed huge and indistinct through the evening haze. There were three of them, and, as far as the trappers could discern, they were engaged in tearing up the brushwood, huge quantities of which lay scattered here and there behind them.

Pierre was the first to perceive these strange animals, and at his exclamation old Jake's attention was directed towards them.

No sooner did this veteran of the mountains see them than he exclaimed, "Jeehosophat! ef thur ain't three o' the most all fired b'ars I iver sot eyes on!"

Gaultier seized his rifle, and, before old Jake could prevent him, levelled it and fired at the nearest of the monsters, who was scarcely one hundred and fifty yards from the boat.

"Wagh!" roared Jake; "ye're the biggest goney as iver got free o' his mammy's apron-strings! D'ye think to whammel old Eph'm over at this distance wi' a single ball? See what ye've done!"

It was in fact high time to take precautions for their safety, as the bear which Gaultier had fired at,

mad with the pain of his wound, was charging down towards the river, followed by his lumbering companions, all three uttering savage growls.

"To the other side!" cried Pierre; and paddling with all their might, the canoe fairly flew through the water.

The spot at which the bears had been seen was almost opposite the embouchure of the Askow river, and it was towards its mouth the trappers directed their course.

Just as they had crossed the Saskatchewan, a heavy splash behind told them that the foremost bear had plunged into the river, and looking round they saw his broad head as he cleft the water with powerful strokes in pursuit.

The other bears had halted on the bank, and seemed to watch the issue of the chase with considerable interest. The unwieldy monsters upreared their huge carcasses on their hams, and pawed the air with their enormous fore arms in a manner which, under other circumstances, would have afforded our trappers no small amusement. At present, however, their attention was otherwise occupied.

As Jake had frequently spoken of his encounters with the grizzly bear, the two youths seemed now to place themselves under his guidance. "D'ye see that thur bend in the river ahead o' us?" said he, after glancing back a moment at their pursuer; "I

reckon we'll play him thur. Them two big fellurs don't seem overly ripe fur a fight, but ef they seed thur compan'on a pitchin' in, they mout jine 'im. I guess they won't see round the corner!"

By this time the bear had crossed the Saskatchewan, and was rapidly overhauling the canoe, as he galloped along the bank of the Askow. When he had gained a point opposite the party, he again leaped into the water, and with loud snorts swam rapidly across the current.

"Now, young fellurs," exclaimed Jake, "now's the time to show yer shootin'; let the canoe float, an' git yer rifles." The boys accordingly raised their weapons.

Scarce fifty yards now separated them from the ferocious beast, whose small pig-like eyes glowed with a concentrated malice, as if he already had his prey within his grasp. Pierre's shot echoed over the water, and true to its aim the bullet ploughed the forehead of the bear, but glancing from the bone, it only inflicted a flesh wound.

It had the effect, however, of partially stunning the beast, whose gyrations in the water afforded the three men an opportunity of pouring in a volley, which dyed the water with the blood of the monster. So great though is the vitality of this species, and so indomitable is their ferocity, that the wounds the animal had received seemed only to stimulate his fury.

His face and head were now one mass of torn skin and gore, and as his enormous mouth opened, displaying his gleaming teeth, his capacity for mischief seemed as yet undiminished. He had now come so near to the canoe that, to prevent his seizing the frail boat, which would have instantly capsized, our trappers had to lay down their rifles and again take to their paddles. Leaving the youths to manage the canoe, Jake then took a steady aim with his gun and fired.

A cloud of spray enveloped the bear for a moment, as the frantic animal beat the water into foam. He then turned towards the bank, and soon lay helpless on the sandy margin of the river.

"That's made the niggur sick, you bet," exclaimed old Jake. "Hooraw fur old Plumcentre! She's the gun to make 'em come!"

The three trappers now brought the canoe opposite their powerless enemy, and each taking a careful aim, they fired together. A spasmodic shiver stirred the frame of the huge animal; a cough, accompanied by a rush of blood from the mouth,—and all was over.

Landing, the hunters approached with caution, for even when apparently dead the grizzly is an object of dread; and having ascertained by throwing stones that the bear was really incapable of further mischief, they proceeded to inspect their prize more closely.

"Wal, I guess he's a raal buster," said Jake, after examining the enormous girth of the fore paws and making sundry measurements. "I've seed only one bigger than this'n; but that wur down Califurny way, whur the b'ars ur heavier than they git hyur. I shud judge this varmint weighs up'ards o' a thousand pounds. But come, fellurs, it's a'most dark, an' we'll hev to make camp yit."

The trappers, finding the spot suitable for camping, accordingly unloaded the canoe. Armfuls of the dried artemisia made a poor and insufficient fire; but, such as it was, our hunters, having eaten a hearty supper, and fatigued with their day's exertion and excitement, lay down with their feet towards it, and wrapping themselves in their blankets, were soon in the realms of forgetfulness.

CHAPTER VIII.

NOCTURNAL ALARM—STRANGE SCENE—BEARS BURYING THEIR DEAD COMRADE—THE PARTY DISCOVERED—A RACE FOR LIFE—OLD JAKE INTRODUCES PLUMCENTRE TO THE GRIZZLY—FLIGHT OF THE SURVIVOR—SOME ACCOUNT OF THE GRIZZLY BEAR—JAKE'S ADVENTURES WITH GRIZZLIES.

REFRESHING and deep as was the sleep into which fatigue had plunged our travellers, they were not destined to be permitted long to enjoy it.

Jake was the first whose slumbers were disturbed by strange noises in the neighbourhood. As he raised himself upon his elbow, the sight that met his eye speedily caused him to arouse his companions, which he did cautiously, desiring them at the same time not to make the least noise.

The night was calm, and a glorious moon sailed high in the heavens, diffusing in that crystal atmosphere a light almost equal to that of day.

"Look thur, fellurs!" exclaimed Jake, "ef old Epn'm's two brothers hev'n't come a-lookin' fur him!" And, in fact, both Pierre and Gaultier perceived two huge animals moving about the carcass of the dead bear, occasionally sitting erect on

their hams in a manner which left no doubt of their species. Now and then they gave vent to low grunts or savage growls, as they sniffed the body of their deceased comrade.

Apparently they had not yet observed the camp, which was, fortunately, at the distance of some hundred yards from the spot where the bear had fallen and farther up the stream. Had it been down stream, it would have been directly in the way of the two dreadful monsters, who probably had followed in the track of the animal which had been killed, and who, doubtless, would have instantly attacked the sleeping hunters, and taken them at a fearful disadvantage.

As if by a species of fascination, the eyes of all three were riveted on the movements of the grizzlies. The party observed a profound silence, lest the slightest noise should betray their presence, in which event the death of one of them at least would have been all but certain; and from behind their slight cover of artemisia they soon had an opportunity of observing one of the habits of this ferocious animal, for which they were at a loss to divine a reason.

The bears, after sniffing round their defunct companion for some time, and assuming sundry grotesque attitudes, seized upon the body and dragged it away for about fifty yards, when, to the astonishment of the hunters, they scooped up great quantities of the shingle with their powerful fore arms, and completely covered it. Having accomplished this ap-

parently to their satisfaction, to the horror of the party they leisurely began to approach the camp.

"They'll be sure to see us now," cried Pierre; "let us get into the canoe,—it's our only chance!"

The party accordingly sprang to their feet and launched the canoe with the utmost speed. They had scarcely time to throw in the various articles of their equipage and take their places, when their presence was discovered by the two monsters, who immediately halted and sat on their haunches, pawing the air and uttering savage growls.

They apparently determined on an attack, for both fell on all-fours, and broke into a lumbering cow-gallop, which kept pace with the canoe, despite the exertions of Jake and Pierre, who paddled with all their might.

The direction taken by the hunters was down stream, or towards the Saskatchewan, which was scarcely three hundred yards distant. A bend in the Askow intervened, however, and on one side of the river the bank projected at this point considerably into the stream, which was, consequently, proportionately narrow at the spot. Towards this point the bears directed themselves, evidently with the intention of springing into the river and intercepting the canoe.

"Keep to the other side!" cried Pierre; "if they overtake us in the canoe, we're lost!"

Deeper dipped the paddles, and with increased

speed the light boat flew along, skimming past the eastern bank of the river. The "point" was reached, and with a loud hurrah the three hunters swept round it, just as the foremost bear reached the water's edge twenty yards behind. He immediately plunged in, and was followed by his companion.

The utmost exertions of Jake and Pierre could hardly increase the distance which separated them from their pursuers. For some time not a word was said; all felt they were paddling for their lives, as little doubt existed as to what would be their fate if overtaken by the relentless monsters, whose fury was now thoroughly aroused.

"Confound the critturs!" at length exclaimed Jake; "my old elbers ur achin' wi' this touzlin'. Hyur, young fellur," said he to Gaultier, "take this paddle while I introjuce old Plumcentre to them varmint!"

He accordingly surrendered the paddle and took his rifle.

The leading bear was now scarcely more than twenty yards behind, and the party had a good view of his huge head as he cleaved the moonlit water. Jake drew a steady bead and fired.

The old trapper's aim was true; the bear reared up out of the water for an instant, struggling furiously, and dashing the spray high into the air. His efforts presently grew fainter, and when the agitated waters permitted a view of the spot, the animal was no longer visible.

The remaining bear snorted with terror when he saw the fate of his comrade, and immediately relinquished the chase, directing his course towards the bank. The trappers permitted him to land without molestation, and Pierre and Gaultier congratulated Jake on his lucky shot, which had saved them from a great and imminent danger.

"Wal, 'twur a lucky shot, sure enough," replied the old fellow; "most o' my shots ur, I reckon; but for all that, it's not often that old Eph'm gits throwed clur an' clean at one shot. No; he's oncommon tough, an' a'most allers takes his full dose o' lead afore he caves in. We're in raal luck to-night, I guess, at bein' so well out o' this bisness. I reckon we'd better camp at the 'buttes' whur we seed them varmints fust. They'll not be thur agin, you bet!"

The canoe, therefore, was headed for the opposite shore of the Saskatchewan, and in a few minutes the party landed at the base of the conical hills previously mentioned. They now, for the second time that night, made camp, and cooked a second supper, during which they fought their battles over again.

The strange conduct of the bears in burying their dead comrade was the subject of a good deal of speculation. Old Jake, from his extensive acquaintance with this animal, gave his companions an interesting account of its natural history, which we recapitulate here in part, for the advantage of such of our readers as may be interested by it.

We will not, however, inflict Jake's peculiar style upon them more than we can help, preferring to condense his narrative.

There can be no doubt that the grizzly bear is the most formidable animal which the American hunter has to encounter. The ferocity of this species is so well known, that no hunter will make an attack unless he be favoured by circumstances such as warrant him in doing so.

Grizzly bears attain their largest size in the Californian Sierras, sometimes reaching in these regions the enormous weight of eighteen hundred pounds, and even more. Farther north, the weight would seem to diminish somewhat, until, in British territory, one thousand pounds is considered an unusually large specimen.

The cinnamon bear is sometimes mistaken for the grizzly, from a general similarity in the colour of the pelage. The ranger, another variety, is considerably smaller, is more numerous, and is much less ferocious than his formidable brother.

The claws of the grizzly often measure six inches in length, and rather resemble cows' horns than the claws of a quadruped. Tracks made by this beast will measure eighteen inches in length, twelve inches of this representing the size of his huge foot. The grizzly is omnivorous, and readily eats flesh of all kinds, as well as roots, such as the Indian turnip and cow-parsnip. He will spring upon a bull buffalo,

and with his powerful arms deal it such a buffet as will prostrate the animal, which is then leisurely dragged off to a convenient spot, or, if "old Ephraim" is hungry, is devoured there and then.

Unlike the black bear, the grizzly cannot climb; but he makes up for this inability by the patience with which he will watch a "treed" victim. Instances have occurred of hunters having been thus kept in durance for many hours and even days. Old Jake's eventful career contained several such reminiscences, which we will let him recount for himself.

"'Twur about ten yeern agone," he commenced, "that the thing I ur a-gwine to tell ye happened. I wur a-trappin' on one o' the cricks that run into the head-waters o' the Yellerstone, an' a likely spot it ur, 'ceptin' for them Siouxes. A fellur has to keep his eyes skinned thur, I guess, or his top-knot wull kim off sure.

"Wal, I'd got together a likely heap o' beaver pelts, an' wur a-thinkin' o' clurrim' out fur Laramie's to trade my plunder. I'd put down my traps in the runs for the last time, an' when mornin' kim I went round to lift 'em. I got all but the last, which wur in a spot whur the crick cañoned through a gulch. The dam wur jüst at the head o' this gulch. Thur wur'n't a sight o' timber 'bout thur, 'ceptin' a few o' the nut-pines, or piñons as the greasers call 'em; an' mighty lucky it wur fur me, I reckon, that they wur

thur! I wur about liftin' the trap, in which wur a fust-rate 'dog,' held by the hind leg, when I heerd behint me a nize, like the coughin' o' a broken-winded buffler bull. Ye may guess I wur'n't long clutchin' old Plumcentre an' squintin' round; an' what shud I see but a b'ar o' the largest size a-sittin' on his hams an' takin' a view o' the sitioation.

"Now, boys, I ain't a-gwine to say I wur'n't skeered. No; I felt queery about the j'int, an' my ha'r riz consid'able, till I a'most felt as if it had got friz. I seed at oncest that the b'ar wur a grizzly, an' more'n that, that he meant mischief; I cud tell that by the glint o' his little peepers. The more I looked at the varmint the less I liked him. I knew it ud eyther hev to be a fight or a race, an' ef I didn't throw him on his tracks the fust shot, 'twur all over wi' me. I jest gev a squint down the cañon, an' seed that about a hunderd yards down thur wur one o' them nut-pines growin' off a ledge o' the bluff, an' stretchin' out over the crick; ef I cud reach that tree I'd be safe!

"The b'ar wur'n't more'n fifty yards away. The question then wur whether he'd give me time to reach the ledge afore collarin' me. I guess thur wur no use askin' the varmint, so I streaked it for the tree! I heerd the b'ar throw hisself on all-fours wi' a flop, an' then I heerd the donnicks a-flyin' from his legs as he galloped arter me. I guess I kivered that hunderd yards like a flash o' greased lightnin'! I made

the tree, an' seed the b'ar about thirty yards ahint me. I jest hooked old Plumcentre over a limb, an' straddled the tree, a-drawin' meself upward an' outward, fur the thing grew as much out as up. 'Twurn't the best kind o' tree, as the b'ar mout walk out on it fur half the way afore it turned up torst the light. I had jest got seated when old Eph arruv on the ledge.

"He wur a tearer, an' no mistake! His huffs wur a foot long, an' the claws at the end o'm wur half as long agin, an' looked as if the varmint hed tacked on buffler horns to his toes. Wal, he jest looked at the tree, an' put his front legs on it, cautious-like; he then put 'em a bit further, an' drewed his hind legs up, an' got fairly on the tree, an' clur o' the ledge. The height to the water o' the crick wur nigh on twenty feet, an' I knew that if the varmint got a whammel that sp'ilt his balance, he'd be sure o' goin' over. I rested old Plumcentre in the fork o' a branch, an' waitin' till the b'ar wur steady, I gin him a ball right plum atween the eyes. Hoh, boycees, ye ought to ha' seen that b'ar—the way he was throwed! I a'most split meself with larfing! He fust reared up on his hams wi' a gurgle o' fear an' rage, an' jest then one o' his hind legs slipped off the tree, an' before he cud rekiver hissself, he fell clur overboard, I guess. The crick bottom jest thur wur strewed wi' big donnicks, as large as hay-cocks a'most. It wur atop o' one o' these the b'ar fell head

fo'most. I reckon ef my lump o' lead wanted any help it got it then. The varmint's brain-pan wur laid open, an' the top o' the rock wur painted wi' his brains. Ye-es! I got that b'ar's skin, and packed it wi' my beaver pelts.

"Tain't always though that old Eph'm kims out o' a scrimmage second best. I've seed the time that one o' the likeliest chaps as ever traded a skin got his scalp pulled over his eyes, besides bein' all tore to raggles, by a grizzly b'ar. They're all-fired beasts, thur's no denyin', an' I'd as lief tackle two Redskins any day as one b'ar—that ur a fact!"

Here the old trapper paused in his narrative, and occupied himself in cutting a plug from a long twist of James River tobacco, which he proceeded to masticate with much apparent relish. After chewing vigorously for a short time, he suddenly extinguished a bright flame in the fire with an accurately directed stream of saliva, and continued,—

"I wur well out o' that bisness an' no mistake. I wish I wur allers as lucky. I'll tell ye o' a slight sareumstance that I comed aerost jest this time last year edzaely. I hed jined another fellur—mebbe ye'll hev heard tell on him; he's well knowed in the mountains—'Eagle Jack' they ealls him, an' a fust-rate mountain man he is too. Wal, we left Santa Fé, an' crossed the Grande fur the Ananuae Range. Peltry wur reported plenty thurawa', an' we wur in great spirits. We hed some poor doin's too,

as game wur shy an' scarce the fust few days, bein' scared by them Redskins. We'd jest made the range, an' wur a prospectin' fur a nice spot to camp, on the seventh day out, when Jack remembered he'd made a cache a matter o' a mile or two farther south. So he sot off wi' our two mules to bring up his plunder, while I unsaddled my old mar' an' staked her out to graze.

"We wur in a nice little valley, wi' a few trees hyur an' thur, an' not big at that; most o' the place wur kivered wi' a chapparal o' mesquito bushes. Thur wur a sight o' rocks scattered on the hillsides, but the bottom wur bare in places; but thur wur'n't none near the crick whur the banks wur good feedin'. Hevin' nothin' pertickler to do jest about then, I thort I'd take a view o' the country over the hill. 'Twurn't long to the top, from which I seed a nice wooded stretch torst the north, wi' a grand show o' mountain peaks an' plains stretchin' away to the skyline along the foot-hills.

