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Title: The Trapper's Son

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Release date: May 16, 2007 [eBook #21491]

Language: English

Credits: Produced by Nick Hodson of London, England

*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK THE TRAPPER'S SON ***

W.H.G. Kingston

"The Trapper's Son"

Chapter One.

The trapper's camp—Beavers caught—The horses killed by wolves—Traps to catch the wolves.

In the far western wilds of North America, over which the untutored red-skinned savage roams at liberty, engaged throughout life in war or the chase, by the side of a broad stream which made its way towards a distant lake, an old man and a boy reclined at length beneath a wigwam, roughly formed of sheets of birch-bark placed against several poles stuck in the ground in a circular form, and fastened together at the top. The sun was just rising above a wood, composed of maple, birch, poplar, and willow, fringing the opposite bank of the river; while rocky hills of no great elevation formed the sides of the valley, through which the stream made its way. Snow rested on the surrounding heights, and the ground was crisp with frost. The foliage which still clung to the deciduous trees exhibited the most gorgeous colours, the brightest red, pink, yellow, and purple tints contrasting with the sombre hues of the pines covering the lower slopes of the hills.

"It's time to look to the traps, Laurence," said the old man, arousing his young companion, who was still asleep by the side of the smouldering embers of their fire.

The boy sat up, and passed his hand across his eyes. There was a weary expression in his intelligent and not unpleasing countenance.

"Yes, father, I am ready," he answered. "But I did not think the night was over; it seems but just now I lay down to sleep."

"You have had some hard work lately, and are tired; but the season will soon be over, and we will bend our steps to Fort Elton, where you can remain till the winter cold has passed away. If I myself were to spend but a few days shut up within the narrow limits of such a place, I should soon tire of idleness, and wish to be off again among the forests and streams, where I have passed so many years."

"Oh, do not leave me among strangers, father," exclaimed the boy, starting to his feet. "I am rested now, and am ready."

They set out, proceeding along the side of the stream, stopping every now and then to search beneath the overhanging bushes, or in the hollows of the bank, where their traps had been concealed. From the first the old trapper drew forth an animal about three feet in length, of a deep chestnut colour, with fine smooth glossy hair, and a broad flat tail nearly a foot long, covered with scales. Its hind feet were webbed, its small fore-paws armed with claws, and it had large, hard, sharp teeth in its somewhat blunted head. Hanging up the beaver, for such it was, to a tree, they continued the examination of their snares.

"Who would have thought creatures so easily caught could make such a work as this?" observed the old man, as they were passing over a narrow causeway which formed a dam across a smaller stream falling into the main river, and had created a back water or shallow lake of some size. The dam was composed of innumerable small branches and trunks of trees, laid horizontally across the stream, mixed with mud and stones. Several willows and small poplars were sprouting up out of it.

"What! have the beavers made this?" asked Laurence.

"Ay, every bit of it, boy; each stem and branch has been cut down by the creatures, with their paws and teeth. No human builders could have formed the work more skilfully. And observe how they thus have made a pond, ever full of water, above the level of the doorways to their houses, when the main stream is lowered by the heats of summer. See, too, how cleverly they build their houses, with dome roofs so hard and strong that even the cunning wolverine

cannot manage to break through them, while they place the doorway so deep down that the ice in winter can never block it up inside. How warm and cozy, too, they are without the aid of fires or blankets.”

“How comes it, then, that they have not the sense to keep out of our traps, father?” inquired Laurence.

“If you had ever been to the big cities, away to the east, you would not ask that question, boy,” answered the old trapper. “You would there have seen thousands of men who seem wonderfully clever, and yet who get caught over and over again by cunning rogues who know their weak points; just as we bait our traps with bark-stone, (see Note) for which the foolish beaver has such a fancy, so the knaves bait their snares with promises of boundless wealth, to be gained without labour or trouble. To my mind, nothing is to be gained without working for it, and pretty hard work too, if the thing is worth having.”

This conversation passed between the old man and his son as they proceeded along the bank of the pond where some of their traps had been set. Some had failed to catch their prey, but after the search was ended, they returned to their camp with a dozen skins as the result of their labour. One of the animals which had been skinned having been preserved for their morning meal, it was soon roasting, supported on two forked sticks, before the freshly made-up fire. This, with some maize flour, and a draught of water from the stream, formed their repast.

“Now, Laurence, go and bring in the horses, while I prepare the skins and do up our bales, and we will away towards the fort,” said the old man.

Laurence set off in search of their horses, which had been left feeding during the night in a meadow at some distance from the camp. The well-trained steeds, long accustomed to carry them and their traps and furs, were not likely to have strayed away from the ground. Laurence went on, expecting every moment to find them, but after proceeding some way, they were nowhere visible. Near at hand was a rocky height which overlooked the meadow. He climbed to the top; still he could not see the horses. Becoming somewhat anxious at their disappearance, he made his way across the meadow, hoping to find that they had discovered a richer pasturage farther on. As he looked round, he saw, to his dismay, two horses lying motionless on the ground. He hurried towards them. They were dead, and fearfully torn and mangled.

“The wolves have done this, the savage brutes. We will be revenged on them,” he exclaimed as he surveyed the dead steeds. “Father and I must have slept very soundly during the night not to have been awake by their howling. It will be a sore grief to the old man, and I would that he had found it out himself, rather than I should have to tell him. However, it must be done.” Saying this, he set off on his return to the camp.

“The brutes shall pay dearly for it,” exclaimed the old trapper, when Laurence brought him the intelligence of what had happened. “Whether Injuns or wolves wrong him, Michael Moggs is not the man to let them go unpunished;” and his eyes lighted up with a fierce expression which made the young boy instinctively shrink back from him. “We have three strong traps which will catch the biggest wolf on the prairies; and if they fail, I’ll lie in wait till I can shoot the savage brutes down with my rifle. We shall have to tramp it on foot, boy, with the furs on our backs. That’s bad for you, but we can leave the traps hidden away *en cache*; and as the snow will soon cover the ground, the cunning Injuns are not likely to find them. It’s not the first adventure of the sort I have met with; and though I am sorry for your sake, and for the loss of our poor horses, I am not going to be cast down.”

Some time was spent in scraping the skins, and in repacking the most valuable of those already obtained in a compass which would enable the old man and his son to carry them. Not wishing to leave such valuable property in the hut, which might be visited during their absence by some wandering Indian, they then strapped the bales on to their backs, the old man carrying his rifle and the steel traps, and set out towards the meadow where their horses had been killed.

Having planted the traps round the carcasses of the slaughtered animals, and concealed them carefully, so that they could not be seen by the savage wolves, they returned to their hut.

“The brutes will pay another visit to the poor horses, unless they fall in with other prey in the meantime, and that they are not likely to find about here,” observed Moggs, as he sat down and struck a light to rekindle the fire. Laurence had collected a supply of dried branches, of which there was an abundance in the surrounding woods.

“We must keep the fire burning during the night, or the savage creatures may chance to pay us a visit; and if they find us napping, they may treat us as they have our horses,” continued the old man. “To-morrow morning, we shall have our revenge, and I shall be vexed indeed if we do not find two or three of the brutes in the traps.”

The day was spent, as many before had been passed when they were not travelling or setting their snares, in scraping furs, greasing their traps, and cleaning the old man’s highly-prized rifle.

Their conversation related wholly to the occupation in which they were engaged; of other matters young Laurence knew nothing. He was a true child of the desert. His early days had been spent in the wigwam of an Indian squaw, who had taught him the legends and faith of her people. Beyond that period his recollections were very faint. He had remained with her until Michael Moggs, who called himself his father, came for him and took him away. He had almost forgotten his native tongue; but from that time, by constantly associating with the old trapper, he soon again learned to speak it. Of the Christian faith he knew nothing, for Moggs and himself were utterly ignorant of its truths; while they had imbibed many of the superstitions of the savage Indians, the only human beings with whom they had for long years associated. Laurence believed firmly in the Great Spirit who governs the destinies of the Red men of the desert—in the happy hunting-grounds, the future abode of brave warriors who die fighting on the battle-field—in the existence of demons, who wander through the forests in search of victims—and in the occult powers of wizards and medicine men. He had been taught that the only objects in life worthy of the occupation of men were war and the chase—that he should look with contempt on those who, he had heard, spent their time in the peaceful business of agriculture and commerce; that revenge and hatred of foes were the noblest sentiments to be cultivated in the

human breast; and that no act was more worthy than to kill a foe, or a feeling more delightful than to witness his suffering under torture. Yet the heart of young Laurence was not hardened, nor altogether debased. Occasionally yearnings for a different life to that he led rose in his bosom. Whence they came he could not tell. Still he could not help thinking that there might be a brighter and better state of existence in those far-off lands away beyond where he saw the glorious sun rise each morning, to run its course through the sky, and to sink again behind the snow-capped range of the Rocky Mountains, to the base of which he and his father had occasionally wandered. Whenever he had ventured even to hint the tenor of his thoughts to the old trapper, the scornful rebuke he had received kept him for many a day afterwards silent.

As evening approached, the old man made a wide circuit round the camp to ascertain that no lurking foes lay hid in the neighbourhood. Having satisfied himself on that score, a large supply of fuel was piled up on the fire, when, after a frugal supper, he and the boy lay down to rest. Although Laurence slept soundly, Michael awoke constantly to put more wood on the fire, and not unfrequently to take a survey around the wigwam, knowing well that their lives might depend on his vigilance.

No sooner did the first faint streaks of dawn appear in the sky than he aroused the boy. A hurried meal was eaten, and then they strapped on their packs and several bundles of furs, which, with their traps, Moggs intended to conceal till he could return for them. The remaining articles, and a few of the least valuable of their furs, were then thrown on the fire, and the wigwam being pulled down on the top of it, the whole mass of combustible material soon burst up into a flame, leaving in a short time no other trace of their abode on the spot than a pile of blackened cinders.

They then made their way by a wide circuit into a neighbouring wood, beyond which a rocky hill afforded, in the old trapper's opinion, a secure place for concealing their goods. The old man stepped cautiously along, avoiding even brushing against any of the branches on either side, Laurence following in his footsteps.

A small cave or hollow, which he had before observed, was soon found. In this the articles were deposited, and the mouth was closed up with stones brought from the hill-side, they again being concealed by a pile of broken branches and leaves, which, to the eye of a passer-by, might appear to have been blown there by the wind.

"It is the best place we can find," exclaimed Moggs. "But if a strange Injun was to come this way before the snow covers the ground, our traps would soon be carried off. Most of the Crees, however, know that they are mine, and would think it wiser to leave them alone. We will hope for the best; and now, Laurence, let us go and see what the wolves have been about." Saying this, he and the boy commenced their retreat from the wood in the same cautious way by which they had approached it.

Note. The bark-stone of which the old trapper spoke is the Castoreum, a substance secreted in two glandular sacs near the root of the beaver's tail, which gives out an extremely powerful odour, and so strangely attracts beavers that the animals, when they scent it at a distance, will sniff about and squeal with eagerness as they make their way towards it. The trapper, therefore, carries a supply in a bottle, and when he arrives at a spot frequented by the animals, he sets his traps, baiting them with some of the substance. This is done with a small twig of wood, the end of which he chews, and, dipping it in the Castoreum, places it just above water, close to the trap, which is beneath the surface, and in such a position that the beaver must pass over it to get at the bait.

Chapter Two.

Pursuit and capture of a white wolf—Laurence's dream—Journey to the fort over the snow—Friendly reception at the fort—Laurence falls sick.

The old trapper and his son crept cautiously among the rocks and shrubs towards the spot where the traps had been set around their slaughtered steeds. Moggs cocked his rifle as his keen eye fell on a large white wolf, which, caught by the leg in one of the traps, was making desperate efforts to free itself, and appeared every instant on the point of succeeding. As they drew near, the ferocious animal, with its mouth wide open, its teeth broken in its attempts to gnaw the iron trap, and its head covered with blood, sprang forward to reach them, but the trap held it fast.

"Keep behind me, Laurence," said Michael. "If the creature gets loose, it will need a steady aim to bring it to the ground." Not for a moment did the wolf turn round to fly, but again and again it sprang forward as far as the chain would allow it.

Although old Michael knew nothing of the humanity which would avoid allowing any of God's creatures to suffer unnecessary pain, he was preparing to put an end to its agonies, when the creature, by a frantic effort, freeing itself, sprang towards him. Laurence uttered a cry of terror; for he expected the next moment to see its savage jaws fixed in his father's throat; but the old man, standing calm and unmoved, fired, and the animal fell dead at his feet.

"Did ye think, Laurence, that I could not manage a single wolf," he said, half turning round with a reproachful look towards the boy, who had not yet recovered from his alarm. "This is a prize worth having, though. It has not often been my luck to kill a white wolf, and we may barter this skin with the Crees for six of the best mustangs they have got. While I skin the varmint, see what the other traps have been about." Laurence went forward to examine them.

"Here is a foot in one of them," he exclaimed. "The creature must have gnawed it off, and got away. The other trap has been pulled up. I can see the tracks it has left, as the animal dragged it away."

"We will be after it, then," cried Moggs. "If it is another white wolf we shall be well repaid indeed for the loss of our steeds, though we have to carry our packs till we can reach the fort. Come, Laurence, help me to finish off this work."

The skin was added to the already heavy load which old Moggs carried, and the traps hid in a spot which, with his experienced eye, he could without difficulty find.

"Now Laurence," he exclaimed, "we will be after the runaway."

The keen sight of the old man easily distinguished the marks left on the ground by the heavy trap as the animal trailed it behind him. The creature, after going some way along the valley, had taken to the higher ground, where its traces were still more easily distinguished upon the crust of the snow which lay there. The white wolf had got some distance ahead, when at length, to the delight of old Moggs, he discovered it with the trap at its heels. It seemed to know that its pursuers were close behind. Off it scampered at a rapid trot, now over the rugged and broken surface of rocks, now descending into ravines, now going north, now south, making numerous zigzag courses in its efforts to escape and deceive the hunters. Still old Moggs pursued, regardless of fatigue, though Laurence had great difficulty in keeping up with him, and often felt as if he must drop. His father encouraged him to continue the chase, promising soon to overtake the creature. At length, however, Laurence could go no further, and sank down on a hill, over which they had just climbed, and were about to descend to a valley below them.

"Rest there till I come back, then, boy," exclaimed the hardy old trapper, a slight tone of contempt mixed with his expression of pity. "The wolf I must have, even though he leads me a score of miles further. Here, take the tinder-box and axe, and make a fire; by the time I come back we shall need some food, after our chase."

Having given Laurence the articles he mentioned, with a handful of pemmican from his wallet, he hastened down the hill, in the direction the wolf had taken along the valley.

