BILL BIDDON TRAPPER

EDWARD S. ELLIS

THE TRAPPER'S HOME.

Bill Biddon, Trapper

OR

LIFE IN THE NORTHWEST

BY

EDWARD S. ELLIS

AUTHOR OF "NATHAN TODD," "LIFE OF PONTIAC, THE CONSPIRATOR," "LAND OF MYSTERY," ETC.

NEW YORK
HURST & COMPANY
PUBLISHERS

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BILL BIDDON, TRAPPER;

OR,

LIFE IN THE NORTHWEST.

CHAPTER I.

OUT LATE AT NIGHT.

"How is it, Nat? Any light yet?"

"Not the least sign of one, and it's my opinion it will be a long time before we see another."

"What! you haven't given up all hopes of reaching the camp? I hope not, as I don't relish the idea of camping out to-night."

"Nor I either; but I'm thinking it will come to that sooner or later."

"Well, there are several hours yet, in which we must plod onward," I added, trudging wearily behind my companion.

Before going further, I may as well introduce my friend and myself. My companion answered

to the name of Nathan Todd, and was a native of Maine. He was a tall, lank individual, with long, attentuated limbs and an awkward appearance generally. He was very meager and muscular, and when roused to a heat of passion, as quick and powerful as the panther. His gait was an ungainly, straddling one, and he was seemingly capable of anything but speed; but on one or two occasions since leaving the States, he had shown a fleetness of foot which was truly wonderful. He was a good, open-hearted fellow, and one who, when driven to the wall, would be a dangerous enemy. Once or twice, however, he had shown the white feather, and his natural timidity would often evince itself. As a consequence, Nat was not, perhaps, the safest companion in the hour of danger; but, for all that, there was no one in our party whose presence I would have preferred upon the night in which I introduce him to notice. There was no imminent peril threatening us, and Nat was a capital companion, who could while-away the hours, if he chose, with his inexhaustible store of anecdote and humor. I knew he entertained a warm affection for me, and would brave almost any danger rather than be suspected of his only deficiency. A single intimation would decide his course in a moment.

Nat wore a singular dress—half savage and half civilized. The pants and shoes were such as are fashionable in the enlightened world; but a capacious hunting-shirt encased his body, secured around the waist by a heavy band, and much the same as are worn by the hunters and natives of the Far West at the present day. The most striking part of his dress, however, was the hat. This he had brought with him from Maine, and it really seemed indestructible. It was a gray color, and having lost its band a long time before, had acquired the shape of a cone. When it rested on his head, the edge reached the shoulders behind, and the eyebrows in front, and the pointed peak was far off above the crown.

Nathan Todd's face was full of shrewdness and good humor. He had a large, curved nose, broad mouth, and a fine blue eye. The chin was retreating; but this drawback was modified partly by a long tuft of yellow hair, the only signs of beard upon his face, except a shadowy mustache. The hair was long and sandy, and harmonized well with the rest of his countenance. There was ever a contraction of the eyebrows—a sort of unspoken question—so often seen in persons from "down east," which indicated a prying, curious disposition.

As for myself, my name is William Relmond, and

I hail from one of the middle States. Shortly after the announcement of the discovery of gold in California, I was seized with the lunacy that was carrying its thousands to the Pacific coast. I was well situated in life at home, but that was not considered. I must go and fish up a fabulous fortune also. I had one brother and several sisters, but our parents had been dead for some years, and we were residing with an uncle, the guardian of each, until maturity. A favorable opportunity offering I had made some preparation for the legal profession; but I was never inclined to Coke, and had no intention of pursuing the practice of the law in after life. At the age of twenty, then, without a settled purpose in life, I determined to make a journey to the El Dorado of the New World. I was not influenced solely by the love of gain, in taking this step, but the love of adventure urged me irresistibly on. I had heard wonderful stories of the boundless prairies, of the wandering hordes of Indians, their millions of buffaloes and horses, and the vast, billowy ocean of verdure and sunshine, and the Far West seemed the paradise of the world to me.

I was provided with an ample outfit at home, and departed amid the tears of my good uncle and affectionate sisters. I proceeded by the usual

route to Independence, Missouri, where I made inquiries of the trains which were constantly leaving the point for Oregon and California. In my wanderings, I stumbled upon Nat Todd, my present companion. He had just arrived from his distant home, where he had left a widowed mother and a disconsolate sweetheart. But he said he was going to return, in just two years from the day he left, with a "rousing heap" of money, and intended to buy "Squire Hunt's farm," take Alminy down there, and live the rest of his life. His frankness and humor impressed me favorably; and, after a short conversation, we grasped hands, and swore to remain by each other till our adventures were terminated by death or a happy *dénouement.*

We engaged places in a train which left the next day. This company numbered nigh two hundred persons, and was composed of all kinds of characters, except females. There were French *voyageurs,* Irishmen, and an agent of one of the western fur companies, and the majority of the rest were those just from the plow or the workshop. They had secured the services of an experienced guide, and were well equipped for the perilous journey before them.

The overland route, at this time, was so alive with passing emigrants, that few depredations were

committed by the Indians. The savages sometimes hung around companies, but as there were almost always other whites in sight, they rarely ventured upon any greater crime than pilfering. Nothing worthy of note occurred upon the journey for a length of time. We experienced the usual mishaps and trials of emigrants, but nothing more startling. We sometimes lost a part of our baggage and provisions in crossing the rivers, and were greatly discomforted by the terrific storms which often rage in these regions. Then, again, we traveled mile after mile, and hour after hour upon the dry, monotonous, glistening rolling prairie, so wearied and tired of the scene that we hardly exchanged a syllable for hours at a stretch.

At last, the plains of Kansas were reached. On the day in which I introduce my friend and myself to notice, we had descried a solitary antelope at a great distance upon the prairie, and set out to bring it down. We left our horses behind, hoping to reach the animal by stratagem. I approached it near enough to wound it, when it made off with the speed of the wind. Expecting to see it give out each moment, we followed it mile after mile, until gathering darkness warned us that night was at hand, when we halted in alarm, and were compelled to allow the antelope to escape, while we endeavored

to retrace our steps. The caravan was nowhere in sight, and we doubted not that it had disappeared hours before. We left the train about noon, and had been warned that they would not halt or wait for us, and should we lose them, they would take no pains to hunt us up. But we heeded not this, as we expected to keep them constantly in view, and have the antelope cooked for our supper.

But I have shown how widely we were mistaken. We were compelled to see the night shut down around us, without bringing us any hope of spending it with our friends; and at a late hour we were still plodding aimlessly over the prairie.

"No light yet, Nat?" I asked, for the twentieth time.

"Well, I should think you had asked that question about often enough, to be suited with my answer."

"I expect to ask it a dozen times more."

"Then I'll just answer at once for all, so I won't be troubled agin with talkin'. *No!* there's the answer."

"I don't know but what you are right, Nat. We must have come a long distance, utterly unconscious of it, in our eagerness to get that plaguey antelope, and it is useless to hope to reach camp again before morning."

"That's my opinion, exactly. That camp, I opine, is a good dozen miles off yet."

"Then we may have a chance of reaching it still before morning, as this bright moon favors us."

The moon, full and clear, had arisen an hour before, and its light illumined the prairie for a great distance around. Far away, on every hand, we could discern the blue outline of the horizon, while the prairie seemed to roll up against it like the dark boundaries of a mighty ocean. Everything was as silent and motionless as though we were treading a region of death.

Mile after mile, we trudged on, beguiling the time by conversation. The ground was dry and hard, and the vegetation scarce and stunted. The day had been quite warm, and there was a delicious coolness about the evening air that made it pleasant to walk an hour or so; but as more than double that time had expired since we commenced, it had long been exceedingly wearisome to us.

"I wonder whether those fellows will go a foot out of the way to pick us up," muttered Nat, half to himself.

"I don't believe they will. They told us they wouldn't and they value their time too highly to waste it for a couple who are of no account to them, especially since we can fall in with other trains."

"I reckon they're of some account to us, being they have got both our horses and considerable of our traveling apparatus."

"That is too true, Nat. In fact, since we have been walking here, I have persuaded myself that those fellows would, just as likely as not, turn something out of the way to get rid of us."

"Somehow or other, I've felt just the same for a week."

"Then, if we value our property, we mustn't let them slip."

"No; I'll be shot, if we must!" exclaimed Nat, half angrily, striking at once into a more rapid walk. "If they run off with my mare, I'll—I'll—" and again he strode faster over the prairie.

Long—long, we journeyed in silence. Nat's apprehensions had been aroused, and he was willing to walk the whole night to come up with those in whose honesty he had so little faith. Now and then he would mutter incoherently to himself and shoot ahead, keeping me almost on a run to maintain my place beside him. Suddenly he halted, and turned upon me with an expression I shall never forget. I could see his eyes expanded to twice their usual size, and his whole face aglow beneath his monstrous hat, as he asked in a cold whisper:

"Wonder if there's Injins about to-night.?"

I laughed outright.

"Why, Nat, you ain't afraid, are you?"

"Who said I was afraid? I just asked a question."

"What possessed you to ask such a question?"

"Don't know; just come into my mind. Do you s'pose there are any Injins roving round the country to-night?"

"I am sure I cannot tell, but I think it extremely probable. Are you fearful that there are some upon our trail?"

"There might be! No; I was thinking if we should come across any of them, they might be able to tell us whether any of them chaps think we're lost, and have run off with my mare."

"Should we meet a lot of those savages, no doubt they would tell us something else besides that."

"I expect so," and he wheeled around and strode ahead again. It was now getting near midnight, and I was completely worn out. It was out of the question to reach the camp that night, and we might as well submit to our fate at once, so I spoke rather decidedly.

"I'm tired of this."

Nat turned and looked at me a second, and then answered:

"So am I. We've to camp out to night, and there's no use in waiting till morning afore we do it. Ain't it lucky you brought your blanket with you? It would go hard to do without that to-night."

"I brought it with me by merest chance, not thinking I should need it. It was indeed fortunate; and now let us prepare to use it."

There was not much choice on the hard but warm earth. My blanket was ample and sufficient for us both. After some search, a small depression was selected, and in this I spread my heavy blanket. We then stretched ourselves upon it, pulled the ends over us, being sure to inclose our rifles in its folds, and resigned ourselves to sleep. In that lone hour, I forgot not that there was one arm upon which I could rely, and One only who could watch over me until morning, and to that protection I appealed.

Ere the sun was fairly above the horizon, we were up and upon our way. Knowing the company would not be in motion for several hours, we hoped to reach them before they breakfasted, and have a laugh over our night's adventure. Nat led the way, and took long, rapid strides over the ground, seemingly oblivious of the existence of any one else. I kept beside him, now and then venturing a remark,

but receiving no answer or intimation that I was heard.

Suddenly, my friend came to a dead halt, dropped the butt of his rifle to the earth with a ringing clamp, and wheeled upon me with one of those indescribable looks. I had seen these before, so that I knew something unusual was agitating him.

"What's the trouble now?"

"It's no use; we'll never see that company agin."

"What makes you think thus?"

"I know so. I had a dream last night that my mare was gone for ever and ever, and I know she is. Don't you remember that fur agent told us they'd change the direction they's traveling some time yesterday? They hadn't done it when we left them, and they done it as soon as we got out of sight, I warrant."

I now remembered hearing our guide remark, as also did the fur agent with us, that the trail we were following made an abrupt bend some miles ahead. We were traveling northeast at that time, and the contemplated change was nearly due southwest. This fact had entirely escaped our minds, until it now occurred to Nat, and we had, consequently, been proceeding in a wrong direction. By referring to the sun, we found we had gone far too much to the east in order to intercept the train,

which was now in all probability many leagues to the southwest.

This was a discovery which was overwhelming. We had then been journeying in a direction which had brought us not a foot nearer the company than if we had remained motionless; and it was certain that the party was irrecoverably lost.

"This is a pleasant discovery, Nat."

"Very."

"I see no hope for your mare. She is probably a good day's journey distant, and we do not know what direction to take to reach her."

"That's it," replied Nat, ill-humoredly; "if I knowed sure what way to tramp to find her, I wouldn't stop till I'd laid my hands on her for a certainty; but this trudging along, and just as like as not going away from her all the time, isn't the thing."

"I see no course left then, but to proceed south, in the hope of falling in with some emigrant train, or in striking the Oregon trail, north, and getting into California ahead of them."

"The Oregon trail will have to be our destination, then. If these fellows find they've got the start of us, they won't give us a chance to come up again, and we might as well try to catch the whirlwind as to follow them. No; we must try the

ready for them when they come. How far is the trail off?"

"It can't be more than a day's journey; the trail follows the Platte through Nebraska, and I'm pretty sure we can reach it by nightfall, if we proceed pretty steadily and rapidly."

The day was clear and pleasant, and the sky devoid of the least signs of threatening storm. There were two or three white clouds straggling off in the western horizon, but the sky was of a deep clear blue. We were now proceeding in a northward direction, intending to strike the Platte at the nearest point. South, east, and west the small waving hills of the prairie stretched, unrelieved by the slightest object, except in the west the far-off outline of some mountain-peak was just visible, resembling a slight pointed cloud against the blue sky. This disappeared at noon, and we were again like wanderers upon the illimitable sea. A short time after, Nat's keen vision detected a number of black, moving specks far to the westward.

"An emigrant train, perhaps," I suggested.

"They're Pawnee Injins as sure as the world, and we'd better give them a wide berth."

"Pawnee Indians! How do you know that? You never have been in this section before?"

"That's true, but you don't s'pose I started out here without first larning something 'bout the country and folks, do you? If you do, you're mighty mistaken. Just let me know in what part of the country we are, and I'll let you know what sights you will see, that is, if we are going to see any at all. But let's keep to the east; I don't want to keep them Pawnees in sight."

"The Pawnee Indians are reported friendly to the whites."

"Exactly; but have they been reported honest? If they should come upon us and take a fancy to our rifles, what is there to prevent them from taking them? And," added Nat, with a shrewd shake of his head. "I've not faith enough in their good intentions to want 'em in sight at this particular time."

There was a great deal of reason in his remarks, and it was not unwillingly that I turned my face more to the northeast, and soon saw them disappear from view.

Some time toward the middle of the afternoon we descried a solitary buffalo ahead. He had apparently left his friends and wandered about as though entirely lost. After considerable difficulty we approached nigh enough to bring him down. He was quite poor, and his flesh was strong and

Oregon trail, and get into California first, and be tough; but we were glad enough to get it, such as it was. He was thrown on his face, with his knees bent under him, a keen knife run along the spine with just sufficient force to penetrate the skin, which was then pulled down each side. This done, we cut the choice portions out. Nat reserved the buffalo-skin for his blanket, and the rest was thrown away. We made a hearty meal, and about the middle of the afternoon again set forward, hoping to accomplish quite a distance ere nightfall.

Just at dark we reached a stream of considerable size, which I afterward learned was the Republican Fork of Nebraska. The point at which we struck it, was about where it leaves the territory of Kansas and enters Nebraska. Although no considerable stream, we concluded not to cross it before morning, and we made arrangements for passing the night upon its banks. There was considerable timber at different points, and a goodly quantity of driftwood lay scattered along its banks. As the river was quite low, we gathered several armfuls, and had a fire soon started. We had brought some meat of the slain buffalo with us, but concluded not to cook supper, as our appetites were satiated.

Seated round our fire, half-hidden in a depres-

sion in the river bottom, with the dark, glistening stream flowing silently by, and smoking our pipes, we naturally fell into an easy conversation.

"We can't be far from the 'trail,' can we?" asked Nat.

"Farther than I suspected," I answered. "The Republican Fork, which I am convinced is the stream out there, is over fifty miles from the Platte, which, with several other streams must be crossed before the trail is reached."

"Fudge! I don't believe I can head off them fellows after all, and my old mare and overcoat will go to thunder."

"They will go *somewhere* where you will never see them again."

"I *know* I'm bound to lose 'em, and I shan't think any more about them."

"That's the best plan, Nat. They are no great loss."

"I sh'd like to know whether that greaser or fur agent took them though," interrupted my friend, earnestly.

After this he fell into a fit of musing, and we remained silent for some time. When the fire had burnt low, I arose and replenished it. Nat looked anxiously at the roaring blaze, carrying ashes and

cinders high in the air, and reflecting far out upon the dark river, and he remarked:

"Wonder if some Injins won't see that."

"I guess not. We are so low down the bank that I think it can be visible for no considerable distance upon the prairie, and the bend in the river fortunately saves us from view up or down the stream. The only point from which it would attract attention is directly across from us."

"And it looks suspicious enough there," repeated Nat, in a whisper, removing his pipe and gazing across the river.

It did indeed look gloomy, forbidding, and threatening. Our fire was nearly on the level with the water, which rolled darkly and noisily at our very feet; and when its crackling blaze arose higher than usual, the low face of the opposite shore was struck by the light. At such times I could not help reflecting what favorable chances were afforded any foe who might be lurking opposite. I involuntarily shrunk from the fire, and felt relieved when the shore blended with the darkness.

It began to grow quite late, the fire had smoldered low, when Nat, removing his cap, turned upon me with:

"What do you think of our journey to California?"

I was at a loss to comprehend his meaning, and looked at him for an explanation.

"I mean to ask whether you feel in such a hurry to get to mines as you did when we were in Independence?"

Now, to confess the truth, the experience of the last week or two, and especially of the last two days, had done much toward dampening the ardor which I once thought could never leave me; and I believe, had I possessed moral courage enough, I should have seized the first opportunity to return to the comforts of a home, where I possessed enough to satisfy any sensible person's ambition. Still I hesitated to commit myself.

"I cannot say that I am; but what induced you to——"

"I'm sick of this business," interrupted Nat, lengthening his legs with a spiteful jerk, and looking disgustedly into the fire.

"What has come over you?" I asked, half-amused at his manner.

"Well there's that mare——"

"But you promised not to think of her."

"How can I help it, I should like to know? She's gone sure, and there's that overcoat, that cost me four dollars and a half in Lubec; and Alminy made a big pocket in it on purpose for me

to fill full of gold chunks; and I should like to know how I am going to do it, when a Greaser has got it."

"I am afraid that that would not be the only difficulty you would be likely to experience, Nat, in getting it filled."

"And my jack-knife was in the coat-pocket, I declare!" exclaimed he, suddenly starting up and pinching alternately one pocket and then another. "Yes, sir, that's gone, too; that's worse than all the rest," he added, despairingly, falling upon his elbow, and gazing abstractedly into the fire.

"That's a trifling loss, surely, as you have your hunting-knife."

"I've a good notion to get up and go back now," he added, not heeding my remark. "I'm sick of this business. It's bad enough to lose the mare, but when the knife is gone I can't stand it."

I knew this was but a momentary despondency with my friend, and for the sake of whiling away the time before sleep, I was inclined to humor it.

"But what will you do for that gold that you was going to buy Deacon Hunt's farm with for your Alminy?"

"Let her go without it," he answered, gruffly, without removing his gaze from the fire. "She can get along without it. I believe she only

coaxed me to go off to Californy to get me out of the way, so that mean Bill Hawkins might take my place. If he does come any such game, he'll catch it when I get back."

I laughed deeply, but silently, as I witnessed his appearance at these remarks. It was so earnest and feeling, that it was impossible to resist its ludicrousness.

"Nat," said I, after a moment's thought, in which my mind had taken an altogether different channel, "I am free to own that I have little faith in our success in California. I left home in a flush of excitement, without considering the consequences of such a rash step, and they are now beginning to present themselves. I propose that we seek our fortune elsewhere. The fact that gold exists in California is now known all over the world, and we know there is not the remotest corner of her territory which is not swarming with hundreds who leave no means untried to amass their fortunes. I have no desire to wrangle and grope with them, and would much rather seek wealth elsewhere."

"But where else?"

"If gold exists in one spot on the Pacific coast, it is right to suppose it exists in many others, and what is to prevent our finding it?"

"Have you thought of any place?"

"It seems to me that in Oregon, among the spurs of the Rocky Mountains, there must be fabulous quantities of the precious metal."

"But why hasn't it been found?"

"Oregon is thinly settled, and no suspicion has led them to search for it."

"Well, let us dream upon it."

A few more fagots were forthwith heaped upon the fire, and then we lay down for the night's rest.

My companion had lain but a minute, when he suddenly sprang to his feet, and exclaimed:

"Hurrah for Oregon!"

"Be careful," I admonished; "your indiscretion may be fatal. That wall of darkness across the river looks gloomy and threatening enough to me."

"It does—hello! I'm shot—no, I ain't, neither."

That instant the report of a rifle burst from the other bank, and the bullet whizzed within an inch of my companion's face.

"Heavens! are we attacked!" I ejaculated, starting back from the fire.

"I believe so," replied Nat, cowering behind me.

We listened silently and fearfully, but heard no

more. The fire smoldered to embers, the river grew darker, and the night, moonless and cold, settled upon us. But no sleep visited my eyelids that night. Till the gray dawn of morning I listened, but heard no more.

CHAPTER II.

A NEW FRIEND.

As the light of morning overspread the stream and prairie, I felt an unspeakable sense of relief. Not a moment of sleep had visited me that night, although Nat's extreme fear toward midnight gave way to his drowsiness, and he slept long and heavily.

"Come, wake up, Nat!" said I, shaking him as soon as I saw that day was at hand.

"How? what's the matter?" said he, rubbing his eyes, and gaping confusedly about him.

"Day is at hand, and we must be on our way to Oregon."

He hastily rose, and we commenced our simple preparations. I ran up the river bank, and swept the prairie to the south of us to satisfy myself that no wandering Indians were in sight. The whole plain was visible, and with a feeling akin to joy, I reported the fact to Nat. He, however, was not

satisfied with my survey, as he had more than once before detected objects that had escaped my vision, and he ascended a high roll in the bank, some distance up, and took a long, careful, scrutinizing sweep of the whole horizon. Feeling satisfied that he would be no more rewarded for his pains than I was, I started the fire, and commenced cooking some of our buffalo. I had been engaged in this for a minute or so, when I heard Nat call, in a hoarse, anxious, half-whisper:

"Come here, quick!"

I hurried to his side and eagerly asked him the cause of agitation.

"Why, just look yonder, if that ain't enough to agitate one, then I don't know what is."

He pointed across the river, out upon the prairie; and following the direction of his finger, I saw not more than a mile or two away a single horseman proceeding leisurely from us.

"Who can that be?" I asked half to myself, still watching the receding figure.

"Why he's the one that sent that bullet across the water after us, and I'm thinking it's lucky for him, he's going another way. If I should get my hands on him, he would remember the time."

And Nat extended his arms energetically, and shook his head spitefully by way of emphasizing his remark.

I continued gazing after the unknown person. At first I supposed it was an Indian, but at that distance, and with his back toward us, it was almost impossible to judge accurately. A moment's thought convinced me that it was a white man. I could make out the hunting-cap of the trapper, and was soon satisfied he belonged to that class. His horse was walking leisurely along, and he seemed totally unaware of the proximity of strangers.

But who could it be? Was it he who had fired the well-nigh fatal shot? And what meant his actions in thus willfully leaving us? These and similar questions I asked myself, without taking my eyes from him, or heeding the numerous questions and remarks my companion was uttering. But, of course, I could give no satisfactory solution, and when his figure had grown to be but a dim speck in the distance, I turned to Nat.

"We may see him again; but, if I don't know him, I know one thing, I'm wonderfully hungry just now."

We partook of a hearty breakfast, my appetite

for which was considerably weakened by the occurrence just narrated. Without much difficulty we forded the Republican Fork, being compelled only to swim a few strokes in the channel, and reached the opposite side, with dry powder and food.

Here we made a careful search of the shore, and ascertained enough to settle beyond a doubt the identity of the horseman with the would-be assassin of the night before. His footprints could be seen, and the place where he had slept upon the ground, together with the scraps of meat. By examining the tracks of his horse, we discovered that both hind feet were shod; this decided our question of his being a white man; and although it cleared up one doubt, left us in a greater one. He could not have avoided the knowledge that we were of the same blood, and what demoniacal wish could lead him to seek the life of two harmless wanderers? Be he who he might, it was with no very Christian feelings toward him that we took the trail of his horse, and pursued it.

Our course after the first five miles, swerved considerably to the northwest. From the actions of the stranger, it was evident he understood the

character of the country, and we judged the shortest way of reaching the Oregon trail would be by following him. The footprints of his animal were distinctly marked, and we had no difficulty in keeping them.

At noon we forded a stream, and shortly after another, both considerably less than the Republican Fork. On the northern bank of the latter, were the still glowing coals of the stranger's camp-fire, and we judged he could be at no great distance. The country here was of a slightly different character from the rolling prairie over which we had journeyed thus far. There were hills quite elevated, and, now and then, groves of timber. In the river bottoms were numerous cottonwoods and elder; these natural causes so obstructed our view, that we might approach our unknown enemy very nigh without knowing it. Nat was quite nervous, and invariably sheered off from the forbidding groves of timber, striking the trail upon the opposite side at a safe distance.

In this way we traveled onward through the entire day. No signs of Indians were seen, and we anticipated little trouble from them, as they were friendly at this time, and the most they would

do would be to rob us of some of our trinkets or rifles.

At sundown we left our guiding trail and struck off toward a small stream to camp for the night. When we reached it, and decided upon the spot, Nat remarked seriously:

"I say, Relmond, that feller might be near enough to give us another shot afore morning, and I'm going to see whether his trail crosses the brook out there or not."

So saying, he wheeled and ran back to the spot where we had left it. It was still bright enough to follow it, and bending his head down to keep it in view, he continued upon a rapid run. I was upon the point of warning him against thus running into danger, but not feeling much apprehension for his safety, I turned my back toward him. A minute after, I heard his footsteps again, and, looking up, saw him coming with full speed toward me, his eyes dilated to their utmost extent, and with every appearance of terror.

"He's there!" he exclaimed.

"Where?" I asked, catching his excitement.

"Just across the stream up there; I liked to have run right into him afore I knowed it. See there!"

As Nat spoke, I saw the glimmering of a fire through the trees, and heard the whinny of a horse.

"Didn't he see you?"

"Yes, I know he did. When I splashed into the water like a fool, he looked up at me and grunted; I seen him pick up his rifle, and then I put, expecting each moment to feel a ball in me."

"I thought you intended laying hands on him if an opportunity offered," I remarked, with a laugh.

"I declare, I forgot that," he replied, somewhat crestfallen.

After some further conversation, I decided to make the acquaintance of the person who had occupied so much of our thoughts. Nat opposed this, and urged me to get farther from him; but a meaning hint changed his views at once, and he readily acquiesced. He would not be prevailed upon, however, to accompany me, but promised to come to my aid if I should need help during the interview. So leaving him, I started boldly up the stream.

When I reached the point opposite the stranger's camp-fire, I stumbled and coughed so as to attract his attention. I saw him raise his eyes and hur-

riedly scan me, but he gave no further evidence of anxiety, and I unhesitatingly sprang across the stream, and made my way toward him. Before I halted, I saw that he was a trapper. He was reclining upon the ground, before a small fire, and smoking a short black pipe, in a sort of dreamy reverie.

