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R.M. Ballantyne

"Fort Desolation"

Chapter One.

Or, Solitude in the Wilderness.

The Outskirter.

To some minds solitude is depressing, to others it is congenial. It was the *former* to our friend John Robinson; yet he had a large share of it in his chequered life. John—more familiarly known as Jack—was as romantic as his name was the reverse. To look at him you would have supposed that he was the most ordinary of common-place men, but if you had known him, as we did, you would have discovered that there was a deep, silent, but ever-flowing river of enthusiasm, energy, fervour—in a word, romance—in his soul, which seldom or never manifested itself in words, and only now and then, on rare occasions, flashed out in a lightning glance, or blazed up in a fiery countenance. For the most part Jack was calm as a mill-pond, deep as the Atlantic, straightforward and grave as an undertaker's clerk and good-humoured as an unspoilt and healthy child.

Jack never made a joke, but, certes, he could enjoy one; and he had a way of showing his enjoyment by a twinkle in his blue eye and a chuckle in his throat that was peculiarly impressive.

Jack was a type of a large class. He was what we may call an *outskirter* of the world. He was one of those who, from the force of necessity, or of self-will, or of circumstances, are driven to the outer circle of this world to do as Adam and Eve's family did, battle with Nature in her wildest scenes and moods; to earn his bread, literally, in the sweat of his brow.

Jack was a middle-sized man of strong make. He was not sufficiently large to overawe men by his size, neither was he so small as to invite impertinence from "big bullies," of whom there were plenty in his neighbourhood. In short, being an unpretending man and a plain man, with a good nose and large chin and sandy hair, he was not usually taken much notice of by strangers during his journeyings in the world; but when vigorous action in cases of emergency was required Jack Robinson was the man to make himself conspicuous.

It is not our intention to give an account of Jack's adventurous life from beginning to end, but to detail the incidents of a sojourn of two months at Fort Desolation, in almost utter solitude, in order to show one of the many phases of rough life to which outskirters are frequently subjected.

In regard to his early life it may be sufficient to say that Jack, after being born, created such perpetual disturbance and storm in the house that his worthy father came to look upon him as a perfect pest, and as soon as possible sent him to a public school, where he fought like a Mameluke Bey, learned his lessons with the zeal of a philosopher, and, at the end of ten years ran away to sea, where he became as sick as a dog and as miserable as a convicted felon.

Poor Jack was honest of heart and generous of spirit, but many a long hard year did he spend in the rugged parts of the earth ere he recovered, (if he ever did recover), from the evil effects of this first false step.

In course of time Jack was landed in Canada, with only a few shillings in his pocket; from that period he became an outskirter. The romance in his nature pointed to the backwoods; he went thither at once, and was not disappointed. At first the wild life surpassed his expectations, but as time wore on the tinsel began to wear off the face of things, and he came to see them as they actually were. Nevertheless, the romance of life did not wear out of his constitution. Enthusiasm, quiet but deep, stuck to him all through his career, and carried him on and over difficulties that would have disgusted and turned back many a colder spirit.

Jack's first success was the obtaining of a situation as clerk in the store of a general merchant in an outskirt

settlement of Canada. Dire necessity drove him to this. He had been three weeks without money and nearly two days without food before he succumbed. Having given in, however, he worked like a Trojan, and would certainly have advanced himself in life if his employer had not failed and left him, minus a portion of his salary, to "try again."

Next, he became an engineer on board one of the Missouri steamers, in which capacity he burst his boiler, and threw himself and the passengers into the river—the captain having adopted the truly Yankee expedient of sitting down on the safety-valve while racing with another boat!

Afterwards, Jack Robinson became clerk in one of the Ontario steam-boats, but, growing tired of this life, he went up the Ottawa, and became overseer of a sawmill. Here, being on the frontier of civilisation, he saw the roughest of Canadian life. The lumbermen of that district are a mixed race—French-Canadians, Irishmen, Indians, half-castes, etcetera,—and whatever good qualities these men might possess in the way of hewing timber and bush-life, they were sadly deficient in the matters of morality and temperance. But Jack was a man of tact and good temper, and played his cards well. He jested with the jocular, sympathised with the homesick, doctored the ailing in a rough and ready fashion peculiarly his own, and avoided the quarrelsome. Thus he became a general favourite.

Of course it was not to be expected that he could escape an occasional broil, and it was herein that his early education did him good service. He had been trained in an English school where he became one of the best boxers. The lumberers on the Ottawa were not practised in this science; they indulged in that kicking, tearing, pommelling sort of mode which is so repugnant to the feelings of an Englishman. The consequence was that Jack had few fights, but these were invariably with the largest bullies of the district; and he, in each case, inflicted such tremendous facial punishment on his opponent that he became a noted man, against whom few cared to pit themselves.

There are none so likely to enjoy peace as those who are prepared for war. Jack used sometimes to say, with a smile, that his few battles were the price he had to pay for peace.

Our hero was unlucky. The saw-mill failed—its master being a drunkard. When that went down he entered the lumber trade, where he made the acquaintance of a young Scotchman, of congenial mind and temperament, who suggested the setting up of a store in a promising locality and proposed entering into partnership. "Murray and Robinson" was forthwith painted by the latter, (who was a bit of an artist), over the door of a small log-house, and the store soon became well known and much frequented by the sparse population as well as by those engaged in the timber trade.

But "the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong." There must have been a screw loose somewhere, for bad debts accumulated and losses were incurred which finally brought the firm to the ground, and left its dissevered partners to begin the world over again!

After this poor Jack Robinson fell into low spirits for a time, but he soon recovered, and bought a small piece of land at a nominal price in a region so wild that he had to cut his own road to it, fell the trees with his own hand, and, in short, reclaim it from the wilderness on the margin of which it lay. This was hard work, but Jack liked hard work, and whatever work he undertook he always did it well. Strange that such a man could not get on! yet so it was, that, in a couple of years, he found himself little better off than he had been when he entered on his new property. The region, too, was not a tempting one. No adventurous spirits had located themselves beside him, and only a few had come within several miles of his habitation.

This did not suit our hero's sociable temperament, and he began to despond very much. Still his sanguine spirit led him to persevere, and there is no saying how long he might have continued to spend his days and his energies in felling trees and sowing among the stumps and hoping for better days, had not his views been changed and his thoughts turned into another channel by a letter.

Chapter Two.

The Letter, and its Consequences.

One fine spring morning Jack was sitting, smoking his pipe after breakfast, at the door of his log cabin, looking pensively out upon the tree-stump-encumbered field which constituted his farm. He had facetiously named his residence the Mountain House, in consequence of there being neither mountain nor hill larger than an inverted wash-hand basin, within ten miles of him! He was wont to defend the misnomer on the ground that it served to keep him in remembrance of the fact that hills really existed in other parts of the world.

Jack was in a desponding mood. His pipe would not "draw" that morning; and his mind had been more active than usual for a few days past, revolving the past, the present, and the future. In short, Jack was cross. There could be no doubt whatever about it; for he suddenly, and without warning, dashed his pipe to pieces against a log, went into the house for another, which he calmly filled, as he resumed his former seat, lit, and continued to smoke for some time in sulky silence. We record this fact because it was quite contrary to Jack's amiable and patient character, and showed that some deep emotions were stirring within him.

The second pipe "drew" well. Probably it was this that induced him to give utterance to the expression—

"I wonder how long this sort of thing will last?"

"Just as long as you've a mind to let it, and no longer," answered a man clad in the garb of a trapper, whose mocassin foot had given no indication of his approach until he was within a couple of paces of the door.

"Is that you, Joe?" said Jack, looking up, and pointing to a log which served as a seat on the other side of the doorway.

"It's all that's of me," replied Joe.

"Sit down and fill your pipe out of my pouch, Joe. It's good 'baccy, you'll find. Any news? I suppose not. There never is; and if there was, what would be the odds to me?"

"In the blues?" remarked the hunter, regarding Jack with a peculiar smile through his first puff of smoke.

"Rather!" said Jack.

"Grog?" inquired Joe.

"Haven't tasted a drop for months," replied Jack.

"All square *here*?" inquired the hunter, tapping his stomach.

"Could digest gun-flints and screw nails!"

The two smoked in silence for some time; then Joe drew forth a soiled letter, which he handed to his companion, saying—

"It's bin lying at the post-office for some weeks, and as the postmaster know'd I was comin' here he asked me to take it. I've a notion it may be an offer to buy your clearin', for I've heerd two or three fellows speakin' about it. Now, as I want to buy it myself, if yer disposed to sell it, I hereby make you the first offer."

Jack Robinson continued to smoke in silence, gazing abstractedly at the letter. Since his mother had died, a year before the date of which we write, he had not received a line from any one, insomuch that he had given up calling at the post-office on his occasional visits to the nearest settlement. This letter, therefore, took him by surprise, all the more that it was addressed in the handwriting of his former partner, Murray.

Breaking the seal, he read as follows:

"Fort Kamenistaquoia, April the somethingth:—

"Dear Jack,—You'll be surprised to see my fist, but not more surprised than I was to hear from an old hunter just arrived, that you had taken to farming. It's not your forte, Jack, my boy. Be advised. Sell off the farm for what it will fetch, and come and join me. My antecedents are not in my favour, I grant; but facts are stubborn things, and it is a fact that I am making dollars here like stones. I'm a fur-trader, my boy. Have joined a small company, and up to this time have made a good thing of it. You know something of the fur trade, if I mistake not. Do come and join us; we want such a man as you at a new post we have established on the coast of Labrador. Shooting, fishing, hunting, *ad libitum*. Eating, drinking, sleeping, *ad infinitum*. What would you more? Come, like a good fellow, and be happy!

"Ever thine, **J. Murray.**"

"I'll sell the *farm*," said Jack Robinson, folding the letter.

"You will?" exclaimed Joe. "What's your price?"

"Come over it with me, and look at the fixings, before I tell you," said Jack.

They went over it together, and looked at every fence and stump and implement. They visited the live stock, and estimated the value of the sprouting crop. Then they returned to the house, where they struck a bargain off-hand.