Young Laurence was too much accustomed to those wilds to feel any alarm at being left alone; and as soon as he had somewhat rested, he set to work to cut a supply of dried branches from the surrounding shrubs, with which he quickly formed a blazing fire. The pemmican, or pounded buffalo meat, further restored his strength, and he began to think that he would follow in the direction his father had taken, to save him from having to ascend the hill. When he began to move, however, he felt so weary that he again sank down by the side of the fire, where in a short time he fell asleep. Wild dreams troubled his slumbers, and long-forgotten scenes came back to his mind. He was playing in a garden among flowers in front of a neat and pretty dwelling, with the waters of a tranquil lake shining far below. He heard the gentle voice of one he trusted, whose fair sweet face ever smiled on him as he gambolled near her. The voice was hastily calling him, when suddenly he was lifted up and carried away far from her shrieks and cries. The rattle of musketry echoed in his ears, then he was borne down a rapid stream, the waters hissing and foaming around. Now numberless Indians, in war-paint and feathers, danced frantically before his eyes, and huge fires blazed up, and again shrieks echoed in his ears. Then a monstrous animal, with glaring eyeballs, burst into their midst, putting the Indians to flight, and scattering their fires far and wide, yelling and roaring savagely. He started up, when what was his horror to see the fierce white wolf his father had been pursuing rushing towards him with the chain and trap still trailing at his heels. Spell-bound, he felt unable to rise. In another moment the enraged wolf would be upon him, when a rifle shot rang through the air, and the wolf dropped dead close to where he lay.

"Art safe, Laurence, art unhurt, boy?" exclaimed the old trapper, who came, breathless, hurrying up the side of the hill. "The brute doubled cunningly on me, and thinking, from the way he was leading, that he would pass near where I left you, I took a short cut, in hopes of being before him. I was nearly too late, and twice before I had fired, shouting to you to be on your guard. It's not often my rifle has failed to kill even at that distance."

Laurence relieved his father's anxiety by showing him that he was unhurt; and greatly to the old trapper's satisfaction, on examining the wolf, three bullet holes were found in the skin, showing that his favourite rifle had not missed, although the first shots had failed to kill.

The prized skin having been secured, as it was too heavy to carry, in addition to their previous loads, it was hidden, as the traps had been, in a hollow in the rocks.

"Little chance of its escaping from Indians or wolverines, though I am loath to abandon it," observed the old man, as he placed the last of a large pile of stones in front of the cave. "But the snow will be down, may be this very night, and then it will be safe."

They now proceeded down the valley, and continued on till they reached the edge of a small wood, where they encamped for the night. For several days they journeyed on towards the south and east, not meeting, as they passed over those desert wilds, a single human being.

"Once, when I first knew this region, many thousand warriors, with their squaws and children, were masters here," observed old Moggs. "But they are all gone; the white man's gunpowder, and his still more deadly fire-water, have carried off the greater number. Famine visited them when they themselves had slaughtered most of the creatures which gave them food, without having learned other means for obtaining support. Before that time, neither white nor red trappers had to go more than a few days' journey from the forts to obtain as many skins as they needed."

"I wish those times would come back again," said the boy. "For my legs feel as if they would soon refuse to carry me further."

"Cheer up, lad, we will camp soon, and in a few days more we shall be at the fort, when you shall have the rest I promised you."

"But you will not quit me then, father, will you?" asked Laurence.

"Well, well, I must buy fresh horses to bring in the skins and traps, and to prepare for the next season," answered Michael. "I have no wish to leave you, lad; so don't let that trouble you just now."

The first fall of snow for that winter had now come down, and thickly covered the ground. For several days it



compelled the trapper and his son to keep within the shelter of their wigwam. Once more they set out. After travelling severe days, young Laurence, though he had partially recovered, again felt ready to give way. Still he trudged with his load by his father's side. The cold had greatly increased; but though he had hitherto been indifferent to it, he felt that he would rather lie down and die than proceed further. The old man took his arm, and did his utmost to encourage him.

They at length reached a wood of birch and firs. "Oh, father, let us camp here, for I can move on no longer," cried Laurence, in a piteous tone.

"Cheer up, cheer up, boy," said the old trapper, repeating the expression he had frequently of late uttered. "A few steps farther, and we shall see the fort."

The poor lad struggled on. The sun was sinking low in the sky, when, just as they doubled the wood, its beams fell on the stockaded sides of a fort, situated on slightly elevated ground out of the prairie.

"There's our resting place at last," exclaimed the old man, pointing with his hand towards the fort. "Keep up your courage, and we shall reach it before dark. The peltries we bring will ensure us a welcome; and though I trust not to the white men who live in cities, the chief factor there calls me his friend, and has a heart which I doubt not will feel compassion for your youth. He will treat you kindly for my sake, though most of the traders such as he care little for the old trapper who has spent his whole life in toiling for them."

Michael continuing to support the tottering steps of his son, they at last reached the gates of the fort, which were opened to give them admittance, their approach having been observed from the look-out towers on the walls. The stockade surrounded an area of considerable size, within which were the residences of the factor and clerks, several large storehouses, and huts for the accommodation of the garrison and hunters, and casual visitors. Altogether, to Michael's eyes, it appeared a place of great importance. A number of voyageurs and half-breeds, in their picturesque costumes, were strolling about; multitudes of children were playing at the doors of the huts; and women were seen going to and from the stores, or occupied in their daily avocations. Laurence felt somewhat awe-struck on finding himself among so many strangers, and kept close to his father. At their entrance they had been saluted by a pack of savage-looking sleigh-dogs, which came out barking at the new-comers, but were quickly driven back to their quarters by their masters.

"Don't mind them, Laurence," said Michael. "As soon as they find that we are treated as friends, they will cease their yelping, and come humbly to our feet to seek our favour."

Michael inquired for Mr Ramsay, the chief factor.

"There he comes from his house," answered the man to whom he had addressed himself.

"What! old friend! I am right glad to see you again," exclaimed Mr Ramsay, advancing, and with frank cordiality shaking the old trapper by the hand. "I was afraid, from your long absence, that you would never find your way back to the fort. And who is this lad? He seems very young for the life of a trapper."

Michael then introduced Laurence, and narrated how they had lost their horses and been compelled to tramp the whole distance on foot, not having met any Indians from whom they could purchase fresh steeds, or obtain assistance in carrying their bales.

"He looks worn out and ill," said the kind-hearted factor. "Come in to my house, and we will have him seen to. A comfortable bed and a quiet night's rest will, I hope, restore him; and you, friend, will, I suspect, be glad to get that heavy pack off your shoulders."

"The boy has not been much accustomed to beds or houses, and the change may, as you say, do him good," observed Michael. "But my old sinews are too tough to feel the weight of this pack, heavy as it is, I'll allow. However, for the boy's sake, I'll accept your hospitality; and, if you'll look after him till he is recovered, the best peltries I have shall be at your service without any other payment."

"Nay, nay, friend; I come frae the Hielands, and have not so far forgotten the customs of the old country as to receive payment for entertaining a guest, and as such your son is welcome. However, come in, and get rid of your packs; and to-morrow, when you have rested, we will examine their contents and calculate their value."

Poor Laurence tottered on, but scarcely had he reached the entrance of the house than he sank to the ground. His pack was quickly taken off, and kindly hands lifted him to a room, where he was undressed and put to bed—a luxury he had not, as his father had said, for many years enjoyed. Restoratives were applied; but kind Mrs Ramsay and those of her household who watched him, as they observed his pale cheeks and slowly-drawn breath, feared that nature was too far exhausted by the fatigue he had undergone to recover. The old man's alarm and grief, when he heard of the dangerous state of his son, was excessive. Kind Mrs Ramsay did her best to console him, and her young daughter, a fair-haired, blue-eyed little girl, Jeanie, climbed up on his knee, and stroked his rough hair, as he hung down his head, utterly overcome.

"We will pray to our merciful Father in heaven to take care of the young boy, and to make him strong and well again," she whispered. "You know that God hears our prayers; and oh, how good and kind He is, to let us speak to Him, and to do what we ask Him in the name of His dear Son Jesus Christ."

The old man gazed earnestly at the child for a few seconds, and, a look of anguish passing over his countenance, he shook his head; and then turning away from her, he put her gently down, as if he was afraid of being thus again addressed, and answered, "Thank you, thank you, little damsel; I hope my boy will get well. It will go pretty nigh to finish me if he does not," he murmured to himself. "I ought to have known that his strength was not equal to the task I put upon it. If he dies, men will say, and justly, that I am his murderer."

The old man partook but sparingly of the abundant repast spread before him, and declining the luxury of a bed, rolled himself up in a blanket, and took his post in the hall, near the door of the room where Laurence had been placed, that he might hear from those who were attending on his boy how it went with him. At every footstep which passed he started up and made the same inquiry, and then with a groan lay down again, his desire to keep on the watch in vain struggling with his fatigue.

Chapter Three.

Anxiety of the trapper about his son—Jeanie tells Laurence about the Bible and God's love to man—Laurence out of danger—The trapper leaves Laurence with his friends—Jeanie tries to teach Laurence to read—History of Mrs Ramsay.

The following morning, the old trapper was sitting on the floor, where he had passed the night, with his head bent down on his knees, when Mrs Ramsay came out of his son's room.

"Is he better? Will he live?" he asked in a low, husky voice, gazing up anxiously at her countenance.

"The issues of life and death are in God's hands," she answered. "Your young son is very ill; but our merciful Father in heaven can restore him if He thinks fit; we can but watch over him, and minister to his wants as may seem best to us. Lift up your heart in prayer to that Great Being through Him who died for us, sinning children as we are that we might be reconciled to our loving Parent, and He will assuredly hear your petition, and grant it if He thinks fit."

The old man groaned as she ceased speaking, and again dropping his head on his breast made no reply to her, though he muttered to himself, "She tells me to pray. The Great Spirit would strike me dead in his anger were I to dare to speak to Him." The kind lady, seeing he did not speak, passed on.

Old Michael could with difficulty be persuaded to eat anything, or to quit his post during the day. Little Jeanie was at length sent to him with some food, to try if he would receive it at her hands.

"Here," she said, placing her hand on his arm. "You must take some of this, or you will become weak and ill. God, you know, gives us food to support our bodies, just as He sends His holy spirit to strengthen our souls. It is very wrong not to eat when we require food, and so it is when we refuse to receive the aid of the Holy Spirit, which we so much need every moment of our lives."

"Who told you that, little damsel?" asked the old man, looking up in the child's sweet face.

"Mamma, of course," she answered. "And Mr Martin, the missionary, who came here some time ago, says she is right, and told me never to forget what she says to me. I try not to do so; but when I am playing about, and sometimes when I feel inclined to be naughty, I am apt not to remember as I ought; and then I ask God to help me and to forgive me, through Jesus Christ, and all those things come back again to my memory."

"You naughty!" said the old man, gazing still more intently at the young fair countenance. "I don't think you ever could be naughty."

"Oh yes, yes, I am, though," answered the child. "I feel sometimes vexed and put out, and so do all sorts of naughty things; besides, you know that God says, 'there is none that doeth good, no, not one;' and even if I did not think I was naughty, I know that I must be in His sight, for He is so pure and holy that even to Him the heavens, so bright to us,

are not pure.”

The old man apparently did not understand what the child was saying to him, but the sound of her soft voice soothed his troubled heart. She little knew how dark and hard that heart had become.

“What is it you want, little damsel?” he asked, in a tone as if he had been lost in thought while she was speaking.

“I came to bring you this food,” she said. “I shall be so glad to see you eat some.”

The old man, without further remonstrance, almost mechanically, it seemed, consumed the food she offered him.

For several days Laurence hung between life and death, but the constant and watchful care of his new friends was blessed with success; and once more he opened his eyes, and was able to understand and reply to what was said to him. As soon as he was considered out of danger, old Michael regained his usual manner. Though he expressed his gratitude to his hosts in his rough, blunt way, he uttered no expression which showed that he believed that aught of thanks were due to the Giver of all good for his son’s recovery. With his ordinary firm tread he stalked into the room where Laurence lay.

“I am glad to see thee coming round, boy,” he said. “Food and quiet is all that is now required to fit thee for work again. Dost not long to be once more wandering through the forest, or trapping by the side of the broad stream? I am already weary, as I knew I should, of this dull life, and must away to look after our traps and such of our peltries as may have escaped the claws of the cunning wolverines.”

“Stay for me but a few days, and I shall be ready to go with you, father,” said the boy, trying to raise himself up.

“Nay, nay, boy; but you’re not yet strong enough for travelling. The snow lies thickly on the ground, and the winter’s wind whistles keenly through the forest and across the plain. Stay a while with your good friends here, and I’ll come back for thee, and then we will hie away to lead the free life we have enjoyed so long.” Old Michael spoke in a more subdued tone than usual.

“You speak truth, father, when you say our friends are kind; if it were not for you I should not wish to leave them. Sometimes, when Mrs Ramsay and her little daughter have been tending me, my thoughts have been carried back to the days when I was a young child, or else to some pleasant dreams which have visited me in my sleep.”

“Speak not again of those times, Laurence,” exclaimed the old trapper in an angry tone. “They are mere foolish fancies of the brain. You are still weak and ill, but you will soon recover,” he added in a more gentle voice. “And when I come for you, promise me that you will be ready to go forth once more to be my companion in the free wilds.”

“Yes, father, yes; I promise, whenever you come and summon me away, I will go with you.”

“Farewell, then, boy,” said the old trapper, taking his son’s hand. “We will look forward to the time when we may enjoy our free roving life together again.”

On the entrance of Mrs Ramsay and Jeanie, who came with some nourishing food for Laurence, the old trapper silently left the room. When, a short time afterwards, Mrs Ramsay inquired for him, she found that he had quitted the fort, leaving behind him his bales of peltries, with the exception of the white wolf-skin.

“He has taken it to trade with the Indians,” observed the factor. “He knows that they value it more than we do.”

“I am so sorry that your father has gone away, Laurence,” said Jeanie, as she sat by the bedside of the young invalid, trying to console him for the grief he showed when he heard of the old trapper’s departure. “But remember you are among friends, and we will do all we can to make you happy. Still, it is a great thing to know that your father loves you. I should be miserable if I could suppose that my father and mother did not love me. But do you know, Laurence, I have often thought how much more wretched I should feel if I did not know that our Heavenly Father loves me also even more than they do. Mamma has often told me that His love is so great that we cannot understand it. It always makes me feel so happy when I think of it, and that He is always watching over us, and that His eye is ever upon us.”

“Do you speak of the Great Spirit, little girl?” said Laurence, raising himself on his elbow, and gazing inquiringly at her. “I have heard that He is the Friend of brave warriors and those who obey Him, and that He is more powerful than any human being; but still I cannot fancy that He cares for young boys and girls, and women and slaves, or cowards who are afraid to fight.”

