Title: Popular Adventure Tales

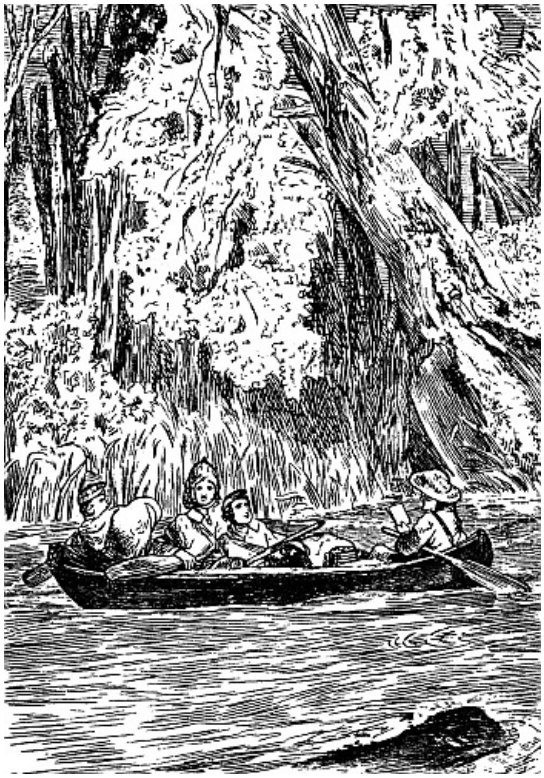
Author: Mayne Reid

Release date: June 1, 2008 [eBook #25665]

Language: English

Credits: Produced by Malcolm Farmer, Marcia Brooks and the Online
Distributed Proofreading Team at http://www.pgdp.net

POPULAR ADVENTURE TALES



THE YOUNG VOYAGEURS ON THE RED RIVER.

Popular Adventure Tales

COMPRISING

THE YOUNG VOYAGEURS
OR, THE BOY HUNTERS IN THE NORTH

THE FOREST EXILES
OR, ADVENTURES AMID THE WILDS OF THE AMAZON

THE BUSH-BOYS

By

CAPTAIN MAYNE REID

AUTHOR OF
"The Rifle Rangers" "The Wood Rangers"
&c., &c.

ILLUSTRATED

LONDON
SIMPKIN, MARSHALL, HAMILTON, KENT & CO.
GLASGOW: THOMAS D. MORISON

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Captain Mayne Reid was born at Ballyroney, County Down, on the 4th April, 1818, and was the son of the Rev. Thomas Mayne Reid. Mayne Reid was educated with a view to the Church, but finding his inclinations opposed to this calling, he emigrated to America and arrived in New Orleans on January, 1840. After a varied career as plantation over-seer, school-master, and actor, with a number of expeditions in connection with hunting and Indian warfare, he settled down in 1843 as a journalist in Philadelphia, where he made the acquaintance of Edgar Allan Poe.

Leaving Philadelphia in 1846, he spent the summer at Newport, Rhode Island, as the correspondent of the *New York Herald*, and in December of the same year, having obtained a commission as second lieutenant in the 1st New York Volunteers, he sailed for Vera Cruz to take part in the Mexican war. He behaved with conspicuous gallantry in many engagements, and was severely wounded and disabled at the storming of Chapultepec on the 13th September, 1847.

Returning to the United States in the spring of 1848, he resumed literary work. But in June, 1849, he sailed for Europe in order to take part in the revolutionary movements going on in Hungary and Bavaria, arriving however too late, he turned his attention again to literature, and in London in 1850, published his first novel "The Rifle Rangers," in two volumes. Between this date and his death, he produced a large number of volumes, which indeed no one else was capable of writing, for in them are avowedly embodied the observations and experiences of his own extraordinary career.

Unfortunate building and journalistic speculation and enterprises involved him in financial failure, so he returned to New York in October, 1867. There he founded and conducted *The Onward Magazine*, but owing to recurring bad effects of his old Mexican wound, he had to abandon work for sometime and go into the hospital, on leaving which he returned to England in 1870. During the later years of his life he resided at Ross in Herefordshire where he died on the 22nd October, 1883, and was buried in Kensal Green Cemetery.

Mayne Reid wrote in all thirty-five works, chiefly books of adventure and travel. As in the case of all authors, the books vary much in merit, but most of them are of a high order in their own department of literature. Many of them have been extraordinary popular and have become standard works. Reid has not been surpassed by any other writer in combining at one and the same time, the features of thrilling adventure and great instruction in the fields of natural history. Many of the works have been translated into Continental languages and are as highly esteemed among the French and Germans as at home.

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Transcriber's Note: Obvious printer errors, (missing accents, missing letters, etc) including punctuation, have been silently corrected.

All other inconsistencies including archaic spellings have been left as they were in the original.

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CHAPTER I

THE FUR COUNTRIES

Boy reader, you have heard of the Hudson's Bay Company? Ten to one you have worn a piece of fur which it has provided for you; if not, your pretty little sister has—in her muff, or her boa, or as a trimming for her winter dress. Would you like to know something of the country whence come these furs?—of the animals whose backs have been stripped to obtain them? As I feel certain that you and I are old friends, I make bold to answer for you—yes. Come, then! let us journey together to the “Fur Countries;” let us cross them from south to north.

A vast journey it will be. It will cost us many thousand miles of travel. We shall find neither railway-train, nor steamboat, nor stagecoach, to carry us on our way. We shall not even have the help of a horse. For us no hotel shall spread its luxurious board; no road-side inn shall hang out its inviting sign and “clean beds;” no roof of any kind shall offer us its hospitable shelter. Our table shall be a rock, a log, or the earth itself; our lodging a tent; and our bed the skin of a wild beast. Such are the best accommodations we can expect upon our journey. Are you still ready to undertake it? Does the prospect not deter you?

No—I hear you exclaim—I shall be satisfied with the table—what care I for mahogany? With the lodging—I can tent like an Arab. With the bed—fling feathers to the wind!

Enough, brave boy! you shall go with me to the wild regions of the “North-west,” to the far “fur countries” of America. But, first—a word about the land through which we are going to travel.

Take down your atlas. Bend your eye upon the map of North America. Note two large islands—one upon the right side, Newfoundland; another upon the left, Vancouver. Draw a line from one to the other; it will nearly bisect the continent. North of that line you behold a vast territory. How
14 vast? You may take your scissors, and clip fifty Englands out of it! There are lakes there in which you might *drown* England, or make an island of it! Now, you may form some idea of the vastness of that region known as the “fur countries.”

Will you believe me, when I tell you that all this immense tract is a wilderness—a howling wilderness, if you like a poetical name? It is even so. From north to south, from ocean to ocean—

throughout all that vast domain, there is neither town nor village—hardly anything that can be dignified with the name of “settlement.” The only signs of civilisation to be seen are the “forts,” or trading posts of the Hudson's Bay Company; and these “signs” are few and far—hundreds of miles—between.

For inhabitants, the country has less than ten thousand white men, the *employés* of the Company; and its native people are Indians of many tribes, living far apart, few in numbers, subsisting by the chase, and half starving for at least a third part of every year! In truth, the territory can hardly be called “inhabited.” There is not a man to every ten miles; and in many parts of it you may travel hundreds of miles without seeing a face, red, white, or black!

The physical aspect is, therefore, entirely wild. It is very different in different parts of the territory. One tract is peculiar. It has been long known as the “Barren Grounds.” It is a tract of vast extent. It lies north-west from the shores of Hudson's Bay, extending nearly to the Mackenzie River. Its rocks are *primitive*. It is a land of hills and valleys—of deep dark lakes and sharp-running streams. It is a woodless region. No timber is found there that deserves the name. No trees but glandular dwarf birches, willows, and black spruce, small and stunted. Even these only grow in isolated valleys. More generally the surface is covered with coarse sand—the *debris* of granite or quartz-rock—upon which no vegetable, save the lichen or the moss, can find life and nourishment.

In one respect these “Barren Grounds” are unlike the deserts of Africa: they are well watered. In almost every valley there is a lake; and though many of these are land-locked, yet do they contain fish of several species. Sometimes these lakes communicate with each other by means of rapid and turbulent streams passing through narrow gorges; and lines of those connected lakes form the great rivers of the district.

Such is a large portion of the Hudson's Bay territory. Most of the extensive peninsula of Labrador partakes of a similar character; and there are other like tracts west of the Rocky Mountain range in the “Russian possessions.”

Yet these “Barren Grounds” have their denizens. Nature has formed animals that delight to dwell there, and that are never found in more fertile regions. Two ruminating creatures find sustenance upon the mosses and lichens that cover their cold rocks: they are the caribou (reindeer) and the musk-ox. These, in their turn, become the food and subsistence of preying creatures. The wolf, in all its varieties of grey, black, white, pied, and dusky, follows upon their trail. The “brown bear”—a large species, nearly resembling the “grizzly”—is found only in the Barren Grounds; and the great “Polar bear” comes within their borders, but the latter is a dweller upon their shores alone, and finds his food among the finny tribes of the seas that surround them. In marshy ponds, existing here and there, the musk-rat builds his house, like that
15 of his larger cousin, the beaver. Upon the water sedge he finds subsistence; but his natural enemy, the wolverene, skulks in the same neighbourhood.

The “Polar hare” lives upon the leaves and twigs of the dwarf birch-tree; and this, transformed into its own white flesh, becomes the food of the Arctic fox. The herbage, sparse though it be, does not grow in vain. The seeds fall to the earth, but they are not suffered to decay. They are gathered by the little lemmings and meadow-mice, who, in their turn, become the prey of two species of *mustelidæ*, the ermine and vison weasels. Have the fish of the lakes no enemy? Yes—a terrible one in the Canada otter. The mink-weasel, too, pursues them; and in summer, the osprey, the great pelican, the cormorant, and the white-headed eagle.

These are the *fauna* of the Barren Grounds. Man rarely ventures within their boundaries. The wretched creatures who find a living there are the Esquimaux on their coasts, and a few Chippewa Indians in the interior, who hunt the caribou, and are known as “caribou-eaters.” Other Indians enter them only in summer, in search of game, or journeying from point to point; and so perilous are these journeyings, that numbers frequently perish by the way. There are no white men in the Barren Grounds. The “Company” has no commerce there. No fort is established in them: so scarce are the fur-bearing animals of these parts, their skins would not repay the expense of a “trading post.”

Far different are the “wooded tracts” of the fur countries. These lie mostly in the southern and central regions of the Hudson's Bay territory. There are found the valuable beaver and the wolverene that preys upon it. There dwells the American hare with its enemy the Canada lynx. There are the squirrels, and the beautiful martens (sables) that hunt them from tree to tree. There are found the foxes of every variety, the red, the cross, and the rare and highly-prized silver-fox, whose shining skin sells for its weight in gold! There, too, the black bear yields its fine coat to adorn the winter carriage, the holsters of the dragoon, and the shako of the grenadier. There the fur-bearing animals exist in greatest plenty, and many others whose skins are valuable in commerce, as the moose, the wapiti, and the wood-bison.

But there is also a “prairie” district in the fur countries. The great table prairies of North America, that slope eastward from the Rocky Mountains, also extend northward into the Hudson's Bay territory. They gradually grow narrower, however, as you proceed farther north, until, on reaching the latitude of the Great Slave Lake, they end altogether. This “prairie-land” has its peculiar animals. Upon it roams the buffalo, the prong-horned antelope, and the mule-deer. There, too, may be seen the “barking wolf” and the “swift fox.” It is the favourite home of the marmots, and the gauffres or sand-rats; and there, too, the noblest of animals, the horse, runs wild.

West of this prairie tract is a region of far different aspect—the region of the Rocky Mountains. This stupendous chain, sometimes called the Andes of North America, continues throughout the fur countries from their southern limits to the shores of the Arctic Sea. Some of its peaks overlook the waters of that sea itself, towering up near the coast. Many of these, even in southern latitudes, carry the “eternal snow.” This “mountain-chain” is, in places, of great breadth. Deep
16 valleys lie in its embrace, many of which have never been visited by man. Some are desolate and dreary; others are oäses of vegetation, which fascinate the traveller whose fortune it has been, after toiling among naked rocks, to gaze upon their smiling fertility.

These lovely wilds are the favourite home of many strange animals. The argali, or mountain-sheep, with his huge curving horns, is seen there; and the shaggy wild goat bounds along the steepest cliffs. The black bear wanders through the wooded ravines; and his fiercer congener, the “grizzly”—the most dreaded of all American animals—drags his huge body along the rocky declivities.

Having crossed the mountains, the fur countries extend westward to the Pacific. There you encounter barren plains, treeless and waterless; rapid rivers, that foam through deep, rock-bound channels; and a country altogether rougher in aspect, and more mountainous, than that lying to the east of the great chain. A warmer atmosphere prevails as you approach the Pacific, and in some places forests of tall trees cover the earth. In these are found most of the fur-bearing animals; and, on account of the greater warmth of the climate, the true *felidæ*—the long-tailed cats—here wander much farther north than upon the eastern side of the continent. Even so far north as the forests of Oregon these appear in the forms of the cougar and the ounce.

But it is not our intention at present to cross the Rocky Mountains. Our journey will lie altogether on the eastern side of that great chain. It will extend from the frontiers of civilization to the shores of the Arctic Sea. It is a long and perilous journey, boy reader; but as we have made up our minds to it, let us waste no more time in talking, but set forth at once. You are ready? Hurrah!

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CHAPTER II

THE YOUNG VOYAGEURS

There is a canoe upon the waters of Red River—Red River of the north. It is near the source of the stream, but passing downward. It is a small canoe, a frail structure of birch-bark, and contains only four persons. They are all young—the eldest of them evidently not over nineteen years of age, and the youngest about fifteen.

The eldest is nearly full-grown, though his body and limbs have not yet assumed the muscular development of manhood. His complexion is dark, nearly olive. His hair is jet black, straight as an Indian's, and long. His eyes are large and brilliant, and his features prominent. His countenance expresses courage, and his well-set jaws betoken firmness and resolution. He does not belie his looks, for he possesses these qualifications in a high degree. There is a gravity in his manner, somewhat rare in one so young; yet it is not the result of a morose disposition, but a subdued temperament produced by modesty, good sense, and much experience. Neither has it the air of stupidity. No: you could easily tell that the mind of this youth, if once roused, would exhibit both energy and alertness. His quiet manner has a far different expression. It is an air of coolness and confidence, which tells you he has met with dangers in the past, and would not fear to encounter them again.

17 It is an expression peculiar, I think, to the hunters of the “Far West,”—those men who dwell amidst dangers in the wild regions of the great prairies. Their solitary mode of life begets this expression. They are often for months without the company of a creature with whom they may converse—months without beholding a human face. They live alone with Nature, surrounded by her majestic forms. These awe them into habits of silence. Such was in point of fact the case with the youth whom we have been describing. He had hunted much, though not as a professional hunter. With him the chase had been followed merely as a pastime; but its pursuit had brought him into situations of peril, and in contact with Nature in her wild solitudes. Young as he was, he had journeyed over the grand prairies, and through the pathless forests of the West. He had slain the bear and the buffalo, the wild cat and the cougar. These experiences had made their impression upon his mind, and stamped his countenance with that air of gravity we have noticed.

The second of the youths whom we shall describe is very different in appearance. He is of blonde complexion, rather pale, with fair silken hair that waves gently down his cheeks, and falls upon his shoulders. He is far from robust. On the contrary, his form is thin and delicate. It is not the delicacy of feebleness or ill-health, but only a body of slighter build. The manner in which he handles his oar shows that he possesses both health and strength, though neither in such a high degree as the dark youth. His face expresses, perhaps, a larger amount of intellect, and it is a countenance that would strike you as more open and communicative. The eye is blue and mild, and the brow is marked by the paleness of study and habits of continued thought. These

indications are no more than just, for the fair-haired youth *is* a student, and one of no ordinary attainments. Although only seventeen years of age, he is already well versed in the natural sciences; and many a graduate of Oxford or Cambridge would but ill compare with him. The former might excel in the knowledge—if we can dignify it by that name—of the laws of scansion, or in the composition of Greek idylls; but in all that constitutes *real* knowledge he would prove but an idle theorist, a dreamy imbecile, alongside our practical young scholar of the West.

The third and youngest of the party—taking them as they sit from stem to bow—differs in many respects from both those described. He has neither the gravity of the first, nor yet the intellectuality of the second. His face is round, and full, and ruddy. It is bright and smiling in its expression. His eye dances merrily in his head, and its glance falls upon everything. His lips are hardly ever at rest. They are either engaged in making words—for he talks almost incessantly—or else contracting and expanding with smiles and joyous laughter. His cap is jauntily set, and his fine brown curls, hanging against the rich roseate skin of his cheeks, give to his countenance an expression of extreme health and boyish beauty. His merry laugh and free air tell you he is not the boy for books. He is not much of a hunter either. In fact, he is not particularly given to anything—one of those easy natures who take the world as it comes, look upon the bright side of everything, without getting sufficiently interested to excel in anything.

These three youths were dressed nearly alike. The eldest wore the costume, as near as may be, of a backwoods hunter—a tunic-like hunting-shirt, of dressed buckskin, leggings and mocassins of
18 the same material, and all—shirt, leggings, and mocassins—handsomely braided and embroidered with stained quills of the porcupine. The cape of the shirt was tastefully fringed, and so was the skirt as well as the seams of the mocassins. On his head was a hairy cap of raccoon skin, and the tail of the animal, with its dark transverse bars, hung down behind like the drooping plume of a helmet. Around his shoulders were two leathern belts that crossed each other upon his breast. One of these slung a bullet-pouch covered with a violet-green skin that glittered splendidly in the sun. It was from the head of the “wood-duck” the most beautiful bird of its tribe. By the other strap was suspended a large crescent-shaped horn taken from the head of an Opelousas bull, and carved with various ornamental devices. Other smaller implements hung from the belts, attached by leathern thongs: there was a picker, a wiper, and a steel for striking fire with. A third belt—a broad stout one of alligator leather—encircled the youth's waist. To this was fastened a holster, and the shining butt of a pistol could be seen protruding out; a hunting-knife of the kind denominated “bowie” hanging over the left hip, completed his “arms and accoutrements.”

The second of the youths was dressed, as already stated, in a somewhat similar manner, though his accoutrements were not of so warlike a character. Like the other, he had a powder-horn and pouch, but instead of knife and pistol, a canvass bag or haversack hung from his shoulder; and had you looked into it, you would have seen that it was half filled with shells, pieces of rock, and rare plants, gathered during the day—the diurnal storehouse of the geologist, the palæontologist, and botanist—to be emptied for study and examination by the night camp-fire. Instead of the 'coon-skin cap he wore a white felt hat with broad leaf; and for leggings and mocassins he had trousers of blue cottonade and laced buskins of tanned leather.

The youngest of the three was dressed and accoutred much like the eldest, except that his cap was of blue cloth—somewhat after the fashion of the military forage cap. All three wore shirts of coloured cotton, the best for journeying in these uninhabited regions, where soap is scarce, and a laundress not to be had at any price.

Though very unlike one another, these three youths were brothers. I knew them well. I had seen them before—about two years before—and though each had grown several inches taller since that time, I had no difficulty in recognising them. Even though they were now two thousand miles from where I had formerly encountered them, I could not be mistaken as to their identity. Beyond a doubt they were the same brave young adventurers whom I had met in the swamps of Louisiana, and whose exploits I had witnessed upon the prairies of Texas. They were the “Boy Hunters,”—Basil, Lucien, François! I was right glad to renew acquaintance with them. Boy reader, do you share my joy?

But whither go they now? They are full two thousand miles from their home in Louisiana. The Red River upon which their canoe floats is not that Red River, whose blood-like waters sweep through the swamps of the hot South—the home of the alligator and the gar. No, it is a stream of a far different character, though also one of great magnitude. Upon the banks of the former ripens the rice-plant, and the sugar-cane waves its golden tassels high in the air. There, too,
19 flourishes the giant reed, the fan-palm, and the broad-leafed magnolia, with its huge snow-white flowers. There the aspect is Southern, and the heat tropical for most part of the year.

All this is reversed on the Red River of the North. It is true that on its banks sugar is also produced; but it is no longer from a plant but a lordly tree—the great sugar-maple. There is rice too,—vast fields of rice upon its marshy borders; but it is not the pearly grain of the South. It is the wild rice, “the water oats,” the food of millions of winged creatures, and thousands of human beings as well. Here, for three-fourths of the year, the sun is feeble, and the aspect that of winter. For months the cold waters are bound up in an icy embrace. The earth is covered with thick snow, over which rise the needle-leafed *coniferæ*—the pines, the cedars, the spruce, and the hemlock. Very unlike each other are the countries watered by the two streams, the Red River of the South and its namesake of the North.

But whither go our Boy Hunters in their birch-bark canoe? The river upon which they are

voyaging runs due northward into the great lake Winnipeg. They are floating with its current, and consequently increasing the distance from their home. Whither go they?

The answer leads us to some sad reflections. Our joy on again beholding them is to be mingled with grief. When we last saw them they had a father, but no mother. Now they have neither one nor the other. The old Colonel, their father—the French *émigré*, the *hunter naturalist*—is dead. He who had taught them all he knew; who had taught them to ride, to swim, to dive deep rivers, to fling the lasso, to climb tall trees, and scale steep cliffs, to bring down birds upon the wing or beasts upon the run, with the arrow and the unerring rifle; who had trained them to sleep in the open air, in the dark forest, on the unsheltered prairie, along the white snow-wreath—anywhere —with but a blanket or a buffalo robe for their bed; who had taught them to live on the simplest food, and had imparted to one of them a knowledge of science, of botany in particular, that enabled them, in case of need, to draw sustenance, from plants and trees, from roots and fruits, to find resources where ignorant men would starve.

He also had taught them to kindle a fire without flint, steel, or detonating powder; to discover their direction without a compass, from the rocks and the trees and the signs of the heavens; and in addition to all, had taught them, as far as was then known, the geography of that vast wilderness that stretches from the Mississippi to the shores of the Pacific Ocean, and northward to the icy borders of the Arctic Sea—he who had taught them all this, their father, was no more; and his three sons, the “boy men,” of whom he was so proud, and of whose accomplishments he was wont to boast, were now orphans upon the wide world.

But little more than a year after their return from their grand expedition to the Texan prairies, the “old Colonel” had died. It was one of the worst years of that scourge of the South—the yellow fever—and to this dread pestilence he had fallen a victim.

Hugot, the *ex-chasseur* and attached domestic, who was accustomed to follow his master like a shadow, had also followed him into the next world. It was not grief that killed Hugot, though he bore the loss of his kind master sadly enough. But it was not grief that killed Hugot. He was laid low by the same disease of which his master had died—the yellow fever. A week had scarcely
20 passed after the death of the latter, before Hugot caught the disease, and in a few days he was carried to the tomb and laid by the side of his “old Colonel.”

The Boy Hunters—Basil, Lucien, François—became orphans. They knew of but one relation in the whole world, with whom their father had kept up any correspondence. This relation was an uncle, and, strange as it may seem, a Scotchman—a Highlander, who had strayed to Corsica in early life, and had there married the Colonel's sister. That uncle had afterwards emigrated to Canada, and had become extensively engaged in the fur trade. He was now a superintendent or “factor” of the Hudson's Bay Company, stationed at one of their most remote posts near the shores of the Arctic Sea! There is a romance in the history of some men wilder than any fiction that could be imagined.

I have not yet answered the question as to where our Boy Hunters were journeying in their birch-bark canoe. By this time you will have divined the answer. Certainly, you will say, they were on their way to join their uncle in his remote home. For no other object could they be travelling through the wild regions of the Red River. That supposition is correct. To visit this Scotch uncle (they had not seen him for years) was the object of their long, toilsome, and perilous journey. After their father's death he had sent for them. He had heard of their exploits upon the prairies; and, being himself of an adventurous disposition, he was filled with admiration for his young kinsmen, and desired very much to have them come and live with him.

Being now their guardian, he might command as much, but it needed not any exercise of authority on his part to induce all three of them to obey his summons. They had travelled through the mighty forests of the Mississippi, and upon the summer prairies of the South. These great features of the earth's surface were to them familiar things, and they were no longer curious about them. But there remained a vast country which they longed eagerly to explore. They longed to look upon its shining lakes and crystal rivers; upon its snow-clad hills and ice-bound streams; upon its huge mammalia—its moose and its musk-oxen, its wapiti and its monster bears. This was the very country to which they were now invited by their kinsman, and cheerfully did they accept his invitation.

Already had they made one-half the journey, though by far the easier half. They had travelled up the Mississippi by steamboat as far as the mouth of the St. Peter's. There they had commenced their canoe voyage—in other words became “voyageurs”—for such is the name given to those who travel by canoes through these wild territories. Their favourite horses and the mule “Jeannette” had been left behind. This was a necessity, as these creatures, however useful upon the dry prairies of the South, where there are few or no lakes, and where rivers only occur at long intervals, would be of little service to the traveller in the Northern regions. Here the route is crossed and intercepted by numerous rivers; and lakes of all sizes, with tracts of inundated marsh, succeed one another continually. Such, in fact, are the highways of the country, and the canoe the travelling carriage; so that a journey from one point of the Hudson's Bay territory to
21 another is often a canoe voyage of thousands of miles—equal to a “trip” across the Atlantic.

Following the usual custom, therefore, our Boy Hunters had become voyageurs—“*Young Voyageurs*.” They had navigated the St. Peter's in safety, almost to its head-waters. These interlock with the sources of the Red River. By a “portage” of a few miles they had crossed to the latter stream; and, having launched their canoe upon its waters, were now floating downward

and northward with its current. But they had yet a long journey before them—nearly two thousand miles! Many a river to be “run,” many a rapid to be “shot,” many a lake to be crossed, and many a “portage” to be passed, ere they could reach the end of that great *voyage*.

Come, boy reader, shall we accompany them? Yes. The strange scenes and wild adventures through which we must pass, may lighten the toils, and perhaps repay us for the perils of the journey. Think not of the toils. Roses grow only upon thorns. From toil we learn to enjoy leisure. Regard not the perils. “From the nettle danger we pluck the flower safety.” Security often springs from peril. From such hard experiences great men have arisen. Come, then, my young friend! mind neither toil nor peril, but with me to the great wilderness of the North!

Stay! We are to have another “*compagnon du voyage*.” There is a fourth in the boat, a fourth “young voyageur.” Who is he? In appearance he is as old as Basil, full as tall, and not unlike him in “build.” But he is altogether of a different *colour*. He is fair-haired; but his hair (unlike that of Lucien, which is also light-coloured) is strong, crisp, and curly. It does not droop, but stands out over his cheeks in a profusion of handsome ringlets. His complexion is of that kind known as “fresh,” and the weather, to which it has evidently been much exposed, has bronzed and rather enriched the colour. The eyes are dark blue, and, strange to say, with *black* brows and lashes! This is not common, though sometimes observed; and, in the case of the youth we are describing, arose from a difference of complexion on the part of his parents. He looked through the eyes of his mother, while in other respects he was more like his father, who was fair-haired and of a “fresh” colour.

The youth, himself, might be termed handsome. Perhaps he did not possess the youthful beauty of François, nor the bolder kind that characterized the face of Basil. Perhaps he was of a coarser “make” than any of his three companions. His intellect had been less cultivated by education, and *education adds to the beauty of the face*. His life had been a harder one—he had toiled more with his hands, and had seen less of civilized society. Still many would have pronounced him a handsome youth. His features were regular, and of clean outline. His lips expressed good-nature as well as firmness. His eye beamed with native intelligence, and his whole face bespoke a heart of true and determined honesty—*that made it beautiful*.

Perhaps a close scrutinizer of countenances might have detected some resemblance—a family one—between him and his three companions. If such there was, it was very slight; but there might have been, from the relationship that existed between them and him. He was their cousin—their full cousin—the only son of that uncle they were now on their way to visit, and the messenger who had been sent to bring them. Such was the fourth of “the young voyageurs.”

His dress was not unlike that worn by Basil; but as he was seated on the bow, and acting as
22 pilot, and therefore more likely to feel the cold, he wore over his hunting-shirt, a Canadian *capote* of white woollen cloth, with its hood hanging down upon his shoulders.

But there was still another “voyageur,” an old acquaintance, whom you, boy reader, will no doubt remember. This was an animal, a quadruped, who lay along the bottom of the canoe upon a buffalo's hide. “From his size and colour—which was a tawny red—you might have mistaken him for a panther—a cougar. His long black muzzle and broad hanging ears gave him quite a different aspect, however, and declared him to be a hound. He *was* one—a bloodhound, with the cross of a mastiff—a powerful animal. It was the dog 'Marengo.'” You remember Marengo?

In the canoe there were other objects of interest. There were blankets and buffalo robes; there was a small canvas tent folded up; there were bags of provisions, and some cooking utensils; there was a spade and an axe; there were rifles—three of them—and a double-barrelled shot-gun; besides a fish-net, and many other articles, the necessary equipments for such a journey.

Loaded almost to the gunwale was that little canoe, yet lightly did it float down the waters of the Red River of the North.

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CHAPTER III

THE TRUMPETER SWAN AND THE BALD EAGLE

It was the spring season, though late. The snow had entirely disappeared from the hills, and the ice from the water, and the melting of both had swollen the river, and rendered its current more rapid than usual. Our young voyageurs needed not therefore to ply their oars, except now and then to guide the canoe; for these little vessels have no rudder, but are steered by the paddles. The skilful voyageurs can shoot them to any point they please, simply by their dexterous handling of the oars; and Basil, Lucien, and François, had had sufficient practice both with “skiffs” and “dug-outs” to make good oarsmen of all three. They had made many a canoe trip upon the lower Mississippi and the bayous of Louisiana; besides their journey up the St. Peter's had rendered them familiar with the management of their birchen craft. An occasional stroke of the paddle kept them in their course, and they floated on without effort.

Norman—such was the name of their Canadian or Highland cousin—sat in the bow and directed their course. This is the post of honour in a canoe; and as he had more experience than any of them in this sort of navigation, he was allowed habitually to occupy this post. Lucien sat in the stern. He held in his hands a book and pencil; and as the canoe glided onward, he was noting down his memoranda. The trees upon the banks were in leaf—many of them in blossom—and as the little craft verged near the shore, his keen eye followed the configuration of the leaves, to discover any new species that might appear.

There is a rich vegetation upon the banks of the Red River; but the *flora* is far different from that which appears upon the low *alluvion* of Louisiana. It is Northern, but not Arctic. Oaks, elms, and poplars, are seen mingling with birches, willows, and aspens. Several species of indigenous fruit trees were observed by Lucien, among which were crab-apple, raspberry, strawberry, and
23 currant. There was also seen the fruit called by the voyageurs “le poire,” but which in English phraseology is known as the “service-berry.” It grows upon a small bush or shrub of six or eight feet high, with smooth pinnate leaves. These pretty red berries are much esteemed and eaten both by Indians and whites, who preserve them by drying, and cook them in various ways.

There was still another bush that fixed the attention of our young botanist, as it appeared all along the banks, and was a *characteristic* of the vegetation of the country. It was not over eight feet in height, with spreading branches of a grey-colour. Its leaves were three inches wide, and somewhat lobed like those of the oak. Of course, at this early season, the fruit was not ripe upon it; but Lucien knew the fruit well. When ripe it resembles very much a red cherry, or, still more, a cranberry, having both the appearance and acrid taste of the latter. Indeed, it is sometimes used as a substitute for cranberries in the making of pies and tarts; and in many parts it is called the “bush cranberry.”

The name, however, by which it is known among the Indians of Red River is “*anepeminan*” from “*nepen*,” summer, and “*minan*,” berry. This has been corrupted by the fur-traders and voyageurs into “Pembina;” hence, the name of a river which runs into the Red, and also the name of the celebrated but unsuccessful settlement of “Pembina,” formed by Lord Selkirk many years ago. Both took their names from this berry that grows in abundance in the neighbourhood. The botanical appellation of this curious shrub is *Viburnum oxycoccos*; but there is another species of the viburnum, which is also styled “oxycoccos.” The common “snowball bush” of our garden is a plant of the same genus, and very like the “Pembina,” both in leaf and flower. In fact, in a wild state they might be regarded as the same; but it is well known that the flowers of the snowball are sterile, and do not produce the beautiful bright crimson berries of the “Pembina.”

Lucien lectured upon these points to his companions as they floated along. Norman listened with astonishment to his philosophic cousin, who, although he had never been in this region before, knew more of its plants and trees than he did himself. Basil also was interested in the explanations given by his brother. On the contrary, François, who cared but little for botanical studies, or studies of any sort, was occupied differently. He sat near the middle of the canoe, double-barrel in hand, eagerly watching for a shot. Many species of water-fowl were upon the river, for it was now late in the spring, and the wild geese and ducks had all arrived, and were passing northward upon their annual migration. During the day François had got several shots, and had “bagged” three wild geese, all of different kinds, for there are many species of wild geese in America.

He had also shot some ducks. But this did not satisfy him. There was a bird upon the river that could not be approached. No matter how the canoe was manœuvred, this shy creature always took flight before François could get within range. For days he had been endeavouring to kill one. Even upon the St. Peter's many of them had been seen, sometimes in pairs, at other times in small flocks of six or seven, but always shy and wary. The very difficulty of getting a shot at them, along with the splendid character of the birds themselves, had rendered François eager to obtain
24 one. The bird itself was no other than the great wild swan—the king of aquatic birds.

“Come, brother!” said François, addressing Lucien, “bother your viburnums and your oxycocks! Tell us something about these swans. See! there goes another of them! What a splendid fellow he is! I'd give something to have him within range of buckshot.”

As François spoke he pointed down-stream to a great white bird that was seen moving out from the bank. It was a swan, and one of the very largest kind—“a trumpeter.”

It had been feeding in a sedge of the wild rice, and no doubt the sight of the canoe or the plash of the guiding oar had disturbed, and given it the alarm. It shot out from the reeds with head erect and wings slightly raised, offering to the eyes of the voyageurs a spectacle of graceful and majestic bearing, that, among the feathered race at least, is quite inimitable.

A few strokes of its broad feet propelled it into the open water near the middle of the stream, when, making a half wheel, it turned head down the river, and swam with the current.

At the point where it turned it was not two hundred yards ahead of the canoe. Its apparent boldness in permitting them to come so near without taking wing, led François to hope that they might get still nearer; and, begging his companions to ply the paddles, he seized hold of his double-barrel, and leaned forward in the canoe. Basil also conceived a hope that a shot was to be had, for he took up his rifle, and looked to the cock and cap. The others went steadily and quietly to work at the oars. In a few moments the canoe cleft the current at the rate of a galloping horse, and one would have supposed that the swan must either at once take wing or be overtaken.

Not so, however. The “trumpeter” knew his game better than that. He had full confidence both in his strength and speed upon the water. He was not going to undergo the trouble of a fly, until the necessity arose for so doing; and, as it was, he seemed to be satisfied that that necessity had not yet arrived. The swim cost him much less muscular exertion than flying would have done, and he judged that the current, here very swift, would carry him out of reach of his pursuers.

It soon began to appear that he judged rightly; and the voyageurs, to their chagrin, saw that, instead of gaining upon him, as they had expected, every moment widened the distance between him and the canoe. The bird had an advantage over his pursuers. Three distinct powers propelled him, while they had only two to rely upon. He had the current in his favour—so had they. He had oars or paddles—his feet; they had oars as well. He “carried sail,” while they spread not a “rag.” The wind chanced to blow directly down-stream, and the broad wings of the bird, held out from his body, and half extended, caught the very pith of the breeze on their double concave surfaces, and carried him through the water with the velocity of an arrow. Do you think that he was not aware of this advantage when he started in the race?

Do you suppose that these birds do not *think*? I for one am satisfied they do, and look upon every one who prates about the *instinct* of these creatures as a philosopher of a very old school
25 indeed. Not only does the great swan think, but so does your parrot, and your piping bullfinch, and the little canary that hops on your thumb. All think, and *reason*, and *judge*. Should it ever be your fortune to witness the performance of those marvellous birds, exhibited by the graceful Mdlle. Vandermeersch in the fashionable *salons* of Paris and London, you will agree with me in the belief that the smallest of them has a mind like yourself.

Most certainly the swan, which our voyageurs were pursuing, thought, and reasoned, and judged, and calculated his distance, and resolved to keep on “the even tenor of his way,” without putting himself to extra trouble by beating the air with his wings, and lifting his heavy body—thirty pounds at least—up into the heavens. His judgment proved sound; for, in less than ten minutes from the commencement of the chase, he had gained a clear hundred yards upon his pursuers, and continued to widen the distance. At intervals he raised his beak higher than usual, and uttered his loud booming note, which fell upon the ears of the voyageurs as though it had been sent back in mockery and defiance.

They would have given up the pursuit, had they not noticed that a few hundred yards farther down the river made a sharp turn to the right. The swan, on reaching this, would no longer have the wind in his favour. This inspired them with fresh hopes. They thought they would be able to overtake him after passing the bend, and then, either get a shot at him, or force him into the air. The latter was the more likely; and, although it would be no great gratification to see him fly off, yet they had become so interested in this singular chase that they desired to terminate it by putting the trumpeter to some trouble. They bent, therefore, with fresh energy to their oars, and pulled onward in the pursuit.

First the swan, and after him the canoe, swung round the bend, and entered the new “reach” of the river. The voyageurs at once perceived that the bird now swam more slowly. He no longer “carried sail,” as the wind was no longer in his favour. His wings lay closely folded to his body, and he moved only by the aid of his webbed feet and the current, which last happened to be sluggish, as the river at this part spread over a wide expanse of level land. The canoe was evidently catching up, and each stroke was bringing the pursuers nearer to the pursued.

After a few minutes' brisk pulling, the trumpeter had lost so much ground that he was not two hundred yards in the advance, and “dead ahead.” His body was no longer carried with the same gracefulness, and the majestic curving of his neck had disappeared. His bill protruded forward, and his thighs began to drag the water in his wake. He was evidently on the threshold of flight. Both François and Basil saw this, as they stood with their guns crossed and ready.

At this moment a shrill cry sounded over the water. It was the scream of some wild creature, ending in a strange laugh, like the laugh of a maniac!

On both sides of the river there was a thick forest of tall trees of the cotton-wood species. From this forest the strange cry had proceeded, and from the right bank. Its echoes had hardly ceased, when it was answered by a similar cry from the trees upon the left. So like were the two, that it seemed as if some one of God's wild creatures was mocking another. These cries were
26 hideous enough to frighten any one not used to them. They had not that effect upon our voyageurs, who knew their import. One and all of them were familiar with the voice of the *white-headed eagle*!

The trumpeter knew it as well as any of them, but on him it produced a far different effect. His terror was apparent, and his intention was all at once changed. Instead of rising into the air, as he had premeditated, he suddenly lowered his head, and disappeared under the water!

Again was heard the wild scream and the maniac laugh; and the next moment an eagle swept out from the timber, and, after a few strokes of its broad wing, poised itself over the spot where the trumpeter had gone down. The other, its mate, was seen crossing at the same time from the opposite side.

Presently the swan rose to the surface, but his head was hardly out of the water when the eagle once more uttered its wild note, and, half folding its wings, darted down from above. The swan seemed to have expected this, for before the eagle could reach the surface, he had gone under a second time, and the latter, though passing with the velocity of an arrow, plunged his

talons in the water to no purpose. With a cry of disappointment the eagle mounted back into the air, and commenced wheeling in circles over the spot. It was now joined by its mate, and both kept round and round watching for the reappearance of their intended victim.

Again the swan came to the surface, but before either of the eagles could swoop upon him he had for the third time disappeared. The swan is but an indifferent diver; but under such circumstances he was likely to do his best at it. But what could it avail him? He must soon rise to the surface to take breath—each time at shorter intervals. He would soon become fatigued and unable to dive with sufficient celerity, and then his cruel enemies would be down upon him with their terrible talons. Such is the usual result, unless the swan takes to the air, which he sometimes does. In the present case he had built his hopes upon a different means of escape. He contemplated being able to conceal himself in a heavy sedge of bulrushes that grew along the edge of the river, and towards these he was evidently directing his course under the water.

At each emersion he appeared some yards nearer them, until at length he rose within a few feet of their margin, and diving again was seen no more! He had crept in among the sedge, and no doubt was lying with only his head, or part of it, above the water, his body concealed by the broad leaves of the *nymphæ*, while the head itself could not be distinguished among the white flowers that lay thickly along the surface.

The eagles now wheeled over the sedge, flapping the tops of the bulrushes with their broad wings, and screaming with disappointed rage. Keen as were their eyes they could not discover the hiding-place of their victim. No doubt they would have searched for it a long time, but the canoe—which they now appeared to notice for the first time—had floated near; and, becoming aware of their own danger, both mounted into the air again, and with a farewell scream flew off, and alighted at some distance down the river.

“A swan for supper!” shouted François, as he poised his gun for the expected shot.

27 The canoe was headed for the bulrushes near the point where the trumpeter had been last seen; and a few strokes of the paddles brought the little craft with a whizzing sound among the sedge. But the culms of the rushes were so tall, and grew so closely together, that the canoe-men, after entering, found to their chagrin they could not see six feet around them. They dared not stand up, for this is exceedingly dangerous in a birch canoe, where the greatest caution is necessary to keep the vessel from careening over. Moreover, the sedge was so thick, that it was with difficulty they could use their oars.

They remained stationary for a time, surrounded by a wall of green bulrush. They soon perceived that that would never do, and resolved to push back into the open water. Meanwhile Marengo had been sent into the sedge, and was now heard plunging and sweltering about in search of the game. Marengo was not much of a water-dog by nature, but he had been trained to almost every kind of hunting, and his experience among the swamps of Louisiana had long since relieved him of all dread for the water. His masters therefore had no fear but that Marengo would “put up” the trumpeter.

Marengo had been let loose a little too soon. Before the canoe could be cleared of the entangling sedge, the dog was heard to utter one of his loud growls, then followed a heavy plunge, there was a confused fluttering of wings, and the great white bird rose majestically into the air! Before either of the gunners could direct their aim, he was beyond the range of shot, and both prudently reserved their fire. Marengo having performed his part, swam back to the canoe, and was lifted over the gunwale.

The swan, after clearing the sedge, rose almost vertically into the air. These birds usually fly at a great elevation—sometimes entirely beyond the reach of sight. Unlike the wild geese and ducks, they never alight upon land, but always upon the bosom of the water. It was evidently the intention of this one to go far from the scene of his late dangers, perhaps to the great lake Winnipeg itself.

After attaining a height of several hundred yards, he flew forward in a horizontal course, and followed the direction of the stream. His flight was now regular, and his trumpet note could be heard at intervals, as, with outstretched neck, he glided along the heavens. He seemed to feel the pleasant sensations that every creature has after an escape from danger, and no doubt he fancied himself secure. But in this fancy he deceived himself. Better for him had he risen a few hundred yards higher, or else had uttered his self-gradulation in a more subdued tone; for it was heard and answered, and that response was the maniac laugh of the white-headed eagle.

At the same instant two of these birds—those already introduced—were seen mounting into the air. They did not fly up vertically, as the swan had done, but in spiral curves, wheeling and crossing each other as they ascended. They were making for a point that would intersect the flight of the swan should he keep on in his horizontal course. This, however, he did not do. With an eye as quick as theirs, he saw that he was “headed;” and, stretching his long neck upward, he again pursued an almost vertical line.

But he had to carry thirty pounds of flesh and bones, while the largest of the eagles—the female bird—with a still broader spread of wing, was a “light weight” of only seven. The result of this difference was soon apparent. Before the trumpeter had got two hundred yards higher, the
28 female of the eagles was seen wheeling around him on the same level. The swan was now observed to double, fly downward, and then upward again, while his mournful note echoed back to the earth. But his efforts were in vain. After a series of contortions and manœuvres, the eagle

darted forward, with a quick toss threw herself back-downward, and, striking upward, planted her talons in the under part of the wing of her victim. The lacerated shaft fell uselessly down; and the great white bird, no longer capable of flight, came whistling through the air.

THE TRUMPETER SWAN AND THE BALD EAGLE.

29 But it was not allowed to drop directly to the earth; it would have fallen on the bosom of the broad river, and that the eagles did not wish, as it would have given them some trouble to get the heavy carcass ashore. As soon as the male—who was lower in the air—saw that his partner had struck the bird, he discontinued his upward flight, and, poising himself on his spread tail, waited its descent. A single instant was sufficient. The white object passed him still fluttering; but the moment it was below his level he shot after it like an arrow, and, clutching it in his talons, with an outward stroke sent it whizzing in a diagonal direction. The next moment a crashing was heard among the twigs, and a dull sound announced that the swan had fallen upon the earth.

The eagles were now seen sailing downward, and soon disappeared among the tops of the trees.

The canoe soon reached the bank; and François, accompanied by Basil and Marengo, leaped ashore, and went in search of the birds. They found the swan quite dead and lying upon its back as the eagles had turned it. Its breast was torn open, and the crimson blood, with which they had been gorging themselves, was spread in broad flakes over its snowy plumage. The eagles themselves, scared by the dog Marengo, had taken flight before the boys could get within shot of them.

As it was just the hour for a “noon halt” and a luncheon, the swan was carried to the bank of the river, where a crackling fire was soon kindled to roast him.

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CHAPTER IV

A SWAN-HUNT BY TORCHLIGHT

A few days brought our travellers to the settlement of Red River, where they made but a very short stay; and, having procured a few articles which they stood in need of, they resumed their journey, and floated on towards Lake Winnipeg. The swans were seen in greater numbers than ever. They were not less shy however, and François, as before, in vain tried to get a shot at one.

He was very desirous of bringing down one of these noble birds, partly because the taste he had had of their flesh had given him a liking for it; and partly because their shyness had greatly tantalized him. One is always more eager to kill shy game, both on account of the rarity of the thing, and the credit one gets for his expertness. But the voyageurs had now got within less than twenty miles of Lake Winnipeg, and François had not as yet shot a single swan. It was not at all likely the eagles would help him to another. So there would be no more roast swan for supper.

Norman, seeing how eager François was to shoot one of these birds, resolved to aid him by his advice.

“Cousin Frank,” said he, one evening as they floated along, “you wish very much to get a shot at the swans?”

“I do,” replied François,—“I do; and if you can tell me how to accomplish that business, I'll make you a present of this knife.” Here François held up a very handsome clasp-knife that he carried in his pouch.

30 A knife in the fur countries is no insignificant affair. With a knife you may sometimes buy a horse, or a tent, or a whole carcass of beef, or, what is stranger still, a wife! To the hunter in these wild regions—perhaps a thousand miles from where knives are sold—such a thing is of very great value indeed; but the knife which François offered to his cousin was a particularly fine one, and the latter had once expressed a wish to become the owner of it. He was not slow, therefore, in accepting the conditions.

“Well,” rejoined he, “you must consent to travel a few miles by night, and I think I can promise you a shot at the trumpeters—perhaps several.”

“What say you, brothers?” asked François, appealing to Basil and Lucien; “shall we have the sport? Say yes.”

“Oh! I have no objection,” said Lucien.

“Nor I,” added Basil. “On the contrary, I should like it above all things. I wish very much to know what plan our cousin shall adopt. I never heard of any mode of approaching these birds.”

“Very well, then,” answered Norman, “I shall have the pleasure of instructing you in a way that is in use in these parts among the Indians, who hunt the swan for its skin and quills, which they trade to us at the post. We can manage it to-night, I think,” continued he, looking up at the sky: “there is no moon, and the sky is thick. Yes, it will be dark enough.”

“Is it necessary the night should be a dark one?” asked François.

“The darker the better,” replied Norman. “To-night, if I am not mistaken, will be as black as pitch. But we need to make some preparations. It is near sundown, and we shall have just time to get ready for the business. Let us get ashore, then, as quickly as possible.”

“Oh! certainly—let us land,” replied all three at once.

The canoe was now turned to the shore; and when it had arrived within a few feet of the land it was brought to a stop. Its keel was not allowed to touch the bottom of the river, as that would have injured the little craft. The greatest precaution is always observed both in landing and embarking these vessels. The voyageurs first get out and wade to the shore, one or two remaining to hold the canoe in its place. The cargo, whatever it be, is then taken out and landed; and after that the canoe itself is lifted out of the water, and carried ashore, where it is set, bottom upward, to dry.

The birch-bark canoe is so frail a structure, that, were it brought rudely in contact either with the bottom or the bank, it would be very much damaged, or might go to pieces altogether. Hence the care with which it is handled. It is dangerous, also, to stand upright in it, as it is so “crank” that it would easily turn over, and spill both canoe-men and cargo into the water. The voyageurs, therefore, when once they have got in, remain seated during the whole passage, shifting about as little as they can help. When landed for the night, the canoe is always taken out of the water as described. The bark is of a somewhat spongy nature; and if left in the water for a length of time, would become soaked and heavy, and would not run so well. When kept all night, bottom upward, it drips and becomes dryer and lighter. In the morning, at the commencement of the day's journey, it sits higher upon the water than in the afternoon and evening, and is at that time more easily paddled along.

31 Our voyageurs, having got on shore, first kindled a fire to cook their supper. This they intended to despatch earlier than usual, so as to give them the early part of the night for their swan hunt, which they expected to finish before midnight. Lucien did the cooking, while Norman, assisted by Basil and François, made his preparations for the hunt. François, who was more interested in the result than any of them, watched every movement of his cousin. Nothing escaped him.

Norman proceeded as follows:—

He walked off into the woods, accompanied by François. After going about an hundred yards or so, he stopped at the foot of a certain tree. The tree was a birch—easily distinguished by its smooth, silvery bark. By means of his sharp hunting-knife he “girdled” this tree near the ground, and then higher up, so that the length between the two “girdlings,” or circular cuttings, was about four feet. He then made a longitudinal incision by drawing the point of his knife from one circle to the other. This done he inserted the blade under the bark, and peeled it off, as he would have taken the skin from a buffalo. The tree was a foot in diameter, consequently the bark, when stripped off and spread flat, was about three feet in width; for you must remember that the circumference of a circle or a cylinder is always about three times the length of its diameter, and therefore a tree is three times as much “*round*” as it is “*through*.”

They now returned to the camp-fire, taking along with them the piece of bark that had been

cut off. This was spread out, though not quite flat, still leaving it somewhat curved. The convex side, that which had lain towards the tree, was now blackened with pulverized charcoal, which Norman had directed Basil to prepare for the purpose; and to the bark at one end was fastened a stake or shaft. Nothing more remained but to fix this stake in the canoe, in an upright position near the bow, and in such a way that the bottom of the piece of bark would be upon a level with the seats, with its hollow side looking forward. It would thus form a screen, and prevent those in the canoe from being seen by any creature that might be ahead.

When all this had been arranged, Norman shouldered the axe, and again walked off into the woods. This time his object was to obtain a quantity of “knots” of the pitch-pine (*Pinus rigida*), which he knew would most likely be found in such a situation. The tree was soon discovered, and pointed out to François, who accompanied him as before. François saw that it was a tree of about fifty feet in height, and a foot in diameter at its base. Its bark was thick, very dark in the colour, and full of cracks or fissures. Its leaves, or “needles,” were about three inches long, and grew in threes, each three forming a little bunch, bound together at its base by a brownish sheath.

These bunches, in botanical language, are termed “fasciles.” The cones were somewhat shorter than the leaves, nearly the shape of eggs, and clustered together in threes and fours. François noticed that the tree was thickly branched, and therefore there are many knots in the wood. For this reason it is not much use as timber; but on account of the resin which it contains, it is the best species for firewood; and for that purpose it is used in all parts of the United States, where it grows. Most of the *pine-wood* sold for fuel in the large cities of America is the wood of
32 this species.

François supposed that his companion was about to fell one of the trees. He was mistaken, however; Norman had no such intention; he had only stopped before one to examine it, and make sure that it was the species he was in search of. He was soon satisfied of this, and moved on, directing his eyes along the ground. Again he stopped; but this time it was by a tree that had already fallen—blown down, perhaps, by the wind. It was half decayed; but François could see that it was one of the same species—the pitch-pine.

This was the very thing Norman wanted, and plying his axe, he soon knocked out a large quantity of the resinous knots. These he at length collected, and putting them into a bag, returned with François to the fire. He then announced that he had no further preparations to make.

All four now sat down to supper, which consisted of dry meat, with biscuits and coffee; and, as their appetites were sharpened by their water journey, they made a hearty meal of it.

As soon as they had finished eating, the canoe was launched and got ready. The screen of birch-bark was set up, by lashing its shaft to the bottom timbers, and also to one of the seats. Immediately in front of this, and out upon the bow, was placed the frying-pan; and this having been secured by being tied at the handle, was filled with dry pine-knots, ready to be kindled at a moment's notice. These arrangements being made, the hunters only awaited the darkness to set forth.

In the progress of their hunt they would be carried still farther down-stream; but as that was the direction in which they were travelling, they would only be progressing on their journey, and thus “killing two birds with one stone.” This was altogether a very pleasant consideration; and having stowed everything snugly in the canoe, they sat chatting agreeably and waiting for the arrival of night.

Night came at length, and, as Norman had predicted, it was as “dark as pitch.” Stepping gently into the canoe, and seating themselves in their respective places, they pushed out and commenced floating down-stream. Norman sat near the bow, in order to attend to his torch of pine-knots. François was next to him, holding his double-barrel, loaded with buckshot, which is the same size as that used for swans, and in England is even known as “swan-shot.”

Next came Basil with his rifle. He sat near François, just by the middle of the little vessel. Lucien, who was altogether a man of peace principles, and but little of a shot compared with either of his brothers, handled the oar—not to propel the canoe, but merely to guide it. In this way the party floated on in silence.

Norman soon kindled his torch, which now cast its red glare over the surface of the river, extending its fiery radii even to the banks on both sides of the stream. The trees that overhung the water seemed tinged with vermilion, and the rippling wave sparkled like liquid gold. The light only extended over a semicircle. From the manner in which the torch was placed, its light did not fall upon the other half of the circle, and this, by contrast, appeared even darker than it would otherwise have done.

The advantage of the plan which Norman had adopted was at once apparent to all. Ahead of the canoe the whole river was plainly seen, for a distance of several hundred yards. No object
33 larger than a cork could have floated on its surface, without being visible to those in the vessel—much less the great white body of a trumpeter swan. Astern of the canoe, on the other hand, all was pitchy darkness, and any one looking at the vessel from a position ahead could have seen nothing but the bright torch and the black uniform surface behind it.

As I have already stated, the convex side of the bark was *towards* the blaze, and the pan containing the torch being placed close into the screen, none of the light could possibly fall upon

the forms of those within the canoe. They were therefore invisible to any creature from the front, while they themselves could see everything before them.

Two questions yet remained unanswered. First—would our hunters find any swans on the river? Second—if they should, would these birds allow themselves to be approached near enough to be shot at? The first question Norman, of course, could not answer. That was a matter beyond his knowledge or control. The swans might or might not appear, but it was to be hoped they would. It was likely enough. Many had been seen on the preceding day, and why not then? To the second question, the young Canadian gave a definite reply.

He assured his cousins that, if met with, the birds would be easily approached in this manner; he had often hunted them so. They would either keep their place, and remain until the light came very near them, or they would move towards it (as he had many times known them to do), attracted by curiosity and the novelty of the spectacle. He had hunted deer in the same manner; he had shot, he said, hundreds of these animals upon the banks of rivers, where they had come down to the water to drink, and stood gazing at the light.

His cousins could well credit his statements. They themselves had hunted deer by torchlight in the woods of Louisiana, where it is termed “fire-hunting.” They had killed several in this way. The creatures as if held by some fascination, would stand with head erect looking at the torch carried by one of the party, while the other took sight between their glancing eyes and fired the deadly bullet. Remembering this, they could easily believe that the swans might act in a similar manner.

It was not long until they were convinced of it by actual experience. As the canoe rounded a bend in the river, three large white objects appeared in the “reach” before them. A single glance satisfied all that they were swans, though in the deceptive glare of the torch, they appeared even larger than swans. Their long upright necks, however, convinced the party they could be nothing else, and the canoe was headed directly for them.

As our hunters approached, one of the birds was heard to utter his strange trumpet note, and this he repeated at intervals as they drew nearer.

“I have heard that they sing before death,” muttered François to Basil, who sat nearest him. “If so, I hope that's the song itself;” and François laughed quietly at the joke he had perpetrated.

Basil also laughed; and Lucien, who had overheard the remark, could not refrain himself from joining in the laughter.

“I fear not,” rejoined Basil; “there is hardly enough music in the note to call it a song. They may live to 'blow their own trumpet' a long while yet.”

This remark called forth a fresh chorus of laughter, in which all took part; but it was a very silent kind of laughter, that could not have been heard ten yards off: it might have been termed “laughing in a whisper.”

It soon ended, however, as matters now became serious: they were already within less than two hundred yards of the game, and the greatest caution had to be observed. The gunners had arranged the order of fire: Basil was to shoot first, taking steady aim with his rifle at any one of the birds; while François should fire as soon as he heard the report of his brother's gun, taking the remaining swans upon the wing, with one or both barrels, as he best might.

At length Basil deemed himself near enough, and, levelling his piece, fired. The bird threw out its wings, and flattened down upon the water, almost without a struggle. The other two were rising into the air, when “crack! crack!” went the two barrels of François' piece, and one of the swans fell back with a broken wing, and fluttered over the surface of the stream. Basil's had been shot dead, and was taken up easily; but the wounded bird was only captured after a long chase with the canoe; and when overtaken, it struck so fiercely with its remaining wing, that one of the blows inflicted a painful wound on the wrist of François. Both, however, were at length got safely aboard, and proved to be a male and female of the largest dimensions.

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CHAPTER V

“CAST AWAY”

Of course, the reports of the guns must have frightened any other swans that were near. It was not likely they would find any more before going some distance farther down the river; so, having stowed away in a safe place the two already killed, the hunters paddled rapidly onward.

They had hardly gone half-a-mile farther, when another flock of swans was discovered. These were approached in a similar way, and no less than three were obtained—François making a remarkable shot, and killing with both barrels. A little farther down, one of the “hoopers” was killed; and still farther on, another trumpeter; making in all no less than seven swans that lay dead in the bottom of the canoe!

These seven great birds almost filled the little craft to the gunwales, and you would think that our “torch-hunters” ought to have been content with such a spoil; but the hunter is hard to satisfy with game, and but too often inclined to “spill much more blood” than is necessary to his wants. Our voyageurs, instead of desisting, again set the canoe in motion, and continued the hunt.

A short distance below the place where they had shot the last swan, as they were rounding a bend in the river, a loud rushing sounded in their ears, similar to that produced by a cascade or waterfall. On first hearing it, they were startled and somewhat alarmed. It might be a “fall,” thought they. Norman could not tell: he had never travelled this route; he did not know whether there were falls in the Red River or not, but he believed not. In his voyage to the South, he had travelled by another route; that was, up the Winnipeg River, and through Rainy Lake and the
35 Lake of the Woods to Lake Superior. This is the usual and well-known track followed by the *employés* of the Hudson's Bay Company; and Norman had travelled it.

In this uncertainty the canoe was brought to a stop, and our voyageurs remained listening. The noise made by the water was not very distant, and sounded like the roaring of “rapids,” or the rush of a “fall.” It was evidently one or the other; but, after listening to it for a considerable time, all came to the conclusion that the sound did not proceed from the Red River itself, but from some stream that emptied into it upon the right. With this belief they again put the canoe in motion, and glided slowly and cautiously onward.

Their conjecture proved to be correct. As they approached nearer, they perceived that the noise appeared every moment more and more to their right; and presently they saw, below them, a rapid current sweeping into the Red River from the right bank. This was easily distinguished by the white froth and bubbles that were carried along upon its surface, and which had evidently been produced by some fall over which the water had lately passed. The hunters now rowed fearlessly forward, and in a few moments came opposite the *débouchure* of the tributary stream, when a considerable cascade appeared to their view, not thirty yards from the Red River itself. The water foamed and dashed over a series of steps, and then swept rapidly on, in a frothy current. They had entered this current, and were now carried along with increased velocity, so that the oarsmen suspended operations, and drew their paddles within the canoe.

A flock of swans now drew their attention. It was the largest flock they had yet seen, numbering nearly a score of these noble birds,—a sight, as Norman informed them, that was exceedingly rare even in the most favoured haunts of the swan. Rarely are more than six or seven seen together, and oftener only two or three. A grand *coup* was determined upon. Norman took up his own gun, and even Lucien, who managed the stern oar, and guided the craft, also brought his piece—a very small rifle—close to his hand, so that he might have a shot as well as the others.

The canoe was directed in such a manner that, by merely keeping its head down the stream, it would float to the spot where the swans were.

In a short while they approached very near the great birds, and our hunters could see them sitting on the water, with upraised necks, gazing in wonder at the torch. Whether they sounded their strange note was not known, for the “sough” of the waterfall still echoed in the ears of the canoe-men, and they could not hear aught else.

Basil and Norman fired first, and simultaneously; but the louder detonations of François' double-barrel, and even the tiny crack of Lucien's rifle, were heard almost the instant after. Three of the birds were killed by the volley, while a fourth, evidently “winged,” was seen to dive, and flutter down-stream. The others mounted into the air, and disappeared in the darkness.

During the time occupied in this manœuvre, the canoe, no longer guided by Lucien's oar, had been caught by some eddy in the current, and swept round stern-foremost. In this position the light no longer shone upon the river ahead, but was thrown up-stream. All in a downward direction was buried in deep darkness. Before the voyageurs could bring the canoe back to its
36 proper direction, a new sound fell upon their ears that caused some of them to utter a cry of terror. It was the noise of rushing water, but not that which they had already heard and passed. It was before them in the river itself. Perhaps it was a cataract, and *they were sweeping rapidly to its brink*!

The voice of Norman was heard exclaiming, “Hold with your oars!—the rapids!—the rapids!” At the same time he himself was seen rising up and stretching forward for an oar. All was now consternation; and the movements of the party naturally consequent upon such a sudden panic shook the little craft until her gunwales lipped the water. At the same time she had swung round, until the light again showed the stream ahead, and a horrid sight it was.

Far as the eye could see, was a reach of foaming rapids. Dark points of rocks, and huge black boulders, thickly scattered in the channel, jutted above the surface; and around and against these, the water frothed and hissed furiously. There was no cataract, it is true—there is none such in Red River—but for all purposes of destruction the rapids before them were equally dangerous and terrible to the eyes of our voyageurs. They no longer thought of the swans. The dead were permitted to float down unheeded, the wounded to make its escape. Their only thought was to stop the canoe before it should be carried upon the rapids.

With this intent all had taken to the oars, but in spite of every exertion they soon found that the light craft had got within the influence of the strong current, and was sucked downward more rapidly than ever. Their backward strokes were to no purpose.

In a few seconds the canoe had passed over the first stage of the rapids, and shot down with the velocity of an arrow. A huge boulder lay directly in the middle of the channel, and against this the current broke with fury, laving its sides in foaming masses. The canoe was hurried to this point; and as the light was again turned up-stream, none of the voyageurs could see this dangerous rock. But they could not have shunned it then. The boat had escaped from their control, and spun round at will. The rock once more came under the light, but just as the canoe, with a heavy crash, was driven against it.

For some moments the vessel, pressed by the current against the rock, remained motionless, but her sides were stove in, and the water was rushing through. The quick eye of Basil—cool in all crises of extreme danger—perceived this at a glance. He saw that the canoe was a wreck, and nothing remained but to save themselves as they best might. Dropping the oar, and seizing his rifle, he called to his companions to leap to the rock; and all together immediately sprang over the gunwale. The dog Marengo followed after.

The canoe, thus lightened, heeled round into the current, and swept on. The next moment she struck another rock, and was carried over on her beams. The water then rushed in—the white bodies of the swans, with the robes, blankets, and implements, rose on the wave; the blazing knots were spilled from the pan, and fell with a hissing sound; and a few seconds after they were extinguished, and all was darkness!

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CHAPTER VI

A BRIDGE OF BUCKSKIN

The canoe was lost, and all it had contained, or nearly all. The voyageurs had saved only their guns, knives, and the powder-horns and pouches, that had been attached to their persons. One other thing had been saved—an axe which Basil had flung upon the rock as he stepped out of the sinking vessel. All the rest—robes, blankets, swans, cooking utensils, bags of provisions, such as coffee, flour, and dried meat—were lost—irrecoverably lost. These had either drifted off upon the surface, or been carried under water and hidden among the loose stones at the bottom. No matter where, they were lost; and our voyageurs now stood on a small naked rock in the middle of the stream, with nothing left but the clothes upon their backs, and the arms in their hands. Such was their condition.

There was something so sudden and awful in the mishap that had befallen them, that for some minutes they stood upon the spot where they had settled without moving or addressing a word to one another. They gazed after the canoe. They knew that it was wrecked, although they could see nothing either of it or its contents. Thick darkness enveloped them, rendered more intense from the sudden extinction of the torchlight. They saw nothing but the foam flickering along the river; like the ghosts of the swans they had killed, and they heard only the roaring of the water, that sounded in their ears with a hoarse and melancholy wail.

For a long time they stood impressed with the lamentable condition into which the accident had plunged them; and a lamentable condition it was, sure enough. They were on a small rock in the midst of a rapid river. They were in the midst of a great wilderness too, many long miles from a settlement. The nearest could only be reached by travelling through pathless forests, and over numerous and deep rivers. Impassable swamps, and lakes with marshy shores, lay on the route, and barred the direct course, and all this journey would have to be made on foot.

But none of our young voyageurs were of that stamp to yield themselves to despair. One and all of them had experienced perils before—greater even than that in which they now stood. As soon, therefore, as they became fully satisfied that their little vessel was wrecked, and all its contents scattered, instead of despairing, their first thoughts were how to make the best of their situation.

For that night, at least, they were helpless. They could not leave the rock. It was surrounded by rapids. Sharp, jagged points peeped out of the water, and between these the current rushed with impetuosity. In the darkness no human being could have crossed to either shore in safety. To attempt it would have been madness, and our voyageurs soon came to this conclusion. They had no other choice than to remain where they were until the morning; so, seating themselves upon the rock, they prepared to pass the night.

They sat huddled close together. They could not lie down—there was not room enough for that. They kept awake most of the night, one or other of them, overcome by fatigue, occasionally nodding over in a sort of half-sleep, but awaking again after a few minutes' uncomfortable dreaming. They talked but little, as the noise of the rushing rapids rendered conversation painful. To be heard, they were under the necessity of shouting to one another, like passengers in an omnibus. It was cold, too. None of them had been much wetted in escaping from the canoe; but they had saved neither overcoat, blanket, nor buffalo-robe; and, although it was now late in the spring, the nights near Lake Winnipeg, even at that season, are chilly. They were above the latitude of 50°; and although in England, which is on that parallel, it is not very cold of a spring

night, it must be remembered that the line of equal temperature—in the language of meteorologists the "*isothermal line*,"—is of a much lower latitude in America than in Europe.

Our voyageurs were chilled to the very bones, and of course glad to see the daylight glimmering through the tops of the trees that grew upon the banks of the river. As soon as day broke, they began to consider how they would reach those trees. Although swimming a river of that width would have been to any of the four a mere bagatelle, they saw that it was not to be so easy an affair. Had they been upon either bank, they could have crossed to the other without difficulty—as they would have chosen a place where the water was comparatively still. On the rock they had no choice, as the rapids extended on both sides above and below it. Between the boulders the current rushed so impetuously, that had they attempted to swim to either bank, they would have been carried downward, and perhaps dashed with violence against one or other of the sharp stones.

As soon as it was light, they saw all this; not without feelings of apprehension and uneasiness. Their whole attention was now occupied with the one object—how they should get to the bank of the river.

The right bank was the more distant; but the passage in that direction appeared the easier one. The current was not so swift, nor yet did it seem so deep. They thought they might ford it, and Basil made the attempt; but he soon got beyond his depth; and was obliged, after being carried off his feet, to swim up under the lee of the rock again.

From the rock to the right bank was about an hundred yards' distance. Here and there, at irregular intervals, sharp, jagged stones rose above the surface, some of them projecting three feet or more out of the water, and looking very much like upright tombstones. Lucien had noticed these, and expressed the opinion that if they only had a rope, they might fling it over one of these stones, and then, holding it fast at the other end, might pass by that means from one to the other.

The suggestion was a good one, but where was the rope to come from? All their ropes and cords—lassoes and all—had been swept away in the wreck. Not a string remained, except those that fastened their horns, flasks, and other accoutrements; and these were only small thongs, and would be of no use for such a purpose. It would require a rope strong enough to carry the weight of a man impelled by a rapid current—in fact, a weight equal to that of several men. They all set to thinking how this was to be obtained. Each looked at the other, and scanned the straps and thongs that were around their bodies.

They were satisfied at a glance that these would not be sufficient to make such a rope as was
39 wanted. They did not give up the hope of being able to obtain one. They were all of them accustomed to resort to strange expedients, and a sufficiently strange one now suggested itself. Basil and Norman seemed to have thought of it at the same time, for both at once unbuckled their straps, and commenced pulling off their buckskin hunting-shirts. The others said nothing, as they knew well what they were going to do with them—they knew they intended cutting them into strips, and then twisting a rope out of them.

All four set to work together. Lucien and François held the shirts taut, while Basil and Norman handled the knives, and in a few minutes the rock was covered with strips of buckskin about two inches wide, by a yard or so in length. These were next joined and plaited together in such a manner that a rope was formed nearly forty feet long. An eye was made at one end, and through this the other end was reeved—so that a running noose was obtained, in the same manner as the Mexicans and Indians make their lassoes. The rope was now ready for use, and Basil was the very hand to use it; for Basil knew how to fling a lasso as well as either Mexican or Indian. He had practised it often, and had lassoed many a long-horned bull upon the prairies of Opelousas and the Attakapas. To Basil, therefore, the rope was given.

He placed himself on the highest part of the rock, having first coiled the new-made lasso, and hung the coil lightly over his left arm. He then took the noose-end in his right hand, and commenced winding it around his head. His companions had laid themselves flat, so as not to be in the way of the noose as it circled about. After a few turns the rope was launched forth, and a loud "hurrah!" from François announced that the throw was successful.

It was so in fact, as the noose was seen settling smoothly over the jutting-stone, taking full hold upon it. A pull from Basil fixed it; and in a few minutes it was made quite fast, without the slightest danger of its slipping off. The other end was then carried round a projecting point of the rock on which they stood, and knotted firmly, so that the rope was quite taut, and stretched in a nearly horizontal direction, about a foot above the surface of the water.

The voyageurs now prepared to cross over. Their guns, pouches, and flasks were carefully secured, so that the water could not damage them. Then each took a piece of the buckskin thong, and fastened it round his waist, leaving enough to form a running loop. This loop was intended to embrace the rope, and run along it, as they drew themselves forward by their hands.

Basil passed over first. He was the oldest, and, as he asserted, it was but right he should run the risk in testing the new-fashioned bridge, of which he was the architect. It worked admirably, and sustained the weight of his body, with the whole force of the current acting upon it. Of course he was swept far down, and the rope was stretched to its full tension, but he succeeded in handing himself along, until he was able to touch the second rock, and clamber upon it in safety. During the passage across he was watched by his companions with emotions of no ordinary character, but as soon as he had reached the opposite end of the rope all three uttered a loud and

simultaneous cheer. Lucien passed over next, and after him François. Notwithstanding his danger, François laughed loudly all the time he was in the water, while his brothers were not
40 without some fears for his safety. Marengo was next attached to the rope, and pulled safely over.

Norman was the last to cross upon the buckskin bridge, but, like the others, he landed in safety; and the four, with the dog, now stood upon the little isolated boulder where there was just room enough to give them all a footing.

A difficulty now presented itself, which they had not hitherto thought of. Another reach of rapid current was to be crossed, before they could safely trust themselves to enter the water. This they knew before, but they had also noticed that there was another jutting rock, upon which they might fling their rope. But the rope itself was now the difficulty. It was fast at both ends, and how were they to release it from the rock they had left? One of them could easily cross over again and untie it, but how was he to get back to the others? Here was a dilemma which had not presented itself before, and they now saw themselves no better off than ever. The rapid that remained to be crossed, was as dangerous as the one they had succeeded in passing. There was no hope that they could swim it in safety. They would certainly be swept with violence against the rocks below. There was no chance, then, of their going an inch farther—unless by some means similar to that they had just used, and the rope was no longer at their service.

For some time they all stood silent, each considering the matter in his own way. How could they free the rope?

“It cannot be done,” said one.

“Impossible,” rejoined another. “We must make a second rope. François's shirt still remains, and our leggings—we can use them.”

This was the mode suggested by François and Norman, and Lucien seemed to assent to it. They had already commenced untying their leggings, when Basil uttered the ejaculation—

“Stop!”

“Well, what is it, brother?” asked Lucien.

“I think I can free the rope at the other end. At all events, let me try. It will not cost much, either in time or trouble.”

“How do you mean to do it, brother?”

“Sit close, all of you. Give me room—you shall see presently.”

As directed by Basil, they all cowered closely down, so as to occupy as little space as possible. Basil, having uncovered the lock of his rifle—which had been carefully bound up in a piece of deer's bladder—placed himself in a firm position, and appeared as if about to fire. Such was his intention—for in a few moments he was seen to raise the gun to his shoulder, and take aim. None of his companions uttered a word. They had already guessed the object of this movement, and sat silently awaiting the result.

On the rock which they had left, the rope still bound fast passed around one of the angles, in such a way that, from the point where Basil stood, it offered a fair mark. It was at this Basil was aiming. His object was to cut the thong with his bullet. He could not do it with a single shot, as the thong was broader than the bullet, but he had calculated that he might effect his purpose with several. If he did not succeed in cutting it clean through, the ball flattening upon the rock would, perhaps, tear the rope in such a manner that, by pulling by the other end, they might
41 detach it. Such were the calculations and hopes of Basil.

A moment more and the crack of his rifle was heard. At the same instant the dust rose up from the point at which he had aimed, and several small fragments flew off into the water. Again was heard François's “hurrah,” for François, as well as the others, had seen that the rope had been hit at the right place, and now exhibited a mangled appearance.

While Basil was reloading, Norman took aim and fired. Norman was a good shot, though perhaps not so good a one as Basil, for that was no easy matter, as there were few such marksmen to be found anywhere, not even among the professional trappers and hunters themselves. But Norman was a fair shot, and this time hit his mark. The thong was evidently better than half divided by the two bullets. Seeing this, François took hold of the other end, and gave it a strong jerk or two, but it was still too much for him, and he ceased pulling and waited the effect of Basil's second shot.

The later had now reloaded, and, taking deliberate aim again, fired. The rope was still held taut upon the rock, for part of it dragged in the current, the force of which kept pressing it hard downward. Scarcely was the report heard, when the farther end of the thong flew from its fastening, and, swept by the running water, was seen falling into the lee of the boulder on which the party now stood. A third time was heard the voice of François uttering one of his customary “hurrahs.” The rope was now dragged up, and made ready for further use. Basil again took hold of it; and, after coiling it as before, succeeded in throwing the noose over the third rock, where it settled and held fast. The other end was tied as before, and all passed safely to the new station. Here, however, their labour ended. They found that from this point to the shore the river was shallow, and fordable; and, leaving the rope where it was, all four took the water, and waded

safely to the bank.

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CHAPTER VII

DECOYING THE ANTELOPES

For the present, then, our voyageurs had escaped. They were safe upon the river's bank; but when we consider the circumstances in which they were placed, we shall perceive that they were far from being pleasant ones. They were in the midst of a wilderness, without either horse or boat to carry them out of it. They had lost everything but their arms and their axe. The hunting-shirts of some of them, as we have seen, were destroyed, and they would now suffer from the severe cold that even in summer, as we have said, often reigns in these latitudes. Not a vessel was left them for cooking with, and not a morsel of meat or anything was left to be cooked. For their future subsistence they would have to depend upon their guns, which, with their ammunition, they had fortunately preserved.

After reaching the shore, their first thoughts were about procuring something to eat. They had now been a long time without food, and all four were hungry enough. As if by one impulse, all cast their eyes around, and looked upward among the branches of the trees, to see if any animal could be discovered that might serve them for a meal. Bird or quadruped, it mattered not, so that it was large enough to give the four a breakfast. But neither one nor the other was to be seen,
42 although the woods around had a promising appearance. The trees were large, and as there was much underwood, consisting of berry-bushes and plants with edible roots, our voyageurs did not doubt that there would be found game in abundance. It was agreed, then, that Lucien and François should remain on the spot and kindle a fire, while Basil and Norman went off in search of something to be cooked upon it.

In less than an hour the latter returned, carrying an animal upon his shoulders, which both the boys recognised as an old acquaintance—the prong-horned antelope, so called from the single fork or prong upon its horns. Norman called it “a goat,” and stated that this was its name among the fur-traders, while the Canadian voyageurs give it the title of “cabree.” Lucien, However, knew the animal well. He knew it was not of the goat kind, but a true antelope, and the only animal of that genus found in North America. Its habitat is the prairie country, and at the present time it is not found farther east than the prairies extend, not farther north either, as it is not a creature that can bear extreme cold.

In early times, however—that is nearly two centuries ago—it must have ranged nearly to the Atlantic shores, as Father Hennipen in his *Travels* speaks of “goats” being killed in the neighbourhood of Niagara, meaning no other than the prong-horned antelopes. The true wild goat of America is a very different animal, and is only found in the remote regions of the Rocky Mountains.

What Norman had shot, then, was an antelope; and the reason why it is called “cabree” by the voyageurs, and “goat” by the fur-traders, is partly from its colour resembling that of the common goat, but more from the fact, that along the upper part of its neck there is a standing mane, which does in truth give it somewhat the appearance of the European goat. Another point of resemblance lies in the fact, that the “prong-horns” emit the same disagreeable odour, which is a well-known characteristic of the goat species. This proceeds from two small glandular openings that lie at the angles of the jaws, and appear spots of a blackish-brown colour.

Both Lucien and François had shot antelopes. They had decoyed them within range in their former expedition on the prairies, and had seen wolves do the same. The Indians usually hunt them in this manner, by holding up some bright-coloured flag, or other curious object, which rarely fails to bring them within shot; but Norman informed his cousins that the Indians of the Hudson's Bay Company care little about the antelope, and rarely think it worth hunting. Its skin is of little value to them, and they consider its flesh but indifferent eating. But the chief reason why they take so little notice of it is, because it is found in the same range, with the buffalo, the moose, and the elk; and, as all these animals are more valuable to the Indian hunter, he allows the antelope to go unmolested, unless when he is hard pressed with hunger, and none of the others are to be had.

While skinning the antelope for breakfast, Norman amused his companions by relating how he had killed it. He said he had got near enough to shoot it by practising a “dodge.” After travelling through the woods for some half-mile or so, he had come out into a country of “openings,” and saw that there was a large prairie beyond. He saw that the woods extended no farther than about a mile from the banks of the river, and that the whole country beyond was without timber, except
43 in scattered clumps. This is, in fact, true of the Red River country, particularly of its western part, from which the great prairies stretch westward even to the “foot-hills” of the Rocky Mountains.

Well, then, after arriving at the openings, Norman espied a small herd of antelopes, about ten or a dozen in all. He would rather they had been something else, as elk or deer; for, like the Indians, he did not much relish the “goat's” meat. He was too hungry, however, to be nice, and so

he set about trying to get within shot of the herd. There was no cover, and he knew he could not approach near enough without using some stratagem. He therefore laid himself flat upon his back, and raised his heels as high as he could into the air. These he kicked about in such a manner as soon to attract the attention of the antelopes, that, curious to make out what it was, commenced running round and round in circles, of which Norman himself was the centre.

The circles gradually became smaller and smaller, until the hunter saw that his game was within range; when slyly rolling himself round on one shoulder, he took aim at a buck, and fired. The buck fell, and the rest of the herd bounded off like the wind. Norman feeling hungry himself, and knowing that his companions were suffering from the same cause, lost no time in looking for other game, but shouldering the “goat,” carried it into camp.

By this time Lucien and François had a fire kindled—a roaring fire of “pine-knots”—and both were standing by it, smoking all over in their wet leggings. They had got nearly dry when Norman returned, and they proceeded to assist in butchering the antelope. The skin was whipped off in a trice; and the venison, cut into steaks and ribs, was soon spitted and sputtering cheerily in the blaze of the pine-knots. Everything looked pleasant and promising, and it only wanted the presence of Basil to make them all feel quite happy again. Basil, however, did not make his appearance; and as they were all as hungry as wolves, they could not wait for him, but set upon the antelope-venison, and made each of them a hearty meal from it.

As yet they had no apprehensions about Basil. They supposed he had not met with any game, and was still travelling about in search of it. Should he succeed in killing any, he would bring it in; and should he not, he would return in proper time without it. It was still early in the day.

But several hours passed over and he did not come. It was an unusual length of time for him to be absent, especially in strange woods of which he knew nothing; moreover, he was in his shirt sleeves, and the rest of his clothing had been dripping wet when he set out. Under these circumstances would he remain so long, unless something unpleasant had happened to him?

This question the three began to ask one another. They began to grow uneasy about their absent companion; and as the hours passed on without his appearing, their uneasiness increased to serious alarm. They at length resolved to go in search of him. They took different directions, so that there would be a better chance of finding him. Norman struck out into the woods, while Lucien and François, followed by the dog Marengo, kept down the bank—thinking that if Basil had got lost, he would make for the river to guide him, as night approached. All were to return to

the camp at nightfall whether successful or not.

After several hours spent in traversing the woods and openings, Norman came back. He had been unable to find any traces of their missing companion. The others had got back before him. They heard his story with sorrowing hearts, for neither had they fallen in with the track of living creature. Basil was lost, beyond a doubt. He would never have stayed so long, had not some accident happened to him. Perhaps he was dead—killed by some wild animal—a panther or a bear. Perhaps he had met with Indians, who had carried him off, or put him to death on the spot. Such were the painful conjectures of his companions.

It was now night. All three sat mournfully over the fire, their looks and gestures betokening the deep dejection they felt. Although in need of repose, none of them attempted to go to sleep. At intervals they discussed the probability of his return, and then they would remain silent. Nothing could be done that night. They could only await the morning light, when they would renew their search, and scour the country in every direction.

It was near midnight, and they were sitting silently around the fire, when Marengo started to his feet, and uttered three or four loud barks. The echoes of these had hardly died among the trees when a shrill whistle was heard at some distance off in the woods.

“Hurrah!” shouted François, leaping to his feet at the instant; “that's Basil's whistle, I'll be bound. I'd know it a mile off. Hurrah!”

François' “hurrah!” rang through the woods, and the next moment came back a loud “Hilloa!” which all recognised as the voice of Basil.

“Hilloa!” shouted the three by the fire.

“Hilloa, my boys! all right!” replied the voice; and a few seconds after, the tall upright form of Basil himself was seen advancing, under the glare of the pine-knots. A shout of congratulation was again raised; and all the party, preceded by Marengo, rushed out to meet the new-comer. They soon returned, bringing Basil up to the fire, when it was seen that he had not returned empty-handed. In one hand he carried a bag of grouse, or “prairie hens,” while from the muzzle of his shouldered rifle there hung something that was at once recognised as a brace of buffalo tongues.

“*Voilà*!” cried Basil, flinging down the bag, “how are you off for supper? And here,” continued he, pointing to the tongues, “here's a pair of tit-bits that'll make you lick your lips. Come! let us lose no time in the cooking, for I'm hungry enough to eat either of them raw.”

Basil's request was instantly complied with. The fire was raked up, spits were speedily procured, a tongue and one of the grouse were roasted; and although Lucien, François, and Norman, had already supped on the “goat's meat,” they set to upon the new viands with fresh appetites. Basil was hungrier than any, for he had been all the while fasting. It was not because

he was without meat, but because he knew that his comrades would be uneasy about him, and he would not stop to cook it. Of meat he had enough, since he had slain the two buffaloes to which the tongues had belonged; and these same buffaloes, he now informed them, had been the cause of his long absence.

45 Of course, all were eager to know how the buffaloes could have delayed him; and therefore, while they were discussing their savoury supper, Basil narrated the details of his day's adventure.

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CHAPTER VIII.

A “PARTRIDGE DANCE.”

“After leaving here,” said Basil, “I struck off through the woods in a line that led from the river, in a diagonal direction. I hadn't walked more than three hundred yards, when I heard a drumming sound, which I at first took to be thunder; but, after listening a while, I knew it was not that, but the drumming of the ruffed grouse. As soon as I could ascertain the direction of the sound, I hurried on in that way; but for a long time I appeared to get no nearer it, so greatly does this sound deceive one. I should think I walked a full mile before I arrived at the place where the birds were, for there were many of them. I then had a full view of them, as they went through their singular performances.