That evening Jack bade adieu to the Mountain House, mounted his horse, with his worldly goods at the pommel of the saddle, and rode away, leaving Joe, the trapper, in possession.

In process of time our hero rode through the settlements to Montreal, where he sold his horse, purchased a few necessaries, and made his way down the Saint Lawrence to the frontier settlements of the bleak and almost uninhabited north shore of the gulf. Here he found some difficulty in engaging a man to go with him, in a canoe, towards the coast of Labrador.

An Irishman, in a fit of despondency, at length agreed; but on reaching a saw-mill that had been established by a couple of adventurous Yankees, in a region that seemed to be the out-skirts of creation, Paddy repented, and vowed he'd go no farther for love or money.

Jack Robinson earnestly advised the faithless man to go home, and help his grandmother, thenceforth, to plant murphies; after which he embarked in his canoe alone, and paddled away into the dreary north.

Camping out in the woods at night, paddling all day, and living on biscuit and salt pork, with an occasional duck or gull, by way of variety; never seeing a human face from morn till night, nor hearing the sound of any voice except his own, Jack pursued his voyage for fourteen days. At the end of that time he descried Fort Kamenistaquoia. It consisted of four small log-houses, perched on a conspicuous promontory, with a flag-staff in the midst of them.

Here he was welcomed warmly by his friend John Murray and his colleagues, and was entertained for three days sumptuously on fresh salmon, salt pork, pancakes, and tea. Intellectually, he was regaled with glowing accounts of the fur trade and the salmon fisheries of that region.

"Now, Jack," said Murray, on the third day after his arrival, while they walked in front of the fort, smoking a morning pipe, "it is time that you were off to the new fort. One of our best men has built it, but he is not a suitable person to

take charge, and as the salmon season has pretty well advanced we are anxious to have you there to look after the salting and sending of them to Quebec."

"What do you call the new fort?" inquired Jack.

"Well, it has not yet got a name. We've been so much in the habit of styling it the New Fort that the necessity of another name has not occurred to us. Perhaps, as you are to be its first master, we may leave the naming of it to you."

"Very good," said Jack; "I am ready at a moment's notice. Shall I set off this forenoon?"

"Not quite so sharp as that," replied Murray, laughing. "To-morrow morning, at day-break, will do. There is a small sloop lying in a creek about twenty miles below this. We beached her there last autumn. You'll go down in a boat with three men, and haul her into deep water. There will be spring tides in two days, so, with the help of tackle, you'll easily manage it. Thence you will sail to the new fort, forty miles farther along the coast, and take charge."

"The three men you mean to give me know their work, I presume?" said Jack.

"Of course they do. None of them have been at the fort, however."

"Oh! How then shall we find it?" inquired Jack.

"By observation," replied the other. "Keep a sharp look out as you coast along, and you can't miss it."

The idea of mists and darkness and storms occurred to Jack Robinson, but he only answered, "Very good."

"Can any of the three men navigate the sloop?" he inquired.

"Not that I'm aware of," said Murray; "but you know something of navigation, yourself, don't you?"

"No! nothing!"

"Pooh! nonsense. Have you never sailed a boat?"

"Yes, occasionally."

"Well, it's the same thing. If a squall comes, keep a steady hand on the helm and a sharp eye to wind'ard, and you're safe as the Bank. If it's too strong for you, loose the halyards, let the sheets fly, and down with the helm; the easiest thing in the world if you only look alive and don't get flurried."

"Very good," said Jack, and as he said so his pipe went out; so he knocked out the ashes and refilled it.

Next morning our hero rowed away with his three men, and soon discovered the creek of which his friend had spoken. Here he found the sloop, a clumsy "tub" of about twenty tons burden, and here Jack's troubles began.

The *Fairy*, as the sloop was named, happened to have been beached during a very high tide. It now lay high and dry in what once had been mud, on the shore of a land-locked bay or pond, under the shadow of some towering pines. The spot looked like an inland lakelet, on the margin of which one might have expected to find a bear or a moose-deer, but certainly not a sloop.

"Oh! ye shall neva' git him off," said François Xavier, one of the three men—a French-Canadian—on beholding the stranded vessel.

"We'll try," said Pierre, another of the three men, and a burly half-breed.

"Try!" exclaimed Rollo, the third of the three men—a tall, powerful, ill-favoured man, who was somewhat of a bully, who could not tell where he had been born, and did not know who his father and mother had been, having been forsaken by them in his infancy. "Try? you might as well try to lift a mountain! I've a mind to go straight back to Kamenistaquoia and tell Mr Murray that to his face!"

"Have you?" said Jack Robinson, in a quiet, peculiar tone, accompanied by a gaze that had the effect of causing Rollo to look a little confused. "Come along, lads, we'll begin at once," he continued, "it will be full tide in an hour or so. Get the tackle ready, François; the rest of you set to work, and clear away the stones and rubbish from under her sides."

Jack threw off his coat, and began to work like a hero—as he was. The others followed his example; and the result was that when the tide rose to its full height the sloop was freed of all the rubbish that had collected round the hull; the block tackle was affixed to the mast; the rope attached to a tree on the opposite side of the creek; and the party were ready to haul. But although they hauled until their sinews cracked, and the large veins of their necks and foreheads swelled almost to bursting, the sloop did not move an inch. The tide began to fall, and in a few minutes that opportunity was gone. There were not many such tides to count on, so Jack applied all his energies and ingenuity to the work. By the time the next tide rose they had felled two large pines, and applied them to the side of the vessel. Two of the party swung at the ends of these; the other two hauled on the block-tackle. This time the sloop moved a little at the full flood; but the moment of hope soon passed, and the end was not yet attained.

The next tide was the last high one. They worked like desperate men during the interval. The wedge was the mechanical power which prevailed at last. Several wedges were inserted under the vessel's side, and driven home. Thus the sloop was canted over a little towards the water. When the tide was at the full, one man hauled at the

tackle, two men swung at the ends of the levers, and Jack hammered home the wedges at each heave and pull; thus securing every inch of movement. The result was that the sloop slid slowly down the bank into deep water.

It is wonderful how small a matter will arouse human enthusiasm! The cheer that was given on the successful floating of the *Fairy* was certainly as full of fervour, if not of volume, as that which followed the launching of the *Great Eastern*.

Setting sail down the gulf they ran before a fair breeze which speedily increased to a favouring gale. Before night a small bay was descried, with three log-huts on the shore. This was the new fort. They ran into the bay, grazing a smooth rock in their passage, which caused the *Fairy* to tremble from stem to stern, and cast anchor close to a wooden jetty. On the end of this a solitary individual, (apparently a maniac), was seen capering and yelling wildly.

"What fort is this?" shouted Jack.

"Sorrow wan o' me knows," cried the maniac; "it's niver been christened yet. Faix, if it's a fort at all, I'd call it Fort Disolation. Och! but it's lonesome I've been these three days—niver a wan here but meself an' the ghosts. Come ashore, darlints, and comfort me!"

"Fort Desolation, indeed!" muttered Jack Robinson, as he looked round him sadly; "not a bad name. I'll adopt it. Lower the boat, lads."

Thus Jack took possession of his new home.

Chapter Three.

Domestic and Personal Matters.

Jack Robinson's first proceeding on entering the new fort and assuming the command, was to summon the man, (supposed to be a maniac), named Teddy O'Donel, to his presence in the "Hall."

"Your name is Teddy O'Donel?" said Jack.

"The same, sir, at your sarvice," said Teddy, with a respectful pull at his forelock. "They was used to call me *Mister* O'Donel when I was in the army, but I've guv that up long ago an' dropped the title wid the commission."

"Indeed: then you were a commissioned officer?" inquired Jack, with a smile.

"Be no manes. It was a slight longer title than that I had. They called me a non-commissioned officer. I niver could find in me heart to consociate wid them consaited commissioners—though there was wan or two of 'em as was desarvin' o' the three stripes. But I niver took kindly to sodgerin'. It was in the Howth militia I was. Good enough boys they was in their way, but I couldn't pull wid them no how. They made me a corp'ral for good conduct, but, faix, the great review finished me; for I got into that state of warlike feeling that I loaded me muskit five times widout firin', an' there was such a row round about that I didn't know the dirty thing had niver wint off till the fifth time, when she bursted into smithereens an' wint off intirely. No wan iver seed a scrag of her after that. An' the worst was, she carried away the small finger of Bob Riley's left hand. Bob threw down his muskit an' ran off the ground howlin', so I picked the wipon up an' blazed away at the inimy; but, bad luck to him, Bob had left his ramrod in, and I sint it right through the flank of an owld donkey as was pullin' an apple and orange cart. Oh! how that baste did kick up its heels, to be sure! and the apples and oranges they was flyin' like—Well, well—the long and the short was, that I wint an' towld the colonel I couldn't stop no longer in such a regiment. So I guv it up an' comed out here."

"And became a fur-trader," said Jack Robinson, with a smile.

"Just so, sur, an' fort-builder to boot; for, being a jiner to trade and handy wid the tools, Mr Murray sent me down here to build the place and take command, but I s'pose I'm supersheeded now!"

"Well, I believe you are, Teddy; but I hope that you will yet do good service as my lieutenant."

The beaming smile on Teddy's face showed that he was well pleased to be relieved from the responsibilities of office.

"Sure," said he, "the throuble I have had wid the min an' the salvages for the last six weeks—it's past belavin'! An' thin, whin I sint the men down to the river to fush—more nor twinty miles off—an' whin the salvages wint away and left me alone wid only wan old salvage woman!—och! I'd not wish my worst inimy in me sitivation."

"Then the savages have been giving you trouble, have they?"

"They have, sur, but not so much as the min."

"Well, Teddy," said Jack, "go and fetch me something to eat, and then you shall sit down and give me an account of things in general. But first give my men food."

"Sure they've got it," replied Teddy, with a broad grin. "That spalpeen they calls Rollo axed for meat the first thing, in a voice that made me think he'd ait me up alive av he didn't git it. So I guv 'em the run o' the pantry. What'll yer plaze to dhrink, sur?"