“Oh, yes, yes; He cares for everybody,” exclaimed Jeanie. “He loves all the creatures He has made, to whom He has given souls which will live for ever and ever. He wants them all to live with Him in the glorious heaven He has prepared for all who accept the gracious offer of mercy which He makes to us. You know that we are by nature rebels and disobedient children; and consequently Satan, the great rebel chief, has power to do evil, and to tempt us to sin, and to rebel against God, as he tempted our first parents; but God sent His Son Jesus Christ into the world, to suffer the punishment which, for our disobedience and sin, we ought to suffer, and to tell us that, if we trust Him and believe that He has so suffered for our sins, and thus taken them away, and will love and obey Him, and follow the laws which He established, we shall be received back again into favour, and when our souls quit this world, that they will go and dwell with Him in that glorious and happy land where He will reign for ever and ever.”

Laurence continued his fixed gaze at the young girl as she spoke.

“These are very wonderful words you speak. They are so wonderful that I cannot understand them,” said Laurence very slowly.

“What I speak of is indeed very wonderful, for even the angels in heaven wonder at it; but if you seek the aid of the

Holy Spirit, He will make it clear to your mind, for He it is who alone can teach us what Christ is, and what He has done for us. My mamma often told me about these things, and I did not understand them; but when I prayed that the Holy Spirit would help me to know the love of Jesus, and all He has done for me, then what appeared so dark and mysterious became as clear as the noonday; and, oh, I am sure that there is no joy so great as that of knowing that Jesus Christ loves us."

"I don't think I shall ever understand that," said the boy, sinking back on his couch. "My father has never told me anything about those things and I am sure He is very, very wise, for the Indians say so; and every one owns that he is the best white trapper between the Rocky Mountains and the Red River. When he comes back, I'll talk to him, and learn what he thinks of the matter."

"Oh, but God tells us that He has 'hid these things from the wise and prudent, and revealed them unto babes,'" observed Jeanie. "Your father is all you say, I am sure; but does he read the Bible, the book which God has given to us, to tell us about Jesus, and to let us know His will?"

"I never heard of such a book," answered the boy. "But then I know nothing about books; I could not understand its meaning if I had one."

"What! cannot you read?" asked the little girl, in a tone of astonishment.

"No, of course not," answered Laurence. "The only books I have seen are those in the hands of the white traders, when they have been taking notes of the peltries they have bought from us or our Indian friends. Then I have observed that they make marks with the end of a stick in their books, and that is all I know about the matter."

"Oh, then, I must show you some books, and you must learn to read. It is a sad thing not to be able to read the Bible."

"I have no wish to learn, though you are very kind to offer to teach me," answered the boy, in a somewhat weary tone. "When I am well enough, I should like to be following my father, or chasing the buffalo with the brave hunters of the prairie. Still, I should be sorry to go away from you and those who have been so kind to me."

"But it will be a long time before you are able to sit on horseback, or to endure the wild camp-life of a hunter, and until that time comes you must let me teach you."

"My head would ache if I were to try to learn anything so strange as reading," said Laurence, closing his eyes. "Even now I cannot bear to think. But you are very kind, very kind," he added, as if he felt the little girl would consider him ungrateful for refusing her offer.

Mrs Ramsay, who had just then come in unperceived, had heard the last part of the conversation, and understanding better than her daughter did the boy's still weak state, saw that it was not the time to press the point, and that it would be better just then to allow Laurence to fall asleep, as she judged from his heavy eyes he was inclined to do. She, therefore, smoothing his pillow, and bestowing a smile on him, led Jeanie from the room.

Mrs Ramsay had gone through many trials. She had been brought up among all the refinements of civilised society in Scotland, and had been early brought by her pious parents to know and love the Lord Jesus. She had married Mr Ramsay, then employed in the service of the Hudson's Bay Company, dining a short visit he paid to his native land; but she had been little aware of the dangers and hardships she would be called on to endure in the wild region to which he was to take her. He had been so accustomed to them from his earliest days that, when describing the life he had led, he unconsciously made light of what might otherwise naturally have appalled her. For his sake she forbore from complaining of the perils and privations to which she had been exposed; and she had ever, by trusting to the aid and protection of God, borne up under them all. Two of her children had been taken from her, and Jeanie alone had been left. Famine, and the small-pox and measles, which has proved so fatal to the inhabitants of those northern wilds, had on several occasions visited the fort, which had also been exposed to the attacks of treacherous and hostile natives; while for years together she had not enjoyed the society of any of her own sex of like cultivated mind and taste. Yet she did not repine; she devoted herself to her husband and child, and to imparting instruction to the native women and children who inhabited the fort. She went further, and endeavoured to spread the blessings of religion and civilisation among the surrounding Indian population. By her influence her husband had been induced to take an interest in the welfare of the Indians, and no longer merely to value them according to the supply of peltries they could bring to trade with at the fort. He endeavoured also to instruct them in the art of agriculture, and already a number of cultivated fields were to be seen in the neighbourhood. He had introduced herds of cattle, which the Indians had been taught to tend and value, and numerous horses fed on the surrounding pastures. His great object now was to obtain a resident missionary, who might instruct the still heathen natives in the truths of Christianity; for when he had learned to value the importance of his own soul, he of necessity felt deeply interested in the salvation of the souls of his surrounding fellow-creatures. He had been warned that, should the natives become Christians and civilised, they would no longer prove useful as hunters and trappers, and that he was acting in opposition to trade.

"When that occurs it will be time enough, if you think fit, to complain, my friends," he answered. "At present I see innumerable immortal souls perishing in their darkness; and am I to be debarred, for fear of future consequences, in offering to them the blessings of the gospel?"

Most of those to whom he spoke were unable to comprehend him, but he persevered; and as the native trappers, certain of being fairly dealt with, resorted in greater numbers than before to the fort, and the amount of peltries he collected not falling off, no objection was taken at headquarters to his proceedings.

Dangers in the fort—The winter sets in—Scarcity of food—Mr Ramsay's account of his first meeting with the old trapper—His journey across the prairies—Attacked by Dacotahs—Death of his companions—Rescued by the old trapper—Prairie on fire—Ride for life.

The remote forts, as the trading posts of that region are called, were exposed at that period to numerous vicissitudes. When the buffalo, in large herds, came northward from the wide prairies in the south, and fish could be caught in the neighbouring lakes and rivers, provisions were abundant. But at other times, as all articles of food had to be brought many hundred miles in canoes, along the streams which intersect the country, or overland by carts or sleighs, notwithstanding all the forethought and precaution of the officers in charge, they were occasionally hard pressed for means of supporting life.

At the period we are describing, the frost had set in earlier than usual, and the neighbouring streams and lakes had been frozen over before a supply of fish could be caught for the winter store. Grasshoppers, or locusts, as they should be more properly called, coming in vast hordes from the south, had settled on the fields, and destroyed the crops of maize and barley; while the buffalo had not migrated so far to the northward as in other years. The hunters who had gone forth in chase of the moose, elk, bears, and other animals, had been less successful than usual.

Mr Ramsay, as the winter drew on, dreaded that famine would visit the fort. He had sent for supplies to headquarters, which he was daily expecting to arrive by a train of dog-sleighs, and had again despatched his hunters in all directions, in the hopes that they might bring in a sufficient number of wild animals of the chase to provision the garrison till their arrival.

Laurence slowly recovered his strength. Mrs Ramsay took care that he, at all events, should be well supplied with nourishing food.

"For his father's sake, I wish you to do all you can for the poor lad," said Mr Ramsay to his wife. "I owe him a debt of gratitude I can never repay, though he appears unwilling to be my creditor, by speaking of the matter as an every-day occurrence. I was travelling some years back, with a small party of half-breed hunters and Crees from the Red River to Chesterfield House, when, a fearful storm coming on, we were compelled to encamp in the open prairie. A short time before we had passed a small stream, on the banks of which grew a few birch and willows. The country was in a disturbed state, and we had heard that several war parties of Dacotahs were out, with the intention of attacking the Crees, their hereditary enemies. Thinking it possible we might be attacked, should our trail have been discovered, we arranged our carts in a circle, to enable us to resist a sudden onslaught of the foe. We were, however, without water or fuel. To obtain a supply of both these necessities, we sent back several of our men to the stream I mentioned, hoping that they would return to the camp before dark.

"The shades of evening were already coming on when we caught sight, in the far distance, of a large party of horsemen scouring over the prairie. We had little doubt that they were Dacotahs, but we hoped that our small encampment, at the distance we were from them, might escape detection. The keen eyes of the red-skin warriors, however, ere long found us out, and we saw them galloping towards us, flourishing their spears and uttering their savage war-cries. Except the plumes in their hair and girdles round their waists, they were destitute of clothing, though their bodies and faces were covered thickly with paint, making them look more like demons than human beings. Had our whole party been together, we might have been able, with our rifles, to drive them back; but divided as we were, had we fired, although we might have shot some of those in advance, the remainder would have dashed forward and speared us before we could have had time to reload.

"The warriors, on getting near the camp, and discovering the preparations we had made for their reception, those in advance waited till the remainder of their party came up. Just then they caught sight of our friends returning across the open plain bringing the wood and water. With wild and fearful shouts the savages dashed forward to cut them off. They had no means of defending themselves, and terror seizing them, they took to flight, hoping to escape to the river and lie concealed under its banks. The horsemen, however, overtook them before they could reach it, and in a short time we saw the Dacotahs returning with the scalps of their victims at the end of their spears. Like savage beasts who have once tasted blood, their rage and fury increased, and they seemed resolved, at all risks, to destroy us, as they had our companions, and to obtain the rich booty they expected to find in our camp. On they came, shrieking and howling more fearfully than before. I called on my few remaining men to fight bravely in defence of our lives, reminding them that should they yield they would be cruelly tortured, and ultimately put to death.

"Although at first driven back by our fire, again and again they rushed forward, surrounding our camp, and breaking through our imperfect fences. Most of my little garrison were speared, and I had received two wounds; but I scarcely felt them, and still retained my strength and energy. The rest of the survivors, although much more hurt, and bleeding at every pore, fought bravely; for all of us knew that we could expect no mercy from our savage foes.

"Night was coming on, and we had little hopes of ever seeing another sun rise.

"Among the stores we were conveying were several casks of gunpowder. As a last resource, I seized one of them which I managed to reach, and placing it before me, shouted out to our enemies that if they approached nearer, I would fire my rifle into it, and blow them and the whole camp into the air. They were well acquainted with its power, and held it, as I knew, in great dread. My example was followed by the rest of my party who had yet strength to move. The Dacotahs retired to a short distance, and held a consultation, after which they galloped round and round us, shrieking and shouting, when one of them advanced somewhat nearer, and, in a derisive tone, told us that we were welcome to remain where we were, for escape was impossible, as they intended to keep near us, and that in a short time we should be starved to death, when they would have our scalps, and take possession of our goods. We knew too well that they spoke the truth; but we replied that we were determined not to yield, and that if they approached, we would carry our threat into execution.

"Darkness had now come on, but we distinguished them still hovering around us in the distance. That was the most

dreadful night I ever passed. The groans and cries of the wounded, as they lay on the ground around me, continued without intermission. I could do but little to relieve them; for we had no water to quench our burning thirst, and had I placed them in the carts they might have been speared, should the enemy have made a sudden attack, as they were very likely to do, hoping to catch us unprepared.

“When morning dawned, the Dacotahs again dashed forward, yelling as before, and approached sufficiently near to survey our condition. All day long they continued the same system, hoping apparently to wear us out, which, indeed, there appeared every probability of their doing.

“Several of my unfortunate companions had sunk from loss of blood and thirst, and my sufferings had become so great that I envied them their fate, when, as I cast my eyes around to watch the movements of our foes, I saw them gathering together in a body, while in the far distance appeared a single horseman, who, galloping at full speed, was coming towards the camp. He stopped short as he approached the Dacotahs, as if to ascertain who they were; he then rode boldly forward towards them. I saw that he was a white man, and knew by his gestures that he was haranguing the savages. Several of their chiefs appeared to be replying to him. He then waved his hand, and galloped up to the camp.

“‘I know all about it,’ he exclaimed in English, and his words sounded pleasantly in my ears. ‘I made them promise to give me one of my countrymen instead of a debt they owe me, and I wish that I could save more of your lives. What!’ he exclaimed, on seeing me rise to move towards him, ‘are you the only one left alive?’

“I had no need to reply, but pointed to the bodies of my companions on the ground; for by that time nearly all were dead, while those who still remained alive were too weak to move, and it was evident that in a short time they also would be numbered with the dead. It grieved me much to leave them in their sad condition; but yet by remaining I could do them no good. The stranger lifted me up on his horse with as much ease as if I had been a child, and bore me off in the direction from whence he had come.

“‘We have no time to lose, for I don’t trust the red-skins, friends though they are of mine,’ he said. ‘They may in a few minutes change their minds.’

“We had gone but a short distance when I saw my preserver turn his head to look behind him. There was an expression of anxiety in his countenance.

“‘What is the matter?’ I asked.

“‘The red-skins have set the prairie on fire,’ he answered. ‘I don’t think they did it on purpose, for they will chance to suffer more than we do; but we must push onwards, or the flames will anon be close at our heels.’

“I raised my head as he spoke, and saw dense wreaths of smoke rising up to the southward, below which I could distinguish a broad red line, extending for a mile or more from east to west.

“The hunter, holding me in his firm grasp, put spurs to his horse, and, slackening his rein, galloped at full speed over the ground. The motion caused my wounds to bleed afresh, but it was no time to stop to bind them up. I felt very weak, and the dreadful thought came across me that, should I faint, my new friend would suppose me dead, and naturally leave me to my fate. Might he not even do so, at all events, should the fire come rapidly after us, for the sake of preserving his own life? He seemed to divine my thoughts.

“‘I will not desert you, lad,’ he said. ‘Cheer up; we have but a few leagues to go to reach a river, on the further side of which we shall be safe. My good steed has been well accustomed to carry a heavy weight, and he makes nothing of what he has now on his back.’

“While he was speaking, a loud dull roar like thunder was heard, and a dense column of smoke rose upward from the spot where we had been encamped.

“‘Ah! ah! the red-skins have lost the booty they were so eager to secure,’ he exclaimed with a peculiar laugh.

“The fire had reached the camp, and the casks of powder had ignited and blown the carts and the rest of their contents into the air.

“‘We shall be safe from them, at all events,’ observed the stranger; ‘for they will not pull rein for many a long league from this, if they should escape the effects of their own carelessness.’