"Good evening, my friend," I said, cheerfully, approaching within a few feet of him. He raised his eyes a moment, and then suffered them lazily to fall again, and continue their vacant stare into the fire. "Quite a pleasant evening," I continued, seating myself near him.

"Umph!" he grunted, removing his pipe, and rising to the upright position. He looked at me a second with a pair of eyes of sharp, glittering blackness, and then asked: "Chaw, stranger?"

"I sometimes use the weed, but not in that form," I replied, handing a piece to him. He wrenched off a huge mouthful with a vigorous twist of his head, and returned it without a word. This done, he sank back to his former position and reverie.

"Excuse me, friend," said I, moving rather impatiently, and determined to force a conversation

upon him, "but I hope you will permit a few questions?"

"Go ahead, stranger," he answered, gruffly.

"Are you traveling alone in this section?"

"I reckon I ar', 'cept the hoss which 'ar a team."

"Follow trapping and hunting, I presume?"

"What's yer handle, stranger?" he suddenly asked, as he came to the upright position, and looking at me with more interest.

"William Relmond, from New Jersey."

"Whar's that place?"

"It is one of the Middle States, quite a distance from here."

"What mought you be doin' in these parts?"

"I and my friend out yonder are on our way to Oregon."

"Umph! you're pretty green 'uns."

"Now I suppose you will have no objection to giving me your name."

"My handle's Bill Biddon, and I'm on my way to trappin'-grounds up country."

"How far distant?"

"A heap; somewhar up 'bove the Yallerstone."

"Do you generally go upon these journeys alone?"

"What's your handle, stranger?"

"Sometimes I does, and sometimes I doesn't."

I ceased my questions for a few moments, for fear of provoking him. As his route, as far as it extended, would be in our direction, I determined to keep his company if I could gain his consent. He was a splendid specimen of the physical man. He was rather short, but heavy and thick-set, with a compactness of frame that showed a terrible strength slumbering in his muscles. His face was broad, covered by a thin, straggling beard of grizzled gray, and several ridged scars were visible in different parts of it. His brows were beetling and lowering, and beneath them a couple of black eyes fairly snapt at times with electric fire. His mouth was broad, and though one could plainly see a whirlwind of terrific passion might be called into life within his breast, yet there was, also in his face, the index of a heart alive to good humor and frankness. I saw that, if approached skillfully, his heart could be reached. He was evidently the creature of odd whims and fancies and caprice, feeling as well satisfied without the society of his fellow-man as with it—one of those strange beings, a hero of a hundred perils, who was satisfied to lose his life in the mighty wilderness of the

Far West, without a single one suspecting or caring for his fate.

"Would you have any objections to my friend and myself accompanying you, that is, as far as you should proceed in our direction?"

He looked steadily at me a moment, and answered, "You kin go with me ef you wants; but I knows as how you're green, and yer needn't s'pose I'm goin' to hold in fur yer. Yers as never does that thing."

"Oh, I shouldn't expect you to. Of course, we will make it a point not to interfere in the least with your plans and movements."

"Whar is yer other chap? S'pose it war him what come peakin' through yer a while ago; had a notion of spilin' his picter fur his imperdence."

"I will go bring him," I answered, rising and moving off. But as I stepped across the stream, I discerned the top of Nat's white hat, just above a small box-elder; and moving on, saw his eye fixed with an eager stare upon the trapper.

"Don't he look savage?" he whispered, as I came to him.

"Not very. Are you afraid of him?"

"No; but I wonder whether he—whether he

knows anything about the old mare and my knife."

"Perhaps so; come and see. He just now asked for you."

"Asked for me?" repeated Nat, stepping back. "What does he want of me?"

"Nothing in particular. I just mentioned your name, and he asked where you were. Come along; I hope you ain't afraid?"

"Afraid! I should like to see the man I'm afraid of!" exclaimed my companion in an almost inaudible whisper, as he tremblingly followed me across the brook, and to the spot where Biddon, the trapper, was lying.

"My friend, Nathan Todd, Biddon."

"How are you? Very happy to make your acquaintance," and Nat nervously extended his hand.

"How're yer?" grunted Biddon, with a slight jerk of his head, and not noticing the proffered hand.

"Been a most exceedingly beautiful day," ventured Nat, quickly and nervously.

I saw the trapper was not particularly impressed with him, and I took up the conversation. I made several unimportant inquiries, and learned in the course of them, that our friend, Bill Biddon, was

about forty years of age, and had followed trapping and hunting for over twenty years. He was a native of Missouri, and Westport was the depot for his peltries. For the last two or three years he had made all his excursions alone. He was quite a famous trapper, and the fur company which he patronized gave him a fine outfit and paid him well for his skins. He possessed a magnificently-mounted rifle, and his horse, he informed me, had few superiors among the fleetest mustangs of the south. Both of these were presented him by the company mentioned.

"Why ain't you got horses?" he asked, looking toward me.

"They were both stolen from us."

"I don't s'pose you've seen anything of a company with a mare, short-tailed, that limped a little, and an overcoat that had a knife in the pocket?" asked Nat, eagerly.

"Not that I knows on," answered Biddon, with a twinkle of humor.

I gave the particulars of our loss, and then asked, without due thought:

"Did you not camp upon the banks of the Republican Fork last night?"

"Yas; what'd yer want to know fur?"

"Oh, nothing, nothing," quickly answered Nat.

I believe the trapper understood my allusion, and I hoped he would give an explanation of his act; but he made no reference to it, and, after further conversation, we all lay down in slumber.

CHAPTER III.

THE TRAPPER'S STORY.

I WAS aroused from my slumber, before it was yet light, by Biddon shaking me and calling in my ear:

"Come, you chaps, you've got only two minutes to swaller yer feed in."

Nat was already moving about, and I sprang to my feet, determined to continue in my friend's good graces, if such a thing were possible, by a cheerful acquiescence in all his reasonable wishes. Our fire was kindled, a hasty breakfast swallowed, and just as the sun made its appearance above the prairie, we moved off toward the north.

Long before noon we reached the Platte, and forded it at the point where Fort Grattan now stands. The Platte, during the winter months, is a boisterous stream of great width, but in summer it is very shallow (from which circumstance it derives its name), and at the dry season it almost ceases running, and dwindles down to an innumer-

able number of stagnant pools. As it was now the summer season, we walked over without more than merely wetting our shoes. The Oregon trail follows the northern shore of this stream to Washington Territory, or to what was Oregon at the time of which I write. Leaving the Platte, we shaped our course toward the northwest, so as to strike the southern spur of the Black Hills. From Biddon's conversation, I found that his destination was the neighborhood of the head-waters of the Tongue or Powder River, which have their cañons in the Black Hills.

As he allowed his horse to proceed upon a moderate walk, we had no trouble in keeping him company. We generally started at the first indication of morning, halting now and then to slake our thirst in the numerous streams which crossed our path, and resting an hour at noon. At sunset we struck camp upon some small stream, cooked our evening meal, spent an hour or two in smoking and conversation, and turned in for the night.

The country over which we now journeyed was much better timbered than any through which we had yet passed. For an entire day after crossing the Platte, we met with thousands of the ash, elm, walnut, and cottonwood trees. The bark of the latter, I was surprised to observe, was greatly rel-

ished by the trapper's horse, he often preferring it to the rich, succulent grass which so abounds in this region. Besides this there were signs of the buffalo, antelope, and hundreds of other animals.

One night we halted upon the bank of a large stream some miles north of the Platte, which emptied into the Missouri. It was quite broad and rapid, and near the center of the channel a small, sandy island was visible. We passed over this while fording the stream, and I noticed that Biddon walked around it, and surveyed several spots with more than common interest. I did not question him then, but at night, when we were stretched before the fire, with our soothing pipes, I ventured the inquiry.

"I seed sights on that chunk of mud one time," said he, with a dark frown.

"What was it?—what was it?" asked Nat, eagerly.

"Here's as what don't like to think of that time, augh!" he answered, seeming still unwilling to refer to it.

"Why not?" I asked, beginning to partake of Nat's curiosity.

"It makes a feller's blood bile; but, howsomever," he added, brightening up, "if you wants to hear it, yer kin."

"We do by all means; please give it."

"Yas, that ar' war' a time of general wipin' out, and this yer water that now looks as black as a wolf's mouth, *run red* that night! It war' nigh onto ten year ago that it happened. I was down in Westport one day in the summer when a feller slapped me on the shoulder and axed me ef I wanted a job. I tole him I didn't care much, but if he's a mind to fork over, and it wan't desprit hard, and too much like work, I's his man. He said as how thar' war' a lot of fellers camped out on the prairie, as war gwine to start for Oregon, and as wanted a guide; and heerin' me spoken on as suthin' extronnery, why he like to know ef I wouldn't go; he'd make the pay all right. I cut around the stump awhile and at last 'cluded to go. I went out onto the perarie, and seed the company. They were men, women, and children, 'specially the last ones. I seed they wanted good watchin', and I kinder hinted they'd find trouble afore they'd reach Oregon.

"There weren't many folks trampin' these parts then, and them as did go, had to make up thar minds to see fight and ha'r-raisin'. B'ars and beavers, they did! The reds war the same then all over, arter you get clear of the States, and no feller's ha'r war his own till he'd lost it.

"We started the next day, and struck the Platte afore night. There war but twenty good men, an' I made half of 'em stand watch that night just to get their hands in. In course they didn't see nothin', 'cept one straddlin' chap, like this feller yer that is called Nat. He said as how he seed wonders, he did, and thar war a hundred reds crawlin' round the camp all night.

"We went purty slow, as it weren't best to hurry the teams; but we hadn't been two days on the way afore the fools got into the all-firedest scrabble I ever seed. I don't know what it come 'bout, but it war so big, they split company, and part of 'em crossed over and camped on t'other side the Platte. I tole 'em they'd see stars purty soon, if they didn't splice agin, but they's too rearin' to do it, and I said if they's a mind to be sich fools, they mought be fur all me, and I'd let 'em go on alone. Howsomever, the smallest party hung on fur me not to leave 'em, and I 'cluded to stay with 'em as I knowed purty well they'd need me all the time.

"The biggest company as had crossed the Platte, kept on by it, and so the others said they'd leave it and cut across fur Oregon. I tole 'em this war the best way, and so we left 'em. Them I war with war a heap the smallest, and had but three or four

men and five or six women and children. What made things look wuss, I seed 'signs' when we parted, and I knowed purty well the reds smelt what war goin' on. And 'bout a dozen times in the afternoon I could see 'em off on the perarie stealin' long and dodgin' through cover. I knowed that the imps were follerin' us, seein' the other war a heap more powerful nor us.

"Things got so dubersome afore night, I said to the men ef they'd take the advice of a feller as knowed what he war 'bout, they'd turn round and never stop till they cotched the others; for ef they didn't, they'd cotch it at night; reds war 'bout them as thick as flies. They said how ef I's *'fraid* I mought go back, but as for them *they'd* go through fire and blazes 'fore they would. I felt riled 'nough at this to leave 'em, and I would ef it hadn't been fur them poor women; they looked so sorrerful I made up my mind to stick to 'em fur thar sake.

"We reached the stream just as it war growing dark, and the reds had got so sassy, that five or six of 'em stood a little ways off and watched us. This scart the women and men, and they axed me what war to be done? The women cried and wanted to coax the Injins up to give 'em sunkthin' to get thar good will, but they war cross and sulky, and didn't say much.

"After some talk and a heap of cryin', we 'cluded to camp on that piece of sand in the river. The teams war drew over and we follered. The water war some deeper nor now, and it took us a long time to land; but we got over at last. As soon as we war clean over, I commenced fixing up things fur the reds. We didn't build no fire, but put the teams together near the middle, and the women inside 'em. There war four men without me, and I set 'em round the place to watch fur sign. I made 'em all squat flat down on the mud close to the water, and told 'em to blaze away at anything they seed, ef it war a beaver or otter, and gave 'em pertickler orders not to wink both eyes at a time. I seed they's skerish, and there weren't no danger of thar snoozin' on watch.

"I's pretty sartin the reds would come some of thar tricks, and come down the river; so I went up to the upper part of the thing, and laid in the mud myself to watch fur 'em. I knowed, too, they wouldn't be 'bout 'fore purty late, so I took a short nap as I laid in the mud. When I woke up the moon war up in the sky, and the river had riz so my pegs war in the water. I flapped out, but didn't see nothin' yet. I sneaked down round by t'other fellers, and found 'em all wide awake; and they said, too, as how they hadn't seen nothin'

'cept the river war gettin' higher, which they kinder thought the Injins mought 've done. Jist as I war going back I heard some of the purtiest singin' in the world. Fust, I thought it war an Injin, ef it hadn't been so nice; then I 'cluded it must be an angel. I listened, and found it came from the wagons. I crept up and seed two little girls all 'lone clus by the wagons, a singin' sunkthin'. Shoot me! ef it didn't make me feel watery to see them. The moon war shinin' down through the flyin' clouds, right out on 'em. They sot with their arms round each other and war bare-headed, and ef I hadn't knowed 'em I'd swore they were angels sure. I axed what they were singin' for, and they said the Injins war goin' to come after 'em that night, and they war singin' to their mother in heaven to keep 'em away. Shoot me! when one of 'em throwed her little white arms round my neck and kissed my ugly meat-trap, I couldn't stand it. I went up to my place again and lad down in the mud.

"It was gettin' colder, and the wind comin' up, drew the white clouds 'fore the moon, makin' it all black. But when it come out agin I seed sunkthin' comin' down the river that looked like a log. I dug down deeper into the mud, and set my peepers on it, fur I knowed thar war sunkthin' else thar, too. It

come right on and struck the mud a little ways from me. I didn't stir 'cept to kinder loose my knife. The log stuck a minute, and then swung round and went down the river. I knowed the boys would see it, and I didn't leave my place. Thinkin' as how this war only sent down to see what we'd do, I war lookin' fur other things, when I heard a noise in the water, and, shoot me, ef a sneakin' red didn't come up out of the water, and commence crawlin' toward whar the gals war singin'. (Jist put a little fodder on the fire.) "

I sprang up and threw on some fagots, and then seated myself and anxiously awaited the rest of his story. He put away his pipe, filled his mouth with tobacco, and, after several annoying delays, resumed:

" Thar weren't no time to lose. I crept 'long behind him mighty sly, and afore he knowed it, come down *spank* onto him. I didn't make no noise nor he either. I jist grabbed his gullet and finished him with my knife. I then crawled back agin, and, shoot me, ef I didn't see forty logs comin' down on us; the river war full of 'em.

" I jumped up and hollered to the other fellers to look out. They came up aside me and stood ready, but it weren't no use. 'Fore we knowed it, I seed over forty of 'em 'long 'side us. We blazed into 'em

and went to usin' our knives, but I knowed it wouldn't do. They set up a yell and pitched fur the wagons, while 'bout a dozen went at us. The fust thing I knowed the whole four boys were down and thar ha'r raised, and the women screechin' murder. It made me desprit, and I reckon I done some tall work that night. Most these beauty spots on my mug come from that scrimmage. I seed a red dart by me with that little gal as was singin', and cotched a dead red's gun and let drive at him; but the gun weren't loaded, and so the devil run off with her.

"The oxes war bellerin', the horses snortin', and the tomahawks stoppin' the women's screams; the redskins war howlin' and yellin' like all mad, and as I had got some big cuts and knocks, I 'cluded it best to move quarters. So I made a jump for the stream, took a long dive, and swam for the shore. I come up 'bout whar you're setting, and I made a heap of tracks 'fore daylight come."

"And did you never hear anything of the children captured upon that night?"

"I never seed 'em agin; but I come 'cross a chap at Fort Laramie when I went down agin, what said he'd seen a gal 'mong some the redskins up in these parts, and I've thought p'r'aps it mought be one of 'em, and agin it moughtn't."

"Did you say that all happened out there?" asked Nat, jerking his thumb toward the island mentioned, without turning his face.

"I reckon I did."

"Bet there's a lot of Injins there now!" exclaimed he, turning his head in that direction.

"Jist as like as not," returned Biddon, with a sly look at me.

"I'm goin' to sleep then," and rolling himself up in his buffalo-blanket, all but his feet, disappeared from view.

"It's 'bout time to snooze, I think," remarked the trapper, in a lower tone, turning toward me.

"I think so, but I suppose there need be no apprehension of molestation from Injins, need there?"

Biddon looked at me a moment; then one side of his mouth expanded into a broad grin, and he quietly remarked:

"Times are different from what they used to war."

"Biddon," said I, after a moment's silence, "before we saw you we camped upon one side of a stream while you were upon the other. Now, I do not suppose you would willfully harm a stranger; but since I have met you, I have a great desire to know why you fired that shot at Nat. You supposed we were Indians, I presume?"

A quiet smile illumined the trapper's swarthy visage; and, after waiting a moment, he answered:

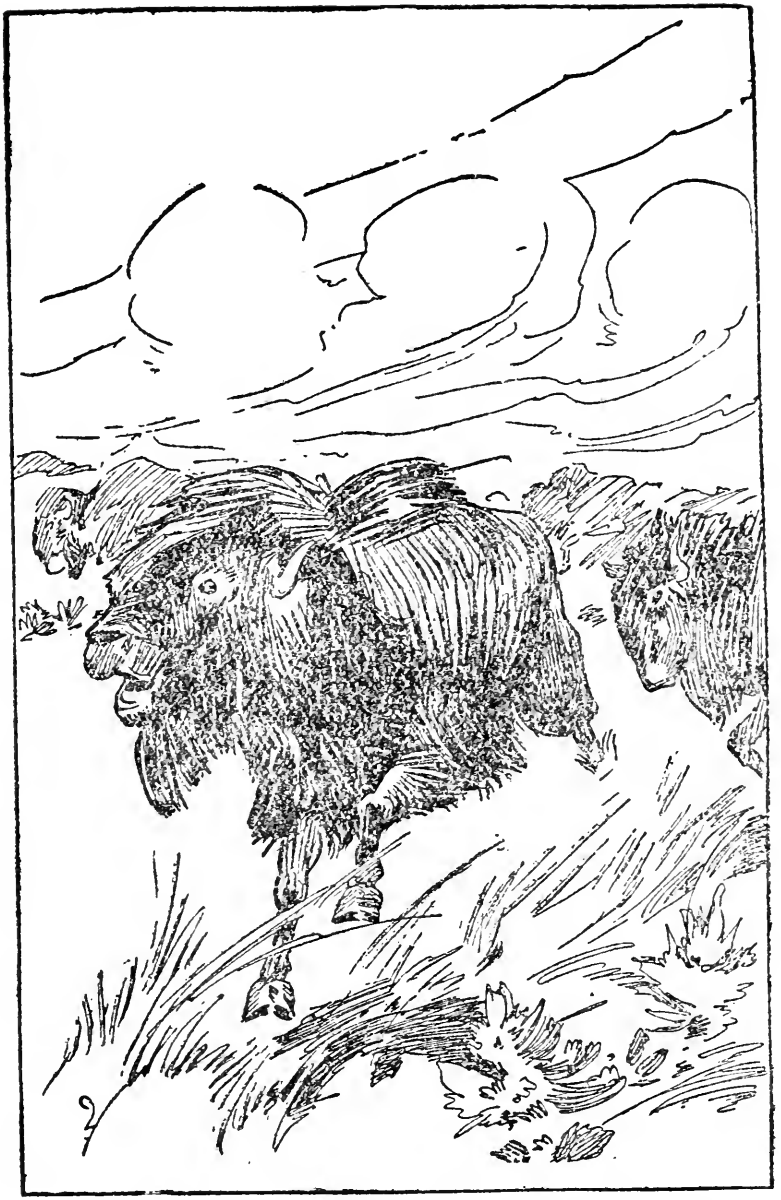
"The way on it war this: I seed you and Nat camping there, and I s'pected you war gwine to tramp these parts. I watched you awhile, and was gwine to sing out for you to come over. Then said I, 'Biddon, you dog, ain't there a chance to give them a powerful scare.' First I drawed bead on you, but when that Nat jumped up, I let fly at him, and he kerflummuxed splendid. Howsumever, it's time to snooze, and I'm in for it."

With this, we wrapped our blankets around us, and in a few moments were asleep.

On a clear summer morning, we sallied out upon the broad, open prairie again. The trapper now struck a direction nearly due northwest toward the Black Hills, and we proceeded with greater speed than before. The face of the country began to change materially. Vast groves of timber met the eye, and the soil became rich and productive. At noon we encountered the most immense drove of buffaloes that I ever witnessed. They were to the west of us, and proceeding in a southern direction, cropping the grass clean as they went. Far away, as far as the vision could reach, nothing but a sea of black moving bodies could be distinguished. I mounted a small knoll to ascertain the size of the

drove; but only gained a clearer idea of their enormous number. The whole western horizon, from the extreme northwest to the southwest, was occupied solely by them, and nothing else met the eye. They were not under way, and yet the whole mass was moving slowly onward. The head buffaloes would seize a mouthful of grass, and then move on a few feet and grasp another. Those behind did the same, and the whole number were proceeding in this manner. This constant change of their position gave an appearance to them, as viewed from my standing-point, similar to the long heaving of the sea after a violent storm. It was truly a magnificent spectacle.

We approached within a short distance. They were more scattered upon the outside, and with a little trouble the trapper managed to insinuate himself among them. His object was to drive off a cow which had a couple of half-grown calves by her side, but they took the alarm too soon, and rushed off into the drove. We then prepared to bring down one apiece. I selected an enormous bull, and sighted for his head. I approached nigh enough to make my aim sure, and fired. The animal raised his head, his mouth full of grass, and glaring at me a moment, gave a snort of alarm and plunged headlong away into the droves. At the same instant I



"Gave a snort of alarm and plunged headlong away into the droves."

heard Nat's rifle beside me, and a moment after that of the trapper. This gave the alarm to the herd. Those near us uttered a series of snorts, and dropping their bushy heads, bowled off at a terrific rate. The motion was rapidly communicated to the others, and in a few seconds the whole eastern side was rolling simultaneously onward, like the violent countercurrent of the sea. The air was filled with such a vast cloud of dust that the sun's light was darkened, and for a time it seemed we should suffocate. We remained in our places for over an hour, when the last of these prairie monsters thundered by. A strong wind carried the dust off to the west, and we were at last in clear air again. Yet our appearance was materially changed, for a thin veil of yellow dust had settled over and completely enveloped us, and we were like walking figures of clay.

I looked away in the direction of the herd, expecting to see my buffalo's lifeless form, but was considerably chagrined at my disappointment, as was also Nat at his. The trapper's was a dozen yards from where it had been struck.

"'Pears to me," said he with a sly smile, "I heer'n your dogs bark, but I don't see nothin' of no buffaloes, ogh!"

"I *hit* mine," I answered quickly; "I am sure of it."

"Whereabouts?"

"In the head, plump and square."

"Whar'd you sight yourn, Greeny?"

"Just back the horns, and I hit him too. If he hasn't dropped before this, I'll bet he'll have the headache for a week."

"B'ars and beavers, you! Them bufflers didn't mind your shots more nor a couple of hailstones. Do you see whar I picked mine?" asked the trapper, pulling the buffalo's fore-leg forward, and disclosing the track of the bullet behind it.

"Isn't a shot in the head fatal?" I asked in astonishment.

"You might hit 'em thar with a cannon-ball, and they'd git up and run agin, and ef you'd pepper 'em all day whar you did yourn, you'd pick the bullets out thar ha'r and they wouldn't mind it."

This I afterward found to be true. No shot, however well aimed, can reach the seat of life in the buffalo through the head, unless it enter the eye, fair front.*

The trapper's buffalo was thrown forward upon

* I may further remark, that the buffalo slain by us when lost upon the prairie, was shot in the side as he wheeled to run from us, without our suspecting it was the only place in which we could have given him a mortal wound.

his face, his legs bent beneath him, and dressed after the usual fashion. He was in good condition, and we had a rich feast upon his carcass. The trapper selected a few choice portions from the inside, relished only by himself, and cutting several huge pieces for future use, the rest was left for the beasts of prey.

We proceeded but a few miles further, and encamped upon the banks of the Dry Fork. This is a small stream, a few miles south of the Black Hills. There was but a foot or two of sluggish water, and in the hot season it was often perfectly dry. Here for the first time I was made aware of the changeable character of the climate in this latitude. The weather, thus far, had been remarkably clear and fine, and at noon we found the weather sometimes oppressively warm. Toward night the wind veered around to the northwest, and grew colder. At nightfall, when we kindled our fire, the air was so chilly and cutting that Nat and I were in a shiver. Had it not been for our blankets we should have suffered considerably, though Biddon did not call his into requisition. There were a number of cottonwood trees near at hand, which served partly to screen us from the blast.

After our evening meal had been cooked, Biddon remarked:

"The fire must go out, boys."

"Why? Do you apprehend danger?" I asked.

"Don't know as I do; I hain't seed signs, but we're gittin' into parts whar we've got to be summat skeerish."

"I suppose it's about time for the Indians to come?" remarked Nat interrogatively, with a look of fear toward the trapper.

"They're 'bout these parts. Me'n Jack Javin once got into a scrimmage yer with 'em, when we didn't 'spect it, and jist 'cause we let our fire burn while we snoozed. I'd seen sign though then, and wanted to put it out, but he wan't afeared."

"Let's have ours out then," exclaimed Nat excitedly, springing up and scattering the brands around.

"Needn't mind 'bout that; it'll go out soon enough."

As Nat reseated himself, Biddon continued:

"You see, Jarsey, them reds kin smell a white man's fire a good way off, and on sich a night as this, ef they're 'bout they'll be bound to give him a call. You needn't be afeared, howsumever, to snooze, 'cause they won't be 'bout."

It was too cold to enjoy our pipes, and we all bundled up for the night's rest. In a few moments I heard the trapper's deep breathing, and shortly

after Nat joined him in sleep. But I found it impossible to get to sleep myself. The ground was so cold that my blanket could not protect me, and the cutting wind was terrible. I used every means that I could devise, but it was of no use, and I feared I should be compelled to either build the fire again, or to continue walking all night to prevent freezing to death.

I chose the latter expedient. It was quite dark, yet I had noticed our situation well enough, I judged, not to lose it. So grasping my blanket in my hand, I started on a rapid run directly over the prairie. I continued a long distance, until pretty well exhausted. I turned to retrace my steps. My blood was warming with the exercise, and I hurried forward, counting upon sound sleep for the remainder of the night.

I continued my run for a full half hour, and then stopped in amazement, as I saw no signs of my companions. Thinking I must have passed the spot where they were lying, I carefully walked back again, but still without discovering the men. I had lost them in the darkness, and it was useless to hunt them at night. So I concluded to wait till morning, feeling sure that they could be at no great distance.