“There were, in all, about a score. They had selected a piece of open and level ground, and over this they were running in a circle, about twenty feet in diameter. They did not all run in the same direction, but met and crossed each other, although they never deviated much from the circumference of the circle, around which the grass was worn quite bare, and a ring upon the turf looked baked and black. When I first got near, they heard my foot among the leaves, and I saw that one and all of them stopped running, and squatted close down.

“I halted, and hid myself behind a tree. After remaining quiet a minute or so, the birds began to stretch up their necks, and then all rose together to their feet, and commenced running round the ring as before. I knew they were performing what is called the 'Partridge Dance;' and as I had never witnessed it I held back awhile, and looked on. Even hungry as I was, and as I knew all of you to be, so odd were the movements of these creatures, that I could not resist watching them a while, before I sent my unwelcome messenger into their 'ball-room.'

“Now and then an old cock would separate from the pack, and running out to some distance, would leap upon a rock that was there; then, after dropping his wings, flirting with his spread tail, erecting the ruff upon his neck, and throwing back his head, he would swell and strut upon the rock, exhibiting himself like a diminutive turkey-cock. After manœuvring in this way for a few moments, he would commence flapping his wings in short quick strokes, which grew more rapid as he proceeded, until a 'booming' sound was produced, more like the rumble of distant thunder than anything I can think of.

“This appeared to be a challenge to the others; and then a second would come out, and, after replying to it by putting himself through a similar series of attitudes, the two would attack each other, and fight with all the fury of a pair of game-cocks.”

“I could have watched their manœuvres much longer,” continued Basil, “but hunger got the better of me, and I made ready to fire. Those that were 'dancing' moved so quickly round the ring
46 that I could not sight one of them. If I had had a shot gun, I might have covered several, but with the rifle I could not hope for more than a single bird; so, wanting to make sure of that, I waited until an old cock mounted the rock, and got to 'drumming.' Then I sighted him, and sent my bullet through his crop. I heard the loud whirr of the pack as they rose up from the ring; and, marking them, I saw that they all alighted only a couple of hundred yards off, upon a large spruce-tree.

“Hoping they would sit there until I could get another shot, I loaded, as quickly as possible, and stepped forward. The course I took brought me past the one I had killed, which I picked up, and thrust hastily into my bag. Beyond this I had to pass over some logs that lay along the ground, with level spaces between them. What was my surprise in getting among these, to see two of the cocks down upon the grass, and fighting so desperately that they took no notice of my approach! At first I threw up my rifle, intending to fire, but seeing that the birds were within a few feet of me, I thought they might let me lay hold of them, which they, in fact, did; for the next moment I had 'grabbed' both of them, and cooled their bellicose spirits by wringing their heads off.

“I now proceeded to the pack, that still kept the tree. When near enough, I sheltered myself behind another tree; and taking aim at one, I brought him tumbling to the ground. The others sat still. Of course, I shot the one upon the lowest branch: I knew that, so long as I did this, the others would sit until I might get the whole of them; but that if I shot one of the upper ones, its fluttering down through the branches would alarm the rest, and cause them to fly off. I loaded and fired, and loaded and fired, until half-a-dozen of the birds lay around the root of the tree.

“I believe I could have killed the whole pack, but it just then occurred to me that I was wasting our precious ammunition, and that, considering the value of powder and shot to us just now, the birds were hardly worth a load a-piece; so I left off cracking at them. As I stepped forward to gather what I had killed, the rest whirred away into the woods.

“On reaching the tree where they had perched, I was very much surprised to find a raw-hide rope neatly coiled up, and hanging from one of the lower branches. I knew that somebody must have placed it there, and I looked round to see what “sign” there was besides. My eye fell upon the cinders of an old fire near the foot of the tree; and I could tell that some Indians had made their camp by it. It must have been a good while ago, as the ashes were beaten into the ground by the rain, and, moreover, some young plants were springing up through them. I concluded, therefore, that whoever had camped there had hung the rope upon the tree, and on leaving the place had forgotten it.

“I took the rope down to examine it: it was no other than a lasso, full fifty feet long, with an iron ring neatly whipped into the loop-end; and, on trying it with a pull, I saw it was in the best condition. Of course, I was not likely to leave such a prize behind me. I had grown, as you may all conceive, to have a very great regard for a rope, considering that one had just saved all our lives; so I resolved on bringing the lasso with me. In order to carry it the more conveniently, I coiled it, and then hung the coil across my shoulders like a belt. I next packed my game into the bag,
47 which they filled chock up to the mouth, and was turning to come back to camp, when my eye fell upon an object that caused me suddenly to change my intention.

“I was near the edge of the woods, and through the trunks I could see a large open space beyond, where there were no trees, or only one here and there. In the middle of this opening there was a cloud of dust, and in the thick of it I could see two great dark animals in motion. They were running about, and now and then coming together with a sudden rush; and every time they did so, I could hear a loud thump, like the stroke of a sledge-hammer. The sun was shining upon the yellow dust-cloud, and the animals appeared from this circumstance to be of immense size—much larger than they really were. Had I not known what kind of creatures were before me, I should have believed that the mammoths were still in existence. But I knew well what they were: I had seen many before, carrying on just such a game. I knew they were buffalo bulls, engaged in one of their terrible battles.

“Here Basil's narrative was interrupted by a singular incident. Indeed, it had been interrupted more than once by strange noises that were heard at some distance off in the woods. These noises were not all alike: at one time they resembled the barking of a cur dog; at another, they might have been mistaken for the gurglings of a person who was being hanged; and then would follow a shriek so dreadful that for some time the woods would echo with its dismal sound! After the shriek a laugh would be heard, but a miserable “haw-haw-haw!” unlike the laugh of a sane person.

“All these strange voices were calculated to inspire terror, and so have they many a time, with travellers not accustomed to the solitary woods of America. But our young voyageurs were not at all alarmed by them. They knew from what sort of a creature they proceeded; they knew they were the varying notes of the great horned-owl; and as they had seen and heard many a one before, they paid no heed to this individual.

“While Basil was going on with his relation, the bird had been several times seen to glide past, and circle around upon his noiseless pinions. So easy was his flight, that the slightest inclining of his spread tail, or the bending of his broad wing, seemed sufficient to turn and carry him in any direction. Nothing could be more graceful than his flight, which was not unlike that of the eagle, while he was but little inferior in size to one of these noble birds.

“What interrupted Basil was, that the owl had alighted upon a branch not twenty feet from where they were all sitting round the fire, by the blaze of which they now had a full view of this singular creature. The moment it alighted, it commenced uttering its hideous and unmusical cries, at the same time going through such a variety of contortions, both with its head and body, as to cause the whole party a fit of laughter. It was, in fact, an odd and interesting sight to witness its grotesque movements, as it turned first its body, and then its head around, without moving the shoulders, while its great honey-coloured eyes glared in the light of the fire. At the end of every attitude and utterance, it would snap its bill with such violence, that the cracking of the mandibles upon each other might have been heard to the distance of several hundred yards.

48 “This was too much for François' patience to bear, and he immediately crept to his gun. He had got hold of the piece, and cocked it; but, just as he was about to take aim, the owl dropped silently down from the branch, and, gliding gently forward, thrust out its feathered leg, and lifted one of the grouse in its talons. The latter had been lying upon the top of a fallen tree not six feet from the fire! The owl, after clutching it, rose into the air; and the next moment would have been lost in darkness, but the crack of François' rifle put a sudden stop to its flight, and with the grouse still clinging to its claws it fell fluttering to the earth. Marengo jumped forward to seize it; but Marengo little knew the sort of creature he had to deal with.”

It happened to be only “winged,” and as soon as the dog came near, it threw itself upon its back, and struck at him with its talons so wickedly, that he was fain to approach it with more caution. It cost Marengo a considerable fight before he succeeded in getting his jaws over it. During the contest it continually snapped its bill, while its great goggle eyes kept alternately and quickly opening and closing, and the feathers being erected all over its body, gave it the

appearance of being twice its real size. Marengo at length succeeded in “crunching” it—although not until he was well scratched about the snout—and its useless carcass having been thrown upon the ground, the dog continued to worry and chew at it, while Basil went on with his narration.

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CHAPTER IX.

BASIL AND THE BISON-BULL.

“As soon as I saw the buffaloes,” continued Basil, “my first thought was to get near, and have a shot at them. *They* were worth a charge of powder and lead, and I reflected that if I could kill but one of them, it would ensure us against hunger for a couple of weeks to come. So I hung my game-bag to the branch of a tree, and set about approaching them. I saw that the wind was in my favour, and there was no danger of their scenting me. But there was no cover near them—the ground was as level as a table, and there was not a score of trees upon as many acres. It was no use crawling up, and I did not attempt it, but walked straight forward, treading lightly as I went. In five minutes, I found myself within good shooting range. Neither of the bulls had noticed me. They were too busy with one another, and in all my life I never saw two creatures fighting in such earnest. They were foaming at the mouth, and the steam poured out of their nostrils incessantly.”

At times, they would back from each other like a pair of rams, and then rush together head-foremost, until their skulls cracked with the terrible collision. One would have fancied that they would break them at every fresh encounter, but I knew the thickness of a buffalo's skull before that time. I remember having fired a musket at one that stood fronting me not more than six feet distant, when, to my surprise, the bullet flattened and fell to the ground before the nose of the buffalo! The creature was not less astonished than myself, as up to that time it had not seen me.

“Well,” continued Basil after a pause, “I did not stop long to watch the battle of the bison-bulls.
49 I was not curious about that. I had seen such many a time. I was thinking about the meat; and I paused just long enough to select the one that appeared to have the most fat upon his flanks, when I drew up my rifle and fired. I aimed for the heart, and my aim was a true one, for the animal came to its knees along with the crack. Just at that moment the other was charging upon it, and, to my surprise, it continued to run on, until striking the wounded one full butt upon the forehead, it knocked the latter right over upon its side; where, after giving half-a-dozen kicks, it lay quite dead.

“The remaining bull had dashed some paces beyond the spot, and now turned round again to renew his attack. On seeing his antagonist stretched out and motionless, he seemed to be as much astonished as I was. At first, no doubt, he fancied himself the author of a grand *coup*, for it was plain that up to this time he had neither noticed my presence, nor the report of the rifle. The bellowing noise that both were making had drowned the latter; and the dust, together with the long shaggy tufts that hung over his eyes, had prevented him from seeing anything more than his rival, with whom he was engaged.

“Now that the other was no longer able to stand before him, and thinking it was himself that had done the deed, he tossed up his head and snorted in triumph. At this moment, the matted hair was thrown back from his eyes, and the dust having somewhat settled away, he sighted me, where I stood reloading my gun. I fancied he would take off before I could finish, and I made all the haste in my power—so much so that I dropped the box of caps at my feet. I had taken one out, however, and hurriedly adjusted it, thinking to myself, as I did so, that the box might lie where it was until I had finished the job.

“I brought the piece to my shoulder, when, to my surprise, the bull, instead of running away, as I had expected, set his head, and uttering one of his terrible bellows, came rushing towards me. I fired, but the shot was a random one, and though it hit him in the snout, it did not in the least disable him. Instead of keeping him off, it only seemed to irritate him the more, and his fury was now at its height.

“I had no time to load again. He was within a few feet of me when I fired, and it was with difficulty that, by leaping to one side, I avoided his horns; but I did so, and he passed me with such violence that I felt the ground shake under his heavy tread.

“He wheeled immediately, and made at me a second time. I knew that if he once touched me I was gone. His horns were set, and his eyes glared with a terrible earnestness. I rushed towards the body of the buffalo that lay near, hoping that this might assist me in avoiding the onset. It did so, for, as he dashed forward over it, he became entangled among the limbs, and again charged without striking me. He turned, however, as quick as thought, and again rushed bellowing upon me. There was a tree near at hand. I had noticed it before, but I could not tell whether I should have time to reach it. I was now somewhat nearer it, and, fearing that I might not be able to dodge the furious brute any longer upon the ground, I struck out for the tree.

“You may be sure I did my best at running. I heard the bull coming after, but before he could
50 overtake me, I had got to the root of the tree. It was my intention, at first, only to take shelter behind the trunk; but when I had got there, I noticed that there were some low branches, and catching one of these I swung myself up among them.

BASIL AND THE BISON-BULL.

“The bull passed under me with a rush—almost touching my feet as I hung by the branch—but I was soon safely lodged in a fork, and out of his reach.

51 “My next thought was to load my gun, and fire at him from my perch, and, with this intention, I commenced loading. I had no fear but that he would give me an opportunity, for he kept round the tree, and at times attacked the trunk, butting and goring it with his horns, and all the while bellowing furiously. The tree was a small one, and it shook so, that I began to fear it might break down. I therefore made all the haste I could to get in the load, expecting soon to put an end to his attacks.

“I succeeded at length in ramming down the bullet, and was just turning the gun to put on a cap, when I recollected that the cap-box was still lying on the ground where it had fallen! The sudden attack of the animal had prevented me from taking it up. My caps were all within that box, and my gun, loaded though it was, was as useless in my hands as a bar of iron. To get at the caps would be quite impossible. I dared not descend from the tree. The infuriated bull still kept pacing under it, now going round and round, and occasionally stopping for a moment and looking angrily up.

“My situation was anything but a pleasant one. I began to fear that I might not be permitted to escape at all. The bull seemed to be most pertinacious in vengeance. I could have shot him in the back, or the neck, or where I liked, if I had only one cap. He was within three feet of the muzzle of my rifle; but what of that when I could not get the gun to go off? After a while I thought of making some tinder paper, and then trying to 'touch off' the piece with it, but a far better plan at that moment came into my head. While I was fumbling about my bullet-pouch to get at my flint and steel, of course my fingers came into contact with the lasso, which was still hanging around my shoulders. It was this that suggested my plan, which was no other than to *lasso the bull, and tie him to the tree*!

“I lost no time in carrying it into execution. I uncoiled the rope, and first made one end fast to the trunk. The other was the loop-end, and reeving it through the ring, I held it in my right hand while I leaned over and watched my opportunity. It was not long before a good one offered. The bull still continued his angry demonstrations below, and passed round and round. It was no new thing for me to fling a lasso, and at the first pitch I had the satisfaction of seeing the noose pass over the bison's head, and settle in a proper position behind his horns. I then gave it a twitch, so as to tighten it, and after that I ran the rope over a branch, and thus getting 'a purchase' upon it, I pulled it with all my might.

“As soon as the bull felt the strange cravat around his neck, he began to plunge and 'rout' with violence, and at length ran furiously out from the tree. But he soon came to the end of his tether; and the quick jerk, which caused the tree itself to crack, brought him to his haunches, while the noose tightening on his throat was fast strangling him. But for the thick matted hair it would have done so, but this saved him, and he continued to sprawl and struggle at the end of the rope. The tree kept on cracking, and as I began to fear that it might give way and precipitate me to the ground, I thought it better to slip down. I ran direct to where I had dropped the caps; and, having

got hold of the box, I soon had one upon my gun. I then stole cautiously back, and while the bison was hanging himself as fast as he could, I brought his struggles to a period by sending a bullet through his ribs.

52 “As it was quite night when I had finished the business, of course I could not stay to butcher the bulls. I knew that you would be wondering what kept me, so I cut out the tongues, and coming by the place where I had left the grouse, brought them along. I left a 'scare-wolf' over both the bulls, however, and I guess we'll find them all right in the morning.”

Basil having finished the narration of his day's adventures, fresh fuel was heaped on the embers, and a huge fire was built—one that would last until morning. This was necessary, as none of them had now either blankets or bedding. Basil himself and Norman were even in their shirt-sleeves, and of course their only chance for keeping warmth in their bodies would be to keep up a roaring fire all the night. This they did, and all four laying themselves close together, slept soundly enough.

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CHAPTER X.

THREE CURIOUS TREES.

Next morning they were awake at an early hour. There was still enough of the tongues and grouse left, along with some ribs of the antelope, to breakfast the party; and then all four set out to bring the flesh of Basil's buffaloes into camp. This they accomplished, after making several journeys. It was their intention to dry the meat over the fire, so that it might keep for future use. For this purpose the flesh was removed from the bones, and after being cut into thin slices and strips, was hung up on poles at some distance from the blaze. Nothing more could be done, but wait until it became sufficiently parched by the heat.

While this process was going on our voyageurs collected around the fire, and entered into a consultation about what was best to be done. At first they thought of going back to the Red River settlement, and obtaining another canoe, as well as a fresh stock of provisions and implements. But they all believed that getting back would be a toilsome and difficult matter. There was a large lake and several extensive marshes on the route, and these would have to be got round, making the journey a very long one indeed. It would take them days to perform it on foot, and nothing is more discouraging on a journey than to be forced by some accident to what is called “taking the back-track.”

All of them acknowledged this, but what else could they do? It is true there was a post of the Hudson's Bay Company at the northern end of Lake Winnipeg. This post was called Norway House. How were they to reach that afoot? To walk around the borders of the lake would be a distance of more than four hundred miles. There would be numerous rivers to cross, as well as swamps and pathless forests to be threaded. Such a journey would occupy a month or more, and at Norway House they would still be as it were only at the beginning of the great journey on which they had set out. Moreover, Norway House lay entirely out of their way. Cumberland House—another trading-post upon the River Saskatchewan—was the next point where they had intended to rest themselves, after leaving the Red River settlements. To reach Cumberland House *afoot* would be equally difficult, as it, too, lay at the distance of hundreds of miles, with
53 lakes, and rivers, and marshes, intervening. What, then, could they do?

“Let us *not* go back,” cried François, ever ready with a bold advice: “let us make a boat, and keep on, say I.”

“Ha! François,” rejoined Basil, “it's easy to say 'make a boat;' how is that to be done, I pray?”

“Why, what's to hinder us to hew a log, and make a dug-out? We have still got the axe, and two hatchets left.”

Norman asked what François meant by a dug-out. The phrase was new to him.

“A canoe,” replied François, “hollowed out of a tree. They are sometimes called 'dug-outs' on the Mississippi, especially when they are roughly made. One of them, I think, would carry all four of us well enough. Don't you think so, Luce?”

“Why, yes,” answered the student; “a large one might: but I fear there are no trees about here of sufficient size. We are not among the great timber of the Mississippi bottom, you must remember.”

“How large a tree would it require?” asked Norman, who knew but little of this kind of craft.

“Three feet in diameter, at least,” replied Lucien; “and it should be of that thickness for a length of nearly twenty feet. A less one would not carry four of us.”

“Then I am sure enough,” responded Norman, “that we won't find such timber here. I have seen no tree of that size either yesterday, or while we were out this morning.”

“Nor I,” added Basil.

“I don't believe there's one,” said Lucien.

“If we were in Louisiana,” rejoined François, “I could find fifty canoe-trees by walking as many yards. Why I never saw such insignificant timber as this here.”

“You'll see smaller timber than this Cousin Frank, before we reach the end of our voyage.”

This remark was made by Norman, who knew that, as they proceeded northward, the trees would be found decreasing in size until they would appear like garden shrubbery.

“But come,” continued he, “if we can't build a craft to carry us from *one* tree, perhaps we can do it out of *three*.”

“With three!” echoed François. “I should like to see a canoe made from three trees! Is it a raft you mean, Cousin Norman?”

“No,” responded the other; “a canoe, and one that will serve us for the rest of our voyage.”

All three—Basil, Lucien, and François—looked to their cousin for an explanation.

“You would rather not go back up the river?” he inquired, glancing from one to the other.

“We wish to go on—all of us,” answered Basil, speaking for his brothers as well.

“Very well,” assented the young fur-trader; “I think it is better as you wish it. Out of these trees I can build a boat that will carry us. It will take us some days to do it, and some time to find the timber, but I am tolerably certain it is to be found in these woods. To do the job properly I want three kinds; two of them I can see from where I sit; the third I expect will be got in the hills we saw this morning.”

As Norman spoke he pointed to two trees that grew among many others not far from the spot.
54 These trees were of very different kinds, as was easily told by their leaves and bark. The nearer and more conspicuous of them at once excited the curiosity of the three Southerners. Lucien recognised it from its botanical description. Even Basil and François, though they had never seen it, as it is not to be found in the hot clime of Louisiana, knew it from the accounts given of it by travellers. The tree was the celebrated “canoe-birch,” or as Lucien named it, “paper-birch,” celebrated as the tree out of whose bark those beautiful canoes are made that carry thousands of Indians over the interior lakes and rivers of North America; out of whose bark whole tribes of these people fashion their bowls, their pails, and their baskets; with which they cover their tents, and from which they even make their soup-kettles and boiling-pots! This, then, was the canoe birch-tree, so much talked of, and so valuable to the poor Indians who inhabit the cold regions where it grows.

Our young Southerners contemplated the tree with feelings of interest and curiosity. They saw that it was about sixty feet high, and somewhat more than a foot in diameter. Its leaves were nearly cordate, or heart-shaped, and of a very dark-green colour; but that which rendered it most conspicuous among the other trees of the forest was the shining white or silver-coloured bark that covered its trunk, and its numerous slender branches. This bark is only white externally. When you have cut through the epidermis you find it of a reddish tinge, very thick, and capable of being divided into several layers. The wood of the tree makes excellent fuel, and is also often used for articles of furniture. It has a close, shining grain, and is strong enough for ordinary implements; but if exposed to the weather will decay rapidly.

The “canoe-birch” is not the only species of these trees found in North America. The genus *Betula* (so called from the Celtic word *batu*, which means birch) has at least half-a-dozen other known representatives in these parts. There is the “white birch,” a worthless tree of some twenty feet in height, and less than six inches diameter. The bark of this species is useless, and its wood, which is soft and white, is unfit even for fuel. It grows, however, in the poorest soil. Next there is a species called the “cherry-birch,” so named from the resemblance of its bark to the common cherry-tree. It is also called “sweet birch,” because its young twigs, when crushed, give out a pleasant aromatic odour. Sometimes the name of “black birch,” is given to this species. It is a tree of fifty or sixty feet in height, and its wood is much used in cabinet-work, as it is close-grained, of a beautiful reddish colour, and susceptible of a high polish.

The information regarding the birches of America was given by Lucien to his brothers, not at that time, but shortly afterward, when the three were engaged in felling one of these trees. Just then other matters occupied them, and they had only glanced, first at the canoe-birch and then at the other tree which Norman had pointed out. The latter was of a different genus. It belonged to the order *Coniferæ*, or cone-bearing trees, as was evident from the cone-shaped fruits that hung upon its branches, as well as from its needle-like evergreen leaves.

The cone-bearing trees of America are divided by botanists into three great sub-orders—the *Pines*, the *Cypresses* and the *Yews*. Each of these includes several genera. By the “pine tribe” is
55 meant all those trees known commonly by the names pine, spruce, fir, and larch: while the *Cupressinæ*, or cypress tribe, are the cypress proper, the cedars, the arbor-vitæ, and the junipers. The yew tribe has fewer genera or species; but the trees in America known as yews and hemlocks—of which there are several varieties—belong to it.

The pines cannot be termed trees of the tropics, yet do they grow in southern and warm

countries. In the Carolinas, tar and turpentine, products of the pine, are two staple articles of exportation; and even under the equator itself, the high mountains are covered with pine-forests. But the pine is more especially the tree of a northern *sylva*. As you approach the Arctic circle, it becomes the characteristic tree. Then it appears in extensive forests, lending their picturesque shelter to the snowy desolation of the earth. One species of pine is the very last tree that disappears as the traveller, in approaching the pole, takes his leave of the limits of vegetation. This species is the “white spruce” the very one which, along with the birch-tree, had been pointed out by Norman to his companions.

It was a tree not over thirty or forty feet high, with a trunk of less than a foot in thickness, and of a brownish colour. Its leaves or “needles” were about an inch in length, very slender and acute, and of a bluish green tint. The cones upon it, which at that season were young were of a pale green. When ripe, however, they become rusty-brown, and are nearly two inches in length.

What use Norman would make of this tree in building his canoe, neither Basil nor François knew. Lucien only guessed at it. François asked the question, by saying that he supposed the “timbers” were to come out of it.

“No,” said Norman, “for that I want still another sort. If I can't find that sort, however, I can manage to do without it, but not so well.”

“What other sort?” demanded François.

“I want some cedar-wood,” replied the other.

“Ah! that's for the timbers,” said François; “I am sure of it. The cedar-wood is lighter than any other, and, I dare say, would answer admirably for ribs and other timbers.”

“You are right this time, Frank—it is considered the best for that purpose.”

“You think there are cedar-trees on the hills we saw this morning?” said François, addressing his Canadian cousin.

“I think so. I noticed something like them.”

“And I, too, observed a dark foliage,” said Lucien, “which looked like the cedar. If anywhere in this neighbourhood, we shall find them there. They usually grow upon rocky, sterile hills, such as those appear to be—that is their proper situation.”

“The question,” remarked Basil, “ought to be settled at once. We have made up our mind to the building of a canoe, and I think we should lose no time in getting ready the materials. Suppose we all set out for the hills.”

“Agreed—agreed!” shouted the others with one voice; and then shouldering their guns, and taking the axe along, all four set out for the hills. On reaching these, the object of their search was at once discovered. The tops of all the hills—dry, barren ridges they were—were covered with a thick grove of the red cedar. The trees were easily distinguished by the numerous branches spreading horizontally, and thickly covered with short dark green needles, giving them
56 that sombre, shady appearance, that makes them the favourite haunt of many species of owls. Their beautiful reddish wood was well known to all the party, as it is to almost every one in the civilized world. Everybody who has seen or used a black-lead pencil must know what the wood of the red cedar is like—for it is in this the black-lead is usually incased. In all parts of America, where this tree grows in plenty, it is employed for posts and fence-rails, as it is one of the most durable woods in existence. It is a great favourite also for kindling fires, as it catches quickly, and blazes up in a few seconds, so as to ignite the heavier logs of other timbers, such as the oak and the pine.

“Now,” said Norman, after examining a few of the cedar-trees, “we have here all that's wanted to make our canoe. We need lose no more time, but go to work at once.”

“Very well,” replied the three brothers, “we are ready to assist you,—tell us what to do.”

“In the first place,” said the other, “I think we had better change our camp to this spot, as I see all the different kinds of trees here, and much better ones than those near the river. There,” continued he, pointing to a piece of moist ground in the valley,—“there are some splendid birches, and there beside them is plenty of the *épinette*” (so the voyageurs term the white spruce). “It will save us many journeys if we go back and bring our meat to this place at once.”

To this they all of course agreed, and started back to their first camp. They soon returned with the meat and other things, and having chosen a clean spot under a large-spreading cedar-tree, they kindled a new fire and made their camp by it—that is, they strung up the provisions, hung their horns and pouches upon the branches around, and rested their guns against the trees. They had no tent to pitch, but that is not necessary to constitute a camp. In the phraseology of the American hunter, wherever you kindle your fire or spend the night is a “camp.”

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CHAPTER XI.

Norman expected that they would be able to finish the canoe in about a week. Of course, the sooner the better, and no time was lost in setting about it. The ribs or “timbers” were the first thing to be fashioned, and a number of straight branches of cedar were cut, out of which they were to be made. These branches were cleared of twigs, and rendered of an equal thickness at both ends. They were then flattened with the knife; and, by means of a little sweating in the ashes, were bent so as to bear some resemblance in shape to the wooden ox-yokes commonly used in America, or indeed to the letter U.

The ribs when thus bent were not all of the same width. On the contrary, those which were intended to be placed near the middle or gangway of the vessel, were about two feet across from side to side, while the space between the sides of the others was gradually less in each fresh pair, according as their position was to be near to the stem and stern. When the whole of them had
57 been forced into the proper shape, they were placed, one inside the other after the manner of dishes, and then all were firmly lashed together, and left to dry. When the lashing should be removed, they would hold to the form thus given them, and would be ready for fastening to the kelson.

While Norman was occupied with the timbers the others were not idle. Basil had cut down several of the largest and straightest birches, and Lucien employed himself in carefully removing the bark and cleansing it of nodules and other inequalities. The broad sheets were suspended by a smoke fire, so as completely to dry up the sap, and render it tough and elastic. François had his part to play, and that was to collect the resinous gum which was distilled in plenty from the trunks of the épinette or spruce-trees.

This gum is a species of pitch, and is one of the most necessary materials in the making of a bark canoe. It is used for “paying” the seams, as well as any cracks that may show themselves in the bark itself; and without it, or some similar substance, it would be difficult to make one of these little vessels water-tight. But that is not the only thing for which the épinette is valued in canoe-building; far from it. This tree produces another indispensable material; its long fibrous roots when split, form the twine-like threads by which the pieces of bark are sewed to each other and fastened to the timbers. These threads are as strong as the best cords of hemp, and are known among the Indians by the name of “watap.”

In a country, therefore, where hemp and flax cannot be readily procured, the “watap” is of great value. You may say that deer are plenty, and that thongs of buckskin would serve the same purpose. This, however, is not the case. The buckskin would never do for such a use. The moment it becomes wet it is liable to stretch, so that the seams would open and the canoe get filled with water. The watap, wet or dry, does not yield, and has therefore been found to be the best thing of all others for this purpose.

The only parts now wanted were the gunwale and the bottom. The former was easily obtained. Two long poles, each twenty feet in length, were bent somewhat like a pair of bows, and then placed with their convex sides towards each other, and firmly lashed together at the ends. This was the gunwale. The bottom was the most difficult part of all. For that a solid plank was required, and they had no saw. The axe and the hatchet, however, were called into requisition, and a log was soon hewn and thinned down to the proper dimensions. It was sharpened off at the ends, so as to run to a very acute angle, both at the stem and stern.

When the bottom was considered sufficiently polished, and modelled to the right shape, the most difficult part of the undertaking was supposed to be accomplished. A few long poles were cut and trimmed flat. These were to be laid longitudinally between the ribs and the bark, somewhat after the fashion of laths in the roofing of a house. Their use was to prevent the bark from splitting. The materials were now all obtained complete, and, with a few days' smoking and drying, would be ready for putting together.

While waiting for the timbers to dry, paddles were made, and Norman, with the help of the others, prepared what he jokingly called his “dock,” and also his “ship-yard.” This was neither more nor less than a long mound of earth—not unlike a new-made grave, only three times the
58 length of one, or even longer. It was flat upon the top, and graded with earth so as to be quite level and free from inequalities.

At length all the materials were considered quite ready for use, and Norman went to work to put them together.

His first operation was to untie the bundle of timbers, and separate them. They were found to have taken the exact form into which they had been bent, and the thongs being no longer necessary to keep them in place, were removed. The timbers themselves were next placed upon the bottom or kelson, those with the widest bottoms being nearer to “midships,” while those with the narrower bend were set towards the narrower ends of the plank. Thus placed, they were all firmly lashed with strong cords of watap, by means of holes pierced in the bottom plank.

Fortunately Lucien happened to have a pocket-knife, in which there was a good awl or piercer, that enabled them to make these holes—else the matter would have been a much more difficult one, as an awl is one of the most essential tools in the construction of a bark canoe. Of course it took Norman a considerable time to set all the ribs in their proper places, and fasten them

securely; but he was ably assisted by François, who waited upon him with much diligence, handing him now the awl, and then the watap, whenever he required them.

Norman's next operation was the laying of his kelson “in dock.” The timbers being attached to it, it was lifted up on the earthen mound, where it reached quite from end to end. Half-a-dozen large heavy stones were then placed upon it, so that, pressed down by these upon the even surface of the mould, it was rendered quite firm; and, moreover, was of such a height from the ground that the young shipwright could work upon it without too much bending and kneeling.

The gunwale, already prepared, was next placed so as to touch the ends of the ribs all round, and these ends were adjusted to it with great nicety, and firmly joined. Strong cross-pieces were fixed, which were designed, not only to keep the gunwale from spreading or contracting, but afterwards to serve as seats.

Of course the gunwale formed the complete mouth, or upper edge of the canoe. It was several feet longer than the bottom plank, and, when in place, projected beyond the ribs at both ends. From each end of the bottom plank, therefore, to the corresponding end of the gunwale, a straight piece of wood was stretched, and fastened. One of these pieces would form the stem or cutwater, while the other would become the stern of the craft. The long poles were next laid longitudinally upon the ribs outside, and lashed in their places; and this done, the skeleton was completed, ready for the bark.

The latter had been already cut to the proper dimensions and shape. It consisted of oblong pieces—each piece being a regular parallelogram, as it had been stripped from the tree. These were laid upon the ribs longitudinally, and then sewed to the edge of the bottom plank, and also to the gunwale. The bark itself was in such broad pieces that two of them were sufficient to cover half a side, so that but one seam was required lengthwise, in addition to the fastenings at the top and bottom. Two lengths of the bark also reached cleverly from stem to stern, and thus required only one transverse seam on each side. There was an advantage in this arrangement, for where
59 the birch-bark can only be obtained in small flakes, a great number of seams is a necessary consequence, and then it is extremely difficult to keep the canoe from leaking. Thanks to the fine birch-trees, that grew in abundance around, our boat-builders had procured the very best bark.

The canoe was now completed all but the “paying,” and that would not take long to do. The gum of the épinette had to be boiled, and mixed with a little grease, so as to form a species of wax. For this the fat already obtained from the buffaloes was the very thing; and a small tin cup which Basil had saved from the wreck (it had been strung to his bullet-pouch), enabled them to melt the gum, and apply it hot. In less than an hour the thing was done. Every crack and awl-hole was payed, and the canoe was pronounced “water-tight,” and, as François added, with a laugh, “seaworthy.”

A small pond was near, at the bottom of the hill: François espied it.

“Come, boys,” cried he, “a launch! a launch!”

This was agreed to by all. The great stones were taken out. Basil and Norman, going one to the stem the other to the stern, lifted the canoe from the “dock,” and, raising it upon their shoulders, carried it down to the pond. The next moment it was pushed into the water, where it floated like a cork. A loud cheer was given, in which even Marengo joined; and a salute was then fired—a full broadside—from the four guns. François, to complete the thing, seized one of the paddles, and leaping into the canoe, shot the little craft out upon the bosom of the pond, cheering all the while like one frantic.

After amusing himself for some minutes, he paddled back to the shore, when they all looked eagerly into the canoe, and perceived to their gratification that not as much as a drop of water had leaked during the “trip.” Thanks and congratulations now greeted Norman from every side; and, taking their vessel from the water, the young voyageurs returned to their camp, to regale themselves with a grand dinner, which Lucien had cooked for the occasion.

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CHAPTER XII

THE CHAIN OF LAKES

Our young voyageurs now prepared to resume their journey. While Norman was engaged in building his canoe, with his assistant, François, the others had not been idle. Basil was, of course, the hunter of the party; and, in addition to the small game, such as hares, geese, and grouse, he had killed three caribou, of the large variety known as “woodland caribou.” These are a species of the reindeer of which I have more to say hereafter. Lucien had attended to the drying of their flesh; and there was enough of it still left, as our voyageurs believed, to supply their wants until they should reach Cumberland House, where they would, of course, procure a fresh stock of provisions. The skins of the caribou had also been scraped and dressed by Lucien—who understood the process well—and these, with the skin of the antelope, were sufficient to

make a pair of hunting-shirts for Basil and Norman, who, it will be remembered, had lost theirs by cutting them up.

60 Next morning the canoe was launched upon the river—below the rapids—and the dried meat, with their other matters, snugly stowed in the stern. Then the young voyageurs got in, and, seating themselves in their places, seized hold of the paddles. The next moment the canoe shot out into the stream; and a triumphant cheer from the crew announced that they had recommenced their journey. They found to their delight that the little vessel behaved admirably—shooting through the water like an arrow, and leaking not water enough, as François expressed it, “to drown a mosquito.”

They had all taken their seats in the order which had been agreed upon for the day. Norman was “bowsman,” and, of course, sat in the bow. This, among the regular Canadian voyageurs, is esteemed the post of honour, and the bowsman is usually styled “Captain” by the rest of the crew. It is also the post that requires the greatest amount of skill on the part of its occupant, particularly where there are rapids or shoals to be avoided. The post of “steersman” is also one of honour and importance; and both steersman and bowsman receive higher wages than the other voyageurs who pass under the name of “middlemen.” The steersman sits in the stern, and that place was now occupied by Lucien, who had proved himself an excellent steersman. Basil and François were, of course, the “middlemen,” and plied the paddles.

This was the arrangement made for the day; but although on other days the programme was to be changed, so as to relieve Basil and François, on all occasions when there were rapids or other difficulties to be encountered they were to return to this order. Norman, of course, understood canoe navigation better than his Southern cousins; and therefore, by universal assent, he was acknowledged “the Captain,” and François always addressed him as such. Lucien's claim to the post of second honour was admitted to be just, as he had proved himself capable of filling it to the satisfaction of all. Marengo had no post, but lay quietly upon the buffalo skin between Lucien's legs, and listened to the conversation without joining in it, or in any way interfering in the working of the vessel.

In a few hours our voyageurs had passed through the low marshy country that lies around the mouth of the Red River, and the white expanse of the great Lake Winnipeg opened before them, stretching northward far beyond the range of their vision. Norman knew the lake, having crossed it before, but its aspect somewhat disappointed the Southern travellers. Instead of a vast dark lake which they had expected to see, they looked upon a whitish muddy sheet, that presented but few attractive points to the eye, either in the hue of its water or the scenery of its shores.

These, so far as they could see them, were low, and apparently marshy; and this is, in fact, the character of the southern shores of Winnipeg. On its east and north, however, the country is of a different character. There the geological formation is what is termed *primitive*. The rocks consist of granite, sienite, gneiss, &c.; and, as is always the case where such rocks are found, the country is hilly and rugged. On the western shores a *secondary* formation exists. This is *stratified limestone*—the same as that which forms the bed of many of the great prairies of America; and, indeed, the Lake Winnipeg lies between this secondary formation and the primitive, which bounds it on the east. Along its western shores extends the flat limestone country, partly wooded
61 and partly prairie land, running from that point for hundreds of miles up to the very foot of the Rocky Mountains, where the primitive rocks again make their appearance in the rugged peaks of that stupendous chain.

Lake Winnipeg is nearly three hundred miles in length, but it is very narrow—being in its widest reach not over fifty miles, and in many places only fifteen miles from shore to shore. It trends nearly due north and south, leaning a little north-west and south-east, and receives many large rivers, as the Red, the Saskatchewan, and the Winnipeg. The waters of these are again carried out of it by other rivers that run from the lake, and empty into the Hudson's Bay. There is a belief among the hunters and voyageurs that this lake has its tides like the ocean. Such, however, is not the case. There is at times a rise and overflow of its waters, but it is not periodical, and is supposed to be occasioned by strong winds forcing the waters towards a particular shore.

Lake Winnipeg is remarkable, as being in the very centre of the North American continent, and may be called the centre of the *canoe navigation*. From this point it is possible to travel *by water* to Hudson's Bay on the north-east, to the Atlantic Ocean on the east, to the Gulf of Mexico on the south, to the Pacific on the west, and to the Polar Sea on the north and north-west. Considering that some of these distances are upwards of three thousand miles, it will be perceived that Lake Winnipeg holds a singular position upon the continent. All the routes mentioned can be made without any great “portage,” and even a choice of route is often to be had upon those different lines of communication.

These were points of information communicated by Norman as the canoe was paddled along the shore; for Norman, although troubling himself but little about the causes of things, possessed a good practical knowledge of things as they actually were. He was tolerably well acquainted with the routes, their portages, and distances. Some of them he had travelled over in company with his father, and of others he had heard the accounts given by the voyageurs, traders, and trappers. Norman knew that Lake Winnipeg was muddy—he did not care to inquire the cause. He knew that there was a hilly country on its eastern and a low level land on its western shores, but it never occurred to him to speculate on this geological difference.

It was the naturalist, Lucien, who threw out some hints on this part of the subject, and further added his opinion, that the lake came to be there in consequence of the wearing away of the rocks at the junction of the stratified with the primitive formation, thus creating an excavation in the surface, which in time became filled with water and formed the lake. This cause he also assigned for the existence of a remarkable “chain of lakes” that extends almost from the Arctic Sea to the frontiers of Canada. The most noted of these are Martin, Great Slave, Athabasca, Wollaston, Deer, Lake Winnipeg and the Lake of the Woods.

Lucien further informed his companions, that where primitive rocks form the surface of a country, that surface will be found to exhibit great diversity of aspect. There will be numerous lakes and swamps, rugged steep hills with deep valleys between, short streams with many falls and rapids. These are the characteristics of a primitive surface. On the other hand, where
62 secondary rocks prevail the surface is usually a series of plains, often high, dry, and treeless, as is the case upon the great American prairies.

Upon such topics did Lucien instruct his companions, as they paddled their canoe around the edge of the lake. They had turned the head of their little vessel westward—as it was their design to keep along the western border of the lake until they should reach the mouth of the Saskatchewan. They kept at a short distance from the shore, usually steering from point to point, and in this way making their route as direct as possible. It would have been still more direct had they struck out into the open lake, and kept up its middle; but this would have been a dangerous course to pursue.

There are often high winds upon Lake Winnipeg, that spring up suddenly; and at such times the waves, if not mountains high, at least arrive at the height of houses. Among such billows the little craft would have been in danger of being swamped, and our voyageurs of going to the bottom. They, therefore, wisely resolved not to risk such an accident, but to “hug the shore,” though it made their voyage longer. Each night they would land at some convenient place, kindle their fire, cook their supper, and dry their canoe for the next day's journey.

According to this arrangement, a little before sunset of the first day they came to land and made their camp. The canoe was unloaded, carefully lifted out of the water, and then set bottom upward to drip and dry. A fire was kindled, some of the dry meat cooked, and all four sat down and began to eat, as only hungry travellers can.

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CHAPTER XIII

WAPITI, WOLVES, AND WOLVERENE

The spot where our voyageurs had landed was at the bottom of a small bay. The country back from the lake was level and clear of timber. Here and there, nearer the shore, however, its surface was prettily interspersed with small clumps of willows, that formed little copse-like thickets of deep green. Beside one of these thickets, within a hundred yards of the beach, the fire had been kindled, on a spot of ground that commanded a view of the plain for miles back.

“Look yonder!” cried François, who had finished eating, and risen to his feet. “What are these, captain?” François pointed to some objects that appeared at a great distance off upon the plain.

The “captain” rose up, placed his hand so as to shade his eyes from the sun, and, after looking for a second or two in the direction indicated, replied to the other's question by simply saying—

“Wapiti.”

“I'm no wiser than before I asked the question,” said François. “Pray, enlighten me as to what a wapiti may be!”

“Why, red deer; or elk, if you like.”

“Oh! elk—now I understand you. I thought they were elk, but they're so far off I wasn't sure.”

Lucien at this moment rose up, and looking through a small telescope, which he carried, confirmed the statement of the “captain,” and pronounced it to be a herd of elk.

“Come, Luce,” demanded François, “tell us what you know of the elk. It will pass the time. Norman says it's no use going after them out there in the open ground, as they'd shy off before
63 one could get within shot. You see there is not a bush within half-a-mile of them.”

“If we wait,” interrupted Norman, “I should not wonder but we may have them among the bushes before long. They appear to be grazing this way. I warrant you, they'll come to the lake to drink before nightfall.”

“Very well then: the philosopher can tell us all about them before that.”

Lucien, thus appealed to, began:—

“There are few animals that have so many names as this. It is called in different districts, or by different authors, *elk*, *round-horned elk*, *American elk*, *stag*, *red deer*, *grey moose*, *le biche*, *wapiti* and *wewaskish*.

“You may ask, Why so many names? I shall tell you. It is called 'elk' because it was supposed by the early colonists to be the same as the elk of Europe. Its name of 'grey moose' is a hunter appellation, to distinguish it from the real moose, which the same hunters know as the 'black moose.' 'Round-horned elk' is also a hunter name. 'Wewaskish,' or 'waskesse,' is an Indian name for the animal. 'Stag' comes from the European deer so called, because this species somewhat resembles the stag; and 'red deer' is a name used by the Hudson Bay traders. 'Le biche' is another synonyme of French authors.

“Of all these names I think that of 'wapiti,' which our cousin has given, the best. The names of 'elk,' 'stag,' and 'red deer,' lead to confusion, as there are other species to which they properly belong, all of which are entirely different from the wapiti. I believe that this last name is now used by the best-informed naturalists.

“In my opinion,” continued Lucien, “the wapiti is the noblest of all the deer kind. It possesses the fine form of the European stag, while it is nearly a third larger and stronger. It has all the grace of limb and motion that belongs to the common deer, while its towering horns give it a most majestic and imposing appearance. Its colour during the summer is of a reddish brown, hence the name red deer; but, indeed, the reddish tint upon the wapiti is deeper and richer than that of its European cousin.

“The wapiti, like other deer, brings forth its fawns in the spring. They are usually a male and female, for two is the number it produces. The males only have horns; and they must be several years old before the antlers become full and branching. They fall every year, but not until February or March, and then the new ones grow out in a month or six weeks. During the summer the horns remain soft and tender to the touch. They are covered at this time with a soft membrane, that looks like greyish velvet, and they are then said to be 'in the velvet.' There are nerves and blood-vessels running through this membrane, and a blow upon the horns at this season gives great pain to the animal. When the autumn arrives the velvet peels off, and they become as hard as bone.

“They would need to be, for this is the 'rutting' season, and the bucks fight furious battles with each other, clashing their horns together, as if they would break them to pieces. Very often a pair of bucks, while thus contending, 'lock' their antlers, and being unable to draw them apart, remain head to head, until both die with hunger, or fall a prey to the prowling wolves. This is true not
64 only of the elk, but also of the reindeer, the moose, and many other species of deer. Hundreds of pairs of horns have been found thus 'locked,' and the solitary hunter has often surprised the deer in this unpleasant predicament.

“The wapiti utters a whistling sound, that can be heard far off, and often guides the hunter to the right spot. In the rutting season the bucks make other noises, which somewhat resemble the braying of an ass, and are equally disagreeable to listen to.

“The wapiti travel about in small herds, rarely exceeding fifty, but often of only six or seven. Where they are not much hunted they are easily approached, but otherwise they are shy enough. The bucks, when wounded and brought to bay, become dangerous assailants; much more so than those of the common deer. Hunters have sometimes escaped with difficulty from their horns and hoofs, with the latter of which they can inflict very severe blows. They are hunted in the same way as other deer; but the Indians capture many of them in the water, when they discover them crossing lakes or rivers. They are excellent swimmers, and can make their way over the arm of a lake or across the widest river.

“They feed upon grass, and sometimes on the young shoots of willows and poplar trees. They are especially fond of a species of wild rose which grows in the countries they frequent.

“The wapiti at one time ranged over a large part of the continent of North America. Its range is now restricted by the spread of the settlements. It is still found in most of the Northern parts of the United States, but only in remote mountainous districts and even there it is a rare animal. In Canada it is more common; and it roams across the continent to the shores of the Pacific. It it not an animal of the tropical countries, as it is not found in Mexico proper. On the other hand, wapiti do not go farther north than about the fifty-seventh parallel of latitude, and then they are not in their favourite habitat, which is properly the temperate zone.”

Lucien was interrupted by an exclamation from Basil, who stood up looking out upon the prairie. They all saw that he had been observing the wapiti.

“What is it?” cried they.

“Look yonder!” replied Basil, pointing in the direction of the herd. “Something disturbs them. Give me your glass, Luce.”

Lucien handed the telescope to his brother, who, drawing it to the proper focus, pointed it towards the deer. The rest watched them, with the naked eye. They could see that there was some trouble among the animals. There were only six in the herd, and even at the distance our voyageurs could tell that they were all bucks, for it was the season when the does secrete themselves in the woods and thickets to bring forth their young. They were running to and fro

upon the prairie, and doubling about as if playing, or rather as if some creature was chasing them. With the naked eye, however, nothing could be seen upon the ground but the bucks themselves, and all the others looked to Basil, who held the glass, for an explanation of their odd manœuvres.

“There are wolves at them,” said Basil, after regarding them for a second or two.

“That's odd,” rejoined Norman. “Wolves don't often attack full-grown wapiti, except when
65 wounded or crippled somehow. They must be precious hungry. What sort of wolves are they?”

To you, boy reader, this question may seem strange. You, perhaps, think that a wolf is a wolf, and there is but one kind. Such, however, is not the exact truth. In America there are two distinct species or wolves, and of these two species there are many varieties, which differ so much in colour and other respects, that some authors have classed them as so many distinct species instead of considering them mere varieties. Whether they may be species or not is still a question among naturalists; but certain it is that *two* well-defined species do exist, which differ in size, form, colour, and habits.

These are the *large* or *common wolf*, and the barking or prairie wolf. The first species is the American representative of the common wolf of Europe; and although an animal of similar nature and habits, it differs very much from the latter in form and appearance. It is, therefore, not the *same*, as hitherto supposed. This American wolf is found in greater or less numbers throughout the whole continent; but in the Northern regions it is very common, and is seen in at least five different varieties, known by the characteristic names of *black*, *pied*, *white*, *dusky*, and *grey* wolves. Of these the grey is the most numerous kind; but as I shall have occasion to speak of the large wolves hearafter, I shall say no more of them at present, but direct your attention to the second and very different species, the *prairie wolves*.

These are a full third smaller than the common kind. They are swifter, and go in larger packs. They bring forth their young in burrows on the open plain, and not among the woods, like the other species. They are the most cunning of American animals, not excepting their kindred the foxes. They cannot be trapped by any contrivance, but by singular manœuvres often themselves decoy the over-curious antelope to approach too near them. When a gun is fired upon the prairies they may be seen starting up on all sides, and running for the spot in hopes of coming in for a share of the game. Should an animal—deer, antelope, or buffalo—be wounded, and escape the hunter, it is not likely to escape them also. They will set after it, and run it down if *the wound has been a mortal one*.

On the other hand, if the wound has been only slight, and is not likely in the end to cripple the animal, the wolves will not stir from—the spot. This extraordinary sagacity often tells the hunter whether it is worth his while to follow the game he has shot at; but in any case he is likely to arrive late, if the wolves set out before him, as a dozen of them will devour the largest deer in a few minutes' time. The prairie wolves as well as the others follow the herds of buffaloes, and attack the gravid cows and calves when separated from the rest. Frequently they sustain a contest with the bulls, when the latter are old or wounded, but on such occasions many of them get killed before the old bull becomes their prey.

They resemble the common grey wolf in colour, but there are varieties in this respect, though not so great as among the larger species. Their voice is entirely different, and consists of three distinct barks, ending in a prolonged howl. Hence the specific and usual name “barking wolf.” They are found only in the Western or prairie half of the continent, and thence west to the Pacific. Their Northern range is limited to the fifty-fifth parallel of latitude—but they are met with southward throughout Mexico, where they are common enough, and known by the name of “coyoté.”

66 Their skins are an article of trade with the Hudson's Bay Company. The fur is of about the same quality with that of other wolves, and consists of long hairs, with a thick wool at the base. In commerce they are termed “cased wolves,” because their skins, on being removed, are not split open as with the large wolf-skins, but are stript off after the manner of rabbits, and then turned inside out, or “cased,” as it is termed.

“Prairie wolves!” said Basil, in answer to the question put by his cousin.

“There must be something the matter with one of the bucks, then,” remarked Norman, “or else there's a good big pack of the wolves, and they expect to tire one down. I believe they sometimes do try it that way.”

“There appears to be a large pack,” answered Basil, still looking through the glass; “fifty at least—See! they have separated one of the bucks from the herd—it's running this way!”

Basil's companions had noticed this as soon as himself, and all four now leaped to their guns. The wapiti was plainly coming towards them, and they could now distinguish the wolves following upon his heels, strung out over the prairie like a pack of hounds. When first started, the buck was a full half-mile distant, but in less than a minute's time he came breasting forward until the boys could see his sparkling eyes and the play of his proud flanks. He was a noble animal to look at. His horns were full grown, but still “in the velvet,” and as he ran with his snout thrown forward, his antlers lay along both sides of his neck until their tips touched his shoulders.

He continued on in a direct line until he was within less than an hundred paces of the camp;

but, perceiving the smoke of the fire, and the figures crouching around it, he swerved suddenly from his course, and darted into the thicket of willows, where he was for the moment hidden from view. The wolves—fifty of them at least—had followed him up to this point; and as he entered the thicket several had been close upon his heels. The boys expected to see the wolves rush in after him—as there appeared to be no impediment to their doing so—but, to the astonishment of all, the latter came to a sudden halt, and then went sneaking back—some of them even running off as if terrified!

At first the hunters attributed this strange conduct to their own presence, and the smoke of the camp; but a moment's reflection convinced them that this could not be the reason of it, as they were all well acquainted with the nature of the prairie wolf, and had never witnessed a similar exhibition before.

They had no time to think of the wolves just then. The buck was the main attraction, and, calling to each other to surround the thicket, all four started in different directions. In a couple of minutes they had placed themselves at nearly equal distances around the copse, and stood watching eagerly for the reappearance of the wapiti.

The willows covered about an acre of ground, but they were tolerably think and full-leaved, and the buck could not be seen from any side. Wherever he was, he was evidently at a stand-still, for not a rustle could be heard among the leaves, nor were any of the tall stalks seen to move.

Marengo was now sent in. This would soon start him, and all four stood with guns cocked and ready. But before the dog had made three lengths of himself into the thicket, a loud snort was
67 heard, followed by a struggle and the stamping of hoofs, and the next moment the wapiti came crashing through the bushes. A shot was fired—it was the crack of Lucien's small rifle—but it had missed, for the buck was seen passing onward and outward. All ran round to the side he had taken, and had a full view of the animal as he bounded off. Instead of running free as before, he now leaped heavily forward, and what was their astonishment on seeing that he *carried another animal upon his back*!

THE WAPITI AND THE WOLVERENE.

68 The hunters could hardly believe their eyes, but there it was, sure enough, a brown shaggy mass, lying flat along the shoulders of the wapiti, and clutching it with large spreading claws. François cried out, “A panther!” and Basil at first believed it to be a bear, but it was hardly large enough for that. Norman, however, who had lived more in those parts where the animal is found, knew it at once to be the dreaded “wolverene.” Its head could not be seen, as that was hid behind the shoulder of the wapiti, whose throat it was engaged in tearing. But its short legs and broad paws, its bushy tail and long shaggy hair, together with its round-arching back and dark-brown colour, were all familiar marks to the young fur-trader; and he at once pronounced it a “wolverene.”

When first seen, both it and the wapiti were beyond the reach of their rifles; and the hunters, surprised by such an unexpected apparition, had suddenly halted. François and Basil were about to renew the pursuit, but were prevented by Norman, who counselled them to remain where they were.

“They won't go far,” said he; “let us watch them a bit. See! the buck takes the water!”

The wapiti, on leaving the willows, had run straight out in the first direction that offered,

which happened to be in a line parallel with the edge of the lake. His eye, however, soon caught sight of the water, and, doubling suddenly round, he made directly towards it, evidently with the intention of plunging in. He had hopes, no doubt, that by this means he might rid himself of the terrible creature that was clinging to his shoulders, and tearing his throat to pieces.

A few bounds brought him to the shore. There was no beach at the spot. The bank—a limestone bluff—rose steeply from the water's edge to a height of eight feet, and the lake under it was several fathoms in depth. The buck did not hesitate, but sprang outward and downwards. A heavy plash followed, and for some seconds both wapiti and wolverene were lost under the water. They rose to the surface, just as the boys reached the bank, but they came up *separately*. The dip had proved a cooler to the fierce wolverene; and while the wapiti was seen to strike boldly out into the lake and swim off, the latter—evidently out of his element—kept plunging about clumsily, and struggling to get back to the shore.

Their position upon the cliff above gave the hunters an excellent opportunity with their rifles, and both Basil and Norman sent their bullets into the wolverene's back. François also emptied his double-barrelled gun at the same object, and the shaggy brute sank dead to the bottom of the lake. Strange to say, not one of the party had thought of firing at the buck. This persecution by so many enemies had won for him their sympathy, and they would now have suffered him to go free, but the prospect of fresh venison for supper overcame their commiseration, and the moment the wolverene was despatched all set about securing the deer.

Their guns were reloaded, and, scattering along the shore, they prepared to await his return. But the buck, seeing there was nothing but death in his rear, swam on, keeping almost in a direct line out into the lake. It was evident to all that he could not swim across the lake, as its farther shore was not even visible. He must either return to where they were, or drown; and knowing
69 this to be his only alternative, they stood still and watched his motions. When he had got about half-a-mile from the shore, to the surprise of all, he was seen to rise higher and higher above the surface, and then all at once stop, with half of his body clear out of the water! He had come upon a shoal, and, knowing the advantage of it, seemed determined to remain there.

Basil and Norman ran to the canoe, and in a few minutes the little craft was launched, and shooting through the water. The buck now saw that it was likely to be all up with him, and, instead of attempting to swim farther, he faced round, and set his antlers forward in a threatening attitude. But his pursuers did not give him the chance to make a rush. When within fifty yards or so, Norman, who used the paddles, stopped and steadied the canoe, and the next moment the crack of Basil's rifle echoed over the lake, and the wapiti fell upon the water, where, after struggling a moment, he lay dead.

The canoe was paddled up, and his antlers being made fast to the stern, he was towed back to the shore, and carried into camp. What now surprised our voyageurs was, their finding that the wapiti had been wounded before encountering either the wolves, wolverene, or themselves. An arrow-head, with a short piece of the shaft, was sticking in one of his thighs. The Indians, then, had been after him, and very lately too, as the wound showed. It was not a mortal wound, had the arrow-head been removed; but of course, as it was, it would have proved his death in the long run. This explained why the wolves had assailed an animal, that otherwise, from his great size and strength, would have defied them.

The wolverene, moreover, rarely attacks game so large as the wapiti; but the latter had, no doubt, chanced upon the lair of his fierce enemy, who could not resist such a tempting opportunity of getting a meal. The wolves had seen the wolverene as they approached the thicket, and that accounted for their strange behaviour in the pursuit. These creatures are as great cowards as they are tyrants, and their dread of a wolverene is equal to that with which they themselves often inspire the wounded deer.

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CHAPTER XIV.

A PAIR OF DEEP DIVERS.

The wapiti was carefully skinned, and the skin spread out to dry. Since their mishap our voyageurs had been very short of clothing. The three skins of the woodland caribou had made only a pair of jackets, instead of full hunting-shirts, and even these were pinched fits. For beds and bed-clothes they had nothing but the hides of buffaloes, and these, although good as far as they went, were only enough for two. Lucien, the most delicate of the party, appropriated one, as the others insisted upon his so doing. François had the other.

As for Basil and Norman, they were forced each night to lie upon the naked earth, and but for the large fires which they kept blazing all the night, they would have suffered severely from cold. Indeed, they did suffer quite enough; for some of the nights were so cold, that it was impossible to sleep by the largest fire without one-half of their bodies feeling chilled. The usual practice with
70 travellers in the West is to lie with their feet to the fire, while the head is at the greatest distance from it. This is considered the best mode, for so long as the feet are warm, the rest of the body

will not suffer badly; but, on the contrary, if the feet are allowed to get cold, no matter what state the other parts be in, it is impossible to sleep with comfort.

Of course our young voyageurs followed the well-known practice of the country, and lay with their feet to the fire in such a manner that, when all were placed, their bodies formed four radii of a circle, of which the fire was the centre. Marengo usually lay beside Basil, whom he looked upon as his proper master.

Notwithstanding a bed of grass and leaves which they each night spread for themselves, they were sadly in want of blankets, and therefore the skin of the wapiti, which was a very fine one, would be a welcome addition to their stock of bedding. They resolved, therefore, to remain one day where they had killed it, so that the skin might be dried and receive a partial dressing. Moreover, they intended to “jerk” some of the meat—although elk-venison is not considered very palatable where other meat can be had. It is without juice, and resembles dry short-grained beef more than venison. For this reason it is looked upon by both Indians and white hunters as inferior to buffalo, moose, caribou, or even the common deer. One peculiarity of the flesh of this animal is, that the fat becomes hard the moment it is taken off the fire. It freezes upon the lips like suet, and clings around the teeth of a person eating it, which is not the case with that of other species of deer.

The skin of the wapiti, however, is held in high esteem among the Indians. It is thinner than that of the moose, but makes a much better article of leather. When dressed in the Indian fashion —that is to say, soaked in a lather composed of the brains and fat of the animal itself, and then washed, dried, scraped, and smoked—it becomes as soft and pliable as a kid-glove, and will wash and dry without stiffening like chamois leather. That is a great advantage which it has, in the eyes of the Indians, over the skins of other species of deer, as the moose and caribou—for the leather made from these, after a wetting, becomes harsh and rigid and requires a great deal of rubbing to render it soft again.

Lucien knew how to dress the elk-hide, and could make leather out of it as well as any Indian squaw in the country. But travelling as they were, there was not a good opportunity for that; so they were content to give it such a dressing as the circumstances might allow. It was spread out on a frame of willow-poles, and set up in front of the fire, to be scraped at intervals and cleared of the fatty matter, as well as the numerous parasites that at this season adhere to the skins of the wapiti.

While Lucien was framing the skin, Basil and Norman occupied themselves in cutting the choice pieces of the meat into thin slices and hanging them up before the fire. This job being finished, all sat down to watch Lucien currying his hide.

“Ho, boys!” cried François, starting up as if something had occurred to him; “what about the wolverene? It's a splendid skin—why not get it too?”

“True enough,” replied Norman, “we had forgotten that. But the beast's gone to the bottom—how can we get at him?”

71 “Why, fish him up, to be sure,” said François. “Let's splice one of these willow-poles to my ram rod, and I'll screw it into him, and draw him to the surface in a jiffy. Come!”

“We must get the canoe round, then,” said Norman. “The bank's too steep for us to reach him without it.”

“Of course,” assented François, at the same time going towards the willows; “get you the canoe into the water, while I cut the sapling.”

“Stay!” cried Basil, “I'll show you a shorter method. Marengo!”

As Basil said this, he rose to his feet, and walked down to the bluff where they had shot the wolverene. All of them followed him as well as Marengo, who bounded triumphantly from side to side, knowing he was wanted for some important enterprise.

“Do you expect the dog to fetch him out?” inquired Norman.

“No,” replied Basil; “only to help.”

“How?”

“Wait a moment—you shall see.”

Basil flung down his 'coon-skin cap, and stripped off his caribou jacket, then his striped cotton shirt, then his under-shirt of fawn skin, and, lastly, his trousers, leggings, and mocassins. He was now as naked as Adam.

“I'll show you, cousin,” said he, addressing himself to Norman, “how we take the water down there on the Mississippi.”

So saying, he stepped forward to the edge of the bluff; and having carefully noted the spot where the wolverene had gone down, turned to the dog, and simply said,—

“Ho! Marengo! *Chez moi*!”

The dog answered with a whimper, and a look of intelligence which showed that he understood

his master's wish.

Basil again pointed to the lake, raised his arms over his head, placing his palms close together, launched himself out into the air, and shot down head-foremost into the water.

Marengo, uttering a loud bay, sprang after so quickly that the plunges were almost simultaneous, and both master and dog were for some time hidden from view. The latter rose first, but it was a long time before Basil came to the surface—so long that Norman and the others were beginning to feel uneasy, and to regard the water with some anxiety. At length, however, a spot was seen to bubble, several yards from where he had gone down, and the black head of Basil appeared above the surface. It was seen that he held something in his teeth, and was pushing a heavy body before him, which they saw was the wolverene.

Marengo, who swam near, now seized hold of the object, and pulled it away from his master, who, calling to the dog to follow, struck out towards a point where the bank was low and shelving. In a few minutes Basil reached a landing-place, and shortly after Marengo arrived towing the wolverene, which was speedily pulled out upon the bank, and carried, or rather dragged, by Norman and François to the camp. Lucien brought Basil's clothes, and all four once more assembled around the blazing fire.

There is not a more hideous-looking animal in America than the wolverene. His thick body and short stout legs, his shaggy coat and bushy tail, but, above all, his long curving claws and dog-like jaws, gave him a formidable appearance. His gait is low and skulking, and his look bold and
72 vicious. He walks somewhat like a bear, and his tracks are often mistaken for those of that animal. Indians and hunters, however, know the difference well. His hind feet are plantigrade, that is, they rest upon the ground from heel to toe; and his back curves like the segment of a circle. He is fierce and extremely voracious—quite as much so as the “glutton,” of which he is the American representative.

No animal is more destructive to the small game, and he will also attack and devour the larger kinds when he can get hold of them; but as he is somewhat slow, he can only seize most of them by stratagem. It is a common belief that he lies in wait upon trees and rocks to seize the deer passing beneath. It has been also asserted that he places moss, such as these animals feed upon under his perch, in order to entice them within reach; and it has been still further asserted, that the arctic foxes assist him in his plans, by hunting the deer towards the spot where he lies in wait, thus acting as his jackals.

These assertions have been made more particularly about his European cousin, the “glutton,” about whom other stories are told equally strange—one of them, that he eats until scarce able to walk, and then draws his body through a narrow space between two trees, in order to relieve himself and get ready for a fresh meal. Buffon and others have given credence to these tales upon the authority of one “Olaus Magnus,” whose name, from the circumstance, might be translated “great fibber.” There is no doubt, however, that the glutton is one of the most sagacious of animals, and so, too, is the wolverene. The latter gives proof of this by many of his habits; one in particular fully illustrates his cunning. It is this.

The marten trappers of the Hudson Bay territory set their traps in the snow, often extending over a line of fifty miles. These traps are constructed out of pieces of wood found near the spot, and are baited with the heads of partridges, or pieces of venison, of which the marten is very fond. As soon as the marten seizes the bait, a trigger is touched, and a heavy piece of wood falling upon the animal, crushes or holds it fast. Now the wolverene *enters the trap from behind*, tears the back out of it before touching the bait, and thus avoids the falling log! Moreover, he will follow the tracks of the trapper from one to another, until he has destroyed the whole line.

Should a marten happen to have been before him, and got caught in the trap, he rarely ever eats it, as he is not fond of its flesh. But he is not satisfied to leave it as he finds it. He usually digs it from under the log, tears it to pieces, and then buries it under the snow. The foxes, who are well aware of this habit, and who themselves greedily eat the marten, are frequently seen following him upon such excursions. They are not strong enough to take the log from off the trapped animal, but from their keen scent can soon find it where the other has buried it in the snow. In this way, instead of their being providers for the wolverene, the reverse is the true story. Notwithstanding, the wolverene will eat *them* too, whenever he can get his claws upon them; but as they are much swifter than he, this seldom happens.

The foxes, however, are themselves taken in traps, or more commonly shot by guns set for the purpose, with the bait attached by a string to the trigger. Often the wolverene, finding the foxes
73 dead or wounded, makes a meal of them before the hunter comes along to examine his traps and guns. The wolverene kills many of the foxes while young, and sometimes on finding their burrow, widens it with his strong claws, and eats the whole family in their nests. Even young wolves sometimes become his prey. He lives, in fact, on very bad terms with both foxes and wolves, and often robs the latter of a fat deer which they may have just killed, and are preparing to dine upon. The beaver, however, is his favourite food, and but that these creatures can escape him by taking to the water—in which element he is not at all at home—he would soon exterminate their whole race. His great strength and acute scent enable him to overcome almost every wild creature of the forest or prairie. He is even said to be a full match for either the panther or the black bear.

The wolverene lives in clefts of rock, or in hollow trees, where such are to be found; but he is equally an inhabitant of the forest and the prairie. He is found in fertile districts, as well as in the

most remote deserts. His range is extensive, but he is properly a denizen of the cold and snowy regions. In the southern parts of the United States he is no longer known, though it is certain that he once lived there when those countries were inhabited by the beaver. North of latitude 40° he ranges perhaps to the pole itself, as traces of him have been found as far as man has yet penetrated.

He is a solitary creature, and, like most predatory animals, a nocturnal prowler. The female brings forth two, sometimes three and four, at a birth. The cubs are of a cream colour, and only when full grown acquire that dark brown hue, which in the extreme of winter often passes into black. The fur is not unlike that of the bear but is shorter-haired, and of less value than a bear-skin. Notwithstanding, it is an article of trade with the Hudson's Bay Company, who procure many thousands of the skins annually.

The Canadian voyageurs call the wolverene “carcajou;” while among the Orkney and Scotch servants of the Hudson's Bay Company he is oftener known as the “quickhatch.” It is supposed that both, these names are corruptions of the Cree word *okee-coo-haw-gew* (the name of the wolverene among the Indians of that tribe). Many words from the same language have been adopted by both voyageurs and traders.

Those points in the natural history of the wolverene, that might be called *scientific*, were imparted by Lucien, while Norman furnished the information about its habits. Norman knew the animal as one of the most common in the “trade”; and in addition to what we have recorded, also related many adventures and stories current among the voyageurs, in which this creature figures in quite as fanciful a manner as he does in the works either of Olaus Magnus, or Count de Buffon.

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CHAPTER XV.

A GRAND SUNDAY DINNER.

After remaining a day at their first camp on the lake, our voyageurs continued their journey. Their course lay a little to the west of north, as the edge of the lake trended in that direction. Their usual plan, as already stated, was to keep out in the lake far enough to shun the numerous indentations of the shore, yet not so far as to endanger their little craft when the
74
wind was high. At night they always landed, either upon some point or on an island. Sometimes the wind blew “dead ahead,” and then their day's journey would be only a few miles. When the wind was favourable they made good progress, using the skin of the wapiti for a sail. On one of these days they reckoned a distance of over forty miles from camp to camp.

It was their custom always to lie by on Sunday, for our young voyageurs were Christians. They had done so on their former expedition across the Southern prairies, and they had found the practice to their advantage in a physical as well as a moral sense. They required the rest thus obtained; besides, a general cleaning up is necessary, at least, once every week. Sunday was also a day of feasting with them. They had more time to devote to culinary operations, and the *cuisine* of that day was always the most varied of the week. Any extra delicacy obtained by the rifle on previous days, was usually reserved for the Sunday's dinner.

On the first Sunday after entering Lake Winnipeg the “camp” chanced to be upon an island. It was a small island, of only a few acres in extent. It lay near the shore, and was well wooded over its whole surface with trees of many different kinds. Indeed, islands in a large lake usually have a great variety of trees, as the seeds of all those sorts that grow around the shores are carried thither by the waves, or in the crops of the numerous birds that flit over its waters. But as the island in question lay in a lake, whose shores exhibited such a varied geology, it was natural the vegetation of the island itself should be varied. And, in truth, it was so.

Among the low bushes and shrubs there were rose and wild raspberry; there were apple and plum trees, and whole thickets of the “Pembina.” There is, in fact, no part of the world where a greater variety of wild fruit has been found indigenous than upon the banks of the Red River of the North, and this variety extended to the little island where our voyageurs had encamped.

The camp had been placed under a beautiful tree—the tacamahac, or balsam poplar. This is one of the finest trees of America, and one of those that extend farthest north into the cold countries. In favourable situations it attains a height of one hundred and fifty feet, with a proportionate thickness of trunk; but it is oftener only fifty or eighty feet high. Its leaves are oval, and, when young, of a rich yellowish colour, which changes to a bright green. The buds are very large, yellow, and covered with a varnish, which exhales a delightful fragrance, and gives to the tree its specific name.

It was near sunset on the afternoon of Saturday, the travellers had just finished their repast, and were reclining around a fire of red cedar, whose delicate smoke curled up among the pale green leaves of the poplars. The fragrant smell of the burning wood, mixed with the aromatic odour of the balsam-tree, filled the air with a sweet perfume, and, almost without knowing why, our voyageurs felt a sense of pleasure stealing over them. The woods of the little island were not

without their voices.

The scream of the jay was heard, and his bright azure wing appeared now and then among the foliage. The scarlet plumage of the cardinal grosbeak flashed under the beams of the setting sun; and the trumpet-note of the ivory-billed woodpecker was heard near the centre of the island. An
75 osprey was circling in the air, with his eye bent on the water below, watching for his finny prey; and a pair of bald eagles were winging their way towards the adjacent mainland. Half-a-dozen turkey vultures were wheeling above the beach, where some object, fish or carrion, had been thrown up by the waves.

For some time the party remained silent, each contemplating the scene with feelings of pleasure. François, as usual, first broke the silence.

“I say, cook, what's for dinner to-morrow?”

It was to Lucien this speech was addressed. He was regarded as the *maitre de cuisine*.

“Roast or boiled—which would you prefer?” asked the cook, with a significant smile.

“Ha! ha! ha!” laughed François; “boiled, indeed! a pretty boil we could have in a tin cup, holding less than a pint. I wish we *could* have a boiled joint and a bowl of soup. I'd give something for it. I'm precious tired of this everlasting dry roast.”

“You shall have both,” rejoined Lucien, “for to-morrow's dinner. I promise you both the soup and the joint.”

Again François laughed incredulously.

“Do you mean to make soup in your shoe, Luce?”

“No; but I shall make it in this.”

And Lucien held up a vessel somewhat like a water-pail, which the day before he had himself made out of birch-bark.

“Well,” replied François, “I know you have got a vessel that holds water, but cold water ain't soup; and if you can boil water in that vessel, I'll believe you to be a conjuror. I know you can do some curious things with your chemical mixtures; but that you can't do, I'm sure. Why, man, the bottom would be burned out of your bucket before the water got blood-warm. Soup, indeed!”

“Never mind, Frank, you shall see. You're only like the rest of mankind—incredulous about everything they can't comprehend. If you'll take your hook and line, and catch some fish, I promise to give you a dinner to-morrow, with all the regular courses—soup, fish, boiled, roast, and dessert, too! I'm satisfied I can do all that.”

“*Parbleu*! brother, you should have been cook to Lucullus. Well, I'll catch the fish for you.”

So saying, François took a fish-hook and line out of his pouch, and fixing a large grasshopper upon the hook, stepped forward to the edge of the water, and cast it in. The float was soon seen to bob and then sink, and François jerked his hook ashore with a small and very pretty fish upon it of a silver hue, with which the lake and the waters running into it abound. Lucien told him it was a fish of the genus *Hyodon*. He also advised him to bait with a worm, and let his bait sink to the bottom, and he might catch a sturgeon, which would be a larger fish.

“How do you know there are sturgeon in the lake?” inquired François.

“I am pretty sure of that,” answered the naturalist; “the sturgeon is found all round the world in the northern temperate zone—both in its seas and fresh waters; although, when you go farther south into the warmer climate, no sturgeons exist. I am sure there are some here, perhaps more than one species. Sink your bait for the sturgeon is a toothless fish, and feeds upon soft substances at the bottom.”

76 François followed the advice of his brother, and in a few minutes he had a “nibble,” and drew up and landed a very large fish, full three feet in length. Lucien at once pronounced it a sturgeon, but of a species he had not before seen. It was the *Acipenser carbonarius*, a curious sort of fish found in these waters. It did not look like a fish that would be pleasant eating; therefore François again took to bobbing for the silver fish which, though small, he knew to be excellent when broiled.

“Come,” said Basil, “I must furnish my quota to this famous dinner that is to be. Let me see what there is on the island in the way of game;” and shouldering his rifle, he walked off among the trees.

“And I,” said Norman, “am not going to eat the produce of other people's labour without contributing my share.”

So the young trader took up his gun and went off in a different direction.

“Good!” exclaimed Lucien, “we are likely to have plenty of meat for the dinner. I must see about the vegetables;” and taking with him his new-made vessel, Lucien sauntered off along the shore of the islet. François alone remained by the camp and continued his fishing. Let us follow the plant-hunter, and learn a lesson of practical botany.

Lucien had not gone far, when he came to what appeared to be a mere sedge growing in the water. The stalks or culms of this sedge were full eight feet high, with smooth leaves, an inch broad, nearly a yard in length, and of a light green colour. At the top of each stalk was a large panicle of seeds, somewhat resembling a head of oats. The plant itself was the famous wild rice so much prized by the Indians as an article of food, and also the favourite of many wild birds especially the reed-bird or rice-bunting. The grain of the zizania was not yet ripe, but the ears were tolerably well filled, and Lucien saw that it would do for his purpose. He therefore waded in, and stripped off into his vessel as much as he wanted.

“I am safe for rice-soup, at all events,” soliloquised he, “but I think I can do still better;” and he continued on around the shore, and shortly after struck into some heavy timber that grew in a damp, rich soil. He had walked about an hundred yards farther, when he was seen to stoop and examine some object on the ground.

“It ought to be found here,” he muttered to himself; “this is the very soil for it—yes, here we have it!”

The object over which he was stooping was a plant, but its leaves appeared shrivelled, or rather quite withered away. The upper part of a bulbous root, however, was just visible above the surface. It was a bulb of the wild leek. The leaves, when young, are about six inches in length, of a flat shape and often three inches broad; but, strange to say, they shrivel or die off very early in the season—even before the plant flowers, and then it is difficult to find the bulb.

Lucien, however, had sharp eyes for such things; and in a short while he had rooted out several bulbs as large as pigeons' eggs, and deposited them in his birchen vessel. He now turned to go back to camp, satisfied with what he had obtained. He had the rice to give consistency to his soup, and the leek roots to flavour it with. That would be enough.

As he was walking over a piece of boggy ground his eye was attracted to a singular plant, whose tall stem rose high above the grass. It was full eight feet in height, and at its top there was
77 an umbel of conspicuous white flowers. Its leaves were large, lobed, and toothed, and the stem itself was over an inch in diameter, with furrows running longitudinally. Lucien had never seen the plant before, although he had often heard accounts of it, and he at once recognised it from its botanical description. It was the celebrated “cow parsnip.” Its stem was jointed and hollow, and Lucien had heard that the Indians called it in their language “flute stem,” as they often used it to make their rude musical instruments from, and also a sort of whistle or “call,” by which they were enabled to imitate and decoy several kinds of deer. But there was another use to which the plant was put, of which the naturalist was not aware. Norman who had been wandering about, came up at this moment, and seeing Lucien standing by the plant, uttered a joyful “Hulloh!”

“Well,” inquired Lucien, “what pleases you, coz?”

“Why, the flute-stem, of course. You talked of making a soup. It will help you, I fancy.”

“How?” demanded Lucien.

“Why, the young stems are good eating, and the roots, if you will; but the young shoots are better. Both Indians and voyageurs eat them in soup, and are fond of them. It's a famous thing, I assure you.”

“Let us gather some, then,” said Lucien; and the cousins commenced cutting off such stems as were still young and tender. As soon as they had obtained enough, they took their way back to the camp. Basil had already arrived with a fine *prairie hen* which he had shot, and Sandy had brought back a squirrel; so that, with François's fish, of which a sufficient number had been caught, Lucien was likely to be able to keep his promise about the dinner.

François, however, could not yet comprehend how the soup was to be boiled in a wooden pot; and, indeed, Basil was unable to guess. Norman, however, knew well enough, for he had travelled through the country of the Assinoboil Indians, who take their name from this very thing. He had also witnessed the operation performed by Crees, Chippewas, and even voyageurs, where metal or earthen pots could not be obtained.

On the next day the mystery was cleared up to Basil and François. Lucien first collected a number of stones—about as large as paving-stones. He chose such as were hard and smooth. These he flung into the cinders, where they soon became red-hot. The water and meat were now put into the bark pot, and then one stone after another,—each being taken out as it got cooled,—until the water came to a fierce boil. The rice and other ingredients were added at the proper time, and in a short while an excellent soup was made. So much, then, for the soup, and the boiled dishes with vegetables. The roast, of course, was easily made ready upon green-wood spits, and the “game” was cooked in a similar way. The fish were broiled upon the red cinders, and eaten, as is usual, after the soup. There were no puddings or pies, though, no doubt, Lucien could have made such had they been wanted.

In their place there was an excellent service of fruit. There were strawberries and raspberries, one sort of which found wild in this region is of a most delicious flavour. There were gooseberries and currants; but the most delicious fruit, and that which François liked best, was a small berry of a dark blue colour, not unlike the huckleberry, but much sweeter and of higher flavour. It
78 grows on a low bush or shrub with ovate leaves; and this bush when it blossoms is so covered with beautiful white flowers, that neither leaves nor branches can be seen. There are no less than

four varieties of it known, two of which attain to the height of twenty feet or more. The French Canadians call it “le poire,” but in most parts of America it is known as the “service-berry,” although several other names are given to it in different districts. Lucien informed his companions, while they were crushing its sweet purplish fruit between their teeth, that its botanical name is *Amelanchier*.

“Now,” remarked François, “if we only had a cup of coffee and a glass of wine, we might say that we had dined in fashionable style.”

“I think,” replied Lucien, “we are better without the wine, and as for the other I cannot give you that, but I fancy I can provide you with a cup of tea if you only allow me a little time.”

“Tea!” screamed François; “why, there's not a leaf of tea nearer than China; and for the sugar, not a grain within hundreds of miles!”

“Come, Frank,” said Lucien, “nature has not been so ungenerous here, even in such luxuries as tea and sugar. Look yonder! You see those large trees with the dark-coloured trunks. What are they?”

“Sugar-maples,” replied François.

“Well,” said Lucien, “I think even at this late season we might contrive to extract sap enough from them to sweeten a cup of tea. You may try, while I go in search of the tea-plant.”

“Upon my word, Luce, you are equal to a wholesale grocery. Very well. Come, Basil, we'll tap the maples; let the captain go with Luce.”

The boys, separating into pairs, walked off, in different directions. Lucien and his companion soon lighted upon the object of their search in the same wet bottom where they had procured the *Heracleum*. It was a branching shrub, not over two feet in height, with small leaves of a deep green colour above, but whitish and woolly underneath. It is a plant well known throughout most of the Hudson's Bay territory by the name of “Labrador tea-plant;” and is so called because the Canadian voyageurs, and other travellers through these northern districts, often drink it as tea. It is one of the *Ericaceæ*, or heath tribe, of the genus *Ledum*—though it is not a true heath, as, strange to say, no true heath is found upon the continent of America.

There are two kinds of it known,—the “narrow-leafed” and “broad-leafed” and the former makes the best tea. But the pretty white flowers of the plant are better for the purpose than the leaves of either variety; and these it was that were now gathered by Lucien and Norman. They require to be dried before the decoction is made; but this can be done in a short time over a fire; and so in a short time it was done, Norman having parched them upon heated stones.

Meanwhile Basil and François had obtained the sugar-water, and Lucien having washed his soup-kettle clean, and once more made his boiling stones red-hot, prepared the beverage; and then it was served out in the tin cup, and all partook of it. Norman had drunk the Labrador tea before, and was rather fond of it, but his Southern cousins did not much relish it. Its peculiar flavour, which somewhat resembles rhubarb, was not at all to the liking of François. All, however, admitted that it produced a cheering effect upon their spirits; and, after drinking it, they felt in that peculiarly happy state of mind which one experiences after a cup of the real “Bohea.”

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CHAPTER XVI.

THE MARMOTS OF AMERICA.

From such a luxurious dinner you may suppose that our young voyageurs lived in prime style. But it was not always so. They had their fasts as well as feasts. Sometimes for days they had nothing to eat but the jerked deer-meat. No bread—no beer—no coffee, nothing but water—dry venison and water. Of course, this is food enough for a hungry man; but it can hardly be called luxurious living. Now and then a wild duck, or a goose, or perhaps a young swan, was shot; and this change in their diet was very agreeable. Fish were caught only upon occasions, for often these capricious creatures refused François' bait, however temptingly offered.

After three weeks' coasting the Lake, they reached the Saskatchewan, and turning up that stream, now travelled in a due westerly direction. At the Grand Rapids, near the mouth of this river, they were obliged to make a portage of no less than three miles, but the magnificent view of these “Rapids” fully repaid them for the toil they underwent in passing them.

The Saskatchewan is one of the largest rivers in America, being full 1600 miles in length, from its source in the Rocky Mountains to its *débouchure*, under the name of the “Nelson River,” in Hudson's Bay. For some distance above Lake Winnipeg, the country upon its banks is well wooded. Farther up, the river runs through dry sandy prairies that extend westward to the foot-hills of the Rocky Mountains. Many of these prairies may be properly called “deserts.” They contain lakes as salt as the ocean itself, and vast tracts—hundreds of square miles in extent—where not a drop of water is to be met with. But the route of our voyageurs did not lie over these

prairies. It was their intention, after reaching Cumberland House, to turn again in a northerly direction.

One evening, when within two days' journey of the Fort, they had encamped upon the bank of the Saskatchewan. They had chosen a beautiful spot for their camp, where the country, swelling into rounded hills, was prettily interspersed with bushy copses of *Amelanchiers*, and *Rosa blanda* whose pale red flowers were conspicuous among the green leaves, and filled the air with a sweet fragrance, that was wafted to our voyageurs upon the sunny breeze. The ground was covered with a grassy sward enamelled by the pink flowers of the *Cleome*, and the deeper red blossoms of the beautiful wind-flower.