“The raging fire had now extended from east to west as far as the eye could reach, and came on even faster than we could move. Still the dauntless hunter showed no signs of fear or intention of abandoning me, that he might insure his own safety. The love of life was strong within me, but I felt that it was almost unjust to allow him to risk his for the sake of saving mine. Away we went, scouring the prairie, the hunter urging on his steed with slackened rein and spur, and by word of mouth. Already I could hear the ominous crackling and hissing of the flames as they made their way over the long dry grass, and caught the bushes which here and there were scattered over the plain. Every now and then the hunter looked behind him. Nearer and nearer came the long line of fire and smoke; the sky overhead was darkened; the air was hot and stifling. Still he cheered on his steed. Fast as we went, the fire came faster.

“On and on we galloped, the dense smoke surrounding us. I gasped for breath; already it seemed that the flames were close at the horse’s heels. The animal appeared to know his danger as well as his rider, and sprang frantically forward. I saw no more. I only felt that the horse had made a desperate plunge, and soon afterwards there was the sound of water in my ears, and instead of the violent movements of the galloping horse I felt myself borne smoothly forward. Then I was lifted in the strong arms of the hunter and placed on the ground. I opened my eyes, and found myself seated on a narrow strand, on the opposite side of a river, with a high bank rising above my head. Across the

stream the fire raged furiously, devouring the trees which fringed its shores; while close above our heads hung a black canopy of smoke, though a cool current of air, which blew up the stream, enabled me to breathe freely. The hunter, holding the bridle of his horse, was seated by my side.

“‘We have done it, friend,’ he said. ‘I knew we should. It’s not the first time I have had to ride for my life; but I never had a harder gallop, that I’ll allow. The Dacotahs will have had a narrow escape if they managed to get clear. Let me look to your hurts. You are hungry, it may be.’

“‘Water, water,’ were the only words I could utter. He produced a leathern cup from his ample pouch, and, filling it with water, poured the contents down my throat. I felt as if I could have drunk the stream dry, but he would give me no more.

“‘Wait a bit; you shall soon have another draught,’ he said. ‘And now let me see to your hurts.’ He brought more water, and having bathed my wounds, bound them skilfully up with a handkerchief which I fortunately had in my pocket. After I had taken another draught of water, I quickly began to revive under his careful treatment. When he thought that I had sufficiently recovered to be removed, he bore me up a bank, and then led his horse round another way up to where I lay. He carried me on till we reached a wood near a stream. Here, finding from my weak state that I was unable to travel further, he built a hut and tended me with the greatest care till I had recovered sufficiently to sit on horseback. He often, I found, deprived himself of food that I might be amply supplied. As soon as I was able to bear the journey he placed me on the horse, and walking by my side, we set out for the fort. We had many weary leagues to go, and frequently we fell in with traces of the savage and treacherous Sioux or Dacotahs, evidently out on expeditions against the Crees. Occasionally, to avoid our foes, we had to remain in concealment for several days together, and at other times it was necessary to halt while my companion went in search of game, and to obtain provisions. Ultimately, after many adventures, when he often exposed his own life to preserve mine, we reached the fort in safety.

“Such was the commencement of my acquaintance with Michael Moggs, the old trapper. We have met occasionally since, but he has always refused to receive any recompense for the service he rendered me, declaring that he was deserving of none, as he would have done the same for any other white man who might have needed his assistance. I have vainly endeavoured to induce him to remain in the fort, or to take service with the company; but he invariably replies that he prefers the life of a free trapper, and that he will not bind himself to serve any master.”

“I wish we could induce him to stop with us, both for his own sake, and for that of his young son,” observed Mrs Ramsay. “He is an intelligent youth, with a mind capable of cultivation. It is sad to see him so utterly ignorant of religious truth; and I fear that his strength will give way if he continues the hard life he has shared with his eccentric father. I cannot but think that the old man is greatly to blame for bringing him up as he has done.”

“We must hope for the best,” said Mr Ramsay.

“We have no right to hope unless we pray and strive, dear husband,” said Mrs Ramsay. “God will hear our prayers, both for father and son. After the account you have just given me, I feel that we are doubly bound to pray for them. How greatly ought we to value that glorious privilege of prayer, which allows us sinful creatures, trusting to the all-cleansing blood of Jesus, to go boldly to the throne of grace, knowing that our petitions will be heard and granted by the all-pure, all-seeing, and all-just God, who does not look upon us as we are in ourselves, but as clothed with the righteousness of Christ. Let us pray this night that the dark mind of our poor friend may be enlightened, and that the Holy Spirit may bring home the truths of the gospel to that of his young son.”

“You are right; you are right, wife,” said Mr Ramsay, taking her hand. “I have hitherto thought only how I could benefit his temporal condition. It did not occur to me how much more important it was to seek the good of his soul.”

Little did the old hunter think, as he was wandering across the snowy waste, that the hearts of friends were lifted up for him in prayer to that God from whom he had so long obstinately turned away; yet though we must be assured that God overhears the prayers of those who come to Him in His Son’s name, He takes His own good time and way to answer the petitions he receives; and we must be prepared to wait patiently for the result, and not expect always to see it brought about in the manner we in our ignorance may have desired.

Chapter Five.

Stock of provisions at the fort still further decreased—Reports of Sioux being in the neighbourhood—Preparations for defence—Children’s amusement of “coasting”—Sioux seen in the distance—The hunters caught by them—Camp-fires of Indians seen in the distance—Fresh bands join them.

The trials to which the inhabitants of the fort were exposed were becoming greater every day. The store of potatoes and other vegetables in the root-house, where they were secured from the frost, deep down below the surface, was rapidly lessening.

Mr Ramsay had lately inspected the meat pit, in which the carcasses of the buffaloes and other animals shot during the previous fall were preserved, and found it nearly empty. Meat is preserved in that region in a peculiar manner. A deep pit is dug, and while the frost is still in the air, and the snow covers the ground, all the animals killed are placed in it. The bottom is lined with a coating of snow beaten hard, and then a layer of meat is placed on it. On the top of this more snow is beaten, when an additional layer of meat is placed in the pit, and so on till the whole is full. It is then covered over with snow, and a thickly-thatched roof is erected over it. The meat-cellar, indeed, resembles an English ice-house. The meat thus remains in a fit condition to be eaten throughout the year. Fish is preserved in the same way. During the winter, however, the fish, when caught, become frozen, and can be kept in an open shed.

This year, as we have said, in consequence of the early frost, but a small supply of fish had been caught.

Mr Ramsay was looking out anxiously for the arrival of the expected supplies, but no news of their coming had yet readied him. The hunters had returned unsuccessful from the chase, and had again gone out with the intention of proceeding to a greater distance than before. News came also which caused the small remaining garrison some anxiety. It was reported that, contrary to their usual custom, for they seldom travel during winter, a large body of Sioux had been seen moving northward on a warlike expedition. Although their destination was unknown, it was feared, as they had long threatened to attack the fort, should they discover how small was its present garrison, and how greatly pressed for food, they might put their evil intentions into execution. Mr Ramsay accordingly made every preparation for defence in his power, and few as were the numbers with him, he hoped to repulse the foe. His fears were rather on account of the hunters scattered at a distance from each other, and who, should they fall into the hands of the Sioux, might be cut off in detail. To call them back was now impossible, as, should he send out to search for them, he would have had still further to lessen the number of defenders. Constant watch was kept day and night, and he determined, at all events, not to be taken by surprise.

Meantime Laurence had greatly recovered his strength, and, clad in a warm fur dress, was able to move about, both inside and for a short distance outside the fort.

The chief amusement of the younger portion of the inhabitants was "coasting," or sliding down the steep side of the hill on which the fort stood seated on small boards placed on runners, called "toboggins." Descending from the height, the impetus they gained carried them for a considerable distance over the level plain, till they were finally brought up by a heap of snow at the end of a long path they had thus formed. The toboggin was then drawn up to the top of the hill, when the young coaster again went sliding down, followed in succession by his companions, shouting and cheering with delight, especially when any of the toboggins went off the line, and their companions were half-buried in the heap of snow below.

This amusement Laurence infinitely preferred to learning to read the books which Jeanie brought him, although she offered to be his instructress. He would sit, however, very patiently during the long winter evenings while she read to him. He told her frankly that the only books which interested him were those of adventures and hairbreadth escapes in various parts of the world. He listened attentively, however, when she read the Bible, but seemed far more interested in the narratives it contained than in any other portion. Its Divine truths had as yet, it seemed, made no impression on his mind.

"Now, Jeanie, I have been a good boy, and listened with my ears open to all you have been reading about, and I think it is but fair that you in return should come and coast with me to-morrow," he said one day, after she had read to him for some time. "I have had a beautiful new toboggin made for you, and I am sure it will run faster and straighter than any in the fort."

"I shall be very glad to come, if mamma will let me, though you are so very bad a scholar that you do not deserve to have your way," she answered.

"If I promise to learn better in future, will you ask leave to come?" urged Laurence. "I should like to be able to read about the wonderful things you tell me of in your books."

"If you promise, I'll ask mamma to let me do as you wish," answered Jeanie. "But, remember, God hears every word you say, and knows everything you think, and the promise made to me is really made to God, and it will grieve Him if you break it."

"Oh, but I mean to keep my promise, though I cannot fancy that the Great Spirit cares for what a young boy like me may think or say," answered Laurence.

"Oh, yes, yes, He cares for young and old alike," exclaimed Jeanie. "He tells us that the very hairs of our head are numbered, and He knows every sparrow that falls to the ground. That is to make us understand that He is interested in all we think about, and in even the very smallest thing we do. It always makes me very happy when I reflect that God cares for me, and loves me even more than my father and mother can do, though they love me a great deal, because He is so much more powerful than they are, and He can help me and keep me out of temptation when I am inclined to be naughty, which they, with all their love and interest in me, cannot do."

"I wish that I could think as you do, Jeanie," said Laurence. "I must try to do so, though; then you will ask your mamma's leave to come and coast on the new sleigh?"

"Yes, I will ask her," said Jeanie. "And you must show that you are in earnest, by trying to say your alphabet this evening. You missed out a great many of the letters yesterday, and I felt ashamed of you."

Laurence had hitherto made but very slow progress in his studies. His head and eyes ached, he said, whenever he looked at a book, though he really was anxious to learn for the sake of pleasing Jeanie.

Mrs Ramsay did not object to allow Jeanie to try the new sleigh, and the next morning, accompanied by several other girls, she set out in high glee with Mrs Ramsay, who went to look on at the sport. Laurence carried the sleigh on his shoulders, a number of other boys being similarly provided.

Proceeding round outside the fort, they soon reached the steep part of the hill. In another minute, a merry laughing party were gliding down the side, one after the other, with headlong speed, the impetus sending them several hundred yards over the smooth hard surface of the snow beyond. Laurence, who sat in front, guiding Jeanie's sleigh, was delighted to find that it went further than any of the others. Up the hill again they soon came, the boys carrying the sleighs, and the girls scrambling up by their sides.

Laurence and Jeanie had coasted down the side of the hill, followed by their companions, and had been carried some distance from the fort, when they heard a shout from the watch-tower nearest them. It was repeated again and again in more urgent tones, calling them back to the fort.

"What can it mean?" asked Jeanie. "We must go, at all events; and, see, there's mamma on the top of the hill beckoning to us."

Laurence proposed to make another trip, saying he was sure there was no necessity to be in a hurry.

"If we are called, we ought to go, we must go," said Jeanie. "It would be very wrong to delay a minute."

Thus urged, Laurence took up the sleigh, and the whole party reached the top of the hill, where they found Mrs Ramsay, who told them to hurry back with her to the fort. On reaching the gate, they were informed that a large party of Indians had been seen in the far distance, and were still hovering just within sight of the fort. At first it was hoped that they were the hunters returning; but from their numbers and the way they were moving it was suspected that they must be a band of Sioux said to be out on a war-path, and that it was very probable they would attack the fort. The gates were accordingly shut, a drawbridge over a deep cutting in front of them was drawn up, arms and ammunition were placed on the platform inside the stockade, ready for use, and every other preparation made for the reception of the foe. Mr Ramsay urged his little garrison to fight bravely in defence of their wives and children, and the property committed to their charge. For some time the Indians had not approached nearer than when they were first seen, and hopes were entertained that they would not venture on an attack. Mr Ramsay had always endeavoured to avoid hostilities with the natives, and had on several occasions succeeded in gaining over and securing the friendship of those who came with the intention of attacking the fort. Under ordinary circumstances he would have felt confident, even should he be unable by diplomacy to pacify the Indians, of easily keeping them at bay, as the fort was sufficiently strong to resist any ordinary attack. Having, however, now but a very small garrison, and being hard pressed for provisions, he felt more anxious than usual as to the result should the fort be attacked; for of the savage character of the Sioux he had already had too much experience not to know the fearful cruelties they would practise should they gain the victory. He examined every part of the fort, and showed his men those points most likely to be assailed, and which it was necessary to guard with the greatest vigilance. It might, however, have damped their spirits had he told them of the scanty supply of provisions which remained. Still he hoped to hold out till the enemy were driven away, when the expected relief might arrive, or the hunters return with a supply of game.

Mrs Ramsay was fully aware of the state of things. She had before been exposed to similar dangers. "We must not faint, dear husband," she said, "but continue to put our trust in God. He will relieve us if he thinks fit. At all events, let us have faith in His protecting love, and know that He does all for the best."

Several hours passed by, and still the strange Indians did not approach.

"There's a man coming towards the fort," shouted the look-out from the tower. "He drags himself but slowly over the snow, and appears to be wounded. He is one of our own people," added the sentinel, in a short time, "and seems to be signing to us to send him assistance."

Mr Ramsay, on hearing this, despatched two of the garrison to bring in the wounded hunter. They lifted him along, looking every now and then behind, as if they expected to be followed. At length they arrived at the gate, but the poor fellow Jaques Venot, was so exhausted from loss of blood that he could not at first speak. On reviving, after his wounds had been bound up, and a cordial given him, he had a sad tale to tell. He and three other hunters were returning to the fort with the flesh of a moose and bear which they had shot, when they were set upon by a band of Sioux. His three companions were shot down, he himself being wounded and taken prisoner by them. Instead of killing him, they led him to their camp, as he supposed, that they might employ him to negotiate with the garrison, and gain their object without the danger of attacking the fort. They knew from experience that in such an exploit many of them would lose their lives.

"I found that I was right in my conjectures," continued Jaques. "I was at once carried before the Sioux leader, who was holding a council of war with several other chiefs, and being placed in their midst, I was asked whether I preferred torture and death to life and liberty. I replied that if they chose to torture me they should see that I could surfer like a man, and that the hunters of the prairies always carried their lives in their hands; but as I had no wish to die, I should be glad to hear on what terms they offered me freedom."

"'You choose wisely,' said the chief. 'Tell us, then, what number of men defend the fort. Are they well armed? Have they a good supply of ammunition? Are there many women and children? And have they an abundance of provisions?'"