I now commenced searching for a suitable place for myself, and at last hit upon a small depression in the prairie. There was a large stone imbedded in the earth on one side, which served to protect me from the chilling wind. As I nestled down, beside this, such a feeling of warmth and comfort came over me that I congratulated myself upon what at first seemed a misfortune.

Lying thus, just on the verge of sleep, my nerves painfully alive to the slightest sound, I suddenly felt a trembling of the ground. At first it seemed a dream; but, as I became fully awake, I started in terror and listened. I raised my head, but heard no sound, and still in the most perplexing wonder sank down again, hoping it would shortly cease. But there was a steady, regular increase, and presently I distinguished millions of faint tremblings, like the distant mutterings of thunder. Gradually these grew plainer and more distinct, and finally I could distinguish sounds like the tread of innumerable feet upon the prairie. Still at a loss to account for this strange occurrence, I listened, every nerve in my body strung to its highest tension. Still louder and louder grew the approaching thunder, and every second the jar of the earth became more per

ceptible. Suddenly the truth flashed upon me—*a herd of buffaloes were approaching.*

Terror for an instant held me dumb when I realized this awful danger. My first resolve was to rush forth and warn Nat and Biddon; but I reflected that they must have been awakened, ere this, and that I could do nothing to ward off the peril which threatened all alike. Springing to my feet, I paused a second to collect my tumultuous thoughts. Could I reach the timber, I could ascend a tree and be beyond danger; but I knew not what direction to take, and there was no time to spare. To remain still was to be trampled to death; to rush away could save me but a few moments longer. God of heaven! what a death!

Louder and louder grew the thundering tread of the animals, and I stood like a madman, the cold sweat pouring off me, tormented by a thousand agonizing thoughts, and expecting death each moment! Nearer and nearer came the rattle of the clamping hoofs, and I stood rooted to the spot!

Sinking on my knees, I implored mercy of the One who could give it in this moment of dire necessity; and while on my knees the means of preservation presented itself.

"Strange!" I exclaimed, breathing deeply, "that I did not think of it before."

I have said that I was in a sort of depression or hollow in the earth, and that a large stone was imbedded on one side. Now a safer and more secure shelter could not have been found in this emergency. I wrapped my blanket around me, and crept as far beneath it as I could, and I was saved!

A few minutes later, and a dark body plunged headlong over me with the rapidity of lightning, followed instantly by another and another, and I knew the herd were thundering past. For a long time I lay there, beneath these thousands of feet, one of which would have been sufficient to kill me. The incessant crackling of their hoofs, and rattling of their horns, sounded like the discharge of musketry. Once a ponderous body tumbled over the rock which sheltered me, and I caught sight of a dark, writhing, bellowing mass, and the next instant it regained its feet and disappeared.

It must have been an hour that I lay here, ere the last animal leaped over me. Then I looked up and saw the stars shining overhead. My joy at the sight of those glittering orbs cannot be expressed. I arose to my feet, and looked about me. It was too dark to discern objects, yet I could hear the rapidly retreating footfalls of the herd in the dis-

tance, and I knew I had been saved from a frightful death. Sinking to the earth I offered a sincere prayer of gratitude to the Almighty for his miraculous preservation of my life!

CHAPTER IV.

THE TRAPPING GROUNDS.

I WAS agreeably surprised upon waking to see Nat standing within a few feet, holding two horses by the bridle.

"Which one will you choose?" he asked with a broad smile.

"How did you come by them?" asked I.

"I s'pose it must have been about the time you left us last night, that Biddon woke me up, and told me to follow him, as there was a *powerful* chance to get a couple of hosses for you and me. I asked him where you could be, and he said he s'posed you'd gone further up-stream to sleep by yourself, though he hadn't seen you go. Howsumever, we wasn't worried, as we thought you were old enough to take care of yourself, so we started down the bed of the stream. We went about half a mile, when Biddon showed me a small camp-fire, burned down to a few coals and ashes; but there was enough light to show us two hosses picketed a few yards away,

and we seen the feet of a couple of redskins turned toward the fire. Biddon said as how they was a couple of hunters, sound asleep, and we might *borrow* their horses, if I didn't make too much noise. He told me to stand still, and keep my gun pointed at them, and the minute one stirred to shoot him, and then rush in, and dispatch the other. I promised to do so, and he stole around to the hosses on his hands and knees. He had cut both the lariats and was leading them away, when one of the Indians raised his head and looked around, and as soon as he seen the hosses moving off, give a grunt and jumped up and ran toward them. I remembered it was my duty to shoot, and as the Indian was running purty fast, I aimed about ten feet ahead of him, supposing, of course, the villain would git there as soon as the bullet did; but, I'll be hanged if he wasn't mean enough to stop, and let the bullet be wasted. My gun kicked like blazes, and the Ingins I s'pose thought a whole tribe was upon them; for setting up a great howl, they *skooted* off in the darkness, leaving us alone with the animals. Running back, I overtook Biddon, who was riding along as though nothing had happened. He asked me to ride and of course I jumped on, and here I am. But which hoss do you want?"

"I do not see as there is much room for choice,"

I replied; "both are splendid animals, and a most opportune blessing."

"If it's all the same to you, this gentleman is mine;" and handing the bridle to me, he vaulted upon the other. The latter was a magnificent Indian pony, of a deep bay color, probably captured when very young, and high spirited and fiery. Both manifested considerable uneasiness, knowing they were in the hands of strangers, and Nat's made one or two efforts to dislodge him; but he was a good horseman, and maintained his place with apparent ease despite the struggles, which were frantic and desperate at first. Mine was somewhat larger, of a coal-black color, and with as much spirit and fire as the other, but in a few moments we had them both under perfect control.

Besides these two animals, we gained two fine Indian saddles, and were now as well mounted as we could wish. Nat remarked, that when the buffaloes thundered by he felt some apprehension for me, but the trapper expressed none, saying that I would be found all right in the morning. As soon as there was light, Nat commenced searching the bed of the stream for me, and failing in this, he climbed a tree and took a survey of the prairie on both sides. From his elevation he discovered what he believed to be my dead body; and, accompanied

by Biddon and the horses, hastened toward me. Upon reaching me, they understood instantly the whole matter, and it was their loud laughter that had aroused me.

We were now pretty far to the northwest of Nebraska Territory. The face of the country was materially different, and I began to notice a change of temperature. The summer had just closed, and the early autumn was like the approach of winter. The nights were cool and chilling, and the days generally mild at noon, but often keen and exhilarating. The prairie was mostly of the rolling kind, but the belts of timber were more common, and the vegetation richer and more exuberant. It was plain, too, that we were journeying into a section where the foot of civilization had not been. The vast, undulating swell of the prairie, the mighty fields of verdure, and the broad rivers and streams, bore only the marks of the red man and wild beast.

Toward noon, Nat descried a solitary antelope far ahead. It was near a grove of timber, from which it had just wandered, and stood gazing wonderingly at our approach. We rode on in silence for some time, when Biddon raised his hand for us to halt.

"What do you intend doing?" I asked.

"Jes' hold on and see," he replied, as he dismounted.

He made a circuit, skirting the prairie, so as to reach the grove mentioned upon the opposite side from the antelope. I still was at a loss to understand his intention, as the animal was too distant from the timber to be brought down with a rifle-shot from that point.

"What under the sun does he intend doing?" I asked, turning to Nat.

"Guess he's getting off there to shoot us."

On the outer edge of the grove, next to the antelope, I saw him emerge, holding a stick over his head, to which was affixed a handkerchief or rag. He walked a short distance, and then lay down flat upon the prairie, perfectly concealed in the grass. The rag was visible, fluttering above him. I now watched the motions of the antelope. He stood gazing at us, until the trapper came into view, when, with a startled glance at him, he wheeled and ran. In a moment, however, he paused and turned quickly around. His looks were now fixed upon the fluttering signal. He stood motionless a moment, and then cautiously lifting his foot, made a step toward it. Thus he continued to approach, step by step, with apparent fear, and yet evidently impelled by an ungovernable curiosity, until he was

scarce a hundred yards distant from the prostrate form of the trapper. Still he was moving stealthily onward, when suddenly a red tongue of fire spouted from the grass, and, as the sharp crack of Biddon's rifle reached us, we saw the antelope give a wild leap into the air, and, bounding a short distance, fall to the ground. The trapper immediately sprang to his feet and hastened to the fallen animal.

"Let us ride to him," said I, walking my horse onward.

We had ridden a short distance when Nat halted and asked:

"What's got into Biddon? Just look at him!"

I did look up, and for a moment believed the man had turned crazy. He had seen us approaching, and was now making furious gesticulations toward us. I watched him a moment, and then remarked:

"He is either signaling for us to come on or to stop."

"He means us to wait, I guess, and we had better pause until he returns."

We reined in our horses and watched him. He was apparently satisfied with our stopping, and stooped and commenced working at the animal. In a few moments he arose, and slinging a huge piece on his shoulder, made his way into the grove. From this he emerged in due time, and made his

way toward us, motioning, meanwhile, for us to remain in our places.

"Why didn't you wish us to approach?" I asked, as soon as he came within speaking distance.

He made no answer, but throwing his meat upon the ground, hastily mounted his horse. Then he spoke in a deep whisper:

"Boys, did you 'spose there's over twenty redskins among them trees?"

"Heavens! it isn't possible?" I exclaimed, catching my breath.

"It's so: I seed 'em, and thar eyes are on us this minute. They're waitin' for us to go on, an' they'll give us thunder and lightnin'."

"What's to be done?" queried Nat.

"Jes' keep still, an' don't kick up, or they'll see it. We've got to make a run for it. Keep close to me, and when I start, let your horses went."

"But the meat?" I hurriedly asked.

"Can't take it. We have a long run, an' our our horses won't want to carry no extra load. I didn't see thar animals, but I guess they ain't mounted. Ready!"

With this, Biddon wheeled his horse quickly around, and vanished from his place with the speed of lightning, while ours almost smultaneously shot ahead like an arrow. An instant after, I heard the

"Looking back saw a host of savage forms."

faint discharge of guns, and, looking back, saw a host of savage forms pouring hastily from the timber.

"No need of hurrying. They are not mounted," I called out to Nat, who has hurrying his horse to the utmost.

"I don't believe it," he exclaimed, still speeding furiously onward.

"Go it, Todd! you'll fetch up at Fort Laramie," yelled Biddon.

The latter drew his horse into a steady canter, and indulged in several loud laughs at the flying fugitive. Nat continued his mad career until he had gone a good distance, when, seeing how far behind he had left us, he reined up and awaited our approach.

The savages, in the meantime, were hurrying on in pursuit. I know not what led them to expect any success in this chase, for, as remarked, not one was mounted. They may have had little faith in the speed or bottom of our horses, and trusted they would be able to run us down. Biddon half turned in his seat, and, looking back a moment, asked:

"Do you see that red, diggin' like all mad off on one side? The one as is tryin' to surround us?"

I glanced back and answered in the affirmative.

"Do you want to see a red drop in purty style?"

I answered again in the affirmative.

"Wal, jis keep yer peeper on him."

So saying, he raised his rifle, without checking the speed of his horse, took a quick aim along its long barrel and fired. To my astonishment, the Indian mentioned uttered a wild shriek, and springing high in the air, fell to the earth.

"He's done for," remarked the trapper, quietly. "While I fodder my iron, 'sposen you try your hand."

I raised mine to my shoulder, and pointing it toward a conspicuous savage, pulled the trigger. As might be expected, I came about as near to him as I did to Nat, in front.

"It will take a long time for me to accomplish that feat," said I.

"Wal, yer goes agin."

And again was the fatal rifle discharged, and again did a savage bite the dust.

Still the pursuers maintained their ground, seemingly determined to overtake us at all hazards. They were separating and scattering over the prairie, with the evident intention of hemming us in. At this moment we came up to Nat.

"Why don't you run?" he asked, impatiently. "They'll shoot us all afore we know it."

He had scarcely finished his words, when the

pursuers did fire, and with an uncomfortable effect, too. The bullets were plainly heard whistling through the air beside us, and one actually cut its way through the upper part of Nat's hat, some eight or ten inches from the crown of his head. He dodged nervously, and jerking the hat off his head, held it up to view.

"Just look there!" he exclaimed, indignantly, putting his finger through the orifice.

"What of it?" gruffly asked Biddon.

"That's a pretty question to ask, I should think! I swow I won't stand any such work as this."

And giving his horse the rein, he shot rapidly ahead.

"I guess we mought as well," remarked Biddon, letting his horse have free rein.

The race was now decided. At such speed as we went, of course the pursuers were soon left behind, and in an hour not one was visible, all of them being either distanced or having voluntarily withdrawn.

Our course was southwest; so that we had lost considerable ground, and were obliged to make a long *detour* to regain the trail. We camped at night about as far south as the previous camp, but farther west. In the morning we struck due north, and continued in this direction for several days.

It is not necessary to give the particulars of our

journey to the northwest. We continued traveling onward for three days, when we reached the region where it was intended we should remain until spring. This was much further northward than I suspected; in fact, it was but a few miles distant from the Hudson Bay Territory, and upon one of the remote tributaries of the Missouri. We had entered a climate that even now, was like the winter of the one we had left. We had entered a mighty wilderness, where, ere we left it, we were doomed to pass through some strange experiences, and of which I now shall speak.

We had detected signs of beavers at several streams which we crossed during the last day or two of our journey, but Biddon paid no attention to them until about the middle of the afternoon, when we reached a small river, flowing nearly due south, and passing through the Hudson Bay Territory in its course. This stream we forded, and, as we reached the opposite side, he remarked:

"Yer' the spot whar we're goin' to squat."

It is perhaps worth remarking that the section was a wooded country. We had passed over no clear prairie during the day, and were in the midst of a deep wood. The trees were of nearly every conceivable kind—the cottonwood predominating,

with oak, elm, ash, walnut, and such as are common in our own forests.

After crossing, the trapper headed directly up-stream for a short distance, when he turned to the left and descended into a valley. Here he dismounted.

"Take yer fixins'," said he, "and turn the hosses loose."

"Won't they wander away?" I asked.

"*Yourn* may, but mine *won't;* you've got to take your chances, though. 'Tain't likely they'll be 'sturbed, 'cept by grizzlys and reds."

The spot selected was a broad bottom of rich grass, inclosed by thick walls of undergrowth upon every side. Here we left our horses, and, taking our saddles and trappings, moved away.

"Have you ever been here before?" I asked of the trapper.

"I stayed yer last season, but didn't 'spect to come back. Howsumever, I changed my mind, and yer we is. Move keerful and don't make a big trail."

We followed nearly a quarter of a mile directly up-stream, when he halted, and looked carefully about him.

"I don't s'pose thar's reds 'bout, but thar's no tellin' whar they is. I didn't see none last year,

but they mought be 'bout now. Jes' hold on a minute."

The banks of the stream were fringed by a deep under-growth upon both sides. Stepping forward to the water's edge, the trapper parted the branches, and glancing a moment within, motioned for us to approach.

"It's all right," said he, "there hain't been no reds poki' 'bout yer while I's gone."

With this he stooped and pushed a small canoe into the water and slipped within it.

We joined him, although our combined weight brought the frail vessel down to its very gunwales. It was made of bark after the Indian fashion, very light, but strong. Biddon dipped a long Indian paddle in the water and we moved slowly up-stream. After going a short distance, he again touched the bank, and from beneath another lot of shrubbery drew forth a number of beaver traps. These were similar to the common trap used in all parts of the world, and set much after the same fashion, but with a very different bait. At every point where signs of the animals were visible, he dug down the bank, so as to make a certain spot perpendicular. Just beneath the surface of the water he then placed the trap. The next and last proceeding was to smear the banks around with a very odoriferous oil, ob-

tained from the beaver itself. This smell attracts the beavers in the vicinity, who immediately swim to the shore to learn more of it. The trap is so arranged that one is sure to place his foot directly upon it for support in ascending the bank, and the natural consequence follows. He is caught and falls into his mortal enemy's hands.

"Ef one don't have a dinner on beaver tails to-morrow, then I'm a beaver," remarked Biddon, after he had set all his traps, and headed his canoe down stream.

"A dinner on beaver tails!" exclaimed Nat, in astonishment. "That must be a fine dinner, I swow."

"If you had read much of these animals, you would know that the part mentioned by Biddon, is the most delicious and nourishing portion," said I.

"And when you gits a bite of it, you'll find it so, I reckons!"

"Perhaps so," replied Nat, doubtingly; "but whar ar' you going to take us?"

"You'll find out when we get thar."

The trapper rowed the canoe quite a distance down stream, when he sheered it into shore close to where a huge chestnut, larger than any I had ever before witnessed, overhung the water. Its base was enveloped by a mass of undergrowth, denser than

common, and we were obliged to stoop to the edge of the boat before we could make our way beneath it. As we sprang up the bank, it pulled up behind us, and I then noticed that the chestnut was hollow, and had a deep orifice at its base.

"Foller," commanded Biddon, stooping and crawling beneath it.

We did so, although there was some hesitation upon my part, and my astonishment was unbounded at what I witnessed when within. At first there was nothing visible but the intense darkness, and I stood, fearful of advancing or retreating.

"Where are you, Biddon?" asked Nat, in a slightly wavering tone. The next instant the trapper struck a light; and as its rays filled the chamber, I repeat, my astonishment was unbounded. We were standing in an open space, at least eight feet in diameter. The chestnut was but a mere shell, with its trunk but a few inches in thickness at the most. The interior of this was fitted up like a house. The rotten chunks upon the sides had been torn down and formed a pleasant, velvety carpet beneath the feet. All around the *walls* were hung numerous furs, and a pile at one side afforded a bed such as we had not enjoyed for weeks. Added to all this, there was an arrangement so as to make it

perfectly easy and convenient to kindle a fire. Nat was the first to express his unbounded astonishment.

"This beats all. I never seen anything like it. But don't the Injins know anything of it?"

"No, *sir;* and I cac'late as how they won't neyther, ef you don't tell 'em."

"Oh! I won't tell them. I swow this is queer," and he looked slowly about and above him. "What's that hole for?" he asked, pointing to a small orifice just visible far above us.

"That's fur the smoke to go out."

"But it must be likely to attract attention," I remarked.

"I never start a fire 'cept at night."

"I see—wonderful!" and I, too, gazed admiringly about me. The light made the whole interior visible. The dark, snuff-colored fragments of decayed wood hung in ponderous masses above us, and the immense diameter gradually tapered as it ascended, until only the small opening, far above, was seen, resembling a faint star. The thickness of the wood, together with the great number of furs, protected us so well from the cold, that there could be little need of fire in the coldest weather, except for cooking purposes.

"This is rather odd, I allow, to you, Jarsey; but ef you had been with me down on the Yallerstone,

you'd seen suthin' as would 've made you look, you would. You may shoot me, ef you wouldn't."

"I suppose I should, but not more than this has."

"Mebbe not, but don't stand gapin' there all day. It's gittin' dark, and we'll have our fodder."

The fire was now started, and the smoke ascended finely, escaping at the outlet. A good slice of meat was cooked, and we made a hearty supper upon it. After this the fire was allowed to slumber, but the light remained burning until a late hour. We lit our pipes, and chatted dreamily for a long time in our new home. The trapper, feeling in the mood, related many reminiscences of his life, including adventures both tragical and comical, and Nat gave a few of his own experiences. At a late hour we ceased, and fell into a peaceful, dreamless slumber.

When I awoke the trapper had disappeared. Nat was stretched beside me still asleep. In a short time the former entered as noiselessly as he had departed.

"What fortune?" I asked.

"Good; had two fat fellers. Wake up, and we'll have a meal as is a meal."

Nat soon made a movement, and, after several yawns, became fully awake. The trapper kindled a small fire, and cooked his beaver tails. The two

made as choice and delicious a meal as I had ever eaten. Nat was convinced by one taste.

The day was clear and pleasant, and Biddon expressed his determination of going up the stream in order to see the signs of game. I accompanied him, but Nat chose to remain at home and sleep a few hours longer.

We sauntered carelessly forth up the stream through the tangled underwood. It was a clear day in autumn; the air was keen and bracing, and the woods gloriously fine. Some of the leaves were just beginning to fall, and they made a dappled and fiery carpet for our feet, rustling with a soft, pleasant sound at every step. Now and then we could hear the shrill notes of some songster of the forest, and once or twice the faint bay of some distant animal.

We had wandered some distance, when Biddon proposed turning back, as he had just discovered he had forgotten his pipe. I was too well pleased, however, with the prospect to retrace my footsteps. Accordingly, we parted company for a time, he remarking that probably he would return when he had regained his indispensable article.

Left alone, I now wandered dreamily onward, in a pleasant reverie, hardly conscious of what I was doing, until I was recalled to my senses by the

grandeur of a new scene that suddenly burst upon my view. I had ascended a small rise on the bank of the stream, from which I had an extended view of the river. I stood for a moment wrapt in the glories of the scene. Far behind could be discerned the broad bosom of the river, stretching away like a vast body of molten silver, bordered on either side by the mighty forest, until it disappeared in a sweeping curve, within the interminable wilderness. Above me for several miles the same winding course could be seen, brightly glistening for miles. Not a ripple disturbed the surface, save when a bird skimmed over it, just tipping its wings, and making a flashing circle or two. The blue sky above, unflecked by a single cloud, harmonized so well with the magnificent view, that I stood a long time, drinking in the splendor of the scene.

My eye was still resting upon the glistening bend of the river above, when the quietness of the scene was interrupted by a dark speck which suddenly came in view, around a curve about a mile above. At first I supposed it to be some animal or log floating upon the surface; but as I looked at it, I saw to my astonishment that it was a canoe coming down-stream. Several forms were visible, yet their number, at that distance, was uncertain. The bright flash of their paddles was visible in the morning

"In the stern, with a guiding oar, sat a young female."

sunshine, and they maintained their place near the center of the stream.

I scrutinized them, vainly to make out their number, until it occurred to me that it would be best to make myself invisible. The approaching canoe might contain nothing but Indians, and it was not desirable that our presence in this section should be known to any but ourselves. I slipped behind the trunk of a tree, nearer the water, yet still upon the elevated knoll, which entirely concealed my body from sight.

From this point I watched the approach of the canoe with interest. Soon it came nigh enough to enable me to distinguish the forms within it. There were two Indian warriors seated each with a paddle in his hand, but not using them, except to keep the canoe in the channel, and in the stern, with a guiding oar, sat a young female. I supposed her a squaw, belonging to the same tribe with her companions, and scrutinized her as closely as my position would permit. She wore a beautiful headdress, gayly ornamented with stained porcupine quills and beads, and a brilliant crimson shawl enveloped her slight form. The savages maintained their places as motionless as statues, their gaze apparently resting upon the stream behind them; while that of the female was fixed upon the stream

in front, and her whole attention absorbed in directing her canoe.

I know not whether the inmates discovered me before I concealed myself, but I fancied I detected a glance of the Indians at my hiding-place, as they floated slowly by, and some cause led the female, when directly opposite, and but a few hundred feet distant, to turn her face toward me. Judge of my astonishment, at perceiving that she was not an Indian—but a white woman! Her appearance, as she turned her gaze directly upon the spot where I was standing, I can never forget. She was so close at hand, and my view so perfect in the clear sunlight, that I saw every feature. The pale white face, surrounded by dark, luxuriant hair falling upon the shoulders, the dark eyes shaded by long inky lashes, and the mute, untranslatable look, haunted me for many a night after. She merely glanced toward me, and slowly floated past.

Dropping upon my hands and knees, I crept hastily from the knoll into the undergrowth below, and made my way hurriedly but noiselessly to the stream. I could not have been over a minute in so doing, but when I reached the water, and peered through the bushes, not a trace of the canoe was visible. I looked closely into each shore, up and down the stream, everywhere that I could look,

but could not detect the slightest ripple or movement to account for this mysterious disappearance. For over an hour I waited in the hope that the canoe would reappear, but I saw nothing more of it.

CHAPTER V.

CONVERSATIONS AND PLANS.

THE disappearance of the canoe, although singular in itself, had nothing supernatural about it. The shrubbery, which overhung the water on either shore, offered a secure and impenetrable hiding-place, and a few dexterous, vigorous strokes of the paddles were all that was needed to send it beneath their shadows. That this had been done, was plainly evident. Yet why had it been done? What motive was there for concealment? And why, if apprehensive of danger, had the Indians waited till they were in its vicinity?

These and numerous questions, I asked myself, as I carefully retraced my steps down-stream again. The whole proceeding was mysterious to me. I had, doubtless, exposed myself while watching the canoe and its occupants, and thus betrayed to an enemy our presence in their country. What would result from this, I could not conjecture, and determined to make everything known to the trapper.

But then I felt somewhat fearful of this. He would, doubtless, be incensed at my imprudent thoughtlessness, which might compel him to leave a country offering such inducements to the trapper and fur-trade; and I argued it was not certain that I had really been seen by the Indians in question. If they meditated hostility, Biddon would be warned soon enough for all purposes—and so I decided to keep my own secret for the present.

But the question which occupied my thoughts, almost to the exclusion of everything else, was the identity of the female in the canoe. What could bring a white maiden to these wild regions of the northwest? What meant her appearance in the canoe with two savage Indian warriors? What if she was the child which Biddon had referred to, as being captured upon the night of the massacre? This thought intensified the interest I already felt in her. I believed *she* had seen me; and her silent look toward the shore had something more than curiosity in it. I imagined there was a mute, eloquent appeal in those dark eyes.

Still ruminating upon this all-absorbing theme, I reached the tree, and, stooping upon my hands and knees, crawled within it. The movement had well-nigh cost me my life. As my head entered, I encountered the alarmed visages of Nat and Biddon

—the latter with his knife drawn, and just preparing to spring upon me.

"You liked to got rubbed out that time!" he exclaimed, replacing his weapon. "What made you forgit the sign?"

"It must have been because it did not occur to me," I laughed; "I have had no occasion to use it before, and forgot it altogether; but I will remember it, you may be assured, in future."

"You'd better, for I was just going to shoot, too," added Nat, rising to his feet, and then seating himself again.

"You shoot!" repeated Biddon, contemptuously, "You're shooter ain't loaded!"

"I forgot that. I wonder if I couldn't load it, say?" he indignantly demanded.

"Yes, in course, if the reds waited fur yer."

Nat made no reply to this, except that of instantly proceeding to load his piece. As it was near noon, the meal was prepared—this time from the beaver's body. The hair was singed off from a piece, which was then cooked in the usual manner. This, although very palatable, was not equal to the tail of the animal, the meat being more tough and oily.

Shortly after, the trapper departed for the purpose of visiting his traps, and setting new ones. When

alone with Nat, I determined to impart to him my morning's experience.

"Nat, I have seen Indians," I remarked, in a quiet tone.

"You hain't!" he exclaimed, starting up from his bed of skins with such suddenness as to break the remains of his pipe.

"I have; and, what is considerably more, they have seen me."