Upon that day our travellers had not succeeded in killing any game, and their dinner was likely to consist of nothing better than dry venison scorched over the coals. As they had been travelling all the morning against a sharp current, and, of course, had taken turn about at the paddles, they all felt fatigued, and none of them was inclined to go in search of game. They had flung themselves down around the fire, and were waiting until the venison should be broiled for dinner.

The camp had been placed at the foot of a tolerably steep hill, that rose near the banks of the river. There was another and higher hill facing it, the whole front of which could be seen by our
80 travellers as they sat around their fire. While glancing their eyes along its declivity, they noticed a number of small protuberances or mounds standing within a few feet of each other. Each of them was about a foot in height, and of the form of a truncated cone—that is, a cone with its top cut off, or beaten down.

“What are they?” inquired François.

“I fancy,” answered Lucien, “they are marmot-houses.”

“They are,” affirmed Norman; “there are plenty of them in this country.”

“Oh! marmots!” said François. “Prairie-dogs, you mean?—the same we met with on the Southern prairies?”

“I think not,” replied Norman: “I think the prairie-dogs are a different sort. Are they not, cousin Luce?”

“Yes, yes,” answered the naturalist; “these must be a different species. There are too few of them to be the houses of prairie-dogs. The 'dogs' live in large settlements, many hundreds of them in one place; besides, their domes are somewhat different in appearance from these. The mounds of the prairie-dogs have a hole in the top or on one side. These, you see, have not. The hole is in the ground beside them, and the hill is in front, made by the earth taken out of the burrow, just as you have seen it at the entrance of a rat's hole. They are marmots, I have no doubt, but of a different species from the prairie-dog marmots.”

“Are there not many kinds of marmots in America? I have heard so,” said François.

This question was of course addressed to Lucien.

“Yes,” answered he. “The *fauna* of North America is peculiarly rich in species of these singular animals. There are thirteen kinds of them, well known to naturalists; and there are even some varieties in these thirteen kinds that might almost be considered distinct species. I have no doubt, moreover, there are yet other species which have not been described. Perhaps, altogether, there are not less than twenty different kinds of marmots in North America. As only one or two species are found in the settled territories of the United States, it was supposed, until lately, that there were no others. Latterly the naturalists of North America have been very active in their researches, and no genus of animals has rewarded them so well as the marmots—unless, perhaps, it may be the squirrels. Almost every year a new species of one or the other of these has been found—mostly inhabiting the vast wilderness territories that lie between the Mississippi and the Pacific Ocean.

“These little animals seem to form a link between the squirrels and rabbits. On the side of the squirrels they very naturally join on, if I may use the expression, to the ground-squirrel, and some of them, differ but little in their habits from many of the latter. Other species, again, are more allied to the rabbits, and less like the squirrels; and there are two or three kinds that I should say —using a Yankee expression—have a 'sprinkling' of the rat in them. Some, as the ground-hog, or wood-chuck of the United States, are as large as rabbits, while others, as the leopard-marmot, are not bigger than Norway rats.

“Some species have cheek-pouches, in which they can carry a large quantity of seeds, nuts, and roots, when they wish to hoard them up for future use. These are the spermophiles, and
81 some species of these have more capacious pouches than others. Their food differs somewhat, perhaps according to the circumstances in which they may be placed. In all cases it is vegetable. Some, as the prairie-dogs, live upon grasses, while others subsist chiefly upon seeds, berries, and leaves.

“It was long supposed that the marmots, like the squirrels, laid up stores against the winter. I believe this is not the case with any of the different species. I know for certain that most of them pass the winter in a state of torpidity, and of course require no provisions, as they eat nothing during that season. In this we observe one of those cases in which Nature so beautifully adapts a creature to its circumstances. In the countries where many of the marmots are found, so severe

are the winters, and so barren the soil, that it would be impossible for these creatures to get a morsel of food for many long months.

“During this period, therefore, Nature suspends her functions, by putting them into a deep, and, for aught we know to the contrary, a pleasant sleep. It is only when the snow melts, under the vernal sun, and the green blades of grass and the spring flowers array themselves on the surface of the earth, that the little marmots make their appearance again. Then the warm air, penetrating into their subterranean abodes, admonishes them to awake from their protracted slumber, and come forth to the enjoyment of their summer life. These animals may be said, therefore, to have no winter. Their life is altogether a season of summer and sunshine.”

“Some of the marmots,” continued Lucien, “live in large communities, as the prairie dogs; others, in smaller tribes, while still other species lead a solitary life, going only in pairs, or at most in families. Nearly all of them are burrowing animals, though there are one or two species that are satisfied with a cleft in the rock, or a hole among loose stones for their nests. Some of them are tree-climbers, but it is supposed they only ascend trees in search of food, as they do not make their dwellings there. Many of the species are very prolific, the females bringing forth eight, and even ten young at a birth.

“The marmots are extremely shy and watchful creatures. Before going to feed, they usually reconnoitre the ground from the tops of their little mounds. Some species do not have such mounds, and for this purpose ascend any little hillock that may be near. Nearly all have the curious habit of placing sentries to watch while the rest are feeding. These sentries station themselves on some commanding point, and when they see an enemy approaching give warning to the others by a peculiar cry. In several of the species this cry resembles the syllables 'seek-seek' repeated with a hiss. Others bark like 'toy-dogs,' while still other kinds utter a whistling noise, from which one species derives its trivial name of 'whistler' among the traders, and is the 'siffleur' of the Canadian voyageurs.

“The 'whistler's' call of alarm can be heard at a great distance; and when uttered by the sentinel is repeated by all the others as far as the troop extends.

“The marmots are eaten both by Indians and white hunters. Sometimes they are captured by pouring water into their burrows; but this method only succeeds in early spring, when the animals awake out of their torpid state, and the ground is still frozen hard enough to prevent the
82 water from filtering away. They are sometimes shot with guns; but, unless killed upon the spot, they will escape to their burrows, and tumble in before the hunter can lay his hands upon them.”

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CHAPTER XVII.

THE BLAIREAU, THE “TAWNIES,” AND THE “LEOPARDS.”

Perhaps Lucien would have carried his account of the marmots still farther—for he had not told half what he knew of their habits—but he was at that moment interrupted by the marmots themselves. Several of them appeared at the mouths of their holes; and, after looking out and reconnoitring for some moments, became bolder, and ran up to the tops of their mounds, and began to scatter along the little beaten paths that led from one to the other. In a short while as many as a dozen could be seen moving about, jerking their tails, and at intervals uttering their seek-seek.

Our voyageurs saw that there were two kinds of them, entirely different in colour, size, and other respects. The larger ones were of a greyish yellow above, with an orange tint upon the throat and belly. These were the “tawny marmots,” called sometimes “ground-squirrels,” and by the voyageurs, “siffleurs,” or “whistlers.”

The other species seen were the most beautiful of all the marmots. They were very little smaller than the tawny marmots; but their tails were larger and more slender, which rendered their appearance more graceful. Their chief beauty, however, lay in their colours and markings. They were striped from the nose to the rump with bands of yellow and chocolate colour, which alternated with each other, while the chocolate bands were themselves variegated by rows of yellow spots regularly placed. These markings gave the animals that peculiar appearance so well known as characterising the skin of the leopard, hence the name of these little creatures was “leopard marmots.”

It was plain from their actions that both kinds were “at home” among the mounds, and that both had their burrows there. This was the fact, and Norman told his companion that the two kinds are always found together, not living in the same houses, but only as neighbours in the same “settlement.” The burrows of the “leopard” have much smaller entrances than those of their “tawny kin,” and run down perpendicularly to a greater depth before branching off in a horizontal direction. A straight stick may be thrust down one of these full five feet before reaching an “elbow.”

The holes of the tawny marmots, on the contrary, branch off near the surface, and are not so deep under ground. This guides us to the explanation of a singular fact—which is, that the “tawnies” make their appearance three weeks earlier in spring than the “leopards,” in consequence of the heat of the sun reaching them sooner, and waking them out of their torpid sleep.

While these explanations were passing among the boys, the marmots had come out, to the number of a score, and were carrying on their gambols along the declivity of the hill. They were at too great a distance to heed the movements of the travellers by the camp fire. Besides, a considerable valley lay between them and the camp, which, as they believed, rendered their
83 position secure. They were not at such a distance but that many of their movements could be clearly made out by the boys, who after a while noticed that several furious battles were being fought among them. It was not the “tawnies” against the others, but the males of each kind in single combats with one another.

They fought like little cats, exhibiting the highest degree of boldness and fury; but it was noticed that in these conflicts the leopards were far more active and spiteful than their kinsmen. In observing them through his glass Lucien noticed that they frequently seized each other by the tails, and he further noticed that several of them had their tails much shorter than the rest. Norman said that these had been bitten off in their battles; and, moreover, that it was a rare thing to find among the males, or “bucks,” as he called them, one that had a perfect tail!

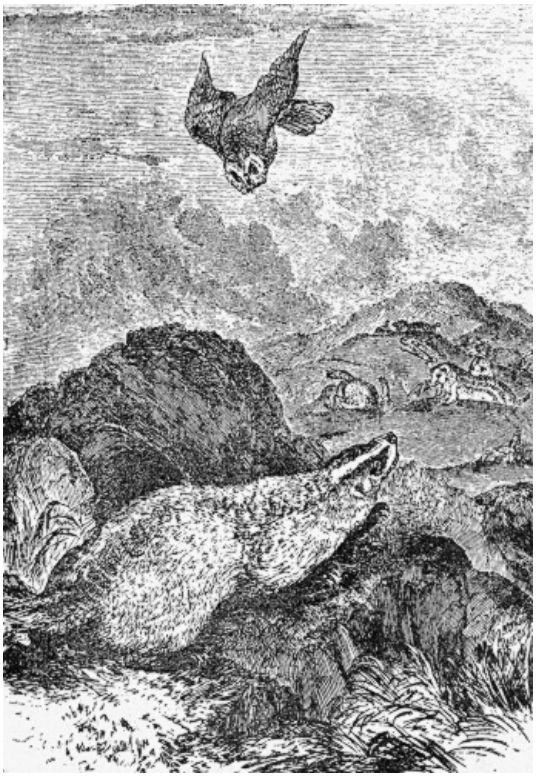
While these observations were being made, the attention of our party was attracted to a strange animal that was seen slowly crawling around the hill. It was a creature about as big as an ordinary setter dog, but much thicker in the body, shorter in the legs, and shaggier in the coat. Its head was flat, and its ears short and rounded. Its hair was long, rough, and of a mottled hoary grey colour, but dark-brown upon the legs and tail. The latter, though covered with long hair, was short, and carried upright; and upon the broad feet of the animal could be seen long and strong curving claws. Its snout was sharp as that of a greyhound—though not so prettily formed—and a white stripe, passing from its very tip over the crown, and bordered by two darker bands, gave a singular expression to the animal's countenance.

It was altogether, both in form and feature, a strange and vicious-looking creature. Norman recognised it at once as the “blaireau,” or American badger. The others had never seen such a creature before—as it is not an inhabitant of the South, nor of any part of the settled portion of the United States.

The badger when first seen was creeping along with its belly almost dragging the ground, and its long snout projected horizontally in the direction of the marmot “village.” It was evidently meditating a surprise of the inhabitants. Now and then it would stop, like a pointer dog when close to a partridge, reconnoitre a moment, and then go on again. Its design appeared to be to get between the marmots and their burrows, intercept some of them, and get a hold of them without the trouble of digging them up—although that would be no great affair to it, for so strong are its fore-arms and claws that in loose soil it can make its way under the ground as fast as a mole.

Slowly and cautiously it stole along, its hind-feet resting all their length upon the ground, its hideous snout thrown forward, and its eyes glaring with a voracious and hungry expression. It had got within fifty paces of the marmots, and would, no doubt, have succeeded in cutting off the retreat of some of them, but at that moment a burrowing owl that had been perched upon one of the mounds, rose up, and commenced hovering in circles above the intruder. This drew the attention of the marmot sentries to their well-known enemy, and their warning cry was followed by a general scamper of both tawnies and leopards towards their respective burrows.

The blaireau, seeing that further concealment was no longer of any use, raised himself higher
84 upon his limbs, and sprang forward in pursuit. He was too late, however, as the marmots had all got into their holes, and their angry “seek-seek” was heard proceeding from various quarters out of the bowels of the earth. The blaireau only hesitated long enough to select one of the burrows into which he was sure a marmot had entered; and then, setting himself to his work, he commenced throwing out the mould like a terrier. In a few seconds he was half buried, and his hind-quarters and tail alone remained above ground.



THE BLAIREAU AND THE MARMOTS

He would soon have disappeared entirely, but at that moment the boys, directed and headed by Norman, ran up the hill, and, seizing him by the tail, endeavoured to jerk him back. That, however, was a task which they could not accomplish, for first one and then another, and then Basil and Norman—who were both strong boys—pulled with all their might, and could not move him. Norman cautioned them against letting him go, as in a moment's time he would burrow beyond their reach. So they held on until François had got his gun ready. This the latter soon did, and a load of small shot was fired into the blaireau's hips, which, although it did not quite kill him, caused him to back out of the hole, and brought him into the clutches of Marengo.

A desperate struggle ensued, which ended by the bloodhound doubling his vast black muzzle upon the throat of the blaireau, and choking him to death in less than a dozen seconds; and then his hide—the only part which was deemed of any value—was taken off and carried to the camp. The carcass was left upon the face of the hill, and the red shining object was soon espied by the buzzards and turkey vultures, so that in a few minutes' time several of these filthy birds were seen hovering around, and alighting upon the hill.

But this was no new sight to our young voyageurs, and soon ceased to be noticed by them. Another bird, of a different kind, for a short time engaged their attention. It was a large hawk, which Lucien, as soon as he saw it, pronounced to be one of the kind known as buzzards. Of these there are several species in North America, but it is not to be supposed that there is any resemblance between them and the buzzards just mentioned as having alighted by the carcass of the blaireau. The latter, commonly called “turkey buzzards,” are true vultures, and feed mostly, though not exclusively, on carrion; while the “hawk buzzards” have all the appearance and general habits of the rest of the falcon tribe.

The one in question, Lucien said, was the “marsh-hawk,” sometimes also called the “hen-harrier.” Norman stated that it was known among the Indians of these parts as the “snake-bird,” because it preys upon a species of small green snake that is common on the plains of the Saskatchewan, and of which it is fonder than of any other food.

The voyageurs were not long in having evidence of the appropriateness of the Indian appellation; for these people, like other savages, have the good habit of giving names that express some quality or characteristic of the thing itself. The bird in question was on the wing, and from its movements evidently searching for game. It sailed in easy circlings near the surface, *quartering* the ground like a pointer dog. It flew so lightly that its wings were not seen to move, and throughout all its wheelings and turnings it appeared to be carried onwards or upwards by the power of mere volition.

Once or twice its course brought it directly over the camp, and François had got hold of his gun, with the intention of bringing it down, but on each occasion it perceived his motions; and, soaring up like a paper-kite until out of reach, it passed over the camp, and then sank down again upon the other side, and continued its “quarterings” as before. For nearly half-an-hour it went on
86 manœvring in this way, when all at once it was seen to make a sudden turning in the air as it fixed its eyes upon some object in the grass.

The next moment it glided diagonally towards the earth, and poising itself for a moment above the surface, rose again with a small green-coloured snake struggling in its talons. After ascending to some height, it directed its flight towards a clump of trees, and was soon lost to the view of our travellers.

Lucien now pointed out to his companions a characteristic of the hawk and buzzard tribe, by which these birds can always be distinguished from the true falcon. That peculiarity lay in the manner of seizing their prey. The former skim forward upon it sideways—that is, in a horizontal or diagonal direction, and pick it up in passing; while the true falcons—as the merlin, the peregrine, the gerfalcon, and the great eagle-falcons—shoot down upon their prey *perpendicularly* like an arrow, or a piece of falling lead.

He pointed out, moreover, how the structure of the different kinds of preying birds, such as the size and form of the wings and tail, as well as other parts, were in each kind adapted to its peculiar mode of pursuing its prey; and then there arose a discussion as to whether this adaption should be considered a *cause*, or an *effect*. Lucien succeeded in convincing his companions that the structure was the effect and not the cause of the habit, for the young naturalist was a firm believer in the changing and progressive system of nature.

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CHAPTER XVIII.

AN ODD SORT OF DECOY-DUCK.

Two days after the adventure with the blaireau, the young voyageurs arrived at Cumberland House—one of the most celebrated posts of the Hudson's Bay Company. The chief factor, who resided there, was a friend of Norman's father, and of course the youths were received with the warmest hospitality, and entertained during their stay in the best manner the place afforded. They did not make a long stay, however, as they wished to complete their journey before the winter should set in, when canoe-travelling would become impossible.

During winter, not only the lakes, but the most rapid rivers of these Northern regions, become frozen up, and remain so for many months. Nearly the whole surface of the earth is buried under deep snow, and travelling can only be done with snow-shoes, or with sledges drawn by dogs. These are the modes practised by the Indians, the Esquimaux, and the few white traders and trappers who have occasion in winter to pass from one point to another of that icy and desolate region.

Travelling under such circumstances is not only difficult and laborious, but is extremely perilous. Food cannot always be obtained—supplies fall short, or become exhausted—game is scarce, or cannot be found at all, as at that season many of the quadrupeds and most of the birds have forsaken the country, and migrated to the South—and whole parties of travellers—even Indians, who can eat anything living or dead, roast or raw—often perish from hunger.

Our travellers were well acquainted with these facts; and being anxious, therefore, to get to
87 the end of their journey before the winter should come down upon them, made all haste to proceed. Of course they obtained a new “outfit” at the Fort; but they took with them only such articles as were absolutely necessary, as they had many portages to make before they could reach the waters of the Mackenzie River. As it required two of the party to carry the canoe, with a few little things besides, all the baggage was comprised in such loads as the others could manage; and of course that was not a great deal, for François was but a lad, and Lucien was far from being in robust health. A light axe, a few cooking utensils, with a small stock of provisions, and of course their guns, formed the bulk of their loads.

After leaving the Fort they kept for several days' journey up the Saskatchewan. They then took leave of that river, and ascended a small stream that emptied into it from the north. Making their first portage over a “divide,” they reached another small stream that ran in quite a different direction, emptying itself into one of the branches of the Mississippi, or Churchill River. Following this in a north-westerly course, and making numerous other portages, they reached Lake La Crosse, and afterwards in succession, Lakes Clear, Buffalo, and Methy.

A long “portage” from the last-mentioned lake brought them to the head of a stream known as the “Clear Water;” and launching their canoe upon this, they floated down to its mouth, and entered the main stream of the Elk, or Athabasca, one of the most beautiful rivers of America. They were now in reality upon the waters of the Mackenzie itself, for the Elk, after passing through the Athabasca takes from thence the name of Slave River, and having traversed Great Slave Lake, becomes the Mackenzie—under which name it continues on to the Arctic Ocean.

Having got, therefore, upon the main head-water of the stream which they intended to traverse, they floated along in their canoe with light hearts and high hopes. It is true they had yet fifteen hundred miles to travel, but they believed that it was all down-hill work now; and as they had still nearly two months of summer before them, they doubted not being able to accomplish the voyage in good time.

On they floated down stream, feasting their eyes as they went—for the scenery of the Elk valley is of a most picturesque and pleasing character; and the broad bosom of the stream itself, studded with wooded islands, looked to our travellers more like a continuation of lakes than a running river. Now they glided along without using an oar, borne onward by the current; then

they would take a spell at the paddles, while the beautiful Canadian boat-song could be heard as it came from the tiny craft, and the appropriate chorus “Row, brothers, row!” echoed from the adjacent shores. No part of their journey was more pleasant than while descending the romantic Elk.

They found plenty of fresh provisions, both in the stream itself and on its banks. They caught salmon in the water, and the silver-coloured hyodon, known among the voyageurs by the name of “Doré.” They shot both ducks and geese, and roast-duck or goose had become an everyday dinner with them. Of the geese there were several species. There were “snow-geese,” so called from their beautiful white plumage; and “laughing geese,” that derive their name from the
88 circumstance that their call resembles the laugh of a man.

The Indians decoy these by striking their open hand repeatedly over the mouth while uttering the syllable “wah.” They also saw the “Brent goose,” a well-known species, and the “Canada goose,” which is the *wild goose par excellence*. Another species resembling the latter, called the “barnacle goose,” was seen by our travellers. Besides these, Lucien informed them that there were several other smaller kinds that inhabit the northern countries of America. These valuable birds are objects of great interest to the people of the fur countries for months in the year. Whole tribes of Indians look to them as a means of support.

With regard to ducks, there was one species which our travellers had not yet met with, and for which they were every day upon the look-out. This was the far-famed “canvass-back,” so justly celebrated among the epicures of America. None of them had ever eaten of it, as it is not known in Louisiana, but only upon the Atlantic coast of the United States. Norman, however, had heard of its existence in the Rocky Mountains—where it is said to breed—as well as in other parts of the fur countries, and they were in hopes that they might fall in with it upon the waters of the Athabasca.

Lucien was, of course, well acquainted with its “biography,” and could have recognised one at sight; and as they glided along he volunteered to give his companions some information, not only about this particular species, but about the whole genus of these interesting birds.

“The canvass-back,” began he, “is perhaps the most celebrated and highly-prized of all the ducks, on account of the exquisite flavour of its flesh—which is thought by some epicures to be superior to that of all other birds. It is not a large duck—rarely weighing over three pounds—and its plumage is far from equalling in beauty that of many other species. It has a red or chestnut-coloured head, a shining black breast, while the greater part of its body is of a greyish colour; but upon close examination this grey is found to be produced by a whitish ground minutely mottled with zig-zag black lines. I believe it is this mottling, combined with the colour, which somewhat resembles the appearance and texture of ship's canvass, that has given the bird its trivial name; but there is some obscurity about the origin of this.

“Shooting the canvass-backs is a source of profit to hundreds of gunners who live around the Chesapeake Bay, as these birds command a high price in the markets of the American cities. Disputes have arisen between the fowlers of different States around the Bay about the right of shooting upon it; and vessels full of armed men—ready to make war upon one another—have gone out on this account. But the government of these States succeeded in settling the matter peacefully, and to the satisfaction of all parties.”

The canoe at this moment shot round a bend, and a long smooth expanse of the river appeared before the eyes of our voyageurs. They could see that upon one side another stream ran in, with a very sluggish current; and around the mouth of this, and for a good stretch below it, there appeared a green sedge-like water-grass, or rushes. Near the border of this sedge, and in a part of it that was thin, a flock of wild fowl was diving and feeding. They were small, and evidently
89 ducks; but the distance was yet too great for the boys to make out to what species they belonged.

A single large swan—a trumpeter—was upon the water, between the shore and the ducks, and was gradually making towards the latter. François immediately loaded one of his barrels with swan, or rather “buck” shot, and Basil looked to his rifle. The ducks were not thought of—the trumpeter was to be the game. Lucien took out his telescope, and commenced observing the flock. They had not intended to use any precaution in approaching the birds, as they were not extremely anxious about getting a shot, and were permitting the canoe to glide gently towards them.

An exclamation from Lucien, however, caused them to change their tactics. He directed them suddenly to “hold water,” and stop the canoe, at the same time telling them that the birds ahead were the very sort about which they had been conversing—the “canvass-backs.” He had no doubt of it, judging from their colour, size, and peculiar movements.

The announcement produced a new excitement. All four were desirous not only of shooting, but of *eating*, a canvass-back; and arrangements were set about to effect the former. It was known to all that the canvass-backs are among the shyest of water-fowl, so much so that it is difficult to approach them unless under cover. While feeding, it is said, they keep sentinels on the look-out. Whether this be true or not, it is certain that they never all dive together, some always remaining above water, and apparently watching while the others are under.

A plan to get near them was necessary, and one was suggested by Norman, which was to tie bushes around the sides of the canoe, so as to hide both the vessel and those in it. This plan was at once adopted—the canoe was paddled up to the bank—thick bushes were cut, and tied along

the gunwale; and then our voyageurs climbed in, and laying themselves as low as possible, commenced paddling gently downward in the direction of the ducks. The rifles were laid aside, as they could be of little service with such game. François' double-barrel was the arm upon which dependence was now placed; and François himself leaned forward in the bow in order to be ready, while the others attended to the guidance of the vessel. The buckshot had been drawn out, and a smaller kind substituted. The swan was no longer cared for or even thought of.

In about a quarter of an hour's time, the canoe, gliding silently along the edge of the sedge—which was the wild celery—came near the place where the ducks were; and the boys, peeping through the leafy screen, could now see the birds plainly. They saw that they were not all canvass-backs, but that three distinct kinds of ducks were feeding together. One sort was the canvass-backs themselves, and a second kind very much resembled them, except that they were a size smaller. These were the “red-heads” or “pochards.”

The third species was different from either. They had also heads of a reddish colour, but of a brighter red, and marked by a white band that ran from the root of the bill over the crown. This mark enabled Lucien at once to tell the species. They were widgeons; but the most singular thing that was now observed by our voyageurs was the terms upon which these three kinds of birds lived with each other. It appeared that the widgeon obtained its food by a regular system of robbery and plunder perpetrated upon the community of the canvass-backs. The latter, as Lucien
90 explained, feeds upon the roots of the valisneria; but for these it is obliged to dive to the depth of four or five feet, and also to spend some time at the bottom while plucking them up. Now the widgeon is as fond of the “celery” as the canvass-back, but the former is not a diver—in fact, never goes under water except when washing itself or in play, and it has therefore no means of procuring the desired roots. Mark, then, the plan that it takes to effect this end.

Seated as near as is safe to the canvass-back, it waits until the latter makes his *somersault* and goes down. It (the widgeon) then darts forward so as to be sufficiently close, and, pausing again, scans the surface with eager eye. It can tell where the other is at work, as the blades of the plant at which it is tugging are seen to move above the water. These at length disappear, pulled down as the plant is dragged from its root, and almost at the same instant the canvass-back comes up holding the root between his mandibles.

But the widgeon is ready for him. He has calculated the exact spot where the other will rise; and, before the latter can open his eyes or get them clear of the water, the widgeon darts forward, snatches the luscious morsel from his bill, and makes off with it. Conflicts sometimes ensue; but the widgeon, knowing himself to be the lesser and weaker bird, never stands to give battle, but secures his prize through his superior agility. On the other hand, the canvass-back rarely attempts to follow him, as he knows that the other is swifter upon the water than he. He only looks after his lost root with an air of chagrin, and then, reflecting that there is “plenty more where it came from,” kicks up its heels, and once more plunges to the bottom.

The red-head rarely interferes with either, as he is contented to feed upon the leaves and stalks, at all times floating in plenty upon the surface.

As the canoe glided near, those on board watched these curious manœuvres of the birds with feelings of interest. They saw, moreover, that the “trumpeter” had arrived among them, and the ducks seemed to take no notice of him. Lucien was struck with something unusual in the appearance of the swan. Its plumage seemed ruffled and on end, and it glided along in a stiff and unnatural manner. It moved its neck neither to one side nor the other, but held its head bent forward, until its bill almost touched the water, in the attitude that these birds adopt when feeding upon something near the surface. Lucien said nothing to his companions, as they were all silent, lest they might frighten the ducks; but Basil and Norman had also remarked the strange look and conduct of the trumpeter. François' eyes were bent only upon the ducks, and he did not heed the other.

As they came closer, first Lucien, and then Basil and Norman, saw something else that puzzled them. Whenever the swan approached any of the ducks, these were observed to disappear under the water. At first, the boys thought that they merely dived to get out of his way, but it was not exactly in the same manner as the others were diving for the roots. Moreover, none of those that went down in the neighbourhood of the swan were seen to come up again!

There was something very odd in all this, and the three boys, thinking so at the same time, were about to communicate their thoughts to one another, when the double crack of François'
91 gun drove the thing, for a moment, out of their heads; and they all looked over the bushes to see how many canvass-backs had been killed. Several were seen dead or fluttering along the surface; but no one counted them, for a strange, and even terrible, object now presented itself to the astonished senses of all. If the conduct of the swan had been odd before, it was now doubly so.

Instead of flying off after the shot, as all expected it would do, it was now seen to dance and plunge about on the water, uttering loud screams, that resembled the human voice far more than any other sounds! Then it rose as if pitched into the air, and fell on its back some distance off; while in its place was seen a dark, round object moving through the water, as if making for the bank, and uttering, as it went, the same hideous human-like screams!

This dark object was no other than the poll of a human being; and the river shallowing towards the bank, it rose higher and higher above the water, until the boys could distinguish the glistening neck and naked shoulders of a red and brawny Indian! All was now explained. The

Indian had been duck-hunting, and had used the stuffed skin of the swan as his disguise; and hence the puzzling motions of the bird. He had not noticed the canoe—concealed as it was—until the loud crack of François' gun had startled him from his work.

This, and the heads and white faces of the boys peeping over the bushes, had frightened him, even more than he had them. Perhaps they were the first white faces he had ever seen. But, whether or not, sadly frightened he was; for, on reaching the bank, he did not stop, but ran off into the woods, howling and yelling as if Old Nick had been after him: and no doubt he believed that such was the case.

The travellers picked up the swan-skin put of curiosity; and, in addition to the ducks which François had killed, they found nearly a score of these birds, which the Indian had dropped in his fright, and that had afterwards risen to the surface. These were strung together, and all had their necks broken.

After getting them aboard, the canoe was cleared of the bushes; and the paddles being once more called into service, the little craft shot down stream like an arrow.

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CHAPTER XIX.

THE SHRIKE AND THE HUMMING-BIRDS

The picturesque scenery of the Elk appeared to be a favourite resort with the feathered creation. Here our voyageurs saw many kinds of birds; both those that migrate into the fur countries during summer, and those that make their home there in the cold, dark days of winter. Among the former were observed—the beautiful blue bird of Wilson which, on account of its gentle and innocent habits, is quite as much esteemed in America as the “robin” in England.

Another favourite of the farmer and the homestead, the purple martin, was seen gracefully wheeling through the air; while, among the green leaves, fluttered many brilliant birds. The “cardinal grosbeak” with his bright scarlet wings; the blue jay, noisy and chattering; the rarer “crossbill” with its deep crimson colour; and many others, equally bright and beautiful, enlivened

the woods, either with their voice or their gaudy plumage.

There was one bird, however, that had neither “fine feathers” nor an agreeable voice, but that interested our travellers more than any of the others. Its voice was unpleasant to the ear, and sounded more like the grating of a rusty hinge than anything else they could think of. The bird itself was not larger than a thrush, of a light grey colour above, white underneath, and with blackish wings. Its bill resembled that of the hawks, but its legs were more like those of the woodpecker tribe; and it seemed, in fact, to be a cross between the two. It was neither the colour of the bird, nor its form, nor yet its song, that interested our travellers, but its singular habits; and these they had a fine opportunity of observing at one of their “noon camps,” where they had halted to rest and refresh themselves during the hot mid-day hours. The place was on one of the little islets, which was covered with underwood, with here and there some larger trees. The underwood bushes were of various sorts; but close to the spot where they had landed was a large thicket of honeysuckle, whose flowers were in full bloom, and filled the air with their sweet perfume.

While seated near these, François' quick eye detected the presence of some very small birds moving among the blossoms. They were at once pronounced to be humming-birds, and of that species known as the “ruby-throats” so called, because a flake of a beautiful vinous colour under the throat of the males exhibits, in the sun, all the glancing glories of the ruby. The back, or upper parts, are of a gilded green colour; and the little creature is the smallest bird that migrates into the fur countries, with one exception, and that is a bird of the same genus—the “cinnamon humming-bird.” The latter, however, has been seen in the Northern regions, only on the western side of the Rocky Mountains; but then it has been observed even as far north as the bleak and inhospitable shores of Nootka Sound. Mexico, and the tropical countries of America, are the favourite home of the humming-birds; and it was, for a long time, supposed that the “ruby-throats” were the only ones that migrated farther north than the territory of Mexico itself. It is now known, that besides the “cinnamon humming-bird,” two or three other species annually make an excursion into higher latitudes.

The “ruby-throats” not only travel into the fur countries, but breed in numbers upon the Elk River, the very place where our travellers now observed them.

As they sat watching these little creatures, for there were several of them skipping about and poising themselves opposite the flowers, the attention of all was attracted to the movements of a far different sort of bird. It was that one we have been speaking of. It was seated upon a tree, not far from the honeysuckles; but every now and then it would spring from its perch, dash forward, and after whirring about for some moments among the humming-birds fly back to the same tree.

At first the boys watched these manœuvres without having their curiosity excited. It was no

new thing to see birds acting in this manner. The jays, and many other birds of the fly-catching kind have this habit, and nothing was thought of it at the moment. Lucien, however, who had watched the bird more narrowly, presently declared to the rest that it was catching the humming-birds, and preying upon them—that each time it made a dash among the honeysuckles,
93 it carried off one in its claws, the smallness of the victim having prevented them at first from noticing this fact. They all now watched it more closely than before, and were soon satisfied of the truth of Lucien's assertion, as they saw it seize one of the ruby-throats in the very act of entering the corolla of a flower.

This excited the indignation of François, who immediately took up his “double-barrel,” and proceeded towards the tree where the bird, as before, had carried this last victim. The tree was a low one, of the locust or *pseud-acacia* family, and covered all over with great thorny spikes, like all trees of that tribe. François paid no attention to this; but, keeping under shelter of the underwood, he crept forward until within shot. Then raising his gun, he took aim, and pulling trigger, brought the bird fluttering down through the branches. He stepped forward and picked it up—not that he cared for such unworthy game, but Lucien had called to him to do so, as the naturalist wished to make an examination of the creature.

He was about turning to go back to camp, when he chanced to glance his eye up into the locust-tree. There it was riveted by a sight which caused him to cry out with astonishment. His cry brought the rest running up to the spot, and they were not less astonished than he, when they saw the cause of it. I have said that the branches of the tree were covered with long thorny spikes that pointed in every direction; but one branch in particular occupied their attention. Upon this there was about a dozen of these spikes pointing upward, and upon each spike *was impaled a ruby-throat*!

The little creatures were dead, of course, but they were neither torn nor even much ruffled in their plumage. They were all placed back upwards, and as neatly spitted upon the thorns as if they had been put there by human hands. On looking more closely it was discovered that other creatures as well as the humming-birds, had been served in a similar manner. Several grasshoppers, spiders, and some coleopterous insects were found, and upon another branch two small meadow-mice had been treated to the same terrible death.

To Basil, Norman, and François, the thing was quite inexplicable, but Lucien understood well enough what it meant. All these creatures, he informed them, were placed there by the bird which François had shot, and which was no other than the “shrike” or “butcher-bird”—a name by which it is more familiarly known, and which it receives from the very habit they had just observed. Why it follows such a practice Lucien could not tell, as naturalists are not agreed upon this point. Some have asserted that it spits the spiders and other insects for the purpose of attracting nearer the small birds upon which it preys; but this cannot be true, for it preys mostly upon birds that are not insect-eaters, as the finches: besides, it is itself as fond of eating grasshoppers as anything else, and consumes large quantities of these insects.

The most probable explanation of the singular and apparently cruel habit of the butcher-bird is, that it merely places its victims upon the thorns, in order to keep them safe from ground-ants, rats, mice, raccoons, foxes, and other preying creatures—just as a good cook would hang up her meat or game in the larder to prevent the cats from carrying it off. The thorny tree thus becomes the storehouse of the shrike, where he hangs up his superfluous spoil for future use, just as the crows, magpies and jays, make their secret deposits in chinks of walls and the hollows of trees. It
94 is no argument against this theory, that the shrike sometimes leaves these stores without returning to them. The fox, and dog, as well as many other preying creatures have the same habit.

Wondering at what they had seen, the voyageurs returned to their camp, and once more embarked on their journey.

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CHAPTER XX.

THE FISH-HAWK.

A few days after, another incident occurred to our voyageurs, which illustrated the habits of a very interesting bird, the “osprey,” or fish-hawk, as it is more familiarly known in America.

The osprey is a bird of the falcon tribe, and one of the largest of the genus—measuring two feet from bill to tail, with an immense spread of wing in proportion, being nearly six feet from tip to tip. It is of a dark brown colour above, that colour peculiar to most of the hawk tribe, while its lower parts are ashy white. Its legs and bill are blue, and its eyes of a yellow orange. It is found in nearly all parts of America, where there are waters containing fish, for on these it exclusively feeds. It is more common on the sea-coast than in the interior, although it also frequents the large lakes, and lives in the central parts of the continent during summer, when these are no longer frozen over. It is not often seen upon muddy rivers, as there it would stand no chance of espying its victims in the water. It is a migratory bird, seeking the South in winter, and especially

the shores of the Great Mexican Gulf, where large numbers are often seen fishing together.

In the spring season these birds move to the northward, and make their appearance along the Atlantic coast of the continent, where they diffuse joy into the hearts of the fishermen—because the latter know, on seeing them, that they may soon expect the large shoals of herring, shad, and other fish, for which they have been anxiously looking out. So great favourites are they with the fisherman, that they would not knowingly kill an osprey for a boat-load of fish, but regard these bold fishing birds in the light of “professional brethren.” In this case the old adage that “two of a trade never agree” is clearly contradicted.

The farmer often takes up his gun to fire at the osprey—mistaking it for the red-tailed buzzard or some other hawk, several species of which at a distance it resembles—but, on discovering his mistake, brings down his piece without pulling trigger, and lets the osprey fly off unharmed. This singular conduct on the part of the farmer arises from his knowledge of the fact, that the osprey will not only *not* kill any of his ducks or hens, but that where he makes a settlement he will drive off from the premises all the hawks, buzzards, and kites, that would otherwise prey upon the poultry. With such protection, therefore, the osprey is one of the securest birds in America. He may breed in a tree over the farmer's or fisherman's door without the slightest danger of being disturbed in his incubation.

I say *his* incubation; but the male takes no part in this domestic duty, further than to supply his loved mate with plenty of fish while she does the hatching business. Of course, thus protected, the osprey is not a rare bird. On the contrary, fish-hawks are more numerous than perhaps any
95 other species of the hawk tribe. Twenty or thirty nests may be seen near each other in the same piece of woods, and as many as three hundred have been counted on one little island. The nests are built upon large trees—not always at the tops, as those of rooks, but often in forks within twenty feet of the ground. They are composed of large sticks, with stalks of corn, weeds, pieces of wet turf, and then lined plentifully with dry sea-grass, or any other grass that may be most convenient.

The whole nest is big enough to make a load for a cart, and would be heavy enough to give any horse a good pull. It can be seen, when the woods are open, to an immense distance, and the more easily, as the tree upon which it is built is always a “dead wood,” and therefore without leaves to conceal it. Some say that the birds select a dead or decaying tree for their nest. It is more probable such is the effect and not the cause, of their building upon a particular tree. It is more likely that the tree is killed partly by the mass of rubbish thus piled upon it, and partly by the nature of the substances, such as sea-weed in the nest, the oil of the fish, the excrement of the birds themselves, and the dead fish that have been dropped about the root, and suffered to remain there; for when the osprey lets fall his finny prey, which he often does, he never condescends to pick it up again, but goes in search of another.

Boys “a-nesting” might easily discover the nest of the osprey; but were they inclined to despoil it of its three or four eggs (which are about the size of a duck's, and blotched with Spanish brown), they would find that a less easy task, for the owners would be very likely to claw their eyes out, or else scratch the tender skin from their beardless cheeks: so that boys do not often trouble the nest of the osprey.

A very curious anecdote is related of a negro having climbed up to plunder a nest of these birds. The negro's head was covered with a close nap of his own black wool, which is supposed by a certain stretch of fancy to have the peculiarity of “growing in at both ends.” The negro, having no other protection than that which his thick fur afforded him, was assailed by both the owners of the nest, one of which, making a dash at the “darkie's” head, struck his talons so firmly into the wool, that he was unable to extricate them, and there stuck fast, until the astonished plunderer had reached the foot of the tree. We shall not answer for the truthfulness of this anecdote, although there is nothing improbable about it; for certain it is that these birds defend their nests with courage and fury, and we know of more than one instance of persons being severely wounded who made the attempt to rob them.

The ospreys, as already stated, feed exclusively on fish. They are not known to prey upon birds or quadrupeds of any kind, even when deprived of their customary food, as they sometimes are for days on account of the lakes and rivers, in which they expected to find it being frozen over to a later season than usual. Other birds, as the purple grakles, often build among the sticks of the osprey's nest, and rear their young without being meddled with by this generous bird. This is an important point of difference between the osprey and other kinds of hawks; and there is a peculiarity of structure about the feet and legs of the osprey, that points to the nature of his food and his mode of procuring it. His legs are disproportionately long and strong. They are without
96 feathers nearly to the knees. The feet and toes are also very long, and the soles are covered with thick, hard scales, like the teeth of a rasp, which enable the bird to hold securely his slippery prey. The claws, too, are long, and curved into semicircles, with points upon them almost as sharp as needles.

I have stated that an incident occurred to our party that illustrated some of the habits of this interesting bird. It was upon the afternoon of a Saturday, after they had fixed their camp to remain for the following day. They had landed upon a point or promontory that ran out into the river, and from which they commanded a view of a fine stretch of water. Near where they had placed their tent was the nest of an osprey, in the forks of a large poplar. The tree, as usual, was dead, and the young were plainly visible over the edge of the nest. They appeared to be full-grown and feathered; but it is a peculiarity of the young ospreys that they will remain in the nest,

and be fed by the parent birds, until long after they might be considered able to shift for themselves. It is even asserted that the latter become impatient at length, and drive the young ones out of the nest by beating them with their wings; but that for a considerable time afterwards they continue to feed them—most likely until the young birds learn to capture their finny prey for themselves.

This Lucien gave as a popular statement, but did not vouch for its truth. It was not long, however, before both he and his companions witnessed its complete verification.

The old birds, after the arrival of the voyageurs upon the promontory, had remained for some time around the nest, and at intervals had shot down to where the party was, uttering loud screams, and making the air whizz with the strokes of their wings. Seeing that there was no intention of disturbing them, they at length desisted from these demonstrations, and sat for a good while quietly upon the edge of their nest. Then first one, and shortly after the other, flew out, and commenced sailing in circles, at the height of an hundred feet or so above the water. Nothing could be more graceful than their flight. Now they would poise themselves a moment in the air, then turn their bodies as if on a pivot, and glide off in another direction.

All these motions were carried on with the most perfect ease, and as if without the slightest aid from the wings. Again they would come to a pause, holding themselves fixed in mid-air by a gentle flapping, and appearing to scrutinise some object below. Perhaps it was a fish; but it was either too large a one, or not the species most relished, or maybe it had sunk to too great a depth to be easily taken. Again they sail around; one of them suddenly arrests its flight, and, like a stone projected from a sling, shoots down to the water. Before reaching the surface, however, the fish, whose quick eye has detected the coming enemy, has gone to the dark bottom and concealed himself; and the osprey, suddenly checking himself by his wings and the spread of his full tail, mounts again, and re-commences his curvilinear flight.

After this had gone on for some time, one of the birds—the larger one, and therefore the female—was seen to leave off hunting and return to the nest. There she sat only for a few seconds, when, to the astonishment of the boys, she began to strike her wings against the young ones, as if she was endeavouring to force them from the nest. This was just what she designed
97 doing. Perhaps her late unsuccessful attempt to get them a fish had led her to a train of reflections, and sharpened her determination to make them shift for themselves. However that may be, in a few moments she succeeded in driving them up to the edge, and then, by half pushing, and half beating them with her wings, one after the other—two of them there were—was seen to take wing, and soar away out over the lake.

At this moment, the male shot down upon the water, and then rose again into the air, bearing a fish, head-foremost, in his talons. He flew directly towards one of the young, and meeting as it hovered in the air, turned suddenly over and held out the fish to it. The latter clutched it with as much ease as if it had been accustomed to the thing for years, and then turning away, carried the fish to a neighbouring tree, and commenced devouring it.

The action had been perceived by the other youngster, who followed after, and alighted upon the same branch, with the intention of sharing in the meal. In a few minutes the best part of the fish was eaten up, and both, rising from the branch, flew back to their nest. There they were met by the parents, and welcomed with a loud squeaking, that was intended, no doubt, to congratulate them upon the success of their first “fly.”

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CHAPTER XXI.

THE OSPREY AND HIS TYRANT.

After remaining for some time on the nest along with the others, the old male again resolved to “go a-fishing,” and with this intent he shot out from the tree, and commenced wheeling above the water. The boys, having nothing better to engage them, sat watching his motions, while they freely conversed about his habits and other points in his natural history. Lucien informed them that the osprey is a bird common to both Continents, and that it is often seen upon the shores of the Mediterranean, pursuing the finny tribes there, just as it does in America. In some parts of Italy it is called the “leaden eagle,” because its sudden heavy plunge upon the water is fancied to resemble the falling of a piece of lead.

While they were discoursing, the osprey was seen to dip once or twice towards the surface of the water, and then suddenly check himself, and mount upward again. These manœuvres were no doubt caused by the fish which he intended to “hook” having suddenly shifted their quarters. Most probably experience had taught them wisdom, and they knew the osprey as their most terrible enemy. But they were not to escape him at all times. As the boys watched the bird, he was seen to poise himself for an instant in the air, then suddenly closing his wings, he shot vertically downward.

So rapid was his descent, that the eye could only trace it like a bolt of lightning. There was a

sharp whizzing sound in the air—a plash was heard—then the smooth bosom of the water was seen to break, and the white spray rose several feet above the surface. For an instant the bird was no longer seen. He was underneath, and the place of his descent was marked by a patch of foam. Only a single moment was he out of sight. The next he emerged, and a few strokes of his broad wing carried him into the air, while a large fish was seen griped in his claws. As the
98 voyageurs had before noticed, the fish was carried head-foremost, and this led them to the conclusion that in striking his prey beneath the water the osprey follows it and aims his blow from behind.

After mounting a short distance the bird paused for a moment in the air, and gave himself a shake, precisely as a dog would do after coming out of water. He then directed his flight, now somewhat slow and heavy, toward the nest. On reaching the tree, however, there appeared to be some mismanagement. The fish caught among the branches as he flew inward. Perhaps the presence of the camp had distracted his attention, and rendered him less careful. At all events, the prey was seen to drop from his talons; and bounding from branch to branch, went tumbling down to the bottom of the tree.

Nothing could be more opportune than this, for François had not been able to get a “nibble” during the whole day, and a fresh fish for dinner was very desirable to all. François and Basil had both started to their feet, in order to secure the fish before the osprey should pounce down and pick it up; but Lucien assured them that they need be in no hurry about that, as the bird would not touch it again after he had once let it fall. Hearing this, they took their time about it, and walked leisurely up to the tree, where they found the fish lying. After taking it up they were fain to escape from the spot, for the effluvium arising from a mass of other fish that lay in a decomposed state around the tree was more than any delicate pair of nostrils could endure.

The one they had secured proved to be a very fine salmon of not less than six pounds weight, and therefore much heavier than the bird itself! The track of the osprey's talons was deeply marked; and by the direction in which the creature was scored, it was evident the bird had seized it from behind. The old hawks made a considerable noise while the fish was being carried away; but they soon gave up their squealing, and, once more hovering out over the river, sailed about with their eyes bent upon the water below.

“What a number of fish they must kill!” said François. “They don't appear to have much difficulty about it. I should think they get as much as they can eat. See! there again! Another, I declare!”

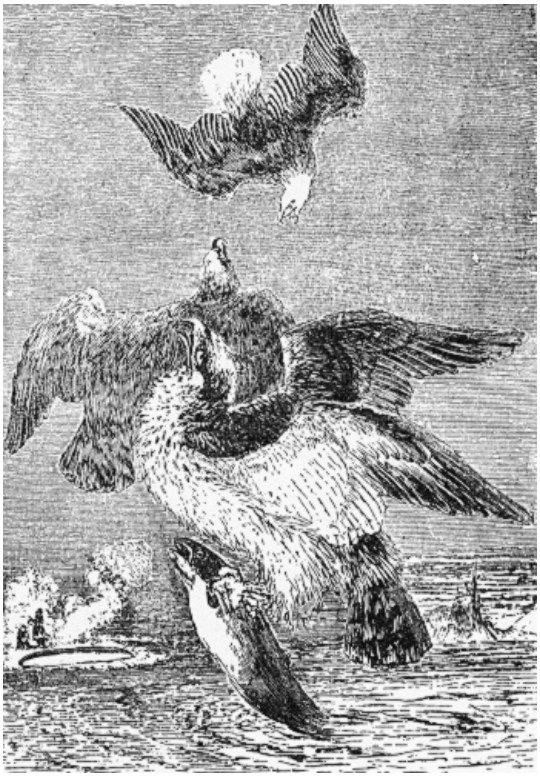
As François spoke the male osprey was seen to shoot down as before, and this time, although he appeared scarcely to dip his foot in the water, rose up with a fish in his talons.

“They have sometimes others to provide for besides themselves,” remarked Lucien. “For instance, the bald eagle——”

Lucien was interrupted by a cackling scream, which was at once recognised as that of the very bird whose name had just escaped his lips. All eyes were instantly turned in the direction whence it came—which was from the opposite side of the river—and there, just in the act of launching itself from the top of a tall tree, was the great enemy of the osprey—the white-headed eagle himself!

“Now a chase!” cried François, “yonder comes the big robber!”

With some excitement of feeling, the whole party watched the movements of the birds. A few strokes of the eagle's wing brought him near; but the osprey had already heard his scream, and knowing it was no use carrying the fish to his nest, turned away from it, and rose spirally upward, in the hope of escaping in that direction. The eagle followed, beating the air with his broad
99 pinions, as he soared after. Close behind him went the female osprey, uttering wild screams, flapping her wings against his very beak, and endeavouring to distract his attention from the chase. It was to no purpose, however, as the eagle full well knew her object, and disregarding her impotent attempts, kept on in steady flight after her mate. This continued until the birds had reached a high elevation, and the ospreys, from their less bulk, were nearly out of sight. But the voyageurs could see that the eagle was on the point of overtaking the one that carried the fish.



THE OSPREY AND WHITE-HEADED EAGLE.

100 Presently, a glittering object dropped down from the heavens, and fell with a plunge upon the water. It was the fish, and almost at the same instant was heard the “whish!” of the eagle, as the great bird shot after it. Before reaching the surface, however, his white tail and wings were seen to spread suddenly, checking his downward course; and then, with a scream of disappointment, he flew off in a horizontal direction, and alit upon the same tree from which he had taken his departure. In a minute after the ospreys came shooting down, in a diagonal line, to their nest; and, having arrived there, a loud and apparently angry consultation was carried on for some time, in which the young birds bore as noisy a part as either of their parents.

“It's a wonder,” said Lucien, “the eagle missed the fish—he rarely does. The impetus which he can give his body enables him to overtake a falling object before it can reach the earth. Perhaps the female osprey was in his way, and hindered him.

“But why did he not pick it up in the water?” demanded François.

“Because it went to the bottom, and he could not reach it—that's clear.”

It was Basil who made answer, and the reason he assigned was the true one.

“It's too bad,” said François, “that the osprey, not half so big a bird, must support this great robber-tyrant by his industry.”

“It's no worse than among our own kind,” interposed Basil. “See how the white man makes the black one work for him here in America. That, however, is the *few* toiling for the *million*. In Europe the case is reversed. There, in every country, you see the million toiling for the few—toiling to support an oligarchy in luxurious case, or a monarch in barbaric splendour.”

“But why do they do so? the fools!” asked François, somewhat angrily.

“Because they know no better. That oligarchy, and those monarchs, have taken precious care to educate and train them to the belief that such is the *natural* state of man. They furnish them with school-books, which are filled with beautiful sophisms—all tending to inculcate principles of endurance of wrong, and reverence for their wrongers. They fill their rude throats with hurrah songs that paint false patriotism in glowing colours, making loyalty—no matter to whatsoever despot—the greatest of virtues, and revolution the greatest of crimes; they studiously divide their subjects into several creeds, and then, playing upon the worst of all passions—the passion of religious bigotry—easily prevent their misguided helots from uniting upon any point which would give them a real reform. Ah! it is a terrible game which the present rulers of Europe are playing!”

It was Basil who gave utterance to these sentiments, for the young republican of Louisiana had already begun to think strongly on political subjects. No doubt Basil would one day be an M.C.

“The bald eagles have been much blamed for their treatment of the ospreys, but,” said Lucien, “perhaps they have more reason for levying their tax than at first appears. It has been asked: Why they do not capture the fish themselves? Now, I apprehend, that there is a *natural* reason why they do not. As you have seen, the fish are not always caught upon the surface. The osprey
101 has often to plunge beneath the water in the pursuit, and Nature has gifted him with power to do so, which, if I am not mistaken, she has denied to the eagles. The latter are therefore compelled, in some measure, to depend upon the former for a supply. But the eagles sometimes do catch the fish themselves, when the water is sufficiently shallow, or when their prey comes near enough to

the surface to enable them to seize it."

"Do they ever kill the ospreys?" inquired François.

"I think not," replied Lucien; "that would be 'killing the goose,' etc. They know the value of their tax-payers too well to get rid of them in that way. A band of ospreys, in a place where there happens to be many of them together, have been known to unite and drive the eagles off. That, I suppose, must be looked upon in the light of a successful *revolution*."

The conversation was here interrupted by another incident. The ospreys had again gone out fishing, and, at this moment, one of them was seen to pounce down and take a fish from the water. It was a large fish, and, as the bird flew heavily upward, the eagle again left its perch, and gave chase. This time the osprey was overtaken before it had got two hundred yards into the air, and seeing it was no use attempting to carry off the prey, it opened its claws and let it drop.

The eagle turned suddenly, poised himself a moment, and then shot after the falling fish. Before the latter had got near the ground, he overtook and secured it in his talons. Then, arresting his own flight by the sudden spread of his tail, he winged his way silently across the river, and disappeared among the trees upon the opposite side. The osprey, taking the thing as a matter of course, again descended to the proper elevation, and betook himself to his work. Perhaps he grinned a little, like many another royal taxpayer, but he knew the tax had to be paid all the same, and he said nothing.

An incident soon after occurred that astonished and puzzled our party not a little. The female osprey, that all this time seemed to have had but poor success in her fishing, was now seen to descend with a rush, and plunge deeply into the wave. The spray rose in a little cloud over the spot, and all sat watching with eager eyes to witness the result. What was their astonishment when, after waiting many seconds, the bird still remained under water! Minutes passed, and still she did not come up. *She came up no more!* The foam she had made in her descent floated away —the bosom of the water was smooth as glass—not a ripple disturbed its surface. They could have seen the smallest object for a hundred yards or more around the spot where she had disappeared.

It was impossible she could have emerged without them seeing her. Where, then, had she gone? This, as I have said, puzzled the whole party; and formed a subject of conjecture and conversation for the rest of that day, and also upon the next. Even Lucien was unable to solve the mystery. It was a point in the natural history of the osprey unknown to him. Could she have drowned herself? Had some great fish, the "gar pike," or some such creature, got hold of and swallowed her? Had she dashed her head against a rock, or become entangled in weeds at the bottom of the river?

All these questions were put, and various solutions of the problem were offered. The true one
102 was not thought of, until accident revealed it. It was Saturday when the incident occurred. The party, of course, remained all next day at the place. They heard almost continually the cry of the bereaved bird, who most likely knew no more than they what had become of his mate. On Monday our travellers re-embarked and continued down-stream. About a mile below, as they were paddling along, their attention was drawn to a singular object floating upon the water. They brought the canoe alongside it.

It was a large fish, a sturgeon, floating dead, with a bird beside it, also dead! On turning both over, what was their astonishment to see that the talons of the bird were firmly fixed in the back of the fish! It was the *female osprey*! This explained all. She had struck a fish too heavy for her strength, and being unable to clear her claws again, had been drawn under the water and had perished along with her victim!

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CHAPTER, XXII.

THE VOYAGE INTERRUPTED.

About ten days' rapid travelling down the Elk River brought our party into the Athabasca Lake—sometimes called the "Lake of the Hills." This is another of those great bodies of fresh water that lie between the primitive rocks of the "Barren Grounds," and the more fertile limestone deposit upon the west. It is nearly two hundred miles long from west to east, and it is only fifteen miles in breadth, but in some places it is so narrow and full of islands that it looks more like a broad river than a lake. Its shores and many of its islands are thickly wooded, particularly upon the southern and western edges; and the eye of the traveller is delighted with many a beautiful vista as he passes along. But our voyageurs took little heed of these things.

A gloom had come over their spirits, for one of their party had taken ill, and was suffering from a painful and dangerous disease—an intermittent fever. It was Lucien—he that was beloved by all of them. He had been complaining for several days—even while admiring the fair scenery of the romantic Elk—but every day he had been getting worse, until, on their arrival at the lake, he

declared himself no longer able to travel. It became necessary, therefore, to suspend their journey; and choosing a place for their camp, they made arrangements to remain until Lucien should recover. They built a small log-hut for the invalid, and did everything to make him as comfortable as possible. The best skins were spread for his couch; and cooling drinks were brewed for him from roots, fruits, and berries, in the way he had already taught his companions to prepare them.

Every day François went forth with his gun, and returned with a pair of young pigeons, or a wood-partridge, or a brace of the beautiful ruffed grouse; and out of these he would make delicate soups, which he was the better able to do as they had procured salt, pepper, and other ingredients, at the Fort. They had also brought with them a stock of tea—the real China tea—and sugar; and as the quantity of both was but small, this luxurious beverage was made exclusively
103 for Lucien, and was found by him exceedingly beneficial during his illness.

To the great joy of all the invalid was at length restored to health, and the canoe being once more launched and freighted, they continued their journey.

They coasted along the shores of the lake, and entered the Great Slave River, which runs from the Athabasca into the Great Slave Lake. They soon came to the mouth of another large river, called the Peace. This runs into the Great Slave a short distance below Lake Athabasca, and, strange to say, the sources of the Peace River lie upon the *western* side of the Rocky Mountains, so that this stream actually runs across the mountain-chain! It passes through the mountains in a succession of deep gorges, which are terrible to behold. On both sides dizzy cliffs and snow-capped peaks rise thousands of feet above its rocky bed, and the scenery is cold and desolate.

Its head-waters interlock with those of several streams that run into the Pacific; so that, had our voyageurs wished to travel to the shores of that ocean, they might have done so in their birch-bark canoe nearly the whole of the way. But this was not their design at present, so they passed the *débouchure* of the Peace, and kept on for the Great Slave Lake. They were still upon the same water as the Elk, for the Great Slave is only another name for that part of the river lying between the two lakes—Athabasca and Great Slave. Of course the river had now become much larger by the influx of the Peace, and they were travelling upon the bosom of a magnificent stream, with varied scenery upon its banks.

They were not so happy, however, as when descending the Elk—not but that they were all in good health, for Lucien had grown quite strong again. No, it was not any want of health that rendered them less cheerful. It was the prospect before them—the prospect of coming winter, which they now felt certain would arrive before they had got to the end of their journey. The delay of nearly a month, occasioned by Lucien's illness, had deranged all their calculations; and they had no longer any hope of being able to finish their voyage in what remained of the short summer. The ice would soon make its appearance; the lakes and rivers would be frozen up; they could no longer navigate them in their canoe. To travel afoot would be a most laborious undertaking, as well as perilous in an extreme degree.

In this way it is only possible to carry a very small quantity of provisions—for the traveller is compelled to load himself with skin-clothing in order to keep out the cold. The chances of procuring game by the way in that season are precarious, and not to be depended upon. Most of the birds and many of the quadrupeds migrate to more southern regions; and those that remain are shy and rare. Besides, great snow-storms are to be encountered, in which the traveller is in danger of getting “smoored.” The earth is buried under a deep covering of snow, and to pass over this while soft is difficult, and at times quite impossible. All these circumstances were known to our young voyageurs—to Norman better than any of them—and of course the prospect was a cheerless one—much more so than those unacquainted with the winter of these dreary regions would be willing to believe.

It was the month of August, near its end, when they reached the Great Slave Lake, in the latitude of 62°. The days had now become very short, and their journeys grew short in
104 proportion. They already experienced weather as cold as an English winter. There were slight frosts at night—though not yet enough to cover the water with ice—and the mid-day hours were hot, sometimes too hot to be comfortable. But this only caused them to feel the cold the more sensibly when evening set in; and all their robes and skins were necessary to keep them warm during the night.

The Great Slave Lake, like the Athabasca, is very long and very narrow. It extends full 260 miles from east to west, but at its widest part is not over thirty, and in some places much less. Along its northern shores lies the edge of the “Barren Grounds,” and there nothing meets the eye but bleak and naked hills of primitive rock. On its southern side the geology is entirely of a different character. There the limestone prevails, and scarcely anything that deserves the name of hill is to be seen. There are fine forests too, in which poplars, pines, and birches, are the principal trees. The lake is filled with islands, many of which are wholly or partially covered with timber of these kinds, and willows also are abundant.

There are fish of several species in its waters—which are in many places of great depth—sixty fathoms deep—and in some of the islands, and around the wooded shores, game exists in abundance in the summer season. Even in winter it is not scarce, but then it is difficult to follow it on account of the deep snow. Many of the animals, too, at this season become torpid, and are of course hidden in caves and hollow trees, and even in the snow itself, where no one can find them. Notwithstanding all this, our voyageurs knew that it would be the best place for them to make

their winter camp. They saw that to complete their journey during that season would be impossible. Even had it been a month earlier it would have been a difficult undertaking.

In a few days winter would be upon them. They would have to stop somewhere. There was no place where they could so safely stay as by the lake. One thing they would have there, which might not be found so plenty elsewhere, that was wood for their fire; and this was an inducement to remain by the lake. Having made up their minds, therefore, to encamp on some part of it, they looked from day to day for a place that would be most suitable, still continuing their journey towards its western end. As yet no place appeared to their liking, and as the lake near its western point trends away towards the south, Norman proposed that they should follow the shore no longer, but strike across to a promontory on the northern shore of the lake, known as “Slave Point.”

This promontory is of the limestone formation, and as Norman had heard, is well wooded, and stocked with game. Even buffaloes are found there. It is, in fact, the farthest point to the north-east that these animals range, and this presents us with a curious fact. It is the farthest point that the limestone deposit extends in that direction. Beyond that, to the east and north, lie the primitive rocks of the Barren Grounds, into which the buffaloes never stray. Thus we observe the connexion that exists between the *fauna* of a country and its geological character.

Of course they all agreed to Norman's proposal. The canoe was, therefore, headed for the open waters; and, after a hard day's paddling—for there was a head-wind—the voyageurs landed upon
105 a small wooded island, about half-way over the lake, where they encamped for the night, intending next day to cross the remaining part.

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CHAPTER XXIII.

FISHING UNDER THE ICE.

On awaking next morning, to their great surprise, they saw that the *lake was frozen over*! They had almost anticipated as much, for the night was one of the coldest they had yet experienced—so cold that one and all of them had slept but badly. As yet the ice was thin, but so much the worse. It was thick enough to prevent them from using the canoe, but too thin to bear their weight, and they now saw that they were *prisoners upon the island*!

It was not without some feelings of alarm that they made this discovery; but their fears were allayed by reflecting, that they could remain upon the island until the ice either thawed away or become strong enough to bear them, and then they could cross upon it to the northern shore. With this consolation, therefore, they set about making their temporary quarters upon the island as snug as circumstances would permit. Their apprehensions, however, began to return again, when several days had passed over, and the ice neither grew any thinner nor any thicker, but seemed to remain at a stand-still. In the early part of the morning it was almost strong enough to bear them; but during the day the sun melted it, until it was little better than a scum over the surface of the water.

The alarm of our voyageurs increased. Their provisions were nearly out. There was no game on the islet—not so much as a bird—for they had beaten every bush, and found nothing. Once or twice they thought of launching their canoe and breaking a way for it through the ice. But they knew that this proceeding would be one of much labour as well as danger. The islet was full ten miles from the shore, and they would therefore have to break the ice for ten miles. Moreover, to stand up in a bark canoe, so as to get at the work, would be a difficult task. It could not be accomplished without endangering the equilibrium of the vessel, and indeed without upsetting it altogether. Even to lean forward in the bow would be a perilous experiment; and under these considerations the idea of breaking a way was abandoned.

But their provisions were at length entirely exhausted, and what was to be done? The ice was still too weak to carry them. Near the shore it might have been strong enough, but farther out lay the danger. There they knew it was thinner, for it had not frozen over until a later period. It would have been madness to have risked it yet. On the other hand, they were starving, or likely to starve from hunger, by staying where they were. There was nothing eatable on the island. What was to be done? In the water were fish—they doubted not that—but how were they to catch them? They had tried them with hook and line, letting the hook through a hole in the ice; but at that late season the fish would not take a bait, and although they kept several continually set, and “looked” them most regularly and assiduously, not a “tail” was taken.

They were about to adopt the desperate expedient, now more difficult than ever, of breaking
106 their way through the ice, when, all at once, it occurred to Norman, that, if they could not coax the fish to take a bait, they might succeed better with a net, and capture them against their will. This idea would have been plausible enough, had there been a net; but there was no net on that islet, nor perhaps within an hundred miles of it. The absence of a net might have been an obstacle to those who are ever ready to despair; but such an obstacle never occurred to our courageous boys. They had two *parchment* skins of the caribou which they had lately killed, and

out of these Norman proposed to make a net.

He would soon do it, he said, if the others would set to work and cut the deer-skins into thongs fine enough for the purpose. Two of them, therefore, Basil and Lucien, took out their knives, and went briskly to work; while François assisted Norman in twining the thongs, and afterwards held them, while the latter wove and knotted them into meshes. In a few hours both the skins were cut into fine strips, and worked up; and a net was produced nearly six yards in length by at least two in width. It was rude enough, to be sure, but perhaps it would do its work as well as if it had been twined out of silk. At all events, it was soon to have a trial—for the moment it was finished the sinkers were attached to it, and it was carried down to the edge of the water.

The three “Southerners” had never seen a net set under ice—for in their country ice is an uncommon thing, and indeed never freezes of sufficient thickness to carry the weight of a man. They were therefore very curious to know how the thing was to be done. They could not conceive how the net was to be stretched under the ice, in such a manner as to catch the fish. Norman, however, knew all about it. He had seen the Indians, and had set many a one himself. It was no new thing for him, and he set about it at once.

He first crept out upon the ice to the distance of about twenty or thirty yards from the shore. He proceeded cautiously, as the ice creaked under him. Having arrived at the place where he intended to set the net, he knelt down, and with his knife cut several holes in the ice, at the distance of about six feet from each other, and all in one line. He had already provided himself with a straight sapling of more than six feet in length, to one end of which he had attached a cord. The other end of this cord was tied to the net, at one of its corners. He now thrust the sapling through the first hole he had made, and then guided it so as to pass directly under the second.

At this hole he took a fresh hold of the stick, and passed it along to the next, and so on to the last, where he pulled it out again, and of course along with it the string. The net was not drawn into the first hole, and by means of the cord already received through, was pulled out to its full length. The sinkers, of course, fell down in the water, and drew it into a vertical position. At both its upper corners the net was made fast above the ice, and was now “set.” Nothing more could be done until the fish came into it of their own accord, when it could be drawn out upon the ice by means of the cord attached; and, of course, by the same means could easily be returned to its place, and set again.

All of them now went back to the fire, and with hungry looks sat around it, waiting the result. They had made up their minds, should no fish be caught, to get once more into the canoe and
107 attempt breaking their way to the shore. Summoning all their patience, therefore, they waited for nearly two hours, without examining the net. Then Norman and Basil crawled back upon the ice, to see what fortune had done for them. They approached the spot, and, with their hearts thumping against their ribs, untied the knot and commenced hauling out.

“It certainly feels heavy,” said Basil, as the net was being drawn. “Hurrah!” he shouted, “Something kicks, hurrah!” and with the second “hurrah!” a beautiful fish was pulled up through the hole, and landed upon the ice. A loud “hurrah” was uttered in response by Lucien and François—who, fearing the ice might not bear so many, had remained upon the shore. A yard or two more of the net was cleared, and a second fish still larger than the former was greeted with a general “hurrah!” The two fish were now taken out—as these were all that had been caught—and the net was once more carefully set. Basil and Norman came back to the shore—Norman to receive quite a shower of compliments from his companions.

The fish—the largest of which weighed nearly five pounds—proved to be trout; and it was not long before their quality was put to the proof. All declared they had never eaten so fine trout in their lives; but when the condition of their appetites is taken into account, we may infer that there was, perhaps, a little exaggeration in this statement. If hunger really makes good sauce, our voyageurs had the best of sauce with their fish, as each of them was as hungry as a half-famished wolf.

They felt quite relieved, as far as present appetite went, but they were still uneasy for the future. Should they not succeed in taking more fish—and it was by no means certain they should succeed—they would be no better off than ever. Their anxiety, however, was soon removed. Their second “haul” proved even more successful than the first—as five fish, weighing together not less than twenty pounds, were pulled up.

This supply would enable them to hold out for a long time, but they had not much longer to remain on the islet. Upon that very night there was one of those severe frosts known only in high latitudes, and the ice upon the lake became nearly a foot in thickness. They had no longer any fear of its breaking under their weight; and taking their canoe with all their “traps,” they set out to cross over upon the ice. In a few hours they reached the shore of the lake, near the end of the promontory, where they chose a spot, and encamped.

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CHAPTER XXIV.

The first thing our voyageurs did after choosing a suitable situation, was to build a log-hut. Being young backwoodsmen this was but a trifle to them. All four of them knew how to handle an axe with dexterity. The logs were soon cut and notched, and a small cabin was put up, and roofed with split clap-boards. With the stones that lay near the shore of the lake they built a chimney. It was but a rude structure, but it drew admirably. Clay was wanted to “chink” the cabin, but that could not be had, as the ground was hard frozen, and it was quite impossible to make either clay or mud.

108 Even hot water poured out would freeze into ice in a few minutes. This was a serious want—for in such a cold climate even the smallest hole in the walls will keep a house uncomfortable, and to fill the interstices between the logs, so as to make them air-tight, some soft substance was necessary. Grass was suggested, and Lucien went off in search of it. After awhile he returned with an armful of half-withered grass, which all agreed would be the very thing; and a large quantity was soon collected, as it grew plentifully at a short distance from the cabin.

They now set to work to stuff it into the chinks; when, to their astonishment, they found that this grass had a beautiful smell, quite as powerful and as pleasant as that of mint or thyme! When a small quantity of it was flung into the fire it filled the cabin with a fragrance as agreeable as the costliest perfumes. It was the “scented grass,” which grows in great profusion in many parts of the Hudson's Bay territory, and out of which the Indians often make their beds, burning it also upon the fire to enjoy its aromatic perfume.

For the first day or two, at their new abode, the travellers had lived altogether on fish. They had, of course, brought their net with them from the island, and had set it near the shore in the same way as before. They had captured as many as they wanted, and, strange to say, at one haul they found no less than five different species in the net! One kind, a white fish, the *Coregonus albus* of naturalists, but which is named “tittameg” by the fur-traders, they caught in great plenty. This fish is found in nearly all the lakes and rivers of the Hudson's Bay territory, and is much prized both by whites and Indians for its delicate flavour. At some of the trading posts it often forms, for weeks together, the only food which the residents can obtain; and they are quite satisfied when they can get enough of it. The tittameg is not a large fish; the largest attain to the weight of about eight pounds.

There was another and still smaller species, which, from its colour, the voyageurs call the “poisson bleu,” or blue fish. It is the *Coregonus signifer* of ichthyologists. It is a species of grayling, and frequents sharp-running water, where it will leap at the fly like a trout. Several kinds of trout also inhabit the Great Slave Lake, and some of these attain to the enormous weight of eighty pounds! A few were caught, but none of so gigantic proportions as this. Pike were also taken in the net, and a species of burbot. This last is one of the most voracious of the finny tribe, and preys upon all others that it is able to swallow. It devours whole quantities of cray-fish, until its stomach becomes crammed to such a degree as to distort the shape of its whole body. When this kind was drawn out, it was treated very rudely by the boys—because its flesh was known to be extremely unsavoury, and none of them cared to eat it. Marengo, however, had no such scruples, and he was wont to make several hearty meals each day upon the rejected burbot.

A fish diet exclusively was not the thing; and as our party soon grew tired of it, the hunter Basil shouldered his rifle, and strode off into the woods in search of game. The others remained working upon the cabin, which was still far from being finished.

Basil kept along the edge of the lake in an easterly direction. He had not gone more than a quarter of a mile, when he came upon a dry gravelly ridge, which was thickly covered with a
109 species of pine-trees that resembled the Scotch fir. These trees were not over forty feet in height, with very thick trunks and long flexible branches. No other trees grew among them, for it is the nature of this pine—which was the “scrub” or grey pine—to monopolise the ground wherever it grows. As Basil passed on, he noticed that many of the trees were completely “barked,” particularly on the branches; and small pieces of the bark lay scattered over the ground, as though it had been peeled off and gnawed by some animal. He was walking quietly on and thinking what creature could have made such a wreck, when he came to a place where the ground was covered with fine sand or dust.

In this, to his astonishment, he observed what he supposed to be the tracks of human feet! They were not those of a man, but small tracks, resembling the footsteps of a child of three or four years of age. He was about stooping down to examine them more closely, when a voice sounded in his ears exactly like the cry of a child! This brought him suddenly to an erect attitude again, and he looked all round to discover who or what had uttered that strange cry. He could see no one—child or man—and strange, too, for he had a clear view through the tree-trunks for several hundred yards around. He was filled with curiosity, not unmixed with alarm; and, stepping forward a few paces, he was about to bend down and examine the tracks a second time, when the singular cry again startled him.

This time it was louder than before, as if he was closer to whatever had uttered it, but Basil now perceived that it proceeded from above him. The creature from which it came was certainly not upon the ground, but high up among the tops of the trees. He looked up, and there, in the fork of one of the pines, he perceived a singular and hideous-looking animal—such as he had

never before seen. It was of a brown colour, about the size of a terrier-dog, with thick shaggy hair, and clumped up in the fork of the tree—so that its head and feet were scarcely distinguishable.

Its odd appearance, as well as the peculiar cry which it had uttered, would have alarmed many a one of less courage than our young hunter, and Basil was at first, as he afterwards confessed, “slightly flurried;” but a moment's reflection told him what the animal was—one of the most innocent and inoffensive of God's creatures—the Canada porcupine. It was this, then, that had barked the scrub pines—for they are its favourite food; and it was its track—which in reality very much resembles that of a child—that Basil had seen in the sand.

The first thought of the young hunter was to throw up his rifle, and send a bullet through the ungainly animal; which, instead of making any effort to escape, remained almost motionless, uttering, at intervals, its child-like screams. Basil, however, reflected that the report of his rifle would frighten any large game that might chance to be near; and as the porcupine was hardly worth a shot, he concluded, upon reflection, it would be better to leave it alone. He knew—for he had heard Lucien say so—that he would find the porcupine at any time, were it a week, or even a month after—for these creatures remain sometimes a whole winter in the same grove. He resolved, therefore, should no other game turn up, to return for it; and, shouldering his rifle again, he continued his course through the woods.

110 As he proceeded, the timber became thinner. The scrub-pines gave place to poplar-trees, with here and there an undergrowth of willows. The trees stood far apart, and the willows grew only in clumps or “islands,” so that the view was nearly open for many hundred yards around. Basil walked on with all the silence and watchfulness of a true “still” hunter—for, among backwoodsmen, this species of hunting is so called. He ascended a low hill, and keeping a tree in front of him, looked cautiously over its crest. Before him, and stretching from the bottom of the hill, was a level tract of considerable extent.

It was bounded on one side by the edge of the lake, and on all the others by thin woods, similar to those through which the hunter had been for some time travelling. Here and there, over the plain, there stood trees, far apart from each other, and in nowise intercepting the view for a mile or more. The ground was clear of underwood, except along the immediate edge of the lake, which was fringed by a thicket of willows.

As Basil looked over the hill, he espied a small group of animals near the interior border of the willows. He had never seen animals of the same species before, but the genus was easily told. The tall antlered horns, that rose upon the head of one of them, showed that they were deer of some kind; and the immense size of the creature that bore them, together with his ungainly form, his long legs, and ass-like ears, his huge head with its overhanging lip, his short neck with its standing mane, and, above all, the broad palmation of the horns themselves, left Basil without any doubt upon his mind that the animals before him were moose-deer—the largest, and perhaps the most awkward, of all the deer kind.

The one with the antlers was the male or bull-moose. The others were the female and her two calves of the preceding year. The latter were still but half-grown, and, like the female, were without the “branching horns” that adorned the head of the old bull. They were all of a dark-brown colour—looking blackish in the distance—but the large one was darker than any of the others.

Basil's heart beat high, for he had often heard of the great moose, but now saw it for the first time. In his own country it is not found, as it is peculiarly a creature of the cold regions, and ranges no farther to the south than the northern edge of the United States territory. To the north it is met with as far as timber grows—even to the shores of the Polar Sea! Naturalists are not certain, whether or not it be the same animal with the elk of Europe. Certainly the two are but little, if anything, different; but the name “elk” has been given in America to quite another and smaller species of deer—the wapiti.

The moose takes its name from its Indian appellation, “moosŏă,” or “wood-eater;” and this name is very appropriate, as the animal lives mostly upon the leaves and twigs of trees. In fact, its structure—like that of the camelopard—is such that it finds great difficulty in reaching grass, or any other herbage, except where the latter chances to be very tall, or grows upon the declivity of a very steep hill. When it wishes to feed upon grass, the moose usually seeks it in such situations; and it may often be seen browsing up the side of a hill, with its legs spread widely on both sides of its neck. But its favourite food is found at a more convenient height, and consists of
111 the young shoots of many species of trees. It prefers those of the poplar, the birch-tree, and willows, and one kind of these last, the red willow, is its particular favourite.

The “striped” maple is also much relished by the moose—hence the name “moose-wood,” by which this tree is known among the hunters. It loves also the common water-lilies, and in summer it may be seen wading out into lakes, and plucking up their succulent leaves. It takes to the water also for other purposes—to cool its body, and rid itself of several species of gnats and mosquitoes that at this season torment it exceedingly. At such times it is more easily approached; and the Indians hunt it in their canoes, and kill it in the water, both with spears and arrows. They never find the moose, however, in large numbers—for it is a solitary animal, and only associates in pairs during one part of the year, and in families at another season—as Basil now found it.

In winter the Indians track it through the snow, following it upon snow-shoes. These give them

the advantage of skimming along the surface, while the moose plunges through the deep rift, and is therefore impeded in its flight. Notwithstanding, it will frequently escape from the hunter, after a *chase of several days' duration*! Sometimes, in deep snow, a dozen or more of these animals will be found in one place, where they have got accidentally together. The snow will be trodden down until the place appears as if enclosed by a wall. This the hunters term a “moose-pound,” and when found in such situations the moose are easily approached and surrounded—when a general *battue* takes place, in which few or none of the animals are allowed to escape.

I have said that Basil's heart beat high at the sight of the moose. He was very desirous of killing one—partly on account of the novelty of the thing, and partly because he and his companions at the camp were anxious for a change of diet. Moose-meat was the very thing; and he knew that if he could return to camp with a few pieces of this strung over his gun, he would receive a double welcome. He was well aware that the flesh of the moose was of the most savoury and delicate kind, and that the long pendulous upper lip is one of the “tit-bits” of the fur countries. Moreover, the fine hide would be an acceptable addition to their stock, as it is the best of all deer-skins for mocassins, as well as snow-shoes—articles which Basil knew would soon be needed. For these reasons he was unusually desirous of killing one of the moose.

He knew it would be difficult to approach them. He had heard that they were shyest at that very season—the beginning of winter—and indeed such is the case. No deer is so difficult to get a shot at as a moose in early winter. In summer it is not so—as then the musquitoes torment these animals to such a degree that they pay less heed to other enemies, and the hunter can more easily approach them. In winter they are always on the alert. Their sense of smell—as well as of sight and hearing—is acute to an extreme degree, and they are cunning besides. They can scent an enemy a long distance off—if the wind be in their favour—and the snapping of a twig, or the slightest rustle of the leaves, is sufficient to start them off.

In their journeyings through the snow, when they wish to rest themselves, they make a sort of *détour*, and, coming back, lie down near the track which they have already passed over. This
112 gives them an opportunity of hearing any enemy that may be following upon their trail, and also of making off in a side-direction, while the latter will be looking steadfastly ahead for them.

Basil had heard of all these tricks of the moose—for many an old moose-hunter had poured his tale into Basil's ear. He proceeded, therefore, with all due caution. He first buried his hand in his game-bag, and after a little groping brought out a downy feather which had chanced to be there. This he placed lightly upon the muzzle of his rifle, and having gently elevated the piece above his head, watched the feather. After a moment, the breeze carried it off, and Basil noted the direction it took. This is called, in hunter phrase, “tossing the feather,” and gave Basil the exact direction of the wind—an important knowledge in the present case.

To Basil's gratification he saw that it was blowing down the lake, and nearly towards himself. He was not exactly to leeward of the moose; but, what was better still, the willows that fringed the lake were, for he could see them bending from the deer, as the breeze blew freshly. He knew he could easily get among the willows; and as they were not quite leafless, and, moreover, were interspersed with tall reed grass, they formed a tolerable cover under which he might make his approach.

Without losing time, then, he made for the willows, and placing them between himself and the game, commenced “approaching” along the shore of the lake.

He had a full half-hour's creeping—at one time upon his hands and knees—at another crawling flat upon his breast like a gigantic lizard, and now and then, at favourable spots, walking in a bent attitude. A full half-hour was he, and much pain and patience did it cost him, before getting within shot. But Basil was a hunter, and knew both how to endure the pain and practise the patience—virtues that, in hunting as well as in many other occupations usually meet with their reward. And Basil was likely to meet with his, for on parting the leaves, and looking cautiously through, he saw that he had arrived at the right spot. Within fifty yards of him he saw the high shoulders of the bull-moose and his great flat antlers towering over the tops of the willows, among the leaves of which the snout of the animal was buried. He also caught a glimpse of parts of the other three beyond; but he thought only of the bull, and it was upon him that he kept his eyes fixed. Basil did not think of the quality of the meat, else he would have selected either the cow or one of the calves. Had it been buffaloes he would certainly have done so; but as he had never killed a moose, he was determined to slay the leader of the herd.

Indeed, had he wished to shoot one of the others, it might not have been so easy, as they were farther off, and he could only see the tops of their shoulders over the willows. Neither did the bull offer a fair mark. He stood face to face with the hunter, and Basil fancied that a shot on the frontal bone might not kill him. He knew it would not kill a buffalo. There was only one other part at which he could aim—the fore-shoulder; and after waiting some moments for the animal to give him a fairer chance he took aim at this and fired. He heard a loud cracking of hoofs, as the cow and calves shambled off over the plain, but he saw that the bull was not with them. He was down behind the willows. No doubt he was dead.

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CHAPTER XXV.

What was a rare thing for Basil to do, he rushed forward without reloading his gun. A few springs brought him into the open ground, and in presence of the game. To his astonishment, the bull was not dead, nor down neither, but only upon his knees—of course wounded. Basil saw the “crease” of the bullet along the neck of the animal as he drew near. It was only by a quick glance that he saw this, for as soon as the bull saw *him* he rose to his full height—his eyes flashing like a tiger's—and settling his antlers in a forward position, sprang upon the hunter! Basil leaped aside to avoid the encounter; and in the first rush was successful, but the animal turned suddenly, and, coming up a second time, raised his fore-feet high in the air, and struck forward with his long-pointed hoofs.

Basil attempted to defend himself with his rifle, but the piece was struck out of his hand in an instant. Once more avoiding the forward rush of the infuriated beast, the young hunter looked around for some object to save him. A tree fell under his eye, and he ran towards it with all his speed. The moose followed close upon his heels, and he had just time to reach the tree and get around its trunk, when the animal brushed past, tearing the bark with his sharp antlers. Basil now slipped round the trunk, and when the moose again turned himself the two were on opposite sides of the tree! The beast, however, rushed up, and struck the tree furiously first with his brow antlers, and then with his hoofs, uttering loud snorts, and at intervals a shrill whistling sound that was terrible to hear.

The disappointment which the enraged animal felt, at seeing his enemy thus escape him, seemed to have added to his rage; and he now vented his spite upon the tree, until the trunk, to the height of six feet, was completely stripped of its bark. While this was going on, Basil remained behind the tree, “dodging” round as the moose manœuvred, and taking care always to have the animal on the opposite side. To have got into a safer situation he would have climbed the tree; but it happened to be a poplar, without a branch for many feet from the ground, and of too great a girth to be “embraced.” He could do nothing, therefore, but remain upon the ground, and keep the tree-trunk between himself and the bull.