"'Twur a good-lookin' country, an' promised well fur game. I wur thinkin' o' this fur some time, when, on a suddint, I heerd a rumpus in the camp. I hed rambled a bit out o' sight o' it, but I cud hear the snortin' an' stampin' o' my old crittur, an' then agin as if she wur a-tryin' to break loose an' cudn't. I guess I soon got a view o' what wur a-goin' on—an' a sight that wur! Wagh! I seed a b'ar as big as an elephant a-chasin' my old mar' all over the camp, an'

the poor thing bein' well hitched cudn't git free, an' wur a-tearin' from side to side, an' runnin' round in a circle, wi' that varmint a-clawin' arter her, an' now an' then stumblin' over the trail-rope. I reckon I kem up purty speedy, an' let drive a ball—sixty to the pound—at old Eph'm's brain-pan; but jest as I pulled the trigger, the varmint moved his head, an' I made a bad shot. He wur wounded though, an', wuss than that, he soon made me out whur I wur standin' in the edge o' the chapparal. He no sooner seed me then he kem straight at me.

“Things looked purty squally. I knowed well enough that 'twurn't o' no use to tackle him wi' my knife,—the thing ud be clinked out o' my hand in a squ'll's jump. Thur wur only one thing fur me to do. I stooped behind the bushes, an' tore through 'em in a half circle. I made for the hoss, an' in a half minute I wur straddled. Old Eph'm wur a runnin' the scent, I jedged, fur at this moment he kem out o' the chapparal just whur I had, an' made straight acrost the open torst me. When I gev the heel to my old mar' to make tracks, you bet my ha'r froze when I diskivered that I hadn't unhitched the trail-rope in my hurry, an' that my crittur an' I wur tethered to the spot wi' that all-fired b'ar a-tearin' down upon us! Boyees, I said my prayers then, I reckon!

“My rifle wur unloaded, an' my only weapons wur my knife an' pistol. It didn't take a half year to

get 'em out, you may be sure; but I felt that it wur about played out wi' this coon, as I hed leetle hope o' stoppin' the b'ar with one shot.

"This takes time to tell, but it all kem like a flash o' lightning. My old crittur plunged an' reared as the b'ar rose on his hind legs 'ithin four yards o' her, an' stretched out to go, but was held by the rope. I leaned forward as far as I cud on her neck, a-slashin' wi' my bowie to cut her loose; but the poor thing wur jumpin' an' shyin' so that I cudn't reach, an' afore I cud rekiver my balance I wur thrown clur overboard. I gev one mighty screech, an' afore I cud say 'Pike's Peak' the b'ar wur at me. Jest as the varmint wur 'ithin three yards, an' I hed given myself up fur lost, I heerd the crack o' a rifle an' the snig o' a bullet as it tuck old Eph'm at the butt o' the ear. He gev a roar an' reared up, but kem down at oncest, an' spun round like a tee-totum. I guess the shot hed stunned him. Seein' as he'd forgot me, I let drive my pistol into him, an' pickin' up my rifle I made tracks fur the chapparal; but thur wur no need. Eagle Jack's shot (fur 'twur him as hed kem up) wur enough; an' in less than a minute we hed the pleasure o' seein' old Eph'm stretched out quiet enough. I may call that a mirac'lous escape, ef thur be sich things. Neyther my old mar' nor myself had a scratch. Ye-es, we wur well out o' that bisness, I reckon."

Both Pierre and Gaultier expressed themselves

well pleased with old Jake's narrative; and as it was still several hours till daylight, they rolled themselves in their blankets, and again fell into a sound sleep, from which they did not awaken until the sun was far above the distant horizon, shedding his fiery beams on the arid wilderness around.

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CHAPTER IX.

JAKE ARRIVES IN CAMP WITH THE SKIN OF THE BEAR—LEAVE CAMP—DISTANT PEAKS OF THE ROCKY MOUNTAINS—INDIANS—THE ATTACK—THE HUNTERS TAKE REFUGE IN A CAVE—JAKE'S PLAN—A STORM—THE ESCAPE—THE TABLES TURNED—THE HUNTERS ATTACK THE INDIANS—THE FIGHT—JAKE WINS HIS TOBACCO.



WHEN the youths arose, they found that old Jake had left the camp, in the canoe; but as he had left his traps behind, they felt little anxiety at his absence. Gaultier filled the camp-kettle, while Pierre kindled the fire; the blankets were rolled up, and the various articles of their luggage were disposed so as to be ready for immediate removal. Their simple meal was soon ready, and they were debating whether to wait the return of their companion ere they commenced, when that worthy was seen rounding the bend in the Askow opposite the camp, and urging the canoe forwards with swift strokes of the paddles. In a few minutes the bows of the canoe grated gently on the sandy margin of the river, and old Jake landed, his hands and arms covered with blood.

“Why, Jake,” said Pierre, “where did you get all

that blood? What have you been doing? I hope you haven't wounded yourself."

"I guess I hev'n't, young fellur," replied the trapper. "I've been takin' the skin off that thur grizzly we throwed last night. 'Twur o' no use leavin' the peltry to rot, an' so I've brought it wi' me. We'd better slap in our fodder now quick," he continued, "an' make a start. It's a long way to our next camp, an' we'll need all our time to do it in before night."

The three accordingly sat round the camp-fire and addressed themselves with keen appetites to their fare of jerked buffalo-meat and coffee. They did not, as may be supposed, linger long over their breakfast, which presented little to induce them to prolong it. Their different effects were speedily collected and placed in the canoe; and with a final glance around to see that nothing was forgotten, they took their places, and were soon cleaving the swift waters of the Saskatchewan.

For a few days they journeyed as rapidly westward as the strength of the stream and the weight of the canoe would permit, stopping only for their mid-day meal, and about an hour before sundown to make their camp for the night.

The country seemed entirely uninhabited, rolling plains extending on either hand to the horizon, devoid of vegetation, and presenting in their utter sterility little to cheer the spirits of our trappers. Far in the west, however, these great heaving plains

seemed to rise and swell into low hills, which formed the sky-line in that direction, topped here and there by a snowy peak, which Jake informed his companions rose from the Rocky Mountain chain. Gradually the river banks became higher, and occasionally assumed the form of cliffs, on the scarped summits of which the mountain pine reared its bushy head or flung its contorted branches abroad over the verge. Its melancholy foliage, by contrast with the desert regions through which the trappers had lately passed, impressed them with an idea of verdure, and seemed an earnest of the cool, shady forests which formed the theme of Jake's conversation.

They did not leave the plains, however, without again having a brush with their former foes the Blackfeet.

One day, while struggling through a cañon whose rugged walls rose to a great height on both sides of the stream, Gaultier, happening to glance upwards, was startled to observe several Indians, who no sooner felt themselves discovered than with wild yells they hurled down large stones or detached huge boulders from the cliffs, which thundered down the precipice and dashed the water into spray around the canoe.

Several of the savages who possessed fire-arms ran some distance up-stream, and took their stand behind a few rocks and bushes at a point where the cliffs had apparently broken away and left a

steep and rock-encumbered declivity towards the river. From this position they could command a better view of the canoe, and with ready rifles they awaited its approach. Old Jake's restless eye, however, which glanced above, below, behind, and before, suddenly fell upon a recess in the rocky wall, immediately under the yelling savages above, over which projected a ledge or shelf. Instantly his resolve was taken. "Yonder's our ground," he exclaimed, and at the word the canoe was impelled into the narrow opening, where for the present they were safe.

"How lucky it was for us," said Pierre, "that they showed themselves here! If they had attacked us lower down, they would have had us at a great disadvantage."

"I think," said Gaultier, "that they've followed us for some time. I thought I saw something moving along the top of the bluffs half an hour ago, but wasn't sure enough, and so I said nothing."

"I wonder," said Pierre, "what tribe they are; I hadn't time to notice their paint."

"I had, though," exclaimed old Jake; "I knows the varmints' ugly picturs well enough. Them's Blackfeet! Boyees," he continued, "we're in a tight place, I guess. Ef we goes out o' hyur, them coons above'll shower donnicks atop o' us an' sink the canoe; an' ef we escapes them, thur's the fellurs as took cover wi' their rifles a-waitin' fur us a leetle furrer up. But we'll walk into them niggurs, I

reckon. Ye-es! old Jake Hawken ain't a-gwine to go under yit; no, that he ain't!"

Pierre inquired of the old hunter what plan he recommended.

"It ain't much of a plan," he replied. "I reckon we'll jest wait here till it's dark; that won't be long, I guess, at the bottom o' this cañon. We'll then slip back a bit, an' git round the skunks from t'other side. They won't be expectin' us from that p'int, an' then we'll gi' 'em goss, you bet."

The minutes which followed were passed almost in silence. The hunters listened with keen attention for any sound which might indicate the approach of their enemies or betray their intentions. But the stillness was unbroken save by the rush of the water against the rocks, or the moan of the wind, which blew in fitful gusts through the cañon and seemed to herald an approaching storm. Pierre, who was struck by the barrenness of the country through which they had travelled for some time, inquired of old Jake if it often rained in these regions.

"It diz at times," replied the trapper; "an' it wur o' that sareumstance this child wur thinkin'. It'll be okard ef it comes down in a flood sich as I've seed hyur away."

"How so?" said Gaultier. "Is it that you are afraid of getting your old carcass soaked through?"

"No," replied Jake, slightly nettled by what he thought a reflection on his manhood, "it ain't that.

Don't ye see that ef it rains as it diz hyur now an' then, we'll be swep' out o' this gulch like a chip. Thur ain't a boat on old Mississippi as cud hold agin the flood comes through hyur; an' them coons above knows that too, I reckon. Ef it comes down in raal earnest, as seems likely, *they'll* meet us below; be sure o' that, young fellur."

This was a new and startling view of the situation, and one which had not occurred to either Pierre or Gaultier. They eagerly scanned the slender strip of the darkening heavens which showed above the opposite wall of the cañon, and in the masses of black cloud which hurried across it they saw the confirmation of their fears. The rain was, in fact, already falling in large drops, though somewhat thinly. Sudden fierce gusts rushed up the river, tearing the surface into foam; and in the pauses between them, distant rumblings and moanings were heard, which seemed to portend an unusual strife of the elements.

For nearly an hour the three hunters sat silent and thoughtful, apparently impressed with the dangers of their situation, and probably debating the chances of their escape. They were aware that certain death would be the result of falling into the hands of the Indians. They were ignorant of the numbers of their wily foes, bands of whom might be prowling along both banks of the river. But they cheered themselves with the hope that the swiftness of the

current and the darkness of a stormy night would enable them to slip past unperceived. There was something humiliating in the thought that they had to turn tail to a handful of savages, whose position alone invested them with importance. On an open plain they would not have hesitated to attack double the number of their present foes, confident in the perfection of their arms and in their own skill in wielding them; but here these would avail them little, as the enemy was hidden from view, while *they* were fully exposed to whatever missiles were hurled against them.

While following these anxious trains of thought, darkness had fully fallen on the river. High above, however, a faint light revealed the jagged sky-line of the enclosing precipices, showing that twilight still continued beyond the shadow of the rocks. The rain now fell in torrents, hissing in the seething river and plashing against the cliffs with a relentless fury. Thunder rolled through the murky sky, accompanied by such vivid lightning as pained the sight and left its impress on the retina for several seconds afterwards.

"Them fireworks'll diskiver us, I reckon," said Jake; "but 'tain't o' no use waitin' longer. The water's risin.' See," he continued, "when we comed in hyur a while ago, it wur eight feet to the top o' this cave; it's not five now. I guess we'd better streak it."

So saying, the old hunter shoved the canoe out into the river, and in a moment they were hurrying down

the cañon at a pace which promised to carry them to its mouth in as many minutes as it had taken them hours to ascend. The canoe was steered towards the opposite side of the stream, which was there deep and rapid, and seemed also less obstructed in its course.

"Keep your eyes skinned, fellurs," whispered Jake, "an' don't ye go fur to run on the rocks. One graze, I guess, an' we'll all go under, sartain."

"I think," said Pierre, who steered, "we had better keep more out in the stream; it is so dark, I can't see ten yards ahead. The rocks—" He was interrupted by a blinding flash which actually crackled as it cleft the darkness, revealing the turbid river, the frowning faces of the cliffs, the boat and its occupants with the utmost vividness. A stunning crash of thunder followed instantaneously, and in the comparative silence which followed, the hunters thought they heard yells high above them along the summit of the crags.

"Jest as I thort," said Jake; "them skunks seed the boat that last flash. Thur's a chance o' our bein' below before 'em, though. I know o' a gully or crack that runs along above thur. It'll take 'em a leetle time to cross it, an' it ain't more'n a matter o' five miles now to the mouth o' this cañon. I guess we'll beat 'em arter all."

"Unless," said Pierre, "there are others below."

"I don't think that ur likely," observed Jake. "Ye see the varmints didn't know we wur a-comin', an'

so I guess thur's none but what we've seed o' them.

The party again relapsed into silence. The light boat flew along, impelled both by the paddles and by the swift current, which surged alongside as it bounded over obstacles far down in its dismal depths. The storm continued with unabated fury, and the rain poured its chilling torrents upon the hunters, whose buckskin clothing speedily became wet through, and clung to their bodies, causing the youths to shiver notwithstanding their exertions. As for Jake, that case-hardened veteran little heeded this inconvenience. He was much more solicitous about keeping Plumcentre dry, or stowing away his spare ammunition in a place of safety, than in protecting himself from the pitiless deluge, which really threatened to swamp the boat.

"It can't go on long at this rate," said Pierre; "it will soon rain itself out. I'd rather fight those demons above there than be drowned like a rat in a hole down here."

"I hope it ain't a-gwine to stop yit," said Jake. "Ef it diz, them clouds'll go, an' the moon'll show out clur. That's jest what them niggurs'd like. No; I reckon the rain'll do my old legs no harm, nor yours neyther, young fellurs."

The minutes flew swiftly by. Already they recognized a high pinnacle, which was just visible against the scarcely lighter sky, and which they remembered

having noticed very soon after entering the cañon. Accordingly the cliffs at either side diminished rapidly in height, and presently they found themselves floating past low rocky banks which presented no obstacle to their landing. Here, therefore, they left the canoe, securing it to a paddle fastened firmly between two large boulders. A couple of buffalo skins were carefully stretched across the boat to protect the contents from the rain; and then shouldering their rifles, they clambered over the rocks in the direction from which they expected their enemies to appear.

It seemed as if Pierre's wish was to be gratified, for the wind, which had hitherto blown with great violence, now moderated somewhat, and the rain ceased altogether. Heavy masses of cloud, however, still coursed across the heavens, and through their rifts the moon shed a partial light, rendering some objects distinct, while all around was wrapped in gloom. For some time the party advanced in comparative silence, the only sounds being those occasioned by the difficulties of the path encumbered with rocks and loose stones. Old Jake led the van, and this son of the woods from time to time uttered something very like an oath, as his moccasined foot slipped on wet rock or was too firmly planted on a sharp flint. Suddenly he halted and listened intently for a few moments. He was about to move forward again, as if satisfied that his suspicions were groundless, when a flash shot from over a low wall of boul-

ders about fifty yards in front, followed by a short report.

"Down wi' ye!" exclaimed Jake; and instantly the three hunters threw themselves to the earth, taking advantage of whatever cover the spot afforded. "I knowed it," hissed the old man. "I guessed the critturs would make fur the mouth o' the cañon. Now, boys, git yer shootin' sticks ready; make a sieve o' whatever moves about them rocks,—d'ye hear?"

The party kept their eyes riveted on the range of boulders across which the moon occasionally threw an uncertain light; but more frequently the shadows of heavy clouds rendered all objects dim and indistinct. Pierre and Gaultier lay side by side, each behind a large stone, which would serve at once as rests for their rifles and to shield them from the bullets of the enemy.

"I see something glistening," whispered Pierre. "See! in the opening between the two big rocks. There! it moves."

Gaultier's eye sought the spot, and as the moon again shone clearly, saw the object which had attracted Pierre's attention. "I'll try it anyhow!" exclaimed the latter; and raising his rifle, he sighted rapidly and fired. A wild yell answered the shot, as a naked savage bounded over the rocks, and fell forward, lying motionless on his face.

"That niggur's rubbed out," said Jake. "Well

done, young fellur. See if ye can't fetch another. Thur's more o' 'em behind them rocks. Ef they'd only show out, we'd gi' 'em goss.

The savages still kept themselves well sheltered by the natural breastwork behind which they crouched, occasionally firing shots which, luckily for the trappers, were ill directed; and yelling like furies, probably hoping to terrify the hunters into flight, when they would have a chance of taking each separately. They did not venture to charge, well knowing that at close quarters the hunters were more than a match for them.

"By the yells, Jake," said Pierre, "I think there aren't more than half-a-dozen of the wretches. What do you say to charging them? If we don't, they'll keep us here until morning, when they'll pick us off easily."

"I wur thinkin' o' that," said Jake. "When the moon goes in next, let's streak it in among 'em, an' I guess your rifles'll make quick work o' the varmints. Lend me one o' yer six-shooters, though; it's better'n my own."

In a few moments the drifting clouds again cast a deep shadow on the earth, and at a signal the hunters sprang to their feet, and crouched forwards, clambering as quietly as possible over the stones. They had almost reached the barrier ere the Indians observed them, and with a loud cheer they sprang over the boulders and leaped down among their lurking foes.

