

THE
RED MOUNTAIN
of
ALASKA

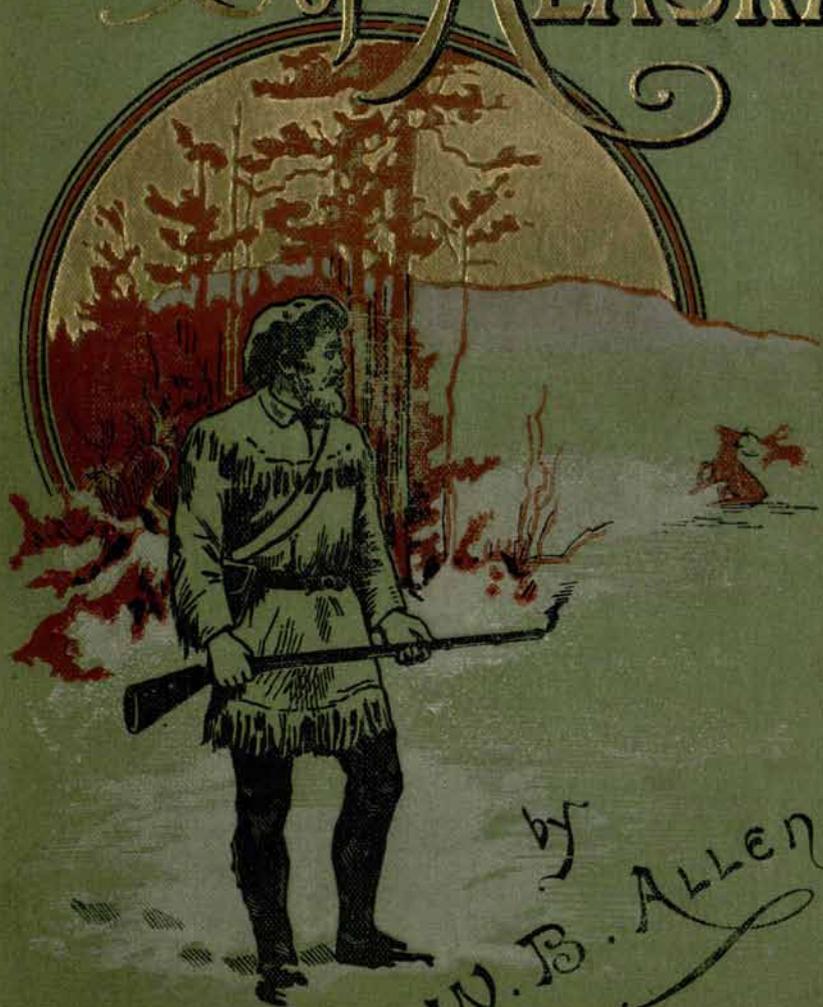
W. B. ALLEN



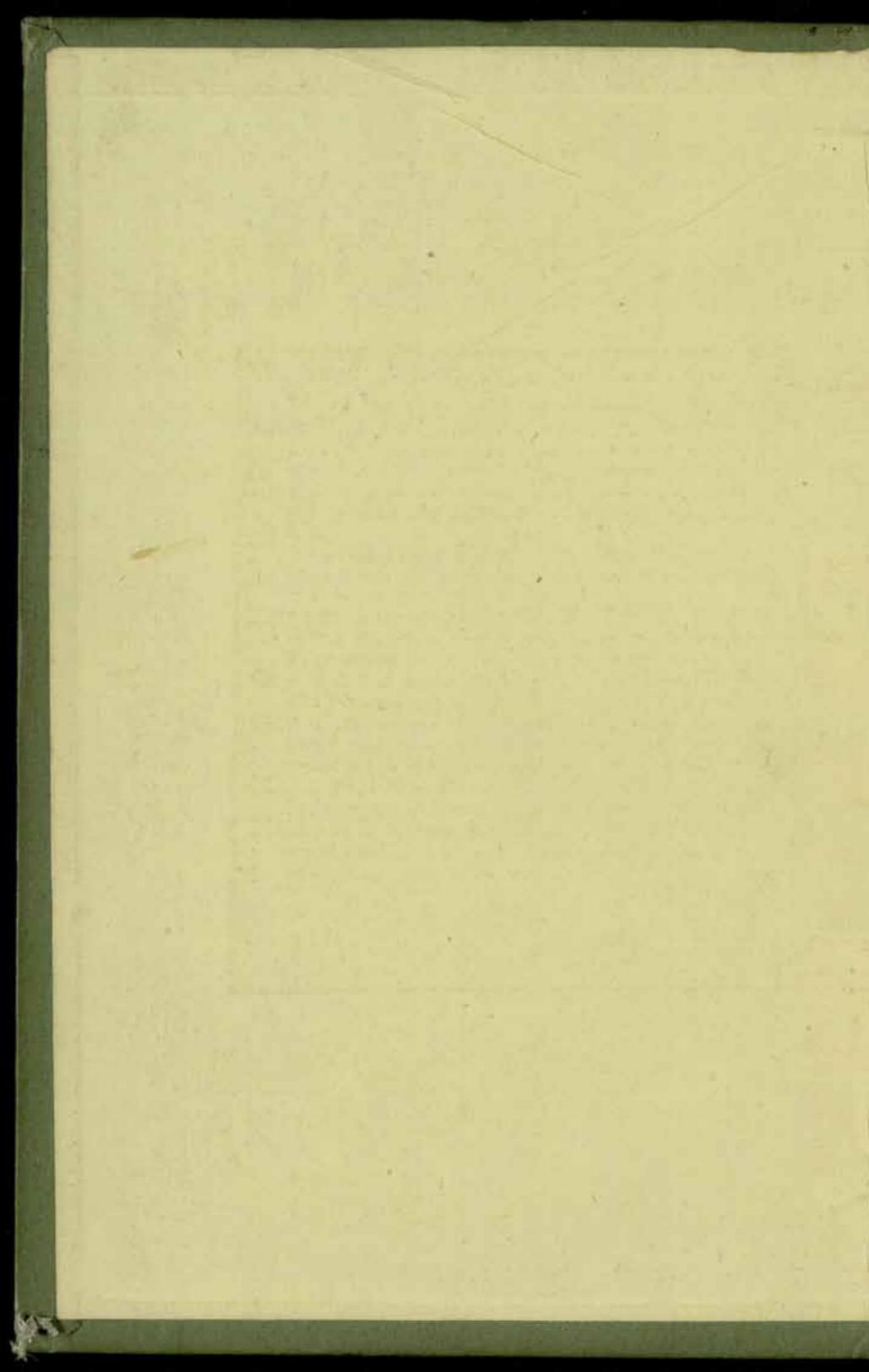
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OF ALASKA



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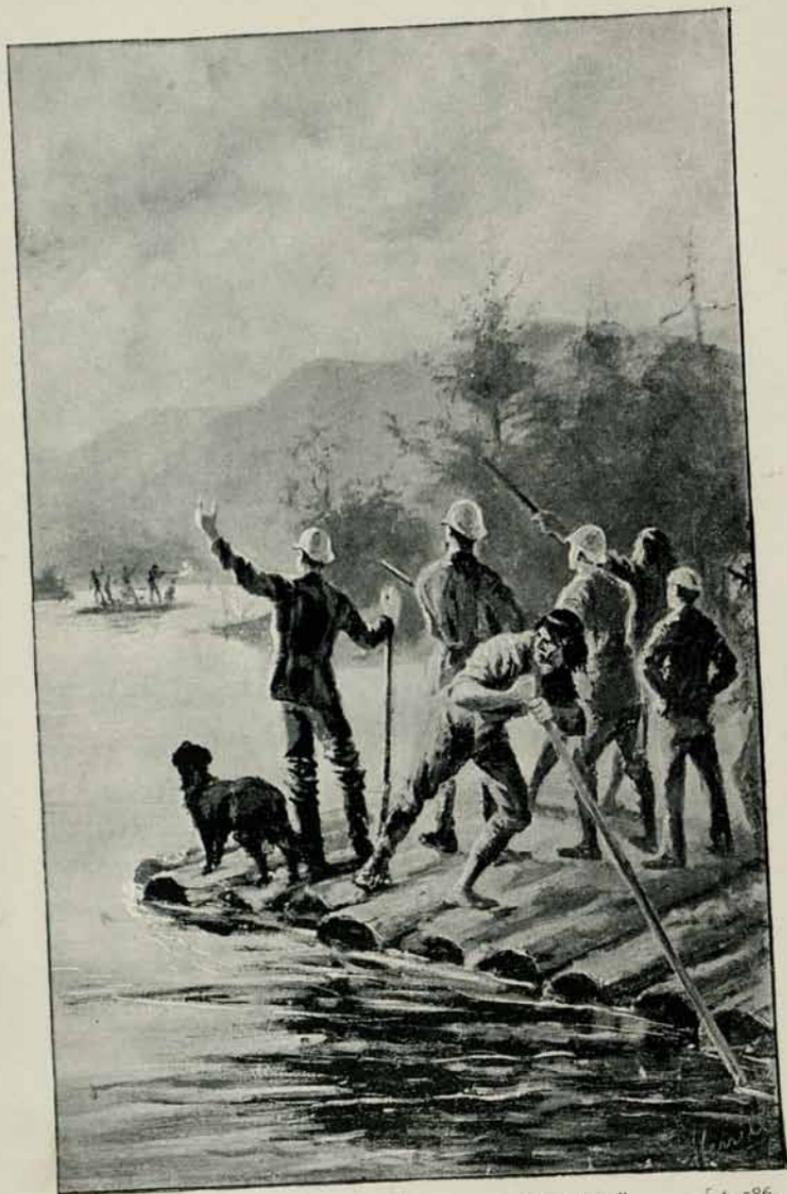
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"TO THE RESCUE!" SHOUTED THE BOYS."

[p. 186.]

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THE
RED MOUNTAIN
OF
ALASKA

BY
WILLIS BOYD ALLEN

AUTHOR OF "PINE CONES," "THE NORTHERN CROSS," "SILVER BAGS,"
"KELP," ETC.



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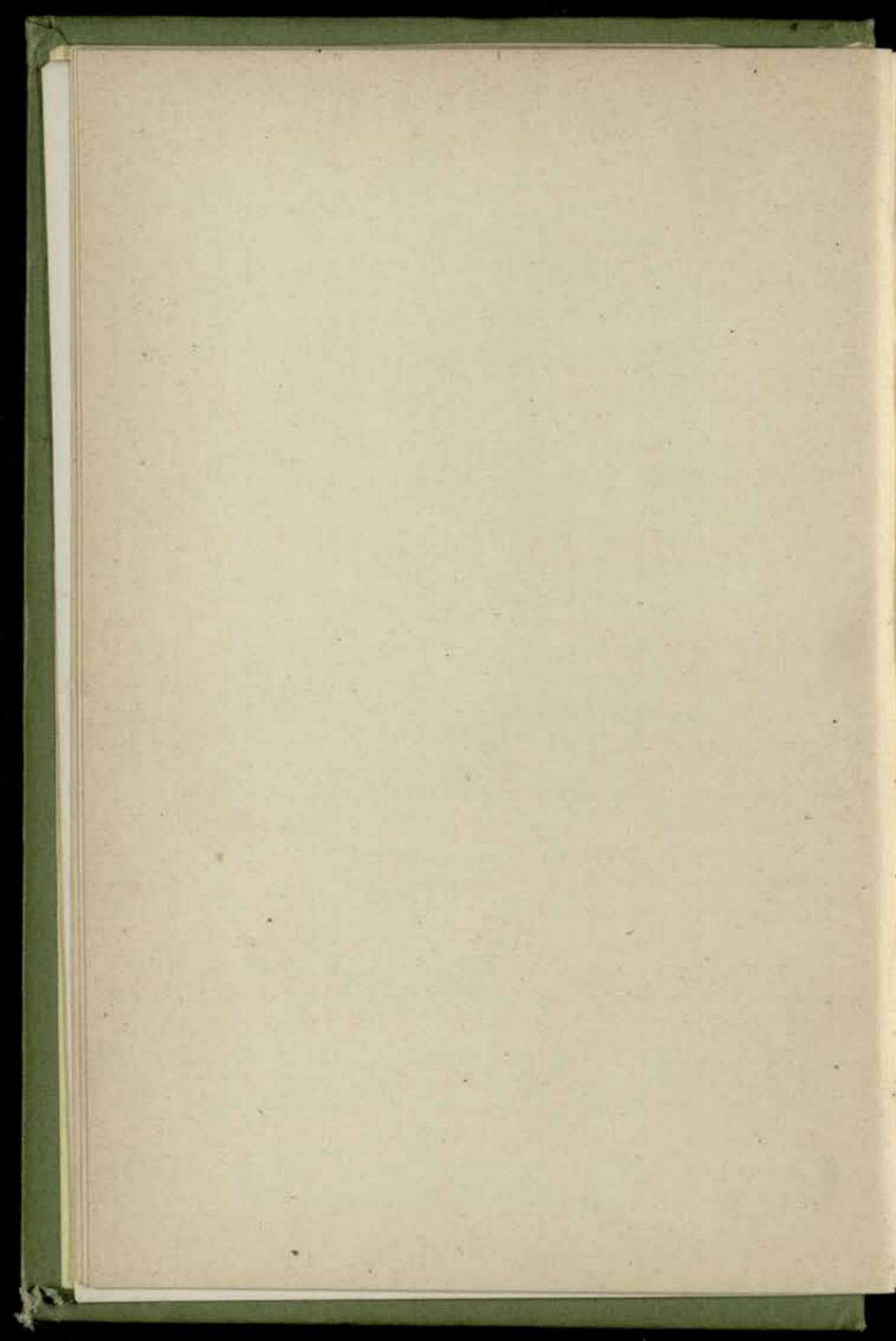
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THE
RED MOUNTAIN OF ALASKA.

CHAPTER I.

A REMARKABLE LETTER.



A SPACIOUS, comfortable-looking house, in the outskirts of one of the largest manufacturing towns of Massachusetts ; the dining-room is brightly lighted, and a wood fire blazes and snaps cheerily in the open fireplace, for it is late October, and the evenings are cold. Around the cosy teatable are gathered the family, namely : John Dutton, Esq., proprietor of the celebrated Sheldon Paper Mills ; Mrs. John Dutton ; Miss Florence Dutton, age fifteen, commonly addressed as " Flossie," or " Floss ;" and Masters Robert, Hugh, and Nathaniel Dutton, ages respectively seventeen, fifteen, and twelve years. Flossie and Hugh, it will be noticed, are twins.

Only three more personages in the town of Sheldon are at present sufficiently important to merit an introduction. They are, in fact, members of the Dutton household, two of them actually signing that name as

their own, and the third plainly desirous of doing so, were he able. All three are in the dining-room at the present moment, and the fact of their familiarity with the family is evident from the interest with which they listen, with open eyes and mouths, to the letter which their master is reading aloud.

Without further ceremony allow me to present: Chloe (Dutton), decided brunette, nurse of all the children successively, maid-of-all-work, and devoted slave to Miss Flossie; Teddy (Dutton), remotely descended from County Kildare, red-haired, freckled, fourteen years old, errand-boy, helper, and mischief-maker in general, particularly attached to the eldest son; Carlo (Dutton), at the side of pale, sweet-faced little Nat,—a shaggy, coal-black, silken-haired fellow, from the south coast of Newfoundland, as faithful a servant and friend as any in the country.

And now for the letter. Mr. Dutton has evidently just reached home from the mills, for his hat, coat, and cane are lying on the sofa where he has dropped them, and he is still out of breath from the quick half-mile walk. All eight of the Duttons listen eagerly while he reads:—

“FORT WRANGEL, ALASKA TER.,

“Sept. 5th, 1868.

“MY DEAR BROTHER,—It is a long time since I have written to you. The uncertainty of the mails in this new adopted country of ours, the constant disputes with Russian traders who are angry at having their hunting-ground sold over their heads—or under their feet, rather!—and the treachery of the native Innuits, as well as the reckless behaviour of our own troops, have kept my hands full and my head in a continual worry since the establishment of the post. Sometimes

I wish the government had kept her seven millions in her pocket, and left this desolate country to take care of itself. It was an immense responsibility to shoulder. Have you any idea of the size of the 'Northwest Territory,' old fellow? Are you aware that it contains something over five hundred thousand square miles, or about one-sixth of the entire extent of the United States and Territories? This vast country is covered throughout its southern districts with jungles and forests, reaching far up the sides of its lofty mountains, which smoke night and day. The portions nearer the Arctic Sea consist mostly of dreary morass and mossy 'tundra,' as it is called, under which lies a deep layer of ice, never thawing, winter or summer. But in the rest of the territory are splendid forests, as I have said. There are mountain peaks reaching (in Mount Wrangel) the enormous height of twenty thousand feet above the sea; there is a river, the noble Yukon, over two thousand miles in length—a rival of the great Mississippi itself. Among the hills are winding streams and pleasant valleys, where brilliant wild-flowers blossom, insects hover over them in the sunshine, and birds dart to and fro as merrily as in our old New England orchards. The woods are full of game. There is no place in the world where bears, black, brown, grizzly, and cinnamon, with two or three other varieties, are found in such abundance. Moose have not learned to fear the rifle, and wild goats clamber over the rocks in full sight. The inland districts of Alaska are almost absolutely uninhabited. The whole interior population of Indians is probably less than three thousand, while no white man ever passes beyond the protection of the trading-posts and forts.

of vapours. By the old way, nearly half is wasted in the process.

"Now as to its value. This varies largely from year to year. It runs from fifty cents to two dollars a pound, avoirdupois. One dollar a pound, or two thousand dollars a ton, would be a low average.

"But a ton, you say, is an enormous amount. Thirty tons is a hundredth part of the world's annual product.

"What would you say, John, to fifty tons a year, or even one hundred? In the countries I have mentioned, the ore crops out, or is found below the surface, in narrow veins, among much schist and slate. What would you say to a whole mountain of cinnabar?"

Dr. Dutton looked up with a prolonged "Whew-w!" and Carlo gave a short yelp. As no one else seemed disposed to conversation, the letter was resumed.

"To make a long story short (for I can see now that you are getting excited, as plainly as if I were sitting with you in your cosy dining-room in Sheldon, where you will probably read this letter), the following facts have recently come to light; no one, until this letter was read, John, knew of them. No one knows of them now, except your family, myself, and Peeschee. The last named gentleman is a Chilkat Indian, whose name in honest English is 'The Fox.' Call him which you like, he has served us a good turn. This is how it came about.

"I was off hunting with a party of Indians from the vicinity of the fort. We were in camp about

twenty miles inland from Wrangel, when something came bounding into the circle of fire light like a deer. It was the Fox, who threw himself panting at our feet, his teeth chattering, and his face fairly grey with terror. As soon as he could talk we made out his story. He had left his village a week before, on a trapping expedition. While at work among his traps, he had accidentally run on to the line set by a wandering party of Tak-heesh natives from the interior, and had ignorantly—so he assured us again and again—taken several pelts from their traps.

“A dozen Tak-heesh had come suddenly upon him, taken him prisoner, and vowed he should die for the offence. Poor Peeschee in vain asserted his innocence. To the stake he should go. On the second day of his captivity he had escaped by gnawing his thongs while his captors were dozing after a hearty meal of bear meat, and had been running all the afternoon, he said.

“We felt a little nervous about the pursuers, but those Tak-heesh are cowards unless they are terribly roused, and, sure enough, when they turned up the next morning a rifle volley into the air put the entire crowd to flight. The Fox was as grateful as a dog, and, the day after we reached Fort Wrangel, he did me the good turn I referred to.

“He came quietly to the barracks, inquired for my room, found me alone, and then and there told me the wonderful story which set me to writing this long letter—an offence, John, which I seldom commit, you’ll acknowledge.

“What the Fox had to say was substantially this: Last autumn he made one of his solitary expeditions over the mountains in search of furs. He penetrated

far into the interior, reaching a district absolutely unknown to him before that trip. He describes it as abounding in game, and heavily wooded. There were many rapid streams, all seeming to be well stocked with trout, grayling, and other fish.

“As often occurs in Alaska, the weather was cloudy for fully ten days at a stretch. Toward the close of a dull, drizzly afternoon, Peeschee stopped for the night on the bank of a swift brook. Suddenly the clouds in the west began to break away, and, as they gradually parted, there appeared high in the heavens what seemed to be a mountain of fire. It was a soft, glowing crimson, and from its summit rose a huge column of smoke; it was beyond doubt a mountain peak; Peeschee had never set eyes on it before in his life. Within five minutes the clouds had closed in again, and the wonderful peak was out of sight.

“The next three days he spent in travelling straight uphill toward the Red Mountain. After much struggling through jungles and morasses, fording streams, and encountering wild beasts by day and night, he claims that he reached the base of the peak, and discovered the cause of its strange colour. He brought a piece of the live rock itself, and showed it to me. I have it in my desk now. It is a magnificent specimen of cinnabar in the ore, deep crimson in colour, promising to yield, if worked, an enormous percentage of weight of the pure metal.

“John, that was a mountain of mercury! It waits for some one to take those red heaps of granite and quartz, fuse them, and bear away such a fortune as you could not make in a century of prosperous mill operation at Sheldon. Will you come? Shall we

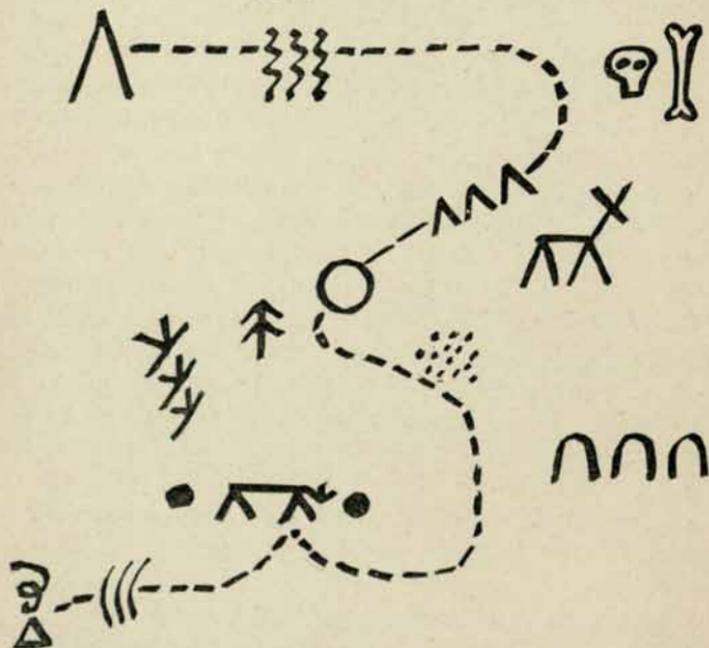
share the Red Mountain, old fellow, as we used to share the red apples in grandfather's orchard?

"This is what I propose. You have been in indifferent health for a good many months. You need a change; you have a competent superintendent in practical charge of the mills; you always liked hunting and camping-out. Take the boys along, and meet me at some point in west central Alaska—say old Fort Yukon. I will come from the west, you from the east, if you like, striking up through Canada and across from the Hudson's Bay post in British America. From Fort Yukon we can proceed together to the Red Mountain, make a rough survey, lay out our claim, and the following spring commence work in earnest. In other words, you can start from Sheldon as soon as the spring of '69 opens, reach the Alaska boundary by the first of July, and before the winter shuts down we shall have finished all our prospecting, and be ready to take out ore in the following May.

"One more point to consider, and then I have done. It is, I admit, an important point. How shall we find this half-fabulous 'Red Mountain' after we have effected a union of forces at Fort Yukon? Here we must rely entirely on Peeschee. He proposes to start from the fort (which is situated on nearly 67° N. lat., 145° long. W.), and strike due south. You will be glad to hear this when I add that the Arctic Circle passes directly through the fort. After travelling something over two hundred miles straight into the wilderness, the Fox says we shall find ourselves at the foot of a lofty range of mountains. From this point he bears away slightly to the east, and within three or four days expects to reach his old camping-ground, from which he obtained his first view of the

flaming peak. Now will begin by far our hardest fight with the forces of nature. Peeschee has drawn a map, which he professes to understand, and by which he proposes to follow as nearly as possible his

Peeschee's Map



former route to the base of the mountain and up its steep sides. I have borrowed this map or chart, and have traced it here for you.

"It's a curious-looking affair, but, with Peeschee as guide, I'd stake it against a government chart. Every

mark on it means something to him. I'll give you his explanation at some other time.

“ Now, then, once more, will you come ?

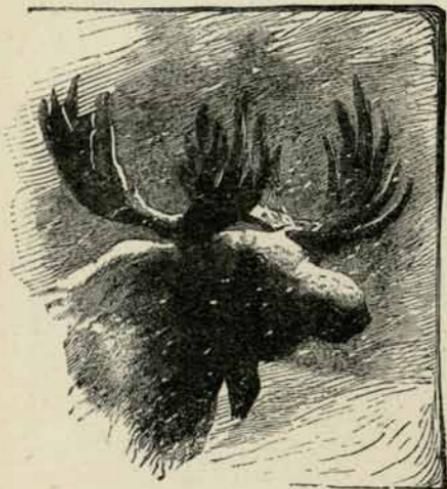
“ Your affectionate brother,

“ DICK DUTTON.

“ P.S.—Write full particulars, exactly when and where you will meet me. Sorry you must leave Mrs. D. and Florence behind. Of course you'll come ”

CHAPTER II.

TREED BY A MOOSE.



JUST five months after the letter of Lieutenant Richard Dutton was read aloud in his brother's cosy dining-room, a group of people are assembled on the platform of the Sheldon railroad station. There is a tallish, brown-bearded gentleman, with

clear, bright eyes, and an exceedingly gentle voice; a lady of refined face and manner, and close beside her a young girl; four boys, one of them freckled and sandy-haired; a negro woman, with a red bandana handkerchief around her black neck; and a young Newfoundland dog, full of quiet surprise at all this commotion. Several large trunks and cases are piled upon the platform, awaiting transportation.

Presently the train comes in sight round a curve, and slows up at the station, ringing and hissing vigorously. People, dog, and baggage are hurried on board, the conductor waves his hand, and, with renewed clanging of bell and hiss of steam, the train starts for Boston, bearing—you know as well as I—the entire Dutton family away from their home.

Dick Dutton was right. The letter could not be resisted. A favourable answer had been sent, thorough preparations made during the winter months, the mill wound up to run for a full year without the personal supervision of the owner—and off the party are starting, this twenty-fifth day of March, 1869, on their long and divided journey.

All the family, I said. You see, there has been a slight change of plan. After the letter had been carefully considered, and it had been voted unanimously that Mr. Dutton and the boys should make the trip to the northwest province, Mrs. Dutton had unexpectedly asserted herself.

“Dick’s plan is a good one,” she said, “with one exception.”

“What is that, my dear?” inquired Mr. Dutton, mildly.

“I do not propose to stay at home while you are off in the woods for a year. Florence and I will take the regular San Francisco route to Sitka, join Dick at his post, and start inland with him, meeting you at the fort.”

Mr. Dutton was astonished, but, as his wife’s remark had rather the appearance of a decision than a suggestion, he wisely refrained from opposing it.

“You shall certainly go, my dear, if you wish to,” said this exemplary husband. And she did.

Certain modifications of the original route had also been made. The "itinerary" was finally laid out as follows :—

The "military section," as Flossie laughingly called the lieutenant's party, were to meet at Sitka, and "pack" over the mountains to the headwaters of the Yukon River, moving down stream until they should reach Fort Selkirk, where they would await the eastern party, instead of at Fort Yukon. Mr. Dutton and the boys decided to follow the regular traders' route from Ottawa, northward and westward to Fort Churchill, on Hudson's Bay. From there a nearly westerly course, bearing a little to the north, above Athabasca Lake and below (on the map) the Great Slave, would bring them to Fort Simpson; thence over a lofty pass in the Chippeway division of the Rocky Mountains into New Columbia, and to Fort Selkirk, which is situated exactly $62^{\circ} 45'$ north, $137^{\circ} 22'$ west from Greenwich.

There! We've done with figures and theoretical geography for a while; practical geography we must study in spite of ourselves. Once in Alaska territory, we must examine our surroundings, and pick our way, almost inch by inch, for we have no reliable guide to the interior of this great, desolate region. If we want a map, we must make one.

We do not need to follow the Dutton family over the first portions of their respective routes, which are more or less familiar to travellers. Mrs. Dutton, Florence, and Chloe sailed from New York for Aspinwall, crossed the Isthmus, took steamer again at Panama, and reached San Francisco safely, after a journey of nearly six thousand miles. Here they rested a week, and completed their outfit necessary

for a summer in the woods. On a bright morning in May they started in a sailing vessel for Victoria and Sitka. So much for the ladies' party.

The sterner portion of the family had hardly a more eventful trip until they left Fort Churchill. From this point the boys had plenty of shooting, and Mr. Dutton had much ado to keep them within reach of camp. The trip, however, was quickly made, the "Rockies" surmounted, and by the second week in June the party were descending the western slopes of the mountains within one hundred and fifty miles of Fort Selkirk.

It was ten o'clock in the forenoon when Mr. Dutton, whose orders were obeyed by every one in the expedition, called a halt, on the first day after the high peaks were left behind.

It was a curious company that was gathered there. Mr. Dutton and the three boys were browned from exposure to the sun and all sorts of weather; while Teddy was burned a bright red, and fairly peppered with freckles. Carlo was in the highest of spirits, and gambolled about the party like a six-months-old pup. There were two Indian guides, strong-limbed, quiet fellows, named Joe and Jim.

At Mr. Dutton's word, these two last named threw down their heavy packs, and drew themselves up with an air of relief.

"Ugh!" grunted Joe, wiping his forehead. "Much hot comin'. No-see-'ems and skeeters dis night."

"Midges? Have you felt any, Joe?" asked Mr. Dutton, recognizing the Indian term for those tiny tormentors.

"No feel 'em. Smell 'em," said Joe, gravely, sniffing the air.

Mr. Dutton laughed, and turned his attention to selecting a good "nooning" spot where they could spend the hottest hours of the day.

They had halted beside a swift-running stream, whose waters, though white with glacial silt, promised sport for Hugh, the fisherman of the party. All around them was a forest of immense spruce trees, through which they had been travelling since early morning. The ground was everywhere covered with thick moss, and long, grey streamers hung from the lofty boughs overhead.

"I tell you what, father," exclaimed Robert, with enthusiasm, "this would be a jolly place to camp in for a week. There's plenty of water, and I'll warrant the woods are full of game."

"A good place enough, Rob, but we've no time to lose. The mosquitoes are getting thicker and hungrier every day, and before long we shall have to rush to the settlements for our lives. They are the pest of Alaska, you know."

"But, father, we are within a few days' march of Fort Selkirk, and are ahead of time."

"I want to see mother," interposed little Nat, quietly. "Don't you, Rob?"

The elder brother made no further protest, but began preparations for a short hunt before dinner.

"I won't be gone long, father," said he, shouldering his Winchester, and starting off at an easy gait.

"Won't you take one of the guides with you, my boy?"

"Oh, no, thank you. They've had enough to do, packing our blankets through the woods. Good-bye. I'll keep within hearing of a gun-shot." And he was gone.

Mr. Dutton now busied himself about his "skeleton tent," as he called it—a device of his own, for relief from the attacks of gnats, mosquitoes, and other insects while on the march.

It was a very simple arrangement; merely an "A" tent made of mosquito netting. It was large enough to accommodate all the party.

A few minutes sufficed to pitch it carefully, so that no rent should be made in its meshes. The guides, Nat, and Mr. Dutton then crept under its folds, and, stretched out comfortably on rubber blankets which had been first spread to keep out dampness, all four fell fast asleep.

Hugh whistled for Carlo, and took his way, fishing-tackle in hand, down to an inviting pool just in sight through the trees.

When Mr. Dutton awoke it was high noon. The guides were already preparing the noon meal, one of them building a good fire, laying the sticks all one way, for convenience of cooking; the other engaged in dressing a fine mess of trout which bore witness to Hugh's success.

Nat strayed about the camp, looking for flowers—the delicate *Linnaea*, or twin-flower, the violet, the cornel, and others familiar in the home woods. The eldest boy had not returned, and Mr. Dutton began to feel anxious about him. He fired his rifle three times, a signal that always meant, "Answer, and come into camp!" But there was no reply.

At one o'clock they sat down to dinner, worried and perplexed by Rob's absence. Two hours passed, and still he did not appear. It was time to resume march. At a word from the captain, Joe, the Indian, took up his rifle, and plunged into the woods, in the direction the missing boy had taken.

When Robert left the camp, he had no definite intention, save that he would skirt round the base of a low hill about a mile away, and return to camp within an hour or two. He hoped to come across some sort of game; a brace of grouse, at least, of which there are several varieties in British America. His Winchester rifle had half-a-dozen cartridges in it, and Robert was a good shot. He had no fear of missing a partridge or ptarmigan at thirty yards, with a single ball.

The forest floor was encumbered with fallen and decayed logs, into whose crumbling sides he sank so often that his progress was slow. There was very little undergrowth to impede his way, however, and within half-an-hour he reached sharply rising ground, which told him he was at the foot of the hill he had seen from camp.

Up to this point he had kept within hearing of the stream, but now he turned off at right angles, thinking he would walk fifteen minutes and then retrace his steps.

Before he had advanced far in this new direction he found himself following a sort of trail. Indeed, it was almost a beaten path in the woods.

"Ah!" said Rob to himself, with some dissatisfaction, "we have struck civilization again! Here's a regular route for fur-traders, I've no doubt. Well," he soliloquized, as he sauntered lazily along the path, "I might as well—hullo!"

He stopped and examined a track that was plainly outlined in a patch of mud. It was shaped like the print of a huge human foot, fourteen inches long at the very least. Robert had not "trailed" from the Hudson's Bay settlements for nothing. He knew

that no man had left that footprint. It was undoubtedly the track of a bear, and an enormous one, too; possibly a grizzly.

The boy's heart beat so hard that it seemed as if he must stifle. The "sign" was fresh. It certainly was not half-an-hour old, for the water was still oozing into it from the sides.

Should he go on? The ambition of Robert's life just now was to shoot a grizzly, but he knew the danger to a single hunter if he should meet one of these terrible brutes alone.

It flashed across the boy's mind at the same moment that the trail he was following was very closely connected with that peculiar track. It was no hunter's at all. It was one of the famous "bear-roads," for which the great Northwest is noted, and which thread the densest forests in every direction.

Only six charges in that rifle! But the temptation was too great. Robert concluded at least to follow the path cautiously for a short distance. Perhaps he could come upon his shaggy game unexpectedly. Perhaps he could stalk him!

With these thoughts passing swiftly through his mind, he examined the lock of his rifle carefully, assured himself that the cartridges were in place, and, stooping over like an old hunter, advanced softly along the trail.

At every slightest sound in the forest his heart gave an answering thump; but no bear appeared. He was beginning to think of turning back toward the camp when a curious noise fell upon his ears. It was a succession of dull blows, like that of a farmer driving a stake into the ground.

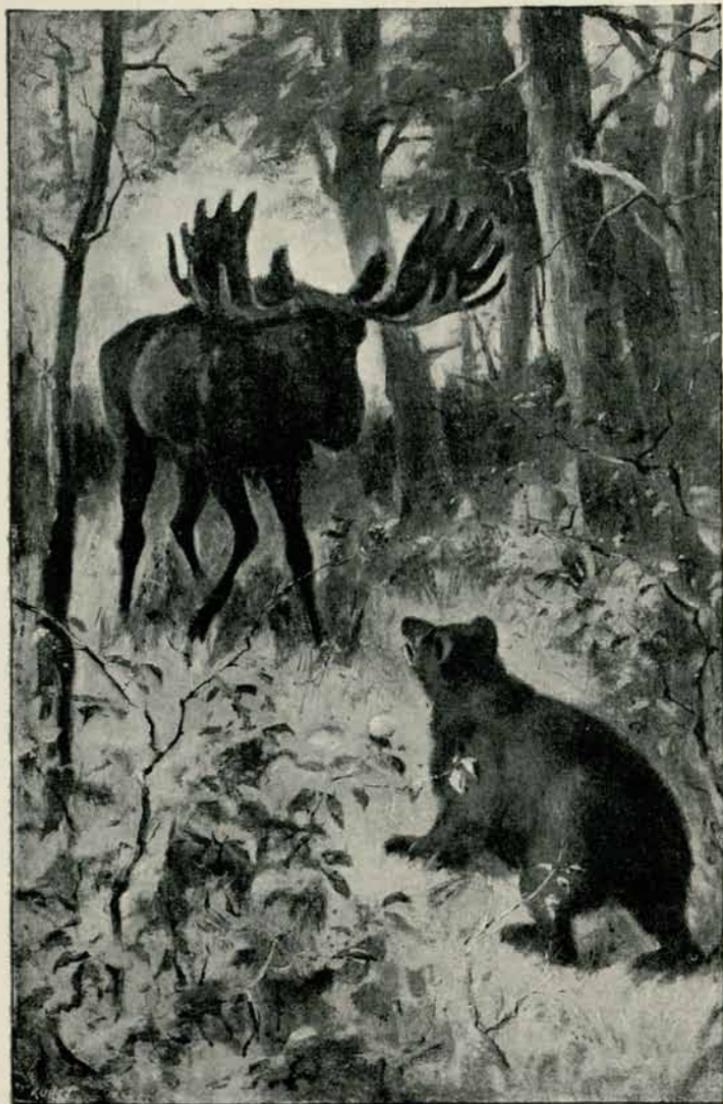
A sudden turn of the path brought him unexpectedly

upon a singular scene. About a hundred yards away the trail was blocked by a huge dark form. It stood about four feet high, and was covered with long, shaggy fur of a dirty brown colour. Robert recognised the animal at once, although it was back to him. It was the Brown Bear, *Ursus Arctos*, of the cold countries. It was with a feeling half chagrin and half relief that the boy knew in a moment it was no grizzly before him. That it was, on the other hand, his very ugliest and most formidable relative south of the Arctic Circle was equally certain.

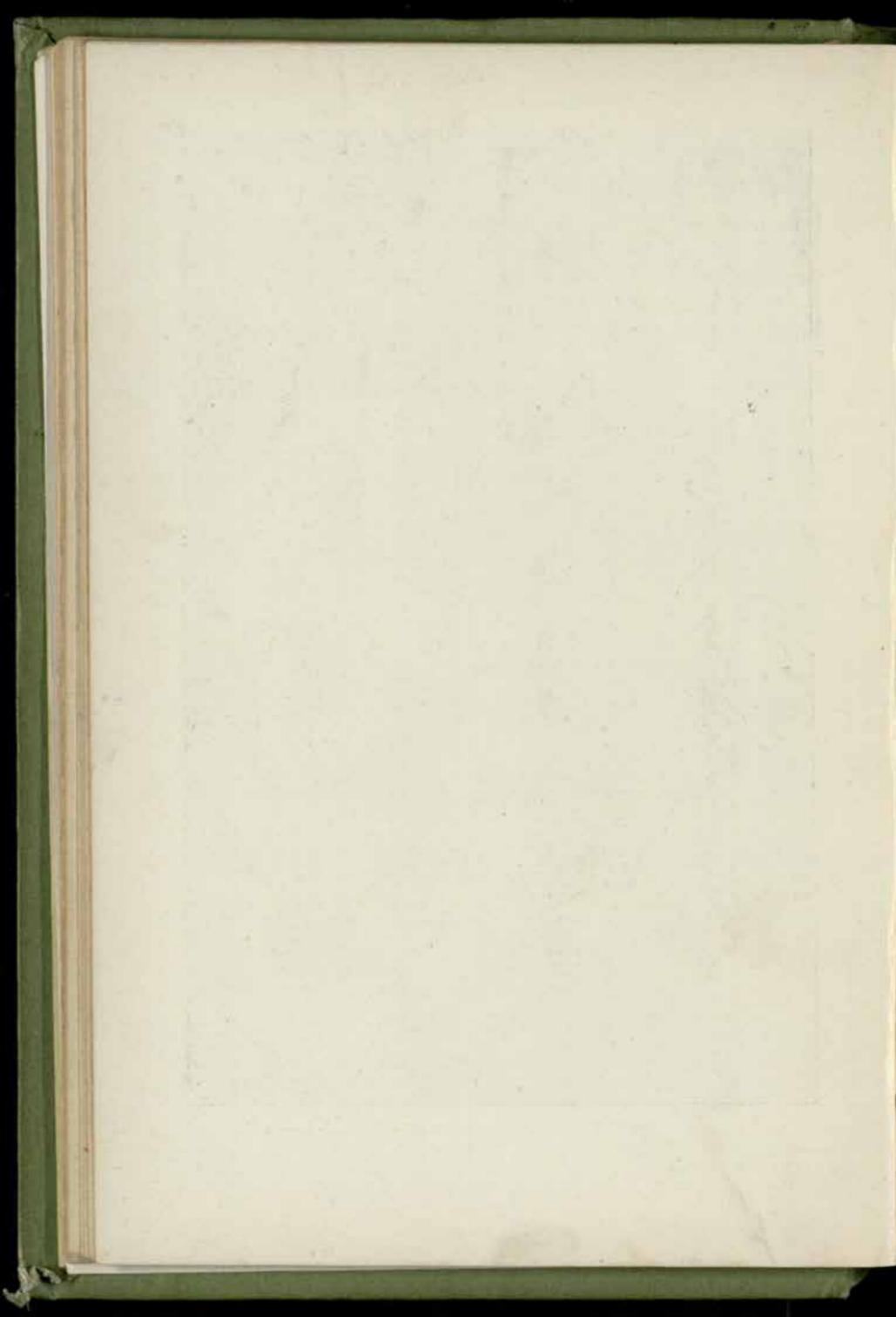
But what was the occasion of the bear's quiet attitude? A glance along the path explained matters. Directly facing the bear stood an old bull moose, his spreading antlers touching the boughs on each side of the path. The big fellow was not standing at his full height. His head was slightly lowered, and his eyes fixed intently on those of his near neighbour. Neither of the animals paid the slightest attention to the new-comer.

There seemed to be no good reason why there should be a quarrel. There was plenty of room, with a little squeezing, for a bear and a moose, even if both, as was the case, were larger than the average, to pass each other comfortably. But neither of them thought of yielding an inch; they glared silently at each other, like two teamsters who have unexpectedly met in a narrow alley. Neither one would back out, that was settled.

The moose raised one of his great hoofs, and struck it upon the ground several times, making moss and mud fly, while his eyes seemed fairly to flash fire. His long, ungainly head drooped lower; it was evident that affairs were reaching a crisis, and Robert



"IT WAS EVIDENT THAT AFFAIRS WERE REACHING A CRISIS."



concluded it was time to act. An old hunter would have walked backward softly to the turn in the path, and then run for his life, leaving the two forest princes to fight it out as they pleased.

Unfortunately, the boy did no such thing. He raised his rifle, sighted a spot in the very centre of the moose's broad breast, and fired.

At the very same instant, the latter made up his mind to knock that bear into small bits, and bounded forward. The bear was watching for this, and rose on his haunches to meet his antagonist.

So it happened that the rifle ball, instead of doing its work as was intended, merely scored the bear's right shoulder, and inflicted a slight wound on the flank of the moose.

Both the brutes were startled by the heavy report of the gun, and enraged by the sting of the ball. The impetus of the big "horned horse" was so great that he could not stop himself, but struck the bear squarely on the snout, causing Bruin to roll over backward, with the moose on top of him.

The two huge creatures scrambled to their feet, and simultaneously caught sight of Robert, who pluckily drew a bead on the brown, struggling mass and fired a second time, with as little apparent result as before.

Then he started for the nearest tree, which, luckily for him, was a good-sized spruce, with two or three boughs, or stubs of them, close to the ground.

He had to drop his rifle, and indeed had no time to spare, for by a common impulse both the late enemies rushed against their common foe.

Robert drew a long breath as he seated himself, not very comfortably, on a stout branch, some twenty feet from the ground. To his relief, the bear concluded

that his honour had been vindicated, and ambled off on his "road" at a swift pace, which took him out of sight in two minutes.

Not so the big moose. Pawing the ground, and snorting fiercely, he continued to charge up and down under the tree, until at last, perceiving that his hated assailant was for the time out of his reach, he sullenly commenced a slow walk to and fro, like a sentinel on guard duty; now and then casting vindictive glances into the evergreen boughs overhead.

Faintly three rifle shots came echoing through the woods, but Robert could not reply. He had given his party no idea of where he was going. Plainly his position was a disagreeable one, not to say positively dangerous.

What was to be done?

CHAPTER III.

TED'S PRICKLY BEAR.



SOON as Joe, the younger and more agile of Mr. Dutton's two Indian guides, struck into the forest, he formed a definite plan of action in his mind.

He had seen his young master start off on his expedition, and had noted the direction he had taken. Once out of sight of camp, the trail was lost in the deep green moss that covered the

ground everywhere. Joe, however, was not at a loss for the route he should take. He reasoned that the boy would, in the main, keep the direction he had at first taken, and would follow the stream up toward the hills, good shooting being generally found near water; moreover, the brook would be an infallible guide back to camp.

Swiftly and stealthily as a cat the Indian glided through the dark shadows of the forest, in and out

among the trunks of the evergreens. Now and then he would utter a grunt of satisfaction as his quick glance fell upon a broken twig or a red mass of crumbling wood where Robert had placed an incautious foot.

Arriving at the bear path, he did not hesitate a moment, but followed it with a swift, shambling gait like the awkward trot of the animals who had trodden down the path for him.

When he perceived the big track in the mud he started, paused, and examined it carefully; then felt for the handle of his long knife—he had brought no other weapon—and kept on as before.

If you had been watching him, a few minutes later, you would have seen him suddenly come to a standstill, listen eagerly, and then creep forward on hands and knees. Presently he dropped flat on the ground, and began wriggling forward as silently as a snake, but more slowly.

From his perch Robert caught sight of a dark figure crouching on the moss, a hundred feet away to the leeward. At first he turned sick with fear, thinking it was a puma, making ready for a spring. Then he recognised with delight the homely features of his guide.

The besieger just then was wandering moodily about at about the same distance the other side of the tree, his attention being distracted by a swarm of mosquitoes who kept him stamping and licking furiously. It was evident that he had not the least idea of the Indian's presence.

The latter wriggled nearer the tree, nearer,—until he could lay his hand on the repeating rifle.

The slight noise he made in cocking the piece caused

the moose to look up quickly, half turning as he did so, and exposing his broad brown side.

A shot rang out, and another. The moose started for the tree like lightning, but before he had covered half the distance he fell headlong.

To leap to his side and plunge the keen blade of the knife into his throat was but an instant's work for the Indian, who had despatched many a moose in his day.

As Robert descended stiffly from his tree, and saw the poor creature's huge bulk stretched out helpless and still, he felt a pang of remorse.

"It's too bad, Joe," he said, gazing at his prostrate enemy.

"H'm. You no kill 'im, he kill you," remarked the other, in soft gutturals. "You lucky git 'way from 'im, yis."

They cut several slices of meat from the moose, and Joe took especial pains to carry away the muzzle, or upper lip, which is esteemed a dainty among hunters. The magnificent antlers they were of course obliged to leave behind.

The Indian had as yet made no allusion to the bear. When they had travelled about half way to the camp, and had been walking in silence for some time, he suddenly asked, —

"You shot at bear, too?"

Robert laughed rather shamefacedly.

"Yes, I did, Joe. I guess I didn't hurt him much, and I'm glad I didn't. One of those splendid creatures is enough to kill in a day."

"You no fire when you see 'im 'gain," remarked the Indian. "No hurt poor bear," he added.

Rob caught the twinkle in his companion's eye.

"You're laughing at me, old fellow!" he cried, good-naturedly. "Never mind, I'll pay you up some day."

"No shoot bear when you 'lone," said Joe, more soberly. "Nor moose, too. Wait for Injun come, he help shoot."

"Well, I'll be more careful another time. Hullo, here we are at camp. Sorry you were worried, father," as he saw Mr. Dutton's look of relief at his approach.

"I was worried, Rob," said the older man, earnestly, "and I thank God that you're back safe. If I had realised half the dangers and hardships of this wild country, I'd never have come. I suppose Dick is used to them, and don't mind meeting a grizzly, or fighting mosquitoes for a week at a time, or running on to a tribe of hostiles. I confess I do."

"But, father, we were never so well in our lives. Just look at Nat there!"

And, indeed, it did one good to glance at the little fellow's brown, healthy face.

"Well, well," said Mr. Dutton, brightening, "we're all in safe keeping, no doubt. Tell me about your adventure, Rob. It's too late to move further to-night, and we could hardly find a better camping-ground. The tents, boys!"

This last was addressed to the guides, who at once quietly set about their preparations for the night. While the boys gathered eagerly about Rob, as he described the big game he had seen, two tents of light strong drilling were taken from the packs and pitched. They were of the "Shelter" form, with side flaps that were secured to the ground by pegs. These were necessary to keep out the little winged tormentors

whose falsetto songs already began to ring unpleasantly in the ears of the hunters.

The mosquito bars were now stretched across the front of the tents, admitting light, air, and nothing else, unless perhaps the midges, or no-see-'ems, whose approach the Indians feared.

In the midst of Rob's glowing account there arose a series of howls and cries, mingled with the barking of a dog, close by the camp.

All hands seized rifles and axes, and ran to the rescue.

"Oh, murder! Oh, save me, quick! She's comin' afther me, sure! Come quick wid yer guns!"

A moment later a shout of laughter went up from the rescuers. Even the taciturn Indians smiled.

There was the valiant Teddy, with his hair fairly standing on end, glaring wildly at a small black animal, which crouched in a tree, about ten feet from the ground.

"Sure, I have fixed it wid me eyes," said Teddy. "I have a shpell on it, I have. If I look off, it'll jump."

"Why, what is it, Ted?" inquired Mr. Dutton, putting on a sober face.

"Can't ye see, sur-r? it's a shmall little bear, bad luck to him! Sure, I looked to see the ould one come rushing out o' the bushes ivery minute, and that's why I called yez."

All this time Carlo was barking furiously at the little animal, whatever it was.

"I think the safest way," said Mr. Dutton, suppressing a smile once more, "is to leave Teddy here for a while to watch the beast. If the she-bear

attacks you, be sure to call us, Ted," he added, making as if he would walk off.

But the Irish boy set up a mournful wail that would have touched a heart of stone.

"Och, don't lave me, sur! I'll be kilt entirely!"

"Oh, Ted!" called out Hugh, who could no longer keep silence, "killed by a—hedgehog! Think of it! Don't you see his prickles?"

Poor Teddy grew even redder than before as he examined the animal anew, and for the first time noticed the quills.

He slunk back to camp, and it was a long time before the boys ceased to allude to "Ted's prickly bear."

The night passed quietly, and an early start was made next morning. Before they halted for their noon rest they had made a good fifteen miles, due west. Nat was tired, and when they started for their afternoon tramp, Jim, the older and larger Indian, had a curious pack upon his back. It was, in fact, no other than Nat himself, comfortably seated in a natural chair, formed by cutting a distorted birch close to the ground, and using the stump of a bent bough for a seat. A belt was carried around the Indian's waist, to steady the chair, but the weight came largely upon his forehead, which held the loop of a leather thong supporting this human piece of baggage. Mr. Dutton had seen Peruvian natives carry travellers in this way over dangerous mountain passes, and Jim found that it worked to a charm.

At about three o'clock the leader of the party uttered a cry of delight.

"Look!" he said, pointing forward. "The headwaters of the Pelly!"

"What is the Pelly, father?" asked the eldest boy.

"The northern branch of the Yukon, Rob. Where that river joins the old 'Lewis,' or properly the Yukon itself, is Fort Selkirk, and there we shall find your mother, Flossie, and Dick."

"Hooray!" shouted Hugh, catching his father's enthusiasm. "How long will it take to reach them?"

"I should think that by the day after to-morrow we ought to come in sight of the chimneys of the old fort. As soon as possible we will build a raft, and finish our journey by water."

An hour's fast walking brought the party to the edge of a small lake. On the southern shore were high bluffs, crowned with evergreen forests. Just before them lay a little meadow. Its bright green grass was dotted with dandelions and buttercups; butterflies, red and yellow, floated gracefully in the sunshine. A cloud of waterfowl rose from the reeds near by, and, flying low over the smooth water, plunged into it again, not half a mile away, with a deal of splashing.

Not a breeze stirred the surface of the lake; the hills along its shore were reflected as in a mirror.

"Beautiful, beautiful!" murmured Mr. Dutton, baring his head for a moment, and gazing over the tranquil scene. "Why should not one settle here, and spend his days within sight of this lovely sheet of water? No cares, but plenty of——"

"Mosquitoes!" interrupted one of the Indians, gravely.

The boys burst into a shout of laughter at the sudden conclusion of their father's soliloquy, and ran gleefully down to the water's edge.

"See, father, see!" cried little Nat presently, holding up a small brown animal in his arms. It was a young marmot, a species which furnishes to the Indians of the interior their blankets, these being made of numerous skins of the little creatures sewn together.

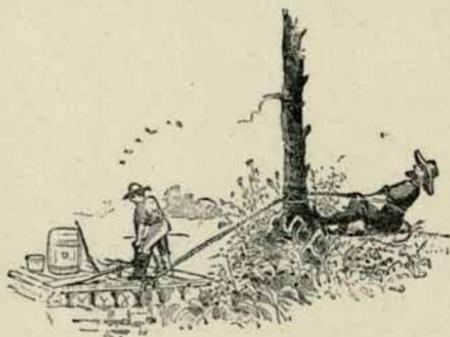
After an inspection by all the boys, the captive was permitted to waddle off at the top of his speed, presumably in the direction his parents had taken.

"Camp, boys, camp!" called Mr. Dutton, and all hands set busily to work, preparing for the night. The tent was pitched on the bank of a tiny stream that fell musically over a mossy ledge into the lake itself. The boys cut and broke armfuls of boughs from the young spruces that grew thickly along the edge of the forest, and threw them into the camp for a bed. Nat was left to kindle the fire, a task at which he was a particular adept. With bits of bark and dried twigs he soon had a jolly blaze mounting up through the larger sticks, and the camp was ready. Rob strolled off with his gun, and Hugh with fishing-rod and flies, as usual. Mr. Dutton took shelter behind a mosquito net, and registered in his diary the events of the day—the various sorts of plants and living creatures he had observed, and the situation and most striking characteristics of the lake before him. Then he took out his map of the British provinces and Alaska, settling his position beyond a doubt, and marking his camping spot with a pencilled cross. Those boys who would like to know just where the party was encamped may make a cross on their maps

at exactly lat. $61^{\circ} 30'$ N., long. $128^{\circ} 10'$ W. from Greenwich. If the map is a good one, they will find this lake, shaped something like a horseshoe, with the open end toward the north. On the east bank of the right-hand arm of the horseshoe was "Camp Prospect," as Mr. Dutton named their halting-place.

CHAPTER IV.

AN UNSEEN ENEMY.



THE afternoon had been so bright, friends seemed so near, and camp was so pleasantly situated, that the Duttons looked forward to a peaceful, rest-

ful night. They were doomed to serious disappointment.

Hugh came back from the lake empty-handed, and Robert was the lucky one this time, bringing back from his hunting expedition a fine bag of black duck and a good fat rabbit.

While Joe was preparing the ducks for supper, Teddy, whose bump of curiosity was always leading him to poke about among bushes and under logs, came rushing back to camp, and breathlessly announced an important discovery.