"What have you got?"

"Tay and coffee, sur, not to mintion wather. There's only flour an' salt pork to ait, for this is a bad place for game. I've

not seed a bird or a bear for three weeks, an' the seals is too cute for me. But I'll bring ye the best that we've got."

Teddy O'Donel hastened to the kitchen, a small log-hut in rear of the dwelling-house, and left Jack Robinson alone in the "Hall."

Jack rose, thrust his hands deep into his pockets, and walked to the window. It was glazed with parchment, with the exception of the centre square, which was of glass.

"Pleasant, uncommonly pleasant," he muttered, as he surveyed the landscape.

In front lay a flat beach of sand with the gulf beyond, the horizon being veiled in mist. Up the river there was a flat beach with a hill beyond. It was a black iron-looking hill, devoid of all visible verdure, and it plunged abruptly down into the sea as if it were trying fiercely to drown itself. Down the river there was a continuation of flat beach, with, apparently, nothing whatever beyond. The only objects that enlivened the dreary expanse were, the sloop at the end of the wooden jetty and a small flagstaff in front of the house, from which a flag was flying in honour of the arrival of the new governor. At the foot of this flagstaff there stood an old iron cannon, which looked pugnacious and cross, as if it longed to burst itself and blow down all visible creation.

Jack Robinson's countenance became a simple blank as he took the first survey of his new dominions. Suddenly a gleam of hope flitted across the blank.

"Perhaps the back is better," he muttered, opening the door that led to the rear of the premises. In order to get out he had to pass through the kitchen, where he found his men busy with fried pork and flour cakes, and his lieutenant, Teddy, preparing coffee.

"What is that?" inquired Jack, pointing to a small heap of brown substance which Teddy was roasting in a frying-pan.

"Sure it's coffee," said the man.

"Eh?" inquired Jack.

"Coffee, sur," repeated Teddy with emphasis.

"What is it made of?" inquired Jack.

"Bread-crumbs, sur. I'm used to make it of pais, but it takes longer, d'ye see, for I've got to pound 'em in a cloth after they're roasted. The crumbs is a'most as good as the pais, an' quicker made whin yer in a hurry."

Jack's first impulse was to countermand the crumbs and order tea, but he refrained, and went out to survey the back regions of his new home.

He found that the point selected for the establishment of the fort was a plain of sand, on which little herbage of any kind grew. In rear of the house there was a belt of stunted bushes, which, as he went onward into the interior, became a wood of stunted firs. This seemed to grow a little more dense farther inland, and finally terminated at the base of the distant and rugged mountains of the interior. In fact, he found that he was established on a sandbank which had either been thrown up by the sea, or at no very remote period had formed part of its bed. Returning home so as to enter by the front door, he observed an enclosed space a few hundred yards distant from the fort. Curious to know what it was, he walked up to it, and, looking over the stockade, beheld numerous little mounds of sand with wooden crosses at the head of them. It was the burial-ground of the establishment. Trade had been carried on here by a few adventurous white men before the fort was built. Some of their number having died, a space had been enclosed as a burying-ground. The Roman Catholic Indians afterwards used it, and it was eventually consecrated with much ceremony by a priest.

With a face from which every vestige of intelligence was removed, Jack Robinson returned to the fort and sat down in solitary state in the hall. In the act of sitting down he discovered that the only arm-chair in the room was unsteady on its legs, these being of unequal length. There were two other chairs without arms, and equally unsteady on their legs. These, as well as everything in the room, were made of fir-wood—as yet unpainted. In the empty fire-place Jack observed a piece of charcoal, which he took up and began, in an absent way, to sketch on the white wall. He portrayed a raving maniac as large as life, and then, sitting down, began insensibly to hum—

"I dreamt that I dwelt in marble halls."

In the midst of which he was interrupted by the entrance of his lieutenant with a tray of viands.

"Ah, yer a purty creatur," exclaimed Teddy, pausing with a look of admiration before the maniac.

"Come, Teddy, sit down and let's have the news. What have we here?" said Jack, looking at three covered plates which were placed before him.

"Salt pork fried," said Teddy removing the cover.

"And here?"

"Salt pork biled," said the man, removing the second cover; "an' salt pork cold," he added, removing the third. "You see, sur, I wasn't sure which way ye'd like it, an' ye was out whin I come to ax; so I just did it up in three fashions. Here's loaf bread, an' it's not bad, though I say it that made it."

As Jack cut down into the loaf, he naturally remembered those lines of a well-known writer:

“Who has not tasted home-made bread,
A heavy compound of putty and
lead!”

“Are these cakes?” he said, as Teddy presented another plate with something hot in it.

“Ay, pancakes they is, made of flour an’ wather fried in grease, an’ the best of aitin’, as ye’ll find;—but, musha! they’ve all stuck together from some raison I han’t yet diskivered: but they’ll be none the worse for that, and there’s plenty of good thick molasses to wash ’em down wid.”

“And this,” said Jack, pointing to a battered tin kettle, “is the—the—”

“That’s the coffee, sur.”

“Ah! well, sit down, Teddy, I have seen worse fare than this. Let’s be thankful for it. Now, then, let me hear about the fishery.”

Nothing pleased Teddy O’Donel so much as being allowed to talk. He sat down accordingly and entertained his master for the next hour with a full, true, and particular account of every thing connected with Fort Desolation. We will not, however, inflict this on the reader. Reduced to its narrowest limits, his information was to the following effect:—

That the Indians, generally, were well disposed towards the traders, though difficult to please. That a good many furs had been already obtained, and there was a report of more coming in. That the salmon fishery was situated on a river twenty miles below the fort, and was progressing favourably; but that the five men engaged there were a quarrelsome set and difficult to keep in order. Teddy thought, however, that it was all owing to one of the men, named Ladoc, a bully, who kept the other four in bad humour.

But the point on which poor Teddy dilated most was his solitude. For some time he had been living with no other companions than an old Indian woman and her half-caste daughter, and they having left him, during the last three days he had been living entirely alone “among the ghosts,” many of which he described minutely.

This intelligence was brought to an abrupt close by a row among the men in the kitchen. Rollo had been boasting of his walking powers to such an extent, that Pierre had become disgusted and spoke contemptuously of Rollo; whereupon the bully, as usual, began to storm, and his wrath culminated when Pierre asserted that, “Mr Robinson would bring him to his marrow-bones ere long.”

“Jack Robinson!” exclaimed Rollo with contempt; “I’d walk him blind in two hours.”

Just at that moment the door opened, and Jack stood before them.

“You are too noisy, men,” said he, in a quiet voice, (Jack almost always spoke in a soft voice); “remember that this kitchen is within hearing of the hall. Rollo, go down to the beach and haul up the sloop’s boat, I see the tide is making on her.”

Rollo hesitated.

“You hear?” said Jack, still in a quiet tone, but with a look—not a fierce look, or a threatening look, but—a peculiar look, which instantly took effect.

One has often observed a cat when about to spring. It makes many pauses in its prowling towards its prey, and occasional motions that lead one to expect a spring. But the motion which precedes the actual spring is always emphatic. It may not be violent; it may be as slight as all the previous motions, but there is that in it which tells irresistibly, somehow, of a fixed purpose. So is it, doubtless, with tigers; so was it with Jack Robinson. His first remark to the men was a growl; his order to Rollo was a pause, with an *intention*; his “you hear?” softly said, had a *something* in it which induced Rollo to accord instant obedience!

On returning to the hall, Jack paced up and down indignantly. “So there are *two* bullies in the camp,” he soliloquised; “I must cure them both;—but softly, Jack. It won’t do to fight if you can secure peace by other means. Let blows be the last resource. That’s my motto. He’ll walk me blind! Well, we shall see, *to-morrow!*”

Chapter Four.

Taming a Bully.

The morrow came, and Jack Robinson rose with the sun. Long before his men were astir he had inspected the few books and papers of the establishment, had examined the condition of the fur and goods store, and had otherwise made himself acquainted with the details of the fort; having gone over its general features with Teddy the day before.

When the “lieutenant” arose, he found indications of his new master having been everywhere before him, and noted the fact! As Teddy was by no means a man of order—although a good and trustworthy man—there was enough to be done before breakfast. Jack purposely put Rollo into the kitchen to prepare the morning meal, this being comparatively light work. He himself worked with the other men in the stores. There was necessarily a great deal of lifting and shifting and clearing, in all of which operations he took the heaviest part of the work, and did his work better and more thoroughly than any of the others. Teddy observed this also, and noted the fact!

At breakfast there was naturally a good deal of talk among the men, and special mention was of course made of the energy of their master.

Breakfast over, Jack assembled the men and apportioned to each his day's work.

"I myself," said he, "mean to walk down to the fishery to-day, and I leave O'Donel in charge; I shall be back to-morrow. Rollo, you will prepare to accompany me."

"Yes, sir," answered the man, not knowing very well how to take this. The others glanced at each other intelligently as they departed to their work.

A few minutes sufficed for preparation, and soon Jack stood with his rifle on his shoulder in front of the house. Rollo quickly made his appearance with an old trading gun.

"You can leave that, we won't require it," said Jack; "besides I want to walk fast, so it is well that you should be as light as possible."

"No fear but I'll keep up with you, sir," said the man, somewhat piqued.

"I do not doubt it," replied Jack, "but one gun is enough for us, so put yours by and come along."

Rollo obeyed, and resolved in his heart that he would give his new master a taste of his powers.

Jack started off at a good rattling pace, somewhat over four miles an hour. For the first mile Rollo allowed him to lead, keeping about a foot behind. Then he thought to himself, "Now, my friend, I'll try you," and ranged up beside him, keeping a few yards to one side, however, in order to avoid the appearance of racing. After a few minutes he pushed the pace considerably, and even went ahead of his companion; but, ere long, Jack was alongside and the pace increased to nearly five miles an hour.

Only those who have tried it know, or can fully appreciate, what is meant by adding a mile an hour to one's pace. Most active men go at four miles an hour when walking at a good smart pace. Men *never* walk at five miles an hour except when in the utmost haste, and then only for a short distance. Anything beyond that requires a run in order to be sustained.