Shots followed each other in rapid succession, mingled with yells and the wild oaths of old Jake. Pierre singled out a brawny savage who was in the act of loosing an arrow from his bow within a yard of his breast. Leaping aside, he felt the arrow-point tear the flesh under his right arm. Instantly he closed with the savage, who parried his knife-thrusts with a tomahawk, and suddenly grasping Pierre with an iron grip, he forced him backwards against the rocks, over which both stumbled and fell, the savage being uppermost. With an exultant yell the Indian raised his tomahawk to deal the fatal blow; but before the weapon could descend, Gaultier, who saw his cousin's danger, sprang upon the savage, and hurled him to the ground several yards from his victim, while at the same moment his revolver flashed, and the Indian, who was about to spring to his feet, reeled forward and rolled over on his back dead.

Pierre quickly rose and looked around. Five Redskins lay dead upon the spot; but where was Jake? He was nowhere visible. They listened attentively, and presently they heard above the whistling of the wind the sounds of strife apparently proceeding from behind a mass of huge boulders at a little distance. The fitful moonlight served to guide them, and on reaching the spot they beheld the old hunter bravely defending himself against two savages, who struck at him with their tomahawks, old Jake parrying their blows with his rifle. Springing forward with a cheer,

Pierre struck one Indian a crushing blow with his rifle-butt which levelled him to the earth; while a bullet from Gaultier's revolver prostrated the other, who had attempted to escape as soon as he saw them arrive to Jake's assistance.

"Thank'ee, lads, thank'ee," said Jake; "ye jest kem in time, I reckon. I wur gettin' tired o' the bisness; an' two to one ain't fair. I guess, though, I've rubbed out a wheen o' the varmints. Them pistols o' yours air great weapons, sure enough. I throwed three o' the skunks the fust three shots, when I wur set upon by them two. The pistol missed fire at one o' 'em, an' before I cud draw ag'in, the thing wur clinked out o' my hand wi' a blow o' a tomahawk. They pressed me so hard that I wur obleeged to give ground, so that's how I kem to be separated from ye."

Pierre mentioned his own encounter and Gaultier's timely aid, without which, he said, he certainly would have "gone under."

"I expect we hev all done one another sarvice, lad," said Jake. "The fust nigger I pulled upon hed his hand twisted in Gaultier's ha'r, an' would hev made a raise as sure as shootin' ef I hadn't put in my say. But we're well out o' the thing anyhow, an' I think we'd better make fur the canoe an' hev something to eat. I'm a'most like a knife, I'm so hungry. But fust o' all we'll hev a squint at them skunks." So saying, the hunter stooped, and catching the out-

stretched arm of the nearest savage, he pulled him over on his back.

At this moment the moon shone clearly, lighting up the grim face of the corpse, which seemed to scowl defiance in death. An exclamation from Jake arrested the youths' attention; for they had turned away, fearing that the old man intended to scalp the Indian.

"Great Christopher Columbus!" cried the strange old fellow, "ef that don't beat all creation. I calls that a raal maracle now. Boyees, come hyur. Look at that skunk's ugly face; half his cheek ur off, an' his nose laid open, ain't it?"

"Yes," said Gaultier, who stooped to examine more attentively; "but it doesn't look as if it was done to-night; the injuries seem old."

"That's the very thing this child knows," continued Jake. "Hooraw! I've won the 'bacca arter all. This is the very varmint that a'most took Bill Bucknall's ha'r. Bill told me o' the skunk's head-mark. Ye-es; this is he sure as beaver medicine—hooraw!" and the old trapper woke the echoes with his wild yells. "I'm a-gwine to take this coon's top-knot, *I* am," he continued. "Come, old fellur; you'll never miss it. Thur's no need o' ha'r whur you've gone, I reckon." He accordingly drew his bowie-knife, and twining his fingers in the long scalp-lock, he described a circle round it with the keen point of his knife, and inserting the weapon under the skin, with a quick pluck the trophy was taken, and secured to his belt. The

boys looked on, partly shocked and partly amused at the wild language and proceedings of their companion.

Returning to the principal battle-ground, they took the arms of the savages, among which there were but two guns, old flint-lock smoothbores, which Jake threw away in great disgust. They retained the hatchets and knives, however, leaving the bows with the dead. Half an hour's quick walking brought them to where they had left the canoe; and taking out their provisions, they sat down in a sheltered spot among some rocks, and fought their battle over again while engaged with their meal.

The gray light of morning surprised them thus occupied; and as they intended to pass the day in that place to rest themselves, and dry their effects, which had been saturated by the rain, they stretched themselves on the shingle, and notwithstanding their late excitement, and the uncomfortable nature of their couches, they soon fell fast asleep.

CHAPTER X.

BIG-HORNS—THE APPROACH—JAKE'S SUCCESS—A GOOD SHOT—THE BIG-HORN—
WOLF-SHOOTING—PIERRE'S ADVENTURE WITH THE INDIANS—HE OWES
HIS ESCAPE TO THEIR LOVE OF FIRE-WATER—A CATASTROPHE—THE ROOM
IN FLAMES—FATAL EFFECTS AMONG THE INDIANS.



STRONG frames and sound constitutions reckon little of fatigue and exposure. Although the hunters slept in garments which adhered to their bodies with wet, they awoke refreshed and cheerful. The sun was high in the heavens ere they crept forth from their lairs, and so powerful were his beams that already no trace of the tempest of the preceding evening was visible. The rocks were dry; the dust flew before the breeze on the distant plain, or mounted heavenward in dun towers under the influence of a whirlwind. The thirsty soil had swallowed the deluge, leaving the surface as dry as before.

In a little sandy hollow they found a quantity of withered artemisia which served for fuel. Over the blaze Gaultier suspended the camp-kettle, which soon bubbled and hissed, sending abroad savoury indications of its contents. Jake sat by cleaning his rifle,

and chuckling occasionally as he reflected on the skirmish of the previous night, and the unlooked-for discovery of his friend Bucknall's enemy, whose scalp was to be exchanged for tobacco. Pierre was dressing the wound he had received, which, although a mere scratch, was still rather painful.

At the distance of half a mile to the south, a ridge of rocks rose from the stony soil to the height of several hundred feet, and stretched away westwards for many miles until it joined a chain of hills whose blue peaks showed over the far horizon.

Happening to glance towards the ridge, Gaultier perceived at its base a number of quaint-looking animals, whose huge crescent-shaped horns seemed out of proportion to the size of the creatures that carried them. But for this huge armature, Gaultier would have believed the animals to be sheep, though their giant size seemed to render this doubtful. He quickly called the attention of his companions to these curious beasts.

"Mountain sheep!" said Jake.

"Big-horns!" exclaimed Pierre.

All three sprang to their feet, and sheltered themselves from observation behind the nearest rocks.

"Thur's only one way of getting at 'em," said Jake. "See that chapparal out thur on the plain—I'll stalk 'em from behind it. Do ye stay hyur, an' don't show yerselves."

The old hunter looked carefully to his rifle, and

availing himself of the cover afforded by the river-bank, he reached the thicket, which extended from the Saskatchewan to within a short distance of where the big-horns were standing. Once within the friendly shelter of the brushwood, the old trapper moved rapidly forward. The wind, fortunately, blew from the game, so that there was little likelihood of their scenting the dangerous proximity of Jake, who speedily arrived at a point beyond which he could not venture without being observed. The distance to the nearest sheep was about one hundred and fifty yards, not too great a range for his rifle; but old Jake's experienced eye told him at a glance that this was a worthless animal for the pot. He therefore preferred risking a shot at a fine ewe which occupied the apex of a rocky spire, and seemed to act the part of sentinel to the flock.

The boys kept their eyes fixed in intense interest on the big-horns, awaiting anxiously the crack of the rifle, and speculating what animal old Jake would select for the shot. After a delay which to them seemed interminable, a puff of smoke shot out of the bushes, and the ewe on the rock, which had been suspiciously snuffing the wind, started convulsively, slipped, struggled to its feet, and again falling, rolled down the crag and lay kicking at the base. The others flew up the cliffs with the swiftness of birds, and disappeared. Old Jake now emerged from his place of concealment and ran towards the big-

horn, bowie in hand. One cut across the throat, and the life-blood of his victim crimsoned the ground.

Pierre and Gaultier now arrived breathless, and congratulated the old hunter on his shot. They admired the strange animal, which Jake proceeded scientifically to flay and cut up. Gaultier, who had never before seen a mountain sheep, examined it with curious interest. From Jake he gathered some facts relative to it, which we here reproduce.

The "big-horn," or mountain sheep, is an inhabitant of the most sterile and arid mountain ranges. On the high plateaux of the American Desert, where the rock formation assumes the most weird, fantastic shapes, and where pinnacle and precipice, serrated cliff and yawning chasm seem to forbid animal locomotion, there the big-horn is at home. There are few animals round which romance has thrown so much interest. The tales of the early explorers of the wild regions forming its habitat were full of allusions to this animal—its wondrous fleetness, and the faculty it possessed of throwing itself headlong from high precipices and breaking its fall by alighting on its huge curved horns. Jake, indeed, allowed that he had never actually seen it perform the latter feat, but he had heard of it from other trappers who had hunted the animals in the Southern Sierras.

The mountain sheep attains the weight of from two hundred and eighty to four hundred pounds, but the latter dimensions are seldom reached. The head

and horns will often turn the scale at fifty pounds, and a pair of the latter on record weighed forty-four and a half pounds! Horns of this size, however, are rare. The colour of the big-horn assimilates pretty closely to that of the rocks among which it lives, and is in general a sooty or dusky gray. The wool, or rather hair, is short, wiry, and quite unlike the pelage of its domestic relative the sheep. In fact, it somewhat resembles the coat of the European ibex; and this is not the sole point of resemblance. The "underpile," too, is similar in each, and fits the animal to withstand the intense cold of the mountain regions in winter.

The big-horn does not gather in large bands. Generally it travels in troops of from a dozen to twenty, although fifty and even seventy have been seen together. The running season seems to be about November, and at this time the patriarchal leaders rejoin their families, having during the rest of the year kept aloof. They engage in fierce contests with each other at this season, the hollow clatter of their huge horns resounding among the cliffs and chasms around.

In common with some other animals, they possess to a remarkable degree the faculty of noiselessly retreating from the neighbourhood of danger, and that over slopes littered with loose stones, where an incautious step would send the shingle thundering down the descent. While the band of sheep are feed-

ing, a vidette is posted on the nearest height, who keeps watch and ward over the rest of the troop. Usually this sentinel is an ewe; but while the old rams consort with the herd, one of them assumes this duty. A snort, or whistle-like sound, with a stamp of the fore foot, gives notice of the approach of danger, and at this signal the whole troop ceases feeding. Careful indeed must be the stalker who can now get within range; but as soon as the leader's suspicions seem allayed, the band again go on with their feeding, or lie in careless security upon the rocky ledges.

By the time Jake had communicated this information, the best portions of the sheep were packed in the hide; and bearing this, the party returned to camp well pleased with their adventure, and anxious to test the quality of the far-famed mountain mutton. One more fact Jake related. He said that from the swiftness with which the big-horns had disappeared, they must have been much hunted of late, as usually those bands unacquainted with man, instead of betaking themselves to instant flight, huddled together when one of their number was fired at, much as the tame sheep do when they apprehend danger. This he accounted for in the present instance by supposing that the band of Indians whom they had encountered had lately been hunting in this neighbourhood.

They now reached the camp, where they found that the kettle had all boiled away, necessitating

another "brew" of coffee. However, they were in high spirits, and did not mind this disappointment. Mutton chops and cutlets were soon sputtering on the embers, diffusing a fragrance which was most grateful to the nostrils of the hungry party. Old Jake was actually facetious under its influence, and seeing a coyote at some distance, challenged Pierre and Gaultier to "drop the skunk in his tracks." Instantly three rifles cracked, and the wolf dropped motionless on the rocks. When brought to camp, an examination showed that two bullets had pierced its skull, while a third had penetrated its heart.

"Right clean shooting," said Pierre; "when we get up among the game on the hills, we'll not let much escape."

"That we won't," said Gaultier; "I think we've killed almost everything we've fired at since we left the fort."

"Boyces," exclaimed Jake, cutting a huge piece of mutton with his knife, and transferring it "hot and hot" from the glowing coals to his capacious mouth, "what wur the tightest place ye ever wur in?"

"I think," said Gaultier, "that last night was as close a shave as I have ever had. Most of my life has been passed in the eastern woods, back of the big lakes, and so I haven't had much chance of scrimmages."

"The tightest place I was ever in," said Pierre, "was in a rumpus with some of the Chippewayans

from near Lake Athabasca. It happened at Fort Pierre au Calumet. The winter was very hard, and game got scarce, so a band of young braves came down to the fort to trade a few skins, and to beg or steal some provisions. As ill luck would have it, the chief trader was away at the council of the Hudson Bay Company at York Factory; while, presuming on my good nature, most of the employés generally about the place had gone away out on the Athabasca to play lacrosse and fish through the ice. There were only myself and another man in the place, when about forty braves marched in through the open stockade gate, and came straight to the door of the fort. I had only just time to shut the door and throw the bar across, when they rushed against it. Finding they couldn't force it, they called out for me to speak to them. I pulled aside a small trap in the upper part of the door, for reconnoitring through, and seeing that the party was in command of a chief, I addressed him:—

“‘Why do my red brothers come to visit friends with arms in their hands? When whites visit their red friends, they do not enter the wigwam of the chief unasked.’

“The chief, whose name was the ‘Moose,’ or Tunne-hee-hee, replied, ‘The white chief is our friend, and will not see his red brothers starve. My young men were hasty, but they hope the ma-kad-ray [trader] will not therefore close his heart against them for

their fault. See, they have brought skins. Let my brother open the door, and they will trade.' I did not like to refuse, and still I thought it was a risky job to let so many in."

"Ye may say that," interrupted Jake; "the skunks 'ud take yer ha'r in half a shake!"

"Well," continued Pierre, "I told the chief that they could not come in, but that I would trade through him. Let him bring in the skins, and let his braves retire two hundred yards outside the stockade. At this there was a great palaver; none of them seemed pleased, but they made a show of agreeing, and left their skins on the ground in charge of the chief, who remained behind. I then instructed my companion to wait until they were well out of the courtyard, and seizing his opportunity, to make a dash and fasten the outer gate. I now opened the door. My man, M'Taggart, slipped out, but had not made one step when the chief, drawing his tomahawk, cleft his skull. He then, with the suddenness of light, darted through the half-open door, and parrying a blow I aimed at him with an axe, he seized the bar which fastened the door, and threw it outside. I had by this got hold of one of my pistols, and pulled at him as he came towards me flourishing his bloody tomahawk. The bullet took effect, for the savage, with a frightful yell, staggered through the doorway, where his cries soon gathered his band about him.

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CHIPPEWA INDIANS.

"In vain I tried to find anything suitable with which to secure the door. The chief had fallen upon the bar outside, and, as if aware that it was the sole fastening, kept a firm grip of it. I gave myself up for lost. The whole band of furious savages burst into the fort, and more eager for plunder than for vengeance, they commenced to lay hands on whatever pleased their fancy. One brave's eye was suddenly attracted by a cask standing in a corner. With his tomahawk he dashed in the head, and applied his nose to the aperture. With a yell of delight, he snatched up a tin mug, dipped it in the cask, and drained it at one draught. All the others gathered about him, eager to quaff the fiery liquid. I now saw my opportunity. If they did not brain me before they became intoxicated, I should be master of the situation. A few empty casks stood close to me, and quietly sinking out of sight behind these, I, trembling, awaited my fate.

"Apparently they had forgotten my existence, for they continued to drink, some of them already showing the effects of their indulgence. These swaggered about, boasting of their deeds in battle, counting the scalps they had taken, and arraying themselves in some articles of finery which they found among the stores, and of which they did not know the use. Dangerous as my position was, I could hardly prevent myself from laughing aloud at the ridiculous figures cut by several. One tall, raw-boned savage,

whose gaunt face was the picture of famine, put on a coat, thrusting his legs through the sleeves; and his look of defiant pride as he staggered about impeded by the novel garment, quite as much as by the whisky, was enough to choke me with laughter."

"If he'd seen you, Pierre," said Gaultier, "I doubt he'd have made you laugh at the other side of your mouth!"

"I am sure of that," continued Pierre, "for I had only one pistol, and that wasn't a revolver, and would have been of no use against so many. However, you may be sure I kept my laughter to myself. In an hour they were all helplessly drunk. But I didn't like to stir yet; I preferred to wait until they lay powerless on the floor. One savage alone seemed to possess a stronger head than his companions, for, notwithstanding all he had taken, he still seemed little the worse. I kept my pistol ready for this fellow, as I knew the others wouldn't give me much trouble.

"Above the whisky-cask was a shelf on which were a few looking-glasses. The Indian, while trying to steady himself in the endeavour to reach one, upset the cask, and in a moment the remainder of its contents was streaming over the floor. A stove stood on one side of the apartment, and I suppose a cinder from it must have dropped in the whisky, for in an instant the whole room was in a blaze. Most of the savages were stretched on the ground, and

these were wrapped in flames. The Indian who had been the occasion of the catastrophe sprang towards the door; but he never left it alive, as my bullet crashed through his skull. Fortunately, the powder and the greater part of the stores were in the upper rooms; and as those on the ground floor consisted in great part of furs packed all round, the whisky burned itself out without doing very much damage. Indeed, there was not a great deal of it left, as the cask had not been a very large one. As for the Indians, many of them died; and the remainder, not knowing the origin of the disaster, attributed it either to the superior medicine of the Palefaces, or to a visitation of the Manito upon them for their treachery. When the other men came back and found so many dead Indians, and beheld the general ruin, they were amazed. Nothing would convince them but that I had managed it all myself; and from that day they always called me after the fort. That's how I got my name."

Here ended Pierre's narrative.

"That wur a near thing, sure enuf," said Jake. "It wur lucky for you that they tuk to that whisky; it wur so. Ef they hadn't a-taken to it, they'd soon a-fetched you out o' yer boots, I guess. How wur it that they didn't go fur ye when they fust kem in?"