"I smiled as the chief spoke. 'You ask many questions,' I said, 'but they are not difficult to answer. The fort is strong, and there are men enough within to defend it against twice the number of warriors I see around me, whose bones will whiten the prairie if they make the attempt. There are great guns which can send their shot nearly as far as this camp, and each man has as many rifles as he can fire, while the women and boys load them. As to provisions, the whites are not like the improvident red-skins, who gorge themselves with food one day and starve for many afterwards. I have spoken. What is it you would have me do?'"

"The chiefs, on hearing my reply, consulted together. 'Listen,' said their leader at length. 'You will go back to the fort and persuade the white-skins within that we are their friends. We want shelter and food while the snow covers the ground; and if they give us that, we will go forth and fish and hunt for them, and bring them more peltries than they have ever before received in one season.'

"'But if I fail to persuade them, I asked, wishing to learn the designs of the Sioux, what am I then to do?'"

“You will try to win some of the people with such promises as you well know how to make. Tell them they will be received among us as friends, and that we will give them all that their hearts desire. Then wait till our warriors collect around the fort, and seek an opportunity at night to open the gates and admit us. You and those who will thus assist us will gain our friendship, and all you ask shall be given you.’

“‘The great Sioux chief speaks wise words,’ I answered. ‘Let me go free, and I’ll do your bidding. I have long served the white-skins, and it is time that I should seek new friends.’ On hearing my reply the chief seemed satisfied.

“‘You shall go, then,’ he said; ‘but remember, should you fail to carry out our wishes, you will learn that the Sioux know how to punish those who play them false.’ On this the chief, bidding me hasten to the fort, ordered some of his braves to conduct me through the camp and let me go free.

“The Sioux are very numerous,” continued the hunter, “and there are not only warriors, but women and children among them. They have lately received a severe defeat from the Americans, and have been driven from their hunting-grounds, and have vowed vengeance against all white-skins and their friends. They are expecting the arrival of another large band, and I fear that they will fall in with the trails of the other hunters and cut them off. Even should our friends escape them, they will find it difficult to return to the fort.”

Laurence, who was present, listened eagerly to what Jaques said, and made several inquiries about the appearance of the Sioux chief and others of his followers. He said nothing, however, but for some time afterwards appeared lost in thought.

Night came on. The garrison was kept constantly on the alert. In the far distance the camp-fires of the Indians could be seen blazing up near a wood, under shelter of which they had pitched their skin tents, and where, the snow being of less depth than on the open plain, their horses could more easily get at the grass below it. They on that account had probably chosen the spot, instead of camping nearer the fort.

No one during the night was seen to approach, although any object might easily have been distinguished moving across the surrounding white field of snow. It was remarked, however, that the fires had increased in number since they had at first been lighted in the evening, and it was consequently surmised that a fresh body of Sioux had arrived.

Frequently during the day Mr Ramsay anxiously looked out from the watch-tower towards the east, in the hopes of seeing the expected train with provisions. He feared, however, that it might be perceived by the Sioux before it could reach the fort. To prevent this, he sent out a couple of scouts to intercept the train, and lead it by a circuitous route to the north, where it could not be seen from the camp of the Sioux.

The day went slowly by, and another night came on. Again the distant camp-fires were seen blazing up, showing that the savages had not abandoned their designs. What prevented them from at once attacking the fort it was difficult to say, unless they were better informed with regard to its scanty supply of provisions than Jaques had supposed.

Note. In the markets in Canada, not only fish, but animals of all sorts, frozen hard, are brought for sale, and it is curious to see deer and hares and pigs standing in rows, like stuffed animals in a museum, on the market people’s stalls; while fish are placed upright on their tails in the baskets, and look as if they were endeavouring to leap out of them.

Chapter Six.

The Indians blockade the fort—Laurence recognises the Sioux as old friends—Obtains leave to go out and meet them—Induces the Sioux chief to retire—Obtains presents for the Indians—Accompanies them—Laurence finds his old nurse—Laurence bids farewell to his friends at the fort.

Several days had passed by; the provision sleighs had not arrived; none of the hunters had returned to the fort; and already the garrison were feeling the pangs of hunger. Mr Ramsay had placed the people on the smallest possible allowance of food, and yet, on examining the remaining store, he found to his grief that it could not last many days longer. There were horses and cattle feeding in a sheltered valley some miles away, and had it not been for the besieging bands of Sioux, they might easily have been brought in; and unwilling as he would have been to kill them, they would have afforded an ample supply of food. The fort, however, was narrowly watched, and had any people been sent out to bring in the cattle, they would have been pursued and cut off, or had they succeeded, in getting away, they and the cattle would have been to a still greater certainty captured on their return. Mr Ramsay, therefore, unwilling to risk the lives of any of his people, resolved not to make the attempt till they were reduced to the last extremity. He feared, from the conduct of the Sioux, that they must have become acquainted with the condition of the fort, probably from one of the hunters, who, under torture, might have confessed the state of the case.

The early part of the morning had passed quietly away, when a movement was observed in the camp of the Sioux. The white sheet of snow which intervened was soon clotted over with their dark forms as they advanced towards the fort in a long line, extending from east to west, the extreme ends moving at a more rapid rate than the rest, as if they purposed to surround it. On they came, increasing their speed as they drew near, shrieking, and shouting, and frantically brandishing their weapons. Their cries and gestures were terrific in the extreme. They seemed to be working themselves up into a fury, as if preparing to attack the fort, and to destroy the hapless defenders. Mr Ramsay again urged those under his command to die at their posts rather than yield, or to trust to any terms the savages might offer. Mrs Ramsay and her daughter, though pale from hunger, showed no signs of alarm. Their usual morning avocations having been performed, they sat together with the Bible before them, and then kneeling down, with calm confidence offered up their prayers for protection to that merciful God whom they well knew heard all their

petitions.

Laurence, now perfectly recovered, was on the platform, where most of the garrison were stationed. He there stood, with several guns by his side, prepared to fire on the advancing savages. Mr Ramsay had given orders that not a shot should be discharged till the last moment. Although the men had hitherto shown no lack of courage, when they saw the overwhelming numbers of the expected assailants some of them cried out that it would be impossible to defend the fort against their assaults. Mr Ramsay rebuked them severely, and charged them not again to express such an idea. Their courage, was, however, put to a great test; for the savages, rushing on, fired their rifles, sending showers of bullets rattling against the stockades. Happily, none of the defenders were struck. Still, not a shot was discharged in return, and the savages, surprised at this, instead of continuing to rush on, halted.

They had now got so near that even their faces as well as their head-dress, by which the different tribes are distinguished, could clearly be discerned. Mr Ramsay, though unwilling to shed blood, was about to give the order to fire should they again advance, when Laurence exclaimed, "I know them. They are my friends. I am a child of their tribe. They love me; and if I go forth to them, they will listen to what I say." His whole manner seemed changed. As he spoke, his eye brightened. He looked a different being to the careless boy he had hitherto seemed.

"How can you influence them, Laurence?" asked Mr Ramsay. "They are not likely to abandon their designs for anything you can say."

"Oh, yes, yes, I am sure they will," answered Laurence. "Let me go forth at once. I'll tell them that you are my father's friend, that you preserved my life, and that, if they love me as they say, they must not hurt you or any of your people."

"But I am afraid that they will shoot you before they know who you are," said Mr Ramsay.

"Oh, I'll run the risk," exclaimed Laurence. "Let me go forth at once, before it is too late. I will tell them how unwilling you were to injure any of them, and that you are good and kind, and wish to be the red man's friend."

Mr Ramsay, thinking that Laurence might be the means of preserving the fort, no longer opposed his proposal. Laurence, however, agreed to take a white flag in his hand, with the meaning of which most of the tribes accustomed to trade at the forts were well acquainted.

Slipping out at a small postern gate, he let himself down into the trench unseen by the Sioux, and climbing up the opposite bank, the next instant was bounding down the slope of the hill, waving his flag. In a few minutes he had reached the chief who had led the assailants. He uttered a few words, and the next moment the savage warrior stood grasping his hands and gazing in his countenance.

"My second father, though your child has long been away from you, he has not forgotten you," he exclaimed; "but he would ere this have been in the world of spirits had not the good white chief, commander of yonder fort, saved his life; and you cannot, knowing this, desire to injure his kind friends. No, my father; you and my brothers promised to be the friend of your son's friends. I knew you even afar off, and my heart yearned towards you, and I felt sure that you would listen to my prayers. You know not the power and generosity of my white friends. Even at this moment their far-reaching guns are pointed towards you, and had they desired to take your life, they would have fired and laid you and many of my brothers low."

Laurence continued for some minutes in the same strain. The chief seemed troubled. He was unwilling to lose the booty he expected to find in the fort, at the same time that he remembered his promise to his adopted son, and was struck also by what he had said about his white friends.

Laurence thus went on eloquently to plead his cause; at the same time, he took care not to acknowledge how unable the garrison were to hold out much longer.

"You have conquered, my son," exclaimed the chief. "I will speak to your brothers; your friends should be our friends. Had blood been shed, our people would have been unwilling to listen to my counsels; but now all will be well. Show the flag you carry, that no one may fire at us as we retire. We will return to our camp, and you will there see many who will welcome you joyfully again among them."

Laurence, rejoiced at the success of his mission, stood waving his flag, while the Sioux retired from around the fort. He then quickly followed, and overtook the chief. Inquiries were made for his father, who had been received into the tribe and long resided among them. Laurence replied that he hoped he would soon return, and that he was sure he would be well pleased to hear that they had refrained from injuring his white friends.

On reaching the camp, Laurence was received with warm greetings from his red-skinned brothers and sisters, for he was looked on as a brother by all the tribe. He soon found his way to a lodge in which was seated an old woman with shrivelled features, her long white locks hanging down over her skeleton-like shoulders. No sooner did she see him than, uttering a wild shriek of delight, she seized him in her withered arms, and pressed him to her heart.

"My child!" she exclaimed; "and you at length have come back to visit the mother who has been yearning for long years to see you; and you have not forgotten her?"

"No, indeed," answered Laurence; "from the day my white father took me away I have ever thought of you, and recollected the happy times I passed under your care."

"You have come, then, once more to be a brother of our people!" exclaimed his old nurse. "You will not go away again; but you will stay and live in our lodges, and grow up and become a brave hunter of the buffalo and moose, and gladden the eyes of one who loves you better than any white mother."

"I have white friends who love me, and have treated me kindly; I should be loath not to see them again. And there is my white father, who may come for me, and I am bound to follow him," answered Laurence.

"Your white friends and your white father cannot care for you as we do. Your heart cannot be so hardened towards those who brought you up as to wish again to quit them."

Much more his old nurse said in the same strain. Laurence thought of all the kindness he had received from Mrs Ramsay. He was very unwilling also to part from little Jeanie; but old feelings revived within him, the new principles which he had of late heard in the fort had taken no strong hold of him, and he became once more the wild Indian boy of former years.

The chief sent for him, and used further powerful arguments to induce him to remain. Laurence at length promised to continue with his old friends, unless his father should claim him; but he begged first to be allowed to go back to the fort to bid farewell to his white friends.

The wily Sioux had had no intention of losing altogether the share of the prized articles which he supposed the fort to contain. He consented, therefore, to allow Laurence to return, on condition that he would obtain from the white chief, as he called Mr Ramsay, a certain number of guns, ammunition, blankets, knives, and numerous other things which he named.

"If he sends them, we will be his friends; but if not, we shall know that he looks upon us as enemies, and we will take by force what we now only ask as a gift."

Laurence, accompanied by a small band of Sioux, set out as the bearer of this message to the fort. The Indians remained outside while he made his way to the gates. He was welcomed warmly by Mr Ramsay. He was thankful to find that the train with the provisions had arrived, and that several of the hunters had also made their way round by the north into the fort, with two bears and several deer and other animals.

Mr Ramsay, notwithstanding this, wishing to establish, if possible, friendly relations with the Sioux, agreed to send the articles the chief demanded as a gift, though he still thought it prudent not to put himself or any of his people in their power.

"You and your red-skinned friends who have come with you shall, therefore, convey them to the chief, and you will then return and remain with us. I wish to show you how much I value the service you have rendered us; for had the Sioux assailed the fort—as not only had the provisions, but our ammunition run short—they very probably would have entered and put every one within to death."

Laurence hung down his head. "I should like to remain, sir," he said, "but I have promised to return, and live with the Sioux, unless my father comes for me. I am at home with them, and know all their ways, and shall become some day, so they say, a great chief among them."

"Their ways, I fear, are bad ways," said Mr Ramsay. "And though I cannot tell you to break your promise, you will, I am sure, some day grieve bitterly that you made it. However, go in and see Mrs Ramsay and Jeanie. You would not wish to go without bidding them farewell."

"I dare not face them; they might make my heart melt," answered Laurence, doubting his own resolution; but Mr Ramsay led him to the house.

Jeanie burst into tears when she heard of his intentions. "Oh, Laurence, and can you, after you have heard about Jesus, have been told of His love, and how He wishes you to be ready to go and live with Him for ever and ever, in glory and happiness, again go back to dwell among heathen savages, who do all sorts of things contrary to His will, merely for the sake of enjoying what you call liberty for a few short years, and thus risk the loss of your soul?" said Mrs Ramsay, taking him kindly by the hand.

"The Sioux, in their dark ignorance, may wish you well, so far as this world is concerned, though the life they would induce you to lead is full of danger and hardships; but here you have friends, who desire not only to benefit your mind and body, but to show you how you may obtain blessings which no earthly power can take away, and which will endure throughout eternity. Think of that, Laurence. Would you barter your soul for the sake of a few years of wild excitement, and what you suppose to be enjoyment, and die as a poor ignorant savage, forgetting God and His mercy and loving-kindness, as shown to us in giving His Son to die for our sins, that we may be received again as favoured children, to live with Him in unspeakable happiness for ever and ever?"

"But if I become a warrior, and die bravely fighting, I shall go to the happy hunting-grounds with my Indian friends," answered Laurence.

It was too evident that all which had been said to the poor lad had fallen upon barren ground. Laurence was still a heathen.

Chapter Seven.

The life of Laurence among the Indians—Shooting the buffalo—The hunters' camp and feast—Laurence in the wood—The Sioux hunters shot by Crees—Laurence lies concealed—His first prayer—Passes a fearful night—His encampment attacked by wolves—Journey over the snow—Falls into a snow-drift.

Laurence was once more with his Indian friends. They were delighted with the presents they had received, and he found himself treated with respect and attention by all the tribe. A horse and arms were provided for him; he was

clothed in a dress of skins, ornamented with feathers and beads, and was looked upon as the son of their chief. Still he could not forget the kindness he had received at the fort, and he very often regretted that he had been persuaded by the Sioux to abandon his white friends. Mr Ramsay would, he knew, inform his father where he had gone, should he return to the fort. He sometimes hoped that the old trapper would come and claim him, although the life he was compelled to lead with him was even harder and more full of danger than his present existence with the Sioux.