It was curious to watch the progress of these two men. The aim of each was to walk at his greatest possible speed, without allowing the slightest evidence of unwonted exertion to appear on his countenance or in his manner.

They walked on the sands of the shore—there being no roads there—and at first the walking was good, as the tide was out and the sand hard. But before they had got half way to the fishery the sea came in and drove them to the soft sand, which, as nearly every one knows, is terribly fatiguing and difficult to walk in.

Up to this point the two men had kept abreast, going at a tremendous pace, yet conversing quietly and keeping down every appearance of distress; affecting, in fact, to be going at their usual and natural pace! Many a sidelong glance did Rollo cast, however, at his companion, to see if he were likely to give in soon. But Jack was as cool as a cucumber, and wore a remarkably amiable expression of countenance. He even hummed snatches of one or two songs, as though he were only sauntering on the beach. At last he took out his pipe, filled it, and began to smoke, without slackening speed. This filled Rollo with surprise, and for the first time he began to entertain doubts as to the result of the struggle.

As for Jack, he never doubted it for a moment. When they were compelled to take to the heavy sand and sank above the ankles at every step, he changed his tactics. Putting out his pipe, he fell behind a few paces.

"Ha!" thought Rollo, "done up at last; now I'll give it you."

The thought that he was sure of victory infused such spirit into the man that he braced himself to renewed exertion. This was just what Jack wanted. He kept exactly a foot behind Rollo, yet when the other ventured to slacken his pace, (which was now too great to be kept up), he pushed forward just enough to keep him at it, without disheartening him as to result. In the midst of this they both came to a full stop on discovering a box made of birch bark, which seemed to have been dropped by some passing Indians.

"Hallo! what have we here?" cried Jack, stooping down to examine it.

"My blessin' on't whatever it is," thought Rollo, to whom the momentary relief from walking was of the greatest consequence. Jack knew this, and hastened his inspection. It was a box of bear's fat.

"Come, not a bad thing in times like these," observed Jack; "will you carry this or the rifle, my man? See, the rifle is lighter, take that."

Again they stepped out, and the sand seemed to grow softer and deeper as they advanced. They were now five miles from the end of their journey, so Jack began to exert himself. He pushed on at a pace that caused Rollo to pant and blow audibly. For some time Jack pretended not to notice this, but at last he turned round and said—

"You seem to be fatigued, my man, let me carry the rifle."

Rollo did not object, and Jack went forward with the box and rifle more rapidly than before. He was perspiring, indeed, at every pore profusely, but wind and limb were as sound as when he started.

He finally left Rollo out of sight, and arrived at the fishery without him!

Half an hour afterwards Rollo arrived. He was a stout fellow, and by taking a short rest, had recovered sufficiently to come in with some degree of spirit; nevertheless, it was evident to all that he was "used up," for, "it is not the distance but the pace that kills!" He found the fishermen at dinner, buttering their cakes with the bear's grease that had been discovered on the way down. Jack Robinson was sitting in the midst of them, chatting quietly and smoking his pipe beside the fire-place of the hut.

Jack introduced him as one of the new men, but made no reference to the walk from Fort Desolation. He felt, however, that he had conquered the man, at least for that time, and hoped that further and more violent methods would not be necessary. In this he was disappointed, as the sequel will show.

That night Jack slept on a bed made of old salmon-nets, with a new salmon-net above him for a blanket. It was a peculiar and not a particularly comfortable bed; but in his circumstances he could have slept on a bed of thorns. He gazed up at the stars through the hole in the roof that served for a chimney, and listened to the chirping of the frogs in a neighbouring swamp, to which the snoring of the men around him formed a rough-and-ready bass. Thus he lay gazing and listening, till stars and strains alike melted away and left him in the sweet regions of oblivion.

Chapter Five.

The Salmon Fishery.

Next morning, Jack Robinson went out at daybreak to inspect the salmon fishery.

The river, up which the fish went in thousands, was broad, deep, and rapid. Its banks were clothed with spruce-fir and dense underwood. There was little of the picturesque or the beautiful in the scenery. It was a bleak spot and unattractive.

Two of the four men who conducted the fishery were stationed at the mouth of the river. The other two attended to the nets about six miles farther up, at a place where there was a considerable fall terminating in a long, turbulent rapid.

With his wonted promptitude and energy, Jack began to make himself master of his position long before the men were stirring. Before Ladoc, who was superintendent, had lighted his first pipe and strolled down to the boat to commence the operations of the day, Jack had examined the nets, the salt boxes, the curing-vats, the fish in pickle, the casks, and all the other *matériel* of the fishery, with a critical eye. From what he saw, he was convinced that Ladoc was not the best manager that could be desired, and, remembering that Ladoc was a bully, he was strengthened in an opinion which he had long entertained, namely, that a bully is never a trustworthy man.

He was in the act of forming this opinion, when Ladoc approached.

"Good morning, Ladoc," said he; "you rise early."

"Oui, sair; mais, you gits up more earlier."

"Yes, I am fond of morning air. The fishery prospers, I see."

"It doos, monsieur," said Ladoc, accepting the remark as a compliment to himself; "ve have catch fifteen casks already, and they is in most splendid condition."

"Hum!" ejaculated Jack, with a doubtful look at a cask which was evidently leaking, "hum! yes, you are getting on pretty well, but—"

Here Jack "hummed" again, and looked pointedly at one of the large vats, which was also leaking, and around which there was a great deal of salt that had been scattered carelessly on the ground. Raising big eyes to the roof of the low shed in which the salt-boxes stood, he touched with his stick a torn piece of its tarpaulin covering, through which rain had found its way in bad weather. He "hummed" again, but said nothing, for he saw that Ladoc was a little disconcerted.

After some minutes Jack turned to his companion with a bland smile, and said—

"The next station is—how many miles did you say?"

"Six, monsieur."

"Ah, six! well, let us go up and see it. You can show me the way."

"Breakfast be ready ver' soon," said Ladoc, "monsieur vill eat first, p'r'aps?"

"No, we will breakfast at the upper station. Ho, Rollo! here, I want you."

Rollo, who issued from the hut at the moment, with a view to examine the weather and light his pipe, came forward.

"I am going with Ladoc to the upper station," said Jack; "you will take his place here until we return."

"Very well, sir," replied Rollo, fixing his eyes upon Ladoc. At the same moment Ladoc fixed his eyes on Rollo. The two men seemed to read each other's character in a single glance, and then and there hurled silent defiance in each other's teeth through their eyes! Ladoc was annoyed at having been silently found fault with and superseded; Rollo was aggrieved at being left behind; both men were therefore enraged—for it is wonderful how small a matter is

sufficient to enrage a bully—but Jack ordered Ladoc to lead the way, so the rivals, or enemies, parted company with another glance of defiance.

That day, Jack Robinson had a somewhat rough and remarkable experience of life.

He began by overhauling the nets at the mouth of the river, and these were so prolific that the small flat-bottomed boat used by the fishermen was soon half filled with glittering salmon, varying from ten to fifteen pounds in weight. In order to avoid having his mocassins and nether garments soiled, Jack, who pulled the sculls, sat with bare feet and tucked-up trousers. In less than an hour he rowed back to the landing-place, literally up to the knees in salmon! Among these were a few young seals that had got entangled in the nets, while in pursuit of the fish, and been drowned. These last were filled with water to such an extent, that they resembled inflated bladders!

"Breakfast is ready, sir," said one of the men, as the boat-party leaped ashore.

"Very good," replied Jack; turning to Ladoc, "now, my man, are you ready to start for the upper fishery?"

"Eh? ah—oui, monsieur."

There was a titter amongst the men at the expression of their big comrade's face, for Ladoc was ravenously hungry, and felt inclined to rebel at the idea of being obliged to start on a six-miles' walk without food; but as his young master was about to do the same he felt that it was beneath his dignity to complain. Besides, there was a *something* peculiar about Jack's manner that puzzled and overawed the man.

The fact was, that Jack Robinson wanted to know what his bullies were made of, and took rather eccentric methods of finding it out. He accordingly set off at his best pace, and pushed Ladoc so hard, that he arrived at the upper fishery in a state of profuse perspiration, with a very red face, and with a disagreeably vacuous feeling about the pit of his stomach.

They found the men at the station just landing with a boat-load of fish. They were all clean-run, and shone in the bright sunshine like bars of burnished silver.

"Now, Ladoc," said Jack, "get breakfast ready, while I look over matters here."

It need not be said that the man obeyed most willingly. His master went to examine into details. Half-an-hour sufficed to make him pretty well acquainted with the state of matters at the station, and, during breakfast, he soon obtained from the men all the knowledge they possessed about the fishery, the natives, and the region.

One of the men was a half-caste, a fine-looking, grave, earnest fellow, who spoke English pretty well. His name was Marteau.

"The seals and the bears are our worst enemies, sir," said Marteau, in the course of conversation.

"Indeed! and which of the two are worst?" inquired Jack. "Another slice of pork, Ladoc, your appetite appears to be sharp this morning; thank you, go on, Marteau, you were saying something about the bears and seals."

"It's not easy to say which of them is worst, sir. I think the bears is, for the seals eat the bits that they bite out o' the fish, and so get some good of it; but the bears, they goes to the vats and pulls out the salt fish with their claws, for you see, sir, they can't resist the smell, but when they tries to eat 'em—ah, you should see the faces they do make! You see, they can't stand the salt, so they don't eat much, but they hauls about and tears up an uncommon lot of fish."

"It must make him ver' t'irsty," observed Ladoc, swallowing a can of tea at a draught.

"It makes one thirsty to think of it," said Jack, imitating Ladoc's example; "now, lads, we'll go and overhaul the nets."

Just as he spoke, Ladoc sprang from his seat, seized Jack's gun, which leant against the wall, shouted, "A bear!" and, levelling the piece through the open doorway, took aim at the bushes in front of the hut.

At the same moment Jack leaped forward, struck up the muzzle of the gun just as it exploded, and, seizing Ladoc by the collar, hurled him with extraordinary violence, considering his size, against the wall.