"I don't know," said Pierre. "I fully expected that they would have done for me right away then;

but I suppose they were in too great a hurry to lay hands on the goods while they had a chance. Besides, when they burst in, they crushed the door round on its hinges, driving me before it, and thus putting it between me and them."

By the time Pierre related his adventure the trappers had finished their breakfast, and having stowed away everything in the canoe, they stepped on board, and once more began the ascent of the river.

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CHAPTER XI.

DIFFICULTIES OF THE ROUTE—A PORTAGE—THE ROCKY MOUNTAINS—NEW COUNTRY—STREAMS AND GROVES—JAKE'S OPINIONS ON FARMERS AND FARMING—BUFFALOES—ELK—MOCK ENCOUNTERS—STALKING THE GAME—GAULTIER'S ADVENTURE—LOST IN THE FOREST—WEIRD NOISES IN THE WOODS—GAULTIER SEES THE REFLECTION OF THE CAMP-FIRE ON THE SKY—GUIDED BY IT, HE REGAINS THE CAMP.



THE freshet had run itself out, and no other trace of it was now visible than the heaps of flood-wrack and timber scattered here and there among the clefts in the rocks.

For several days they laboured hard at paddling and poling the canoe against the Saskatchewan, which here ran very swiftly. Occasionally they had to make a portage, where the strength of the current rushing over rocky ledges rendered the passage of the canoe impossible. This was a tedious operation, as it involved, not only carrying the canoe itself overland to the next navigable portion of the river, but it necessitated many separate journeys to bring up the various articles which composed the cargo. However, all was at length safely accomplished, and the hunters once more found themselves sailing on comparatively smooth water.

The river, which had hitherto followed a west or north-west course, now trended towards the south, which Jake said it did about one hundred miles below the mouth of the Bull Pound.

"Thur's a mighty likely country hyur to the west'ards," said he, "which we mout try fur game by'm-by; an' thur's a fine river thur too—the Moo-coo-wan, the Injuns calls it. It runs out o' the old Rockies, an' I heern tell thur's lots o' beaver about the head-waters o' it. It jines the Askow—that's whur we fout them b'ars—only it's a hunderd mile above that."

"What mountains are those, Jake?" asked Gaultier, as they rounded a bend in the river where the banks no longer circumscribed the view.

"Them hills ur the Rocky Mountains, lad," replied the trapper; "an' fine hills they ur, I reckon!"

Pierre and Gaultier feasted their eyes on the prospect. At length, then, these were those wondrous peaks which for many a day they had beheld in imagination. This was the giant vertebræ of the continent, the western shore of the prairie ocean. As they gazed, they conjured up the vast deserts which lay behind them, the dangers and difficulties they had surmounted to reach this spot; and, as they thought, they experienced a pride in their own endurance, and felt that now really they might lay claim to be considered men.

"How far is it now, Jake," asked Pierre, "to where you say we'll make our winter camp?"

"Wal, I dunno edzactly. It ur about a hunderd mile now to the mouth o' the Bull Pound, an' I reckon it ur about that, or a trifle more, to the States border, which I've heern the boyees say wur about a hunderd an' twenty mile north o' whur the river rises. I guess about three hunderd mile or thur-away 'll see us hum."

The country now presented a varied aspect. Since leaving the rocky cañons behind them, the trappers had entered a land where verdure took the place of the utter sterility to which they had almost grown accustomed. Rivulets and even considerable streams danced down through the groves and joined the main river at frequent intervals. The country was diversified with hill and dale, the former often clad with pine forests, while the latter disclosed grassy expanses studded with sparkling lakelets and mottled with groves of poplars and little knots of pines. The air was balmy, and seemed filled with a resinous perfume borne upon a gentle breeze. The boys felt thoroughly happy; and even old Jake, whose ideas of pleasure seemed restricted to the animal gratifications of good eating and drinking, if we except the pleasure of hunting, expanded a little under the influence of genial skies, a bright landscape, and the anticipation of soon reaching the end of their journey.

"I wonder what them coons back in the settlements find to tickle thur fancy in plasterin' the

ground wi' dirt, an' then rippin' it open wi' thur ploughs an' devilments!" said he. "I never seed game plenty whur thur wur sich doin's. As if thur wurn't turnips or corn enuf in the world afore. I cudn't stand sich work nohow. Give me the free air, an' plains, an' mountains to ramble over fur health an' happiness. I cudn't sleep now ef thur wur no danger o' some kind about. I've growed used to it all my life, an' I'd feel right down lonesome 'ithout it—I would so!"

Gaultier laughed at the old hunter's conceit. "I think," said he, "that I could just manage to sleep a little, a very little, if I felt myself safe. There's no saying though, but perhaps before I get back east I may be like you, Jake!"

"See if ye don't, young fellur," replied the hunter; "anyways, afore ye sees as many years in the mountains as my old peepers hev!"

"You might have dangers too in the settlements, Jake," said Pierre. "Your corn and wheat would be in danger often, I've no doubt, from the neighbours' cattle."

"I guess I'd soon clur *them* out o' it wi' my old rifle; thur wudn't be many o' *them* about, you bet, arter I seed 'em," replied Jake.

"Nay, then," continued Pierre, "you would soon be in danger enough to satisfy even you. The settlers might take a fancy to clear *you* out too with their rifles."

"This is foolish talk, young fellur," said Jake; "I

ain't a-gwine to turn dung-scraper at this time o' day. I'd far rayther be wiped out by old Eph'm in a tussle than by them plough an' harrow fellurs that one cud git no good o' nohow. Thur pelts wudn't fetch much, I calc'late!"

With such conversation did they pass the time. It must not be supposed, however, that their existence was a halcyon one, luxuriously drifting along through beautiful scenes, feasting on the choicest game, and having no care to cloud the prospect. On the contrary, they often went to bed supperless, and without a fire, exposed to the pelting of the midnight storm, and arose hungry, to continue their weary work of paddling the heavy canoe against rapid currents, or making portages over rocks slippery with spray or rain, bending beneath the weight of the articles of the freight.

The hunters were in the habit of ending their day's work some time before sun-down, so as to have time to unload the canoe and make preparations for the evening meal. On one occasion, while Pierre and Gaultier were thus employed, old Jake, shouldering his rifle, left the camp, announcing his intention of getting some game for supper. He quickly disappeared over the crest of a low hill which limited the view in that direction; but had not been many minutes gone, when he came running over the slope, eagerly calling, "Boyees! thur's meat a-movin' hyur! Bring yer shootin' irons,—quick!"

The lads seized their rifles and flew up the hill with the quickness of deer. Beyond lay a prairie dotted over with clumps of timber, rocky ridges, jutting up here and there like gigantic fences, while now and then a solitary boulder of immense size reared its gray crest above the emerald plain. To the left were a number of rounded hills covered with forest, the groves and clumps of timber on the plain below having the appearance of skirmishers thrown out in front of the main army behind.

But of infinitely more interest than all these was a huge herd of buffaloes, which grazed in fancied security among the clumps of timber, or stood in the shade of the groves, switching off the flies with busy tails. Some old bulls were wallowing in a slough, twisting round and round as they lay upon their sides, kicking their legs wildly about, and presenting a fearful appearance, their long hair, matted with dirt, adding to the natural ferocity of their aspect.

By the edge of a small grove of poplars was a band of elk, rubbing their antlers against the branches, and seeming to regard the presence of so many buffaloes with the utmost indifference. A mimic combat soon took place between two huge buffalo bulls. Each would retreat, and at the same instant charge each other with such fury that the earth seemed to tremble, and the shock was plainly audible where the trappers stood. Occasionally they

threw themselves on their knees, and continued the contest in this fashion, bellowing the while, until, suddenly tired of the sport, they would spring to their feet and graze peacefully together, apparently with tempers quite unruffled by their encounter.

Old Jake and the boys watched the wild scene with an enthusiastic interest. Fortunately they were concealed from the view of the animals by a thicket of young pines, and they were further secured from detection by the fresh breeze which blew directly towards them from the game.

The distance to the nearest band of buffalo was scarcely three hundred yards, and therefore within the range of the Winchester; but the party prepared to get nearer so as to give old Jake a chance, he being armed with a weapon of shorter range. They therefore dropped amongst the cover of young pine-trees, and commenced their advance with the utmost caution, avoiding treading on dried sticks, and taking care to hand back the branches from one to the other, not allowing them to swing.

This care would not have been so needful were the buffaloes the only game in the vicinity, as they are animals dull of hearing and not very quick-sighted, their eyes being covered by the mass of hair which clothes their foreheads, and, indeed, all their forequarters. But the hunters hoped to secure an elk as well, Gaultier volunteering to undertake this branch of the attack.

They soon descended the hill, which was of slight elevation, and found themselves at the skirt of the timber, from which point they commanded a good view of the herd, the nearest members of which were now only about a hundred and fifty yards distant. Among these were several old bulls, who, from their colossal size and ungainly appearance, seemed rather the inhabitants of an antediluvian world than animals to be met with in the latter half of the nineteenth century.

There were also half-a-dozen cows with calves at foot; but none of these seemed to realize old Jake's idea of "meat."

"Old fur an' leather" (meaning the bulls), said he, "ur as tough chawin' as my old leggin's. Yonder's our game," he continued, pointing to some young cows who were not attended by calves; "them heifers hain't bred this year, an' I guess they'll be thick fat." These were at a rather greater distance than the others, but it was decided to fire from their present position rather than to risk discovery by a further advance.

The elk were still unconscious of danger: some were lazily stretched on the ground at the edge of the shade, their huge antlers visible over the long grass and bushes; others stood around, indulging in a "rub" against the tree-trunks, as is the habit of our domestic cattle when irritated by parasites. They were still considerably out of shot, so it oc-

curred to Gaultier that by retracing his steps a little and following an arm of the same pine-thicket which projected like a promontory into the plain, he would be able to get within a hundred yards of the grove in which the elk were reposing.

This plan met with Jake's approval. He and Pierre therefore lay flat on the ground, each having already selected his victim; and in this position they impatiently waited until Gaultier had completed his approach.

The distance was slight, but Gaultier found it so difficult to advance silently through the thick interlacing branches of the spruces, that fully twenty minutes elapsed ere he found himself in a position from which he could safely fire. A huge bull elk attracted his attention, partly because he stood nearest, and partly because he seemed the leader of the band, and Gaultier was ambitious of such a trophy. He therefore took a rest off a branch, and drawing a steady bead, he pressed the trigger. Almost simultaneously with the report were heard the sharp cracks of his companions' rifles; but Gaultier had not time to note the effect, for the elk, which had fallen, now regained its feet and followed his comrades, who were speeding towards the woods, at a rate scarcely inferior to their own.

Leaving his ambush, Gaultier gave chase, and while crossing the plain he passed Jake and Pierre, who were hurrying in the direction of the buffaloes

at which they had fired. He did not stop, however, but continued at his utmost speed. He fancied he heard old Jake calling out something after him, of which he could only catch the word "care." But at that moment his mind was too busily occupied to speculate on what the old trapper could have to say to him. He soon left the plain and entered among copses and groves, which gradually grew larger and larger, and closed in upon each other, until they united in a stretch of forest which covered a number of low swelling hills.

Hitherto the trail of the band of elk had been distinct enough, and in particular that of the wounded bull was marked with blood. This, however, grew gradually fainter and fainter, and at length became undistinguishable, as the path now entered the woods, which were in every direction marked by the tracks of animals of every species. Gaultier still held on, thinking that in each new vista among the trees he might discover the game he was in pursuit of. For upwards of an hour he continued his search, but in vain. Several times, as he forced his way through the brushwood, he heard some animals break away, but the thickness of the cover prevented him from seeing to what species they belonged.

Exhausted and vexed, he at length threw himself on the ground beneath a pine-tree in order to rest. He was annoyed at his failure to bag the wounded animal, especially as Jake would be sure to take

advantage of it to point his jokes with. He could almost hear the old hunter offering him some buffalo meat with the remark—"Tain't as good as elk meat, I reckon; but 'twurn't allers as one had the chance o' gettin' thur teeth upon that." However, there was no help for it, and sadly enough he arose and set out for camp.

He had not long left the tree beneath which he had been resting than he became aware that the path he now followed was not the same as that by which he had come. "It is no matter," thought he; "whatever way brings me back is as good as any other."

It was not till he had been walking for upwards of an hour that the possibility occurred to him that he might be proceeding in the wrong direction. He looked at the heavens with a view of noting the position of the sun; but these were overcast with gray clouds, which left no indication of the luminary's whereabouts. He examined the moss upon the trees; but neither did this afford the desired information, as the soil was spongy and damp, and the moss grew with equal luxuriance on all sides of the stems. He next inspected the branches, knowing that the longest pointed towards the south. But here, too, he was at fault; for at this spot the woods were comparatively thin, and each tree had a sufficiency of light and air on all sides, so that the branches grew alike. There was nothing for it but to continue, or,

if possible, to retrace his steps to the tree beneath which he had rested, and where he might hope to find some clue to the direction from whence he had come.

For a short time he fancied that he was successful in this; but he speedily came to a deep ravine, which he well knew he had not hitherto crossed. Gaultier now became thoroughly alarmed. He was well aware of the danger of getting lost—or “turned round,” as the Western hunters phrase it—in the pathless forest which stretched for leagues around. He tried to hope that Jake and Pierre would follow him up when he did not return to the camp-fire at sunset; but as he reflected that it would then be too late for them to track him that night, this source of comfort left him.

The shades of night were now falling fast and thickening the gloom of the wild woods around. A strong breeze, too, had sprung up, and whistled mournfully through the trees, some of which, old and decayed, groaned and wheezed as they swayed beneath its influence.

Gaultier, however, was too good a woodsman to be dismayed at spending a night alone in the forest. He had many a time camped in solitude in the backwoods of Lower Canada; but *then* he knew his route, while *now* it was the want of this knowledge which alarmed him. However, he cheered himself as best he could, and set about collecting a quantity of dried

branches, of which there was abundance scattered around, in order to make a fire. He next cut several small poles, two with crotches at the end. These he planted firmly in the ground, with the crotches uppermost, and across these he laid a third pole. He now collected a number of the feathery branches of the silver fir, and placed them against the framework, until he had fashioned a snug hut in which to pass the night. The floor he covered thickly with the same branches; and building his fire opposite the entrance, he dragged himself into his nest and lay down.

His reflections were melancholy enough at first, but his natural buoyancy of temper soon chased away gloomy thoughts, and his principal regret arose from the want of anything to eat. He figured to himself Jake and Pierre at their cheerful camp-fire by the river, the buffalo ribs grilling on the embers, or the more succulent hump filling the air with its appetizing odour; the canoe on the windy side, propped on its edge; and over all the ruddy glow of the huge fire which Jake prided himself on constructing.

"No matter," thought he, "it is only for one night after all; to-morrow at this time I shall be with them." With this comforting assurance he stretched himself upon the elastic silver-fir boughs (which are soft and do not prick like those of the spruce), and endeavoured to sleep.

Gaultier could not tell how long he lay in a state

of semi-forgetfulness before his attention was suddenly arrested by dismal noises proceeding from amid the darkest recesses of the woods. The direction seemed to be that opposite the entrance to his hut, but nothing was visible in the thick gloom. He was a brave lad, however, and instead of cowering in the fancied security of his retreat, he seized his rifle and stepped out beside the fire.

Again the noises were repeated; and now that he heard them in the open air, he at once recognized the creature that made them. Still they were such as might well appal those unacquainted with the denizens of the North American forest, and who for the first time found themselves in the situation of our young hunter. Gaultier, however, now that he recognized the maniac screams, hootings, and gurglings of the great horned-owl, smiled at his first alarm, and was about to enter the hut again, when he happened to cast his eyes down a dark vista, probably torn in the woods during some winter hurricane.

Above this, and far away, the sky presented a lurid appearance, as if it reflected a conflagration. "A prairie on fire," thought he, and was about to turn away when a thought struck him: "Perhaps Jake and Pierre have made signal-fires on the hill near the camp!"

In an instant he looked around, and seeing a tall spruce which considerably overtopped its fellows, he

sprang up its branches and soon reached the top. From this elevated position he could overlook the forest, which, as we have said, clothed the sides of some gentle hills; and it was with a shout of joy that he beheld, several miles away, a huge fire, apparently constantly fed with fresh fuel, for whenever it seemed to get low it suddenly again brightened, and he even thought he could distinguish figures which occasionally passed before the blaze. He immediately descended, and carefully noting the direction, set off at a rapid pace down the woods.

He cared little for falls, which were frequent, nor for the spiteful switchings across his face as he plunged through the entangled branches of the young spruce thickets. He every now and then got a glimpse of the reflection of the fire on the sky, and with this beacon he held on a straight path.

After more than an hour of quick walking and running where the ground permitted, Gaultier found himself out on the plain amongst the detached groves, where he remembered pursuing the elk many hours before. Here he was enabled to proceed at a more rapid rate, and he soon had the satisfaction of finding himself within a mile of the fire, which he could perceive was attended to by two figures, who threw armfuls of brushwood upon the blaze. He now fired a shot, which was quickly returned from the hill; and in answer to his shouts he could hear the well-known halloo of Pierre, while Jake gave

vent to an unearthly yell, which echoed far and wide.

Breathless and exhausted, he at length approached the fire.

"Hurrah!" yelled Pierre, as he ran forward to meet him. "Why, Gaultier, we had almost given you up for lost. Where have you been, or what have you been about all this time?"

"Ay, young fellur, jest tell us that," said Jake; "but fust gi' us a couple o' them elk tongues—I guess you're pretty peckish now—an' I'll gi' 'em a turn over the fire while yer reelin' off yer doin's. Why," continued the trapper, "this beats grainin'—he hasn't got any meat arter all!"