The tribe had moved to a considerable distance from the fort, where they again took up their winter quarters. Hence they sent out parties of hunters to capture buffalo, which, in small herds, pasture, even while the snow lies on the ground, by digging beneath it to reach the dry grass. Laurence, whose mind was ill at ease, endeavoured to banish thought by joining on every opportunity these expeditions. They were, he knew, full of danger. Sometimes the powerful buffalo would turn on their assailants, and broken limbs and wounds, and not unfrequently death, was the consequence. Snow storms might come on, and before the shelter of a wood could be gained horses and men might be overwhelmed. They were also on the borders of the country of the Crees, the deadly enemies of the Sioux, who would without fail put to death any who might fall into their hands. In the summer, when large herds of buffaloes appear, the hunters, on swift horses, and armed with rifle, or bows and sharp arrows, gallop fearlessly in among them, shooting them down, again managing dexterously to extricate themselves from amid the concourse of animals. Sometimes also a large enclosure is formed with a narrow entrance, and having a road lined with trees leading to it, broad at the outer end, and gradually decreasing in width towards the mouth of the pound. The hunters, forming a wide semicircle in the distance, drive the animals towards it, while people with flags stationed on either side of the road prevent the buffalo breaking through, which are thus induced to rush on till they become entrapped in the pound, where they are shot down with bullets or arrows. In the winter, however, buffaloes can only be approached by stalking, the hunter creeping cautiously on till he gets within range of his victim. Sometimes also a cruel stratagem is employed.

Laurence had gone out with three hunters on horseback. They had proceeded a considerable distance without meeting any animals; still, eager to obtain some meat, of which the camp was greatly in want, they pushed onwards. At length they descried, in the far distance to the north, several buffalo feeding near the banks of a broad stream. As they approached, they discovered that they were cows, and had two young buffaloes among them. The wary animals had espied them, and were making slowly off. Each of the hunters carried on his saddle the skin of an animal with the hair on. Laurence had that of a young buffalo calf, as also had one of the others, while the remaining two were provided with skins of wolves. Securing their horses to some trees near the banks of the river, the hunters covered their backs with the skins. Trailing their rifles along the ground, Laurence and his companion with the calf skin cautiously crept towards the buffalo, while the men in wolves' clothing followed at a distance. As they advanced, the animals stopped to watch them, uncertain what they were. Thus they were enabled to make their way towards the generally cautious monsters of the prairie. The seeming wolves now crept on at faster speed, when the buffaloes, believing that some of their young were in danger of destruction from the savage foes they were accustomed to dread, dashed forward to rescue them. The wolves now hastened on, and made as if they were about to spring on the calves. As the buffaloes rushed up, the hunters sprang to their feet, and firing at the heads of the confiding and faithful animals, brought three of them to the ground. The rest, astonished at finding themselves face to face with human foes, turning round, bellowing with rage, galloped away. The unfortunate animals were quickly despatched with the hunters' knives. The bodies were then dragged by the horses to the wood which bordered the stream. As much of the meat as the horses could carry was then packed, ready to be transported to the camp the following morning, while the remainder was hung up on the higher branches of the neighbouring trees. The hunters next lighted a fire, putting up a screen of birch bark to keep off the wind, while they sat down to regale themselves on the humps and other prize portions of the animals. Here, while their horses were left to pick up their food from beneath the snow, the hardy hunters purposed, without seek any other shelter, to pass the night.

The sky had been for some time overcast, and snow began to fall heavily; but their fire blazed up brightly, and as they sat close round it, enjoying its warmth, they cared little for the thick flakes which passed by them. Steak after steak of the buffalo meat disappeared, as they sat eating and boasting of their deeds of war and the chase, and fully giving themselves up to savage enjoyment.

Laurence listened to their tales, wondering whether he should ever perform similar brave deeds. Unaccustomed for so long to the ways of his wild companions, he had soon satisfied his hunger, and in spite of the fire, feeling the cold severely, he had gone a short distance into the wood to bring some large pieces of birch-bark with which he could form an additional shelter for himself, by putting up a small wigwam. Having found the pieces of bark, he was on the point of returning when the sharp report of several rifles rang through the air, and looking towards the fire, he saw two of his companions stretched on the ground, while the other was in vain struggling to rise. A fierce yell followed, and directly afterwards the light of the fire fell on a party of Cree warriors, who came springing out of the darkness towards the spot. He stopped to see no more, but, urged by the instinct of self-preservation, he made his way through the wood till he reached a thick mass of bushes, into the midst of which he threw himself, in the hopes that he might escape the search of the savages. He lay there, expecting every instant to be discovered, and put to death. He could hear the shouts of the victors as they hastily partook of the feast prepared by those they had slaughtered, and having caught their horses, loaded them with the buffalo meat. He judged by the sounds of their voices that his enemies were moving from the spot; and as they got further and further away, he began to entertain the hope of escape. Still fearing that they might come back, he dared not move. He felt very cold and wretched, yet the horror of the scene he had witnessed kept him from going to sleep. Poor Laurence, as he lay there almost frozen to death, not for the first time perhaps repented of his folly in having quitted the protection of his kind friends in the fort. The recollection, too, of the many things Mrs Ramsay and Jeanie had said to him came back to his mind.

"I wonder if I was to pray to the great God they told me of, He would take care of me, and lead me back to them," he thought. "They told me He hears prayers, and would listen to those which so careless and foolish a boy as I have been may make to Him; but then they said I must pray through Jesus Christ; that He is good and merciful, and loves me, and died for me too. I am sure they spoke the truth, for they would not deceive me; and so I'll pray through Jesus Christ, and ask God to protect me; for I am sure I shall never get back to the camp of the Sioux by myself without my

horse, and that, of course, the Crees have carried off.”

Poor Laurence did pray with all his heart, ignorant half-heathen that he was in many respects.

He soon fell asleep, and the snow came down and nearly covered up the bushes among which he lay. He awoke at length, finding a thick canopy over him, which, had he not been well clothed in furs, would probably have formed his shroud. He easily made his way out.

The spot where the fire had been was covered with snow. He could distinguish the bodies of his companions beneath it, but he dared not disturb them. Some of the buffalo meat which the Crees had not discovered still hung on the trees; he loaded himself with as much as he could carry, and then hastened away from the fatal spot. At first he thought of attempting to reach the camp of the Sioux, but it was a long distance off, and all the tracks had disappeared. So had those of the Crees. Should they be on the watch for their enemies, he would very probably fall into their hands. Then, again, the desire to be once more with his friends at the fort came strong upon him; but how could he hope to reach it across miles and miles of snow? It was somewhere away to the north-east, that was all he knew; and although the sun was gaining power when the sky was bright, the wind often blew bitterly cold at night. Yet to stay where he was would be certain death, and so the hardy boy, making up his mind to try and reach the fort, and trusting to his strength and courage, began his hazardous journey.

He had lived among the Indians long enough to learn something of their cunning; and as he went along he stripped off from his dress all the ornaments and other signs which might show that they had been manufactured by the Sioux, and hid them away in a hole beneath the snow. He had a tinder-box and powder-horn in his pouch, so that he was able to light a fire. As night approached, he made his way towards a wood, near the bank of a stream, where he could procure fuel. Here he built himself a hut with birch-bark, banking it up thickly with snow. He had not forgotten the fate of his companions on the previous night; but he hoped that the Crees were by this time far away, and he knew that, without a fire, he should run the risk of being destroyed by wolves prowling about. He therefore made it inside the hut, where it was also well sheltered from the wind, and he hoped that the light would not be seen at a distance; his chief fear was that, should he sleep too long it might go out. Closing the entrance of his hut with a sheet of bark, he made up his fire, and sat down to sup on a piece of meat which he cooked before it. There was but little space in his hut to allow him to go to sleep without the risk of burning his clothes, though he had drawn himself as far away from it as he could, and leaned back against the wall of the hut. Fatigue at length, however, overcame his desire to keep on the alert.

He was awoke by hearing a wild howling around him: he knew the sound full well; it was that of a pack of wolves. His fire had almost gone out; he hurriedly scraped the embers together, and drew in from the front of the hut some fuel which he had kept in store. The voices of the wolves came nearer and nearer. He had just time to light a bundle of sticks when he heard the savage animals close to his hut. He boldly went out and waved his torch around, shouting and shrieking with all his might. The wolves, alarmed at the sudden glare of the light and the sound of a human voice, took to flight. He once more closed the entrance of his hut and sat down. It did not occur to him that it was his duty to return thanks to God for his deliverance. He fancied that it was his cleverness and boldness that had saved him. He had been ready to ask that unknown Great Spirit to preserve him. How many daily receive blessings from the Giver of all good, and yet ungratefully forget to acknowledge them and refuse to do His will!

Fear of the wolves prevented Laurence from sleeping soundly, and he started up constantly, expecting to hear their savage howlings.

Daylight came at last, and he once more pushed forward over the snow. He had cooked a piece of buffalo meat, which he ate beneath the shelter of a bank, when he saw the sun high in the sky. It restored his strength for a time; but as night again approached he felt far more weary than on the previous day. He built a hut as before, and lighted a fire, and scarcely had he eaten his supper before he dropped off to sleep. He awoke, feeling very cold, though somewhat refreshed; and great was his surprise to find the sun already high in the sky. He had been preserved from danger during the hours of darkness; but, alas! he did not kneel down to pray, but thought only that it was very fortunate the wolves had not come near him, and he hoped to have the same good luck, so he called it, the next night.

“I daresay I shall be able to reach the fort, notwithstanding my fears, in a few days,” he said to himself. “I must try to avoid the Crees, though; but I fancy that I am clever enough to do that.”

He trudged bravely on, hour after hour. The sky was clear, and the sun enabled him to direct his course with tolerable accuracy. Still his feet, inured though he was to fatigue, felt very weary, and he longed to arrive at the end of his journey. Sometimes he regretted that he had not tried to make his way to the Sioux camp; he might have reached it sooner. No wood was in sight, where he might build his hut and light a fire as usual for the night. He gnawed, as he walked on, a piece of the hard frozen meat, a small portion of which now only remained. Still he was afraid to stop.

A level plain, covered with snow, lay before him; he looked around in vain for some sheltering hill or wood. The sun was sinking low on his left. He must try, before darkness set in, to make his way across that wide plain. He did his utmost to exert his remaining strength. Darkness at last came on. He fancied he could distinguish a wood and a range of hills in the distance. He would make a desperate effort to reach it. Suddenly he found himself sinking in the snow. He struggled to get out, but sank lower and lower. He had fallen into a gully or water-course, now filled up by drift-snow. At length, finding his efforts vain, he gave himself up for lost, every moment expecting that the snow wreath would overwhelm him. As he lay there, he could see the stars come out and shine brightly over his head, and thus he knew that there was an opening above him; but he was afraid to move lest he might bring the snow down upon his head. Sheltered from the wind, he felt tolerably warm, and at last, in spite of his perilous position, he fell fast asleep.

Chapter Eight.

Laurence in the snow—Discovered by Crees—Rescued—Conveyed to the chief's tent—Kindness of the old chief—Escorted to the fort—Fears as to his reception—Kindly welcomed by Mr Ramsay—Laurence again falls sick—Mrs Ramsay explains the gospel to him—Laurence begins to understand it.

Daylight came again. Laurence, on opening his eyes, found himself surrounded by a high wall of snow. He was hungry, but he had consumed every particle of food. His strength was almost gone. He somewhat assuaged his thirst by eating a little snow, though that gave him but momentary relief. Again he made an attempt to get out, hoping by beating down the snow to form steps in the side of the wall up which he might climb, but the snow came sliding down in vast masses upon him, and by the time he had struggled out of it he felt so weak that he was unable to make any further effort. With a cry of despair he fell back on the heap which had been formed by the snow slipping down, and out of which he had just made his way. For some minutes he was unconscious. Then the barking of dogs once more aroused him. The sound of human voices struck his ear. He listened with breathless anxiety to hear the language they spoke. They drew near. "I am lost if they find me," he said to himself. "They are Crees." Directly afterwards, several dogs poked their noses over the edge of the pit and barked to attract the attention of their masters. He waited, expecting in a few minutes to be put to death. Then, casting his eyes upwards, he saw the faces of two savages looking down upon him. He knew them at once to be Crees. He tried to speak—not to ask their pity, for that he believed would be useless, but, after the Indian fashion, to dare them to do their worst. His tongue, however, refused its office. Presently he saw them beginning to scrape away the snow; and as they commenced at the top, they were soon able to form some rough steps in the side of the pit, down which one of them descended. Laurence closed his eyes, expecting to have the scalp cut from his head. Instead of that the Cree lifted him in his arms, and, with the assistance of his companion, soon brought him to the surface. Making a wide circuit, to avoid the gully, together they bore him across the plain. They were directing their course towards some lodges which were erected close to a wood, and under the shelter of a high hill. On reviving, Laurence found himself in a large roomy hut, by the side of a fire, near which sat a tall Indian somewhat advanced in years. A squaw was chafing his feet, while another, bending over the fire, was cooking a mess of broth. She soon came round to him, and poured some of the warm mixture down his throat, which greatly revived him. He tried to sit up, but again fell back on the pile of skins on which his head had been resting.

"Do not try to move, young pale face," said the chief. "Your strength has gone for a while, but the Great Spirit will soon restore it. You shall then tell me whence you come, and how you happened to be where my sons found you. We are friends of the pale faces, and would gladly aid you to the best of our power."

These words greatly revived Laurence's spirits. The chief, however, insisted on not letting him speak until he had taken some rest. The kind squaw had put on his feet some warm dry socks, and then began chafing his hands, and in a short time he again fell asleep.

When Laurence awoke there was no one in the tent. This gave him time to consider what he should say. He would speak truly, and tell the Cree chief that he wished to make his way to the fort, and would be grateful to him if he would assist him in reaching it. He soon found, however, when he attempted to rise, that he was utterly unable to do so. The chief smiled when he heard his account.

"You speak but partly the truth," he said. "Still, you are a pale face, and I regard the pale faces with affection. When you are restored to strength I'll conduct you thither; for it is some way off, and unaided, without horses, or weapons to defend yourself or obtain food, you would not have been able to find your way there. I know with whom you have been, though you have pulled off the ornaments. That dress was manufactured by the Sioux. However, though you were foolish to consort with such people, you are wisely making your escape from them. So speak no more about it."

Laurence felt ashamed of himself at having been so easily detected. He at once acknowledged that the chief was right in his conjectures.

For several days he was kept in the tent of the friendly chief, and treated by his squaws as if he had been a son. When he had sufficiently recovered to sit on horseback, the chief, covering him with a thick cloak of furs, set out with a party of his people towards the fort. Even although they formed a strong party, as it was possible that bands of Sioux might attack them, scouts were sent out in all directions to feel their way as they advanced.