"Make yourself a better hunter," said he, sternly, "before you presume to lay hands again on my gun. Look there!"

Jack pointed, as he spoke, in the direction in which the man had fired, where the object that had been mistaken for a bear appeared in the form of a man, crawling out of the bushes on all-fours. He seemed to move unsteadily, as if he were in pain.

Running to his assistance, they found that he was an Indian, and, from the blood that bespattered his dress and hand, it was evident that he had been wounded. He was a pitiable object, in the last stage of exhaustion. When the party ran towards him, he looked up in their faces with lustreless eyes, and then sank fainting on the ground.

"Poor fellow!" said Jack, as they carried him into the hut and placed him on one of the low beds; "he must have met with an accident, for there is no warfare in this region among the Indians to account for his being wounded."

"'Tis a strange accident," said Marteau, when the man's clothes were stripped off and the wounds exposed. "An accident sometimes puts *one* bullet through a man, but seldom puts *two*!"

"True," said Jack, "this looks bad, here is a hole clean through the fleshy part of his right arm, and another through

his right thigh. An enemy must have done this.”

On farther examination it was found that the bone of the man’s leg had been smashed by the bullet, which, after passing through to the other side of the limb, was arrested by the skin. It was easily extracted, and the wounds were dressed by Jack, who, to his many useful qualities, added a considerable knowledge of medicine and surgery.

When the Indian recovered sufficiently to give an account of himself to Marteau, who understood his language perfectly, he told him, to the surprise of all, that his double wound was indeed the result of an accident, and, moreover, that he had done the deed with his own hand. Doubtless it will puzzle the reader to imagine how a man could so twist himself, that with an unusually long gun he could send a bullet at one shot through his right arm and right thigh. It puzzled Jack and his men so much, that they were half inclined to think the Indian was not telling the truth, until he explained that about a mile above the hut, while walking through the bushes, he tripped and fell. He was carrying the gun over his shoulder in the customary Indian fashion, that is, by the muzzle, with the stock behind him. He fell on his hands and knees; the gun was thrown forward and struck against a tree so violently, that it exploded; in its flight it had turned completely round, so that, at the moment of discharge, the barrel was in a line with the man’s arm and leg, and thus the extraordinary wound was inflicted.

To crawl from the spot where the accident occurred took the poor fellow nearly twelve hours, and he performed this trying journey during the night and morning over a rugged country and without food.

The surgical operation engaged Jack’s attention the greater part of the forenoon. When it was completed and the Indian made as comfortable as possible, he went out with the men to visit the nets which were set at the rapids about two miles higher up the river.

Chapter Six.

Jack has a Desperate Encounter.

We never can tell what a day or an hour may bring forth. This is a solemn fact on which young and old might frequently ponder with advantage, and on which we might enlarge to an unlimited extent; but our space will not admit of moralising very much, therefore we beg the reader to moralise on that, for him—or herself. The subject is none the less important, that circumstances require that it should be touched on in a slight, almost flippant, manner.

Had Jack Robinson known what lay before him that evening, he would—he would have been a wiser man! Nothing more appropriate than that occurs to us at this moment. But, to be more particular:—

When the party reached the nets, Jack left them to attend to their work, and went off alone to the vats, some of which, measuring about six feet in diameter, were nearly full of fish in pickle.

As he walked along the slight track which guided him towards them, he pondered the circumstances in which he then found himself, and, indulging in a habit which he had acquired in his frequent and prolonged periods of solitude, began to mutter his thoughts aloud.

“So, so, Jack, you left your farm because you were tired of solitude, and now you find yourself in the midst of society. Pleasant society, truly!—bullies and geese, without a sympathetic mind to rub against. Humph! a pleasant fix you’ve got into, old fellow.”

Jack was wrong in this to some extent, as he afterwards came to confess to himself, for among his men there were two or three minds worth cultivating, noble and shrewd, and deep, too, though not educated or refined. But at the time of which we write, Jack did not know this. He went on to soliloquise:

“Yes, you’ve got a pretty set to deal with; elements that will cause you enough of trouble before you have done with them. Well, well, don’t give in, old chap. Never say die. If solitude is to be your lot, meet it like a man. Why, they say that solitude of the worst kind is to be found where most people dwell. Has it not been said, that in the great city of London itself a man may be more solitary than in the heart of the wilderness? I’ve read it, but I can’t very well believe it. Yet, there *may* be something in it. Humph! Well, well, Jack, you’re not a philosopher, so don’t try to go too deep; take it easy, and do the best you can.”

At this point Jack came suddenly in sight of the vats. They stood in the centre of a cleared space in the forest. On the edge of the largest vat was perched an object which induced our hero to throw forward his fowling-piece hastily. It was a black bear, or rather the hind-quarters of a black bear, for the head and one paw and shoulder of the animal were far down in the vat. He was holding firmly to its edge by the hind legs and one fore-leg, while with the other he was straining his utmost to reach the fish.

Jack’s first impulse was to fire, but reflecting that the portion of the bear then in view was not a very vulnerable part, he hesitated, and finally crept behind a tree to consider, feeling confident that whatever should occur he would be pretty sure of getting a favourable opportunity to fire with effect.

Quite unconscious of his danger, bruin continued to reach down into the vat with unwearied determination. His efforts were rewarded with success, for he presently appeared on the edge of the vat with a fine salmon in his embrace. Now was Jack’s opportunity. He raised his piece, but remembering Marteau’s remark about the bear’s difficulty in eating salt salmon, he postponed the fatal shot until he should have studied this point in natural history.

His forbearance met with a reward, for the bear kept him during the next five minutes in such a state of suppressed laughter, that he could not have taken a steady aim to have saved his life. Its sense of smell was evidently gratified,

for on leaping to the ground it took a powerful snuff, and then began to devour the salmon with immense gusto. But the first mouthful produced an expression of countenance that could not be misunderstood. It coughed, spluttered, and sneezed, or at least gave vent to something resembling these sounds, and drew back from the fish with a snarl; then it snuffed again. There was no mistaking the smell. It was delicious! Bruin, disbelieving his sense of taste, and displaying unwise faith in his sense of smell, made another attempt. He had tried the head first; with some show of reason he now tried the tail. Faugh! it was worse than the other; "as salt as fire," as we have heard it sometimes expressed. The spluttering at this point became excessive, and it was clear that the bear was getting angry. Once again, with an amount of perseverance that deserved better fortune, the bear snuffed heartily at the fish, tore it to shreds with his claws, and then tried another mouthful, which it spat out instantly. Displaying all its teeth and gums, it shut its eyes, and, raising its head in the air, fairly howled with disappointment.

Jack now deemed it prudent to bring the scene to a close, so, calming himself as well as he could, he took a steady aim, and, watching his opportunity, fired.

The bear did not fall. It faced round in a moment, and, uttering a fierce growl, very unlike to its previous tones, rushed upon its enemy, who fired his second barrel at the creature's breast. Whether it was that Jack's fit of laughter had shaken his nerves so as to render him incapable of taking a good aim, is a matter of uncertainty, but although both shots took effect, the bear was not checked in his career. On it came. Jack had no time to load. He turned to run, when his quick eye observed a branch of a tree over his head within reach. Dropping his gun he bounded upwards and caught it, and, being unusually powerful in the arms, drew himself up and got astride of it just as the bear reached the spot. But bruin was not to be baulked so easily. He was a black bear and a good climber. Finding that he could not at his utmost stretch obtain a nibble at Jack's toes, he rushed at the trunk of the tree and began to ascend rapidly. Jack at once moved towards the end of the branch, intending to drop to the ground, recover his gun and run for it; but the movement broke the branch off suddenly, and he came down with such a crash, that the bear stopped, looked round, and, seeing his enemy on the ground, began to descend.

Although somewhat stunned by the fall, our hero was able to spring up and run in the direction of the hut. The bear was so close on his heels, however, that he had no chance of his reaching it. He felt this, and, as a last resource, doubled on his track like a hare and made for the banks of the river, which were twenty feet high at the place, intending to leap into the rapid and take his chance.

In this, too, he was foiled. His fall from the tree had partially disabled him, and he could not run with his wonted agility. About ten yards from the edge of the bank the bear overtook him, and it seemed as if poor Jack Robinson's troubles were at last about to be brought to an abrupt close. But Jack was self-possessed and brave as steel. On feeling the bear's claws in his back, he drew his knife, wheeled round, fell into its embrace, and plunged the knife three or four times in its side. The thing was done in a moment, and the two, falling together, rolled over the edge of the steep bank, and went crashing down through the bushes amid a cloud of dust and stones into the raging flood below. At the foot of the rapid, Marteau and one of the men happened to be rowing ashore with a load of fish.

"Hallo! what's that?" cried Marteau.

"Eh!" exclaimed his comrade.

"A bear!" shouted Marteau, backing his oar.

"And a man! What! I say!"

"Pull! pull!"

Next moment the boat was dancing on the foam, and Marteau had hold of the bear's neck with one hand, and Jack's hair with the other.

They were soon hauled to land, the bear in its dying agonies and Jack in a state of insensibility; but it took the united strength of the two men to tear him from the tremendous grasp that he had fastened on the brute, and his knife was found buried to the handle close alongside of bruin's heart!

Chapter Seven.

Solitude.

On the day of his encounter with the bear, Jack Robinson sent Rollo up to the fort to fetch down all the men except O'Donel, in order that the fishery might be carried on with vigour.

Of course it is unnecessary to inform the reader that Jack speedily recovered from the effects of his adventure. It would be absurd to suppose that anything of an ordinary nature could kill or even do much damage to our hero. Beyond five deep punctures on his back and five on his breast, besides a bite in the shoulder, Jack had received no damage, and was able to return on foot to Fort Desolation a few days after the event.

On arriving, he found his man, Teddy O'Donel, sitting over the kitchen fire in the last stage of an attack of deep depression and home sickness. Jack's sudden appearance wrought an instantaneous cure.

"Ah!" said he, grasping his master's hand and wringing it warmly; "it's a blessed sight for sore eyes! Sure I've bin all but dead, sur, since ye wint away."