For nearly an hour this lasted, the moose now remaining at rest for a few minutes, and then making fresh onsets that seemed to abate nothing in their fury. His rage appeared to be implacable, and his vengeance as tenacious as that of a tiger or any other beast of prey. The wound which the hunter had given him was no doubt painful, and kept his resentment from cooling. Unfortunately, it was not a mortal wound, as Basil had every opportunity of seeing. The bullet had hit the fore-shoulder; but, after tearing along the skin, had glanced off without injuring the bone. It had only enraged the bull, without crippling him in the least degree.

Basil began to dread the result. He was becoming faint with fatigue as well as hunger. When would he be relieved? When would the fierce brute feel inclined to leave him? These were questions which the hunter put to himself repeatedly, without being able to divine an answer. He
114 had heard of hunters being killed by wounded moose. He had heard that these creatures will remain for days watching a person whom they may have “treed.” He could not stand it for days. He would drop down with fatigue, and then the bull would gore and trample him at pleasure. Would they be able to trace him from the camp? They would not think of that before nightfall. They would not think of him as “lost” before that time; and then they could not follow his trail in the darkness, nor even in the light—for the ground was hard as a rock, and he had made no footmarks. Marengo might trace him. The dog had been left at the camp, as Basil preferred “still-hunting” without him. But in his present situation the hunter's apprehensions were stronger than his hopes. Even Marengo might be baffled in lifting the scent.

The trail was an exceedingly devious one, for Basil had meandered round the sides of the hill in search of game. Deer or other animals might have since crossed it, which might mislead the hound. It would be cold at night, and much colder next morning. There were many chances that no relief might reach him from the camp. Impressed with this conviction, Basil began to feel serious alarm. Not despair, however—he was not the boy to despair. His mind only grew more alive to the necessity for action. He looked around to discover some means of escape. His gun lay not a hundred yards off. Could he only get hold of the piece, and return safely to the tree again, he could there load it and put an end to the scene at once. But to reach the gun was impossible. The moose would bound after and overtake him to a certainty. The idea of getting the gun was abandoned.

In the opposite direction to that in which the gun lay, Basil perceived that there were other trees. The nearest was but a dozen yards from him; and others, again, grew at about the same distance from that one, and from each other. Basil now conceived the idea of escaping to the nearest, and from that to the next, and by this means getting back into the thick forest. Once there, he believed that he would be the better able to effect his escape, and perhaps reach the camp by dodging from tree to tree. He could beat the moose for a dozen yards—getting a little the start of him—and this he hoped to be able to do. Should he fail in his short race, however—should his foot slip—the alternative was fearful. *It was no other than death!*

He knew that, but it did not change his resolution to make the attempt. He only waited for the animal to work round between him and the tree towards which he intended to run. You will wonder that he did not prefer to have the moose on the other side. But he did not, for this reason—had the bull been there, he could have sprung after him at the first start; whereas, when

heading the other way, Basil believed he could brush close past, and gain an advantage, as the unwieldy brute, taken by surprise, would require some time in turning himself to give chase.

The opportunity at length arrived; and, nerving himself for the race, the hunter sprang past the moose, brushing the very tips of its antlers. He ran without either stopping or even looking back, until he had reached the tree, and sheltered himself behind its trunk. The moose had followed, and arrived but the moment after, snorting and whistling furiously. Enraged at the *ruse*, it
115 attacked this tree, as it had the other, with hoof and horns; and Basil nimbly evaded both by keeping on the opposite side, as before.

In a few minutes he prepared himself for a second rush, and once more started. A third tree was reached in safety—and then a fourth, and a fifth, and many others, in a similar manner—the moose all the while following in hot pursuit. Basil had begun to hope that in this way he would get off, when, to his chagrin, he saw that an open space still intervened between him and the thick woods, upon which there were only a few trees, and those so small that not one of them would have sheltered him. This tract was full two hundred yards in width, and extended all along the edge of the thick forest. He dared not cross it. The moose would overtake him before he could get half the way; and he was obliged to give up the idea of making the attempt.

As he stood behind the last tree he had reached, he saw that it branched, and the lowest branches grew but a little above his head. He could easily climb it, and at once resolved to do so. He would there be safe for the time, and could at least rest himself, for he was now weak with fatigue. He therefore stretched up his hands, and, laying hold of a branch, swung himself up into the tree. Then, climbing up a little higher, he sat down on one of the forks.

The moose appeared as furious as ever; and ran round the tree, now striking it with his horns, and then rearing upon his hind-legs, and pouncing against the trunk with his hoofs. At times his snout was so close to Basil, that the latter could almost touch it; and he had even drawn his hunting-knife, and reached down with the intent of giving the creature a stab.

This last action led to a train of thought, and Basil seemed suddenly to adopt some new resolution. Leaving the fork where he had perched himself, he climbed higher up the tree; and, selecting one of the longest and straightest branches, commenced cutting it off close to the trunk. This was soon effected; and then, drawing it along his knee, he trimmed off all the twigs and tops until the branch became a straight pole, like a spear-handle. Along one end of this he laid the handle of his knife; and with thongs, which he had already cut out of the strap of his bullet-pouch, he spliced the knife and pole together. This gave him a formidable weapon—for the knife was a “bowie,” and had a long blade, with a point like a rapier. He was not slow in using it.

Descending again to the lowermost limbs, he commenced making demonstrations, in order to bring the moose within reach. This he very soon succeeded in doing; and the animal ran forward and reared up against the tree. Before it could get upon its four legs again, Basil had thrust it in the neck, giving full force to the blow. The blood rushed forth in a thick stream, as the jugular vein had been cut by the keen blade; and the huge brute was seen to totter in its steps, and then fall with a dull heavy sound to the earth. In a few moments the hunter had the satisfaction of perceiving that it was quite dead.

Basil now dropped out of the tree, and walking back to where his rifle lay, took up the piece and carefully reloaded it. He then returned to the moose, and opening the great jaws of the animal, gagged them with a stick. He next unspliced his knife, took off the gristly lips, and cut out
116 the tongue. These he placed in his game-bag, and shouldering his rifle, was about to depart; when some new idea caused him to halt, put down his gun, and again unsheath his knife. Once more approaching the carcass, he made an incision near the kidneys; and having inserted his hand, drew forth what appeared to be a part of the intestines. It was the bladder. He then looked around as if in search of something. Presently his eye rested upon some tall reed-grass that was growing near. This was just what he wanted, and, pulling up one of the stems, he cut and fashioned it into a pipe.

BASIL AND THE MOOSE BULL

117 With this the moose-bladder was blown out to its full dimensions, and tied at the neck by a piece of thong. The other end of the thong was fastened to one of the branches of the tree above, so that the bladder dangled within a few feet of the carcass of the moose, dancing about with the lightest breath of wind. All these precautions Basil had taken to keep the wolves from devouring the moose—for it was his intention to return and butcher it, as soon as he could get help. When he had hung the bladder to his liking, he put up his knife again; and, once more shouldering his rifle, walked off.

On reaching the camp—which he did shortly after—the tongue of the moose was broiled without delay, and, after making a delicious meal of it, the whole party went off for the remainder of the meat. They found it all quite safe; although, had it not been for the bladder, not much of it would have been there—as no less than a dozen great gaunt wolves were seen lurking about, and these would have eaten it up in the shortest possible time. The bladder, however, had kept them off; for, strange to say, these creatures, who are as cunning as foxes, and can hardly be trapped, can yet be deceived and frightened by such a simple thing as a bladder dangling from a branch.

The moose proved to be one of the largest of his kind. His height was quite equal to that of a horse; and his horns, flattened out to the breadth of shovels, weighed over sixty pounds. His carcass was not less than fifteen hundred pounds weight; and our voyageurs had to make two journeys to convey the meat to their camp. On the last journey, François brought the porcupine as well—having found it on the very same tree where Basil had left it!

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CHAPTER XXVI.

LIFE IN A LOG-HUT.

The log-hut was finished on the 1st of September, and not a day too soon; for on that very day the winter set in with full severity. A heavy fall of snow came down in the night; and next morning, when our voyageurs looked abroad, the ground was covered to the depth of a foot, or more; and the ice upon the lake was also white. Walking through the great wreaths now became very difficult; and the next thing to be done was the making of “snow-shoes.”

Snow-shoes are an invention of the Indians; and, in the winter of the Arctic regions of America, are an article almost as indispensable as clothing itself. Without them, travelling afoot would be impossible. In these countries, as already stated, the snow often covers the ground to the depth of many feet; and remains without any considerable diminution for six, and, in some years, eight or nine months. At times, it is frozen hard enough on the surface to bear a man without the snow-shoes; but oftener on account of thaws and fresh falls, it becomes quite soft, and at such times travelling over it is both difficult and dangerous. To avoid both the difficulty and the danger, the Indians make use of this very singular sort of foot-wear—called “snow-shoes” by the English, and “raquets” by the Canadian voyageurs.

They are used by all the Indian tribes of the Hudson's Bay territory; and were it not for them these people would be confined to one place for months together, and could not follow the deer
118 or other game. As almost all savages are improvident, and none more so than the North American Indians, were they prevented for a season from going out to hunt, whole tribes would starve. Indeed, many individuals of them perish with hunger as it is; and the life of all these Indians is nothing more than one continued struggle for food enough to sustain them. In summer they are often in the midst of plenty; slaughtering deer and buffalo by hundreds, taking out only the tongues, and recklessly leaving the flesh to the wolves! In winter the very same Indians may be seen without a pound of meat in their encampment—the lives of themselves and their families depending upon the success of a single day's hunt!

But let us return to the snow-shoes. Let us see what they are, and learn how they are made.

Any boy who has snared sparrows in snow-time, has, no doubt, done so by tying his snares upon a hoop netted across with twine or other small cord. Now, if he will conceive his hoop bent into an oblong shape—something like what the figure of a boat turned on its mouth would make in snow—and if he will also fancy the netting to consist of thongs of twisted deer-hide woven somewhat closely together, he will get a very good idea of an Indian snow-shoe. It is usually from three to four feet long, by about a foot wide at the middle part, from which it tapers gently to a point, both at the heel and toe.

The frame, as I have said, is like the hoop of a boy's bird-snare. It is made of light, tough wood, and, of course, carefully bent and polished with the knife. The slender branches of the “scrub-pine” are esteemed excellent for this purpose, as their wood is light, flexible and tough in its fibres. This is also a favourite tree, where it grows, to make tent-poles, canoe-timbers, and other implements required by the Indians; and these people use so much of it for their arrows, that it has received from the Canadian voyageurs the name of *bois de flêche* (arrow-wood).

Well, then, the frame of the snow-shoes being bent to its proper shape, two transverse bars are placed across near the middle, and several inches from each other. They are for the foot to rest upon, as well as to give strength to the whole structure. These being made fast, the netting is woven on, and extends over the whole frame, with the exception of a little space in front of the bars where the ball of the foot is to rest. This space is left free of netting, in order to allow play to the toes while walking. The mesh-work is made of thongs usually cut from the parchment-skin of a deer, and twisted. Sometimes twisted intestines are used, and the netting exactly resembles that seen in “racquets” for ball play.

The snow-shoe, when finished, is simply fastened upon the foot by means of straps or thongs; and a pair of them thus placed, will present a surface to the snow of nearly six square feet—more, if required, by making them larger. But this is enough to sustain the heaviest man upon the softest snow, and an Indian thus “shod” will skim over the surface like a skater.

The shoes used by all tribes of Indians are not alike in shape. There are fashions and fancies in this respect. Some are made—as among the Chippewa Indians—with one side of the frame nearly
119 straight; and these, of course, will not do for either foot, but are “rights and lefts.” Generally, however, the shape is such that the snow-shoe will fit either foot.

The snow-shoes having now become a necessary thing, our young voyageurs set about making a complete set for the whole party—that is, no less than four pairs. Norman was the “shoemaker,” and Norman knew how. He could splice the frames, and work in the netting, equal to an Indian squaw. Of course all the others assisted him. Lucien cut the moose-skin into fine regular strips; Basil waded off through the snow, and procured the frames from the wood of the scrub-pine trees where he had encountered the porcupine; and then he and François trimmed them with their knives, and sweated them in the hot ashes until they became dry, and ready for the hands of the “shoemaker.”

This work occupied them several days, and then each had a pair of shoes fitted to his size and weight.

The next consideration was, to lay in a stock of meat. The moose had furnished them with enough for present use, but that would not last long, as there was no bread nor anything else to eat with it. Persons in their situation require a great deal of meat to sustain them, much more than those who live in great cities, who eat a variety of substances, and drink many kinds of drinks. The healthy voyageur is rarely without a keen appetite; and meat by itself is a food that speedily digests, and makes way for a fresh meal; so that the ration usually allowed to the *employés* of the fur companies would appear large enough to supply the table of several families. For instance, in some parts of the Hudson's Bay territory, the voyageur is allowed eight pounds of buffalo-meat *per diem*! And yet it is all eaten by him, and sometimes deemed barely sufficient.

A single deer, therefore, or even a buffalo, lasts a party of voyageurs for a very short time, since they have no other substance, such as bread or vegetables, to help it out. It was necessary, then, that our travellers should use all their diligence in laying up a stock of dried meat, before the winter became too cold for them to hunt. There was another consideration—their clothing. They all had clothing sufficient for such weather as they had yet experienced; but that would never do for the winter of the Great Slave Lake, and they knew it. Many deer must be killed, and many hides dressed, before they could make a full set of clothing for all, as well as a set of deer-skin blankets, which would be much needed.

As soon as the snow-shoes were finished, therefore, Basil and Norman went out each day upon

long hunting expeditions, from which they rarely returned before nightfall. Sometimes they brought with them a deer, of the caribou or reindeer species, and the “woodland” variety, which were in plenty at this place. They only carried to camp the best parts with the skin, as the flesh of the woodland caribou is not much esteemed. It is larger than the other kind—the “Barren Ground caribou,” weighing about one hundred and fifty pounds; but both its venison and hide are of inferior quality to those of the latter species. Sometimes our hunters killed smaller game; and on several occasions they returned without having emptied their guns at all.

But there was one day that made up for several—one grand day when they were extremely successful, and on which they killed a whole herd of moose, consisting of five individuals—the old
120 bull, a spike buck—that is, a young buck, whose horns had not yet got antlers upon them—the cow, and two calves. These they had tracked and followed for a long distance, and had succeeded, at length, in running them into a valley where the snow was exceedingly deep, and where the moose became entangled. There had been a shower of rain the day before that had melted the surface of the snow; and this had again frozen into an icy crust, upon which the deer lacerated their ankles at every plunge, leaving a track of blood behind them as they ran.

Under these circumstances they were easily trailed, and Basil and Norman, skimming along upon their snow-shoes, soon came up with them, and shot first one and then another, until the whole herd were stretched in the valley. They then butchered them, and hung the hides and quarters upon high branches, so as to secure them from wolves and wolverenes. When the job was finished, the whole place looked like a great slaughter-yard! Next day a rude sledge was constructed; and the voyageurs, returning in full force, transported the meat to camp. Huge fires were kindled outside the hut, and several days were spent in cutting up and drying the flesh. Had our travellers been certain that the frost would have continued all winter, this would not have been necessary—since the meat was already frozen as hard as a brick.

But they knew that a sudden thaw would spoil it; and, as there was plenty of good firewood on the spot, they were not going to run the risk of losing it in that way.

They had now enough provision to last them for months; and hunting became no longer necessary, except to obtain fresh meat—which was, of course, preferable to the dry stock. Hunting, also, gave them exercise and amusement—both of which were necessary to their health; for to remain idle and inactive in a situation such as that in which they were placed is the worst possible plan, and is sure to engender both sickness and *ennui*. Indeed, the last grew upon them, notwithstanding all the pains they took to prevent it. There were days on which the cold was so extreme, that they could not put their noses out of the door without the danger of having them frost-bitten—although each had now a complete suit of deer-skin clothing, made by Lucien, the “tailor” of the party.

Upon such days they were fain to remain shut up in their hut; and, seated around their huge log-fire, they passed the time in cleaning their guns, mending their nets, stitching their clothes, and such-like employments. These days were far from being their dullest; for, what with the varied and scientific knowledge of Lucien, which he took pleasure in imparting to his companions —what with the practical experience of Norman amid scenes of Arctic life, and the many “voyageur tales” he could tell—what with François merry jokes and *bon mots*—and what with Basil's *talent for listening*—not the least important element in a good *conversazione*,—our *quartette* of young voyageurs found their indoor days anything but dull.

This was all well enough for a while. For a month or two they bore their odd kind of life cheerfully enough; but the prospect of nearly six months more of it began to appal them, when they reflected upon it; and they soon found themselves longing for a change. Hunting adventures, that at other times would have interested them, now occurred without creating any excitement;
121 and the whole routine of their employments seemed monotonous. Nearly all of them were boys of an active character of mind; and most of them were old enough to reason about the value of time. Their idea of such a long isolation from civilized life, and, above all, the being debarred from following any useful pursuit, began to impress some of them forcibly. Others, as François, could not be contented for a very great stretch of time with any sort of life; so that all of them began to sigh for a change.

One day, while conversing upon this theme, a bold proposal was made by Basil. It was, that they should “strike camp,” and continue their journey. This proposal took the others by surprise, but they were all just in the frame of mind to entertain and discuss it; and a long consultation was held upon the point. François chimed in with the proposal at once; while Lucien, more cautious, did not exactly oppose, but rather offered the reasons that were against it, and pointed out the perils of the undertaking. Norman, of course, was appealed to—all of them looking to him as one whose advice, upon that question at least, was more valuable than their own.

Norman admitted the dangers pointed out by Lucien, but believed that they might overcome them by a proper caution. On the whole, Norman approved of the plan, and it was at length adopted. Perhaps Norman's habitual prudence was to some extent influenced on this occasion by the very natural desire he had of returning to what he considered his home. He had now been absent nearly two years, and was desirous of once more seeing his father and his old companions at the Fort.

There was another feeling that influenced nearly all of them: that was *ambition*. They knew that to make such a journey would be something of a feat, and they wished to have the credit of performing it. To minds like that of Basil, even the danger had something attractive in it. It was

resolved then to break up the encampment, and continue their journey.

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CHAPTER XXVII.

TRAVELLING ON SNOW-SHOES.

Once their resolution was taken, they lost but little time in making preparations to carry it out. Most of the articles required for such a journey were already in their hands. They had the proper dresses—snow-shoes, skin-blankets, and gloves. They had prepared for themselves sets of “snow spectacles.” These were made out of red cedar-wood. Each pair consisted of two small thin pieces, that covered the eyes, joined together and fastened on by thongs of buckskin. In each piece an oblong slit served for the eye-hole, through which the eye looked without being dazzled by the snow. Without this, or some like contrivance, travelling in the Arctic regions is painful to the eyes, and the traveller often loses his sight. Indeed, one of the most common infirmities of both the Indians and Esquimaux of these parts is blindness or soreness of the eyes, caused by the reflexion of the sunbeams from the crystals of the frozen snow. Norman was aware of this, and had made the spectacles to guard against this peril.

122 Out of their spare skins they had made a small tent. This was to be carried along by Marengo in a light sledge, which they had long since constructed, and taught the dog to draw. Nothing else remained but to pack their provisions in the smallest bulk possible, and this was done, according to the custom of the country, by making “pemmican.” The dry meat was first pounded until it became a powder; it was then put into small skin bags, made for the purpose, and the hot melted fat was poured in and well mixed with it. This soon froze hard, and the mixture—that resembled “potted meat,”—was now ready for use, and would keep for an indefinite time without the least danger of spoiling. Buffalo-beef, moose-meat, or venison of any sort, thus prepared, is called “*pemmican*,” and is more portable in this shape than any other. Besides no further cooking is required—an important consideration upon those vast prairie deserts, where firewood is seldom to be procured without the trouble of carrying it a great distance.

Norman, who was the maker of the pemmican, had produced a superior article upon this occasion. Besides the pounded meat and fat, he had mixed another ingredient with it, which rendered it a most delicious food. This third ingredient was a small purple-coloured berry—of which we have already spoken—not unlike the whortleberry, but sweeter and of a higher flavour. It grows through most of the Northern regions of America; and in some places, as upon the Red River and the Elk, the bushes that produce it are seen in great plenty.

Previous to the setting in of winter, our voyageurs had collected a large bagful upon the banks of the Elk, which they had dried and stored away—expecting to stand in need of them for this very purpose. They now came into use, and enabled Norman to make his pemmican of the very choicest quality. Five bags of it were put up, each weighing over thirty pounds. One of these was to be drawn upon the sledge, along with the tent, the axe, and a few other articles. The rest were to be carried by the voyageurs themselves—each shouldering one, which, along with their guns and accoutrements, would be load enough.

These arrangements being at length complete, the party bid adieu to their log-hut—gave a parting look to their little canoe, which still rested by the door—and then, shouldering their guns and bags of pemmican, set out over the frozen surface of the snow.

Of course before starting they had decided upon the route they were to take. This decision, however, had not been arrived at until after much discussion. Lucien advised that they should follow the shore of the lake until they should reach the Mackenzie River—which of course was now frozen up. Its channel, he argued, would then guide them; and, in case their provisions should run short, they would be more likely to find game upon its banks than elsewhere, as these were wooded almost to the sea—in consequence of its head-waters rising in southern latitudes, and carrying with them a warmer climate.

There was plausibility in Lucien's argument, combined with much prudence. Norman, however, advised a contrary course. He said that they would have to make a considerable journey westward before reaching the place where the Mackenzie River flows out of the lake; and, moreover, he knew that the river itself was very crooked—in some places winding about in great
123 curves, whose ends come near meeting each other. Should they keep the course of the river, Norman believed it would almost double their journey. A much shorter route, he said, would be obtained by striking across the country in a north-westerly direction, so as to reach the Mackenzie near where another great stream—the River of the Mountains—empties into it from the west. This would certainly be a more direct route, and they would avoid the windings of the river channel.

Norman's reasoning prevailed. Basil and François readily agreed to his plan, and Lucien at length also gave his assent, but with some reluctance. Norman knew nothing whatever of the route he was advising them to take. His former journeys up and down the Mackenzie had been made in summer, and of course he had travelled by canoe, in company with the traders and

voyageurs. He only knew that to strike across the country would be the shorter way. But “the shortest way is not always the nearest,” says the proverb; and although Lucien remembered this prudent maxim, the others did not give it a thought. Before the end of their journey they received a practical lesson of its wisdom—a lesson they were not likely to forget. But they knew not what was before them, and they started off in high spirits.

Their first three or four days' journeys were without any event worth being chronicled. They travelled full twenty miles each day. The Southerners had become quite skilful in the management of their snow-shoes, and they skimmed along upon the icy crust at the rate of three or four miles an hour.

Marengo and his sledge gave them very little trouble. There was full sixty pounds weight upon it; but to the huge dog this was a mere bagatelle, and he pulled it after him without any great strain. His harness was neatly made of moose-skin, and consisted of a collar with a back strap and traces—the traces meeting behind, where they were attached to the head of the sledge. No head-gear was necessary, as Marengo needed not to be either led or driven. The sledge consisted of two or three light planks of smooth wood, laid alongside each other, and held together by transverse bands. In front it turned up with a circular sweep, so as not to “plough” the snow; and at the top of this curved part the traces were adjusted. The load was, of course, carefully packed and tied, so that the overturning of the vehicle did no damage whatever, and it could be easily righted again. Marengo required no one to guide him, but followed quietly in the tracks of the snow-shoes, and thus avoided the trees, rocks, and other inequalities. If a rabbit or other creature started up, Marengo knew better than to go galloping after it; he felt that he had a more important duty to perform than to throw away his time upon rabbit-hunting.

Each night a spot was chosen for the camp by the side of some lake or stream, where wood could be obtained for their fire. Water was got by breaking a hole in the ice, and the little tent was always set up in a sheltered situation.

Upon the fifth day after leaving the log-hut the woods began to grown thinner and more straggling; and towards night of the same day they found themselves travelling through a country, where the timber only grew here and there in small clumps, and the individual trees
124 were small and stunted. Next day still less timber was seen upon their route; and when camping-time came, they were obliged to halt at a spot where nothing but willows could be procured for their fire. They had, in fact, arrived upon the edge of that vast wilderness, the Barren Grounds, which stretches in all its wild desolation along the Northern half of the American continent from the Great Slave Lake even to the shores of the Arctic Sea on the north, and to those of Hudson's Bay on the east.

This territory bears an appropriate name, for, perhaps, upon the whole surface of the earth there is no tract more barren or desolate—not even the Saära of Africa. Both are deserts of immense extent, equally difficult to cross, and equally dangerous to the traveller. On both the traveller often perishes, but from different causes. On the Saära it is *thirst* that kills; upon the Barren Grounds *hunger* is more frequently the destroyer. In the latter there is but little to be feared on the score of water. That exists in great plenty; or where it is not found, snow supplies its place. But there is water everywhere. Hill succeeds hill, bleak, rocky, and bare. Everywhere granite, gneiss, or other primitive rocks, show themselves.

No vegetation covers the steep declivities of the hills, except the moss and lichen upon the rocks, a few willows upon the banks of streams, the dwarf birch-tree or the scrub-pines, rising only to the height of a few inches, and often straggling over the earth like vines. Every hill has its valley, and every valley its lake—dark, and deep, and silent—in winter scarce to be distinguished under the snow-covered ice. The prospect in every direction exhibits a surface of rocks, or bleak hills, half covered with snow. The traveller looks around and sees no life. He listens and hears no sound. The world appears dead and wrapped in its cold winding-sheet!

Amidst just such scenes did our voyageurs find themselves on the seventh day after parting from the lake. They had heard of the Barren Grounds—had heard many fearful stories of the sufferings of travellers who had attempted to cross them; but the description had fallen far short of the actual reality. None of them could believe in the difficulties to be encountered, and the desolateness of the scene they were to witness, until now that they found themselves in its midst; and, as they proceeded on their journey, getting farther and farther from the wooded region, their apprehensions, already aroused by the wild aspect of the country, grew stronger and stronger. They began to entertain serious fears, for they knew not how far the barren tract extended along their route.

On calculation they found they had provisions enough to last them for a month. That in some measure restored their confidence; but even then, they could not help giving way to serious reflections. Should they get lost or retarded in their course by mountains, or other obstacles, it might take them longer than a month to reach some place where game was to be met with. Each day, as they advanced, they found the country more hilly and difficult. Precipices often bounded the valleys, lying directly across their track; and as these could not be scaled, it was necessary to make long *détours* to pass them, so that some days they actually advanced less than five miles upon their journey.

Notwithstanding these impediments, they might still have got over the Barren Grounds without further suffering than the fatigue and necessary exposure to cold; but at this time an incident
125 occurred, that not only frustrated all their calculations, but placed them in imminent danger of

perishing.

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CHAPTER XXVIII

THE BARREN GROUNDS

The Barren Grounds are not entirely destitute of animal life. Even in winter—when they are almost covered with snow, and you would suppose that no living creature could procure subsistence upon them—even then they have their denizens; and, strange to say, there are many animals that choose them for their home. There is no part of the earth's surface so sterile but that some animated being can find a living upon it, and such a being Nature adapts to its peculiar situation. For instance, there are animals that prefer the very desert itself, and would not thrive were you to place them in a country of mild climate and fertile soil. In our own species this peculiarity is also found—as the Esquimaux would not be happy were you to transplant him from his icy hut amid the snows of the Arctic regions, and give him a palace under the genial skies of Italy.

Among other creatures that remain all winter upon the Barren Grounds are the wolves. How they exist there is almost a question of the naturalists. It is true they prey upon other animals found at times in the same district; but wolves have been met with where not the slightest traces of other living creatures could be seen!

There is no animal more generally distributed over the earth's surface than the wolf. He exists in nearly every country, and most likely has at one time existed in all. In America there are wolves in its three zones. They are met with from Cape Horn to the farthest point northward that man has reached. They are common in the tropical forests of Mexico and South America. They range over the great prairies of the temperate zones of both divisions of the continent, and in the colder regions of the Hudson's Bay territory they are among the best known of wild animals. They frequent the mountains, they gallop over the plains, they skulk through the valleys, they dwell everywhere—everywhere the wolf seems equally at home.

In North America two very different kinds are known. One is the “prairie” or “barking” wolf, which we have already met with and described. The other species is the “common” or “large” wolf; but it is not decided among naturalists that there are not several distinct species of the latter. At all events, there are several *varieties* of it—distinguished from each other in size, colour, and even to some extent in form. The habits of all, however, appear to be similar, and it is a question, whether any of these varieties be *permanent* or only *accidental*. Some of them, it is well known, are accidental—as wolves differing in colour have been found in the same litter—but late explorers, of the countries around and beyond the Rocky Mountains, have discovered one or two kinds that appear to be specifically distinct from the common wolf of America—one of them, the “dusky wolf,” being much larger.

This last is said to resemble the wolf of Europe more than the other American wolves do—for there is a considerable difference between the wolves of the two continents. Those of the
126 Northern regions of America have shorter ears, a broader snout and forehead, and are of a stouter make, than the European wolves. Their fur, too, is finer, denser, and longer; their tails more bushy and fox-like; and their feet broader. The European wolf, on the contrary, is characterized by a gaunt appearance, a pointed snout, long jaws, high ears, long legs, and feet very narrow. It is possible, nothwithstanding these points of difference, that both may be of the same species, the difference arising from a want of similitude in the circumstances by which they are surrounded.

For instance, the dense wool of the Hudson's Bay wolf may be accounted for by the fact of its colder habitat, and its broader feet may be the result of its having to run much upon the surface of the snow. The writer of this little book believes that this peculiar adaptation of Nature—which may be observed in all her kingdoms—may explain the difference that exists between the wolves of the Northern parts of America and those of the South of Europe. He believes, moreover, that those of the Southern parts of the American continent approximate more nearly to the Pyrenean wolves, as he has seen in the tropical forest of Mexico some that possessed all that “gaunt” form and “sneaking” aspect that characterize the latter.

It would be interesting to inquire whether the wolves of Siberia and Lapland, inhabitating a similar climate to that of the Northern parts of America, do not possess the same peculiarities as the North American kind—a point which naturalists have not yet considered, and which you, my boy reader, may some day find both amusement and instruction in determining for yourself.

With regard to colour the wolves of both continents exhibit many varieties. In North America there are more than half-a-dozen colours of them, all receiving different names. There is the “grey wolf,” the “white,” the “brown,” the “dusky,” the “pied,” and the “black.” These trivial names will give a good enough idea of the colours of each kind, but there are even varieties in their markings. “Yellow” wolves, too, have been seen, and “red” ones, and some of a “cream colour.” Of all these the grey wolf is the most common, and is *par excellence the wolf*; but there

are districts in which individuals of other colours predominate. Wolves purely black are plenty in many parts, and white wolves are often seen in large packs.

Even those of the same colour differ in size, and that to a considerable extent. And what is also strange, large wolves will be found in one district of country, while much smaller ones *of the same colour and species* inhabit another. The largest in size of American wolves are about six feet in length, the tail included; and about three feet in height, measuring to the tips of the standing fur. The tail is usually about one-third of the whole length.

The habits of the American wolf are pretty much like those of his European cousin. He is a beast of prey, devouring all the smaller animals he can lay hold of. He pursues and overtakes the deer, and often runs down the fox and makes a meal of it. He will kill and eat Indian dogs, although these are so near his own species that the one is often taken for the other. But this is not all, for he will even eat his own kind, on a pinch. He is as cunning as the fox himself, and as cowardly; but at times, when impelled by hunger, he becomes bolder, and has been known to attack man. Instances of this kind, however, are rare.

127 The American wolves burrow, and, like the fox, have several entrances to their holes. A litter of young wolves numbers five puppies, but as many as eight are often produced at one birth.

During their journey through the Barren Grounds our voyageurs had frequently observed wolves. They were mostly grey ones, and of great size, for they were travelling through a district where the very largest kind is found. At times they saw a party of five or six together; and these appeared to be following upon their trail—as each night, when they came barking about the camp, our travellers recognised some of them as having been seen before. They made no attempt to shoot any of them—partly because they did not want either their skins or flesh, and partly because their ammunition had been reduced to a small quantity, and they did not wish to spend it unnecessarily.

The wolves, therefore, were allowed to approach very near the camp, and howl as much as they liked—which they usually did throughout the livelong night. What they found to allure them after our travellers, the latter could not make out; as they had not shot an animal of any kind since leaving the lake, and scarcely a scrap of anything was ever left behind them. Perhaps the wolves were *living upon hope*.

One evening our travellers had made their camp on the side of a ridge—which they had just crossed—and under the shelter of some rough rocks. There was no wood in the neighbourhood wherewith to make a fire; but they had scraped the snow from the place over which their tent was pitched, and under it their skins were spread upon the ground. As the tent was a very small one, Marengo's sledge, with the utensils and pemmican bags, was always left outside close by the opening. Marengo himself slept there, and that was considered sufficient to secure all these things from wolves, or any other creatures that might be prowling about.

On the evening in question, the sledge was in its usual place—the dog having been taken from it—and as our voyageurs had not yet had their supper, the pemmican bags were lying loosely about, one or two of them being open. There was a small rivulet at the foot of the ridge—some two hundred paces distant—and Basil and François had gone down to it to get water. One of them took the axe to break the ice with, while the other carried a vessel. On arriving near the bank of the rivulet, the attention of the boys was attracted to a singular appearance upon the snow. A fresh shower had fallen that morning, and the surface was still soft, and very smooth. Upon this they observed double lines of little dots, running in different directions, which, upon close inspection, appeared to be the tracks of some animal.

At first, Basil and François could hardly believe them to be such, the tracks were so very small. They had never seen so small ones before—those of a mouse being quite double the size. But when they looked more closely at them, the boys could distinguish the marks of five little toes with claws upon them, which left no doubt upon their minds that some living creature, and that a very diminutive one, must have passed over the spot. Indeed, had the snow not been both fine-grained and soft, the feet of such a creature could not have made any impression upon it.

The boys stopped and looked around, thinking they might see the animal itself. There was a
128 wide circle of snow around them, and its surface was smooth and level; but not a speck upon it betrayed the presence of any creature.

“Perhaps it was a bird,” said François, “and has taken flight.”

“I think not,” rejoined Basil. “They are not the tracks of a bird. It is some animal that has gone under the snow, I fancy.”

“But I see no hole,” said François, “where even a beetle could have gone down. Let us look for one.”

At François' suggestion, they walked on following one of the dotted lines. Presently they came to a place, where a stalk of long grass stood up through the snow—its seedless panicle just appearing above the surface. Round this stalk a little hole had been formed—partly by the melting of the snow, and partly by the action of the wind upon the panicle—and into this hole the tracks led. It was evident that the animal, whatever it was, must have gone down the culm of the grass in making its descent from the surface of the snow!

They now observed another track going *from* the hole in an opposite direction, which showed

that the creature had climbed up in the same way. Curious to know what it might have been, the boys hailed Lucien and Norman, telling them to come down. These, followed by Marengo, soon arrived upon the spot. When Lucien saw the tracks, he pronounced them at once to be those of the little shrew-mouse, the smallest of all the quadrupeds of America. Several of them had evidently been out upon the snow—as there were other dotted lines—and the tops of many stalks of grass were seen above the surface, each of which had formed a little hole around it, by which the mice were enabled to get up and down.

Norman, who had seen these little animals before, cautioned his companions to remain quiet awhile, and perhaps some of them might come to the surface. They all stopped therefore, and stood some time without moving, or speaking to one another. Presently, a little head not much bigger than a pea was seen peeping up, and then a body followed, which in size did not exceed that of a large gooseberry! To this a tail was suspended, just one inch in length, of a square shape, and tapering from root to point, like that of any other mouse. The little creature was covered with a close smooth fur, of a clove-brown colour above, but more yellowish upon the belly and sides; and was certainly, as it sat upon the even surface of the snow, the most diminutive and oddest-looking quadruped that any of the party had ever beheld.

They were just whispering to one another what means they should use to capture it, when Marengo, whom Basil had been holding quiet, all at once uttered a loud bay; and, springing out of the hands of his master, galloped off towards the camp. All of them looked after, wondering what had started the dog; but his strange behaviour was at once explained, and to their consternation. Around the tent, and close to its entrance, several large wolves were seen. They were leaping about hurriedly, and worrying some objects that lay upon the ground. What these objects were was too plain. They were *the bags of pemmican*! Part of their contents was seen strewed over the snow, and part was already in the stomachs of the wolves.

The boys uttered a simultaneous shout, and ran forward. Marengo was by this time among the wolves, and had set fiercely upon one of them. Had his masters not been at hand, the fierce
129 brutes would soon have settled the account with Marengo. But the former were now close by, and the wolves, seeing them, ran off; but, to the consternation of the boys, each of them carried off a bag of the pemmican in his mouth with as much lightness and speed as if nothing encumbered them!

THE WOLVES AND THE PEMMICAN BAGS.

“We are lost!” cried Norman, in a voice of terror. “Our provisions are gone!—all gone!”

It was true. The next moment the wolves disappeared over the summit of the ridge; and
130 although each of the boys had seized his gun, and ran after, the pursuit proved an idle one. Not a wolf was overtaken.

Scarce a scrap of the pemmican had been left—only some fragments that had been gnawed by the ravenous brutes, and scattered over the snow. That night our travellers went to bed supperless; and, what with hunger, and the depression of spirits caused by this incident, one and all of them kept awake nearly the whole of the night.

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CHAPTER XXIX.

They left their skin-couch at an early hour, close after daybreak. Hunger and anxiety drove them out of their tent. Not a morsel of anything for breakfast! They looked abroad over the country, in order, if possible, to descry some living creature. None could be seen—nothing but the wilderness waste of snow, with here and there the side of a steep hill, or a rock showing cold and bleak. Even the wolves that had robbed them were no longer to be seen, as if these creatures knew that they had got all that was worth having, and had now taken themselves off to hunt for plunder elsewhere.

The situation of our travellers was really one of extreme peril, although it may be difficult for you, young reader, to conceive why it should be so. They, however, knew it well. They knew that they might travel for days through that inhospitable region, without falling in with anything that would make a single meal for them. But less time than that would suffice to starve them all. Already they felt the pangs of hunger—for they had not eaten since their breakfast of the preceding day, the wolves having interrupted their preparations for dinner.

It was of no use remaining where they were; so, striking their tent once more, they travelled forward. It was but poor consolation to them that they travelled much lighter than before. They had nothing to carry but their guns, and these they had got ready for work—so that their journey partook somewhat of the character of a hunting excursion. They did not even follow a direct course, but occasionally turned to one side or the other, wherever a clump of willows, or any other roughness on the ground, looked like it might be the shelter of game. But during that whole day—although they travelled from near sunrise to sunset—not a living thing was seen; and for the second night they went supperless to bed.

A man will bear hunger for many days—some more, some less—without actually dying of it; but at no period will his sufferings be greater than during the third or fourth day. He will grow more feeble afterwards, but the pain which he endures will not be greater.

On the third day the sufferings of our party were extreme. They began to chew pieces of their skin-tent and blankets; but although this took the sharp edge off their appetites, it added nothing to their strength; and they still craved for food, and grew feebler.

To use a poetical phrase, Marengo now became the “cynosure of every eye.” Marengo was not very fat. The sledge and short rations had thinned him down, and his ribs could be easily traced.
131 Although the boys, and Basil in particular, would have suffered much before sacrificing him, yet starvation will reconcile a man to part with his best friend. In spite of their friendship for Marengo, his masters could not help scanning him from time to time with hungry looks. Marengo was an old dog, and, no doubt, as tough as a piece of tan-leather; but their appetites were made up for anything.

It was near mid-day. They had started early, as on the day before. They were trudging wearily along, and making but little progress. Marengo was struggling with his sledge, feeble as any of the party. Basil saw that the eyes of his companions were from time to time bent upon the dog; and though none of them said anything, he understood the thoughts that were passing within them. He knew that none of them wished to propose it—as Basil was the real master of Marengo—but their glances were sufficiently intelligible to him. He looked at the downcast countenance of the once merry François—at the serious air of Norman—at the wan cheek and sunken eye of Lucien, whom Basil dearly loved. He hesitated no longer. His duty to his companions at once overcame his affection for his faithful dog.

“We must kill *him*!” said he, suddenly stopping, and pointing to Marengo.

The rest halted.

“I fear there's no help for it,” said Norman, turning his face in every direction, and sweeping the surface of the snow with hopeless glances.

François also assented to the proposal.

“Let us make a condition,” suggested Lucien; “I for one could walk five miles farther.” And as Lucien said this, he made an effort to stand erect, and look strong and brave; but Basil knew it was an effort of *generosity*.

“No,” said he,—“no, dear Luce. You are done up. We must kill the dog!”

“Nonsense, Basil, you mistake,” replied the other; “I assure you I am far from being done up. I could go much farther yet. Stay!” continued he, pointing ahead; “you see yonder rocks? They are about three miles off, I should think. They lie directly in our course. Well, now, let us agree to this condition. Let us give poor Marengo a chance for his life. If we find nothing before reaching those rocks, why then——”

And Lucien, seeing Marengo gazing up in his face, left the sentence unfinished. The poor brute looked up at all of them as though he understood every word that they were saying; and his mute appeal, had it been necessary, would not have been thrown away. But it did not require that to get him the proposed respite. All agreed willingly with Lucien's proposition; and, shouldering their pieces, the party moved on.

Lucien had purposely understated the distance to the rocks. It was five, instead of three miles; and some of them made it full ten, as they were determined Marengo should have the benefit of every chance. They deployed like skirmishers; and not a brake or brush that lay to the right or left of the path but was visited and beaten by one or other of them. Their diligence was to no purpose. After two hours' weary work, they arrived among the rocks, having seen not a trace of either quadruped or bird.

“Come!” cried Lucien in his now feeble voice, still trying to look cheerful, “we must pass
132 through them. There is a chance yet. Let him have fair play. The rocks were to be the limit, but it was not stated what part of them. Let us pass through to the other side—they do not extend far.”

Encouraged by the words of Lucien, the party entered among the rocks, moving on separate paths. They had gone only a few paces, when a shout from Norman caused the rest to look to him for an explanation. No animal was in sight. Had he seen any? No; but something that gratified him certainly, for his voice and manner expressed it.

“What is it?” inquired the others, all speaking at the same time.

“*Tripe de roche*!” answered he.

“*Tripe de roche*?”

“Yes,” replied Norman, “look there!” and he pointed to one of the rocks directly ahead of them, at the same time moving forward to it. The others hastened up after. On reaching the rock, they saw what Norman had meant by the words *tripe de roche* (rock-tripe). It was a black, hard, crumply substance, that nearly covered the surface of the rock, and was evidently of a vegetable nature. Lucien knew what it was as well as Norman, and joy had expressed itself upon his pale cheeks at the sight. As for Basil and François they only stood waiting an explanation, and wondering what value a quantity of “rock moss,” as they deemed it, could be to persons in their condition.

Lucien soon informed them that it was not a “moss,” but a “lichen,” and of that celebrated species which will sustain human life. It was the *Gyrophora*. Norman confirmed Lucien's statement, and furthermore affirmed, that not only the Indians and Esquimaux, but also parties of voyageurs, had often subsisted upon it for days, when they would otherwise have starved. There are many species,—not less than five or six. All of them possess nutritive properties, but only one is a palatable food—the *Gyrophora vellea* of botanists. Unfortunately this was not the sort which our voyageurs had happened upon, as it grows only upon rocks shaded by woods, and is rarely met with in the open barrens. The one, however, which Norman had discovered was the “next best,” and they were all glad at finding even that.

The first thing to be thought of was to collect it, and all four set to peeling and scraping it from the rocks. The next thought was to make it ready for eating. Here a new difficulty stared them in the face. The *tripe de roche* had to be boiled,—it could not be eaten else,—and where was the fire? where was the wood to make one? Not a stick was to be seen. They had not met with a tree during all that day's journey!

They were now as badly off as ever. The *tripe de roche* would be of no more use to them than so much dry grass. What could they do with it?

In the midst of their suspense, one of them thought of the sledge.—Marengo's sledge. That would make a fire, but a very small one. It might do to cook a single meal. Even that was better than none. Marengo was not going to object to the arrangement. He looked quite willing to part with the sledge. But a few hours before, it came near being used to cook Marengo himself. He was not aware of that, perhaps, but no matter. All agreed that the sledge must be broken up, and converted into firewood.

133 They were about taking it to pieces, and had already “unhitched” Marengo from it, when Basil, who had walked to the other side of the rocky jumble, cried back to them to desist. He had espied some willows at no great distance. Out of these a fire could be made. The sledge, therefore, was let alone for the present. Basil and François immediately started for the willows, while Norman and Lucien remained upon the spot to prepare the “tripe” for the pot.

In a short time the former parties returned with two large bundles of willows, and the fire was kindled. The *tripe de roche*, with some snow—for there was no water near—was put into the pot, and the latter hung over the blaze.

After boiling for nearly an hour, the lichen became reduced to a soft gummy pulp, and Norman thickened the mess to his taste by putting in more snow, or more of the “tripe,” as it seemed to require it. The pot was then taken from the fire, and all four greedily ate of its contents. It was far from being palatable, and had a clammy “feel” in the mouth, something like sago; but none of the party was in any way either dainty or fastidious just at that time, and they soon consumed all that had been cooked. It did not satisfy the appetite, though it filled the stomach, and made their situation less painful to bear.

Norman informed them that it was much better when cooked with a little meat, so as to make broth. This Norman's companions could easily credit, but where was the meat to come from? The Indians prefer the *tripe de roche* when prepared along with the roe of fish, or when boiled in fish liquor.

Our weary voyageurs resolved to remain among the rocks for that night at least; and with this intent they put up their little tent. They did not kindle any fire, as the willows were scarce, and there would be barely enough to make one or two more boilings of the rock-tripe. They spread their skins within the tent, and creeping in, kept one another as warm as they could until morning.

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CHAPTER XXX.

THE POLAR HARE AND GREAT SNOWY OWL.

Of course hunger kept them from sleeping late. They were up and out of the tent by an early hour. Their fire was re-kindled, and they were making preparations for a fresh pot of rock-tripe, when they were startled by the note of a well-known bird. On looking up, they beheld seated upon the point of a rock the creature itself, which was the “cinereous crow,” or, as it is better known, the “whiskey Jack.” The latter name it receives from the voyageurs, on account of the resemblance of its Indian appellation, “whiskae-shaw-neesh” to the words “whiskey John.” Although sometimes called the “cinereous crow,” the bird is a true jay.

It is one of the most inelegant of the genus, being of a dull grey colour, and not particularly graceful in its form. Its plumage, moreover, does not consist of webbed feathers, but rather more resembles hair; nor does its voice make up for the plainness of its appearance, as is the case with some birds. On the contrary, the voice of “whiskey Jack” is plaintive and squeaking, though he is something of a mocker in his way, and frequently imitates the notes of other birds. He is one of
134 those creatures that frequent the habitations of man, and there is not a fur post, or fort, in all the Hudson's Bay territory, where “whiskey Jack” is not familiarly known.

He is far from being a favourite, however, as, like his near relative the magpie, he is a great thief, and will follow the marten-trapper all day while baiting his traps, perching upon a tree until the bait is set, and then pouncing down, and carrying it off. He frequently pilfers small articles from the forts and encampments, and is so bold as to enter the tents, and seize food out of any vessel that may contain it. Notwithstanding all this, he is a favourite with the traveller through these inhospitable regions. No matter how barren the spot where the voyageur may make his camp, his tent will hardly be pitched, before he receives a visit from “whiskey Jack,” who comes, of course, to pick up any crumbs that may fall. His company, therefore, in a region where all other wild creatures shun the society of man, endears him to the lonely traveller.

At many of their camps our voyageurs had met with this singular bird, and were always glad to receive him as a friend. They were now doubly delighted to see him, but this delight arose from no friendly feelings. Their guest was at once doomed to die. François had taken up his gun, and in the next moment would have brought him down, had he not been checked by Norman. Not that Norman intended to plead for his life, but Norman's eye had caught sight of another “whiskey Jack,”—which was hopping among the rocks at some distance—and fearing that François' shot might frighten it away, had hindered him from firing. It was Norman's design to get both.

The second “whiskey Jack,” or, perhaps, it was the “whiskey Jill,” soon drew near; and both were now seen to hop from rock to rock, and then upon the top of the tent, and one of them actually settled upon the edge of the pot, as it hung over the fire, and quietly looking into it, appeared to scrutinize its contents!

The boys could not think of any way of getting the birds, except by François' gun; and it was at length agreed that François should do his best. He was sure of one of them, at least; so telling the others to get behind him, he fired at the more distant one where it sat upon the tent, and took the other on the wing.

Both shots were successful. The two jays fell, and were soon divested of their soft, silky, hair-like plumage, and dropped into the boiling pot. They did not weigh together more than about six or seven ounces; but even that was accounted something under present circumstances; and, with the *tripe de roche*, a much better breakfast was made than they had anticipated.

No more of the lichen could be found. The rocks were all searched, but only a few patches—not enough for another full meal—could be obtained. The travellers had no other resource, therefore, but to continue on, and passing through the rocky ground, they once more embarked upon the wilderness of snow.

During that whole day not a living creature gladdened their eyes. They saw nothing that was eatable—fish, flesh, fowl, or vegetable. Not even a bit of rock-tripe—in these parts the last resource of starving men—could be met with. They encamped in a plain, where not a tree stood—not even a rock to shelter them.

135 Next morning a consultation was held. Marengo was again the subject of their thoughts and conversation. Should they kill him on the spot or go a little farther? That was the question. Lucien, as before, interposed in his favour. There was a high hill many miles off, and in their

proper course. “Let us first reach yonder hill,” proposed Lucien. “If nothing is found before that, then we must part with Marengo.”

The proposal was agreed to, and, striking their tent, they again set out.

It was a toilsome long way to that hill—feeble and weary as they all were—but they reached it without having observed the slightest trace of animal life.

“Up the hill!” cried Lucien, beckoning to the others, and cheering them with his weak voice, “Up the hill!”

On they went, up the steep declivity—Marengo toiling on after them. The dog looked downcast and despairing. He really appeared to know the conditions that had been made for his life. His masters, as they crept upward, looked sharply before them. Every tuft that appeared above the snow was scrutinized, and every inch of the ground, as it came into view, was examined.

At length they crossed the escarpment of the hill, and stood upon the summit. They gazed forward with disappointed feelings. The hill-top was a sort of table plain, of about three hundred yards in diameter. It was covered with snow, nearly a foot in depth. A few heads of withered grass were seen above the surface, but not enough to subdue the uniform white that prevailed all over. There was no creature upon it; that was evident. A bird as big as a sparrow, or a quadruped as large as a shrew-mouse, could have been seen upon any part of it. A single glance satisfied all of them that no living thing was there.

They halted without proceeding farther. Some of them could not have gone another mile, and all of them were tottering in their tracks. Marengo had arrived upon the summit, and stood a little to one side, with the sledge behind him.

“*You* must do it!” said Basil, speaking to Norman in a hoarse voice, and turning his head away. Lucien and François stepped aside at the same time, and stood as if looking down the hill. The countenances of all three betokened extreme sorrow. There was a tear in Basil's eye that he was trying to wipe away with his sleeve.

The sharp click of Norman's gun was heard behind them, and they were all waiting for the report, when, at that moment, a dark shadow passing over the white declivity arrested their attention! It was the shadow of a bird upon the wing. The simultaneous exclamation of all three stayed Norman's finger—already pressing upon the trigger—and the latter, turning round, saw that they were regarding some object in the air. It was a bird of great size—almost as large as an eagle, but with the plumage of a swan. It was white all over—both body and wings—white as the snow over which it was sailing. Norman knew the bird at a glance. Its thick short neck and large head—its broad-spreading wings, of milky whiteness, were not to be mistaken. It was the “great snowy owl” of the Arctic regions.

Its appearance suddenly changed the aspect of affairs. Norman let the butt of his rifle fall to the ground, and stood, like the rest, watching the bird in its flight.

136 The snowy owl is, perhaps, the most beautiful, as it is one of the most powerful birds of its genus—of which there are more than a dozen in North America. It is a bird of the Polar regions—even the most remote—and in the dead of winter it is found within the Arctic circle, on both Continents—although at the same season it also wanders farther south. It dwells upon the Barren Grounds as well as in wooded districts. In the former it squats upon the snow, where its peculiar colour often prevents it from being noticed by the passing hunter. Nature has furnished it with every protection from the cold. Its plumage is thick, closely matted, and downy, and it is feathered to the very eyes—so that its legs appear as large as those of a good-sized dog. The bill, too, is completely hidden under a mass of feathers that cover its face, and not even a point of its whole body is exposed.

The owl is usually looked upon as a night-bird, and in Southern latitudes it is rarely seen by day; but the owls of the Northern regions differ from their congeners in this respect. They hunt by day, even during the bright hours of noon. Were it not so, how could they exist in the midst of an Arctic summer, when the days are months in duration? Here we have another example of the manner in which Nature trains her wild creatures to adapt themselves to their situation.

At least a dozen species of owls frequent the territory of the Hudson's Bay Company—the largest of which is the cinereous owl, whose wings have a spread of nearly five feet. Some species migrate south on the approach of winter; while several, as the snowy owl, remain to prey upon the ptarmigan, the hares, and other small quadrupeds, who, like themselves, choose that dreary region for their winter home.

Our travellers, as I have said, stood watching the owl as it soared silently through the heavens. François had thrown his gun across his left arm, in hopes he might get a shot at it; but the bird—a shy one at all times—kept away out of range; and, after circling once or twice over the hill, uttered a loud cry and flew off.

Its cry resembled the moan of a human being in distress; and its effect upon the minds of our travellers, in the state they then were, was far from being pleasant. They watched the bird with despairing looks, until it was lost against the white background of a snow-covered hill.

They had noticed that the owl appeared to be just taking flight when they first saw it. It must have risen up from the hill upon which they were; and they once more ran their eyes along the

level summit, curious to know where it had been perched that they had not seen it. No doubt, reflected they, it had been near enough, but its colour had rendered it undistinguishable from the snow.

“What a pity!” exclaimed François.

While making these reflections, and sweeping their glances around, an object caught their eyes that caused some of them to ejaculate and suddenly raise their guns. This object was near the centre of the summit table, and at first sight appeared to be only a lump of snow; but upon closer inspection, two little round spots of a dark colour, and above these two elongated black marks, could be seen. Looking steadily, the eye at length traced the outlines of an animal, that sat in a crouching attitude. The round spots were its eyes, and the black marks above them were
137 tips of a pair of very long ears. All the rest of its body was covered with a soft white fur, hardly to be distinguished from the snow upon which it rested.

The form and colour of the animal, but more especially its long erect ears, made it easy for them to tell what it was. All of them saw it was a hare.

“Hush!” continued Norman, as soon as he saw it, “keep still all of you—leave it to me.”

“What shall we do?” demanded Basil. “Can we not assist you?”

“No,” was the reply, uttered in a whisper, “stay where you are. Keep the dog quiet. I'll manage puss, if the owl hasn't scared her too badly. That scream has started her out of her form. I'm certain she wasn't that way before. Maybe she'll sit it out. Lucky the sun's high—don't move a step. Have the dog ready, but hold him tight, and keep a sharp look out if she bolts.”

After giving these instructions, that were all uttered quickly and in an under tone, Norman moved off, with his gun carried across his arm. He did not move in the direction of the hare, but rather as if he was going *from* her. His course, however, bent gradually into a circle of which the hare was the centre—the diameter being the full breadth of the summit level, which was about three hundred yards. In this circle he walked round and round, keeping his eye fixed upon the crouching animal. When he had nearly completed one circumference, he began to shorten the diameter—so that the curve which he was now following was a spiral one, and gradually drawing nearer to the hare. The latter kept watching him as he moved—curiosity evidently mingling with her fears. Fortunately, as Norman had said, the sun was nearly in the vertex of the heavens, and his own body cast very little shadow upon the snow. Had it been otherwise, the hare would have been frightened at the moving shadow, and would have sprung out of her form, before he could have got within range.

When he had made some four or five circuits, Norman moved slower and slower, and then stopped nearly opposite to where the others were. These stood watching him with beating hearts, for they knew that the life of Marengo, and perhaps their own as well, depended on the shot. Norman had chosen his place, so that in case the hare bolted, she might run towards them, and give them the chance of a flying shot. His gun was already at his shoulder—his finger rested on the trigger, and the boys were expecting the report, when again the shadow of a bird flitted over the snow, a loud human-like scream sounded in their ears, and the hare was seen to spring up, and stretch her long legs in flight. At the same instant the great snowy owl was observed wheeling above, and threatening to pounce upon the fleeing animal!

The hare ran in a side direction, but it brought her as she passed within range of the party by the sledge. The owl kept above her as she ran. A dozen leaps was all the hare ever made. A loud crack was heard, and she was seen to spring up and fall back upon the snow, dead as a door-nail. Like an echo another crack followed—a wild scream rang through the air, and the great white owl fell fluttering to the earth. The reports were not of a rifle. They were the louder detonations of a shot gun. All eyes were turned towards François, who, like a little god, stood enveloped in a halo of blue smoke. François was the hero of the hour.

138 Marengo rushed forward and seized the struggling owl, that snapped its bill at him like a watchman's rattle. But Marengo did not care for that; and seizing its head in his teeth, gave it a crunch that at once put an end to its flapping.

Marengo was reprieved, and he seemed to know it, as he bounded over the snow, waving his tail, and barking like a young fool.

They all ran up to the hare, which proved to be the “Polar hare” and one of the largest of its species—not less than fifteen pounds in weight. Its fur, soft and white like swan-down, was stained with red blood. It was not quite dead. Its little heart yet beat faintly, and the light of life was still shining from its beautiful honey-coloured eyes. Both it and the owl were taken up and carried to the sledge, which was once more attached to Marengo, as the party intended to go forward and halt under the shelter of the hill.

“There must be some wood in this quarter,” remarked Norman; “I never knew this sort of hare far from timber.”

“True,” said Lucien, “the Polar hare feeds upon willows, arbutus, and the Labrador tea-plant. Some of these kinds must be near.”

While they were speaking, they had reached the brow of the hill, on the opposite side from where they had ascended. On looking into the valley below, to their great joy they beheld some

clumps of willows, and good-sized trees of poplar, birch, and spruce-pine, and passing down the hill, the travellers soon stood in their midst. Presently was heard the chipping sound of an axe and crash of falling timber, and in a few moments after a column of smoke was seen soaring up out of the valley, and curling cheerfully towards the bright blue sky.

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CHAPTER XXXI.

THE JUMPING MOUSE AND THE ERMINE.

Large as the hare was, she would have made but a meal for our four hungry voyageurs, had they eaten at will. By Lucien's advice, however, they restrained themselves, and half of her was left for supper, when the “cook” promised to make them hare-soup. The head, feet, and other spare bits, fell to Marengo's share. The owl, whose flesh was almost as white as its plumage, and, as Norman well knew, most delicate eating, was reserved for to-morrow's breakfast.

They had pitched their tent with the intention of remaining at that place all night, and continuing their journey next day; but, as it still wanted several hours of sunset, and the strength of all was considerably recruited, they resolved to hunt about the neighbourhood as long as they had light. It was of great importance that they should procure more game. The owl would make but a spare breakfast, and after that where was the next meal to come from? They had had a temporary relief, and while their strength lasted, they must use every effort to procure a further supply. The valley in which their new camp was placed looked well for game.

It was a sort of oäsis in the Barren Grounds. There was a lake and a considerable skirting of timber around it—consisting, as we have said, of willows, poplars, spruce-pine, and dwarf birch-trees. The Alpine arbutus, whose berries are the food of many species of animals, also grew upon the side of the hills; and the Labrador tea-plant was found upon the low ground around the lake.
139 The leaves of this last is a favourite food of the Polar hare, and our voyageurs had no doubt but that there were many of these animals in the neighbourhood. Indeed, they had better evidence than conjecture, for they saw numerous hare-tracks in the snow. There were tracks of other animals too, for it is a well-known fact that where one kind exists, at least two or three others will be found in the same habitat—all being connected together by a “chain of destruction.”

A singular illustration of this was afforded to Lucien, who remained at the camp while the rest went out hunting. He had gathered some of the leaves of the Labrador tea, and was drying them over the coals, intending to cheer his comrades with a cup of this beverage after supper. The hare-soup was boiling, and the “cook” sat listening to the cheerful sounds that issued from the pot—now and then taking off the lid to examine its savoury contents, and give them a stir. He would then direct his attention to the tea-leaves that were parching in the frying-pan; and, having shifted them a little, felt himself at liberty to look about for a minute or two.

On one of these occasions, while glancing up, his attention was attracted to an object which appeared upon the snow at a short distance from where he sat. A wreath of snow, that had formed under the shelter of the hill, extended all around its base, presenting a steep front in every direction. This front was only two or three feet in height; but the top surface of the wreath was many yards wide—in fact, it extended back until it became blended with the slope of the hill. It was smooth and nearly level, but the hill above was steep, and somewhat rough and rocky. The steep front of the wreath came down within half-a-dozen paces of the fire where Lucien was seated; and it was upon the top or scarpment of it that the object appeared that had drawn his attention. It was a small creature, but it was in motion, and thus had caught his eye.

A single glance showed him that the little animal was a mouse, but of a somewhat singular species. It was about the size of the common mouse, but quite different in colour. The upper half of its body was of a light mahogany tint, while the lower half, including the legs and feet, were of a milky whiteness. It was, in fact, the “white-footed mouse” (*Mus leucopus*), one of the most beautiful of its kind.

Here and there above the surface of the snow protruded the tops of arbutus-trees; and the little creature was passing from one of these to the other, in search, no doubt, of the berries that remain upon these trees all the winter. Sometimes it ran from point to point like any other mouse, but now and then it would rear itself on its hind-legs, and leap several feet at a single bound! In this it evidently assisted itself by pressing its tail—in which it possesses muscular power—against the snow. This peculiar mode of progression has obtained for it the name of the “jumping-mouse,” and among the Indians “deer”-mouse, because its leap reminds them of the bounding spring of the deer. But there are still other species of “jumping-mice” in America that possess this power to a greater degree even than the *Mus leucopus*.

Lucien watched its motions without attempting to interfere with it, until it had got nearly out of sight. He did not desire to do injury to the little creature, nor was he curious to obtain it, as he had already met with many specimens, and examined them to his satisfaction. He had ceased to
140 think of it, and would, perhaps, never have thought of it again, but, upon turning his eyes in the

opposite direction, he observed another animal upon the snow. This creature had a far different aspect from the mouse. Its body was nearly a foot in length, although not much thicker than that of the other! Its legs were short, but strong, and its forehead broad and arched convexly. It had a tail more than half the length of the body, hairy, and tapering like that of a cat. Its form was the well-known form of the weasel, and it was, in fact, a species of weasel.

It was the celebrated *ermine*, celebrated for its soft and beautiful fur, so long prized as an ornament for the robes of the rich. It was white all over, with the exception of its tail; and that, for about an inch or so at the tip, was covered with black silky hair. On some parts of the body, too, the white was tinged with a primrose yellow; but this tinge is not found in all animals of this species, as some individuals are pure white. Of course it was now in its winter “robes”; but in the summer it changes to a colour that does not differ much from that of the common weasel.

When Lucien first saw it, it was running along the top of the wreath, and coming from the same direction from which the mouse had come. Now and then it paused awhile, and then ran on again. Lucien observed that it kept its nose to the ground, and as it drew nearer he saw that it was following on the same path which the other had taken. To his astonishment he perceived that it was *trailing the mouse*! Whatever the latter had doubled or made a *détour*, the ermine followed the track; and where the mouse had given one of its long leaps, there the ermine would stop, and, after beating about until it struck the trail again, would resume its onward course at a gallop. Its manœuvres were exactly like those of a hound upon the fresh trail of a fox!

Lucien now looked abroad to discover the mouse. It was still in sight far off upon the snow, and, as Lucien could see, busily gnawing at the arbutus, quite unconscious that its *greatest* enemy was so near. I say greatest enemy, for the *Mus leucopus* is the *natural* prey of the *Mustela erminea*.

The mouse was soon made aware of the dangerous proximity, but not until the ermine had got within a few feet of it. When it perceived the latter it shrunk, at first, among the leaves of the arbutus; but seeing there would be no protection there—as the other was still springing forward to seize it—it leaped up, and endeavoured to escape by flight. Its flight appeared to be in alternate jumps and runs, but the chase was not a long one. The ermine was as active as a cat, and, after a few skips, its claws were struck into the mouse. There was a short, slender squeak, and then a “crunch,” like the cracking of a hazel-nut. This last sound was produced by the teeth of the ermine breaking through the skull of its victim.

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CHAPTER XXXII.

THE ARCTIC FOX AND WHITE WOLF.

Lucien turned round to get hold of his rifle, intending to punish the ermine, although the little creature, in doing what it did, had only obeyed a law of nature. But the boy had also another

design in killing it: he wished to compare it with some ermines he had seen while travelling upon Lake Winnipeg, which, as he thought, were much larger—one that he had caught having measured more than a foot in length, without including the tail. He wished, also, to make some comparison between it and the common weasel; for in its *winter dress*, in the snowy regions, the latter very much resembles the ermine; and, indeed, the trappers make no distinction between them.

With these ideas Lucien had grasped his gun, and was raising himself to creep a little nearer, when his eye was arrested by the motions of another creature coming along the top of the wreath. This last was a snow-white animal, with long, shaggy fur, sharp-pointed snout, erect ears, and bushy tail. Its aspect was fox-like, and its movements and attitudes had all that semblance of cunning and caution so characteristic of these animals. Well might it, for it *was* a fox—the beautiful white fox of the Arctic regions.

It is commonly supposed that there are but two or three kinds of foxes in America; and that these are only varieties of the European species.

This is an erroneous idea, as there are nearly a dozen varieties existing in North America, although they may be referred to a less number of species. There is the Arctic fox, which is confined to the cold Northern regions, and which in winter is white.

The “sooty-fox” is a variety of the “Arctic,” distinguished from it only by its colour, which is of a uniform blackish brown.

The “American fox” or, as it is commonly called, the “red fox,” has been long supposed to be the same as the European red fox. This is erroneous. They differ in many points; and, what is somewhat curious, these points of difference are similar to those that exist between the European and American wolves, as already given.

The “cross fox” is supposed by the Indians and some naturalists to be only a variety of the last. It derives its name from its having two dark stripes crossing each other upon the shoulders. Its

fur from this circumstance, and perhaps because the animal is scarce, is more prized than that of the red variety. When a single skin of the latter is worth only fifteen shillings, one of the cross fox will bring as much as five guineas.

Another variety of the red fox, and a much more rare one, is the “black,” or “silver” fox. The skins of these command six times the price of any other furs found in America, with the exception of the sea-otter. The animal itself is so rare that only a few fall into the hands of the Hudson's Bay Company in a season; and Mr. Nicholay, the celebrated London furrier, asserts that a single skin will fetch from ten to forty guineas, according to quality. A remarkable cloak, or pelisse, belonging to the Emperor of Russia, and made out of the skins of silver-foxes, was exhibited in the Great London Exposition of 1851. It was made entirely from the neck-part of the skins—the only part of the silver-fox which is pure black. This cloak was valued at 3400*l.*; though Mr. Nicholay considers this an exaggerated estimate, and states its true value to be not over 1000*l.* George the Fourth had a lining of black fox-skins worth 1000*l.*

The “grey fox” is a more southern species than any already described. Its proper home is the temperate zone covered by the United States; although it extends its range into the southern
142 parts of Canada. In the United States it is the most common kind, although in that district there is also a “red fox,” different from the *Vulpus fulvus* already noticed; and which, no doubt, is the red fox of Europe, introduced by the early colonists of America.

Still another species, the smallest and perhaps the most interesting of any, is the “kit fox.” This little creature is an inhabitant of the prairies, where it makes its burrows far from any wood. It is extremely shy, and the swiftest animal in the prairie country—outrunning even the antelope!

When Lucien saw the fox he thought no more of the ermine, but drew back and crouched down, in hopes he might get a shot at the larger animal. He knew well that the flesh of the Arctic fox is highly esteemed as food, particularly by persons situated as he and his companions were, and he hoped to be able to add it to their larder.

When first seen it was coming towards him, though not in a direct line. It was engaged in hunting, and, with its nose to the snow, was running in zig-zag lines, “quartering” the ground like a pointer dog. Presently it struck the trail of the ermine, and with a yelp of satisfaction followed it. This of course brought it close past where Lucien was; but, notwithstanding his eagerness to fire, it moved so rapidly along the trail that he was unable to take sight upon it. It did not halt for a moment; and, as Lucien's gun was a rifle, he knew that a flying shot would be an uncertain one. In the belief, therefore, that the fox would stop soon—at all events when it came up with the ermine—he restrained himself from firing, and waited.

It ran on, still keeping the track of the ermine. The latter, hitherto busy with his own prey, did not see the fox until it was itself seen, when, dropping the half-eaten mouse, it reared up on its hind-quarters like a squirrel or a monkey, at the same time spitting as spitefully as any other weasel could have done. In a moment, however, it changed its tactics—for the open jaws of the fox were within a few paces of it—and after making a short quick run along the surface, it threw up its hind-quarters, and plunged head-foremost into the snow! The fox sprang forward, and flinging his brush high in the air, shot after like an arrow!

Both had now disappeared from Lucien's sight. For a moment the surface of the snow was disturbed above the spot where they had gone down, but the next moment all was still, and no evidence existed that a living creature had been there, except the tracks, and the break the two creatures had made in going down. Lucien ran forward until he was within a few yards of the place, and stood watching the hole, with his rifle ready—thinking that the fox, at least, would soon come up again.

He had waited for nearly five minutes, looking steadily at this point, when his eye was attracted by a movement under the snow, at a considerable distance, quite fifty paces, from where he stood. The frozen crust was seen to upheave: and, the next moment, the head of the fox, and afterwards his whole body, appeared above the surface. Lucien saw that the ermine lay transversely between his jaws, and was quite dead! He was about to fire, but the fox, suddenly perceiving him, shot off like an arrow, carrying his prey along with him.

He was soon out of reach, and Lucien, seeing that he had lost his chance, was about to return to the fire, when, all at once, the fox was observed to stop, turn suddenly in his tracks, and run
143 off in a new direction! Lucien looked beyond to ascertain the cause of this strange manœuvre. That was soon ascertained. Coming down from among the rocks was a large animal—five times the fox's size—but in other respects not unlike him. It was also of a snow-white colour, with long hair, bushy tail, and short erect ears, but its aspect was not to be mistaken. It was the great *white wolf*.

When Lucien first saw this new-comer, the latter had just espied the fox, and was about stretching out into a gallop towards him. The fox, *watching backwards* as he ran, had not seen the wolf, until the latter was within a few springs of him; and now when he had turned, and both were in full chase, there was not over twenty yards between them. The direction in which they ran would bring them near to Lucien; and so they came, and passed him—neither of them seeming to heed his presence. They had not got many yards farther, before Lucien perceived that the wolf was fast closing on the fox, and would soon capture him. Believing he would then stop, so as to offer him a fairer chance for a shot, Lucien followed. The wolf, however, had noticed him coming after, and although the next moment he closed his great jaws upon the fox, he did not

pause for a single instant, but, lifting the latter clear up from the ground, ran on without the slightest apparent diminution of speed!

Reynard was seen to struggle and kick, while he squeaked like a shot puppy; but his cries each moment grew feebler, and his struggles soon came to an end. The wolf held him transversely in his jaws—just as he himself but the moment before had carried the ermine.

Lucien saw there was no use in following them, as the wolf ran on with his prey. With some disappointment, therefore, he was about to return to the fire, where, to add to his mortification, he knew he would find his tea-leaves parched to a cinder. He lingered a moment, however, with his eyes still fixed upon the departing wolf that was just about to disappear over the crest of a ridge. The fox was still in his jaws, but no longer struggling. Reynard looked limber and dead, as his legs swung loosely on both sides of the wolf's head Lucien at that moment saw the latter suddenly stop in his career, and then drop down upon the surface of the snow as if dead! He fell with his victim in his jaws, and lay half doubled up, and quite still.

This strange action would have been a difficult thing for Lucien to explain, but, almost at the same instant in which he observed it, a puff of blue smoke shot up over the ridge, and quickly following was heard the sharp crack of a rifle. Then a head with its cap of raccoon skin appeared above the snow, and Lucien, recognising the face of Basil, ran forward to meet him.

Both soon stood over the body of the dead wolf, wondering at what they saw; but Basil, far more than Lucien—for the latter already knew the circumstances of that strange scene of death. First there was the great gaunt body of the wolf stretched along the snow, and quite dead. Cross-ways in his mouth was the fox, just as he had been carried off; and across the jaws of the latter, lay the long worm-like body of the ermine, still retaining between its teeth the half-devoured remains of the white-footed mouse! A very chain of destroyers! These creatures died as they had lived, preying one upon the other! Of all four the little mouse alone was an innocent victim. The other three, though morally guilty by the laws of man, yet were only acting in obedience to the
144 laws of Nature and necessity.

Man himself obeys a similar law, as Basil had just shown. Philosophize as we will, we cannot comprehend why it is so—why Nature requires the sacrifice of one of her creatures for the sustenance of another. But although we cannot understand the cause, we must not condemn the fact as it exists; nor must we suppose, as some do, that the destruction of God's creatures for our necessities constitutes a crime. They who think so, and who, in consistency with their doctrines, confine themselves to what they term “vegetable” food, are at best but shallow reasoners. They have not studied Nature very closely, else would they know that every time they pluck up a parsnip, or draw their blade across the leaf of a lettuce, they cause pain and death!

How much pain we cannot tell; but that the plant feels, as well as the animal, we can clearly *prove*. Probably it feels less, and it may be each kind of plant differs from others in the amount, according to its higher or lower organism. Probably its amount of pleasure—its capability of enjoyment—is in a direct proportion to the pain which it endures; and it is highly probable that this double line of ratios runs in an ascending scale throughout the vegetable kingdom, gradually joining on to what is more strictly termed the “animal.” But these mysteries of life, my young friend, will be interesting studies for you when your mind becomes matured.

Perhaps it may be your fortune to unravel some of them, for the benefit of your fellow-men. I feel satisfied that you will not only be a student of Nature, but one of her great teachers; you will far surpass the author of this little book in your knowledge of Nature's laws; but it will always be a happiness to him to reflect, that, when far advanced upon the highway of science, you will look back to him as one you had passed upon the road, and who *pointed you to the path*.

Though Basil had shot the wolf, it was plain that it was not the first nor yet the second time he had discharged his rifle since leaving the camp. From his game-bag protruded the curving claws and wing-tips of a great bird. In one hand he carried a white hare—not the Polar hare—but a much smaller kind, also an inhabitant of these snowy regions; and over his shoulders was slung a fierce-looking creature, the great wild-cat or lynx of America. The bird in his bag was the golden eagle, one of the few feathered creatures that brave the fierce winter of a northern climate, and does not migrate, like its congeners, the “white-head” and the osprey, to more southern regions.

Basil had returned alone—for the three, Basil, Norman, and François, had taken different directions at setting out. This they had done, in order to have as great a number of chances as possible of finding the game. Norman came in a few minutes after, bearing a whole deer upon his shoulders—a glad sight that was—and, a short interval having passed, François's “hurrah” sounded upon their ears, and François himself was seen coming up the valley loaded like a little donkey with two bunches of large snow-white birds.

The camp now exhibited a cheering sight. Such a variety was never seen even in the larder of a palace kitchen. The ground was strewed with animals like a dead menagerie. There were no less than a dozen kinds upon it!

145 The hare-soup was now quite ready, and was accordingly served up by Lucien in the best style. Lucien had dried a fresh “grist” of the tea leaves, and a cheering cup followed; and then the party all sat around their log-fire, while each of them detailed the history of his experience since parting with the others.

François was the first to relate what had befallen him.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

THE JERFALCON AND THE WHITE GROUSE.

"Mine," began François, "was a bird adventure, as you all see—though what kind of birds I've shot, *I* can't tell. One of them's a hawk, I'm sure; but it's a *white* hawk, and that I never saw before. The rest, I suppose, are *white* partridges. Everything appears to be white here. What are they, Luce?"

"You are right about this first," answered Lucien, taking up one of the birds which François had brought back with him, and which was white all but a few spots of clove-brown upon its back. "This is a hawk, as you may tell, by its appearance, or rather I should say a 'falcon,' for you must know there is a difference."

"What difference?" demanded François, with some eagerness of manner.

"Why the principal difference is the formation of their beaks or bills. The bills of the true falcons are stronger, and have a notch in the lower mandible answering to a tooth in the upper one. Their nostrils, too, are differently formed. But another point of distinction is found in their habits. Both feed on warm-blooded animals, and neither will eat carrion. In this respect the hawks and falcons are alike. Both take their prey upon the wing; but herein lies the difference. The hawks capture it by skimming along horizontally or obliquely, and picking it up as they pass; whereas the true falcons 'pounce' down upon it from above, and in a line nearly vertical."

"Then this must be a true falcon," interrupted François, "for I saw the gentleman do that very thing; and beautifully he did it, too."

"It is a falcon," continued Lucien; "and of the many species of hawks which inhabit North America—over twenty in all—it is one of the boldest and handsomest. I don't wonder you never saw it before; for it is truly a bird of the Northern regions, and does not come so far south as the territory of the United States, much less into Louisiana. It is found in North Europe, Greenland, and Iceland, and has been seen as far north on both continents as human beings have travelled. It is known by the name of 'jerfalcon,' or 'gyrfalcon,' but its zoological name is *Falco Islandicus*."

"The Indians here," interposed Norman, "call it by a name that means 'winter bird,' or 'winterer'—I suppose, because it is one of the few that stay in these parts all the year round, and is therefore often noticed by them in winter time. The traders sometimes call it the 'speckled partridge-hawk,' for there are some of them more spotted than this one is."

"True," said Lucien; "the young ones are nearly of a brown colour, and they first become spotted or mottled after a year or two. They are several years old before they get the white plumage, and very few individuals are seen of a pure white all over, though there are some without a spot."

"Yes," continued the naturalist, "it is the jerfalcon; and those other birds which you call 'white partridges,' are the very creatures upon which it preys. So you have killed both the tyrant and his victims. They are not partridges though, but grouse—that species known as 'willow grouse.'"

And as Lucien said this, he began to handle the birds, which were of a beautiful white all over, with the exception of the tail feathers. These last were pitch-black.

"Ho!" exclaimed Lucien, in some surprise, "you have two kinds here! Were they all together when you shot them?"

"No," answered François; "one I shot along with the hawk out in the open ground. All the others I killed upon a tree in a piece of woods that I fell in with. There's no difference between them that I can see."

"But I can," said Lucien, "although I acknowledge they all look very much alike. Both are feathered to the toes—both have the black feathers in the tail—and the bills of both are black; but if you observe closely, this kind—the willow-grouse—has the bill much stronger and less flattened. Besides, it is a larger bird than the other, which is 'the rock-grouse.' Both are sometimes, though erroneously, called 'ptarmigan;' but they are not the true ptarmigan—such as exist in North Europe—though these last are also to be met with in the Northern parts of America. The ptarmigan are somewhat larger than either of these kinds, but in other respects differ but little from them.

"The habits of the 'rock' and 'willow' grouse are very similar. They are both birds of the snowy region, and are found as far north as has been explored. The willow-grouse in winter keep more among the trees, and are oftener met with in wooded countries; whereas the others like best to live in the open ground, and, from your statement, it appears you found each kind in its favourite haunt."

"Just so," said François. "After leaving here, I kept down the valley, and was just crossing an

open piece of high ground, when I espied the white hawk, or falcon as you call it, hovering in the air as I'd often seen hawks do. Well, I stopped and hid behind a rock, thinking I might have a chance to put a few drops into him. All at once he appeared to stand still in the air, and, then closing his wings, shot down like an arrow. Just then I heard a loud '*whur-r-r*,' and up started a whole covey of white partridges—grouse, I should say—the same as this you call the 'rock-grouse.' I saw that the hawk had missed the whole of them, and I marked them as they flew off.

"They pitched about a hundred yards or so, and then went plunge under the snow—every one of them making a hole for itself just like where one had poked their foot in! I guess, boys, this looked funny enough. I thought I would be sure to get a shot at some of these grouse as they came out again; so I walked straight up to the holes they had made, and stood waiting. I still saw the hawk hovering in the air, about an hundred yards ahead of me.

"I was considering whether I ought to go farther on, and tramp the birds out of the snow; for I believed, of course, they were still under the place where the holes were. All at once I noticed a movement on the crust of the snow right under where the hawk was flying, and then that individual shot down to the spot, and disappeared under the snow! At the same instant, the crust
147 broke in several places, and up came the grouse one after another, and whirred off out of sight, without giving me any sort of a chance. The hawk, however, had not come up yet; and I ran forward, determined to take him as soon as he should make his appearance. When I had got within shooting distance, up he fluttered to the surface, and—what do you think?—he had one of the grouse struggling in his claws! I let him have the right barrel, and both he and grousy were knocked dead as a couple of door-nails!

"I thought I might fall in with the others again; and kept on in the direction they had taken, which brought me at last to a piece of woodland consisting of birches and willow-trees. As I was walking along the edge of this, I noticed one of the willows, at some distance off, covered with great white things, that at first I took for flakes of snow; but then I thought it curious that none of the other trees had the same upon them. As I came a little nearer, I noticed one of the things moving, and then I saw they were birds, and very like the same I had just seen, and was then in search of. So I crept in among the trees; and, after some dodging, got within beautiful shooting distance, and gave them both barrels. There, you see the result!"

Here François triumphantly pointed to the pile of birds, which in all, with the jerfalcon, counted four brace and a half.

One was the rock-grouse, which the falcon had itself killed, and the others were willow-grouse, as Lucien had stated. François now remained silent, while Basil related his day's adventure.

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CHAPTER XXXIV.

THE HARE, THE LYNX, AND THE GOLDEN EAGLE.

"Frank," began he, "has called his 'a bird adventure.' I might give mine somewhat of the same title, for there was a bird mixed up with it—the noblest of all birds—the eagle. But you shall hear it.

"On leaving the camp, I went, as you all know, up the valley. After travelling for a quarter of a mile or so, I came upon a wide open bottom, where there were some scattered willows and clumps of dwarf birch-trees. As Luce had told me that such are the favourite food of the American hare, or, as we call it in Louisiana, 'rabbit,' I looked out for the sign of one, and, sure enough, I soon came upon a track, which I knew to be that of 'puss.' It was fresh enough, and I followed it. It kept me meandering about for a long while, till at last I saw that it took a straight course for some thick brushwood, with two or three low birches growing out of it.

"As I made sure of finding the game there, I crept forward very quietly, holding Marengo in the leash. But the hare was not in the brush; and, after tramping all through it, I again noticed the track where she had gone out on the opposite side. I was about starting forth to follow it, when all at once an odd-looking creature made its appearance right before me. It was that fellow there!" And Basil pointed to the lynx. "I thought at first sight," continued he, "it was our Louisiana wild cat or bay lynx, as Luce calls it, for it is very like our cat; but I saw it was nearly twice as big, and more greyish in the fur. Well, when I first sighted the creature, it was about an hundred yards off.

148 "It hadn't seen me, though, for it was not running away, but skulking along slowly—nearly crosswise to the course of the hare's track—and looking in a different direction to that in which I was. I was well screened behind the bushes, and that, no doubt, prevented it from noticing me. At first I thought of running forward, and setting Marengo after it. Then I determined on staying where I was, and watching it a while. Perhaps it may come to a stop, reflected I, and let me creep within shot. I remained, therefore, crouching among the bushes, and kept the dog at my feet.

"As I continued to watch the cat, I saw that, instead of following a straight line, it was moving

in a circle!

“The diameter of this circle was not over an hundred yards; and in a very short while the animal had got once round the circumference, and came back to where I had first seen it. It did not stop there, but continued on, though not in its old tracks. It still walked in a circle, but a much smaller one than before. Both, however, had a common centre; and, as I noticed that the animal kept its eyes constantly turned towards the centre, I felt satisfied that in that place would be found the cause of its strange manœuvring. I looked to the centre. At first I could see nothing —at least nothing that might be supposed to attract the cat. There was a very small bush of willows, but they were thin. I could see distinctly through them, and there was no creature there, either in the bush or around it. The snow lay white up to the roots of the willows, and I thought that a mouse could hardly have found shelter among them, without my seeing it from where I stood.

“Still I could not explain the odd actions of the lynx, upon any other principle than that it was in the pursuit of game; and I looked again, and carefully examined every inch of the ground as my eyes passed over it. This time I discovered what the animal was after. Close into the willows appeared two little parallel streaks of a dark colour, just rising above the surface of the snow. I should not have noticed them had there not been two of them, and these slanting in the same direction. They had caught my eyes before, but I had taken them for the points of broken willows. I now saw that they were the ears of some animal, and I thought that once or twice they moved slightly while I was regarding them.