Gaultier, however, was too hungry to regard old Jake's innuendos, and speedily occupied himself in polishing a huge buffalo rib, which he snatched, sputtering and smoking, from the embers; and after he had taken the keen edge off his appetite, he recounted his adventures since he had passed them on the plain in the evening. Pierre and Jake listened attentively, again and again pressing him to eat, as his exertions seemed to flag, until at length he lay back on a buffalo robe incapable of swallowing another mouthful.

"Wagh!" exclaimed Jake, "ye ain't no account at eatin', ef that's all yer able fur; but preehaps ye've had another supper a'ready. How much o' them elk hev ye chawed up now?"

Pierre laughed, and Gaultier joined, although he was a little nettled too at so many gibes against his skill. It was now very late, and the hunters each wrapped himself in his blanket, and, lying in a circle round the fire, with their feet towards it, they soon were sound asleep.

CHAPTER XII.

WOODS ON FIRE—LEAVE CAMP—A HALT—PRAIRIE DOGS—A DOG-TOWN—EXCITEMENT AMONG THE DOGS—A RATTLESNAKE—GAULTIER'S ATTACK ON THE DOGS—A BEAR—PLUMCENTRE MISSES FIRE—GAULTIER SHOTS THE BEAR—THE CANOE HAS A NARROW ESCAPE—THE PARTY MAKE CAMP.

“**H**EEHOSOPHAT!” cried Jake on awaking in the morning, “hyur’s a muss! The Injuns hev sot fire to the woods. Thur’s smoke enuf to choke a skunk out o’ a persimmon log!”

The boys leaped to their feet, and saw, as Jake had said, that the woods on the hills were evidently on fire. Huge columns of smoke rolled upwards in the calm air, until they overspread the sky, and through the murky volumes the sun shed a brazen light. Occasionally forked tongues of flame shot upwards, but were immediately inwreathed in vast clouds of smoke which wrapped the whole hills in their enormous folds. Even at the distance at which the trappers stood a constant crackling was audible, resembling the rattle of musketry, while showers of ashes fell like snow-flakes around the camp. Dimly seen through the smoke, bands of elk and mule-deer

galloped across the plain, flying from the conflagration, which in one or two points had encroached upon the prairie, where the grass was long and dry.

"I wonder if it was Indians?" said Pierre; "I don't think it can be, for they could have no reason for destroying the woods."

"Don't ye go fur to say that, young fellur," said Jake; "they mout a thort they'd gi' us a roastin'. They'll take a look round arterwards, I guess, to see what they've done. They'll be welcome to what they'll find o' us, I reckon!"

"I think you're both mistaken," said Gaultier; "I fear the fire is altogether *my* fault."

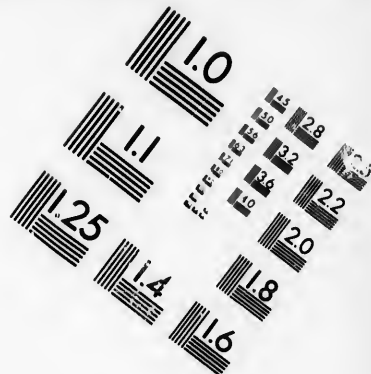
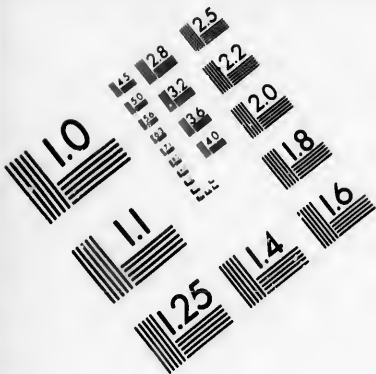
"*Your* fault!" cried Pierre; "how can *you* have had anything to do with it?"

"Why," replied Gaultier, "you know I had a fire at my camp in the woods, and when I saw your signal I just left it and came straight away. I left a large pile of withered brushwood near it, and no doubt it caught fire, and the flames spread through the dry grass. I am very sorry; it's a great pity to have such a waste of fine timber."

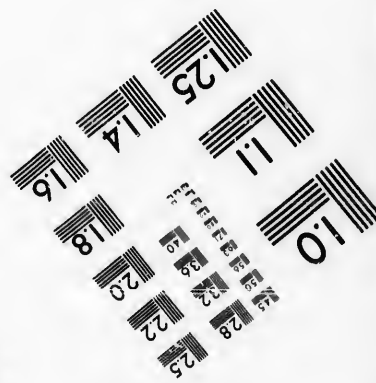
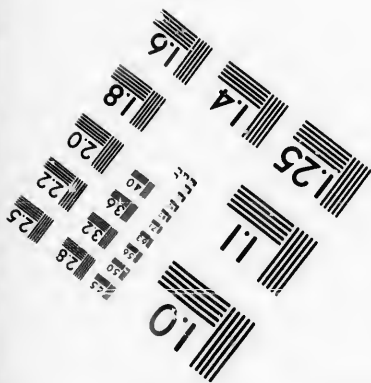
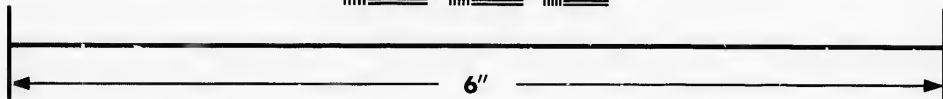
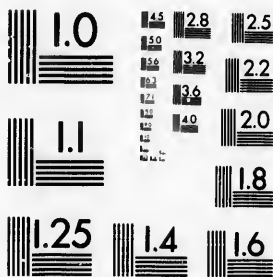
"Wagh!" said Jake, "ye're a tender-foot to leave yer fire that way. Thur's places whur you'd burn a thousan' mile o' trees ef ye didn't take kear o' yer fire. Hows'ever, 'twon't be round hyur fur a couple o' hours, and we'd better put ourselves outside o' some buffler meat while we've the time."

The party, therefore, addressed themselves to their





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meal with the keen appetites born of exercise and health. This over, they packed the canoe, and stepping in left the camp.

On the western side the river bank rose into a bluff, though of inconsiderable height; on the other side a hill sloped gently upwards from the water's edge. The hunters, therefore, commanded a good view of the ascent, which in some places consisted of a green meadow-like expanse, while in others small clumps of trees dotted its surface.

They had been afloat for several hours, and already the sun was approaching the zenith, when Gaultier proposed that they should land and rest; for the heat was very great, as the rising ground on both sides of the river shut off the breeze which waved the branches on the summit of the slope. As neither Pierre nor Jake raised any objection, the canoe was directed to the bank, and the party flung themselves among the rich grass which grew under the shade of one of the small knots or islands of timber, several of which grew at the water's edge. This happened to be at a bend in the river which afforded a view both up and down the stream for a considerable distance.

Pierre was puffing his favourite brier-root, in an attitude of lazy contentment; while Jake, who sat leaning against a tree vigorously chewing a plug of "James River," kept his restless eye roving over both reaches of the river, as if he momentarily expected the appearance of enemy or of game. Gaultier, who

did not smoke, was busied in cleaning his rifle, which, for that purpose, he had taken to pieces.

Opposite this spot the bluff had sunk to the level of the river, and a shelving beach extended along the stream for more than a mile, permitting a view of a prairie which sloped away to the westward, rising higher the further it receded from the river. Clustering thickly over this were little mounds, somewhat like the mole-hills so common in some districts in England, but considerably larger. Numerous small animals ran quickly among these, occasionally uttering a sort of barking noise, which soon attracted Jake's attention.

"Yonder's a dog-town," said he, pointing across the river; "thur's a wheen o' the critturs out takin' the air. Look at that ar chap on the top o' his house—he's like a Methody minister at a meetin'! Listen to the varmint, how he throws his barks out; he'll bust hisself."

The boys, in fact, observed that one of the little animals seemed extraordinarily excited, barking vociferously, and jerking his tail about in a most ludicrous manner. Occasionally he sprang down off his house-top and ran forward a few paces, but quickly retreated to his former position. What could it mean? The boys could not guess.

Old Jake when interrogated replied, "Belike some varmint's botherin' the crittur—maybe a rattler or an owl."

Pierre, whose curiosity was awakened, taking his rifle, stepped into the canoe, and with half-a-dozen strokes of his paddle reached the opposite bank. On ascending to the level of the "town," he soon perceived the cause of the commotion. A huge rattlesnake lay among the grass in front of the prairie dog's "house," and was preparing to swallow at his leisure a member of the community—perhaps a wife or a brother of the individual whose objurgations had at first attracted the attention of the trappers. As Pierre approached, the inhabitants betook themselves to their burrows with the utmost rapidity, uttering their shrill squeaks and barks.

No sooner had they dived into these than they reappeared at the entrances, working themselves up to a state of frenzied excitement, only again to adopt invisibility.

Pierre advanced, however, nothing daunted by this display of hostility, until he stood before the reptile, who no sooner perceived him than he dropped his victim and erected himself on his coil, sounding his rattles, while his forked tongue played in and out of his mouth.

Levelling his rifle, at the report the reptile's head flew several yards from his body, and trailing the disgusting object behind him, Pierre returned to the canoe, and speedily rejoined his comrades.

"Wagh!" exclaimed Jake, "what did you bring that stinkin' thing back fur?"

"Don't you think the skin would make a nice belt?" asked Pierre. An expression of disgust crossed the old trapper's face, at which Pierre laughed as he said, "Well, Jake, if you don't like travelling with it, it's easy to leave it behind us, so there it goes," he continued, throwing it into the river, where it speedily sank, still writhing in its protracted death-agonies.

"Look," cried Gaultier, who had now put his rifle together,—*"look at those funny little fellows; they're all out again!"*

"That's thur way," said old Jake; *"they're allers poppin' in an' out. Thur mighty nice eatin', too. Ye mout ha' throwed one o' the varmints when ye wur about it, Pierre."*

"I'll go for one for you, Jake," cried Gaultier.

"Do, young fellur," said the old hunter; *"'twill be nicer than that elk meat ye fetched in last night."*

Shaking his rifle at the old fellow, Gaultier crossed the river. Here he cautiously ascended the bank, and getting a position where he could secure a good shot, he took a steady aim at a "dog," who, from his size, might be the mayor or an alderman of the city, and fired. The bullet sped truly, for the poor dog tumbled over stiff; whereupon the whole community, with a shrill chorus of barks and squeaks, again plunged out of sight in their subterranean dwellings.

While Gaultier was descending the bank, bearing his trophy by the hind leg, Jake suddenly seized

Pierre by the arm, and pointing up-stream, directed his attention to a black object which was rapidly crossing to their side of the river. "A b'ar! a b'ar!" he cried; and seizing his rifle, he dodged through the trees towards the spot where he expected the animal to land. Pierre followed as quickly as he could; and Gaultier, who saw the whole proceedings from his side of the river, also ran along the bank, hoping to get a shot before the bear left the water.

Meanwhile Jake had reached a spot which placed him opposite the swimming animal. In a moment Plumcentre was at his shoulder, but upon pulling the trigger no report followed. With something that sounded very like an imprecation, the hunter threw down his rifle and pulled out his heavy pistol, which he discharged too quickly to get a good aim. Bruin, not liking this reception, nor the hostile attitude of the trapper on the bank, turned round and made for the opposite side of the river.

Pierre, who had now come up, was about to fire, when he perceived Gaultier in a direct line beyond. He was, therefore, afraid to pull trigger, and suffered the animal to gain the bank, where Gaultier was ready to receive him.

The latter was determined to retrieve his character as a hunter, somewhat tarnished by his recent failure. He therefore permitted the bear to ascend the bank before firing, in order to make a certain shot. Dropping on one knee, he took a careful aim, and

pressed the trigger. The bear raised himself to his hind legs, and with a snort of rage he plunged towards the young hunter, who actively darted to one side, and before the infuriated animal could again turn on him, he stretched him lifeless on the ground by a well-directed bullet.

"Well done, Gaultier," shouted Pierre; "you've settled him at last! Bring over the canoe, and let's cross to skin him."

This was accordingly done, and in a few minutes the shaggy pelt was added to the stores in the canoe. The hams were next cleverly butchered by Jake, who deposited them with the hide; and, as it was still much too early to camp for the night, the party embarked and continued their journey.

Nothing of interest occurred during the afternoon, with the exception of a narrow escape from a disaster which would have exposed them to the gravest difficulties, if not dangers—namely, the loss of the canoe. It was only the affair of a few moments, but it seemed to the trappers as if into those moments were condensed the feelings of a much longer period. It happened in this wise.

All were busily debating the late adventure with the bear, and not paying as much attention as usual to the navigation of their frail craft. They had passed a number of rocks which protruded their black and wave-worn crests above the surface of the water, which whirled in swift eddies round them,

when suddenly Jake exclaimed, "Look out, fellurs! thur's a tree a-floatin' down upon us!"

Scarcely was the fact observed when the tree—a huge cotton-wood, which had no doubt been uprooted by the late freshet—bore down upon them, and before they could steer clear of it, its branches enclosed the canoe on both sides, and in an instant the hunters found themselves hurried down-stream and borne full upon the rocks.

"Back yer paddles, lads," cried Jake, "back yer paddles; we mout get out that a way!"

The tree meantime quickened its motion as it got into the swift water near the rocks, and swept them past several of the boulders, the least touch of whose rough sides would have torn such a hole in the canoe as would have instantly swamped it.

Below them was a kind of barrier, over which the water surged in wild tumult, showing the presence beneath the surface of a dangerous ledge of rocks. This they had avoided when ascending the river, as it presented an obstacle which could not escape their observation. Now they were helplessly impelled upon it, and they gave themselves up for lost. Old Jake was calculating the possibility of swimming ashore with his rifle; while Pierre and Gaultier proposed that they should leave the canoe to its fate, and endeavour to climb among the branches of the cotton-wood, several of which rose high above the surface. Fortunately, neither alternative became necessary.

Just as scarcely fifty yards separated them from the seething caldron, in the midst of which they could now see the black and jagged crests of numerous rocks, the stem of the tree was caught by an eddy and whirled to one side, where a huge boulder jutted above the level of the stream. Upon this rock the snag of a broken branch caught a firm hold, and suddenly the tree became stationary. In a moment the hunters with their hatchets chopped off the branches which had enclosed the canoe, and with a feeling of genuine gratitude they paddled towards the calmer water which ran by the eastern bank.

"That was a lucky rock for us," said Pierre; "only for it, salt wouldn't have saved us."

"We'll hev to keep our eyes open an' our mouths shet ag'in when the road ain't clur," said Jake. "It all kem o' talkin' an' palaverin' like them Injun skunks when they've done anything out o' the common."

"Well, well," said Pierre, "it's over, and there's no use saying more about it. I vote we land and go no further this day. We've done very little travelling as it is, and we couldn't do much before evening. I say, let's camp."

Jake proposed they should camp at the spot opposite where the bear had been shot. "Thur's more timber about thur," he said; "an' mebbe them cussed coyotes ud be smellin' round the b'ar's car-kidge, an' we mout get a few o' 'em."

This proposal was agreed to, and the party accordingly landed at the place, which was but a few hundred yards above the scene of their escape. Here camp was made, and as dry float-wood was plentiful at the spot, a huge fire was built, over which the kettle was suspended, while buffalo-meat and bear-ham were speedily hissing on the embers.

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CHAPTER XIII.

THE PRAIRIE DOG—DIFFERENT VARIETIES—STRIKING VIEW—THE HUNTERS
MAKE AN AMBUSH—LIE IN WAIT FOR THE COYOTES—GRAY WOLVES—
EACH HUNTER SECURES A WOLF—A GRIZZLY AMBUSHED—ANTICIPATION
—HE ARRIVES—IN FOR IT—THE FIGHT—GAULTIER'S ESCAPE—DEATH OF
THE BEAR.

“**B**OYEES, whur’s the dog?” asked Jake.
“I ain’t gwine to ekal him to this gris-
kin o’ fat cow; but ef ye never tasted
the thing, ye mout jest swaller a mouth-
ful to try it.”

Gaultier confessed that he had forgotten it on the other side when he ran to meet the bear.

“Tain’t o’ no use, neyther,” said the hunter, “when we’ve better chawin’s. But they’re queerities, them dogs. Thur’s more sorts than one o’ ’em, too. I guess I knows more about ’em than them city folks as writes books about all kinds o’ varmints. I oncest seed a fellur from New York as ud go five miles to lay his claws on a bug. He had boxes o’ ’em hung all over his mule, wi’ pins stuck into ’em—butterflies, an’ grassjumpers, straddle-bugs, an’ all sorts o’ such rubbish. Wagh! *he* was ‘some,’ *he* was!” and here

the old trapper laughed aloud at the idiocy of this enthusiast.

"Come, Jake," said Gaultier in a coaxing tone, "tell us about the prairie dogs; it will help down the meat."

"Wal, I don't care ef I diz," replied the hunter. But we will not trouble the reader with Jake's patois, which we here translate.

It seems that there are many kinds of this curious little animal, which would appear to be a connecting link between the squirrels and rabbits, presenting some traits of resemblance to both. Jake said that on the Southern plains the houses of the "dogs" had the entrance placed on the top or at the side; whereas those inhabiting the more northern regions of British America make their burrows at the foot of the mounds, or that, more probably, the mounds were merely the earth excavated by the little animal when digging his hole.

The ground squirrel of the United States may be said to be of the same family, as its habits do not differ greatly from those of the true marmots. The different varieties vary considerably in size: the wood-chuck, which is an inhabitant of the Eastern States, attains the dimensions of a rabbit; while other varieties—such as, for example, the leopard-marmot—scarcely equal the size of the common water-rat.

These little creatures are purely vegetable feeders

—some subsisting on grasses, while others will only eat certain berries or seeds, unless by force of circumstances they happen to be deprived of these. It is not a little odd that some kinds are furnished with bags or cheek-pouches—in which Jake declared they stored up fruits or berries for consumption when hungry—and that others of the same genus should be deprived of these appendages. It has been stated that these pouches were stored with the food necessary for the animal during the rigorous winter of its habitat; but this does not harmonize with other statements, which represent the marmot as passing the winter in a state of torpidity.