"Sure, it's a bear this time," he stammered, looking

over his shoulder. "Ye've tould me toime and toime agin that the print of a bear's fut looks like a man's boot. Sure, there's wan here in the bushes that's the very image o' wan, toes an' all. Oh, wirra, wirra, he'll ate us up before mornin'!"

"Hush, Teddy," exclaimed Mr. Dutton, authoritatively. "Tell us where you saw the track."

"Jist beyant in the bushes."

"Come, Joe, we'll look at it."

The rest wanted to follow, but Mr. Dutton bade them stay where they were. He had uncomfortable misgivings regarding that track, with its toes so plainly marked. What if it were not a bear's footprint at all! What if—

His worst fears were realized when he saw the Indian's manner on looking at the track.

"H'm!" he grunted, with a slight start, as he stooped low to examine it. "H'm! Him no bear!"

"What is it, then?"

"Him man's foot."

"White?"

"No. Injun."

"How old is the sign?"

"Half-hour, maybe."

Here was intelligence, to be sure, of a decidedly unpleasant character.

While they had been building their camp, discussing their plans, roaming about the woods, dark forms had been flitting to and fro among the shadows of the forest, within a stone's throw. Glistening eyes had been watching them, probably with looks of hatred. For a friendly band would have advanced at once, where the party of whites was so

evidently a harmless one, with its four boys and one middle-aged man.

The two guides now held a short consultation, and, on Mr. Dutton's return to camp, they darted into the woods.

The hour spent before their return was one of extreme anxiety. The boys knew nothing of their father's apprehensions, and chatted merrily over the supper-getting, which, in the absence of the guides, they took into their own hands.

If the Takheesh Indians, in the border of whose country they now were, should take the warpath, they were greatly to be feared. Their tribe had been foully treated by the traders, and, though few in numbers, the Alaska Indians are known to be among the fiercest and most implacable of their race when their evil passions are once roused. And if there was danger to his own party, what of the other, near by, containing his brother, wife, and daughter?

While these thoughts were chasing one another through Mr. Dutton's troubled mind, Joe returned, and shortly afterward his comrade.

The information they brought was not reassuring. They had struck the trail of the strange Indians, they said, in several parts of the surrounding forest, and, though they did not come upon the band, the guides were pretty sure that they were encamped just beyond a little ridge, about two miles south-west of Camp Prospect. They had probably been startled, Joe intimated, by the report of Rob's gun.

The boys by this time had been acquainted with the situation, and the faces of the company were clouded.

"Well," said Mr. Dutton, at last, "we won't try to cross a bridge before we come to it. The Indians will not dare to attack us to-night, while we are all in camp, nor are they fond of roaming the woods after dark. We'll take turns keeping guard, however, and while one watches the rest shall sleep."

It was still so early in the evening that no thoughts of sleep could be entertained for an hour or two. Mr. Dutton was determined that his boys should not worry away their chances for a night's rest. He therefore proposed telling stories until bedtime.

"That is," said he, with a good-natured slap on Joe's broad shoulders, "I don't mean to do all the talking myself. You can begin, old fellow."

The Indian's dark eyes lighted up. Taciturn as he was on ordinary occasions, he was renowned among his comrades as a recounter of marvellous tales and hair's-breadth escapes. Joe was a good story-teller, and he knew it.

As full of airs as a young lady who is asked to play, and "has left her music at home," Joe coughed and smoked and pretended indifference, but, after the proper amount of urging, raised himself upon his elbow instead of squatting in the traditional Indian fashion, and, having replenished his pipe (which, however, soon died out), began as follows. I do not attempt to spell out his peculiar dialect, or indicate the expressive grunts and gutturals which served as punctuation marks.

"About ten years ago," he said, "I was guiding, near Fort Churchill, with my brother, John Feather-top."

"I didn't know you had a brother, Joe," interrupted Nat.

"Dead now," remarked the narrator, laconically, then resumed his story.

"We started out, one fine morning, from the fort, and by the end of the next day reached a



"WE STARTED ACROSS THE LAKE."

lake about thirty miles away, where the fishing was good.

"Two men—white men—were with us. They were from a big town in the States—New—New——"

"York?" suggested Rob.

"That's it. They paid us well, and were full of fun. On the lake we had two good canoes, hidden in the bushes at different points. John and I soon found one of them, drew the paddles from a hollow

log close by, and started across the lake for the other canoe.

"We paddled straight across a wide bay, in a north-east direction, took our bearings from a bunch of rocks just above water (there were half-a-dozen gulls'-nests on them, and the birds flew up slowly as we paddled past); then worked up to a point heavily wooded with black growth, and John landed.

"Pretty soon I heard a squirrel chatter, and right afterward a bird sound, like this."

Here Joe imitated pretty closely the long, plaintive whistle of the hermit thrush.

The boys nodded to their father, to show that they recognized the notes; and Joe gravely proceeded.

"I knew then that something was out of the common, and that John apprehended danger; otherwise he would not have called me at all, or would have sung out my name. The squirrel and the bird meant 'Trouble—come quick, but carefully.' If the bird had sung first, it would have meant, 'Stay there; I'm coming back.'

"I answered the bird call, and stepped out of the canoe, pulling it up a little on a big rock. Then I went into the bushes and found John.

"He was standing near an old pine stub that had been our landmark for the second canoe. It ought to have been just six paces from that stub, in a little overgrown run, covered with brush. The fir and spruce, with a few white cedars, grew so thick along the edge of the run that nobody would have found the canoe without a hard hunt and a hint as to its hiding-place. Nobody in the world knew of that place but John and I. *The canoe was gone.*"

Joe paused impressively, having dropped his voice to its lowest gutturals in pronouncing the two words, "Canoe gone!"—and looked around the firelit circle of faces to observe the effect.

The result of the survey proving satisfactory, he lighted his pipe anew with a blazing twig from the camp-fire.

"But that wasn't the worst of it," he continued, more solemnly than ever. "There wasn't the faintest sign of any stranger there. Not a track showed in the earth between that spot and the lake. Not a twig, as far as we could see in any direction, was broken or bent; even the boughs that had been thrown over the run were absolutely undisturbed.

"Simply, the canoe was not there. In some mysterious way it had been drawn out from its hiding-place, and had totally disappeared.

"I said there was no track. Stop—there was one. John pointed it out after we had been there a minute. It was a mere touch on the moss—so light as hardly to bend down the soft tops—yet, here and there, plainly enough marked when once we had found one, were the prints of a child's or a young girl's foot. The strange part of it was the lightness. We found one spot where she or it had stepped fairly on a piece of soft, muddy soil. As I live, masters, the print was not half a day old, and was not so deep."

Joe measured off about an eighth of an inch on his thumb-nail. Nat crept more closely to his father, and glanced over his shoulder. There was always something uncanny about Joe's stories; and, indeed, Mr. Dutton began to repent having called for the performance on this particular night.

"Hurry up, Joe," he exclaimed, "and get to the point of your story. What made the tracks around the run? Some light-footed Indian squaw, I suppose!"

"No squaw," replied Joe, with dignity. "Track too ver' light, you see."

But, as I said, I will not try to give the story in Joe's peculiar dialect. Here is the rest of it, translated into English.

"We could make nothing of the tracks, and pretty soon we paddled back to camp, after having searched the point over for the missing canoe. Not a sign of it could we find.

"When we returned to our two hunters, they laughed at us, but were angry, too, because they had but one canoe to fish from. Only one of them could go out at a time.

"We took a few trout in the lake, but the fish did not rise well, and after a couple of days we pushed on to a small pond five miles above.

"It was all white water between, so we had to carry. It took five trips to get across, for it's the hardest carry in all the north country.

"The last time we took the canoe. It was rather heavy for that style of craft, and there was one point, just opposite a big waterfall in the river, where it had to be lugged straight uphill for fifty rods or more.

"John and I got underneath, and the New York men pulled on a rope hitched round the bows.

"It was a hard tug, but we got there at last.

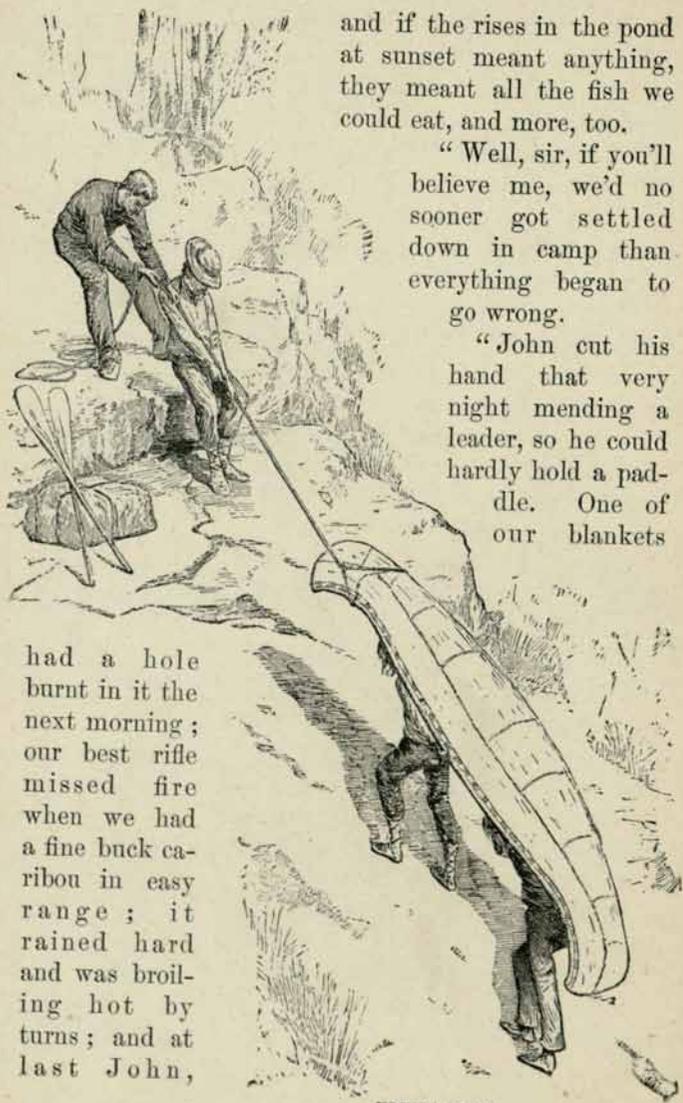
"We built a brush camp pretty near the shore of the upper pond, and laid out for a fortnight's stay at least. There was deer-sign in the woods,

and if the rises in the pond at sunset meant anything, they meant all the fish we could eat, and more, too.

"Well, sir, if you'll believe me, we'd no sooner got settled down in camp than everything began to go wrong.

"John cut his hand that very night mending a leader, so he could hardly hold a paddle. One of our blankets

had a hole burnt in it the next morning; our best rifle missed fire when we had a fine buck caribou in easy range; it rained hard and was broiling hot by turns; and at last John,



UPHILL WORK.

through clumsy paddling with his lame hand, run the canoe square on to a rock, near the outlet, and put a hole through the birch.

"'It's no use,' we agreed, he and I, 'the trip's bewitched. Whatever it was that took that canoe has sent us bad luck.'

"Then we remembered an old story of how an innocent Indian girl was shot by trappers in that region years before; shot because some skulking chap in her tribe had stolen a pelt or two, and these fellows wanted to square the account.

"John shook his head, and said he believed the spirit of the girl was abroad in the woods, and would be the death of us if we didn't go out.

"He wanted to tell the two gentlemen about it, but I told him they'd laugh at him, and we'd better wait a while before doing anything.

"'H'm,' said John, 'if we want to go back, who can hinder?'

"'You'd have to go alone,' said I, 'for I won't leave a party I've once taken into the woods, spirit or no spirit.'

"That night one of our two masters was taken with fever and chills, though he had been perfectly well an hour before. John looked hard at me as we sat by the fire, but I pretended not to see him.

"Next morning the poor gentleman was rather worse than better. Part of the time he was out of his head; and kept raving about somebody he thought was trying to drown him in the canoe.

"'Don't tip it over! Don't tip it over!' he'd cry, in the most awful way, starting up and then sinking back with a choking sound as if he were going under water.

"As soon as I got a chance I called John out into the brush a bit.

"'John,' said I, 'I had a queer dream last night.'

"'So did I,' said he, quietly.

"'I dreamed I found that canoe.'

"'So did I.'

"'It was placed across two flat, mossy rocks, and in it was the body of a young squaw——'

"Before John had time to say, 'So it was!' (as I've no doubt his dream was exactly the same as mine) we were called to hold the sick man, who was now quite out of his head, and muttering strange things that nobody but John and I understood.

"He grew quieter after a while, and slept. The other gentleman, worried and troubled as he was, took his rifle and started round the shore of the lake for game.

"Before long I heard the crack of his piece, and not a minute later a doe dashed past the camp.

"Her tongue was out, and I could see that she was wounded; but she was out of sight with three bounds. As she went past us she half turned her head, and gave me one swift look from her big, frightened eyes. I'm an old hunter, sir, but I declare to you I never had a deer nor a living animal look at me so before. I found a single red spot on a green leaf in her tracks after she had gone.

"This was at about noon. The master came back more tired and anxious than ever. As soon as dinner was over he wanted me to go and hunt up that doe.

"Generally, I'd want no better job, for I knew by the way she ran that she was shot to death, and I wouldn't have to go far. But, sir, I hated to go. I'd have taken John, but he said he must stay in camp and gum that leak in the old canoe before dark. I left him getting his gum and some bark to burn and sear with.

"Well, it took longer than I thought it would. For upwards of three miles I tramped through the black growth to the head of the pond, following the trail, which wasn't the easiest to keep in sight. There wasn't a broken limb or even a bent brake; and on the ground scarcely a track, she was so light.

"The sun was well down, and it was getting pretty shady in the woods when I struck a plain carry, made by traders in old times, from the head of the pond to a chain of lakes and a post beyond.

"After following this about a hundred rods I came to a standstill. A small sheet of water was just in front of me; but what I noticed most was a lot of big, mossy rocks along the shore. They were the very rocks that I had seen in my dream!

"And there, sir, not quite as I had dreamed it, but pulled up a little across the opening of the carry, was the lost canoe.

"I came up to it with a creeping all over me from head to foot. I knew what I should find there, even before I saw the patch of soft brown and white over the edge of the canoe.

"There, just as she had stumbled and fallen, in her last feeble effort to reach the water, lay the beautiful doe, the blood still flowing from the fatal bullet-hole. She was quite dead.

"Perhaps you'll laugh at me, sir, when I tell you I didn't cut her up?"

"I took her out easy, and laid her on the moss, out of sight of the carry. She was a small, slender thing, and lifted easy. I threw some brush over her, and shouldered the canoe, which was not so large as the one we had brought with us from the first lake, and in five minutes was paddling down the lower pond as if all the spirits of the forest were after me.

"At last I came in sight of John Feathertop, just putting the last touches on the bottom of the damaged canoe, and then, I confess, for the first time I breathed freely.

"The gentleman asked me where the doe was, but I took no notice, and he supposed I felt bad at not finding her, so he said nothing more about it.

"The next day the sick man was well enough to move, and we all started for home, although the two New Yorkers wanted to stay and finish their sport."

"Why did they go out, then?"

"Because they could not stay without guides. And both guides refused, quietly and respectfully, but firmly, to spend another day in that locality.

"We got out in safety, with the exception of the lighter canoe. That we left behind. Why? Because it had carried the dead; because the dead had claimed it; because it belonged to the dead.

"John Feathertop and I, as well as Jim here, were poor enough; but there wasn't money enough in all the Hudson's Bay territory to hire us ever to visit that lake again."

(1.)

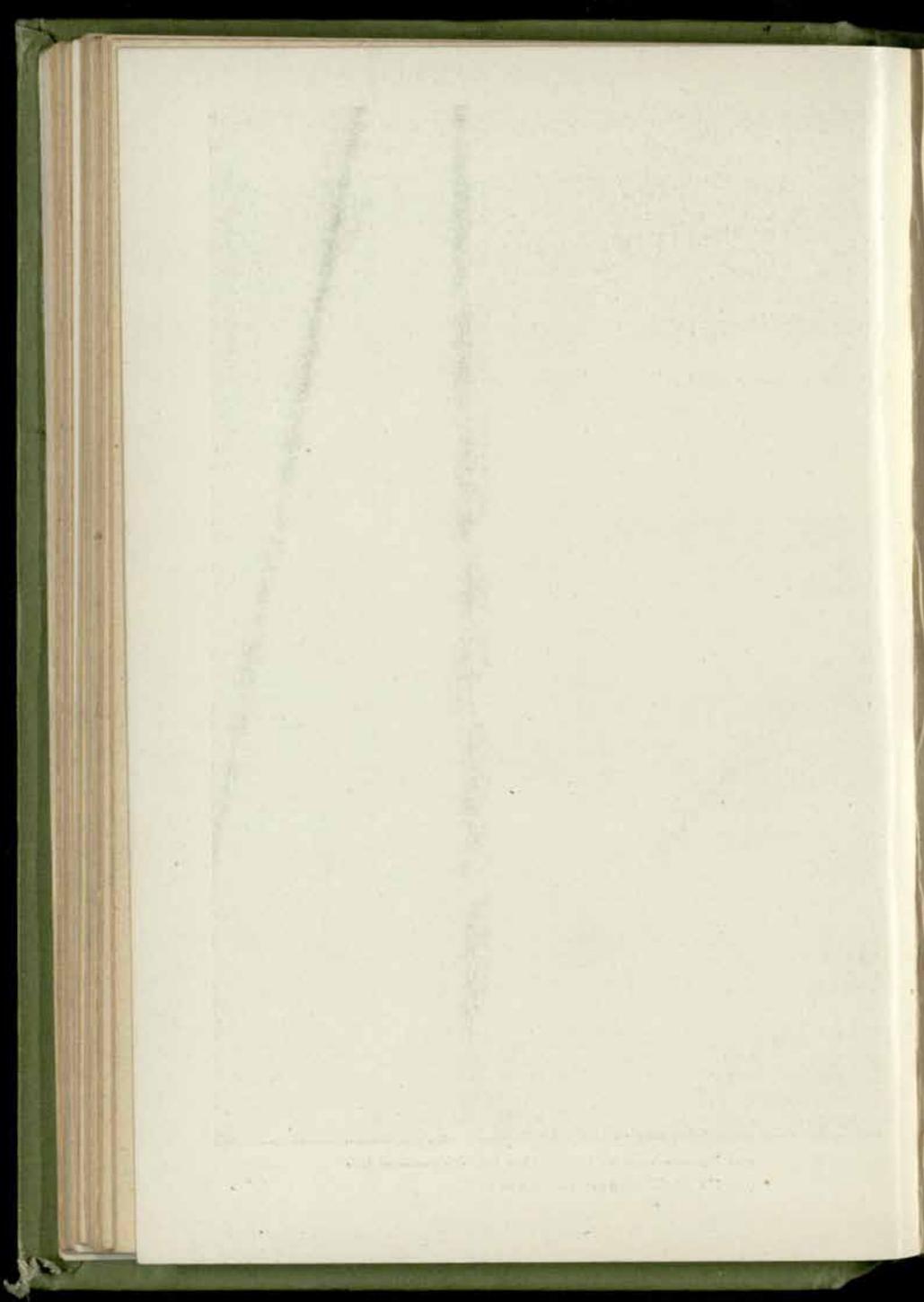


(2.)



(1.) "JOHN WAS PUTTING THE LAST TOUCHES ON."

(2.) "I SHOULDERED THE CANOE."



As Joe concluded his story, with a furtive glance at the staring eyes about him, a loon in the lake below suddenly made night hideous with its maniac laughter.

Mr. Dutton could feel little Nat shiver in his arms.

CHAPTER V.

RAFT-BUILDING.



IT was plain that Joe's story, instead of quieting the boys, as their father had intended, had wrought them to a high pitch of nervousness, which would have to relax before sleep visited the little camp by the headwaters of the Pelly that night.

"Now, boys," he exclaimed, in his cheery, wholesome tones, that of themselves began at once to put to flight the imaginary terrors of the night, "I'm going to tell you a story. The difference between mine and Joe's is, principally, that mine is true!"

Joe withdrew his pipe from his lips, and gazed reproachfully at Mr. Dutton; contented himself with a shake of his head at the idea of his veracity being questioned; and began to puff again at his tobacco.

"That is," added Mr. Dutton, changing his position in the tent so as to rest more easily, and at the same time face the boys, "the main facts are true. It's about a severe cold snap that took place in Atlanta, Georgia, not long ago."

Thereupon he proceeded to narrate the following story, giving the negro dialect with such excellent effect as to make the boys laugh heartily at some points, and to bring tears to their eyes at others.

Lex had been busy all day, partly in efforts to keep out from under customers' feet, partly in running errands. When he turned away from the store at night, and started for home, he was very tired.

"Hi!" chattered Lex, as he pattered along the side-walk, "ain't dis yere cold, jes'!"

It was cold, and was growing colder. The sun had muffled itself in a bank of clouds as it hurried off to a warmer climate, turning a very cold shoulder indeed upon Lex and his surroundings. As soon as the sun was well out of the way, presto! up dodged the sly breezes that had kept quiet since morning, and, spying the black boy on his way home, made for him with eager glee.

They could not do much with his hair, to be sure, it curled so tightly and closely to his round head; but, to make up for that, they pinched his ears and pulled off his tattered hat, tweaked his fingers and toes, whooped and hallooed at him, and threw dust in his astonished black eyes, until he felt as if he were in the paws of a sort of great Polar tiger, playing with him cruelly and breathing on him from her icy jaws.

So the wind kept on blowing harder and harder, and the mercury in the thermometers sought to hide itself in their bulbs, until the very light of the moon above the chimney-tops seemed to come down frozen.

Colder and colder it grew. In the North, people would not have been surprised at it, but Atlanta folks were not used to such cold, and it took them by surprise.

George Alexander Jackson, or "Lex," as he was called for short, hurried along till he reached a small cabin on the outskirts of the city, and, slamming the

door behind him, stood shivering before the stove, whose firelight, shining out between the bars in front, fell pleasantly on the floor, and danced all about the white kitten, who blinked sleepily at Lex.

"Well, Lex, got home f'm yo' wo'k agin, ain't ye?" said a stout black woman, cheerily, coming up to him and drawing his woolly head to her motherly bosom. "Po' little boy! He's done run all d' way home,—now, ain't ye, honey?"

Lex bobbed his head, and squirmed with the cold.

"Dar, dar, chile, you jes' stay right in mammy's arms till ye get wo'm an' comf'ble. Reckon 'twon't be so cold ter-morrer. An' de Lo'd will pervide!"

Chloe Jackson was one of the old slaves who had "got religion," as her master had sneeringly said. Truly she had "got" it, firmly enough, and not even her freedom in these later days was so precious to her. To Lex, religion as yet meant mostly—"mammy," and he would have been as much alarmed had she stopped using Scripture phrases as if she had stopped breathing.

A comfortable sense of warmth stole through Lex's sturdy little frame as he watched his mother going about the room in her preparations for supper. On the table, bare but clean, were set three plates of different sizes, and in varied stages of repair; a small teapot, a plate of hoe-cakes, and a cracked mug full of a dark liquid that Lex's critical eye told him was molasses.

A cup and saucer for Chloe herself completed the tea-set, and Lex was told to take his place beside his mother and sister, the latter being a year or two younger than himself. His father had gone quietly away to another country five years before, leaving his

poor black earth-clothes in the little burying-ground outside the city.

"Be quiet, chilluns!" said Chloe, softly, raising her hand. Then she proceeded to say grace—rather longer than common, Lex thought, sniffing the hoe-cakes with his eyes shut.

"O Lo'd," she concluded, her voice beginning to tremble strangely, "bress dese yere chilluns! O doan fergit yo' brack chilluns, what yo' led outen de wildness, O Lo'd, an' don't let dese yere little ones freeze wid cold, or die fer want of food, an' doan, O Lord—Amen."

Lex looked up, surprised at her abrupt close, and caught sight of two big tears rolling down her cheeks.

"O mammy! mammy! what ye done cry fer?" he begged, laying his head again on her shoulder. "What makes y' ask Mass' Lo'd" (she never could break him of saying that) "ter keep us f'm freezin'?"

"Dar, chile," she said, almost sharply, "doan ye go ter axin' questions. De Lo'd an' I done got two er free secrets what pickaninnies mus'n know nuf'n' 'bout. You jes' eat yo' supper an' be quiet."

His thoughts diverted for a few minutes by this last suggestion, Lex busied himself with his bread and molasses. Then he asked,—

"Mammy, who was it you read 'bout in de Bible dat got fo' or five t'ousand hoe-cakes f'm a flock of crows?"

"Laws-a-me, jes' hear him!" cried mammy, an ill-suppressed chuckle of fun driving the anxiety out of her face for a moment. "'Twas meat, *meat*, chile, what dem birds bro't to 'Lijah."

"An' would dey brung meat to us, mammy, ef we wus mighty hungry?"

"I reckon so, honey," said Chloe, with a sweet look of faith in her honest eyes. "He's never fergot us yit."

So Lex was satisfied, and returned to his post by the fire. Presently he looked up, with a little shiver.

"Mammy, please put some mo' wood on de fire."

Mammy glanced up quickly, then came to the small stove, and stirred the brands together till they crackled and blazed again.

"Lex," she said, quietly, "I'm gwine out fer a little while. You an' Bess stay here an' 'have yer-selves till I git back."

Without further words she drew a faded shawl over her head, and went out into the bleak night.

It was half-an-hour or more before she came back. She kept her shawl about her till she had sent the children out of the room on an errand, then deposited upon the floor a few sticks of wood she had brought in. When they returned she was replenishing the fire.

"'Pears colder 'n ever," she said. "You chillun 'd better go ter bed now."

And they went, curling up in a heap of straw and under a patched quilt in one corner of the hut.

"Are ye *sho'* de crows will come, mammy?" yawned Lex, as she tucked the ragged edges of an old blanket around him.

"Sho', honey," she replied, heartily.

"An' could—dey—brung—wood?" but Lex was too sleepy to wait for an answer.

It will be long before the Atlanta people forget the night of January 26th, 18—. The bitter wind, which only a few weeks before had urged a conflagration to do its fearful work, until a whole city seemed mount-

ing to heaven in a chariot of fire, now with icy coldness crept in noiselessly, to counteract the efforts of the very element it had so lately helped.

In the night Lex had a curious dream. He thought he saw his mother creep softly into the kitchen and bear the old pine table out of the house. Then there seemed to come a crackling noise, and presently the firelight shone out merrily through the little bars, and Lex felt warm and comfortable. Mammy stayed by the stove, occasionally throwing in bits of wood, until his dream carried him elsewhere.

The next morning Lex was waked by hearing Bess crying softly beside him.

"What's de matter, Bess?" he asked, sleepily.

"I'se s-so cold!" she sobbed, cuddling up close to him.

But mammy's ears had caught the sound too, and she was beside her little black lambs in a moment, covering them with the shawl she had worn the night before. As she did so, Lex felt something soft and warm between him and Bess. It was the white kitten. It struck Lex as strange that the white kitten should prefer his bed to the floor underneath the stove, where she was usually found on other mornings. At that same moment he observed that the steam was not puffing from the tea-kettle, as was its wont.

"Wh-what's de matter wid de stove, mammy?" he stammered, rubbing his eyes.

"Doan you bodder yo' head 'bout dat ar stove," said Chloe, with great cheerfulness. "I jes' let the fire go down a bit b'fo' breakfas', dat's all."

"B-but—whar's de table?"

Chloe turned her head away at first, without answering. She had loved the little four-foot table, at which

she and her husband had sat so often, and it had been a sore sacrifice to burn it up. But she had all her motherhood stirred in defence of her children. She fought the cold as if it had been a living thing.

Just then Bess, catching the look, gave a little miserable wail of distress and cold.

At that cry the fierce light that sometimes comes into the mild eyes of her race flashed in Chloe's as she crouched by the little heap of straw, and glanced nervously about the room.

There were only two wooden pieces of furniture that had survived the demands of that night; an old broken-legged stool, which her husband had brought from the plantation, and which had always been specially set apart for him; and a small shelf, high up on the opposite wall, on which were laid a worn Bible and hymn-book.

Chloe rose, hesitated a moment, then stepped across the room, swiftly reached up, and, taking the two books from their resting-place, laid them carefully and reverently upon a few wisps of clean straw in a corner of the hut. Next, she gave the shelf a wrench that brought it down with a cloud of dust, and, without pausing,—as if she were afraid of repenting,—opened the stove-door and thrust in the fragments upon the glowing brands.

All these proceedings Lex and Bess and the white kitten watched with intense interest, and with very dubious faces. Bess no longer cried, but had hard work to keep her lip from quivering. Kitty put out one dainty paw, shook it as if she had dipped it into cold water, curled up again in Lex's bosom, and made a brave attempt to purr.

Lex privately thought it might be about time for

the ravens. It comforted him a little, he hardly knew why, to think that they would be black, like himself—these chosen messengers from Heaven. He was cut short in his reflections by mammy.

“I’se gwine out again,” she said, in a queer voice Lex had never heard. “I’se gwine out ter git somefin’ for ye ter burn an’ ter eat.”

“But dem—dem crows, mammy?”

“I’se gwine ter look for ’em.” And she was gone.

“Mebbe dey mout ’light down round de house,” meditated Lex. “I’ll jes’ keep de cat inside de do’, anyways.”

This time it was an hour before Chloe returned, weary, footsore, slow of speech, benumbed with cold. She had left the shawl, you see, over little Bess.

In her pocket she brought a few chips, two bits of coal, and a fragment of bread-crust. With the remains of last night’s supper, for which she had used the last crumb of provisions in the house, they made a meagre breakfast. The children were not allowed to get up, so they did not miss the table so much.

Still the ravens did not come. Chloe dragged herself out once more, and returned—empty-handed!

It was Sunday, and the church-bells, in the wealthier part of the city, rang merrily. But congregations that morning were small. Those whose conscience permitted them to do so stayed at home. The lower streets were thronged with poor people, crying for bread and fuel. The little white kitten, and many other kittens that day, white and black, mewed piteously for the meat the ravens did not bring.

“Mammy,” said Lex, “I’se pow’ful hungry. Doan y’ t’ink it’s ’bout time for ’em?”

The three-legged stool had gone long ago. Mammy, her brave heart battling against the numb despair that was creeping over her, laid her poor rough hand on the boy's head, and sang:—

“Oh, my way's cloudy—
My way—
Oh, send dem angels down.”

“Mammy!” Lex suddenly broke out, with a sharp cry, “was dat 'Lijah *white*?”

Poor mammy! Perhaps, if she could have had an image of Elijah's swarthy face as it really must have looked, she would have been comforted. As it was, she was fain to lay her finger on the child's trembling lips and go on singing.

In the west the sun glowed in all its mockery of red light, like a painted furnace in a frame of ice. The wind,—ah, that remorseless wind!—springing up again, blew out the last spark of fire, and thrust itself through the wide cracks in the little hut.

Still mammy sat stiffly, forming the words with her lips—

“Send dem angels down,—
My way's clo-o-udy——”

“Mammy,” moaned Lex once more, “'pears like dem crows lost dar way, 'r else dey doan come to no brack folks. DAR DEY IS!” he shrieked out, all at once, jumping to his feet and almost upsetting mammy, who raised herself more slowly and listened.

Yes! it was a low, heavy rumble of wheels over the frozen ground. Nearer and nearer it came. Chloe darted to the door. They were stopping—two big waggons, one loaded high with wood, the other with

baskets of provisions of every sort conceivable. The driver was a wealthy resident of Atlanta, well known throughout the city, and, doubtless, throughout heaven, too, God bless him !

So the ravens had come, and Chloe and her little ones knew no more want that winter. The next morning the following telegram quivered over the wires to the great Northern newspapers, in the files of which you can find it if you look :—

“ATLANTA, GA., Jan. 27.—The severe weather of the past week caused great suffering among the poor. On Saturday it was learned that hundreds of poor women and children were huddling around their last burning stick of wood, and the *Constitution* of Sunday morning made an appeal to the citizens to send to the paper money, provisions, and fuel, which would be distributed by its business department.

“At noon there were gathered together about sixty waggons, containing wood and provisions. Merchants worth hundreds of thousands of dollars took their places as drivers, each with a wood-waggon and a provision-waggon under his charge, and started on a tour of the city, working all day until nightfall.

“All day the *Constitution* office looked more like a military supply depôt than a newspaper office. Hundreds of sacks of flour, coffee, and sugar, sides of meat and hams, and on the sidewalk cords of wood were seen, while the streets were full of people, clamorous for relief. No distinction was made in the distribution in regard to colour.”

Who shall say, boys, that men are not still about their Father's business ?

When Mr. Dutton concluded, Nat was already yawning, and the relieved expression of the other boys' faces showed that their pulses were beating calmly once more.

"Now," said the father, "we'll go to sleep."

It was easier to say "sleep" than to do it, after all. Never did a night seem so long to the boys as they lay huddled together in the tent. Perhaps little Nat, now that he had recovered from his nervousness, was the bravest of all. He said his prayers composedly, took off his jacket, and lay down in the tent with perfect trust in both his heavenly and his human father, feeling very sure that he would be well taken care of until morning.

Mr. Dutton watched, rifle across his knee, until twelve o'clock. Then he called Rob, who kept guard till two. The guides relieved him, and he slept heavily for the next two hours.

At four o'clock the whole camp was astir. Mr. Dutton, who had decided upon a definite course, gave his orders quietly. First, a good breakfast, in which hot coffee and Rob's rabbit played a prominent part. It was wonderful how much better they all felt after this. Teddy, reinforced by a huge lump from the savoury stew, declared himself ready to fight "ivery Injun in Alashky."

No alarm had been given during the night, and all were alert for the day's work.

Already the terrors of the dusky evening twilight seemed a thing of the past.

"The first thing," said Mr. Dutton, cheerily, as they rose from their meal, "is to find some good large logs floating in the lake. Half-a-dozen will do."

"There's a lot of them down there," said Hugh, pointing. "I crept out on them yesterday when I was fishing."

"What are you going to do with them, papa?" asked Nat.

"I think it best that we should finish our journey, if possible, on a raft, though it will take all day to make one. We should be liable to lose our way by shore, and I've noticed that the undergrowth of bushes and deep moss is growing much more troublesome as we approach the coast."

"But how about the Indians?"

"If they are really hostile, we shall be safest on our raft, for then they cannot reach us without coming into full view. Yes, by all means, it is best to take to the water."

"To the water, then!" cried Robert, seizing an axe, and starting for the point indicated by Hugh.

"To the water!" echoed all, and a general stampede toward the lake would have followed had not the leader checked it.

"Wait! wait!" he called out, laughing. "There's work here for some to do. Nat, do you straighten out all the pieces of cord you can find in the packs. They must be used for fastening the cross pieces together. Hugh, you may busy yourself about camp. Take down the tent, to begin with, and pack it up for transportation."

"But, father, I thought you said we should stay here another day. Sha'n't we need the tent——"

"Another day, my boy, but not another night! No, we shall take the 'night boat,' and before sunrise tomorrow we must be thirty miles from here, if it can be done."

Mr. Dutton now dispatched the two guides into the woods, to reconnoitre. They joined him shortly afterward at the water's edge, and reported all quiet; no new signs of the enemy.

How those axes did flash through the air! Branches were lopped off from the fallen trees where it was necessary, but for the most part they had been broken or rubbed away in the wild rush they must have recently made from their native heights, in the current of a glacial torrent. The ends of four of the largest logs were notched, and the big timbers "saddled" on each other. Then, although they lay quite firmly together, they were lashed with stout cords. Two other pieces were saddled across from side to side in the same way, at even distances between the ends of the oblong raft, and on these four cross-pieces was laid a dry, compact floor or deck of logs, running lengthwise of the raft, and secured by notching and tying at the outside corners. It was eight o'clock in the evening when the last log was fastened in its place.

The day had passed without a visit from the savages, but there had been an indication of their presence which had disturbed Mr. Dutton.

About the middle of the afternoon a light column of thin blue smoke had been seen to descend from just beyond the ridge before referred to. Within three minutes a similar smoke arose from a hill-top on the opposite side of the lake. Then both disappeared. It was plainly a signal. It looked as if the natives were gathering in force. Perhaps it was not a band of Takheesh after all, but some strange, unknown tribe from the interior, far more savage and uncivilized.

Supper was eaten in silence.

"Now," said Mr. Dutton, quietly, "we'll rest an hour or two under the mosquito tent."

The netting had been left out for this especial purpose, and the whole party crawled under its meshes, thankful to stretch themselves out on their blankets for even that short time.

They had done little during the day except hard work, standing half the time up to their knees in water, while the mosquitoes were buzzing in swarms around their heads.

Hugh had taken half-a-dozen trout, and Robert had shot a green-winged teal.

At just half-past ten o'clock Dr. Dutton gave the signal for rising. They rubbed their stiff and weary limbs, and, one by one, scrambled, yawning, to their feet.

"Do up the blankets, boys. Joe, is the raft ready? Have you got the poles on board, and the mast rigged with the braces?"

"Yis."

"Now, Rob—that's it, take everything with you, and scatter the fire a little. Good-bye, Camp Prospect!"

They stepped on board their rough craft, and the three men took positions with the long push-poles Joe had provided.

"Now, then; off she goes!"

And off she went, away from the silent shore, toward the middle of the lake.

A gentle breeze was blowing from the east. Mr. Dutton spread the cotton tent in such a way as to shelter the younger boys, and at the same time help their progress a little as a sail. From the time they left the shore they spoke in low tones, in order not

to apprise any lurking enemy of their departure. In this way they moved slowly but steadily on their course down the lake, the little waves rippling against the sides of the raft, and a startled *Quack!* now and then betraying the presence of a duck paddling about in the water.

It was now near midnight, but they were so far north that they could have read a newspaper easily had such a commodity been furnished by the Alaska press.

The mosquitoes were so voracious that the "skeleton tent" was pitched on the raft, and afforded intense relief to those of the crew who could be spared to take refuge under it.

Hugh, Nat, Teddy, and Carlo were the first to take advantage of the netting, and in five minutes all four were fast asleep, Nat's head resting lovingly on Carlo's black fur.

Robert came over to his father's side.

"Where are you aiming for, father? How far do you expect to go?"

"If the traders' and travellers' stories are correct, this lake is about a dozen or fifteen miles long, by an average of three wide. At the foot of it, the river Pelly starts in a series of rough but not dangerous rapids. I studied this all out at home, for I could see that we were likely to travel on or beside the river, from its source to its union with the Yukon proper."

"And do you expect to cross those rapids to-night, sir?" asked Robert, in amazement.

"I do," said Mr. Dutton, firmly. "About ten miles from their foot the river widens into a small pond, which contains one island. On that island we shall camp——"

"Look, father, what is that?" interrupted Rob, eagerly. "It looks like a man swimming. Isn't it?"

A moment's scrutiny and a single question to the guides explained the true character of the swimmer. It was not an Indian or a white man. What they saw was simply the head of a large black bear, swimming across at the narrowest part of the lake.

Robert was eager to get out his Winchester and shoot the animal, but his father said no. He did not dare to fire a gun, lest he should put the natives on their guard.

"Besides," he said, "we could not possibly secure either carcass or skin, and we must not join the large army of thoughtless people who take animal life 'for fun.'"

The bear looked neither to right nor left, but swam on, and presently they saw him drag himself out of the water and disappear in the forest.

The raft had now turned the bend of the horseshoe, and was heading north-west. The east wind, drawing in around the high hills I have already spoken of, on the southern shore of the lake, was still slightly astern, and helped the raft so that the poles were not used.

They now drew near the opening which, they could plainly see, marked the exit of the Pelly River. Already they could hear the rush of the "rip" waves, where the fierce current contended with the eternal rocks.

Bump! went the raft on a huge boulder. Carlo became uneasy, and, getting out somehow from under the mosquito canopy, advanced gravely to the forward end of the raft.

Thump! went the raft again. Still it kept the

main channel, and was not appreciably the worse for wear.

A sort of steering oar had been arranged for this craft by the boys, and by a diligent use of this, as well as the push-poles, no great damage was done to the vessel or passengers.

Presently the raft began to run more smoothly. She was passing swiftly down between the shadowy banks of the Pelly, picturesque and grand by daylight, but solemn and awe-inspiring in the dim, brown dusk of the northern night. Overhead, a thick bank of fog was stealing across the sky, concealing stars and moon.

Still on the raft rushed. Strange shapes seemed to throng the banks. The boys thought they could see huge elks, gigantic serpents, even lions and tigers, along the shore. These were but the ghosts born of darkness and imagination.

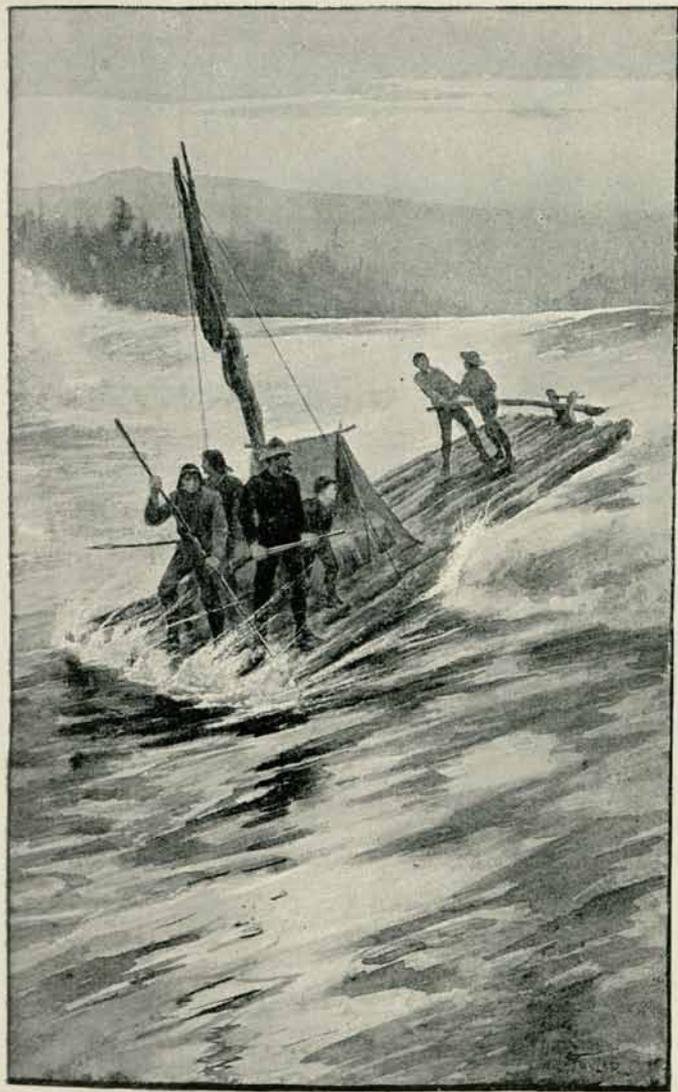
They hoped now that they were well beyond their unwelcome and unseen visitors of the night before. Certainly no Indian war-party could have kept up with them had they started on shore at the same time. The only danger was that some roving band of Takheesh had been warned by that column of blue smoke that a raft was going down the rapids soon.

"Every foot is clear gain," said Mr. Dutton. "We must be getting pretty well down to the little lake where I intend we shall camp. I believe there are some light rips just before we reach there, but I think we've got over the worst of——"

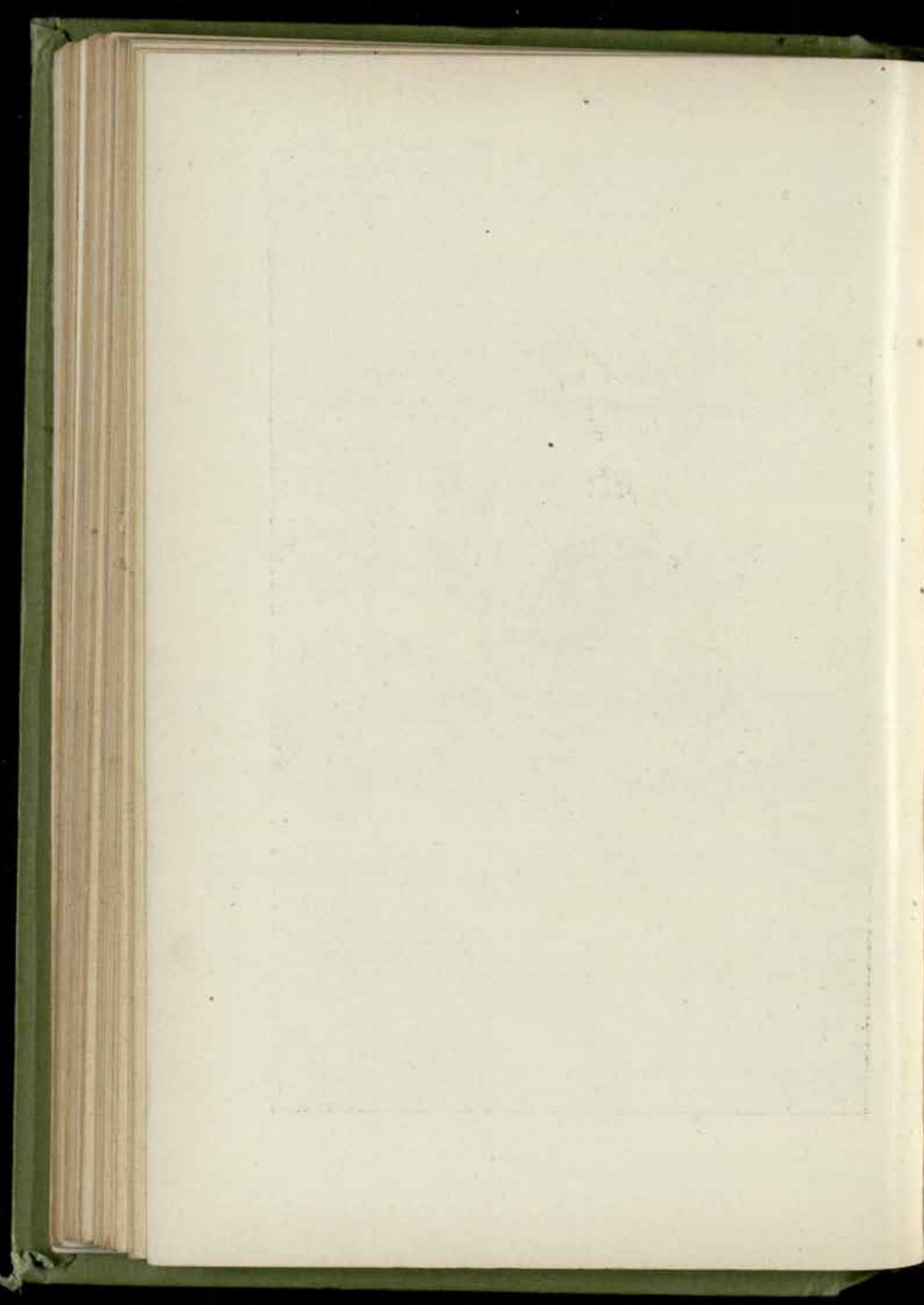
A startled grunt from Joe, who was at the forward end of the raft, interrupted him.

"What is it, boy?"

Joe pointed ahead, and at the same moment Carlo gave a sharp, angry yelp.



"STILL ON THE RAFT RUSHED."



In the dim light could be seen a row of dark figures stretched entirely across the stream, about three hundred yards below them. Beyond a doubt they were Indians.

In profound silence the raft swept forward, with its tremendous momentum, and in another moment it was upon them.

CHAPTER VI.

THROUGH THE ENEMY'S LINES.



ON catching sight of the shadowy line of enemies, stretched across the river in the direct path of the swiftly moving raft, Mr. Dutton's first impulse had been to seize his rifle, which was fully charged with reserve cartridges, and was close at hand. The time was so short that he had barely an opportunity to cock the piece before the voyagers were in the very midst of the band of Indians, who crowded about the raft, and, half wading, half floating downstream with the clumsy raft, began urging it toward the right bank of the river.

Before any of them could climb upon the raft, Mr. Dutton discharged his rifle into the air; at exactly the same moment Carlo gave a fierce yelp, and Teddy, who for the first time realized the condition of affairs, uttered an unearthly howl of dismay.

At the report of the rifle, the natives fell back in consternation, putting their hands to their ears; and

the apparition of the huge, shaggy Newfoundland, together with Teddy's outcry, put a climax to their fright. Tumbling and splashing in the water, they made for the shore, and, before the Duttons fairly knew what had happened, the river was as silent as a grave, save for the rushing of the muddy waters around the rocks and the protruding logs of the raft.

"Out with your poles, boys! Push for your lives—they may be back, or send their arrows after us, at any minute!" cried the leader, seizing one of the long poles, and suiting the action to the word.

The raft, which had already touched bottom, now glided off into deeper water, and soon was swinging down-stream without interruption, save an occasional thump upon a hidden boulder. For half-an-hour the voyage continued in perfect silence, Nat, Hugh, and Ted sleeping quietly in their tent, and the attention of the rest being concentrated on keeping the raft in the channel. Once it grounded on a sandbar, but the two Indians, leaping into the water and standing waist-deep, succeeded in heaving it off.

At length, to the intense relief of all, the river began perceptibly to widen. The banks became more and more obscure in the mists of early morning. The speed of the raft slackened, and the poles now and then failed to touch bottom. Beyond a doubt, they were emerging into the broad lake to which they had been anxiously looking forward throughout the long night.

As the daylight grew brighter, they could soon make out a low, wooded island ahead. Toward this they moved, and ere long the logs grated on the pebbles some half-dozen rods from shore.

Again the Indians entered the water, but, like the

raven from the ark, this time they did not return. They disappeared for a few moments ; then, having explored a small bit of the rocky island, came running back, not to climb on board, but to drag and push the raft a few yards nearer the shore.

Carlo plunged into the water, and swam like an otter to the island. Nat, Hugh, Rob, and even Mr. Dutton himself, were carried ashore on the stout shoulders of the guides. It remained only to bring Teddy ; but, to everybody's surprise, that valiant youth refused to set foot on dry land.

"Sure, I'm safer on the raft," he said. "I'll not be going into the woods again till I see the sojers." So he was left to guard the ship.

Blankets and tents were landed, a roaring fire made, and soon the whole party were sound asleep.

CHAPTER VII.

OUT OF THE FRYING-PAN.



OUR friends slept well that night,—or morning, rather,—it was ten o'clock before the camp was fairly astir. Teddy begged to come ashore at last, and complained bitterly of the “muskayters,” who, he said, made such a noise about his ears that he was awake all the time he was sleeping.

Jim waded out to the raft to bring him in. The Indian was observed to stoop and examine something closely near the end of one of the logs. He brought Teddy to land on his back, and then handed Mr. Dutton a fragment of a peculiar-shaped arrow, which he said he had found sticking in the raft.

“What do you make of it, Joe?” asked Mr. Dutton.

The two Indians examined the ugly-looking shaft narrowly, and exchanged a few guttural remarks in their own tongue. Jim gave the verdict, laconically, as usual.

“Ayan moose arrow.”

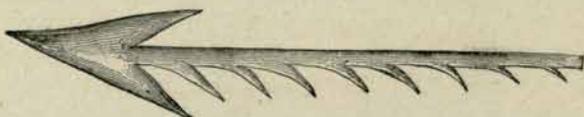
"Then it was not a war party that we saw?" exclaimed the leader. The arrow is pictured below.

"No. Hunt."

"But who or what are the Ayans?"

"Injuns round here," said Joe, with a sweep of his arm. "No Takheesh yit."

Mr. Dutton was greatly gratified at this information. The band they had come upon, then, was simply a hunting-party of river Indians, who were probably attracted to the travellers by curiosity. When the gun was fired, or after the Indians had reached the shore, it was likely that one or two arrows had been discharged at the fast disappearing raft. No trouble then, was to be apprehended after all.



AYAN MOOSE ARROW.

They were making leisurely preparations to break camp once more, when a slight splashing in the lake caused Teddy, who was nearest the water, to glance up from his work. A wild howl of despair broke from his lips. Mr. Dutton sprang to his feet, and followed the horrified gaze of the Irish lad; as he did so his heart sank.

No less than a dozen small rafts were flocking round the corner of the island, bearing at least twice that number of hideously painted and bedecked Indians. It was folly to resist. Grasping his rifle firmly, Mr. Dutton stood erect, and awaited their approach. The rest of the party followed his example, even Ted being rooted to the spot by utter terror.

The new-comers did not seem in a hurry to land, but paddled and pushed their rafts along slowly toward shore. One particularly ugly-looking old fellow, alone on a raft, was in advance of the rest. As soon as he came within speaking distance, he uttered a loud harangue in a jargon which neither white men nor guides could understand. The word "Ayan" was repeated several times, and Mr. Dutton gathered, after a while, that the stranger was introducing himself.

The native's next move was to push his raft in until it grounded, and then, looking over his shoulder to see that his companions were following closely, he gathered up his long marmot-skin blanket, and, stepping into the water, waded solemnly ashore. The other Indians had bows and arrows, but this one, who was clearly a man of influence in the tribe, now advanced with arms outspread, to show that he was unarmed.

"What in the world does the old fellow want?" murmured Hugh.

"Probably inquiring the way to Boston," answered Rob, in the same tone. "Looks as if a little civilization would do him good."

The old Ayan halted at a few paces' distance, and, to every one's surprise, pointed to Teddy, at the same time making a gesture towards the rafts, and moving his jaws in imitation of eating.

The cold perspiration broke out on the boy's freckled face. He was absolutely too frightened to speak.

The Ayan chief stepped forward boldly, and laid his hand on Ted's shoulder. This familiarity, however, was indignantly resented by Carlo, who bounded to the rescue with a deep growl, and doubtless would

have attacked the stranger had not little Nat held him by the collar.

"I don't think he wants to hurt us," said Nat, looking up with a fearless smile into the dark face of the Indian.

The Ayan's grim features relaxed, and he patted Nat's head several times, in token of amity.

An animated pantomime now ensued, aided by the other savages, who had come ashore, and crowded round the whites with intense but apparently not ill-natured curiosity.

Joe, the guide, was the first to catch an inkling of their meaning.

"They want us go visit village," he interpreted to Mr. Dutton. "Have plenty eat. Injun women want to see white men."

"Are you sure, Joe, they don't mean harm to us?"