"I should think it was considerably more, umph! What did you do to them? I didn't hear you shoot. Why didn't you tell me before? Why didn't you—why, it seems to me you're very cool about it."

"There is no occasion for excitement at all. Just remain quiet, and I will tell you how it all happened."

And thereupon I related the particulars of the incident already known to the reader. Nat's wonder, excitement, and apprehension were roused to the highest pitch at the narration. Springing to his feet, he pulled his flattened hat violently over his forehead, and striding about a moment, demanded:

"Why didn't you tell Bill? Like as not he'll be shot and scalped before he gets back."

"I did not think it best," I returned. "Biddon is not the man to walk into danger with his eyes

shut, and if there is any cause for fear, he will discover it soon enough."

"Suppose he will; but ain't it terrible?"

"Isn't what terrible?"

"Why, that we're surrounded by Injins, thirsting for our blood!"

"We are not surrounded by Indians, Nat," I returned, reprovingly.

"I know; but then they are all around us. It won't do to stick our heads out, except at night, and then, like as not, we'll be shot for our trouble."

"You are not afraid, I hope."

"Oh, no! not a bit; but then you know it's rather *unpleasant* to feel that those infarnal Blackfeet (because this is the country of the Blackfeet Injins) are all about you, and waiting for a chance to shoot you from behind every bush."

"Nat," I commenced, earnestly, "you say you are not afraid of Indians, and yet you show it in every word, look, and action. There is no excuse for this. I saw only two savages, and a girl, evidently a captive; no words or actions were exchanged between us. They disappeared very suddenly and were, more probably, frightened at my presence. I see nothing in this to excuse the excitement and terror you have exhibited."

"I wonder what that girl is?"

"I am afraid you will have to wonder a long time, as I can see no occasion for satisfying your curiosity."

"Is she good looking?" asked my companion, seriously.

"Very! What makes you ask that question?"

"I declare, if I don't marry her, just to spite Alminy, and make Bill Hawkins mad," he exclaimed, joyously.

At this point I could restrain my mirth no longer; but, as I indulged it, I was considerably surprised to feel a slight twinge of jealousy at his words. This discovery was painful.

"I am afraid you will meet with several formidable obstacles, before you can accomplish that; the most difficult of which will be to obtain an audience with the fair one herself."

"Don't suppose she'd be very anxious to see me; and I wouldn't care if I only had my pipe and jackknife to pass away time with."

"I think it would be as well not to mention this affair to Biddon."

"Why not?"

"It can do no good, and he would be displeased at the thoughtlessness I have evidenced. I do not think there are savages enough in the vicinity to render us fearful of our safety. The canoe, I am

disposed to believe, belongs to some tribe quite distant from here."

"But what are they here for?"

"I can only conjecture. Biddon has never seen savages in this particular section, and these may be returning from some journey to their tribe."

"Perhaps so, and may be not. These plagued Injins sometimes live in one place and sometimes in another, you know, and it may be that a notion has just entered their heads to come and live in these parts."

"There is reason in what you say, but, as I stated, if danger threatens, Biddon will undoubtedly detect its signs himself in time."

"I think he will, though I shall feel a little flustered every time he goes out. You remember when he was after the antelope, he walked right among the Injins, without knowing it till it was too late to stop."

"He did, it is true, but how nicely he walked out again. I tell you, Nat, that fellow has nerve equal to any emergency. What man, when conscious of an overwhelming foe being concealed within a few feet of him, could have repressed every sign of trepidation or fear, as he did, and bring the antelope through the same fearful ordeal, with the same coolness and deliberation?"

"That was a clever thing, I allow."

"Biddon told me he felt a little nervous when he saw us start to come up to him, for, if we had reached him, it would have been all up with us. He called out to us, though we did not hear him, that there were more animals in the grove, and our approach would frighten them. The impatient Indians were thus held at bay, in the hope of being offered a better opportunity to accomplish our ruin, until it was too late to accomplish anything save the loss of two or three of their number. Such a man, I repeat, will scent danger soon enough without the help of others."

"He will, and I hope he'll find out who that white girl is."

"Nat, do you remember the account Biddon gave some time ago of a horrible massacre, upon the sandy island near where we encamped one night?"

"I don't think there is much likelihood of my ever forgetting it."

"You will also recall his account of the capture of a small child by the savages? Now, it has occurred to me that this is that child grown to womanhood."

"I *know* it is!" exclaimed Nat, joyously.

"It is true there is much against it. It was a

great distance from here, but as these savages wander hundreds of miles at times, it is not improbable, upon that ground. Instances are only too common of persons spending their lives in captivity among these Indian tribes. She is a captive, beyond a doubt, and must long for restoration to her home and friends. If possible, I am bound to know more of her."

"So am I!" exclaimed my excitable companion.

"As I said, we will say nothing of this to Biddon, until he discovers signs of Indians himself. To-morrow, we will go forth together, and spend the day in endeavoring to gain traces of the canoe and its inmates; and if anything is discovered which is alarming, we will impart it to him."

This Nat agreed to, and shortly after we heard three raps upon the outside of the tree—the trapper's signal of his presence. A moment after, he made his appearance. He was considerably elated at his prospect for a goodly quantity of furs; had set a number of traps; was sure of half a dozen next day; had seen no signs of Indians, and was convinced there were none in the vicinity. None of us passed out again that day, but remained indulging in our pipes and conversation as usual, until a late hour.

The next morning the trapper proposed that I should accompany him upon his daily round. I complied, while Nat remained behind.

The day was as warm and pleasant as the preceding one, and the forest and stream as delightful. Biddon paddled slowly up the unrippled surface, and in a short time reached the first trap; it had not been disturbed. Still hopeful, he passed on to the second and third and all the others. But there were no signs of beaver in any.

"Shoot me, that's quar'!" he exclaimed, thoughtfully, as he saw the last one. "I don't understand it; I must git out and take a look round."

He sprang ashore, and minutely examined the ground around. A few seconds sufficed. He looked up with a gleam of deep meaning, and said:

"Here's the track of a thunderin' moccasin. The reds have found us out."

He stepped into the canoe, and taking the paddle moved it carefully back again. He touched at each trap on the way. The footprints of a stranger were visible at each.

"Thar's been a beaver taken out of that one!" he remarked, as the last one was reached. "It's lucky for the sneakin' coward that I didn't see him. He wouldn't 'sturbed any more gentlemen's traps."

"Are you sure it is an Indian who has been annoying you?"

"Wogh! Don't you s'pose I could tell a red's track from a grizzly's?"

"But it might have been a white man—some hunter or trapper?" I suggested.

"A white man wouldn't be mean 'nough to do sich a thing, 'less it war some of those Hudson Bay fellers. They try them tricks sometimes, but they git come up to. I catched a feller once from Fort Hall at mine, and the way I walked into him war a caution; but this ar' an Injin's track, sure."

"Do you suspect there could be a number in the vicinity?"

"Ef there war, I'd 've heard of 'em afore. This is some varmint, sneakin' round yer, and he's got to be rubbed out afore he makes more trouble."

"I fear that will be a difficult and dangerous job."

"Let me be for that."

Shortly after we reached our home, and running the canoe beneath the bushes, entered it. We were somewhat surprised to find Nat absent. He returned, however, in a short time, and I saw at once by his nervous, flustered manner that something unusual had occurred. Biddon questioned him rather closely, as he suspected something, but Nat evaded his inquiries, and would not admit that

he had seen anything to excite alarm or apprehension.

"I'm goin' out, and when I come back I'll tell you what's the matter with them traps," said Biddon, seizing his rifle and departing.

I waited until he was beyond hearing, and then turning to my companion, asked,

"What is the matter with you, Nat?"

"Why?" he asked, in turn, with a start.

"Because you show plainly that something has occurred to alarm you."

He remained silent a moment, and then seizing his hat, jerked it off his head, and threw it spitefully down, where he gazed at it a second, and exclaimed,

"I'm sick of this."

"Sick of what?"

"Why, of being in this fix."

"I don't understand you. Please explain what you mean."

"I should think you ought to know."

"But I do not."

"Why, this wood is full of Injins; they're behind every tree and stump, and in every bush, and you can hardly step without pitching over some painted heathen."

"I am afraid you are exaggerating," I answered,

suppressing a smile which was struggling at the corners of my mouth.

"No, I ain't. I swow there are ten thousand Injins just waiting outside to pounce upon us."

"You are talking nonsense, and you know it."

"Well, there's *one* Injin, for I seen him. Come now," he affirmed, as if the matter was now settled beyond a question.

"Ah! that alters the case considerably. I shouldn't wonder at all if there is one or a half-dozen savages in the forest."

"If you see *one* savage haven't you a right to suppose there's a hundred more about, I should like to know?"

"Not always, Nat; I have seen three myself, yet I do not believe there is another one in the neighborhood. But I have not heard the particulars of this affair of which you have been speaking. Please let me hear them."

"There isn't much to tell, but there is enough to make you do a heap of thinking. You see, after you had left, I took a notion that I must have a morning ramble; and I thought, too, there might be such a thing as you two running into danger and needing my help (I should like to know what you are laughing at). So, on the whole, there was no hesitation upon my part. Taking my rifle out, I

was soon making my way as noiselessly as possible, in a direction from the river.

"I hadn't gone more than a dozen yards before I commenced thinking about Injins, and came nigh going back again. I wasn't afraid at all, you know, but then it appeared to me I might bring you and Biddon into trouble. However, I kept on. I had gone some distance further, when all of a sudden I heard a terrible whirr and rattle, and jumped clean off my feet. But it was only a big owl which I had stirred up. I was so provoked at the start he gave me, that I should have wrung his neck had I got my hands upon him. But I went on. Pretty soon I reached a little stream of water, and as I jumped across, what do you suppose I saw in the sand?"

"I am sure I cannot tell."

"Nothing less than a big moccasin track. And what was more, it hadn't been made there a week before! I stood and looked at it a good while, cogitating some wonderful things. At last I stooped and went to measuring it. I was just going to rise, when I heard a grunt right by me. I jumped up so quick—to be ready, you know—that I floundered backward into the water. And I may be shot if there wasn't a big painted Injin standing not ten feet off. He didn't say a word, but just stood and looked at me with them awful eyes of his.

As soon as I could think, I raised my gun, took a quick aim, and pulled the trigger; but the infernal gun snapped. I pulled it again, but it wouldn't go, and I just happened to think the thing wasn't loaded. All this time the painted imp stood grinning at me, without saying a word, except to kinder grunt. He had a big shining gun in one hand, and I was dreadful afraid he would shoot it. I told him not to stir, but to stand still till I got mine loaded, and he waited. But somehow or other, I s'pose I was in such a hurry that things wouldn't go right. Instead of putting the powder in the gun-barrel, I crammed it in my pocket, and jammed the ramrod into my shoe. I told the Injin to have patience and I'd get it loaded in a minute. I got it fixed somehow at last and hauled it up to my shoulder, when, no Injin was there! I looked behind, all about me, and up into the trees but he'd been spirited away somewhere. However, I made up my mind to shoot at the spot where he had stood, and I up and blazed away. That is, I blazed away without the gun going off. I believe he spirited that too."

"Let me examine it. Perhaps you made some blunder."

"No, I'm sure I didn't."

I took the rifle, with a smile of certainty that

I should find something the matter with it. Sure enough the muzzle was crammed with paper, and upon removing it, *a pipestem,* broken in pieces, rolled out, while there was not a grain of powder in the barrel.

"I declare, I forgot about the powder!" exclaimed Nat, opening his eyes in wonder.

"But not about the bullet," I laughed, pointing to the fragments of his pipe.

"How'd that get there?" he angrily asked.

"That's the question."

"I didn't put it there."

"Who did, then?"

"I don't know, I declare."

Nat picked up the fragments and examined them carefully.

"That's my pipe sure; and I had it in my mouth, I remember when I started out, and missed it coming back. I didn't put it in the gun though."

"Let it pass then. Did you see no more of your Indian friend?"

"No; he knew enough to keep out of my way. I waited a long time for him, and at last started home again. I kept an eye on every suspicious object, but as I just said, seen nothing."

At this point I gave free vent to my pent-up

mirth. Nat, much astonished, looked wonderingly at me, seemingly at a loss to understand the cause.

"I do not see what there is to laugh at," he remarked, reprovingly. "If it's a laughing matter to know that there are Injins all about you, why you must laugh."

"Your adventure with the Indian, Nat, and the singular load in your rifle appears to me to be a funny matter, and I trust you will pardon me if——"

"Didn't I tell you I didn't put it in there? It was the Injin's work."

And to this day Nat cannot be made to believe that he was instrumenal in introducing the pipe into his gun.

After a few more unimportant remarks, the conversation ceased. Nat's adventure began to appear to me in a different light from that in which I had viewed it at first. I doubted not but that he was perfectly honest and truthful in what he said. But why, when exposed to the will of the savage, did he escape unscathed? Why did the latter stand fearless and harmless before him? And what meant these strange signs, these "footprints," which were becoming visible around us? Matters were assuming a puzzling form. We were being environed by Indians without any evidence of

hostility upon their part. What meant it? Surely there was a meaning too deep and hidden for us to divine as yet.

Suddenly Nat spoke.

"Don't you remember the canoe? We were going to hunt for that to-day!"

"Ah! how did I forget that? But had we not better wait till Biddon returns?"

"No; let us go at once. Hark! what's that?"

I held my breath, as the distant report of a rifle reached our ears. The next instant came a sound, faint and far away yet clear and distinct—a horrid, unearthly sound, as the cry of a being in mortal agony!

CHAPTER VI.

STILL IN THE DARK—THE CANOE AGAIN.

For a moment we stood breathless, paralyzed and speechless. Then our eyes sought each other with a look of fearful inquiry.

"Was that Biddon's voice?" I asked, in a faint whisper.

"I don't know. There it is again!"

And again came that wild, howling shriek of such agony as made our blood curdle within us.

"*It is his voice!* Let us hasten to his aid," I exclaimed, catching my rifle, and springing out. Nat followed closely, his gun having been reloaded. The cry came from up the river and toward it we dashed, scrambling and tearing through the brush and undergrowth, like two maddened animals, heedless of what the consequence might be. Several times we halted and listened, but heard nothing save our own panting breasts and leaping hearts. On again we dashed, looking hurriedly about us, until I knew we had ascended as high as

could be the author of that startling cry. Here we paused and listened. No one was to be seen. I turned toward Nat, standing behind me, and directly behind him I saw Biddon slowly approaching.

"What are you doin' here?" he asked, as he came up.

"Was not that your voice which I just heard?"

"I rather reckon it wan't. When you hear Bill Biddon bawl out in that way, jist let me know, will yer?"

"What under the sun was it?" I asked then, greatly relieved.

"That's more nor me can tell; but shoot and skin me, if I can't tell you one thing;" he approached closely and whispered, "there's sunkthin" else nor reds about yer."

"What do you mean?" I asked, although I understood well enough what he meant.

"I's here once afore, as I told yer, and I never heerd sich goin's on then. I've seed the tracks of moccasins all about the traps, but can't draw bead on the shadder of a redskin."

"You heard that horrid howl, didn't you?"

"Heerd it! I should think I did."

"Was it you who shot?"

"Yes; the way on it was this: I got on a purty plain trail and follered it up hereabouts, when I cotched the glimpse of a Blackfoot's feather goin' down through the bushes there, and blazed away at him. I never missed a red in my life, and I didn't miss him. Howsumever, he didn't mind it, but kept on and got away, and jist as he went out of sight that orful yell come. It didn't seem that he made it, but sounded like as though 'twas all about me, above and under the ground, and around and behind me."

"Anywhere near us?" asked Nat.

"It sounded jist under your feet about."

"Jerusha!" exclaimed the affrighted Nat, as he sprang nervously toward me.

"It must have been the Indian, surely, who made that yell," said I.

"In course; though things are beginnin' to look qua'rish to me."

The same look of uneasiness again passed over the trapper's face; and I saw that although he strove to hide it, he was by no means at rest. Matters were beginning to put on an unusual aspect, and that was the reason. Give the trapper of the northwest flesh and blood to contend against, let him know that nothing supernatural is arrayed against him, and he is the last man in the world

to yield an inch. But the moment he sees something unexplainable to his simple mind, (and the trapper is a credulous being), his courage deserts him. He believes that other spirits than those of men visit this earth, and they are his greatest horror.

"Les' go home; there's Injins all around us," pleaded Nat.

"How'd you know?"

"Because I *seen* one myself."

Biddon looked inquiringly at me, and, deeming it best, I related the incident given in the preceding chapter. I saw at once his uneasiness was increased.

"Why didn't you shoot the redskin?" he angrily asked of Nat.

"Why didn't ***you*** shoot the redskin?" queried Nat, in turn.

"I did—hit him fair and square as I ever hit anything."

"But didn't do any more good than I did."

"I made the infarnal imp howl."

"And I made mine *grunt,*" added Nat, triumphantly.

"There is no need of words," I interposed. "Each of you did your best, Nat included. You, Bill, I believe, hit your man and mortally wounded him. That yell was of agony, though I can't con-

ceive how we came to mistake it for yours. The dead or dying body of that Indian, I believe, is near at hand. See! what does that mean?" I asked, as I detected some red fluid dripping from the limb of a bush to the earth. The trapper stepped forward and looked at it.

"That's the blood of a Blackfoot, or I'm a skinned beaver!" he remarked, with a glow of relief at having those strange apprehensions of his removed.

"Yes, I'm convinced that's Injin blood," added Nat, rubbing it between the tip of his finger and thumb. "The blood of a Blackfoot Injin, too—a man's about thirty-two years old. Probably a brother to the one I frightened."

"What do you know about that?" I asked.

"Oh! it's only a supposition of mine."

"Biddon, I believe, as I just said, that we will find the body of that savage near at hand. Let us follow it."

"Jes' what I's agoin' to do," he replied, starting off at once upon the trail.

It was easy to follow, as every step was marked by blood, which, in many places, was dripping from the bushes to the ground. It was followed but a short distance, however, as it led in a direct line to the river.

"It's as I s'pected," said Biddon, turning round in disgust.

"He must have drowned then."

"Dunno 'bout that. He's taken to the water to hide his trail, an' jes' as like as not some of the other painted heathen have helped him off."

"No doubt about that. I've been thinking that some of them helped off that fellow when I was loading my gun."

"We mought as well go back agin," said Biddon. "I'm tired of huntin' spirits, and I dunno but what we'd better move traps and leave this plagued place to 'em."

"That's what I am in favor of—"

Nat suddenly paused, for Biddon, with a slight "sh" motioned us down. We both sank quickly and silently to the earth, while he, in a crouching position, gazed stealthily up-stream.

"What is it, Bill?" whispered Nat.

"*There's a canoe comin' down stream!*"

We said nothing; and Nat looking meaningly in the water.

"Skin me, if there ain't two reds and a squaw in it," added Biddon, without changing his position, or removing his gaze.

I could not restrain the singular agitation that

came over me at this announcement. Fearing to betray myself, I cautiously arose beside Biddon.

"Let me take a look," I whispered.

"Be keerful you ain't seen," he whispered, in turn, as he stepped back.

As I looked, I saw, not more than two hundred yards distant the canoe approaching, heading directly towards us. For this reason, I could only see the foremost Indian, though I was positive another, together with the white captive, were in it. I gazed but a moment and then looked inquiringly at the trapper. He made no reply, but again peered forth.

"That ain't a squaw; it's a white gal," said he, looking round upon us with an astounded look.

"Shall we rescue her? I asked.

"Ef she wants us to, in course."

"You going to shoot them?" asked Nat, anxiously.

"Can't tell yit. Jest see that yer irons is ready, and we'll wait till they get out yer. Don't make no noise till I give the motion."

The trapper stole a yard or two in front of us, where he sank softly down upon his face until only his head was visible. Nat fingered his gun nervously beside me, while I, not a whit less agi-

tated, waited for the canoe to appear through the interstices of the bushes in front.

In a moment, I heard the faint ripple of an oar, and saw the trapper slowly raising his head and bringing his rifle in front of him. He raised his hand warningly for us to remain quiet until the moment should arrive. I heard the click of my companion's gun, as he raised the hammer, and admonished him to be careful.

Suddenly, I saw the red head-dress of one of the savages glittering through the bushes, and, before I could speak, came an explosion beside me like the crash of a thunderbolt. Almost simultaneously, the herculean frame of the trapper bounded over me, and he exclaimed:

"Who fired that? I'm shot."

Nat and I sprang to our feet and dashed after him; but as I turned, though bewildered with excitement, I looked at the spot where the canoe was seen. It was gone!

We dashed up the bank, and in a moment reached Biddon. The excitement had completely gone, and he stood coolly feeling his ear.

"Was that your gun, Jarsey?" he asked.

"No, sir; mine is still loaded."

"How is yours, Greeny?"

Nat lifted his, examined the lock and looked

into the barrel. He had indeed discharged it, grazing the trapper's head so closely as to wound his ear.

"Wonder if that was my gun? Sure, I believe it was," he remarked, still looking into the barrel.

"Was it your gun?" repeated the trapper, his brow darkening like a thunder-cloud, and laying his hand upon his knife-handle, as he approached. Nat looked up and started as he saw his visage fairly gleaming with passion.

"I didn't shoot it, Bill, by thunder!" he expostulated.

The face of the trapper changed. It grew paler, and the dark cloud fled from it. He replaced his drawn knife. He believed the words of Nat.

Matters were approaching a crisis. The recent startling events had their effect upon us all. The trapper avowed he could not stand "sich goin's on," and should leave for some other quarters. Little sleep came to Nat at night. His adventure with the savage, and the more recent occurrence alarmed him. He had discovered that there were consequences to be feared from both sides.

I was still unwilling to believe that there was anything in the events given which would not soon be explained. It was evident our foes were around, and from some inexplicable cause, had pursued an

unusual course toward us. We had all been exposed to their power, and had yet escaped harmless. What was the meaning of this? And, above all, what was the object of the appearance and disappearance of the canoe at the different times mentioned? Who could be that fair being of whose existence I only was as yet aware?

These questions, prompted only my anxious curiosity and desire to learn more of that mysterious being whom I had now twice seen. I ridiculed the ideas of Biddon, and Nat strove hard to convince him that he was not afraid. Biddon, consented to remain until more was learned, intimating at the same time, that it must be very soon. He visited the horses each day, and found them undisturbed. This, however, only added to his anxiety. Had they been gone he would have taken it as convincing evidence that *bona fide* Indians were in the neighborhood.

The next day, after the closing scene of the last chapter, Nat agreed to accompany me for the last time to the spot where we had seen the canoe. The trapper could not be prevailed upon to go, affirming that he should probably have his hands full at home. It required my utmost skill to succeed with Nat, as the horror had plainly settled upon him.

"It's awful!" said he, as we started, "this

walking right into danger, but I want to see that canoe agin, but especially that gal, and so I'll go."

"And, I trust, behave yourself. You well know, Nat, you fired that shot which came so near ending Biddon's life."

"Wonder if I did pull the trigger!" he exclaimed, suddenly stopping and looking round at me.

"You *know* you did, and had he known it, too, it would have been a sorry piece of business for you. That temper of his is terrible, when it is once excited."

"I remember cocking my gun, and kind of pulling the trigger, but I didn't mean to pull hard enough to make it go off."

"I suppose not. I cannot conceive how Biddon persuaded himself to believe that you did not discharge it when the case was self-evident. But he is willing to believe almost anything since he has started."

"He shouldn't have gotten before my gun, for he knows my hand sometimes trembles."

"I trust you will be able to control it this time."

"No doubt of that; but, then, I'd advise you, as a friend, not to get before me, especially if you see the canoe coming."

I assured him that I should not, and we kept

upon our way. Upon each of the occasions before, as near as I could judge, it was about noon that the canoe made its appearance; and, as it was that time now, we hurried forward, lest the opportunity should pass. The opportunity, I say—for, although it had appeared but twice as yet, I somehow or other was well satisfied we should see it again.

"What are you going to do?" asked Nat.

"It will depend upon what we see. If simply those two savages with the captive, as we judge her to be, are in the canoe, and no demonstration is made, I think it best not to attempt a rescue. It is only a supposition of ours that she is a captive, and we know not that she would thank us for interfering in her case."

In a short time we reached the elevation already mentioned. Here we seated ourselves so as to remain concealed from any stragglers in the vicinity, while we ourselves with a little care could detect the slightest object passing. As I stooped, my hand came in contact with something cold, and upon looking at it, I saw it covered with dark clotted blood. I started, and wiped it on the grass, but it sent a shudder through me to reflect that it had once been the life-fluid of a human being.

"Ugh!" exclaimed Nat; "ain't that awful?"

"It is disagreeable, to say the least."

"Just look at the blood on the grass, too, and all around. I believe Bill must have hit a half-dozen Injins sure, the way things appear here."

"He must have wounded one terribly to make him bleed like this."

"And if he had been a flesh and blood Injin he would have never tramped in that manner. I tell you, William Relmond, there *is* something more more than human about us. I can feel it in my bones, and I'm of Biddon's opinion that the sooner we get away from here the better."

"Fudge! I see you are beginning to get alarmed."

"Oh no; you are mistaken. I am not frightened at all. For Biddon's sake, but more especially for yours, I am anxious. If you are desirous of remaining hereabouts, and will take all the consequences, I will make no objections."

"Of course, if I run into danger of my own accord, I expect that I alone will suffer the penalty."

"Then we needn't say anything more about it; you know we pledged ourselves to remain true to each other, and I won't desert you."

"That's well spoken, Nat. The minute I am satisfied that our lives are imperiled, I shall not be the means of prolonging that peril a moment.

It is only this great desire to solve and understand the singular occurrences that are transpiring around us, that leads me to still remain. I have determined that to-day we shall all be satisfied."

"My curiosity is extraordinarily high; but I guess that gal has as much to do with it as anything else. I'm determined to get a glimpse of her face, and, if possible, whisper in her ear that Nat Todd, from Maine, is about. I flatter myself that the minute she knows that, she will jump overboard and make for shore without saying a word to the chaps with her."

"The greatest difficulty, I fear, will be to convey your words to the captive, without conveying it also to her captors."

"I swow, it would be harder than I thought at first."

During this conversation, which was carried on in a half-whisper, Nat was constantly parting the bushes and peering through them, while now and then I glanced expectantly up the stream; but nothing as yet had rewarded our watchfulness. Suddenly I reflected that as I had been twice defeated in observing the disappearance of the canoe, from the exact spot upon which we were now seated, that we might make a better arrange-

ment of ourselves, so as to insure this coveted knowledge to one of us at least.

I mentioned this to Nat.

"If one of us was on t'other side, the thing would be certain, but that can't be done very conveniently, and we shall have to try something else."

"Suppose you go down stream about a hundred yards near the bend yonder," I proposed to Nat.

"Guess I will!" he exclaimed, as he rose to go.