In what a wretched state is man who knows not God, and loves not the Saviour! Instead of peace, goodwill, and friendly intercourse existing in that savage land, every man's hand is against his neighbour, and in each stranger he expects to find a foe.

The party, however, reached the neighbourhood of the fort without meeting any enemies. Laurence had left his friends, proud of his recovered strength, and fancying that he was about to enjoy the liberty of a savage life. He was now returning sick and weak, and a feeling of shame and doubt of the reception he might meet with stole over him. He kept behind the chief and his party, and hung down his head as they drew near the gates. They were recognised from the fort, and several of the garrison came out to give them a friendly greeting.

The old chief related how his sons had found and rescued the white-skin boy, and Laurence was brought forward just as Mr Ramsay, followed by his wife and daughter, appeared from their house. Jeanie recognised him in a moment, and running forward, took his hand, exclaiming, "Oh, Laurence, is it you? I am so glad you have come back. We all thought harm would befall you among those savage Sioux. You look pale and ill. Oh papa! mamma! it is Laurence," she added, looking towards her parents, who were advancing.

Laurence was silent. It was so long since he had spoken English that he could not for some seconds find words to express himself. Mr Ramsay warmly shook him by the hand, and his wife welcomed him with the same cordiality, while not a syllable of reproach did they utter.

"He does indeed look ill," said Mrs Ramsay. "Come to the house, my poor boy," she said. "Your old room shall be prepared for you, and you can tell us all that has happened by-and-by."

Laurence burst into tears. The reception he met with was so different from what he had expected that it overcame him. He had borne up during the journey, but his strength now gave way; and he required almost the same attention and care that he had before received.

"I was indeed wicked and foolish in choosing to go and live with my old savage friends, instead of remaining with you, good Christian people, who are so kind to me," he said at length to Mrs Ramsay, as she sat by his bedside. "Can you forgive me?"

"Yes, indeed we can; and we are very thankful that you have been brought back to us," she answered. "God himself shows that we ought to receive those who have done wrong when they repent and desire to return to the right way. He himself in His mercy is always thus ready to receive repentant sinners who desire to be reconciled to Him. I'll read to you the parable of the prodigal son, and you will then understand how God the Father, as He in His goodness allows us to call Him, receives all His children who come back to Him, acknowledging their sins and transgressions. He not only does this, but He has pointed out a way by which the sinner can be reconciled to Him, and have all his sins completely blotted out, or put out of remembrance and done away with. That way is by simple faith in the atoning blood of Jesus; in other words, God desires us to believe that Jesus, His own well-beloved Son, pure and holy and sinless, became man, and was punished by death on the cross instead of us; and thus His justice, which can by no means overlook or forgive sin, is perfectly satisfied with that punishment, and He considers the debt we owe Him fully paid. Can you understand this, Laurence?"

"I will try to do so," answered the boy. "But I do not understand it yet."

"Then you must pray for the aid of God's Holy Spirit to enable you to understand it; for He alone has the power of doing that. All that one person can do for others is simply to explain the truth to them, and to read God's Word to them, or urge them to read it if they can. You, Laurence, must learn to read it without delay."

"Oh, yes, I will try now," he said, "if you and Jeanie will teach me. I was very idle before."

"That we will gladly," answered Mrs Ramsay. "But, recollect, you must not only try to read, but you must ask God's Holy Spirit to enable you to understand it also. It is not sufficient to know that Christ died on the cross to reconcile sinners to God; but you must believe that He died for you, and to reconcile you to God; for without that, whatever you may do or profess, you are still in your sins, an outcast from God, and deserving, as you will assuredly receive, punishment for your sins."

"Tell me, Mrs Ramsay, how am I to believe that Christ died for me? I feel that I am wicked, and very unlike what you, and Mr Ramsay, and Jeanie are, who are Christians; but I cannot think that the Son of God should have suffered death for a poor miserable boy like me."

"It's very simple. God does not give us a very difficult task," answered Mrs Ramsay. "All He requires of us is to take Him at His word: 'God so loved the world, that he gave his only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.' You understand, Laurence, that God does not say, only people who have been generally well behaved, and are supposed to be good, but *whosoever*, which includes every human being, however bad and abandoned they may have been. The prodigal son had been very ungrateful and very wicked, but his father received him as soon as he came back. That parable was told by Christ himself, to show that His Father in heaven gladly receives all sinners returning to Him. When God says, 'He so loved the world,' He means the people in the world, and we know that the world lies in wickedness. Oh, trust God, for He is loving and merciful, and without doubt or fear accept His offers of reconciliation."

Chapter Nine.

Arrival of Mr Martin, the missionary—He preaches the gospel to the Indians—Laurence listens with attention—Learns more of the truth, and expresses his wish to make it known to others—The spring returns.

A keen, strong wind was blowing, driving the heavy snow which fell in small sharp flakes over the ground, when, one evening shortly after the arrival of Laurence, a dog sleigh was seen approaching the fort. The sleigh, which was simply a narrow board turned up in front, a slight iron frame forming the sides and back, and lined with buffalo skins, was drawn by six dogs, harnessed two and two, while the driver ran behind, with a long whip guiding the animals. On it came, in spite of the snow storm, at rapid speed, for the sagacious dogs knew that they had nearly reached the end of their journey. The traveller, who had faced the dangers of a long journey over the trackless wintry waste, was welcomed by Mr Ramsay, who conducted him to the house. Some time elapsed, however, before he could venture near a fire, after the bitter cold to which he had been exposed.

"We have been long looking for you, Mr Martin," said Mrs Ramsay, as she came out to greet him; "and thank Heaven that you have arrived in safety."

"We should thank the God of heaven and earth for all the blessings we receive," answered Mr Martin, who was the missionary Mrs Ramsay had been so anxious should come to form a station near the fort. "I shall be amply repaid if I am permitted to win souls to Christ in this neighbourhood."

"It will be a hard task, for they are deeply sunk in heathen ignorance," observed Mr Ramsay.

“An impossible task, if man alone were to engage in it,” said Mr Martin. “Man, however, is but the humble instrument; God the Holy Spirit is the active agent, and with Him nothing is impossible. Let us labour on, confident in that glorious fact; and whatever may appear in the way, we may be sure that the victory will be won, not by us, but by Him, who is all-powerful.”

Such was the faith in which the new missionary commenced his labours among the savage Crees of the woods and plains who frequented the neighbourhood of the fort. The glad tidings of salvation by faith in the blood of the Lamb, shed for sinful man, sounded strange in their ears. Strange, too, it seemed to them, when they were told of His great love, which made Him willingly yield himself up as an all-atoning sacrifice of His abounding goodwill; and stranger still seemed His law, that man should not only love his neighbours himself, but should love his enemies; should do good to those who despitefully use and abuse him, and should willingly forgive all who offend him, as he hopes to be forgiven by God for his offences.

Among his most earnest hearers on the first day he preached the gospel to the Indians assembled in the fort was young Laurence. He had sufficiently recovered to leave the house, though he was now always unwilling to be absent from it longer than he could help. All the time he was within doors he was endeavouring to learn to read that wonderful Book, which God in His mercy has given to man, that he may know His will and understand His dealings with mankind.

Laurence, however, as yet had made little progress in reading, but he could listen to Jeanie and her mother read to him without ever growing weary.

Still as yet his mind did not comprehend many of the more glorious truths, and he held to the idea that he himself had some great work to do, to merit the love of God and the glory of Heaven.

He asked Mr Martin how he was to set about the work. “I want to be very good,” he said, “and to do something with which God will be highly pleased, and then I am sure I shall go to heaven when I die.”

“My dear young friend,” answered Mr Martin, “had you read the Bible, you would have found that ‘there are none that do good, no, not one;’ and that ‘God came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.’ God will certainly be well pleased with you, not from any good works which you can do, but simply if you banish all thoughts of your own merits, and put faith in His well-beloved Son; then He will assuredly fulfil His promise to make you heir with Him of eternal life, and receive you into that glorious heaven he has prepared for all those who love Him.”

“But I am afraid, sir, that I can never have faith enough or love enough to satisfy God.”

“You certainly, my young friend, can never have too much faith or too much love,” said Mr Martin. “But God does not say that He will measure our faith or our love, or our sorrow for sin, but He simply tells us to take him at His word, to show our love by our obedience; and then Jesus Christ tells us what He would have all those who love Him to do, namely, to follow His example—to make known His Gospel among those who do not know it. Have you read the account of the thief on the cross?”

“I have heard it,” said Laurence. “Jeanie read it to me yesterday.”

“Did it not occur to you that, when Christ told that dying thief that he should be with Him in paradise, it was not on account of his burning faith, still less because he had performed any works, or because of obedience, but simply because he believed that He who hung like himself on the cross was the Messiah who should come into the world to die for sinful men. But though He saves all who come to Him, simply if they will but trust Him, He desires these to remain in the world, as He desired His disciples, to make His Gospel known among their companions, to tell them what great things the Lord has done for their souls; while to some He gives the command to go forth with the glad tidings throughout all lands; and thus He has put it into my heart, and enabled me to come here to win souls for Him.”

Day after day Laurence listened to these and other glorious truths which Mr Martin unfolded to him from God’s Word, and when the missionary was otherwise engaged, Jeanie or Mrs Ramsay read to him, or assisted him in learning to read. He felt himself becoming, as he was indeed, a new creature; his old habits of thought were passing away. He wondered sometimes how he could have thought as he had done.

“Ah, then I was in darkness,” he said to himself. “I knew nothing of the love of God I knew not how sinful I was, and how He hates sin, though He loves the sinner. I knew not that God is so pure and holy that even the heavens are not clean in His sight; and I had no idea how sinful sin is, how contrary in every way to God. I had little thought that God, my loving Father, would hear the prayers of so wicked, wayward a child as I was, and as I am indeed still, if left to myself in my own nakedness; but I know now that He does not look at me as I am in myself, but as I am clothed with Christ’s righteousness. Trusting in Him, I am no longer naked, but dressed in His pure and spotless robe, at which God will alone look when I offer up my prayers; and that, for the sake of His son, He listens to all who are thus clothed. Oh how thankful I ought to be that God has made known these joyous things to me!”

When, some days afterwards, Laurence expressed the same thoughts to Mr Martin, the missionary replied, “Now these things are yours, can you be so selfish as not to desire to make them known to others?”

“Oh, indeed, I do wish to make them known,” exclaimed Laurence. “I should like to tell every one I meet of them, and to go forth and find people to whom to tell them.”

“Before you do that, you must prepare yourself, you must be armed for the battle you will have to fight; for a severe battle it is, and you will find Satan, the great enemy to the truth, ever ready to oppose you. The thought of this, however, will stimulate you to make the necessary preparations, by study and prayer; and I trust, Laurence, that some day God will employ you as His missionary among the savage Indians of this long-benighted land.”

Chapter Ten.

Laurence learns what it is to be a Christian—Gets leave to set out in search of his father—Starts on an expedition with Peter, a Christian Cree—Discovers two of Michael's traps—A party of Blackfeet—Blackfeet wound old Michael—Blackfeet captured—Laurence goes to his father's assistance—Peter preaches to the Blackfeet, and invites them to the fort—The Blackfeet set at liberty—Hearing Laurence explain the gospel to him—Laurence conveys the old trapper to the fort—Narrates to Mr Martin his former life—Mr Martin tells him that the Queen has pardoned him—The old trapper at length believes the truth—Returns with Laurence to Canada—Laurence restored to his parents—Revisits the fort as a missionary.

Spring was now advancing. Laurence was anxiously looking out for the return of his father. He would, at all events, have longed to see him; but his desire to do so was greatly increased by his wish to impart to him a knowledge of the glorious truths he himself possessed. Having learned the priceless value of his own soul, he could now appreciate that of others.

Laurence's faith was simple, and he enjoyed a clear view of the gospel truth.

From every Indian who came to the fort he made inquiries for the old trapper, who was known to many of them. At length several brought tidings of his death. Laurence refused to believe them; and when Mr Ramsay came to cross-question his visitors, he found that they had only heard the report from others. Laurence, therefore, begged that he might be allowed to go out and search for the old man.

"I know all his haunts so well," he said, "that I am sure I shall find him better than any one else; he may be sick in some distant place, and unable to come as he promised."

So earnestly did he plead that Mr Ramsay, hoping that his old friend might still be alive, could no longer refuse to let him go.

A Cree who had become a Christian, and was named Peter, offered to accompany him; and Laurence thankfully accepted his assistance.

The only provision they took with them was a good supply of pemmican; but they had an abundance of ammunition, knowing that they might depend for their support on the animals they might shoot.

"You will come back, Laurence, when you have found your father?" said Jeanie, as, with tears in her eyes, she wished him good-bye.

"If God spares me, and I have the means to do so, I will come back, whether I find him or not; I promise you that," answered Laurence. "That object alone would have induced me to quit the fort. I have no longer any wish to roam or lead the wild life of a trapper; and when I return, my great desire will be to go on with the study of that blessed Book which you first taught me to read and love."

"I taught you to read it, but God's Holy Spirit could alone have taught you to love it," answered Jeanie.

Laurence and Peter, followed by the prayers of many in the fort, set out on their expedition. The appearance of the country was now completely changed from the stern aspect it had worn but a few weeks before. Trees and shrubs were clothed with a livery of green of varied hues, the grass was springing up in rich luxuriance, and flowers exhibited their gem-like tints in the valleys and woods; full streams flowed with rapid currents, sparkling along; numberless birds flew through the air, swarmed on the lakes, or perched on the boughs of the forest-trees.

Laurence led the way towards the spot where he and his father had concealed their traps before they set out to visit the fort, believing that old Michael would to a certainty have visited them, and hoping to find some traces beyond showing the direction he had afterwards taken. Peter agreed with him that this was the best course to pursue. The journey would take them many days. Although so long a time had elapsed, from habit Laurence recollected the various landmarks, and was able to direct his course with great accuracy.

They arrived at length at the spot where the white wolf-skin had been concealed. It was gone; and from the tracks near it, which an Indian alone would have observed, Peter was of opinion that Michael must have removed it. On they went, therefore, over hill and dale, camping at night by the side of a fire, the warm weather enabling them to dispense with any shelter, towards the next spot where the wolf traps had been concealed. These also had been taken, and Peter found the tree to which the old man had tied his horse while he fastened them on their backs. They soon reached the wood within which Laurence had assisted to hide the beaver traps. They also had been removed.

"Now I know that my father intended to begin trapping as soon as the spring commenced," observed Laurence. "See, he took his way onward through the wood towards the north, instead of returning by the road he came."

Laurence and Peter's keen eyes easily distinguished the twigs which the horses had broken as the old trapper led them through the wood. Probably he intended to spend the remainder of the winter in a wigwam by himself, as he often had done, or else in the lodges of some friendly Crees.