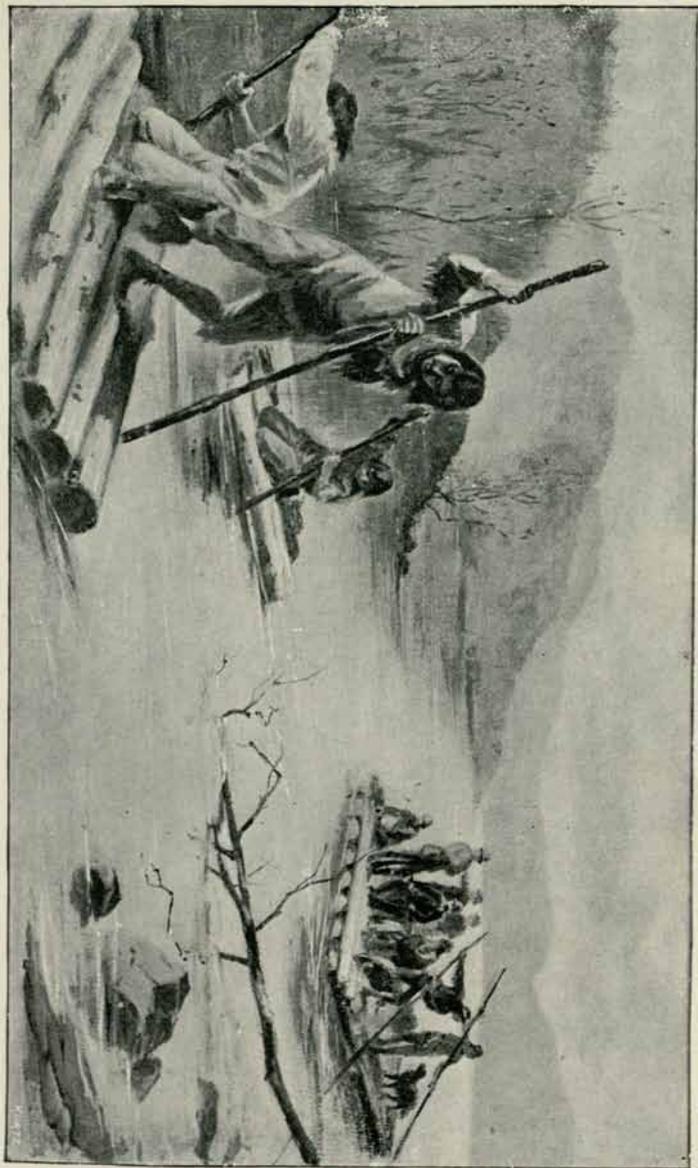
"No hurt. See, no war arrows—only moose."

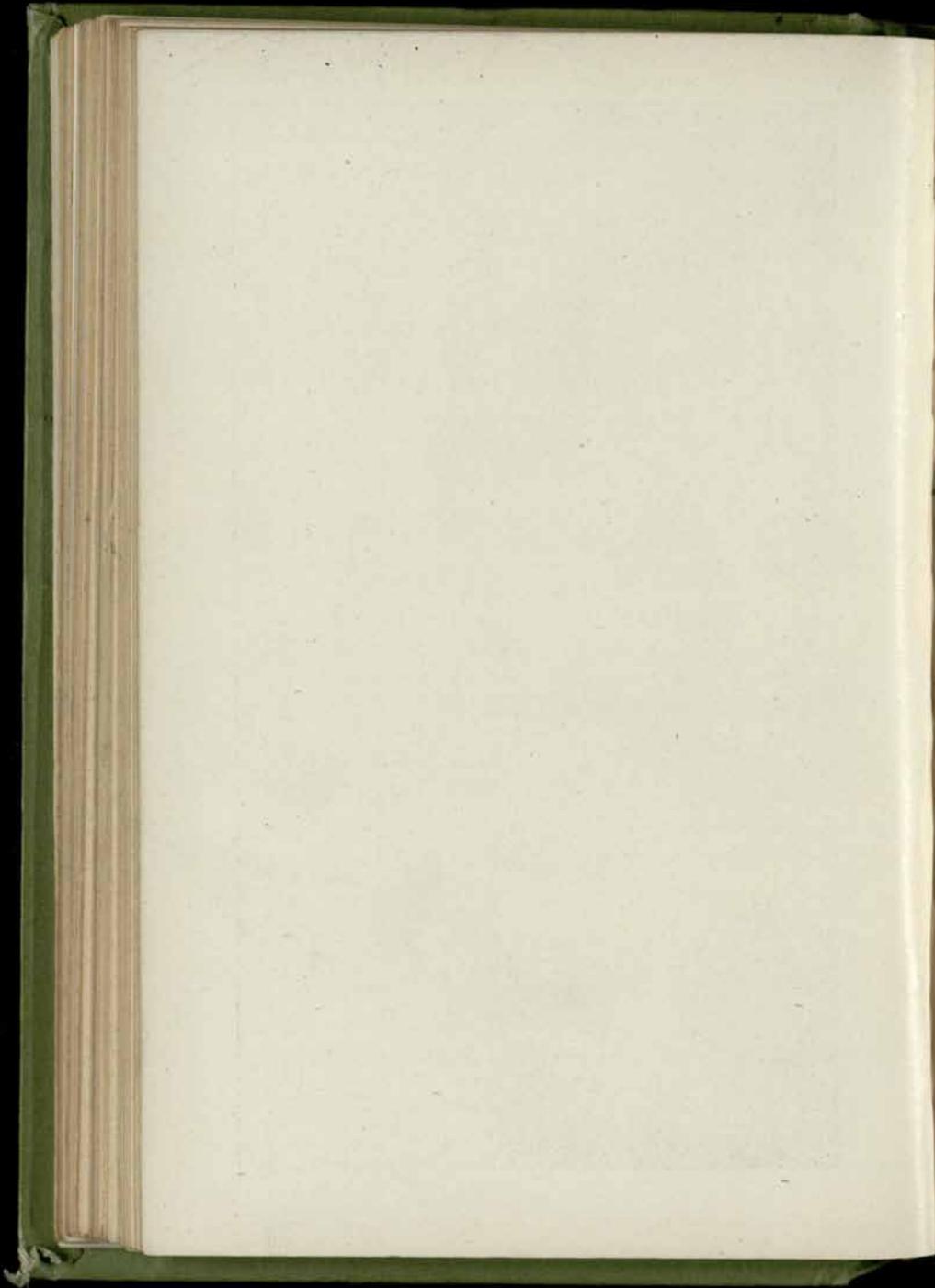
After a short consultation with the boys, Mr. Dutton decided that it would be wise to accept the invitation, which, as he said to Robert, was like that of royalty—in effect, a command.

The moment this decision was made known, the Indians pounced upon them and carried them to the large raft. In an incredibly short space of time everything was on board, including the passengers, Teddy being borne last, struggling every step of the way, on the shoulder of a brawny Ayan.

A dozen savages now gave the raft a push that sent it out into deep water. The chief, whose name was Loklok (signifying "Bear," they afterward learned), accompanied the whites as an honorary escort. The small rafts, each manned by one to three Ayans, went ahead to show the way, the royal barge, so to speak,

"THE ROYAL BARGE WAS BRINGING UP THE REAR."





bringing up the rear. In this manner the whole flotilla moved slowly down the lake, aided by the breeze, which still blew freshly from the east.

"Well, I say," remarked Hugh, in an interval of poling, "this isn't so bad! It reminds me of the day when the President visited Boston, and the governor and staff turned out in barouches to receive him."

"I can't say that I altogether like the looks of old Governor Loklok, if that's his name," replied Rob. "And Carlo is of my opinion, it's plain to see."

The dog had never taken his eyes off the chief, and watched narrowly every movement of those dark legs, as if he were ready to seize them on very slight provocation.

"Oh, he's all right. It's only a way the old fellow has. He wanted Ted to go ahead with him, I guess, as a sort of sample."

"Much as to say we're going to be sold."

"Not by a good deal! We'll keep our eyes open, and let 'em have a taste of Winchester sauce if they come any shines on us. Hullo, here's the outlet."

The rushing of waters could plainly be heard, and presently the raft shot down the narrow channel, where the banks were steeper than they had yet seen them. The rapids were rougher than before, but there was a much greater volume of water than in the upper courses, and they suffered no greater disaster than an occasional bump, which would nearly upset them all.

One grave obstacle which had to be constantly avoided was the occurrence, at sharp bends of the river, of whole clumps of dead trees, which had fallen where the earth had caved in, and now leaned out toward the middle of the river, with their scraggy branches

only half submerged. These had to be dodged with great alacrity, and the Newfoundland was once fairly swept off into the ice-cold stream, to the great delight of the persecuted Loklok.

In some places these fallen clumps of earth had left huge caves in the high banks, and the ice could be seen dripping into the stream beneath. Now and then the party were startled by a loud report as of a musket; not for some time did they discover that the noises were merely caused by the breaking off and falling of these heavy masses of earth, trees, and rocks.

Anxious as they were concerning the future, the involuntary visitors could not help marvelling, as they swept down-stream, at the scenery on both sides of the river, which was for the most part bordered by high hills, heavily wooded with spruce and fir. Along the horizon stretched gigantic forms of the Rockies and their outlying spurs, ending in snowy summits, from which flowed enormous glaciers, all in plain sight whenever the clouds were swept aside. No wonder a recent traveller says that "before long we may hear Switzerland spoken of as the Alaska of Europe!"

A commotion was caused by a crashing among the bushes just ahead.

"Look!" cried Hugh, eagerly. "There comes another Indian, waving his arms!"

"Ugh! Moose!" grunted Joe, after one glance at the object.

Hugh was not the first hunter in these far-away forests to mistake the broad, spreading antlers of the moose for the brandished arms of a man, as they were seen approaching through the low underbrush.

The Indians quickly fitted their many-barbed moose

arrows to their bows, but before they could shoot, the great creature had caught the sound of Hugh's voice, and went crashing off into the depths of the woods.

Seeing that Loklok appeared much surprised and excited by the sight of the moose, Mr. Dutton inquired of his guides if this animal was not common thereabouts. The Indians informed him, correctly enough, that in Alaska and the adjacent British possessions large game is scarce in the summer time, being driven away by the dense swarms of mosquitoes, and following the melting snow line up the flanks of the mountains.

By one o'clock Mr. Dutton estimated that they must have made thirty miles from the island where they had spent the night. Everybody was hungry, and it was intimated to the chief that it was time for dinner. The old fellow looked black, but presently gave a few sharp orders to his band, who once more plunged into the ice-cold water, waist-deep, and drew the raft ashore.

While some were building a fire, and others producing pieces of strong-smelling dried salmon for the meal, Hugh took the opportunity to try his rod in the stream, using a small red-and-white fly. At the third cast he had a hungry rise; in a couple of minutes a fine spotted grayling of perhaps half-a-pound weight was flopping about the timbers of the raft. The Ayans were immensely impressed by the young angler's performance, and instantly a dozen eager hands were stretched out beseechingly for the rod. Indeed, the Duttons soon found that, while the natives assumed a vast deal of dignity on absurd occasions, they were not above begging for every movable thing they saw in their guests' possession. This trait gave the latter

some uneasiness, but Mr. Dutton had already made up his mind to give his dark-skinned entertainers the slip before daylight the next morning, if it were possible.

The meal dragged rather slowly, though it was helped somewhat by Hugh's contribution. The mosquitoes were now reinforced by a kind of small black fly, much like those of the Rangeley Lakes and Adirondacks, and their attacks became so determined that the voyagers were glad to be on the move once more.

After an hour's progress, the light rafts of the Ayans began to forge ahead. One by one they disappeared beyond a bend of the river, until the larger craft was left to itself.

"It's a temptation," said Robert, reflectively, eyeing the morose chieftain, "to give this old chap a good ducking in the river, and leave him to shift for himself."

"Don't disturb him in any way," cautioned his father, earnestly. "Our safety lies in his friendliness toward us. We are much outnumbered, and so far from our friends that if our whole party were massacred no one outside the tribe would know of it."

Joe, the guide, was plainly of his employer's opinion, for he took from his pocket a small piece of tobacco, and offered it to the chief.

Loklok seized it eagerly, and popped the precious morsel in his mouth, as if to make sure of it. There are no two commodities, Joe knew, so dear to an Alaskan native as tobacco and tea.

It was of no use to ask an explanation of the sudden disappearance of the Ayans, for "The Bear" could not understand a word of English. The far-off bend in

the river was reached in due time, and the raft swung heavily round in the swift current. All were occupied in keeping it clear of the rocks, when a loud exclamation from Loklok caused them to look up from their work. The chief was standing at his full height, his blanket drawn round his shoulders, and an expression of patriotic pride on his wrinkled face, as he majestically pointed ahead.

A glance showed the reason for this sudden change in Loklok's demeanour. On the right bank of the river, about an eighth of a mile below them, a long line of Indians was drawn up, with faces turned eagerly toward the raft. Others ran wildly up and down the shore, gesticulating and screaming frantically. Mr. Dutton involuntarily tightened his grasp upon his rifle, while the boys clustered in the bows of the raft to gaze at the strange scene.

Loklok alone was unmoved, save by pride in the array before him. A rope was now carried ashore, and every Ayan rushed for it, including women and children, pulling away until the raft grounded with a bump.

The moment it was made fast, the line of Indians commenced a low, monotonous noise, which was evidently intended for singing. At the same time they placed their arms akimbo, and swayed from side to side in a kind of dance, their long hair swinging to and fro.

At a word from "The Bear" the dance ceased, and the travellers were conducted—all save Jõe and Jim, who absolutely refused to leave the raft—to the clump of eight or ten houses which composed the village.

Mr. Dutton pointed to his tent-pack, and intimated

by gestures that he would prefer to occupy his own quarters for the night. But Loklok shook his head, and pointed firmly to one of the huts, a little larger than the rest. They were all obliged to enter, stooping low at the entrance, and there "The Bear" left them, evidently relieved at having his curiosities securely caged.

Now at last the party had a chance to reflect upon the situation, and discuss plans for the morrow.

CHAPTER VIII.

A STARTLING DISCOVERY.



THE hut in which our friends found themselves was a small affair, built of spruce boughs, which were laid against a ridge-pole in such a way as to form a semicircular wall. A caribou hide was thrown over the upper part of these, on the outside, leaving only a small space for the escape of smoke, which hung

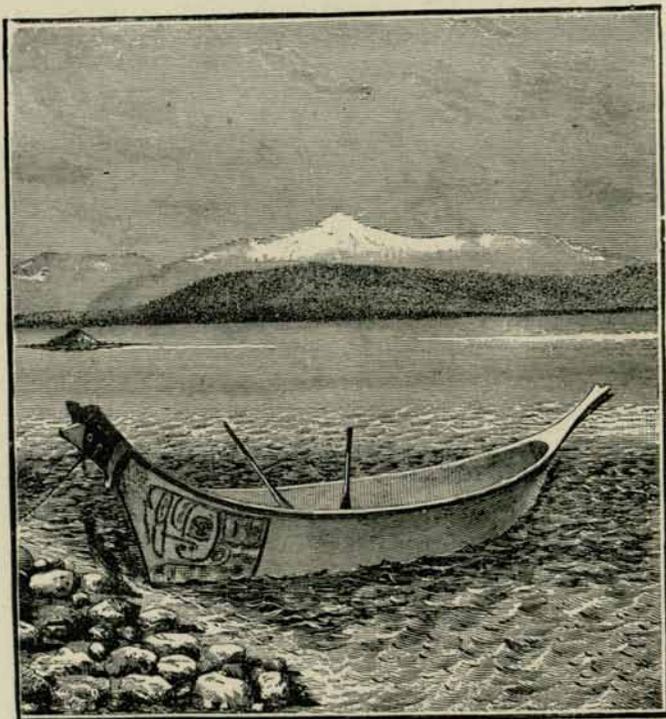
heavily in the apex of the hut, rising from embers left in the centre by the previous occupants, who had evidently but just been hurried out of the guest chamber.

A dozen split salmon were hanging from the rafters, drying in the smoke, at an altitude unpleasantly near the noses of the new-comers when they stood up. Every few minutes, a native dog, of which there appeared to be dozens about the place, would put his head in at the door and snarl viciously, until scared away by Carlo, who had declared war with the whole canine tribe at the outset.

"I say, father," remarked Hugh, as the weary five threw themselves down at the greatest possible distance from the smouldering spruce-knot fire, "there's no danger of getting lost in this hotel, any way."

"Sure, it's the hotel itself is lost," added Teddy, dolefully. "Get out, ye baste!" with a kick at one of the lean village curs.

"This is a summer village," said Mr. Dutton.



CHILKAT CANOE.

"Where these fellows live in the winter I'm sure I don't know."

"Have you ever heard of the tribe before?" asked Rob, who had been examining his surroundings curiously.

"Yes, I remember that Dick mentioned them in one of his letters. They claim the whole country watered by the Pelly River—which they call the Ayan—and a considerable stretch of the big Yukon itself, above and below old Fort Selkirk. They never go near the coast, I believe, but live along the large rivers, and in the winter time make long hunting excursions into the interior after caribou and moose."

"And bear?"

"Not much," interrupted Hugh. "I heard Joe say that the Alaska Indians won't hunt the brown bear, he is so fierce."

"It's strange that they have only rafts to go about in."

"Down below, the tribe have plenty of canoes, and good ones, too, I've heard. They make them of birch bark, sewed with the fine roots of the spruce, well boiled to make them soft and tough."

"Whew!" exclaimed Rob, at this point in the conversation, "isn't that salmon terrific! I don't believe I can stand it much longer."

"If it was only salmon!" remarked Hugh, sadly. "But there are about four other smells, each worse than all the rest."

"Hold on, boys," said their father. "Ted, you stay near the door, and make sure that nobody is listening. There may be some one in the tribe who understands English."

"Faith, it's meself that'll be glad to get a breath of air," said Teddy, taking his post as sentry, and laying hold of a good-sized stick, to keep the dogs away.

"The question is," continued Mr. Dutton, "how

shall we get away from here? These fellows are good-natured enough, but somehow I don't wholly trust them. Once or twice I caught old Loklok exchanging glances with some of his big subjects, and I didn't like the look in his eyes."

"I say, let's part company with the whole crowd as soon as possible," urged Rob. "I feel about them just as you do, father. They looked at my rifle to-night as though they'd eat it. I don't believe they'll be satisfied until they've laid hands on everything in our packs. They could hardly keep from fighting over Hugh's rod there while he was catching the grayling for dinner."

"Whist!" came from the doorway. "There's an Injun goin' into the house beyant."

As "beyant" was only a foot or two away, caution was certainly necessary.

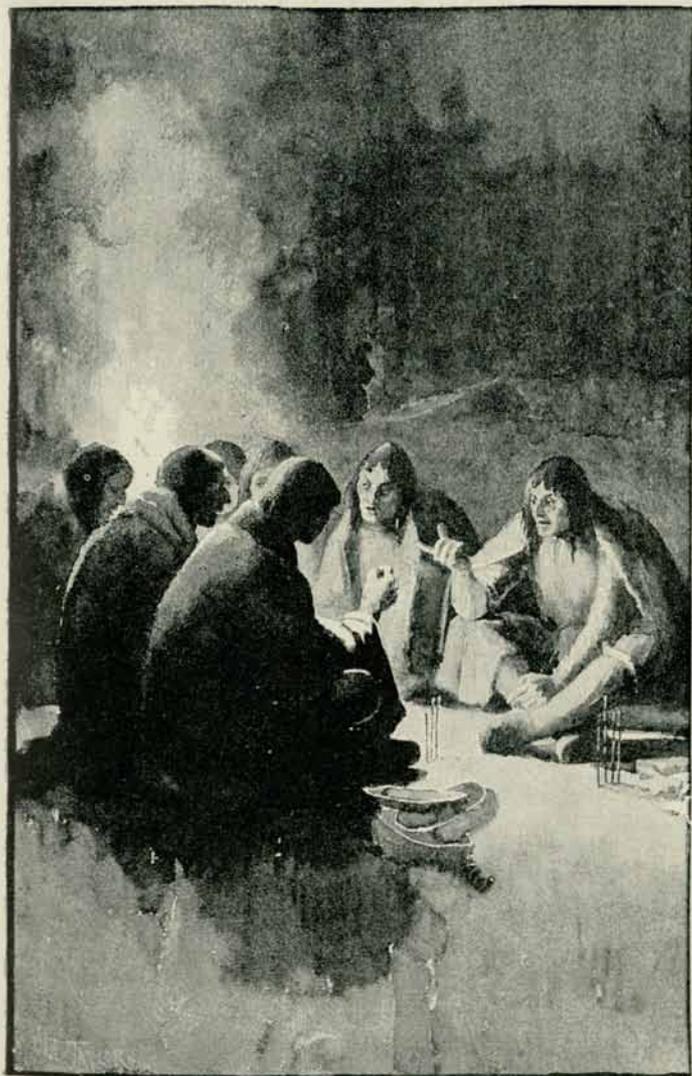
The huts were mostly in pairs, and the Duttons had noticed, on entering theirs, that, in common with the rest, it directly faced a duplicate of itself, with only a narrow passage-way, a foot or two in width, between.

"Sure, it's the ould 'Bear' himself!" added Teddy softly, peering out of the door.

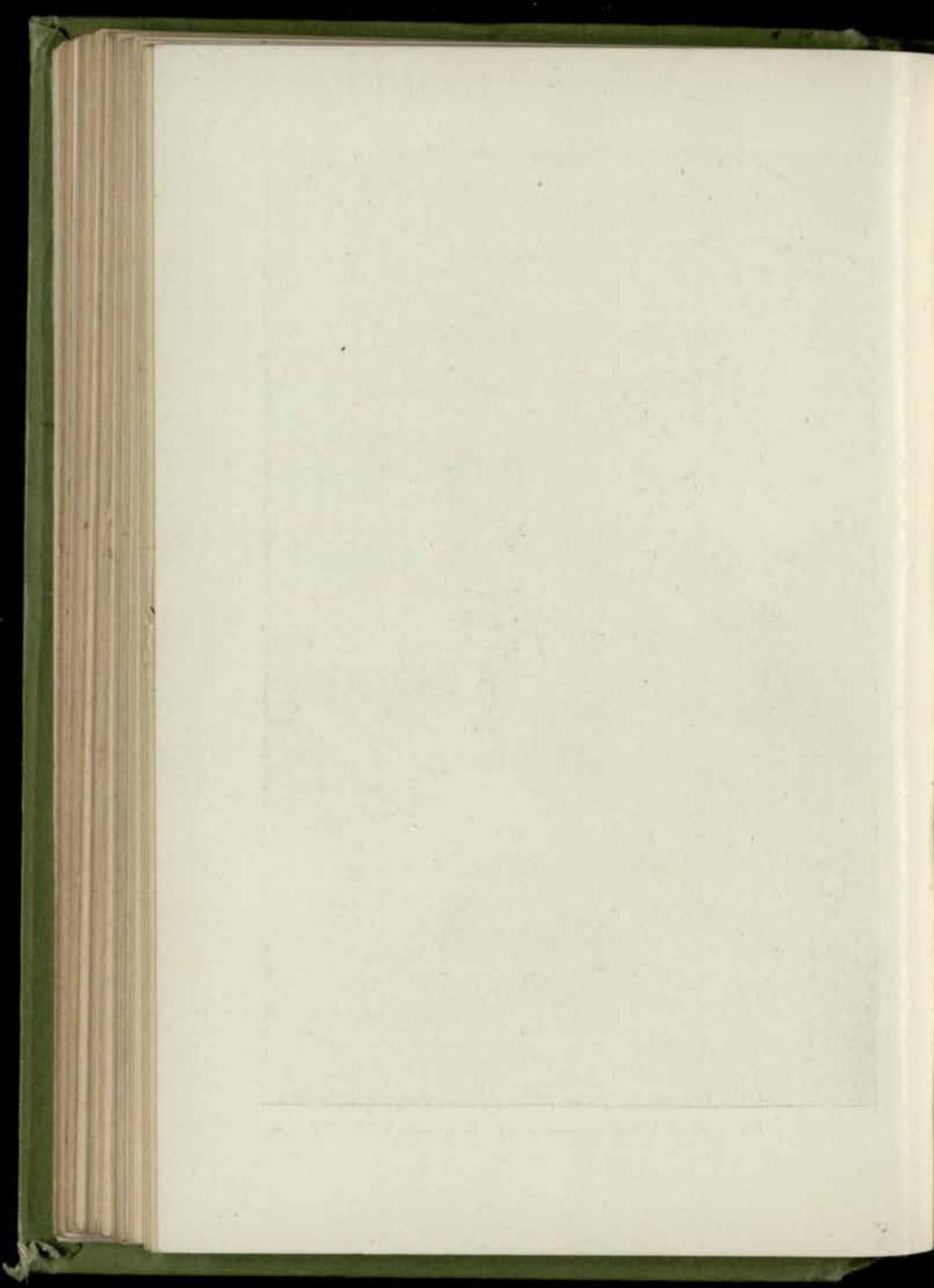
"If Loklok is to occupy that hut for the night," said Mr. Dutton, decidedly, "it's of no use for us to think of leaving by the front door. We must make our way out of the rear of the hut, and that very early in the morning, before the Ayans are up."

Fortunately, this hut was a little removed from the others in the village, and the back was toward the forest.

"Look out!" sang out the faithful Irish boy



"THE INDIANS WERE GAMBLING IN DEAD EARNEST." [p. 102.]



again, "one o' these ugly cratur is comin' now, sure." And he glided away from the entrance in a manner that would have done credit to an Ayan himself.

The visitor turned out to be some official of importance, who was surmised to be a medicine-man. He was dressed in a blue-black army blanket, with a St. George's cross of gorgeous red in the centre, which had somehow found its way into the interior from one of the military posts. This extraordinary individual performed a series of remarkable antics in front of the entrance to the two huts, strutting up and down, dancing, and assuming all sorts of ridiculous attitudes; at the same time flourishing the showy blanket to what he considered the best advantage.

In the very midst of an uncommonly dignified strut he suddenly unbent, and, diving forward, would have laid his hand on the rifle had not little Nat seen the movement in time to snatch the piece out of his reach. Carlo now thought it was high time for him to take a part in the performance, and, darting forward before anybody could stop him, gave the Ayan's calf a good pinch with his teeth.

The medicine-man uttered a cry of pain and rage, and retreated, shaking his fist at the owners of the malevolent Newfoundland. He plainly meant mischief.

"I thought all Indians wore tanned skins of animals and had feathers stuck in their hair," said Nat, watching the retreating form of their uncouth caller.

"We are too far north for that," explained his father. "The Indians are more and more like Esquimaux in their habits and dress as we near the Arctic

Circle, which, you will remember, passes directly through Fort Yukon."

A more alarming sound than the medicine-man's harsh voice was now heard at the other end of the village. It was the report of a musket.

"Ah!" exclaimed Mr. Dutton, starting at the noise, "so they have guns! It must be one of the old smooth-bores, with flint locks. Dick said they still turned up, once in a while, among the savages."

"How did they get them, father?"

"Why, when the Russian traders purchased furs from the Indians, in the old times, they used to set a musket upright, and pile skins around it until they reached the muzzle. That amount was considered a fair exchange for the gun."

Further conversation was interrupted by a sort of embassy of four Ayans, who waited upon the strangers with a birch-bark dish piled high with dried salmon, together with a generous slice of bear meat, roasted over one of their smoky fires.

The boys would have preferred to provide their own supper, but it was thought polite to accept the hospitality, if such it was, of their hosts. They therefore made low bows of thanks, and partook in a gingerly fashion of the viands set before them.

Several of the Indians joined the group at the door-way, to watch the strangers at their repast. Teddy was greatly amused to see the babies carried on their mothers' backs, and facing backward. The good-natured boy completely won the heart of a wofully homely squaw by giving a lump of sugar to her copper-coloured pappoose.

As soon as the unsavoury meal was finished, the

whites rose and began to stroll about the village. Nobody made any objection to this, but the boys noticed that there was always some one pair of piercing dark eyes watching them. Now it was old Loklok, who had a gaudy turban tied over his long, stringy locks; now the medicine-man's ugly features scowled at them from behind a hut; now it was a squaw, carelessly wandering near by, with apparently no other object than to give her baby an airing.

Joe and Jim were found comfortably ensconced on the raft. They had prepared their own supper, and eaten it in their own way; the Ayans, it appeared, had pressed their favourite titbit, some half-decayed salmon, upon the swarthy visitors, but Greek had met Greek, and Manitoban obstinacy had won against Alaskan.

Mr. Dutton talked with his guides a moment in low tones, giving them directions for action if he should board the raft during the night; but his conversation evidently excited so much suspicion and distrust on the part of the Ayans that he desisted and walked off, after receiving a meaning glance and nod from each of the guides.

The village itself was picturesque enough, the red sides of the recently caught and split salmon showing prettily against the dark spruce brush of the wigwams, on which they were hung and spread to dry. Some of the Indians were gathered in groups, eagerly playing a sort of game with small bone dice, or "chips," about as large as one's finger.

The Duttons watched the progress of one of these games with much interest. An even number of

Indians took part—generally six or eight—and sat in two rows, facing each other. One of the little pieces of bone was marked in a peculiar way, and was held, in common with the other pieces, out of sight in the hands of one of the players. The whole group then commenced a sort of low, groaning sing-song, with their elbows and heads wagging, until one of the five suddenly pointed to the hand of his *vis-à-vis*, which he thought held the marked piece. If he was right, his side tallied one, with a peeled willow stick thrust in the sand; if wrong, the count went to the other party, and the sing-song commenced again. It was plain that the Indians were gambling, and in dead earnest, for they bet and delivered over fish, horn implements, birch-bark dishes, and even the clothes on their backs.

As the night grew more dusky, and the Indians became more and more excited in their games, the scene was a singularly striking one—the dark forms bending eagerly forward, and swaying to the weird music of their wailing song, the firelight now lighting up their swarthy faces, now leaving them obscured in the gathering shadows—the pale waters of the glacial river rushing by the dark forests, and, behind all, the huge, silent forms of the everlasting hills, with their gloomy ravines, glittering peaks, and streams of ice.

At length the Duttons, weary with the day's exertions, and uncertain what plan to pursue, turned toward the hut allotted to them for the night. As they did so, they brushed against an old, wrinkled squaw, who had been eyeing them narrowly for a considerable time.

Something white fluttered from the filthy folds of

her garment. Robert had it in his hand in a moment, for it had a strangely familiar look.

It was a delicately embroidered handkerchief, and in the corner were the words, in raised letters,—

“FLOSSIE, FROM MOTHER.”

CHAPTER IX.

FROM VICTORIA TO SITKA.



WHEN Mrs. Dutton, Florence, and Chloe found themselves on the deck of the good ship *St. Elias*, leaving the hills of the United States blue and misty on the horizon, and coasting along Vancouver Island with all fore-and-aft sails set, on a fair west-north-west wind, they felt that the adventurous portion of their trip had fairly begun.

Of course, they had had no summer's-day excursion thus far. The two ocean voyages had been arduous, and the ladies had often felt the need of a male escort on their long and tedious journey. Still, they had not struck off from the regular lines of travel, and many of their own sex had been their companions on ship-board. Now, on the contrary, they were the only ladies aboard; they were off the steam routes, and were bound for a wild and desolate country. Had it not been for the near prospect of meeting her husband and sons, Mrs. Dutton would have felt undeniably homesick, as she leaned against the rail on the quarter-deck of the *St. Elias*, and watched the headlands of Cape Flattery melt into the clouds that hung along the southern horizon.

Flossie, on the other hand, was full of life and

spirits. She had just passed her sixteenth birthday, and presented a fair picture of healthful girlhood. Her soft hair blew out in golden wisps above a pair of honest, sparkling, blue eyes, and fell over her shoulders in a thick, shining, brown braid. Her nose was just turned up enough to be a bit saucy, and her lips and dimpled cheeks were as winsome helpmates to the before-mentioned features as one could wish to see.

"Don't feel blue, mamma," said the girl, nestling to her mother's side, and throwing an arm around her in that pretty, half-protecting way that growing daughters have. "We'll soon be there, and see them all. I wonder if Hugh has grown! And little Nat—I expect he's a great, tall boy, brown as an Indian."

"I shall be glad when we see your Uncle Richard, Flossie," returned the elder lady.

"There! you're tired of taking care of me!" laughed Florence. "You'll be glad to send me off with the boys, so that you can 'talk sensible' with father and uncle!"

"I don't care much about the minerals and the great fortune he wrote of," continued Mrs. Dutton, hardly noticing the girl's interruption. "The main thing is to get them all back alive and well. We've money enough to make us comfortable already."

Here the attention of both was attracted to a school of dolphins, who curved in and out of the waves close beside the vessel, flashing brilliantly in the sunlight.

The steamers now running between California and Sitka take the "inside route," passing between Vancouver and the mainland. Sailing vessels, however, keep to the open sea, where they can have steady breezes, and few treacherous currents, sunken reefs, or floating icebergs, such as render the narrower

channels perilous to craft that can be handled only slowly. From San Francisco to Victoria is seven hundred and fifty miles. From that port to Sitka the Duttons had still a sail before them of somewhat over a thousand miles. Richard Dutton would have to travel about a third of that distance, from Fort Wrangel, to join his sister-in-law at Sitka. With these distances clearly fixed in our minds, we can follow our friends over every league of their voyage. While Mrs. Dutton was on the *St. Elias*, it may be said, in dismissing the subject of times and distances, her husband's party was travelling slowly westward through the dense evergreen forests of British America, just south of Great Slave Lake.

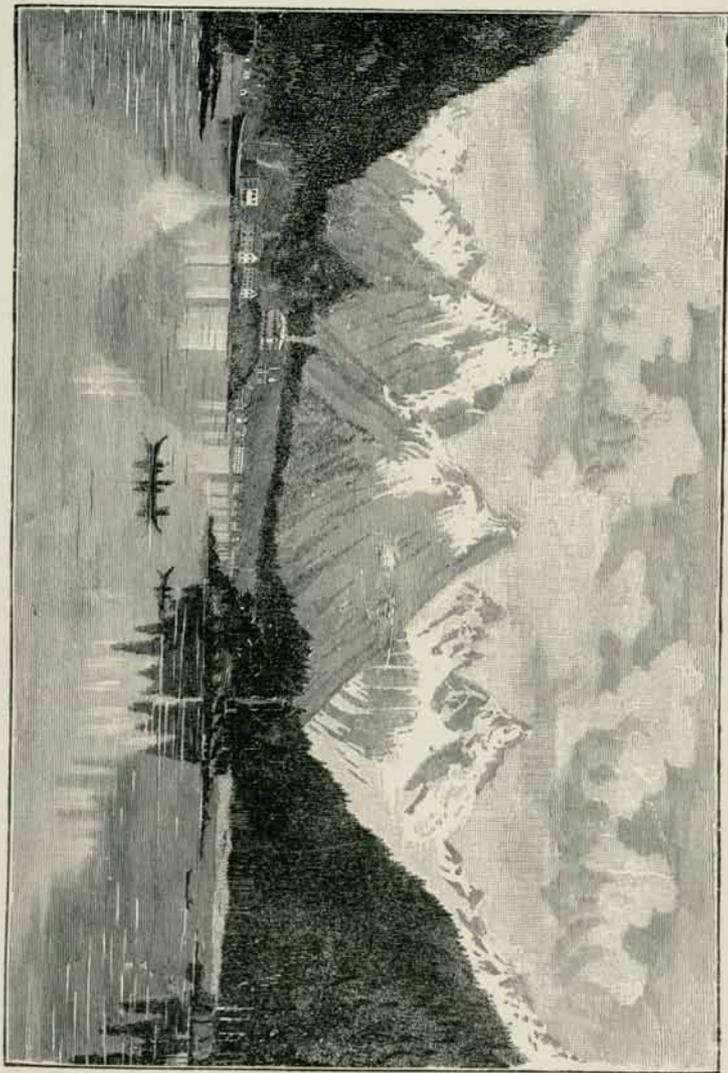
The good ship *St. Elias* was favoured with fair winds, and in just a fortnight from the day she sailed from Victoria the lofty peak of Mount Edgecumbe appeared on the north-east horizon.

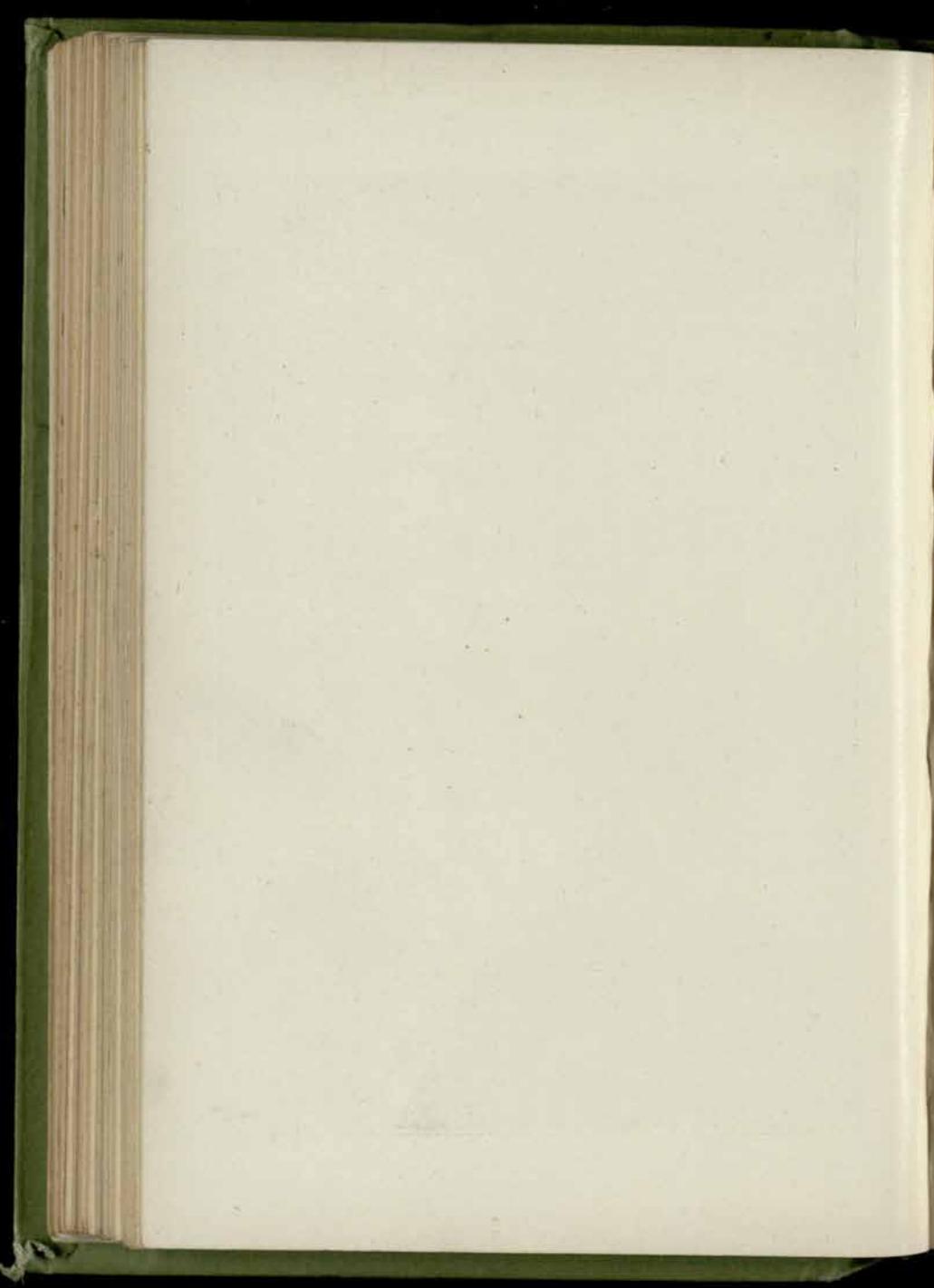
Flossie was wild with delight at the glorious view, which constantly opened as the vessel kept on her course toward land. The coast line was everywhere broken by huge mountains, their rugged sides torn by avalanche and torrent, and seamed with glaciers, flowing steadily downward into the sea. It was late in the evening when the *St. Elias* entered Sitka Sound. A long canoe, containing half-a-dozen Indians, passed the vessel. They were Stickeens, the captain informed the passengers, running down to the halibut grounds off Borka.

A sharp mountain peak lifted its granite head to the very clouds straight ahead. This was Mount Verstova. Its sides were clothed with dark reaches of hemlock and pine.

At the head of the sound a clump of low, dingy-

SITKA, ALASKA.





looking buildings crouched beside the water. One of these was on a bold, rocky bluff—the old Russian castle—nearly two hundred feet above the other houses. A tumbledown wharf presently came in view, with a few sleepy people lounging upon it.

“What place is this?” asked Flossie, eagerly.

“Sitka!”

CHAPTER X.

DAY AND NIGHT IN ALASKA.



IT was now after nine o'clock in the evening, but the sun was still shining brightly, lighting up with a soft glow the slopes of Mount Edgumbe, fourteen miles away, and throwing a strange light over every object ashore. It seemed like a dream. There was the old castle, of which they had read, the decaying wharf, the desolate but sturdy old buildings of the Russians, and the ice-topped heights far away, reaching up into the eastern sky.

But now a tall, manly figure appeared on the wharf, as the vessel dropped her anchor a short distance from the shore. In another minute a boat was seen putting off, manned by a native oarsman.

"Uncle Dick! Uncle Dick!" cried Flossie, recognising the quiet figure in dark blue sitting in the stern-sheets.

The officer made no reply, but lifted his hat and swung it.

The boat came alongside; Lieutenant Richard Dutton was up over the side in a twinkling, and held Flossie and her mother in his honest arms.

"I'm so glad you've come," he said, as they rowed ashore. "It was getting pretty late for a start, and we've a long ourney before us. Bless me, how this

little girl has grown!" and he eyed Florence with a look of quizzical admiration, that made her laugh and blush and give his whiskers a pull at the same time.

"You've grown—brown, yourself, uncle!" she laughed. "You've tanned so, I didn't know that you'd know me!"

"I don't suppose you need to wait very long before starting?" inquired the lieutenant, turning to Mrs. Dutton.

"Oh, no, not more than a week——"

"A week! Why, Ella, that won't do at all. To-day is the 15th of June. We have agreed to meet at Fort Selkirk on July 10th."

"Well, how soon must we go?"

"To-morrow."

Mrs. Dutton, as we have already seen, was a woman of decision.

"Very well, Dick, at two o'clock to-morrow afternoon my daughter and I will be ready."

The lieutenant looked relieved, and the subject was dropped.

The two ladies were lodged that night in an old house, formerly belonging to one of the wealthiest Russian residents. It was built of big spruce logs, trimmed square, was three stories high, and as long as a good-sized hotel. These large buildings were once divided into "flats," like some modern apartment hotels, and were occupied in this way by well-to-do families, both comfort and self-protection being gained. The walls of the house were painted red, and the roof was covered with sheets of iron of a dingy yellow.

Flossie was delighted with her room, which opened into her mother's. She declared, as she tried one antique piece of Russian furniture after another, that

she almost wished she was going to stay in Sitka, which promised so many surprising walks, funny customs among the native inhabitants, and genuinely interesting antiquities. Florence was an ardent lover of history at school, and had taken pains during the winter to post herself up thoroughly on the story of Russian America, from the time when the first Russian explorers visited its wild shores in 1742, through the history of the oppressed Indians, the massacres and wars, the greedy incursions of the fur-hunters, to the year 1867, when the whole territory now known as Alaska was sold to the United States for \$7,200,000, and garrisoned by United States troops. There was already a custom-house officer at New Archangel, or Sitka, as it had come to be called from the Indian name.

So Flossie was eager to verify her studies, and as she skipped over the polished plank floor of her room, back and forth from the deep window-seats to the old mahogany sofa and the wild-goat skin rug before the fireplace, she did long to see the castle of Baronov, and the tin-roofed spire, beneath which the gorgeously bedecked priests had so long administered the rites of the Greek Church to Siwash, Stickeen, American, Englishman, and Russian.

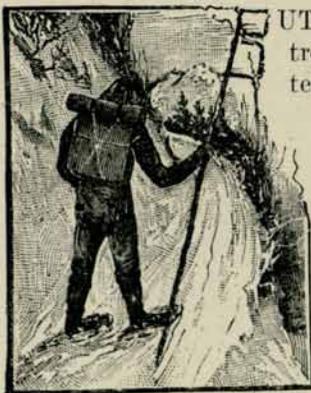
But Mrs. Dutton was already busy with preparations for the trip, and at eleven o'clock, while it was still bright daylight, the two ladies retired to dream of the glaciers, forests, and volcanoes which lay in their path; which separated them from the wonderful "Red Mountain."

Next morning, Florence is awakened by a flood of sunlight streaming in on her chamber floor. Conscience-stricken at having overslept, she patters to

the window for a look at the new country before dressing. Nobody seems to be stirring. Curious, how lazy the inhabitants are! She pulls out the tiny Geneva watch that her father gave her on her sixteenth birthday, and springs open the cover. A quarter to three! With a merry little laugh all to herself the girl swings to the shutters of the windows, jumps back into bed again, cuddles down under the blankets, and is soon enjoying the soundest of morning naps.

CHAPTER XI.

THE CHILKOOT PASS.



“UT there is one thing that troubles me,” said Lieutenant Dick, as the party sat around the table, eating the last meal at Sitka, “and that is that a Copper River Indian, with a couple of Ayans, was hanging around the settlements yesterday, trying to find out where we were going and what was the object of our expedition.”

“Are those tribes located in the country to which we are bound?” asked Mrs. Dutton, calmly, helping herself to another saucer of preserved salmon-berries.

“That’s just the bother. The Coppers live on the outskirts of the very district covered by Peeschee’s map. Isn’t that so, Peeschee?”

“The Fox,” who was waiting on the party most obsequiously, corroborated the lieutenant’s statement

by several emphatic shakes of the head. "Ayans fish on Yukon and Big Ayan," he added.

"Hang it!" exclaimed the officer, ruefully. "I hope we sha'n't have any trouble with those fellows."

"What does he mean by the 'Big Ayan'?" asked Florence, who had been listening attentively.

"That's the native name for the Pelly River, the northern fork of the Yukon. Fort Selkirk, where our expedition is to form, is at the junction of the two streams."

"But why are you concerned about the Indians, Dick?" asked his sister-in-law.

"Why, it's only about twenty years ago that a lot of 'em in there rose and massacred a party of whites. Then, a few years later, they burned Fort Selkirk. They're awfully jealous of any one who comes into their territory for mining,—or anything else, for that matter. I was in hopes that we could slip down by their country without attracting much attention, they're so busy catching salmon just now."

"Well, why can't we?"

"Because it's got round somehow that we are a big prospecting party, on the lookout to establish a post for furs, and so cut in ahead of the natives and spoil their profits. Here, Peeschee, step outside and see if anybody has heard anything more of those skulking chaps from the north."

Peeschee was absent just seven minutes. No one knew of his re-entrance until he was at his master's shoulder once more.

"Injuns gone at sunrise this morning. Paddle um canoes for Copper River."

Richard shook his head gravely, and rose from the table.

"We may hear more of them," he said, "but I hardly think there is serious danger, or I would not start. We shall go well armed, and when the cowardly chaps find we are to strike reinforcements at Selkirk, they won't care to risk their skins, I reckon."

One half-hour later the party was under way.

As it moved down toward the wharf, viewed by a half-hundred sleepy Sitkans, it was composed as follows :—

1. Lieutenant Dutton and Peeschee.

2. Mrs. Dutton, Florence, and Chloe.

3. Thirty Chilkat Indians, whose services had been procured to "pack" the tents, arms, blankets, and provisions over the snowy mountain pass to the navigable waters of the Yukon.

4. Solomon Baronov. This last was a hunter, trapper, and guide ; a Yankee through and through on his mother's side, and a shrewd Russian on his father's. The former had been a Cape Cod girl, and had found her way somehow with her father, the skipper of a fisherman-coaster, to the Alaska banks. Seeking shelter in Sitka from a storm, they had met Ivan Baronov, and "Betsy" had loved and married him. Solomon, their only child, had at an early age taken to the woods for amusement and occupation. Whether his mother and grandfather had always retained the peculiarities of the nasal New England dialect is not known ; but certain it is that Solomon was "down-east" in every shrewd twinkle of his eye and intonation of his voice. This, with the fact that he was a dead shot, and immensely powerful in his arms, is all we need to know at present of Solomon Baronov. We shall be better acquainted with him by-and-bye. Getting wind of the lieutenant's expedition, he had

petitioned at once to join it, on small pay, as general hunter and guide. At the present moment he was swinging along at an easy gait, behind the Indians, smoking a well-blackened briar-wood as he walked.

A small schooner had been chartered, and lay at the wharf in waiting for her passengers and freight. These were soon on board, sails were hoisted, and the *Walrus* began to plough the waters of the sound. Sitka was left behind, Mount Edgecumbe passed, and the prow of the schooner turned northward.

The short voyage was without special incident, and early on the morning of the fourth day, Saturday, the *Walrus* let go her anchor in Chilkoot Inlet.

Canoes—and the schooner's boat—were now taken to the extreme head of the inlet, an all-day's hard pull. At noon the party stopped for lunch under some large cedars near the shore. Grass grew on all sides shoulder-high; enormous dandelions, buttercups, and violets dotted the moist banks, while briars and berry vines, covered with snowy blossoms, grew in rank profusion over boulder and fallen trunk.

Soon after leaving this spot, the little flotilla entered the narrow portion of their course, known as Dayay Inlet. Again Florence's girlish adjectives of admiration were called into play by the dark masses of foliage clothing the steep hills on each side of the stream, and the frequent cataracts that dashed down from the far-off heights.

The end of open navigation was reached at last, but the banks were too soft at this point to admit of a camp.

The swift Dayay River was therefore followed up for a mile, and here the really wild life commenced.

Tents were pitched and fires lighted at once. Solomon slouched off with his rifle, and presently returned with a couple of rabbits, which he threw down for his contribution to the evening meal.

After supper, the whites gathered about the fire in front of the largest tent, which was devoted to the ladies, and told stories. How dim and weird the twisted shapes of the trees in the dusky northern twilight! How ceaseless and *cold* the rush of the white, icy river! The Indians at once organized themselves into gambling parties, and added their doleful wails to the hooting of an owl somewhere in the forest.

"Hark!" said Solomon, suddenly, letting his hand drop instinctively upon his rifle, then continuing the story he had just been telling, but plainly with every sense on the alert.

Flossie looked up inquiringly, but, guided by an expressive gesture of the hunter's big hand, said nothing.

Before Solomon had reached the end of his story—which indeed had assumed a remarkably rambling character during the last few minutes—the snapping of a twig close by was heard by all, and a moment later three men walked into the circle of firelight.

"Ayans!" grunted the Fox, just loud enough for his master to hear.

The new-comers merely glanced around the group, and then joined the Chilkats, by whom, however, they were coldly received.

Finding their presence unwelcome, they retired a short distance, threw themselves down on their blankets, and were soon apparently sound asleep.

In the morning the Ayans were missing, together

with several small articles, of more or less value, about the camp—including an embroidered handkerchief, which Flossie had incautiously left on a log near the fire on the previous evening. As it was Sunday, this day was spent quietly in camp.

Monday's journey was a hard one. For ten miles the party straggled along the banks of the Dayay, up whose milky current the "packers" dragged the canoes, heavily loaded with baggage. More than a dozen times the ladies had to be carried across the stream, as the trail struck its bends and long, winding *détours*. Chloe at first objected seriously to this method of ferriage.

"Dat's a po' contrivance," she said, anxiously, as she watched a broad-shouldered Chilkat lift Florence and carry her across to the opposite bank. "He'll go an' drop me, sho'."

"But how are you going to cross, Chloe?" asked her mistress, amused.

"I dunno, Mis' Dutton, I dunno. 'Pears like I done got far's I c'n go."

"Oh, nonsense, Chloe," and Mrs. Dutton gathered up her skirts preparatory to her own embarkation. "If I can go, you can."

A compromise was finally effected by employing two Indians, instead of one, to carry the black woman, who uttered various uncouth cries at every step of her bearers, and clung so tightly to their necks as almost to choke them.

The scenery grew more and more wild as the expedition advanced. Baird's Glacier seemed fairly to overhang the valley. Heavy clouds rested on the summits of the highest mountains during the day, rising only as evening came on.

That night the air was much colder than before; bigger fires and more blankets were called into requisition.

The canoes were now concealed in the bushes, a few yards from the shore, and the baggage packed upon the backs of the Indians, the men carrying about one hundred pounds each, and the boys less weight, proportionately to their strength.

The travelling now became so difficult that Lieutenant Dutton was in serious doubt whether it was practicable for ladies to advance farther into the wilderness. He accordingly summoned a council of war.

"Ella," said he, addressing Mrs. Dutton, "the trail is decidedly rough—much rougher than I expected, I must say. There seem to be thousands of acres of these fallen trees——"

"We can climb over them," interpolated Mrs. Dutton with energy.

"There are boggy places between——"

"We will wade through them."

"There are numerous bears in the neighbourhood, Solomon informs me."

"So much the better for the commissariat."

"The Ayans have got wind of our approach——"

"Let them come."

"In short," shouted Dick, in desperation, "it's going to be a mighty hard road to travel. The question is, Shall we return, or go on?"

Mrs. Dutton rose to the occasion. She did not argue or discuss. She pointed to the mountain pass before them, and said just two words—

"Go on!"

It was on the evening of this same day that they reached a wild and desolate district, known to the

Indians as the "stone houses." These consisted merely of huge boulders piled pell-mell in great heaps, with crevices and caves between, where shelter could be found. There were banks of deep snow close by, and closing the gaps between mountains on every side were walls of blue ice.

The lieutenant and Solomon set to work at once, and in a short time had one of these caves cleared out, carpeted with moss and spruce boughs, and provided with two front curtains, one of drilling and one of netting, as a protection against mosquitoes, which even at this altitude were inclined to be troublesome.

This comfortable little retreat was bestowed upon Mrs. Dutton, her daughter, and maid, and, with a bright fire crackling just before the entrance, was really as cosy-looking a camp as one could wish.

"Oh, look!" cried Flossie, just as the cave was finished, "there's some kind of a creature crossing the snow, away off there!"

Solomon looked up from his work, and viewed the distant animal with a professional eye.

"A mountain goat," said he, picking up his rifle. "I guess I'll go 'n' stir him up a leetle—no, I don't want anybody but the Fox thar," he added, as a dozen or more Chilkats came forward to join him.

The goat's hair was white, and he could hardly be distinguished against the snow. Sending Peeschee round in the rear of the animal, the hunter crept cautiously toward a certain bold bluff of bare rocks, half-way between him and the game.

After an absence of some twenty minutes Peeschee appeared beyond the goat, which started on a quick

run toward the bluff. There he was seen to pause suddenly, and wheel about. But it was too late. A puff of smoke arose from between the rocks, a sharp report rang out across the valley, and the goat made his last leap, falling headlong over the bluff to the boulders at its base. Solomon and Peeschee now descended the cliff in more leisurely fashion, and presently were seen bending over the game, which was evidently stone-dead.

What were the two men about? Were they preparing to bring the carcase of the goat into camp? Not they. The day's work had been too arduous to invite a "lug" of a hundred-and-fifty-pound goat across half a mile of rough rocks and deep snow. They busied themselves for some time at the foot of the bluff, and then were seen coming back to their party. Peeschee bore his share of the results of the hunt—a hide of snow-white hair, reaching an almost furry softness on the neck and breast parts of the animal. Solomon did not want the hide. The handle of his hunting-knife had been cracked in some way the day before. He proposed to occupy his leisure moments in manufacturing a new one from the glossy ebony horns, the points of which protruded from the pocket or pouch of his hunting-shirt. In each hand, it should be added (Peeschee carried the empty rifle), Baronov swung what might well be taken for an uncommonly large "Indian club." They were the hind-quarters of the goat, which were straightway added to the bill of fare of the party.

It was thought best to rest a day at the Stone Houses, and the decision was a fortunate one, for by eleven in the forenoon a driving hailstorm set in, and throughout the remainder of the day it rained and

snowed furiously by turns. The ladies were quite comfortable in their snug cave, the front opening of which was overhung by a broad boulder, forming a natural lintel. The Indians crept into the crevices among the rocks, like so many marmots. Solomon improved the time by fashioning the new horn handle to his knife.