"Wait a moment," said I, detaining him. "Let me admonish you to exercise no ordinary caution, Nat, for you have seen enough to convince you that your own safety depends upon it. Remember that a word or false movement, however slight, may defeat our plans. Look out for danger to yourself, and not let your curiosity be the means of your destruction. *Be very careful.*"

I know not what led me to thus warn him; but at the moment he arose to go, an unaccountable sense of impending danger came over me. It was not so much for me as for him I spoke thus. He promised to heed my words and departed.

As soon as he had disappeared, I cast another look up stream, but still there were no signs of the expected canoe, and a sudden apprehension that I should not see it again came over me. There was, in fact; as much reason not to expect it as to

anticipate its coming, and as I looked up at the sun and saw that it was already beyond the hour, I was half-tempted to turn back. While I was debating, I naturally looked up the river, and there, just rounding the bend where the canoe had first come into view before,—and there it was coming! Quivering with agitation, I sank upon the ground, and gave a low whistle as a signal to Nat. He returned it, as an evidence of his watchfulness.

I saw from that point where I was seated, the view would be most obstructed when the canoe was nearest. Accordingly, I crept cautiously and quickly nearer the water's edge. This time, however, I slightly varied my course, and concealed myself behind the trunk of a fallen tree. This was within a yard of the water, and afforded complete concealment. I noticed the log was rotten and apparently hollow.

Here I lay, and intently listened and watched. A few moments and an almost inaudible ripple was heard, and the canoe was opposite. I exercised the most extreme caution, and was fortunate enough to obtain a perfect view of each of the occupants. They were the same—the dark, malignant faces of the savages, and the fair features of the captive. She sat in the stern, her hand resting gently upon a guiding oar, and her gaze fixed upon

the stream in front. The canoe floated with the current, and not a paddle was stirred, nor the least motion made by the beings before me. The headdress of the captive was, as mentioned before, eagle feathers aud porcupine quills, while the dark, waving masses of hair hung low upon the shoulders, contrasting with the whiteness of the face. A heavy crimson shawl enveloped the form, as when first seen. The features were regular, and, perhaps, in my state of feeling, their beauty was considerably enhanced; but the thought came upon me that if there were anything supernatural in my experience, it was in seeing such wonderful beauty as was now before me.

Unconsciously I forgot myself as the canoe was gliding past, and before I was aware, it was hid from view by intervening obstacles. I withdrew hastily, intending to hurry farther down, where the view would be more complete. I had taken but a step or two when Nat's rifle was discharged, and I heard distinctly a muffled sound of his voice. Wild with agitation, I dashed to the spot where I supposed him to be. The view of the river at this point was clear, and I turned to look at the canoe. It had vanished!

I looked around for Nat, but he too, was gone. I called him, and once thought I heard a faint

answer. But it was not repeated, and I could not tell its direction. I reached the ground, and beheld *the tracks of others beside his own.* I awaited until near night, but Nathan Todd was never to return.

CHAPTER VII.

ALONE IN THE WILDERNESS.

"WHERE's your friend?"

There was apprehension in the question of the trapper, or he would not have called Nat, as he had never called him before. The question was asked, too, the instant I appeared.

"I cannot tell," I answered, seating myself gloomily.

"Whar'd you leave him?"

"I cannot answer that either. He went with me to watch the river, as you remember. Espying that canoe which you saw yesterday, he concealed himself a few yards distant, in order to obtain a better view of it. Since then I have seen nothing of him."

"Was it he who shot?"

"It sounded like his gun, although I am not positive that it really was."

"I heerd it, an' took it for him; and, shoot me, if I didn't know he'd get into some scrape."

"I fear he has, and the last one, too."

"My thoughts 'zactly. Luckily you did not, too."

"I came nearer than I wish to again, Biddon. I can tell you, that I am willing to leave this place as soon as you wish; I've seen enough to satisfy me."

"Shouldn't wonder; I did long ago."

"Let us leave to-morrow. Are you willing?"

"I'll go to-night if you want to."

"No; there is no need of that. It will be best to wait until daylight."

"I don't know; that's the only time we've been interfered with."

"Besides," I added. "I have faint hopes that Nat may return."

"Waugh! you'll never see him again, and ef we're 'bout yer another day, we'll never see each other again. No use lookin' fur him, shoot me ef thar is."

"I do not think he has been slain, only captured by some lurking enemy, from whom he may escape."

"No, *sir;* I tell you he's gone, and I reckon as how we'd better be gone too."

"Perhaps you are right, Biddon, although I shall

be loth to leave the vicinity when I am not satisfied of his fate."

"I'm satisfied, an' you oughter be. Leastways, *I'm* goin' to-morrow, an' you kin stay and play with these Blackfeet as long as you like. I've been up to see the horses, and fixed things so as to start as soon as daylight. Any 'jections?"

"None at all."

"Then 'tis settled, and let's snooze."

But it was by no means settled. As I lay that night ruminating upon the strange scenes through which I had so recently passed, the pledge that I had made with Nat came back to me. I had promised to remain by him as long as there was hope; and to desert him now, would be a violation of that vow, and a base and unworthy act upon my part. For us both to leave him would probably seal his fate, if alive. It was by no means certain that if lost, he was irrecoverably gone, and I resolved that if the trapper should depart on the morrow I would remain.

In making this resolution, perhaps it was not the desire alone to benefit my companion that prompted it, although I aver that that alone would have been sufficient. Unconsciously, almost, I found my thoughts wandering from Nat to the fair being who had been the cause of all this trouble. At

most, I could only speculate and conjecture with regard to her, and the same speculations and conjectures I had made before. Undoubtedly she was a captive among a tribe of Indians, over whom she wielded a great influence; and that she was the same maid referred to by Biddon, seemed certain to me. I had mentioned this thought to him, in the hope of persuading him to remain. He started somewhat at the unsuspected suggestion, and, after a few moments' thought, admitted the probability of such being the case. To my surprise I found I had completely defeated my own plans.

"I kinder thought then, that little thing war suthin' more nor human, an' ef it's her, you see, I'm purty sure now. No use talkin', I shan't stay here longer than time 'nough to start. It might be that gal, and then agin it moughn't. Shoot me ef it moughn't."

I said no more, for I saw it would be useless. When he had once determined upon a matter there was no changing him. He was satisfied that "spirits invisible" had encompassed him, and there was but one way of escapng them.

He was now reposing quietly beside me, utterly oblivious to external things; and as the night was far advanced, I sank upon my knees, and besought the great Disposer of events to guide me aright

in the undertaking which I was about to commence, and to watch over my unfortunate companion, now doubtless in captivity; to protect the kind-hearted trapper, and to soon clear away the mystery which had enveloped us like a cloud. Then I lay down and slept.

I awoke, hearing a slight rustling noise beside me, and, upon looking around, caught a glimpse of Biddon as he departed. It was very early, and he doubtless was after the horses, in order to leave at once the place which had such terrors for him. In the course of a half hour he returned.

"The horses are waitin'," said he.

I arose and passed out. The three animals stood outside, a short distance away, each saddled and prepared for travel.

"Come, work lively, and fetch them skins out," said Biddon, commencing himself. I made no reply, but assisted him until everything was in readiness, for starting.

"Jump on, and shoot me ef we won't soon be clar of this outlandish place."

"Biddon, I am not going with you" I said, mildly.

"*What?*" he asked, looking wonderingly at one, as if doubting my senses.

"I intend to remain here."

"Ogh! jump on, an' shut up yer meat-trap; it's time we started."

"I said I was going to remain here."

"Do you mean it, Jarsey?" he queried, bending such a fierce look upon me.

"Most certainly I do."

"Then, all Bill Biddon's got to say is, you're a fool."

I colored slightly at this, but made no reply.

"What yer going to stay fur? Get shot and lose yer ha'r, I s'pose, jist to please the reds."

"I am sorry, friend Biddon, that you feel thus. When Nathan Todd and I left the States for this country, we pledged eternal friendship to each other, and I am sure I should never feel at ease if I should leave him in this dire extremity. I am by no means satisfied that I can afford him no assistance, although he is a captive. He has no claims upon you, and I should not expect you to remain, but, as I said, I am determined not to leave this place until I have obtained satisfactory intelligence of him."

The trapper remained silent a few moments after this. He then spoke:

"I s'pose you mean right, Jarsey, but you're awful simple. Yer's as what hopes you'll find the other chap right side up and squar with his ha'r on,

but I don't 'spect *your* ha'r 'll b' yer's to-night. Howsumever you're bound to stay, I see, so yer's good luck. I'd like to stay with you, but I ain't backward to own Bill Biddon knocks under *this* time."

He reached his hard, horny hand, and I took it.

"Good-by, Bill, I hope we shall meet again. We have not been long acquainted, but I trust long enough to be friends."

"And you'll remember as how ole Bill Biddon didn't mean what he said just now."

"Certainly, certainly, I know you did not."

"Wal, good-by it is, then."

A half-hour after and I was alone in the great wilderness of the Northwest.

After parting with Biddon, I remained stationary a long time, meditating upon the strange resolve that I had acted upon. If looked at with the common-sense view that the honest trapper gave it, I was sensible it was nothing less than a piece of recklessness upon my part, which only could be excused by the motives that actuated me. I felt some regret certainly at parting with Biddon, for that honest, manly heart which throbbed within his massive breast had drawn me toward him, and I knew he had come to regard me in a far different light than he did at first. However, I was hopeful,

and could not persuade myself that I was never to see him again.

Toward night the sky gave evidence of an approaching storm. A strong wind arose, and a melancholy, desolate moaning, like the precursor of winter, could be heard at intervals in the forest. Darkness came on earlier than usual, and, as I passed into the trapper's home, the storm burst upon me. No one who has not witnessed a storm in the wilderness, can appreciate its awful grandeur. As I cowered within the heart of the old forest king, its power was subdued to my ears; but enough reached them to give me an idea of the terrific spectacle without. The huge sides of the tree surrounding me rumbled and groaned as though it were yielding to the hurricane; the wind blew with such fury that at times it sounded as though wailing screams were rending the air above me; and the sharp splintering of the trees riven by the lightning, rivaled the crash of the thunderbolt itself.

As the morning approached, the storm gradually died away, and as I stepped forth the sun was shining in unclouded splendor.

Slinging my rifle over my shoulder, I wandered aimlessly forward, following the course of the stream for several hours. Finally, becoming con-

siderably wearied, I seated myself upon a fallen tree, to gain a little rest; but my mind was in such a state of excitement that the desire to press forward was irresistible, and I arose again.

As I stood upon the spot, I happened to look across the stream upon the prairie. The river at this point was flowing east and west, so that I looked to the southward; and as I did so I saw Biddon in the distance, riding leisurely away. He was miles distant, so that I could not hope to make my voice reach him; and as the prairie in many parts was submerged, it was out of the question to pursue with the hope of overtaking him. So I contented myself with watching him until he disappeared. He appeared precisely the same as when Nat and I first caught sight of him; and it struck me as a rather curious coincidence that my first and last glimpse of him were similar. Shortly after, he was a mere quivering speck on the horizon, and soon disappeared altogether.

The storm which had just ended was the usher of the cold season. A strong wind had arisen, and was blowing coldly through the forest. The changes in these regions are remarkably sudden; and by the middle of the afternoon, needles of ice put out along the shores of the stream. I suffered much from this sudden and severe cold; and to

make it worse, everything upon which I could lay hands was so water-soaked as to make it impossible to kindle a fire.

I continued wandering aimlessly onward, until I descended a large valley, filled with trees of enormous growth. As I entered, I heard a crackling in the bushes above me. I looked carefully about, but could detect nothing, although the crackling was still heard. Creeping cautiously and stealthily up the bank, I came upon the cause of this apprehension. There was a species of fruit, called the "buffalo berry," quite numerous here, and in among them, seated on his haunches, and contentedly devouring, was a grizzly bear. I started as I took in his colossal form, and turned to make a hasty retreat; but curiosity held me to the spot. He was a huge, unwieldy body; his massive form being enveloped in a coat of long, black, glossy hair, and his eyes small and glittering. His long nails rattled among the leaves, as he pulled the bushes toward him, and plucked the delicate fruit.

All at once a mad desire to take this formidable creature's life came upon me. I knew it was only the most skillful hunter who could prevail against him, and yet I determined to take the risk. As he sat, his side was turned toward me, and I made a low whistle to attract his attention. He stopped

chewing instantly, and turned his head toward me as if listening. I could see his two coal-black eyes glistening plainly. I was lying upon my face, with my rifle resting upon a stone in front. Raising the hammer of my rifle, I took a long, a deliberate, a sure aim at one of his eyes, and before he changed his head, pulled the trigger.

"How does that suit?" I asked exultingly, expecting to see him give up the ghost immediately. To my surprise and terror, I saw him sitting unmoved and apparently unhurt, but looking about him, as if to ascertain from what direction the shot had come. The next instant he caught sight of the bluish wreath from my rifle, and with a low growl of rage plunged directly toward me.

That cumbrous body could roll over the ground much faster than I suspected, and I found that, when alarmed, I could also travel rapidly. But in the tangled undergrowth I was no match for him, as he crashed through it without the least inconvenience, and gained rapidly. I saw he would assuredly overtake me before I could go a hundred yards further; so throwing my rifle to the ground, I drew my knife, and waited his attack. As he came rolling forward, the blood from his wound trickled down, and daubed his mouth; while his red tongue lolled out, his mouth was wide open, and

"I could see his two coal-black eyes glittering plainly."

his long and white teeth shone with terrible ferocity. He was, indeed, a terrific animal, and I drew a deep breath as I felt that a struggle for life or death was at hand.

Suddenly, when a hundred feet distant, there came the *report of another rifle,* and the brute halted, and gazed about him. I also cast a wondering look around to see who my new friend was. No one was in sight, yet I saw a faint curl of smoke rising from the bushes above me. The bear also discovered it, and with another growl made toward it. He had evidently been struck, and his rage was turned in another direction. Hastily loading my rifle, I ran up the hill, intending to follow and assist my unknown friend, but both he and the brute had disappeared. I stood anxiously listening for some guiding sound, and soon heard the report of a gun in the distance, followed by a faint shout.

Tearing through the undergrowth, I dashed hastily forward, calling out in loud tones, so that my friend might guide me to him. There was no response homeward. I feared that he had suffered the fate which had well-nigh been mine. The trail of the bear was now very plain to be seen by the broken twigs, the rising branches, and the blood marks upon the ground. Soon I reached the spot

where the last struggle had evidently taken place. The ground was torn up and cast about, and the blood was spattered for many feet around. Following further, I came upon the dead body of the brute. There was another bullet mark in the head, and a ghastly wound in the throat from which an enormous quantity of blood had poured.

But where was the author of this deed? Why had he fled? Who was he? I looked about expecting to see him near at hand, but I was disappointed. On the ground were the marks of a moccasin, and it was evident my preserver was an Indian. This fact suggested other questions. Had he been following me? Else how came he to be present just at the instant needed? And what was his object? It could not be that my life was sought, for, if such were the case, it had been really spared, as I had been continually exposed through the day; and in the occurrence just narrated, he had preserved my life at the imminent risk of his own.

At any rate, the affair was singular and unaccountable. The Indian was probably gazing upon me this moment, and I looked furtively about, half-expecting to see his glowing eye-balls in the thick shrubbery around.

It was now growing late, and I cast about for some place in which to spend the night. The wind

still blew, and a fire was indispensable. I gathered several armfuls of twigs and branches, and pitched my camp upon the banks of a small rippling stream, a tributary of the river referred to. Here, after the expense of an almost incredible amount of patience, I succeeded in starting a fire, and with the feeling of a conqueror inhaled its glowing, cheerful warmth. The pangs of hunger now began to make themselves felt, as I had tasted no food the entire day. The grizzly bear lay but a short distance away, and, after a few minutes' debate, I concluded that he should answer the demands of nature.

As I drew my knife, and started toward him, a shadow glided from before me, and I saw a human form stealthily make off. I stopped suddenly and hesitated, but finally went on, cut a piece from the animal, and returned. Just before I reached the crackling fire, I again saw a shadow flit before me and disappear. It was too distinct and plain to be a freak of imagination, and it was evident that something or somebody was following or watching. Whoever he might be, I determined that, upon the first opportunity, he should have the contents of my gun for his temerity.

The consciousness that some one was near at hand, watching, perhaps, every motion, lessened my

appetite somewhat. However, after skewering a good-sized piece and roasting it, I made a hearty supper; and, as I produced my inseparable pipe, I think, had it not been for the instinctive presence of that invisible form, my enjoyment would have been complete.

The pleasant warmth of the fire, the soothing effect of the pipe, gradually threw a dreamy, half-unconsciousness over me, into which I sunk with willing delight. As my listless eyes rested upon the glowng embers, there came a strain of wonderful music, like the faint tones of some distant wind-harp. I stirred not, but listened, fearing to move lest the spell should be broken. Again came the wave of heavenly harmony, swelling to the most inspiring grandeur, and then dying away into faint, fluctuating tremors, fainter and fainter, till the strained ear could just feel their waves. It sounded in the air above me, and at that moment I knew that there was nothing real in my experience, and I listened breathlessly for it again.

The music continued, I think, over an hour, and to this day it seems I can hear it still. Such music I have never heard before or since. As I sat alone that dark, stormy night, in the wilderness of the northwest, hundreds of miles from civilization, it seemed there was a chord within me that responded

to the air tones above. It appeared sometimes to sink until it had enveloped me in its wild thrilling power, and then it suddenly swept upward, until I was pained with intense listening. At last, it died away, and with a long sigh of relief I awoke to full consciousness.

I have heard others narrate experience similar to mine and I leave the explanation to the curious and investigating, convinced that I can offer none that will be satisfactory.

I replenished the fire, folded my blanket around me, and lay down to sleep. The night wind was howling dismally through the forest, and the distant rush of the river made melancholy music. In a short time I fell into a deep, and profound sleep.

I was aroused from this by feeling something working at my blanket. I lay motionless a moment to ascertain the character of the threatened danger. The next instant something struck me like the paw of an animal; and, thinking a wolf had attacked me, I sprang to my feet with a shout, threw off my blanket, and drew my knife. Instead of confronting wolves, I met the gaze of a half-dozen savages! For a moment I was completely bewildered.

"You go 'long with us," said one, laying his hand upon my arm.

I saw that resistance would be useless. There were half a dozen fully armed, and my rifle was in their hands.

"I am in your power," said I; "do what you please with me."

CHAPTER VIII.

TRAPPING AMONG THE INDIANS.

ONE of the savages cast some wood upon the fire, and as it blazed up, I saw that five of them stood around me. Resistance would be useless, as my rifle, knife, and revolver were in their hands. Their faces were devoid of paint, and they were probably a party of hunters who had fallen upon my trail. I remembered my spectral visitant a few hours before, and doubted not that he was the means of the tedious captivity which had now only commenced.

After I had arisen to my feet, the captors continued conversing in an unknown tongue. It perplexed me to understand how one of them was able to address me in tolerably good English; but I supposed he must have had intercourse with the fur traders and hunters and the forts and stations of the northwest.

The debate of the Indians I judged to be a decision upon the course they were to follow.

Singularly enough, I had hardly any fears at all in regard to my life, feeling pretty well convinced that they intended an endless captivity for me. I doubted not I should be adopted into their tribe, and doomed to the office of the meanest slave. This was not a very encouraging prospect it is true, but it was infinitely superior to that of death.

After a few minutes' conversation, the Indians apparently came to a satisfactory conclusion; for they seated themselves around the fire, ordering me to do the same, and here they sat as grim and silent as statues, not a muscle moving, excepting an occasional wink of the eyes at long intervals. I watched them, it seemed for an hour, shivering with cold all the time, although my captors had not deprived me of my blanket.

At last, as I looked up, I saw that day was breaking. There was a faint light in the east, heralding the approach of the sun. Shortly after, it burst above the forest line, lighting up the interminable prairie and wilderness with its golden glory. The savages sprang to their feet, seized their weapons and started away.

"Keep close, and don't run!" said the savage who had addressed me at first.

"No danger of my attempting it," I answered, following almost cheerfully behind them.

And in truth it would have been the height of folly to make an attempt to escape. Each of the savages was a fleet runner, each possessed a loaded rifle (and one of them had another, together with my revolver, which, by the way, was a source of great wonderment and perplexity to him), and the utmost limit that I possibly could have gained, as will be evident to the reader, was perhaps ten feet. So I meditated no attempt, but followed close in the footsteps of my captors.

No halt was made for breakfast, and during the whole forenoon we tramped through the wilderness in a northerly direction. As I knew I was in the extreme upper part of the great Nebraska Territory when taken captive, I felt pretty certain that I was now in the Hudson Bay Territory, within the British line. But here my companions made a turn to the eastward, and then, strangely enough, proceeded south again, so that I was uncer tain whether I was now in the United States or not. The reason of this detour on the part of the savages I never knew and could only conjecture. I afterward imagined it was for the purpose of misleading and bewildering me in case I should ever attempt to leave them.

When the sun was overhead, the Indians halted upon the bank of a small flashing stream, and

prepared their meal. A half-hour before halting, one of the Indians had dodged off into the forest. Some time after I heard the report of a rifle, and in a few minutes he returned with a large ptarmigan in his hand. The feathers were plucked from this, and the body dressed much after the fashion of civilized communities. It was then partially cooked over the blaze, and despite the change of circumstances, I made as good and substantial a meal upon it as did any of my companions.

The meal finished, the savages squatted before the fire, drew forth their pipes and commenced silently smoking, their eyes glittering though the vapor with suppressed fierceness, as ever and anon a sidelong glance was bestowed upon me. One of the Indians—he who spoke English—was examining my revolver. He closed one eye and peered wonderingly into the six little barrels; then he fingered about the hammer, took off the cap, tasted it, and replaced it. (It may be remarked here that at the time of my experience, percussion caps were almost unknown in this region. As they were of comparatively recent invention, few of the trappers consented to use them until a long time after.) I was expecting each moment to see the weapon discharge itself,

as it was fully charged, and was handled awkwardly. The Indian looked at it in every direction, at last gave it up. He took a smell of it, and snuffing the gunpowder, handed it to me.

"What is he?"

"A young gun," I answered with a smile.

As I took the weapon I looked about me. There were five unsuspicious savages, and there were six messengers of death at my command. For an instant a wild resolve thrilled me; but it was for an instant only. My soul revolted at the wholesale slaughter I should be compelled to inflict, and I looked at my interlocutor with a pleasant smile.

"Does he shoot?" he queried, his dark eyes lighting up with curiosity.

"Of course. Would you like to see me fire it?"

"Yaw! shoot at him," he answered, pointing at the trunk of a large tree.

"What part of it?"

"Hit him where you mind to."

"Oh, let's have a mark," I laughed, stepping forward and tearing off a small piece of the bark, so as to offer a red spot several inches in diameter. The other savages were now surveying my motions with interest, and with some degree of suspicion the

formidable looking little weapon in my hand. I saw there was an opportunity for making a good impression and I resolved to do it. I stepped back a few paces, took a careful, though apparently a careless aim, and fired the six barrels in succession with tolerable good effect.

"Just look at the mark," I remarked, rather stiffly.

The Indian stepped forward and examined the holes, all within an inch or two of the center. Then with his knife he pried out each bullet, and showed them to his companions. They grunted their satisfaction, or rather wonder, and turned the diminutive six-shooter over and over in their hands, totally unable to comprehend how such a number of fatal shots could come almost simultaneously from it. I loaded and fired it a number of times, and my friend—he who spoke English—asked me to make him a present of it. I assented with the greatest pleasure, as I had no power to refuse, and volunteered to instruct him in its use, and all things considered we were getting on quite intimate terms.

This proceeding of mine was a stroke of policy, to which I believe I owe my life. My apparent cheerfulness, my readiness to acquiesce in all their

wishes, convinced them that I cherished no sullen vindictiveness toward them, and I am well satisfied that had I asked my captors at this time to allow me to proceed unmolested upon my way, they would have done so. Yet I was perfectly willing to tarry with them a while, for reasons which, I trust, are obvious to the reader, and I made no request of them.

We remained in this spot for over an hour practicing with the revolver. At the end of that time its new owner had made such progress as to be able to strike a good-sized tree a yard distant, at nearly every shot.

"Him nice thing!" he remarked, shoving it carefully down in his belt.

"Very good in a close hug with a bear or foe," I replied.

"He is, by dam," he added, pulling it forth and again examining each part.

There was but one drawback to the savage's prospect of pleasure. I had but a small quantity of caps, and of course there was no means of obtaining any among his own kindred. He however satisfied himself with the thought that he could obtain more at some of the trading posts in that section.

The line of march was again taken up, and continued until nightfall. They traveled in Indian file, my dusky friend bringing up the rear, and myself directly in front of him. This plan was adopted, not through any fear of pursuit, as they were in their own country, but because caution and watchfulness are habitual to the North American Indian. Every now and then the click of the revolver was audible behind, but I felt no apprehension as I knew the savage was only examining it for his own pleasure.

Just before dusk we reached a large and rapidly flowing stream. Here the rifles were slung about their persons, and we grasped hands and plunged unhesitatingly in. Had not this expedient been adopted, I should never have reached the opposite side. We sank to our shoulders several times, and the boisterous current lifted me clean from the bottom, but the strong arms of my captors were all-efficient, and held me firmly in my place until the opposite shore was reached, with no greater misfortune than the uncomfortableness of our soaked and clinging garments.

The sun had sunk behind the western mountains, and the deep gloom of night was settling over the

wilderness, when as we reached the top of a swell, I saw for the first time the Indian village. It lay in a sort of valley, and numbered sixty or seventy lodges. As seen in the dim twilight these looked singularly picturesque and fanciful. I could see dark forms flitting like shadows about the lodges, and the low hum of their conversation was audible. We were descried, as our forms stood out in relief against the sky, but no signals were given by either party.

As we descended into the valley my heart began to fail me, at what I feared my reception would be. Stories of the tortures undergone by captives came over me, and I ventured my fears to my friend.

"What your name?" he asked, halting and turning toward me.

"Will," I replied.

"Will stay here, and me come and fix things. My name Jim," said he, taking the name probably given him by the whites with whom he was acquainted.

The other savages seeing us halting stopped also, and looked suspiciously. Jim (as I shall hereafter name him) said something in an unintelligible tongue and they passed on.

"Stay here, Will, and me fix things."

With this he disappeared, and I seated myself upon the ground to await his return. It struck me as rather curious for him to give a captive such a good opportunity to escape, but it pleased me withal, and it need not be told I made no attempt to make off.

In a few moments he returned, bearing in his arms several Indian garments.

"Will put him on, and me fix things," said he, throwing them down beside me. I hastily donned them, understanding fully their use and intentions.

"Keep close, and don't say nothing to nobody," he added, as they enveloped my person.

He now turned his face towards the village, and we were soon wending our way through it. We passed several savages who spoke to me, Jim however taking the responsibility of replying. At last we reached his lodge without my identity being discovered. This was at the extreme eastern end of the village, and as we entered I saw it was devoid of any persons except ourselves.