"You've not been ill, have you?" said Jack, looking somewhat earnestly in the man's face.

"Ill? No, not i' the body, if that's what ye mane, but I've been awful bad i' the mind. It's the intellect as kills men more nor the body. The sowl is what does it all." (Here Teddy passed his hand across his forehead and looked haggard.) "Ah! Mr Robinson, it's myself as'll niver do to live alone. I do belave that all the ghosts as iver lived have come and took up there abode in this kitchen."

"Nonsense!" said Jack, sitting down on a stool beside the fire and filling his pipe; "you're too superstitious."

"Supperstitious, is it?" exclaimed the man, with a look of intense gravity. "Faix, if ye seed them ye'd change yer tune. It's the noses of 'em as is wust. Of all the noses for length and redness and for blowin' like trumpets I ever did see—well, well, it's no use conjicturin', but I do wonder sometimes what guv the ghosts sitch noses."

"I suppose they *knows* that best themselves," observed Jack.

"P'r'aps they does," replied Teddy with a meditative gaze at the fire.

"But I rather suspect," continued Jack, "that as your own nose is somewhat long and red, and as you've got a habit of squinting, not to mention snoring, Teddy, we may be justified in accounting for the—"

"Ah! it's no use jokin'," interrupted O'Donel; "ye'll niver joke me out o' my belaiif in ghosts. It's no longer agone than last night, after tay, I laid me down on the floor beside the fire in sitch a state o' moloncholly weakness, that I really tried to die. It's true for ye; and I belave I'd have done it, too, av I hadn't wint off to slape by mistake, an' whin I awoke, I was so cowld and hungry that I thought I'd pusspone dyin' till after supper. I got better after supper, but, och! it's a hard thing to live all be yer lone like this."

"Have no Indians been here since I left?"

"Not wan, sur."

"Well, Teddy, I will keep you company now. We shall be alone here together for a few weeks, as I mean to leave all our lads at the fishery. Meanwhile, bestir yourself and let me have supper."

During the next few weeks Jack Robinson was very busy. Being an extremely active man, he soon did every conceivable thing that had to be done about the fort, and conceived, as well as did, a good many things that did not require to be done. While rummaging in the stores, he discovered a hand-net, with which he waded into the sea and caught large quantities of small fish, about four inches in length, resembling herrings. These he salted and dried in the sun, and thus improved his fare,—for, having only salt pork and fresh salmon, he felt the need of a little variety. Indeed, he had already begun to get tired of salmon, insomuch that he greatly preferred salt pork.

After that, he scraped together a sufficient number of old planks, and built therewith a flat-bottomed boat—a vessel much wanted at the place. But, do what he would, time hung very heavy on his hands, even although he made as much of a companion of Teddy O'Donel, as was consistent with his dignity. The season for wild fowl had not arrived, and he soon got tired of going out with his gun, with the certainty of returning empty-handed.

At last there was a brief break in the monotony of the daily life at Fort Desolation. A band of Indians came with a good supply of furs. They were not a very high type of human beings, had little to say, and did not seem disposed to say it. But they wanted goods from Jack, and Jack wanted furs from them; so their presence during the two days and nights they stayed shed a glow of moral sunshine over the fort that made its inhabitants as light-hearted and joyful as though some unwonted piece of good fortune had befallen them.

When the Indians went away, however, the gloom was proportionally deeper, Jack and his man sounded lower depths of despair than they had ever before fathomed, and the latter began to make frequent allusions to the possibility of making away with himself. Indeed, he did one evening, while he and Jack stood silently on the shore together, propose that they should go into the bush behind the fort, cover themselves over with leaves, and perish "at wance, like the babes in the wood."

Things were in this gloomy condition, when an event occurred, which, although not of great importance in itself, made such a deep impression on the dwellers at Fort Desolation, that it is worthy of a chapter to itself.

Chapter Eight.

Horrors.

One morning the sun rose with unwonted splendour on the broad bosom of the Saint Lawrence. The gulf was like a mirror, in which the images of the seagulls were as perfect as the birds themselves, and the warm hazy atmosphere was lighted up so brightly by the sun, that it seemed as though the world were enveloped in delicate golden gauze.

Jack Robinson stood on the shore, with the exile of Erin beside him. Strange to say, the effect of this lovely scene on both was the reverse of gladdening.

"It's *very* sad," said Jack, slowly.

"True for ye," observed the sympathising Teddy, supposing that his master had finished his remark.

"It's *very* sad," repeated Jack, "to look abroad upon this lovely world, and know that thousands of our fellow-men are enjoying it in each other's society, while we are self-exiled here."

"An' so it is," said Teddy, "not to mention our fellow-women an' our fellow-children to boot."

"To be sure we have got each other's society, O'Donel," continued Jack, "and the society of the gulls—"

"An' the fish," interposed Teddy.

"And the fish," assented Jack; "for all of which blessings we have cause to be thankful; but it's my opinion that you and I are a couple of egregious asses for having forsaken our kind and come to vegetate here in the wilderness."

"That's just how it is, sur. We're both on us big asses, an' it's a pint for investigation which on us is the biggest—you, who ought to have know'd better, or me, as niver know'd anything, a'most, to spake of."

Jack smiled. He was much too deeply depressed to laugh. For some minutes they stood gazing in silent despondency at the sea.

"What's that?" exclaimed Jack, with sudden animation, pointing to an object which appeared at the moment near the extremity of a point of rocks not far from the spot where they stood—"a canoe?"

"Two of 'em!" cried O'Donel, as another object came into view.

The change which came over the countenances of the two men, as they stood watching the approach of the two canoes, would have been incomprehensible to any one not acquainted with the effect of solitude on the human mind. They did not exactly caper on the beach, but they felt inclined to do so, and their heaving bosoms and sparkling eyes told of the depth of emotion within.

In about a quarter of an hour the canoes were within a short distance of the landing-place, but no shout or sign of recognition came from the Indians who paddled them. There was an Indian in the bow and stern of each canoe, and a woman in the middle of one of them.

"Well, boys, what cheer?" said Jack, using a well-known backwood's salutation, as the men landed.

The Indians silently took the proffered hand of the trader and shook it, replying in a low voice, "Wachee," as the nearest point they could attain to the pronunciation of "What cheer?"

There was something so unusually solemn in the air and manner of the savages, that Jack glanced at the canoe in which the woman sat. There he saw what explained the mystery. In the bottom lay an object wrapped up in pieces of old cloth and birchbark, which, from its form, was evidently a human body. A few words with the Indians soon drew from them the information that this was one of their wives who had been ailing for a long time, and at length had died. They were Roman Catholic converts, and had come to bury the body in the graveyard of the fort which had been "consecrated" by a priest.

To whatever pitch of excitement Jack and his man had risen at the unexpected appearance of the Indians, their spirits fell to an immeasurably profounder depth than before when their errand was made known.

Everything connected with this burial was sad and repulsive, yet Jack and his man felt constrained, out of mere sympathy, to witness it all.

The Indians were shabby and squalid in the extreme, and, being destitute of the means of making a coffin, had rolled the corpse up in such wretched materials as they happened to possess. One consequence of this was, that it was quite supple. On being lifted out of the canoe, the joints bent, and a sort of noise was emitted from the mouth, which was exceedingly horrible. Had the dead face been visible, the effect would not have been so powerful, but its being covered tended to set the imagination free to conceive things still more dreadful.

The grave was soon dug in the sand inside the graveyard, which was not more than a hundred yards on one side of the fort. Here, without ceremony of any kind, the poor form was laid and covered over. While being lowered into the grave, the same doubling-up of the frame and the same noise were observed. After all was over, the Indians returned to their canoe and paddled away, silently, as they had come; not before Jack, however, had gone to the store for a large piece of tobacco, which he threw to them as they were pushing off.

During the remainder of that day, Jack Robinson and his man went about their vocations with hearts heavy as lead. But it was not till night that this depression of spirits culminated. For the first time in his life Jack Robinson became superstitiously nervous. As for Teddy O'Donel, he had seldom been entirely free from this condition during any night of his existence; but he was much worse than usual on the present occasion!

After sunset, Jack had his tea alone in the hall, while O'Donel took his—also, of course, alone—in the kitchen. Tea over, Jack sat down and wrote part of a journal which he was in the habit of posting up irregularly. Then he went into the kitchen to give Teddy his orders for the following day, and stayed longer than usual. Thereafter, he read parts of one or two books which he had brought with him from the civilised world. But, do what he would, the image of the dead woman lying so near him invariably came between him and the page, and obtruded itself on his mind obstinately. Once he was so exasperated while reading, that he jumped violently off his chair, exclaiming, "This is childish nonsense!" In doing so he tilted the chair over, so that it balanced for an instant on its hind legs, and then fell with an awful crash, which caused him to leap at least three feet forward, clench his fists, and wheel round with a look of fury that would certainly have put to flight any *real* ghost in creation.

Jack gasped, then he sighed, after which he smiled and began to pace the hall slowly. At last he said, half aloud, "I think I'll smoke my pipe to-night with that poor fellow, O'Donel. He must be lonely enough, and I don't often condescend to be social."

Taking up his pipe and tobacco-pouch, he went towards the kitchen.

Now, while his master was enduring those uncomfortable feelings in the hall, Teddy was undergoing torments in the kitchen that are past description. He had had a grandmother—with no nose to speak of, a mouth large enough for two, four teeth, and one eye—who had stuffed him in his youth with horrible stories as full as a doll is of sawdust. That old lady's influence was now strong upon him. Every gust of wind that rumbled in the chimney sent a qualm to his heart. Every creak in the beams of his wooden kitchen startled his soul. Every accidental noise that occurred filled him with unutterable horror. The door, being clumsily made, fitted badly in all its parts, so that it shook and rattled in a perfectly heartrending manner.

Teddy resolved to cure this. He stuck bits of wood in the opening between it and the floor, besides jamming several nails in at the sides and top. Still, the latch *would* rattle, being complicated in construction, and not easily checked in all its parts. But Teddy was an ingenious fellow. He settled the latch by stuffing it and covering it with a mass of dough! In order further to secure things, he placed a small table against the door, and then sat down on a bench to smoke his pipe beside the door.