Next morning the expedition was *en route* at half-past three. The sun shone brightly, and scattered the fogs from the valleys. The hardest day's march of all was before the Duttons, through what is now called Perrier Pass.

Up, up they mounted, over dreary wastes of snow and ice, the Indian packers going ahead and often pausing to cut steps in the glacier slopes, or looking back and gesticulating to point out the best route. At noon all hands reached the summit of the pass, a trifle more than four thousand feet above the level of the sea. A cold, clammy fog drifted around them; nothing was to be seen but snow and ice and a few stretches of bare rock.

On one of these last they paused for a dry and cold luncheon, there being no fuel of any kind near. On again, down a steep descent, the Indians using snowshoes, which they had brought on their backs for that purpose.

Now they came to a frozen lake. One swallow, swiftly darting across its still, white expanse, was the only sign of life.

Nightfall—or what would have been nightfall at home—came down upon them while they were still tramping wearily through the snow, and it was nearly midnight when the broad waters of Lake Lindeman stretched out before them. Tents were hastily pitched,

and, thoroughly exhausted, the whole party threw themselves down on their blankets and forgot snow, ice, weariness, and mosquitoes, yes, even apprehensions of the sullen Ayans, in refreshing sleep.

We have already seen how Mr. Dutton and the boys built their raft near "Camp Prospect." It is needless to describe the process again. Lieutenant Dutton went to work with his forces in much the same way, and the result was a craft considerably stronger and handsomer than the former—as government work is usually more thorough than that of private contractors! In addition to ropes at the corners of the raft, the logs were fastened together with stout wooden pins, driven into auger holes which had been bored for that purpose at the points where the logs were mortised and saddled. An elevated deck of spruce poles, high and dry above the water, furnished comfortable quarters for the gentler members of the expedition.

On the second Monday morning, the twenty-eighth of June, the voyage down the river began. All the Indians except Peeschee and half-a-dozen of the most trusted Chilkats were paid, discharged, and sent home across the pass.

For two weeks the raft sailed, bumped, floated its way down-stream. Just below Lindeman was another lake, thirty miles long. Its shores were low and boggy, but the hills in the background gave a liveliness to the landscape, which was increased by the abundance of little streams that came leaping down from the far-away glaciers, to pour their ice-cold waters into the larger river.

Now and then, but rarely, large game appeared on shore. Solomon and Flossie became firm friends, and

had many a long talk together as they sat on the raised deck, looking out over lake or stream.

"What do you do in the winter?" the girl asked, on one of these occasions.

"Oh, I jest *hang raound*, pretty much. Sometimes I hev a line o' traps to tend."

"What do you do with the poor little creatures after you catch them?"

"Sell their pelts," said Baronov, laconically.

"Why, how much are they worth?"

"Oh, a good beaver skin 'll bring abaout two dollars an' a half. They're the commonest fur animal in Alasky that's wuth ketchin'. Mush-rat pelts air wuth five cents. A sea-otter's skin kin be sold anywhere for seventy-five dollars and up'ards."

"I wonder if there are really any 'blue foxes'?" asked Flossie. "I had such a pretty boa last winter. It was just the colour of a Maltese kitten, and the fur was as long and silky!"

"Oh, yes, thar's some islands whar the blue foxes are commoner than red. Thar's eight or ten thaousand pelts sent off every year. The Injuns on them islands kill off the red foxes all they kin, so's to leave only pure blue ones."

"Poor little things!" mused the girl. "How they must wish they didn't have any fur at all. I wouldn't like to be a blue fox."

"Wal, I d'no," said Solomon, "I reckon they kind o' look daown on the red ones, an' git some comfort out o' that. It's astonishin' haow foxes—an' folks—do like to look daown!"

Day after day the raft surged onward, drawing constantly nearer its destination. On Friday noon, July 9th, it was only forty-five miles from Fort

Selkirk. The banks were now steep and forbidding, and the river full of dangerous rapids. More than once Florence and Chloe went ashore and walked over a "carry," while the rest of the party shot the swift water, or "rips," as they were called. Mrs. Dutton never deserted the ship.

All that Friday night they kept on, not daring to halt lest some unforeseen accident should cause them to miss their appointment. For Saturday, July 10th, was the day set for the union of forces.

Only twelve miles away! Perhaps it was the effect of the gloomy gorges through which they were shooting, or the heavy clouds which settled down over the river, betokening a coming storm; but the party could not shake off a strange sensation of fear, of dread of some discovery to take place, of an actual shrinking terror, that gained on them momentarily as they swept onward.

High noon, and the site of Fort Selkirk only five miles away, according to the confident assertion of Peeschee, the Fox.

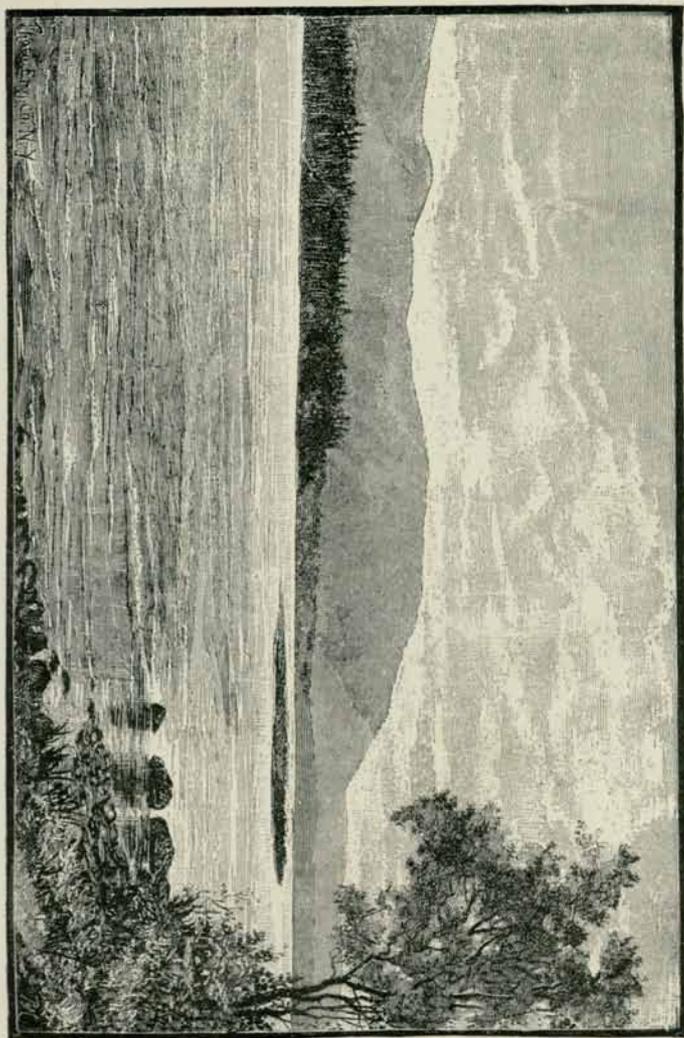
Three miles,—two,—one!

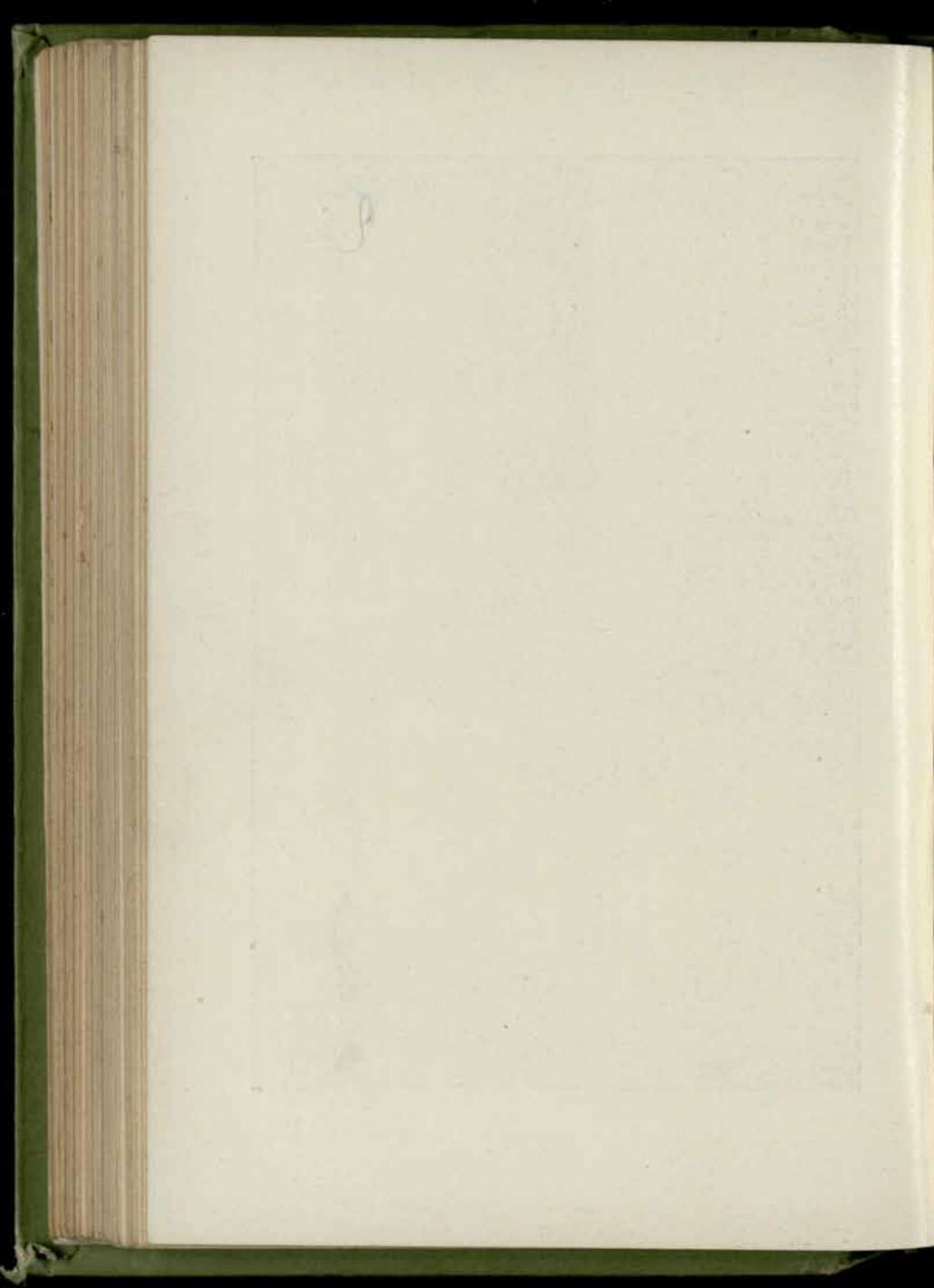
A clump of blackened, ruined chimneys comes into view, on a little raised plateau ahead.

Dick Dutton strained his eyes, Mrs. Dutton looked eagerly in the same direction, Flossie waved her handkerchief and Chloe her red bandana; but there was no response, though by all previous calculations the British-American party ought to have arrived several days in advance of the Sitkans.

The raft grounded, and the Duttons, with hearts full of forebodings, hurried up to the ruined fort. Their worst dread was realised. The ground was trampled with the recent tread of many feet, but no other sign

LOOKING UP THE YUKON.





of the dear ones they longed for was to be seen. While they stood staring silently at the ground, the wind began to moan uneasily through the spruce tops, a few great drops of rain came splashing down, and in another minute, with a glittering flash of lightning, the storm burst upon them.

CHAPTER XII.

AN ESCAPE, AND A NEW ENEMY.



CHILKAT BRACE-
LET, MADE FROM
SILVER COIN.

COMING upon his sister's handkerchief, Robert's heart sank within him. Until his father and brothers were safe inside the hut, and the tattered caribou hide drawn across the entrance, the boy did not dare to speak of his discovery.

As they threw themselves down on the skins and blankets that carpeted the cabin, the fire flared up for a moment. Instantly Mr. Dutton saw by Robert's expression that something had gone wrong.

"What's the matter, my boy?" he asked quietly, after waiting a moment for the former to speak.

Robert handed him the handkerchief without a word, hardly daring to look into his father's face as he did so.

Mr. Dutton controlled himself by a strong effort.

"It is Flossie's?"

"Yes, sir."

There was another silence, that threatened to be broken by a wail from Teddy. While Hugh was hushing him up, Carlo gave a low growl, and at the same moment the hide across the doorway was pushed aside.

"Be still, Carlo!" commanded Mr. Dutton. "What

is it?" he added more sharply to the new-comer, forgetting that the Ayans spoke and understood only their own language.

But, to the surprise of all, the visitor, though evidently one of the tribe, replied in broken English. By the dim light they could make out that it was the ill-favoured squaw to whose pappoose Ted had given the sugar.

"S-s-t!" she hissed, looking over her shoulder.
"Bad Injun hear. No speak loud."

"What do you want?"

"You 'fraid, 'cause find white girl's han'chif."

The boys gathered more closely about the speaker. Mr. Dutton's voice trembled in spite of himself.

"Well, well, my good woman, go on. Is—is she alive?"

"White girl not hurt. Nobody hurt. Bad Injuns go look for white people comin'. Think he come steal furs. Injun take han'chif."

The man gave a long sigh of relief.

"What do your tribe mean to do?" he asked.

"They go hunt for white people. P'r'aps kill 'em."

"And we——"

"You stay here with squaws."

There was no trace of humour in the woman's voice or face. She was simply telling facts as she knew them.

"You git off to-night, go tell white people," she added, rising to leave the hut.

"When shall we try it?" eagerly inquired Rob and Hugh, in a breath.

"When *ungaik* (grouse) call t'ree times."

And she was gone.

Preparations for departure were hastily made. The

rifles, of which, fortunately, the Ayans had not yet seen fit to deprive them, were carefully examined.

"What day of the month is it?" asked Nat, while they were resting on their arms, listening for the signal.

"The twenty-ninth of June, my boy."

"And how far are we from the old fort, papa?"

"About two hundred and fifty miles."

"Then, if we start to-night, we shall get there before the tenth of July, sha'n't we, sir?"

"Please God," replied his father, earnestly, "we shall be there by the fifth, at the latest. Then we can prepare for trouble, and, if they have not yet arrived, we can even go up the Yukon a bit to meet them. But I think they will be there, for we allowed several days to spare, and Dick always was a prompt fellow."

For half-an-hour nobody spoke. Then Teddy started up and put his hand to his ear. The others listened intently.

"*Oo-oo-oo!*" the sound came faintly from the forest.

The Duttons started to their feet and peered out of the hut. What was their disappointment to find that the Indian—presumably Loklok—occupying the hut opposite and almost adjoining their own, had left his front entrance wide open, so that it would have been almost impossible for five men and a big dog to get past and out through the narrow passage-way already referred to without discovery. They softly withdrew into the recesses of their own apartment for further deliberation.

"*Oo-oo-oo! Oo-oo-oo!*" plainer than before. The grouse was getting impatient.

A low exclamation from Nat directed the attention

of the rest to Carlo, who was thrusting his black snout between the spruce limbs forming the rear wall of the hut. The close air of the place disturbed the Newfoundland, and, on being checked at the front door, he was bound to get out by hook or crook.

The dog's instinct had led him to the loosest place in the wall. His masters took the hint, and softly widened the aperture that Carlo's nose had begun. In three minutes it was large enough to allow a human body to pass, and one by one the captives—for such they practically were—squeezed through.

How delicious the cold night air, after the foul, tainted atmosphere of the Ayan hut! The dogs discovered them at once, and set up a doleful howling, but the natives were apparently too well used to midnight concerts of that sort to trouble themselves as to its cause.

The very uproar made by these canine performers served, in fact, to cover the slight noise made by the escaping party. They crept round behind the huts, Nat holding Carlo by the collar, and Mr. Dutton leading the way down to the shore of the river.

Joe and Jim were wide awake, and had managed, during the earlier hours of the night, to edge the raft off from the banks, so that it swung free in deep water, held only by the rope.

One dark form after another crept on board. A quick sweep of Joe's sharp hunting-knife severed the tightly drawn hawser, and away swept the raft to freedom.

"Glorious! glorious!" exclaimed Mr. Dutton, in low tones, gazing back at the fast dwindling village, where nothing was stirring but the wolfish dogs, who howled a dismal farewell from the landing.

The energies of all the party were now bent on keeping the raft free from obstructions. Once they grounded on a mud flat, but, by poling the free end of the raft up-stream, they got the force of the current to help them, and presently swung off again. The sun rose brightly shortly after two o'clock, but the refugees dared take no moment of rest. Hugh managed to secure half-a-dozen grayling as they swept along, and these were cooked over a fire of twigs hastily collected at the lower end of a small island, where they ventured to halt a few minutes after ten hours' steady progress.

At noon they reached another lake, and here their advance was slow, as hardly a breath of wind was stirring. The rays of the sun were intensely hot, and the attacks of both mosquitoes and gnats incessant.

By six o'clock they had reached the lower end of the lake, and just at the outlet they ventured to enjoy an hour's refreshing rest.

Hugh knocked over a brace of spruce grouse with his shotgun, and these, with a mess of fish caught by little Nat during their tedious sail across the lake, made a very good supper.

It now seemed improbable that the Indians would pursue them closely, so long a time had elapsed without their appearing in the rear. All the Alaskan tribes, Mr. Dutton knew, were sluggish in their disposition, and preferred to hunt their game down deliberately rather than with undue haste.

At a little after seven the raft resumed its voyage, keeping steadily onward until midnight. A heavy fog now set in, and the leader, confident that the savages would not follow in the darkness or gray dusk, with a risk of being caught in a storm, came to anchor

against a large boulder, just under the lee of a little knoll crowned with spruces. All hands went ashore, taking the most valuable of the property with them, as a precaution against sudden attack. Tents were pitched, and the weary crew were soon as sound asleep as if they were in their own comfortable beds at home, instead of the frontier of Alaska, surrounded by known and unknown dangers.

Quietly the little company on the embankment slept; so quietly, so soundly, indeed, that they did not perceive the approach of an enemy against which they had not thought it necessary to guard. Attacks of wild beasts they did not fear, for had they not their good rifles, not to mention a 36-calibre revolver, and a breech-loading shotgun with shells charged with buckshot? The Ayans, they felt certain, would not trouble them, separated from them as they were by leagues of fog-blanketed river. What other foe could there be?

Ah, one they never suspected; one that had heretofore been their best friend; had, indeed, borne them and their raft swiftly away from the hostile camp by night and day.

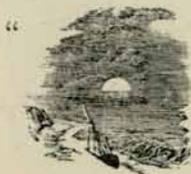
You know now? Yes, the *river* itself. The treacherous Pelly turned against them, and took away their only means of reaching their friends in time. Far up on the spurs of the Rockies, two days before, there had been a tremendous shower. It had poured hundreds of thousands, millions of hogsheads of water on the snowy slopes, and on the broad district drained by the head-waters of the Pelly and its tributaries. This shower, together with the suddenly melted snow, had turned every trickling streamlet into a roaring torrent. Lake after lake had felt the incoming stream,

and had brimmed to overflowing, passing the freshet wave on from inlet to outlet. The advancing flood, now grown more quiet and gradual in its power, had pursued the flying raftsmen more swiftly and surely, through every maze in the forest, around every bend of the river, than the best equipped canoe-fleet of the Ayans.

And as they slept it reached them. The men and boys were safe on the embankment; but there was the raft! Softly the river pushed its fingers under the heavy logs; lifted, lifted, lifted, as the minutes flew by, until with one swelling, eddying ripple it drew the sturdy old craft away from its moorings, out into the deep current, and swept it silently down the stream toward the sea.

CHAPTER XIII.

NAT'S SHAGGY PUP.



“**F**ATHER, father, where is the raft?” Mr. Dutton sprang to his feet and rubbed his eyes. There was the river, running quietly between its wooded banks, as he had seen it the evening before. But the raft! No-where to be seen!

Mr. Dutton's first move was to secure his rifle and glance at the lock.

“The Indians must be near! They must have surprised us during the night, and, having taken away our means of escape, the cowards mean to attack us only when we are too weak and bewildered to resist!”

By this time the boys were all awake, and filled with consternation at their loss.

“How much farther is it to the fort?” asked Hugh.

“Not far from two hundred miles. And to-day is the first of July! We cannot reach it by the tenth.”

“But why not build a new raft, father?”

Mr. Dutton pointed sadly to the little heap of baggage they had brought to land the night before. Hugh's eye followed the gesture, and wandered quickly over the bags and rifles. Then he sprang to where they were lying, and turned them over. It was of no use.

No need for his father to put into words what was only too plain to all ; the axes had been left on the raft !

At that moment Joe, the Indian guide, came running up from the water's edge. He evidently had made a discovery.

"No Ayans !" he said, pointing to the river.

"No Ayans ? Another tribe is on our heels, then ?"

"No. Raft not carried off. Raft float away itself."

"Float away ! How is it possible ?" demanded Mr. Dutton, incredulously.

"High water in night. Big rain in mountains. Now him low again. See !"

The evidence was indisputable. There was a mass of drenched sticks and leaves left stranded on one of the large boulders near which the ark of their safety had been moored. All remembered that the top of the rock had been bare and smooth the night before.

One source of dread, then, was removed. In much better spirits than at first, the leader gave orders to prepare breakfast.

Here again trouble immediately arose. Hugh's rod, line, and reel were on the ill-fated raft. Fortunately, his small wallet of flies was in his pocket. Three spare lengths of snell were found tucked away in it. One of these the boy knotted on to a piece of twine, which little Nat produced from *his* pocket. A willow rod was quickly cut from a thicket lining the river bank ; and, by standing on the boulders, well out toward the centre of the stream, Hugh found he could make a tolerable cast. He first tried a brown hackle. Finding that nothing rose, he changed it for a red ibis. At the third cast there was a splash among the eddies of the stream, and the rod bent almost double.

The strain came so quickly that the fisherman lost

his balance and plumped fairly into the river. Fortunately the water was not deep, and the plunge resulted in nothing worse than an extremely cold before-breakfast dip. Teddy rushed to the rescue, and, after ten minutes' careful manœuvring,—for Hugh was too thorough a fisherman to throw away the chance of killing a fine fish just for a ducking,—they managed to land the game.

It proved to be a splendid salmon, weighing at least six pounds. Hugh was proud enough when he scrambled up the bank bearing the big fish, its beautiful grey sides glittering in the sunlight.

Meanwhile, Rob had been in no less luck. Within twenty rods of the camp, he had started up a rabbit, and bagged him at the first shot.

“Good for you, my boys!” exclaimed the ex-manufacturer, as the two purveyors came into camp almost simultaneously. “There's not much danger of starving while you are on the commissariat!”

Teddy, who had a wonderful knack of cooking, prepared some broiled slices of salmon in fine style. And, though tea and coffee were among the lost stores, the whole party declared they had never sat down to a better breakfast than Teddy's salmon, some hard biscuit, which luckily had been brought ashore, and glacier water from the river.

As soon as the meal was over, preparations were made for an immediate start.

“First of all,” said Mr. Dutton, “let us know exactly what we have for provisions and other baggage. Ted, take up one thing at a time, and let me write them down.”

The list, when complete, was as follows:—

Two Winchester rifles.

One Ballard shotgun.

Two hundred cartridges for the former, and half that number loaded paper shells for the Ballard.

About forty-eight pounds pilot-bread.

About one half-peck Indian meal.

About one pint salt.

Two cotton-drilling tents.

One mosquito-bar tent.

Every one of the party had a pocket-knife, and two had small tin dippers on their belts. Mr. Dutton produced his compass, which was now to be their guide, in company with the river, to Fort Selkirk.

The two Indians packed and shouldered the tents, and the provisions were distributed as fairly as possible among the rest, according to their strength.

"Forward—march!" called Mr. Dutton, cheerily.

Joe went first, and Jim brought up the rear, the rest trailing along between.

For an hour or more, no great difficulty was experienced. They kept along the height of land within hearing of the river, following patiently all its wayward crooks and turns. At length, however, they began to come upon fallen trees in greater and greater abundance.

Now, the hardest possible tramping in wild lands is where growing timber has fallen and died with its limbs sticking out in every direction. This kind of a district is called "slash," and is as far as possible avoided by hunters.

The Indian in advance stopped, dodged about here and there, and tried every possible chance of an escape or *détour*: but it was of no use; through the timber their path lay, and through it they must go. There had been large forest fires there at some time within

the last generation, and the bleached or charred trunks protruded mournfully from the entangled mass of underbrush. Hour after hour the weary travellers toiled over and through this terrible *chevaux-de-frise*. Their clothes were torn, their limbs bruised, and their feet aching. Oftentimes they would step from a slippery log and sink in a slough, covered with treacherous moss, up to the waist. The mosquitoes—those ever-present torments—fairly swarm in this *brulé*, as the French-Canadian hunters call the burnt district. Poor Carlo's eyelids were swollen by the bites of the ravenous little insects so that he could hardly see.

Not more than eight miles had been traversed when Mr. Dutton began to look about for a camping-place for the night. A clump of boulders, exquisitely draped with ferns, showed itself above the desolate tract of white trees, about half a league ahead.

Upon its summit was a little grove of spruces, fresh and green, a refreshing sight in the midst of such dreary wastes of dead timber. Toward this knoll they pressed, gaining strength at the sight, like horses headed for home.

As they advanced, the passage of the fallen trees actually became less arduous. No one noticed this, however, until Teddy exclaimed,—

“Faith, isn't it good, then, to git into a rale path ag'in! Sure, I'd forgotten the looks o' wan, I had.”

By a simultaneous impulse the whole train halted in their tracks, and looked at the young Hibernian as if he were crazy.

“I said it's a path we're in,” he reaffirmed, stoutly. “If ye don't belave it, look fer yerselves. D'yer see the branches broken off, jest beyant?”

Again, as one man, they looked at the point indicated, and then at the ground at their feet. Teddy was right this time. They had struck, without knowing it, a trail—unmistakable, though faint.

"The question is," said Mr. Dutton, breaking the silence, "whether we are deliberately walking into another Indian village."

Something as near a smile as ever lights an Indian face agitated the stolid features of the guides.

"Do you think it is an Ayan trail?" asked the leader, not noticing the flicker of merriment in the faces of the two Indians.

Joe merely shook his head, but John solved the problem with one word,—

"Bears!"

Teddy's cheeks grew pale under his freckles.

"Sure, is it to them bastes we'll be afther comin' all this way!" he muttered, glancing in every direction.

He did not have much time for reflection, however. At that moment the expedition emerged on a small open space, in the centre of which was a pool, surrounded by low, boggy banks. The trees near by had mostly fallen, and lay about in all stages of decay. But it was not this that arrested the attention of our friends.

A little to one side, not far from the "path," were three animals, busily engaged in pawing and pushing over the prostrate trunks and roots in search of larvæ. Now and then one would run out his tongue and pick off a delicate morsel. No bevy of school children, off on a picnic, gathering blueberries, could have enjoyed themselves more heartily than these great furry creatures. For, beyond a doubt, they were good-sized brown bears, every one of them.

The moment the two parties saw each other, Teddy's voice was raised in a cry of terror; and the three bears, without waiting for a further introduction to the strangers, wheeled about and dashed into the *brulé* at the top of their speed. It was well known to Mr. Dutton that the bears of the North-west, while extremely dangerous if brought to bay or surprised at close quarters, always obey their first instinct to run, when they can get the chance.

Convinced that there was no further danger from their ursine neighbours, he gave the word to advance; and an hour later the green oasis was reached in safety. It was elevated about sixty feet from the surrounding plateau, and was nearly a quarter of a mile from the river, whose rushing waters could be plainly heard. At the summit of the mound was a broken heap of large rocks, among the crevices of which grew the little spruces that had escaped the fire, or sprung up since its date. It was plain that the whole hill was a mere pile of boulders, covered ages ago with moss, decayed wood, and slowly-forming forest mould, thus affording sustenance for the ferns and larger growths upon its rugged sides. Nat soon spied a sheltered cranny among the rocks, large enough to accommodate the whole party, and here they resolved to camp for the night. At the base of the knoll was a spring of delicious cold water, the ground round about showing marks of many generations of bears, caribou, and moose, who had slaked their thirst from its clear depths.

Strips of salmon were soon sizzling most appetizingly over the fire, the mosquito-bar was thrown over the rocks in such a way that any one not actually employed could shelter himself from his noisy little

foes. Overhead, the dark spruces stretched their protecting arms.

While the other boys were deep in consultation whether to turn the salmon, and the older members of the party were getting water, unstrapping the packs, and reconnoitring the surroundings, Master Nathaniel took it into his head to explore the snug niche, among the boulders, which they had selected for a bedroom. He scrambled up, therefore, over the slippery spruce needles and jagged rocks until he reached what seemed to be the end of the cave or shelter, formed by the overlapping stone. But no! a cluster of broad-leaved ferns had concealed a further opening. The boy pressed forward eagerly, and squeezed himself through the narrow passage, which presently grew wider, until it expanded into a sort of inner cave. The further end of this subterranean chamber was a trifle lighter, as if there were another entrance in that direction; but where Nat was it seemed as dark as night.

The little fellow had hardly gained his feet, after the scramble on hands and knees, when a queer sound caught his ear. It was a low, wheezing, snarling noise, with now and then a sort of hoarse squeal, like that of a pig with a very bad cold.

Nat's curiosity was aroused. As his eyes became accustomed to the dim light of the cave, he perceived a wriggling mound of greyish-black fur. At first he thought Carlo had made his way into the cave ahead of him; but a moment's observation convinced him of his error. It was not a shaggy Newfoundland, venting his displeasure so inhospitably in the corner. There were plainly *two* animals, whatever they were, making the uncouth noises, and showing their little white teeth at the intruder.

Now Nat, as we have seen, was a strangely courageous boy. He absolutely did not seem to know what fear meant. He always acted as if he knew his father were close at hand, and that no evil could possibly befall him so long as he behaved well and did as he would be done by.

When he saw the furry pair on the leaves in the corner, he was by no means alarmed, but, advancing, began to speak to them coaxingly, holding his hand out as he did so.

The little creatures, after all, did not seem disposed to be hostile, but rather cuddled up to the boy with contented little whines and grunts. Nat's heart was won at once.

"They must be little dogs!" he said to himself. "There are wild-cats in the woods, I've heard Joe say; and why shouldn't there be wild dogs as well?"

It then occurred to his active brain that one of them would make a good play-fellow for Carlo—at least over night. If he wanted to go back to his nest in the morning he could.

Accordingly, Nat stepped out to the farther end of the cave, and was delighted to find that an easy and well-worn path led out into the open air, over a fern-draped rock, from which he did not doubt he could easily climb up to the camp.

Retracing his steps, he lifted the smaller of the two puppies, as he called them, in his arms. The animal was bigger than he thought, and proved to be about all the boy could lift. Although he seemed very young and helpless, his claws were remarkably sharp, and in the course of a minute or two had inflicted one or two painful scratches on his captor's wrists.

"Well," exclaimed Nat, out loud, "I never in my life saw such a heavy puppy!"

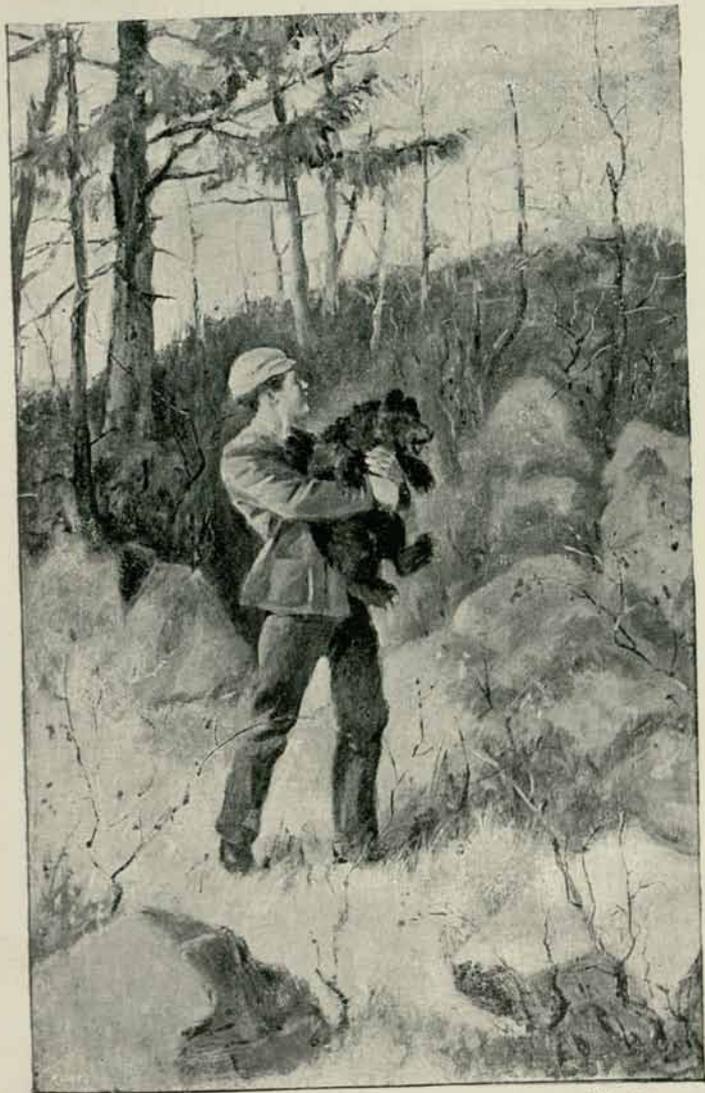
There were bones scattered here and there about the mouth of the cave.

"That's where the father and mother dog have had their suppers," thought Nat, pausing to take breath.

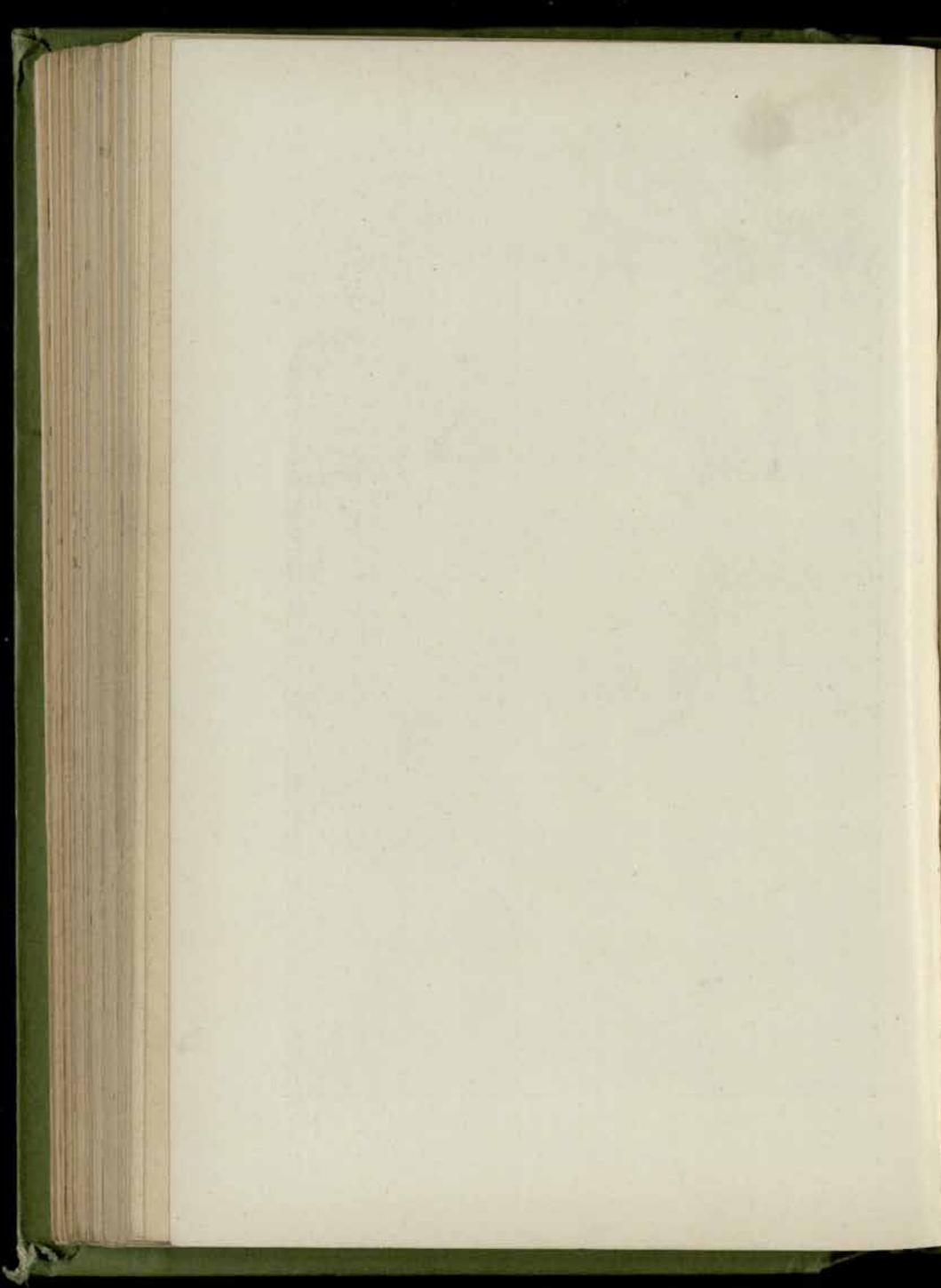
To return for a few moments to the rest of the party: they all were so busily engaged in performing their various tasks that they did not for some time notice the absence of the youngest member of the expedition.

Mr. Dutton walked down to the river bank, in a vain hope of catching a glimpse of the lost raft. The terrible exertions of the day's walk showed him what a journey was ahead. He could hardly hope to reach Fort Selkirk inside of ten days. Could the boys, young and unaccustomed to hardship as they were, endure the fearful strain? Besides, what if they reached the fort, as now seemed inevitable, too late to connect with his brother and wife? True, it had been agreed that, in absence of any letter or sign at the trysting-place, either party reaching it alone should wait for the other, if it took all summer. But what if the Sitka expedition should fancy, by some supposed traces or by false advices, that he and the boys had gone on, down-stream?

The more poor Mr. Dutton thought about it, the worse he felt, and the more bitterly he upbraided himself for taking his family upon such an unheard-of trip. His best tools and half his provisions were swept away. Yes, and a large package of Lucifer matches, which had been left on the raft that unlucky night. Without sure means for a fire, without pro-



"A GRIZZLY CUB. DROP IT, NAT, FOR YOUR LIFE!" [p. 150.]



visions, without ammunition,—how long could such a large party subsist at Fort Selkirk, a mere patch of blackened ruins in a tract of country as desolate, save for wandering tribes of Indians, as if it had been smitten by a plague?

Mr. Dutton buried his face in his hands and groaned aloud. His anxiety and self-reproach seemed almost more than he could bear, as he turned his weary steps back towards the camp, where he must speak cheerfully, and keep up the spirits of the rest.

Hugh and Rob were entirely absorbed in a discussion over the cooking of the salmon. Hugh maintained that it should be laid on a previously heated rock, and so baked. Robert was in favour of roasting or broiling on a spit, Indian fashion.

Joe came back from a short excursion into the forest with both hands full of what appeared to be small green bulbs.

Teddy, as chief cook, gave the vegetables a dignified sniff. Then his features expanded with delight.

"Hooray!" he shouted. "Sure, it's ingyuns ye have!"

Onions they were—small, to be sure, at this season, but with the "rale tang to 'em," as Teddy announced.

Jim had taken the Ballard with him, and now joined the campers, throwing down at their feet as he did so a fine ptarmigan, such as abound in south central Alaska and the adjoining province.

"Shtuffin' fer the bur-rd!" ejaculated Ted, feasting his eyes on the suddenly accumulated stock of provisions, in anticipation of the morrow's breakfast.

"Where is Nat?" suddenly asked Mr. Dutton, looking round him.

"He climbed up those rocks just now, sir," answered

Hugh, his whole being concentrated on the slice of salmon browning odorously over the blaze.

Mr. Dutton was not satisfied, and sprang up to the highest point of the bluff, calling, "Nat! Nat!" Presently he heard an answer, just below him.

Nat had found the big shaggy "puppy" a hard lug, and nothing but real Dutton pluck kept him from dropping his heavy, squealing, struggling burden.

Up he mounted, much out of breath. All at once he heard his father's shouts.

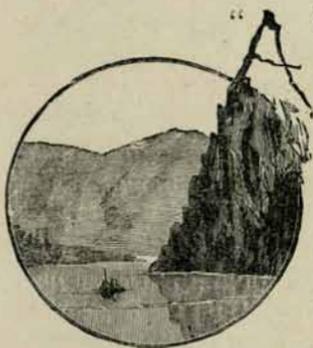
"Here I am, papa," he answered, looking up.

At the same moment the father's eyes fell on the animal in his boy's arms. The man's face absolutely blanched with terror. The two Indians gained his side, and from the three men came a confused medley of cries that smote on the boy's ears as he tugged away at his load.

"*A grizzly cub! A grizzly! Drop it, Nat! Drop it for your life!*"

CHAPTER XIV.

TO THE RESCUE!



“GRIZZLY, a grizzly cub!” repeated Joe and his mate. “Come quick, Nat! The old one must be near.”

Nat must have failed to catch the import of their cries, for he still toiled upward, despite the warning gestures of the men and the renewed struggles of the cub.

Mr. Dutton, in an agony of dread lest he should be too late, started down to meet the lad. He had hardly cleared the first boulder when a hoarse panting was heard by all, and a crashing among the underbrush at the foot of the knoll. The noise ceased as suddenly as it began, and the anxious father hoped for a moment that the danger was past. He reached Nat's side in safety, almost tore the cub from his arms, laid the animal down on the ground, and, catching up his son without a word, started for the camp.

As he did so, a low, deep growl came from below, together with a renewed trampling of dry twigs and

bushes. Then, perhaps for the first time, Nat realized what he had done. The she-bear, having entered her den and discovered the absence of one of her twins, was returning and charging fiercely up the hill on their trail.

In another moment her head and shoulders appeared, and then her whole huge form, as she scrambled up the rough hillside with marvellous rapidity.

On reaching her cub she paused and licked it; then lifted her head and looked up irresolutely after the retreating forms of her unwelcome visitors.

Robert, by this time, had gained a good position, rifle in hand; but Joe told him not to fire unless the life of his father or brother should actually be in peril. It often takes a dozen well-placed balls to kill a full-grown grizzly, and the risk of merely enraging her was too great.

The shaggy mother, relieved at finding her offspring safe, now renewed her maternal attentions to it; and soon, her natural affections mastering her anger, she proceeded to trundle it along home, partly lifting it by the back of the neck, like a gigantic kitten, partly pushing it with her huge paws, of which an ox might well have stood in terror. As Mr. Dutton reached the summit of the knoll, the grizzly disappeared among the willow scrub at its base.

The Indians earnestly counselled that the bears should not be approached. They believed that, if they were not disturbed, the she-bear would not leave her young to attack the camp. And the chance of killing her, in case of a fight, without injury to some of the party, was very small.

The result proved that the guides' reasoning was

correct. A watch was kept up during the night, but nothing more was heard from the ursine neighbours. Early in the morning, the party "folded their tents like the Arabs, and as silently stole away."

It was very rare, Joe informed them, that a grizzly cub was still so small at that season. They are usually born in January or February, and by the time midsummer arrives are able to shift for themselves.

It would be tedious to follow our friends in their long, wearisome tramp through the forest. At the end of the tenth day Hugh, looking down from a high bluff by the river's bank, beheld a sight that made his heart beat with delight.

His shout of joy called the rest to his side.

"The raft! The raft!" he cried, pointing to a bend in the river just below.

Sure enough, there was the old craft, grounded high and dry, one end of it at least on a mud bank. All hands rushed down, and, not without more or less wetting, clambered on board.

Not one article of their belongings remained on the raft, except a rusty axe. Every other scrap had been swept away by flood, wind, or wild beasts.

The raft was in tolerably good repair, and, with the aid of the axe, the men soon had it fitted out for another voyage.

"A long push, a strong push, and a push all together!" shouted Robert. The stubborn old raft moved inch by inch, then slid off the bar, and floated grandly away once more, bearing its little band of adventurers, young and old.

In due time they arrived at Fort Selkirk. They landed eagerly, and searched about for traces of their

friends, the date being July 14th, or four days beyond that appointed for the meeting.

Traces there were in abundance, but no litter. A violent storm, of which they had experienced but the edge, had evidently passed over the place not long before, and nearly obliterated the tracks of the visitors. But Jim and Joe had sharp eyes, and they presently pointed out to Mr. Dutton the little heel-prints of the ladies, as well as the firmly-defined marks left by the lieutenant's boot. There were numerous other tracks, seemingly older than these, which the guides did not understand. One thing was plain: the salt-water branch of the expedition had reached the spot, and, without waiting even one night, had continued their journey—presumably down the Yukon, whose waters, increased at this point by the whole mass of the swift Pelly, rolled downward toward the sea in a broad, turbid flood. Why the lieutenant had departed so hastily, without leaving any message, was something Mr. Dutton could not comprehend. Still, there had doubtless been some good reason, and the party would probably be found encamped near by.

Having reached the site of the fort in the early evening, the travellers spent the night near the blackened chimneys, and next morning took raft once more, full of expectation of meeting their dear ones soon.

For two days, however, nothing was seen of them. At the end of the third, a faint sound of muskets was heard—welcome break in the silence that had reigned so long.

Half-a-mile more by river brought them into the very midst of a stirring scene. A raft, much like their own, but slightly larger; three women and

several men upon it ; smoke and flashes of fire issuing from the muskets of the latter. On either shore, skulking behind trees, dark, ugly forms, that could be no other than Indians.

“To the rescue!” shouted the boys, lustily, bearing down upon the expedition and the craft that had thus been brought to bay.

CHAPTER XV.

UNDER THE EARTH.



MRS. DUTTON had barely time to draw Flossie into the shelter of one of the chimneys of the old fort, still standing, when the storm burst upon them in all its fury. The men occupied themselves in covering the goods on the raft, and making everything fast. The wind increased in violence from moment to moment, and the rain came down in torrents.

Fortunately, there remained the greater part of the fireplace, at the base of the chimney. It was as large as a fair-sized bedroom would be in our own part of the country. Evidently, the early traders had intended to keep warm during the long, terrible winters of the North, where even the Indians do not venture far from their huts, and the desolate forests and bare mossy plains are left to the undisputed reign of the moose, the wolf, and the caribou.

Although the rain trickled down the sides of the chimney, the dismayed little company in the old fireplace soon perceived that the small rivulets finding their way over the rough bricks did not increase in size. They afterwards learned that the fur-traders had an ingenious contrivance, consisting mainly of

a large stone slab at the top of the chimney, which could be closed at will during the summer, when only rain fell, and the fire below was not needed.

The ruined fireplace, therefore, was far from being an uncomfortable shelter from the storm, and, had not their hearts been heavy with disappointment and apprehension, the three women—if we count little Flossie as such—would have really enjoyed the fun.

How the wind did roar about the rugged old chimney! It bellowed down the flue in trumpet tones, and died away in doleful murmurs around the few gnarled and tempest-beaten trees that told of the little settlement once making its home there.

“Here comes uncle,” exclaimed Floss; “I’m so glad!”

The rest of the men took shelter as best they might, under canvas, and in the lee of rocks and ruined walls.

“Well, well,” said Lieutenant Dick, whose spirits had risen under the excitement of the storm and the work of getting the baggage under cover, “this isn’t so bad, after all!”

He stooped, slightly, under the cross-bar where a mantel had once been, and stood upright with the others.

“Oh, Richard, do you suppose we shall ever find them?”

“Find them?—of course we shall! They can’t have gone far, and my men say the tracks hereabouts were made by Indians, who were probably canoeing down the Yukon. There are half-a-dozen villages on the banks, and nothing could be more natural.”

"But they may have taken my boys prisoners—my husband——" Mrs. Dutton covered her face and sobbed.

"Nonsense, Ella!" said Dick, with energy. "I tell you the other party must have gone down at least two days ahead of the rest. There isn't a *boot* track among 'em."

"But how can we ever find them?"

"Oh, they'll go down-stream a piece, and then camp. They can't go beyond Fort Yukon, any way, for that's the point where we leave the river, and John hasn't a ghost of an idea where to go to strike the mountain."

"We'll find them—we'll find them!" cried Floss, who was too young to remain sad over the future for more than five minutes at a time. "What a funny old place this is!" she added, poking over a heap of dry grass and leaves with her foot. "Why, something wriggled!"

She stooped and began to brush away the leaves. "Look, look, mamma!" she cried, excitedly. "An iron ring, just like the Arabian Nights!"

The other members of the group now became interested, and the lieutenant got down on his hands and knees to help pull aside the rubbish.

A few minutes' hard work cleared the surface of a broad, flat rock, reaching from the side of the fireplace out some three feet toward the centre. It was blackened by the mass of cinders and charred wood and bricks that had long lain upon it, but the outline could be clearly made out. In the centre was an iron ring, about four inches in diameter, let into a circular groove neatly hewn out of the face of the slab for its reception and partial concealment. The ring was

covered and eaten into by a thick layer of rust, and when Mr. Dutton pried it out of its socket, and endeavoured to raise the slab, the iron, nearly cut through by the rust, broke with such suddenness that the lieutenant sat down hard, at the feet of the startled Chloe, whose eyes had been growing rounder at every new development.

"Laws, massa!" she cried, her teeth chattering with dread and the chill dampness of the place, "d-don't go no funder. Dat's an orful place, dar. Nobody knows what's in under dat stone. 'Pears like sumfin' 'll jump up at us, jes' so soon as dat stone comes off."

Dick added to the black woman's dismay by stamping on the slab, which gave out a dismally hollow sound.

"Don't you be afraid, auntie," said he, good-naturedly, seeing that she was really terrified by the combination of the storm, the strange land, and the mystery beneath their feet. "This is nothing but a sort of private cellar, I reckon, where those old Russians kept their wines and other property they didn't care to have their coppery neighbours get hold of."

"And when the door was covered with ashes," added Flossie, who felt the importance of a first discoverer, "of course no one could ever find it."

There was a delightful sort of Captain Kidd flavour about the whole thing, however, which urged them all to make further investigations. At the same time each one felt an unaccountable sense of aversion and distrust regarding that cellar. Looking round the circle, they read the same expression in one another's face.

"Nonsense!" exclaimed Dick, answering the look.

"What are we afraid of? Chloë's talk has made geese of us. It is dark, though!"

The clouds grew blacker, and the wind steadily rose in fury, until it fairly lashed the little peninsula and the frothing waters of the river beyond. The lieutenant drew a small pocket-lantern from his coat, unfolded it, and lighted the candle. Contrary to his expectations, the yellow light, mingling with the cold grey gloom from outside, but increased the *eeriness* of the situation and the unpleasant sensations they had all felt.

As he hesitated what to do next, he struck his heel sharply again on the groove in the slab where the ring had been. The blow broke the stone squarely in the centre, and the two pieces fell in with a crash. The stone itself was not over an inch thick, and was merely a fire-proof protection for an under-layer of planking, now worm-eaten and decayed.

A peculiar musty scent arose from the hole as they bent over it. Dick remembered having somewhere caught the same odour: at first he could not recall it; then he remembered that it was at the reopening of a long disused tomb, which he had watched with boyish curiosity and awe twenty-five years before. The recollection was not a pleasant one, and for a moment the United States officer heartily wished that his niece had found other employment for her little feet than uncovering this uncanny aperture gaping below.

"Well," said he, at length, trying to throw off his nervousness, which he felt to be unmanly, "shall we enter?"

The uncertain flame of the candle threw a fitful light into the opening, and at first disclosed nothing.

When Dick kneeled by the side of the hole, and held his little lantern as far down into it as possible, there could only be made out a small, square apartment, like a dungeon, rudely walled in with uncut rocks, and ceiled with timber. The two halves of the stone slab lay where they had fallen, just beneath the opening, on the earthen floor.

"It's quite empty!" announced the lieutenant, in a tone of relief. "We had all our trouble for nothing."

"But, uncle," interposed Florence, who had been screening her eyes from the flame of the lantern, "what do you call that dark place over in that corner? Isn't that another opening in the wall? A doorway to some place beyond?"

Dick scrutinized the spot, and wished the young lady with sunny hair was in—Sheldon.

Beyond a doubt, it *was* a door. Beyond a doubt, Dick Dutton was called upon, under the circumstances, to pass through it, and explore the shadowy vault beyond.

He tried to temporise.

"Why not wait till to-morrow?" he suggested, weakly.

"If you don't go, Dick, I shall. I believe you're afraid!"

It was Mrs. Dutton who spoke, with a nervous laugh that betrayed her own state of mind.

The lieutenant prepared to descend. He felt they would all regret the discovery they were to make. He knew they would make it, nevertheless, before leaving the ruins of ill-fated Selkirk.

"If I must——" he said, with a resigned air.

Near the broken stone lay some fragments of wood.

These, it appeared, were all that was left of a step-ladder that had once formed a means of entrance to and egress from the dungeon.

"Hold the lantern, Flossie," said he, as he seized the framework of the pit firmly, and let himself down.

The dungeon, or cellar, was about eight feet deep. He dropped the last two feet.

"Wait," called Floss, peering down into the darkness; "I must come, too!"

Richard groaned in his sleeve, but obediently reached up and lifted the girl down, lantern and all. It was exceedingly damp in the pit, and the close air gave them a choking sensation.

"For Heaven's sake, my girl, let's hurry!" said the officer, coughing violently; "I want to get out of this."

"Let me have the lantern," commanded his niece. "There! I'm going ahead the rest of the way."

She accordingly advanced cautiously to the opening in the wall, which seemed to indicate further opportunities for exploration.

Her uncle humoured her ambition for taking the lead, but placed himself almost directly at her side.

On passing the doorway, which was so narrow that they could hardly squeeze through, they found themselves in a sort of gallery, about five feet high and two feet wide. Here they had to walk in single file, Florence preceding her companion. The noise of the storm overhead had now become only a faint, dull roar, like surf at a great distance.

Dick knocked his head several times against projecting roots or knots in the rough planks that only partially lined the passage.

Stooping, and moving very slowly, they crept along, following the gallery, which had several sharp turns, for fully two hundred feet. The air now became decidedly more foul, and the lieutenant earnestly begged the girl to go back and wait for him. But she was a Dutton, and was determined to see the adventure through to the end.

The passage suddenly contracted still further, becoming so low that it was with difficulty they walked at all. They could not speak without violently interrupting themselves by spasmodic coughing.

"Only a few steps more," gasped Floss. "Then, if we don't find anything, I'll turn back."

Even the light seemed to grow dim as they advanced.

Suddenly the gallery widened. They saw that they were in another apartment, or cell, about the size of the first. As Florence entered this room, and held her lantern aloft, she uttered a shrill cry of terror, and, turning, hid her face in her uncle's arms.

It was no ordinary sight that shook the girl's nerves.

The lieutenant felt a cold horror sweep over him as he followed her glance to the furthest corner of the room.

There were two pieces of furniture—a rough deal table and a chair. In the chair, with head supported by its hand, sat a skeleton, with its grinning jaws turned directly toward the intruders.