Laurence and Peter now went confidently on, expecting before long to meet with further traces of the old trapper. The borders of all the neighbouring lakes and streams were visited, but no signs of his having trapped there were discovered. Many leagues were passed over, till at last an Indian village was reached. It consisted not of neat cottages, but of birch-bark wigwams of a sugar-loaf form, on the banks of a stream, a few patches of Indian corn and some small tobacco plantations being the only signs of cultivation around; fish sported in the river; and the wild

animals of the forest afforded the inhabitants the chief means of subsistence. They welcomed the travellers. Peter was of their tribe. They gave them tidings of old Michael. He had been seen to pass just before the snow had begun to melt in the warmer valleys.

Peter did not fail to tell his red-skinned brothers of the wonderful tidings the white-face missionary at the fort had brought.

"The great God of the white-faces loves us as much as He does them," he exclaimed. "He wishes us to go and dwell with Him in a far better land than the happy hunting-grounds we have hitherto heard of. He says that we are wicked, and deserve punishment; but He has allowed another, His own well-beloved Son, to be punished instead of us; and all He wants us to do is to believe that His dutiful and well-beloved Son was so punished, and to follow the example which He set while He was on earth."

"These are wise things you tell us," cried several of the Crees; "but how do you know that it is so?"

"Because it is all written in a book which He has given to us. He sends His Holy Spirit to all who seek for His aid to understand that book."

Laurence assured the Crees that he had thought us they then did a short time ago, but that now he knew that all Peter said was true. So earnestly did Peter plead the cause of the gospel, that many of the Crees promised to visit the fort, to hear from the missionary himself further on the subject.

Several of the inhabitants offered to accompany Laurence and his friends to assist them in their search, and to spread the strange tidings they had heard among others of their tribe whom they might fall in with.

For several days they journeyed on, lakes and streams being visited as before. At last they found a broken trap. Laurence, on examining it, decided that it belonged to his father. Still he must have gone further to the west. Laurence began to fear that he might have wandered into a part of the country frequented by Blackfeet and Peigans, among the most savage tribes of the Sioux.

"He is friendly with many of the Sioux, among whom, indeed, I was brought up," observed Laurence, "and fears none of them. Still, I know how treacherous many of them are; and he may, I fear, have fallen into their power. This will account for his not returning to the fort."

"He may, however, have escaped them, and be still trapping about here, as it is a rich country for the beaver," observed Peter. "We may then hope ere long to find him."

The party now advanced more cautiously than before. They had certain proof that old Michael was in the neighbourhood; for Laurence discovered, by the side of a beaver pond, another of his father's traps. Why it was deserted he could not tell. Peter was of opinion that he had hurried away from the spot, probably on account of the appearance of enemies, and had been unable to return. This increased Laurence's anxiety. They now advanced according to Indian custom, concealing themselves behind every bush and rock, and climbing each height or tall tree whence they could obtain a view of the surrounding country.

It was towards evening, and they were looking out for a sheltered place for their camp. Peter had gone to the summit of a hill and gazed around for the purpose mentioned, when he came hurrying down.

"There are Blackfeet at the further end of the valley," he said, "and by their movements they are evidently watching for some one. If it is your father, we have no time to lose. We outnumber them, and may hope easily to come off victorious."

"Oh, let us not delay a moment, or we may be too late to save him," exclaimed Laurence; and they and their allies pushed on as before in the direction where Peter had seen the Blackfeet. By carefully keeping among the thick underwood and trees they hoped to take their enemies by surprise.

"Remember, my friends," said Laurence, "that though we conquer them, we are to endeavour to spare their lives, and by no means to injure them."

With stealthy steps Laurence and his friends advanced towards the Blackfeet, of whom they now discovered there were but five, while his party numbered eight. They were so eager in tracking whatever they were in pursuit of that, notwithstanding their usual wariness, they did not discover the approach of Laurence and the Crees. Presently the Blackfeet were seen to draw their bows, and several arrows winged their flight through the air. At the same time Laurence caught sight of the figure of a man, who sprang up from where he had been seated near a fire to seek shelter behind a rock, firing his rifle as he did so. Laurence recognised his father, and to his horror saw that two arrows had pierced his body. The moment he fired, one of the Blackfeet fell to the ground. The old man stood as if uninjured, calmly reloading his weapon; while the Indians, with their bows ready drawn to shoot should he reappear, sprang towards the thick trunks of some neighbouring trees to escape his fire. They were thus separated from each other, and brought nearer to where Laurence and his party lay concealed. Peter now made a sign to his companions, and in a few bounds they were up to the Blackfeet, who, thus taken unawares, were pinioned and brought to the ground before they could turn round and shoot their arrows or draw their hatchets from their belts.

Laurence, leaving his companions to guard their prisoners, who, expecting instant death, had assumed that stoic indifference of which Indians boast, hastened to the assistance of his father. He shouted as he ran, "Father, father, I am coming to you."

The old man, who had sunk on one knee, with rifle ready prepared to fight to the last, fortunately recognised his voice. "What have become of the Blackfeet, boy?" were his first words. "I saw the Crees spring from under cover to

attack them. Have they killed the treacherous vermin?"

"No, father," answered Laurence. "Our friends made them prisoners. We will spare their lives, and pray God to soften their hearts."

"What is that you say?" asked Michael. "The Crees will surely kill them, and take their scalps, unless they wish to carry them to their lodges, that their wives and children may torture them as they deserve. But I feel faint, Laurence; their arrows have made some ugly wounds in my flesh; help me to get them out."

Laurence saw with grief that his father was indeed badly hurt; and as he supported him, he shouted to Peter to come to his assistance. Peter, having helped to secure their prisoners, soon appeared. The old trapper, notwithstanding his hardihood, had fainted from pain and loss of blood. Peter's first care was to extricate the arrows, which, though they had inflicted severe injuries, had mercifully not reached any vital part. He and Laurence then, having bound up his wounds, carried him to his little wigwam, which stood close by. Within it were a large supply of skins, several traps, and articles for camp use, to obtain which probably the treacherous Blackfeet had attacked old Michael. In the meadow hard by his horses were also found. Laurence sat by his side, supporting his head, and moistening his parched lips. He soon sufficiently recovered to speak.

"I was about to return, Laurence," he said, "but I wished to bring a good amount of skins to pay for your charges, should you wish to remain longer at the fort, and learn the ways of the white man; or if not, to fit you out, that you might come back and trap with me. We might have had some pleasant days again together, boy; but had you and our friends not appeared the moment you did, the Blackfeet would have put an end to all my plans."

"Father," said Laurence, "I never wished to desert you; but it would have been a sore trial to me to leave the fort; and if God in His mercy spares your life, I pray that you may return there with me, and that we may employ our time in a better way than in trapping beaver."

"No, no! God cannot have mercy on such a one as I am," groaned Michael; "and it's hard to say whether I shall ever get back to the fort."

"Oh, but God is a God of love and mercy," cried Laurence. "He delights in showing mercy and forgiveness. You must hear what Mr Martin, the missionary, will tell you about Him; then I am sure you will wish to stop and hear more, and to serve and love Him."

Peter now came back with the old trapper's horses to the camp, near to which his friends had dragged their prisoners. He had had much difficulty in persuading the Crees not to put to death the Blackfeet. He had still a harder task to perform.

"Friends," he said, "according to Indian custom you might kill them; but I have learned a new law, which is just and true—given me by an all-powerful, kind, and merciful Master, who commands His servants to forgive their enemies, and to do good to those who injure them. Our prisoners were doing a wicked thing, and have been severely punished, for one of their number lies dead. I would that he were alive again, that he might hear what I have to say. I must pray you, therefore, to let these men go. We will take their arms, that they may do us no further injury; but we will give them food, that they may return to their friends, to tell them about the love of our great Father; that He desires all His children to serve Him, and to be at peace with each other."

Peter then, in a simple way, suited to the comprehension of his hearers, unfolded to them the gospel plan of salvation. The Blackfeet listened with astonished ears, and could scarcely believe the fact that they were allowed to go free and uninjured. Peter then invited them to the fort, and promised to receive them as friends, and to tell them more of the wonderful things of which he had spoken. The coals of fire which he heaped on their heads appeared really to have softened their hearts. Having, with the assistance of the Crees, buried their companion, by Peter's desire their arms were unbound, and they were set at liberty. Uttering expressions of gratitude such as rarely fall from an Indian's lips, they took their departure, promising ere long to pay him a visit at the fort.

A night's rest sufficiently restored old Michael to enable him to commence his journey on one of the horses to the fort, while the other carried his peltries and traps. Laurence walked all the way at the head of his steed, endeavouring by his conversation to keep up the spirits of his father, and never failing, at every opportunity, to introduce the subject nearest his heart. The old man listened to what he said; but he seldom made any answer. He offered, however, no opposition to his remarks. Frequently Laurence feared that he would sink from the effects of his wounds; but his life was mercifully preserved, and at length the fort was reached.

There was sincere rejoicing as Laurence was seen leading his father's horse up to the gate. The old trapper was carried into Mr Ramsay's house, and there received that watchful care he so greatly needed. He gradually recovered his strength. One of his first visitors was Mr Martin. His object, as may be supposed, was not to talk of temporal affairs, but to unfold to him, as he perceived that his mind was capable of comprehending it, God's merciful plan of salvation.

The old man's heart, unlike that of his young son, appeared so hardened and seared, from having long rejected Divine truth, that some people might have given up the attempt in despair; but Mr Martin had too much knowledge of the human heart, and too firm a faith of the all-powerful influence of God the Holy Spirit, to relax his efforts. From no idle curiosity, he endeavoured to draw from Michael some account of his early life. He was, he found, an Englishman, and that he had been for some time married and settled in Canada, when he had joined the rebellion which broke out many years ago against the authority of the British Government. Having acted as a leader in some of the more desperate enterprises in which a few of the misguided inhabitants engaged at that time, a price was set on his head. He escaped, however, to the wilds of the Far West, where, both from inclination and necessity, he had taken to the pursuit of a trapper. He quickly learned the language both of the Crees and Sioux, and other tribes among whom he wandered. He gained their confidence and friendship;—he believed, indeed, that he could lead them to any purpose

he might entertain, and all sorts of wild plans passed through his mind. One enterprise he was, unfortunately, able to carry out. One of his daughters had married a gentleman of some property who had been a firm adherent of the Government, and Moggs had, in consequence, conceived a bitter hatred against him, which time in no way had lessened. Several years passed by, when he heard that his daughter had a son, then about four years of age; and he formed the barbarous idea of carrying off the child. He had little difficulty in obtaining the assistance of a band of Indians; and, disguising himself as one of them, he led an attack on the place, and succeeded too well in his nefarious project. As the country was in a disturbed state at the time, the attack was supposed to have been instigated by American sympathisers, and the real culprit was not suspected. Making good his retreat, he did not stop till he had got many hundred miles away from the borders of Canada; and believing that he might still be traced, he placed the child under charge of an old squaw belonging to a tribe of Sioux, with whom he had formed a friendship. Strangely inconsistent as it would seem, an affection for the boy grew up in his hard heart; and in time, oppressed with the solitary life he had doomed himself to lead, he determined to make him his companion in his trapping expeditions.

“Has no remorse ever visited you?” asked Mr Martin, when the old man had finished his narrative.

“Yes, sometimes my thoughts have been terrible,” groaned Michael.

“Then pray God that it may be a repentance to salvation not to be repented of. With regard, however, to your temporal affairs, my friend, I can assure you that, through the clemency of the Queen of England, all the rebels in Canada at the time you speak of have been forgiven.”

“Ah, sir,” exclaimed Michael Moggs, “the Queen may have forgiven some, but she cannot have forgiven me. You must, I am sure, be mistaken.”

“But, my friend, if I can show you her proclamation, in which she declares that she overlooks and pardons all those rebellious subjects who rose against her authority, and allows those who have fled the country to return under her rule, would you then believe me?”

“I suppose I could not help it,” said Michael. “Let me see the paper.”

Mr Martin went to his room, and returned with the document he spoke of.

“I have preserved it,” he said, “for I am pleased with the gracious terras in which it is couched.”

Old Michael read the paper with intense interest.

“Yes!” he exclaimed. “I can no longer doubt the fact. Had I not kept away from those who knew of this, I might long ago have been enjoying the comforts and pleasures of the home I abandoned, and have again become a member of civilised society.”

“Then, my friend, if an earthly sovereign can be so merciful and gracious, do you suppose that the King of Heaven, who has so wonderfully manifested his love to man, is less merciful and gracious in forgiving those who sin against Him?” said Mr Martin, feeling the importance of not allowing so practical an illustration of the great truth to pass unemployed. “Here is God’s proclamation to sinful, rebellious man,” he added, lifting his Bible before the eyes of the old trapper. “He declares in this—not once, but over and over again—that He forgives, freely and fully all who come to Him; that their sins and iniquities are blotted out and remembered no more; that ‘though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool;’ that His pardon is a free gift, without money and without price! You have seen the Queen’s proclamation, and you believe it, and you know that you may return to your home with perfect safety, provided you take back your grandson, and restore him to his long-bereaved parents. That they will forgive and welcome you I know; for they belong to Christ’s flock, and I am well acquainted with them. Now, my friend, let me entreat you to believe God’s proclamation, to trust to the gracious plan He has designed, whereby you can obtain free pardon, perfect reconciliation, and life eternal.”

“But can He ever pardon such a wretch as I am? Oh! tell me, sir, what shall I do to be saved?”

“I’ll answer, as Paul answered the jailor at Philippi, who was, we have reason to believe, a cruel and bad man, or he was very unlike others in his occupation in those days: ‘Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved.’ Paul, who certainly knew what God requires, did not tell him to go and do anything, he was simply to believe with a living faith. That, my friend, is all you have to do; and, be assured, the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, will be yours; and however you may bewail the effects of your sins, still you will know that they are all put out of God’s remembrance; for He sees you not as you are, but clothed with the righteousness of Christ, with the white spotless robes of the Lamb.”

Many days passed by, and at length the old trapper could say with confidence, as he clasped the hand of the missionary, “I rejoice in the blood of my risen Saviour.”

Young Laurence had long before been able to say the same.

They together soon afterwards set out for Canada. Mr Martin had not wrongly estimated the character of his Christian friends. While they rejoiced at the return of their long-lost son, they truly heaped coals of fire on the head of the old man by their kindness and attention. A few years afterwards he died, in perfect peace, in their midst. Laurence’s thoughts had ever been fixed on the far-off fort and its beloved inmates. He made rapid progress in his studies, and with the entire concurrence of his parents, at an early age he returned to act as a Catechist under Mr Martin. He was soon placed in a more important position, when Jeanie Ramsay became the devoted sharer of his labours in making known the unspeakable goodness of Christ to the red men of the woods and prairies.

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