"You sleep there, Will," said he, pointing to one corner, where a buffalo robe was visible by the dim light of a few smoldering embers. I repaired to

the spot, thanking him for his kindly offer, and lay down, while he replenished the fire, seating himself by it, and commenced the never-ceasing pleasure of examining his revolver.

Lying half asleep on the buffalo robe, listlessly gazing at the savage, his features all at once struck me. I had seen them before, but where I could not recollect. Let me see—ah! it was plain now. He was one of the occupants of the mysterious canoe!

It soon became known throughout the Indian village that a white man was a captive among them, and the next morning the entrance to Jim's lodge was thronged with hundreds anxious to get a peep at me. Knowing that this curiosity must be gratified sooner or later, I stepped boldly forth, and mingled among them, in order to have the matter finished at once. No violence was offered me, although several pinched my arms rather severely, seemingly determined to be satisfied upon all my points.

My Indian friend Jim was married, and, in the course of the day, his squaw made her appearance. She was a middle-aged woman, and tolerably good-looking for a savage. Jim informed her that I was

to be her slave, and thus it may be said I was established in winter-quarters.

The heavy storm referred to in the previous chapter, was the close of the warm season, and the fierce northern winter commenced setting in. Winter in the northwest is far different from that season in the Middle States. It is full six months in continuance, and such is the intense coldness for the greater part of the season, that the thermometer sinks to thirty and often forty degrees below zero. Two weeks after my capture, it seemed impossible to prevent freezing to death in the lodge with a roaring fire a few feet off. Yet the savages minded it hardly at all. A few extra garments were added to their costume, and they flitted as incessantly through the village as ever.

In the tribe it was acknowledged that I was the property of Jim, and thus my lot was much more endurable than otherwise. He was really a good-hearted Indian, I believe; and the course that I ever maintained toward him won some of his regard. However, he was a lazy dog, like all of his male kindred, and, although I had an exalted opinion of him, it was impossible to discover in him any of those poetical attributes which are so generally conceded

to the North American Indian. In conversation with me, he discarded entirely those extravagant, highly-wrought figures of speech common to his kindred, and added in their place an awkward oath or two, and a phrase learned from the Hudson-Bay traders. The greater part of the day he sat before his fire, smoking and gazing moodily into it, while his better-half busied herself about the apartment as willingly and contentedly as though she never dreamed of a different lot. Of course, I assisted her as much as lay within my power, and came at last to do all of the out-door work.

I have always regarded my capture by this tribe of Indians as a fortunate circumstance. I cannot imagine how else I could have maintained life through the unusually severe winter which followed. No mortal hand could have saved me from perishing from cold, while it would have been utterly impossible to have procured food, when the snow lay six feet upon the ground, and the rivers were sealed by great depths of ice. Although frequent occasions presented themselves, I determined to make no effort to leave my captors until the spring had arrived.

As mentioned, I had pretty well-defined suspicions that Jim was one of the savages who occupied the mysterious canoe, referred to in the preceding

chapters. I was not positive of this, although, when I stood by his side and viewed his profile, the resemblance seemed perfect.

One great disappointment had already come. I was sure that I should learn something either of Nat, or of the fair, mysterious captive. When I questioned Jim, he answered with such apparent sincerity and truth, that I was pretty well convinced he knew nothing of either. In regard to the latter he laughed; the former he merely shook his head; he knew nothing of either. Sometimes when I fell into a deep reverie, and suddenly awoke, I could see Jim lift his eyes quickly from me, as though he had been endeavoring to satisfy himself of my identity. He questioned me artfully, and I told him all. At last, I resolved to put the question direct.

"Jim, didn't you and another warrior, some weeks ago, pass down the river, some distance south, with a white woman?"

There was a perceptible start at this question, but he answered promptly:

"Don't know nothing 'bout 'em."

"Why, I was pretty sure that I saw you."

He shook his head.

There was nothing to be gained by further questioning, and I gave it up. But I was satisfied he

knew more of Nat and the sweet captive than he was willing to tell—and I was not mistaken.

Shortly after this conversation, Jim told me that he and several of his tribe were in the employ of the Hudson Bay Fur Company, and traded numerous furs with them every spring. I asked him whether he was not in the territory of the Northwest Fur Company. He replied that that made no difference; each trespassed upon the other's grounds, and he had been engaged for both.*

A few weeks subsequent to this, there came a storm which laid the snow six feet deep, and Jim informed me that, in company with several others, he should proceed to set his traps for the winter's work, and he willingly consented that I should accompany him. Preparations were accordingly made. Extra garments were donned, a couple of traps taken by each, and, placing our snow-shoes upon our feet, we sallied forth. This was the first time I ever attempted to travel with snow-shoes,

* The Hudson Bay Company, established two hundred years ago, by Prince Rupert, divided its territory into four compartments—the Northern, including all the country of the Far North; the Southern, extending south to Lake Superior; the Montreal, including the country along the northern shore of the Gulf of St. Lawrence; and the Columbia Department, comprehending all the country west of the Rocky Mountains, including Oregon, in which, I believe, they still trade.

and, as may be supposed, I made awkward work of it. These were fully six feet in length, resembling a canoe somewhat in shape, and of extreme lightness. The interior is filled with a gauzy network, which allows the light, sand-like snow to fall through without impeding one's progress. They are fastened loosely but securely to the feet, and when the snow is not dampened by thaws, twenty miles can be easily made in a day. Without these convenient things, it would be next to impossible to travel during six months of the year in the fur-bearing regions.

We proceeded westward some eight or ten miles before all of the traps were set, when, turning, we retraced our steps, intending to visit them the following night. The trap used by the Indians of this section is much the same as the common steel-trap of the States, being, however, much larger, and without the saw-like teeth of the latter. A long chain, with a heavy stone attached, is fastened to the trap, and concealed beneath the snow, to prevent the animal making off with the whole concern. The trap is placed just beneath the surface of the snow, and bits of frozen fish are scattered around, which attract the half-starved foxes, lynx, beavers, and wolves in the region. Having completed all arrangements, we retraced

our steps, and reached the village just as night was setting in.

Nothing of note took place the next day, and, as the night came on, Jim informed me that they were going to visit their traps to ascertain what luck they had. As he made no objection, I again donned my snow-shoes and joined them. There was but one savage beside himself. The snow was crisp and fine, and the traveling comparatively easy. Jim dragged a small sled behind him for the purpose of bringing back anything found in the traps.

It was a bright moonlight night, and as we journeyed through the forest, there were patches of snow almost as light as day. We shunned the trees, as the snow-crust was brittle around them, and once or twice crossed broad belts of snow, devoid of timber, which Jim informed me were the beds of rivers. As we traveled on, nothing broke the silence, except the muffled sliding of our shoes over the icy crust, or a single word from one of the savages; and it occurred to me that if my friends at home could have seen me at this particular moment, they would have imagined I was searching for gold in a strange country.

The first trap we reached had the *fore-leg* of a

fox in it only. I looked at Jim inquiringly, unable to understand what it meant.

"He gnawed him off, and run away; look out next time."

The fox had been caught by his fore-leg, and, finding himself unable to get loose, had eaten off the imprisoned limb and escaped on the others. In a month's time he would probably suffer no inconvenience from it. In the next trap was found a red fox, whose fur bears but a trifling value. He was killed, placed upon the sled, the trap reset, and we proceeded to the rest. None of them had been visited, except the last. In this was imprisoned a beautiful black fox, the capture of which nearly set the two savages into ecstasies. The fur, of this animal is more valuable than that of any other caught by the trappers, one alone sometimes bringing as high as two hundred dollars. It is so rarely captured, and such a prize, when taken, that a hunter would be satisfied with one single animal during the whole season.

Our two animals being secured upon our sled, and the traps carefully reset, we commenced our return journey. The night was far advanced when we reached the Indian village. As we entered our lodge, Jim's squaw arose noiselessly and replenished the fire. While removing my snow-shoes, I

remarked to Jim that my feet had felt for the last hour or two as though they were asleep.

"Let me see him," he asked quickly, jerking off the thick moccasins which I had donned a few weeks back. He looked at my feet a moment, and then exclaimed, "By dam, him froze up!"

I was considerably startled at this, and anxiously asked him if they were badly frozen.

"Yaw, but me fix 'em," he answered, and commenced immediately rubbing until I begged him to desist. He paid no heed to my entreaties, but continued this treatment until he had restored completely the congealed circulation, and saved the useful members.

The savages had but poor fortune in trapping this winter, and there was considerable suffering. The Indians of the northwest rely solely upon what they are able thus to take, for their food during the cold season; and, as there is generally plenty of game, they fare well. But now and then some unaccountable cause drives all the animals away, and cases of actual starvation have occurred. Jim told me that three winters before a case of cannibalism had occurred in their tribe, and years before that, when a mere child, there came an appalling time. Half the families were obliged to devour some of their members to support life until spring, and,

for over a week, an old, miserable bison supported the whole tribe. Jim said he had more than once cooked his moccasins and eaten them.

The tribe was driven to no such extremity as this while I was with them, and I saw no want myself. Jim was one of their best hunters and he supplied his own lodge before that of others. Yet, there were others who were not so fortunate, and who were often compelled to endure the pangs of hunger for days at a time. When food was secured, they gorged themselves nearly to bursting, and were the happiest of mortals, until the wants of nature again made themselves felt.

I could write far more of my experience with this tribe of Indians; but I feel it would be hardly in place here, as there are other characters in this narrative who must claim notice. My aim has been only to dwell long enough upon particulars, for an understanding of the events that follow. During my captivity, several things occurred to make me suspect that the mysterious captive referred to was in this village the whole time, and I was satisfied that the Indian Jim knew more of Nat than he would impart to me. These imaginings filled me with moody misgivings, and I made a resolve that as soon as spring came I would make my escape; and if I could learn nothing of the two beings

whose fate was unknown to me, depart for the States. The life I was leading was a wearisome, monotonous one, and in time would become unbearable. Spring was but a month or two distant, and in its approach I placed my fondest hopes; but it was doomed to open an experience in my life of which I little dreamed.

CHAPTER IX.

THE BUFFALO HUNT AND ITS CONSEQUENCES.

During my captivity among the Indians, as stated in the last chapter, there was considerable suffering on account of the scarcity of food. The country to the north of Nebraska is the paradise of all species of game in the summer months, but during the winter the large animals proceed to the southward, and the deep snows prevent the capture of the smaller ones, except by means of traps. Spring, therefore, was looked forward to with eager expectation, as the harbinger of enjoyment and the season of the chase.

And it came at last. First, the sun grew hotter and blazed more fiercely; the snow became damp and cloggy, and the dripping of water could be heard through the day and night. Snow-shoe traveling was now nearly impossible, as long as the thaw continued. Huge streams of melted snow poured into the rivers all along the banks, and the ice became weaker and weaker each moment, till, at

last, with a terrific crashing and thundering, the whole mass started, and, a week after, the clear, blue running water only was seen. The thaw continued, until at last all the snow had disappeared, and with feelings of indescribable joy, we once more saw the face of the earth. Vegetation now commenced with surprising growth, and, in an almost incredible short space of time, bright, radiant, glorious spring held indisputed reign. Indians were departing and arriving every day with loads of fish, wild fowl, and game, and the village was a scene of unbridled feasting for many a day.

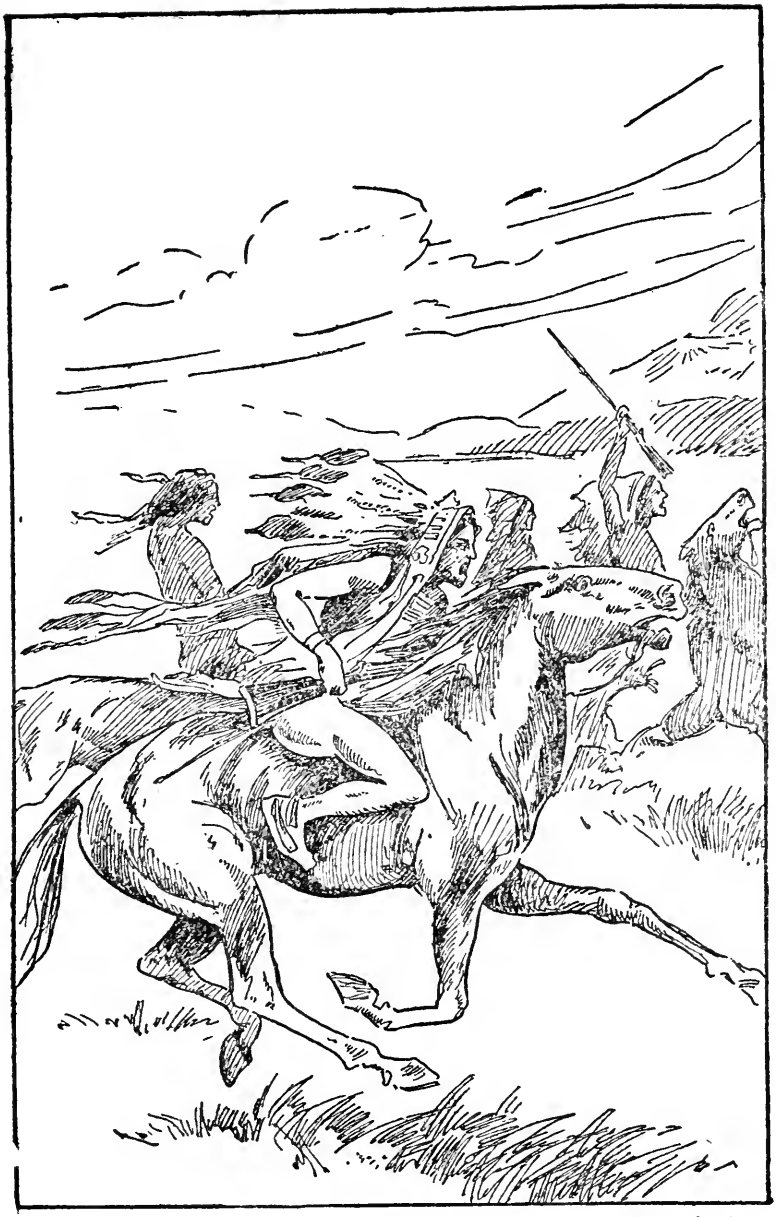
One forenoon, a savage, who had been absent a day or two, announced that a herd of buffaloes were quietly browsing a few miles to the southward. This produced violent commotion throughout the village, and preparations were at once made for the grand hunt. Some twenty or thirty splendid Indian ponies were mounted by as many warriors, and, to my inexpressible delight, Jim informed me that I should accompany them. A small, high-spirited animal was given me as my charger. He was of a dark color, and his dappled haunches glistened in the sun like polished ebony.

About noon we sallied forth from the village, and struck a southward direction, restraining our animals to a walk, in order to preserve their wind for

the severe test at hand. While riding along by the side of Jim, the thought of escape—which had not been absent from me for the last six months—came with double force. I was now mounted upon a fleet, long-winded animal, who could hold his own with any horse bestrode by the Indians, and what was to prevent my escape? In the bewilderment and excitement of the chase, I might wander miles away, and be gone many hours, without exciting suspicion. My captors, I suppose, had no thoughts of my attempting a flight, as I had permitted so many opportunities to pass, and I felt there would be no suspicious eyes watching my motions. The prairie stretched hundreds of miles to the southward, and it seemed my animal longed to bound away upon it. At any rate, I felt the time had come, and resolved that I should never return to the Indian village a captive.

An hour or so after, we came in sight of the drove, cropping the new grass of the prairie. So numerous were they, that, as we looked over them, it was impossible to see their extent. Far away, until they touched the horizon, the ocean of dark, swarming bodies could be seen.

Our animals now partook of the excitement of their masters. Arching their necks, they scented the prey afar, and it was nearly impossible to



"Setting up a wild yell, the Indians scattered and plunged after them."

restrain their impatience. They snorted, and plunged, champed their bits, and shook their heads, and seemed determined to rush forward despite all restraint.

We continued stealthily approaching in a body, preserving strict silence, in order not to alarm the game. In this way, we came within a hundred yards, when a bull raised his alarmed gaze at us, and, giving a loud snort, heaved his huge body round, and plunged madly into the herd. All took the alarm, and went thundering away, making the earth tremble with their multitudinous tread.

It was now wholly useless to undertake to check our animals longer, and, setting up a wild yell, the Indians scattered and plunged after them. The buffalo is not a runner, and, owing to the shortness of his fore-legs, appears to roll in his gait. The Indians' horses soon bring their riders alongside the bisons, and as soon as the shot is given, they shy off to avoid the infuriated animal's horns. Before I was prepared for it, my animal was abreast of a buffalo, and waiting for my shot. Here I committed a blunder common to all beginners of the hunt. I fired while holding the reins in my hands. The consequence was, my bullet struck the animal somewhere about the head, got entangled in his mane, where it would drop out in a day or two.

My horse immediately veered to one side, and allowed the buffalo to run until I could reload. I now saw my beast knew more of the chase than I did, and dropping the rein upon his neck, allowed him full freedom.

Cautiously, but rapidly, he came alongside the plunging buffalo, and taking more care, I sent a bullet through the fore part of his body. It was his death-wound; and, seemingly conscious of his fate, and determined on revenge, he wheeled instantly round, drove his fore-feet into the ground, and dropped his head to rip up my charger. This movement was so sudden, and we were so close upon him, that my horse could neither check his speed nor turn to one side. But he avoided him for all that. Dropping upon his haunches with a snort, he made a terrific bound upward and went clean over the buffalo. The maddened animal expected this, and plunged his horns upward at him, expecting to still kill him. The instinct of the horse was too much, however; he, too, feared such a fate, and leaped high enough to avoid him. As he came to the earth again, he plunged swiftly away, the enraged buffalo in full pursuit; but he easily kept clear from him, wheeling and dodging, and still remaining nigh enough for me to give my shot. My gun was unloaded, and before I could charge

it, the buffalo had fallen to the earth and was fast dying.

I now looked about me. Buffaloes were flying in every direction, and the forms of the savages could be seen darting to and fro among them, dealing death and destruction at every turn. The main herd was pouring simultaneously southward, while the scores which had been cut off, were endeavoring to rejoin them, carrying us along with them. In different parts of the prairie could be seen the dark, motionless forms of the slain buffaloes, showing how successful the chase had been thus far.

The sky, which in the mornng was fair and clear, was now becoming overcast with heavy clouds, and two or three warning rumbles of thunder were heard in the distance. Still, the savages were too excited to notice the interruption, as long as a single buffalo remained. I saw Jim plunge his horse unhesitatingly into a crowd of a dozen or so, when, as he commenced dealing destruction, his horse became entangled, and he was compelled to make a flying leap over the backs of the animals around him. This he accomplished successfully, leaping from one back to the other, until he was clear of them all.

Suddenly, it occurred to me, while holding my fiery horse, that if I meditated escape it was high

time to be about it. Turning to the southward, I could just descry the drove thundering away, a vast cloud of dust circling above them. The rein was dropped upon the neck of my horse, and, stretching out his head, he bounded away like the wind. He was a noble animal, and was now in his element. He enjoyed the chase as much as any of the savages; and, as mile after mile of prairie flew beneath his feet, he was only warming into the excitement. As I looked back, I could just discern the Indians, like specks in the distance, still at their bloody work.

We were now at no great distance from the herd, and my horse catching sight of an old worried bull, somewhat in the rear, instantly made toward him. He was too jaded to hasten his pace, and I could see his fury was roused. I prepared to shoot him, as it would go to show my pursuers, if I should have any, that the excitement of the chase had alone carried me away. While yet some distance, he shied to one side, and turned his head warningly toward us, but without halting. The horse, however, finding that I still restrained my shot, continued to bring me closer. At last, the bison struck into a swifter run, and made desperate efforts to rejoin his companions. In an instant I was beside him, and holding my gun to my shoul-

der, was just on the point of firing, when he suddenly stood at bay, in precisely the same manner as the other. My horse, instead of making a running leap this time, stopped instantaneously, planting his feet firmly in the ground. I was not prepared for this, and shot a dozen feet over his head, falling upon my face within a foot of the buffalo. The shock was terrible, and I was severely injured. I endeavored to rise, fearing that I should be gored and trampled to death, but was unable, and heard the buffalo scampering away. I placed my hand to my face, and found it covered with blood, and a strange bewilderment was coming over me. I arose to my knees, and gazed about me. The buffalo was plunging in the rear of his drove, while my horse was galloping wildly around me, his mane and bridle flying in the wind. I heard the bursting of thunder overhead, and everything was growing dark and confused. I tried again to rise, but failed. There was a thick darkness about me, a heavy hand pressing me to the earth, and all become chaotic.

When consciousness returned, all was blank darkness. The rain was pouring down in torrents, and, stunned and bleeding, I lay on the soaked,

cold, spongy earth. Gradually, the remembrance of my misfortune came over me. I must have been lying several hours upon the prairie, exposed to the cold, dismal storm. My clothes were saturated with the chilling rain, and my face and hands bedabbled with mud and dirt.

I struggled desperately to my feet, and endeavored to pierce the Stygian gloom around; but it was useless; not the smallest point of the faintest light could be seen in any direction. Up, down, on every hand, the same solid walls of darkness enveloped me. I was many miles from the Indian village, and had lost its direction. At that moment, I would have given worlds to have been within Jim's lodge. Flight, in my present condition, was not to be thought of, and I must soon receive succor or I should perish.

I listened. In the dismal sweep of the rain something like a footstep was heard. I called out, but there was no reply. Again the splash of a foot was heard, now from a different point. Soon I discovered some animal was walking around me in a circle. Feeling round in the spongy prairie, I found my rifle, but it was useless as a means of defense, as the charge was thoroughly wetted. I

clubbed it, and waited for the attack. Still around and around the same step went. At first I fondly hoped it might be Jim, or one of his companions, but its footfall showed it to be a quadruped, and its approach was too cautious. Suddenly it halted and walked directly toward me. I drew my rifle back, ready to brain it the minute it was within my reach. A faint neigh was heard—joy inexpressible! it was my faithful horse. As I called to him, he approached, and lowered his head for me to take his bridle. With a feeling of deep thankfulness and hope, I clambered into the saddle, and he bounded away, his unerring instinct leading him straight toward home.

The rain continued to beat, cold and dismal, and I felt already burning within me a hot, fiery fever, from the terrible suffering I had undergone. I should soon be prostrated, and without some kindly hand to nurse me, would inevitably perish. But the horse was certain; and, after an hour or two, my heart leaped, as we entered the silent Indian village. But one light was burning, and that was in the lodge of Jim, showing that he expected my return. I rode instantly up to the entrance and dismounted, while my noble horse made off to look

out for himself. Jim arose as he heard my approach, and, lifting his torch, advanced to meet me.

"You had long hunt—"

He started back in horror at my appearance. Then, holding his light over his head, and peering at me, he asked:

"What de matter? Been in fight?"

"No; I was thrown from my horse, and lay senseless upon the prairie until a short time ago. I feel bad, Jim, and fear I am severely injured," said I, starting to seat myself.

"Wait minute; am hurt; let me fix 'em."

He clapped his hands, and instantly the bundle of blankets at the side of the lodge arose to an upright position, and his squaw walked forth. My wounds were now dressed, my garments changed for dry ones, and with a hot cup of drink, I was swathed in blankets, and placed by the fire. Jim said it was not far from morning, and if at that time I was worse, he would call in the Medicine Man.

All night the fever burned and raged, and when morning came I was partially delirious. Jim examined my pulse, shook his head doubtingly, and departed from the lodge. In a short time he returned, and with him came the Medicine Man, an Indian considerably advanced in years, and much

loved and honored by his tribe. He, too, looked grave, and held a consultation in an undertone with Jim. From these signs, I knew I was dangerously, probably fatally injured.

And now came days of those strange, indescribable visions that come over one in high fever. I was in all imaginable places, and saw wonderful persons and scenes. Now and then, there were moments when reason flitted to its throne. At such times I saw the Medicine Man or Jim near me; and once, as I wonderingly opened my eyes, I saw the mysterious captive bending over me. I looked straight into her dark, liquid eyes, and reached forth and touched her garment, to satisfy myself that it was no freak of mind. My fixed stare alarmed her, and she looked inquiringly at the Medicine Man. He mumbled something, and she departed.

About a week after my accident, as I subsequently learned, I awoke with my full reason. As I looked wonderingly about me, the first object that encountered my eyes was the captive to whom I have alluded. My fixed stare at her seemed to alarm her, and she arose to pass out.

"Wait," said I; "pray do not leave me."

"But you should not talk," she replied, much agitated; "the Medicine Man would not allow it; you will surely injure yourself."

"You and the Medicine Man are both mistaken, if he thinks thus. I know I have been sick and delirious, but my mind was never clearer than it is this instant, and I know a few moments' conversation cannot injure me. Let me beg you not to refuse me this, as I cannot tell whether the opportunity will ever again be offered."

The being before me was much embarrassed, and for a moment hesitated, seemingly in doubt between duty and inclination. Seizing the opportunity, I urged my wish with greater fervor than ever. Finally she glanced furtively around, as though she expected to meet the twinkling orbs of the Medicine Man, and then answered:

"I cannot refuse your request, and yet it seems wrong that I should thus disobey the injunctions that were given for your good. What is it that you wish to ask me?"

"Am I out of danger?"

"Not yet. You have been crazy for a long time, and more than once the Medicine Man has shaken his head in doubt when he looked upon you."

"Have you not watched by me nearly all the time I have been thus?" I gazed full in her face as I uttered this question, and she dropped her eyes in confusion, as she replied:

"I have assisted the Medicine Man several times

as he wished me to, and I have done no more to you than I would to any one in similar circumstances."

"No, sweet being, I know you haven't," I exclaimed, in admiration; "your heart is open to any one. Who you are I know not, but I can see your race is similar to my own, and judge you to be a willing prisoner among these Indians. Your image has long been before me, and I can never forget your fair, angelic face. What first was merely *interest* upon my part, has grown into a stronger passion for you, though I fear—"

I paused as she suddenly arose to her feet, and raised her hand in a warning manner. Before I could ask the meaning of this, a shuffling step was heard, and the next minute the Medicine Man made his appearance. He gesticulated angrily toward her, and she passed quietly out of the lodge. I followed her with my eyes, and as she reached the passage way, she turned toward me with a look that told more than words.

The Medicine Man evidently suspected what I had been doing; for I could see he was excited, and mumbled continually to himself. He forced a bitter, scalding drink into my mouth, which was soothing in its effects, and in a short time I slept.

Now comes a long blank in my memory. After this incident, black night shut around my mind.

There is a faint recollection of again seeing Jim and the Medicine Man bending over me, and the sweet pale face of the fair captive, and then again came utter oblivion.

CHAPTER X.

AN AWFUL AWAKENING.