The figure leaned against the wall, as well as the back of the chair, and was thus kept in the position in which death had come to the unhappy occupant of the dungeon. Scattered over the table were two or three bits of paper, yellow and mouldy.

A few rags still hung about the bones of the hideous figure, adding to its fearful aspect.

There were no indications of what had taken place previous to the tragedy, slow or swift, which had been enacted in that subterranean chamber of horrors, save a shallow excavation in the floor, near the opposite wall. A pickaxe lay on the heap of earth beside it. The work of digging seemed to have been abandoned on account of a ledge which was just below the surface of the floor, and which, while a deep crack had been made in it, or uncovered, by the pick, had discouraged the poor creature whose repulsive likeness alone inhabited the dreary place.

As soon as he could steady his nerves, and could leave the shuddering girl by herself at the entrance of the gallery, the lieutenant proceeded to investigate.

Repressing his strong feeling of revulsion, he moved across the room, and satisfied himself that this was really the end of the passage. The sound of the tempest was now more indistinct than ever, by which he gathered that they were farther below the surface than at any previous point in their walk.

The room had evidently not been meant for permanent habitation. There was no apparent means for ventilation, and no arrangement for either cooking or sleeping. Rather, it might be a place of refuge in times of sudden attack; of concealment of valuable property, were the safety of the fort threatened. Could that be the key to the excavation? Was the man engaged in burying a hoard of treasure? But, if so, why did he stop, and die? It could not have been a violent death, for that easy sitting position would not have been taken.

All these thoughts flashed through the lieutenant's mind as he gathered up the fragments of mouldy paper,

and tried to decipher them by the dim light of the pocket-lantern. Nothing, however, could be made out, and he stuffed the papers into his pocket for future inspection.

There was one piece of paper, yellow and tattered, toward which Richard felt an overwhelming repugnance ; yet that might explain the man's errand in that dismal burrow, and might disclose information that would be highly important to the Dutton expedition, or even to the government.

Why did the brave lieutenant hesitate to touch this document? Because it was held in its place on the table by a forefinger that eloquently forbade meddling. Yet it must be taken. It was taken.

Richard gave a sudden start as he held it up to the light. The paper showed no handwriting, but faint tracings of curved lines, and odd figures like Egyptian hieroglyphics. At the lower left-hand corner was a character like a triangle ; then a wavy line crossed by three vertical strokes. Just above these were three inverted K's, and further over to the right were three objects looking something like sugar loaves. Various other dots and markings were to be seen, the most ominous of which was a plainly defined death's head in the upper right-hand corner.

I said that Richard started the moment his eye fell on the tracing. It looked strangely familiar to him. Then he remembered.

"Peeschee's map!" he exclaimed, aloud. "The very thing, line for line! Just look here, Florence!"

Without noticing that she gave him no reply, he continued his search about the room, preparatory to leaving it. He felt sure that this place was in some way connected with the object of their search.

Turning from the table, his foot struck heavily against a box which he had not before noticed. It was a common grocery box, and the cover was nailed down. A blow with his boot-heel broke the half-decayed boards, and disclosed the contents. They consisted wholly of masses of rock, which sparkled in the light of the candle. A second glance showed their colour to be a deep, glowing crimson. Richard took one in his hand, and held it nearer the lantern. Without a shadow of doubt, it was a magnificent specimen of cinnabar in the ore. The box was full of similar samples.

Richard tugged the box out into the centre of the room, resolving either to take it out himself or send Peeschee for it on his return to daylight.

All this takes a long time to tell, a shorter time for you to read. The actual occurrences were still more brief. Richard had not been in the dungeon two minutes when he stooped down for a final look at the ragged excavation in the floor, and the fractured ledge.

As he did so, his cough, which had troubled him more or less ever since he had entered the narrow passage-way, returned with redoubled violence. His brows throbbed with a sudden pain. He turned sick and faint. The cell seemed to grow dark. Was he losing his senses in this fearful place?—or was it—look—the lantern! the lantern!

Even while the man rose dizzily to his feet, and tried to collect his dazed senses, the flame of the candle—not yet half burned out—dwindled, dwindled, before his very eyes.

And now what is Richard doing? Is he going crazy? He snatches the little lantern up from the mound of

loose earth on which he has placed it, tears it open, and dashes out the feeble remnant of flame, leaving the place in total darkness.

Then he staggers over to the entrance of the passage-way, where he last saw Florence, gasping,--

“Flossie! Flossie! Hurry! We are lost if we wait! *The fire-damp is on us!*”

CHAPTER XVI.

A MYSTERY EXPLAINED.



IT cannot be denied that we deserted our gallant officer in a most uncomfortable situation—"under fire," we might almost say.

Had Lieutenant Dutton been obliged to spend many moments in the old cellar-way under Fort Selkirk, with his sunny-tempered but headstrong little niece, it is quite certain that neither of the two would ever have lived to read this account of their subterranean explorations.

As Richard started toward the door, he thrust his foot, in the darkness, against the table. There was a crash as the old piece of furniture went over, followed by a rattling sound, like an armful of dry sticks falling on the hard floor. Under other circumstances, the thought of what produced this singular noise would have unnerved him; but the man's mind was now wholly bent on rescuing the girl, whose continued silence filled him with a new fear.

He groped his way toward the exit, calling again,—
"Flossie! Flossie! my dear child! Where are you?"

No sound. Only the consciousness of that hideous heap on the floor, over which he might stumble at

any moment; and the stifling carbonic-acid gas, or "fire-damp," which seemed fairly to have its clammy hands on his throat.

After what seemed hours, he felt, with the joy of a drowning man clutching at floating timber, the posts that supported the doorway opening into the long gallery.

Moving cautiously along, he had not advanced a yard in the new direction before he nearly stumbled over an obstruction in his path. Stooping, he felt the unconscious form of Flossie, who had been unable to endure the poisonous gas.

Richard put all his waning strength into a great effort, and lifted the girl in his arms. As he staggered confusedly along the passage-way, bruising himself at nearly every step, realizing only that two lives hung on his powers of endurance, he tried to call for help, but his throat would not respond.

And now, in spite of every effort, he felt his senses leaving him, and Flossie slipping down from his grasp.

"Help! help!" he gasped, in a husky whisper.

Hark! Was that a sound of footsteps in the passage? A rustling of woman's clothing? In another moment Flossie was snatched from the lieutenant's failing grasp, and a torrent of soft, almost incoherent ejaculations burst out in the darkness.

"Dar, dar, my po' little lamb! Did ye git tired, honey? Was y' almos' done suffumcated? Po' chile? Come to yer ole mammy, bress yer heart! Dar! dar!"

The sounds grew fainter as the rescuing Chloe withdrew, bearing Flossie, and evidently forgetting all about her late comrade.

Relieved of his burden, the man felt new strength

come to him. The gas was not nearly as strong now, and he could catch whiffs of fresh air from the opening ahead.

And now the Fox himself, the faithful Peeschee, came hurrying into the passage-way, and, with his arm around his master, managed to assist him out to daylight and life.

The Chilkats had already drawn Chloe and Floss out of the pit, and Richard was soon pulled up after them. Not ten seconds after he was extricated there was a dull, crashing sound beneath them: the earth settled slightly, in a line toward the river, and a cloud of dust arose from the opening in the fireplace.

Then they knew what had happened. The old timbers, long ago worm-eaten and crumbling, had at some point been jarred or pushed down by the passing footsteps. The earth had fallen; and the whole, following like a river behind a broken dam, had caved in, completely filling and destroying the passage.

The Indians were employed for half-an-hour, as a matter of safety for future visitors, in filling the entrance pit with bricks, stones, moss, and clods of earth—the whole smoothed over and covered with ashes, until not the slightest trace remained of the trap that had so nearly proved fatal to the two adventurers.

Meantime the latter came fairly to their senses, and soon were as well as ever, saving a pair of headaches and a slight nausea, accompanied by a ringing in the ears.

The storm was still violent, but evidently abating its force.

“It’s going to clear off soon,” said Richard, looking

up at the sky with a knowing air, "but we can't go any further to-night, it's so late. We must have used up three or fours hours in this miserable business."

"Dick," remarked Mrs. Dutton, quietly, "how long do you suppose you and Floss were underground, from the time you jumped in to the moment when you were drawn out through that trap-door?"

"I'm sure I don't know, Ella," looking rather surprised at her queer tone. "I haven't looked at my watch. Two hours, I should think, at the very least. Perhaps more."

"I did look at my watch," said Mrs. Dutton, "for I was anxious about you both. You were out of my sight just six minutes and a half!"

It was hard to believe, but the evidence was conclusive. It is a well known fact that a review of a whole life may pass through a man's mind in a hardly appreciable instant of time. So it had been in this case.

They had arrived at the camp at about two o'clock in the afternoon. It was now a quarter before four, the surplus time having been occupied in securing the raft and goods against injury and in filling up the hole under their feet.

By half-past four the rain had ceased, the sun blazed out with tropical fervour, and a glowing rainbow spanned the sky.

"*En route!*" called the lieutenant, cheerily, bustling about among the Indians, and urging them to the work of resuming the voyage down-stream. Mrs. Dutton had expressed her earnest wish to leave the fort, with its unpleasant associations, and camp further down on the banks of the Yukon. Besides,

she said, they would be lessening the distance between the two parties, and every mile of hill and dale made the separation harder to bear.

By five o'clock the raft, with all the company on board, swung off into mid-stream, and floated slowly downward, past the mouth of the Pelly, down which the husband and sons were really pursuing their toilsome journey. But the dark hills gave no hint of the secret they held, and the Pelly, the Upper Yukon, and old Fort Selkirk were soon out of sight.

For two days they rafted down-stream. On the evening of the second day they passed two Takheesh Indians paddling up-stream. The Indians were friendly, and, on being questioned by the Chilkats, informed them that no party of whites had descended the river within the last fortnight.

Here was a poser. Poor Mrs. Dutton was almost discouraged again, and even the sturdy lieutenant hardly knew how to act. As they positively could not, however, work the raft up-stream, they determined to go into comfortable quarters, and wait several days—a week, at least—for the arrival of their friends, at the first spot which should show favourable indications as a camping-ground.

The north bank of the river, for many miles below Fort Selkirk, had presented much the same appearance as the lower Hudson, a steep, columnar bluff playing the part of the Palisades. The south shore was less bold, and invited the voyagers to rest there during their enforced delay. A site for the camp was accordingly selected near the mouth of the Yuko-kon Heena, or White River, whose swift, turbid waters poured down like a broad stream of milk into the deeper Yukon.

The banks here were frozen some six or eight feet deep ; but their mossy surface was bright green, and at noon each day the sun was intensely hot.

Here the expedition remained for four days, undisturbed save by one or two thunderstorms and myriads of gnats and mosquitoes. Lieutenant Schwatka, who passed through the same region a dozen years later, declares that, when a netting is put up in these regions, two mosquitoes will hold the wings of a third flat to his sides, and push him through the meshes !

While the raft was quietly resting at its moorings, during these few days, Richard had ample opportunity to examine the writings found under the fort. Of most of the papers he could make nothing ; for not only was the writing blurred and almost indecipherable by reason of age, but the characters were of a sort which the honest young officer had never set eyes on before.

"They're not Russian," said he, throwing down the papers in despair before Mrs. Dutton and her daughter; "I'm sure of that. What those outlandish-looking square things mean, with their dots and crosses, is more than I can tell."

Mrs. Dutton pored over them in vain, and shook her head.

"Let me see, mamma," said Florence, stretching out her hand languidly. She had not been wholly herself since her adventure that so nearly proved fatal, and her mother watched her pale face anxiously as she handed her the mysterious manuscripts.

"Why," she exclaimed, "these are not paper at all ! They're parchment, and I think—yes, I'm sure, the writing is in Hebrew."

"Why, how do you know that, Floss ?" asked the

lieutenant, scrutinizing each fragment with a new interest.

"Teacher once showed us the 'Lord's Prayer' in two or three languages. She copied them on the blackboard out of a book, and one of them was Hebrew. It looked almost exactly like this."

As none of the party knew a word of the language, the information didn't avail them much; although, as Dick gravely remarked, it was "a great moral consolation to know what language they were written in."

"I have it!" he added, suddenly. "Let's call Peeschee into the council. That fellow knows a good deal more than he's told yet, I'll warrant. I want to know how he got hold of a duplicate of the map our—hem!—quiet friend down below was guarding so carefully."

He pulled a crumpled piece of parchment out of his pocket as he spoke.

The Indian was summoned; his stolid face changed when he saw the map, and his teeth actually chattered with fear.

"W-where you git dat map?" he stammered, pointing with shaking finger to the stained parchment.

"Never mind where I found it, my fine fellow," said the other, sternly. "The question is, where did you get yours, and what do you mean by telling me you made it?"

"I—I did make dat, master," chattered the Fox, looking fearfully over his shoulder. "You no tell medicine-man?"

"There, there, Peeschee," said the lieutenant, more gently, perceiving that nothing was to be gained by terrifying the man, "make a clean breast of it, and

tell the whole story. You've done something crooked, no doubt, but I don't believe you mean any harm by us. No," he added, seeing the Indian's frightened glance around, "you needn't be afraid of the party that owned that map. He won't trouble you any more. He's gone to the Warm Country" (an Alaskan's idea of heaven).

The Fox, being thus reassured, told his "plain, unvarnished tale" as follows. We will turn it into English, rather than stop to puzzle over his broken sentences and Indian idioms.

"It is true that I have seen the Great Red Mountain. It lies there," pointing to the south-west. "It is true that the only way to reach the mountain alive is by the map I have made for you, a copy of the one on the parchment there. It is true that the piece of red rock I showed you came from the mountain; it must be true, for the medicine-man with the grey beard told me."

"So you have never visited the mountain yourself? You were lying to me when you told me that?"

"Listen, master!"

Peeschee's gesture with the outspread palm had something of the native dignity that marks his red-skin cousins of the lower latitudes.

"I have not visited the mountain myself. If I had told you that, you would never have gone. When I was a very small pappoose, my father was packing goods for the great fur company. One day he wandered from the trail. After a week of suffering he came upon an Ayan village, where he was kindly received. The medicine-man took him into his own hut, and nursed him. He was an old man, with a long grey beard and hooked nose, very, very terrible.

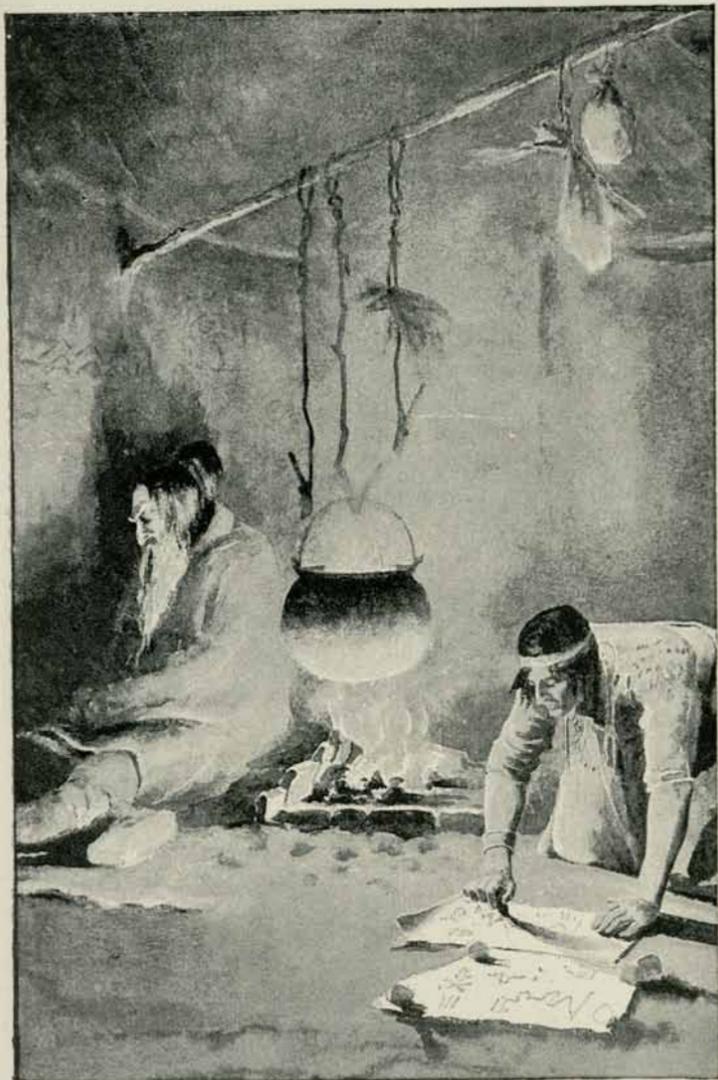
“My father soon heard that he was a descendant of many generations of medicine-men in that tribe; that he had in his possession many old pieces of skin, covered with strange marks, that had been handed down from father to son for many hundred years. The whole tribe believed that when Alaska was made, and raised up out of the ocean, the Ayans crossed the great waters from the west, and took possession of the new land.”

“The Lost Tribes of Judæa!” shouted Richard, almost upsetting the tent in his eagerness, as he sprang up and paced to and fro. “Don’t you remember, Ella, that one of the theories of scholars is that the tribes crossed Behring’s Straits, and gradually changed their character as they became more fitted to the climate, until they were such men as we see now among the North American Indians?”

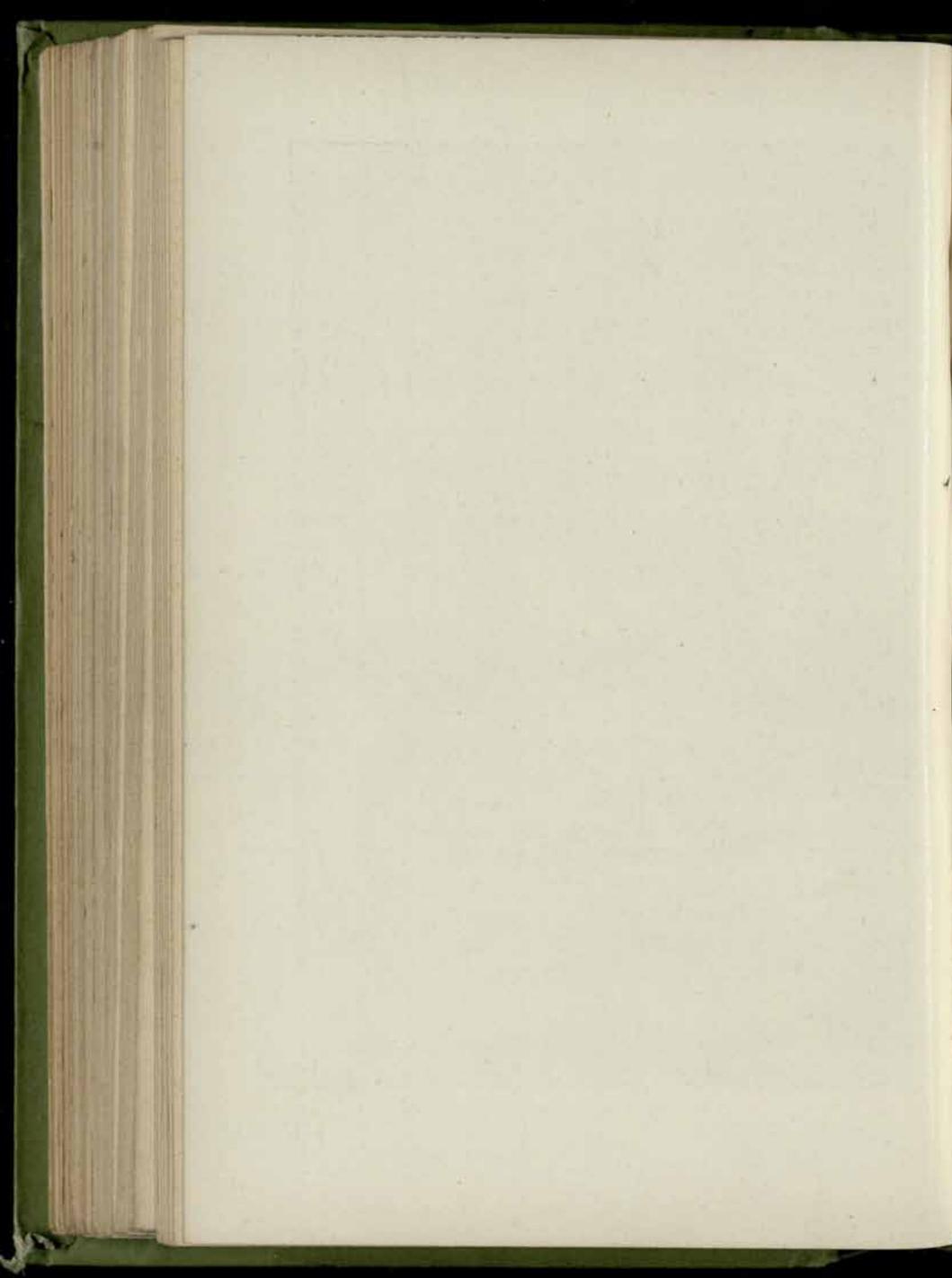
“Yes,” replied Mrs. Dutton, no less eagerly, “and I noticed particularly that those two Ayans who camped with us the first night had a strong Jewish cast of countenance. Go on, Peeschee!”

The Fox had waited quietly, during these exclamations of surprise, and now continued.

“One night the old Long Grey Beard fell asleep before his kettle, in which he was boiling herbs. One of those strange pieces of skin lay near him, forgotten for the moment. My father copied it exactly on a strip of birch bark, using a black coal from the fire. Before the medicine-man awoke, he had hidden this copy under his blanket. When Long Beard was awake, my father asked, ‘What does that mean?’ He was studying the map. ‘It is the road to the Red Mountain,’ said Long Beard, angrily. ‘It is the house of demons and evil spirits, and no one can reach



"HE WAS STUDYING THE MAP."



it alive but the great medicine-man.' He then snatched up the map, and put it in his pocket. The very next day, Long Beard went off for many hours in his canoe. While he was gone, my father found some red rocks under a pile of blankets in a corner of the hut. He took only one," said Peeschee, drawing himself up with pardonable pride at his father's moral bravery under severe temptation. "When he went away, two days later, he showed one of the tribe the piece of rock, and asked him what it was. The Ayan looked frightened, and said it was a piece of the Red Mountain, which could not be visited by any living man. He added that it was worth more than gold, but that it would surely bring death to the owner. That is the piece of rock I gave to you."

"Cheerful prospect for the present owners!" laughed Richard, nervously, trying to shake off a presentiment of coming evil, as he fingered the rock, at that very moment reposing in the bottom of his pocket.

"When I was hunting," continued Peeschee, in conclusion, "I did see with my eyes the Red Mountain, as I told you. I did not dare to go there myself," he added, honestly. "When you saved my life, I thought: I will tell him of the red rocks which are better than gold among white men."

"And your father?"

"He died many years ago."

"Have you heard from the long-bearded medicine-man?"

Peeschee could not repress another shudder. He simply said, "No."

"But how do you know this map starts at Fort Yukon, as you said?"

"Because that," pointing, "is what the Indians

make for fort. That is a big wigwam, with smoke going up. You have seen the big chimneys that made the smoke. The next year the fort was burned."

"You think, then, that the medicine-man knew of the mountain, through his old parchments, or skins, as you call them; and that he made this map himself?"

"Yes," and Peeschee nodded several times vigorously.

"But why did the Ayans want to burn the fort?"

"The medicine-men of all the tribes drove them to do it. They told the Ayans the white men would take away their trade in skins. They were mad because the white men brought good medicines, that cured sick Indians better than their own."

"And do you suppose your long-bearded friend ever visited the fort before it was burned?"

"Yes. The tribe lived on the Ayan River, just above the fort."

"The Ayan—that's the river called Pelly now," mused the lieutenant. "I hope John and the boys won't get into any trouble up there. It's perfectly clear," he added aloud. "Old Grey Beard found out about that cellar, which was probably built by the traders to store their furs in, where they could be neither stolen nor injured, either by Indians or elements. It probably was unfinished when the fort was built. The crafty old medicine-man, knowing he was closely watched in his own tribe, found out about this cellar, got down into it some day when nobody was round, taking a pickaxe from Russian stores in the fort. Then carried his treasures with him, intending to hide them, like every old miser that ever lived, where nobody could find them but their owner. While he was digging, and planning future trips to his

haunted Red Mountain, the steel point of the pick struck open an empty pocket in the ledge, reaching to a blast of that fearful fire-damp. It only came out slowly, and I suppose he didn't know what was the matter, but sat down at the table to take another look at his precious documents. He never got up again from that chair."

"Do you suppose those Hebrew writings tell about the mountain?"

"That's more than I know. The main point is that the map is probably correct, and, if we have the pluck to put this thing through, the Duttons are the wealthiest family in the United States!"

Peeschee now withdrew, but not till his master had given his hand a hearty shake as a token of restored confidence.

The Indian's eyes glistened, but he said nothing.

CHAPTER XVII.

A REUNION.



IT was now nearly a week beyond the day appointed for the rendezvous at Fort Selkirk, and nothing had been heard from Mr. Dutton. The lieutenant began to entertain serious fears as to the safety of the inland party; the more so when he heard Peeschee's account of the hostility of the tribes of the interior to any intruders upon their domain.

That there were Ayan villages or encampments both above and below them on the river they knew. The Chilkats went on daily scouting expeditions, and on several occasions reported fresh trails of large parties of natives,—whether peaceful or warlike they could not tell.

Richard became decidedly impatient. He fretted because of the enforced inaction, the torment of the clouds of mosquitoes that infested the banks of the river, the bands of Indians hanging about the camp; and last, but not least, the state of Flossie's health. The girl seemed suffering from a sort of malarial attack, for which the most direct cure would be a trip into the mountainous interior.

There was one more apprehension, of which the

lieutenant did not speak to the rest of the party. By the middle of September the warm season would be over, and snow would fall among the mountains by October 1st, if not before. If they should be caught by the wintry storms, and snowed in, their escape alive would be almost a miracle. Whatever was to be done, then, must be accomplished within about eight weeks at the latest, as it was now the middle of July. Besides, the last vessels going south from St. Michael's, at the stormy mouth of the Yukon, would leave before the end of September. Cut off from this avenue of exit from Alaska, the only alternative was a long and arduous struggle with the forest, through an unknown country, directly south to William's Sound. This last route was, moreover, impassable on account of the enormous glaciers, which can be seen for miles at sea, and which furnish the northern Pacific with thousands of icebergs every summer, advancing down the mountain-side, as they do, at the rate of forty feet a day, or about twelve times as fast as the swiftest pace attained by the great glaciers of Mont Blanc,—the *Du Bois* and *Mer de Glace*.

Under the circumstances, great alacrity was necessary to prevent their trip from being an utter failure, or to escape from the wilderness with their lives.

The raft was now poled out to the lower end of one of the little islands with which the river was dotted, and the heaviest of the goods stowed upon it, so as to be ready for a start at half-an-hour's notice. The Chilkats had a rather battered and leaky canoe which they had found stranded among the rank willows by the water's edge, and in this shaky little craft the goods and passengers were conveyed across the narrow

arm of the stream separating the island from the south shore.

On the morning of the seventeenth day of the month, the whole company were seated outside their tents, on the high, abrupt bank of the river; not, however, over ten feet above the surface of the water.

As usual, their conversation turned on the conjectural whereabouts of their friends, and the length of time which they should wait before giving up the undertaking and floating down the Yukon to the sea.

Richard declared positively that he would not stir a step toward the mountain until he had his brother by his side.

"It seems to me," said Flossie, in her sweet voice, that now had a little weary inflection, "that I see something on the river, away up."

They all shaded their eyes with their hands, and gazed eagerly. The view from this point covered at least two miles.

"A raft, a raft!" cried Richard, capering about like a boy, after a single glance at the approaching object through his field-glass.

The colour rushed to Flossie's pale cheeks.

"Oh, is it papa? and Rob and Hugh and dear little Nat? It can't be! Oh, I feel better already!"

Richard instantly discharged his rifle into the air as a signal, but, before anything more could be said, the Fox came hurrying up the river bank.

"Bad Injuns comin'," he panted. "Woods all full both sides river. Come to kill white folks. No stay here!"

"To the canoe! To the canoe!" cried Richard, forgetting the reinforcements at hand, in his fear of the new danger. "Quick! the island is our only

chance. Jump in, Flossie and Ella. Peeschee, paddle for your life!"

"Get into the willows, girls!" he shouted, as the canoe, driven by Peeschee's powerful strokes, foamed through the water.

In an incredibly short space of time he was back again, and off once more with Chloe and the lieutenant.

As yet not an Indian had been seen. The Chilkats plunged into the water, and swam across to the island.

The tents and the few remaining goods were hurriedly bundled into the canoe, and carried to the raft. Peeschee pulled the canoe upon its stout logs and dived for the willows.

Still no sign of the savages. Richard began to hope the Fox had for once mistaken a passing band of hunters for a war party.

"Perhaps we can get away quietly, and dodge the whole crowd," he said to Peeschee, in low tones.

Then, after a careful survey of both banks, he called the women out on the raft. The Chilkats stood ready with their poles. Peeschee held the painter in his hand.

"Cast off the moment the other raft comes in sight round the end of the island," commanded Dick. "They'll follow us——"

His confident remarks were cut short by a loud report from the shore, and a musket ball imbedded itself in one of the logs, just grazing the bare leg of the foremost Chilkat. In an instant, as if by magic, the woods on either bank fairly swarmed with dark forms.

The lieutenant, who had served through all the late war, tossed his head up like a war-horse. Seizing his Winchester, he sighted carefully on the nearest of the

enemies, who was just preparing to swim out from their late camping-ground, and pulled trigger. The Indian clapped his hand to his left arm and howled with terror and pain. At the same moment Peeschee picked off an especially prominent assailant on the opposite shore.

And now a splendid volley, from three pieces, roared out like an echo, as Raft No. 2 swept round the end of the island.

"To the rescue!" shouted the boys, waving their hats.

"Hurrah!" returned the lieutenant, raising his piece for another shot. But where were the living targets that had thronged the shores but a moment before?

Gone! The forest was apparently as lonely and quiet as it had been for weeks before. The cowardly foe had melted away into its depths at the first fire. Even the man hit by Peeschee had picked himself up and limped off, with apparently only a flesh-wound.

Thankful that no lives were lost on either side in the little skirmish, Richard turned to greet the newcomers.

Down came the raft, the boys clustering eagerly in its clumsy bows, and preparing for a jump.

The two unwieldy crafts bump and swing round. There is a confused laughing and crying and kissing, all of which the Chilkats look upon stoically, as they hold the second raft in place with their poles. Carlo barks his loudest, and "wags his tail all over," as Nat expresses it. Even Chloe and Teddy are discovered in a wild embrace.

"And now," calls Mr. Dutton, in his hearty voice, "as we are all united, through the mercy of Him

who has cared for us,—now we are ready to complete our trip !”

“Onward, then !” cries Uncle Dick, catching the infection of enthusiasm.

“Hurrah for the Red Mountain !” cry the boys in unison, while Flossie waves her little hand and Chloe her red bandana.

“Cast off, Peeschee, but keep the other raft in tow !” orders Mr. Dutton, assuming command of the expedition.

The timbers tremble under the powerful thrust of the Chilkat poles and the impulse of the river current as the flotilla sweeps down-stream.

“Onward, to the Red Mountain !”

CHAPTER XVIII.

A LESSON IN BRIDGE-MAKING.



THUS far we have followed the fortunes of the Dutton party almost step by step. But, I hear you say, what has become of Solomon, the Yankee hunter and backwoods philosopher? It seems to us that you have left him entirely.

Not so, boy and girl readers; Solomon has left himself out. During the adventure at Fort Selkirk he was reconnoitring the vicinity of the peninsula, regardless of rain or lightning. He accompanied the lieutenant's party as far as the White River camp, and, learning that they had decided to wait there several days, petitioned for a leave of absence. Solomon, like most of his countrymen, was an uneasy mortal. He wanted to prospect a little, he said, on his own account, nearer the mountains. He agreed to meet them at Fort Yukon.

The long-limbed hunter was better than his word. He joined the united party at their first camp below the White River, and now the expedition was complete in its quota of members.

The raft swept bravely down-stream without further molestation from the Indians, who seemed to have been pretty thoroughly frightened. One or two

villages were passed, but the inhabitants were all so busy with their salmon-fishery that they paid but little attention to the whites, probably thinking them a party of fur-traders going out from the interior. The size of the company on the raft was now such as to intimidate any ordinary band of natives, no matter how warlike their inclinations.

On about the fifth day they knew they must be crossing the boundary of Alaska—in other words, the one hundred and forty-first meridian west from Greenwich. They were now fairly in Alaskan territory, and felt that they were nearing their goal. Every night the larger raft was moored to the lower end of an island, with its more fragile consort, that of Mr. Dutton and the boys, close at hand. The whole party slept on board, going ashore only to cook, eat, and hunt.

The broad and dreary "Yukon Flat Lands" were now reached, where the river spreads out in a perfect network of shallow, swift streams, cutting off hundreds of islands, and measuring ten miles in width from bank to bank. The greatest care was necessary, lest they should take the wrong channel, and be obliged to abandon the raft. Indeed, this very accident occurred to the smaller craft, which got swept into a narrow passage-way between two sandbars, and presently grounded, sticking so fast that it was useless to try to get it off before the next freshet. Three of the remaining Chilkat packers were now paid up and discharged.

They immediately started up-stream, to return on foot over the Chilkoot pass. This left the following membership on the large raft; Mr. Dutton, Mrs. Dutton, Lieutenant Dutton, Robert, Florence, Hugh, Nathaniel, Chloe, Teddy, Solomon, Joe, and Jim; two

Chilkats, of whom one was a good interpreter ; Peeschee, and Carlo.

On the afternoon of the seventeenth day from White River, the whole party said good-bye to the old raft, and landed with all their stores on the left bank of the Yukon.

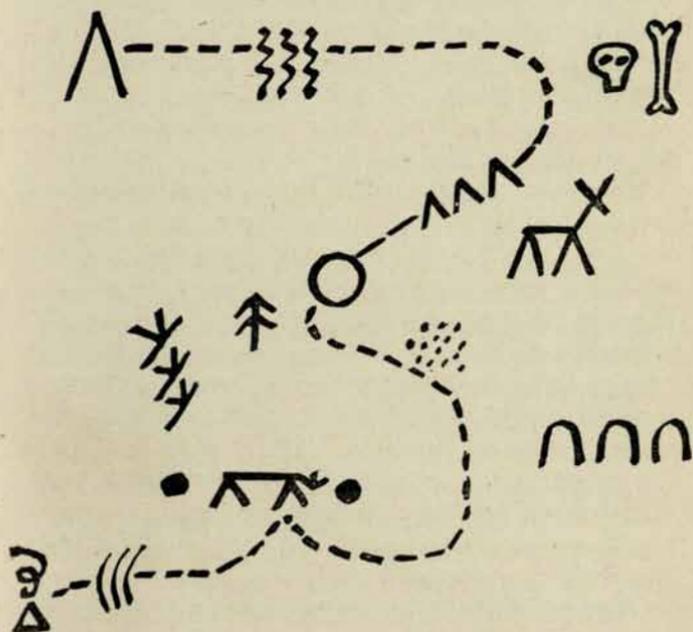
They were now exactly on the Arctic Circle, which runs through Fort Yukon at the extreme northern point of the "Great Arctic Bend" of the Yukon River. They did not visit the rough-looking buildings which constituted the trading-post, but struck directly into the interior, heading due south. As they were now to travel entirely by Peeschee's map, it will do no harm to take a fresh look at it, that we may follow them intelligently during their wanderings in the trackless wilderness,—the chosen home of the moose, the caribou, the wolf, of countless numbers of bears, and, as the native Alaskan devoutly believes, of spirits, who guard the higher mountain peaks against intrusion.

The map was arranged with the north and south points exactly reversed: that is, the bottom of the map is north, and the top south; of course, east and west change places accordingly. This must be carefully borne in mind in tracing the journey.

Starting from the lower left-hand (or north-east) corner, at which point the rude representation of a wigwam, with smoke ascending, stood for Fort Yukon, the party took the east bank of a little stream for a mile or two, then struck off to the right, where a natural ravine, probably the path of an ancient glacier, plainly corresponded to the route traced on the chart. Peeschee indicated to the lieutenant as well as he could that, from what his father had told him, the

whole distance marked out was not far from three hundred and fifty miles. Of this there was one section where over a hundred miles could be made in twenty-four hours, by rafting down a swift and deep river. The lieutenant made a rough guess at propor-

Peschee's Map



tions, and marked a scale of miles on the margin of his map—as the reader can do if he likes. On Richard's map he allowed about forty miles to an inch.

The second day passed without special incident. Although there was no defined trail, the walking was

far easier than Mr. Dutton had found it along the Pelly. Peeschee seemed to choose by instinct the exact route by which the original draughtsman of the strange map had found his way to the great peak of cinnabar.

In the forenoon of the third day, a new sound fell upon their ears. It was a dull roar, like that of a passing railway train.

Solomon was the first to notice it.

The party halted and listened.

"Ef I was in any kind of a decent country," remarked the hunter, after a momentary silence, "I should guess we were comin' to a waterfall, an' a mighty big one at that."

Peeschee nodded several times intelligently, and pointed to the vertical marks crossing the trail on the lieutenant's map. He then scrambled on ahead with the utmost agility, much pleased at striking the first landmark correctly.

The thunder of the waters grew deeper as they advanced, until the ground itself seemed fairly to shake beneath their feet. Soon a mist was seen rising above the tree-tops. And half-an-hour later the travellers were assembled on the bank of a swift, deep stream, looking up with delight and awe at the mighty cataract which came tumbling over the rocks above with a sheer fall of sixty feet or more.

One feature of the scene lent an almost grotesque aspect to the falling river; the water was nearly white, with its sediment of glacial mud, so that it was as if the spectators were looking upon a veritable cataract of milk.

"But how to cross it?" asked the leader, turning to the guides.

The Indians seemed somewhat at a loss. Solomon, however, cast a critical eye up and down the stream.

"I guess we c'n fix it somehaow," said he. "You jest sit daown here 'n' rest 'n' git dinner. You come along with me," motioning to Joe, Jim, and Peeschee.

"Can't I go, too, *please?*" asked Flossie, jumping up, and placing herself at Solomon's side.

"Wal, ef ye won't git into no mischief," said the hunter, with a kindly look down into the girl's pale face. "I 'low I do like to hev ye raound."

"And me!" called Nat, eagerly, running after them.

"And me! And me!" shouted the boys, joining the pioneering party.

Solomon laughed, and shrugged his shoulders; but, as he made no serious objections, they all set off together toward a point two or three hundred yards below the camping-ground.

The boys followed the backwoodsman patiently, climbing over logs and boulders, sinking knee-deep in moss, and helping their sister over the roughest places. They longed to inquire how Solomon proposed to cross the stream, but they knew better than to ask questions. Solomon was as averse as a brigadier-general to explaining his plans beforehand.

He paused at length at a point where the river narrowed in to a width of about sixty feet, having a depth of fifteen or twenty in the centre of the channel. The shores were thickly wooded with evergreens, rising to a great height. Prominent among these was a huge old hemlock close to the water's edge, towering to the height of at least one hundred feet. Solomon measured it with his eye, and gripped his axe firmly. He had found what he wanted.

Clip! clip! went the keen edge of the axe into the

tough fibres of the tree. Chips flew in every direction. As the trunk was at least thirty inches in diameter, it was no light job to reach its core, on the side toward the stream. After ten minutes' steady work, the white man handed over his axe to Peeschee and the Chilkats, all of whom were accomplished choppers.

The young people looked on as the pile of yellow, fragrant chips grew; applauding every particularly large piece that was successfully detached. Hugh became tired of inaction at length, and strolled off with his fishing-tackle.

And now, after three-quarters of an hour's pretty continuous chopping, Solomon pronounced the cleft sufficiently deep, and, taking the axe again into his own hands, attacked the rugged bark on the opposite side of the tree.

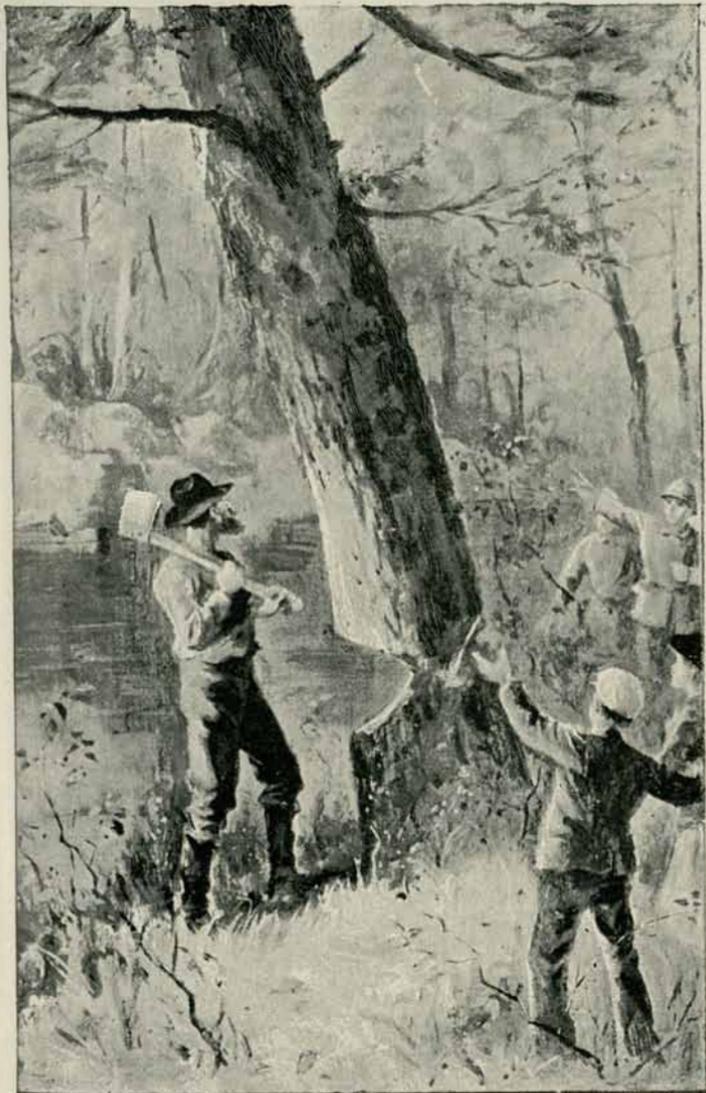
Presently the great hemlock began to shiver; every blow was felt throughout its broad limbs and masses of tiny-needled foliage.

"Look out!" shouted the backwoodsman to the Indians, who were stretched out on the moss, dangerously near.

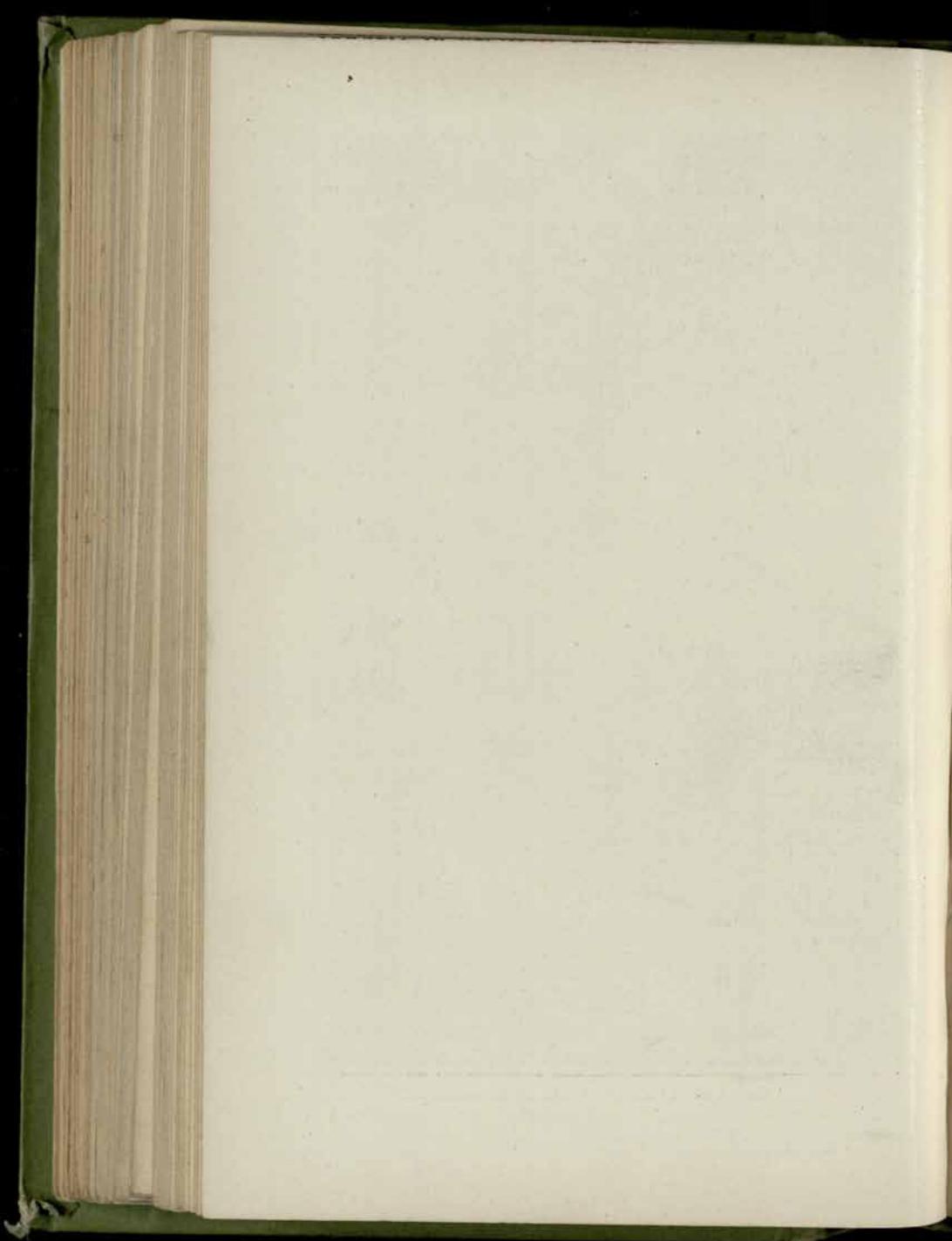
Slowly at first, then gathering speed and momentum, the enormous tree swept downward with a mighty crash, which for the time drowned even the voice of the cataract.

"Hurrah!" cried Robert, leaping upon the prostrate trunk, and waving his hat. "The bridge is built!"

The hemlock had fallen just as Solomon had intended it should. Its top rested well upon the opposite bank of the river, with a good forty feet to spare.



"'LOOK OUT!' SHOUTED THE BACKWOODSMAN."



He now proceeded to mount the trunk himself, and with his axe clear away half-a-dozen boughs that blocked the way across. Flossie then walked over the bridge, and pronounced it "perfectly splendid."

As soon as dinner was over, the march was resumed across the new hemlock bridge. Both Chloe and Carlo showed considerable reluctance at going over, but with persuasion and assistance the feat was accomplished.

"Thar!" said Solomon, as, with his rifle thrown across his shoulder, he paused and glanced back at the fallen hemlock, "the b'ars ought tew pass a vote o' thanks to me at their next taown-meetin.' They'll use that ar bridge o' mine for the next forty year, and not pay no toll, nuther!"

CHAPTER XIX.

CAPTURED BY BROWN BEARS.



IT must be confessed that even Mr. Dutton and the lieutenant looked forward with considerable anxiety to the next object, in the line of their route, which the old medicine-man had thought worthy of noting down on his map. If Solomon had any misgivings, he kept them to himself.

Peeschee admitted that he had no idea of the meaning of the design, though it seemed intended to indicate some animal. From the fact that it had no tail, he was inclined to think it represented a bear; but that was a mere guess.

After leaving the stream which Solomon bridged so neatly, they found that the trail led up the course of one of the numerous little streams that threaded the hillsides. Mr. Dutton paused from time to time to adjust their route by the compass; but there was now not much danger of missing the path, which had clearly been traversed many times since it was first made. The lieutenant was of the opinion that its origin was due to bears, whose tracks were plain enough beside every muddy pool they passed. Peeschee, on the other hand, maintained that the trail had been

"bushed out" in the first place by man. Whichever theory was correct, the path was a good one; otherwise, it would have been impossible for the women to penetrate the thick underbrush which covered the whole district through which they were passing.

A day went by, and nothing was seen to indicate any especially novel feature. The direction was still steadily south-west.

Toward nightfall they came in sight of a range of low hills, differing from any they had yet passed in that they were entirely bare of vegetation, save a coating, here and there, of crinkled black lichens. Their aspect was dreary in the extreme.

The Duttons camped for the night beside the brook they had been following, and in the morning pushed on.

"Let me go on ahead with Solomon!" begged Hugh; and the two were allowed to precede the rest of the party.

They were hardly out of sight when Richard called his brother's attention to a singular black cloud, creeping up over the northern sky.

Piling huge heaps of shadowy vapour on high, it spread rapidly, until the sun disappeared, and every object wore a lifeless, grey aspect. It was clear that a severe storm was at hand.

Immediate preparations were made to meet it. Tents were spread, and secured with double pegs. Everything was got under cover as fast as possible; and none too soon, for the men had barely time to dive into the tents, and close the flaps, before the rain came down in torrents, thunder boomed and rattled like a park of artillery, and the lightning glittered almost incessantly.

Mr. Dutton was not much worried about Hugh, for

Solomon was a host in himself, and would doubtless find shelter for himself and the boy somewhere. At the worst, only a thorough ducking could result.

The storm lasted all the forenoon, and left both ground and bushes so wet that it was decided to be impracticable to go on before the next day. A musket was discharged three times, therefore, to recall the wanderers. As they did not come in at once, the signal was repeated. By six o'clock the party began to worry a little, and Peeschee, with Carlo, was sent on to hunt up the two absentees. At ten o'clock, just after sunset, he returned with news of grave import.

He had followed the trail for fully three miles, when he came on a collection of Indian huts, from which smoke was ascending, showing that some members of the tribe at least were at home. He saw nothing of them, however, nor of the missing ones. Whether the natives were hostile or not, he could not tell. The huts or wigwams, he said, looked something like the work of coast Indians, but had this peculiarity, that they were covered with skins of the brown bear, instead of the more ordinary hides.

At this the Chilkats pricked up their ears.

"Well, what is it, man? Speak out!" said Dick to the nearest, slapping the stock of his rifle impatiently.

"You say him tent have bearskin?"

"Yes."

"P'r'aps him Brown Bear Chilkat."

"What does he mean?" asked Dick, appealing to Peeschee.

"Biggest tribe of Chilkats called 'Brown Bears,'" answered the Fox, laconically.

"And you think there may be a detachment of them in this out-of-the-way place?"

Peeschee nodded.

Dick was about to question the packers still further, when he noticed that the one who had spoken was gazing eagerly at a little ornament which dangled from the bracelet on Flossie's wrist.

"What that?" asked the Chilkat, eagerly.

"Oh," said Floss, "that's just a little charm for my bangles. Mamma bought it in Victoria. See—it's a bear's head, I believe."

The dark faces of the Chilkats bent eagerly over the flattened bit of copper, and two or three guttural remarks were exchanged in their own language.

"Well, what mischief are you up to now?" demanded Richard, after he had watched the pantomime long enough.

The Chilkat looked up.

"You buy boy and great hunter wid dat," pointing to the charm.

"H'm! seems to me, I remember now," mused Dick. "The Brown Bears are the wealthiest and biggest clan of the Chilkats, and copper is called by them the most precious metal. Is that so, Fox?"

Peeschee nodded again.

"Exactly so. And the most valuable trinket you can offer them is a brown bear carved in copper. That's the very thing!"

"Who shall take it to the tribe?" asked Mr. Dutton hastily.

"Hadn't these Chilkats better go?"

But the packers hung back, and Peeschee explained, with a shrug of his shoulders, that they belonged to another and inferior clan, the Penguins, and did not relish meeting their superiors.

Thereupon Mr. Dutton declared he would go him-

self, leaving Dick in command of the camp, and taking Peeschee along as guide. Carlo should have been left at home, but managed to slip off just as they were starting, and only joined them when it was too late to send him back. The council of war had been held late at night; the ransom party started early next morning.

As they advanced, Mr. Dutton found that he was entering a tract of country strikingly different from anything he had yet seen. A fire seemed to have swept over it at some remote period, clearing off all the larger timber. In the valleys and along the water-courses vegetation had sprung up and flourished luxuriantly; but from the hills the very soil itself had been washed away by heavy rains, leaving only the bare ledges. These were composed mostly of limestone, and were full of caves, so that one huge precipice looked fairly like a bank filled with swallows' nests.

"Soft! soft!" whispered Peeschee, motioning with his hand. "Much big lot Chilkat squaw!"

Peeschee was a little in advance, and had nimbly mounted to the top of one of those boulders left by the ice-drift of the glacial period. The other crept to his side, and peered over the edge of the boulder.

About a hundred yards beyond them was the Indian village, in plain sight. The huts were at the base of one of those high and steep precipices pierced with caves. They were built of timber and brush, with huge, shaggy bear-skins thrown over them. In a little open space between the huts and a small lake which stretched away to the westward were twenty or thirty hideous-looking old squaws, wrapped in blankets

and seated in a circle around a man and boy, who were lying, bound hand and foot, in their midst.

A glance only was necessary to identify the captives as the two missing members of the expedition, Solomon and Hugh.

The faces of the two presented a strange contrast. Solomon glared at his jailers with a look of extreme disfavour, that would have made Mr. Dutton shout with laughter had not the situation been so serious. Hugh, on the contrary, was pale as death, and, while he tried his best to look amiable, kept glancing around for succour.

Mr. Dutton and Peeschee, lying on their faces, and peering through the thick boughs of a spruce, could easily see all this without being seen.

The squaws now set up an excited jabbering, pointing at the two whites before them, and discussing some point with the utmost vehemence.

Peeschee made out, after a while, that they were indifferent what became of poor Hugh, but that they wanted Solomon for a husband, several of the ugliest of the lot claiming him, each to the exclusion of the rest. Perhaps it was fortunate that the long-limbed hunter could not understand what they were up to, or he might have expressed himself vigorously as to a matrimonial alliance with any of the fair "Brown Bears" before him.

"Where do you suppose the men are?" whispered Mr. Dutton to his companion.

"Men gone 'way off to fish. All come back in winter. Live in wigwam now."

"Well, the women won't hurt their prisoners, will they?"

"Squaws much bad," replied the Fox, sententiously.

“Worse than men.”

Whatever plan might have been matured for a rescue was now frustrated by a move on Carlo's part. The faithful Newfoundland was as much interested in the scene as anybody; and when Mr. Dutton unconsciously loosened his grip on his collar, the dog freed himself by a sudden jerk, and went crashing down through the bushes toward his young master.

A perfect Babel of voices ensued. Two or three dozen lean, sharp-nosed curs, such as the Alaskans use for their sledges in the winter, sprang toward the intruder, *yapping*, snarling, and howling vociferously. The ring of squaws started to their feet, and several muskets were produced from hiding-places. Carlo paid no attention to any one until he had given both Hugh and Solomon a plentiful lapping all over their faces, a caress which they could not prevent, as their hands were tied behind them.