One of the most remarkable traits of this creature, because that which is most forced on the attention of the observer, is the habit of setting sentries to watch over the others while gambolling in front of their houses or while feeding. We have already remarked this with regard to the big-horn, and it is a characteristic of several other animals. Each kind announces the approach of danger by a noise peculiar to itself. That made by some somewhat resembles a bark; others again make a whistling sound. These have been named by the French employés of the Hudson Bay Company and voyageurs "siffleurs," or whistlers. This signal of alarm is instantly taken up by all the animals of the "settlement," and with one accord they fly to the friendly shelter of their burrows.

As Jake had said, they are eatable; but they present a repulsive appearance when scorched over the coals, looking like overgrown rats. Whether they would be improved by a more civilized "cuisine" still remains to be determined.

These and many other particulars did Jake communicate to the youths. Pierre, indeed, had seen the animals before, and was acquainted with most of the facts stated by the old hunter; but he listened with pleasure to the recital. Most hunters—even such rough characters as Jake—are naturalists at heart; those of comparative refinement, like Pierre and Gaultier, never fail to take a deep interest in the history of the various animals in whose pursuit they spend their lives.

As soon as Jake ceased speaking, Pierre, taking his rifle, left the camp, directing himself towards the brow of the hill or rising ground which we have already noticed as enclosing the river bottom on the eastern side. It was now evening, and as he stood on the crest he thought he had never beheld a prospect so beautiful.

Below lay the river in shadow, the strife of its waters against rocks and boulders softened by distance to a gentle murmur. Beyond, to the west, stretched the prairie, rising as it receded, dotted with groves which indicated the course of streams; while far away on the horizon appeared the snow-capped summits of the Rocky Mountains, painted by the sun,

which was descending behind them. In the east the limitless prairie extended away to the sky-line, lying gray and solemn in the shadow of the heights on which Pierre stood, and streaked with the dark lines of groves along the water-courses. A solemn silence seemed to brood over the vast scene,—not even the cry of a bird broke the stillness. All seemed as it might have done on the morning of creation—a tenantless world.

Retracing his steps, Pierre soon regained the camp. Here he found Jake and Gaultier cutting some branches off the pines to make a screen within shot of the carcass of the bear, as no natural cover existed on that side of the river. Pierre lent his assistance, and they soon had collected sufficient for their purpose. This they ferried across the stream, and placed it in the least likely position to attract suspicion; for the coyote, which was the game they hoped for, is a very wary and cautious beast, and has a wholesome dread of traps of all kinds.

When all their preparations were complete the three hunters lay down behind the screen, and awaited with what patience they could the success of their artifice.

Twilight was already descending on the river; the roseate flush on the sky had gradually faded, and now objects at a little distance were confused and indistinct. The blood-covered carcass of the bear, however, was sufficiently visible, and the trappers took a

glance at this from time to time, to see if any of their game had as yet made their appearance. Under the influence of the balmy air, the drowsy rush of the river, and the prosy recital of old Jake's experiences of the coyote, the two youths were falling fast asleep. Old Jake had relapsed into silence, and he, too, was courting the drowsy god, when, suddenly, a wild, prolonged clamour caused them all to spring up. Again the despairing cry was repeated in a horrible chorus.

"Thur's the varmints!" whispered Jake. Looking through the screen the trappers could see a number of animals fighting and leaping round the dead bear; while they could distinctly hear the crunching of bones, and the ravenous bolting of flesh, which the hungry brutes would not give themselves time enough to masticate.

"Fellurs," said Jake, "thur's two gray wolves wi' 'em; we must throw 'em fust, an' Gaultier'll pick out one o' the coyotes."

The gray wolves were easily distinguishable, not only by their colour, but by their size, which was much greater than that of their *confrères*. These Pierre and Jake singled out, and at a word the three rifles cracked together.

"Hooraw!" yelled Jake, rushing forward; "we've fetched the varmints.—Eh, my beauty," continued he, taking hold of the wolf he had killed by the tail; "ye've got a dose o' lead instead o' meat. Yer

pelt'll keep old Plumcentre in fodder for a while, I guess!

Pierre had also been successful in his aim; his wolf had fallen dead upon the carcass of the bear. The coyote at which Gaultier had fired still scrambled and whined over the ground badly wounded. Another shot settled his account; and bearing their three trophies, the hunters got into their canoe and crossed to the camp. Here they soon made a roaring fire, by the light of which they skinned the wolves. Old Jake was loath to throw away the carcasses, which he said he had often found "not bad eatin'." But as there was plenty of meat in the camp, and as game seemed plentiful in the country, the boys heaved the wolves into the Saskatchewan, which rapidly bore them out of sight.

"Them varmints'll come ag'in to the carkidge," said Jake; "we mout git a few more o' 'em ef we crossed. They'll not leave so much meat to rot on the ground fur want o' eatin', you bet."

"Would a grizzly come to it, do you think, Jake?" asked Gaultier.

"He would so," said the hunter; "but seein' as the thing ur a b'ar too, I won't say he'd eat it. He'll eat bugs, grassjumpers, tree-lice, fish, flesh, fowl, an' roots—anything a'most; but I never seed one eat his own kind. I won't say he wouldn't; I hain't seed it, that's all. As I said, hows'ever, ef the varmint wur pokin' round, he'd be pretty considerable sure o'

sniffin' the thing, an' he'd be bound to get clost up to hev a good look."

"Well, then," said Pierre, "what do you say to our going over and waiting for the chance?"

"Ye're grit to the toes, young fellur!" exclaimed Jake, in admiration of Pierre's courage. "I says, ef thur's to be a scrimmage, I'm in it."

It was therefore arranged that they should all recross the river, and lie in wait for the chance of a grizzly's turning up. They knew that although that animal is more frequently encountered during the daytime, it nevertheless roams about also during the night, and is, of course, at this time proportionately more dangerous owing to the difficulty of shooting accurately in the darkness, as well as from the greater ferocity natural to beasts of prey on the prowl at that time. But there was something fascinating to their bold spirits in the idea of attacking or being attacked by an antagonist so terrible, and at a time when the difficulties of the task were so greatly enhanced. They accordingly got into the canoe, and paddled across the Saskatchewan, and again ensconced themselves behind their cover of pine branches.

The time passed slowly, as it always does when the mind is in a state of expectation. The rustling of the grass as the wind swept through it, or the rushing of the river against the rocks, assumed a significance it had never before possessed. In each, their excited fancies detected the approach of the fierce

monster,—at one time clattering over the shingle at the water's edge, and again stealing along through the rough bent grass which fringed the river-beach.

They had been about an hour silently crouched behind the screen, when they became aware of something shuffling round the carcass, which lay some thirty yards farther up-stream. Jake peered anxiously for a few moments over the branches, and in a whisper said to the youths, "I guess we're in the trap now; it's old Eph'm, as sure as I'm a sinner!"

The blood bounded through the veins of the young hunters as they cautiously rose to reconnoitre. The night was not very dark, although the moon had not yet risen. The light afforded by the stars, however, was sufficient to show the outlines of the huge animal sniffing round the carcass, and occasionally sitting erect on his hams, in which attitude he presented so good a mark that old Jake desired the young hunters to wait until he again assumed it, when they would all fire together.

The bear, meanwhile, seemed as if his curiosity was satisfied, for he now slowly approached the cover which concealed the hunters from his observation. An eddy of the wind, just at this moment, must have carried the scent of the ambushed party to his nostrils, for he suddenly stopped and growled savagely. He rose to his hind legs as if to take a better view, which was the opportunity the hunters waited for. Instantly Jake called out, "Now, boyees, gi' it him!"

The three reports seemed as one; and leaping out of their cover, the hunters could perceive the animal rolling upon the ground, growling horribly. Suddenly he regained his legs, and singling out Gaultier, who happened to be the nearest of his antagonists, the furious animal dashed at him, disregarding the shots which both the youths fired at him. Scarcely fifteen yards intervened between the bear and the young trapper, when Jake called out, "To the canoe, lad! to the canoe!"

Gaultier turned, and in a second reached the boat. Fortunately the paddles had not been taken out, so that he was enabled to push off and paddle rapidly down-stream. The bear seemed determined to follow up his prey, for, plunging into the water, he swam swiftly in pursuit.

"Keep near this side, Gaultier!" cried Pierre; "keep him within sight, so that we'll be able to pepper him!"

Gaultier paddled with all his might, and it was as much as Jake and Pierre could do to keep pace with him on the bank. Another danger now presented itself. The same reef of rocks which had already proved so formidable lay but a few hundred yards in advance, and towards these Gaultier was urging the canoe with his utmost exertions. To turn again was out of the question, as the bear would immediately overtake him; and once in his grasp, the frail boat would be instantly capsized.

The gloomy shadow of the opposite hill prevented any reflection of the sky upon the water, thus rendering it almost impossible for Jake or Pierre to get an accurate view of the head of the monster, whose wild snorts, however, they could hear, as he cleft the current in his efforts to overtake the canoe.

With almost a superhuman exertion, Pierre got a little in advance of the chase. It was at a point where some rocks projected into the stream from the bank. The outermost rock rose some ten feet above the water, which swept swiftly round it, forming a deep and comparatively still pool behind the ridge of which it was the termination. Next this large boulder Pierre took up his position, and awaited the approach of the canoe. Calling to Gaultier to round the rock and bring up behind it, he endeavoured to pierce the gloom in search of the grizzly.

He had not long to wait. Scarcely had the canoe glided past when the monster's head and neck appeared at a few yards' distance. "With the eye of faith and the finger of instinct" Pierre raised his rifle and pulled the trigger. A cloud of spray rose from the spot, and for a moment concealed the effect of the shot; but only for a moment. The next instant the bear was seen floating past the canoe, but no longer animated with the instinct of revenge. Feebly beating the water, he was rapidly carried down the current, from which the hunters thought he was now endeavouring to escape. His strength

seemed to fail him, for he was dashed against the rocks and whirled about in the rapids, disappearing from the eyes of the trappers under the shade of the huge cotton-wood which had nearly proved their own destruction a short time before.

Jake now came up, having reloaded his rifle. "Whur's the varmint?" cried he.

"He's just gone down by that cotton-wood," replied Pierre; "the last shot took the fight out of him. Let's go and finish him."

Gaultier now landed, and together the party followed in pursuit. They soon reached a spot opposite the tree, and for some time failed to discover the object of their search. The river plashed and gurgled through the branches, among which, in the uncertain light, bundles of drift-weed or sedge assumed the form of the animal, and more than once nearly drew shots from the trappers.

They were about to relinquish the search at this spot, when suddenly Jake, who had satisfied himself that the bear was not caught among the branches, looked keenly along the trunk, which had got wedged among several huge boulders, the tops of which rose here and there above it.

Stretched upon the stem, partly resting against one of these rocks, was the object of their pursuit. They could not have failed to detect him before, had they not supposed him drifting altogether at the will of the current; and consequently they had not cast an

eye on the trunk of the cotton-wood, which extended fully sixty feet up-stream from its bushy head.

"Hyur he is!" called Jake. "Hyur's the varmint. Gi' it him!" And suiting the action to the word, the old hunter shouldered Plumcentre and fired. A spasmodic start, a shiver, and the bear rolled off the log and floated with the river.

"Get the canoe, Gaultier," said Pierre; "but take care of the rocks. Keep to the other side, where the water is calm."

Jake and Pierre ran down along the stream, keeping the carcass in view. They shortly reached a spot where the current set strongly against a projection of the bank, past which the bear drifted rapidly. Leaning over, the old hunter seized the shaggy hide; but the weight was too great, and he was unable to drag it ashore. Gaultier soon arrived with the canoe, and together the three hunters pushed and hauled, and finally landed the carcass upon the shingle.

"Wal that's what this coon calls a right-down tall night's work," said Jake with great exultation. "Tain't a-many fellurs as ud tackle old Eph'm in daylight, let alone when they couldn't see to squint through thur hind sights. Ye-es, boyees, I guess we're pretty considerably uphill sort of chaps fur a b'ar to run ag'in."

As it was now too late to skin the bear, the party returned to camp, Jake saying that "before the owls

had gone to roost he'd lift the skunk's ha'r" in the morning. Having reached the camp, they replenished the fire, and well satisfied with their night's adventure, they lay down and slept as only tired hunters can sleep.

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CHAPTER XIV.

THE PARTY HALT—SUN-DRYING THE HIDES—LEAVE CAMP—VOYAGEURS—JAKE MEETS AN OLD ACQUAINTANCE—DIFFICULTIES OF THE ROUTE—THE BULL POUND—LEAVE THE SASKATCHEWAN—AN EXPLORING EXCURSION—RAVINES—SPLENDID VIEW—THE TRAPPERS' HOME—GAULTIER ADHERES TO HIS OWN OPINION—THE CONSEQUENCES—IN A FIX—A TURKEY BUZZARD—UNPLEASANT PREDICAMENT—HELP ARRIVES.



WHEN the boys awoke on the succeeding morning, they found that for the second time during their expedition old Jake was just returning to camp with the skin of the dangerous foe of the preceding night. They resolved to camp on the spot for a few days, in order to sun-dry the hides, which were much in need of such treatment. Among the stores was a quantity of alum and salt for this very purpose; and the hunters spent that day in removing with their sharp-pointed knives all fatty particles from the peltries, and in soaking them in a strong solution of alum, with a little salt added. They were then stretched out tight upon a framework of poles, exposed to the heat of the sun, which speedily dried them sufficiently to preserve them until they were disposed of.

During these few days they were so busy that

they had no time to devote to hunting. On the third morning, however, they again packed the canoe and left the camp, leaving with a kind of regret a spot which had been in a sort of way hallowed by so much danger successfully encountered. For several hours they forced their way against swift currents, which in some places were so strong as to necessitate poling; and they were at length pleased to find themselves again floating upon water where a slight exertion sufficed to propel the light craft. On rounding a bend in the river, they were much surprised to see a canoe swiftly approaching them, paddled by several stalwart men, whose general appearance betokened them voyageurs in the employ of the Hudson Bay Company. Both boats were speedily alongside each other.

"Eh, Jake! vieux garçon! qu'allez-vous faire ici?" exclaimed a small, wiry-looking French Canadian. "Je suis ravi de vous voir. Dat is," said he, correcting himself, "How you are?—how you get alongs?"

"Wal, Porky, jest middlin'. Who's yer lot?" asked Jake, viewing the other individuals in the canoe.

"Zese? Oh, dey are chasseurs—trappares of ze Compagnie—braves gens—fine fellows—mais ils sont braves comme dix mille démons!"

"I guess, old coon, ye allers keep smart company. But whur hev ye been? Them furs ain't been got in a day, I reckon," he added, as he observed several

packs of fine beaver which lay in the bottom of the canoe.

"Vere me been? eh? I 'aves been up ze Bull Pound, all ze way from Fort Kootanie; mais les beevare sont plenty. Qui sont-ils—ces gens-là?" he asked, as his eyes rested on Pierre and Gaultier.

Jake did not quite understand the question, and was just asking the youths "what the little sand-rat wur saying," when Pierre politely lifted his cap and said,—

"Monsieur, je suis français. Je suis charmé de faire votre connaissance. Je me nomme Pierre-au-Calumet."

"Pierre-au-Calumet!" cried the little voyageur excitedly; "le héros de cent mille batailles! Parbleu! mais zis is von 'appy day! I 'aves met mon ami intime, and 'aves made votre connaissance, monsieur. Ah! que je suis heureux! Allons, fellows! let's camp. To ze bank, I say!"

Accordingly the two boats were paddled to the nearest bank, and the parties were immediately engaged in the pleasing task of giving and receiving news. Our hunters were delighted to hear that game had never been so plentiful on the Bull Pound as it was just then, and the voluble little Frenchman told them that "their bateau would sink under the weight of skins they would collect." The two parties finally separated, one to pierce still further into the wilds, and the other to reach, after many vicissitudes, the far-distant St. Lawrence.

Just as the Canadians were taking their leave, Jake desired Monsieur le Porc-épic (or, as Jake called him, "Porky") to tell Bill Bucknall that he had secured the scalp he knew of, and that he would expect the tobacco on his return.

The voyageur replied, "Ah! oui! I know your Bill—ver fine fellow; fust-rate mountain man. I vill tells him certainement. Adieu, Jake, cher ami! Prenez garde de grizzly b'ar. He vill raise votre chevelure yet—you see!" And bowing to Pierre and Gaultier, and waving his hand gracefully to Jake, the little man was soon lost to view round a bend in the river.

"Who is he, Jake?" asked Pierre; "he seems to take a heap of airs."

"He's a chief trader o' the Comp'ny," replied the trapper, "an' takes on before the men, I guess. I thort I heerd ye askin' him who he wur."

"No," said Pierre, "I only asked him who was at Fort Kootanie now. But he said he didn't know, as the late chief factor had left, and his successor hadn't yet come."

"I say, young fellurs," inquired Jake, "I think I've heerd ye say ye wur Bluenoses yerselves,—how is it ye don't speechify an' gibber like that ar little chap?"

"We've lived a good deal among the English in the Upper Province," said Pierre. "Besides, my mother was an Englishwoman; and Gaultier's came from Baltimore."

"I thort ye had a cross o' good stuff in ye somehow," replied the old hunter. "But let's be movin'."

They therefore again embarked, and proceeded on their journey. For some days our trappers met with no more exciting adventure than the difficulties of the route, and these were not slight. Rapids had to be encountered; and upon one occasion a portage of half a mile became necessary, as the navigation was too dangerous to justify the risk of attempting to force the canoe through the furious currents, broken into foam by a thousand rocks. The fifth morning after meeting with the French Canadians, as they were coasting along the eastern bank, which here was fringed with tall trees, they suddenly rounded a promontory that jutted into the stream, and at once found themselves in the embouchure of a fine river, which joined the Saskatchewan from the south-east.