“After looking at them steadily for a time, I made out the shape of a little head underneath. It was white, but there was a round dark spot in the middle, which I knew to be an eye. There was no body to be seen. That was under the snow, but it was plain enough that what I saw was the head of a hare. At first I supposed it to be a Polar hare—such as we had just killed—but the tracks I had followed were not those of the Polar hare. Then I remembered that the 'rabbit' of the United States also turns white in the winter of the Northern regions. This, then, must be the American rabbit, thought I.

“Of course my reflections did not occupy all the time I have taken in describing them. Only a moment or so. All the while the lynx was moving round and round the circle, but still getting nearer to the hare that appeared eagerly to watch it. I remembered how Norman had manœuvred to get within shot of the Polar hare; and I now saw the very same *ruse* being practised by a dumb creature, that is supposed to have no other guide than instinct. But I had
149 seen the 'bay lynx' of Louisiana do some 'dodges' as cunning as that,—such as claying his feet to make the hounds lose the scent, and, after running backwards and forwards upon a fallen log, leap into the tops of trees, and get off in that way.”

“Believing that his Northern cousin was just as artful as himself” (here Basil looked significantly at the “Captain,”) “I did not so much wonder at the performance I now witnessed. Nevertheless, I felt a great curiosity to see it out. But for this curiosity I could have shot the lynx every time he passed me on the nearer edge of the circle. Round and round he went, then, until he was not twenty feet from the hare, that, strange to say, seemed to regard this the worst of her enemies more with wonder than fear. The lynx at length stopped suddenly, brought his four feet close together, arched his back like an angry cat, and then with one immense bound, sprang forward upon his victim.

“The hare had only time to leap out of her form, and the second spring of the lynx brought him right upon the top of her. I could hear the child-like scream which the American rabbit always utters when thus seized; but the cloud of snow-spray raised above the spot prevented me for a while from seeing either lynx or hare. The scream was stifled in a moment, and when the snow-spray cleared off, I saw that the lynx held the hare under his paws, and that 'puss' was quite dead.

“I was considering how I might best steal up within shooting distance, when, all at once, I heard another scream of a very different sort. At the same time a dark shadow passed over the snow. I looked up, and there, within fifty yards of the ground, a great big bird was wheeling about. I knew it to be an eagle from its shape; and at first I fancied it was a young one of the white-headed kind—for, as you are aware, these do not have either the white head or tail until they are several years old. Its immense size, however, showed that it could not be one of these. It must be the great *'golden' eagle* of the Rocky Mountains, thought I.

“When I first noticed it, I fancied that it had been after the rabbit; and, seeing the latter pounced upon by another preying creature, had uttered its scream at being thus disappointed of its prey. I expected, therefore, to see it fly off. To my astonishment it broke suddenly out of the circles in which it had been so gracefully wheeling, and, with another scream wilder than before, darted down towards the lynx!

“The latter, on hearing the first cry of the eagle, had started, dropped his prey, and looked up. In the eagle he evidently recognised an antagonist, for his back suddenly became arched, his fur bristled up, his short tail moved quickly from side to side, and he stood with glaring eyes, and claws ready to receive the attack.

“As the eagle came down, its legs and claws were thrown forward, and I could then tell it was not a bald eagle, nor the great “Washington eagle,” nor yet a fishing eagle of any sort, which both of these are. The fishing eagles, as Lucien had told me, *have always naked legs*, while those of

the true eagles are more feathered. So were his, but beyond the feathers I could see his great curved talons, as he struck forward at the lynx. He evidently touched and wounded the animal, but the wound only served to make it more angry: and I could hear it purring and spitting like a tom-cat, only far louder.

150 “The eagle again mounted back into the air, but soon wheeled round and shot down a second time. This time the lynx sprang forward to meet it, and I could hear the concussion of their bodies as they came together. I think the eagle must have been crippled, so that it could not fly up again, for the fight from that time was carried on upon the ground. The lynx seemed anxious to grasp some part of his antagonist's body—and at times I thought he had succeeded—but then he was beaten off again by the bird, that fought furiously with wings, beak, and talons.”

THE LYNX AND THE GOLDEN EAGLE.

151 “The lynx now appeared to be the attacking party, as I saw him repeatedly spring forward at the eagle, while the latter always received him upon its claws, lying with its back upon the snow. Both fur and feathers flew in every direction, and sometimes the combatants were so covered with the snow-spray that I could see neither of them.

“I watched the conflict for several minutes, until it occurred to me, that my best time to get near enough for a shot was just while they were in the thick of it, and not likely to heed me. I therefore moved silently out of the bushes; and, keeping Marengo in the string, crept forward. I had but the one bullet to give them, and with that I could not shoot both; but I knew that the quadruped was eatable, and, as I was not sure about the bird, I very easily made choice, and shot the lynx. To my surprise the eagle did not fly off, and I now saw that one of its wings was disabled! He was still strong enough, however, to scratch Marengo severely before the latter could master him. As to the lynx, he had been roughly handled. His skin was torn in several places, and one of his eyes, as you see, regularly 'gouged out.'”

Here Basil ended his narration; and after an interval, during which some fresh wood was chopped and thrown upon the fire, Norman, in turn, commenced relating what had befallen him.

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CHAPTER XXXV.

THE “ALARM BIRD” AND THE CARIBOU.

“There wasn't much 'adventure' in my day's sport,” said he, “though I might call it a 'bird-adventure' too, for if it hadn't been for a bird I shouldn't have had it. I shot a deer—that's all. But maybe it would be curious for you to know how I came to find the animal, so I'll tell you.

“The first thing I did after leaving here was to climb the hill yonder”—here Norman pointed to a long hill that sloped up from the opposite shore of the lake, and which was the direction he had taken, as Basil and François had gone right and left.

“I saw neither bird, beast, nor track, until I had reached the top of the hill. There I got a good view of the country ahead. I saw it was very rocky, without a stick of timber, and did not look very promising for game. 'It's no use going that way,' I says to myself; “I'll keep along the ridge, above where Frank's gone. He may drive some varmint out of the hollow, and I'll get a crack at it, as it comes over the hill.

“I was about to turn to the left when I heard the skreek of a bird away ahead of me. I looked in that direction; and, sure enough, saw one wheeling about in the air, right above the rocky jumble with which the country was covered.

“Now it's a mighty curious bird that I saw. It's a sort of an owl, but, I should say myself, there's a sprinkling of the hawk in it—for it's as much like the one as the other.”

“No doubt,” interrupted Lucien, “it was one of the day owls of these Northern regions, some of which approach very near to the hawks, both in shape and habits. This peculiarity arises from the fact of the long summer day—of weeks in duration—within the Arctic circle, requiring them to hunt for their prey, just as hawks do; and therefore Nature has gifted them with certain
152 peculiarities that make them resemble these birds. They want the very broad faces and large tufted heads of the true owls; besides the ears, which in the latter are remarkable for their size, and also for being operculated, or with lids, in the former are not much larger than in other birds of prey. The small hawk-owl which is altogether a Northern bird, is one of this kind.”

“Very well,” continued Norman, “what you say may be very true, cousin Luce; I only know that the bird I am speaking about is a mighty curious little creature. It ain't bigger than a pigeon, and is of a mottled brown colour; but what I call it curious for is this:—Whenever it sees any creature passing from place to place, it mounts up into the air, and hovers above them, keeping up a constant screeching, like the squalling of a child—and that's anything but agreeable. It does so, not only in the neighbourhood of its nest—like the plover and some other birds—but it will sometimes follow a travelling party for hours together, and for miles across the country.”

From this circumstance the Indians of these parts call it the “alarm bird,” or “bird of warning,” because it often makes them aware of the approach either of their enemies or of strangers. Sometimes it alarms and startles the game, while the hunter is crawling up to it; and I have known it to bother myself for a while of a day, when I was after grouse. It's a great favourite with the Indians though—as it often guides them to deer, or musk-oxen, by its flying and screaming above where these animals are feeding.

Just in the same way it guided me. I knew, from the movements of the bird, that there must be something among the rocks. I couldn't tell what, but I hoped it would turn out to be some creature that was eatable; so I changed my intention, and struck out for the place where it was.

It was a good half mile from the hill, and it cost me considerable clambering over the rocks, before I reached the ground. I thought to get near enough to see what it was, without drawing the bird upon myself, and I crouched from hummock to hummock; but the sharp-eyed creature caught sight of me, and came screeching over my head. I kept on without noticing it; but as I was obliged to go round some large rocks, I lost the direction, and soon found myself wandering back into my own trail.

I could do nothing, therefore, until the bird should leave me, and fly back to whatever had first set it a-going. In order that it might do so, I crept in under a big stone that jutted out, and lay quiet a bit, watching it. It soon flew off, and commenced wheeling about in the air, not more than three hundred yards from where I lay. This time I took good bearings, and then went on. I did not care for the bird to guide me any longer, for I observed there was an open spot ahead, and I was sure that there I could see something. And sure enough I did. On peeping round the end of a rock, I spied a herd of about fifty deer.

They were reindeer, of course, as there are no others upon the 'Barren Grounds,' and I saw they were all does—for at this season the bucks keep altogether in the woods. Some of them were pawing the snow to get at the moss, while others were standing by the rocks, and tearing off the lichens with their teeth. It so happened that I had the wind of them, else they would have scented
153 me and made off, for I was within a hundred yards of the nearest. I was not afraid of their taking fright, so long as they could only see part of my body—for these deer are so stupid, or rather so curious, that almost anything will draw them within shot.

Knowing this, I practised a trick that had often helped me before; and that was to move the barrel of my gun, up and down, with the same sort of motion as the deer make with their horns, when rubbing their necks against a rock or tree. If I'd had a set of antlers, it would have been all the better; but the other answered well enough. It happened the animals were not very wild, as, likely, they hadn't been hunted for a good while. I bellowed at the same time,—for I know how to imitate their call—and, in less than a minute's time, I got several of them within range. Then I took aim, and knocked one over, and the rest ran off. “That,” said Norman, “ended *my* adventure —unless you call the carrying a good hundred pounds weight of deer-meat all the way back to camp part of it. If so, I can assure you that it was by far the most unpleasant part.”

Here Norman finished his narration, and a conversation was carried on upon the subject of reindeer, or, as these animals are termed, in America, “caribou.”

Lucien said that the reindeer is found in the Northern regions of Europe and Asia as well as in America, but that there were several varieties of them, and perhaps there were different species.

Those of Lapland are most celebrated, because they not only draw sledges, but also furnish food, clothing, and many other commodities for their owners. In the north of Asia, the Tungusians have a much larger sort, which they ride upon; and the Koreki, who dwell upon the borders of Kamschatka, possess vast herds of reindeer—some rich individuals owing as many as ten or twenty thousand!

It is not certain that the reindeer of America is exactly the same as either of the kinds mentioned; and indeed in America itself there are two very distinct kinds—perhaps a third. Two kinds are well known, that differ from each other in size, and also in habits. One is the “Barren Ground caribou,” and the other, the “Woodland caribou.” The former is one of the smallest of the deer kind—the bucks weighing little over one hundred pounds. As its name implies, it frequents the Barren Grounds, although in winter it also seeks the shelter of wooded tracts. Upon the Barren Grounds, and the desolate shores and islands of the Arctic Sea, it is the only kind of deer found, except at one or two points, as the mouth of the Mackenzie River—which happens to be a wooded country, and there the moose also is met with.

Nature seems to have gifted the Barren Ground caribou with such tastes and habits, that a fertile country and a genial clime would not be a pleasant home for it. It seems adapted to the bleak, sterile countries in which it dwells, and where its favourite food—the mosses and lichens—is found. In the short summer of the Arctic regions, it ranges still farther north; and its traces have been found wherever the Northern navigators have gone. It must remain among the icy islands of the Arctic Sea until winter be considerably advanced, or until the sea is so frozen as to allow it to get back to the shores of the continent.

The “Woodland caribou” is a larger variety—a Woodland doe being about as big as a Barren Ground buck—although the horns of the latter species are larger and more branching than those
154 of the former. The Woodland kind are found around the shores of Hudson's Bay, and in other wooded tracts that lie in the southern parts of the fur countries—into which the Barren Ground caribou never penetrates. They also migrate annually, but, strange to say, their spring migrations are southward, while, at the same season, their cousins of the Barren Grounds are making their way northward to the shores of the Arctic Sea. This is a very singular difference in their habits, and along with their difference in bulk, form, &c., entitles them to be ranked as separate species of deer.

The flesh of the Woodland caribou is not esteemed so good an article of food as that of the other; and, as it inhabits a district where many large animals are found, it is not considered of so much importance in the economy of human life. The “Barren Ground caribou,” on the other hand, is an indispensable animal to various tribes of Indians, as well as to the Esquimaux. Without it, these people would be unable to dwell where they do; and although they have not domesticated it, and trained it to draught, like the Laplanders, it forms their main source of subsistence, and there is no part of its body which they do not turn to some useful purpose.

Of its horns they form their fish-spears and hooks, and, previous to the introduction of iron by the Europeans, their ice-chisels and various other utensils. Their scraping or currying knives are made from the split shin-bones. The skins make their clothing, tent-covers, beds, and blankets. The raw hide, cleared of the hair and cut into thongs, serves for snares, bow-strings, net-lines, and every other sort of ropes. The finer thongs make netting for snow-shoes—an indispensable article to these people—and of these thongs fish-nets are also woven; while the tendons of the muscles, when split, serve for fine sewing-thread. Besides these uses, the flesh of the caribou is the food of many tribes, Indians and Esquimaux, for most of the year; and, indeed, it may be looked upon as their staple article of subsistence.

There is hardly any part of it (even the horns, when soft) that is not eaten and relished by them. Were it not for the immense herds of these creatures that roam over the country, they would soon be exterminated—for they are easily approached, and the Indians have very little difficulty, during the summer season, in killing as many as they please.

Norman next gave a description of the various modes of hunting the caribou practised by the Indians and Esquimaux; such as driving them into a pound, snaring them, decoying and shooting them with arrows, and also a singular way which the Esquimaux have of taking them in a pit-trap built in the snow.

“The sides of the trap,” said he, “are built of slabs of snow, cut as if to make a snow-house. An inclined plane of snow leads to the entrance of the pit, which is about five feet deep, and large enough within to hold several deer. The exterior of the trap is banked up on all sides with snow; but so steep are these sides left, that the deer can only get up by the inclined plane which leads to the entrance. A great slab of snow is then placed over the mouth of the pit, and revolves on two axles of wood. This slab will carry the deer until it has passed the line of the axles, when its weight overbalances one side, and the animal is precipitated into the pit. The slab then comes back into a horizontal position as before, and is ready to receive another deer. The animals are
155 attracted by moss and lichens placed for them on the opposite side of the trap—in such a way that they cannot be reached without crossing the slab. In this sort of trap several deer are frequently caught during a single day.”

Norman knew another mode of hunting practised by the Esquimaux, and proposed that the party should proceed in search of the herd upon the following day; when, should they succeed in finding the deer, he would show them how the thing was done; and he had no doubt of their being able to make a good hunt of it. All agreed to this proposal, as it would be of great

importance to them to kill a large number of these animals. It is true they had now provision enough to serve for several days—but there were perhaps months, not days, to be provided for. They believed that they could not be far from the wooded countries near the banks of the Mackenzie, as some kinds of the animal they had met with were only to be found near timber during the winter season. But what of that? Even on the banks of the great river itself they might not succeed in procuring game. They resolved, therefore, to track the herd of deer which Norman had seen; and for this purpose they agreed to make a stay of some days at their present camp.

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CHAPTER XXXVI.

A BATTLE WITH WOLVES.

Next morning they were up by early daybreak. The days were now only a few hours in length, for it was mid-winter, and they were but three or four degrees south of the Arctic circle. Of course they would require all the day for the intended hunt of the caribou, as they might have to follow the track of the herd for many miles before coming up with the animals. Lucien was to remain by the camp, as it would never do to leave the animals they had already killed without some guard. To have hung them on the trees, would have put them out of the reach of both wolves and foxes; but the lynx and wolverene are both tree-climbers, and could easily have got at them there.

They had reason to believe there were wolverenes about; for these fierce and destructive beasts are found in every part of the fur countries—wherever there exist other animals upon which they can prey. Eagles, hawks, and owls, moreover, would have picked the partridges from the branches of the trees without difficulty. One proposed burying them in the snow; but Norman assured them that the Arctic foxes could scent them out, and dig them up in a few minutes. Then it was suggested to cover them under a pile of stones, as there were plenty of these lying about.

To this Norman also objected, saying that the wolverene could pull off any stones they were able to pile upon them—as this creature in its fore-legs possesses more than the strength of a man. Besides, it was not unlikely that one of the great brown bears,—a species entirely different from either the black or grizzly bears, and which is only met with on the Barren Grounds—might come ranging that way; and he could soon toss over any stone-heap they might build. On the whole it was better that one of the four should remain by the camp; and Lucien, who cared less
156 about hunting than any of them, willingly agreed to be the one.

Their arrangements were soon completed, and the three hunters set out. They did not go straight towards the place where Norman had found the deer upon the preceding day, but took a cross-cut over the hills. This was by Norman's advice, who guided himself by the wind—which had not changed since the previous day. He knew that the caribou in feeding always travel *against* the wind; and he expected therefore to find them somewhere in the direction from which it was blowing. Following a course, which angled with that of the wind, they kept on, expecting soon to strike the trail of the herd.

Meanwhile Lucien, left to himself, was not idle. He had to prepare the flesh of the different animals, so as to render it fit to be carried along. Nothing was required farther than to skin and cut them up. Neither salting nor drying was necessary, for the flesh of one and all had got frozen as stiff as a stone, and in this way it would keep during the whole winter. The wolf was skinned with the others, but this was because his fine skin was wanted. His flesh was not intended to be eaten—although only a day or two before any one of the party would have been glad of such a meal.

Not only the Indians, but the voyageurs and fur-traders, while journeying through these inhospitable wilds, are often but too delighted to get a dinner of wolf-meat. The ermine and the little mouse were the only other creatures of the collection that were deemed uneatable. As to the Arctic fox and the lynx, the flesh of both these creatures is highly esteemed, and is white and tender, almost as much so as the hares upon which they feed. The snowy owl too, the jerfalcon, and the eagle, were looked upon as part of the larder—the flesh of all being almost as good as that of the grouse.

Had it been a fishing eagle—such as the bald-head—the case would have been different, for these last, on account of their peculiar food, taste rank and disagreeable. But there was no danger of their falling in with a fishing eagle at that place. These can only exist where there is *open* water. Hence the cause of their annual migrations to the southward, when the lakes and rivers of the fur countries become covered with their winter ice.

Though Lucien remained quietly at the camp he was not without adventures to keep him from wearying. While he was singeing his grouse his eye happened to fall upon the shadow of a bird passing over the snow. On looking up he saw a very large bird, nearly as big as an eagle, flying softly about in wide circles. It was of a mottled-brown colour; but its short neck and great round head told the naturalist at a glance that it was a bird of the owl genus. It was the largest of the kind that Lucien had ever seen, and was, in fact, the largest known in America—the “great

cinereous owl.” Now and then it would alight upon a rock or tree, at the distance of an hundred yards or so from the camp; where it would watch the operations of Lucien, evidently inclined to help him in dissecting some of the animals. Whenever he took up his gun and tried to approach within shot, it would rise into the air again, always keeping out of range. Lucien was provoked at this—for he wished, as a naturalist, to examine the bird, and for this purpose to kill it, of course; but the owl seemed determined that he should do no such thing.

At length, however, Lucien resolved upon a plan to decoy the creature within shot. Taking up
157 one of the grouse, he flung it out upon the snow some thirty yards from the fire. No sooner had he done so, than the owl, at sight of the tempting morsel, left aside both its shyness and prudence, and sailed gently forward; then, hovering for a moment over the ground, hooked the grouse upon its claws, and was about to carry it off, when a bullet from Lucien's rifle, just in the “nick of time,” put a stop to its further flight, and dropped the creature dead upon the snow.

Lucien picked it up and brought it to the camp, where he passed some time in making notes upon its size, colour, and other peculiarities. The owl measured exactly two feet in length from the point of the bill to the end of the tail; and its “alar spread,” as naturalists term it, was full five feet in extent. It was of a clove-brown colour, beautifully mottled with white, and its bill and eyes were of a bright gamboge yellow. Like all of its tribe that winter in the Arctic wilds, it was feathered to the toes. Lucien reflected that this species lives more in the woods than the “great snowy owl,” and, as he had heard, is never found far out on the Barren Grounds during winter. This fact, therefore, was a pleasant one to reflect upon, for it confirmed the testimony which the travellers had already obtained from several of the other creatures they had killed—that is to say, that they must be in the neighbourhood of some timbered country.

Lucien had hardly finished his examination of the owl when he was called upon to witness another incident of a still more exciting nature. A hill, as already mentioned, or rather a ridge, rose up from the opposite shore of the lake by which the camp was pitched. The declivity of this hill fronted the lake, and sloped gradually back from the edge of the water. Its whole face was smooth and treeless, covered with a layer of pure snow. The camp commanded a full view of it up to its very crest.

As Lucien was sitting quietly by the fire a singular sound, or rather continuation of sounds, fell upon his ear. It somewhat resembled the baying of hounds at a distance; and at first he was inclined to believe that it was Marengo on a view-hunt after the deer. On listening more attentively, however, he observed that the sounds came from more than one animal; and also, that they bore more resemblance to the howling of wolves than the deep-toned bay of a bloodhound. This, in fact, it was; for the next moment a caribou shot up over the crest of the hill, and was seen stretching at full gallop down the smooth declivity in the direction of the lake. Not twenty paces in its rear followed a string of howling animals, evidently in pursuit of it. There were a dozen of them in all, and they were running exactly like hounds upon the “view holloa.” Lucien saw at a glance they were wolves. Most of them were dappled-grey and white, while some were of a pure white colour. Any one of them was nearly as large as the caribou itself; for in these parts—around Great Slave Lake—the wolf grows to his largest size.

The caribou gained upon them as it bounded down the slope of the hill. It was evidently making for the lake, believing, no doubt, that the black ice upon its surface was water, and that in that element it would have the advantage of its pursuers, for the caribou is a splendid swimmer. Nearly all deer when hunted take to the water—to throw off the dogs, or escape from men—and to this habit the reindeer makes no exception.

158 Down the hill swept the chase, Lucien having a full view both of pursuers and pursued. The deer ran boldly. It seemed to have gathered fresh confidence at sight of the lake, while the same object caused its pursuers a feeling of disappointment. They knew they were no match for a caribou in the water, as no doubt many a one had escaped them in that element. It is not likely, however, that they made reflections of this sort. There was but little time. From the moment of their appearance upon the crest of the hill till the chase arrived at the edge of the lake, was but a few seconds. On reaching the shore the caribou made no stop; but bounded forward in the same way as if it had been springing upon water. Most likely it expected to hear a plunge; but, instead of that, its hoofs came down upon the hard ice; and, by the impulse thus given, the animal shot out with the velocity of a skater.

Strange to say, it still kept its feet; but, now seemingly overcome by surprise, and knowing the advantage its pursuers would have over it upon the slippery ice, it began to plunge and flounder, and once or twice came to its knees. The hungry pursuers appeared to recognise their advantage at once, for their howling opened with a fresh burst, and they quickened their pace. Their sharp claws enabled them to gallop over the ice at top speed; and one large brute that led the pack soon came up with the deer, sprang upon it, and bit it in the flank. This brought the deer upon its haunches, and at once put an end to the chase. The animal was hardly down upon the ice, when the foremost wolves coming up precipitated themselves upon its body, and began to devour it.

It was about the middle of the lake where the caribou had been overtaken. At the time it first reached the ice, Lucien had laid hold of his rifle and run forward in order to meet the animal half-way, and, if possible, get a shot at it. Now that the creature was killed, he continued on with the design of driving off the wolves, and securing the carcass of the deer for himself. He kept along the ice until he was within less than twenty yards of the pack, when, seeing that the fierce brutes had torn the deer to pieces, and perceiving, moreover, that they exhibited no fear of himself, he began to think he might be in danger by advancing any nearer. Perhaps a shot from his rifle

would scatter them, and without further reflection he raised the piece, and fired. One of the wolves kicked over upon the ice, and lay quite dead; but the others, to Lucien's great surprise, instead of being frightened off, immediately sprang upon their dead companion, and commenced tearing and devouring it, just as they had done the deer!

The sight filled Lucien with alarm; which was increased at seeing several of the wolves—that had been beaten by the others from the quarry—commence making demonstrations towards himself! Lucien now trembled for his safety, and no wonder. He was near the middle of the lake upon slippery ice. To attempt running back to the camp would be hazardous; the wolves could overtake him before he had got half-way, and he felt certain that any signs of fear on his part would be the signal for the fierce brutes to assail him.

For some moments he was irresolute how to act. He had commenced loading his gun, but his fingers were numbed with the cold, and it was a good while before he could get the piece ready for a second fire. He succeeded at length. He did not fire then, but resolved to keep the charge
159 for a more desperate crisis. Could he but reach the camp there were trees near it, and one of these he might climb. This was his only hope, in case the wolves attacked him, and he knew it was. Instead of turning and running for this point, he began to back for it stealthily and with caution, keeping his front all the while towards the wolves, and his eyes fixed upon them.

He had not got many yards, when he perceived to his horror, that the whole pack were in motion, and *coming after him*! It was a terrible sight, and Lucien seeing that by retreating he only drew them on, stopped and held his rifle in a threatening attitude. The wolves were now within twenty yards of him; but, instead of moving any longer directly towards him, they broke into two lines, swept past on opposite sides of him, and then circling round, met each other in his rear. *His retreat was cut off!*

He now stood upon the ice with the fierce wolves forming a ring around him, whose diameter was not the six lengths of his gun, and every moment growing shorter and shorter. The prospect was appalling. It would have caused the stoutest heart to quail, and Lucien's was terrified. He shouted at the top of his voice. He fired his rifle at the nearest. The brute fell, but the others showed no symptoms of fear; they only grew more furious. Lucien clubbed his gun—the last resort in such cases—and laid around him with all his might; but he was in danger of slipping upon the ice, and his efforts were feeble.

Once down he never would have risen again, for his fierce assailants would have sprung upon him like tigers. As it was, he felt but little hope. He believed himself lost. The teeth of the ferocious monsters gleamed under his eyes. He was growing weaker and weaker, yet still he battled on, and swept his gun around him with the energy of despair.

Such a struggle could not have continued much longer. Lucien's fate would have been sealed in a very few minutes more, had not relief arrived in some shape or other. But it did come. A loud shout was heard upon the hill; and Lucien, glancing suddenly towards it, saw several forms rushing downward to the lake! It was the hunting party returned, and in a moment more they were crossing the ice to his rescue. Lucien gaining confidence fought with fresh vigour. The wolves busy in their attack had either not heard or were regardless of the new-comers; but the “crack, crack” of the guns—repeated no less than four times—and then the nearer reports of pistols, made a speedy impression upon the brutes, and in a short while half their number were seen tumbling and kicking upon the ice. The rest, uttering their hideous howls, took to flight, and soon disappeared from the valley; and Lucien, half dead with fatigue, staggered into the arms of his deliverers.

No less than seven of the wolves were killed in the affray—two of which Lucien had shot himself. One or two were only wounded, but so badly, that they could not get away; and these were handed over to the tender mercies of Marengo, who amused himself for some time after by worrying them to death.

The hunting party had made a good day of it. They had fallen in with the caribou, and had killed three of them. These they were bringing to camp, but had dropped them upon the hill, on
160 perceiving the perilous position of Lucien. They now went back, and having carried the deer to their camping-place, were soon engaged in the pleasant occupation of eating a savoury dinner. Lucien soon recovered from his fright and fatigue, and amused his companions by giving an account of the adventures that had befallen him in their absence.

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CHAPTER XXXVII.

END OF THE “VOYAGE.”

Our party remained several days at this place, until they had made a fresh stock of “pemmican” from the flesh of the caribou, several more of which they succeeded in killing; and then, arranging everything anew, and taking with them such skins as they wanted, they continued their journey.

They had two days' hard travelling through a rocky mountainous country, where they could not find a stick of wood to cook their meals with, and were exposed to cold more than at any other place. Both François and Lucien had their faces frost-bitten; but they were cured by Norman, who prevented them from going near a fire until he had well rubbed the parts with soft snow.

The rocks through which they passed were in many places covered with the *tripe de roche* of several species; but our voyageurs cared nothing about it so long as their pemmican lasted, and of that each of them had nearly as much as he could carry.

In the most dreary part of the mountains they chanced upon a herd of those curious animals, the musk-oxen, and shot one of them; but the meat tasted so rank, and smelt so strongly of musk, that the whole of it was left to the wolves, foxes, and other preying creatures of these parts.

On the third day, after leaving their camp by the lake, a pleasant prospect opened before them. It was the valley of the Mackenzie, stretching to the west, and extending north and south as far as the eye could reach, covered with forests of pine and poplar, and other large trees. Of course the landscape was a winter one, as the river was bound up in ice, and the trees themselves were half-white with frozen snow; but after the dreary scenery of the barren grounds, even this appeared warm and summer-like. There was no longer any danger they should be without a good fire to cook their dinners, or warm themselves at, and a wooded country offers a better prospect of game.

The sight, therefore, of a great forest was cheering; and our travellers, in high spirits, planted their tent upon the banks of the great Northern river. They had still many hundred miles to go before arriving at their destination; but they determined to continue their journey without much delay, following the river as a guide. No more “near cuts” were to be taken in future. They had learned, from their recent experience, that “the shortest way across is sometimes the longest way round,” and they resolved to profit by the lesson. I hope, boy reader, you too will remember it.

After reaching the Mackenzie the voyageurs halted one day, and upon the next commenced their journey down-stream. Sometimes they kept upon the bank, but at times, for a change, they
161 travelled upon the ice of the river. There was no danger of its giving way under them, for it was more than a foot in thickness, and would have supported a loaded wagon and horses, without even cracking.

They were now drawing near the Arctic circle, and the days grew shorter and shorter as they advanced. But this did not much interfere with their travelling. The long nights of the Polar regions are not like those of more Southern latitudes. They are sometimes so clear, that one may read the smallest print. What with the coruscations of the aurora borealis, and the cheerful gleaming of the Northern constellations, one may travel without difficulty throughout the livelong night. I am sure, my young friend, you have made good use of your globes, and need not be told that the length of both nights and days, as you approach the pole, depends upon two things—the latitude of the place, and the season of the year; and were you to spend a whole year *leaning against the pole itself, (!)* you would *live but one day and one night*—each of them six months in length.

But no doubt you know all these things without my telling you of them, and you are impatient to hear not about that, but whether the young voyageurs safely reached the end of their journey. That question I answer briefly at once—they did.

Some distance below the point where they had struck the Mackenzie, they fell in with a winter encampment of Dog-rib Indians. Some of these people had been to the Fort to trade; and Norman being known to them, he and his Southern cousins were received with much hospitality. All their wants were provided for, as far as it lay in the power of these poor people to do; but the most valuable thing obtained from the Indians was a full set of dogs and dog-sledges for the whole party. These were furnished by the chief, upon the understanding that he should be paid for them on his next visit to the Fort.

Although the reindeer of North America are not trained to the sledge by the Esquimaux and Indians, several kinds of dogs are; and a single pair of these faithful creatures will draw a full-grown man at a rate that exceeds almost every other mode of travelling—steam excepted. When our voyageurs, therefore, flung away their snow-shoes, and, wrapped in their skin cloaks, seated themselves snugly in their dog sledges, the five hundred miles that separated them from the Fort were soon reduced to nothing; and one afternoon, four small sledges, each carrying a “young voyageur,” with a large bloodhound galloping in the rear, were seen driving up to the stockade fence surrounding the Fort.

Before they had quite reached the gate, there was a general rush of trappers, traders, voyageurs, *coureurs-des-bois* and other *employés*, to reach them; and the next moment they were lost in the midst of the people who crowded out of the Fort to welcome them. This was their hour of happiness and joy.

To me there is an hour of regret, and I hope, boy reader, to you as well—the hour of our
162 parting with the “Young Voyageurs.”

THE FOREST EXILES,

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CHAPTER I.

THE BIGGEST WOOD IN THE WORLD.

Boy Reader, I am told that you are not tired of my company. Is this true?

"Quite true, dear Captain,—quite true!"

That is your reply. You speak sincerely? I believe you do.

In return, believe *me*, when I tell you I am not tired of yours; and the best proof I can give is, that I have come once more to seek you. I have come to solicit the pleasure of your company,—not to an evening party, nor to a ball, nor to the Grand Opera, nor to the Crystal Palace, nor yet to the Zoological Gardens of Regent's Park,—no, but to the great zoological garden of Nature. I have come to ask you to accompany me on another "campaign,"—another "grand journey" through the fields of Science and Adventure. Will you go?

"Most willingly—with you, dear Captain, anywhere."

Come with me, then.

Again we turn our faces westward; again we cross the blue and billowy Atlantic; again we seek the shores of the noble continent of America.

"What! to America again?"

Ha! that is a large continent, and you need not fear that I am going to take you over old ground. No, fear not that! New scenes, await us; a new *fauna*, a new *flora*,—I might almost say, a new earth and a new sky!

You shall have variety, I promise you,—a perfect contrast to the scenes of our last journey.

Then, you remember, we turned our faces to the cold and icy North,—now our path lies through the hot and sunny South. Then we lived in a log-hut, and closed every cranny to keep out the cold,—now, in our cottage of palms and cane, we shall be but too glad to let the breeze play through the open walls. Then we wrapped our bodies in thick furs,—now we shall be content with the lightest garments. Then we were bitten by the frost—now we shall be bitten by the sand-flies, and mosquitoes, and bats, and snakes, and scorpions, and spiders, and stung by wasps, and centipedes, and great red ants! Trust me, you shall have a change!

Perhaps you do not contemplate *such* a change with any very lively feelings of pleasure. Come! do not be alarmed at the snakes, and scorpions, and centipedes! We shall find a cure for every bite—an antidote for every bane.

Our new journey shall have its pleasures and advantages. Remember how of old we shivered as we slept, coiled up in the corner of our dark log-hut and smothered in skins,—now we shall swing
163 lightly in our netted hammocks under the gossamer leaves of the palm-tree, or the feathery frondage of the ferns. Then we gazed upon leaden skies, and at night looked upon the cold constellation of the Northern Bear;—now, we shall have over us an azure canopy, and shall nightly behold the sparkling glories of the Southern Cross, still shining as bright as when Paul and his little Virginia with loving eyes gazed upon it from their island home. In our last journey we toiled over bleak and barren wastes, across frozen lakes, and marshes, and rivers;—now we shall pass under the shadows of virgin forests, and float lightly upon the bosom of broad majestic streams, whose shores echo with the voices of living nature.

Hitherto our travels have been upon the wide, open prairie, the trackless plain of sand, the frozen lake, the thin scattering woods of the North, or the treeless snow-clad "Barrens." Now we are about to enter a great forest,—a forest where the leaves never fade, where the flowers are always in bloom,—a forest where the woodman's axe has not yet echoed, where the colonist has hardly hewed out a single clearing,—a vast primeval forest,—the largest in the world.

How large, do you ask? I can hardly tell you. Are you thinking of Epping or the New Forest? True, these are large woods, and have been larger at one time. But if you draw your ideas of a great forest from either of these you must prepare yourselves for a startling announcement—and that is, that the forest through which I am going to take you is *as big as all Europe*! There is one place where a straight line might be drawn across this forest that would measure the enormous

length of two thousand six hundred miles! And there is a point in it from which a circle might be described, with a diameter of more than a thousand miles, and the whole area included within the vast circumference would be found covered with an unbroken forest!

I need scarce tell you what forest I allude to, for there is none other in the world of such dimensions—none to compare with that vast, trackless forest that covers the valley of the mighty Amazon!

And what shall we see in travelling through this tree-covered expanse? Many a strange form of life—both vegetable and animal. We shall see the giant “ceiba” tree, and the “zamang,” and the “caoba,” twined by huge parasites almost as thick as their own trunks, and looking as though they embraced but to crush them; the “juvia,” with its globe-shaped fruits as large as the human head; the “cow-tree,” with its abundant fountains of rich milk; the “seringa,” with its valuable gum—the caoutchouc of commerce; the “cinchona,” with its fever-killing bark; the curious “volador,” with its winged seeds; the wild indigo, and the arnatto. We shall see palms of many species—some with trunks smooth and cylindrical, others covered with thorns, sharp and thickly set—some with broad entire leaves, others with fronds pinnate and feathery, and still others whose leaves are the shape of a fan—some rising like naked columns to the height of an hundred and fifty feet, while others scarcely attain to the standard of an ordinary man.

On the water we shall see beautiful lilies—the snow-white *nymphs*, and the yellow *nuphars*. We shall see the *Victoria regia* covering the pool with its massive wax-like flowers, and huge circular leaves of bronze green. We shall see tall flags like Saracen spears, and the dark green culms of gigantic rushes, and the golden *arundinaria*—the bamboo, and “caña brava,”—that rival the
164 forest trees in height.

Many a form of animal life we may behold. Basking in the sun, we may behold the yellow and spotted body of the jaguar—a beautiful but dreaded sight. Breaking through the thick underwood, or emerging slowly from the water, we may catch a glimpse of the sombre tapir, or the red-brown capivara. We may see the ocelot skulking through the deep shade, or the margay springing upon its winged prey.

We may see the shaggy ant-bear tearing at the cones of sand-clay, and licking up the white termites; or we may behold the scaly armadillo crawling over the sun-parched earth, and rolling itself up at the approach of danger. We may see human-like forms,—the *quadrumana*—clinging among the high branches, and leaping from tree to tree, like birds upon the wing; we may see them of many shapes, sizes, and colours, from the great howling monkeys, with their long prehensive tails, down to the little saimiris and ouistitis not larger than squirrels.

What beautiful birds, too!—for this forest is their favourite home. Upon the ground, the large curassows, and gurns, and the “gallo,” with his plumage of bright red. Upon the trees, the macaws, and parrots, and toucans, and trogons. In the waters, the scarlet flamingoes, the ibises, and the tall herons; and in the air, the hawks, the zamuros, the king-vultures, and the eagles.

We shall see much of the reptile world, both by land and water. Basking upon the bank, or floating along the stream, we may behold the great water lizards—the crocodile and caïman; or the unwieldly forms of the *cheloniæ*—the turtles. Nimbly running along the tree-trunk, or up the slanting lliana, we may see the crested iguana, hideous to behold. On the branches that overhang the silent pool we may see the “water-boa,” of huge dimensions, watching for his prey—the peccary, the capivara, the paca, or the agouti; and in the dry forest we may meet with his congener the “stag-swallower,” twined around a tree, and waiting for the roebuck or the little red-deer of the woods.

We may see the mygale, or bird-catching spider, at the end of his strong net-trap, among the thick foliage; and the tarantula, at the bottom of his dark pit-fall, constructed in the ground. We may see the tent-like hills of the white ants, raised high above the surface, and the nests of many other kinds, hanging from high branches, and looking as though they had been constructed out of raw silk and pasteboard. We may see trees covered with these nests, and some with the nests of wasps, and still others with those of troupials and orioles—birds of the genus *icterus* and *cassicus* —hanging down like long cylindrical purses.

All those, and many more strange sights, may be seen in the great forest of the Amazon valley; and some of them we *shall* see—*voilà*!

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CHAPTER II.

THE REFUGEES.

Upon a bright and lovely evening, many years ago, a party of travellers might have been seen climbing up that Cordillera of the Andes that lies to the eastward of the ancient city of
165 Cuzco. It was a small and somewhat singular party of travellers; in fact, a travelling family, —father, mother, children, and one attendant. We shall say a word of each of them separately.

The chief of the party was a tall and handsome man, of nearly forty years of age. His countenance bespoke him of Spanish race, and so he was. He was not a Spaniard, however, but a Spanish-American, or “Creole,” for so Spaniards born in America are called to distinguish them from the natives of Old Spain.

Remember—Creoles are *not* people with negro or African blood in their veins. There is a misconception on this head in England, and elsewhere. The African races of America are either negroes, mulattoes, quadroons, quinteroons, or mestizoes; but the “Creoles” are of European blood, though born in America. Remember this. Don Pablo Romero—for that was the name of our traveller—was a Creole, a native of Cuzco, which, as you know, was the ancient capital of the Incas of Peru.

Don Pablo, as already stated, was nearly forty years of age. Perhaps he looked older. His life had not been spent in idleness. Much study, combined with a good deal of suffering and care, had made many of those lines that rob the face of its youthful appearance. Still, although his look was serious, and just then sad, his eye was occasionally seen to brighten, and his light elastic step showed that he was full of vigour and manhood. He had a moustache, very full and black, but his whiskers were clean shaven, and his hair cut short, after the fashion of most people in Spanish America.

He wore velvet pantaloons, trimmed at the bottoms with black stamped leather, and upon his feet were strong boots of a reddish yellow colour—that is, the natural colour of the tanned hide before it has been stained. A dark jacket, closely buttoned, covered the upper-part of his body, and a scarlet silk sash encircled his waist, the long fringed ends hanging down over the left hip. In this sash were stuck a Spanish knife and a pair of pistols, richly ornamented with silver mountings.

But all these things were concealed from the view by a capacious poncho, which is a garment that in South America serves as a cloak by day and a blanket by night. It is nearly of the size and shape of an ordinary blanket, with a slit in the centre, through which the head is passed, leaving the ends to hang down. Instead of being of uniform colour, several bright colours are usually woven into the poncho, forming a variety of patterns. In Mexico a very similar garment—the serapé—is almost universally worn. The poncho of Don Pablo was a costly one, woven by hand, and out of the finest wool of the vicuña, for that is the native country of this useful and curious animal.

Such a poncho would cost 20*l.*, and would not only keep out cold, but would turn rain like a “macintosh.” Don Pablo's hat was also curious and costly. It was one of those known as “Panama,” or “Guayaquil,”—hats so called because they are manufactured by Indian tribes who dwell upon the Pacific coast, and are made out of a rare sea-grass, which is found near the above-mentioned places. A good Guayaquil hat will cost 20*l.*; and although, with its broad curling brim and low crown, it looks not much better than Leghorn or even fine straw, yet it is far superior to either, both as a protection against rain, or, what is of more importance in southern countries,
166 against a hot tropical sun. The best of them will wear half a life-time. Don Pablo's “sombrero” was one of the very best and costliest; and this, combined with the style of his other habiliments, betokened that the wearer was one of the “ricos,” or high class of his country.

The costume of his wife, who was a dark and very beautiful Spanish woman, would have strengthened this idea. She wore a dress of black silk with velvet bodice and sleeves, tastefully embroidered. A mantilla of dark cloth covered her shoulders, and on her head was a low broad-brimmed hat, similar to those usually worn by men, for a bonnet is a thing unknown to the ladies of Spanish America. A single glance at the Doña Isidora would have satisfied any one that she was a lady of rank and refinement.

There were two children, upon which, from time to time, she gazed tenderly. They were her only ones. They were a boy and girl, nearly of equal size and age. The boy was the elder, perhaps thirteen or more, a handsome lad, with swarth face, coal-black eyes, and curly full-flowing dark hair. The girl, too, who would be about twelve, was dark—that is to say, brunette in complexion. Her eyes were large, round, and dreamy, with long lashes that kept the sun from shining into them, and thus deepened their expression.

Perhaps there are no children in the world so beautiful as those of the Spanish race. There is a smoothness of skin, a richness in colour, and a noble “hidalgo” expression in their round black eyes that is rare in other countries. Spanish women retain this expression to a good age. The men lose it earlier, because, as I believe, they are oftener of corrupted morals and habits; and these, long exercised, certainly stamp their lines upon the face. Those which are mean, and low, and vicious, produce a similar character of countenance, while those which are high, and holy, and virtuous, give it an aspect of beauty and nobility.

Of all beautiful Spanish children none could have been more beautiful than our two little Creole Spaniards, Leon and Leona—for such were the names of the brother and sister.

There yet remains one to be described, ere we complete the account of our travelling party. This one was a grown and tall man, quite as tall as Don Pablo himself, but thinner and more angular in his outlines. His coppery colour, his long straight black hair, his dark and wild piercing eye, with his somewhat odd attire, told you at once he was of a different race from any of the others. He was an Indian—a South American Indian; and although a descendant from the noble race of the Peruvian Incas, he was acting in the capacity of a servant or attendant to Don Pablo

and his family.

There was a familiarity, however, between the old Indian—for he was an old man—and Don Pablo, that bespoke the existence of some tie of a stronger nature than that which exists between master and servant. And such there was in reality. This Indian had been one of the patriots who had rallied around Tupac Amaru in his revolution against the Spaniards. He had been proscribed, captured, and sentenced to death. He would have been executed, but for the interference of Don Pablo, who had saved his life. Since then Guapo—such was the Indian's name—had remained not only the retainer, but the firm and faithful friend, of his benefactor.

Guapo's feet were sandalled. His legs were naked up to the knees, showing many an old scar
167 received from the cactus plants and the thorny bushes of acacia, so common in the mountain-valleys of Peru. A tunic-like skirt of woollen cloth,—that home-made sort called “bayeta,”—was fastened around his waist, and reached down to the knees; but the upper part of his body was quite bare, and you could see the naked breast and arms, corded with strong muscles, and covered with a skin of a dark copper colour. The upper part of his body was naked only when the sun was hot. At other times Guapo wore a species of poncho like his master, but that of the Indian was of common stuff—woven out of the coarse wool of the llama. His head was bare.

THE FLIGHT OF THE REFUGEES.

168 Guapo's features were thin, sharp, and intelligent. His eye was keen and piercing; and the gait of the old man, as he strode along the rocky path, told that it would be many years before he would show any signs of feebleness or tottering.

There were four animals that carried our travellers and their effects. One was a horse ridden by the boy Leon. The second was a saddle mule, on which rode Doña Isidora and Leona. The other two animals were not mounted. They were beasts of burden, with “yerguas,” or pack-saddles, upon which were carried the few articles that belonged to the travellers. They were the camels of Peru—the far-famed llamas. Don Pablo, with his faithful retainer, travelled afoot.

You will wonder that one apparently so rich, and on so distant a journey, was not provided with animals enough to carry his whole party. Another horse at least, or a mule, might have been expected in the cavalcade. It would not have been strange had Guapo only walked—as he was the arriero, or driver, of the llamas—but to see Don Pablo afoot and evidently tired, with neither horse nor mule to ride upon, was something that required explanation. There was another fact that required explanation. The countenance of Don Pablo wore an anxious expression, as if some danger impended; so did that of the lady, and the children were silent, with their little hearts full of fear. They knew not *what* danger, but they knew that their father and mother were in trouble.

The Indian, too, had a serious look; and at each angle of the mountain road he and Don Pablo would turn around, and with anxious eyes gaze back in the direction that led towards Cuzco. As yet they could distinguish the spires of the distant city, and the Catholic crosses, as they glistened under the evening sunbeam. Why did they look back with fear and distrust? Why? *Because Don Pablo was in flight, and feared pursuers!* What? Had he committed some great crime? No. On the contrary, he was the *victim of a noble virtue*—the virtue of patriotism! For that had he been condemned, and was now in flight—flying to save not only his liberty but his life! yes, *his life;* for had the sentinels on those distant towers but recognised him, he would soon have been followed and dragged back to an ignominious death.

Young reader, I am writing of things that occurred before the Spanish-American colonies

became free from the rule of Old Spain. You will remember that these countries were then governed by viceroys, who represented the King of Spain, but who in reality were quite as absolute as that monarch himself. The great viceroys of Mexico and Peru held court in grand state, and lived in the midst of barbaric pomp and luxury. The power of life and death was in their hands, and in many instances they used it in the most unjust and arbitrary manner. They were themselves, of course, natives of Old Spain—often the pampered favourites of that corrupt court.

All the officials by which they were surrounded and served were, like themselves, natives of Spain, or “Gachupinos,” (as the Creoles used to call them,) while the Creoles—no matter how rich, or learned, or accomplished in any way—were excluded from every office of honour and
169 profit. They were treated by the Gachupinos with contempt and insult. Hence for long, long years before the great revolutions of Spanish America, a strong feeling of dislike existed between Creole Spaniards and Spaniards of Old Spain; and this feeling was quite independent of that which either had towards the Indians—the aborigines of America. This feeling brought about the revolution, which broke out in all the countries of Spanish America (including Mexico) and which, after fifteen years of cruel and sanguinary fighting, led to the independence of these countries.

Some people will tell you that they gained nothing by this independence, as since that time so much war and anarchy have marked their history. There is scarcely any subject upon which mankind thinks more superficially, and judges more wrongly, than upon this very one. It is a mistake to suppose that a people enjoys either peace or prosperity, simply because it is quiet. There is quiet in Russia, but to its millions of serfs war continuous and eternal; and the same may be said of many other countries as well as Russia.

To the poor slave, or even to the over-taxed subject, peace is no peace, but a constant and systematised struggle, often more pernicious in its effects than even the anarchy of open war. A war of this kind numbers its slain by millions, for the victims of famine are victims of *political crime* on the part of a nation's rulers. I have no time now to talk of these things. Perhaps, boy reader, you and I may meet on this ground again, and at no very distant period.

Well, it was not in the general rising that Don Pablo had been compromised, but previous to that. The influence of the European Revolution of 1798 was felt even in distant Spanish America, and several ebullitions occurred in different parts of that country at the same time. They were premature; they were crushed. Those who had taken part in them were hunted to the death. Death! death! was the war-cry of the Spanish hirelings, and bitterly did they execute their vengeance on all who were compromised. Don Pablo would have been a victim among others, had he not had timely warning and escaped; but as it was, all his property was taken by confiscation, and became the plunder of the rapacious tyrant.

We are introduced to him just at the period of his escape. By the aid of the faithful Guapo he had hastily collected a few things, and with his wife and family fled in the night. Hence the incompleteness of his travelling equipage. He had taken one of the most unfrequented paths—a mere bridle-road—that led from Cuzco eastward over the Cordillera. His intent was to gain the eastern slope of the Andes mountains, where he might conceal himself for a time in the uninhabited woods of the Great *Montaña*, and towards this point was he journeying. By a *ruse* he had succeeded in putting the soldiers of the despot on a false track; but it was not certain that they might not yet fall into the true one. No wonder then, when he gazed back towards Cuzco, that his look was one of apprehension and anxiety.

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CHAPTER III.

THE POISON-TREES.

170 Following the rugged and winding path, the travellers had climbed to a height of many thousand feet above the ocean level. There was very little vegetation around them. Nothing that deserved the name of tree, if we except a few stunted specimens of queñoa trees, and here and there patches of the Ratanhia shrub, which covered the hill-sides. Both these are used by the mountain Indians as fuel, but the Ratanhia is also a favourite remedy against dysentery and blood-spitting. Its extract is even exported to European countries, and is to be found in the shop of the apothecary.

Now and then a beautiful species of locust was seen with its bright red flowers. It was the “Sangre de Christo” of the Peruvian *flora*.

Don Pablo Romero was a naturalist, and I may here tell you a pleasant and interesting fact—which is, that many of the earliest patriots and revolutionists of Spanish America were men who had distinguished themselves in natural science—in fact, were the “savans” of these countries. I call this a pleasant fact, and you may deem it a curious one too, because men of science are usually lovers of peace, and not accustomed to meddle either in war or politics.

But the truth of the matter is this,—under the government of the viceroys all books, except those of a monkish religion, were jealously excluded from these countries. No political work

whatever was permitted to be introduced; and the people were kept in the grossest ignorance of their natural rights. It was only into learned institutions that a glimmering of the light of freedom found its way, and it was amongst the professors of these institutions that the “rights of men” first began to be discussed. Many of these noble patriots were the first victims offered up on the altar of Spanish-American independence.

Don Pablo, I have said, was a naturalist; and it was perhaps the first journey he had ever made without observing attentively the natural objects that presented themselves along his route. But his mind was busy with other cares; and he heeded neither the *fauna* nor *flora*. He thought only of his loved wife and dear children, of the dangers to which he and they were exposed. He thought only of increasing the distance between them and his vengeful enemies. During that day they had made a toilsome journey of fifteen miles, up the mountain—a long journey for the llamas, who rarely travel more than ten or twelve; but the dumb brutes seemed to exert themselves as if they knew that danger threatened those who guided them.

They belonged to Guapo, who had not been a mere servant, but a cultivator, and had held a small “chacra,” or farm, under Don Pablo. Guapo's voice was well known to the creatures, and his “hist!” of encouragement urged them on. But fifteen miles was an unusual journey, and the animals began to show symptoms of fatigue. Their humming noise, which bears some resemblance to the tones of an Eolian harp, boomed loud at intervals as the creatures came to a stop; and then the voice of Guapo could be heard urging them forward.

The road led up a defile, which was nothing more than the bed of a mountain-torrent, now dry. For a long distance there was no spot of level ground where our travellers could have encamped, even had they desired to stop. At length, however, the path led out of the torrent-bed, and they found themselves on a small ledge, or table, covered with low trees. These trees were of a
171 peculiar kind, very common in all parts of the Andes, and known as *mollé* trees. They are more properly bushes than trees, being only about ten or twelve feet in height. They have long delicate pinnate leaves, very like those of the acacia, and, when in fruit, they are thickly covered with clusters of small bright red berries.

These berries are used among some tribes of Indians for making a highly valuable and medicinal beer; but the wood of the tree is of more importance to the people of those parts as an article of fuel, because the tree grows where other wood is scarce. It is even considered by the sugar-refiners as the best for their purpose, since its ashes, possessing highly alkaline properties, are more efficient than any other in purifying the boiling juice of the sugar-cane. The leaves of this beautiful tree, when pressed, emit a strong aromatic smell; and a very curious property ascribed to it by the more ignorant people of the mountains will be illustrated by the dialogue which follows:—

“Let us pass the night here,” said Don Pablo, halting, and addressing himself to Guapo. “This level spot will serve us to encamp. We can sleep under the shade of the bushes.”

“What! *mi amo*! (my master) Here?” replied the Indian, with a gesture of surprise.

“And why not here? Can any place be better? If we again enter the defile we may find no other level spot. See! the llamas will go no farther. We must remain therefore.”

“But, master,” continued Guapo—“see!”

“See what?”

“The trees, master!”

“Well, what of the trees? Their shade will serve to screen us from the night dew. We can sleep under them.”

“Impossible, master—*they are poison trees*!”

“You are talking foolishly, Guapo. These are *mollé* trees.”

“I know it, señor; but they are poison. If we sleep under them we shall not awake in the morning—we shall awake no more.”

And Guapo, as he uttered these words, looked horrified.

“This is nonsense; you are superstitious, old man. We must abide here. See, the llamas have lain down. They will not move hence, I warrant.”

Guapo turned to the llamas, and thinking that their movements might influence the decision of his master, began to urge them in his accustomed way. But it is a peculiarity of these creatures not to stir one step beyond what they consider a proper journey. Even when the load is above that which they are accustomed to carry—that is to say, 120 lbs.—neither voice nor whip will move them. They may be goaded to death, but will not yield, and coaxing has a like effect. Both knew that they had done their day's work; and the voice, the gesticulations and blows of Guapo, were all in vain. Neither would obey him any longer. The Indian saw this, and reluctantly consented to remain; at the same time he continued to repeat his belief that they would all most certainly perish in the night. For himself, he expressed his intention to climb a ledge, and sleep upon the naked rocks; and he earnestly entreated the others to follow his example.

Don Pablo listened to the admonitions of his retainer with incredulity, though not with any

degree of disdain. He knew the devotedness of the old Indian, and therefore treated, what he
172 considered a mere superstition, with a show of respect. But he felt an inclination to cure Guapo of the folly of such a belief; and was, on this account, the more inclined to put his original design into execution. To pass the night under the shade of the mollé trees was, therefore, determined upon.

All dismounted. The llamas were unloaded; their packs, or *yerguas*, taken off; the horse and mule were unsaddled; and all were permitted to browse over the little space which the ledge afforded. They were all trained animals. There was no fear of any of them straying.

The next thing was to prepare supper. All were hungry, as none of the party had eaten since morning. In the hurry of flight, they had made no provision for an extended journey. A few pieces of *charqui* (jerked or dried beef) had been brought along; and, in passing near a field of “oca,” Guapo had gathered a bunch of the roots, and placed them on the back of his llama. This oca is a tuberous root, of an oval shape and pale red colour, but white inside. It resembles very much the Jerusalem artichoke, but it is longer and slimmer. Its taste is very agreeable and sweetish—somewhat like that of pumpkins, and it is equally good when roasted or boiled.

There is another sort of tuberous root, called “ulluca” by the Peruvians, which is more glutinous and less pleasant to the taste. This kind is various in form, being either round, oblong, straight, or curved, and of a reddish, yellow colour outside, though green within. It is insipid when boiled with water, but excellent when dressed with Spanish peppers (*Capsicum*). Out of the *oca*, then, and *charqui*, the supper must be made; and for the purpose of cooking it, a fire must be kindled with the wood of the mollé.

For a long time there was a doubt about whether it would be safe to kindle this fire. The sun had not yet gone down, and the smoke might attract observation from the valley below. If the pursuers were on their track, it might be noticed; as upon this lonely route a fire would indicate nothing else than the camp of some one on a journey. But the stomachs of our travellers cried for food, and it was at length resolved to light the fire, but not until after sunset, when the smoke could be no longer seen, and the blaze would be hidden behind the thick bushes of mollé.

Don Pablo walked off from the camp, and wandered among the trees to see if he could find something that might contribute a little variety to their simple supper. A small, broom-like plant, that grew among the mollé trees, soon attracted his attention. This was the *quinoa* plant, which produces a seed, not unlike rice, though smaller in the grain, whence it has received in commerce the name “petty rice.” The quinoa seeds, when boiled, are both pleasant and nutritious, but especially so when boiled in milk. Previous to the discovery of America, “quinoa” was an article of food, supplying the place of wheat. It was much used by the natives, and is still collected for food in many parts. Indeed, it has been introduced into some European countries, and cultivated with success. The leaves, when young, can be used as spinach, but the seeds are the most sought after for food.

Don Pablo having called Leon to assist him, a quantity of the seeds were soon collected into a vessel, and carried to the place which they had chosen for their camp; and, as it was now dark
173 enough, the fire was kindled and the cooking-pot got ready. The Doña Isidora, although a fine lady, was one of those who had all her life been accustomed to look after her household affairs; and this, it may be remarked, is a somewhat rare virtue among the Peruvian ladies, who are generally too much given to dress and idleness. It was not so, however, with the wife of Don Pablo. She knew how to look after the affairs of the *cuisine*, and could dress any of the peculiar dishes of the country with the best of cooks. In a short while, therefore, an excellent supper was ready, of which all ate heartily, and then, wrapping themselves up in their ponchos, lay down to sleep.

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CHAPTER IV.

THE SUPPER OF GUAPO.

I have said all ate of the supper. This is not strictly true. One of the party did not touch it, and that was old Guapo. Why? Was he not hungry like the rest? Yes; as hungry as any of them. Why then did he not eat of the *charqui* and ocas? Simply because Guapo had a supper of a very different kind, which he carried in his pouch, and which he liked much better than the charqui stew. What was it? It was “coca.”

“Chocolate,” you will say, or, as some call it, “cocoa,” which should be called, to name it properly, “cacao.” No, I answer—it was not chocolate, nor cocoa, nor cacao neither.

“It must have been cocoa-nuts then?” No; nor yet cocoa-nuts. The “coca,” upon which Guapo made his supper, and which contented his stomach perfectly for the night, was an article very different from either the cacao which makes chocolate, or the nut of the cocoa-palm. You are now impatient to hear what sort of thing it was, and I shall tell you at once.

The coca is a small tree or shrub about six feet in height, which grows in the warmer valleys among the Andes mountains. Its botanical name is *Erythroxylon coca*. Its leaves are small and of a bright green colour, and its blossoms white. Its fruits are very small scarlet berries. It is a native plant, and, therefore, found in a wild state; but it is cultivated by the planters of these countries in fields regularly laid out, and hence called “cocales.” This plant is raised from the seed, and when the young shoots have attained the height of about eighteen inches, they are transplanted and put down again at the distance of about a foot apart from each other.

Now as these little bushes require a humid atmosphere, maize-plants are sown between the rows to protect them from the sun. In other places arbours of palm-leaves are constructed over the coca-plants. When no rain falls, they are watered every five or six days. After about two and a half years of this nursing, the coca-bush is ready for use, and it is the leaves alone that are valuable. These are gathered with great care, just as the Chinese gather the leaves of the tea-plant; and, as in China, women are principally employed in this labour. The leaves are said to be ripe, not when they have withered and turned brown, but at a period when they are full-grown and become brittle. When this period arrives, they are picked from the tree, and laid out on coarse woollen cloths to dry in the sun.

When dried, they remain of a pale green colour; but should they get damp during the process,
174 they become darker, and are then of inferior quality, and sell for a less price. When fully dried, they are carefully packed in bags and covered up with dry sand, and are thus ready for the market. Their price, on the spot where the crop is produced, is about one shilling English per pound. They are, therefore, full as costly to produce as tea itself, although the coca-bush will yield three crops of leaves in one year—that is, a crop every four months; and one hundred plants will produce about an arroba (25 lbs.) at a crop. The coca-plant will continue to give fresh leaves for a long period of years, unless attacked and destroyed by ants, which is not unfrequently the case.

Now, why have I so minutely described the coca-bush? Because, that, in the economy of the life of those Indians who inhabit the countries of the Andes mountains, this curious plant plays a most important part. Scarcely one of these people is to be met with who is not an eater of cocoa—a “coquero.” With them it is what the tea-tree is to the Chinese. Indeed, it is a curious fact, that in all parts of the world some stimulating vegetable is used by the human race. Tea in China; the betel-leaf, and the nut of the areca palm, among the Southern Asiatics; the poppy in the East; with tobacco, and many like things, in other countries.

But the coca not only supplies the Indian with a solace to his cares, it forms the chief article of his food. With a supply of coca, an Indian will support himself five or six days without eating anything else. The poor miners, in the Peruvian mines, are all “coqueros;” and it is alleged that, without coca, they would be unable to undergo the painful toil to which their calling subjects them. When used to excess, the coca produces deleterious effects on the human system; but, if moderately taken, it is far more innocent in its results than either opium or tobacco.

The coca-leaf is not eaten alone. A certain preparation is necessary, and another substance is mixed with it before it produces the proper effect. But let us watch the movements of Guapo, and we shall see how *he* does it, for Guapo is a confirmed coquero.

Guapo, true to his promise, does not sleep under the mollé trees. He leaves the party, and, with a melancholy air, has climbed up and seated himself upon a projecting rock, where he intends to pass the night. His last glance at Don Pablo and his family was one of foreboding. He had again remonstrated with his master, but to no purpose. The latter only laughed at the earnestness of the old Indian, and told him to go to his perch and leave the party to themselves.

It was still grey light when Guapo climbed up to the rock. Against the sky his tall, lank form could be traced in all its outlines. For some moments he sat in a serious and reflective mood—evidently busy with thoughts about the “poison-trees.” His appetite, however, soon got the better of him; and he set to work to prepare his coca supper. It was a simple operation.

Around Guapo's neck there hung a small pouch made of the skin of the chinchilla, which beautiful little animal is a native of these parts. This pouch contained a quantity of the dry leaves of the coca. Having taken out some half-dozen of these leaves, he put them into his mouth and commenced chewing them. In a short while, by the aid of tongue, teeth, and lips, they were
175 formed into a little ball of pulp, that rolled about in his mouth. Another step in the process now became necessary. A small gourd, that hung around Guapo's neck by a thong, was laid hold of. This was corked with a wooden stopper, in which stopper a wire pin was fixed, long enough to reach down to the bottom of the gourd.

After taking out the stopper, Guapo applied the lower part of the pin to his lips, and then, plunging it once more into the gourd, drew it out again. This time the pin came out, with a fine whitish powder adhering to the part that had been wetted. Now what was this powder? It was nothing else than lime that had been burned, and pulverised. Perhaps it was the ashes of the mollé tree, of which we have already spoken, and which, as we have said, possess a highly alkaline property. The ashes of the musa, or plaintain, are sometimes used; but, after all, it is most likely that it was the mollé ashes which Guapo carried, for these are most highly esteemed by the Indians of Southern Peru; and Guapo was a connoisseur in coca-eating.

Whichever of the three it was—lime, mollé, or musa—Guapo carried the pin to his mouth, and, without touching his lips (it would have burnt him if he had), he inserted it, so as to penetrate the

ball of chewed cocoa-leaves that rested upon the tip of his tongue. This was stabbed repeatedly and adroitly by the pin, until all the powder remained in the coca-ball; and then the pin was withdrawn, wiped, and restored to its place, along with the stopper of the gourd.

Guapo now remained quietly “ruminating” for a period of about forty minutes—for this is about the time required for chewing a mess of cocoa-leaves. Indeed, so exactly is this time observed, that the Indians, when travelling, measure distances by it; and one “coceada” is about equal to the time occupied in walking a couple of English miles.

The coceada of our old Indian being finished, he drew his llama-wool poncho around him; and, leaning back against the rock, was soon buried in a profound slumber.

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CHAPTER V.

THE PUNA.

By early dawn Guapo was awake, but he did not immediately awake the others. It was still too dark to follow the mountain road. His first care was to have his coca breakfast, and to this he applied himself at once.

Day was fairly broke when he had ended the process of mastication, and he bethought him of descending from the rock to arouse the sleepers. He knew they still slept, as no voice had yet issued from the grove of mollés. The mule and horse were heard cropping the grass, and the llamas were now feeding upon an open spot,—the first they had eaten since their halt, as these creatures do not browse in the night.

Guapo descended with fear in his heart. How it would have joyed him to hear the voice of his master, or of any of them! But, no. Not a sound proceeded from any one of the party. He stole nimbly along the ledge, making his way through the mollé trees. At length he reached the spot. All asleep?—yes, all! “Are they dead?” thought Guapo, and his heart beat with anxiety. Indeed,
176 they seemed so. The fatigue of travel had cast a sickly paleness over the faces of all, and one might easily have fancied they no longer lived. But they breathed. “Yes, they breathe!” ejaculated the old Indian, half aloud. “They live!”

Guapo bent down, and seizing Don Pablo by the arm, shook him—at first gently, uttering, at the same time, some words to awake him. But neither the shaking nor the voice had any effect. Guapo shook more violently, and shouted louder. Still Don Pablo slept. None of the others moved—none of them heard him. It was strange, for the Indian knew that Don Pablo himself, as well as the others, were easily awaked on ordinary occasions. Guapo, becoming alarmed, now raised his voice to its loudest pitch, at the same time dragging Don Pablo's shoulder in a still more violent manner. This had the desired effect. The sleeper awoke but so slowly, and evidently with such exertion, that there was something mysterious in it.

“What is it?” he inquired, with half-opened eyes. “Is it morning already?”

“The sun is up. Rouse, my master! It is time we were on the road,” replied the Indian.

“I feel very drowsy—I am heavy—I can scarce keep my eyes open. What can be the cause of this?”

“The poison-trees, master,” answered Guapo.

The answer seemed to impress Don Pablo. He made a violent effort, and rose to his feet. When up he could scarcely stand. He felt as though he had swallowed a powerful opiate.

“It must be so, good Guapo. Perhaps there is some truth in what you have said. O, heavens!” exclaimed he, suddenly recollecting himself,—“the others—my wife and children!”

This thought had fully awakened Don Pablo; and Guapo and he proceeded at once to arouse the others, which they effected after much shouting and shaking. All were still heavy with sleep, and felt as did Don Pablo himself.

“Surely there is some narcotic power in the aroma of these trees,” muttered Don Pablo. “Come, wife, let us be gone! We must remain under its influence no longer, else what Guapo has said may prove too true. Saddle up—we must eat our breakfasts farther on. To the road!—to the road!”

Guapo soon had the horses ready, and all hurried from the spot, and were once more climbing up the mountain-path. Even the animals seemed to move slowly and lazily, as though they, too, had been under the influence of some soporific. But the pure cold air of the mountain soon produced its effect. All gradually recovered, and after cooking some *charqui* and ocas in the ravine, and making their breakfast upon these, they again felt light and fresh, and pursued their journey with renewed vigour.

The road kept on up the ravine, and in some places the banks rose almost perpendicularly from

the bed of the dry torrent, presenting on both sides vast walls of black porphyry—for this is the principal rock composing the giant chain of the Andes. Above their heads screamed small parrots of rich plumage of the species *Conurus rupicola*, which make their nestling places, and dwell upon these rocky cliffs. This is a singular fact, as all other parrots known are dwellers among
177 trees and are found in the forest at all times, except when on their passage from place to place.

But even the squirrel, which is an animal peculiarly delighting in tree-life, has its representative in several species of ground-squirrels, that never ascend a tree; and, among the monkeys, there exists the troglodyte or cave-dwelling chimpanzee. No doubt squirrels or monkeys of any kind, transported to an open or treeless country, would soon habituate themselves to their new situation,—for Nature affords many illustrations of this power of adaptation on the part of her creatures.

It was near sunset when our travellers reached the highest point of their route, nearly 14,000 feet above the level of the sea! Here they emerged upon an open plain which stretched far before them. Above this plain towered mountains of all shapes to a height of many thousand feet from the level of the plain itself. Some of these mountains carried their covering of eternal snow, which, as the evening sun glanced upon it, exhibited the most beautiful tints of rose, and purple, and gold. The plain looked bleak and barren, and the cold which our travellers now felt added to the desolateness of the scene. No trees were in sight. Dry yellow grass covered the ground, and the rocks stood out naked and shaggy. They had reached one of those elevated tables of the Andes known as the *Puna*.

These singular tracts elevated above the level of cultivation are almost uninhabited. Their only inhabitants are a few poor Indians, who are employed by the rich proprietors of the lower valleys as shepherds; for upon these cold uplands thrive sheep, and cattle, and llamas, and flocks of the wool-bearing alpaco. Through this wild region, however, you may travel for days without encountering even a single one of the wretched and isolated inhabitants who watch over these flocks and herds.

On reaching the Puna, our party had made their day's journey, and would have halted. The llamas already showed signs of giving out by stopping and uttering their strange booming note. But Guapo knew these parts—for, though a descendant of the Incas, he had originally come from the great forest beyond the eastern slope of the Andes, where many of the Peruvian Indians had retired after the cruel massacres of Pizarro. He now remembered, that not far from where they were, was a shepherd's hut, and that the shepherd himself was an old friend of his. That would be the place to stop for the night; and, by Guapo's advice, Don Pablo resolved to continue on to the hut.

Guapo fell upon his knees before the llamas, and, after caressing and kissing them, and using a great variety of endearing expressions, he at last coaxed these animals to proceed. No other means would have availed, as beating would not make either llama budge an inch. The leader, who was a fine large animal and a great favourite with its master, at length stepped boldly out; and the other, encouraged by the sound of the small bells that tinkled around the head of the leader, followed after, and so the travellers moved on.

“Come, papa!” cried Leon; “you are tired yourself—mount this horse—I can walk a bit:” at the same instant the boy flung himself from the back of the horse, and led him up to where his father stood. Then handing the bridle to the latter, he struck off along the plain, following Guapo and his llamas.

178 The road skirted round the rocks, where the mountain came down to meet the plain. The walk was not a long one, for the hut of which Guapo spoke became visible at less than a quarter of a mile's distance. An odd-looking hut it was—more like an ill-built stack of bean-straw than a house. It had been built in the following manner:—

First, a round ring of large stones had been laid, then a row of turf, then another tier of stones, and so on, until the circular wall had reached the height of about four or five feet, the diameter being not more than eight or nine. On the top of the wall a number of poles had been set, so as to meet above where they were tied together. These poles were nothing else than the long flower-stalks of the *maguey* or American aloe, as no other wood of sufficient length grew in the vicinity. These poles served for rafters, and across them laths had been laid, and made fast. Over all this was placed a thatch of the long coarse Puna grass, which was tied in its place by grass ropes that were stretched from side to side over the top. This was the hut of Guapo's friend, and similar to all others that may be encountered in the wild region of the Puna. A door was left in the side, not over two feet high, so that it was necessary to crawl upon the hands and knees before any one could reach the interior.

As our travellers approached, they saw that the entrance was closed by an ox-hide which covered the whole of the opening.

Whether the shepherd was at home, was the next question; but as they got near to the house, Guapo suggested that Don Pablo should dismount and let Leon get upon horseback. This suggestion was made on account of the Puna dogs—of which creatures Guapo had a previous knowledge. These dogs, known by the name of Inca dogs, are, perhaps, the fiercest animals of their species.

They are small, with pointed muzzles, tails curling upward, and long shaggy hair. They are half-wild, snappish, and surly, as it is possible for dogs to be. They attack strangers with fury, and

it is as much as their masters can do to rescue even a friend from their attack. Even when wounded, and unable any longer to keep their feet, they will crawl along the ground and bite the legs of those who have wounded them. They are even more hostile to white people than to Indians, and it is sometimes dangerous to approach an Indian hut where three or four of these fierce creatures are kept, as they will jump up against the side of a horse, and bite the legs of the rider. Their masters often use the stick before they can get obedience from them. In every Indian hut several of these animals may be found, as they are extremely useful to the shepherds in guarding their flocks and for hunting.

They are much employed throughout the Puna to hunt the “yutu,” a species of partridge which inhabits the rushy grass. This bird is traced by the dogs, seized before it can take to flight, and killed by a single bite of its fierce pursuer. Considering the savage nature of the Inca dogs, Guapo showed great caution in approaching the hut of his friend. He first called loudly, but there was no reply. He then stole forward with his long knife, or “*macheté*,” in his hand; and having lifted the
179 skin that covered the low doorway, peeped in. The hut was empty.

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CHAPTER VI.

THE WILD BULL OF THE PUNA.

Guapo was not much troubled at this. He knew he could take the liberty of using his friend's roof for the night, even should the latter not return to grant it. He crawled in. Of course his friend was only temporarily absent—no doubt looking after his flocks of sheep and alpacos; and as he was a bachelor, there was no wife at home, but there were his furniture and utensils. Furniture! No—there was none. There never is in the hut of a Puna shepherd. Utensils! yes—there was an earthen “olla,” or pot to cook soup in, another to boil or roast maize, a jar to hold water, a few split gourd-shells for plates, two or three others for cups—that was all.

This was the catalogue of utensils. Two stones set a little apart formed the fireplace, in which the shepherd, when he makes a fire to cook with, makes it out of dry dung. A couple of dirty sheep-skins lay upon the ground. These were the bed. Nothing more was to be seen. Yes, there was one thing more, and this gladdened the eyes of Guapo. In a bag that hung against the wall, and on which he soon laid his hands, he felt something—a collection of hard round objects, about as big as large chestnuts. Guapo knew very well what these were. He knew they were “macas.”

What are *macas*? you will ask. Macas, then, are tuberous roots that grow in the elevated regions of the Puna, where neither ocas, ullucas, nor potatoes, will thrive. They are cultivated by the inhabitants, and in many parts constitute almost the only food of these wretched people. They have an agreeable and rather sweetish flavour, and, when boiled in milk, taste somewhat like boiled chestnuts. They can be preserved for more than a year by simply drying them in the sun, and then exposing them to the cold air, when they become hard and shrivelled. They thrive best in this high region, for although they will grow in the lower valleys, they are there very insipid and worthless. The Indians prepare them for food by boiling them into a soup, or syrup, which is taken with parched maize-corn.

Guapo knew that he had got his hands upon a bag of dried macas, and although their owner was absent, he had already come to the determination to appropriate them for himself and party. His joy at the discovery had not subsided when another bag drew his attention, and this was the signal for another delightful surprise. His hand touched the new bag in a trice. There was a rattling sound within. Peas? No—maize.

“Good!” ejaculated Guapo; “maize and macas! That with what is left of the charqui—we shall not fast to-night.”

Guapo now backed himself out of the hut, and joyfully announced the discoveries he had made. The travellers dismounted. The horse and mule were picketed on lassoes on the plain. The llamas were left to go at will. They would not stray far from their owner.

It was piercing cold in this highland region. Doña Isidora and the children entered the hut, while Don Pablo and Guapo remained without for the purpose of collecting fuel. There was not a
180 stick of wood, as no trees of any sort grew near. Both strayed off upon the plain to gather the *taquia*, or ordure of the cattle, though no cattle were in sight. Their tracks, however, were visible all around.

While engaged thus, the old Indian suddenly raised himself from his stooping position with an exclamation that betokened alarm. What had startled him? A loud bellowing was heard—it was the bellowing of a bull. But what was there in that sound to alarm two full-grown men? Ah! you know not the bulls of the Puna.

Coming around a promontory of rocks a large black bull was in sight. He was approaching them in full run, his head thrown down, his eyes glaring fiercely. At every spring he uttered a roar, which was terrific to hear. A more horrid object it would be difficult to conceive. You may

suppose that an adventure with an enraged bull is one of an ordinary character, and may occur any day, even in the green meadow pastures of Old England. So it is, if the animal were only an English bull. But it is a far different affair with the bulls of the Puna.

Throughout all Spanish America animals of this kind are of a fiercer nature than elsewhere. It is from them the bulls used in the celebrated fights are obtained; and, perhaps, the race has been made fiercer by the treatment they receive on such occasions—for many of those that exhibit in the arena are afterwards used to breed from. But, in general, the Spanish-American “vacqueros,” or cattle-herds, treat the cattle under their charge with much cruelty, and this has the effect of rendering them savage. Even in herds of cattle where there are no bulls, there are cows so dangerous to approach, that the vacqueros never attempt driving them unless when well mounted.

A Mexican or South American cattle-herd is, therefore, always a mounted man. There is a difference, too, among the bulls in different parts of these countries. On the Llanos of Venezuela they are not so fierce as those of the Puna, and they are more and less so in different parts of Mexico and the Pampas of Buenos Ayres.

The Puna bulls are, perhaps, the fiercest and most dangerous of all. They are more than half wild. They scarcely ever see a human being, and they will attack one upon sight. To a mounted man there is little danger, unless by the stumbling or falling of his horse; but many a poor Indian, crossing these high plains afoot, has fallen a sacrifice to these vengeful brutes.

Both Don Pablo and Guapo knew all this, and therefore were aware of their own danger. Neither had a weapon—not so much as a stick. They had laid aside their knives and other arms, which had been carried inside the hut. To reach the hut before the bull reached *them* would be impossible; the brute was coming nearly from it—for he had issued from some shelter in the rocks not far off. They were full two hundred yards out upon the plain, and to run in the direction of the rocks would have been to run counter to the bull, and meet him face to face! Their danger was imminent. What was to be done?

There was not much time left them for consideration. The furious animal was within thirty paces distance, roaring loudly, shaking his head and brandishing his long sharp horns. At this moment a happy thought occurred almost simultaneously to Don Pablo and the Indian. The evening, as we have already said, was piercing cold, and both, in going out to collect the fuel, had worn their ponchos.

181 The trick of the matador with his red cloak suggested itself in this moment of peril. Both had seen it performed—Don Pablo often—and knew something of the “way.” In a moment both had stripped the ponchos from their shoulders, and, placing themselves *à la matador*, awaited the onset of the bull. It was agreed that as soon as the bull was “hooded” by either, that both should run at all speed to the rocks, where they could easily climb out of reach of the animal.

Don Pablo happened to be more in the way, and perhaps his more showy poncho attracted the brute; but whether or not, he was the first to receive the charge. With the adroitness of a practised matador he flung his poncho on the horns of the animal, and then both ran in the direction of the rocks. As they faced towards the hut, however, to the horror of Don Pablo he saw the Doña Isidora, with Leon and the little Leona, all outside, and even at some distance from the entrance! Attracted by the bellowing of the bull and the shouts of the men, they had rushed out of the hut.

Don Pablo, in wild accents, shouted to them to make for the door; but, paralysed by terror, they were for some moments unable to move. At length Doña Isidora, recovering herself, ran for the entrance, pushing the children before her. But the low doorway was difficult of access; they were slow in getting under it; and they would have been too late, as the bull, after shaking off the poncho, had turned and made directly for the hut.

“O God, preserve her!” cried Don Pablo, as he saw the enraged animal within a few paces of where his wife had knelt to enter the doorway. “She is lost! she is lost!”

In fact, the bull was making directly towards her, and it seemed as if nothing could then have interposed to save her.

At that moment the tramp of a horse in full gallop sounded on their ears. Don Pablo looked up. A strange horseman was near the spot—an Indian. Over his head a singular instrument was revolving. There were three thongs fastened at one end, while at the other end of each was a ball. These balls were whirling and gyrating in the air. The next moment both thongs and balls were seen to part from the hands of the rider, and wrap themselves around the legs of the bull. The latter made an awkward spring forward, and then fell upon the plain, where he lay kicking and helpless. The horseman uttered a yell of triumph, sprang from his horse, and running up to the prostrate animal, thrust the blade of his long macheté into its throat. The red stream gushed forth, and in a few seconds the black monster lay motionless upon the plain.

The new-comer quietly unwound the thongs—the *bolas*—from the legs of the dead bull, and then addressed himself to our travellers.

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CHAPTER VII.

THE “VAQUERO.”

Who was this deliverer? No other than the vaquero—the friend of Guapo,—who now welcomed Guapo and his companions, telling them in the polite phraseology of all Spanish-Americans that his *house(!)* was at their service. They were welcome to all it contained.

The macas, and maize, and a fresh steak from the wild bull, enabled them to make a most excellent supper. In return for this hospitality, Don Pablo made the vaquero a handsome present
182 out of his purse; but what gratified him still more was a supply of coca which his friend Guapo was enabled to bestow upon him, for his own stock had been exhausted for some days. Guapo, on leaving Cuzco, had spent his last *peseta* in buying this luxury, and therefore was well provided for weeks to come.

After they had had supper, he and his friend seated themselves on one side, and quietly chewed for a good half-hour, when at length Guapo, who knew he could trust the vaquero—because the latter, like himself, was one of the “patriotas”—communicated to him the object of their journey through that desolate region. The vaquero not only promised secrecy, but bound himself to put any party of pursuers completely off the trail.

The vaquero, even in his remote mountain-home, had heard of Don Pablo, knew that he was a good patriot and friend of the Indians, and he would therefore have risked his life to serve such a man—for no people have proved more devoted to the friends of their race than these simple and faithful Indians of the Andes. How many instances of noble self-sacrifice—even of life itself—occurred during the painful history of their conquest by the cruel and sanguinary followers of Pizarro!

The vaquero, therefore, did all in his power to make his guests comfortable for the night. His dogs—there were four of them—were not so hospitably inclined, for they did not seem to know friends from enemies. They had come up shortly after their master himself arrived, and had made a desperate attack upon everybody. The vaquero, however, assisted by Guapo—who, being an Indian, was less troubled with them—gave them a very rough handling with a large whip which he carried; and then, securing the whole of them, tied them together in a bunch, and left them at the back of the hut to snap and growl at each other, which they did throughout the livelong night. Supper over, all the travellers would have retired to rest; but the vaquero, having announced that he was going out to set snares for the chinchillas and viscachas, Leon could not rest, but asked permission to accompany him. This was granted both by Don Pablo and the vaquero himself.

The chinchilla, and its near relative the viscacha, are two little animals of the rodent, or grass-eating kind, that inhabit the very highest mountains of Peru and Chili. They are nearly of the same size, and each about as big as a rabbit, which in habits they very much resemble. They have long tails, however, which the rabbit has not, though the latter beats them in the length of his ears. The colour of the chinchilla is known to everybody, since its soft, velvety fur is highly prized by ladies as an article of dress, and may be seen in every London fur-shop.

The animal is of a beautiful marbled grey, white and black, with pure white feet. The fur of the viscacha is not so pretty, being of a brownish and white mixture. Its cheeks are black, with long, bristly moustaches, like those of a cat; while its head resembles that of the hare or rabbit. Both these innocent little creatures live upon the high declivities of the Andes, in holes and crevices among the rocks, where they remain concealed during the day, but steal out to feed twice in the twenty-four hours,—that is, during the evening twilight and in the early morning. The mode of
183 capturing them is by snares made of horse-hair, which are set in front of their caves—just as we snare rabbits in a warren, except that for the rabbits we make use of light elastic wire, instead of the horse-hair.

Leon was delighted with the excursion, as the vaquero showed him how to set the snares, and told him a great many curious stories of Puna life and habits. Some of these stories were about the great condor vulture—which the narrator, of course, described as a much bigger bird than it really is, for the condor, after all, is not so much bigger than the griffon vulture, or even the vulture of California. But you, young reader, have already had a full account of the vultures of America—the condor among the rest—therefore we shall not repeat what was said by the vaquero about this interesting bird.