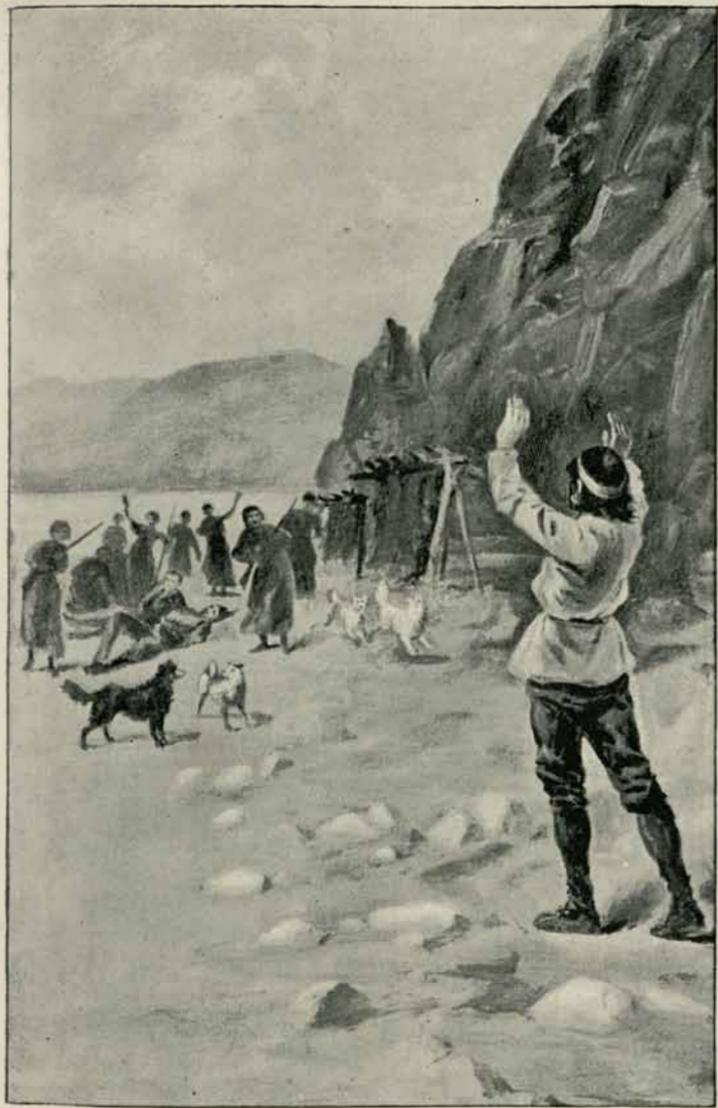
Immediate action was necessary. Mr. Dutton and the Fox hesitated no longer, but followed in Carlo's tracks. Peeschee advanced first, holding up his hands in sign of amity.

The squaws, seeing a man of their own colour, lowered the threatening muzzles of their old Hudson's Bay muskets.

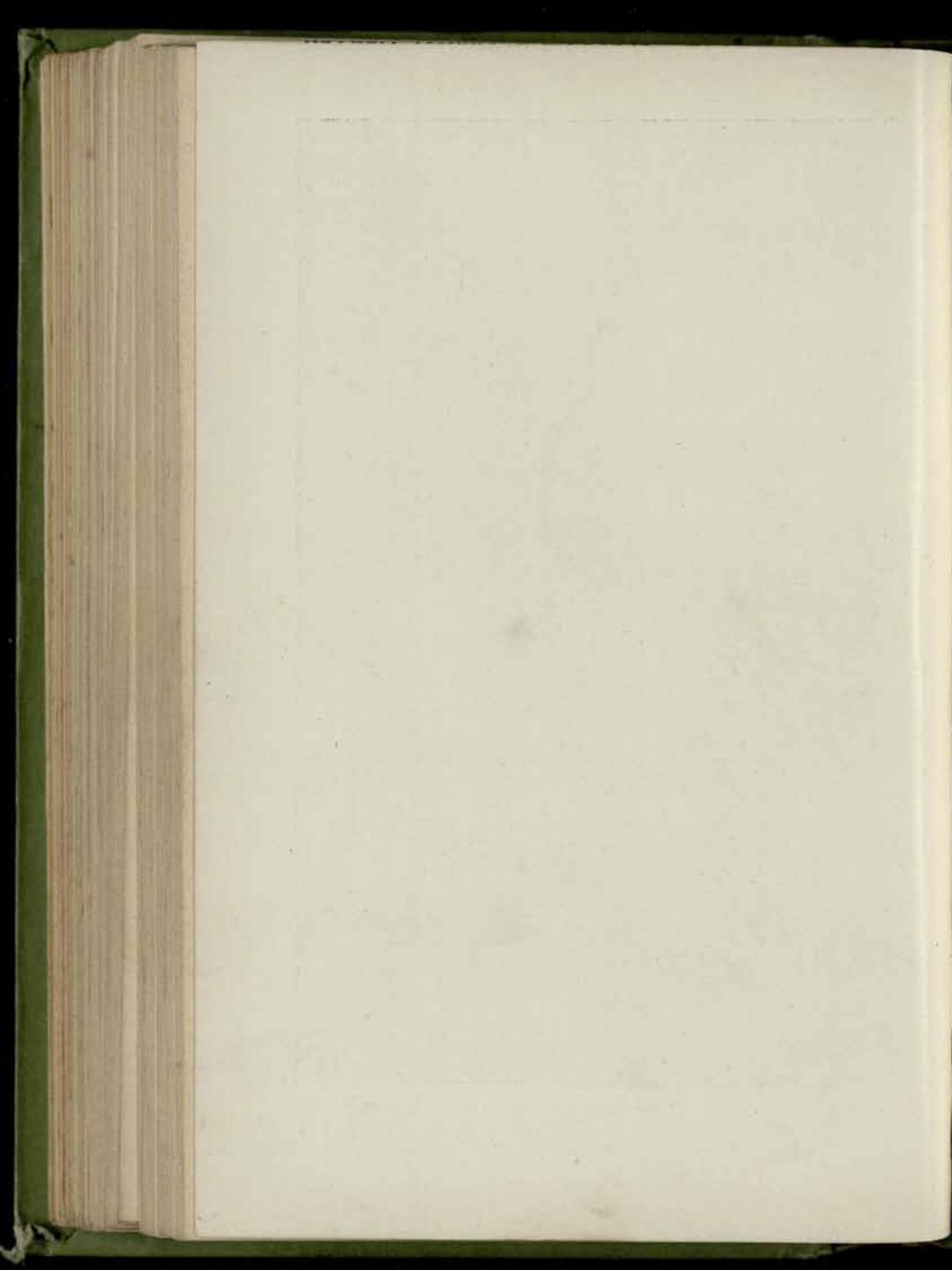
“I have come from the great white medicine-man,” said Peeschee, rapidly, in his own tongue, “to visit the royal clan of the Chilkats, the noble Brown Bears!”

The squaws looked at one another, but made no reply.

“The medicine-man has decided to give to the Brown Bears, and the women of the Brown Bears, a marvellous present.”



"I COME FROM THE GREAT MEDICINE MAN."



Sensation among the squaws.

"Have you ever seen an image of the terrible, the fierce bear himself, the dweller in caves, the awful one, engraved in the rich copper of the mountain? No, you have not! Here, the great white medicine-man is ready to give this to you. See!" And he held up Flossie's trinket, so that the sunlight glinted on the bright metal.

Several of the squaws started forward eagerly, when Peeschee suddenly drew back.

"Wait!" he commanded, waving his hand. "I will consult the medicine-man once more."

He beckoned, and Mr. Dutton came forward from the grove, where he had been awaiting this signal.

Peeschee whispered one or two words to him, and then turned once more to the Chilkats, whose brows were beginning to darken.

"He consents to give you the wonderful image on one condition. That is that you will set free the captives now lying beside us, the mighty man with the long arm, and the boy beloved by the black dog; and, moreover, that you will do no harm to his tribe, who must shortly pass through the village of the Brown Bears on their way to the mountains of fire."

Peeschee well knew that no Alaskan Indian would approach within twenty miles of a volcano. The statement that the white men were to visit those abodes of evil spirits and magic evidently impressed them, as he had intended it should.

"The women of the Brown Bears will let the boy go with the black dog," they announced, after some consultation among themselves; and, stooping down, one of them cut the thongs that bound poor Hugh, who staggered stiffly to his feet, rubbing his joints,

and groaning in spite of himself at the twinges the change of position caused him.

"No!" said Peeschee, firmly. "Both must go free. And if the Bears should refuse, then will the storm come upon their village, as it did yesterday, and destroy every woman in the tribe for the evil done to the white strangers!"

Whatever effect Peeschee's speech might have had, Mr. Dutton added the last straw by producing a small pocket-mirror, which he handed to Peeschee. The latter held it carelessly so as to let the light reflect from it straight into the eyes of first one, then another, of the delighted squaws.

As with one accord, two or three of them freed their coveted bridegroom, and again stretched out their hands for the gifts.

"Not yet," said Peeschee, solemnly. "When the sun shall touch the trees on yonder hill, and all the tribe of the great white medicine-man shall have gone their way toward the land of fire, then shall you have both gifts, and some of the white man's tea to cheer your hearts. Farewell!"

With these words, all four started on the return trip to the camp, not without misgivings that some squaw might repent, and select their backs for targets. Instead of this, however, the women began a strange chant, swaying to and fro, and waving both arms, until the travellers were out of sight. Even then the wailing notes, like a dirge, could be heard floating after them down the valley.*

* If any of my boy readers should think that Peeschee spoke in more lofty strains than would be possible for a degraded Alaskan Indian to use, let him send to the proper source for a copy of an address recently made at Met-lah-Kah-tla by one of

With all haste the camp was reached, goods packed, and the party put in marching order. By noon they came once more to the village. To the surprise of all, not a living being was in sight. The wigwams were perfectly deserted, and not even a dog was to be seen. Evidently, the Brown Bears feared a summary punishment from the mighty medicine-man, or "Shaman," to use the native term, who bore about upon his august person the image of their savage prototype.

At last Florence descried a dark face peering down from one of the caves high above them; then another and another. The squaws had taken to earth, and, while there, were certainly safe.

Peeschee alone stayed behind, and, when he had given the expedition time enough to gain a dozen miles by hard walking, he called in low, soft tones to the women. One by one they came trooping in.

The Fox pointed silently to the sunlight, just gilding the topmost boughs of the far-off spruces on the hilly horizon, as it sank from sight.

Then he drew from his pouch the copper trinket, the looking-glass, and a half-pound package of tea. These articles he placed on the ground, waved his hands, as if in blessing, over the village, and departed with stately stride.

Once out of sight, his dignity departed, and he scrambled through the woods like a wild cat, overtaking the main body at a little after midnight.

The hieroglyphic on the map was clear. The Brown Bears dwelling in the caves,—any one could see it now.

the natives, in which much more stately language was used than that employed by the humble guide of the Dutton expedition.

To avoid the hills, the route on the morrow swerved toward the north. The three peculiar-looking marks, "like croquet hoops," observed Floss, proved to indicate three rounded mountains, far to the west. The dots, some eighty miles further on, asserted themselves as swarms of mosquitoes in a swampy territory; while the three K's, to the east, were nothing more or less than flying eagles, of whom an immense number were seen soaring above the cliffs near the camp on August 20th.

On the next day a discovery was made which struck terror into every heart. It meant privation, danger of a fearful kind, possibly death to one or all of the party. It will need but one sentence to explain all. And that must be the opening sentence of the next chapter.

CHAPTER XX.

HALT!



WINTER—a white valley between dark mountain walls reaching up, up, into the cold blue ice of eternal glaciers, until they lose themselves in white frost clouds, impenetrable in their clammy folds—two log huts, or rather shanties, one of them containing, besides two women, one black and the other white, a sick girl, tossing feverishly on the pile of fir and cedar boughs that serve for a bed.

Reader, I told you in the last chapter that you could read in one sentence the story of the misfortune that had been threatening the Duttons ever since the miserable adventure at Fort Selkirk, and which had stared them plainly in the face ere they had accomplished half the distance between the river and their fateful goal. *Fever* had overtaken our sunny-haired little Flossie. Far from every physician and every comfort of home, the mother had seen with agony the symptoms gaining from day to day.

Why did they not turn and hasten back to the settlements? you say. Because return *up* the Yukon, against the swift current, was impossible with the

only means of transportation at their command ; and from Fort Yukon, where they struck off from the river, to its mouth would have been a voyage of *a clear thousand miles*, and that, too, through the very kind of district most conducive to the malarial disorder which threatened the girl—to say nothing of the countless perils of the trip. Even should they reach the sea in safety, they would be too late to take the last south-bound ships to the settlements ; and the small post at St. Michael's, in the midst of a desolate land of wintry storms, was not an alluring prospect.

Had all gone well, the lieutenant had hoped to pilot his party, after the Red Mountain was found and roughly surveyed, to the country lying about the head-waters of the Copper River, down which they could raft to the coast, and make the short sea-trip easily in canoes to Sitka.

“Had all gone well !” But all had not gone well ; and here was the expedition snowed in, in the interior of one of the wildest and coldest habitable countries on the globe, with no prospect of release until the following May ; and with a sick girl suffering for want of proper nursing and medicine. Truly, all had not gone well !

To understand fully just how matters stood, we must retrace our steps a little.

We left the expedition on the borders of a small and exquisitely beautiful lake, surrounded by stately red cedars of centuries' growth. This is the first you have heard of the lake, you say ? Turn back and look at Peeschee's invaluable chart. In the centre, do you see that circle with something like a double-barbed arrow sticking up beside it ? That is the lake ; the

arrow indicated, beyond a doubt, the lofty trees that mirrored their evergreen branches in its clear depths along the northern shore.

Beautiful, beyond anything they had yet seen, was this broad, placid sheet of water, stretching away to the south for nearly twenty miles. But before morning the travellers wished themselves a thousand leagues from its dimpling waves and bosky shores.

Little Floss had complained quietly, during the day, of greater fatigue than usual.

"It makes my back ache so," she said, "to climb over these trees!"

So the Indians made an armchair, as they had in the pass, and carried her for a while. But she soon tired of this, and asked to be allowed to walk again.

"Never mind," said Uncle Dick, cheerfully. "We're going straight toward home now, little girl. In not many days we shall see salt water again, and you shall have your cosy old room at Sitka."

Flossie did not reply, but a tear trembled at the end of her long brown lashes, as she thought of Sheldon and home. That night, in the camp beside the lake, she had an unmistakable chill, and the next morning was so feverish and weak that they did not dare to move on.

During the day, however, and the two that followed, she gained rapidly; so much so they started forward again on their weary march. About a week later they found themselves in the rough country indicated on the map by marks like this, $\Delta \Delta \Delta \Delta$.

Here the poor girl utterly gave out, and from the twenty-fifth of August until the tenth of September the expedition remained in permanent camp, their

hopes now raised by a seeming improvement in her health, now depressed again by renewed attacks of chills and fever.

The wind began to sweep down savagely from the heights beyond, and the nights became very cold.

One morning, the ground was found to be white with a heavy frost. It was plain that something must be done, and that quickly.

A council was called, and the men all gathered round the blazing fire in front of the tents.

"It's of no use to try to return to the settlements, that's certain," began Mr. Dutton. "We are over three hundred miles from the Yukon, and, if we found the fort abandoned for the winter, we should have a clear thousand miles of rafting before us, down to St. Michael's, all the time through low country. Flossie's only safety"—here the strong man's moustache twitched, but he controlled himself and went on—"is in keeping to the high grounds."

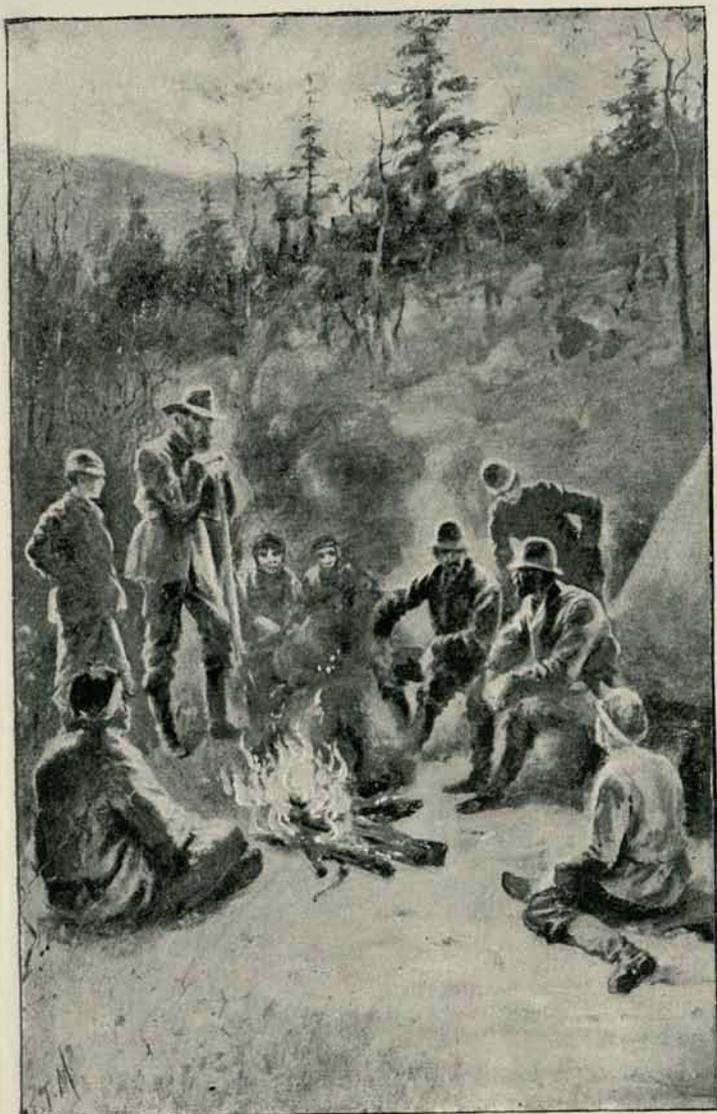
"And we may just as well give up all idea of going on," added the lieutenant, gloomily. "In the first place, Flossie isn't fit to move; and secondly, we are a good three hundred miles from the nearest point on the coast—say somewhere along William's Sound—unless all my calculations are wrong."

"And no sign of the Red Mountain yet!"

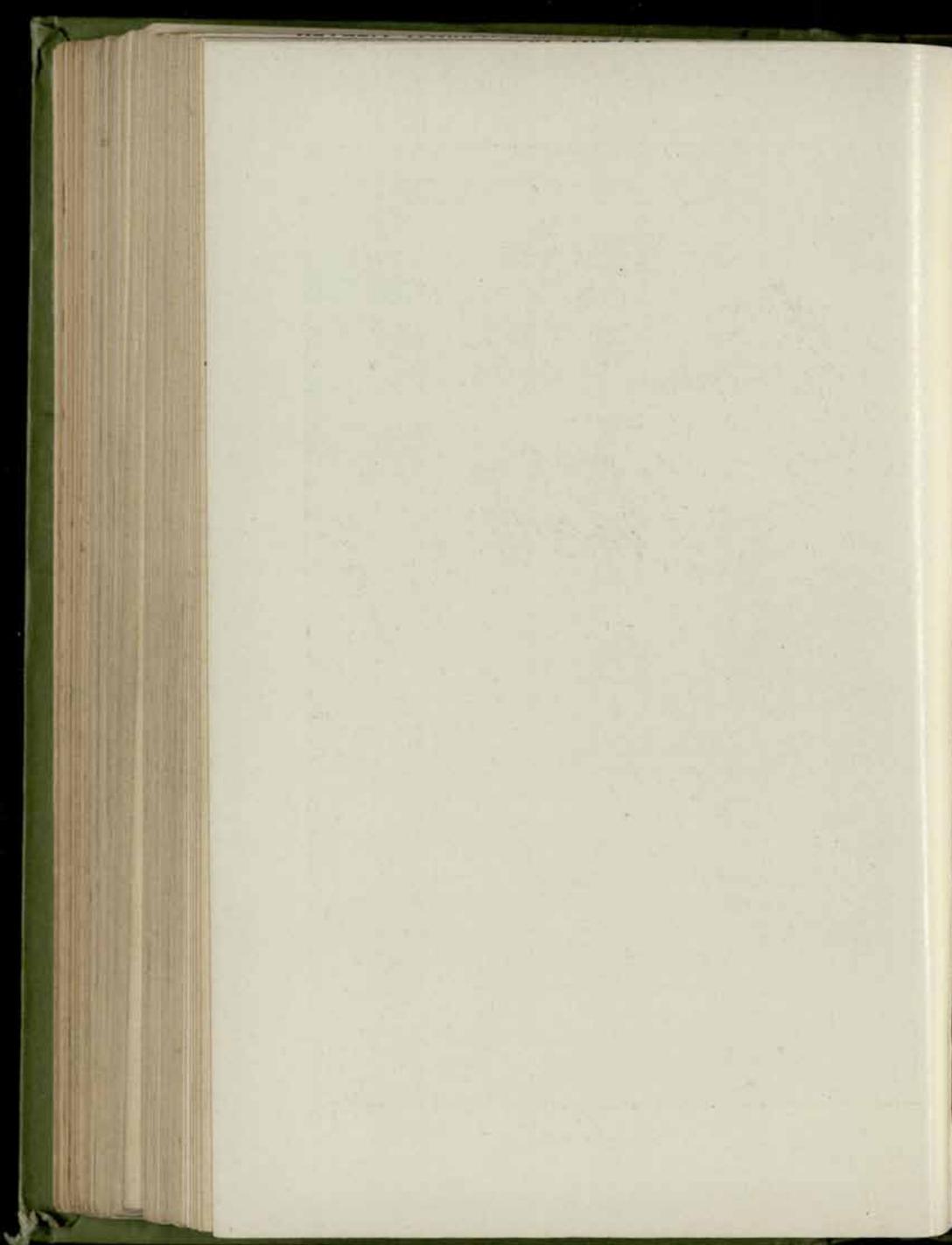
It was Robert who spoke last. All eyes were turned on Peeschee, who felt that his reputation was at stake.

"Red Mountain there!" said the Indian, impressively, pointing to the south-east.

"Well, for my part," grumbled Solomon, who had



A COUNCIL OF WAR.



thus far taken no part in the discussion, "I'm inclined tew believe that the Fox, thar, dreamed the whole business! Thar ain't no Red Maounting, and thar never was." He struck the butt of his rifle on the ground, to emphasize his words. "And never was!" he repeated angrily.

Peeschee drew himself up to his full height. He regarded the hunter one moment in silence. Then said slowly,—

"Red Mountain *there*. Peeschee no lie. He go bring back red rock. Come back in one moon," making a circular sweep with his hand.

Before any one could stop him, or realize what he was doing, the Fox turned his back on the little group by the fire, and strode off toward the woods.

"By George, that's rough!" exclaimed Richard, springing to his feet.

Solomon grasped his rifle angrily, and glared after the retreating Indian.

"I swan, he's up tew some rascally trick!" shouted the sinewy backwoodsman. "Come back here, you sneaking Fox! Come back, or I'll stop ye in a way ye won't like!"

"Hold on, Solomon," interposed the leader, seeing that his follower was really in earnest, "you can't stop him now, and if you did he'd make off within twenty-four hours. The sooner he goes the sooner he'll get back."

"I tell you he's goin' to get some tribe o' Bears or Penguins or Catamaounts or some o' his ugly packs daown on us," said Solomon, still fingering his rifle excitedly. "Thar never was an honest Injun yit, an' I don't believe the line's started with a Fox."

By this time the altercation was needless, for, with a parting wave of his hand, Peeschee was lost to sight in the thick "black growth," that covered the foothills of the lofty range along the horizon.

"Well," resumed Mr. Dutton, with a sigh, "there's one mouth less to feed for a month, any way."

"We can't stay in these tents much longer," suggested Hugh, "or we'll freeze to death. I was awfully cold last night."

It was curious that nobody referred to the map. There seemed to be a tacit understanding that it should not be consulted in this emergency. The last time Mr. Dutton had produced Peeschee's masterpiece which had travelled across the continent to Sheldon a year before, and back again in the wealthy mill-owner's inside vest-pocket, a strange expression had come into the faces that were gathered round him, and were looking over his shoulder as usual. The route was clearly traced from the fort on the Yukon to their present camp. There were the cataract, the caves of the Bears, the Three Buttes, the insect-infested swamp, the eagles on the wing, the fair lake with its symbol of the magnificent forest beside it; yes, and the hill country was plainly enough defined. Why, then, shudder at the first glance upon this faithful chart?

Ah, there was one more hieroglyphic, whose fearful import none could mistake. At the very spot where they were encamped, and where all possibility of either retreat or advance was cut off, was reared the hateful symbol of death, the skull and bone. Could it be, then, that this was to be the end of their labours? The map was hastily thrust aside—buried

deep at the bottom of the largest pack of goods, where no careless hand could reach it and bring it unwittingly to light.

Out of sight—out of sight—but not one of the party forgot.

CHAPTER XXI.

WINTER-QUARTERS.



THE lieutenant was the first to throw off the gloom which oppressed the little circle round the fire after Peeschee's departure.

"Well," he cried, cheerily, "there's no use in our moping here, at all events.

I've been in a good deal tighter place than this, and I don't give up the ship. If we are to stay here for a while, we must have a place to live in."

"Flossie is certainly no worse," added Mr. Dutton, catching the other's hopeful tone. "Perhaps the winter air will be the very best thing for her, if we can make a comfortable shelter for the cold months."

"Oh, good, good!" cried little Nat, who had just run out from his sister's tent. "Shall we have a real log cabin to live in? Like President Lincoln?"

Mr. Dutton laughed. "Who knows, Nat," said he, taking the boy on his knee, "but you will be President some day? and people will read about President Nathaniel Dutton's early hardships in the wilds of Alaska!"

"Well, I know 'twould make an awful good book,"

said the boy, decidedly. "I just wish I could read it about somebody else. Won't you tell a man all about it when we get home, papa, and let him make a book of it?"

"And put you in?"

"Yes, and Carlo, and all!"

"Illustrated?"

"Of course, papa."

Solomon set up a great laugh.

"I'd jest like to see a picter o' me drawn into a book," said he. "Haow pooty 'twould be! Make it sell like hot buns!"

"Well, I know you aren't *very* nice-looking," said Nat, frankly, "but you're awfully strong, Solomon, and I *guess* you're real good, too. I'd have a picture of you chopping down that tree for a bridge!"

Solomon laughed again, as he exchanged his rifle for an axe, and gave the fire a kick with his heavy boot to settle the red brands; and remarked that "ef he wus goin' to set fer his picter, he guessed he'd better be buildin' a haouse to den up in, over winter,"—a figure taken from the hibernating habits of his neighbour, *Ursus Arctos*, of Alaska.

The men now went to work with a will. The sounds of axes, the rustle of flying chips, the crackling and crashing of falling trees, filled the air with cheery sounds and delicious woody smells.

"I'm hungry as an ox," said Rob, when dinner-time came. "Best forenoon's work I ever did yet."

Flossie's eyes brightened with interest, and she listened eagerly to the plans of the architects.

"We shall need two big log huts," said Mr. Dutton, "connected by a covered passage-way. Each of them

will be divided into two parts. One of the huts, on a little higher ground than the other, and a little nearer the shelter of the woods, shall have bedrooms in it for you and me, Ella, and for Flossie and Chloe, as well as for the three boys. The other half of the building shall be used as a dining-room and general living-room."

"And where shall we cook?"

"The kitchen shall be in the other building, and beds for the rest of the men."

"Teddy shall sleep close by me," declared Hugh, throwing his arm around the boy's shoulder; a demonstration to which the warm-hearted Ted responded with an affectionate hug. Carlo set up a loud barking, just for fun, and everybody was in the best of spirits.

"There will be a good large fireplace in each hut," Mr. Dutton explained further. "We can get some good clay from the banks of the brook, about half-a-mile above here; and stones are plenty enough."

That afternoon all hands were hard at work. Solomon was in his element, swinging his shining axe, and bringing down tree after tree. Poplars and spruces were mostly chosen, for their soft wood and long straight trunks, from one to two feet in diameter. As soon as a tree came down it was pounced upon by Richard and his brother, who hewed off the few boughs that grew from the lower portion, and cut the logs into uniform lengths of about forty feet. The large branches were pulled away by Hugh and Rob, who cut off the smaller green boughs, which in turn were taken to a point close by the camp, and piled up by Teddy and little Nat. The Chilkats did not relish

the work, and, rather to the relief of the leader, disappeared at the close of the day ; nor did he ever set eyes on them again. They probably joined some of their tribe on the Yukon. Fortunately, the camp was so carefully guarded by Solomon and Carlo, with a view to this very contingency, that nothing whatever was stolen by the deserters, beyond a small case of canned beef.

Next morning, work went on with more alacrity than ever, although the assistance of the runaway Chilkats, poor as it had been, was missed in handling the heavy timbers. Joe and Jim, however, laboured bravely in their stead.

By the middle of the afternoon, Solomon, who had quietly assumed direction of the house-building, announced that he had logs enough to make a start. In addition to the longer pieces, he had cut about twenty, shorter by fifteen feet.

The boys had been employed in levelling off the site as well as they could without a shovel. The spot chosen for the hut which was to be put up first, for the use of the ladies, was peculiarly favourable to the purpose.

There was a large rock, sloping down gradually on the side toward the woods, but presenting an abrupt and vertical face, some six feet high, at its opposite extremity. Solomon resolved that this should form the back of his fireplace, which was to be midway in the longer wall of the hut.

Four logs were now laid on the ground, and carefully levelled by wedging them into place with rocks and turf. They formed a perfect parallelogram, forty feet by twenty-five. The rear forty-foot log came within three feet of the perpendicular face of the

boulder just described. This log was now cut away in front of the intended fireplace, which was to be six feet broad.

The logs were notched deeply at the corners of the hut, and saddled, as had been done in the raft-making. At every point a strong upright pole was driven to hold the ends of the logs which were not supported by saddling on others. This was necessary at the sides of the fireplace and the door. The full length of the lowest log was left across the latter, as Solomon explained that it would make the whole hut firmer, and they could easily step over it in going in and out.

The laying of the four foundation timbers, and driving stakes, occupied the builders until eight o'clock, when darkness stopped the work. That night the mercury in Mr. Dutton's little camp-thermometer fell to 29° Fahrenheit, and ice formed across puddles and in deep footprints down by the brook. The sun came out warmly, however; and the bracing atmosphere not only added an incentive to the labours of building, but lightened them. Little Nat's work was constantly to help Teddy collect green fir and spruce boughs, and soft, thick moss; they soon had a pile of each as large as a good-sized haycock.

Chloe absented herself on this particular morning for a couple of hours, much to Mrs. Dutton's surprise. She returned, however, bearing a big armful of green and withered rushes, of which a great abundance lined a cove in a small pond close by. These rushes she dried before the fire, and, while they were spread out, gathered as many more, cutting every blade with scissors. On the morrow she showed

Mrs. Dutton how to braid the rushes into long ropes. These she proposed to coil up so as to make matting, but both string and thread were scarce. What should she do? She had recourse to Solomon, who was half-way through the trunk of a seventy-five-foot poplar.

"Let me see," said the chopper, leaving his axe buried in the wood, "I guess I c'n find suthin' that'll dew ye. Look here!"

He pulled up a little spruce, not more than a foot high, that grew beside the brook. As he shook the dirt off, Chloe could see a large number of fine, long rootlets.

"See ef ye c'n break one."

The negro woman found them tough as stationers' twine.

"Naow," said Solomon, resuming his axe, "them's what the Injuns use in sewing their bark canoes. You want to git a lot o' them leetle roots, and bile 'em half a day. Then they'll hold till the caows come home."

Chink! chunk! went the axe, and the poplar chips began to fly in such a shower that Chloe was glad to retreat. Hugh helped her to gather the roots, and before night she had an ample stock of spruce thread. The mats grew daily after that. Flossie was never tired of seeing the old nurse braid rushes, and even helped with her own little thin fingers once in a while.

The hut was floored with long spruce poles, laid side by side, and hastily levelled. Chloe's mats laid over these, with a few fir boughs under the hollows and uneven spots, would make the hut comfortable under foot.

The walls were raised higher and higher. Solomon chopped steadily from morning till night. "Bein's the others had l'arned haow to lay the logs," he said, "I'd better use the axe." No one disputed him, for he could chop twice as fast as any other person in camp, besides showing superior judgment in selecting and felling the trees.

The inside of the hut was roughly partitioned off with light upright poles, covered with bark, to the height of about seven feet. Above that interstices were left, for free circulation of air. Across the ends opening into the main room they expected to hang skins, which could be drawn back most of the time. Two small window-openings were left in the front wall. When asked how they were to be "glazed," Solomon chuckled, and said he'd show 'em before long.

One morning he announced that no more logs would be necessary, in his opinion, for either house. There were enough down to build both. As for himself, he guessed he would take a holiday. And, with his peculiar chuckle, he strolled off, rifle on shoulder.

Late in the afternoon he returned, staggering under a queer burden. It was a large bundle, apparently wrapped in dark brown fur.

"Thar!" said Solomon, still chuckling. "Thar's your glass fer the winders!"

Nat would not be satisfied until Solomon explained himself. The backwoodsman untied the folds of the fur, which proved to be the skin of a good-sized bear, of the now familiar brown variety. Inside the skin was a rather unsavoury-looking mass of flesh from the animal himself. This consisted of

steaks, skilfully sliced off by Solomon, and a pile of intestines.

"What on earth did you bring that home for?" asked Mrs. Dutton, after one look at his booty.

"You'll see, ma'am, before night."

Solomon, with the assistance of the boys, stretched the hide of the bear on the inside of one end of the hut, now nearly completed. Having no nails, he was obliged to drive wooden pegs through the pelt. He then proceeded to thoroughly clean out and wash the intestines, which he next cut open, and stretched to their utmost across the logs, as he had the larger skin. Within a week they were hard and dry, and, on being fastened across the rude window frames, served excellently the purpose of glass. This he had learned from the natives of *Kamschatka*, across the straits.

Solomon made one or two more hunting expeditions, and brought home the hides of several black and brown bears, and one grizzly. The claws of the latter he saved, and gave to Florence for a necklace! He secured and laid up at the same time a plentiful supply of tallow, or "bear's greese," for the manufacture of candles and various household purposes.

He stretched and dried a dozen or more sheets of intestine, telling Mr. Dutton they would need to wear them over their eyes on the intensely bright days of spring, when the snow was on the ground and the sun high.

Robert took every opportunity to assist in purveying for the expedition, and was fortunate enough to come upon a hillside perfectly honeycombed with marmots' burrows. He managed to snare a dozen or more of

these little animals, and preserve their skins, from which Solomon promised to show him how to make caps and gloves. A couple of deer and a large moose fell victims to Solomon's unerring aim, and their pelts were added to the stock which was accumulating for use as coverlets.

The first hut was now roofed over, the rafters being shingled with long red-cedar slabs, which were riven out by Solomon with his axe. They gave a delightful fragrance to the whole hut.

As soon as the ladies could sleep indoors, which they did with great delight, their tent was used as a smoke-room, and dozens of brook trout and grayling, as well as slices of bear meat and venison, were prepared for winter consumption. Teddy and Nat now spent all their time in chinking up the spaces between the logs with moss. As the eaves of the huts were not over six feet from the ground, this was easily done, although it was a long and tedious job. Earth and moss were "banked" against the walls on the outside to the height of four feet; while all round the end of the Dutton hut, where the beds were, a second wall was made by laying poles up against the eaves on the outside, and stuffing the space between with boughs and moss.

The chimneys were Solomon's pride and joy. Using clay from the bed of the brook, he stoned up the sides of the fireplaces, and laid tolerably smooth hearths. But the chimneys were built entirely of small green poplar sticks, laid crosswise, and plastered inside and out with all the clay that would stick on.

Mrs. Dutton was positive that her chimney would burn up, together with the whole hut, when the first

fire was built. Solomon assured her, however, that it would last throughout the winter unharmed ; and the result showed that he was right.

A double door was made, with storm entry between. The idea of connecting the two huts was given up, as liable to let in too much cold through the cracks and joints. As the buildings were only a rod apart, the passage-way was really not needed. Matches were getting scarce, and a fire was kept constantly alight on the hearth.

To understand how these two huts could be erected in so short a time, it must be remembered that five full-grown men, three strong, healthy boys (besides Nat, whose nimble fingers were of great assistance), and two remarkably capable women, worked during every available hour of daylight, Sundays excepted, for five weeks before the unfurnished, bare walls were completed. Something in the way of tables and benches had to be provided yet. These Solomon proposed to make on stormy days.

A good deal of anxiety was felt about Peeschee, who was now two weeks overdue.

On the morning of the tenth of October, the first of the Duttons who opened the door noticed something like a white, downy feather float in and disappear. Then another, and another. Before ten o'clock a furious snow-storm was raging. Flossie was worse that morning, as we learned at the opening of this chapter ; but toward afternoon she grew brighter, and took a great interest in the reports of the progress of the storm. She was not told of the anxiety felt by all concerning Peeschee, nor regarding their own future.

Deeper and deeper fell the snow. The day seemed

hardly three hours long. As night came on, the wind roared and howled like a pack of wolves about the little huts ; while the flames danced up the chimney and threw their red light over the rough bark of the logs, the rush mattings on the floor, and the faces of the group gathered round the hearth.

CHAPTER XXII.

PEESCHEE'S MARVELLOUS STORY.



THE nights became so cold during the month of October that the Duttons found they must lay in more wood for their winter's supply. Accordingly, Solomon once more shouldered his axe, and started for the woods. There was one member of the company who had as yet done no work at all, beyond guarding the property. His turn had now come, and during the next week his labours were by no means light. Who was he? Come with me this clear, cold November morning, and take a view of the encampment.

In one of the huts Mrs. Dutton is getting breakfast, with the assistance of Chloe and Ted. Already a dish of venison is smoking on the table, which is built of slabs of cedar, rough-hewn with an axe. Benches of the same manufacture are drawn up in readiness for the men and boys, who are just now in the other hut, putting the last touches on a sort of sledge, the runners of which are stout young saplings. The rest of the sledge is of cedar, rendering it both light and strong. Carlo sits on his haunches, and regards this new piece of furniture gravely. Well

he may, for it is destined to be drawn by him. Yes, he is the new labourer, and, being in Alaska, he must do an Alaskan dog's work. All hands are now summoned to breakfast. Flossie takes her place with the rest, and begs permission to pour the tea. Teacups are scarce, you observe. The boys have one large tin dipper to pass round.

Mr. Dutton bows his head and asks a blessing, as gravely as if he were in his own luxurious home in Sheldon. Then the merry hum of voices and laughter begins.

"Mamma, Teddy is sure he heard a bear outside, last night!"

"Ho! was it a *prickly* one, Ted!"

"Sure, I heard him shniff at the door."

"What would a b'ar want wid a do', chile? He come down de chimbley arter you, 'f ye don' look out!"

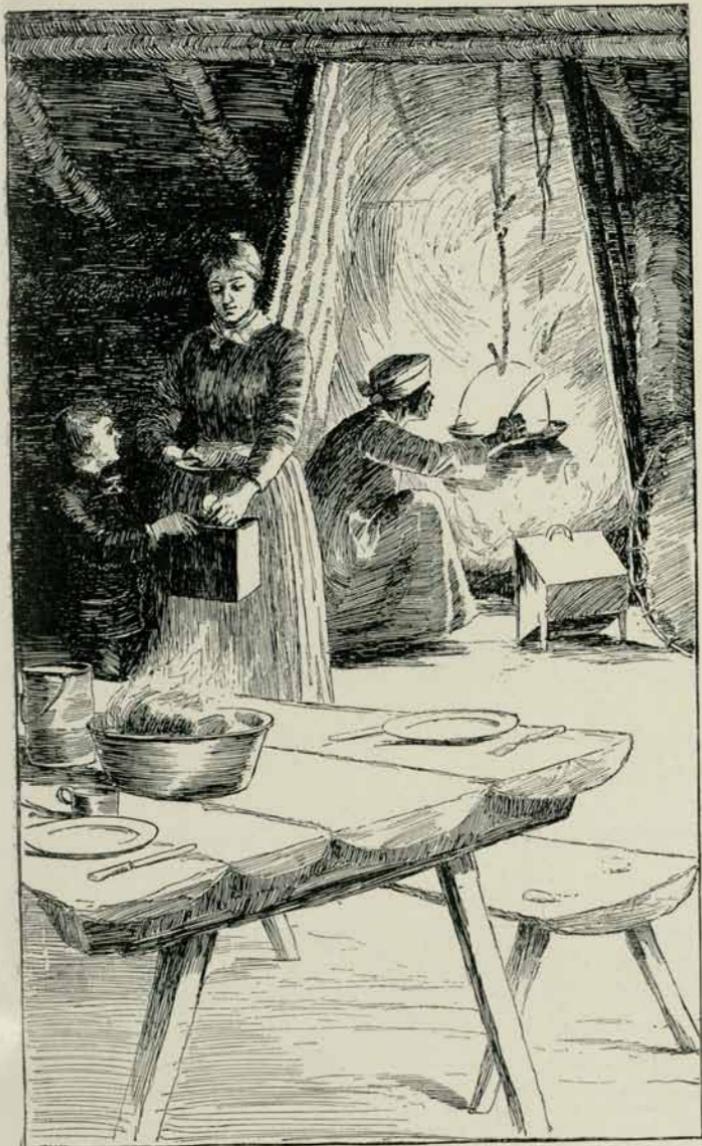
"Your sledge done, Solomon?"

"Sartin it is, ma'am. An' this 'ere black fellow wishes he'd gone home with them wuthless Chilkats—don't ye, Carlo?"

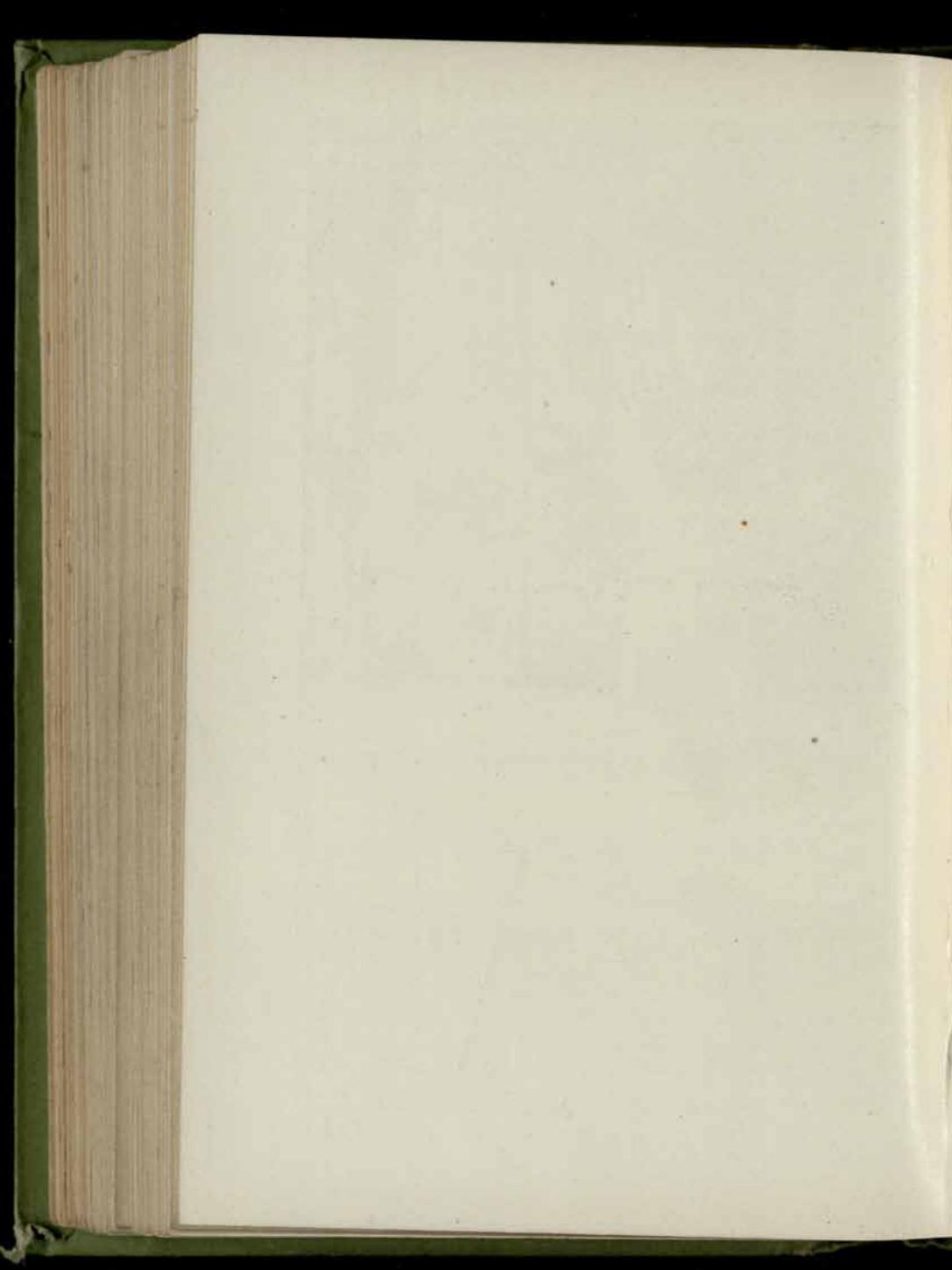
Thump, thump on the floor, with a shaggy tail.

"Mother, please give me some more currants—and Nat would like a little apple sauce."

A strange request, this last, you think? You do not know, then, that, before cold weather set in, Mrs. Dutton gathered several quarts of wild currants near the camp, and by great good-luck discovered a little natural plantation of crab-apple trees, such as grow luxuriantly in the interior of this great territory. The currants she dried for occasional consumption; the apples she stored, and brought out from time to time, in various appetizing shapes. In addition to these fruits of the land, she had collected a large



"A DISH OF VENISON IS SMOKING ON THE TABLE." [p. 231.]



store of wild onions, to serve as anti-scorbutics during the long winter.

One more article had been gathered, during those two or three days of uncertainty when the party knew not whether to push on, retreat, or camp. Peeschee himself had been the harvester this time. He had brought in a large armful of a plant with thick, rough leaves, the under side being covered with a soft, brown, "fuzzy" substance. When asked what it was, the Fox had replied, laconically,—

"Tea."

The others had laughed, and paid no more attention to Peeschee's harvest, supposing it to be some herb, of medicinal qualities, used by the natives. The twigs and leaves were carefully preserved and dried by their finder, however, and were now hanging, in several large bunches, to the rafters of the kitchen.

To return to the Duttons' jolly breakfast table. There is as yet but little daylight. It is eight o'clock, and the sun is not above the mountain tops on the east. The little hut is lighted by two lamps, each made by floating a wick in a dish of bear's grease. Solomon had been aware, when he went bear-hunting, that this commodity abounded in bears at just that season, before they retired to their dens and hollow trees for the winter.

A faint, yellowish light was already beginning to show through the windows, which, with their stretched skins, looked like square drum-heads, when the men arose from the table and, whistling to Carlo, prepared for a day of work. Both Richard and Solomon had seen too much of Innuite and Esquimaux life not to understand how to harness a dog into a sledge. Carlo had, indeed, been in training for several days, under

the supervision of Nat. A harness had been made for the Newfoundland from deer-skin thongs, and the dog had already learned to draw a burden with tolerable steadiness. Accordingly, he trotted smartly along over the crisp four or five inches of snow toward the woods, Solomon and the rest following with axes.

All that day the sound of chopping rang out. Trees were felled, cut into four-foot lengths, and laid on the sledge, a dozen sticks at a time. Carlo pulled lustily, and kept bravely to the work, encouraged by Nat, who drove the sledge, loaded and unloaded it.

Favoured by several days of fair weather, this method of labour was kept up until several cords of firewood were piled in the kitchen, and a large heap left outside the door. It should be added that much of the cooking was now done in Mrs. Dutton's own establishment. It had been finally decided that Richard, Joe, Jim, Peeschee, and all the boys except Nat should occupy the other building, sleeping there, and doing all their rough work beside their own fireside.

Early one evening, about November the 10th, there was a sound of footsteps outside the door. Hugh sprang to open it, and admitted—Peeschee! The poor fellow was hardly able to stand from hunger and exhaustion; but before he would touch a morsel of food he drew from his pouch a handful of rocks, and handed them to Mr. Dutton, not deigning to look at Solomon, who had long ago repented of his hasty words.

They all clustered round the specimens, which sparkled in the firelight with a dull-red glow. Beyond a doubt they were splendid examples of the ore of cinnabar.

“Hooray for you, Fox!” shouted Solomon.

"You've found the real stuff, sure. Come up here to the fire, old fellow," he continued, dragging the shivering Indian to the hearth, "and get warm before you speak a word. I swan, I'll feed ye myself!" And he did.

Flossie was the only one who caught the gleam of a tear in the eye of the rough hunter, but all were touched by the evident attempt of Solomon to make up for his past harshness and unjust suspicions.

Peeschee gravely held out his hand, and grasped that of Baronov, in token of forgiveness; then applied himself voraciously to the "pemmican," or smoked and chopped venison, which was set before him.

After he had eaten and eaten until Chloe became seriously alarmed for his safety, and stood gazing at him with arms akimbo, and the whites of her eyes showing as she stared, Peeschee sat down on the floor and told his story.

He had travelled straight on, in the line of the trail, for two days. Then a light flurry of snow had covered all marks, and he soon found himself lost in a region of ice and snow. He had struggled on, in what he believed to be the right direction, until he came to a high cliff, which completely blocked his way. At the foot of this precipice he had picked up his specimens of cinnabar.

Almost fainting from cold, exhaustion, and want of food, he had made his way down to the line of vegetation. There he managed to knock over a partridge, and ate it raw. This gave him strength to travel for a day or two longer, in what direction he knew not. While wandering about aimlessly, he came upon an enormous track in the moss, sunk to the

depth of several inches, and bigger over than a barrel.

"Whew!" whistled Dick, incredulously, under his breath. "I guess our friend was a little out of his head!"

Peeschee paid no attention to the whisper, or the glances that were exchanged over his head, but continued gravely.

On the fifth day after leaving the glacial regions, he averred that he actually caught sight of the creature that had left the strange tracks. Peeschee heard the animal crashing through the bushes, and presently there came into view a gigantic quadruped, covered with long hairs, with fearful curving tusks of a yellowish, shiny appearance, and a mouth big enough to swallow a man at one gulp. He was larger than a post-trader's store, said Peeschee, and altogether so frightful to behold that he, the narrator, fled in terror.

Again the boys nudged each other, their eyes twinkling with fun. To their surprise, however, Solomon looked grave, and stated that, on the whole, he believed the Indian's story.

"Let's see haow the critter looked, Peeschee," said he, handing him a charred stick, and clearing a spot on the smooth hearthstone.

When Peeschee leaned back again there was a rough drawing on the stone.

"Why, that looks like an elephant!" exclaimed two or three at once, as all bent eagerly over the drawing.

"That's jest it!" said Solomon, who had eyed the drawing closely. "I've heerd fur-hunters tell of an animil jest like an elephant, somewhars in the interior,

only a good deal bigger, an' covered with long hair.* They say thar's only two or three in Alaska, an' nowhars else in the world."

"I know," exclaimed Robert, suddenly. "Whether it's true or not, the animal the hunters have described, and Peeschee has drawn, is the Mammoth, or pre-historic hairy elephant. In 1800 the body of one of them was frozen into an iceberg in Siberia, and the bones are in the Royal Museum now."

"Now you speak of it, I believe I've heard the same story around Wrangel," said the lieutenant. "But I always supposed it was only a hunter's yarn. I don't know why there may not be a few of those big fellows left, though!"

The idea of having these gigantic neighbours was not a pleasant one, and the women were glad when Peeschee was allowed to resume his narrative.

Shortly after running away from the Mammoth, he said, he sprained his ankle on a snow-covered root, and felt that he could go no further. Making one final effort, and limping painfully along, he was preparing to lie down and die when he saw smoke arising through the tree-tops. Pressing on once more, he came upon a small collection of wigwams, containing two or three dozen natives. They proved to be Ungaliks, a little known tribe of the interior, with whom he could only converse with signs. The Indians were hospitable and kind to him; had sheltered, fed, and nursed him, as the Ayans had his father in years gone by; and at the end of three weeks he had been able to continue his journey, with a pouch full of dried

* See in recent issue of *Alaska Free Press* (Sitka) and *Boston Journal*, Oct. 28th, 1887, reports, by natives, of this strange animal.

meat and salmon. After a hard journey of six days' duration he had arrived home.

“Home!” It was a strange word to apply to these two lonely little huts in the midst of a wilderness of forest and ice; but the Duttons felt more thankful than ever for their cosy shelter as they heard Peeschee's story.

CHAPTER XXIII.

CHRISTMAS IN ALASKA.



AS the winter wore on, all the members of the expedition found that their clothes were becoming decidedly the worse for wear.

"Why not make some more?" asked Solomon.

"No cloth!"

"Humph! A whole storeful running around the woods on four legs!"

Solomon accordingly took Joe and Jim, the two Canadian Indians, and started off for a two-days' hunt. They returned heavily laden with pelts. On being laid out, the furs were found to be long and silky, of a delicate Maltese blue colour.

"Blue foxes," explained the hunter. "We struck a lot of 'em up towards the maountings. Lucky we've got plenty o' fish an' meat stored up fer winter," he added, with a grave shake of his head. "I've never seed game so scource in my life. "It's my belief that that 'ere big critter Peeschee saw has scared 'em all away. B'ars is denned up, and I haven't seen a sign o' deer nor moose sence we started."

The fox-skins were stretched and salted, and, as soon as they were dry enough, were manufactured into garments. As there were over twenty of these skins,

everybody soon had at least some bit of blue fox about his person—and a picturesque-looking sight they were. Flossie fairly screamed with delight when they first met at table, wearing their new clothing of blue, silky fur.

It must be confessed that the days dragged somewhat wearily along through November and December. The sun did not rise until about half-past nine o'clock; then it hung, sulky and red, above the horizon for four or five hours only, and by three o'clock in the afternoon it was dark enough in the ill-lighted huts to use lamps again. They played games, told stories, and even started a newspaper on birch bark.

The snow kept off marvellously, lying on the ground to the depth of only about ten inches. The boys hunted through the woods near by, but, as Solomon had said, game was so scarce that it hardly paid for the tramp. Many a time they came home completely empty-handed.

One morning Flossie had an inspiration. Teddy was the unconscious "first cause."

"Oh, wirra!" said he, with his favourite exclamation, and a comical twist to his face, "do ye remimber the Christmas we had last year as iver was, at Sheldon? An' look at us now!"

"Why not have Christmas here?" cried Flossie, with a sudden thought. "What day is it now, papa?"

"It is—let me see—Thursday, December tenth," said her father, consulting his calendar.

"Then, Christmas is just a fortnight from to-morrow! We can have a tree, and hang up evergreen, and have a splendid time! Why not?"

As nobody seemed disposed to come forward with any reason "why not," the plan was eagerly taken up

by all. The three Indians had no idea what Christmas meant, and very gravely and sweetly Flossie undertook to explain to them about its origin, and how dear the day was to all the world.