"What river is this, Jake?" inquired Pierre.

"The Bull Pound, lad," answered the trapper.

The youths gazed with interest upon the noble stream up which the canoe was now headed; but they did not leave the Saskatchewan without feelings of real regret. It seemed as if they were leaving an old friend, and one whom they knew not when they should see again. However, these sentiments did not prevent them from admiring the broad stream which now bore them on its ample bosom, and feasting their eyes on the rich prairie which stretched away on one hand, its greenness contrasting with a rugged and

precipitous chain of hills which ran parallel with the other bank at some distance.

"What a likely range for big-horn!" said Pierre, pointing to the heights.

"Ye may say that," said Jake: "I hunted thur not long ago, an' the place wur a-crawlin' wi' 'em. Thur's goats too—not the prong-horns, but raal goats, an' big uns at that. But they're not on these hills; they're furrer back."

It was now considerably past the hour for the noon halt, when seeing a pretty nook among the bushes on the western bank, the canoe was steered towards it, and the party landed. Their provisions were soon ready, and the trappers made a hearty meal, although it consisted only of jerked buffalo meat broiled over the fire, and water.

The hills already mentioned lay but a short distance from the camp, and Pierre proposed that they should spend a few hours in climbing the nearest height, in order to see what sort of country lay beyond. To this proposition neither of his companions offered any objection, especially as some game might be met with during the expedition. They accordingly left the camp, and turned up the dry bed of a water-course, which no doubt sent down its impetuous flood to swell the main river in the winter season.

The path, if so it could be called, led for about a mile across a tolerably level plain, encumbered with many huge rocks, which seemed as if they had in

some manner rolled to their present position from the hills beyond. This plain was traversed by cracks or fissures which joined the water-course through which they laboured. They were, in fact, miniature cañons, and resembled that strange formation of the desert land in all respects.

When at length, after three hours' hard walking and climbing, they attained the summit of the chain, a task which they did not accomplish without much difficulty and even danger, the scene beyond so far surpassed their anticipations that they halted, as if by common consent, to feast their eyes on the glorious prospect. At their feet, far below, lay a tranquil lake, reflecting like a mirror the wild amphitheatre of hills which surrounded its lonely basin, its placid waters catching in a line of burnished gold a sheaf of sunbeams which shot through a narrow pass to the westward. The scream of the shushuga and the cries of many water-fowl sounded faint from the distance, while at intervals the rush of falling water fell on the ear, wafted on the wings of the varying breeze. The opposite hills were clad with a varied foliage which rolled in luxuriant undulations from their summits to the borders of the lake, where the birches and willows bending outwards from the banks dropped their branches in the water. Above the line of timber bald crags and stern cliffs reared their frowning foreheads midway to the clouds, their bare sides furrowed with ravines, in the clefts of which,

high above, even at that late season, some patches of snow were lingering.

"What a splendid view!" exclaimed Gaultier; "and what a sweet spot for a hunter's cabin by the shore of that lake!"

"Ay," said Pierre, "fish and fowl in plenty; and game enough, I'll be bound, in the hills around."

"That thur is," said Jake. "See, if yer eyes ur sharp enuf, ye'll spot twenty sheep from whur we stand,—over thur jest above timber-line,—the gray spots on that green patch. I've been a-watchin' o' 'em since we kem up, an' they've mov up a bit. I'm sartain they're sheep."

The boys soon observed what the keen-eyed old hunter pointed out to them, but the distance and difficulties of passing the intervening space prevented them from attempting a hunt just then. Well satisfied with their first glimpse of the Bull Pound country, the youths turned to descend. Here a new view presented itself.

It was the boundless prairie which expanded its immeasurable vastness before them. It was such an expanse as one views seaward from the top of the Peak of Teneriffe; but here the billows were at rest. The undulations of the tremendous plain were, however, picked out in light and shade, and the breeze sweeping across their crests, bending the tall grasses, gave an appearance of motion to the landscape which heightened its general resemblance to the ocean.

"This is our home!" said Pierre, sweeping his arm round the prospect. "It's more to my taste than an eastern farm, with villages and roads, and policemen and jails, and all the rest of it."

"An' ye mout say the gallows," added Jake. "I never seed the settlurs come into a country yet but they brought thur gallows along wi' 'em. It seems nat'ral to the critturs somehow. It allers appears to this coon that the fust crop arter a plough is put in the ground is a jail and a gallows!"

The boys laughed, and in high good-humour they descended the hills towards the river, which they could see from their elevated position winding like a huge serpent for many miles through the prairie.

When they arrived at the foot of the chain, Gaultier proposed that they should return by the plain. But Pierre reminded him of the many small cañons which almost rendered it impassable. Gaultier, however, was obstinate, saying he was sure some way existed of crossing it, as he had noticed from the heights something like a path, a deer-path most probably, that led towards the river from the foot of the hills. Pierre declined to accompany him, being quite satisfied with the path by which they had come. Jake advised Gaultier to go with them, reminding him of his adventure with the elks, when he got lost by following his own will. However, Gaultier was determined, like every obstinate boy, to have his own way, and waving his hand to his two companions,

who had descended into the rocky bed of the water-course, turned and followed the path along the hill-side.

For some time all was easy sailing with the young hunter, and he laughed at what he considered the foolish caution of his comrades. The evening was beautiful; the distant plains were bathed in sunlight, which here and there flashed upon the reaches of the river; the air was balmy, and was perfumed by the many sweet-smelling flowers which nestled among the herbage.

The path which Gaultier followed had hitherto led parallel with the hills in a southerly direction; but it now led directly for the plain, which was scarcely more than a mile in breadth. He did not advance far in this direction when he found that the track stopped abruptly at a small stagnant pool, which was now nearly dried up, and round which the banks were much trampled. This was evidently a spot to which game frequently came to drink; but none of the tracks seemed very recent. Leaving this behind him, Gaultier proceeded rapidly forward, but suddenly, without warning, soon found himself standing at the verge of a deep fissure which zigzagged across the plain as far as he could see. The depth was fully fifty feet, and the sides so perpendicular that not even a goat could have effected the descent. The breadth was not more than thirty feet, but it might as well have been as many miles—there was no possibility of crossing it.

Loath to retrace his steps and be laughed at by Jake and Pierre, Gaultier walked along the brink of the cañon, hoping to find some spot where he could descend. The evening was wearing away, and not more than a couple of hours now remained before darkness would add to the difficulties and dangers of his situation. After proceeding for fully a mile along the edge of the cañon, he arrived at a spot where the upper surface was broken away, giving access by careful scrambling to a crack in the rock, down which he thought he could descend to the bottom. Cautiously picking his steps, and availing himself of several rough projections on the slippery incline, he reached the perpendicular fissure, which was about a foot broad, and was barred transversely at intervals by slates or stones, presenting somewhat the appearance of an irregular ladder.

About fifteen feet down, a ledge ran along the face of the cliff, and offered a convenient resting-place. Slinging his rifle, and turning his face to the rock, Gaultier lowered himself, and feeling with his feet for the steps in the fissure, he commenced the descent. He had accomplished several feet in safety, when all at once his treacherous foothold gave way, and before he could save himself, he found himself sliding down the cliff, accompanied by a shower of *débris* which he had loosened in his fall. With a cry of despair he thought his last hour had come. But suddenly he found his descent arrested by the ledge which we

have already mentioned; and catching at the protuberances on the face of the cliff, lest his bewildered senses should cause him to lose his balance, he sank into a sitting posture upon the narrow shelf.

As soon as he had somewhat recovered his composure, he ventured to peep over the edge of the shelf. A sheer wall, without break or anything which offered foothold, extended to the bottom. He looked upwards, and to his dismay he perceived that in his fall he had loosened from their hold in the crevice many of the stones by which he had descended. To retreat was therefore almost as difficult as to advance. If he slipped in endeavouring to climb upwards, he might not again be so fortunate as to alight uninjured on the ledge; while to fall over the edge meant to be dashed to pieces on the rough rocks at the bottom of the cañon.

He now bitterly repented his headstrong opposition to the advice of his companions; but this was of little use to him. He guessed that even by this time they would be beginning to feel uneasy at his absence, and would most probably return to search for him. But would they find him? He had wandered a long distance from the spot at which he had separated from them. The ground was hard, and frequently covered with rocks and stones, where his feet would leave no impression. There were many cañons too, and it would take a long time, even days, to search them all. This situation was far from pleasant, but he

determined to wait with patience the arrival of his comrades to his rescue. He still had his rifle, and with this he might dig steps between the rocks if they did not come. Any risk would be preferable to dying by inches on a narrow ledge tormented by hunger and thirst.

While reflecting thus on the perils of his position, a large shadow flitted across the rocks, and looking up, he perceived one of the foul vultures called turkey buzzards circling overhead. It presently alighted on a prominent point at the edge of the cañon, and ogled the hunter as if it anticipated his fate, and already put in its claim to a share in the banquet. With a feeling of disgust Gaultier levelled his rifle at the repulsive creature; and at the report, which reverberated in a thousand echoes from cliff to cliff, the buzzard dropped from its perch, and after vainly trying to bear itself gently to the bottom, turned over in the air and fell heavily on the boulders beneath.

No sooner had the echoes of the report died away than Gaultier fancied he heard a shot in the distance. Ha! it was a signal! He immediately fired several shots in quick succession, and listened eagerly. He was not mistaken; two shots were distinctly audible, and as far as he could judge, they seemed to come from the direction of the river. His heart beat high with hope as he waited to hear the signals repeated. He occasionally fired a shot, and after some time he could hear distant shouts. These he answered, calling at the top of his voice.

Meantime the sun had set, and darkness was fast falling on the scene, increasing the difficulty of his friends finding their way across the plain, which in some places was covered with huge stones lying at every angle towards each other, the surface having in all probability been denuded by winter torrents pouring from the hills behind. Gaultier, however, shouted as loudly as he could to guide them; and at length he was delighted by beholding their figures relieved against the sky above.

"Hullo, young fellur!" called Jake's welcome voice, "what on airth ur ye up to down thur? We'd never hev found ye only fur yer hollerin' out. How did ye get down thur?"

Gaultier told them of his narrow escape.

"Ye're a goney, that's clur," said Jake. "Howsoever, we must get ye up, I s'pose."

Pierre, finding that Gaultier was unhurt, busied himself in assisting Jake in uncoiling a long lasso. A noose having been formed at one end and the rope lowered, Gaultier secured it round his body under his arms; and at a signal the two hunters hauled him up, none the worse for his adventure. They quickly left the spot, and in about an hour arrived at the camp, where they enjoyed a little mild chaff during supper at Gaultier's expense. The latter, however, took it very good-humouredly, and so they soon ceased to exercise their wit upon his adventures.

CHAPTER XV.

GAME PLENTIFUL—LEAVE BRITISH TERRITORY—MONTANA—FORESTS—HARD WORK—A HALT—DISMAL SCENE—DIFFICULTIES OF THE ROUTE—PLAIN SAILING AGAIN—A BEE-HUNT—JAKE'S MODUS OPERANDI—FINDS THE HIVE—APPROACHING THE END OF THE JOURNEY—GLOOMY STREAM—GHOST'S RIVER—A PORTAGE—A PRETTY STREAM—A LAKE—CAMP—SUNSET—AN EVENING STROLL NEAR CAMP—"PAINTERS."



THE days now passed pleasantly. That the country was full of game was evident from the tracks at the water's edge wherever the ground was soft. Bands of elk and mule-deer too were frequently seen galloping over the prairie as they detected the approach of the canoe. The hunters, therefore, plied their paddles briskly, in order that they might the sooner reach the end of the journey, when they would at once begin to collect their stock of furs. Upon the eighth morning after entering the Bull Pound, Jake informed the youths that they had left British soil behind them.

"D'ye see that thur heap o' donnicks?" said he, addressing Pierre, and pointing to some stones piled together upon the bank. "I calc'late that's the boundary atween the Stars and Stripes and old Vicky's land."

"What State are we in now, Jake?" inquired Pierre.

"I guess this is Montana," replied the trapper.

The boys looked round with increasing interest, as if the change of name or ownership could have effected some transformation in the landscape. Thus they journeyed on, stopping sometimes to hunt when their provisions ran short, and sometimes to rest their weary arms, for the stream ran with greater rapidity the nearer they approached the mountains. These huge hills loomed nearer day by day, the snow on the higher peaks attesting their tremendous altitude. Vast forests covered the lower slopes, and extended along the range as far as the eye could reach.

As they advanced, the banks rose gradually, until they again found themselves enclosed on both sides by high cliffs, which reminded them of the cañons on the Saskatchewan. Other streams, rushing swiftly down through similar fissures, joined the Bull Pound, the great height of the overhanging crags transforming noonday into twilight at the bottom. In these dismal passages the water rushed so swiftly that they were borne back for some distance as often as they relaxed their exertions for a moment.

"Wagh!" exclaimed Jake, "this beats grainin' bull hide. I guess the snow's meltin' on the hills an' swellin' the river. 'Twurn't harf so bad to come up hyur last time. I say, fellurs, thur's a spot a leetle above hyur whur we kin camp. I ain't a-gvine

to work my old elbers off their stumps this a way."

After half an hour's arduous exertion, the party observed a spot where the cliffs at one side of the stream had been worn away, leaving a shelving bank of some twenty feet in width between their base and the water. Here, accordingly, they landed, and unpacked the canoe, which they carefully removed from the water and turned bottom up to dry. Luckily there were some pieces of drift-wood, which had been deposited on this spot by a flood. These furnished them with materials for a fire, which they soon constructed. The reflection of the blaze upon the black rushing river and upon the rough walls of the cañon produced a strangely weird effect. It seemed an encampment of spirits on the shores of the Styx, waiting for Charon to ferry them to the lugubrious domains of the infernal world.

After an uncomfortable night, the trappers again addressed themselves to the difficulties of the route. Several times they were nearly dashed against rocks; and once they actually grazed a sharp boulder, which inflicted a slight injury on the canoe. Slight as it was, it served to show them how narrow had been their escape. In such a place a hole in the canoe meant certain death, as the precipitous cliffs rose sheer from the water on either side. It was with a sense of relief that they at length emerged from the gloomy cañon, and breathed what seemed a fresher

air. The rocks rapidly disappeared, and once more they floated between pleasant meadows flanked by woods, and heard the chirp of the birds and busy hum of bees.

"Boyees," said Jake, "I'm right down glad we ur out o' that ugly gulch. I feels as if a load wur riz off my old gizzard, now that the thing ur ahint us."

"What a pretty spot this is!" said Gaultier,— "this green prairie all covered with flowers, and enclosed by those fine woods!"

"A very likely place for a bee-hunt," said Pierre.— "Jake," he continued, "you know all about finding honey, and the bees must have plenty made by this. Let's go ashore and have a hunt."

"Right ye ur," replied the trapper. "I wur allers fond o' sweets; so we'll jest line the little varmint to thur gum."

The canoe was directed towards a convenient spot for landing, and the three hunters stepped ashore. Jake produced from his "possible-sack" an old wine-glass, which had survived his wanderings, with the loss merely of its stem. This he cleaned and dried. He next procured a little sugar from the common store, and mixing a few drops of water with it upon a bit of slate (just enough to make a thick syrup), he advanced into the prairie. On all sides were bright parterres of flowers,—the scarlet malva, the orange-coloured asclepia, the pink-hued cleome, while the tall stems of the helianthus waved their yellow heads

in the breeze. Bees were in plenty, buzzing from flower to flower in search of the honeyed contents of their pistils.

Jake was not long in securing one of the insects, which he placed upon the slate, and inverted the glass above it. The bee at first resented this liberty, and buzzed around the sides of its crystal prison, but soon fell to the bottom, where it alighted on the sugar syrup. It instantly lost all its desire for freedom, for it settled to work, loading itself from the copious treasure. As soon as Jake perceived that it had gorged itself, and was on the eve of taking flight, he raised the side of the glass, and seizing the bee gently between his fingers, he deftly turned it upon its back, and secured between its legs a small tuft of cotton wool. He then slightly sprinkled the insect with sulphur, and throwing it into the air, he watched its flight. The little creature at first circled round the spot, as if to get its bearings; it then set off in a straight line, as bees always do, and flew directly for the nearest patch of woods.

"He's gone in by that tall poplar," said Pierre. "Now, Jake, how are you to find the hive?"

"I guess we 'angle' 'em now," replied the hunter, moving away to a point at some distance. "Gaultier," he added, "go blaze the side o' that big poplar wi' yer axe, so as it'll show clur this way. Ye sees that big pine too (in the same line, mind ye) furrer in? Jest blaze that as well."

Gaultier ran off to do as required, while Jake caught another bee, and treated it in precisely the same way as the first. This also headed for the same patch of woods.

"I've spotted that varmint," said Jake; "he's jest cut the other'n's line back a leetle o' the big pine. It's all done now, lad," he continued; "let's go. The hive ur 'ithin twenty yards o' that big spruce."

"What did you put sulphur on them for, Jake?" asked Gaultier, as he rejoined them.

"I guess thur'll be pretty considerable o' a muss when the others smell the stuff I've made them a present of," replied the trapper. "You see," he continued, "we fust start a bee on his line, which ur allers as straight as a rifle barrel. We then marks a spot in the wood whur the varmint goes in, an' marks another p'int beyond, in a line from whur we stand. We then cotches another o' the critturs a couple o' hunderd yards to one side o' whur we got the fust one, an' whur his line cuts the fust's, thur's the hive."