On the way to the place where the snares were to be set, they passed a lagoon, or marshy lake, in which were many kinds of birds peculiar to these high regions. Out on the open water they saw a wild goose of a very beautiful species. It is called the “Huachua” goose. Its plumage is of a snowy whiteness, all except the wings, which are bright green and violet, while the beak, legs, and feet, are scarlet. They also saw two species of ibis wading about in the marsh, and a gigantic water-hen almost as big as a turkey. This last is of a dark grey colour, with a red beak, at the base of which is a large yellow knob of the shape of a bean. On this account it is called by the Indians “bean nose.”

Upon the plain, near the border of the marsh, they noticed a beautiful plover, having plumage

marked very much like that of the “huachua” goose, with green wings shining in the sun like polished metal. Another curious bird also sat upon the plain, or flew around their heads. This was a bird of prey of the species of jerfalcons (*Polyborus*). The vaquero called it the “Huarahua.” He told Leon it preyed only on carrion, and never killed its own food; that it was very harmless and tame—which was evidently true, as, shortly after, one of them seated upon a stone allowed the Indian to approach and knock it over with a stick! Such a silly bird Leon had never seen.

The vaquero was quite a naturalist in his way—that is, he knew all the animals of the Puna, and their habits, just as you will sometimes find a gamekeeper in our own country, or often a shepherd or farm-servant. He pointed out a rock-woodpecker, which he called a “pito” (*Colaptes rupicola*), that was fluttering about and flying from rock to rock. Like the cliff-parrots we have already mentioned, this rock-woodpecker was a curious phenomenon, for, as their very name implies, the woodpeckers are all tree-dwelling birds, yet here was one of the genus living among rocks where not a tree was to be seen, and scarcely a plant, except the thorny cactuses and magueys, with which succulent vegetables the woodpecker has nothing to do. The “pito” is a small, brown, speckled bird, with yellow belly, and there were great numbers of them flying about.

But the bird which most fixed the attention of Leon was a little bird about the size of a starling. Its plumage was rather pretty. It was brown, with black stripes on the back, and white-breasted. But it was not the plumage of the bird that interested Leon. It was what his companion told him of a singular habit which it had—that of repeating, at the end of every hour during the night, its melancholy and monotonous note. The Indians call this bird the “cock of the Inca,” and they
184 moreover regard it with a sort of superstitious reverence.

Having placed his snares, the vaquero set out to return with his youthful companion. As they walked back along the mountain-foot, a fox stole out from the rocks and skulked towards the marshy lake, no doubt in search of prey. This fox was the *Canis Azaræ*, a most troublesome species, found all through South America. He is the great pest of the Puna shepherds, as he is a fierce hunter, and kills many of the young lambs and alpacos.

The vaquero was sorry he had not his dogs with him, as, from the route the fox had taken, he would have been certain to have captured him, and that would have been worth something, for the great sheep-owners give their shepherds a sheep for every old fox that they can kill, and for every young one a lamb. But the dogs, on this occasion, had been left behind, lest they should have bitten Leon, and the vaquero was compelled to let “Reynard” go his way. It was night when they returned to the hut, and then, after Leon had related the details of their excursion, all retired to rest.

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CHAPTER VIII.

LLAMAS, ALPACOS, VICUÑAS, AND GUANACOS.

Our travellers were stirring by early break of day. As they issued from the hut, a singular and interesting scene presented itself to their eyes. At one view—one *coup d'œil*—they beheld the whole four species of the celebrated camel-sheep of the Andes; for there are four of them,—llama, guanaco, alpaco, and vicuña! This was a rare sight, indeed. They were all browsing upon the open plain: first, the llamas, near the hut; then a flock of tame alpacos, out upon the plain; thirdly, a herd of seven guanacos farther off; and still more distant, a larger herd of the shy vicuñas. The guanacos and vicuñas were of uniform colours,—that is, in each flock the colour of the individuals was the same; while among the llamas and alpacos there were many varieties of colour. The latter two kinds were tame,—in fact, they were under the charge of Guapo's friend the shepherd, whereas the herds of vicuñas and guanacos consisted of wild animals.

Perhaps no animal of South America has attracted so much attention as the llama, as it was the only beast of burden the Indians had trained to their use on the arrival of Europeans in that country. So many strange stories were told by the earlier Spanish travellers regarding this “camel-sheep,” that it was natural that great interest should attach to it. These reported that the llama was used for riding. Such, however, is not the case. It is only trained to carry burdens; although an Indian boy may be sometimes seen on the back of a llama for mischief, or when crossing a stream and the lad does not wish to get his feet wet.

The llama is three feet high from hoof to shoulder, though his long neck makes him look taller. His colour is generally brown, with black and yellow shades, sometimes speckled or spotted; and there are black and white llamas, but these are rare. His wool is long and coarse, though the females, which are smaller, have a finer and better wool. The latter are never used to carry burdens, but only kept for breeding. They are fed in flocks upon the Puna heights, and it was a flock of these that our travellers saw near the hut.

185 The males are trained to carry burdens at the age of four years. A pack-saddle, called *yergua*, woven out of course wool, is fastened on the back, and upon this the goods are placed. The burden never exceeds 120 or 130 pounds. Should a heavier one be put on, the llama, like the

camel, quite understands that he is “over-weighted,” and neither coaxing nor beating will induce him to move a step. He will lie down, or, if much vexed, spit angrily at his driver, and this spittle has a highly acrid property, and will cause blisters on the skin where it touches. Sometimes a llama, over vexed by ill-treatment, has been known, in despair, to dash his brains out against a rock.

The llamas are used much in the mines of Peru, for carrying the ore. They frequently serve better than either asses or mules, as they can pass up and down declivities where neither ass nor mule can travel. They are sometimes taken in long trains from the mountains down to the coast region for salt and other goods; but on such occasions many of them die, as they cannot bear the warm climate of the lowlands. Their proper and native place is on the higher plains of the Andes.

A string of llamas, when on a journey, is a very interesting spectacle. One of the largest is usually the leader. The rest follow in single file, at a slow, measured pace, their heads ornamented tastefully with ribands, while small bells, hanging around their necks, tinkle as they go. They throw their high heads from side to side, gazing around them, and when frightened at anything, will “break ranks,” and scamper out of their path, to be collected again with some trouble.

When resting, they utter a low, humming noise, which has been compared to the sound of an Eolian harp. They crouch down on their breast—where there is a callosity—when about to receive their burdens, and also sleep resting in the same attitude. A halt during the day is necessary, in order that they may be fed, as these animals will not eat by night. In consequence of this they make but short journeys—ten to fifteen miles—although they will travel for a long time, allowing them a day's rest out of every five or six. Like the camels of the East, they can go days without water, and Buffon knew one that went *eighteen months* without it! but Buffon is very poor authority. When one of them becomes wearied, and does not wish to proceed, it is exceedingly difficult to coax him onward.

These animals were at one time very valuable. On the discovery of America a llama cost as much as eighteen or twenty dollars. But the introduction of mules and other beasts of burden has considerably cheapened them. At present they are sold for about four dollars in the mining districts, but can be bought where they are bred and reared for half that amount. In the days of the Incas their flesh was much used as food. It is still eaten; but for this purpose the common sheep is preferred, as the flesh of the llama is spongy and not very well flavoured. The wool is used for many sorts of coarse manufacture. So much for llamas. Now the “guanaco.”

This animal (whose name is sometimes written “huanaca,” though the pronunciation is the same with “guanaco” or “guanaca”) is larger than the llama, and for a long time was considered merely as the wild llama, or the llama *run wild*, in which you will perceive an essential distinction. It is neither, but an animal of specific difference. It exists in a wild state in the high
186 mountains, though, with great care and trouble, it can be domesticated and trained to carry burdens as well as its congener the llama. In form it resembles the latter, but, as is the case with most wild animals, the guanacos are all alike in colour. The upper parts of the body are of a reddish brown, while underneath it is a dirty white. The lips are white, and the face a dark grey. The wool is shorter than that of the llama, and of the same length all over the body. The guanaco lives in herds of five or seven individuals, and these are very shy, fleeing to the most inaccessible cliffs when any one approaches them. Like the chamois of Switzerland and the “bighorn” of the Rocky Mountains, they can glide along steep ledges when neither men nor dogs can find footing.

The “alpaco,” or “paco,” as it is sometimes called, is one of the most useful of the Peruvian sheep, and is more like the common sheep than the others. This arises from its bulkier shape, caused by its thick fleece of long wool. The latter is soft, fine, and often five inches in length; and, as is well known, has become an important article in the manufacture of cloth. Its colour is usually either white or black, though there are some of the alpacos speckled or spotted. Ponchos are woven out of alpaco-wool by the Indians of the Andes.

The alpaco is a domesticated animal, like the llama, but it is not used for carrying burdens. It is kept in large flocks, and regularly shorn as sheep are. If one of the alpacos gets separated from the flock, it will lie down and suffer itself to be beaten to death, rather than go the way its driver wishes. You have, no doubt, sometimes seen a common sheep exhibit similar obstinacy.

Of all the Peruvian sheep the vicuña is certainly the prettiest and most graceful. It has more the form of the deer or antelope than of the sheep, and its colour is so striking that it has obtained among the Peruvians the name of the animal itself, *color de vicuña* (vicuña colour). It is of a reddish yellow, not unlike that of our domestic red cat, although the breast and under parts of the body are white. The flesh of the vicuña is excellent eating, and its wool is of more value than even that of the alpaco. Where a pound of the former sells for one dollar—which is the usual price—the pound of alpaco will fetch only a quarter of that sum. Hats and the finest fabrics can be woven from the fleece of the vicuña, and the Incas used to clothe themselves in rich stuffs manufactured from it. In the present day the “ricos,” or rich proprietors of Peru, pride themselves in possessing ponchos of vicuña wool.

The vicuña inhabits the high plains of the Andes, though, unlike the guanaco, it rarely ventures up the rocky cliffs, as its hoofs are only calculated for the soft turf of the plains. It roams about in larger herds than the other—eighteen or twenty in the herd—and these are usually females under the protection and guidance of one polygamous old male. While feeding, the latter keeps watch over the flock, usually posting himself at some distance, so that he may have a better opportunity

of seeing and hearing any danger that may approach. When any is perceived, a shrill whistle from the leader and a quick stroke of his hoof on the turf warn the flock; and all draw closely together, each stretching out its head in the direction of the danger. They then take to flight, at first slowly, but afterwards with the swiftness of the roe; while the male, true to his trust, hangs in the rear,
187 and halts at intervals, as if to cover the retreat of the herd.

The llama, guanaco, alpaco, and vicuña, although different species, will breed with each other; and it is certain that some of their hybrids will again produce young. There exist, therefore, many intermediate varieties, or “mules,” throughout the countries of the Andes, some of which have been mistaken for separate species.

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CHAPTER IX.

A VICUÑA HUNT.

The vicuña being of such value, both inside and out, both in flesh and wool, is hunted by the mountain Indians with great assiduity. It is an animal most difficult to approach, and there is rarely any cover on these naked plains by which to approach it.

The chief mode of capturing it is by the “chacu.” This cannot be effected by a single hunter. A great number is required. Usually the whole population of one of the villages of the “Sierras” lower down turns out for this sport, or rather business, for it is an annual source of profit. Even the women go along, to cook and perform other offices, as the hunt of the *chacu* sometimes lasts a week or more.

A hunting party will number from fifty to one hundred persons. They climb up to the *altos*, or high and secluded plains, where the vicuña dwells in greatest numbers. They carry with them immense coils of ropes, and a large quantity of coloured rags, together with bundles of stakes three or four feet in length. When a proper part of the plain has been chosen, they drive in the stakes four or five yards apart and running in the circumference of a circle, sometimes nearly a mile in diameter.

A rope is then stretched from stake to stake, at the height of between two and three feet from the ground, and over this rope are hung the coloured rags provided for the occasion, and which keep fluttering in the wind. A sort of scare-crow fence is thus constructed in the form of a ring, except that on one side a space of about two hundred yards is left open to serve as an entrance for the game. The Indians then, most of them on horseback, make a grand détour, extending for miles over the country; and having got behind the herds of vicuñas, drive them within the circle, and close up the entrance by completing the ring.

The hunters then go inside, and using the *bolas*, or even seizing the animals by their hind-legs, soon capture the whole. Strange to say, these silly creatures make no attempt to break through the sham fence, nor even to leap over it. Not so with the guanacos, when so enclosed. The latter spring against the fence at once, and if, by chance, a party of guanacos be driven in along with the vicuñas, they not only break open the rope enclosure and free themselves, but also the whole herd of their cousins, the vicuñas. It is, therefore, not considered any gain to get a flock of guanacos into the trap.

The hunt usually lasts several days, but during that time the enclosure of ropes is flitted from place to place, until no more vicuñas can be found. Then the ropes, stakes, &c., are collected, and the produce of the hunt distributed among the hunters. But the Church levies its tax upon the “chacu,” and the skins—worth a dollar each—have to be given up to the priest of the village. A
188 good round sum this amounts to, as frequently four or five hundred vicuñas are taken at a single *chacu*.

A good hunter is sometimes able to “approach” the vicuña. Guapo's friend was esteemed one of the best in all the Puna. The sight of the herd out on the plain, with their graceful forms, and beautiful reddish-orange bodies, was too much for him, and he resolved to try his skill upon them. He said he had a plan of his own, which he intended to practise on this occasion.

Don Pablo and his party—even Doña Isidora and the little Leona—were all outside the hut, although the morning air was raw and chill. But the domicile of the worthy vaquero was not empty, for all that. It was peopled by a very large colony of very small animals, and a night in their society had proved enough for the travellers. The chill air of the Puna was even more endurable than such company.

The vaquero crawled back into the hut, and in a few minutes returned, but so metamorphosed, that had the party not seen him come out of the doorway they would have mistaken him for a llama! He was completely disguised in the skin of one of these animals. His face only was partly visible, and his eyes looked out of the breast. The head and neck of the skin, stuffed with some light substance, stood up and forward, after the manner of the living animal, and although the legs were a little clumsy, yet it would have required a more intelligent creature than the vicuña

to have observed this defect.

All hands, even the saturnine Guapo, laughed loudly at the counterfeit, and the vaquero himself was heard to chuckle through the long wool upon the breast. He did not lose time, however, but instantly prepared to set off. He needed no other preparation than to get hold of his *bolas*,—that was his favourite weapon. Before going farther, I shall tell you what sort of weapon it is.

The bolas consist of three balls—hence the name—of lead or stone, two of them heavier than the third. Each ball is fastened to the end of a stout thong made of twisted sinews of the vicuña itself, and the other ends of the three thongs are joined together. In using them the hunter holds the lightest ball in his hand, and twirls the other two in circles around his head, until they have attained the proper velocity, when he takes aim and launches them forth.

Through the air fly the thongs and balls, and all whirling round in circles, until they strike some object; and if that object be the legs of an animal, the thongs become immediately warped around them, until the animal is regularly hoppled, and in attempting to escape comes at once to the ground. Of course great practice is required before such an instrument can be used skilfully; and to the novice there is some danger of one of the balls hitting him a crack on the head, and knocking over himself instead of the game. But there was no danger of Guapo's friend the vaquero committing this blunder. He had been swinging the bolas around his head for more than forty years!

Without more ado, then, he seized the weapon, and, having gathered it with his *fore-feet* into a portable shape, he proceeded in the direction of the vicuñas.

The travellers remained by the hut, watching him with interest, but his movements were
189 particularly interesting to Leon, who, like all boys, was naturally fond of such enterprises.

The herd of vicuñas was not more than three quarters of a mile off. For the first half of this distance the vaquero shambled along right speedily, but as he drew nearer to the animals he proceeded slower and with more caution.

The pretty creatures were busily browsing, and had no fear. They knew they were well guarded by their faithful sentinel, in whom they had every confidence,—the lord and leader of the herd. Even from the hut, this one could be seen standing some distance apart from the rest. He was easily recognised by his greater bulk and prouder bearing.

The false llama has passed near the guanacos, and they have taken no heed of him. This is a good omen, for the guanacos are quite as sharp and shy as their smaller cousins, and since he has succeeded in deceiving them, he will likely do the same for the vicuñas. Already he approaches them. He does not make for the herd, but directly for the leader. Surely he is near enough; from the hut he seems close up to the creature. See! the vicuña tosses his head and strikes the ground with his hoof. Listen! it is his shrill whistle. The scattered herd suddenly start and flock together; but, look! the *llama* stands erect on his hind-legs; the bolas whirl around his head—they are launched out. Ha! the vicuña is down!

Where is the female drove? Have they scampered off and forsaken their lord? No! faithful as a loving wife, they run up to share his danger. With shrill cries they gather around him, moving to and fro. The llama is in their midst. See! he is dealing blows with some weapon—it is a knife! his victims fall around him—one at every blow; one by one they are falling. At last, at last, they are all down,—yes, the whole herd are stretched, dead or dying, upon the plain!

The struggle is over; no sound is heard, save the hoof-stroke of the guanacos, llamas, and alpacos, that cover the plain in their wild flight.

Leon could no longer restrain his curiosity; but ran off to the scene of the slaughter. There he counted no less than nineteen vicuñas lying dead, each one stabbed in the ribs! The Indian assured him that it was not the first *battue* of the kind he had made. A whole herd of vicuñas is often taken in this way. When the male is wounded or killed, the females will not leave him; but, as if out of gratitude for the protection he has during life afforded them, they share his fate without making an effort to escape!

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CHAPTER X.

CAPTURING A CONDOR.

The vaquero with his horse soon dragged the vicuñas to the hut. Guapo gave him a help with the mule, and in a few minutes they were all brought up. One of them was immediately skinned, and part of it prepared for breakfast, and our travellers ate heartily of it, as the cold Puna air had given an edge to their appetites.

The new-killed animals, along with the red skin of the bull, which had been spread out on the ground at some distance from the hut, had already attracted the condors; and four or five of

these great birds were now seen hovering in the air, evidently with the intention of alighting at
190 the first opportunity.

An idea seemed to enter the head of the vaquero, while his guests were still at breakfast, and he asked Leon if he would like to see a condor caught. Of course Leon replied in the affirmative. What boy wouldn't like to see a condor caught?

The vaquero said he would gratify him with the sight, and without staying to finish his breakfast—indeed he had had his “coceada,” and didn't care for any,—he started to his feet, and began to make preparations for the capture.

How he was to catch one of these great birds, Leon had not the slightest idea. Perhaps with the “bolas,” thought he. That would have done well enough if he could only get near them; but the condors were sufficiently shy not to let any man within reach either with bolas or guns. It is only when they have been feasting on carrion, and have gorged themselves to repletion, that they can be thus approached, and then they may be even knocked over with sticks.

At other times the condor is a shy and wary bird. No wonder either that he is so, for, unlike most other vultures, he is hunted and killed at all times. The vultures of most countries are respected by the people, because they perform a valuable service in clearing away carrion; and in many parts these birds are protected by statute. There are laws in the Southern United States, and in several of the Spanish-American Republics, which impose fines and penalties for killing the black vultures. In some Oriental countries, too, similar laws exist. But no statute protects the condor. On the contrary, he is a proscribed bird, and there is a bounty on his head, because he does great damage to the proprietors of sheep, and llamas, and alpacos, killing and devouring the young of these animals. His large quills, moreover, are much prized in the South American cities, and the killing of a condor is worth something. All this will account for the shyness of this great bird, while other vultures are usually so tame that you may approach within a few paces of them.

As yet the half-dozen condors hovering about kept well off from the hut; and Leon could not understand how any one of them was to be caught.

The vaquero, however, had a good many “dodges,” and after the *ruse* he had just practised upon the vicuñas, Leon suspected he would employ some similar artifice with the condors. Leon was right. It was by a stratagem the bird was to be taken.

The vaquero laid hold of a long rope, and lifting the bull's hide upon his shoulders, asked Guapo to follow him with the two horses. When he had got out some four or five hundred yards from the hut, he simply spread himself flat upon the ground, and drew the skin over him, the fleshy side turned upward. There was a hollow in the ground about as big as his body—in fact, a trench he had himself made for a former occasion—and when lying in this on his back, his breast was about on a level with the surrounding turf.

His object in asking Guapo to accompany him with the horses was simply a *ruse* to deceive the condors, who from their high elevation were all the while looking down upon the plain. But the vaquero covered himself so adroitly with his red blanket, that even their keen eyes could scarcely have noticed him; and as Guapo afterwards left the ground with the led horses, the vultures supposed that nothing remained but the skin, which from its sanguinary colour to them appeared
191 to be flesh.

The birds had now nothing to fear from the propinquity of the hut. There the party were all seated quietly eating their breakfast, and apparently taking no notice of them. In a few minutes' time, therefore, they descended lower, and lower,—and then one of the very largest dropped upon the ground within a few feet of the hide. After surveying it for a moment, he appeared to see nothing suspicious about it, and hopped a little closer. Another at this moment came to the ground—which gave courage to the first—and this at length stalked boldly on the hide, and began to tear at it with his great beak.

A movement was now perceived on the part of the vaquero—the hide “lumped” up, and at the same time the wings of the condor were seen to play and flap about as if he wanted to rise into the air, but could not. He was evidently held by the legs!

The other bird had flown off at the first alarm, and the whole band were soon soaring far upward into the blue heavens.

Leon now expected to see the vaquero uncover himself. Not so, however, as yet. That wily hunter had no such intention, and although he was now in a sitting posture, grasping the legs of the condor, yet his head and shoulders were still enveloped in the bull's hide. He knew better than to show his naked face to the giant vulture, that at a single “peck” of his powerful beak would have deprived him of an eye, or otherwise injured him severely. The vaquero was aware of all this, and therefore did not leave his hiding-place until he had firmly knotted one end of the long cord around the shank of the bird—then slipping out at one side, he ran off to some distance before stopping. The condor, apparently relieved of his disagreeable company, made a sudden effort and rose into the air, carrying the hide after him. Leon shouted out, for he thought the vulture had escaped; but the vaquero knew better, as he held the other end of the cord in his hand; and the bird, partly from the weight of the skin, and partly from a slight tug given by the hunter, soon came heavily to the ground again. The vaquero was now joined by Guapo; and, after some sharp manœuvring, they succeeded between them in passing the string through the nostrils of the condor, by which means it was quietly conducted to the hut, and staked on the ground in

the rear—to be disposed of whenever its captor should think fit.

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CHAPTER XI.

THE PERILS OF A PERUVIAN ROAD.

It was as yet only an hour or so after daybreak—for the vicuña hunt had occupied but a very short time and the capture of the condor a still shorter. Don Pablo was anxious to be gone, as he knew he was not beyond the reach of pursuit. A pair of the vicuñas were hastily prepared, and packed upon a llama for use upon their journey. Thus furnished, the party resumed their route.

The vaquero did not accompany them. He had an office to perform of far more importance to their welfare and safety. As soon as they were gone he let loose his four snarling curs, and taking them out to where the pile of dead vicuñas lay upon the plain, he left them there with instructions
192 to guard the carcasses from foxes, condors, or whatever else might wish to make a meal off them. Then mounting, he rode off to the place where the road leading from Cuzco ascended upon the table-land, and having tied his horse to a bush, he climbed upon a projecting rock and sat down. From this point he commanded a view of the winding road to the distance of miles below him.

No traveller—much less a party of soldiers—could approach without his seeing them, even many hours before they could get up to where he sat; and it was for that reason he had stationed himself there. Had Don Pablo been pursued, the faithful Indian would have galloped after and given him warning, long before his pursuers could have reached the plain.

He sat until sunset—contenting himself with a few leaves of coca. No pursuer appeared in sight. He then mounted his horse, and rode back to his solitary hut.

Let us follow our travellers.

They crossed the table-plain during the day, and rested that night under the shelter of some overhanging rocks on the other side. They supped upon part of the vicuñas, and felt more cheerful, as they widened the distance between themselves and danger. But in the morning they did not remain longer by their camp than was necessary to get breakfast. Half-an-hour after sunrise saw them once more on their route.

Their road led through a pass in the mountains. At first it ascended, and then began to go downward. They had crossed the last ridge of the Andes, and were now descending the eastern slopes. Another day's journey, or two at most, would bring them to the borders of that wild forest, which stretches from the foot-hills of the Andes to the shores of the Atlantic Ocean—that forest with scarcely a civilised settlement throughout all its wide extent—where no roads exist—whose only paths are rivers—whose dark jungles are in places so impenetrable that the Indian cannot enter them, and even the fierce jaguar, embarrassed by the thick underwood, has to take to the tree-tops in pursuit of his prey. Another day's journey or so would bring them to the borders of the “Montaña”—for such is the name which, by a strange misapplication of terms, has been given to this primeval wood. Yes, the Montaña was before them, and although yet distant, it could now and then be seen as the road wound among the rocks, stretching far towards the sky like a green and misty ocean.

In that almost boundless region there dwelt none but the aborigines of the soil—the wild Indians—and these only in sparse and distant bands. Even the Spaniards in their day of glory had failed to conquer it; and the Portuguese from the other side were not more successful.

The Spanish colonists, on the Peruvian or western border of this immense forest, had never been able to penetrate it as colonists or settlers. Expeditions from time to time had passed along its rivers in search of the fabled gold country of *Manoa*, whose king each morning gave himself a coating of gold dust, and was hence called El Dorado (the gilded); but all these expeditions ended in mortification and defeat. The settlements never extended beyond the *sierras*, or foot-hill of the Andes, which stretch only a few days' journey (in some places but a score of leagues) from the
193 populous cities on the mountain-heights.

Even at this present time, if you travel thirty leagues eastward of the large town of Cuzco, in the direction taken by Don Pablo, you will pass the boundaries of civilisation, and enter a country unexplored and altogether unknown to the people of Cuzco themselves! About the “Montaña” very little is known in the settlements of the Andes. Fierce tribes of Indians, the jaguar, the vampire bat, swarms of mosquitoes, and the hot atmosphere, have kept the settler, as well as the curious traveller, out of these wooded plains.

Don Pablo had already passed the outskirts of civilisation. Any settlement he might find beyond would be the hut of some half-wild Indian. There was no fear of his encountering a white face upon the unfrequented path he had chosen, though had he gone by some other route he might have found white settlements extending farther to the eastward. As it was, the wilderness lay before him, and he would soon enter it.

And what was he to do in the wilderness? He knew not. He had never reflected on that. He only knew that behind him was a relentless foe thirsting for his life. To go back was to march to certain death. He had no thoughts of returning. That would have been madness. His property was already confiscated—his death decreed by the vengeful Viceroy, whose soldiers had orders to capture or slay, whenever they should find him. His only hope, then, was to escape beyond the borders of civilisation—to hide himself in the great Montaña. Beyond this he had formed no plan. He had scarcely thought about the future. Forward, then, for the Montaña!

The road which our travellers followed was nothing more than a narrow path or “trail” formed by cattle, or by some party of Indians occasionally passing up from the lower valleys to the mountain-heights. It lay along the edge of a torrent that leaped and foamed over its rocky bed. The torrent was no doubt on its way to join the greatest of rivers, the mighty Amazon—the head-waters of which spring from all parts of the Andes, draining the slopes of these mountains through more than twenty degrees of latitude.

Towards evening the little party were beginning to enter among the mountain spurs, or foot-hills. Here the travelling grew exceedingly difficult, the path sometimes running up a steep acclivity and then descending into deep ravines—so deep and dark that the sun's rays seemed hardly to enter them. The road was what Spanish-Americans term, “*Cuesta arriba, cuesta abajo*” (up hill, down hill).

In no part of the world are such roads to be met with as among the Andes Mountains, both in South America and in their Mexican continuation through the northern division of the continent. This arises from the peculiar geological structure of these mountains. Vast clefts traverse them, yawning far into the earth. In South America these are called *quebradas*. You may stand on the edge of one of them and look sheer down a precipice two thousand feet! You may fancy a whole mountain scooped out and carried away, and yet you may have to reach the bottom of this yawning gulf by a road which seems cut out of the face of the cliff, or rather has been formed by a freak of Nature—for in these countries the hand of man has done but little for the roads.

Sometimes the path traverses a ledge so narrow that scarce room is found for the feet of your
194 trusty mule. Sometimes a hanging bridge has to be crossed, spanning a horrid chasm, at the bottom of which roars a foaming torrent—the bridge itself, composed of ropes and brambles, all the while swinging like a hammock under the tread of the affrighted traveller!

He who journeys through the tame scenery of European countries can form but little idea of the wild and dangerous highways of the Andes. Even the passes of the Alps or Carpathians are safe in comparison. On the Peruvian road the lives of men and animals are often sacrificed. Mules slide from the narrow ledges, or break through the frail “soga” bridges, carrying their riders along with them, whirling through empty air to be plunged into foaming waters or dashed on sharp rocks below.

These are accidents of continual occurrence; and yet, on account of the apathy of the Spano-Indian races that inhabit these countries, little is done for either roads or bridges. Every one is left to take care of himself, and get over them as he best may. It is only now and then that positive necessity prompts to a great effort, and then a road is repaired or a broken bridge patched with new ropes.

But the road that was travelled by Don Pablo had seen no repairs—there were no bridges. It was, in fact, a mere pathway where the traveller scrambled over rocks, or plunged into the stream, and forded or swam across it as he best could. Sometimes it lay along the water's edge, keeping in the bottom of the ravine; at other places no space was left by the water, and then the path ascended and ran along some ledge perhaps for miles, at the end of which it would again descend to the bed of the stream.

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CHAPTER XII.

ENCOUNTER UPON A CLIFF.

That night they encamped in the bottom of the ravine close to the water's edge. They found just enough of level ground to enable them to stretch themselves, but they were contented with that. There was nothing for the animals to eat except the succulent, but thorny, leaves of the *Cactus opuntia*, or the more fibrous blades of the wild agave. This evening there were no quinoa seeds to be had, for none of these trees grew near. Even the botanist, Don Pablo, could find no vegetable substance that was eatable, and they would have to sup upon the vicuña meat, without bread, potatoes, or other vegetables. Their stock of ocas, ullucas, and macas, was quite out. They had cooked the last of the macas for that morning's meal.

Guapo here came to their relief. Guapo's experience went beyond the theoretical knowledge of the botanist. Guapo knew a vegetable which was good to eat—in fact, a most delicious vegetable when cooked with meat. This was no other than the fleshy heart of the wild maguey (*agave*), with part of the adhering roots. Among naked rocks, in the most barren parts of the desert wilderness,

the wild agave may be found growing in luxuriance. Its thick, succulent blades, when split open, exude a cool liquid, that often gives considerable relief to the thirsty traveller; while the heart, or egg-shaped nucleus from which spring the sheathing leaves—and even parts of the leaves
195 themselves—when cooked with any sort of meat, become an excellent and nourishing food.

The Indians make this use of the aloe on the high plains of Northern Mexico, among the roving bands of the Apaché, Navajo, and Comanché. These people cook them along with horse's flesh, for there the wild horse is the principal food of whole tribes. Their mode of cooking, both the flesh and the aloe, is by baking them together in little ovens of stones sunk in the ground, and then heated by fire until they are nearly red hot. The ashes are then cleared out, the meat and vegetables placed in the ovens, and then buried until both are sufficiently done. In fact, there is one tribe of the Apachés who have obtained the name of “Mezcaleros,” from the fact of their eating the wild aloe, which in those countries goes under the name of “mezcal” plant.

In many parts of the Andes, where the soil is barren, the wild maguey is almost the only vegetation to be seen, and in such places the Indians use it as food. It seems to be a gift of Nature to the desert, so that even there man may find something on which to subsist.

Guapo with his knife had soon cleared off several large pieces of the maguey, and these, fried along with the vicuña meat, enabled the party to make a supper sufficiently palatable. A cup of pure water from the cold mountain stream, sweeter than all the wine in the world, washed it down; and they went to rest with hearts full of contentment and gratitude.

They rose at an early hour, and, breakfasting as they had supped, once more took the road.

After travelling a mile or two, the path gradually ascended along one of those narrow ledges that shelve out from the cliff, of which we have already spoken. They soon found themselves hundreds of feet above the bed of the torrent, yet still hundreds of feet above them rose the wall of dark porphyry, seamed, and scarred, and frowning. The ledge or path was of unequal breadth —here and there forming little tables or platforms. At other places, however, it was so narrow that those who were mounted could look over the brink of the precipice into the frothing water below—so narrow that no two animals could have passed each other. These terrible passes were sometimes more than an hundred yards in length, and not straight, but winding around buttresses of the rock, so that one end was not visible from the other.

On frequented roads, where such places occur, it is usual for travellers, entering upon them, to shout, so that any one who chances to be coming from the opposite side, may have warning and halt. Sometimes this warning is neglected, and two trains of mules or llamas meet upon the ledge! Then there is a terrible scene—the drivers quarrel—one party has to submit—their animals have to be unloaded and dragged back by the heels to some wider part of the path, so that each party can get past in its turn!

Near the highest part of the road, our travellers had entered upon one of these narrow ledges, and were proceeding along it with caution. The trusty mule, that carried Doña Isidora and Leona, was in front, the horse followed, and then the llamas. It is safer to ride than walk on such occasions, especially upon mules, for these animals are more sure-footed than the traveller himself. The horse that carried Leon, however, was as safe as any mule. He was one of the small Spanish-American breed, almost as sure-footed as a chamois.

196 The torrent rushed and thundered beneath. It was fearful to listen and look downward; the heads of all were giddy, and their hearts full of fear. Guapo, alone accustomed to such dangers, was of steady nerve. He and Don Pablo afoot were in the rear.

GUAPO'S ENCOUNTER WITH THE BULLS.

They had neared the highest point of the road, where a jutting rock hid all beyond from their view. They were already within a few paces of this rock, when the mule—which, as we have stated, was in the front—suddenly stopped, showing such symptoms of terror that Doña Isidora
197 and the little Leona both shrieked!

Of course all the rest came to a halt behind the terrified and trembling mule. Don Pablo, from behind, shouted out, inquiring the cause of the alarm; but before any answer could be given the cause became apparent to all. Around the rock suddenly appeared the head and horns of a fierce bull, and the next moment his whole body had come into view, while another pair of horns and another head were seen close behind him!

It would be difficult to describe the feelings of our travellers at that moment. The bull came on with a determined and sullen look, until he stood nearly head to head with the mule. The smoke of his wide steaming nostrils was mingled with the breath of the terrified mule, and he held his head downward, and evidently with the intention of rushing forward upon the latter. Neither could have gone back, and of course the fierce bull would drive the mule into the abyss. The other bull stood close behind, ready to continue the work if the first one failed, and, perhaps, there were many others behind!

The mule was sensible of her danger, and, planting her hoofs firmly on the hard rock, she clung closely to the precipice. But this would not have served her, had not a hand interposed in her behalf. Amidst the terrified cries of the children, the voice of Guapo was heard calling to Don Pablo,—“Your pistols, master! give me your pistols!”

Something glided quickly among the legs of the animals. It was the lithe body of the Indian. In a second's time he appeared in front of the mule. The bull was just lowering his head to charge forward—his horns were set—the foam fell from his lips—and his eyes glanced fire out of their dark orbs. Before he could make the rush, there came the loud report of a pistol—a cloud of sulphury smoke—a short struggle on the cliff—and then a dead plunge in the torrent below!

The smoke partially cleared away; then came another crack—another cloud—another short struggle—and another distant plash in the water!

The smoke cleared away a second time. The two bulls were no longer to be seen!

Guapo, in front of the mule, now ran forward upon the ledge, and looked around the buttress of rock. Then, turning suddenly, he waved his hand, and shouted back,—

“No more, master; you may come on—the road is clear!”

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CHAPTER XIII.

THE LONE CROSS IN THE FOREST.

After two more days of fatiguing travel, the road parted from the bank of the river, and ran along the ridge of a high mountain spur in a direction at right angles to that of the Andes themselves. This spur continued for several miles, and then ended abruptly. At the point where it ended, the path, which for the whole of the day had been scarcely traceable, also came to an end. They were now of course in a forest-covered country—in the *Ceja de la Montaña*—that is, the forest that covers the foot-hills of the mountains. The forest of the plains, which were yet
198 lower down, is known as the “Montaña” proper.

During that day they had found the road in several places choked up with underwood, and Guapo had to clear it with his *macheté*—a sort of half-sword, half-knife, used throughout all Spanish America, partly to cut brushwood and partly as a weapon of defence. Where the ridge ended, however, what had once been a road was now entirely overgrown—vines and llianas of large size crossed the path. Evidently no one had passed for years. A road existed no longer; the luxuriant vegetation had effaced it.

This is no unusual thing on the borders of the Montaña. Many a settlement had existed there in former times, and had been abandoned. No doubt the road they had been following once led to some such settlement that had long since fallen into ruin.

It is a melancholy fact that the Spanish-Americans—including the Mexican nation—have been retrograding for the last hundred years. Settlements which they have made, and even large cities built by them, are now deserted and in ruins; and extensive tracts of country, once occupied by them, have become uninhabited, and have gone back to a state of nature. Whole provinces, conquered and peopled by the followers of Cortez and Pizarro, have within the last fifty years been retaken from them *by the Indians*: and it would be very easy to prove, that had the descendants of the Spanish conquerors, been left to themselves, another half century would have seen them driven from that very continent which their forefathers so easily conquered and so cruelly kept. This re-conquest on the part of the Indian races was going on in a wholesale way in the northern provinces of Mexico. But it is now interrupted by the approach of another and stronger race from the East—the Anglo-American.

To return to our travellers. Don Pablo was not surprised that the road had run out. He had been expecting this for miles back. What was to be done? Of course they must halt for that night at least. Indeed it was already near camping-time. The sun was low in the sky, and the animals were all much jaded. The llamas could not have gone much farther. They looked as if they should never go farther. The heat of the climate—it had been getting warmer every hour—was too much for them. These animals, whose native home is among the high cool mountain valleys, as already observed, cannot live in the low tropical plains. Even as they descended the Sierras they had shown symptoms of suffering from the heat during all that day. Their strength was now fairly exhausted.

The party halted. A little open space was chosen for the camp. The animals were relieved of their burdens and tied to the trees, lest they might stray off and be lost in the thick woods. A fire was kindled, and part of the vicuña meat cooked for supper.

It was not yet night when they had finished eating, and all were seated on the ground. The countenance of the father was clouded with a melancholy expression. Doña Isidora sat by his side and tried to cheer him, endeavouring to force a smile into her large black eyes. The little Leona, with her head resting on her mother's lap, overcome with the heat and fatigue, had fallen asleep. Leon, seeing the dejected look of his father, was silent and thoughtful. Guapo was busy with his llamas.

“Come, dear husband!” said the lady, trying to assume a cheerful tone, “do not be so sad. We
199 are now safe. Surely they will never pursue us here.”

“They may not,” mechanically replied Don Pablo; “but what then? We have escaped death, for what purpose? Either to live like savages in these wild woods—perhaps to be killed by savages—perhaps to die of hunger!”

“Do not say so, Don Pablo. I have never heard that the Indians of these parts were cruel. They will not injure poor harmless people such as we are. And as for starving, are not these luxuriant woods filled with roots and fruits that will sustain life a long while? You, too, know so well what they are! Dear husband, do not despond; God will not forsake us. He has enabled us to escape from our enemies, from fearful dangers on our journey. Fear not! He will not leave us to perish now.”

The cheering words of his beautiful wife had their effect upon Don Pablo. He embraced and kissed her in a transport of love and gratitude. He felt inspired with new hope. The vigour of mind and body, that for days had deserted him, now suddenly returned; and he sprang to his feet evidently with some newly-formed resolution.

The country both before and behind them was shut out from their view by the thick foliage and underwood. A tall tree grew by the spot, with branches down to the level of a man's head. Don Pablo approached this tree, and seizing the branches drew himself up, and then climbed on towards its top. When he had reached a sufficient height, to overlook the surrounding woods, he stopped; and, resting himself upon one of the branches, looked abroad towards the east. All the rest stood watching him from below.

He had been gazing but a few seconds when his face brightened up, and a smile of satisfaction

was seen to play upon his countenance. He evidently saw something that pleased him. Isidora, impatient, called out to him from below; but Don Pablo waved his hand to her, as if admonishing her to be silent.

“Have patience, love,” he cried down. “I shall descend presently and tell you all. I have good news, but be patient.”

It required a good share of patience, for Don Pablo after this remained a full half-hour upon the tree. He was not all the time looking abroad, however. Part of it he sat upon his perch—his head leaning forward, and his eyes not appearing to be particularly engaged with anything. He was busy with his thoughts, and evidently meditating on some great project. Perhaps the going down of the sun admonished him, as much as the desire of satisfying his wife's curiosity, but just as the bright orb was sinking among the far tree-tops he descended.

“Now, Don Pablo,” said the fair Isidora, pretending to frown and look angry, “you have tried our patience, have you not? Come, then, no more mystery, but tell us all. What have you seen?”

“Forgive me, wife; you shall know all.”

Both sat down upon the trunk of a dead tree that Guapo had felled, and was cutting up for firewood: not that it was at all cold, but they had now arrived in the country of the terrible *jaguar*, and it would be necessary to keep up a blazing fire throughout the night.

“Your words were true, love,” began Don Pablo. “God has not forsaken us. I have seen three things that have inspired me with fresh life and hope.

“First, I looked out upon the Montaña, which I expected to see stretching away to the horizon,
200 like a green ocean. I saw this in fact; but, to my surprise, I saw more. I beheld a broad river winding like an immense serpent through the distant forest. It ran in a direction north-east, as far as the eye could reach. Even upon the horizon I could distinguish spots of its bright water glancing like silver under the rays of the setting sun. My heart leaped with joy, for I recognised a river whose existence has been doubted. It can be no other, thought I, than the *Madre de Dios*. I have often heard that there existed such a river in these parts, that runs on to the Amazon. A missionary is said to have visited it, but with the destruction of the missions the record has been lost. I have no doubt the river I have seen is the *Madre de Dios* of that missionary.”

The thought of being so near the banks of this river suggested other thoughts. At once a design entered into my mind. “We can build a raft,” thought I, “launch it upon this noble river, and float down to the Amazon, and thence to the mouth of the great stream itself. There is a Portuguese settlement there—the town of Grand Para. There we shall be safe from our foes.”

Such were my first thoughts on beholding the new river. I reflected further. “Our fortune is gone,” I reflected; “we have nothing in the wide world—what should we do at Para, even if we arrived there in safety? How could we attempt such a journey without provisions. It would be impossible.”

My hopes fell as quickly as they had sprung up.

“I noticed your countenance change as you sat upon the tree.”

“True, you might easily have done so: the prospect of reaching Para, penniless, and becoming a beggar in the streets—the nearer prospect of starving in the wilderness of the Amazon—were before my mind.”

My eyes for awhile were bent mechanically upon the green ocean of tree-tops. All at once an object arrested them. It was a patch of bright rose-coloured foliage, easily distinguishable amid the green leaves that surrounded it. It was not down in the Montaña—for that is a thousand feet below us. It was upon the side of the Sierra. My eyes glanced quickly around. I beheld other patches of similar foliage, some of them nearly an acre in breadth. My heart again leaped with joy. I knew well what these red spots of the forest were. They were clumps of *cinchona* trees—those trees that yield the celebrated febrifuge—the Peruvian bark!

New ideas passed rapidly through my mind. “Our fortune is gone,” thought I. “Here is a fortune in these valuable trees. Here is a mine that only requires to be worked. I shall turn *cascarillero*—I shall be a *bark-hunter*.”

“At first I thought that we might gather the bark, and send Guapo to sell it in the towns of the Sierra. Then the idea came into my mind that it might be possible to collect an immense quantity, store it up, build a great raft, float it down the rivers, and dispose of it in Para. I knew that in this way it would more than quadruple its price—for the traders of the Sierra purchase it from the poor cascarilleros, and have enormous profits upon it from the larger merchants.

“But how to live while making this store? Yes, how to live even on the morrow? Could we support ourselves by hunting, or find sustenance from fruits and roots, as you have suggested? This was the most important question of all, for our present necessities far outweighed our future
201 prospects.

“The very thought of our necessity caused me once more to glance over the forest, and I continued to scan it on all sides. My eye was again arrested, and fixed upon a point where I saw there existed a different vegetation from any that could be seen elsewhere. There is a small valley about five hundred feet below us. It is a sort of table valley, and the stream along which we

have been travelling runs through it, afterwards dashing over a fall to join the river below. In this valley I saw huge broad leaves of a brilliant yellowish green. I knew them at once to be the leaves of the great *musaceæ*, either plantains or bananas. I thought, too, I could distinguish the form of the *yucca* plant. These are the certain signs of some settlement, or where one has existed. I fancy the latter is the correct idea, as I could distinguish neither house nor smoke. It may be some deserted Indian 'chacra,' or it may be the grounds of an old mission. In either case, we shall be likely to find those useful plants from which we may obtain food."

"Oh, papa! mamma!" cried Leon, running up and interrupting the conversation. "See what is here among the trees! I declare it is a great cross!"

Don Pablo and Isidora walked towards the spot. There, sure enough, was a large wooden cross planted in the ground, and leaning to one side. The wood was much decayed, but the inscription that had been deeply cut in the transverse beam was still legible. It was simply the Spanish phrase:—

"Brazos de Dios" (The arm of God).

Isidora took Don Pablo by the hand, and looking steadfastly in his face, pointed to the inscription.

"It *is* true," said she, "God protects us!"

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CHAPTER XIV.

THE DESERTED MISSION.

That night all went to rest with hope in their hearts, though still not without some anxiety.

If you reflect upon the situation in which they were placed, you will not wonder that they were anxious about the future. Their first care had been to fly into the wilderness, without thinking upon the necessities they might encounter there—without reflecting that they had made no provision of food to sustain them. It is true that in the great Montaña there are many plants and trees whose roots and fruits can be eaten; but a traveller may go for days without finding one of these. Indeed, to pass through this great forest, in most places, is impossible, so completely are the creeping parasites matted and laced together. It is necessary to keep along the rivers in a canoe or raft, else you cannot get from place to place.

You cannot even walk along the banks of many of these rivers, as the underwood hangs into the very water! For the same reason game is hard to be procured, and neither Don Pablo nor Guapo were provided with proper weapons to hunt with. Don Pablo's pistols were all the fire-arms they had, and Guapo had no other weapon than his macheté. With their present means, then, there was very little chance of their killing any game, even should they have fallen in with
202 it. But they saw none as yet, except some birds, such as parrots, macaws, and toucans, that fluttered among the leaves. No wonder, then, they were anxious about what they should find to eat, or whether they should find anything at all.

Don Pablo considered the cross a good omen, or rather a good *sign*. Some missionary must have planted it in years gone by. No doubt a missionary station must have been near; and it was highly probable that what he had seen in the little valley below would turn out to be the very place where it had stood.

As soon as it became day, therefore, Don Pablo again ascended the tree to take the bearings of the valley, so that they should proceed towards it. Guapo also climbed up, so that both might make sure of the route they ought to take—for in the tangled forests of South America it is no easy matter to reach any object, which you may have only seen at a distance from the top of a tree. Without a compass, the traveller soon loses his direction; and, after hours of vain exertion and devious wandering, often finds himself at the very place from which he had started.

After carefully noting the direction of the valley, Don Pablo and Guapo came down from the tree; and while the former, assisted by Leon, packed and saddled the animals, Guapo was busy with his macheté in clearing away the brushwood that obstructed the path. This did not turn out such a task after all. It was only at the brow of the ridge, where the undergrowth had choked up the way. A little farther down it was quite passable, and the party, animals and all, were soon winding down the Sierra towards the valley. Half-an-hour's travelling brought them to their destination; and then a shout of joy, coming simultaneously from all of them, announced their arrival upon the spot.

What was it that caused them to utter this shout of joy? Before them towered the great *musaceæ*—plantains and bananas. There were both: their broad yellow-green and wax-like leaves sheathing their succulent stems, and bending gracefully over to a length of twenty feet. But beautiful as were the leaves of these giant plants, more attractive still to the eyes of our travellers were the huge clusters of fruit-pods that hung from beneath them. Each of these would

have weighed nearly an hundred-weight! There was food for hundreds. These plants grew by the water's edge, in a damp soil—their natural habitat. Their leaves drooped over the stream. Another plant, equally interesting, was seen farther back, in a dry place. There were many of these ten or fifteen feet high, and as thick as a man's wrist. This was the *yucca* plant. All of them knew it. They knew that its roots produced the far-famed cassava. Cassava is bread. Hurrah! the staff of life was secure!

But, more than this, there were fruits in abundance; there were mangoes and guavas, oranges and the celebrated cherimoya—the favourite of Peru. There were shaddocks and sweet limes; and see! yonder is a clump of sugar-canes, with their thin silken leaves and yellow tassels waving in the wind. Oh, look here! Here is a coffee-shrub, with its ripe, aromatic berries; and here is the cacao-tree. Coffee and chocolate—there was a choice of beverages! Ha! what have we here—this plant like an orange tree? It is a species of holly. As I live, it is the *yerba maté*, the “Paraguay tea.” What shall we light upon next?

203 And so the delighted travellers went on, over the ground, through the thick-tangled weeds and convolvuli, making new discoveries at every step. Even Guapo's favourite, the coca-shrub, was found growing among the rest, and the eyes of the old Indian sparkled at the sight of it.

Don Pablo's first conjecture had been right. They had arrived at the ruin of some old missionary station, long since deserted. Some zealous monk had planted all these plants and trees; had for years, no doubt, tended them with care; had dreamt of establishing around this lonely spot a great hierarchy, and making the “wilderness blossom as the rose.” An evil day had come—perhaps during the revolt of Juan Santos, or maybe in the later revolution of Tupac Amaru. The hand of the savage had been turned against the priest, who had fallen a victim, and his roof—the mission-house—had been given to the flames. Not a vestige of building was to be seen—neither stick nor stone—and had it not been for the curious variety of vegetation collected on the spot, this once cultivated and flourishing garden might have been taken for part of the primeval forest.

It must have been a long time since the place was inhabited, for great trees and parasites had grown up in the midst of the cultivated plants.

After the first transports of delight had to some extent subsided, a consultation was held as to future proceedings. They were not long in coming to a conclusion. It was resolved that a house should be built in the middle of this wild garden, which should be, for a time at least, their home.

The poor llamas had made their last journey. They were to be killed. Guapo, although reluctant to part with his old favourites, knew that they could not live in the warm climate of the valley, and therefore consented. Their flesh, it is true, is none of the best, but it would taste the better that no other was to be had; and their wool and skins would be found useful. The llamas were killed.

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CHAPTER XV.

THE GUACO AND THE CORAL SNAKE.

It was Guapo himself that killed the llamas, and, having skinned them, he cut the flesh into thin strips, and hung it upon the branches to dry in the sun. This, of course, was necessary, as they had no salt to cure it with; but meat well dried under a hot sun will keep good for a long time. It is curious, that in all Spanish-American countries they preserve most of their meat in this way, whereas in North America, among the people of our own race, “jerked beef” (for that is the name we give it) is very rare.

Now, in Spanish-America there are vast depositories of salt—both in mines and on plains, with salt lakes—called *salinas*; yet, for want of a proper commercial activity existing among these people, in many places the valuable article, salt, is both scarce and dear. In Mexico dried or “jerked” beef is called “tasajo.” In Peru, as we have stated, it is “charqui;” but mutton cured in this way is distinguished by the name “chalona.” Now as the llamas are a species of sheep, it was “chalona” that Guapo was making out of their mutton.

204 The others were not idle; Don Pablo, assisted by Leon, was clearing a place on which they intended to build the house, while the Doña Isidora, with her soft slender fingers (for the first time in her life, perhaps), was acting as laundress, and the little Leona assisted her as much as she was able. Where did they get their soap, for they had not brought so much as a single cake along with them?

But Don Pablo was too good a botanist not to know the nature of the trees that grew around, and the uses to which they could be applied. Near by grew a curious tree, which is known among the Indians as the *parapara*. It was the soap-berry of botanists and Don Pablo knew that the bark of the berries, when rubbed, produces a lather that will wash linen equal to the best “Castile.” Doña Isidora was not long in making a trial of it, and found this to be true. The little round stones

of the berries, when cleared of the pulp, are very pretty, and are much used by the missionaries in making rosaries. Leon found, dropping one of them on a stone, that it was as elastic as a ball of India rubber, for it rebounded several times the height of a man's head!

In the evening they all rested from their various occupations, and seated themselves upon the new-cleared ground, upon the trunk of a tree that had been felled. They were one and all quite cheerful. They felt no more apprehension of pursuit. It would have been a very revengeful enemy, indeed, who would have followed them so far into the wilderness. They had no fear of that. Doña Isidora had just cooked a kettle of coffee—they had both pots and kettles, for these were some of the utensils with which Guapo, even in the hurry of flight, had taken the precaution to load his llamas.

This coffee turned out to be of the finest quality. It was of a peculiar species, which has long been cultivated by the missionaries of Peru, and which yields a very high price. It used to be sent by the viceroys as a valued present to the kings of Spain. To sweeten the coffee some joints of sugar-cane had been crushed, and boiled in a rough manner; and for bread they had roasted plantains. During the repast they were all quite merry, and pleasant jokes were passed for the first time in many days.

While thus engaged a singular sound fell upon their ears. It was like a voice repeating the word “Guaco!” They all listened. “Guaco—Guaco!” again came the voice.

“Hola!” cried Leon, “Guapo—Guapo! there's some one calling you, Guapo. There again!—no—it's 'Guaco'—listen! Guaco—Guaco' What is it, I wonder?”

“That's the snake-bird,” quietly answered Guapo, who, it must be remembered, was a native of the Montaña, and knew a great deal both about the birds and beasts of these regions.

“The snake-bird?” exclaimed Leon, evidently interested in the name.

“Yes, young master!” replied Guapo; “look! yonder it goes!”

The eyes of all were instantly turned in the direction pointed out by Guapo. There sure enough was a bird, not much larger than a common pigeon, but which had all the appearance of a sparrow-hawk. It was “swallow-tailed,” however, and this, with its peculiar form and the manner of its flight, showed that it was one of the kite-hawks. When first noticed, it was perched upon the top of a high tree, but it soon flew to another not so high, uttering as it went, the “Guaco—
205 Guaco!” It then pitched itself to a still lower branch, and was evidently after something which none of the party could see. That something, however, soon became apparent. The ground had been cleared in a broad track down to the water's edge, and near the middle of the open space an object was observed in motion, making towards the weeds. That object was a snake.

It was not a large one—not more than three feet in length—and its beautiful body, variegated with bands of black, red, and bright yellow, glistened as it moved. Its predominating colour was a fleshy red, or coral, from whence it has its name, for both Don Pablo and Guapo, as soon as they saw it, pronounced it the “coral snake.” Beautiful as it appeared, all knew that it was one of the most poisonous of serpents—one of the most dreaded of South American reptiles.

The first thought of Guapo and Leon was to spring up, seize upon some weapon, and kill the creature. Don Pablo, however, restrained them.

“Stay where you are,” said he; “be patient; we shall have a scene. Look at the hawk,—see!”

As Don Pablo spoke, the guaco, which had hopped down to the lowest branches of a neighbouring tree, swooped suddenly at the snake, evidently aiming to clutch it around the neck. The latter, however, had been too quick, and coiling itself, like a flash of lightning darted its head out towards the bird in a threatening manner. Its eyes sparkled with rage, and their fiery glitter could be seen even at many yards distance.

The bird diverged from its course, and after passing the snake, turned and swooped again from the opposite direction. But the reptile had shifted its body so as to meet the attack, and its threatening head once more was reared high above its coiled body. The guaco was foiled a second time.

This second failure seemed to enrage the bird, as it turned at shorter intervals, and apparently losing all fear, fluttered over the reptile, striking both with beak and claws. The latter still kept in its coil, but its head moved hastily from side to side, so as always to “show front” to its active antagonist.

After this play had continued for some time, the snake was seen to draw in its head farther than usual, and the hawk, evidently somewhat off his guard, deeming this a fair opportunity, pounced forward to seize it. But he was met half way. The head of the serpent shot forward like a rapier, and reached his breast. The hawk felt that he was wounded; and uttering a wild scream, he flew suddenly away.

All eyes watched him as he flew off, expecting that he would fall—for the bite of the coral snake will kill even a man in a few minutes, and a bird or small animal in much less time. It is not correct to say that all of them expected to see him fall. Guapo, from experience, knew better, and even Don Pablo, as a naturalist, had heard a strange account of this singular bird, and was curious to witness the result. The hawk, therefore, was narrowly watched.

It flew directly for a tree, up against the trunk of which, and clinging to its branches, grew a parasite or creeping plant. The latter was of the thickness of a willow rod, with long slender leaves, of a dark green colour. The bird did not alight upon the top of the tree, but on a branch
206 where it could reach the leaves of the creeper, which it began immediately to pluck and devour. In a short while it had eaten as many as a dozen of these long leaves, when it again took to wing, and flew back in the direction of the snake.

All had, for the moment, forgotten the snake, in their eagerness to watch the movements of the bird. To their astonishment the reptile was still in the same place, and coiled up as when last seen. This was easily explained, however, as snakes who defend themselves in that attitude usually remain coiled, until they are certain that their enemy has gone away and will not return to the attack.

The contest was now renewed with redoubled fury. The bird fought with fresh courage, knowing that he had taken precautions against a fatal result, while the snake defended itself with the energy of despair. This time the battle was a short one. The guaco, using its wings, succeeded in striking its antagonist upon the upraised head, and quickly following up the blow, planted his talons so as to encircle the throat of his victim. The effect of his gripe was instantly apparent. The reptile unfolded itself, and the slender coral body was seen writhing and twisting along the ground. But it did not remain long upon the ground, for in a few moments the guaco rose into the air, and carried the struggling victim into the woods to devour it at his leisure.

Now Guapo was exceedingly pleased at what had occurred. Why? It was not because such a scene was at all new to him. No; he had often witnessed such, and was no longer curious upon that head. It was something more than mere curiosity that moved Guapo. When the affair was over, he rose from his seat, and stalking off to the place where the bird had been seen to eat the leaves, he gathered a quantity of them, and then returned to the fire. Don Pablo recognised them as the leaves of a plant of the genus *Mikania*, and known popularly as the “vejuco de guaco.”

Guapo knew nothing of the scientific designation of the plant, but he had long ago been taught the valuable properties of its leaves as an antidote against the bite of the most poisonous snakes. He had known them to cure the bite of the cascabel (*rattle-snake*), and even of the small spotted viper, the most poisonous of all the American snakes.

What, then, did Guapo with the leaves of the vejuco? First, he chopped them up as fine as he could, and then, tying them tightly in a piece of cotton cloth, he expressed from them a quantity of juice—enough for his purpose. That done, with the point of a knife he made small incisions between his toes, and also upon his breast and fingers. Into each of these incisions, even while the blood was flowing from them, he dropped the juice of the Mikania, and rubbed it in with fresh leaves of the plant itself; and then, with some tufts of the soft floss of the silk-cotton tree he covered the incisions, so as to stop the bleeding. He wound up this strange performance, by chewing some of the leaves, and swallowing about a spoonful of the juice. This made the “inoculation” complete, and Guapo, as he himself declared, was now invulnerable to the bite of the most venomous serpent!

He offered to “inoculate” the others in the same way. They at first refused—Don Pablo among the rest—but after a day or two, when each of the party had met with several narrow escapes
207 from vipers, coral snakes, and the much-dreaded “jararaca,” Don Pablo thought it prudent that all should submit to the operation, and accordingly Guapo “doctored” the party without more ado.

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CHAPTER XVI.

THE PALM-WOODS.

It happened, that upon the opposite side of the stream there was a broad track covered with palm-trees, while not one was to be seen on that side where they intended building their house. As these are the most convenient trees for constructing a house to suit the hot climate of the Montaña, it appeared necessary that they should use them. But how were they to get at them? The stream flowed between them and the camp; and although not a large river, yet at that place it was very wide and deep, for in the flat table valley it expanded to the dimensions of a little lake.

Below, where it issued out of the valley, it ran for some distance in a deep cleft between rocky banks almost or quite perpendicular, and above the valley it came dashing through an impassable ravine. If they could only get over to cut the palms, they knew they could roll them to the bank, and float them across the stretch of still water. But how to get over required some consideration. Guapo could swim like a water-dog, but Don Pablo could not; and Leon, having been brought up as a town boy, had had but little practice, and consequently was but a poor swimmer. What, then, was to be done, as Guapo could not well manage the palms without help?

After examining the stream, both above and below, no crossing place could be found, but just at the point where it ran out of the valley, the space between the high banks was very narrow. A

good long plank would have reached across it—had they only had one—but that they had not. Now, upon the opposite bank there grew a tall tree. It was one of the beautiful silk-cotton trees already mentioned. It stood upon the very edge of the chasm. Both Don Pablo and Guapo saw at a glance that this tree could be felled, and made to fall across the stream, so as to form the very bridge they wanted.

Not much time was lost about it. Guapo, tying his axe upon his shoulders, ran up the near side, until he was opposite the still running water; and then plunging in, swam across in a few seconds. He soon after appeared on the opposite bank, at the root of the bombax, which he attacked in such a manner that one who did not know what he was about might have fancied he was angry at it. In a few minutes a great notch appeared in the side of the tree, and Guapo continuing his sturdy blows, made the yellow chips fly out in showers. Of course the notch was cut on the side next the stream, so that the tree would fall in that direction. The beaver understands that much, and Guapo had considerably more intelligence than any beaver.

In about half-an-hour the bombax began to creak and lean a little. Then Don Pablo threw over a lasso, which had been brought along. Guapo noosed one end over a high limb, and tying a stone to the other, pitched it back to Don Pablo, who hauled it taut. Then a few cuts of the axe broke the skin of the tree on the other side, Don Pablo pulled by the rope, and with a loud tear and a
208 crash, and a vast deal of crackling among the branches, the great bombax settled into a horizontal position across the chasm. The bridge was built.

After all, it was no slight adventure to cross it. The rounded trunk was anything but sure footing, and even had it been a flat plank, the depth of the chasm—nearly an hundred feet clear—and the white roaring torrent below, were enough to shake the stoutest nerves. All, however, got over in safety, and proceeded up to the palm-woods. I say all—but I mean only the male population of the new settlement. Doña Isidora and the little Leona remained by the camp, both of them busy scraping *yucca* roots, to be manufactured into cassava, and then into bread.

On arriving among the palm-trees, Don Pablo was struck with a singular fact. He observed (indeed, he had already noticed as much from the opposite side of the river) that instead of one species of palm, there were not less than a dozen kinds growing in this wood. This was a very unusual circumstance, as although two or three species are often found together, such a varied collection as were there could only have been made by human hands. Here, again, was recognised the work of the missionary monk, who had no doubt planted most of the species, having received them very likely from many distant stations of his fellow-labourers in other parts of the Amazon valley.

Whether Franciscan, Jesuit, or Dominican (for all three have had their missions in this part of the world), the holy father who resided here, thought Don Pablo, must have been an ardent horticulturist. Whether or not he converted many Indians to his faith, he seemed to have exerted himself to provide for their temporal necessities, for there was hardly a useful plant or tree suitable to the climate that was not to be found growing near the spot. Such were the reflections of Don Pablo.

“What a variety of beautiful palms!” said he, looking around upon these by far the fairest forms of the vegetable creation.

Now, my boy reader, I have not the slightest doubt but that you, too, think the palms the fairest forms of the vegetable creation. I have not the shadow of a doubt that your heart beats joyfully at the very word “palm;” that you love to gaze at one of the stately trees, and that you would give all your pocket-money for an afternoon's ramble through a real palm-wood. Would you not? Yes. I am sure of it. Now I could tell you a great deal about palms if I *would*; and I would, too, if my space and time allowed me, but neither will, alas! Why, if I were only to give you even the shortest and dryest botanic description of all the different palms that are known to us, that mere dry catalogue would fill a book as big as this one!

How many species do you think there are? Up to this time you have thought, perhaps, there was only one, and that was *the palm-tree itself*. Maybe you have heard of more, such as the sago-palm, the cocoa-nut palm, the date-palm, or the cabbage-palm; and you fancied there might be others—perhaps as many as a dozen! Now you will hardly credit me when I tell you that we know of no less than *six hundred species of palms*, all differing from each other! I may add, further, that it is my belief that there exist on the earth as many more—that is, the enormous number of twelve hundred.

The reason why I entertain this belief is, that in all cases where similar guesses have been
209 hazarded—whether with regard to plants, or birds, or *mammalia*—they have eventually proved far below the mark; and as the palm countries are the very regions of the earth least known and least explored by botanists, it is but reasonable to conclude that great numbers of species have never yet been described, nor even seen. Another fact which strengthens this probability is, that peculiar species of palms are sometimes found only in a limited district, and nowhere else in the same country. A small river even sometimes forms the boundary-line of a species; and although whole groves may be seen on the one side, not a tree of the same sort grows on the other. Some botanists even prognosticate that more than two thousand species of palms will yet become known.

Of the six hundred species known, about half belong to the Old World, and half to America. In America they are chiefly found growing on the Continent—although several species are natives of

the West India Islands—while on the Eastern hemisphere the greatest number of species belong to the islands.

I might tell you a great deal of the importance of these noble trees to the human race, for they are as useful as they are beautiful. Almost every sort has its particular use in the economy of human life. Not only do they serve certain purposes in Africa, Asia, America, and Oceanica, but in all these divisions of the earth there are whole nations who *live almost exclusively* upon one or another species of palm.

A discovery has lately been made in regard to an African species, which it is to be hoped will have an important influence in doing away with the infamous slave traffic so long existing in that unhappy country. You have heard of *palm-oil*. Well, it is extracted from the nuts of a species of palm. The oil is no new discovery, but it is only lately that it has been found to be as quite as good for the manufacture of candles as either spermaceti or wax.

The consequence has been a great increase in the traffic of this article on the western coast of Africa; and the native princes, finding that it is more profitable than slave-selling, have in many parts given up the last-named atrocious commerce, and have taken to gathering palm-oil. If a palm-tree can effect what has baffled the skill of the combined philanthropists and powers of Europe, then, indeed, we shall say, “All honour to the noble palms.”

But I might go on talking of palms until our little volume came to an end. I must, therefore, no longer speak generally of these beautiful trees, but confine myself to such species as came under the observation, and ministered to the wants, of the new settlers.

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CHAPTER XVII.

A HOUSE OF PALMS.

The first species of palms that attracted the observation of Don Pablo and his party, was that known as the “patawa” palm. It belongs to the genus *Œnocarpus*. There are several species of this genus in South America, but none more beautiful than the “patawa.” It is a palm with a straight smooth stem, and pinnate leaves—the stem being sixty feet in height, and about a foot in diameter. The stem becomes smooth only in old trees. In the young ones, and even in those
210 that stand in a thick shady forest, it presents a very shaggy appearance, and is completely hidden by the bases of the old leaves that have decayed and fallen off. From the margins of these bases grow spinous processes of nearly three feet in length, which point upward. These are used by the Indians to make the arrows of their “blow-guns,” of which more hereafter.

From the fruits of this palm a most delicious drink is manufactured with very little trouble. The fruit itself is about the size of a plum, but of an oval shape and deep violet colour. It grows in large clusters just under the leaves. To make the drink, the fruits are thrown into a vessel of hot water, where they remain for a few minutes until the pulp becomes soft. The hot water is next poured off, and cold water is substituted. In this the fruits are crushed and rubbed with the hands until all the pulp is washed from the stones. The liquid is then strained so as to separate the stones and other substances, when it is ready for use, and a most luxurious beverage it is,—in its taste bearing some resemblance to filberts and cream.

A palm called the “assái” has a small sloe-like fruit which produces a similar beverage—thick and creamy, and of a fine plum colour. In all the Portuguese settlements the “assái” is a favourite drink, and is taken along with cassava bread, as we use milk or coffee.

It was not on account of its fruit, however, that Don Pablo rejoiced at beholding the “patawa” palms. Perhaps Leon thought more about the rich clusters of oval plums, but his father looked only to the straight smooth stems which were designed for corner-posts, beams, and the heavier woodwork of the house.

In a few minutes Guapo was busy with his axe, and one after another fell the princely trunks of the “patawa” until enough were cut down for their purpose.

Don Pablo next looked out for some palm of a more slender trunk for the rafters and joists.

This was soon found in the “catinga,” which is a species of the “assái palm, the one of which we have just spoken as producing the assái wine.” The catinga was the very thing for the rafters. It is tall, nearly forty feet high, but quite slender. It is one of the smooth palms, with pinnate leaves, not unlike those of the “patawa.” There is a peculiarity about its top,—that is, there is a column or sheath of several feet in length, out of which the leaves spring, and, at the lower end of this column, and not immediately at the root of the leaves, the fruit clusters grow. This sheathing column is of a red colour, which gives the tree a strange look.

Another peculiarity of the catinga is that its roots grow out of the ground, and form a little cone from the top of which rises the stem. The fruits of this sort are smaller than the true assái, but a drink is also made from them which some people consider more delicious than that either of

the assái or patawa. The rafters then were got from the catinga.

Now for the thatch, that was the next consideration.

“Master!” cried Guapo, pointing off into the woods. “Yonder's 'bussu,'—very thing for thatch!”

Guapo indicated a very singular-looking tree, with a thick, clumsy, crooked, and deeply ringed stem. It was not a bit like either of the palm-trees they had already cut down. Its trunk was not
211 over ten or a dozen feet high, but then, such leaves! They were not pinnated like those already described, but what is termed “entire,” that is, all in one piece, and thirty feet in length by full five in width! Fancy two or three dozen of these gigantic leaves standing up almost erect from the top of the thick trunk, and you may form some idea of the “bussu” palm. There are many palm-trees whose leaves are used for thatching houses, but of all others for that purpose the bussu is the best.

These great fronds have a mid-rib, and from this, on both sides, run veins in a diagonal direction to the edge. When they are used for thatch the leaf is split up the mid-rib, and then each half is laid upon the rafters, not straight, but in such a way that the veins of the leaf will lie in a vertical direction, and thus serve as gutters to guide the rain-water down the roof. A very few leaves will thatch a house, and a covering of this kind, when properly laid on, will last for ten or twelve years. So much are the bussu-leaves prized for thatch, that the Indians, in parts where this palm does not grow, often make a canoe voyage of a week to procure them!

The spathe which contains the flowers is also put to many uses. It is of a long spindle shape, of fibrous, cloth-like texture, and brown colour. The Indians use it as cloth. It makes an excellent bag, in which the native carries his paints or other articles; and a large one, stretched out, makes a very comfortable cap. Indeed, Guapo used the first spathe he laid his hands upon for this very purpose.

There remained now to be found some palm-tree that would split easily, and make laths for the roof, as well as planks for the door, shelves, and benches. They soon discovered the very palm for these purposes. It was one of the genus *Iriartea*, and known as the “pashiuba” palm. It was a tree that differed from all the others in its aspect. It was a noble-looking tree, rising, with a smooth stem, to the height of seventy feet. At its top, there was a sheathing column swollen larger than the stem, and not unlike the sheathing column of the catinga already mentioned, except that that of the pashiuba was of a deep green colour. Its leaves, however, differed materially from those of the catinga. It is true, that, like them, they were pinnate, but the leaflets, instead of being slender and tapering, were of a triangular shape, notched along the edges, and not growing very regularly out from the mid-rib.

Their general arrangement, as well as the form, therefore, gave the tree a different, and, perhaps, more beautiful aspect. But the most singular characteristic of the pashiuba was its roots. I have said that the roots of the catinga rose above the surface of the soil. So did they, but only to a limited height, forming a little cone. Now the roots of the pashiuba stood up to the height of ten or a dozen feet! Each root was nearly straight in itself, but there were a number of them, and they sloped upwards so as to make a sort of pyramid, out of the apex of which grew the stem. There were wide spaces between the roots—so wide that you could easily pass through, and a full-grown man might stand upright with his head under the very base of the stem. Fancy a man standing under the trunk of a tree that rose seventy feet above his head!

There were young trees of the same species growing around, and these were miniature models of the older ones. Sometimes these lesser ones are supported on three roots, like the tripod of a
212 surveyor's compass, and this gives them a somewhat ludicrous appearance. There are many species of this sort of palms, which are classed under the genus *Iriartea*. In most of them the fruit, which is small oval and red or yellow, is bitter and uneatable; but their wood is prized for many purposes. The wood of the species which Don Pablo had found is hard on the outside, but soft within, and splits readier into laths and planks than any other kind of palm.

Guapo attacked the roots with his axe, and enough trunks were soon felled to make laths, doors, and all sorts of benches.

The different kinds were now collected on the edge of the stream, and were tied together by a rope-like, creeping plant, called a “Sipo,” so that they formed a rude raft. The leaves of the “bussu,” with great clusters of the fruits of the catinga and patawa, were laid upon the raft; and then, Guapo, mounting himself on top of all, pushed out with his long pole, and ferried the whole across. The others walked round by the bridge, and were just in time to assist Guapo in mooring his somewhat unwieldy craft.

Next day the framework of the house was put up, and on the day after the walls. These were made of bamboo-canes, plenty of which grew near the bottom of the valley. They grew wild, for the slopes of the Andes are the favourite soil of these gigantic grasses. They were set on end, side by side, and then tied to each other and to the beams of palm-trees. On the third day the “bussu” leaves were laid on, and the house was finished.

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CHAPTER XVIII.

It has been already mentioned that the stream in front of the house was wider than at other parts, forming a sort of lake. There was a slow current down the middle, but at the sides the water was nearly stagnant, and there grew in some places bunches of flags interspersed with beautiful white lilies. Among these could be distinguished that gigantic *nympha* so celebrated under the name of *Victoria regia*—for South America is the native country of this rare plant.

Every night, as our party were resting from their labours, they heard strange noises proceeding from the water. There was plunging and plashing, and now and then a snorting sound like that sometimes uttered by frightened swine. Perhaps it would have puzzled any of them to tell whence these sounds proceeded, or what animal gave utterance to them, for there could be no doubt they were caused by an animal. Some of them guessed “alligators;” but that was not a correct guess, for although there are plenty of alligators in all the rivers of tropical America, there seemed to be none in that particular place.

In truth, they might have remained long in the dark about what creature they thus heard sweltering about nightly, for they could neither see nor hear anything of it in the day; but Guapo, who knew every sound of the Montaña, enlightened them at once. Guapo had been a keen *tapir-hunter* in his time, and understood all the habits of that strange animal. It was a tapir, then, which they had heard taking his regular nightly bath, and regaling himself on the roots of the flags and *nymphæ*.

213 Have you ever seen a tapir? Not a living one, I fancy; perhaps the skin of one in a museum. He is an interesting creature, for this reason—that he is the largest land animal indigenous to South America. The llama and guanaco stand higher because their legs are longer, and they are far inferior to the tapir in bulk and weight: while the bears of South America, of which there are two or three species, are small-sized bears, and therefore less than the tapir. In fact, no very large land animals were found indigenous in the southern division of the American continent. There were none of the *bovine* tribe, as the buffalo and musk-ox of North America; and no large deer, as the elk and moose of the Northern latitudes. The deer of South America, of which there are several undescribed species, are all small animals. The tapir, then, in point of size takes precedence in the South-American *fauna*.

His rounded body gives him some resemblance to a great hog, or a donkey with its hair shaved off; but, in fact, he is not very like either; he is more like a *tapir* than anything else—that is, he is a creature *sui generis*. Perhaps, if you were to shave a large donkey, cut off most part of his ears and tail, shorten his limbs—and, if possible, make them stouter and clumsier—lengthen his upper jaw so that it should protrude over the under one into a prolonged curving snout, and then give him a coat of blackish-brown paint, you would get something not unlike a tapir.

To complete the resemblance, however, you would have to continue the erect mane over the forehead, between the ears, and down to the level of the eyes, which would give that crested appearance that characterises the tapir. Instead of hoofs, moreover, you would give your donkey large toes—four upon the fore feet, and upon the hind ones three. A little silky hair upon the stumped tail, and a few thinly scattered hairs of a brown colour over the body, would make the likeness still more striking; and it would be necessary, too, that the donkey be one of the very biggest kind to be as big as a big tapir.

The tapir is a harmless creature, and although it has a good set of teeth, it never uses them for the purpose of defending itself. When attacked by either men or fierce animals, it tries to escape by flight, and if that fails, submits to be killed; but there is no “fight” to be got out of a tapir.

The tapir leads a very solitary life, being met with alone, or sometimes in the company of the female. The latter has but one young at a birth, which follows her until able to provide for itself; when they associate no longer together, but part company, each taking its own way.

This animal is called amphibious, because it spends part of its time in the water; but, although it has been called the American representative of the rhinoceros and hippopotamus, it is not so much a water animal as either of these. It seeks its food in the river, or the marshes that border it, and can remain for several minutes under water; but for all that most of its time is passed on dry land. It sleeps during the day in some dry spot upon a bed of withered leaves, from whence it sallies every evening, and makes to the marshy banks of some well-known stream. It frequently leaves its lair during rain, and goes in search of food. Like hogs it is very fond of wallowing in a muddy place; but, unlike these slovenly animals, it does not return to its bed until it has plunged
214 into the clear water, and thoroughly purified itself of the mud.

One habit of the tapir—and an unfortunate one for itself—is that in going its rounds it always follows the old track. In this way a path is soon formed from its lair to its feeding-place, so conspicuous that a hunter might trail it upon the run. It is easy, therefore, to “waylay” a tapir. Guapo knew this well, and had already, while over among the palms, marked the track of the one that came nightly to the stream, and had settled it in his mind that that particular tapir had not many days to live. In fact, Leon coaxed him to fix the tapir-hunt for the next morning, which Guapo, with Don Pablo's permission, accordingly did.

Guapo was anxious as any of them to kill the tapir, for, like many Indians, he was fond of its flesh, though that is by no means a palatable article of food. On the contrary, it is dry, and to

most people tastes disagreeably. Guapo, however, liked it exceedingly; and, moreover, he wanted the tough skin for some purpose of his own. The wild Indians value the skin highly, as it is the best thing they can procure for “viches,” or shields, to ward off the poisoned arrows of their enemies.

Next morning, an hour or so after daybreak, Guapo started for the hunt, accompanied by Leon. Don Pablo remained at home with his wife and the little Leona. Now, had the tapir-hunter possessed a gun, or even a bow and arrows, his plan of proceedings would have been different, and he would no doubt have chosen a different hour for the hunt. He would have chosen the twilight of the evening or morning, and would have hid himself in the bushes, so as to command a view of the track which the tapir would be certain to take on his way to or from the water. He would then have simply shot the creature as it was going past; but this is not so easy a matter neither, for the tapir, fearful of enemies while on land, always travels at a trot. As Guapo had neither bow nor gun, nothing in fact but his *macheté*, how was he to get near enough to use this weapon? Clumsy-looking as the tapir certainly is, he can shuffle over the ground faster than the fastest Indian.

Guapo knew all this, but he also knew a stratagem by which the amphibious brute could be outwitted, and this stratagem he designed putting in practice. For the purpose he carried another weapon besides the *macheté*. That weapon was a very pacific one—it was a *spade*! Fortunately he had one which he had brought with him from the mountains.

Now what did Guapo mean to do with the spade? The tapir is not a burrowing animal, and therefore would not require to be “dug out.” We shall presently see what use was made of the spade.

After crossing the bridge, and getting well round among the palms, the hunter came upon a path well tracked into the mud. It was the path of the tapir,—that could be easily seen. There were the broad footmarks—some with three, and others with four toes—and there, too, were places where the animal had “wallowed.” The tracks were quite fresh, and made, as Guapo said, not an hour before they had arrived on the spot.

This was just what the tapir-hunter wanted; and, choosing a place where the track ran between two palm-trees, and could not well have gone round either of them, he halted, rested his *macheté* against a tree, and took a determined hold of the spade. Leon now began to see what use he intended to make of the spade. He was *going to dig a pit*!

That was, in fact, the very thing he was going to do, and in less than an hour, with the help of Leon, it was done—the latter carrying away the earth upon “bussu” leaves as fast as Guapo shovelled it out. When the pit was sunk to what Guapo considered a sufficient depth, he came out of it; and then choosing some slender poles, with palm-leaves, branches, and grass, he covered it in such a manner that a fox himself would not have known it to be a pit-trap. But such it was—wide enough and deep enough, as Guapo deemed, to entrap the largest tapir.

It now only remained to get the tapir into it, but therein lay the difficulty. Leon could not understand how this was to be managed. He knew that at night, as the animal was on its way to the water, it might step on the covering, and fall in. But Guapo had promised him that he should see the tapir trapped in an hour's time. Guapo had a plan of his own for bringing it that way, and he at once proceeded to put his plan into execution.

They started along the trail going *from* the water, and towards the lair of the beast. The hunter knew it would not be very distant—perhaps a quarter or half-a-mile, perhaps less. Before starting he cautioned Leon to keep close behind him, and not to make the least noise. So little as a whisper or the rustling of the brush, he alleged, might spoil all his plans. Guapo marched, or rather crouched, along; at first freely, but after some time his step grew more stealthy and cautious. He knew that he was getting near to his sleeping victim.

After stopping and repeating his caution to his companion, he proceeded as before until they had got better than a quarter of a mile from the water. Here they began to ascend a gentle hill, where the ground was dry, and strewed with fallen trees. At some places the trail was difficult to make out, and Leon would soon have lost it had he been left to himself. But there was no fear of Guapo losing it. A hound could not have followed it more surely.

Suddenly Guapo stopped—then went on a few steps—then stopped a second time, and made a sign for Leon to come up. Without speaking, he pointed to a little thicket of scrubby bushes, through the leaves of which they could just make out some large brown object perfectly at rest. That was the tapir himself—sound asleep.

Guapo had already instructed his companion that when they should arrive near the den of the animal, they were to make a wide circuit around—Leon going one way, while he himself took the other. Both now drew back a little, and then parted—the hunter going to one side, and Leon in the opposite direction. After making their circuit, they met at some distance beyond the back of the den; and then Guapo, telling the other to follow him, and, without observing any further caution, walked straight towards where the tapir lay.

The Indian knew by experience that the latter, when roused, would make directly along its accustomed trail to the water, for to the water it always flies when alarmed by an enemy. When they had got within a few paces of the den, a movement was seen among the leaves—then a crackling noise was heard, as the huge body of the animal broke through the bushes, and took to

flight. He did not trot according to his usual gait, but went off in a gallop, with his head carried in a singular and awkward manner between his fore-legs! You have, no doubt, seen a donkey sometimes gallop in a similar style.

Guapo bounded after, followed by Leon, who kept close at his heels. Of course the tapir was in sight only a few seconds, but the hunter knew that he would take the beaten track, and therefore was at no loss. They made no unnecessary noise—lest the tapir might be frightened from its path—but ran on in silence.

They soon got back to the pit-fall, Guapo of course leading the way.

“Hola!” cried the latter, when he came in sight of it, “hola, young master! he's in the trap!”

Sure enough he was; and the next moment they stood upon the edge of the pit, and beheld the great brown body struggling and tumbling about at the bottom.

Guapo did not pause a moment, but leaped in, *macheté* in hand. He had no fear of the animal biting him, for he knew it would not do so; but Guapo, in his hurry, had leaped carelessly, and his foot slipping, he fell over the smooth body of the tapir. The latter in its fright jumped upward, and the next moment Guapo was *undermost* at the bottom of the pit!

The animal had no design of trampling the hunter; but seeing that it could easily leap out—the pit being shallowed for it by Guapo's body and the fallen branches—it made a spring, and came out on the edge. Leon had got round upon the side next the river, but he chanced to be on the wrong side just then; for the heavy tapir dashing past, knocked against him, and sent him sprawling among the trees. Before he could recover himself, or Guapo climb out of the pit, a loud plunge in the water announced that the animal had escaped to an element where it might defy their pursuit.

Both were quite crest-fallen and disappointed, but Guapo especially so. He had prided himself very much on his skill as a tapir-hunter, and his pride was mortified at the result. He seemed very much chagrined; and as he and Leon returned toward the house, he stopped at intervals and looked into the water. Then shaking his macheté in a threatening manner, cried out,—

“Dive away, old thick-skin! Dive deep as you will, I'll have your hide yet!”

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CHAPTER XIX.

THE POISONED ARROWS.

The result of the tapir chase determined Guapo to have himself better armed. There was one weapon—and a very efficient one too—which he knew how both to make and use. That weapon was a “gravatána,” or blow-gun, sometimes called “pocuna.” He had had an eye to this weapon all along, and had already provided the materials necessary for making it. These materials were of a varied character, and had cost him some trouble in getting them together.