I HAVE now reached a point in my life over which I would fain pass in silence. It is an experience so strange, so like some horrid vision of sleep, so different from what usually falls to the lot of man, that, at this remote day, I cannot look upon it without a recoiling shudder of horror. I have sometimes persuaded myself that it was unreal; but no, it is true, and time can never clothe the memory of it in a different dress than that of unearthly terror. Bleak and bare it stands alone, in my checkered lot, and the silver that now glistens prematurely in my hair, came upon that night.

I remember falling into a deep sleep, in which the last form that passed before my eyes was that of the dark Medicine Man; there was a confused murmur of voices, and then all became blank and dark. Gradually the darkness was swept by the glittering folds of a dream—a dream which had little form or theme, but the minutest particulars of which

I remember to this day. There were airy, waving figures gliding silently about me without voice, but with every variety of motion. They passed and repassed before my face, frequently pausing and extending their arms over my body, and sometimes standing and intently scanning my countenance. This continued a long time, not a word spoken either by myself or the forms, when suddenly the whole changed. The waving figures darted with the rapidity of lightning among each other, and the quiet radiance became instantly as black as night. In this, I could distinguish the rushing forms growing fainter and fainter, until, at last, all was blackness again.

Then came a feeling as though the thick darkness in one volume were gradually crushing me beneath it, and then a strange feeling of being cramped and held forcibly still. Then came a long, deep, indrawn breath, and I awoke.

All was confused and inexplicable. Open my eyes as wide as I might, I could not pierce the Stygian gloom. I tried to move, but could not—could not stir a limb, and only the fingers of my hand. The air was steamy and hot, and I was surrounded by something which chained every part. I strove to collect my thoughts. I remembered the consultation in the hut, the coming unconsciousness,

and—my present awakening. My first impression, after this, was that the house had fallen over me. I clenched my hands—*they closed upon earth!* I reached forward and licked the darkness. *I tasted earth!*—and then came the sudden, overwhelming knowledge—

I WAS BURIED ALIVE!!

No pen can draw the faintest picture, no soul conceive the unutterable horror, unless that soul has gone through the same awful experience that filled my soul at that discovery. Such a whirlwind of fire as seethed through my bursting brain, such a perfect blaze of all the passions that can rack the human mind, I cannot portray with this feeble pen. For a moment I was frantic, and then suddenly a dreadful and frightful calmness soothed my frame.

Ay, I was buried alive! The savages had mistaken my trance-like stupor for death itself, and I had been hurried prematurely into the grave.

Oh, the appalling discovery! To die while in the grave! The thought was too horrible! I was not yet ready to give way to utter despair. I durst not pause a second for thought, for I knew it would surely come. I twisted and struggled with the strength of fury. I could turn my body around, and use my arms. There was an open space before

my face, as I had been buried in the sitting position. Had I lain back I could not have survived five minutes; as it was, my limbs were immovably secured, and it *was absolutely impossible for me to free myself.*

It was a long time, for such an experience, before I admitted this, but I was compelled to at last. Death by suffocation was rapidly approaching, and all that was left for me was to prepare for it. The small breath of air around me had already been breathed over and over again, and was become hot, steamy, and sickening. I was gasping and panting, but strove to collect my thoughts and keep them from wandering. I commenced praying.

Suddenly a muffled sound reached my ear, as though something had fallen to the earth above. I listened—it was repeated directly over me, now rapidly and regularly. What could it mean? Was it the sign of dissolution, or was it real? I listened, and heard it plainer and plainer above the mild throbs of my heart. *It was real!* Something or somebody was digging at the grave above!

Could I now hold out till I was reached? The air had already become *thick and palpable,* and strange fires were flitting before my eyes. I held my breath till the distended blood-vessels seemed bursting, and then as I respired, the earth turned

to soft *mud* around me; and then the long-labored inspiration was like drawing in some loathsome reptile.

But *what* was above? It could not be a person, as I had been buried by them. It must be some famished animal hastening to devour me. Yet this would be a relief, to gain one more draught of the sweet, cool air of heaven before death.

Now I heard the murmur of *voices!* I shouted —there was a pause and stillness; then the efforts were renewed with greater vigor. I shouted again. I could feel the jarring tremble of the loose earth above. Some one was endeavoring to rescue me from my awful fate, thank God!

A moment after, and the cool air brushed my face; a strong hand seized my arm, and—Oh, joy inexpressible! I was on the earth again.

For a moment I was bewildered and dizzy, and my pulse fluttered wildly, for I had been very, very nigh death. I was recalled to full consciousness by the familiar voice of Jim.

"Got in a tight fix, Bill. Ole Jim jus' in time."

I took the savage's hand without a word, and, sinking upon my knees, sent up a deep, heartfelt prayer to the Merciful Being who had thus snatched me from the most appalling death. There was a

bright moon shining, and, as I turned, I saw the dark Indian's eyes fixed wonderingly upon me.

"Jim," said I, solemnly, "may the God who has put it into your heart, reward you for this act. I *never, never* can."

"Jim didn't do it," he quickly interrupted. "*She* did!" and, disengaging his grasp, he darted out of sight. I turned and looked behind me. There, standing motionless as a statue, her slight form wrapped in a thick mantle, her sweet, white face appearing like a spirit's, stood the fair, mysterious captive.*

For a moment, I was disposed to believe it was a spirit before me, so still and motionless she remained. Suddenly she turned to depart.

"Hold!" exclaimed I, springing forward and seizing her arm; "hold one moment, till I thank thee."

"Thank the Great One above," she replied, in a low, sweet voice. "He it is who has preserved your life."

As she uttered these words, she turned her dark

* In the northwestern part of Oregon is a tribe of Indians called Chenooks, who bury their sick, as soon as the Medicine Man pronounces them beyond recovery. This horrid practice is not confined to them alone, for other tribes in the northwest have been known to inflict it upon their captives.

eyes upward, and the moonlight streaming down upon her face, threw a vail like the halo of glory around it. Then looking me calmly in the face, she added:

"You have escaped an awful death, it is true; and you are not the only one who has thus risen from the grave. When delirious, you spoke of home and of friends there, and I know your presence is prayed for. The chance of reaching them is now placed within your reach. A horse is saddled and bridled, and awaiting you, but a short distance away. Jim will furnish you with a rifle. You know the direction to take, and let me urge you to flee."

Again she turned to go, but I restrained her.

"You are a white person, and do you wish to live and die with these savages?"

The tears glistened on her face as she replied, "I have not a friend in the civilized world. My parents were murdered by the Indians, and myself and sister carried away in captivity. We were separated; I was taken eastward, and she westward beyond the Rocky Mountains. She cannot be living, for she was a delicate child, younger than me, and incapable of bearing one-half the suffering that must have been imposed upon her. Should I ever see the land I left when a child, I should

be a stranger among strangers. There are those here who love me, and I will remain behind and die among them."

"Flee with me," I impetuously urged. "You will not be a stranger. Hundreds will love you, and you can die with your own kindred. Jim, who is faithful to you, will furnish us both with a fleet horse, and we can elude all pursuit. I—"

I paused, for her agitation had become painful. She was sinking to the earth, when I caught her, and, leading her a short distance, seated myself beside her upon a fallen tree. Then I gently pulled her head over on my bosom, and looked down upon her features. Her gaudy head-dress was removed, and her white face lay among the mass of jetty hair like a jewel set in darkness. The dark, sweeping lashes, the faint roseate glow of each cheek, the delicate nose and lips, as the moonlight rested on them, were indescribably beautiful. There was, too, an utter abandonment about her,—a tumultuous throbbing, that showed what a powerful emotion was agitating her.

What was that emotion? Was it a response to my own great passion? What else could it be? Encouraged by the certainty that the latter was

the case, I urged my suit with redoubled ardor. I pictured the happiness that would be hers in a civilized country, and the utter misery that must follow her life among the savages. She informed me that she was a captive, not of the tribe near at hand, but of one further north, which had held her ever since the massacre of her parents; and that she had been told, in case she attempted to leave them, instant death would be the result. I saw she wished —she *longed* to flee, and the objections she offered were only suggested by her fears.

"Hist!" she whispered, "there is some one."

I turned on the defensive. In an instant Jim stood beside me.

"How soon goin'?" he asked, anxiously, turning toward me.

"Shortly; why do you ask?"

"Day clus comin', and if you cotched, no use!" he replied, meaningly.

"I was not aware, Jim, that I had enemies among you."

"You hain't; but—"

The rest of the sentence was gesticulated, first pointing to me and the fair one beside me.

"Do you not understand?" asked the latter.

"There are several in the tribe who look upon me with envious eyes, and were they conscious that you knew of my existence, you would not be spared a moment. This is what Jim means, and his words must be heeded."

"Must I travel afoot and alone?" I asked of the Indian.

"There's the hoss what tossed you over the buffler there," he answered, pointing to a clump of trees, "and I've brought you them other things," he added, handing me my knife, powder-horn, and rifle, "and I'll show you through the woods to the peararie."

"Thank you; but I shall not need you, as I know the way well enough."

"How soon you goin' to start?" he asked, turning to depart.

"In less than an hour I shall bid you farewell."

"Jim," interposed the fair captive, "bring my horse to the same spot. I think I shall also leave for home to-night. If inquiry is made, you can tell them this, and add that I shall probably be with them in a few days again. As I know the wilderness well, I will guide our friend here through it."

The savage looked cautiously at us both. If he

was shrewd enough to suspect the truth, he was polite enough not to show it. He replied that her wish should be gratified, and he disappeared as noiselessly as he came. It was now getting far in the night. The moon rode high in the heavens, and shed a full, perfect light down upon us.

"So you are going," said I, looking at her.

"I am going to attempt it," she answered, firmly.

"And through no action of mine shall you ever regret this step," I added, warmly.

"Oh! I hope he will soon return, for I *wish* to go," she said, as with a shiver of apprehension she looked hurriedly about in the dark shadows of the forest.

"As yet, we know not each other's names," said I, pleasantly.

"True," she answered, with a faint smile. "Mine is Imogene Merment."

"And mine is William Relmond; but where can Jim be?"

"Ah! there he is now," she answered, with a deep flush; and the next minute the savage stood beside us.

"The animals are there; and I'm thinking you'd better be off. Soon as you git away, I'll cover up

the hole, so thee won't think him has crawled out; but I'm much afeared there am some peeking about here."

"We will go at once," said Imogene, gathering up her dress.

I turned to give a last word to Jim, but he had vanished.

"Let us hurry," said she, "for I have a dread that we are watched, and will not get away after all. I pray God that nothing may prevent us, now that we are started."

She almost ran, and in a minute we reached the grove referred to. Here we found two horses saddled and bridled, and ready for a journey. Without losing a moment, we mounted and struck to the northward.

"Why this direction, Imogene?" I asked.

"To avoid pursuit," she answered. "At daylight we will change it, and proceed to the southeast."

The open prairie was some miles distant, and as long as we were in the deep shadows of the wood, the greatest danger was to be apprehended. It was more than probable that the extended absence of Jim and Imogene, at the same time, had

"Without losing a moment, we mounted and struck to the northward."

aroused the suspicions of more than one savage. As all must have known that I was buried while still living, and that she had battled their determination as long as there was hope, when the morning came and showed her abrupt departure, they could not help suspecting the true cause.

The air was cool and exhilarating, and, as my fiery animal pranced beside that of Imogene, I could not restrain the wild, ardent hopes that thrilled my being. I was homeward bound with the fairest prize of the universe to me. What else could be needed? Ah! there was the fate of Nat, my companion, still shrouded in obscurity. I determined to question her at once in regard to him.

"Imogene, although this is hardly the proper moment, I cannot help questioning you about the fate of a friend of mine."

"I know to whom you refer," she answered, quickly. "I have heard him speak of you, but he does not know of your existence. He is a captive like yourself, save that he seems perfectly contented with his fate."

"Thank heaven! it seems indeed that a wonderful Providence is watching over all of us."

"I believe he can effect his escape, but it must be through your instrumentality, for I will not dare to show myself under the circumstances."

"Good, clever Nat, I will do anything for him," I exclaimed, warmly. "He is a whole-souled fellow, for all he is so odd. Only to think, he has been so nigh me all this time! Of course, it is my place to assist him, as far as lies in my power."

"I have had several conversations with him, in all of which he spoke of you. He appeared to love you, and regretted greatly that you were so reckless. He said he had long striven to teach you how to hunt with caution, but never succeeded. He also referred to a trapper named Bill Biddon, the one who did his best to save our family when they fell victims to the savages, and who I would give all the world to see. He said he succeeded, after several years, in making quite a hunter of him."

"Oh! the rascal," I laughed, "just like him."

When day dawned we continued our journey for several hours. I learned in the course of our conversation that Imogene Merment wandered continually among the tribes for many miles around, and, as I learned in after years, her existence was known to points as far opposite as Fort Churchill and Fort Hall.*

* The Crow Indians are a numerous tribe, subdivided into the Blackfeet-Sioux, Dacotah, Ouk-pa-pas, Two Kettle, and Minnie, besides several others. Each has its separate village and chief, but all are on friendly relations with each other.

At noon I shot a ptarmigan, which was cooked and upon which we made a hearty dinner. Imogene ascended a small eminence to ascertain whether any signs of pursuit were visible. None were discovered, but we hurried forward until nightfall, when we drew up for the night. We started a fire, and at my urgent request, Imogene lay down beside it, while I kept watch. Our horses were picketed at scarcely a rod distant, and yet in the night they became so terrified at the approach of some animal, that they broke loose and fled, and we never saw them again.

This was a great loss to us, but in the morning we continued our journey on foot, and at noon ascended a high mountain, which was a spur of the Black Hills, lying between the Yellowstone and Missouri. The day was a clear, beautiful one, and the fairest peaks of the mountains, looming up against the blue, far-off horizon, formed a fine background to the glorious landscape spread out before us. Never shall I forget the magnificent scene which was opened to our vision. To the north, the mighty wilderness stretched in one unbroken tract as far as the eye could reach, while to the southward the glistening waters of the vast rivers could be seen, winding and losing their tortuous channels in the forest again. Numerous

patches of prairie were visible to the west, and small, dark specks moving over their face, showed us that animal life was not wanting in this favored country. South of us, nestling in a deep valley, could be seen the tiny beehive-like lodges of the tribe we had left, seemingly covering scarcely a square rod of ground.

"Yonder," said Imogene, pointing to the northward, "is the tribe which holds your friend. The village is two days' journey, but the course is direct, and you cannot fail to find it. If you wish to search for him, I will remain here until you return. I should wish to approach no nearer, as it would increase the danger to both of us. Your friend has hunted with the tribe in this mountain, and should you be at a loss to find me again, ask him to guide you to the 'Death Rock,' and you will reach me by the most direct course."

I hesitated long before leaving Imogene, but my duty to Nat, and the hopeful view she took of it, finally decided me. She was confident I should find him and be back in a few days, and urged me to delay no longer. We repaired to the "Death Rock," where we separated. Imogene was familiar with its peculiarities, and assured me that in its recesses she could find security from any animal

foe.* Before leaving her, I saw that she was provided with food sufficient to last a week at least, and as she was furnished with a rifle and ammunition, her situation was certainly as good as my own.

* Death Rock is composed principally of a vast cave, in which it is said a whole tribe of Indians once perished; choosing death by starvation rather than to fall into the hands of their enemies.

CHAPTER XI.

THE BRIGADE AND AN OLD FRIEND.

After bidding Imogene good-by, I started on a rapid pace to the northward. At night I kindled a fire by which I slept in safety, and at an early hour resumed my journey. The character of the country continued much the same—broad belts of prairie relieved by groves of trees and streams of considerable magnitude. Birds of all kinds whirred through the air and sang within the wood, and the dark forms of wild animals were more than once seen gamboling in the distance.

At noon I reached the banks of a river, so large that I was pretty certain it was the Yellowstone, and hence was able to judge pretty correctly of my locality. The river was very broad, and it was quite a serious undertaking to cross it; but, nevertheless, it had to be done, and I commenced making my preparations.

As I was stepping in, a sound of voices struck me. I paused and listened, and soon could hear

the loud, regular swelling song gradually approaching nearer and nearer, and at stated intervals the powerful chorus. There was something in the sound of this song, at such a time, that was indescribably stirring and inspiriting; and, as it came nigher and nigher, and grew louder, its power increased. Hardly satisfied of the nature of the approaching body, I withdrew a short distance, and waited its appearance. Soon a large canoe, nearly full of men, came to view around a bend some hundred yards distant, and it was instantly followed by another and another, all keeping time to the words of the song:

We are going with the tide,
Yoho! yoho!
Free as the mountain-winds we glide,
Yoho! yoho!
Oh! ours is a merry life,
Yoho! yoho!
And full of danger, toil, and strife,
Yoho! yoho!
Then join your voices
In the glad refrain,
And let the mountains
Echo back the strain.

As over a score of majestic voices joined in the deep swelling chorus, the echoes were awakened for miles around. I watched them in wonder and admiration. Soon, to my surprise, they made to-

ward the shore where I stood. As it was noon, they were probably putting in for their dinner. In a moment the boats were hauled up on the bank, and as rough and hardy a set of fellows as ever met, sprang upon the shore. A half dozen scattered along the bank, and in a moment returned bearing armfuls of sticks and fuel. A huge fire was soon blazing and roaring, an enormous quantity of meat steaming and spitting, and the men, excepting the cook, were lolling about on the grass, each one smoking and chatting, and making a scene of pleasant confusion and enjoyment.

I now stepped forth from my concealment. Several turned their faces toward me as I passed them, but no unusual amount of astonishment was manifested. I made my way to a group of three, and seated myself beside them.

"Whar'd you come from?" asked a short, gruff-looking man.

"No place in particular, at present," I replied, pleasantly.

"One of them Nor'west chaps, I s'pose?"

"No, sir; I am no trapper at all, but a mere adventurer in these parts."

"Pooty story to tell them as will believe it," he retorted, angrily.

"I am sure it is immaterial with me whether you

"A fight! a fight! make a ring for them."

believe it or not. If I were a member of the Northwest Fur Company, I should not be ashamed or afraid to own it, as I believe that is as respectable and honorable as the one in whose service you are."

"Boys! do you hear that?" called out a fellow beside me. "Yer's one of them sneaking chaps—a Nor'wester, and he's insulted us—"

"Beg your pardon, sir," I interrupted; "I did no such thing."

"Do you hear that, I say?" he called out, without regarding my words. "Here's a sneaking Nor'wester cracking up his party afore us."

I was so provoked that I made no reply or noticed him. His words attracted their attention, and, anxious to see the trouble, they gathered round.

"What's up?" demanded a stumpy fellow, pushing his head in between the others.

"A fight! a fight!"

"Make a ring for 'em."

"Blow me, if he don't look like one o' them Nor'westers as sent Governor Semple out the world.* Go in, Tom!"

* In an affray between two parties, belonging respectively to the Hudson Bay and Northwest Fur Companies, the leader of the former, Mr. Semple, was shot by a member of the latter. This happened some years before the date of our story, but for a long time there was ill-feeling and frequent encounters between the members of the companies.

"I'll maul him as soon as I get in fightin' order," said Tom—he of my first acquaintance.

Matters were now getting serious. A collision between the redoubtable Tom and myself seemed unavoidable. His impudent bravado and insults had roused me somewhat, and I made up my mind that I should withdraw nothing I had uttered, and bear none of his insolence.

"What's the row?" demanded another; "I don't understand it."

"Why, here's a sneakin' Nor'wester," answered Tom, "blowin' 'bout things, and I've made up my mind I won't stand it;" and he continued his war-like preparations.

"That's right, Tom, go in and win," added several voices.

"Gentlemen," said I, "all I ask is that you shall understand this matter and show fair play—"

"We'll do that, you!" interrupted several.

"In the first place," I continued, "I have said nothing against the company in whose service you are. This man, whom you call Tom, accused me of being a member of a rival company; I replied I was not, although I should not be ashamed if such were the case, as I considered the latter as respectable as yours. He avers, however, I have insulted you, and seems determined to avenge it, and I am

perfectly willing to gratify him. As I told him, I am not in the service of any company, but am a mere adventurer in these parts. With this explanation I am now ready for any proceeding he may wish."

"Smash me to nuthin', ram me down and shoot me, if thar ain't Jarsey, or I'm a sinner!" exclaimed a familiar voice, and the same instant Bill Biddon stepped into the ring before me. "Give us your paw, Jarsey."

He grasped my hand and gave a vigorous gripe, while his scarred countenance was dissolved in one great broad smile. It is needless to say I was delighted beyond measure at this unexpected meeting.

"Why, Bill, I little thought to meet you here."

"And yer's as what thinks Bill didn't think so himself."

During this passage of words between us, the others stood wondering and perplexed. The honest old trapper turned, and seeing Tom standing with his fists still clinched, shouted:

"Ef you say another word to that gentleman thar, as is worth forty like you, there'll be only a grease-spot left of you. Do you hear, eh?" and he shook his ponderous fist beneath his nose.

The fellow did hear, and with a muttering, "It's

cu'rous, I allow," donned his coat with the most perfect meekness

"Now," said Biddon facing the rest, "if thar are any 'bout yer as wants to take up this fout, why jist step forward and get lammed."

"Is he a Nor'wester?" asked one, breaking the perfect silence.

"What you want to know fur?"

"'Cause if he is, he can't pass this crowd without swallerin' them words."

"What words?" demanded Biddon, fiercely.

"What Tom said he said."

"Have I not explained—" I commenced.

"Now jist hold on, Jarsey," interrupted the trapper, turning toward me with a backward wave of his hand. "Now, hold on, you, fur ef you take back anything you've said, shoot me, ef *I* don't lick you. Ogh!" Then turning to the others he continued, "He ain't goin' to take back nothin' he's said yerabouts; and ef Tom Wilson thar don't swaller what *he* said, yer's as will make him do it."

"I mought've be mistaken," said the now thoroughly-frightened Tom.

"That won't do."

"Wal, he didn't say so," he jerked out.

"That'll answer. S'posen I say he is a Nor'-

wester, how 'bout that?" demanded Biddon, glaring about on the rest.

There was no response. All was still as death.

"Wal, boys," added Bill, returning to his good nature, "he *ain't* a trapper; never took a skin in his born days; is a parfect gentleman, and I'll make you 'quainted with Bill Relmond, from the States, or, as I call him, Jarsey, as fine a chap as ever tramped these parts."

The scene that followed was singular and amusing All crowded around me, smiling and talking and shaking hands; and the first hand I grasped was Tom Wilson's.

"Hope you won't mind what I said;" he spoke in a lower tone, "I orter been lammed for it, sure."

"Don't refer to it," I laughed; "I suppose you were only anxious for a little amusement to pass away time."

"That's it 'zactly, Jarsey, you're a trump."

"It's my private opine," called out Biddon, "that this coon is goin' inter these eatables, and ef you wants a bite, Jarsey, you'd better jine."

All now crowded around the meal-pot, and commenced devouring its contents with the avidity of wild animals. It consisted mainly of pemmican (dried buffalo flesh), a food much in vogue in the northwest, with several biscuits and some scalding

tea. The meal finished, the men instantly produced their pipes, which they indulged in for ten or fifteen minutes. The boats were then shoved into the water, the cooking-utensils placed on board, and preparations made for starting.

"Whar you bound to?" asked Biddon, just as they were ready.

"The Blackfeet-Sioux," I answered, unable to repress a smile.

"The Blackfeet-Sioux?" he repeated.

"Yes; do you know their grounds?"

"I's 'bout twenty miles down-stream—that is the village. We cac'late to camp thereabouts to-night. What, in the name of beavers, do you want with them?"

"I'll explain matters when we have a better opportunity," I answered.

"Jump in with me then, an' I'll git Tom Wilson to rest a while, and we'll talk over matters and things."

I sprang into the boat, and the brigade was soon under way. The Yellowstone, being broad and deep and the current quite powerful, the work was comparatively light The song was again taken up by the *voyageurs,* all joining in the chorus and keeping time with the measured dip of their paddles. I seated myself in the stern, beside the steersman,

who I found to be a clerk in the Hudson Bay Company, and a gentleman.

"How long will you remain with us, Mr. Relmond?" he asked.

"Only until night."

"I was in hopes you would accompany us to the settlement."

"I should be glad to do so, but circumstances forbid."

"It was quite fortunate," he smiled, "that you and Biddon were acquainted. He is a noble fellow."

"Most assuredly he is. I accompanied him, as a seeker of adventures, last summer from Independence, and we separated in the autumn, while in the wilderness. I was considerably surprised to find him in your service."

"He had a misunderstanding with his employers, I believe. He had a dispute with one of their agents, and gave him a severe pounding. He was reproved rather sharply for this and left the company in disgust. This was during the winter. Shortly after he visited Red River settlement, and volunteered his services, and they were gladly accepted, as his skill was known to many."

"He has been then but a short time with you."

"Only a few weeks—but long enough to let us

know the value of his services. This brigade is all owing to him."

"How so?"

"You are aware we are now in the United States territory. It is not often that we extend our work into it, except in Oregon, which has lately fallen into the hands of the Americans. Biddon had engaged a large quantity of furs of the Indians in the neighborhood, intending them for one of their fur companies, but after his dispute he offered them to us, and this brigade was dispatched for the purpose of collecting them. He will find there is quite a pile of money due him at York fort when he arrives there."

Further time was spent in conversation with the clerks when I noticed a person had taken Biddon's place at the oars. The trapper motioned me beside him, and seating ourselves in the opposite end of the boat he said:

"Now we'll have a talk, Jarsey, ogh!"

"The first thing to be knowed," said Biddon, "is how in the name of human natur you come in these parts. How war it, Jarsey?"

"You must remember, Biddon, I've been a prisoner for the last six months."

"Did you ever hear nothin' of Greeny?"

"Yes; a rumor reached me that he was living with a tribe of Indians to the east of us."

"Altogether onpossible," answered the trapper, with a shake of his head.

"Why is it impossible?"

"He's had his ha'r raised sure, and never seed the next day arter we seed the last on him."

"I am more hopeful than you are. Recollect *I* have been a captive and am now here without bodily harm."

"It's qua'r, I allow, how you come out, as you did. The reds down in them parts are ramparageous, and if it hadn't been for that Jim, you spoke about, and that gal, you'd a gone under sure. I's tuck once by them same chaps one time. Me an' Snapper Jack was sat on one dark night in an awful snow-storm by a hundred on 'em. They blazed right into us, and Jack rolled over with a pound of lead in him and never said a word. I's purty well riddled in my lower story, but I tuk through and got off with my ha'r, while Jack never knowed who tuk his. They cac'lated on toastin' you up brown, and would ef it want fur that gal, as I's sayin' while he's had it all."

"I cannot yet see, Biddon, why there is not a probability of Nat's being alive. The Indians in these parts are on friendly intercourse with the

traders, and it is in this region, if anywhere, that he will be found."

"I don't b'lieve he's about. They got him down thar, and he got it down thar, *sure*."