The boys listened, much pleased with the old hunter's ingenuity. By this time they had arrived at the big pine-tree, and upon listening attentively, a terrible buzzing was heard at a little distance. Upon proceeding in this direction, the party soon arrived at the foot of a huge old cotton-wood which was decayed by age, or which might have been killed by lightning in some storm. Twenty feet up the

trunk was a hole about four inches across, through which clouds of the angry insects were buzzing.

"D'ye hear the critturs?" asked Jake. "I reckon them two I sent in ur not pop'lar with the rest. Come, handle yer axes, young fellurs. We'll not taste the honey if we stand hyur all day starin' up at that thur hole."

Pierre and Gaultier accordingly set to work, and in a few moments a gaping chasm yawned in the side of the tree, which was, in fact, hollow within for the greater part of its diameter. In this opening a fire of leaves and damp moss was speedily made, which sent volumes of dense smoke up the stem, and pouring out through the smaller aperture above. This speedily banished the bees, who had been buzzing death and ruin to all and sundry. The tree was soon cut through; and at its fall it burst open, disclosing its delicious contents to the ruthless destroyers. Notwithstanding that as yet the summer was not much more than half over, a considerable quantity of honey had been collected by the busy community. This the hunters gathered; and laden with their spoil, they returned well satisfied to the canoe.

Their journey was now drawing to a close. But a few days more, and they would reach the valley in which Jake had made up his mind that they should spend the autumn and winter trapping the beaver and collecting the furs of the bear, the wolverine, the panther, and the silver fox, as well as the skins of

several kinds of deer. The youths felt a degree of melancholy stealing over them as they reflected that their pleasant canoe voyage, with all its hardships and vicissitudes, as well as pleasures, was drawing near its end. But they looked forward to the excitements of the chase among the grim solitudes and forest-covered slopes and valleys of the Rocky Mountains, on whose very threshold they now found themselves. Jake had described the valley to which they were bound in such glowing language that they could picture it to themselves as if they had actually beheld it.

Besides the pleasure of these anticipations, they also looked forward to returning by the same route during the ensuing spring, when they would once more cleave the rapid currents in their canoe, and hunt along the shores, as either inclination or necessity dictated. Elated by these hopes, they pushed forward, making longer journeys each day, and stopping a shorter time at the noon halts.

On the third day after their discovery of the beech-tree, the canoe left the Bull Pound, and turned up a smaller stream which joined it from the west. The scenery upon this was of a gloomy character. High banks of clay, which at frequent intervals had been undermined by the water and had fallen or slipped forward, narrowing the channel to half its width, were covered with a thick growth of firs, which met above the stream. Beneath these sombre arches the

party paddled, trying, when the banks permitted it, to pierce the dismal vistas in search of objects less lugubrious than those by which they were surrounded.

"What a lonely, solemn place to live in!" said Gaultier, wishing to break the oppressive silence. "A fellow would die in a week here!"

The party started, as the words were distinctly repeated: "A fellow would die in a week here!" The boys were not what could be called superstitious; but still, almost every backwoodsman has a lurking belief in something supernatural, which selects the darkest haunts and most gloomy recesses of the forests as its appropriate residence. They could hardly convince themselves but that this dark, dismal stream was haunted by some kelpie, whose ill-omened voice had thrown back, with significance, Gaultier's thoughtless remark. It was not until they had again spoken and shouted that they could disabuse their minds of this disagreeable impression, and assure themselves that, after all, it was but one of the tricks of Echo.

"How far do we follow this stream, Jake?" asked Pierre.

"A matter o' ten mile or thurabouts," replied the hunter, who sat an amused spectator of the effects of this lonely river upon his companions; nor would he confess that he himself had been similarly affected by it when first he ascended its sable waters some months before.

The current in the Ghost's River, as they named this stream, was sluggish, and they therefore made rapid progress. On rounding a bend, there fell on their ears the rush of falling water, which old Jake informed them was caused by a cascade, which would necessitate a portage. This unpleasant obstacle to their progress soon made its appearance. A ledge of rocks, over which the river precipitated itself, extended from bank to bank. The canoe was steered to a shelving strand, and the voyageurs busied themselves in unpacking their various effects. While thus engaged, they were much surprised to see a number of hunters coming towards them. These had belonged to the same party which they had met on the Saskatchewan under the command of Jake's friend, the French Canadian. They were now on their way to that river on foot, having lost their canoe by an accident, and having no means in that spot of building another. They readily assisted our trappers in carrying their canoe and effects over the portage, for which service they would not accept any remuneration. Finally, Pierre pressed some tobacco on them, which they took with alacrity. They then continued their journey, and were soon lost among the gloomy labyrinth of tree-trunks.

The stream above the falls ran brightly and swiftly, dancing over clean gravel, upon which the sun threw a golden light through openings in the overhanging foliage. The quick eye of Gaultier detected the pres-

ence of fine brook trout, which darted under the shadow of the banks or of the rocks at the approach of the canoe.

At one point the stream formed a perfectly straight reach of nearly half a mile in length, the trees on either side joining their branches overhead. Bright patches of fern grew here and there upon the banks, the tall graceful fronds bending outwards towards the water. This watery avenue presented a beautiful spectacle: all was bright and fresh, and contrasted pleasingly with the gloomy character of the lower part of the river. Shooting round the bend at the end of this reach, the trappers found themselves at the outlet of the stream, which was fed by a large lake embosomed among the woods; while in the background, the grizzled peaks of the Rocky Mountains looked down upon the scene.

"Thur's four streams comes down from the mountains," said Jake, "on t'other side o' this piece o' water; they're jest crowded wi' beaver. D'ye see," he continued, pointing across the lake, "them dead trees stretchin' back torst the hills? The varmints hev killed all them by floodin' the woods wi' their dams acrost the streams. Back o' thur a bit, thur's some open meadows clurred o' timber this long time, jest in that way."

The canoe was, by Jake's direction, headed across the lake for a deep bay, which stretched inwards among the trees between two long points. At the

head of this was a small green slope thickly surrounded by giant pines, except upon the lake side, where the grass was fringed by a silvery beach, upon which the wavelets broke with a gentle ripple.

"Hyur's the spot!" said Jake; "an' to my thinkin', a sweet, purty location it ur. Thur's plenty o' fish in the lake an' streams, sight o' game back in the woods an' hills, an' a heap o' beaver. We'll put up a shanty hyur at oncest, an' make ourselves comfortable."

The boys were charmed with the retreat the old hunter had discovered. Life in a log-hut on that verdant slope facing the lake, with fish and game in profusion all around, seemed to them the perfection of happiness. The world was at an inconceivable distance behind, and here they promised themselves immunity from the multiform vexations which they found to be the result of contact with their fellow-men. The canoe, which they unpacked and lifted from the water, was carried up the slope and placed under the shelter of the trees. A huge fire was next built, over which soon sputtered a fine goose, which had fallen to Pierre's rifle just as they entered the lake. Tired with their exertions during the day, the party lay around the fire waiting, with the impatience born of keen appetites, until their supper was cooked.

The sun was now sinking like a globe of molten iron behind the western peaks, throwing a flood of

glory across the skies, and tinting mountain, wood, and water with his fiery hues. Far out on the lake, just where the water shone like burnished copper, were flocks of wild fowl, the clamour of their voices, softened by distance, being audible at the camp.

"Look, fellurs," said Jake, pointing along the lake shore, "thur's game a plenty."

Looking eagerly at this intimation, the youths turned and beheld a little band of deer; while farther off, knee-deep in the water, were several elk, which at the fall of evening had come to quench their thirst.

"I've seed fifty elk along this lake from whur we sit now," said Jake, "'ithout countin' the white-tailed deer, an' that too arter I'd been huntin' through the range fur a hull sayson."

As meat was not an immediate object, none of the party molested the game, preferring to leave the neighbourhood undisturbed until they had completed their hut, which they expected to do in a week. Supper over, the boys strolled along the shores of the lake, admiring their new home and coming at each turn upon some fresh object of interest.

There were coves that seemed to lose themselves among overhanging branches and wildernesses of fern. In these the musk-rats had built their dome-like houses; and while they pushed through the covert, the frequent splashes of the occupants, as they took the water in alarm, indicated the number in

which they existed. Water-fowl of several kinds were seen leading their young broods along the watery way to yet more secluded pools, where they might be free from intrusion. Several times the rush of large animals through the brushwood attested the presence of big game.

As they walked, the air became chill; a white mist rose from the surface of the water, and hung stationary, or drifted sluggishly in heavy masses whenever the occasional breeze lent it its uncertain impulse. Retracing their steps towards the camp, the cries of the wild birds sounded harsh and distinct; while from the hills across the lake was heard the scream of the cougar. When they reached the fire, old Jake was busily engaged in collecting a huge pile of brushwood for the night's supply of fuel.

"I heerd the screech o' a painter," said the old fellow, "an' I'm fur gettin' the brush handy to keep up a good fire. It scars the varmints."

The party now lay down to enjoy the repose which their labours during the day rendered deep and refreshing.

CHAPTER XVI.

A LOG-HUT—A LABORIOUS TASK—FURNITURE—GAME—PIERRE MAKES A GOOD SHOT AND VICTUALS THE CAMP—AN EXCURSION IN SEARCH OF BEAVER—A BEAVER DAM—THE HUNTERS REAP A RICH HARVEST—SETTLE DOWN IN THEIR HUT—THE END.



HARDLY had the sun thrown his first beams upon the bosom of the lake, when the three hunters arose on the following morning. The day was to be a busy one; they were to select and cut the logs for their hut, and carry them to the site which they selected as most appropriate. This was at one end of the meadow already mentioned, where a huge spreading tree shaded the space underneath from the rays of the sun. Gaultier and Pierre took their axes, and soon the crash of falling timber echoed through the woods.

The first thing to be done was to plant four smooth poles in the ground in the form of a square. Having flattened the sides of a number of other logs, they were piled against these, and their ends being deeply notched, the adjacent sides were firmly dove-tailed to each other, by fitting the ends of the logs into these notches. This was a laborious task, and took several days to complete, the difficulty of getting the logs

into position increasing in proportion as they raised the walls. The youths, however, were stalwart lads, and old Jake's ingenuity suggested many contrivances which facilitated the operation.

On the fifth morning after arriving at the lake the sides of the hut were erected, but as yet it possessed neither window nor door. These were chopped out with the axe, which took quite a day, the bottom logs being very stout. A window was hewn both in front and at the back, and the door was cut in that side which fronted the lake. Moss mixed with wet clay was stuffed in the interstices between the logs, thus preventing the entrance of any draughts. The walls were smoothed within with the axe, and skins were suspended against them, thus giving the interior quite a finished appearance. Pierre then split a number of young firs lengthwise, and with the rough boards thus procured the roof was covered. Birch bark was secured in the manner of tiles over all, thus forming a perfectly rain-proof roof.

A chimney was the next consideration. An opening, some five feet in height and breadth, was cut in the wall at one end of the hut; this was lined with stones and pieces of turf where the logs touched upon it. Outside this aperture the chimney was erected,—a piece of work which occupied the hunters for a whole day, as the stones and sods had to be carried up the slope from the shore of the lake. At length, however, it was completed, and Gaultier collected a

huge quantity of dry brushwood, which he crammed into the ample hearth. This was quickly in a flame, and the trappers had the satisfaction of finding that their work successfully withstood this test. The flue, in fact, "drew" admirably, and with pride they beheld the smoke pouring from the chimney-top and losing itself among the foliage of the overhanging tree.

The hunters now proceeded to manufacture some furniture for their new home. This was comparatively an easy task. Stools were simply the pieces cut off the ends of logs, the tops being smoothed with the axe. Truckle-bed frames were constructed of young fir-poles, skins being stretched tightly across to rest a mattress on. The latter were simply bearskins and buffalo-ropes thrown over the silky fronds or branchlets of the silver fir, which made a bed sufficiently elastic to please more fastidious tastes than those of the trappers. A table was hewn in one single piece out of a gigantic log, and was an effort of skill on which the party especially prided themselves.

While they were thus occupied, the trappers had no opportunity of hunting. This would have been a necessity, however, had it not been for a lucky accident.

One day, while hard at work, a fine elk crashed through the bushes on the shore and plunged into the lake. Several gaunt wolves appeared on the trail, which they ran like hounds, now and then giving tongue as they lifted the scent breast high.

Pierre, calling to Jake and Gaultier to launch the

canoe, seized his rifle and ran down to the water's edge. As soon as the wolves saw the hunters they slunk back to the edge of the cover, where they sat with lolling tongues, probably expecting a share in the spoil.

The elk, meantime, was swimming with powerful strokes directly towards the centre of the lake, and had already placed fully a hundred and fifty yards between himself and his pursuers. Pierre, however, confident in his skill, took a steady aim at the creature's head, which, with the massive antlers, was carried proudly erect above the rippling water.

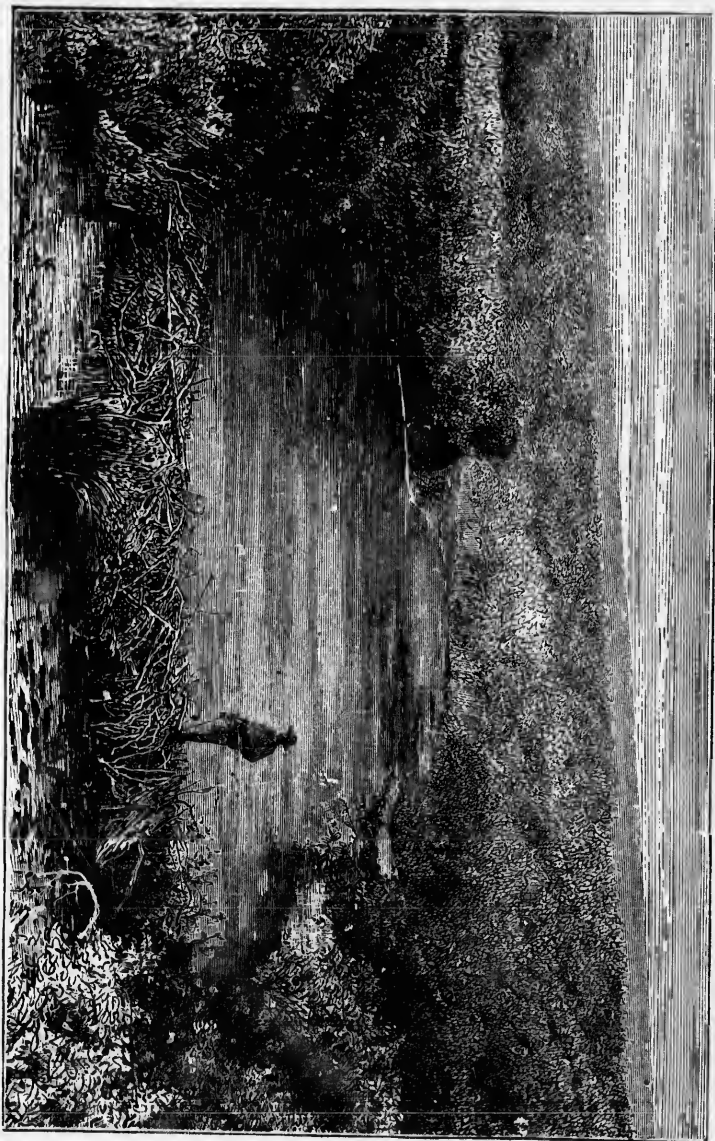
At the report the elk frantically reared himself in the water and turned back towards the shore. Soon his exertions lessened, and presently ceased altogether. Before the carcass could sink, the canoe, urged forward by Jake and Gaultier, arrived on the spot, and leaning over, the old hunter seized the huge antlers, and directing Gaultier to paddle back to shore, they safely landed the elk upon the beach. This noble supply of venison lasted them until their hut was completed on the evening of the seventh day.

On the morning following, the party set out in the canoe, directing their course towards one of the streams which emptied itself into the lake from the mountains. The gray mist which had risen from the water the preceding evening still hung heavily in the air; but the sun soon dispelled the chilly vapour, and lighted up both forest and lake with his warm beams.

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BEAVER DAM.

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Jake's object in his present expedition was to reconnoitre the beaver settlements and ascertain if they still existed in their former plenty. That this was the case soon became evident, as the party shortly came upon a dam, which the clever little engineers had constructed across the stream. Over this the water fell in a miniature cascade. Gaultier admired the ingenuity of these sagacious animals evinced in the construction of the dam. This, instead of being made directly at right angles to the current, slanted obliquely down-stream, thus not meeting the full force of the river, which glided by it rather than rushed against it.

The community had evidently recently apprehended a rise in the river, as they had partially removed the obstruction to the sluice, thus giving freer egress to the water. Above the surface, and scattered at irregular intervals, appeared the dome-like tops of the beaver lodges. Upon these lay freshly-gnawed poles, which had been left by the inhabitants, either to strengthen the roofs of their houses or to be removed by the next freshet. None of the animals were in sight, and satisfied with what they had seen on this river, the trappers visited in succession each of the others. In all, the beaver were found to be very numerous, and without disturbing them the party returned well pleased to the hut.

During the succeeding week the hunters, who had laid their traps in all the runs, took no less than fifty

beavers. Curing the skins occupied their time fully, as they were constantly adding to the supply; and not alone beaver but elk, bear, big-horn, cougar, and other animals yielded their hides to swell the store.

Our story now draws to a close. We have followed our hunters through their varied adventures and trials from the moment of their departure from Finlay House, and we at length see them safely settled in their mountain home, where they have begun to reap a rich harvest of valuable furs.

It is with regret that we bid adieu to the gallant youths and their veteran companion,—a regret which we would fain hope is shared by our boy readers. In the spring the trappers intend to return by the same route to dispose of the produce of their season's hunt. Perhaps we may again have the privilege of accompanying the party on their downward way, and of chronicling their adventures for the benefit of those of our young friends who may have been interested in these pages.

THE END.

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