First, then, for the blow-tube itself he had cut stems of a slender palm-tree, a species of *Iriartea*, but not that sort already described. It was the *Pashiuba miri* of the Indians. This little
217 palm grows to the height of from twelve to twenty feet, and is never thicker than a man's wrist. Its roots, like the others of its genus, rise above the ground, but only a few inches. The stems which Guapo had chosen were of different sizes. One was about the thickness of the handle of a garden-rake, while the other was not over the diameter of a walking-cane. Both were hollow in the heart, or rather they contained pith like the alder-tree, which when forced out left a smooth bore.

Having cut these stems to a length of about ten feet, and pushed out the pith, Guapo inserted the smaller one into the bore of the larger, which fitted tightly all the way—for he had chosen it of the proper thickness to this end. The object of thus using two stems instead of one will not, at first, be understood. It was for the purpose of making the tube perfectly straight, as this is a most important consideration in the gravatána. The outer and stronger stem corrected any bend that there might be in the inner one, and they were carefully arranged so that the one should straighten the other.

Had it not been perfectly straight, Guapo would have bound it to a post and made it so; but it happened to come quite right without further trouble. The tube of the lesser one was now cleaned out thoroughly, and polished by a little bunch of the roots of a tree-fern, until it was as smooth and hard as ebony. A mouthpiece of wood was placed at the smaller end of the table, and a sight was glued on the outside. This “sight” was the tooth of an animal,—one of the long curving incisors of a rodent animal called the “paca,” which is found in most parts of tropical America. To make the instrument look neater, Guapo had procured the tough shining bark of a creeping plant, which he wound spirally around the outside from the mouthpiece to the muzzle; and then the gravatána was finished.

There was yet much to be done before it could be used. Arrows were to be made, and a quiver

in which to carry them, and poison to dip their points in—for the arrows of the blow-gun do not kill by the wound they inflict, but by the poison with which they are charged.

The next thing, then, to which Guapo turned his attention was the manufacture of the arrows. These can be made of cane, reeds, and other kinds of wood; but the best materials for the purpose are the long spines of the patawa palm, of which I have already spoken. These spines grow out from the lower part of the leaf-petioles, and, in young trees and those much sheltered, remain upon the trunk, giving it a very shaggy appearance. They are often three feet in length, about as thick as large wire, rather flattish, and of a black colour. To make the arrows, Guapo cut them to the length of fifteen or eighteen inches, and then pointed them sharply at one end. About three inches from the points he notched them all, so that they would break in the wound rather than drop out again, in consequence of the struggles of the animal.

About two or three inches from the thick end of the arrow Guapo wrapped lightly around the shaft some strands of the soft silky cotton, which he had procured from the pods of the great "ceiba," or silk-cotton tree, already mentioned. This he fastened on with a fibre of an aloe plant—one of the *bromelias*; and the cotton, when thus secured, assumed a conical or spindle shape, having its larger end towards the butt of the arrow. When inserted into the gravatána, the swell
218 of the cotton filled the tube exactly,—not so tightly as to impede the passage of the arrow, nor so loosely as to allow of "windage" when blown upon through the mouthpiece.

The arrows were now ready, with the exception of the poison for their tips; and this was the most important of all, for without it both blow-gun and arrows would have been useless weapons, indeed. But Guapo was just the man who knew how to make this poison, and that is more than could be said of every Indian, for it is only the "piaches" (priests, or "medicine-men") who understand the process. Nay, more, there are even some tribes where not an individual knows how the arrow-poison is made; and these have to procure it by barter from others, paying a high price, and sometimes going a great distance for it.

This celebrated poison is known under different names, but those of "curare," "ticuna," and "wouraly," are the principal.

It is one of the most deadly poisons yet discovered—as much so as the *upastiente* of Java, or the bean of St. Ignatius—but it is perfectly harmless when swallowed, and, indeed, it is often taken by the Indians as an excellent stomachic. Should it get into the blood, however, by means of an arrow-wound, or a sore, no remedy has yet been discovered that will cure it. Death is certain, and a death similar to that caused by the bite of a venomous serpent. So say those who have suffered from it, but recovered on account of their having been only slightly wounded, or lightly inoculated with it. Let us see, then, how Guapo prepared this deadly mixture.

He had gone out to the forest, and returned carrying a bundle of slender rods. They were pieces of a lliana, or creeping plant. It was the *bejuco de curare*, or "mavacure," as it is sometimes called. The leaves he had stripped off, and left behind as useless. Had he brought them with him, they would have been seen to be small leaves of an oblong-oval shape, sharp at the points, and of a whittish-green colour. Don Pablo knew the plant to be a species of *Strychnos*.

Guapo with his knife first scraped all the bark, as well as the alburnum or white coating, from the rods, which last he flung away. The mixture of bark and alburnum was next placed upon a smooth stone, and mashed into a fibre of a yellowish colour. This done, it was gathered into a heap, and placed within a funnel, which had already been made out of a plantain-leaf. The funnel was a long narrow cone, and to strengthen it, it was set within another funnel made of the thick leaf of the "bussu" palm, and then both were supported by a framework of palm fibres.

Underneath the apex was placed a small pan—which could afterwards be put over the fire—and then cold water was thrown into the funnel along with the bark. A yellowish liquid soon commenced to filter and drip into the pan, and this liquid was the *curare*, the arrow poison. It still required, however, to be concentrated by evaporation; and for this purpose the pan was transferred to a slow fire, where it was kept until the liquid became thickened by the heat.

Another process was yet required before the curare was ready for the arrows. It was sufficiently concentrated and deadly, but still too thin to adhere properly to their tips, and for this purpose a mixture of some gummy juice was necessary. This Guapo soon prepared from the large leaves of a tree called the "kiracaguero," and poured it into the infusion; and then the curare turned from its yellow colour to black, and was ready for use. The change of colour was produced
219 by the decomposition of a hydruret of carbon; the hydrogen was burned, and the carbon set free.

Guapo now dipped a few of his arrows, and carefully deposited them in a large joint of bamboo, which served as a quiver. I say *carefully*, for had one of these arrows dropped with its poisoned point upon his naked foot, or wounded him elsewhere, he never would have prepared any more curare. But he handled them with care, and the remainder of the liquid he poured into a small gourd (similar to that in which he carried his coca-lime), which he closely corked up with a piece of the pith from a palm.

Don Pablo, with Doña Isidora and the children, had watched with interest all this process. At first, they were afraid to go near, believing that the fumes of the liquid might be injurious. This was long believed to be the case, in consequence of the absurd tales spread abroad by the old missionaries, and even at a later period by the traveller La Condamine. These asserted, that when the Indians wished to make the curare poison, they selected for this purpose the old women of the tribe, whose lives were not deemed of any value; and that several of these always fell a

sacrifice while “cooking” the curare!

This silly story is now refuted; and Guapo not only assured his companions that there was no danger, but even tasted the curare from time to time while in the pan, in order to judge when it was sufficiently concentrated. This he could tell by its taste, as it grew more and more bitter as the evaporation proceeded. The arrow-poisons of South America are not all made from the creeping plant, the mavacure. Among some Indian tribes a root is used called “curare de raiz;” and with others the poison is produced by a mixture of several species of juices from the plant *Ambihuasca*, tobacco, red pepper, a bark called “barbasco,” from a tree of the genus *Jacquinia*, and a plant of the name “sarnango.” Of all these the juice of the *Ambihuasca* is the most powerful ingredient, but the making of this species of poison is a most complicated process.

Guapo was not long in having an opportunity to test his gravatána, and this was just what he desired, for the old Indian was not a little vain of his skill, and he wished to make a show of it in the eyes of his companions. His vanity, however, was the more pardonable, as he was in reality a first-rate shot, which he proved to the satisfaction of everybody within half-an-hour. The instrument had scarcely been finished and laid aside, when a loud screaming and chattering was heard in the air, and on looking up a flock of large birds was seen flying over the heavens. They were still high up, but all of a sudden they darted down together and alit on a tall tree that stood nearly alone.

Here they continued their chattering, only in a lower and more confidential tone; and they could be seen, not hopping, but climbing about, sometimes with their backs and heads turned downward, and, in short, clinging to the branches in every imaginable way. These birds were all of one kind, each of them full eighteen inches in length, and of a uniform colour over the body, which was a purple, or deep indigo—their beaks only being white. In the sun their plumage glistened with a metallic lustre. They were, in fact, a rare species,—the *ana*, or *purple macaw*.

220 Without saying a word, Guapo seized his gravatána and arrows, and stole off through the underwood towards the tree upon which the macaws had perched. In a few minutes he stood under it, screened from the view of the birds by the broad leaves of a plantain that happened to grow beneath. This cover was necessary, else the macaws, which are shy birds, might have uttered one of their wild, choral screams, and flown off. They did not, however, and Guapo had a fair chance at them. All his movements could be observed by the party at the house, as he was on that side of the plantain.

He was seen to adjust an arrow into the tube, and then raise the gravatána to his lips. Strange to say, he did not hold it as we do a common gun,—that is, with the left hand advanced along the tube. On the contrary, both hands were held nearly together, at the lower end, and close to his mouth. Now, you will wonder how he could hold such a long tube steady in this way. It is, indeed, a very difficult thing, and much practice alone can accomplish it. As they watched him narrowly, his chest was seen to expand, his cheeks rose with a strong “puff,” and some of them thought they could perceive the passage of the little arrow out of the tube.

However this might be, they soon after saw something sticking in the side of one of the macaws, and could see the bird pecking at it with its great beak, and trying to pull it out. In this it appeared to have succeeded after a short while, for something fell from the tree. It was the shaft with its cotton “boss” that fell down. The point, broken off where it had been notched, was still in the body of the bird, and was infusing the deadly venom into its veins. In about two minutes' time the wounded bird seemed to grow giddy, and began to stagger. It then fell over, still clutching the branch with its strong, prehensile claws; but after hanging a moment, these too relaxed, and the body fell heavily to the ground. It was quite dead.

Long before it came down Guapo had pushed a fresh arrow into the tube, and given a fresh puff through it, wounding a second of the macaws. Then another arrow was chosen, and another victim, until several had been shot, and the creatures upon the tree could be seen in all stages of dying. Some, on receiving the wound, uttered a cry and flew off, but the poison soon brought them down, and they invariably fell at no great distance from the tree.

At length Guapo was seen to desist, and walk boldly out from his ambush. To the surprise of all, the remaining macaws, of which there were still six or seven upon the tree, showed no fear of him, nor did they attempt to fly away! This was explained, however, by their subsequent conduct; for in a few seconds more they were seen, one by one, falling to the ground, until not a single bird was left upon the tree. All of them had been killed by the arrows of the blow-gun!

Leon now ran out to assist Guapo in gathering his game. There were no less than eight couple of them in all, and they were all quite dead—some of them shot in the thigh, some in the neck or wing, and others through the body. None of them had lived over two minutes after receiving the wound. Such is the quickness with which the “curare” does its work!

As a hunting instrument for most species of game the South American Indian prefers the gravatána to any other; and with good reason. Had Guapo been armed with a rifle or fowling-
221 piece, he would have shot one macaw, or perhaps a pair, and then the rest would have uttered a tantalising scream, and winged their way out of his reach. He might have missed the whole flock, too, for on a high tree, such as that on which they had alit, it is no easy matter to kill a macaw with a shot-gun. Now the gravatána throws its arrow to a height of from thirty to forty yards, and the least touch is sufficient to do the business. Its silence, moreover, enables the hunter to repeat the shot, until several head of game reward his skill. The Indians use it with most effect in a

vertical or upward direction; and they are always surer to kill a bird with it when perched on a high tree, than when seated on a low shrub or on the ground.

As we have observed that the curare can be taken inwardly without any danger, it will be evident to all that game killed by the poisoned arrows may be eaten with safety. Indeed, there are many epicures in South America who prefer it in this way; and when a chicken is wanted for the table, these people require that it should be killed by an arrow dipped in curare.

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CHAPTER XX.

THE MILK-TREE.

Guapo kept his promise with the tapir, and on that very same day. Shortly after the macaws had been brought in, little Leona, who had been straying down by the water's edge, came running back to the house, and in breathless haste cried out, “Mamma, mamma! what a big hog!”

“Where, my pet?” inquired her mother, with a degree of anxiety, for she fancied that the child might have seen some fierce beast of prey instead of a hog.

“In the water,” replied Leona; “among the great lillies.”

“It's the tapir,” cried Leon. “Carrambo! it's our tapir!”

Guapo was busy plucking his macaws, but at the word tapir he sprang to his feet, making the feathers fly in all directions.

“Where, señorita?” he asked, addressing little Leona.

“Down below,” replied the child; “near the edge of the river.”

Guapo seized his gravatána, and crouched down towards the bank, with Leon at his heels. On nearing the water, he stopped; and, with his body half-bent, looked down stream. There, sure enough, was the huge brown beast standing with his body half out of the water, and pulling up the roots of the flags with his great teeth and long moveable snout. It was not likely he would return to his former den after the chase he had had; and fancying, no doubt, that all the danger lay upon the opposite shore, he had come to this side to browse awhile.

Guapo cautioned Leon to remain where he was, while he himself, almost crawling upon his belly, proceeded along the bank. In a few minutes he was out of sight, and Leon, seeing nothing more of him, kept his eyes sharply fixed upon the tapir.

The latter remained quietly feeding for about ten minutes, when the boy saw him give a little start. Perhaps, thought he, he has heard Guapo among the weeds—for the tapir has good ears—and that was what caused him to make the motion. The tapir stopped feeding for a moment, but
222 then recommenced, though evidently not with as much eagerness as before. Presently he stopped a second time, and seemed undetermined as to whether he should not turn and take to the clear water. In this way he hesitated for several minutes; then, to the astonishment of Leon, his body began to rock from side to side, and the next moment, with a plunge, he fell heavily backward, making the waves undulate on all sides of him. The arrow had done its work—he was dead!

A loud shout from Guapo echoed along the river, and the Indian was seen plunging forward to the dead tapir, which the next moment he had seized by the leg, and was dragging towards the bank. He was here met by the whole party, all of whom were anxious to see this rare and singular creature. Ropes were soon attached to the legs, and Guapo, assisted by Don Pablo and Leon, drew the huge carcass out upon the shore; and dragged it up to the house.

Guapo at once skinned it, carefully preserving the hide to make soles for his sandals and other purposes; and that night all of them tried a “tapir-steak” for supper. All, however, Guapo alone excepted, preferred the flesh of the purple macaws, which, cooked as they were with onions and red pepper, were excellent eating, particularly for Spanish-American palates. Guapo had all the tapir to himself.

The bamboo palm-house was now quite finished, and several articles of furniture too—for during the nights both Don Pablo and his trusty man Guapo had worked at many things. You will, no doubt, be asking where they procured lights,—will you not? I shall tell you. One of the loftiest and most beautiful of the palm-trees—*the wax-palm*—grew in these very parts, for the lower slopes of the Andes are its favourite habitat. Out of its trunk exudes wax, which has only to be scraped off and made into candles, that burn as well as those made of the wax of bees. Indeed, the missionaries, in their various religious ceremonies, have always made large use of these palm-candles.

Another “wax-palm,” called “Carnáuba,” is found in South America. In this one, the wax—of a pure white colour, and without any admixture of resin—collects upon the under-side of the

leaves, and can be had in large quantities by merely stripping it off. But even, had neither of these palms been found, they needed not to have gone without lights, for the fruits of the “patawa,” already described, when submitted to pressure, yield a pure liquid oil, without any disagreeable smell, and most excellent for burning in lamps. So, you see, there was no lack of light in the cheerful cottage.

But there were two things, you will say, still wanting—one of them a necessary article, and the other almost so—and which could not possibly be procured in such a place. These two things were *salt* and *milk*. Now there was neither a salt-mine, nor a lake, nor a drop of salt water, nor yet either cow, goat, or ass, within scores of miles of the place, and still they had both salt and milk!

The milk they procured from a tree which grew in the woods close by, and a tree so singular and celebrated, that you have no doubt heard of it before now. It was the *palo de vaca*, or “cow-tree,” called sometimes by an equally appropriate name *arbol del leche*, or “milk-tree.” It is one of the noblest trees of the forest, rising, with its tall straight stem, to a great height, and adorned
223 with large oblong pointed leaves, some of which are nearly a foot in length. It carries fruit which is eatable, about the size of a peach, and containing one or two stones; and the wood itself is valuable, being hard, fine-grained, and durable.

But it is the sap which gives celebrity to the tree. This is neither more nor less than milk of a thick creamy kind, and most agreeable in flavour. Indeed, there are many persons who prefer it to the milk of cows, and it has been proved to be equally nutritious, the people fattening upon it in districts where it grows. It is collected, as the sugar-water is from the maple, simply by making a notch or incision in the bark, and placing a vessel underneath, into which the sap runs abundantly. It runs most freely at the hour of sunrise; and this is also true as regards the sap of the sugar-tree, and many other trees of that kind.

Sometimes it is drunk pure as it flows from the tree; but there are some people who, not relishing it in its thick gummy state, dilute it with water, and strain it before using it. It is excellent for tea or coffee, quite equal to the best cream, and of a richer colour. When left to stand in an open vessel, a thick coagulum forms on the top, which the natives term cheese, and which they eat in a similar manner, and with equal relish. Another virtue of this extraordinary tree is that the cream, without any preparation, makes a glue for all purposes as good as that used by cabinet-makers, and, indeed, Don Pablo and Guapo had already availed themselves of it in this way.

So much for the *palo de vaca*.

It still remains for me to tell you where the *salt* came from; and although the milk-tree was ever so welcome, yet the salt was a thing of still greater necessity. Indeed, the latter might be looked upon as an indispensable article in household economy. You, my young reader, know not what it is to be without salt. With whole sacks of this beautiful mineral within your reach, almost as cheap as sand, you cannot fancy the longing—the absolute craving—for it, which they feel who are for a period deprived of it.

Even the wild animals will make long journeys in search of those salt-springs—or, as they are called, “licks”—which exist in many places in the wilderness of America. For salt, Don Pablo and his companions would have exchanged anything they had,—their sugar, plantains, cocoa, coffee, or even the cassava, which was their bread. They longed for salt, and knew not how they could get on without it. The only substitute was the “aji,” or capsicum, of which several species grew around, and almost every dish they ate was strongly spiced with it. But still this was not salt, and they were not contented with it.

It was now that they found a friend in Guapo. Guapo knew that among many of the Indian tribes the fruit of a certain species of palm was manufactured into salt; and he knew the palm, too, if he could only get his eyes upon it. Seeing his master and the rest so troubled upon this head, Guapo rose one morning early and stole off among the groves of palm, on the other side of the river. There, in a marshy place, with its roots even growing in the water, stood the very tree,—a small palm of about four inches in diameter and twenty to thirty feet high. It was thicker at the base than the top, and the top itself rose several feet above the tuft of pinnate, feathery fronds, ending in a pointed spike. It was the “jara” palm, of the genus *Leopoldinia*.

224 It was the fruits upon which Guapo bent his eyes with earnestness. Each one was as large as a peach, of an oval shape, slightly flattened, and of a yellowish green colour. They grew in large clusters among the bases of the leaves; and Guapo was not long in ascending several trees—for the jara is a smooth-skinned palm, and can be climbed—and breaking off the spadices, and flinging them to the ground. He had soon collected a bag-full, with which he hurried back to the house.

All wondered what Guapo meant to do with these fruits, for they tasted them and found them very bitter. Guapo soon showed them his intention. Having prepared a sort of furnace, he set the nuts on fire; and when they were thoroughly reduced to ashes, to the great joy and astonishment of all, these ashes, which were as white as flour, had the taste of salt! It is true it was not equal to “Turk's Island,” nor yet to “Bay” salt, but it proved to be good enough for cooking purposes, and satisfied the craving which all had felt for this indispensable article.

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CHAPTER XXI.

THE CANNIBAL FISH AND THE GYMNOTUS.

About this time an incident occurred that was very near having a fatal termination for one of the party—Leon. The day was a very hot one, and as the cool water looked inviting, Leon could not resist the temptation of taking a bath. Having undressed himself, he plunged into the river nearly in front of where the house stood, and began splashing about quite delighted. The rest were not heeding him, as each was engaged with some occupation within the house.

Leon at first kept wading about in a place that was not beyond his depth, but, by little and little, he took short swims, as he wished to practise, and become a good swimmer like Guapo. His father had not only given him permission, but had even advised him to do so. And it may be here remarked that all parents would do well to take the same course with their children and allow them to acquire this healthful and useful art. No one can deny that thousands of lives are annually sacrificed, because so few have taken the trouble to learn swimming.

Well; Leon was determined to be a swimmer, and at each attempt he made a wider stretch into the deep water, swam around, and then back again to the bank.

In one of these excursions, just as he had got farthest out, all at once he felt a sharp pain as if from the bite of some animal, and then another, and another, upon different parts of the body, as if several sets of teeth were attacking him at once!

Leon screamed—who wouldn't have done so?—and his scream brought the whole household to the edge of the water in less than a score of seconds. All of them believed that he was either drowning or attacked by a crocodile. On arriving at the bank, however, they saw that he was still above water, and swimming boldly for the shore—no signs of a crocodile were to be seen!

What was the matter?

Of course that question was asked of him by them all in a breath. His reply was that “he could
225 not tell—*something was biting him all over*!”

The quick eye of the mother now caught sight of blood—around the swimmer the water was tinged with it—her piercing shriek rent the air.

“O God! my child—my child! Save him—save him!”

Both Don Pablo and Guapo dashed into the water and plunged forward to meet him. In the next moment he was raised in their arms, but the blood streamed down his body and limbs, apparently from a dozen wounds. As they lifted him out of the water they saw what had caused these wounds. A shoal of small fish, with ashy-green backs and bright orange bellies and fins, was seen below. With large open mouths they had followed their victim to the very surface, and now that he was lifted out of their reach, they shot forward and attacked the legs of his rescuers, causing Don Pablo and Guapo to dance up in the water, and make with all haste for the bank. As soon as they had reached it, they turned round and looked into the water. There were these blood-thirsty pursuers that had followed them up to the very bank, and now swam about darting from point to point, and ready for a fresh attack on any one that might enter the water!

“They are the 'cannibal fish!'” said Guapo, in an angry tone, as he turned to attend to Leon. “I shall punish them yet for it. Trust me, young master, you shall be revenged!”

Leon was now carried up to the house, and it was found that in all he had received nearly a dozen wounds! Some of them were on the calves of his legs, where the piece of flesh was actually taken out! Had he been farther out in the river, when first attacked, he might never have reached the shore alive, as the fierce creatures were gathering in far greater numbers when he was rescued, and would most undoubtedly have torn him to pieces and eaten him up!

Such has been the fate of many persons who have fallen among the “cannibal fish” in the midst of wide rivers where they had no chance of escape. These ferocious little “caribes,” or “caribitos,” as they are called (for the word *carib* signifies cannibal), lie at the bottom of rivers, and are not easily seen; but the moment an attack is made by one of them, and a drop of blood stains the water, the whole shoal rises to the surface, and woe to the creature that is assailed by their sharp triangular teeth!

Of course the wounds of Leon, although painful, were not dangerous, but the chief danger lay in the loss of blood which was pouring from so many veins. But Guapo found ready to his hand the best thing in the world for stopping it. On some mimosa-trees, not far from the house, he had already observed—indeed, so had all of them—a very singular species of ants' nests of a yellowish brown colour. The ants themselves were of a beautiful emerald green. They were the *Formica spinicollis*. These nests were composed of a soft cotton-down, which the ants had collected from a species of *Melastoma*, a handsome shrub found growing in these regions; and this down Guapo knew to be the best for blood-stopping.

Even Don Pablo had heard of its being used by the Indians for this purpose, and knew it by the name of “*yesca de hormigas*,” or “touch-wood of ants.” He had heard, moreover, that it was far

superior even to the ants' nests of Cayenne, which form an article of commerce and are highly prized in the hospitals of Europe. Guapo, therefore, ran off and robbed the green ants of their
226 nests, and speedily returned with the full of his hands of the soft “yesca.” This was applied to the wounds, and in a few minutes the bleeding was effectually stopped, and Leon, although still suffering pain, had now only to be patient and get well.

Strange to say, another incident occurred that very evening, which taught our party a further lesson of the danger of taking to the water without knowing more of its inhabitants. Just as they had finished supper, and were seated in front of their new house, the mule, that had been let loose, stepped into the river to drink and cool its flanks. It was standing in the water, which came up to its belly, and, having finished its drink, was quietly gazing around it. All at once, it was observed to give a violent plunge, and make with hot haste for the bank. It snorted and looked terrified, while its red nostrils were wide open, and its eyes appeared as if they would start from their sockets. At length it reached the bank, and, staggering forward, rolled over in the sand, as if it was going to die!

What could all this mean? Had it, too, been attacked by the “caribes?” No; that was not likely, as the bite of these creatures upon the hard shanks of the mule could not have produced such an effect. They might have frightened it, but they could not have thrown it into “fits”—for it was evidently in some sort of a fit at that moment.

It might have been a puzzle to our party not easily solved, had Guapo not been upon the spot. But Guapo had witnessed such an incident before. Just before the mule gave the first plunge Guapo's eyes had been wandering in that direction. He had noticed an odd-looking form glide near the mule and pass under the animal's belly. This creature was of a greenish-yellow colour, about five feet in length, and four or five inches thick. It resembled some kind of water-snake more than a fish, but Guapo knew it was not a snake, but an eel. It was the great *electric eel*—the “temblador,” or “gymnotus.”

This explained the mystery. The gymnotus, having placed itself under the belly of the unsuspecting mule, was able to bring its body in contact at all points, and hence the powerful shock that had created such an effect.

The mule, however, soon recovered, but from that time forward, no coaxing, nor leading, nor driving, nor whipping, nor pushing, would induce that same mule to go within twenty feet of the bank of that same piece of water.

Guapo now bethought himself of the narrow escape he himself had had while swimming across to the palm-woods; and the appearance of the gymnotus only rendered him more determined to keep the promise he had made to Leon,—that is, that he would revenge him of the caribes.

None of them could understand how Guapo was to get his revenge without catching the fish, and that would be difficult to do. Guapo, however, showed them how on the very next day.

During that evening he had made an excursion into the wood, and returned home carrying with him a large bundle of roots.

They were the roots of two species of plants—one of the genus *Piscidea*, the other a *Jacquinia*. Out of these, when properly pounded together, Guapo intended to make the celebrated
227 “barbasco,” or fish-poison, which is used by all the Indians of South America in capturing fish. Guapo knew that a sufficient quantity of the barbasco thrown into the water would kill either “temblador,” caribe, or any fish that ever swam with fins.

And so it proved. In the morning Guapo having prepared his barbasco, proceeded to the upper end of the lake-like opening of the river, and there flung his poison into the stream. The slow current through the valley greatly favoured him, and from the large quantity of roots he had used, the whole pool was soon infected with it. This was seen from the whitish tinge which the water assumed. The barbasco had scarcely time to sink to the bottom when small fish were seen coming to the surface, and turning “wrong side uppermost.” Then larger ones appeared, and in a few minutes all the fish in that particular stretch of water, with several gymnoti, were seen floating on the surface quite dead. To the great joy of Guapo and Leon, who sat by the bank watching, hundreds of the little caribes, with their bronze gills quite open, and their yellow bellies turned up, were seen among the rest.

But Guapo had not made this great slaughter purely out of revenge. He had another object. They were not too well off for meat, and a dish of fish would be welcome. Guapo and Don Pablo had already provided themselves with long-handled nets, and they soon scooped out several basketfuls of fish. Among others they netted numerous “caribes,” for these little monsters, fierce as they are, are not surpassed for delicacy of flavour by any fish in the South American rivers. The gymnoti approached the bank, where Guapo fished them out, not to eat—although they are often eaten. There was not a spark of electricity in them now. The barbasco had cured them of that; any one might have handled them with safety, as there was not a charge left in their whole battery.

The lake was quite cleared of all its dangerous denizens, and Leon might bathe with safety, as soon as he got well; and over the fish-dinner they could now laugh at the adventures both of Leon and the electrified mule.

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CHAPTER XXII.

THE CINCHONA-TREES.

In about two weeks from their arrival in the valley, the house, with a stable for the horse and mule, was completed, and all the necessary furniture as well. Had you entered the establishment about this time, you would have observed many odd articles and implements, most of them quite new. You would have seen boxes woven out of palm leaves, and bags made of the fibrous, cloth-like spathe of the “bussu,” filled with the soft, silky cotton of the bombax, to be afterwards spun and woven for shirts and dresses.

You would have seen baskets of various shapes and sizes woven out of the rind of the leaf-stalks of a singular palm called “Iú,” which has no stem, but only leaves of ten feet long, growing directly out of the ground. You would have seen chairs made of split palms and bamboo, and a good-sized table, upon which, at meal-time, might be noticed a table-cloth, not of diaper, but, what served equally well, the broad smooth silken leaves of the plantain. There were cups, too,
228 and plates, and bowls, and dishes, and bottles, of the light gourd-shell (*Crescentia cujete*), some of the bottles holding useful liquids, and corked with the elastic pith of a palm. Other vessels of a boat-shape might be noticed.

There were large wooden vessels pointed at the ends like little canoes. They were nothing more than the spathes or flower-sheaths of one of the largest of palms, the “*Inaga*.” This noble tree rises to the height of one hundred feet, and carries feathery fronds of more than fifty feet in length. The spathes are so large that they are used by the Indian women for cradles and baskets; and their wood is so hard, that hunters often cook meat in them, hanging them over the fire when filled with water!

Many other singular implements might have been noticed in the new home. One, a cylinder of what appeared to be wood, covered thickly with spinous points, hung against the wall. That was a grater, used for the manioc, or yucca roots; and it was a grater of nature's own making, for it was nothing more than a piece of one of the air roots of the “pashiuba” palm, already described. Another curious object hung near this last. It was a sort of conical bag, woven out of palm-fibre, with a loop at the bottom, through which loop a strong pole was passed, that acted as a lever when the article was in use. This wicker-work bag was the “tipiti.” Its use was to compress the grated pulp of the manioc roots, so as to separate the juice from it, and thus make “cassava.” The roots of the yucca, or manioc plant, grow in bunches like potatoes.

Some of them are oblong—the length of a man's arm—and more than twenty pounds in weight. When required for use, the bark is scraped off, and they are grated down. They are then put into the tipiti, already mentioned; and the bag is hung up to a strong pin, while the lever is passed through the loop at the bottom. Its short end goes under a firm notch, and then some one usually sits upon the long end until the pulp is squeezed sufficiently dry. The bag is so formed that its extension, by the force of the lever, causes its sides to close upon the pulp, and thus press out the juice. The pulp is next dried in an oven, and becomes the famous “cassava” or “farinha,” which, throughout the greater part of South America, is the only bread that is used. The juice, of course, runs through the wicker-work of the *tipiti* into a vessel below, and there produces a sediment, which is the well-known “tapioca.”

There are two kinds of the yucca or manioc-root,—the *yucca dulce*, and *yucca amarga*—the sweet and bitter. One may be eaten raw without danger. The other, which very closely resembles it, if eaten raw, would produce almost instant death, as its juice is one of the deadliest of vegetable poisons. Even while it is dripping from the tipiti into the vessel placed below, great care is always taken lest children or other animals should drink of it.

There were no beds—such things are hardly to be found in any part of tropical America—at least not in the low hot countries. To sleep in a bed in these climates is far from being pleasant. The sleeper would be at the mercy of a thousand crawling things,—insects and reptiles. Hammocks, or “redes,” as they are called, take the place of bedsteads; and five hammocks, of different dimensions, could be seen about the new house. Some were strung up within, others in the porch in front, for, in building his house, Don Pablo had fashioned it so that the roof
229 protruded in front, and formed a shaded verandah—a pleasant place in which to enjoy the evenings. Guapo had made the hammocks, having woven the cords out of the epidermis of the leaf of a noble palm, called “tucum.”

Their home being now sufficiently comfortable, Don Pablo began to turn his attention to the object for which he had settled on that spot. He had already examined the cinchona-trees, and saw that they were of the finest species. They were, in fact, the same which have since become celebrated as producing the “Cuzconin,” and known as *Cascarilla de Cuzco* (Cuzco bark).

Of the Peruvian-bark trees there are many species,—between twenty and thirty. Most of these are true cinchona-trees, but there are also many kinds of the genus *Exostemma*, whose bark is collected as a febrifuge, and passes in commerce under the name of *Peruvian bark*. All these are of different qualities and value. Some are utterly worthless, and, like many other kinds of “goods,” form a sad commentary on the honesty of commerce.

The species, which grew on the sides of the adjacent hills, Don Pablo recognised as one of the most valuable. It was a nearly-allied species to the tree of Loxa, which produces the best bark. It was a tall slender tree—when full grown, rising to the height of eighty feet; but there were some of every age and size. Its leaves were five inches long and about half that breadth, of a reddish colour, and with a glistening surface, which rendered them easily distinguished from the foliage of the other trees. Now it is a fortunate circumstance that the Peruvian-bark trees differ from all others in the colour of their leaves.

Were this not the case, “bark-hunting” would be a very troublesome operation. The labour of finding the trees would not be repaid with double the price obtained for the bark. You may be thinking, my young friend, that a “cascarillero,” or bark-hunter, has nothing to do but find a wood of these trees; and then the trouble of searching is over, and nothing remains but to go to work and fell them. So it would be, did the cinchona-trees grow together in large numbers, but they do not. Only a few—sometimes only a single tree—will be found in one place; and I may here remark that the same is true of most of the trees of the Great Montaña of South America. This is a curious fact, because it is a different arrangement from that made by nature in the forests of North America.

There a whole country will be covered with timber of a single, or at most two or three species; whereas, in South America, the forests are composed of an endless variety. Hence it has been found difficult to establish saw-mills in these forests, as no one timber can be conveniently furnished in sufficient quantity to make it worth while. Some of the palms, as the great *morichi*, form an exception to this rule. These are found in vast *palmares*, or palm-woods, extending over large tracts of country, and monopolising the soil to themselves.

Don Pablo, having spent the whole of a day in examining the cinchonas, returned home quite satisfied with them, both as regarded their quantity and value. He saw, from a high tree which he had climbed, “*manchas*,” or spots of the glistening reddish leaves, nearly an acre in breadth. This was a fortune in itself. Could he only collect 100,000 lbs. of this bark, and convey it down stream to the mouth of the Amazon, it would there yield him the handsome sum of 40,000 or 50,000
230 dollars! How long before he could accomplish this task he had not yet calculated; but he resolved to set about it at once.

GUAPO AND THE 'NIMBLE PETERS.'

A large house had been already constructed for storing the bark, and in the dry hot climate of the high Montaña, where they now were, Don Pablo knew it could be dried in the woods, where it
231 was stripped from the trees.

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CHAPTER XXIII.

A PAIR OF SLOW GOERS.

At length, all things being ready, Don Pablo and party set out for a day's work among the cinchonas. As it was the first day of bark-gathering all went along to enjoy the novelty of the thing. A “mancha” of the cinchona trees was not far off, so their journey would be a short one. For this reason, the horse and mule remained in the stable eating the fruits of the “murumuru” palm, of which all cattle are exceedingly fond. Even the hard undigested stones or nuts, after passing through the bodies of horses and cattle, are eagerly devoured by wild or tame hogs, and the zamuros, or black vultures, when hungered, take to the pulpy fruit of this thorny palm-tree.

It was a very early hour when they set out, for Don Pablo and his people were no sluggards. Indeed, in that climate, the early morning hours are the pleasantest, and they had made it a rule to be always up at daybreak. They could thus afford to take a *siesta* in their hammocks during the hot noontide,—a custom very common, and almost necessary, in tropical countries. Their road to the cinchonas led up the stream, on the same side with the house. After going a few hundred yards, they entered a grove of trees that had white trunks and leaves of a light silvery colour. The straight, slender stems of these trees, and the disposition of their branches,—leaning over at the tops,—gave them somewhat the appearance of palms. They were not palms, however, but “ambaïba” trees. So said Don Pablo, as they passed under their shade.

“I shouldn't wonder,” added he, “if we should see that strange animal the aï. The leaves of these trees are its favourite food, and it lives altogether among their branches.”

“You mean the 'nimble Peter,' do you not, papa?”

This inquiry was put by Leon, who had read about the animal under this name, and had read many false stories of it, even in the works of the great Buffon.

“Yes,” replied Don Pablo; “it goes by that name sometimes, on account of its sluggish habits and slow motions. For the same reason the English call it 'sloth,' and it is known among naturalists as *bradypus*. There are two or three species, but all with very similar habits, though, as usual, the French classifiers have separated them into distinct genera.”

“Why, Buffon says,” rejoined Leon, “that it is the most miserable creature in the world; that it can scarcely get from tree to tree; that some remain in the same tree all their lives, or, that when one has eaten all the leaves off a tree, it drops to the ground, to save itself the trouble of getting down by the trunk, and, that when on the ground it cannot move a yard in an hour. Is all this true?”

“Totally untrue. It is true the aï does not move rapidly over the ground, but the ground is not its proper place no more than it is that of the orang-otang, or other tree-monkeys. Its conformation shows that nature intended it for an inhabitant of the trees, where it can move about with sufficient ease to procure its food. On the branches it is quite at home, or, rather, I should say, *under* the branches, for, unlike the squirrels and monkeys, it travels along the under
232 sides of the horizontal limbs, with its back downward. This it can do with ease, by means of its great curving claws, which are large enough to span the thickest boughs. In this position, with a long neck of *nine vertebræ*,—the only animal which has that number,—it can reach the leaves on all sides of it; and, when not feeding, this is its natural position of repose.

“Its remaining during its whole life in one tree, or suffering itself to fall from the branches, are romances of the early Spanish voyagers, to which M. Buffon gave too much credit. The aï does not descend to the ground at all when it can help it, but passes from one tree to another by means of the outspreading branches. Sometimes, when these do not meet, it has cunning enough to wait for a windy day, and then, taking advantage of some branch blown nearer by the wind, it grasps it and passes to the next tree. As it requires no drink, and can live without any other food than the leaves of the *cecropia*, of course it remains on a single tree so long as it has plenty of leaves. See!” exclaimed Don Pablo, pointing up; “here are several trees stripped of their leaves! I'll warrant that was done by the aï.”

“*A-ee*!” echoed a voice in the most lugubrious tones.

“I thought so,” cried Don Pablo, laughing at the surprise which the voice had created among the rest of the party. “That's the very fellow himself,—this way,—here he is!”

All of them ran under the tree to which Don Pablo pointed, and looked up. There, sure enough, was an animal about the size of a cat, of a dark hay colour, with a patch of dirty orange and black upon the back. This could be easily seen, for the creature was hanging along a horizontal branch with its back downward, and its huge curving claws, all in a bunch, were hooked over the branch. Its hair was thick and rough, and no tail was visible, but its small round head and flat face was almost as like the human face as is that of any monkey. Indeed, the others would have taken it for a monkey,—Guapo excepted,—had they not been already talking about it.

“Oh, yonder's another!” cried Leon, pointing higher up in the tree; and, sure enough, there was, for the aï is usually found in company with its mate. The other was a copy of the one already observed, with some slight difference in size—no doubt it was the female one. Both had observed the approach of the party, and now uttered their melancholy “Ayee—a-ee!” that sounded anything but agreeable. In fact, so very disagreeable is the voice of this creature, that it has been considered its best weapon of defence. Beside the utterance of their cry, neither of them made any effort to escape or defend themselves.

Don Pablo and the rest were about to pass on and leave the aïs to their leaf diet, but Guapo had other notions on that subject. Ugly as these creatures were, Guapo intended to have one of them for his dinner. He, therefore, begged Don Pablo to stop a moment until he should get them down. How was this to be done? Would he climb up and drag them from the tree? That is not so easily accomplished, for the aïs, with their crescent claws, can hold on with terrible force. Besides, they were out upon the slender branches, where it would have been difficult to get at them.

But Guapo did not intend to climb. The tree was a slender one—he had his axe with him—and
233 the next moment its keen blade was crashing through the bark of the ambaïba wood. A few minutes served to bring the tree down, and down it came, the aïs screaming as it fell. Guapo now approached to seize them, but about this he used some caution. Both finding themselves without hope of escape, prepared for defence. Buffon asserts that they make none. That is not true, as was seen by all the party.

Throwing themselves on their backs, they struck out with their fore-arms in a sort of mechanical manner. These with the long horny claws they kept playing in front of their bodies, striking alternately with them, and rapidly, as a dog will do when suddenly plunged into water. Guapo did not put his hands near them. He knew they would not bite, but he also knew that he might get a scratch with the sharp claws, and that he did not wish for. But Guapo had a way to take them, and that he now put in practice. Lopping a couple of branches from the tree, he held one out to each of the aïs, and touched them with it on the breast.

Each, as soon as it felt the branch, clutched it tightly between its powerful fore-arms and held on as if for life and death. It would have taken a stronger man than Guapo to have pulled either of the branches away again. The thing was now done. Giving his axe to Leon to carry for him, Guapo lifted an aï, still clinging to the branch, in each hand, and carried them off as if they had been a pair of water-pots. He did not wish to kill them until he got them home, alleging that they were better for eating when freshly butchered.

The bark-hunters now continued their route, and shortly after entered a little glade or opening in the forest, about an acre in size. When they had reached the middle of this, Guapo threw his aïs upon the ground and marched on.

“Why do you leave them?” inquired the others.

“No fear for them,” replied Guapo; “they'll be there when we come back. If I carried them into the woods, they might steal off while we were at work, but it would take them six hours to get to the nearest tree.” All laughed at this, and went on, leaving the aïs to themselves. Before passing out from the glade, they stopped a moment to look at the great, conical nests of the termites, or white ants, several of which, like soldiers' tents, stood near the edge of the glade. It was yet early, the air was chilly, and the ants were not abroad; so that, after gazing for a while on these singular habitations, the bark-gatherers pursued their way, and were soon under the shadow of the cinchona trees.

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CHAPTER XXIV.

THE BARK-HUNTERS.

In a few minutes the work began—that work which was to occupy them, perhaps, for several years. The first blow of Guapo's axe was the signal to begin the making of a fortune. It was followed by many others, until one of the cinchonas lay along the sward. Then Guapo attacked another, as near the root as was convenient for chopping.

Don Pablo's part of the work now began. Armed with a sharp knife, he made circular incisions
234 round the trunk, at the distance of several feet from each other, and a single longitudinal one intersecting all the others. The branches were also served in a similar way, and then the tree was left as it lay. In three or four days they would return to strip off the bark both from trunk and branches, and this would be spread out under the sun to dry. When light and dry it would be carried to the storehouse. So the work went merrily on. The trees were taken as they stood—the very young ones alone being left, as the bark of these is useless for commerce.

The Doña Isidora sat upon a fallen trunk, and, conversing with her husband, watched the proceedings with interest. A new and happy future seemed at no great distance off. Little Leona stood beside Guapo, watching the yellow chips as they flew, and listening to some very fine stories with which Guapo was regaling her. Guapo loved little Leona. He would have risked his life for her, would Guapo, and Leona knew it.

Leon was not particularly engaged on that day. When the bark was ready for peeling he intended to take a hand with the rest. He could then employ himself in spreading it, or could lead the mule in carrying it to the storehouse. Leon did not intend to be idle, but there happened to be no work for him just then; and after watching the bark-cutters for awhile, he sauntered back

along the path, in order to have a little fun with the aïs. Leon had no very great confidence that he would find them in the place where they had been left, and yet he believed in Guapo. But it was hard to understand that two animals, each endowed with a full set of legs and feet, should not be able to make their way for a distance of twenty paces, and escape! After the rough handling they had had, too! He would have a peep at them, anyhow, to see how they were coming on. So back he went.

On getting near the glade their voices reached him. They were there, after all! He could hear them utter their pitiful “ay-ee—ay-ee!” and, as he thought, in a louder and more distressing tone than ever. What could be the matter? They had been silent for some time, he was sure, for such cries as they now uttered could have been heard easily where the rest were. What could be the meaning of this fresh outburst? Had some new enemy attacked them? It seemed like enough.

Leon stole forward, and peeped into the glade. No—there was nothing near them! But what was the matter with the creatures? Instead of lying quietly, as they had done when left behind, they were now rolling and tumbling backward and forward, and pitching about, and dancing first on their feet and then on their heads, and cutting all sorts of strange capers! Could it be for their own amusement? No; their lamentable cries precluded that supposition; besides, their odd attitudes and contortions bespoke terror and pain!

“Carrambo!” muttered Leon. “What's the matter with them?”

They seemed inclined to escape towards the trees; but, after making a few lengths, they would fall to the ground, tumble about, and then, getting up again, head in the opposite direction!

Leon was puzzled,—no wonder. He looked around for a solution of this queer conduct on the part of the aïs. No explanation appeared. At length he bethought himself of going up to them.
235 Perhaps, when nearer, he might learn what set them a-dancing.

“Ha!” he ejaculated, struck with some sudden thought. “I know now; there's a snake at them.”

This conjecture—for it was only a conjecture—caused him to stop short. It might be some venomous snake, thought he. The grass was not long, and he could have seen a very large snake; but still a small coral snake, or the little poisonous viper, might have been there. He fancied he saw something moving; but to get a better view he passed slowly around the edge of the glade, until he was nearly on the opposite side to that where he had entered. He still kept at a good distance from the aïs, but as yet discovered no snake.

To his great surprise, the aïs now lay stretched along the grass, their struggles appeared each moment to grow less violent, and their melancholy cries became weaker and weaker. Their contortions at length came to an end. A feeble effort to raise themselves alone could be perceived,—then a spasmodic motion of their long crooked limbs,—their cries became indistinct; and, after a while, both lay motionless and silent! Were they dead? Surely so, thought Leon.

He stood gazing at them for some minutes. Not a motion of their bodies could be perceived. Surely they had no longer lived! But, then, what could have killed them? There was no snake to be seen; no animal of any kind except themselves! Had they been taken with some sudden disease,—some kind of convulsions that had ended fatally? This seemed the most probable thing, judging from the odd manner in which they had acted. Maybe they had eaten some sort of plant that had poisoned them!

These conjectures passed rapidly through the mind of Leon. Of course, he resolved to satisfy himself as to the cause of their death, if dead they actually were. He began to draw nearer, making his advances with stealth and caution—as he was still apprehensive about the snake.

After he had made a few paces in a forward direction, he began to perceive something moving around the bodies of the animals. Snakes? No. What then? A few paces nearer. See! the whole ground is in motion. The bodies of the aïs, though dead, are covered with living, moving objects! Ha! *it is a “chacu” of the white ants*.

Leon now comprehended the whole affair. The ground was literally alive with the terrible *termites*. They had made their foray, or “chacu,” as it is called, from the neighbouring cones; they had attacked the helpless aïs, and put them to death, with their poisonous stings! Already they were tearing them to pieces, and bearing them off to their dark caves! So thick were they on the bodies of the animals, that the latter had suddenly changed their colour, and now appeared to be nothing more than living heaps of crawling insects!

It was a hideous sight to behold, and Leon felt his flesh creep as he looked upon it. Still he felt a curiosity to witness the result, and he stood watching the busy crowd that had gathered about the aïs. He had heard strange accounts of these white ants; how that, in a few minutes, they will tear the carcasses of large animals to pieces, and carry them away to their dens; and he was determined to prove the truth of this by observation. He did not go any nearer, for he was not without some dread of these ugly creatures; but, happening to find himself beside a small tree, with low horizontal branches, he climbed up, and sat down upon one of the branches, resting his
236 feet upon another. He was inclined to take the thing as easily as possible.

His perch commanded a full view of the operations of the termites, and for a long time he sat watching them with interest. He could see that it was not the same set that were always on the carcasses of the aïs. On the contrary, one host were always leaving the spot, while another took their places, and from the great conical houses fresh bands appeared to issue. In fact, two great

parallel belts of them, like army columns, stretched from the “hills” to the aïs, going in opposite directions.

Those which travelled towards the cells presented a very different appearance to the others. These were loaded with pieces of torn flesh, or skin with tufts of hair adhering to it; and each ant carried a piece by far larger than its own body. Their bodies, in fact, were quite hidden under their disproportionate burdens. The others—those which were coming from the conical hills—were empty-handed, and presented the appearance of a whittish stream flowing along the surface of the ground!

It was a most singular sight; and Leon sat watching the creatures until his head was giddy, and he felt as though the ground itself was in motion.

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CHAPTER XXV.

THE PUMA AND THE GREAT ANT-BEAR.

All at once the attention of the boy was called away from the crawling millions. A rustling among some dead leaves was heard. It appeared to proceed from the edge of the glade, not far from the ant-hills. The branches of the underwood were seen to move, and the next moment a slender cylindrical object, about a foot and a half in length, was protruded out from the leaves. Had there not been a pair of small eyes and ears near the farther end of this cylindrical object, no one would have taken it for the head and snout of an animal. But Leon saw the little sparkling black eyes, and he therefore conjectured that it was some such creature.

The next moment the body came into view, and a singular creature it was. It was about the size of a very large Newfoundland dog, though of a different shape. It was covered all over with long brownish hair, part of which looked so coarse as to resemble dry grass or bristles. On each shoulder was a wide strip of black, bordered with whitish bands; and the tail, which was full three feet long, was clothed with a thick growth of coarse hair, several inches in length, that looked like strips of whalebone. This was carried aloft, and curving over the back. But the most curious feature of the animal was its snout.

Talk of the nose of a grey hound. It would be a “pug” in comparison! That of this animal was full twice as long, and not half so thick, with a little mouth not over an inch in size, and without a single tooth! It was certainly the oddest snout Leon had ever seen. The legs, too, were remarkable. They were stout and thick, the hinder ones appearing much shorter than the fore-legs; but this was because the creature in its hind-feet was *plantigrade*, that is, it walked with the whole of its soles touching the surface, which only bears and a few other sorts of quadrupeds do.

237 Its fore-feet, too, were oddly placed upon the ground. They had four long claws upon each, but these claws, instead of being spread out, as in the dog or cat, were all folded backward along the sole, and the creature, to avoid treading on them, actually walked on the sides of its feet! The claws were only used for scraping up the ground, and then it could bring them forward in a perpendicular position, like the blade of a hoe, or the teeth of a garden-rake. Of course, with feet furnished in such an out-of-the-way fashion, the animal moved but slowly over the ground. In fact it went very slowly, and with a stealthy pace.

Although Leon had never seen the creature before, he had read about it, and had also seen pictures of it. He knew it, therefore, at a glance. That proboscis-looking snout was not to be mistaken. It could belong to no other creature than the *tamanoir*, or *great ant-eater*, by the people of South America called the *ant-bear*. It was, in fact, that very thing; but to Leon's astonishment, as soon as it got fairly out of the bushes, he noticed a singular-looking hunch upon its back, just over the shoulder. At first he could not make out what this was, as he had never heard of such a protuberance, besides, the tail half hid it from his view. All of a sudden the animal turned its head backwards, touched the hunch with its snout, gave itself a shake, and then the odd excrescence fell to the ground, and proved to be a young ant-eater, with bushy tail and long snout, the “very image of its mother.” The large one was thus seen to be a female that had been carrying her infant upon her shoulders.

It was close to one of the ant-hills where the old tamanoir placed her young upon the ground, and turning away from it, she approached the great cone. Erecting herself upon her hind-feet, she stood with the fore ones resting against the hill, apparently examining it, and considering in what part of it the shell or roof was thinnest and weakest. These cones, composed of agglutinated sand and earth, are frequently so stoutly put together that it requires a pick-axe or crowbar to break them open.

But the ant-eater knew well that her fore-feet were armed with an implement equal to either pick or crow, and she would certainly have made a hole there and then, had she not noticed, on looking around to the other side, that the inhabitants of the hill were all abroad upon one of their forays. This seemed to bring about a sudden change in her determination, and, dropping her fore-feet to the ground, she once more threw up her great tail, and returned to where she had left her

young one. Partly pushing it before her with her snout, and partly lifting it between her strong fore-arms, she succeeded in bringing the latter to the border of the path along which travelled the ants.

Here she squatted down, and placed herself so that the point of her nose just touched the selvedge of the swarming hosts, having caused the youngster by her side to do the same. Then throwing out a long worm-like tongue, which glittered with a viscous coating, she drew it back again covered with ants. These passed into her mouth, and thence, of course, into her capacious stomach. The tongue, which was more than a foot in length, and nearly as thick as a quill, was again thrown out, and again drawn back, and this operation she continued, the tongue making about two “hauls” to every second of time! Now and then she stopped eating, in order to give
238 some instructions to the little one that was seen closely imitating her, and with its more slender tongue dealing death among the *termites*.

So very comic was the sight that Leon could not help laughing at it, as he sat upon his perch.

An end, however, was put to his merriment, by the sudden appearance of another animal—one of a different character. It was a large cat-like creature, of a reddish-yellow, or tawny colour, long body and tail, round head, with whiskers, and bright gleaming eyes. Leon had seen that sort of animal before. He had seen it led in strings by Indians through the streets of Cuzco, and he at once recognised it. It was the *Puma*—the maneless lion of America.

The specimens which Leon had seen with the Indians had been rendered tame and harmless. He knew that, but he had also been told that the animal in its wild state is a savage and dangerous beast. This is true of the puma in some districts, while in others the creature is cowardly, and will flee at the sight of man. In all cases, however, when the puma is brought to bay, it makes a desperate fight, and both dogs and men have been killed in the attack.

Leon had not been frightened at the tamanoir. Even had it been a savage creature, he knew it could not climb a tree—though there are two smaller species of ant-bears in South America that can—and he therefore knew he was quite safe on his perch. But his feelings were very different when the red body of the puma came in sight. It could run up the smoothest trunk in the forest with as much ease and agility as a cat, and there would be no chance of escaping from it if it felt disposed to attack him. Of this the boy was fully conscious, and no wonder he was alarmed.

His first thought was to leap down, and make for the cinchona-trees, where the others were; but the puma had entered the glade from that side, and it was therefore directly in his way: he would have run right in its teeth by going toward the cinchona-trees. He next thought of slipping quietly down, and getting into the woods behind him. Unfortunately, the tree on which he was stood out in the glade quite apart from any others, the puma would see him go off, and, of course, could overtake him in a dozen leaps. These thoughts passed through the boy's mind in a few seconds of time; and in a few seconds of time he was convinced that his best course would be to remain where he was, and keep quiet. Perhaps the puma would not notice him—as yet he had not.

No doubt he would have done so, had there been nothing else on the spot to take off his attention; but just as he came into the open ground, his eyes fell upon the ant-eaters, where they lay squatted and licking up the termites. He had entered the glade in a sort of skulking trot, but the moment he saw the tamanoirs he halted, drew his body into a crouching attitude, and remained thus for some moments, while his long tail oscillated from side to side, as that of a cat when about to spring upon a mouse or a sparrow.

Just at this moment the tamanoir, having turned round to address some conversation to her young companion, espied him, and sprang to her feet. She recognised in the puma—as in others of his race—a deadly enemy. With one sweep of her fore-arm she flung the young one behind her, until it rested against the wall of the ant-hill, and then, following in all haste, threw herself into
239 an erect attitude in front of her young, covering it with her body.

She was now standing firm upon her hind-feet—her back resting against the mud wall—but her long snout had entirely disappeared! That was held close along her breast, and entirely concealed by the shaggy tail, which for this purpose had been brought up in front. Her defence rested in her strong fore-arms, which, with the great claws standing at right angles, were now held out in a threatening manner. The young one, no doubt aware of some danger, had drawn itself into its smallest bulk, and was clewed up behind her.

The puma dashed forward, open-mouthed, and began the attack. He looked as though he would carry everything by the first assault; but a sharp tear from the tamanoir's claws drew the blood from his cheek, and although it rendered him more furious, it seemed to increase his caution. In the two or three successive attempts he kept prudently out of reach of these terrible weapons. His adversary held her fore-legs wide open, as though she was desirous of getting the other to rush between them, that she might clutch him, after the manner of the bears. This was exactly what she wanted, and in this consists the chief mode of defence adopted by these animals. The puma, however, seemed to be up to her trick.

This thrust-and-parry game continued for some minutes, and might have lasted longer, had it not been for the young tamanoir. This foolish little creature, who up to that moment was not very sure what the fuss was all about, had the imprudent curiosity to thrust out its slender snout. The puma espied it, and making a dart forward, seized the snout in his great teeth, and jerked the animal from under. It uttered a low squall, but the next moment its head was “crunched”

between the muscular jaws of the puma.

The old one now appeared to lose all fear and caution. Her tail fell down. Her long snout was unsheathed from under its protection, and she seemed undecided what to do. But she was not allowed much time to reflect. The puma, seeing the snout, the most vulnerable part, uncovered, launched himself forward like an arrow, and caught hold of it in his bristling fangs. Then having dragged his victim forward, he flung her upon her breast, and mounting rapidly on her back, proceeded to worry her at his pleasure.

Although Leon pitied the poor tamanoir, yet he dared not interfere, and would have permitted the puma to finish his work, but at that moment a sharp pain, which he suddenly felt in his ankle, caused him to start upon his seat, and utter an involuntary scream.

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CHAPTER XXVI.

ATTACK OF THE WHITE ANTS.

Leon looked down to ascertain what had caused him such a sudden pain. The sight that met his eyes made his blood run cold. The ground below was alive and moving. A white stratum of ants covered it on all sides to the distance of several yards. *They were ascending the tree!* Nay, more; a string of them had already crawled up; the trunk was crowded by others coming after; and several were upon his feet, and legs, and thighs! It was one of these that had stung him!

The fate of the aïs—which he had just witnessed—and the sight of the hideous host, caused him
240 again to scream out. At the same time he had risen to his feet, and was pulling himself up among the upper branches. He soon reached the highest; but he had not been a moment there, when he reflected that it would be no security. The creatures were crawling upwards as fast as they could come.

His next thought was to descend again, leap from the tree, and crushing the vermin under his feet, make for the bark-cutters. He had made up his mind to this course, and was already half-down, when *he remembered the puma*! In his alarm at the approach of the ants he had quite forgotten this enemy, and he now remembered that it was directly in the way of his intended escape. He turned his eyes in that direction. It was not there! The ant-bears were still upon the ground—the young one dead, and the mother struggling in her last agonies; but no puma!

The boy began to hope that his cries had frightened him off. His hope was short-lived; for on glancing around the glade, he now beheld the fierce brute crouching among the grass, and evidently coming towards him! What was to be done? Would the puma attack him in the tree? Surely he would; but what better would he be on the ground? No better, but worse. At all events he had not time for much reflection, for before two seconds the fierce puma was close to the tree. Leon was helpless—he gave himself up for lost. He could only cry for help, and he raised his voice to its highest pitch.

The puma did not spring up the tree at once, as Leon had expected. On the contrary, it crouched round and round with glaring eyes and wagging tail, as if calculating the mode of attack. Its lips were red—stained with the blood of the ant-eaters—and this added to the hideousness of its appearance. But it needed not that, for it was hideous enough at any time.

Leon kept his eyes upon it, every moment expecting it to spring up the tree. All at once he saw it give a sudden start, and at the same instant he heard a hissing noise, as if something passed rapidly through the air. Ha! something sticking in the body of the puma! It is an arrow,—a poisoned arrow! The puma utters a fierce growl—it turns upon itself—the arrow is crushed between its teeth. Another “hist!”—another arrow! Hark! a well-known voice—well-known voices—the voices of Don Pablo and Guapo! See! they burst into the glade—Don Pablo with his axe, and Guapo with his unerring gravatána!

The puma turns to flee. He has already reached the border of the wood; he staggers—the poison is doing its work. Hurrah! he is down; but the poison does not kill him, for the axe of Don Pablo is crashing through his skull. Hurrah! the monster is dead, and Leon is triumphantly borne off on the shoulders of the faithful Guapo!

Don Pablo dragged the puma away, in order that they might get his fine skin. The ant-eaters, both of which were now dead, he left behind, as he saw that the termites were crawling thickly around them, and had already begun their work of devastation. Strange to say, as the party returned that way, going to dinner, not a vestige remained either of the aïs or the ant-eaters, except a few bones and some portions of coarse hair. The rest of all these animals had been cleared off by the ants, and carried into the cells of their hollow cones!

It was, no doubt, the noise of the bark-hunters that had started the ant-eaters abroad, for these
241 creatures usually prowl only in the night. The same may have aroused the fierce puma from his lair, although he is not strictly a nocturnal hunter.

A curious incident occurred as they approached the glade on their way home. The male tamanoir was roused from his nest among the dry leaves, and Guapo, instead of running upon him and killing the creature, warned them all to keep a little back, and he would show them some fun. Guapo now commenced shaking the leaves, so that they rattled as if rain was falling upon them. At this the ant-eater jerked up its broad tail, and appeared to shelter itself as with an umbrella! Guapo then went towards it, and commenced driving it before him just as if it had been a sheep or goat, and in this manner he took it all the way to the house. Of course Guapo took care not to irritate it; for, when that is done, the ant-eater will either turn out of his way or stop to defend itself.

The tamanoir is not so defenceless a creature as might at first sight be imagined by considering his small toothless mouth and slow motions. His mode of defence is that which has been described, and which is quite sufficient against the tiger-cat, the ocelot, and all the smaller species of feline animals. No doubt the old female would have proved a match for the puma had she not been thrown off her guard by his seizing upon her young. It is even asserted that the great ant-bear sometimes hugs the jaguar to death; but this I believe to be a mistake, as the latter is far too powerful and active to be thus conquered. Doubtless the resemblance of the jaguar to some of the smaller spotted cats of these countries, leads to a great many misconceptions concerning the prowess of the *American tiger*.

Besides the tamanoir there are two, or perhaps three, other species of *ant-bears* in the forests of South America. These, however, are so different in habits and appearance, that they might properly be classed as a separate genus of animals. They are *tree-climbers*, which the tamanoir is not, spite of his great claws. They pursue the ants that build their nests upon the high branches, as well as the wasps and bees; and to befit them for this life, they are furnished with *naked prehensile tails*, like the opossums and monkeys. These are characteristics entirely distinct from those of the *Myrmecophaga jubata*, or *great* ant-eater.

One of these species is the *tamandua*, called by the Spano-Americans *Osso hormiguero* (ant-bear). The tamandua is much less than the tamanoir, being only three and a half feet in length, while the latter is over seven. The former is of a stouter build, with neither so long a snout in proportion, nor such claws. The claws, moreover, are made for tree-climbing, and are not so much in the way when the animal walks on the ground. It is, therefore, a more active creature, and stands better upon its limbs. Its fur is short and silky, but the tail is nearly naked, and, as already stated, highly prehensile, although it does not sleep hanging by the tail as some other animals do.

The tamandua is usually of a dull straw-colour, although it varies in this respect, so that several species have been supposed to exist. It spends most of its time upon the trees; and in addition to its ant-diet, it feeds upon wild honey, and bees too, whenever it can catch them. The female, like the tamanoir, produces only one young at a birth, and like the other species, carries it upon her back until it is able to provide for itself. The tamandua has sometimes been called
242 *tridactyla*, or the “three-toed ant-eater,” because it has only three claws upon each of its fore-feet, whereas the tamanoir is provided with four.

Another species of “ant-bear,” differing from both in size and in many of its habits, is the “little ant-eater.” This one has only two claws on each fore-foot, hence its specific name. It is a very small creature—not larger than the common grey squirrel—with a prehensile tail like the tamandua. The tail, however, is not entirely naked—only on the under side near the point. It is not so good a walker as the three-toed kind, though more active on its feet than the tamanoir. Standing upon its hind-feet, and supporting itself also by the tail—which it has already thrown around some branch—the little ant-eater uses its fore-feet as hands to carry food to its mouth. It lives among the trees, and feeds upon wasps, bees, and especially the larvæ of both; but it does not use the tongue to any great extent. It is, on this account, an essentially different sort of animal.

The little ant-eater is usually of a bright yellow colour, brownish on the back; but there are many varieties in this respect, and some are of a snowy whiteness. Its fur is soft and silky, sometimes slightly curled or matted at the points, and the tail fur is annulated, or ringed, with the prevailing colours of the body.

So much for the ant-bears of America.

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CHAPTER XXVII.

THE ANT-LION.

Ants are disagreeable insects in any country, but especially so in warm tropical climates. Their ugly appearance, their destructive habits, but, above all, the pain of their sting, or rather bite—for ants do not sting as wasps, but bite with the jaws, and then infuse poison into the wound—all these render them very unpopular creatures. A superficial thinker would suppose that such troublesome insects could be of no use, and would question the propriety of

Nature in having created them.

But when we give the subject a little attention, we find that they were not created in vain. Were it not for these busy creatures, what would become of the vast quantities of decomposing substances found in some countries? What would be done with the decaying vegetation and the dead animal matter? Why, in many places, were it not consumed by these insects, and reorganised into new forms of life, it would produce pestilence and death; and surely these are far more disagreeable things than ants.

Of ants there are many different kinds; but the greatest number of species belong to warm countries, where, indeed, they are most useful. Some of these species are so curious in their habits, that whole volumes have been written about them, and naturalists have spent a life-time in their study and observation. Their social and domestic economy is of the most singular character, more so than that of the bees; and I am afraid here to give a single trait of their lives, lest I should be led on to talk too much about them. I need only mention the wonderful nests or hills which some species build—those great cones of twenty feet in height, and so strong that
243 wild bulls run up their sides and stand upon their tops without doing them the least injury!

Others make their houses of cylindrical form, rising several feet from the surface. Others, again, prefer nesting in the trees, where they construct large cellular masses of many shapes, suspending them from the highest branches; while many species make their waxen dwellings in hollow trunks, or beneath the surface of the earth. There is not a species, however, whose habits, fully observed and described, would not strike you with astonishment. Indeed, it is difficult to believe all that is related about these insects by naturalists who have made them their study. One can hardly understand how such little creatures can be gifted with so much intelligence, or *instinct*, as some choose to call it.

Man is not the only enemy of the ants. If he were so, it is to be feared that these small insignificant creatures would soon make the earth too hot for him. So prolific are they, that if left to themselves our whole planet would, in a short period, become a gigantic ants' nest!

Nature has wisely provided against the over increase of the ant family. No living thing has a greater variety of enemies than they. In all the divisions of animated nature there are ant-destroyers—*ant-eaters*! To begin with the mammalia, man himself feeds upon them—for there are tribes of Indians in South America, the principal part of whose food consists of dried termites, which they bake into a kind of “paste!” There are quadrupeds that live exclusively on them, as the ant-bear, already described, and the *pangolins*, or scaly ant-eaters of the Eastern continent. There are birds, too, of many sorts that devour the ants; and there are even some who make them exclusively their food, as the genus *Myothera*, or “ant-catchers.” Many kinds of reptiles, both snakes and lizards, are ant-eaters; and, what is strangest of all, there are *insects* that prey upon them!

No wonder, then, with such a variety of enemies that the ants are kept within proper limits, and are not allowed to overrun the earth.

The observations just made are very similar to those that were addressed by Doña Isidora to the little Leona, one day when they were left alone. The others had gone about their usual occupation of bark-cutting, and these, of course, remained at home to take care of the house and cook the dinner. That was already hanging over a fire outside the house: for in these hot countries it is often more convenient to do the cooking out-of-doors.

Doña Isidora, busy with some sewing, was seated under the shadow of the banana-trees, and the pretty little Leona was playing near her. Leona had been abusing the ants, partly on account of their having so frightened Leon, and partly because one of the red species had bitten herself the day before; and it was for this reason that her mother had entered into such explanations regarding these creatures, with a view of exculpating them from the bitter accusations urged against them by Leona. Talking about ants very naturally led them to cast their eyes to the ground to see if any of the creatures were near; and sure enough there were several of the red ones wandering about. Just then the eyes of Doña Isidora rested upon a very different insect, and she drew the attention of her daughter to it.

It was an insect of considerable size, being full an inch in length, with an elongated oval body, and a small flat head. From the head protruded two great horny jaws, that bore some
244 resemblance to a pair of calliper compasses. Its legs were short and very unfitted for motion. Indeed they were not of much use for that purpose, as it could make very little way on them, but crawled only sidewards, or backwards, with great apparent difficulty. The creature was of a greyish or sand colour; and in the sand, where it was seated, it might not have been observed at all had not the lady's eyes been directed upon the very spot. But Doña Isidora, who was a very good entomologist, recognised it; and, knowing that it was a very curious insect, on this account called the attention of her daughter to it.

“What is it, mamma?” inquired the little Leona, bending forward to examine it.

“The *ant-lion*.”

“The ant-lion! Why, mamma, it is an insect! How then can it be called lion?”

“It is a name given it,” replied the lady, “on account of its fierce habits, which, in that respect, assimilate it to its powerful namesake,—the king of the beasts; and, indeed, this little creature

has more strength and ferocity in proportion to its size than even the lion himself.”

“But why the *ant*-lion, mamma?”

“Because it preys principally on ants. I have said there are insect ant-eaters. This is one of them.”

“But how can such a slow creature as that get hold of them? Why, the ants could crawl out of its way in a moment!”

“That is true. Nevertheless it manages to capture as many as it requires. Remember 'the race is not always to the swift.' It is by stratagem it succeeds in taking its prey—a very singular stratagem too. If you will sit back and not frighten it, I have no doubt it will soon give you an opportunity of seeing how it manages the matter.”

Leona took a seat by the side of her mother. They were both at just such a distance from the ant-lion that they could observe every movement it made; but for a considerable time it remained quiet; no doubt, because they had alarmed it. In the interval Doña Isidora imparted to her daughter some further information about its natural history.

“The ant-lion,” said she, “is not an insect in its perfect state, but only the *larva* of one. The perfect insect is a very different creature, having wings and longer legs. It is one of the *neuropterous* tribe, or those with nerved wings. The wings of this species rest against each other, forming a covering over its body, like the roof upon a house. They are most beautifully reticulated like the finest lace-work, and variegated with dark spots, that give the insect a very elegant appearance. Its habits are quite different to those which it follows when a larva, or in that state when it is the ant-lion. It flies but little during the day, and is usually found quietly sitting amongst the leaves of plants, and seems to be one of the most pacific and harmless of insects. How very different with the larva—the very reverse—See!”

Doña Isidora pointed to the ant-lion that was just then beginning to bestir itself, and both sat silent regarding it attentively.

First, then, the little creature going backwards, and working with its callipers, traced a circle on the surface of the sand. This circle was between two and three inches in diameter. Having completed it, it now commenced to clear out all the sand within the circle. To accomplish this, it
245 was seen to scrape up the sand with one of its fore-feet, and shovel a quantity of it upon its flat head; then, giving a sudden jerk of the neck, it pitched the sand several inches outside the traced circumference.

This operation it repeated so often, and so adroitly, that in a very short time a round pit began to show itself in the surface of the ground. Whenever it encountered a stone, this was raised between its callipers and pitched out beyond the ring. Sometimes stones occurred that were too large to be thrown out in this way. These it managed to get upon its back, and, then crawling cautiously up the sides of the pit, it tumbled them upon the edge and rolled them away. Had it met with a stone so large as to render this impossible, it would have left the place, and chosen another spot of ground. Fortunately this was not the case, and they had an opportunity of watching the labour to its conclusion.

For nearly an hour they sat watching it—of course not neglecting their other affairs—and, at the end of that time, the ant-lion had jerked out so much sand, that a little funnel-shaped pit was formed nearly as deep as it was wide. This was its trap, and it was now finished and ready for action.

Having made all its arrangements, it had nothing more to do than remain at the bottom of the pit, and wait patiently until some unfortunate ant should chance to come that way and fall in; and where these insects were constantly wandering over the ground, such an accident would, sooner or later, be certain to take place.

Lest the ant should peep into the pit, discover its hideous form below, and then retreat, this ant-lion had actually the cunning to bury its body in the sand, leaving only a small portion of its head to be seen.

Both Doña Isidora and the little Leona remained watching with increased interest. They were very anxious to witness the result. They were not kept long in suspense. I have already stated that many ants were crawling about. There were dozens of them “quatering” the ground in every direction in search of their own prey; and they left not an inch of it unsearched. At last one was seen to approach the trap of the ant-lion. Curiosity brings it to the very edge of that terrible pit-fall. It protrudes its head and part of its body over the brink—it is not such a terrible gulf to look into—if it should slip down, it could easily crawl out again.

Ha! it little knows the enemy that is ambushed there. It perceives something singular—an odd something—perhaps it might be something good to eat. It is half resolved to slide down and make a closer examination of this something. It is balancing on the brink, and would, no doubt, have gone down voluntarily, but that is no longer left to its own choice. The mysterious object at the bottom of the funnel suddenly springs up and shows itself—it is the ant-lion in all its hideous proportions; and before the little ant can draw itself away, the other has flung around it a shower of sand that brings it rolling down the side of the pit. Then the sharp callipers are closed upon the victim—all the moisture in his body is sucked out—and his remains, now a dry and shapeless mass, are rested for a moment upon the head of the destroyer, and then jerked far outside the

pit!

The ant-lion now dresses his trap, and, again burying himself in the sand, awaits another
246 victim.

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CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE TATOU-POYOU AND THE DEER CARCASS.

Doña Isidora and Leona had watched all the manœuvres of the ant-lion with great interest, and Leona, after the bite she had had, was not in any mood to sympathise with the ants. Indeed, she felt rather grateful to the ant-lion, ugly as he was, for killing them.

Presently Leon returned from the woods, and was shown the trap in full operation; but Leon, upon this day, was full of adventures that had occurred upon the hills to himself, Guapo, and Don Pablo. In fact, he had hastened home before the others to tell his mamma of the odd incidents to which he had been a witness.

That morning they had discovered a new *mancha* of cinchona trees. When proceeding towards them they came upon the dead carcass of a deer. It was a large species, the *Cervus antisensis*, but, as it had evidently been dead several days, it was swollen out to twice its original size, as is always the case with carcasses of animals left exposed in a warm climate. It was odd that some preying animals had not eaten it up. A clump of tall trees, that shaded it, had, no doubt, concealed it from the sharp sight of the vultures, and these birds, contrary to what has so often been alleged, can find no dead body by the smell. Neither ants nor animals that prey upon carrion had chanced to come that way, and there lay the deer intact.

So thought Don Pablo and Leon. Guapo, however, was of a different opinion, and, going up to the body, he struck it a blow with his axe. To the surprise of the others, instead of the dead sound which they expected to hear, a dry crash followed the blow, and a dark hole appeared where a piece of thin shell-like substance had fallen off. Another blow from Guapo's axe, and the whole side went in. Not a bit of carcass was there; there were bones—clean bones—and dry hard skin, but no flesh, not an atom of flesh!

“Tatou-poyou!” quietly remarked Guapo.

“What!” said Don Pablo, “an armadillo, you think?” recognising, in Guapo's words, the Indian name for one of the large species of armadillos.

“Yes,” replied Guapo. “All eaten by the tatou-poyou. See! there's his hole.”

Don Pablo and Leon bent over the sham carcass, and, sure enough, under where its body had been they could see a large hole in the ground. Outside the carcass, also, at the distance of several feet was another.

“This is where he entered,” said Guapo, pointing to the second. “He's not about here now,” continued he, “no, no,—ate all the meat, and gone long ago.”

This was evident, as the hollow skeleton was quite dry, and had evidently been empty for a good while.

Don Pablo was pleased at this incident, as it gave him an opportunity of verifying a curious habit of the armadillos. These creatures are among the finest burrowers in the world, and can bury themselves in the earth in a few seconds time; but, being badly toothed,—some of them altogether without teeth,—they can only feed upon very soft substances. Putrid flesh is with them
247 a favourite “dish,” and in order to get at the softest side of a carcass, they burrow under, and enter it from below, rarely leaving their horrid cave until they have thoroughly cleared it out.

The bark-hunters now passed on, Don Pablo making many inquiries about the armadillos, and Guapo giving replies, while Leon listened with interest. Guapo knew a good deal about these curious creatures, for he had eaten many a dozen of them in his time, and as many different kinds of them too. Their feeding upon carrion had no effect on Guapo's stomach, and, indeed, white people in South America relish them as much as Indians. The white people, however, make a distinction in the species, as they suppose some kinds to be more disposed to a vegetable diet than others.

There are some in the neighbourhood of the settlements, that *occasionally pay a visit to the graveyards or cemeteries*, and these kinds do not go down well. All of them will devour almost any sort of trash that is soft and pulpy, and they are more destructive to the ant than even the ant-eaters themselves. How so? Because, instead of making a nice little hole in the side of the ant-hill, as the tamanoirs do, and through this hole eating the ants themselves, the armadillos break down a large part of the structure and devour the *larvæ*. Now the ants love these *larvæ* more than their own lives, and when these are destroyed, they yield themselves up to despair, refuse to patch up the building, the rain gets in, and the colony is ruined and breaks up.

It does not follow, however, that the flesh of the armadillo should be “queer” because the animal itself eats queer substances. Among carnivorous creatures the very opposite is sometimes the truth; and some animals—as the tapir, for instance—that feed exclusively on sweet and succulent vegetables, produce a most bitter flesh for themselves. About this there is no standing law either way.

The flesh of the armadillo is excellent eating, not unlike young pork, and, when “roasted in the shell” (the Indian mode of cooking it), it is quite equal, if not superior, to a baked “pig,” a dish very much eaten in our own country.

Guapo did not call them armadillos—he had several Indian names for different kinds of them. “Armadillo” is the Spanish name, and signifies the “little armed one,” the diminutive of “armado” or “armed.” This name is peculiarly appropriate to these animals, as the hard bony casing which covers the whole upper parts of their bodies, bears an exceeding resemblance to the suits of plate armour worn in the days of Cortez and chivalry.

On the head there is the helmet, the back is shielded by a corslet, and even the limbs are covered with greaves. Of course, this armour is arranged differently in the different species, and there is more or less hair upon all, between the joinings of the plates.

These points were not touched upon by Guapo, but others of equal interest were. He went on to say that he knew many different kinds of them;—some not bigger than a rat, and some as large as a full-grown sheep; some that were slow in their paces, and others that could outrun a man; some that were flat, and could squat so close as hardly to be seen against the ground,—(these were *tatou-poyous*, the sort that had hollowed out the deer); and some again that were high-backed and nearly globe-shaped. Such was Guapo's account of these curious animals which are
248 found only in the warmer regions of North and South America.

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CHAPTER XXIX.

AN ARMADILLO HUNT.

Conversing in this way, the bark-hunters, at length, reached the cinchona-trees, and then all talk about armadillos was at an end. They went lustily to their work—which was of more importance—and, under Guapo's axe, several of the cinchonas soon “bit the dust.”

There was a spot of open ground just a little to one side of where these trees stood. They had noticed, on coming up, a flock of zamuros, or black vultures, out upon this ground, clustered around some object. It was the carcass of another deer. The first blow of the axe startled the birds, and they flapped a short way off. They soon returned, however, not being shy birds, but the contrary.

There was nothing in all this to create surprise, except, perhaps, the dead deer. What had been killing these animals? Not a beast of prey, for that would have devoured them, unless, indeed, it might be the puma, that often kills more than he can eat.

The thought had occurred to Don Pablo that they might have died from the poisoned arrows of an Indian. This thought somewhat disquieted him, for he knew not what kind of Indians they might be,—they might be friendly or hostile;—if the latter, not only would all his plans be frustrated, but the lives of himself and party would be in danger. Guapo could not assure him on this head; he had been so long absent from the Great Montaña that he was ignorant of the places where the tribes of these parts might now be located. These tribes often change their homes.

He knew that the Chunchos sometimes roamed so far up, and they were the most dangerous of all the Indians of the Montaña,—haters of the whites, fierce and revengeful. It was they who several times destroyed the settlements and mission stations. If Chunchos were in the woods they might look out for trouble. Guapo did not think there were any Indians near. He would have seen some traces of them before now, and he had observed none since their arrival. This assurance of the knowing Indian quite restored Don Pablo's confidence, and they talked no longer on the subject. After a while, their attention was again called to the vultures. These filthy creatures had returned to the deer, and were busily gorging themselves, when, all at once, they were seen to rise up as if affrighted. They did not fly far,—only a few feet,—and stood with outstretched necks looking towards the carrion, as if whatever had frightened them was there.

The bark-hunters could perceive nothing. It was the body of a small deer, already half eaten, and no object bigger than a man's hand could have been concealed behind it. The zamuros, however, *had* seen something strange—else they would hardly have acted as they did—and, with this conviction, the bark-hunters stopped their work to observe them.

After a while the birds seemed to take fresh courage, hopped back to the carrion, and recommenced tearing at it. In another moment they again started and flew back, but, this time, not so far as before, and then they all returned again, and, after feeding another short while, started back a third time.

This was all very mysterious, but Guapo, guessing what was the matter, solved the mystery by
249 crying out,—

"*Tatou-poyou*!"

"Where?" inquired Don Pablo.

"Yonder, master, yonder in the body of the beast."

Don Pablo looked, and, sure enough, he could see something moving; it was the head and shoulders of an armadillo. It had burrowed and come up through the body of the deer, thus meeting the vultures half-way! No doubt, it was the mysterious mode by which it had entered on the stage that had frightened them.

They soon, however, got over their affright, and returned to their repast.

The armadillo—a very large one—had, by this time, crept out into the open air, and went on eating.

For a while the zamuros took no heed of him, deeming, perhaps, that, although he had come in by the back-door, he might have as good a right upon the premises as themselves. Their pacific attitude, however, was but of short duration; something occurred to ruffle their temper—some silent affront, no doubt, for the bark-hunters heard nothing. Perhaps the *tatou* had run against the legs of one, and scraped it with the sharp edge of his corslet. Whether this was the cause or no, a scuffle commenced, and the beast in armour was attacked by all the vultures at once.

Of course he did not attack in turn, he had no means; he acted altogether on the defensive; and this he was enabled to do by simply drawing in his legs and flattening himself upon the ground. He was then proof, not only against the beaks and weak talons of a vulture, but he might have defied the royal eagle himself.

After flapping him with their wings, and pecking him with their filthy beaks, and clawing him with their talons, the zamuros saw it was all to no purpose, and desisted. If they could not damage him, however, they could prevent him from eating any more of the deer; for the moment he stretched out his neck, several vultures sprang at him afresh, and would have wounded him in the tender parts of his throat had he not quickly drawn in his head again. Seeing that his feast was at an end—at least above ground—he suddenly raised his hind-quarters, and in a brace of seconds buried himself in the earth. The vultures pecked him behind as he disappeared, but the odd manner of his exit, like that of his *entrée*, seemed to mystify them, and several of them stood for some moments in neck-stretched wonder.

This scene had scarcely ended when a pair of fresh armadillos were espied, coming from the farther edge of the opening, and, in fact, from the edge of a precipice, for the river flowed close by, and its channel was at that point shut in by cliffs. These two were large fellows, and were making speedily towards the carrion, in order to get up before it was all gone. Guapo could stand it no longer. Guapo had tasted roast armadillo, and longed for more. In an instant, therefore, axe in hand, he was off to intercept the new-comers. Don Pablo and Leon followed to see the sport and assist in the capture.

The armadillos, although not afraid of the vultures, seeing the hunters approach, turned tail and made for the precipice. Guapo took after one, while Don Pablo and Leon pursued the other. Guapo soon overhauled his one, but, before he could lay his hands upon it, it had already half
250 buried itself in the dry ground. Guapo, however, seized the tail and held on; and, although not able to drag it out, he was resolved it should get no deeper.

THE ESCAPE OF THE ARMADILLO.

The one pursued by Don Pablo had got close to the edge of the precipice, before either he or Leon could come up with it. There it stood for a moment, as if in doubt what plan to pursue. Don Pablo and Leon were congratulating themselves that they had fairly “cornered” it, for the cliff was a clear fall of fifty feet, and, of course, it could get no farther in that direction, while they
251 approached it from two sides so as to cut off its retreat. They approached it with caution, as they were now near the edge, and it would not do to move too rashly. Both were bent forward with their arms outstretched to clutch their prey; they felt confident it was already in their grasp. Judge their astonishment, then, at seeing the creature suddenly clew itself into a round ball, and roll over the cliff!

They looked below. They saw it upon the ground; they saw it open out again, apparently unharmed, for, the next moment, it scuttled off and hid itself among the rocks by the edge of the water!

They turned toward Guapo, who was still holding his one by the tail, and calling for help. Although it was but half buried, all three of them could not have dragged it forth by the tail. That member would have pulled out before the animal could have been dislodged; and such is not an unfrequent occurrence to the hunters of the armadillo. Don Pablo, however, took hold of the tail and held fast until Guapo loosened the earth with his axe, and then the creature was more easily “extracted.” A blow on its head from Guapo made all right, and it was afterwards carried safely to the house, and “roasted in the shell.”

That was a great day among the “armadillos.”

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CHAPTER XXX.

THE OCELOT.