It was at this point in the evening that Jack resolved, as we have said, to be condescending.

As he had hitherto very seldom smoked his pipe in the kitchen, his footstep in the passage caused O'Donel's very marrow to quake. He turned as pale as death and became rigid with terror, so that he resembled nothing but an Irish statue of very dirty and discoloured marble.

When Jack put his hand on the latch, Teddy gasped once—he was incapable of more! The vision of the poor Indian woman rose before his mental eye, and he—well, it's of no use to attempt saying what he thought or felt!

The obstruction in the latch puzzled Jack not a little. He was surprised at its stiffness. The passage between the hall and kitchen was rather dark, so that he was somewhat nervous and impatient to open the door. It happened that he had left the door by which he had quitted the hall partially open. A gust of wind shut this with a bang that sent every drop of blood into his heart, whence it rebounded into his extremities. The impulse thus communicated to his hand was irresistible. The door was burst in; as a matter of course the table was hurled into the middle of the kitchen, where it was violently arrested by the stove. Poor Teddy O'Donel, unable to stand it any longer, toppled backwards over the bench with a hideous yell, and fell headlong into a mass of pans, kettles, and firewood, where he lay sprawling and roaring at the full power of his lungs, and keeping up an irregular discharge of such things as came to hand at the supposed ghost, who sheltered himself as he best might behind the stove.

"Hold hard, you frightened ass!" shouted Jack as a billet of wood whizzed over his head.

"Eh! what? It's *you*, sur? O, musha, av I didn't belave it was the ghost at last!"

"I tell you what, my man," said Jack, who was a good deal nettled at his reception, "I would advise you to make sure that it *is* a ghost next time before you shie pots and kettles about in that way. See what a smash you have made. Why, what on earth have you been doing to the door?"

"Sure I only stuffed up the kayhole to keep out the wind."

"Humph! and the ghosts, I suppose. Well, see that you are up betimes to-morrow and have these salmon nets looked over and repaired."

So saying, Jack turned on his heel and left the room, feeling too much annoyed to carry out his original intention of smoking a pipe with his man. He spent the evening, therefore, in reading a pocket copy of Shakespeare, and retired to rest at the usual hour in a more composed frame of mind, and rather inclined to laugh at his superstitious fears.

It happened, unfortunately, that from his window, as he lay on his bed, Jack could see the graveyard. This fact had never been noticed by him before, although he had lain there nightly since his arrival, and looked over the yard to the beach and the sea beyond. Now, the night being bright moonlight, he could see it with appalling distinctness. Sleep was banished from his eyes, and although he frequently turned with resolution to the wall and shut them, he was invariably brought back to his old position as if by a species of fascination.

Meanwhile Teddy O'Donel lay absolutely quaking in the kitchen. Unable to endure it, he at last rose, opened the door softly, and creeping up as near us he dared venture to his master's door, sat down there, as he said, "for company." In course of time he fell asleep.

Jack, being more imaginative, remained awake. Presently he saw a figure moving near the churchyard. It was white—at least the upper half of it was.

"Pshaw! this is positive folly; my digestion must be out of order," muttered Jack, rubbing his eyes; but the rubbing did not dissipate the figure which moved past the yard and approached the fort. At that moment Teddy O'Donel gave vent to a prolonged snore. Delivered as it was against the wooden step on which his nose was flattened, it sounded dreadfully like a groan. Almost mad with indignation and alarm, Jack Robinson leaped from his bed and pulled on his trousers, resolved to bring things to an issue of some sort.

He threw open his chamber door with violence and descended the staircase noisily, intending to arouse his man. He *did* arouse him, effectually, by placing his foot on the back of his head and crushing his face against the steps with such force as to produce a roar that would have put to shame the war-whoop of the wildest savage in America.

In endeavouring to recover himself, Jack fell upon Teddy and they rolled head-over-heels down the steps together towards the door of the house, which was opened at that instant by Ladoc, who had walked up to the fort, clad only

in his shirt and trousers, (the night being warm), to give a report of the condition of things at the fishery, where he and Rollo had quarrelled, and the men generally were in a state of mutiny.

Chapter Nine.

The Bully receives a Lesson.

We regret to be compelled to chronicle the fact, that Jack Robinson lost command of his temper on the occasion referred to in the last chapter. He and Teddy O'Donel rolled to the very feet of the amazed Ladoc, before the force of their fall was expended. They sprang up instantly, and Jack dealt the Irishman an open-handed box on the ear that sent him staggering against one of the pillars of the verandah, and resounded in the still night air like a pistol-shot. Poor Teddy would have fired up under other circumstances, but he felt so deeply ashamed of having caused the undignified mishap to his master, that he pocketed the affront, and quietly retired towards his kitchen. On his way thither, however, he was arrested by the tremendous tone in which Jack demanded of Ladoc the reason of his appearance at such an untimely hour.

There was a slight dash of insolence in the man's reply.

"I come up, monsieur," said he, "to tell you if there be *two* masters at fishery, / not be one of 'em. Rollo tink he do vat him please, mais I say, no; so ve quarrel."

"And so, you take upon you to desert your post," thundered Jack.

"Vraiment, oui," coolly replied Ladoc.

Jack clenched his fist and sprang at the man as a bull-terrier might leap on a mastiff. Almost in the act of striking he changed his mind, and, instead of delivering one of those scientific blows with which he had on more than one occasion in his past history terminated a fight at its very commencement, he seized Ladoc by the throat, tripped up his heels, and hurled him to the ground with such force, that he lay quite still for at least half a minute! Leaving him there to the care of O'Donel, who had returned, Jack went up to his bedroom, shut the door, thrust his hands into his pockets, and began to pace the floor rapidly, and to shake his head. Gradually his pace became slower, and the shaking of his head more sedate. Presently he soliloquised in an undertone.

"This won't do, John Robinson. You've let off too much steam. Quite against your principles to be so violent—shame on you, man. Yet after all it was very provoking to be made such a fool of before that insolent fellow. Poor Teddy—I wish I hadn't hit you such a slap. But, after all, you deserved it, you superstitious blockhead. Well, well, it's of no use regretting. Glad I didn't hit Ladoc, though, it's too soon for *that*. Humph! the time has come for action, however. Things are drawing to a point. They shall culminate *to-morrow*. Let me see."

Here Jack's tones became inaudible, and he began to complete his toilette. His thoughts were busy—to judge from his knitted brows and compressed lips. The decision of his motions at last showed that he had made up his mind to a course of action.

It was with a cleared brow and a self-possessed expression of countenance that he descended, a few minutes later, to the hall, and summoned O'Donel.

That worthy, on making his appearance, looked confused, and began to stammer out—

"I beg parding, sur, but—but raally, you know—it, it was all owin' to them abominable ghosts."

Jack smiled, or rather, tried to smile, but owing to conflicting emotions the attempt resulted in a grin.

"Let bygones be bygones," he said, "and send Ladoc here."

Ladoc entered with a defiant expression, which was evidently somewhat forced.

Jack was seated at a table, turning over some papers. Without raising his head, he said—

"Be prepared to start for the fishery with me in half-an-hour, Ladoc."

"Monsieur?" exclaimed the man, with a look of surprise.

Jack raised his head and *looked* at him. It was one of his peculiar looks.

"Did you not understand me?" he said, jumping up suddenly.

Ladoc vanished with an abrupt, "Oui, monsieur," and Jack proceeded, with a *real* smile on his good-humoured face, to equip himself for the road.

In half an hour the two were walking silently side by side at a smart pace towards the fishery, while poor Teddy O'Donel was left, as he afterwards said, "all be his lone wid the ghost and the newly buried ooman," in a state of mental agony, which may, perhaps, be conceived by those who possess strong imaginations, but which cannot by any possibility be adequately described.

Chapter Ten.

Strangers and Strange Events.

The monotony of the night march to the fishery was enlivened by the unexpected apparition of a boat. There was just enough of moonlight to render it dimly visible a few hundred yards from the shore.

"Indians!" exclaimed Ladoc, breaking silence for the first time since they set out.

"The stroke is too steady and regular for Indians," said Jack. "Boat ahoy!"

"Shore ahoy!" came back at once in the ringing tones of a seaman's voice.

"Pull in; there's plenty of water!" shouted Jack.

"Ay, ay," was the response. In a few seconds the boat's keel grated on the sand, and an active sailor jumped ashore. There were five other men in the boat.

"Where have *you* dropped from?" enquired Jack. "Well, the last place we dropped from," answered the seaman, "was the port quarter davits of the good ship Ontario, Captain Jones, from Liverpool to Quebec, with a general cargo; that was last night, and ten minutes afterwards, the Ontario dropped to the bottom of the sea."

"Wrecked!" exclaimed Jack.

"Just so. Leastwise, sprung a leak and gone to the bottom."

"No hands lost, I hope?"

"No, all saved in the boats; but we parted company in the night, and haven't seen each other since. Is there any port hereabouts, where we could get a bit o' summat to eat?"

"There is, friend. Just pull six miles farther along shore as you are going, and you'll come to the place that I have the honour and happiness to command—we call it Fort Desolation. You and your party are heartily welcome to food and shelter there, and you'll find an Irishman in charge who will be overjoyed, I doubt not, to act the part of host. Tomorrow night I shall return to the fort."

The shipwrecked mariners, who were half-starved, received this news with a cheer, and pushing off, resumed their oars with fresh vigour, while Jack and his man continued their journey.

They reached the fishery before dawn, and, without awakening the men, retired at once to rest.

Before breakfast, Jack was up, and went out to inspect the place. He found that his orders, about repairing the roof of the out-house and the clearing up, had not been attended to. He said nothing at first, but, from the quiet settled expression of his face, the men felt convinced that he did not mean to let it pass.