As she told the story of Bethlehem, reading now and then from her little Testament, Solomon joined the group, and listened with bared head and a sober face.

"Reminds me of when I was a leetle feller," he said, when Flossie paused at the end of a chapter. "Seems ter me my father used to read 'bout that once, but I've e'ena'most forgotten every word of it. Go on, miss."

The Alaskans themselves hardly comprehended what it was all about; but something of the young girl's devout spirit must have made itself felt, for they listened eagerly, and nodded to each other several times, and were evidently sorry when the lesson was over.

"And now," concluded Floss, closing her book, "it's going to be His birthday next week—*Christmas*, we call it—and everybody ought to be happy on that day, and make everybody else happy—and we're going to have just as good a time as we can—*there!*"

The girl jumped up, and at once entered into profoundly secret plans with her mother and Chloe, relating to evergreen, candles, ornaments for the tree, and even gifts, for these last were by no means to be omitted. Each of the family was occupied in manufacturing some kind of a surprise for the rest, and the time went much more quickly. On the twenty-fourth, the boys tramped off into the forest, and gathered armfuls of green boughs, as well as a lot of long, grey moss with which the larger trees throughout the

woods were draped. These boughs, which were of fir and cedar, were tastefully fastened up about the large "living-room," and over the fireplace. Peeschee came in a little after the others, and produced several clusters of scarlet wild-rose hips, which "came in just right for holly berries," Flossie said.

Before long the whole room was spicy with the fragrance of the boughs, and it began truly to seem like Christmas. Solomon was trusted with the important duty of securing the tree, which he fulfilled to a charm, leaving it out-of-doors over night.

The next day—Christmas—what glorious weather! It began with the loveliest of rosy skies, slowly growing to bright gold, until the sun itself peeped over the far-away mountains of ice, and sent its glad beams dancing down to the little clearing. All hands were up in good season, and dressed in their best blue fox for the day.

Early in the afternoon, as the sun sank again behind its fir draperies, the Christmas tree was brought in, and set up near the fire. The boys and men were now all banished to their own quarters, while the others decked the boughs with the little gaieties they had prepared. In the first place, a dozen tiny candles, "dipped" in bear's grease, were fastened on with pins. Then, some of Peeschee's rose-hips, and streamers of grey moss, were added, and a lot of Mrs. Dutton's precious crab-apples hung here and there, giving a really gala effect to the whole. A few bits of bright-coloured ribbon completed the adornment of the tree—but not its mission; for now the gifts were placed among its branches, carefully labelled. Flossie clapped her hands, and fairly danced about it, as the candles were lighted and blazed up bravely.

"Call the boys, Chloe, call the boys!" said Mrs. Dutton; and, with a vast deal of stamping and laughing, in they all came. A splendid fire was blazing on the hearth, with a huge "Yule Log" on top, sending a glorious sheet of red flame up the rude chimney. But *the* object in the room was the tree!

How those Indians did stare, to be sure, and glance apprehensively at the ceiling, to be sure the whole building was not on fire! Never a word they said, however, and you might have thought, after the first moment, that they had been accustomed to Christmas trees from their childhood.

Suddenly a strange-looking being came out from behind a clump of boughs in the corner. The astonished Manitobans gave one involuntary grunt in chorus, and then were as silent as before.

It was apparently a little old man, dressed in a bear-skin, with a cap of marmot, and a blue-fox tail hanging down behind. He wore a mask made from material provided by Solomon's brown bear, and had a long grey beard (of moss).

This singular creature now advanced into the fire-light, and announced himself as Santa Claus. He was a little late, he said, because his reindeer were a trifle timid about going through the Chilkoot pass, and had shied at a Mammoth a few miles away. However, he had arrived safely, and was prepared to distribute presents, as usual.

Turning to the tree, he proceeded to take down a really beautiful little pair of snow-shoes, about one half the regular size.

"These," said Santa Claus, "are for Miss Florence Dutton. They were manufactured and placed in my

hands for her by my good friend Solomon. 'May she live long to wear 'em,' is his wish."

Florence examined the shoes with delight. The frames were made of young birch, and they were strung with strong, fine sinews. The sockets and straps were of marmot and deer skin.

"Here is a bow and arrow for Master Nat," continued the benevolent saint. "Peeschee, the Indian, knows more about the making of them than I do."

A pair of deer-skin slippers, with the hair on, were next discovered, and announced for Uncle Richard, who somehow did not seem to be present. They were laid aside until the lieutenant's return.

Everybody received something, even Joe and Jim. It was wonderful how swiftly and skilfully the nimble fingers of the women had wrought during these last few days.

When the last present was given, and the candles had burned low, Santa Claus wished all a good-night and a merry Christmas, and went out through the door. Within two minutes Uncle Dick appeared, demanding, with a woful face, where the visitor was, and *had* he missed seeing him while he was just taking a little stroll for his health?

That the device was so transparent only tickled the fancies of these grown-up people the more, and they laughed as heartily as children over the lieutenant's fun.

Chloe, meanwhile, had called into play all her culinary powers, and now invited the company to sit down to a Christmas dinner.

Robert and his uncle had put their heads together the evening before, and produced with great solemnity the following

BILL OF FARE.

At Dutton Lodge, about lat. 63° N., long. 144° W. from
Greenwich.

CHRISTMAS, 1869.

POTAGE.

Rabbit, à l'eau chaude.

FISH.

Salmon, *fumé à l'Ayan*. Broiled Smoked Grayling.

FOWL.

Roast Spruce Partridge, Sauce à la Chloë.

ROAST.

Venison, *aux Oignons Sauvages*. Bear, à l'Alaska.

ENTRÉES.

Mountain Pemmican. More Rabbit. More Bear.

VEGETABLES.

Onions.

RELISHES.

Alaskan Currant Sauce. More A. C. Sauce.

PASTRY.

Grilled Pilot-Biscuit.

DESSERT.

North-American Crab-Apples, *au naturel*.

This inviting bill, which was printed on birch bark, was received with great applause. Mr. Dutton ventured a mild doubt as to the French rendering of "wild" onions, but was instantly frowned down by the rest of the company. The rabbit and grouse had been shot a week before, and kept frozen for the occasion. The Indians, nay, Solomon himself, had scoured the woods during the intervening period, with the hope of procuring more variety for the grand dinner, but had failed to find a living creature.

The long evening passed merrily enough. Hugh

began the fun by reciting a familiar passage from Dickens's "Carol," which he had used as a declamation at school; and little Nat following, "'Twas the night before Christmas," from beginning to end without a stumble.

The lieutenant was now called on for a story. It was evident that he had been at some pains in preparing the narrative that followed; for, although he pretended to be weaving its incidents from his brain on the spur of the moment, he was observed to glance several times at a small slip of paper, covered with pencilled notes, which he held in his hand.

"Let me see," said he, gravely, looking about upon the company, and giving the blazing logs a kick: "I suppose it must be a Christmas story?"

"Of course."

"Well, I'll call it

"AN ECHO OF THE CHRISTMAS CAROL."*

It was at precisely eight o'clock, on the evening of the twenty-fourth of December, that Mr. Broadstreet yawned, glanced at the clock, closed the book he had been reading, and stretched himself out comfortably in his smoking-chair before the cannel fire which snapped and rustled cosily in the broad grate. The book was "Christmas Carol;" and the reader, familiar as he was with its pages, had been considerably affected by that portion relating to Tiny Tim, as well as cheered by the joyful notes with which the Carol ends.

For some minutes he sat silently surveying the

* Flossie and her mother afterward were at some pains to copy the story out as nearly as they could remember it, so I can give it to you entire.

pattern on his slippers, and apparently working it out again on his own brow. Now, Mr. Broadstreet was not a man to act upon impulse. A lawyer in large and profitable practice, and a shrewd man of business as well, he was never known to do, say, or perhaps even decide, anything without deliberation.

"Hold on a bit," he would say to an eager client; "softly, softly, my friend, you're too fast for me. Now, what did you say was done with the property?" and so on to the end of the story. If there was any money in the case, Mr. Broadstreet was pretty sure to draw it out for the benefit of his clients, and, remotely of course, himself.

"When I put my hand *down*," he was fond of remarking, with significant gesture upon the office desk, "I never take it up again without something in it."

In the course of his long practice, aided by a series of fortunate speculations, he had amassed such a goodly sum that his name stood near the head of the list of "Our Prominent Tax-Payers." He drove a fine span of horses, and was free enough with his money, in a general way. That is, when some large philanthropic movement was on foot, Alonzo M. Broadstreet, Esq., was pretty sure to be down for a round sum. He paid his share in church and politics, and annually sent a cheque to the Board of Foreign Missions. He made a rule, however, never to encourage pauperism by promiscuous alms-giving, and never tried a case or gave legal advice for love. Poor people who called at his office for assistance always found him unaccountably busy, and street beggars had long since learned to skip his door on their morning basket-visits.

To-night Mr. Broadstreet had picked up the "Carol" in a specially complacent mood. He had spent liberally in Christmas gifts for his wife and children, letting himself almost defy his better judgment by purchasing for the former an expensive pin she had seen and fancied in a shop window the week before. Just as he had completed the bargain, a rescript had come down from the Supreme Court affirming judgment in his favour, on a case which meant at least a five-thousand-dollar fee.

Notwithstanding the memory of this recent good luck, he continued on this particular evening, of all evenings in the year, to knit his brows and give unmistakable evidence that some emotion or reflection not altogether pleasant was stirring him powerfully.

"Nonsense!" said Mr. Broadstreet, presently, half aloud, as if he were addressing someone in the centre of the glowing coals. "Nonsense!" he repeated, looking hard at a grotesque, carved figure that supported the mantel; "I'm *not* like Scrooge. I give freely, and I spend freely. That fire don't look much like the one old Scrooge warmed his gruel over, does it now?"

The marble figure making no answer to this appeal, but continuing his stony gaze, Mr. Broadstreet shifted his position again uneasily. "Don't I give away hundreds of dollars every year to the societies, and haven't I left them a round Ten Thousand in my will? Won't somebody mourn for me, eh?"

But the carved lips replied never a word, only seeming to curl slightly, as the firelight played upon them, thereby assuming such an unpleasantly scornful expression that Mr. Broadstreet began to feel more uncomfortable than ever.

Rising hastily from his chair, and throwing the book down upon the table, he walked on to the window, rubbed a little place clear upon the frosty pane, and looked out.

The night was gloomy enough to make the plainest of homes seem cheery by contrast. Since morning, the skies had been dully grey ; so that every one who went out wore arctics and ulster, and was provoked because no storm came. At about the time when the sun might be supposed to be setting, somewhere behind that dismal wall of clouds, a few tiny, shivering flakes had come floating down or up, one could hardly tell which, and had mingled with the dust that, driven by the biting wind, had filled the air, and piled itself in little ridges along the sidewalk, and blinded the eyes of men and beasts throughout the dreary day. Before long, the snow overcame the low-born friend with whom it had at first treacherously allied itself, laid it prostrate on the earth, and, calling in all its forces, rioted victoriously over the field. The storm now took full possession of the city, whitening roofs and pavements, muffling every footfall and wheel-rattle, filling the streets up to their slaty brims with whirling mists of sleety snow, and roaring furiously through the tree-tops and around corners. As Mr. Broadstreet gazed through his frosty loop-hole, with mind full of the story he had just finished, he fancied he could discern the shadowy forms of old Marley and his fellow-ghosts moaning and wringing their hands as they swept past in trailing white robes.

He turned away with a half-shiver, and once more ensconced himself in his warm easy-chair, taking up the Carol as he did so, and turning its leaves carelessly until he came to a picture of the Ghost of Christmas

Present. It was wonderfully well drawn, following the text with great care, and hitting off the idea of the jovial, holly-crowned spirit to the very life. And then the heap of good things that lay in generous piles about the room! Mr. Broadstreet could almost catch a whiff of fragrance from the turkeys and geese and spicy boughs. Indeed, so strong was the illusion that he involuntarily glanced over his shoulder at the marble-topped table near by, half expecting to see an appetizing dish of eatables at his side. No one had entered, however, and the table was as usual, with only its album and gilt-mounted screen, flanked by a few books that were too choice to be hidden away on the library shelves. When he looked back at the picture in the book, he started and rubbed his eyes. He thought—but it could not have been possible—that the central figure on the page moved slightly; and he was positive that one of the Ghost's arms, in the engraving, had been raised, while now both were at his side.

Mr. Broadstreet turned back the leaf with some misgiving, and looked carefully behind it. Nothing but blank white paper.

"How," muttered Mr. Broadstreet to himself, "a man's fancy does play strange tricks with—Halloo!"

He was once more glancing at the picture, when the jolly Ghost gave him an unmistakable wink.

To say that the lawyer started, was astonished, struck dumb,—would be mild. He sat staring at the page, not wholly believing his own eyes, and yet not liking to look upon such a—to say the least—peculiar picture.

While he was in this bewildered state of mind, a rich, jovial voice was heard, apparently proceeding

from a great distance, and at the same time directly from the book he held in his hand; and—yes, no doubt about it—the Ghost's bearded lips were moving.

"Well?" said the Ghost, still seeming very, very far off.

"Well, sir?" stammered Mr. Broadstreet, in return.

"You see, I'm not dead yet, although some of your good people on this side of the water pay precious little attention to me."

"Why, really," said Mr. Broadstreet, instinctively arguing the opposite side of the question, "as to that, I'm not so sure. Take Christmas cards, now. Five years ago they were unknown; now they're as common as valentines."

"Oh, yes," replied the Ghost, "I know. You see I have my room pretty well decorated with them."

The lawyer scrutinized the background of the picture more clearly, and, sure enough, the walls were covered with what at first seemed a rich sort of illuminated paper, but proved to be composed entirely of Christmas cards, many of which he had never seen. Even in the momentary glance he gave, he observed that those which had taken prizes, and had been most largely advertised during the few past winters, were tucked away in obscure corners, while several which were exceedingly simple in design and text occupied the most prominent positions.

"Yes," the Ghost went on, "the cards are well enough in their way, and so are the other displays and festivities of the day. But it is the spirit of Christmas that you need. Charity, charity in its good old sense—open hearts and kind deeds, with less thought of self-pleasing. While these dainty little gifts are being manufactured, purchased, sent, and

thrown away, hundreds of people are at starvation's door in your own city ; thousands of people know little or nothing of the real meaning of the day and of its Founder."

As the Ghost spoke, its voice seemed to come nearer, and at the same time the book grew so large and heavy that Mr. Broadstreet was fain to set it down upon the carpet. He no longer feared the Ghost, nor did it seem strange that it should converse with him in this manner.

"Wherein are we deficient?" he asked, eagerly. "Or what more can we do? The charitable institutions of Boston are among the best in the world, the sky is full of her church-steeple, her police and missionary forces are vigilant and effective in their work."

The Ghost of Christmas Present gave a toss to his long hair and beard.

"How much have *you* done to carry the spirit of Christmas-tide beyond your own threshold? Who in this great city will cherish the day and love it more dearly for your warm human friendship and kindly act, until it symbolizes to them whatever is purest and merriest and holiest in life?"

The Ghost's voice, now grown very near, was rather sad than stern, and its eyes were fixed intently upon Mr. Broadstreet's face.

Mr. Broadstreet hesitated. With cross-examination he was familiar enough, but he did not relish the part of witness. So confused was he that he hardly noticed that book and picture were now so large that they quite filled the end of the room in which he was sitting, and seemed like another apartment opening out of his own.

"I—I—hardly know," he stammered. "Really, I've spent a good deal of money; my Christmas bills are always tremendous, but I suppose it's mostly in the family."

"Mind," interrupted the Ghost, almost sharply, "I don't say anything against the good cheer and merriment at home. But there are many homes within a stone's throw of your chair where there will be no fine dinner, no presents, no meeting of friends, no tree,—nothing but anxiety and doubt and despair. Your dressing-gown would provide for several of them."

Mr. Broadstreet looked meekly at the embroidery upon his sleeves.

"What would you have me do?" he asked.

"Do you desire to perform your part toward making the morrow bright for some one who otherwise would find it all clouds? Do you wish to plant seeds of love and mercy and tenderness in some heart that has heretofore borne only thistles? To bring a smile to some weary face, warmth to shivering limbs, light and hope to dreary lives?"

"I do! I do!" exclaimed the rich man, eagerly starting up from his chair.

"And are you ready to sacrifice your ease and comfort, this stormy night, for such as they?"

Mr. Broadstreet seized his fur cap and ulster from the rack in the hall. "Try me!" he cried. "I'm ready for anything!"

The Ghost smiled pleasantly upon him, at the same time seeming to lift its hand involuntarily, as in blessing. Then he spoke for the last time.

"Hitherto you have known only the bright side of Christmas," it said, gently. "It has been full of joy to you and yours. But there are those among your

fellow-creatures—nay, among your very neighbours—who dwell in such continued misery that when Christmas comes it but reminds them of their unhappy state, and by its excess of light upon others deepens the gloom about themselves. This is the Shadow of Christmas Present, and it falls heavily upon many a heart and many a household where the day, with its good cheer and blessed associations, should bring naught but delight.” The kind Spirit’s voice wavered slightly. “I myself can do but little to dispel this shadow. It grieves me sorely, year by year, but it remains, and I fear I but make it worse, with my bluff ways and keen winter breezes. It is for those who love me most to carry such light and comfort to those upon whom it rests that it shall be banished, never to return. The shadow grows less year by year, but it is still broad, broad.”

The Ghost was silent a moment. It beckoned to the other, and motioned to him to step behind it. “In my shadow you shall move to-night,” it concluded, in a firmer voice. “It shall accompany you wherever you go, and your work shall be to turn it away with whatever kind deeds your hand shall find to do, or cheering words you may have the power to speak.”

It said no more. Mr. Broadstreet, who when a child had often longed to peep behind a picture, found himself actually fulfilling his wish. As he drew nearer the printed page he heard a dull roar, like surf beating upon a rocky coast. He advanced farther, picking his way around the pile of poultry and vegetables and glistening holly upon which the Ghost sat enthroned. A moment more and the room vanished in utter blackness of night; the roar grew grander and deeper, until it throbbed in his ears like the

diapason of the mighty organ ; a fierce blast of snow-laden wind struck his bewildered face ; the street-lamp upon the corner flickered feebly in a mist of flakes—he was standing before his own door, knee-deep in a snow-drift, and buffeted above, below, and on every side by the storm that was abroad that Christmas Eve.

At this point in the lieutenant's story Mr. Dutton suddenly raised his hand, and turned his head slightly towards the door.

His face wore an expression of keen anxiety.
Everybody was silent, listening intently.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE LIEUTENANT'S STORY CONCLUDED.



WHEN Mr. Dutton, the coolest and most self-possessed member of the party, had so unexpectedly interrupted his brother, and assumed a listening attitude, with an undoubted look of apprehension toward the low door, the rest could not resist a gradually increasing sensation of dread. What had their leader heard that caused him such unconcealed alarm?

As they listened, the wind, which seemed to be rising, gave utterance to a long, low, and sad moan round the corner of the hut.

Mr. Dutton at once resumed his former easy position, with a long breath of relief.

"I believe I'm getting nervous," said he, with a short laugh. "Go on with your story, Dick."

"I thought I heard somebody calling just now, away off in the woods," said Nat; "but I guess 'twas only the wind."

Mr. Dutton glanced sharply at the boy and at Solomon, meeting the latter's eyes for an instant. Neither of them spoke, however, and the story-teller proceeded with the strange adventures of Mr. Broadstreet.

As soon as Mr. Broadstreet recovered himself, and cleared his eyes from the blinding snow, he saw a heavy black shadow on the sidewalk, enveloping his own person and resting upon the figure of a man who had evidently just sheltered himself behind the high stone steps, for his footprints, leading from the street, were still quite fresh. As the man thrashed his arms, and stamped vigorously to start the blood through his benumbed feet, a bright button or two gleamed upon his breast through the cape of his great-coat. Mr. Broadstreet now recognized him as the policeman whose beat it was, and whom he had occasionally favoured with a condescending nod as he came home late at night from the theatre or the club. He had never addressed him by so much as a word; but now the Shadow was full upon him, and Mr. Broadstreet felt that here was his first opportunity.

"Good-evening, officer!" he shouted, cheerily, through the storm. "Wish you a merry Christmas to-morrow."

"Thank you, sir; same to you," replied the other, with a touch of the cap and a pleased glance at the great man. "Hard times for the boys to-night, though."

"It is hard," said Mr. Broadstreet, compassionately. "And you're rather cold, I suppose?" he added, awkwardly, after a pause.

"Rather!"

"Why, bless me!" a bright thought striking him, "wouldn't you like a cup of hot coffee, now?"

The officer looked up again surprised. "I would that, sir, first-rate," he answered, heartily.

Mr. Broadstreet stepped to the side door and pressed the electric knob.

"Give this man a good cup of coffee," he said to the girl who answered the bell. "And, officer, buy the folks at home a trifle for me ; Christmas, you know." As he spoke, he put a big silver dollar into the astonished policeman's hand, and at the same time the Shadow vanished, leaving the light from the bright, warm hall falling fairly upon the snow-covered cap and buttons.

A muffled roll and jingling of bells made themselves heard above the wind, and a horse-car came labouring down the street through the heavy drifts. Mr. Broadstreet, without a thought as to the destination of the car, but impelled by some unseen force, clambered upon the rear platform. The conductor was standing like a snow-man, covered with white from head to foot, collar up round his ears, and hands deep in his pockets. And the Shadow was there again. Broad and gloomy, it surrounded both conductor and passenger in its bleak folds.

"Tough night, sir," remarked the former, presently.

"Yes, yes ; it is, indeed," replied Mr. Broadstreet, who was thinking what in the world he could give this man except money. "And Christmas Eve, too !"

"That's a fact," said the conductor. "Just the luck of it, I say. Now, to-morrow I get four hours' lay-off in the afternoon ; and my wife, she was planning to take the children and go to the play. But they're none of 'em over-strong, and 'twon't do to take 'em out in this snow. Besides, like's not 'twill storm all day."

"Children?" exclaimed Mr. Broadstreet, seeing a way out of his difficulty ; "how many?"

"Two girls and a boy, all under seven."

"Got any Christmas presents for them?—don't mind my asking."

"Well, I'd just 's lief show you what I *have* got. 'Tain't much, you know, but then it's *some*thin'."

He stepped inside the door, laid aside his snowy mittens, and, taking from the corner of the seat a small brown parcel, carefully removed the string and wrappings.

"There!" he said, with a sort of pleading pride in his eyes. "I guess these'll please 'em some. 'Tain't much, you know," he added again, glancing at his passenger's fur cap, as he displayed the presents on the car-seat.

A very red-cheeked and blue-eyed doll, with a placid countenance quite out of keeping with her arms; these members being so constructed as to occupy only two positions, one of which expressed unbounded astonishment, and the other gloomy resignation;—a transparent slate, with a dim cow under the glass, and "15 cents" plainly marked in lead-pencil on one corner of the frame;—and a rattle for the girl baby.

As the conductor held up these articles in his stiff, red fingers, turning the doll about so as to show her flaxen braid to the best advantage, and inducing the arms to take the positions alluded to, the Shadow crept away, and had well-nigh disappeared. But it returned again, thicker than ever, when he said, with a little choke in his voice, "I did mean to get 'em a little tree, with candles on it, and a picture-book or two; but our pay ain't over-much, and we had sickness, and—and——" he was very busy doing up the bundle, and very clumsy he must have been, too, for

it was a long time before the wide-looped, single bowknot was tied, and the parcel carefully put away again.

Mr. Broadstreet winked hard, and his eyes shone.

"How long before you pass here on the way back?" he asked.

"About thirty-five minutes it'll take us to get round, sir, on account of the snow. It's my last trip."

"Very well. Now, conductor—ahem!—what did you say your name was?"

"Tryson, sir; David Tryson."

"Then, ahem!—Mr. Tryson—just ring your bell when you reach the corner there, on the up trip; and dodge into that store where the lights are. You'll find a bundle waiting for you. Good-night, cond—Mr. Tryson, and a merry Christmas to you and yours!"

"Good-night, sir! God bless you, sir! Merry——" but his passenger was gone.

As he reached the sidewalk, Mr. Broadstreet turned and looked after the car. Whether it was the light from the street lamp, or the broad flood of radiance that poured out from the windows of the toy-shop just beyond, he could not tell; but the rear platform was illuminated by a pure, steady glow, in the very centre of which stood the conductor, smiling, and waving his hand. No sign of a Shadow; not a bit of it. Mr. Broadstreet looked carefully about him, but it was nowhere to be seen. Even the snow, which all this time continued to fall without interruption, seemed to fill the air with tiny lamps of soft light.

Ah, that toy-shop! Such heaps of blocks, and

marbles, and sleds ; such dolls with eyes that would wink upside down, exactly like a hen's ; such troops of horses and caravans of teams ; such jangling of toy pianos, and tooting of toy horns, and shrieking of toy whistles (these instruments being anxiously tested by portly papas and mammas, apparently to be sure of a good bargain, but really for the fun of the thing) ; such crowds of good-natured people, carrying canes and drums and hoop-sticks under their arms, taking and giving thrusts of these articles, and being constantly pushed, and pulled, and jammed, and trodden upon with the most delightful good-humour ; such rows of pretty girls behind the counters, now climbing to the summits of Ararats, where innumerable Noah's-Arks of all sizes had been stranded,—all these girls being completely used up with the day's work, of course, but more cheerful and willing than ever, bless them ! such scamperings to and fro of cash-boys, and divings into the crowd, and emergings in utterly unexpected places,—were never seen before in this quiet old city.

Mr. Broadstreet embarked on the current, and, with an unconsciously benevolent smile on his round face, was borne half-way down the store before he could make fast to a counter.

“What can I do for you, sir ?” If the girlish voice was brisk and business-like, it was, at the same time, undeniably pleasant. Mr. Broadstreet started. “Why, I want some presents ; Christmas presents, you know,” he said, looking down into the merry brown eyes.

“Boy or girl, sir, and how old ?” Mr. Broadstreet was fairly taken aback by her promptness. His wife always did the Christmas shopping.

"Let me see," he began, hurriedly; "two girls and a—no, I mean two boys—why, bless me!" he went on, in great confusion, as her low laugh rang out among the woolly sheep with which she happened to be surrounded, "I've really forgotten. That is—oh, I see, you needn't laugh!" and Mr. Broadstreet's own smile broadened as he spoke. "They're not mine. I never heard of them until five minutes ago, and, I declare, I don't remember which is which. At any rate, there are three of them, all under seven."

"How would a lamb do for the eldest? Real wool and natural motion!" In proof of which latter assertion, she set all their heads nodding in the most violent manner, until it made her customers quite dizzy to look at them. Mr. Broadstreet picked out the biggest one. "He seems to—ah—bow more vigorously than the rest," he said, gravely.

The girl then proceeded to display various toys and gay-coloured picture-books, Mr. Broadstreet assenting to the choice in every instance, until a large, compact bundle lay on the counter, plainly marked:—

"MR. TRYSON, CONDUCTOR, TO BE CALLED FOR."

As the lawyer was leaving the store he remembered something, and turned back.

"I forgot," he said, "I wanted to buy a tree——"

"Just round the corner," interrupted the brown-eyed girl, over her shoulder, without looking at him. She was already deep in the confidence of the next customer, who had told her the early history of two of her children, and was now proceeding to the third. Mr. Broadstreet buttoned up his coat collar, and

stepped out once more into the storm. A few moments' walk brought him to a stand where the trees were for sale. And what a spicy, fragrant, delicious, jolly place it was, to be sure! The sidewalk was flanked right and left with rows upon rows of spruce, pine, and fir trees, all gaily decked with tufts of snow; every doorway, too, was full of these trees, as if they had huddled in there to get out of the storm. Here and there were great boxes, overflowing with evergreen and holly boughs, many of which the dealers had taken out and stuck into all sorts of crannies and corners of their stands, so that the glossy leaves and scarlet berries glistened in the flaring light of the lamps. Wreaths of every size and description—some made of crispy grey moss, dotted with bright amaranths, some of holly—were threaded upon sticks like beads, and were being constantly pulled off and sold to the muffled customers, who poured through the narrow passage-way in a continuous stream.

"All brightness," thought Mr. Broadstreet, "and no shadow this time."

None? What was that black, ugly-looking stain on the fallen snow, extending from his own feet to one of the rude wooden stands where traffic was busiest? Mr. Broadstreet started, and scrutinized it sharply. He soon discovered the outline of Christmas Present. Beyond a doubt, it was the Shadow again.

It must be confessed that for a moment Mr. Broadstreet felt slightly annoyed. Why should that thing be constantly starting up and darkening his cheerful mood? It was bad enough that the Shadow should exist, without intruding its melancholy

length upon people who were enjoying Christmas Eve. He might have indulged in still further discontent, when he noticed the head of the Shadow-figure droop as in sadness. He remembered the kind ghost's grief, and upbraided himself for his hardness of heart.

"Forgive me," he said, half aloud. "I was wrong. I forgot. I will, please God, brighten this spot and turn away the Shadow!"

Without further delay, he advanced through the gloomy space until he reached the box upon which a large lot of holly wreaths and crosses were displayed. He soon completed the purchase of a fine, thick fir, and sent it, together with a roll of evergreens, to the toy-shop, directed, like the parcel, to the conductor.

The owner of the stand was a jovial, bright-faced young fellow, and it was evident that to him Christmas meant only gladness and jollity. But the Shadow still rested upon Mr. Broadstreet and all the snowy sidewalk about him. He was thoroughly puzzled to find its object, and had almost begun to consider the whole affair a delusion, when his eyes fell upon an odd little man, standing in the shelter of the trees, and visibly shaking with the cold, although his coat was tightly buttoned about his meagre form, and his old hat pulled down over his ears. As he saw the portly lawyer looking at him, he advanced timidly, and touched his hat with a not ungraceful movement.

"Can I carry a bundle for you, sir?" he asked, his teeth chattering as he spoke.

"Why, I'm afraid not," said Mr. Broadstreet. "I've just sent away all my goods."

The man's face fell. He touched his hat again, and was humbly turning away, when the other laid his hand lightly on his shoulder.

"You seem to be really suffering with the cold, my friend," he said, in such gentle tones that his "learned brothers upon the other side" would not have recognized it; "and that's a little too bad for Christmas Eve."

"Christmas! Christmas!" shivered the man, with a little moan, wringing his thin hands, "what is that to me! What is that to a man whose wife is dying for want of tender nursing and wholesome food?—whose children are growing up to a life of misery and degradation?—whose own happiness is gone, gone so long ago that he has forgotten the feeling of it?"

Mr. Broadstreet patted his shoulder gently. "Come, come," he said, trying to speak cheerily, "it isn't so bad as that, you know. Times are better, and there's plenty of work."

"Work!" cried the man, bitterly. "Yes, for the friends of the rich; for the young and strong; for the hopeful, but not for me. I tell you, sir," he continued, raising his clenched fist until the ragged sleeve fell back and left his long, gaunt wrist bare in the biting wind, "I've walked from end to end of Boston, day after day, answering every advertisement, applying for any kind of honourable employment; but not even the city will take me to shovel snow in the streets, and I'm discouraged—discouraged."

To Mr. Broadstreet's dismay, the poor fellow suddenly hid his face in his hands and broke down in a tempest of sobs.

Ah, how dark the Shadow was then! The storm

had ceased, but the keen north-west wind still swept the streets, filling the air with fine, icy particles of snow, and driving to their warm homes those who had remained down town to make their last purchases.

The man shivered and sobbed by turns, and was quite the sport of the wind, which was buffeting him with its soft, cruel paws, when suddenly the world seemed to grow warmer. He felt something heavy and soft upon his back and round his neck. Mechanically thrusting his arms through the sleeves which opened to meet them, and looking up in amazement, he beheld his new friend standing upon the sidewalk in his dressing-gown, a genial smile upon his beaming face, and his hand outstretched. The lawyer laughed gleefully at his consternation.

"It's all right," he said, as the discouraged man tried to pull off the ulster and return it to its owner. "I'm warmer than ever. Come on, let's go home and see your wife and children. Don't stop to talk!" And seizing the other by the hand, or rather the cuff of his sleeve, which was much too long for him, he hurried him off, snatching a couple of wreaths from the stand as he went by, and dropping a half-dollar in their place.

It was a strange experience for the proud lawyer, that walk through the dark streets, floundering among snowdrifts, slipping, tumbling, scrambling along over icy sidewalks and buried crossings, the long-skirted gown flapping about his heels in the most ridiculous way. He kept his eyes steadily fixed on the Shadow, which was always before him, now turning down a side street, now doubling on itself, ever growing more and more distinct, and drawing its two followers

further and further into the lowest quarter of the city. The stars were out now, and seemed to flicker in the fierce wind like the gaslights upon the street corners. Mr. Broadstreet felt curiously warm without his ulster, and as light-hearted as a boy.

As they passed through the most brilliantly lighted streets, however, he saw much that filled him for the moment with sadness. For the Shadow now grew enormously large, and rested upon many places. It brooded darkly over the brilliant saloons that lined the way, and that clothed themselves in the very garments of Christmas to attract the innocent and foolish, so that, drawn by the sheen of holly and ever-green, and the show of festivities and good cheer, they might enter and find their own destruction. Oftentimes, too, the Shadow flitted along the street in company with some man or woman who, to all outward appearance, was calm and content with life; perhaps even happy, one would have said. In the black folds of the Shadow, brutal-faced ruffians hid their bleared eyes; houses were draped as in some time of national mourning; once the slight, pretty figure of a young girl came up, wearing the Shadow flauntingly about her neck, like a scarf; she stopped, and seemed about to address Mr. Broadstreet with bold words.

As she met his kind, pitying glance, however, her own eyes fell, her lips quivered, she drew the Shadow about her face and fled. Alas! they could do nothing for such as her, unless that gentle, fatherly face should come before her again in her solitude, and by its silent eloquence lead her to better things, and to the Founder of Christmas.

While Mr. Broadstreet was peering about for the

Shadow, and taking into his heart the lessons it taught, he had not been idle, giving a kind word, or a bit of money, or a pleasant glance wherever the chance offered.

The Shadow now paused before a narrow doorway in a crooked little street, and the two—or rather the three, for the Shadow went before them—entered and mounted the stairway. Mr. Broadstreet stumbled several times, but the Discouraged Man went up like one who was well used to the premises. As they reached the third landing, a voice somewhere near them commenced to sing feebly, and they stopped to listen.

“It’s Annette,” whispered the Discouraged Man; “she’s singing for me. It was a way she had when we were first married; and I used to like it, coming home from a hard day’s work, so she tried to keep it up ever since. Do you hear her, sir?”

Yes, Mr. Broadstreet heard her. Poor, poor little thin voice, trembling weakly on the high notes, and avoiding the low ones altogether. It was more like a child’s than a woman’s, and so tired—so tired! He fumbled in his dressing-gown pocket, and turned his head away—quite needlessly, for it was very dark.

The two men remained silent for a moment, listening to the echo of the gay young voice with which the little bride used to greet her husband; she so tender, and loving, and true; he so strong, and brave, and hopeful for the future! And, as they listened, they caught the words:—

“Christ was born on Christmas Day,
Wreathe the holly, twine the bay:

Carol, Christians, joyfully,
The Babe, the Son, the Holy One of Mary."

"That's a new one," whispered the Discouraged Man again, delightedly. "She never sang it before. She must have learned it on purpose for to-night!"

There was a weary little pause within the room. She was wondering, perhaps, why he didn't come. Presently she began again, and her voice had grown strangely weak, so that they could hardly hear it in the rush of the wind outside the building.

"Let the bright red berries glow
Everywhere—in goodly show"—

It died away into a mere whisper, and then ceased entirely.

Mr. Broadstreet hesitated no longer, but touched his companion's arm, and they both entered.

She was lying on a rude bed in the corner of the room, her eyes closed, and her hands folded upon her breast. An agony swept across the face of her husband as he knelt beside her, taking her cold hands—ah, so thin!—in his own, chafing and kissing them by turns.

Above his head, on the whitewashed wall, was the word "JOHN," in large, bright letters. It was his name; she had crept from her bed and traced it upon the frosty window-pane, so that the light from a far-off street-lamp shone through the clear lines, and thus reproduced them upon the opposite wall. Just beneath was "*Merry Christmas.*" She thought it would please him, and seem like a sort of decoration hung there above her bed. And now he was kneeling by her side, and holding her thin hands. Perhaps he was

more discouraged than ever just then. Oh, Shadow, Shadow, could you not have spared him this !

Mr. Broadstreet hung the wreath he had bought upon the bedpost, and waited helplessly. A mist gathered in his eyes, so that he could not see ; the walls of the little dismal chamber wavered to and fro ; the Shadow grew more and more dense, until it seemed to assume definite shape, the shape of Christmas Present, sitting, as before, enthroned amidst plenty and good cheer ; the deep-toned bells in a neighbouring church-tower slowly and solemnly tolled twelve strokes, answered by the silver chime of a clock ; the flames of the open fire rose and fell fitfully, in mute answer to the blasts of wind that roared about the chimney top. The Ghost dwindled rapidly, the Discouraged Man assumed the proportions and appearance of a marble figure under the mantel, and Mr. Broadstreet, starting up in affright, found himself standing in his own warm room, the Christmas Carol (still open at the wonderful picture) in his hand, and his fur cap upon his head. The air still vibrated with the last echoes of the midnight bell. It was Christmas morning.

Not many hours later, the glad sun was shining brightly over the white-robed city, sprinkling the streets and housetops with diamond-dust, gleaming upon the golden spires of churches, seeking out every dark and unwholesome corner with its noiseless step, and dispensing with open hand its bounty of purity and warmth. Yet the Shadow was there, even on that fairest of Christmas Days,—and Mr. Broadstreet knew it.

Throughout the day he was thoughtful and abstracted, and during the following weeks he was

observed to act in the most unaccountable manner. On snowy evenings he would dodge out of the house, without the slightest warning, and return shortly after with damp boots and a discouraged air, until one night he came in with a beaming face, leading a policeman, upon whom he had apparently turned the tables by arresting him in his own doorway. He only made him sit down, however, and drink hot coffee to a most alarming extent, following it up with an invitation to drop in any cold evening and warm himself.

Upon the horse-cars Mr. Broadstreet became famous that winter for his obliging manners and pleasant ways with the employés. Indeed, he more than once persisted in remaining on the platform with the conductor or driver, at the imminent risk of freezing his ears and nose, until he was fairly driven within-doors.

Down town he behaved still more queerly, leaving the office long before dark, and being discovered in the oddest places imaginable; now diving into narrow courts and up steep staircases, now plunging into alley-ways and no thoroughfares; and returning home late to dinner, greatly exhausted, with little or no money in his pockets. In these days, too, he began to talk about the sufferings of the poor, the abuses of the liquor law, the need of strong, pure women to go among the outcasts of the great, troubled city and perform Christ-like deeds.

One bitter cold night he was much later than usual. It had been snowing heavily, and his wife had begun to worry a little over the absence of her husband, when she heard the click of his key in the front door. When Mr. Broadstreet entered, sprinkled with snow

from head to foot, what was her amazement to see him standing there with fur cap and gloves, and a glowing face, but no ulster!

"Alonzo! Alonzo!" she cried, from the head of the stairs, "what will you forget next? Where have you left it?"

"Why," said he, simply, "I've found the Discouraged Man. And the doctor says she'll get well."

CHAPTER XXV.

SNOWED UP.



WHEN the applause which followed the lieutenant's story had died away, Mrs. Dutton announced that it was ten o'clock, and time for the young folks to be a-bed.

There was a general outcry at this, and Mr. Dutton good-naturedly consented to tell one more story, to wind

up the evening.

"I can't pretend to make it up," said he. "It's one I read in the *Christmas Traveller* in Boston a year or two ago. However, here goes! I'll give it to you as nearly as I can, the way it came out in print."

The story which Mr. Dutton told, he announced as

CHRISTMAS ON WHEELS.

A railroad station in a large city is hardly an inviting spot, at its best. But at the close of a cheerless, blustering December day, when biting draughts of wind come scurrying in at every open door, filling the air with a grey compound of dust and fine snow; when passengers tramp up and down the long platform, waiting impatiently for their trains; when newsboys wander about with disconsolate, red faces, hands in

pockets, and bundles of unsold papers under their ragged and shivering arms ; when, in general, human-kind presents itself as altogether a frozen, forlorn, discouraged, and hopeless race, condemned to be swept about on the nipping, dusty wind, like Francesca and her lover, at the rate of thirty miles an hour,—then the station becomes positively unendurable.

So thought Bob Estabrook, as he paced to and fro in the Boston & Albany depôt, travelling-bag in hand, on just such a night as I have described. Beside him, locomotives puffed and plunged and backed on the shining rails, as if they, too, felt compelled to trot up and down to keep themselves warm, and in even tolerably good humour.

“Just my luck !” growled Bob, with a misanthropic glare at a loud-voiced family who were passing. “Christmas coming, two jolly Brighton parties and an oratorio thrown up, and here am I, fired off to San Francisco. So much for being junior member of a law firm. Wonder what——”

Here the ruffled current of his meditations ran plump against a rock, and as suddenly diverged from their former course. The rock was no less than a young person who at that moment approached, with a grey-haired man, and inquired the way to the ticket office.

Bob politely gave them the desired information, and watched them with growing interest as they followed his directions and stood before the lighted window. The two silhouettes were decidedly out of the common. The voice, whose delicate tones still lingered pleasantly about Mr. Robert Estabrook’s fastidious ears, was an individual voice, as distinguishable from any other he remembered as was the owner’s bright face, the little

fur collar beneath it, the daintily gloved hands, and the pretty brown travelling-suit.

"Dignified old fellow!" mused Bob, irrelevantly, as the couple moved toward the train-gates. "Probably her father. Perhaps—hallo, by George! they're going on my car!"

With which breath of summer in his winter of discontent, the young man proceeded to finish his cigar, consult his watch, and, as the last warning bell rang, step upon the platform of the already moving Pullman. It must be admitted that as he entered he gave an expectant glance down the aisle of the car; but the sombre curtains hanging from ceiling to floor told no tales. Too sleepy to speculate, and too learned in the marvellous acoustic properties of a sleeping-car to engage the porter in conversation on the subject, he found his berth, arranged himself for the night with the nonchalance of an old traveller, and, laying his head upon his vibrating atom of a pillow, was soon plunged into a dream at least fifty miles long.

It was snowing, and snowing hard. Moreover, it had been snowing all night and all the afternoon before. The wind rioted furiously over the broad Missouri plains, alternately building up huge castles of snow and throwing them down again, like a fretful child; overtaking the belated teamster on his homeward journey, clutching him with its icy hand, and leaving him buried in a tomb more spotless than the fairest marble; howling, shrieking, racing madly to and fro, never out of breath, always the same tireless, pitiless, awful power. Rocks, fields, sometimes even forests, were blotted out of the landscape. A mere hyphen upon the broad, white page lay the Western-

bound train. The fires in the locomotives (there were two of them) had been suffered to go out, and the great creatures waited silently together, while the snow drifted higher and higher upon their patient backs.

When Bob had waked that morning, to find the tempest more furious than ever, and the train stuck fast in a huge snow-bank, his first thought was of dismay at the possible detention in the narrow limits of the Pullman, which seemed much colder than it had before; his next was to wonder how the change of fortune would affect Gertrude Raymond. Of course, he had long ago become acquainted with the brown travelling-suit and fur collar. Of course, there had been numberless little services for him to perform for her and the old gentleman, who had indeed proved to be her father.

Once more he became misanthropic. "There's Miss Raymond, now," he growled to himself, knocking his head savagely against the upper berth in his attempt to look out through the frosty pane, "sitting over across the aisle day after day, with her kid gloves and all that. Nice enough, of course," recalling one or two spirited conversations where hours had slipped by like minutes, "but confoundedly useless, like the rest of 'em. If she were like mother, now, there'd be no trouble. She'd take care of herself. But, as it is, the whole car will be turned upside down for her to-day, for fear she'll freeze, or starve, or spoil her complexion, or something."

Here Bob turned an extremely cold shoulder on the window, and, having performed a sort of horizontal toilet, emerged from his berth, his hair on end, and his face expressive of utter defiance to the world in

general, and contempt of fashionable young ladies in particular.

At that moment Miss Raymond appeared in the aisle, sweet and rosy as a June morning, her cheeks glowing, and her eyes sparkling with fun.

"Good-morning, Mr. Estabrook," she said, demurely, settling the fur collar about her neck.

Bob endeavoured to look dignified, and was conscious of failure.

"Good-mo-morning," he replied, with some stiffness, and a shiver which took him by surprise. It *was* cold, jumping out of that warm berth.

"I understand we must stay—but don't let me detain you," she added, with a sly glance at his hair.

Bob turned and marched off solemnly to the masculine end of the car, washed in ice-water, completed his toilet, and came back refreshed. Breakfast was formally served as usual, and then a council of war was held. Conductor, engineers, and brakemen being consulted, and inventories taken, it was found that, while food was abundant, the stock of wood in the bins would not last till noon. There were twelve railroad men and thirty-five passengers on board, some twenty of the latter being emigrants in a second-class, behind the two Pullmans.

The little company gathered in the snow-bound car looked blankly at each other, some of them instinctively drawing their wraps more tightly about their shoulders, as if they already felt the approaching chill.

It was miles to the nearest station in either direction. Above, below, on all sides, was the white blur of tumultuous, wind-lashed snow.

The silence was broken pleasantly. Once more Bob felt the power of those clear, sweet tones.

"The men must make up a party to hunt for wood," she said. "While you're gone, we women will do what we can for those who are left."

The necessity for immediate action was evident; and without further words the council broke up, to obey her suggestion.

A dozen men, looking like amateur Esquimaux, and floundering up to their armpits at the first step, started off through the drifts. Bob thought he recognized a face pressed close to the pane, and watching them anxiously; but he could not be sure.

Two hours later, the men appeared once more, some staggering under huge logs, some with axes, some with bundles of lighter boughs for kindling. In another five minutes, smoke was going up cheerily from the whole line of cars.

When Bob Estabrook stamped into his own car, hugging up a big armful of wood, he was a different-looking fellow from the trim young lawyer who was wont to stand before the jury seats in the Boston court-house. He had on a pair of immense blue-yarn mittens loaned by a kindly brakeman, his face was scratched with refractory twigs, his eyebrows were frosted, his moustache an icy caret, two fingers-tips frozen, and, with all this, he looked and felt more manly than ever before in his life.

His eye roved through the length of the car, as it had that first night in the dépôt. She was not there. He was as anxious as a boy for her praise.

"Guess I'll take it into the next car," he said, apologetically, to the nearest passenger; "there's more coming, just behind."

She was not in the second Pullman. Of course she wasn't in the baggage-car. Was it possible——? He

entered the third and last car, recoiling just a bit at the odour of crowded and unclean poverty which met him at the door.

Sure enough, there she sat—his idle, fashionable type of inutility—with one frowzy child upon the seat beside her, two very ruffled-looking boys in front, and in her arms a baby with terra-cotta hair. Somehow, the baby's hair against the fur collar didn't look so badly as you would expect, either. She seemed to be singing it to sleep, and kept on with her soft crooning as she glanced up over its tangled red locks at snowy Bob and his armful of wood, with a look in her eyes that would have sent him cheerfully to Alaska for more, had there been need.

With the comfortable heat of the fires, the kind offices of nearly all the well-dressed people to the poorer ones,—for they were not slow, these kid-gloved Pullman passengers, to follow Miss Raymond's example,—the day wore on quietly and not unpleasantly toward its close. Then some one suddenly remembered that it was Christmas Eve.

"Dear me!" cried Miss Raymond, delightedly, reaching round the baby to clap her hands; "let's have a Christmas party!"

A few sighed and shook their heads, as they thought of their own home firesides; one or two smiled indulgently on the small enthusiast; several chimed in at once. Conductor and baggage-master were consulted, and the spacious baggage-car "specially engaged for the occasion," the originator of the scheme triumphantly announced. Preparations commenced without delay. All the young people put their heads together in one corner, and many were the explosions of

laughter as the programme grew. Trunks were visited by their owners, and small articles abstracted therefrom to serve as gifts for the emigrants and train-men, to whose particular entertainment the evening was by common consent to be devoted.

Just as the lamps were lighted in the train, our hero, who had disappeared early in the afternoon, returned, dragging after him a small, stunted pine tree, which seemed to have strayed away from its native forest on purpose for the celebration. On being admitted to the grand hall, Bob further added to the decorations a few strings of a queer, mossy sort of evergreen. Hereupon a very young man with light eyebrows, who had hitherto been inconspicuous, suddenly appeared from the depths of a battered trunk, over the edge of which he had for some time been bent like a siphon, and with a beaming face produced a box of veritable tiny wax candles! He was "on the road," he explained, for a large wholesale toy-shop, and these were samples. He guessed he could make it all right with the firm.

Of course, the affair was a great success. I have no space to tell of the sheltered walk that Bob constructed, of rugs, from car to car; of the beautified interior of the old baggage-car, draped with shawls and brightened with bits of ribbon; of the mute wonder of the poor emigrants, a number of whom had but just arrived from Germany, and could not speak a word of English; of their unbounded delight when the glistening tree was disclosed, and the cries of "*Weihnachtsbaum! Weihnachtsbaum!*" from their rumped children, whose faces waked into a glow of blissful recollection at the sight. Ah! if you could have seen the pretty gifts, the brave little pine (which

all the managers agreed couldn't possibly have been used had it been an inch taller); the improvised tableaux, wherein Bob successively personated an organ-grinder, a pug dog, and Hamlet, amid thunders of applause from the brakemen and engineers! Then the passengers sang a simple Christmas carol, Miss Raymond leading with her pure soprano, and Bob chiming in like the diapason of an organ.

Just as the last words died away, a sudden hush came over the audience. Could it be an illusion, or did they hear the muffled but sweet notes of a church bell faintly sounding without? Tears came into the eyes of some of the roughest of the emigrants as they listened, and thought of a wee belfry somewhere in the Fatherland, where the Christmas bells were calling to prayers that night. The sound of the bells ceased, and the merriment went on, while the young man, with eyebrows lighter than ever, but with radiant face, let himself quietly into the car unnoticed. It had been his own thought to creep out into the storm, clear away the snow from the nearer locomotive bell, and ring it while the gaiety was at its height.

All this indeed there was, and more; but to Bob the joy and sweetness of the evening centred in one bright face. What mattered it if the wind roared and moaned about the lonely, snow-drifted train, while he could look into those brown eyes, and listen to that voice for whose every tone he was fast learning to watch? Truly, it was a wonderful evening altogether.

Well, the blockade was raised, and the long railroad trip finished at last. But two of its passengers, at least, have agreed to enter upon a still longer journey.

She says it all began when he came staggering in

with his armful of wood and his blue mittens. And he? he doesn't care at all when it began. He only realizes the joy that has come to him, and believes that after a certain day next May it will be Christmas for him all the year round.

The story was voted a success, and with many "good-nights" the company broke up to lie down and dream of the dear old Christmas Day of old,—and of home.

At about midnight, Mrs. Dutton was aroused by a hand placed on her shoulder.

"Lor, Mis' Dutton!" chattered Chloe, who had awakened her, "I's mos' scaret to death, I am!"

"Why, what's the matter, Chloe?"

"Jes' you hark, ma'am!—Dar—hear dat?"

Mrs. Dutton did hear it, and it made her flesh creep. It was a long, mournful howl, as sad and penetrating in its drawn-out notes as the wail of a lost soul. Another, and another, nearer than before.

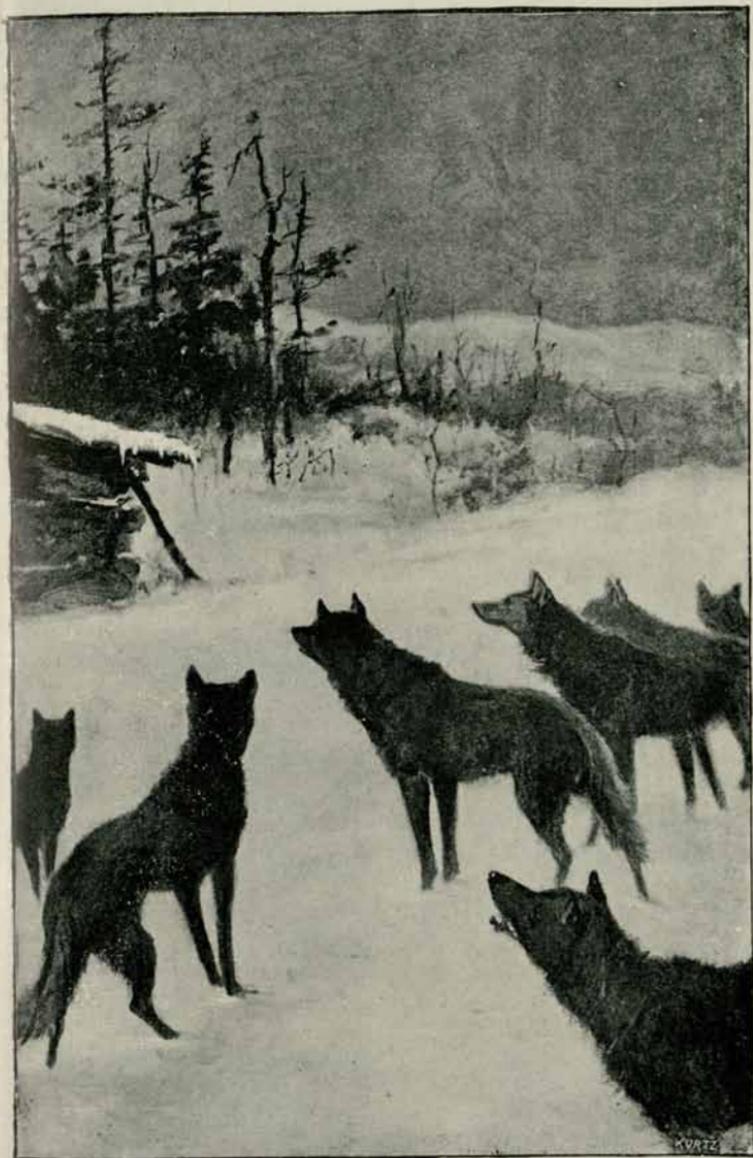
Carlo, who was spending the night in their hut, now began to growl. Looking out, they found him standing in the firelight, his hair bristling and his teeth showing.

"Look at his tail, missus!" whispered Chloe. "He's as scaret as I am, Oh, Lor'! what shell we do?"