These words of the trapper dampened my expectations greatly. Much of the joy of my hope was that I expected to again grasp the hand of my old friend, and the thought that he had long been dead made me sad and gloomy. However, I was not ready to give up all hope, and determined that I should be satisfied of his fate before I returned to the States.

The brigade proceeded regularly and rapidly down the Yellowstone, until the sun sinking in the west, warned them that night was at hand. The steersman informed me they should not be able to reach the Indian village that night, but would early the next day. Just as the shadows were blending with the darkness on the river banks, the brigade ran into shore for the night's encampment. There was a dense forest on either side of us, which rendered our situation dark and gloomy; but this was soon dispelled by the jolly *voyageurs*. Fuel was collected, and a great roaring fire crackled and blazed cheerily around us; and the men passing to and fro, chatting and joking, the confusion of preparations for supper, made a scene well calculated to dispel all gloomy reveries. The three boats were hauled up on the

banks, turned over, and their contents scattered among the owners, and all gathered around the hearty evening meal. These hardy fellows after the laborious day's work, their appetites sharpened, and healthy truly,

"Ate like horses, when you hear them eat."

The meal finished, the indispensable pipes were in requisition. Three or four huge fires were kindled, around which the men lazily stretched themselves, to while away the hour that must elapse ere they "turned in" for the night. The brigade included men in it, who had trapped and hunted the shores of the Frozen Sea to the plains of the Kansas, and from Labrador to the mouth of the Columbia, beyond the Rocky Mountains. They had encountered every imaginable foe: the intense cold and the polar bear of the far North, and the innumerable hordes of savages of the more temperate regions; and now they recounted their thrilling reminiscences to each other, and speculated upon the fate still in store for them. The hour passed rapidly, and ere I was aware, the *voyageurs* were gathering their blankets around them for the night's rest.

"Come, bundle up, Jarsey," said Biddon, "for thar'll be no time to snooze in the daylight."

The men were stretched at every point around

the fire, their feet being toward it, their heads radiating outward, so that the three groups resembled the same number of immense wheels. As most of the places were occupied, I lay a little beyond the circle, within a foot or two of Biddon. The fires now smoldered, and the heavy darkness again settled over wood and river. Nothing disturbed the deep silence save the faint flow of the Yellowstone, or the dull noise of an ember as it broke apart, and now and then the distant wail of some wild animal. But a short time elapsed ere I joined the rest in the land of dreams.

The night passed away without any event worthy of note; and the first apprisal I had of the approach of day, was by hearing loud cries of "Léve! léve! léve!" * uttered by numerous voices.

Starting up, I saw the *voyageurs* were all astir, and making ready to embark. The boats were launched, and being too early for breakfast, the men sprang in and seized the oars.

"When we halt for breakfast," said the steersman, "it will be at the Indian village, which I understand is your destination."

With the same inspiring song of yesterday, the men bent to their oars, and the boats shot rapidly through the foaming water. In the course of an

* Arouse, or get up.

hour or more, the brigade put in for breakfast, and the same bustling scene that had taken place the night before was re-enacted.

The place chosen was a broad, open plot of grass, reaching down to the water's edge, and extending some hundred feet back, when the edge of the forest was reached. No signs of Indians were seen, and I was somewhat puzzled to know how it was known they were in the vicinity. The clerk mentioned before, explained to me that Biddon had described the halting spot, and the distance so accurately, that there could be no mistake, and the savages would soon make their appearance.

We had scarcely spoken, when a movement was heard in the forest, and several Indians made their appearance. They seemed to understand the meaning of the brigade; for, directly behind them came numbers of others bearing loads of peltries—the furs of beavers, foxes, badgers, lynxes, martens, otters, and wolverines. A barter at once commenced, and in less than half an hour the whole array was deposited in the boats, and the Indians were proudly parading in the gaudy trinkets and dresses which had just fallen to their lot.

"Where is their village?" I asked of Biddon.

"A mile or so back in the woods; you can't miss it."

"I can remain here without danger, can I not?"

"Yas, I guess so—hold on, I'll fix it for you."

With this he strode rapidly toward a man who appeared to be the chief, and commenced a conversation. He understood the Sioux tongue well enough to hold quite an intelligible conversation. The talk lasted but a moment, when he returned.

"You needn't be skeerish," said he; "I've made it all right. I told that old chap you wanted to take a look at the country hereabouts, to skeer up some furs fur us agin. He was a little s'pishus at fust, shoot me ef he warn't! and he axed ef you wanted to run off with that gal o' theirs, 'cause ef you war, you'd better leave yer ha'r behind you. There's been two or three round these parts after her, and he won't stand it no longer. You've got to be mighty shy, Jarsey, I kin tell yer; but I hope you'll git her fur all that, ogh!"

"I am grateful to you for this kindness, Biddon——"

"Never mind 'bout that; come to the pint ef you've got anything to say."

"I had nothing except to express my thanks, which you seem averse to receiving."

"It does go again my stummick, I allow, Jarsey;

when you come the squaw over me, I can't stand it. Yer's as likes to talk fair and squar, and leave the rest. Shoot me ef I doesn't! Wal I does, ogh!"

"I suppose the time has come for us to separate, then, Biddon?"

"Leastways it's close at hand. Think you'd better go up to Selkirk settlement with us; don't s'pose you will; think you're a fool, shoot me ef I don't, ogh!"

"It seems our separation is to be something like it was before," I laughed. "I believe you had a small opinion of my abilities at that time."

"Wal, yer's as hopes you'll come out right side up this time. In course I'll have a glimpse of that ugly face of your'n agin. In course."

"I don't know about that. As you have gone into the service of the Hudson Bay Company, your sphere of action will be far removed from mine, and it will be an occurrence which I cannot imagine at this time that will bring us together."

"That ain't so sartin," said the trapper, in a low, confidential tone. "I rather opine I'll be down in Westport or Independence this fall, and ef these fellows cac'lates on keepin' me around, they've got

to step round 'emselves. Shoot me if they hain't, ogh!"

"I hope you will not spend your life in the dreary region north of this, for it will indeed be a dreary, lonely life for you."

"Wal, you see, Jarsey," he continued, with a shade of feeling, "it don't make much difference whar I traps. Yer's as s'pects to go under somewhar in the mountains, and leave my topknot fur the buzzards and reds, and it mought as well be in one part as t'other of this country."

"Fudge, Biddon, don't talk that way. Why, I am sure I shall see you settled down in the States with a wife and a dozen children—"

I paused as I noticed the trapper's face. Some strange emotion was gaining the mastery over him; but he conquered in a minute.

"Never talk that way agin, Jarsey; I can't stand it."

"Pardon me; you will soon be under way," I spoke, wishing to pass from the allusion which had been so painful to him. He turned, and looking at the brigade, which was making preparations to start, answered:

"Yas; the boys are near ready, and they won't

wait. What yer goin' to do, Jarsey, when we leave you 'mong the reds?"

"I have told you, Biddon, that my sole purpose is to seek out Nat Todd. I have given you an account of my meeting and partial flight with Imogene, the captive, who has told me of his whereabouts. She is now waiting at Death Rock for me, and is as confident as I am that I shall bring Nat with me. These Indians, believing Imogene to be with the other tribe, will not suspect her flight unless a runner arrives here and acquaints them with it; but I have little fear of that, as I have no expectation of remaining any length of time."

"Wal, as that little gal has *seed* Nat, of course he's kickin'. Bless her soul! I'd like to see her sweet face, but I s'pose the brigade can't spare me just now. Jarsey, I've my s'picions that that other sperit is somewhere out toward Oregon, 'mong a tribe of redskins. I've had my s'picions I say, but I'll say nothin' more now 'cept to kind of hint I may take a tramp out in them parts some day to see ef thar be signs of her."

"I sincerely hope that such may be the case, although I cannot be as sanguine as you are. Should you rescue her, the debt of gratitude—"

"There! that'll do, ogh!" interrupted Biddon, imperatively. "Such things go agin my stummick,

and I don't want to hear 'em. As you're on the track of Nat, *go,* fur he may be somewhar yit, in spite of the fears I have that he isn't, arter all."

"Rest assured I shall leave no stone unturned. I shall seek him at once."

"And when you finds him, jest tell him old Bill Biddon is about, and ready to hunt savages with him any time, ef he don't git behind me when shootin' time comes. Ogh! ogh!" and the trapper enjoyed his joke merrily. He stopped suddenly and looked at the brigade. A few moments more and they would be under way.

"Wal, Jarsey, talkin' time's gittin' mighty short. I'd like to talk longer, but can't do it this time. Hope we'll have a time down in the States 'fore long."

"I sincerely trust we shall," I answered, unwilling to turn away from the hopeful picture which he was drawing for himself.

"And we'll have Nat 'long with us," he added.

"Of course, for I am sure he would not willingly miss an opportunity of seeing his old friend again. Of course, Biddon, we shall meet, if not in this world, I hope in the next."

"P'r'aps so, though I can't tell till we gits there. Don't know much 'bout them matters, ogh!"

At this moment the voice of the steersman was

heard, ordering the men to their places. Biddon turned, took a step, then halted and faced me.

"Good-by, Jarsey."

He extended his hand, but ere I could take it it was hastily withdrawn. He mumbled something, dashed his hand across his face, and strode rapidly toward the boat.

"Good-by, Biddon. God bless you!" I called after him.

The *voyageurs* seized their oars, and in a few moments they were in the stream, their same cheery song echoing as loudly and as joyously as before. I stood upon the bank, watching them as the current bore them onward. In a few moments they reached a bend in the river—Biddon made a signal to me, and the next minute they had all vanished.

As the brigade vanished down the river, and the song of the *voyageurs* grew fainter and fainter, until it died away in the distant windings of the Yellowstone, I awoke from the mournful reverie into which I had fallen, and turned to the work before me. There was a dozen Indians around, all busy with their new possessions. Some were parading pompously in their new blankets, some examining their glitterng knives, and others wrenching off great mouthfuls from huge twists of tobacco, and all evidently in the highest spirits. The chief had

been presented with a fine, polished rifle, and he was standing apart, trying its lock, and "drawing bead" on different objects in the distance.

I waited till he appeared satisfied, and then approached and made a complimentary remark; I saw at once it was not comprehended, and there was not probably a savage who could speak a word of English in the tribe. However, as they spoke the same tongue as the tribe in which I spent my captivity, my situation in this respect was not as bad as it might have been.

In the course of half an hour, the chief started toward his village, the others sauntering along behind him, and myself at his side. His rifle was now thrown over his shoulder, and he seemed to have lost all interest in it as he walked thoughtfully forward, his dark eyes bent upon the ground. A few minutes' walk through the forest brought us to the Indian village. It was so similar to the one before described, that it needs no mention here.

The Blackfeet-Sioux are one of the many divisions of the Dacotah or Sioux tribe, whose hunting-grounds include the greater part of the vast territory of Nebraska. These subdivisions of this numerous people are tribes within themselves. Although speaking the same tongue, they are separate and literally independent of each other. Each has its

village and chief, whose authority is absolute. Like all North American Indians, their life is a migratory one; and the traveler who to-day finds them located on the Yellowstone or Little Missouri, may, a year after, find them as far westward as the Great Falls of the Missouri.

My advent among these savages excited no unusual attention, as they are often visited by traders and hunters. The chief took me to his own lodge, where all the attention I could wish was given. I was gladly surprised to find upon the next day, that there was a half-breed among them who could speak the English tongue. His acquaintance I soon made. He was a middle-aged man, who had spent most of his life in trapping, sometimes as far northward as the Saskatchewan, and who often acted as interpreter for his tribe. He possessed the daring hardihood of the French trapper, and the low, ferocious cunning of the savage. He had ever considered this tribe as his people, having a squaw and several children.

From this half-breed I learned that the flight of Imogene was not yet discovered, and that the tribe which held Nat was about a dozen miles to the eastward I informed the chief, through the interpreter, that I should make several days' ramble through the woods, in order to get a better idea of

the face of the country and of its resources. He seemed to believe I really was an agent of one of the fur companies, and offered me an escort. I declined, however, and the next morning started on foot in the direction of the tribe alluded to.

CHAPTER XII.

FOUND AT LAST.

I TOOK a direction nearly due east toward the Black Hills. Near the middle of the day I reached the shore of a lake. It was a small, beautiful sheet of water, its glistening surface unruffled by a single ripple, and I stood a long time gazing upon its placid bosom. The blue outline of the opposite shore was faintly visible in the distance, and here and there the green face of a tiny island protruded from its surface adding greatly to the picturesqueness of the scene.

As I stood looking dreamily out upon this lake, my eyes rested upon a small speck, just discernible far toward the other side. It was too small and dark to be an island, and, furthermore, I fancied it was moving. A moment more satisfied me that it was a canoe crossing the lake nearly to the point upon which I was standing. So small and black was it, that for a long time I was tempted to believe it was nothing but a bird floating upon the surface; but the flashing of the oars in the sunshine

showed its true nature, and I waited anxiously its approach.

On it came, slowly and steadily, its form gradually increasing as it approached, until I could discover the outlines of a single man propelling it over the water. A sudden hope that it might be Nat himself came over me, but as it came nigher, the dazzling plumes of a savage convinced me of my mistake. It struck me as a little singular that the Indian, solitary and alone, should approach so unhesitatingly a stranger, and I was upon the point of concealing myself; but, knowing that I must have been seen, and that such a proceeding would only awaken suspicion upon his part, I remained boldly in view.

A few minutes later and the canoe grated upon the sand a few yards from me; and, daubed in all the glittering paraphernalia of savage war-paint and plumes, no less a personage than Nat stepped ashore and approached me!

I was upon the point of calling out to him, when I saw he did not recognize me. Since we had last been together my beard had grown considerably, and my dress was also changed to that of a semi-barbarous one. I drew my hat down to my eyes, and spoke in a changed voice.

"A pleasant day this, my friend."

"No less personage than Nat stepped ashore."

"Yes, it is," replied the same natural, cracked voice.

"A fine country this, too,"

"Yes, that's so; didn't expect to see you."

"And why not, my friend?"

"'Cause 'tain't often you see a white man in these parts; you're the first one I've seen."

"And how is it you are here yourself?"

"Wal, stranger, there's a long story fastened to that question—a longer one than I care about spinning at present."

"You are not a prisoner, I hope."

"It was some time last fall I got tuk, and I've been with them, of course, ever since."

"And why have you remained with them so long? It strikes me that if I had the fine opportunity you have, I should not be long waiting to bid them farewell."

"You see, when I landed down here, it was winter, and if you're any hunter, as I calculate you are, from your dress, you must know that a fellow from the States would make poor work tramping a thousand miles at such a time. So I concluded to wait till spring, and have been thinking about going for the last month or two, but, somehow or other I haven't got started; I suppose 'cause I haven't had a good start."

"What were you doing on the lake?"

"I came down this morning to fish, and seeing you on t'other side, took you to be an Injin fishin' and so I paddled across."

"You are allowed considerable liberty, it seems, after all."

"Well, I have considerable, though it hain't done me much good so fur."

"You wish to return to the States, I presume."

"I guess I do; I am about as homesick a dog as you ever laid eyes on, and there's a gal home that I want to see amazingly."

At this remark I was compelled to cough several times, to prevent bursting into a loud, boisterous laugh. I felt like dropping upon the grass and rolling over and over, and yelling like an Indian. But I restrained myself, and determined to carry the deception further.

"She most likely has given you up as dead by this time."

"I'm a little afraid she has, and that's the reason I want to go down and tell her her mistake. But I don't know as it would be any use, by gracious!" he added, in a desponding tone.

"And why not, pray?"

"Oh, there's a chap named Bill Hawkins, who thinks he's mighty smart, all the time flourishing

round there. I'd just like to lay hands on him once," and Nat clinched his hands and shook his head menacingly. Then resuming his natural manner, he added, quickly, and with a sort of desperation, "I don't care though. If Sal wants him, she can have him."

"That's it. Take things philosophically is my motto, when you are compelled to."

In making this last remark, I unwittingly dropped my voice to its natural key. Nat started and raised those large, blue innocent eyes of his, and stared wonderingly at me.

"Did my remark surprise you?" I asked, working harder than I ever did to restrain my gravity.

"It weren't what you said, but your voice sounded amazingly like a person I used to know, and I thought maybe you might be him."

"Perhaps I am."

"No; you don't look like him. He was about your size, but didn't dress like you, nor didn't have such whiskers."

"What was his name?"

"William Relmond, from New Jersey."

"William Relmond, from New Jersey," I repeated, as though trying to recall some half-forgotten remembrance.

"He used to be called 'Jarsey' by Bill Biddon," added Nat, quickly, as if to aid my recollection.

"And do you know Bill Biddon, a trapper?" I demanded, eagerly.

"I am of the opinion that I do, being as I have hunted with him a long time."

"Ah! indeed. He is an old friend of mine. I saw him some time since, and he was then in the service of the Hudson Bay Company."

"Didn't he say anything about 'Jarsey?'"

"I've hit it now! There's where I heard the name. Yes; he said a great deal about him, and he also mentioned a person called Nathan Todd, I think."

"I am the man, sir," responded Nat, with considerable dignity.

"You are! I recall now that he mentioned the fact of your captivity, although he was more inclined to say you were dead and gone long since."

"Bill is a pretty 'cute chap, but he's mistaken there."

"Yes; he seemed to cherish a warm friendship for you."

"You see the way of it was this: Me and Bill Relmond started from Independence last summer for California. The company we was with ran away from us, taking my knife and mare with them.

So we started fur Californy on our own hook. We came across this Bill Biddon and changed our minds, or, rather, Relmond did, and concluded to go on a hunt up in these parts. Well, we did, and this is the end of that hunt. We fixed on a place down on the Yellowstone, and would have spent a good time if it hadn't been for that Relmond. He was a good fellow, but betwixt you and me (you needn't say nothing about it, you know), he was rather soft, and I had to keep a clus watch over him to prevent his getting into danger. There used to come some Injins down the stream in a canoe, and they set his head crazy. It wasn't the Injins, though, but a white gal they had. She was pretty, I allow, but he ought to have knowed better than to chase her as he did; he might have knowed what would have come of it. We used to go down and watch this canoe. One day I went a little lower down the stream than he did, and hid in some bushes beside the water to take a good look at the gal and the Injins. Pretty soon they came, and as they got along by me, by gracious if they didn't start right into the bushes after me! I was so fast in the roots and limbs that I hadn't time to git out before they got right on to me. I then up and blazed away to keep them off, but I forgot to take aim, and didn't hit them, and the first thing I knowed

I didn't know anything. One of them smashed his tomahawk square at me, grabbed me by the neck, whopped me into the canoe, paddled to the other side, and made me walk all the way here. I haven't seen Relmond or Biddon since, and I should like to know what has become of them."

"Biddon is safe, of course; and Relmond was a captive, I believe, awhile, but he managed to make his escape some time since."

"How do you know that much, I should like to know?"

"Simply for the reason that I am William Relmond."

Nathan Todd started as if struck by a thunderbolt. His eyes and mouth opened, his rifle fell unheeded to his feet, and he stared all agape at me. His face was such an embodiment of wonder, doubt, then certainty and pleasure, that I gave way completely to my feelings, and, seating myself upon the ground rolled over and laughed one of those laughs which rack our whole being, and make us as weak as an infant. When I again resumed my feet, my old friend approached and extended his hand.

"What you laughing at? I knowed it was you all the time."

It is hardly worth time to dwell upon the words which passed between Nat and myself after my

identity became known to him. Of course he was half frantic with joy in turn, and overwhelmed me with questions and explanations, and in the course of half an hour we both came to a full understanding.

I had acquainted Nat with my separation from Imogene, and that she was waiting for me at "Death Rock." He knew the place well and without losing time we hastened forward. He had become acquainted with Imogene, and had often conversed with her about her lost sister, and of me, little dreaming that she had ever seen me.

Nat proved his knowledge of the country, for his course toward the Death Rock was direct, and, ere we had traveled many miles it loomed up to view. It seemed a long while to reach it, but before dark we were both conversing with Imogene.

The night was spent within the cave, Nat and I conversing around the fire, while Imogene, wrapped in our blankets, slumbered unconsciously beside it. Nat succeeded in catching several fine trout from a small mountain-stream, and when we resumed our journey, I hardly think three more hopeful people could have been found in the universe.

Our progress was less rapid than usual, as we feared for Imogene, although her life had been such as to make her the very embodiment of health and

activity. At night we reached a bend of the Yellowstone, and camped upon its banks. A fire was again kindled, and while Nat kept watch, I concluded to take a little rest. He allowed me to sleep heavily until morning, when I was aroused by one of the most terrific, unearthly shrieks that ever greeted mortal ear.

"God of heaven! what does that mean?" I exclaimed, springing to my feet

"Sounds like the 'Snorter,' the engine that I heard on the Boston road," answered Nat, rubbing his eyes, and listening.

"Hush!" I admonished, as again that hideous scream burst upon us.

"Wonder if the Pacific Railroad's built yet?" remarked Nat, with the utmost *nonchalance;* "or, maybe, some of their engines have run away from them."

As I stood wondering and waiting, the gray light of morning commenced appearing through the forest, and shortly the day dawned. A moment after, as I was about to awaken Imogene, the awful scream was repeated, seemingly directly across the river. It was different from a human voice, but sounded like the cry of a wild animal in extremity of the direst agony.

As if our terror was still too faint, we now heard

the loud ring of a *bell,* apparently from the very forest.

"What is that?" asked Imogene, pale with horror.

"Heaven knows!" I answered.

"Sounds like the old bell up in Lubec," remarked Nat; who, singularly enough, was the least agitated.

"Listen!" whispered Imogene, raising her hand.

Now was heard a dead sound like the distant heave of the stormy sea, growing stronger and nearer each second, and at intervals that wild, unearthly shriek reverberated through the forest arches with a horrid power.

Matters were now assuming such an inexplicable form I began to fear I was losing my senses. I looked around upon the faces of others; but no—it was all a terrible reality.

"Look!" spoke Imogene, in a husky whisper, pointing down the river.

I did look and what was seen? There, just rounding the curve of the Yellowstone below us, burst the broad flaming hull of a steamboat.

For a moment I could scarce believe my senses. Nat was the first to recover himself.

"I knowed what it was all the time, by gracious! Hilloa, you!"

The latter exclamation was addressed in vocif-

erous tones to the steamboat; and, fearing lest he might still escape notice, he sprang into the water and waved his plumes excitedly over his head, yelling at the top of his voice all the time. We had been seen, however, and heeded by those on the boat. A small bell tinkled, and instantly the huge wheel of the steamer reversed, plowing the water into foamy waves, and quickly bringing it to a stand still. The captain then stepped from his wheel-house and hailed us:

"What's wanted?"

"Supper and lodging," answered Nat.

"Who are you?"

"White men of course."

"White men; I see only one, and you're an Injin, sure as I'm Captain Garbold."

I now stepped forward from the shelter of the forest, to which I had instinctively retreated with the trembling Imogene, upon the appearance of the boat.

"Ah! who are those?" called the captain, instantly.

"We are whites, as you can readily see, and only ask to be taken to our friends."

The captain immediately turned and spoke to several beside him. A few minutes afterward a small boat put out from the steamer, and Imogene,

"Hilloa, you!"

followed by myself, stepped into the boat, but Nat lingered.

"Come, hurry, Nat, don't keep them waiting," said I.

"*I'm going to remain!*" he remarked, quietly.

"What do you mean?" I asked, in astonishment.

He approached, and whispered in my ear:

"*I'm going to hunt up Irene Merment!*"

"Why——

"Don't say anything," he interrupted, with a smile. "I will do it. There is no use of trying to persuade me to go with you. My mind is made up, and has been made up a long time."

Imogene joined her entreaties with mine, but he could not be made to change his resolution. Not wishing to detain our friends, I extended my hand.

"If you are determined to remain, I must now bid you good-by, Nat. Your determination is so new to me that I can hardly realize it. It is a hopeless search upon which you are going, I fear. May the One who has so mercifully watched over all of us, still protect you. If you ever see Biddon, don't forget me to him. Good-by."

"Nor me either," said Imogene, taking his hand. "I long to see him, to pour out my heart's gratitude to him. I hope we shall see you again."

"Oh! you will, sure. I shall be down in the States one of these days, and like enough bring a wife with me, and several little Nat Todds, as good-looking as your heirs will be. You mustn't think this is a last farewell, for I know it isn't."

We exchanged farewells once more, and then were rowed out to the steamboat. As we were received on board, Nat swung his plume over his head, and shouted:

"Long life to you! the fust news you will receive from Nat Todd will be a telegraphic dispatch from the Rocky Mountains, 'that he is making a sensation in that neighborhood.'"

Another and a last farewell, and the eccentric being had vanished in the forest.

Imogene had no suspicion of the true cause of Nat Todd's erratic course, and I judged it best to let her remain in ignorance until Nat should inform her himself. Whether that time was ever to come or not, no one could tell; but I had strong hope that it would.

As may be supposed, our advent created an infinite amount of questioning and wonderment for our new-found friends. The boat was the steamer "Shooting Star," which had been sent to trace the Yellowstone, as far as it was navigable, by a company in St. Louis. They proposed opening trade

in this section, and knowing well the prodigious resources of the country watered by its tributaries, had sent a skillful captain and crew to ascertain its character and availability. This river had, however, been ascended before.

The "Shooting Star" ascended the Yellowstone several hundred miles further, until brought to a stand still by the rapids in its upper part. Several days were spent in running up Clark's Fork, the Big Horn, Tongue, Powder, and numerous other streams, many of which, as yet, have received no names though of considerable size. All along the banks of these gathered crowds of wondering Indians, who surveyed us with mingled terror and amazement. On two occasions, when halting to wood, the crew were attacked by them, and one of their number was slain. At other points they manifested a friendly disposition and bartered extensively with us.

Finally the bow of the boat was turned home, and on a glorious morning, in the latter part of June, 1850, we glided into the turbid waters of the mad Missouri, and a few days later "Shooting Star" sunk to rest at the wharves in St. Louis. Accompanied by Imogene, I made my way home as rapidly as possible. As may be supposed, my return was a never-to-be forgotten day to my

friends. The caravan which I had joined at Independence, had been attacked, a few days subsequent to my separation from it, by an overwhelming body of Apache Indians. Rumors reached the States that all had fallen in the massacre, and my reappearance was like the dead returning to life. The reader, I trust, can imagine the few remaining incidents. After inducing Imogene to return to the States, I do not think I should have ever forgiven myself had I not offered her all the protection within my power. She was like an exotic at first, taken from a distant clime; but love works wonders. To-day there are few accomplishments of her sex which she does not possess. True there was no great romances or mystery yet to be developed in her history. She had been orphaned when a young child, in the terrible manner described by the trapper at the commencement of this tale. I had gained no princess or wealthy heroine, but simply a *wife,* in the truest sense of the word.

The history of Nat Todd's adventures and journey to the Rocky Mountains, together with a further account of Bill Biddon, the Trapper, and of Irene Merment, the lost sister, will be given the reader in another volume.

THE END.