He ordered Ladoc to repair the roof forthwith, and bade Rollo commence a general clearing-up. He also set the other men to various occupations, and gave each to understand, that when his job was finished he might return to breakfast. The result of this was, that breakfast that morning was delayed till between eleven and twelve, the fishery speedily assumed quite a new aspect, and that the men ate a good deal more than usual when they were permitted to break their fast.

After breakfast, while they were seated outside the door of their hut smoking, Jack smoked his pipe alone by the margin of the river, about fifty yards off.

"Monsieur be meditating of something this morning," observed little François Xavier, glancing at Rollo with a twinkle in his sharp grey eye.

"He may meditate on what he likes, for all that / care," said Rollo with a scornful laugh. "He'll find it difficult to cow *me*, as I'll let him know before long."

Ladoc coughed, and an unmistakable sneer curled his lip as he relighted his pipe. The flushed face of Rollo showed what he felt, but, as nothing had been *said*, he could not with propriety give vent to his passion.

At that moment Jack Robinson hailed Ladoc, who rose and went towards him. Jack said a few words to him, which, of course, owing to the distance, could not be heard by the men. Immediately after, Ladoc was seen to walk away in the direction of an old Indian burying-ground, which lay in the woods about a quarter of a mile from the fishery.

Five minutes later Jack hailed Rollo, who obeyed the summons, and after a few words with his master, went off in the same direction as Ladoc. There seemed something mysterious in these movements. The mystery was deepened when Jack hailed François Xavier, and sent him after the other two, and it culminated when Jack himself, after allowing five minutes more to elapse, sauntered away in the same direction with a stout cudgel under his arm. He was soon lost to view in the woods.

Each of the three men had been told to go to the burying-ground, and to wait there until Jack himself should arrive. Ladoc was surprised on receiving the order, but, as we have seen, obeyed it. He was more than surprised, however, when he saw Rollo walk into the enclosure, and still more astonished when François followed in due course. None of the three spoke. They felt that Jack would not keep them long in suspense, and they were right. He soon appeared—smoking calmly.

"Now, lads," said he, "come here. Stand aside, François. I have brought you to this place to witness our proceedings,

and to carry back a true report to your comrades. Ladoc and Rollo, (here Jack's face became suddenly very stern; there was something *intense*, though not loud, in his voice), you have kept my men in constant hot water by your quarrelling since you came together. I mean to put an end to this. You don't seem to be quite sure which of you is the best man. You shall settle that question this day, on this spot, and within this hour. So set to, you rascals! Fight or shake hands. *I will see fair play!*"

Jack blazed up at this point, and stepped up to the men with such a fierce expression, that they were utterly cowed.

"Fight, I say, or shake hands, or—" Here Jack paused, and his teeth were heard to grate harshly together.

The two bullies stood abashed. They evidently did not feel inclined to "come to the scratch." Yet they saw by the peculiar way in which their master grasped his cudgel, that it would be worse for both of them if they did not obey.

"Well," said Ladoc, turning with a somewhat candid smile to Rollo, "I's willin' to shake hands if *you* be."

He held out his hand to Rollo, who took it in a shamefaced sort of way and then dropped it.

"Good," said Jack; "now you may go back to the hut; *but*, walk arm in arm. Let your comrades *see* that you are friends. Come, no hesitation!"

The tone of command could not be resisted; the two men walked down to the river arm in arm, as if they had been the best of friends, and little François followed—chuckling!

Next day a man arrived on foot with a letter to the gentlemen in charge of Fort Desolation. He and another man had conveyed it to the fort in a canoe from Fort Kamenistaquoia.

"What have we here?" said Jack Robinson, sitting down on the gunwale of a boat and breaking the seal.

The letter ran as follows:—

"Fort Kamenistaquoia, etcetera, etcetera.

"My Dear Jack,

"I am sorry to tell you that the business has all gone to sticks and stivers. We have not got enough of capital to compete with the Hudson's Bay Company, and I may remark, privately, that if we had, it would not be worth while to oppose them on this desolate coast. The trade, therefore, is to be given up, and the posts abandoned. I have sent a clerk to succeed you and wind up the business, at Fort Desolation, as I want you to come here directly, to consult as to future plans.

"Your loving but unfortunate friend,

"J. Murray."

On reading this epistle, Jack heaved a deep sigh.

"Adrift again!" he muttered.

At that moment his attention was arrested by the sound of voices in dispute. Presently the door of the men's house was flung open, and Rollo appeared with a large bundle on his shoulders. The bundle contained his "little all." He was gesticulating passionately to his comrades.

"What's wrong now?" said Jack to François, as the latter came towards him.

"Rollo he go 'way," said François. "There be an Indian come in hims canoe, and Rollo make up his mind to go off vid him."

"Oh! has he?" said Jack, springing up and walking rapidly towards the hut.

Now it must be told here that, a few days before the events we are describing, Jack had given Rollo a new suit of clothes from the Company's store, with a view to gain his regard by kindness, and attach him to the service, if possible. Rollo was clad in this suit at the time, and he evidently meant to carry it off.

Jack crushed back his anger as he came up, and said in a calm, deliberate voice, "What *now*, Rollo?"

"I'm going off," said the man fiercely. "I've had enough of *you*."

There was something supernaturally calm and bland in Jack's manner, as he smiled and said—

"Indeed! I'm *very* glad to hear it. Do you go soon?"

"Ay, at once."

"Good. You had better change your dress before going."

"Eh?" exclaimed the man.

"Your clothes belong to the company; *put them off!*" said Jack. "Strip, you blackguard!" he shouted, suddenly bringing his stick within three inches of Rollo's nose, "Strip, or I'll break every bone in your carcase."

The man hesitated, but a nervous motion in Jack's arm caused him to take off his coat somewhat promptly.

"I'll go into the house," said Rollo, humbly.

"No!" said Jack, sternly, "Strip where you are. Quick!"

Rollo continued to divest himself of his garments, until there was nothing left to remove.

"Here, François," said Jack, "take these things away. Now, sir, you may go."

Rollo took up his bundle and went into the hut, thoroughly crestfallen, to re-clothe himself in his old garments, while Jack strolled into the woods to meditate on his strange fortunes.

That was the end of Rollo. He embarked in a canoe with an Indian and went off—no one knew whither. So, the wicked and useless among men wander about this world to annoy their fellows for a time—to pass away and be forgotten. Perhaps some of them, through God's mercy, return to their right minds. We cannot tell.

According to instructions, Jack made over the charge of his establishment that day to the clerk who had been sent down to take charge, and next morning set out for Fort Kamenistaquoia, in the boat with the shipwrecked seamen.

Misfortune attended him even to the last minute. The new clerk, who chanced to be an enthusiastic young man, had resolved to celebrate his own advent and his predecessor's departure by firing a salute from an old carronade which stood in front of the fort, and which might, possibly, have figured at the battle of the Nile. He overcharged this gun, and, just as the boat pushed off, applied the match. The result was tremendous. The gun burst into a thousand pieces, and the clerk was laid flat on the sand! Of course the boat was run ashore immediately, and Jack sprang out and hastened to the scene of the disaster, which he reached just as the clerk, recovering from the effects of the shock, managed to sit up.

He presented a wonderful appearance! Fortunately, none of the flying pieces of the gun had touched him, but a flat tin dish, full of powder, from which he had primed the piece, had exploded in his face. This was now of a uniform bluish-black colour, without eyelashes or eyebrows, and surmounted by a mass of frizzled material that had once been the unfortunate youth's hair.

Beyond this he had received no damage, so Jack remained just long enough to dress his hurts, and make sure that he was still fit for duty.

Once more entering the boat, Jack pushed off. "Good-bye, boys!" said he, as the sailors pulled away. "Farewell, Teddy, mind you find me out when you go up to Quebec."

"Bad luck to me av I don't," cried the Irishman, whose eyes became watery in spite of himself.

"And don't let the ghosts get the better of you!" shouted Jack.

O'Donel shook his head. "Ah, they're a bad lot, sur—but sorrow wan o' them was iver so ugly as *him!*"

He concluded this remark by pointing over his shoulder with his thumb in the direction of the house where the new clerk lay, a hideous, though not severely injured, spectacle, on his bed.

A last "farewell" floated over the water, as the boat passed round a point of land. Jack waved his hand, and, a moment later, Fort Desolation vanished from his eyes for ever.

Readers, it is not our purpose here to detail to you the life and adventures of Jack Robinson.

We have recalled and recounted this brief passage in his eventful history, in order to give you some idea of what "outsiders," and wandering stars of humanity sometimes see, and say, and go through.

Doubtless Jack's future career would interest you, for his was a nature that could not be easily subdued. Difficulties had the effect of stirring him up to more resolute exertions. Opposition had the effect of drawing him on, instead of keeping him back. "Cold water" warmed him. "Wet blankets," when thrown on him, were dried and made hot! His energy was untiring, his zeal red hot, and when one effort failed, he began another with as much fervour as if it were the first he had ever made.

Yet Jack Robinson did not succeed in life. It would be difficult to say why. Perhaps his zeal and energy were frittered away on too many objects. Perhaps, if he had confined himself to one purpose and object in life, he would have been a great man. Yet no one could say that he was given to change, until change was forced upon him. Perchance want of judgment was the cause of all his misfortunes; yet he was a clever fellow: cleverer than the average of men. It may be that Jack's self-reliance had something to do with it, and that he was too apt to trust to his own strength and wisdom, forgetting that there is One, without whose blessing man's powers can accomplish no good whatever. We know not. We do not charge Jack with this, yet this is by no means an uncommon sin, if we are to believe the confessions of multitudes of good men.

Be this as it may, Jack arrived at Fort Kamenistaquoia in due course, and kindly, but firmly, refused to take part with his sanguine friend, J Murray, who proposed—to use his own language—"the getting-up of a great joint-stock company, to buy up all the sawmills on the Ottawa!"

Thereafter, Jack went to Quebec, where he was joined by Teddy O'Donel, with whom he found his way to the outskirts of the far west. There, having purchased two horses and two rifles, he mounted his steed, and, followed by his man, galloped away into the prairie to seek his fortune.

*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK FORT DESOLATION: RED INDIANS AND FUR TRADERS OF RUPERT'S LAND

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