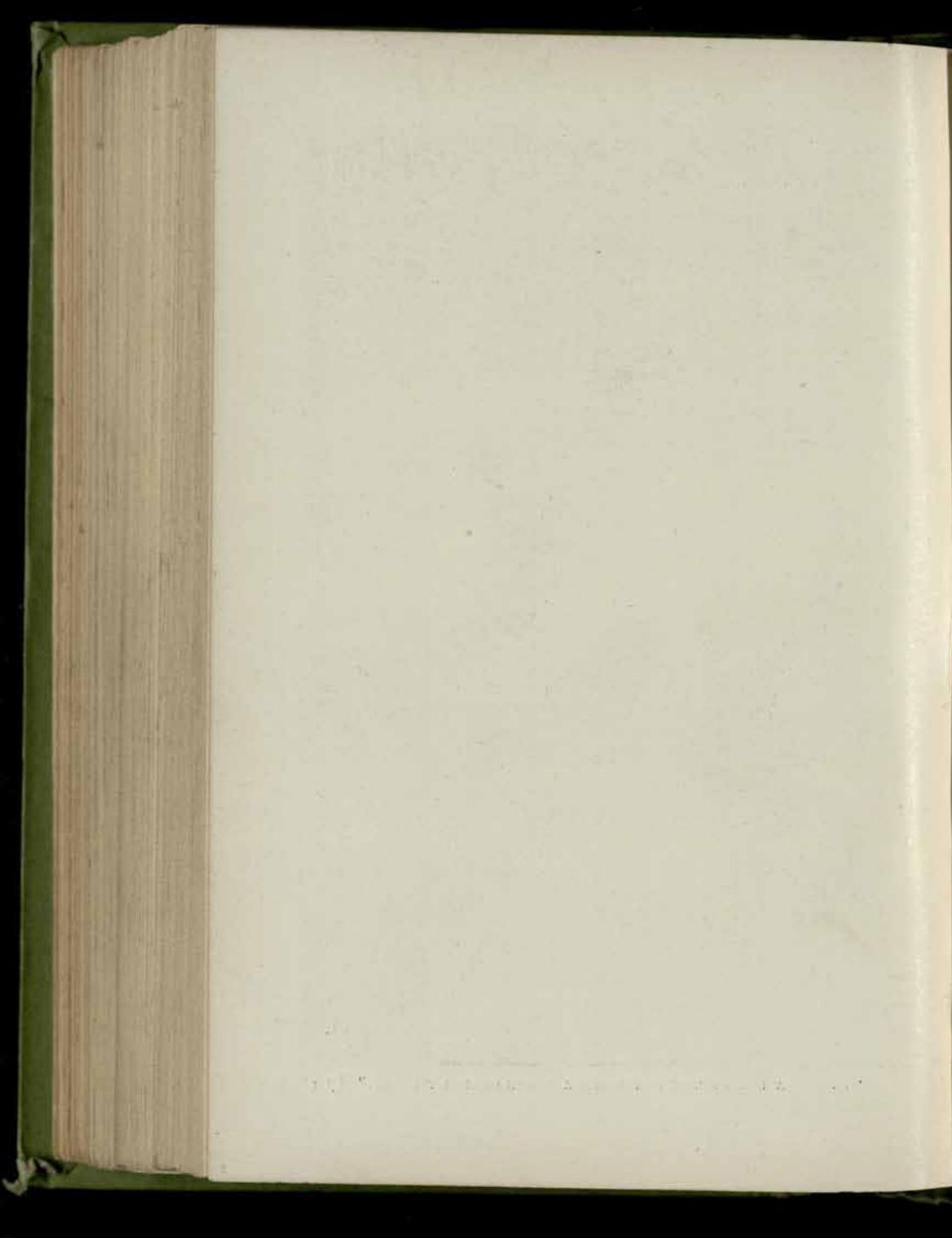
She was right. The big Newfoundland's tail was between his legs, and he was trembling from head to foot.

"Wake up, wake up, John!" cried Mrs. Dutton, arousing her sleepy husband. "There's something outside the hut. Look at the dog!"

By this time little Nat and Flossie were beside their mother.



"WITHIN A ROD OF THE HUT WERE A DOZEN SHADOWY FORMS." [p. 287.]



Again that fearful howl, so much nearer, and repeated in such prolonged chorus that every one started. The women shook with fear.

"Let's go out and see what it is," said Nat, calmly, stepping toward the door and opening it.

Mr. Dutton sprang forward, dragged the boy back, and slammed the door again; none too soon, for within a rod of the hut were a dozen dark, shadowy forms, with fiery eyes and snarling mouths. Even as Mr. Dutton closed the door two or three of them sprang forward.

A renewed howl arose at their disappointment.

"Wolves," said Mr. Dutton, calmly, turning to his wife. "As long as we keep indoors we are safe."

Mrs. Dutton shuddered, as she thought of the freedom with which they had all strayed away from the hut during the past week.

"They have found game scarce, just as we have," added Mr. Dutton, "and that makes them ugly and bold——"

He was interrupted by a renewed howling and snarling outside, accompanied by a scratching and ripping sound.

Then came a rifle shot, close by, a sharp yelp, and a tremendous scampering of feet. The door opened, admitting the welcome form of Solomon, rifle in hand.

"The pesky critters have got into our stores," said he, hastily. "Come out here quick, an' bring your rifle to keep 'em off, while I see haow much mischief they've done."

Mr. Dutton turned pale, but did as he was bid. Already the fierce creatures were gathering for another onslaught. A well-aimed ball scattered them again, and a hasty examination was made of the storage tent.

When the hunter and Mr. Dutton re-entered the hut they were silent. Each bore in his arms a few pieces of meat and fish. As they laid these fragments on the table at which they had so recently sat with shouts of merriment, Mr. Dutton turned his face away from his wife's inquiring look.

"Is—is—that *all* that is left, John?"

"All!"

The wolves had made an almost clean sweep of the larder. Not four days' provisions were left. There was no game to be found within fifty miles, so far as the besieged party knew, and the fierce pack constituted a new peril to hunters. Four long months of cold weather to come before they could think of resuming their journey. Was Peeschee's map right, then, after all? Was a new enemy—*starvation*—to accomplish what neither cold nor wild beasts nor disease had effected? Was it to be, to this brave little company, a Valley of Death?

Mournfully, on the night wind, came the howl of the wolves outside, like an answer to the question.

CHAPTER XXVI.

PEESCHEE'S MAP AGAIN.



“PAPA, we’ve just been having Christmas, you know. Won’t He take care of us, and give us plenty to eat? He did once, didn’t He, with only just a few loaves and fishes?”

The men had remained silently standing before the fire. Mr. Dutton’s head was bowed, and his face was covered with his hands.

At little Nat’s words, which showed never a doubt of his heavenly Father’s care over His children, Mrs. Dutton came to her husband’s side, and laid her hand gently on his shoulder.

“Nat is right,” she said, softly. “Let us be brave, John. God has not deserted us yet, and He will not now.”

“But what can we do, Ella?”

“I wus thinkin’,” broke in Solomon, who had been standing at a little distance, leaning on his rifle, “the only way will be fer me and your two Injuns to start off to-morrow morning fer a grand hunt.”

“Oh, I shall go myself,” began Mr. Dutton.

“No. You mustn’t resk anything before you have

to. You've got your wife an' darter and the boys to think of. I'm alone in the world. No one will care when I go, any way!"—the man faltered a little.

"Oh, Solomon!" cried Floss, slipping her little hand into his, "you mustn't talk so! We all love you dearly!"

"I know, I know," said Solomon, "an' as fer you, Miss Floss, I b'lieve I couldn't think more of ye ef you wus my very own darter. But, however that may be, I'm the fust man to go on that hunt. The Injuns shall go too, ef they will. They're lonesome, roamin' critters like me, and mout's well be off in the woods as sozzlin' over the fire here 't home."

"When shall you start?" asked Mrs. Dutton. "Oh, those wolves!" she added, nervously. "I do wish they'd stop that dreadful howling!"

"Can't afford to waste lead on 'em, or I'd drive 'em off fer a while. I shall start as soon as it's light enough to see."

"Papa," said Nat, holding up a piece of paper, "what is this? It was sticking on to that largest piece of meat you brought in."

Mr. Dutton glanced at it carelessly, as he took it.

"It's Peeschee's map," he said. "Would to God he had never made it!" he added, bitterly.

Solomon too had observed the map, as the little fellow held it.

A sudden thought, or remembrance, seemed to strike him.

"Let me look at that ar map one minute, will ye?" he said.

He held it down to the firelight and examined it attentively; then rubbed his hand through his grizzled locks in a puzzled way.

"What is it, Solomon?"

"I want to see Peeschee," said the hunter, reflectively, without vouchsafing an answer.

He rose to go out, but the Alaskan saved him the trouble by entering the hut at that moment. It was evident from his blank face that he knew what had happened, and realized the danger that stared them in the face.

"Look here, old fellow," said Solomon, "here's something I don't understand."

He pointed to the hieroglyph, on the map, which looked like a saw-horse with an X on one end.

"We've faound everything else, so far," continued Solomon, "except that critter. As fer that skull in the corner, I believe the old medicine-man, or whoever first made the map, jest put it in to scare people away, in case they got so near the maounting as this."

The two men crouched by the fire, and bent closely over the tracing.

Presently Peeschee straightened himself up, and announced his verdict in one word:

"Caribou."

"Hooray!" shouted Solomon, starting to his feet. "You've got it, sure. I've seen an Injun draw a caribou, an' that's jest the way he figgers it aout. Four legs and two big horns."

"Well, well," said Mr. Dutton, impatiently, "what does it mean? We haven't seen any caribou signs near the trail."

"That's exactly the p'int. Ef we had, and hadn't

come on to a caribou, I should think sartin the game hed deserted the country and moved thar quarters. But it's my opinion we hev'n't struck the right place for 'em, fust nor last!"

"Where do you think the game is, then?" Mr. Dutton's tone, it must be confessed, was not very hopeful.

"Why, I remember seein' a sort of big gulch making up inter the maountings on the right-hand side o' the trail, as we come along over that ar awful rough piece o' travellin'. It looked kind o' gamey then, but we wus all so full o' gittin' ahead that thar was no chance to try. It's my opinion that ef I should go back fifteen miles or so on our trail, and then strike off straight to the west'ard, by that ar gulch, I'd bring ye in some caribou."

"You never could get it home, if you shot one."

"Oh, you c'n resk me an' the Injuns fer luggin' it home, ef we once bring daown a caribou. Anyways, we'll try it. Good-night!"

"Good-night, Solomon, and God bless you for your courage and devotion!"

They all shook hands with him silently, and he went out into the night.

Long before breakfast, the three hunters were off on their wearisome and perilous undertaking.

That day passed slowly, and the next, and the next, the wolves returning each night with their dismal serenade.

The stock of provisions diminished with frightful rapidity. Mr. Dutton prepared to start out himself on the morrow. More than one look was cast on Carlo, whose brown eyes were raised piteously to his young master, as if he understood that, in case of

Solomon's failure to replenish the larder, he must be sacrificed to save the lives of the rest.

They tried not to think of such a possibility, and caressed the noble Newfoundland with unusual tenderness, as if to atone for the suggestion which had entered their minds.

Meanwhile, what of Solomon and the two Canadians?

CHAPTER XXVII.

FOR LIFE OR DEATH.



ON leaving the camp at about nine o'clock—or an hour before sunrise—on the morning after Christmas, the three men had proceeded directly down the banks of the brook, following the route by which the party had come. The wolves had withdrawn to the depths of the forest, as is their custom in the day-time, and were nowhere to be seen. Fortunately, the snow on the ground was still of only moderate depth, and the brook was open except in the deeper pools. Colder weather might now be expected at any time, Solomon knew, and the reflection added speed to his powerful stride.

Each man had in his pouch a scanty three-days' supply of pemmican. If no game had been found by that time—why, Solomon reasoned that they might as well die in the woods, like wounded deer, as go back and perish with their friends.

The morning was fair, and the hunters made good time. Unencumbered by baggage or women, they covered nearly the whole distance to the ravine of which Solomon had spoken in a single day.

At night they built a huge fire, and encamped in the open air, near the brook. All three were terribly

cold before morning, but they ate their pemmican and resumed their march. It was no boy's-play in which they were engaged. It was life or death to themselves and those they had left behind.

By ten o'clock they had reached the gulch, and, without stopping, turned into it. Their route now lay uphill, and was much more difficult. They managed to cover four miles, however, before they stopped to lunch.

While they were silently munching their dried meat, a twig cracked not far away.

The suddenness with which all three pairs of jaws ceased to move was almost comical.

Three right hands cautiously grasped the stocks of as many guns, and the hunters watched the woods like so many panthers waiting for their prey.

While they looked, a magnificent animal emerged from the spruce growth and stood an instant by the brook. Before a muzzle could be raised, he had caught both scent and sight of the strangers, and bounded forward into the cover like an arrow. It was a full-sized buck caribou.

The men looked at each other for a moment in blank silence.

Then Solomon issued his orders.

"You creep raound that way," said he to Joe, indicating the circuitous route he wished him to take, "and you, Jim, go raound the other side of the valley. I'll foller the brook straight up. We'll meet, say, two mile above here. See?"

The two nodded intelligently, examined the locks of their pieces, and disappeared almost as quickly as had the startled caribou.

With beating heart, in spite of his long experience in the woods, Solomon started up the bed of the brook,

It was very hard walking indeed. The stones of the stream were coated with ice, which in its turn was covered with a thin layer of snow. Again and again the hunter slipped and stumbled, bruising his hands and limbs, and wrenching his ankles. Before long he struck abundant "sign" of caribou. The snow was fairly trampled hard in some places, where the water was open, and the animals had often come to drink.

Creeping cautiously along, he worked his way upward, now crouching beneath snow-laden fir-boughs, now walking upright for a few steps, now crawling on his hands and knees. After about a mile of this sort of work the ground became more level. The brook was frozen solid, and formed an admirable highway, of which the stags had evidently availed themselves.

A sudden turn of the banks brought the hunter out upon the margin of a small pond or lake, perhaps three-quarters of a mile long by an eighth wide. The hills rose precipitously from its shores on either side, giving it almost the appearance of a broad cañon, and forming a scene of striking grandeur.

But Solomon gave not a thought to the picturesque qualities of the landscape. He had dropped flat upon his stomach beneath a clump of half-grown willows, and was peering eagerly out through their stems at some object or objects at the further end of the opening.

At first he thought he saw Joe and Jim, and his heart sank. An instant later he discovered the true character of the moving creatures just in the edge of the woods at the head of the pond. They had four legs apiece, and spreading antlers. They were of a greyish-brown colour—about as large as good-sized ponies—and had each a light-coloured mass of long

hair depending from the neck. The moment Solomon got a good look at them he recognized the animals. Beyond a doubt they were caribou, a fine herd of at least a dozen individuals. They had as yet taken no alarm, but were feeding in leisurely enough fashion on dried grasses, projecting from the snow, and the tender bark of willow shoots.

Solomon determined to wait until the Indians should surround them, rather than make the attempt at stalking. By good luck the light wind was in his favour, blowing directly from the game.

Assuming as easy a position as was consistent with concealment, the backwoodsman set himself to wait patiently for some action on the part of his allies. He was spared a long delay, however, by a new crowd of actors in the scene.

Solomon at first did not understand the movements of the caribou. They tossed their heads, and made little starts to and fro as if in great alarm. It could not be from any proximity of the Indians, for it was simply impossible for them to have surmounted those steep hills, and reached the end of the cañon, in so short a time.

Suddenly a sound broke the stillness of the Alaskan solitude. It was a dismal noise, a succession of long, uncanny howls, like those of a dog in distress.

Solomon knew well enough now what was the matter; and indeed his doubts, had any remained, would have been solved a moment later, when at least thirty dark grey animals were seen leaping out of the woods, and dashing around the terrified caribou. It was an uncommonly large pack of wolves, such as had fattened themselves on Mr. Dutton's store of pemmican and sent Solomon off on this expedition. The

very best pemmican is made from caribou meat ; this pack was more particular than the first, and preferred their meat fresh.

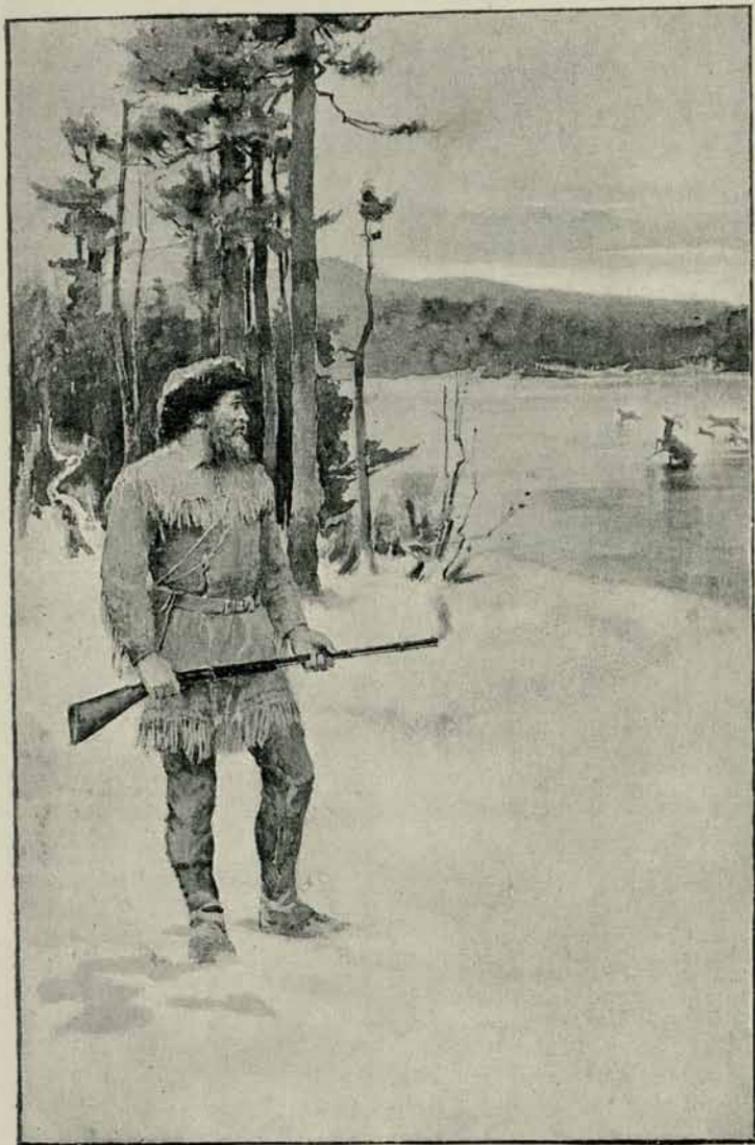
Do not suppose they intended to attack the whole herd, or any member of it, so long as it remained compact. They were far too wary and too cowardly for any such procedure. With red tongues hanging out, and with yelps and howls, they made feints of charging at the youngest and feeblest does, while others of the pack kept galloping around them, to keep them from taking to the woods.

At last the crisis came. A fine doe and two fawns, nearly full-grown, retreated a few paces before a furious onslaught from their assailants. Instantly half-a-dozen gaunt fellows leaped into the gap, and cut them off from the rest of the herd. The three helpless creatures ran off a few steps, looked in vain for help from their trembling companions, then made a sudden break, and started at full speed down the lake.

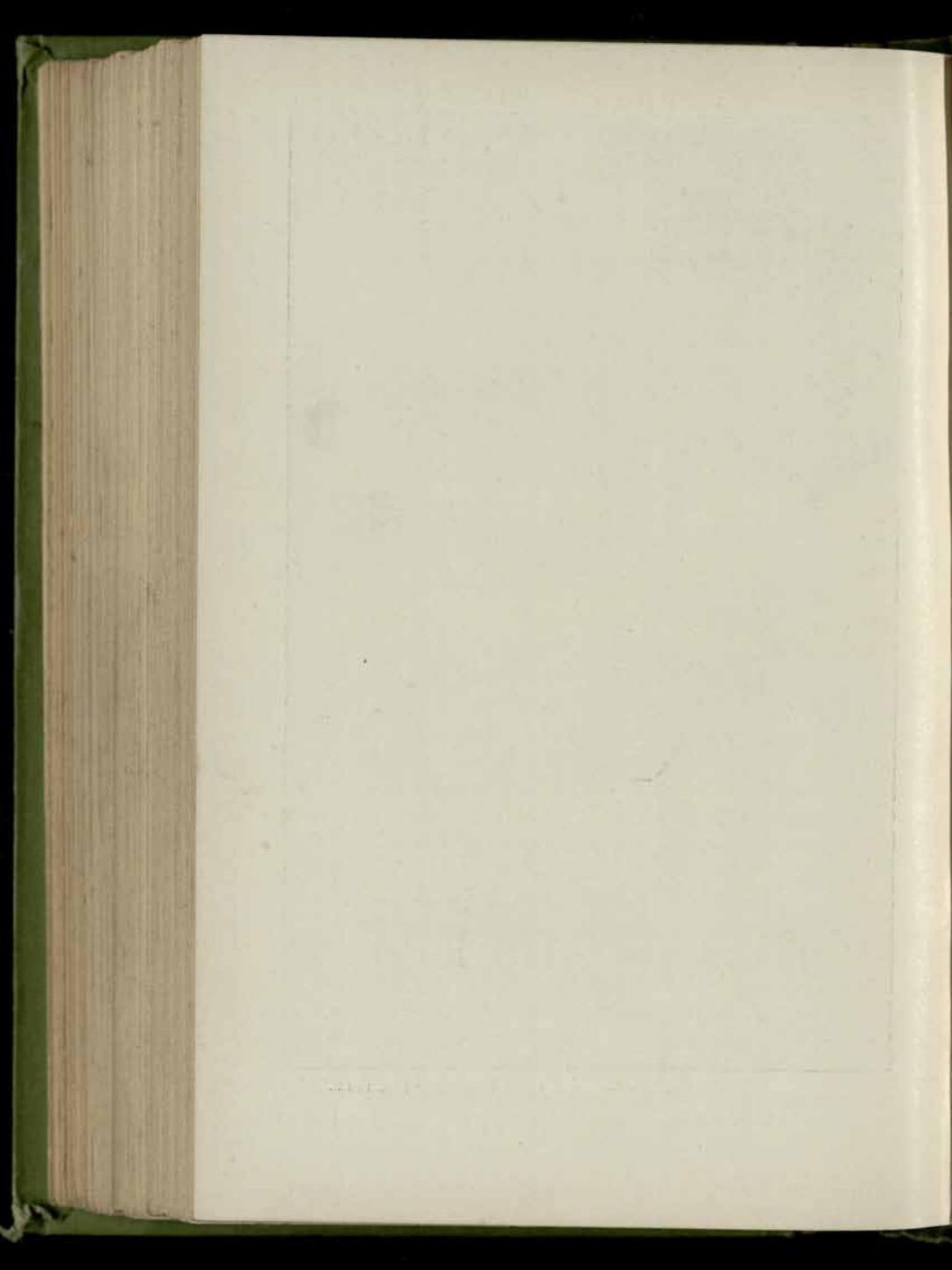
This was exactly what the wolves wanted. In full cry they started after their prey, over the ice.

Solomon rose to his feet, as he saw this *dénouement* of the little drama at the head of the valley, and, stepping boldly out into open ground, prepared to take part in it himself. Neither pursued nor pursuers caught sight of him until within less than sixty rods. The doe tried to check herself, and threw herself fairly down on her haunches, her two fawns following her example, but the momentum of all three carried them over the ice to within easy range of a rifle that had rarely missed its aim.

Just as the largest caribou scrambled to her feet, and headed for the side of the pond, there was a sharp



"THERE WAS A SHARP REPORT, AND WITH ONE LEAP SHE FELL."



report, and, with one leap, she fell almost in her tracks. The youngest one paused an instant irresolutely, when half-a-dozen wolves were upon it, and dragged it to the ice; again the report of the gun, and the third of the trio fell, while the cowardly wolves scattered, snarling and yelping, as Solomon came running toward them, shouting and waving his arms.

All this had occurred within the space of half a minute; in fifteen seconds more all three of the caribou were put out of their suffering.

Solomon replaced his knife in its sheath, and looked around for Joe and Jim. Here was meat enough to last for weeks to come; but could it be carried to the camp, with twenty miles of rough ground and two independent packs of half-starved wolves between? This was the question which passed through Baronov's mind as he stood there on the ice, in the midst of his booty.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

WOLF AGAINST MAN.



THE wolves were evidently thoroughly frightened by the presence of the hunter and the reports of his gun. Besides, they refreshed themselves with a light lunch as soon as they gained the shelter of the woods. When Solomon heard a fresh series of wolfish howls, he knew what they were about.

The six members of the pack who had leaped upon the fawn and torn it had smeared themselves with blood in the process. These red patches were the seals of their death-warrants. All six of them were sure to fall beneath the fangs of their famished comrades.

The hunter lost no time in preparing the carcasses of the caribou for transportation. He had already carved off the hind-quarters of the largest, together with a few choice slices from the ribs, when Joe and Jim put in their appearance, running down the pond at the top of their speed. When they saw the three carcasses stretched out on the ice, they made no comment whatever, but immediately set to work on the two as yet untouched. As they laboured, they paused occasionally to suck the marrow of the larger

bones, which is very sweet and palatable, and almost invariably eaten raw by the natives. They also removed from under the skin of the back and croup of the two fawns, both of which were males, a fatty deposit, some three inches thick, called by French Canadian hunters *dépouillé*.

This, Solomon knew, was an essential element in well-prepared pemmican, being pounded in with the dried flesh of the animal.

Just as they were making ready to start, heavily loaded, the down-easter was observed to stoop and sever the bladder from each of the remains before him. These he tied on to the rest of his load—for what purpose we shall soon see.

“And naow, boys,” said Solomon, as the three started off in high spirits, “we want to jest pull fer home in good style.”

“Pull” they did, although, encumbered as they were with their heavy loads, they could not move as fast as during the morning. Still, by dint of perseverance and steady work, they managed to reach their last night’s camping-ground before stopping to rest.

The first thing Solomon did was to pull open the ashes with which he had prudently covered the live coals of the fire that morning, thus saving an extra match. Next, he hung each of the bladders he had saved to the swaying end of an alder withe, which he stuck into the ground a few feet away from the camp. Neither of his companions needed to ask the reason for these singular objects; they had often protected themselves for a night in the woods by a “scare-wolf” of the same sort. Fierce and voracious as is this ugly animal, he shares with the New England crow its terror of any novel or unusual contrivance, such as a

bit of fluttering ribbon, a trailing string, or a bladder bobbing about at the end of a rod.

Their hungry neighbours howled about the three sleepers by the hour that night, aggravated by the smell of fresh meat, but kept at a respectful distance.

Early in the morning the hunters were on the move again, after a hasty breakfast from their original supply of pemmican. During the day they made ten miles, up-hill, over rough country. Each of them carried upwards of eighty pounds of meat, in addition to his rifle and ammunition. They camped that night within five miles of the huts.

Soon after midnight snow began to fall, and, by the time they could see to walk, the storm was raging furiously, doubling the labour and the dangers of the journey. Once or twice they heard the distant howl of a wolf, but were unmolested until within half a mile of camp.

"Here they come—the same pack o' varmints that carried off the meat," cried Solomon, as a dozen great doggish forms came pouring over a high bank just ahead. "They've been hanging raound here ever sence, I 'low."

The wolves fairly filled the bed of the brook in front, and showed no disposition to yield at the approach of the men.

"Let me have half your load, and give Jim the other half," said Solomon to the foremost Indian, shaking his head as he saw the stubborn stand taken by the enemy. "Naow, Joe, you let drive into 'em, and see if you can't scare 'em a bit."

Joe fired and rushed at the pack with hideous whoops and frantic gestures. One of the wolves fell, mortally wounded, and the rest leaped up to the top

of the bank, where they paused and eyed the men hungrily as they staggered along under their increased burdens.

"Impudent critters!" growled Solomon. "I'd like to wring their necks, every one of 'em!"

The moment the travellers were past, the pack fell upon their wounded brother, and speedily ate him up. Then they closed in upon the men, as before, except that they were behind instead of in front.

The same manœuvre was repeated by Joe, with less satisfactory result than at first. They hardly gained a dozen steps before the pack were close at their heels. At any moment a rush might be made, and all the precious supplies lost, if not human life.

Just as the situation was beginning to assume a decidedly serious aspect, a rattling volley of musketry was heard, followed by joyous shouts from the front. Three wolves fell in their tracks, and, while the cannibal pack were making a meal of them, the relief party, consisting of Mr. Dutton, Richard, Robert, and Peeschee, came rushing down the trail to meet them.

"We heard the reports of your gun," they explained, as they hastily divided the loads of the two nearly exhausted men among themselves; "and we were prepared to start off on a trip of our own, any way, as a last hope. What a glorious supply—two hundred pounds, at the very least! Where did you get them? Are you *completely* used up? Here, Jim, let me take your rifle, poor fellow. Oh, Carlo, you're safe, my boy!"

And Robert fairly cried like a baby, as he stooped and hugged the faithful dog, who had come with the rest to the rescue of the rescuers.

For the next two days the camp was a scene of

joyous activity. Outside the wind roared and the snow fell steadily, drifting deep around the two huts, and making them warmer than they had been at any time during the winter. The meat was cut into long thin strips and hung in one of the chimneys, where a huge column of smoke was kept going night and day. No better manufacturer of pemmican could be found than Solomon, who was now in his element.

As fast as the meat was ready, it was stored away in a little cellar hole, which was dug out under the flooring of the cooler of the two huts. In this way over a hundred pounds of fine dried meat were preserved for future use. The vegetables and small fruits had not been harmed by the wolves.

Chloe announced in woful tones, one morning early in January, that the tea was all gone; but Peeschee thereupon pulled down his precious bundles of Labrador Tea, from which he showed the negro woman how to concoct a beverage which, if not equal to that produced by the famous Japanese herb, was at least hot and refreshing, and not at all unpalatable. Peeschee, moreover, went out for an hour or two, one day, and brought in a big pouch full of a crinkled black substance, which Richard, on inspecting it, pronounced to be the "edible lichen" of the Russian fur-hunters. On being boiled, this gave a rather sticky but not ill-tasting dish, somewhat resembling sago.

Now and then a rabbit was knocked over, and afforded a pleasant variety in the monotonous régime to which our adventurers had for some time been reduced.

The snow increased in depth, after a week's thaw in January, and the mercury dropped until it marked 40° below zero, beyond which Mr. Dutton's provok-

ing thermometer, like Gilbert White's, would not register.

In March a few puffs of warmer breeze from the south, and the swelling buds of willow and alder, told that spring was coming. The wolves no longer troubled them, having learned at last that too much familiarity with these human intruders meant a flash of lightning, a peal of thunder, and sudden death. Caribou afforded easier prey, and off streamed the remnant of the pack to some part of the country where they could obtain better returns for less labour than round the Dutton camp.

Game now became plentiful, and famine was no longer feared. The days lengthened, and snow-banks began to disappear before the coaxing rays of the sun, which shone on them for twelve hours together.

In April there was such a freshet in the little brook near by that the safety of the huts themselves was threatened, and the fire in one of them was actually put out, one night, by invading rills of melted snow.

On May Day a sound was heard which brought tears to the eyes of Mrs. Dutton. It was a robin's whistle, half cheery, half plaintive, reminding her of the old home-orchard, where she had played in the tall grass, and picked buttercups, when she was a little girl.

And now it was time to make preparations for an early start southward. Flossie's weakness had entirely disappeared, and she was never in better spirits or health. It was the same with all the rest.

On the last evening before setting out anew on their long journey, now nearing its end, the whole party stood before the door of the little hut, looking wistfully along the path they were to take on the morrow.

There were the mountains, covered, as they had ever been since last autumn, with seemingly eternal banks of clouds.

Suddenly Mr. Dutton seized his wife's arm. His face was lighted with a strange expression. His hand trembled.

"What is it, dear?"

He pointed, without a word, to the eastern sky.

Oh, wonder of wonders! Through a rift in the snowy banks of mist there towered, faintly visible in the rays of the setting sun, a single peak, mounting into the blue sky, one hundred miles away.

It was of the most exquisite rose-colour, as fair to look upon as the blush upon a girl's cheek.

"Can it be——"

"The Red Mountain! The Red Mountain of Alaska!"

CHAPTER XXIX.

OVER THE ICE.



“WELL, I swan! I'd ruther travel tew miles through the woods than one on this ice. Do you s'pose 'twill last long, cap'n?”

“I'm sure I can't tell, Solomon. If this glacier is what is meant by those wavy cross-lines on the map, we shall probably get over it in the course of three or four hours.”

Solomon groaned so comically that Flossie laughed outright.

“I don't mind it a bit,” said she, merrily. “This reminds me of when I was in Switzerland, Solomon. We often walked on a glacier, though none of them were as large as this.”

The Duttons, you see, were fairly *en route* once more. Not without a feeling of sadness they bade farewell to the huts that had sheltered them so long, knowing the extreme improbability of their ever beholding them again.

In easy stages they had journeyed to the eastward. After about a week of steady ascent, they had come to a broad river of ice, bordered by immense moraines, or

banks of stone and gravel, pushed up by the glacier. No one could doubt that this was the one remaining object indicated on the map between them and the lofty peak which was their goal.

They had caught several glimpses of the mountain, which did not appear so red as they drew near to it.

A dark column of smoke hung over it continually, and now and then rumblings and even sharp reports could be heard, denoting that it was an active volcano.

As this became evident, some new thought could be plainly seen to be working in the lieutenant's mind. He made repeated examinations of Peeschee's map, compared it with a small travelling-map of Alaska carried by his brother, and covered the backs of both with figures. Something perplexed and troubled him, but as yet he held his peace, and the others refrained from disturbing him with questions.

The journey now became really perilous, as well as exceedingly laborious. They could only advance five or six miles a day after they left the glacier, for the ground was encumbered with underbrush and fallen trees, the valleys were filled with soft and treacherous mud, and thin layers of moss often covered a deep substratum of slippery ice, on which the negro woman, in particular, floundered about like a seal.

Besides, the air was steadily growing rarer as well as more chilly. By his pocket barometer, which formed a part of the same instrument with the thermometer, Mr. Dutton found, on the tenth day from winter-quarters, that they had actually reached an altitude of ten thousand feet above the level of the sea. He consulted seriously with his brother and Solomon as to the propriety and feasibility of leaving

the women while the rest should go on, accomplish the necessary prospecting, and return to them,—the whole expedition then to proceed directly toward the coast.

Richard agreed that this would eventually be a wise method of procedure, and two days later a comfortable little brush camp was built in accordance with this plan. Joe and Jim were left with Mrs. Dutton, Chloe, Flossie, Nat, and Ted. The other six pushed on toward the granite peak, which now towered into the clouds directly before them. At the end of the third day they returned, their pockets bulging with ore. Robert told the story of their visit to the great object of the whole trip, as follows.

CHAPTER XXX.

CONCLUSION.



“WHEN we left you, mother,” he began, taking a comfortable position before the fire, “we dropped all care for any special trail, and just put straight for the Red Mountain itself, right before our eyes.

“You’ve noticed that it hasn’t seemed so red lately? Well, we’d all thought of the same thing, but nobody liked to say anything about it. We crossed a small glacier, about three miles from here, and pretty soon met another, coming straight down from our mountain. Peeschee himself didn’t know where he was, for he’d never been there before. The cliff where he picked up his rocks last fall was round further to the north, he said.

“We climbed up over the moraine, which was a huge one, and started straight up the glacier, instead of across it.

“‘I’ve noticed, Dick,’ says father, after a while, ‘that we don’t hear the volcano as plainly as we did. Do you suppose it’s dying down a little?’

“‘I’m afraid not,’ says Uncle Richard.

“‘Why afraid?’

“Because—I’ll tell you before long, if what I am afraid of turns out to be true.”

“Uncle looked troubled when he said this, and it worried us all a little. Somehow we had a feeling, a presentiment, I suppose you’d call it, that all our trip was to be for nothing. Still, we kept on.

“That night we camped on the moraine, where we went to get off the ice, which was chilling us through. We hadn’t a spark of fire, and I didn’t know but we’d freeze to death before morning. Oh, what a long night!”

Robert spread out his hands to the fire as he spoke, and shivered at the bare recollection.

“Well, you may be sure we were on our way bright and early the next morning. We left the glacier at about ten o’clock, and reached the foot of the great peak itself an hour later. You can imagine how we felt, mother, laying our hands on the veritable Red Mountain of Alaska, that we had been travelling a year to reach.

“And now comes the queerest part of the story.”

Mrs. Dutton, Florence, and indeed all who had been left behind, leaned forward eagerly to listen.

“When we came to examine the rock, it was—not cinnabar at all!”

The faces of the listeners fell. It was a terrible disappointment to them, as it had been to the men when they made the discovery.

“Well,” said Mrs. Dutton, heaving a deep sigh, as she saw her dreams of wealth depart, “I suppose we ought to be so thankful to have you back again, and to have escaped all the fearful dangers of last winter, that we shouldn’t complain when we find it has all been a wild-goose chase.”

"Never mind," said Flossie, trying to be brave under the disappointment. "We've enough left, papa; and perhaps it would have made us proud and disagreeable if we had been awfully rich."

"I did hope," began poor Mrs. Dutton, who found it hard to relinquish all the plans she had made, "I did hope we might endow an institution, and call it 'Dutton University,' but there!—I'll try not to think of it again. Did you bring money enough to pay our fares home, John, from Sitka?"

"There, there, Ella! don't take on about it," said Mr. Dutton; and he actually laughed.

His wife looked up sympathetically at what she thought his heroic effort to be cheerful; but there was actually a twinkle in his eye. It *was* provoking, you know, when she was trying so hard to bear up under this culminating misfortune.

"I really don't see, John," she began, in a hurt tone, her lips quivering a little, "what you can find amusing in it. To say nothing of my having dragged myself a thousand miles or more through these woods, and suffering such torments of anxiety as I have about Floss, I *have* had my hopes raised about that mountain. I didn't mean to think of anything beyond your health; that's why I came, to take—care—of you——"

Here the poor woman, worn with the final anxiety of the last few days, actually sobbed. The reaction was too great, and she was unable to go on.

Now, Mr. Dutton was not one of that sort of men who think it fun to "tease." He recognized the fact, as every true, manly boy will, that giving pain to any one under the name of "teasing" is a disgraceful and cruel sport.

So he just crossed right over to his wife, sat down on the big log beside her, and drew her head down on his shoulder.

"There, there, dear!" said he, "it isn't quite so bad as you think. I've been trying to tell you, but you wouldn't listen to comfort. Who said we were disappointed?"

"Why, Robert here!"

"No, indeed. He merely said the mountain was not one of cinnabar. You stopped him, my dear, before he could go on to tell you that, although that fairy dream of a whole mountain of wealth (which I don't believe either of us really entertained in our serious moments) could not be realized, we have not been left to spend the remainder of our lives in abject poverty, nor yet in that condition of well-to-do-ness which we have enjoyed at Sheldon. I am not sure that 'Dutton University' will prove a myth after all, Ella."

"What do you mean, John?"

Mrs. Dutton sat up straight and dried her tears with marvellous alacrity.

"Why, don't you see, mother," broke in Hugh, taking up the story where Rob had left it, "there might be something else there almost as good as a mercury mountain? Just as we reached the foot of the peak, we heard the old volcano once more, and the rumbling and all. The queer look came into Uncle Dick's face again.

"Well, what is it?" says father. "Out with it, Dick. Don't stand there staring like an owl with a bad conscience."

"Well, the fact is," says uncle, "I've made a discovery. I wasn't quite sure of it until to-day, but I've figured it out pretty carefully, and I'm confident

I'm right now.' (You can't hurry uncle a mite, you know, when he chooses to take his time.) 'Where is north?' says he, in a general kind of a way.

"'Over there,' says Solomon, who carried the compass.

"'H'm! Then, the sun rose in the south-west, and is going to set due east!'

"Sure enough, there was the sun, all twisted round on the wrong side of the sky.

"'Well, now for your figures,' father sings out.

"As for Solomon there, he just scowled at the sun, and kept saying, 'I swan!' over and over." And Hugh burst into an irrepressible laugh at the memory.

"Uncle pulled Peeschee's map out of his pocket," said Robert, hastening to take the floor while Hugh was indulging in his merriment, "and placed it beside father's little map of Alaska. 'There,' said he, 'now allow two points' variation of the compass back there by the lake-with-the-tall-trees, swerving more and more as we worked our way over the last two hundred miles of the trip, till the needle is nearly at right angles with its true course; where would we be on the map of Alaska?'

"'Somewhere about this point,' says father, putting his finger down on the map.

"'Exactly so. Now oblige me, John, by looking under your finger.'

"'Mount Wrangel!'

"'And no other!' says Uncle Dick, getting rather excited as he comes out with his discovery. 'Your Red Mountain, Peeschee, is nothing more or less than a spur of Mount Wrangel, twenty thousand feet high, the loftiest mountain in America!'

“‘But how about the variation of the compass?’

“‘Look!’ says uncle, pointing up at the jagged rocks above us. ‘*Red Mountain*, eh, John? This peak is not composed of solid cinnabar, to be sure, but it is a tolerably perfect specimen of a mountain of iron!’”

“There, mother, there!” cried Hugh, “the secret’s out!”

“But how can the iron help us, John?”

“Because, in the first place, that ore, in such rich proportions of the true metal, is extremely valuable. Secondly, it is almost invariably accompanied by the presence of other ores of great commercial worth. By a little diligent prospecting we came across outcrops of one or two splendid cinnabar veins, with specimens such as Peeschee found on the other side of the mountain, split off by frost, and asking to be gathered. Then there was every indication of immense amounts of copper, and, better still, a glorious vein of silver-bearing ore. There was a little gold to be seen here and there, and a broad streak of bituminous coal, which will double the value of mines, crushers, and smelting works, by providing the fuel for the furnaces, as in the Pennsylvania region. Here are the specimens of every ore found.”

Pockets were emptied, and the beautiful, sparkling bits of rock examined with delight.

“Peeschee and Solomon will return to the spot,” continued Mr. Dutton, “as soon as they get us fairly started on our rafting voyage down the Copper River, which rises somewhere hereabouts. They will locate and stake out mines, as required by miners’ law, and remain actually on the spot, with good salaries, to hold

the ground until we have assayed the minerals, and disposed of the claims."

"Oh, Solomon!" exclaimed Flossie, "aren't you going to finish the trip with us? We shall miss you dreadfully!"

"Can't do it, little gal," said the honest hunter, not daring to look her in the face. "The settlements is no place fer me. I shall spend my days in the interior, with the Ungaliks and grizzlies. Mayhap I'll git a shot yet at the big hairy elephant, and be famous!" he added, with a poor attempt at a laugh.

Flossie's eyes filled with tears at the thought of losing her faithful companion and protector, but she made no further protest.

Carlo looked up with his grave brown eyes, as if he had understood all that had been said, and, rising gravely, walked over to the hunter, and laid his head upon his knee. The rest went to their tents one by one, but Solomon never moved. The dog lay down at his feet and slept; and all night the grave, quiet man sat there, his head leaning on his hand, now closing his eyes with a quick contraction of the forehead as if with a sudden pain; now glancing toward the white tent where the girl was resting; now gazing into the glowing coals of the camp-fire, and reading there, perhaps, the bright story of—what might have been.

So the short hours of the Alaskan night passed away. The light spread in the eastern sky; the song-sparrow and white-throat raised their contented chants from the valley, and a flock of snow-birds, in pretty array of gray and white, fluttered through the spruce boughs over the head of the silent man.

At last he rose stiffly, drew his hand once or twice across his eyes, threw his rifle over his shoulder, whistled to Carlo, and started off into the forest.

"I guess we'll go an' pick 'em up a leetle suthin' fer breakfast," said he, gently, to the dog. "Like's not they'll be hungry."

The rest of the story is short. I linger over the last few pages of manuscript, dear boys and girls, with a pleasure that is touched with pain. Long as you have lived in the company of the Duttons, the author has lived longer with them; for not only does the writing take far more time than the reading of a story, but Flossie and Robert and Solomon and the rest have been my companions, night and day, since the words CHAPTER I. were written. I hope you have learned to love them as I have, and that you will feel a little sorry at parting with them. For part we must at last. There is no need of telling you in detail how they journeyed to the navigable waters of the Copper River; how they said good-bye to Solomon and Peeschee, watching them from the raft until it passed round a bend in the river, and they were lost to view; how the little expedition reached the coast in safety, took passage in a small fishing-smack to Sitka, and thence by packet-ship to San Francisco.

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Mrs. Dutton is much exercised over a site for an

educational institution which her husband proposes to found next spring, with a permanent fund.

As to Solomon's history, and the subsequent adventures of Flossie and the boys, I must tell you at another time.

Good-night !

THE END.

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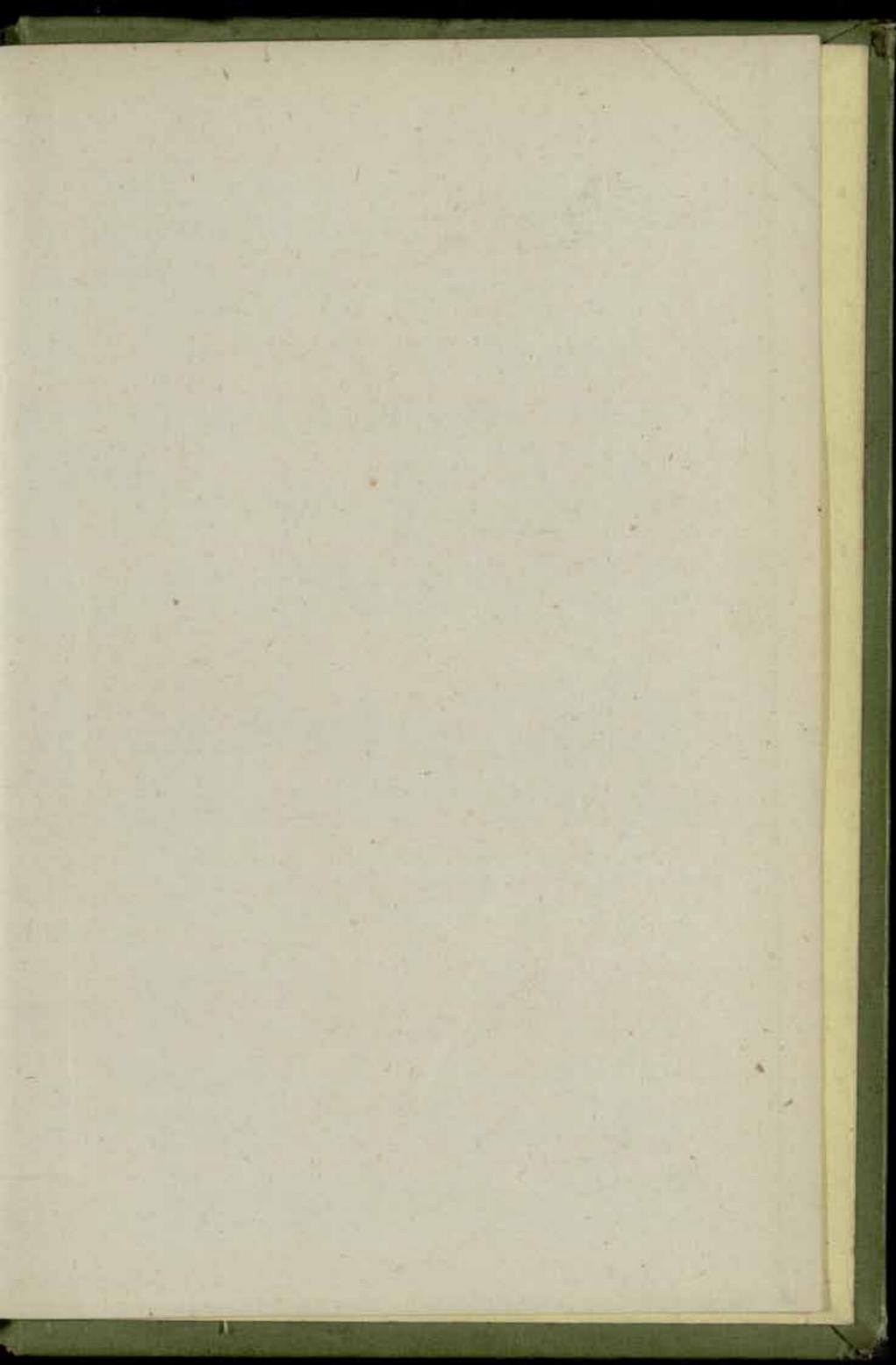
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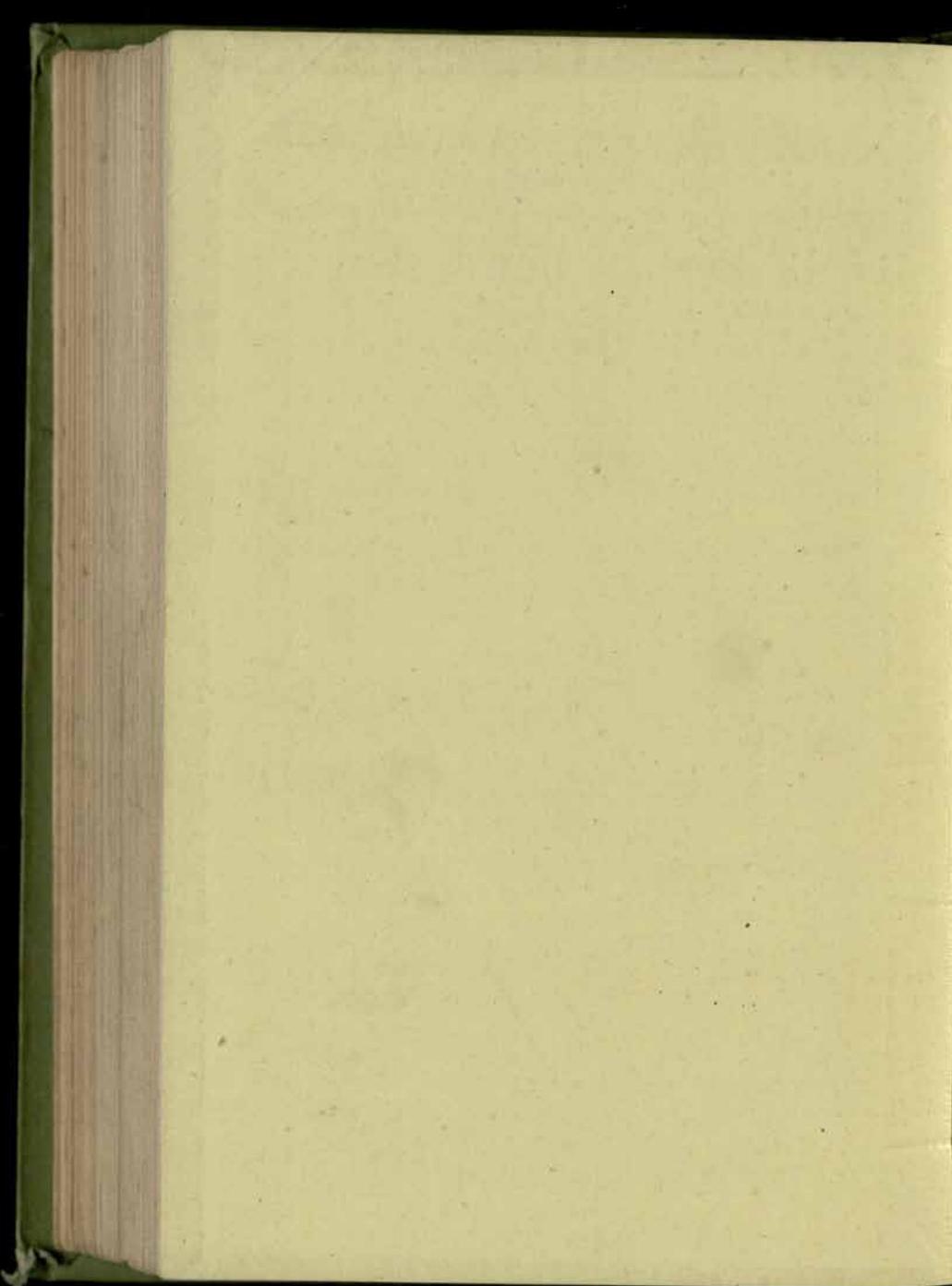
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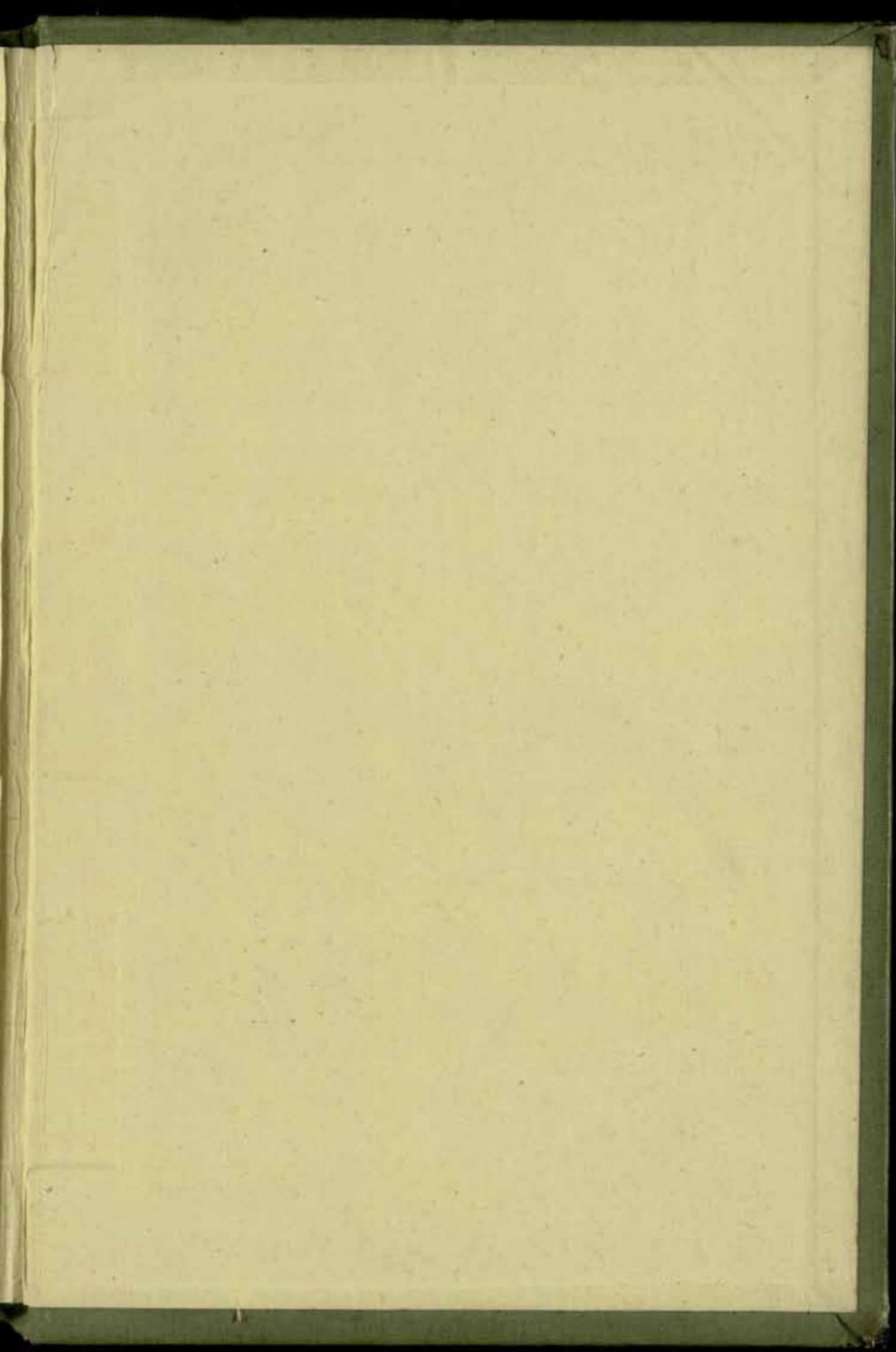
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