During the whole summer, Don Pablo, Guapo, and Leon, continued bark-gathering. Every day they went out into the woods, excepting Sunday of course. That was kept as a day of rest; for, although far from civilised society, there was not the less necessity for their being Christians. God dwells in the wilderness as well as in the walled city, and worship to Him is as pleasing under the shadow of the forest leaves, as with sounding organ beneath the vaulted dome of the grand cathedral.

During week-days, while the others were abroad, Doña Isidora and the little Leona were not idle at home; yet their whole time was not taken up by the mere concerns of the *cuisine*. They had an industry of their own, and, in fact, one that promised to be almost as profitable in its results as the bark-gathering. This was neither more nor less than preparing *vanilla*.

Some days after arriving in the valley, while exploring a wood that lay at the back of the cultivated ground, Don Pablo discovered that every tree carried a creeper or parasite of a peculiar kind. It was a small creeper not unlike ivy, and was covered with flowers of a greenish-

yellow colour, mixed with white. Don Pablo at once recognised in this parasitical plant one of the many species of lianas that produce the delicious and perfumed vanilla. It was, in fact, the finest of the kind—that which, among the French, is called *leq* vanilla; and, from the fact that every tree had a number of these parasites, and no other climbing vines, Don Pablo came to the conclusion that they had been planted by the missionaries. It is thus that vanilla is usually cultivated, by being set in slips at the root of some tree which may afterwards sustain it.

In the course of the summer, these vanilla vines exhibited a different appearance. Instead of
252 flowers, long bean-like capsules made their appearance. These capsules or pods were nearly a foot in length, though not much thicker than a swan's quill. They were a little flattish, wrinkled, and of a yellow colour, and contained inside, instead of beans, a pulpy substance, surrounding a vast quantity of small seeds, like grains of sand. These seeds are the perfumed vanilla so much prized, and which often yield the enormous price of fifty dollars a pound! To preserve these, therefore, was the work of Doña Isidora and Leona; and they understood perfectly how to do it.

First, they gathered the pods before they were quite ripe. These they strung upon a thread, taking care to pass the thread through that end nearest the footstalk. The whole were next plunged for an instant into boiling water, which gave them a blanched appearance. The thread was then stretched from tree to tree, and the pods, hanging like a string of candles, were then exposed to the sun for several hours. Next day, they were lightly smeared with an oiled feather, and then wrapped in oiled cotton of the *Bombax ceiba*, to prevent the valves from opening.

When they had remained in this state for a few days, the string was taken out, and passed through the other ends, so that they should hang in an inverted position. This was to permit the discharge of a viscid liquid from the footstalk end; and in order to assist this discharge, the pods were several times lightly pressed between the fingers. They now became dry and wrinkled. They had also shrunk to less than half their original size, and changed their colour to a reddish-brown. Another delicate touch of the oil-feather, and the vanilla was ready for the market. Nothing remained but to pack them in small cases, which had already been prepared from the leaf of a species of palm-tree.

In such a way did the lady Isidora and her daughter pass their time; and before the summer was out they had added largely to the stock of wealth of our exiles.

Although these two always remained by the house, they were not without *their* adventures as well, one of which I shall describe. It occurred while they were getting in their crop of vanilla. Leona was in the porch in front, busy among the vanilla-beans. She had a large needle and a thread of palm-leaf fibre, with which she was stringing the long pods, while her mother was inside the house packing some that had been already dried.

Leona rested for a moment, and was looking over the water, when, all at once, she exclaimed,

“Maman—Maman! come out and see! oh! what a beautiful cat!”

The exclamation caused Doña Isidora to start, and with a feeling of uneasiness. The cause of her uneasiness was the word “cat.” She feared that what the innocent child had taken for a “beautiful cat” might prove to be the dreaded jaguar. She ran at once out of the door, and looked in the direction pointed out by Leona. There, sure enough, on the other side of the water, was a spotted creature, looking in the distance, very much like a cat; but Doña Isidora saw at a glance that it was a far larger animal.

Was it the jaguar? It was like one, in its colour and markings. It was of a yellowish colour, and covered all over with black spots, which gave it the semblance of the jaguar. Still Doña Isidora thought that it was not so large as these animals usually are; and this, to some extent, restored
253 her confidence. When first seen, it was close down to the water's edge, as if it had come there to drink; and Doña Isidora was in hopes that, after satisfying its thirst, it would go away again. What was her consternation to see it make a forward spring, and, plunging into the water, swim directly for the house!

Terrified, she seized Leona by the hand, and retreated inside. She shut the door, and bolted it. If it were a jaguar, what protection would that be? Such a creature could dash itself through the frail bamboo wall, or tear the door to pieces with his great claws in a moment. “If it be a jaguar,” thought she, “we are lost!”

Doña Isidora was a woman of courage. She was determined to defend the lives of herself and daughter to the last. She looked around the house for a weapon. The pistols of Don Pablo were hanging against the wall. She knew they were loaded. She took them down, and looked to the flints and priming, and then stationed herself at a place where she could see out through the interstices of the bamboos. The little Leona kept by her side, though she knew, that in a struggle with a ferocious jaguar, she could give no help.

By this time the animal had crossed the river, and she could see it spring out on the bank, and come on towards the house. In a few seconds it was close to the porch, where it halted to reconnoitre. Doña Isidora saw it very plainly, and would now have had a very good chance to fire at it; but she did not wish to begin the combat. Perhaps it might go away again, without attempting to enter the house. In order not to draw its attention, she stood perfectly quiet, having cautioned Leona to do the same.

It was not a large animal, though its aspect was fierce enough to terrify any one. Its tiger-like

eyes, and white teeth, which it showed at intervals, were anything but pleasant to look upon. Its size, however, was not so formidable; and Doña Isidora had understood the jaguar to be a large animal; but there is also a smaller species of jaguar. This might be the one.

After halting a moment, the creature turned to one side, and then proceeded at a skulking trot around the house. Now and then it stopped and looked toward the building, as if searching for some aperture by which it might get in. Doña Isidora followed it round on the inside. The walls were so open that she could mark all its movements; and, with a pistol in each hand, she was ready for the attack, determined to fire the moment it might threaten to spring against the bamboos.

On one side of the house, at a few paces distance, stood the mule. The horse had been taken to the woods, and the mule was left alone. This animal was tied to a tree, which shaded her from the sun. As soon as the fierce creature got well round the house, it came in full view of the mule, which now claimed its attention. The latter, on seeing it, had started, and sprung round upon her halter, as if badly terrified by the apparition.

Whether the beast of prey had ever before seen a mule was a question. Most likely it had not; for, half-innocently, and half as if with the intention of making an attack, it went skulking up until it was close to the heels of the latter. It could not have placed itself in a better position to be well kicked; and well kicked it was, for, just at that moment, the mule let fling with both her heels,
254 and struck it upon the ribs. A loud “thump” was heard by those within the house, and Doña Isidora, still watching through the canes, had the satisfaction to see the spotted creature take to its heels, and gallop off as if a kettle had been tied to its tail! It made no stop, not even to look back; but having reached the edge of the water, plunged in, and swam over to the opposite shore. They could see it climb out on the other side, and then, with a cowed and conquered look, it trotted off, and disappeared among the palm-trees.

Doña Isidora knew that it was gone for good; and having now no further fear went on with her work as before. She first, however, carried out a large measure of the *murumuru* nuts, and gave them to the mule, patting the creature upon the nose, and thanking her for the important service she had rendered.

When Don Pablo and the rest returned, the adventure was, of course, related; but from the description given of the animal, neither Don Pablo nor Guapo believed it could have been the jaguar. It was too small for that. Besides a jaguar would not have been cowed and driven off by a mule. He would more likely have killed the mule, and dragged its body off with him across the river, or perhaps have broken into the house, and done worse.

The animal was, no doubt, the “ocelot,” which is also spotted, or rather marked with the eye-like rosettes which distinguish the skin of the jaguar. Indeed, there are quite a number of animals of the cat genus in the forests of the Montaña; some spotted like the leopard, others striped as the tiger, and still others of uniform colour all over the body. They are, of course, all preying animals, but none of them will attack man, except the jaguar and the puma. Some of the others, when brought to bay, will fight desperately, as would the common wild cat under like circumstances; but the largest of them will leave man alone, if unmolested themselves. Not so with the jaguar, who will attack either man or beast, and put them to death, unless he be himself overpowered.

The jaguar, or, as he is sometimes called, “ounce,” and by most Spanish-Americans “tiger,” is the largest and most ferocious of all the American *Felidæ*. He stands third in rank as to these qualities—the lion and tiger of the Eastern continent taking precedence of him. Specimens of the jaguar have been seen equal in size to the Asiatic tiger; but the average size of the American animal is much less. He is strong enough, however, to drag a dead horse or ox to his den—often to a distance of a quarter of a mile—and this feat has been repeatedly observed.

The jaguar is found throughout all the tropical countries of Spanish America, and is oftener called tiger than jaguar. This is a misapplied name; for although he bears a considerable likeness to the tiger, both in shape and habits, yet the markings of his skin are quite different. The tiger is striated or striped, while the black on the jaguar is in beautiful eye-like rosettes. The leopard is more like the jaguar than any other creature; and the panther and cheetah of the Eastern continent also resemble him. The markings of the jaguar, when closely examined, differ from all of these. The spots on the animals of the old world are simple spots or black rings, while those of the American species are rings with a single spot in the middle, forming *ocellæ*, or eyes. Each, in fact, resembles a rosette.

Jaguars are not always of the same colour. Some have skins of an orange yellow, and these are
255 the most beautiful. Others are lighter-coloured; and individuals have been killed that were nearly white. But there is a “black jaguar,” which is thought to be of a different species. It is larger and fiercer than the other, and is found in the very hottest parts of the Great Montaña. Its skin is not quite jet-black, but of a deep maroon brown; and upon close inspection, the spots upon it can be seen of a pure black. This species is more dreaded by the inhabitants of those countries than the other; and it is said always to attack man wherever it may encounter him.

In the forests of South America, the jaguar reigns with undisputed sway. All the other beasts fear, and fly from him. His roar produces terror and confusion among the animated creation, and causes them to fly in every direction. It is never heard by the Indian without some feeling of fear, —and no wonder; for a year does not pass without a number of these people falling victims to the

savage ferocity of this animal.

There are those, however, among them who can deal single-handed with the jaguar,—regular “jaguar-hunters” by profession,—who do not fear to attack the fierce brute in his own haunts. They do not trust to fire-arms, but to a sharp spear. Upon this they receive his attack, transfixing the animal with unerring aim as he advances. Should they fail in their first thrust, their situation is one of peril; yet all hope is not lost. On their left arm they carry a sort of sheep-skin shield. This is held forward, and usually seized by the jaguar; and while he is busy with it, the hunter gains time for a second effort, which rarely fails to accomplish his purpose.

The jaguars are killed for many reasons. Their beautiful skins sell for several dollars; besides, in many places a price is set upon their heads, on account of their destructive habits. Thousands are destroyed every year. For all this, they do not seem to diminish in numbers. The introduction of the large mammalia into America has provided them with increased resources; and in many places, where there are herds of half-wild cattle, the number of the jaguars is said to be greater than formerly. It is difficult for one, living in a country where such fierce animals are unknown, to believe that they may have an influence over man to such an extent as to prevent his settling in a particular place; yet such is the fact. In many parts of South America, not only plantations, but whole villages, have been abandoned solely from fear of the jaguars!

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CHAPTER XXXI.

A FAMILY OF JAGUARS.

As yet none of the exiles had seen any tracks or indications of the terrible jaguar, and Don Pablo began to believe that there were none in that district of country. He was not allowed to remain much longer in this belief, for an incident occurred shortly after proving that at least one pair of these fierce animals was not far off.

It was near the end of the summer, and the cinchona-trees on the side of the river on which stood the house had been all cut down and “barked.” It became necessary, therefore, to cross the stream in search of others. Indeed, numerous “manchas” had been seen on the other side, and to
256
these the “cascarilleros” now turned their attention. They, of course, reached them by crossing the tree-bridge, and then keeping up the stream on the farther side.

For several days they had been at work in this new direction, and were getting bark in by the hundred-weight.

One day Guapo and Leon had gone by themselves—Guapo to fell the trees as usual, and Leon who was now an expert bark-peeler, to use the scalping-knife. Don Pablo had remained at home, busy with work in the great magazine, for there was much to do there in the packing and storing.

An hour or two after, Guapo was seen to return alone. He had broken the handle of his axe, and having, several spare ones at the house, he had returned to get one. Leon had remained in the woods.

Now Leon had finished his operations on such trees as Guapo had already cut down, and not finding a good seat near, had walked towards the precipice which was farther up the hill, and sat down upon one of the loose rocks at its base. Here he amused himself by watching the parrots and toucans that were fluttering through the trees over his head.

He noticed that just by his side there was a large hole or cave in the cliff. He could see to the further end of it from where he sat, but curiosity prompted him to step up to its mouth, and gave it a closer examination. On doing so, he heard a noise, not unlike the mew of a cat. It evidently came from the cave, and only increased his curiosity to look inside. He put his head to the entrance, and there, in a sort of nest, upon the bottom of the cave, he perceived two creatures, exactly like two spotted kittens, only larger. They were about half as big as full-grown cats.

“Two beauties!” said Leon to himself; “they are the kittens of some wild cat—that's plain. Now we want a cat very much at home. If these were brought up in the house, why shouldn't they do? I'll warrant they'd be tame enough. I know mamma wants a cat. I've heard her say so. I'll give her an agreeable surprise by taking this pair home.—The beauties!”

Without another word Leon climbed up, and taking hold of the two spotted animals, returned with them out of the cave. They were evidently very young creatures, yet for all that they growled, and spat, and attempted to scratch his hands; but Leon was not a boy to be frightened at trifles, and after getting one under each arm, he set off in triumph, intending to carry them direct to the house.

Guapo was in front of the house busy in new-hafting his axe. Don Pablo was at his work in the store-room. Doña Isidora and the little Leona were occupied with some affair in the porch. All were engaged one way or other. Just then a voice sounded upon their ears, causing them all to stop their work, and look abroad. It even brought Don Pablo out of the storehouse. It was the

voice of Leon, who shouted from the other side of the lake, where they all saw him standing, with a strange object under each arm.

“Hola!” cried he. “Look, mamma! See what I've got! I've brought you a couple of cats—beauties, ain't they?” And as he said this, he held the two yellow bodies out before him.

Don Pablo turned pale, and even the coppery cheek of Guapo blanched at the sight. Though at some distance, both knew at a glance what they were. Cats, indeed! *They were the cubs of the*
257 *jaguar!*

“My God!” cried Don Pablo, hoarse with affright. “My God! the boy will be lost!” and as he spoke he swept the upper edge of the lake with an anxious glance.

“Run, little master!” shouted Guapo. “Run for your life; make for the bridge—for the bridge!”

Leon seemed astonished. He knew by the words of Guapo, and the earnest gestures of the rest, that there was some danger:—but of what? Why was he to run? He could not comprehend it. He hesitated, and might have stayed longer on the spot, had not his father, seeing his indecision, shouted out to him in a loud voice—

“Run, boy! run! The jaguars are after you!”

This speech enabled Leon to comprehend his situation for the first time, and he immediately started off towards the bridge, running as fast as he was able.

Don Pablo had not seen the jaguars when he spoke, but his words were prophetic, and that prophecy was speedily verified. They had hardly been uttered when two yellow bodies, dashing out of the brushwood, appeared near the upper end of the lake. There was no mistaking what they were. Their orange flanks and ocellated sides were sufficiently characteristic. *They were jaguars!*

A few springs brought them to the edge of the water, and they were seen to take the track over which Leon had just passed. They were following by the scent—sometimes pausing—sometimes one passing the other—and their waving tails and quick energetic movements showed that they were furious and excited to the highest degree. Now they disappeared behind the palm-trunks, and the next moment their shining bodies shot out again like flashes of light.

Doña Isidora and the little Leona screamed with affright. Don Pablo shouted words of encouragement in a hoarse voice. Guapo seized his axe—which fortunately he had finished hafting—and ran towards the bridge, along the water's edge. Don Pablo followed with his pistols, which he had hastily got his hands upon.

For a short moment there was silence on both sides of the river. Guapo was opposite Leon, both running. The stream narrowed as it approached the ravine, and Leon and Guapo could see each other, and hear every word distinctly. Guapo now cried out,—

“Drop one! young master—*only one*!”

Leon heard, and, being a sharp boy, understood what was meant. Up to this moment he had not thought of parting with his “cats”—in fact, it was because he had *not* thought of it. Now, however, at the voice of Guapo, he flung one of them to the ground, without stopping to see where it fell. He ran on, and in a few seconds again heard Guapo cry out—

“*Now the other!*”

Leon let the second slip from his grasp, and kept on for the bridge.

It was well he had dropped the cubs, else he would never have reached that bridge. When the first one fell the jaguars were not twenty paces behind him. They were almost in sight, but by good fortune the weeds and underwood hid the pursued from the pursuers.

On reaching their young, the first that had been dropped, both stopped, and appeared to lick and caress it. They remained by it but a moment. One parted sooner than the other—the female it was, no doubt, in search of her second offspring. Shortly after the other started also, and both
258 were again seen springing along the trail in pursuit. A few stretches brought them to where the second cub lay, and here they again halted, caressing this one as they had done the other.

Don Pablo and Doña Isidora, who saw all this from the other side, were in hopes that having recovered their young, the jaguars might give over their chase, and carry them off. But they were mistaken in this. The American tiger is of a very different nature. Once enraged, he will seek revenge with relentless pertinacity. It so proved. After delaying a moment with the second cub. Both left it, and sprang forward upon the trail, which they knew had been taken by whoever had robbed them.

By this time Leon had gained the bridge—had crossed it—and was lifted from its nearer end by Guapo. The latter scarce spoke a word—only telling Leon to hurry towards the house. For himself he had other work to do than run. The bridge he knew would be no protection. The jaguars would cross over it like squirrels, and then——

Guapo reflected no further, but bending over the thick branch, attacked it with his axe. His design was apparent at once. He was going to cut it from the cliff!

He plied the axe with all his might. Every muscle in his body was at play. Blow succeeded blow. The branch was already creaking, when, to his horror, the foremost of the jaguars appeared in sight on the opposite side! He was not discouraged. Again fell the axe—again and again; the jaguar is upon the bank; it has sprung upon the root of the tree! It pauses a moment—another blow of the axe—the jaguar bounds upon the trunk—its claws rattle along the bark—it is midway over the chasm! Another blow—the branch crackles—there is a crash—it parts from the cliff—it is gone! Both tree and jaguar gone—down—down to the sharp rocks of the foaming torrent!

A loud yell from the Indian announced his triumph. But it was not yet complete. It was the female jaguar—the smaller one that had fallen. The male still remained—where was he? Already upon the opposite brink of the chasm!

He had dashed forward, just in time to see his mate disappearing into the gulf below. He saw, and seemed to comprehend all that had passed. His eyes glared with redoubled fury. There was vengeance in his look, and determination in his attitude.

For a moment he surveyed the wide gulf that separated him from his enemies. He seemed to measure the distance at a glance. His heart was bold with rage and despair. He had lost his companion—his faithful partner—his wife. Life was nothing now—he resolved upon revenge or death!

He was seen to run a few paces back from the edge of the chasm, and then turning suddenly, set his body for the spring.

It would have been beautiful to have beheld the play of his glistening flanks at that moment had one been out of danger; but Guapo was not, and he had no pleasure in the sight. Guapo stood upon the opposite brink, axe in hand, ready to receive him.

The Indian had not long to wait. With one desperate bound the jaguar launched his body into the air, and, like lightning, passed to the opposite bank. His fore-feet only reached it, and his

claws firmly grasped the rock. The rest of his body hung over, clutching the cliff!

In a moment he would have sprung up, and then woe to his antagonist! but he was not allowed that moment, for he had scarcely touched the rock when the Indian leaped forward and struck at his head with the axe. The blow was not well aimed, and although it stunned the jaguar, he still clung to the cliff. In setting himself for a second blow, Guapo came too near, and the next moment the great claws of the tiger were buried in his foot!

It is difficult to tell what might have been the result. It would, no doubt, have been different. Guapo would have been dragged over, and that was certain death; but at this moment a hand was protruded between Guapo's legs—the muzzle of a pistol was seen close to the head of the jaguar—a loud crack rang through the ravine, and when the smoke cleared away the jaguar was seen no more!

Guapo, with his foot badly lacerated, was drawn back from the cliff into the arms of Don Pablo.

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CHAPTER XXXII.

THE RAFT.

This was the most exciting day that had been passed since their arrival in the Montaña; and considering the result it was well that the occurrence had taken place. It had rid them of a pair of bad neighbours—there would soon have been four—that some time or other would have endangered the lives of some of the party. It was the opinion of Guapo that they need not, at least for a while, have any fear of jaguars. It was not likely there was another pair in that district; although, from the roaming disposition of this animal, fresh ones might soon make their appearance; and it was deemed best always to act as though some were already in the neighbourhood.

The cubs were disposed of. It was not deemed advisable to bring them up as “cats.” After what had occurred that was voted, even by Leon, a dangerous experiment—too dangerous to be attempted. They were still on the other side of the river, and the bridge was now gone. If left to themselves, no doubt they would have perished, as they were very young things. Perhaps some carnivorous creature—wolf, coati, eagle, or vulture—would have devoured them, or they might have been eaten up by the ants. But this was not to be their fate. Guapo swam across, and strangled them. Then tying them together, he suspended the pair over his shoulders, and brought them with him to be exhibited as a curiosity. Moreover Guapo had a design upon their skins.

It was not long after that a pleasanter pet than either of them was found, and this was a beautiful little saïmiri monkey, about the size of a squirrel, which Guapo and Leon captured one day in the woods. They heard a noise as they were passing along, and going up to the spot, saw on the branch of a low tree nearly a dozen little monkeys all rolled up together in a heap with

their tails wrapped round each other as if to keep themselves warm.

Nearly another dozen were running about, whining and apparently trying to get in among the rest. Guapo and Leon made a sudden rush upon them, and were able to capture three or four
260 before the creatures could free themselves; but only one lived, and that became a great pet and favourite. It was a beautiful little creature—a true saïmiri, or squirrel-monkey, called the “titi.” Its silky fur was of a rich olive-green colour; and its fine large eyes expressed fear or joy—now filling with tears, and now brightening again—just like those of a child.

During the summer our bark-gatherers continued their labour without interruption, and on account of the great plenty of the cinchona-trees, and their proximity to the house, they were enabled to accumulate a very large store. They worked like bees.

Although this forest life was not without its pleasures and excitements, yet it began to grow very irksome both to Don Pablo and Doña Isidora. Life in the wilderness, with its rude cares and rude enjoyments, may be very pleasant for a while to those who seek it as amateurs, or to that class who as colonists intend to make it a permanent thing. But neither Don Pablo nor his wife had ever thought of colonisation. With them their present industry was the result of accident and necessity. Their tastes and longings were very different. They longed to return to civilised life; and though the very misfortune which had driven them forth into the wilderness had also guided them to an opportunity of making a fortune, it is probable they would have passed it by, had they not known that, penniless as they were, they would have fared still worse in any city to which they might have gone.

But before the first year was out, they yearned very much to return to civilisation, and this desire was very natural. But there were other reasons that influenced them besides the mere *ennui* of the wilderness. The lives of themselves and their children were constantly in danger from jaguars, pumas, and poisonous reptiles. Even man himself might at any moment appear as their destroyer. As yet no Indian—not even a trace of one—had been seen. But this was not strange.

In the tangled and impenetrable forests of the Great Montaña two tribes of Indians may reside for years within less than a league's distance of each other, without either being aware of the other's existence! Scarcely any intercourse is carried on, or excursions made, except by the rivers—for they are the only roads—and where two of these run parallel, although they may be only at a short distance from each other, people residing on one may never think of crossing to the other.

Notwithstanding that no Indians had yet appeared to disturb them, there was no certainty that these might not arrive any day, and treat them as enemies. On this account, Don Pablo and Doña Isidora were never without a feeling of uneasiness.

After mutual deliberation, therefore, they resolved not to prolong their stay beyond the early part of spring, when they would carry out their original design of building a *balza* raft, and commit themselves to the great river, which, according to all appearance, and to Guapo's confident belief, flowed directly to the Amazon. Guapo had never either descended or ascended it himself, and on their first arrival was not so sure about its course; but after having gone down to its banks, and examined its waters, his recollections revived, and he remembered many accounts which he had heard of it from Indians of his own tribe. He had no doubt but it was the same
261 which, under the name of the “Purus,” falls into the Amazon between the mouths of the Madeira and the Coary.

Upon this stream, therefore, in a few months they would embark. But these intervening months were not spent in idleness. Although the season for bark-gathering was past, another source of industry presented itself. The bottom lands of the great river were found to be covered with a network of underwood, and among this underwood the principal plant was a well-known briar, *Smilax officinalis*. This is the creeping plant that yields the celebrated “sarsaparilla;” and Don Pablo, having made an analysis of some roots, discovered it to be the most valuable species—for it is to be remembered, that, like the cinchona, a whole genus, or rather several genera, furnish the article of commerce.

The briar which produces the sarsaparilla is a tall creeping plant, which throws out a large number of long wrinkled roots of a uniform thickness, and about the size of a goose-quill. Nothing is required further than digging and dragging these roots out of the ground, drying them a while, and then binding them in bundles with a small “sipo,” or tough forest creeper. These bundles are made up, so as to render the roots convenient for packing and transport.

During several months this branch of industry occupied Don Pablo, Guapo, and Leon; so that when the time drew nigh for their departure, what with the cinchona-bark, the sarsaparilla, and the vanilla-beans, there was not an empty inch in the large storehouse.

Guapo had not been all the time with them. For several days Gruapo was not to be seen at the house, nor anywhere around it. Where had Guapo been all this time? I will tell you; Guapo *had been to the mountains*!

Yes, Don Pablo had sent him on an important mission, which he had performed with secrecy and despatch. Don Pablo, before braving the dangers of the vast journey he had projected, had still a lingering hope that something might have happened—some change in the government of Peru—perhaps a new Viceroy—that might enable him to return with safety to his native land. To

ascertain if such had taken place, Guapo had made his journey to the mountains.

He went no farther than the Puna—no farther than the hut of his friend the vaquero—who, by a previous understanding with Guapo, had kept himself informed about political matters.

There was no hope; the same Council, the same Viceroy, the same price upon the head of Don Pablo—who, however, was believed to have escaped in an American ship, and to have taken refuge in the great Republic of the North.

With this news Guapo returned, and now the preparations for the river voyage were set about in earnest. A balza raft was built out of large trunks of the *Bombax ceiba*, which, being light wood, was the best for the purpose. Of course these trunks had been cut long ago with a view to using them in this way. A commodious cabin, or “toldo,” was constructed on the raft, built of palm and bamboos, and thatched with the broad leaves of the bussu. A light canoe was also hollowed out, as a sort of tender to the raft, and a couple of very large canoes for the purpose of giving buoyancy to it, were lashed one upon each side. The “merchandise” was carefully “stowed” and covered with “tarpaulins” of palm-leaves, and the stores laid in with every
262 providential care and calculation.

You will be wondering what was done with the horse and mule,—those creatures who had served the exiles so faithfully and so well? Were they left behind to become a prey to the jaguars and the large blood-sucking bats, that kill so many animals in these parts? No—they were not to be left to such a fate. One of them—the mule—had been already disposed of. It was a valuable beast, and partly on that account, and partly from gratitude felt towards it for the well-timed kick it had given the ocelot, it was to be spared. Guapo had taken both the mule and the horse on his mountain journey, and presented the former to his friend the vaquero.

But the horse was still on hand. What was to be done with him? Leave him behind? That would be certain death, for no horse, that was not cared for, could exist in the Montaña ten days without being eaten up by the fierce creatures that inhabit it. The bats would surely have destroyed him. Well, what was done? He could not be carried on the raft. But he was, though,—*in a way*.

Guapo was resolved that the bats should not have him, nor the jaguars neither. He was in fine condition—fat as a pig. The fruit of the murumuru had agreed with him. He was just in the condition in which an Indian thinks a horse “good for killing,” and *Guapo killed him*! Yes, Guapo killed him! It is true it was a sort of a Virginius tragedy, and Guapo had great difficulty in nerving himself for the task. But the blow-gun was at length levelled, and the *curare* did its work. Then Guapo skinned him, and cut him into strips, and dried him into “charqui,” and carried him on board the raft. That was the closing scene.

All left the house together, carrying with them the remains of their hastily-created *penates*. On reaching the end of the valley, they turned and threw back a last glance at a home that had to them been a happy one; and then, continuing their journey, they were soon upon the balza. The only living creature that accompanied them from their valley home was the pretty saïmiri, carried on the shoulder of the little Leona.

The cable of piassaba-palm was carefully taken in and coiled, the raft was pushed out, and the next moment floated lightly upon the broad bosom of the river.

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CHAPTER XXXIII.

THE GUARDIAN BROTHER.

The current of the river flowed at the rate of about four miles an hour, and at this speed they travelled. They had nothing to do but guide the raft in the middle part of the stream. This was effected by means of a large stern-oar fixed upon a pivot, and which served the purpose of a rudder. One was required to look after this oar, and Don Pablo and Guapo took turns at it. It was not a very troublesome task, except where some bend had to be got round, or some eddy was to be cleared, when both had to work at it together. At other times the balza floated straight on, without requiring the least effort on the part of the crew; and then they would all sit down and chat pleasantly, and view the changing scenery of the forest-covered shores.

Sometimes tall palms lined the banks, and sometimes great forest trees netted together by
263 thick parasites that crept from one to the other, and twined around the trunks like monster serpents. Sometimes the shores were one unbroken thicket of underwood, where it would have been almost impossible to make a landing had they wished it. At other places there were sand-bars, and even little islets with scarce any vegetation upon them; and they also passed many other islets and large islands thickly wooded. The country generally appeared to be flat, though at one or two places they saw hills that ran in to the banks of the river.

Of course the change of scenery, and the many fresh vistas continually opening before them, rendered their voyage both cheerful and interesting. The many beautiful birds too, and new kinds

of trees and animals which they saw, were a constant source of varied enjoyment, and furnished them with themes of conversation.

During the first day they made a journey of full forty miles. Having brought their balza close to the shore, and secured it to a tree, they encamped for the night. There was no opening of any extent, but for some distance the ground was clear of underwood, and the trunks of great old trees rose like columns losing themselves amidst the thick foliage overhead. A dark forest only could be seen, and, as night drew on, the horrid cries of the alouattes, or howling monkeys, mingling with the voices of other nocturnal animals, filled the woods. They had no fear of monkeys, but now and then they thought they could distinguish the cry of the jaguar, and of him they had fear enough. Indeed the jaguar possesses the power of imitating the cry of the other animals of the forest, and often uses it to draw them within reach of him.

In addition to the fire upon which they had cooked their supper, as soon as night had fairly set in, they kindled others, forming a sort of semicircle, the chord of which was the bank of the river itself. Within this semicircle the hammocks were stretched from tree to tree; and, as all were fatigued with the day's exertions, they climbed into them at an early hour, and were soon asleep. One alone sat up to keep watch. As they thought they had heard the jaguar, this was deemed best; for they knew that fire will not always frighten off that fierce animal. As the neighbourhood looked suspicious, and also as it was their first encampment, they, like all travellers at setting out, of course were more timid and cautious.

To Leon was assigned the first watch; for Leon was a courageous boy, and it was not the first time he had taken his turn in this way. He was to sit up for about two hours, and then wake Guapo, who would keep the midnight watch; after which Don Pablo's turn would come, and that would terminate in the morning at daybreak. Leon was instructed to rouse the others in case any danger might threaten the camp.

Leon from choice had seated himself by the head of the hammock in which slept the little Leona; in order, no doubt, to be nearer her, as she was the most helpless of the party, and therefore required more immediate protection. He had both the pistols by him—ready to his hand and loaded—and in case of danger he knew very well how to use them.

He had been seated for about half-an-hour, now casting his eyes up to the red and wrinkled trunks of the trees, and then gazing into the dark vistas of the surrounding forest, or at other
264 times looking out upon the glistening surface of the river. Many a strange sound fell upon his ear. Sometimes the whole forest appeared to be alive with voices—the voices of beasts and birds, reptiles, and insects—for the tree-frogs and ciendas were as noisy as the larger creatures. At other times a perfect stillness reigned, so that he could distinctly hear the tiny hum of the mosquito; and then, all at once, would fall upon his ear the melancholy wailing of the night-hawk —the "*alma perdida*," or "lost soul"—for such is the poetical and fanciful name given by the Spanish Americans to this nocturnal bird.

While thus engaged Leon began to feel very drowsy. The heavy day's work, in which he had borne part, had fatigued him as well as the others; and, in spite of the odd voices that from time to time fell upon his ear, he could have lain down upon the bare ground and slept without a feeling of fear. Snakes or scorpions, or biting lizards or spiders, would not have kept him from going to sleep at that moment. It is astonishing how the desire of sleep makes one indifferent to all these things, which at other times we so much dread. Leon did not fear them a bit, but kept himself awake from a feeling of pride and honour. He reflected that it would never do to be unfaithful to the important trust confided to him. No; that would never do. He rubbed his eyes, and rose up, and approached the bank, and dipped his hands in the water, and came back to his former place, and sat down again. Spite of all his efforts, however, he felt very heavy. Oh! when would the two hours pass that he might rouse Guapo?

"Car-r-ambo! I nev-er was so s-s-sleepy. *Vamos*! Leon! you mustn't give in!"

And striking himself a lively slap on the chest, he straightened his back, and sat upright for a while.

He was just beginning to get bowed about the shoulders again, and to nod a little, when he was startled by a short sharp exclamation uttered by the little Leona. He looked up to her hammock. He could perceive it had moved slightly, but it was at rest again, and its occupant was evidently asleep.

"Poor little sis! she is dreaming," he muttered half aloud. "Perhaps some horrid dream of jaguars or serpents. I have half a mind to awake her. But, no, she sleeps too soundly; I might disturb them all;" and with these reflections Leon remained upon his seat.

Once more his head was beginning to bob, when the voice of Leona again startled him, and he looked up as before. The hammock moved slightly, but there was no appearance of anything wrong. From where he sat he could not see well into it, but the outlines of the child's body were easily discernible through the elastic netting; and at the farther end he could just perceive one of her little feet, where it had escaped from the covering, and rested partly over the edge.

As he continued to gaze upon the delicate member, thinking whether he had not better cover it against the mosquitoes, all at once his eye was attracted by something red—a crooked red line that traversed from the toe downward along the side of the foot. It was red and glittering—it was *a stream of blood*!

His first feeling was one of horror. His next was a resolve to spring to his feet and rouse the camp, but this impulse was checked by one of greater prudence. Whatever enemy had done it, thought he, must still be about the hammock; to make a noise would, perhaps, only irritate it, and
265 cause it to inflict some still more terrible wound. He would remain quiet, until he had got his eyes upon the creature, when he could spring upon it, or fire his pistol before it could do further harm.

With these ideas, quickly conceived, he rose silently to his feet, and standing, or rather crouching forward, bent his eyes over the hammock.

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CHAPTER XXXIV.

THE VAMPIRE.

Leon's head was close to that of the sleeper, whose sweet breath he felt, and whose little bosom rose and fell in gentle undulation. He scanned the inside of the hammock from head to foot. He gazed anxiously into every fold of the cover. Not an object could he see that should not have been there—no terrible creature—no serpent—for it was this last that was in his mind. But something must have been there. What could have caused the stream of blood, that now being closer he could more plainly see trickling over the soft blue veins? Some creature must have done it!

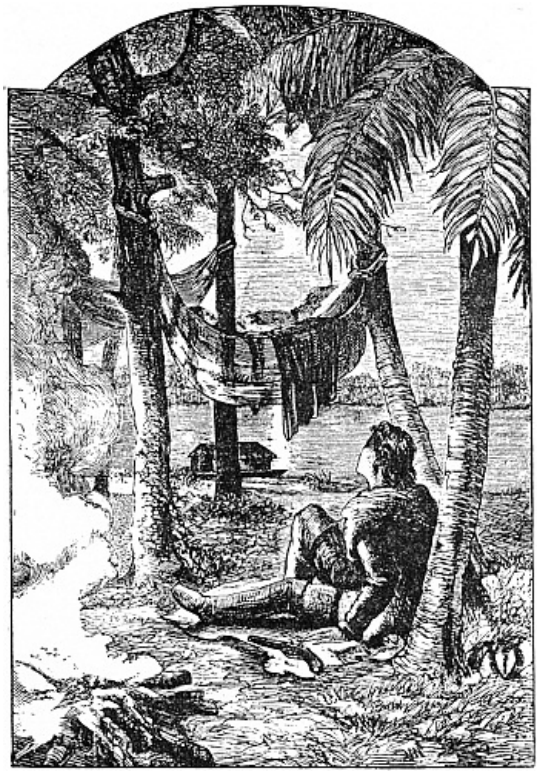
“Oh! if it be the small viper,” thought he, “or the coral snake, or the deadly macaurel! If these ——”.

His thoughts at this moment were interrupted. A light flapping of wings sounded in his ear—so light, that it appeared to be made by the soft pinions of the owl, or some nocturnal bird. It was not by the wings of a bird that that sound was produced, but by the wings of a hideous creature. Leon was conscious, from the continued flapping, that something was playing through the air, and that it occasionally approached close to his head. He gazed upward and around him, and at length he could distinguish a dark form passing between him and the light; but it glided into the darkness again, and he could see it no more.

Was it a bird? It looked like one—it might have been an owl—it was full as large as one; but yet, from the glance he had had of it, it appeared to be black or very dark, and he had never heard of owls of that colour. Moreover, it had not the look nor flight of an owl. Was it a bird at all? or whatever it was, was it the cause of the blood? This did not appear likely to Leon, who still had his thoughts bent upon the snakes.

While he was revolving these questions in his mind, he again turned and looked toward the foot of the hammock. The sight caused him a thrill of horror. There was the hideous creature, which, he had just seen, right over the bleeding foot. It was not perched, but suspended in the air on its moving wings, with its long snout protruded forward and pressed against the toe of the sleeper! Its sharp white teeth were visible in both jaws, and its small vicious eyes glistened under the light of the fires. The red hair covering its body and large membranous wings added to the hideousness of its aspect, and a more hideous creature could not have been conceived. *It was the vampire*,—the blood-sucking *phyllostoma*!

A short cry escaped from the lips of Leon. It was not a cry of pain, but the contrary. The sight of the great bat, hideous as the creature was, relieved him. He had all along been under the
266 painful impression that some venomous serpent had caused the blood to flow, and now he had no further fear on that score. He knew that there was no poison in the wound inflicted by the phyllostoma—only the loss of a little blood; and this quieted his anxieties at once. He resolved, however, to punish the intruder; and not caring to rouse the camp by firing, he stole a little closer, and aimed a blow with the butt of his pistol.



THE VAMPIRE BAT.

The blow was well aimed, and brought the bat to the ground, but its shrill screeching awoke
267 everybody, and in a few moments the camp was in complete confusion. The sight of the blood on the foot of the little Leona quite terrified Doña Isidora and the rest; but when the cause was explained, all felt reassured and thankful that the thing was no worse. The little foot was bound up in a rag; and although, for two or three days after, it was not without pain, yet no bad effects came of it.

The “blood-sucking” bats do not cause death either to man, or any other animal, by a single attack. All the blood they can draw out amounts to only a few ounces, although after their departure, the blood continues to run from the open wound. It is by repeating their attacks night after night that the strength of an animal becomes exhausted, and it dies from sheer loss of blood and consequent faintness. With animals this is far from being a rare occurrence. Hundreds of horses and cattle are killed every year in the South American pastures. These creatures suffer, perhaps, without knowing from what cause, for the phyllostoma performs its cupping operation without causing the least pain—at all events the sleeper is very rarely awakened by it.

It is easy to understand how it sucks the blood of its victim, for its snout and the leafy appendage around its mouth—from whence it derives the name “phyllostoma”—are admirably adapted to that end. But how does it make the puncture to “let” the blood? That is as yet a mystery among naturalists, as it also is among the people who are habitually its victims. Even Guapo could not explain the process. The large teeth—of which it has got quite a mouthful—seem altogether unfitted to make a hole such as is found where the “phyllostoma” has been at work. Their bite, moreover, would awake the soundest sleeper.

Besides these, it has neither fangs, nor stings, nor proboscis, that would serve the purpose. How then does its reach the blood? Many theories have been offered; some assert that it rubs the skin with its snout until its brings it to bleeding: others say that it sets the sharp point of one of its large tusks against the part, and then by plying its wings wheels round and round, as upon a pivot, until the point has penetrated—that during this operation the motion of the wings fans and cools the sleeping victim, so that no pain is felt. It may be a long while before this curious question is solved, on account of the difficulty of observing a creature whose habits are nocturnal, and most of whose deeds are “done in the dark.”

People have denied the existence of such a creature as the blood-sucking bat—even naturalists have gone so far. They can allege no better grounds for their incredulity than that the thing has an air of the fabulous and horrible about it. But this is not philosophy. Incredulity is the characteristic of the half-educated. It may be carried too far, and the fables of the vulgar have often a stratum of truth at the bottom. There is one thing that is almost intolerable, and that is the conceit of the “closet-naturalist,” who sneers at everything as untrue that seems to show the least *design* on the part of the brute creation—who denies everything that appears at all singular or fanciful, and simply because it appears so. With the truthful observations that have been made upon the curious domestic economy of such little creatures as bees, and wasps, and ants, we ought to be cautious how we reject statements about the habits of other animals, however
268 strange they may appear.

Who doubts that a mosquito will perch itself upon the skin of a human being, pierce it with its proboscis, and suck away until it is gorged with blood! Why does it appear strange that a bat should do the same?

Now your closet-naturalist will believe that the bat *does* suck the blood of cattle and horses, but denies that it will attack man! This is sheer nonsense. What difference to the vampire, whether its victim be a biped or quadruped? Is it fear of the former that would prevent it from attacking him? Perhaps it may never have seen a human being before: besides, it attacks its victim while asleep, and is rarely ever caught or punished in the act. Where these creatures are much hunted or persecuted by man, they may learn to fear him, and their original habits may become changed, but that is quite another thing.

As nature has formed them, the blood-sucking bats will make their attack indifferently, either upon man or large quadrupeds. There are a thousand proofs to be had in all the tropical regions of America. Every year animals are killed by the *phyllostoma hastatum*, not in hundreds, but in thousands. It is recorded that on one extensive cattle-farm several hundred head were killed in the short period of six months by the bats; and the vaqueros, who received a bounty upon every bat they should capture, in one year succeeded in destroying the enormous number of *seven thousand*! Indeed, “bat-hunting” is followed by some as a profession, so eager are the owners of the cattle-farms to get rid of these pests.

Many tribes of Indians and travellers suffer great annoyance from the vampire-bats. Some persons never go to sleep without covering themselves with blankets, although the heat be ever so oppressive. Any part left naked will be attacked by the “phyllostoma”, but they seem to have a preference for the tip of the great toe—perhaps because they have found that part more habitually exposed. Sometimes one sleeper is “cupped” by them, while another will not be molested; and this, I may observe, is true also of the mosquitoes. There may be some difference as to the state of the blood of two individuals, that leads to this fastidious preference. Some are far more subject to their attack than others—so much so that they require to adopt every precaution to save themselves from being bled to death. Cayenne pepper rubbed over the skin is used to keep them off, and also to cure the wound they have made; but even this sometimes proves ineffective.

Of course there are many species of bats in South America besides the vampire; in fact, there is no class of mammalia more numerous in genera and species, and no part of the world where greater numbers are found than in the tropical regions of America. Some are insect-eaters, while others live entirely on vegetable substances; but all have the same unsightly and repulsive appearance. The odour of some kinds is extremely fetid and disagreeable.

Notwithstanding this, they are eaten by many tribes of Indians, and even the French Creoles of Guiana have their “bat-soup,” which they relish highly. The proverb “*De gustibus non disputandum est*,” seems to be true for all time. The Spanish Americans have it in the phrase “*Cada uno a su gusto*;” “*Chacun à son goût*,” say the French; and on hearing these tales about “ant-paste,” and “roast monkey,” and “armidillo done in the shell,” and “bat-soup,” you, boy
269 reader, will not fail to exclaim “Every one to his liking.”

The vampire appeared to be to Guapo's liking. It was now his turn to keep watch, and as the rest of them got into their hammocks, and lay awake for a while, they saw him take up the bat, spit it upon a forked stick, and commence broiling it over the fire. Of course *he ate it*!

When morning came, and they had got up, what was their astonishment to see no less than fourteen bats lying side by side! They were dead, of course: Guapo had killed them all during his watch. They had appeared at one period of the night in alarming numbers, and Guapo had done battle manfully without awaking anybody.

Another curious tableau came under their notice shortly after. Just as they were about to embark, a singular looking tree was observed growing near the bank of the river. At first they thought the tree was covered with birds'-nests, or pieces of some kind of moss. Indeed, it looked more like a tree hung over with rags than anything else. Curiosity led them to approach it. What was their astonishment to find that the nests, moss, or rags, were neither more or less than a vast assemblage of bats suspended, and asleep! They were hanging in all possible positions; some with their heads down, some by the claws upon either wing, and some by both, while a great many had merely hooked over the branch the little horny curvature of their tails. Some hung down along the trunk, suspended by a crack in the bark, while others were far out upon the branches.

It was certainly the oddest “roost” that any of the party (Guapo, perhaps, excepted) had ever witnessed; and, after gazing at it for some time, they turned away without disturbing the sleepers, and getting on board once more, floated adown the stream swiftly and silently.

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CHAPTER XXXV.

THE MARIMONDAS.

That day they made good progress, having dropped down the river a distance of fifty miles at least. They might even have gone farther, but a good camping-place offered, and they did not like to pass it, as they might not find another so convenient. It was a muddy bank, or rather a promontory that ran out into the river, and was entirely without trees, or any other vegetation, as it was annually overflowed, and formed, in fact, part of the bed of the river. At this time the mud was quite dry and smooth, and appeared as if it had been paddled and beaten down by the feet of animals and birds. This was, in fact, the case, for the point was a favourite resting-place for the “chiguires,” or “capivaras,” on their passage to and from the water. There were tracks of tapirs, too, and peccaries, and many sorts of wading birds, that had been there while the mud was still soft.

There were no trees to which to hang their hammocks, but the ground was smooth and dry, and they could sleep well enough upon it. They would not be troubled with the bats, as these creatures keep mostly in the dark shadowy places of the forest; and snakes would not likely be found out on the bare ground. They thought they would there be safer from jaguars, too. In fact,
270 it was from these considerations that they had chosen the place for their camp. They could go to the woods for an armful or two of sticks to cook supper with, and that would suffice.

The balza was brought close in on the upper side of the promontory, so as to be out of the current; and then all landed and made their preparations for passing the night. Guapo marched off with his axe to get some firewood, and Leon accompanied him to assist in carrying it. They had not far to go—only a hundred yards or so, for up at the end of the promontory the forest began, and there were both large trees and underwood.

As they walked forward one species of trees caught their attention. They were palm-trees, but of a sort they had not yet met with. They were very tall, with a thick, globe-shaped head of pinnate, plume-like leaves. But what rendered these trees peculiar was the stem. It was slender in proportion to the height of the tree, and was thickly covered with long needle-shaped spines, not growing irregularly, but set in bands, or rings, around the tree. This new palm was the “pupunha,” or “peach-palm,” as it is called, from the resemblance which its fruits bear to peaches. It is also named “pirijao” in other parts of South America, and it belongs to the genus “*Gullielma*.”

At the tops of these trees, under the great globe of leaves, Guapo and Leon perceived the nuts. They were hanging in clusters, as grapes grow; but the fruits were as large as apricots, of an oval, triangular shape, and of a beautiful reddish yellow colour. That they were delicious eating, either roasted or boiled, Guapo well knew; and he was determined that some of them should be served at supper. But how were they to be reached? No man could climb such a tree as they grew upon! The needles would have torn the flesh from any one who should have attempted it.

Guapo knew this. He knew, moreover, that the Indians, who are very fond of the fruit of this tree,—so much so that they plant large *palmares* of it around their villages—have a way of climbing it to get at the ripe clusters. They tie cross pieces of wood from one tree to the other, and thus make a sort of step-ladder, by which they ascend to the fruit. It is true, they might easily cut down the trees, as the trunks are not very thick; but that would be killing the goose that gave the golden eggs.

Guapo, however, had no farther interest in this wild orchard than to make it serve his turn for that one night; so, laying his axe to one of the “pupunhas,” he soon levelled its majestic stem to the ground. Nothing more remained than to lop off the clusters, any one of which was as much as Leon could lift from the ground. Guapo found the wood hard enough even in its green state, but when old it becomes black, and is then so hard that it will turn the edge of an axe. There is, perhaps, no wood in all South America harder than that of the pirijao palm.

It is with the needle-like spines of this species that many tribes of Indians puncture their skins in tattooing themselves, and other uses are made by them of different parts of this noble tree. The macaws, parrots, and other fruit-eating birds, are fonder of the nuts of the pupunha than perhaps any other species; and so, too, would be the fruit-eating quadrupeds if they could get at
271 them. But the thorny trunk renders them quite inaccessible to all creatures without wings, excepting man himself. No; there is one other exception, and that is a creature closely allied to man, I mean the *monkey*.

Notwithstanding the thorny stem, which even man cannot scale without a contrivance; notwithstanding the apparently inaccessible clusters—inaccessible from their great height—there is a species of monkey that manages now and then to get a meal of them. How do these monkeys manage it? Not by climbing the stem, for the thorns are too sharp even for them. How then? Do the nuts fall to the ground and allow the monkeys to gather them? No. This is not the case. How then? We shall see!

Guapo and Leon had returned to the camp, taking with them the pupunha fruit and the firewood. A fire was kindled, the cooking-pot hung over it on a tripod, and they all sat around to wait for its boiling.

While thus seated, an unusual noise reached their ears coming from the woods. There were parrots and macaws among the palms making noise enough, and fluttering about, but it was not these. The noise that had arrested the attention of our travellers was a mixture of screaming, and chattering, and howling, and barking, as if there were fifty sorts of creatures at the making of it. The bushes, too, were heard “switching about,” and now and then a dead branch would crack, as

if snapped suddenly. To a stranger in these woods such a blending of sounds would have appeared very mysterious and inexplicable. Not so to our party. They knew it was only a troop of monkeys passing along upon one of their journeys. From their peculiar cries, Guapo knew what kind of monkeys they were.

"*Marimondas*," he said.

The marimondas are not true "howlers," although they are of the same tribe as the "howling monkeys." They belong to the genus *Ateles*, so called because they want the thumb, and are therefore *imperfect* or *unfinished* as regards the hands. But what the ateles want in hands is supplied by another member—the tail, and this they have to all perfection. It is to them a fifth hand, and apparently more useful than the other four. It assists them very materially in travelling through the tree-tops. They use it to bring objects nearer them. They use it to suspend themselves in a state of repose, and thus suspended, they sleep—nay more, thus suspended they often die! Of all the monkey tribe the ateles are those that have most prehensile power in their tails.

There are several species of them known—the coaita, the white-faced, the black cayou, the beelzebub, the chamek, the black-handed, and the marimonda. The habits of all are very similar, though the species differ in size and colour.

The marimonda is one of the largest of South American monkeys, being about three feet standing upon its hind-legs, with a tail of immense length, thick and strong near the root, and tapering to a point. On its under side, for the last foot or so from the end, there is no hair, but a callous skin, and this is the part used for holding on to the branches. The marimonda is far from being a handsome monkey. Its long, thin arms and thumbless hands give it an attenuated appearance, which is not relieved by the immense disproportioned tail. It is reddish, or of a parched coffee colour, on the upper part of the body, which becomes blanched on the throat,
272 belly, and insides of the thighs. Its colour, in fact, is somewhat of the hue of the half-blood Indian and Negro,—hence the marimonda is known in some parts of Spanish America by the name of "mono zambo," or "zambo" monkey—a "zambo" being the descendant of Indian and Negro parents.

The noise made by the marimondas which had been heard by our party seemed to proceed from the bank of the river, some distance above the promontory; but it was evidently growing louder every minute, and they judged that the monkeys were approaching.

In a few minutes they appeared in sight, passing along the upper part of a grove of trees that stood close to the water. Our travellers had now an excellent view of them, and they sat watching them with interest. Their mode of progression was extremely curious. They never came to the ground, but where the branches interlocked they ran from one to the other with the lightning speed of squirrels, or, indeed, like birds upon the wing.

Sometimes, however, the boughs stood far apart. Then the marimonda, running out as far as the branch would bear him, would wrap a few inches of his tail around it and spring off into the air. In the spring he would give himself such an impetus as would cause the branch to revolve, and his body following this circular motion, with the long thin arms thrown out in front, he would grasp the first branch that he could reach. This, of course, would land him on a new tree, and over that he would soon spring to the next.

Among the troop several females were perceived with their young. The latter were carried on the backs of the mothers, where they held on by means of their own little tails, feeling perfectly secure. Sometimes the mothers would dismount them, and cause them to swing themselves from branch to branch, going before to show them the way. This was witnessed repeatedly. In other places, where the intervening space was too wide for the females with their young to pass over, the males could be seen bending down a branch of the opposite tree, so as to bring it nearer, and assist them in crossing. All these movements were performed amidst a constant gabble of conversation, and shouting, and chattering, and the noise of branches springing back to their places.

The grove through which the troop was passing ended just by the edge of the promontory. The palm-trees succeeded, with some trees of large size that grew over them.

The marimondas at length reached the margin of the grove, and then they were all seen to stop, most of them throwing themselves, heads down, and hanging only by their tails. This is the position in which they find themselves best prepared for any immediate action; and it is into this attitude they throw themselves when suddenly alarmed. They remained so for some minutes; and from the chattering carried on among them, it was evident that they were engaged in deliberation. A loud and general scream proclaimed the result; and all of them, at one and the same instant, dropped down to the ground, and were seen crossing over among the palm-trees.

They had to pass over a piece of open ground with only some weeds upon it; but their helplessness on the ground was at once apparent. They could not place their palms on the surface, but doubled them up and walked, as it were, on the backs of their hands in the most awkward manner. Every now and again, they flung out their great tails, in hopes of grasping
273 something that would help them along; and even a large weed was a welcome support to them. On the ground they were evidently "out of their element." In fact, the *ateles* rarely descend from the trees, which are their natural *habitat*.

At length they reached the palms; and, seated in various attitudes, looked up at the tempting fruit, all the while chattering away. How were they to reach it? Not a tree that was not covered with long needles—not a bunch of the luscious fruit that was not far above the height of the tallest marimonda! How were they to get at it?—that was the question. It might have been a puzzling question to so many boys—to the monkeys it was not; for in less than a score of seconds they had settled it in their minds how the pupunhas were to be plucked.

Rising high over the palms grew a large tree, with long out-reaching branches. It was the "zamang" tree—a species of *mimosa*, and one of the most beautiful trees of South America. Its trunk rose full seventy feet without a branch; and then it spread out in every direction in numerous horizontal limbs, that forked and forked again until they became slender boughs. These branches were clad with the delicate pinnate leaves that characterise the family of the mimosas.

Many of the pupunha palms grew under the shadow of this zamang, but not the tallest ones. These were farther out. There were some, however, whose tufted crowns reached within a few yards of the lower limbs of the mimosa.

The monkeys, after a short consultation, were seen scampering up the zamang. Only some of the old and strong ones went—the rest remained watching below.

From the earnestness of their looks it was evident they felt a lively interest in the result. So, too, did the party of travellers; for these watched so closely, that the pot was in danger of boiling over.

The marimondas, having climbed the trunk, ran out upon the lowermost limbs, until they were directly above the palms. Then one or two were seen to drop off, and hang down by their tails. But, although, with their fore-arms at full stretch, they hung nearly five feet from the branch, they could not even touch the highest fronds of the palms, much less the fruit-clusters that were ten or twelve feet farther down. They made repeated attempts; suspending themselves over the very tallest palms, but all to no purpose.

One would have supposed they would have given it up as a bad job. So thought Doña Isidora, Leon, and the little Leona. Don Pablo knew better by his reading, and Guapo by his experience. When they saw that no one of them could reach the nuts, several were seen to get together on one of the branches. After a moment one dropped down head-foremost as before, and hung at his full length. Another ran down the body of this one, and taking a turn of his tail round his neck and fore-arm, skipped off and also hung head downwards. A third joined himself on to the second in a similar manner, and then a fourth. The fore-arms of the fourth rested upon the fruit-cluster of the pupunha!

The chain was now long enough for the purpose. In a few minutes the last monkey on the chain, with his teeth and hands, had separated the footstalk of the spathes, and the great clusters
274 —two of them there were—fell heavily to the bottom of the tree. The marimondas on the ground ran forward; and, in the midst of loud rejoicings began to pull off the "peaches" and devour them.

But the monkeys above did not cease their labours. There were many mouths to feed, and they wanted more nuts. Without changing their position, they, by means of their arms and legs, threw themselves into a vibrating motion, and by this means the last on the string soon seized upon another pupunha, and also detached its fruit. In this way they continued, until they had stripped every tree within their reach; when, judging they had got enough, the lowermost monkey *climbed back upon himself*, then up his companions to the branch, and in the same style was followed by the other three in succession. As soon as they were clear of one another, the whole party came down by the trunk to the ground, and joined their comrades below in the luxurious repast.

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CHAPTER XXXVI.

THE MONKEY MOTHER.

Now you will, perhaps, imagine that Guapo, having sat so quiet during all this scene, had no desire for a bit of roast-monkey to supper. In that fancy, then, you would be quite astray from the truth. Guapo had a *strong* desire to eat roast marimonda that very night; and, had he not been held back by Don Pablo, he would never have allowed the monkeys to get quietly out of the zamang—for it being an isolated tree, it would have afforded him a capital opportunity of "treeing" them. His blow-gun had been causing his fingers to itch all the time; and as soon as Don Pablo and the rest were satisfied with observing the monkeys, Guapo set out, blow-gun, in hand, followed by Leon.

There was no cover by which he might approach the group; and, therefore, no course was left for him but to run up as quickly forward as possible, and take his chance of getting a shot as they made off.

This course he pursued; but, before he was within anything like fair range, the monkeys,

uttering their shrill screams, scampered over the open ground, much faster than before, and took to the grove, from which they had approached the spot.

Guapo followed at a slashing pace, and was soon under the trees, Leon at his heels. Here they were met by a shower of sticks, pieces of bark, half-eaten “peaches,” and something that was far less pleasant to their olfactory nerves! All these came from the tops of the trees—the very tallest ones—to which the monkeys had retreated, and where they were now hidden among the llianas and leaves.

You may fancy that it is easy to pursue a troop of monkeys in a forest. But it is not easy—in most cases it is not *possible*. The tangled underwood below puts a stop to the chase at once, as the monkeys can make their way through the branches above much quicker than the hunter can through the creeping plants below.

The pursuit would have been all up with Guapo, for the marimondas had soon got some way beyond the edge of the grove; but just as he was turning to sulk back, his keen Indian eye caught sight of one that was far behind the rest—so far, indeed, that it seemed determined to seek its
275 safety rather by hiding than by flight. It had got under cover of a bunch of leaves, and there it lay quiet, uttering neither sound nor syllable. Guapo could just see a little bit of its side, and at this in an instant the gravatána was pointed. Guapo's chest and cheeks were seen to swell out to their fullest extent, and off went the arrow. A shriek followed—the monkey was hit—beyond a doubt. Guapo coolly waited the result.

A movement was visible among the leaves; the marimonda was seen to turn and double about, and pluck something from its side; and then the broken arrow came glancing among the twigs, and fell to the ground. The monkey was now perceived to be twisting and writhing upon the branches, and its wild death-screams was answered by the voices of the others farther off.

At length its body was seen more distinctly; it no longer thought of concealment; but lay out along the limb; and the next moment it dropped off. It did not fall to the ground, though. It had no design of gratifying its cruel destroyer to that extent. No; it merely dropped to the end of its tail, which, lapped over the branch, held it suspended. A few convulsive vibrations followed, and it hung down dead!

Guapo was thinking in what way he might get it down, for he knew that unless he could reach it by some means, it would hang there until the weather rotted it off, or until some preying bird or the tree-ants had eaten it. He thought of his axe—the tree was not a very thick one, and it was a soft-wood tree. It would be worth the labour of cutting it down.

He was about turning away to get the axe, when his eye was attracted by the motion of some object near the monkey.

“Another!” he muttered, and sure enough, another,—a little tiny-creature,—ran out from among the leaves, and climbed down the tail and body of the one already shot, threw it arms around her neck and whined piteously. It was the young one—Guapo had shot the mother!

The sight filled Leon with pity and grief; but Guapo knew nothing of these sentiments. He had already inserted another arrow into his gravatána, and was raising his tube to bend it, when, all at once, there was a loud rustling among the leaves above—a large marimonda that had returned from the band was seen springing out upon the branch—he was the husband and father!

He did not pause a moment. Instinct or quick perception taught him that the female was dead: his object was to save the young one.

He threw his long tail down, and grasped the little creature in its firm hold, jerked it upward; and then mounting it on his back, bore it off among the branches!

All this passed so quickly, that Guapo had not time to deliver his second arrow. Guapo saw them no more.

The Indian, however, was not to be cheated out of his supper of roasted-monkey. He walked quietly back for his axe; and bringing it up, soon felled the tree, and took the marimond mother with him to the camp.

His next affair was to skin it, which he did by stripping the pelt from the head, arms, legs, and all; so that after being skinned, the creature bore a most hideous resemblance to a child!

The process of cooking came next, and this Guapo made more tedious than it might have been,
276 as he was resolved to dress the marimonda after the manner practised by the Indians, and which by them is esteemed the best. He first built a little stage out of split laths of the pupunha palm. For this a hard wood that will resist fire a long time is necessary, and the pupunha was just the thing.

Under this stage Guapo kindled a fire of dry wood, and upon the laths he placed his monkey in a sitting posture, with its arms crossed in front, and its head resting upon them. The fire was then blown upon, until it became a bright blaze, which completely enveloped the half-upright form of the monkey. There was plenty of smoke; but this is nothing in the eyes of a South American Indian, many of whom prefer the “smoky flavour” in a roast monkey.

Guapo had now no more to do, but wait patiently until the body should be reduced to a black and charred mass, for this is the condition in which it is eaten by these strange people. When

thus cooked, the flesh becomes so dry that it will keep for months without spoiling.

The white people who live in the *monkey countries* eat roast monkey as well as the Indians. Many of them, in fact, grow very fond of it. They usually dress it, however, in a different manner. They take off the head and hands before bringing it to the table; so that the “child-like” appearance is less perceptible.

Some species of monkeys are more delicate food than others, and there are some kinds that *white* monkey-eaters will not touch.

As for the Indians, it seems with them to be “all fish,” &c.; and they devour all kinds indifferently, whether they be “howlers,” or “ateles,” or “capuchins,” or “ouistitis,” or “sajous,” or “sakis,” or whatever sort. In fact, among many Indian tribes, monkey stands in the same place that mutton does in England; and they consider it their staple article of flesh meat. Indeed, in these parts, no other animal is so common as the monkey; and, with the exception of birds and fish, they have little chance of getting any other species of animal food. The best “Southdown” would, perhaps, be as distasteful to them as monkey meat would be to you; so here again we are met by that same eternal proverb,—*Chacun à son goût*.

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CHAPTER XXXVII.

AN UNEXPECTED GUEST.

Guapo sat by the fire patiently awaiting the “doing” of the marimonda. The rest had eaten their supper, and were seated some distance apart. They were looking out upon the broad river, and watching the movements of the various birds. They could see tall scarlet flamingoes on the farther shore, and smaller birds of the ibis kind. They could see the “tiger crane,” so called from its colour and spots resembling the markings of the jaguar. Among some tall canes on the banks the “ciganos,” or gipsy birds, fluttered about with their great crest, looking like so many pheasants, but far inferior to these creatures in their flesh. In fact, the flesh of the “cigano” is so bitter and disagreeable that even *Indians will not eat it*.

Sitting upon a naked branch that projected over the water they noticed the solitary sky-blue king-fisher. Over the water swept the great harpy eagle—also a fisher like his white-headed
277 cousin of the North; and now and then flocks of muscovy ducks made the air resound with their strong broad wings. They saw also the “boat-bill,” or “crab-eater,” a curious wading bird of the heron kind, with a large bill shaped like two boats laid with their concave sides against each other. This, like the king-fisher, sat solitarily upon a projecting stump, now and then dashing into the shallow water, and scooping up the small fishes, frogs, and crustacea with its huge mandibles.

Another curious bird was observed, which had something of the appearance of the water-hen—to which kind it is also assimilated in its habits. It was the “faithful jacana” or “chuza,” as it is called in some places. There are several species of “jacana” in South America, and also some species in the tropical countries of the East. That known as the “faithful jacana” has a body about the size of a common fowl; but its legs and neck are longer, so that when standing it is a foot and a half in height. The body is of a brownish colour; and there is a crest of twelve black feathers on the nape of the neck, three inches in length. At the bend of the wings there are horny spurs, half an inch long, with which the bird can defend itself when attacked. It is, however, a pacific bird, and only uses them in defence.

The most singular character of the jacana is its long toes and claws. There are four upon each foot: three in front, and one directed backwards, and when standing these cover a base nearly as large as the body of the bird; and, indeed, upon ordinary ground they interfere with the freedom of its walking. But these spreading feet were not designed for ordinary ground. They were given it to enable it to pass lightly over the leaves of water-lilies, and other yielding surfaces, through which a narrow-footed bird would at once sink. Of course, as nature designed them for this purpose, they answer admirably, and the jacana skims along the surface of lily-covered ponds or streams without sinking. From the leaves it picks up such insects and larvæ as lodge there, and which form its principal food.

The jacana utters a singular cry when alarmed. It remains silent during the whole day, and also at night, unless disturbed by the approach of some danger, when it utters its “alarm cry.” So quick is its ear, that it can detect the least noise or rustling caused by any one approaching. For this reason some tribes of Indians have tamed the jacana, and use it as a sentinel or “watch-dog,” to apprise them of the approach of their enemies during the darkness of the night. Another use is also made of it by the Spanish-Americans. It is tamed and allowed to go about along with the domestic poultry. When these are attacked by hawks or other birds of prey, the jacana defends them with its sharp wing-spurs, and generally succeeds in beating off the enemy. It never deserts the flock, but accompanies it in all its movements, and will defend its charge with great fury and courage.

Besides the water-birds which were noticed by our travellers, many kinds were seen by them upon the shore and fluttering among the trees. There were parrots in flocks, and macaws in pairs —for these birds usually go in twos—there were trogons, and great billed toucans, and their kindred the aracaris; and there, too, were “umbrella-chatterers,” of which there is a species quite
278 white; and upon a fruit-covered tree, not far off, they saw a flock of the snow-white “bell-birds” (*Casmarhynchos*). These are about as large as blackbirds, with broad bills, from the base of which grows a fleshy tubercle that hangs down to the length of nearly three inches, like that of the turkey-cock. The name of “bell-birds” is given to them on account of the clear, bell-like ring of their note, which they utter about the middle of the day, when most other creatures of the tropical world are in silence or asleep.

Of course Don Pablo as a naturalist was interested in all those birds, and observed their habits and movements with attention. There was none of them about which he had not some strange story to tell, and in this way he was beguiling the after-supper hour. It was too early for them to go to rest—indeed it was not quite sunset; and Guapo for one had not yet had his supper, although that meal was now very near at hand. The marimonda was becoming charred and black, and would soon be ready for mastication.

Guapo sat by the fire, now and again raking up the cinders with a long pole which he held in his hand, while his eyes from time to time rested on the marimonda that was directly in front of him, *vis-à-vis*.

At length the monkey appeared to him to be “done to a turn,” and with his *macheté* in one hand, and a forked stick in the other, he was just bending forward to lift it off the fire, when, to his horror, the ground was felt to move beneath him, causing him to stagger, and almost throwing him from his feet! Before he could recover himself, the surface again heaved up, and a loud report was heard, like the explosion of some terrible engine. Then another upheaval—another report—the ground opened into a long fissure—the staging of palms, and the half-burned cinders, and the charred monkey, were flung in all directions, and Guapo himself went sprawling upon his back!

Was it an earthquake? So thought the others, who were now on their feet running about in great consternation—the females screaming loudly. So, too, thought Guapo for the moment.

Their belief in its being an earthquake, however, was of short duration. The shocks continued; the dried mud flew about in large pieces, and the burnt wood and splinters were showered in the air. The smoke of these covered the spot, and prevented a clear view; but through the smoke the terrified spectators could perceive that some large body was in motion—apparently struggling for life! In another moment it broke through the bending stratum of mud, causing a long rift, and there was displayed before their eyes the hideous form of a gigantic crocodile!

Though not quite so terrible as an earthquake, it was a fearful monster to behold. It was one of the largest, being nearly twenty feet in length, with a body thicker than that of a man. Its immense jaws were of themselves several feet long, and its huge tusks, plainly seen, gave it a most frightful appearance. Its mouth was thrown open, as though it gasped for air, and a loud bellowing proceeded from its throat that sounded like a cross between the grunting of a hog and the lowing of a bull.

The air was filled with a strong musky odour, which emanated from the body of the animal; and, what with the noise made by the crocodile itself, the screams and shouts of the party, the yelling of the various birds—for they, too, had taken up the cue—there was for some moments an utter impossibility of any voice being heard above the rest. It was, indeed, a scene of confusion.
279 Don Pablo and his companions were running to and fro—Guapo was tumbling about where he had fallen—and the great lizard was writhing and flapping his tail, so that pots, pans, half-burnt faggots, and even Guapo's monkey, were being knocked about in every direction.

Of course such a violent scene could not be of long duration. It must end one way or the other. Guapo, who soon came to himself, now that he saw what it was that had pitched him over, had already conceived a plan for terminating it. He ran for his axe, which fortunately lay out of the range of the crocodile's tail, and having laid his hands upon it, he approached in a stealthy manner with the intention of striking a blow.

He directed himself towards the root of the reptile's tail, for he knew that that was the only place where a blow of the axe would cripple it; but, just as he was getting within reach, the crocodile suddenly shifted himself round, making his tail fly like a piece of sprung whalebone. Guapo leaped hastily back—as hastily, I will make bold to say, as any Indian of his years could have done, but not quick enough to clear himself quite. He wanted about eight inches; but in this case inches were as good as miles for the crocodile's purpose, for about eight inches of the tip of his tail came “smack” across Guapo's naked shins, and sent the old Indian head over heels.

It was just an accident that Guapo's shanks were not broken like sticks of sealing-wax; and had the blow been directed with the crocodile's full force, such would have been the unhappy result. As it was they were only “scratched,” and Guapo, leaping to his feet, ran to recover his axe, for that weapon had flown several yards out of his hands at the blow.

By the time he laid hold of it, however, the *saurian*, was no longer on dry ground. His newly-opened eyes—opened, perhaps, for the first time for months—caught sight of the water close by, and crawling forward a step or two, he launched his ugly, mud-bedaubed carcass into the welcome element. The next moment he had dived, and was out of sight.

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CHAPTER XXXVIII.

THE CROCODILE AND CAPIVARAS.

Guapo was in no humour for enjoying the conversation of that evening. The crocodile had “choused” him out of his favourite supper. The monkey was literally knocked to “smithereens,” and the pieces that still adhered together were daubed all over with mud. It wasn't fit meat—even for an Indian—and Guapo had to content himself with a dried plantain and a stew of jerked horse-flesh.

Of course Don Pablo and the rest examined with curiosity the great hole in the mud that had contained the crocodile. There it had lain during months of the dry season in a state of torpidity, and would, no doubt, have remained still longer, but that it was aroused by the big fire that Guapo had built over it. The irritation produced by this had been the cause of its sudden resurrection, for the crocodiles that thus bury themselves usually come out after the beginning of the heavy rains.

It was a true long-snouted crocodile, as Don Pablo had observed in the short opportunity he
280 had had; and not an alligator—for it must be here remarked, that the true crocodile is found in many parts of Spanish America, and also in many of the West Indian Islands. For a long time it was believed that only alligators existed in America, and that the crocodiles were confined to the Eastern Continent. It is now known that at least one species of crocodile is an American animal, and several distinct species of alligators are inhabitants of the New World.

There is the alligator of the Mississippi—which is the “caïman” or “cayman” of the Spanish Americans; there is the spectacled alligator, a southern species, so called from a pair of rings around its eyes having a resemblance to spectacles; and there is a still smaller species called the “bava,” which is found in Lake Valencia, and in many South American rivers. The last kind is much hunted by the Indians, who, although they eat parts of all these creatures, are fonder of the flesh of the bava than of any of the others.

They had not intended to keep watch this night, as the naked promontory seemed to be a safe place to sleep upon; but now, after their adventure with the crocodile, they changed their minds, and they resolved to mount guard as before. The monster might easily crawl out of the water again, and, judging from the size of his mouth, it is not improbable to suppose that he might have swallowed one of the smaller individuals of the party at a single effort. Lest he might return to use either his teeth or his tail, the watch was set as on other nights—Leon taking the first turn, Guapo the second, and Don Pablo sitting it out till daybreak. The night passed through, however, without any unusual disturbance; and although an occasional plunge was heard in the water close by, no more was seen of the crocodile until morning.

I have said *until* morning—for he was seen then. Yes! indeed. That beauty was not going to let them off without giving them another peep at him—not he.

They were awake and up before day; and as the fire had been kept burning all night, they had now nothing more to do than rake up the embers, and hang on the coffee-kettle. It was not yet bright day when breakfast was already cooked, and they sat down to eat it.

While engaged in this operation, they noticed a string of flamingoes on the muddy promontory, at the end where it joined the land. They were ranged in line, like soldiers, some of them balanced on one long thin leg, as these birds do. They appeared in the grey light to be unusually tall; but when it became a little clearer, our travellers could perceive that they were not upon the ground, but standing upon an old log. This, of course, made them look taller. They were just in the very track by which Guapo and Leon had passed to get the wood the evening before. Now, neither Guapo nor Leon remembered any log. They were certain there was none there, else they would have cut it up for firewood, that was a sure thing; and it was very mysterious who could have rolled a log there during the night!

While discussing this point it became clearer; and, to the astonishment of all, what they had taken to be an old log turned out to be nothing else than their old friend the crocodile! I have said to the astonishment of all—that is not strictly correct. Guapo saw nothing to astonish him in
281 that sight. He had witnessed a similar one many a time, and so does every one who travels either on the Amazon or the Orinoco.

These flamingoes were perfectly safe, so far as the crocodile was concerned, and they knew it. As long as they kept out of the reach of his jaws and tail, he could not hurt them. Although he could bend himself to either side, so as to “kiss” the tip of his own tail, he could not reach any part of his back, exert himself as he might. This the flamingoes and other birds well know, and these creatures being fond of a place to perch upon, often avail themselves of the long serrated back of the crocodile, or the caïman.

As the day became brighter the flamingoes sat still—not appearing to be alarmed by the

movements at the camp, which was about an hundred yards distant from their perch. It was likely they had never been frightened by the hunter, for these birds in districts where they are hunted are exceedingly shy. All at once, however, as if by a given signal, the whole flock rose together, and flew off with loud screams. The crocodile, too, was seen to move, but it was not this which had scared them off. It was after they had gone that he had stirred himself; and even, had it not been so, they would not have regarded his movements, as these birds are often seen perched upon a *crawling* crocodile!

No. Something else had affrighted them, and that was a noise in the bushes beyond, which was now distinctly heard at the camp. There was a rustling of leaves and a crackling of branches, as if more than one creature made the noise. So it appeared, for the next moment nearly a score of animals dashed out of the bushes, and ran on towards the water.

These creatures were odd enough to fix the attention of the party at the camp. They were about the size of small hogs—very much of the same build—and covered with a thin sandy bristly hair, just like some hogs are. They were not "pig-headed," however. Their heads were exactly like those of the grey rabbit, and instead of hoofs they were toed and clawed. This gave them altogether a lighter appearance than hogs, and yet they did not run as fast, although when first noticed they appeared to be doing their best.

Our travellers knew them at once, for they were animals that are common upon the rivers in all the warm parts of South America. They were "*capivaras*," or "chiguires," as they are also called. These creatures are peculiar to the American continent. They are, in fact, "guinea-pigs" on a large scale, and bear the greatest resemblance to those well-known animals, except in size and colour; for the capivaras are of uniform sandy brown.

They are of the same genus as the guinea-pigs, though the systematizers have put them into a separate one, and have also made a third genus to suit another animal of very similar shape and habits. This is the "moco," which is between the guinea-pig and capivara in size, and of a greyish olive colour. All three are natives of South America, and in their wild state are found only there, though from the absurd name "guinea-pig," you may be led to think that this little creature came originally from Africa.

The three are all "rodent" animals, and the capivara is the largest "rodent" that is known. It, moreover, is amphibious, quite as much so as the tapir, and is found only near the banks of
282 rivers. It is more at home in the water than on dry land, or perhaps it has more numerous enemies on land; though, poor, persecuted creature! it is not without some in either element, as will be seen by what follows.

The drove of the capivaras counted nearly a score, and they were making for the water as fast as their legs could carry them. The crocodile lay directly across their path, but their black eyes, large and prominent, seemed to be occupied with something behind; and they had run up almost against the body of the reptile before they saw it. Uttering a sort of squeak they made a half-pause. Some sprang up and leaped over—others attempted to go round. All succeeded except one; but the crocodile, on seeing their approach—no doubt it was for this he had been in wait all the morning—had thrown himself into the form of a half-moon; and as they passed he let fly at them. His powerful tail came "flap" against the nearest, and it was pitched several yards, where, after a kick or two, it lay upon its side as dead as a herring, a door-nail, or even Julius Cæsar—take your choice.

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CHAPTER XXXIX.

FIGHT OF THE JAGUAR AND CROCODILE.

The chiguires that escaped past the crocodile, the next instant plunged into the river, and disappeared under the water. They would come to the surface for breath in ten or twelve minutes, but at such a distance off that they needed no longer fear pursuit from the same enemy.

Our travellers took no notice of them from the moment they were fairly out of the bushes. They saw that the crocodile had knocked one of them over; but the eyes of Guapo and Don Pablo were directed upon a different place—the point at which the chiguires had sallied out of the underwood. These knew that the animals had not issued forth in their natural way, as if they were going to the stream to drink, or in search of food. No—quite different. Their bristles were erect—they were excited—they were terrified—beyond a doubt they were pursued!

Who or what was their pursuer? It might be an ocelot, or the yaguarundi, or some one of the smaller cats; for many of these prey on the defenceless capivara. It *might* be one of these, thought Don Pablo and Guapo; but what if it was not? What else could it be? What else? *The jaguar!*

It *was* the jaguar? As they stood gazing with looks full of apprehension, the leaves of the

underwood were seen to move, and then a beautiful but terrible object, the spotted head of a jaguar, was thrust forth. It remained a moment as if reconnoitring, and then the whole body, bright and glistening, glided clear of the leaves, and stood boldly out in front of the underwood. Here it halted another moment—only a moment. The crocodile had turned itself, and was about closing its jaws upon the body of the chiguire, when the jaguar seeing this, uttered a loud scream, and making one bound forward, seized the dead animal almost at the same instant.

They were now face to face,—the great lizard and the great cat; and their common prey was between them. Each had a firm hold with his powerful jaws, and each appeared determined to
283 keep what he had got. The yellow eyes of the jaguar seemed to flash fire, and the black sunken orbs of the saurian glared with a lurid and deadly light. It was a terrible picture to look upon.

For some seconds both remained apparently gazing into each other's eyes, and firmly holding the prey between them. The tail of the jaguar vibrated in sudden angry jerks, while that of the crocodile lay bent into a semicircle, as if ready to be sprung at a moment's notice.

This inaction did not last long. The fury of the jaguar was evidently on the increase. He was indignant that he, the king of the American forest, should thus meet with opposition to his will; and, indeed, the crocodile was about the only creature in all the wide Montaña that dare oppose him in open fight. But he was determined to conquer even this enemy, and for that purpose he prepared himself.

Still holding on to the capivara, and watching his opportunity, he sprang suddenly forward, throwing one of his great paws far in advance. His object was to *claw the eye* of his adversary; for he well knew that the latter was vulnerable neither upon its long snout, nor its gaunt jaws, nor even upon the tough scaly skin of its throat. Its eyes alone could be injured, and these were the objects of the jaguar's attack.

The thrust was a failure. The crocodile had anticipated such a manœuvre, and suddenly raising himself on his fore-legs, threw up one of his great scaly hands and warded off the blow. The jaguar fearing to be clutched between the strong fore-arms of the saurian, drew back to his former position.

This manœuvre, and its counter-manœuvre, were repeated several times, and although each time the struggle lasted a little longer than before, and there was a good deal of lashing of tails and tearing of teeth, and scratching of claws, still neither of the combatants seemed to gain any great advantage. Both were now at the height of their fury, and a third enemy approaching the spot would not have been heeded by either.

From the first the head of the crocodile had been turned to the water, from which he was not distant over ten feet. He had, in fact, been carrying his prey towards it when he was interrupted by the attack of the jaguar; and now at every fresh opportunity he was pushing on, bit by bit, in that direction. He knew that in his own proper element he would be more than a match for his spotted assailant, and no doubt he might have escaped from the contest by surrendering his prey. Had he been a smaller crocodile he would have been only too glad to have done so; but trusting to his size and strength, and perhaps not a little to the justice of his cause, he was determined not to go without taking the capivara along with him.

The jaguar, on the other hand, was just as determined he should not. He, too, had some rights. The capivara would not have been killed so easily, had he not frightened it from behind; besides, the crocodile was out of his element. He was poaching on the domain of the forest monarch.

Bit by bit, the crocodile was gaining ground—at each fresh pause in the struggle he was forging forward, pushing the chiguire before him, and of course causing his antagonist to make ground backwards.

284 The jaguar at length felt his hind-feet in the water; and this seemed to act upon him like a shock of electricity. All at once he let go his hold of the capivara, ran a few feet forward, and then flattening his body along the ground, prepared himself for a mighty spring. Before a second had passed, he launched his body high into the air, and descended upon the back of the crocodile just over his fore-shoulders! He did not settle there, but ran nimbly down the back of the saurian towards its hinder part, and its claws could be heard rattling against its scaly skin.

In a moment more he was seen close-squatted along the crocodile's body, and with his teeth tearing fiercely at the root of its tail. He knew that after the eyes this was the most vulnerable part of his antagonist, and if he had been allowed but a few minutes' time, he would soon have disabled the crocodile; for to have seriously wounded the root of his tail, would have been to have destroyed his essential weapon of offence.

The jaguar would have succeeded had the encounter occurred only a dozen yards farther from the water. But the crocodile was close to the river's edge, and perceiving the advantage against him, and that there was no hope of dismounting his adversary, he dropped the capivara, and crawling forward, plunged into the water. When fairly launched, he shot out from the shore like an arrow, carrying the jaguar along, and the next moment he had dived to the depth of the stream. The water was lashed into foam by the blows of his feet and tail; but in the midst of the froth, the yellow body of the jaguar was seen rising to the surface, and after turning once or twice, as if searching for his hated enemy, the creature headed for the bank and climbed out. He stood for a moment looking back into the stream. He appeared less cowed than angry and disappointed. He seemed to vow a future revenge; and then seizing the half-torn carcass of the

capivara, he threw it lightly over his shoulder and trotted off into the thicket.

Our travellers had not watched this scene either closely or continuously. They had been too busy all the time. From its commencement they had been doing all in their power to get away from the spot; for they dreaded lest the jaguar might either first overpower the crocodile and then attack them, or being beaten off by the latter, might take it into his head to revenge himself by killing whatever he could. With these apprehensions, therefore, they had hastily carried everything aboard, and drawing in their cable, pushed the balza from the shore. When the fight came to an end, they had got fairly into the current, and just as the jaguar disappeared, the raft was gliding swiftly down the broad and rippling stream.

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CHAPTER XL.

ADVENTURE WITH AN ANACONDA.

For several days they voyaged down-stream, without any occurrence of particular interest. Once or twice they saw Indians upon the shore; but these, instead of putting off in their canoes, seemed frightened at so large a craft, and remained by their “maloccas,” or great village-houses, in each of which several families live together. Not caring to have any dealings with them, our travellers were only too glad to get past without molestation; and, therefore, when
285 they passed any place where they thought they observed the signs of Indians on the bank, they kept on for hours after, without stopping.

A curious incident occurred one evening as they were bringing the balza to her moorings, which compelled them to drop a little farther down-stream, and, in fact, almost obliged them to float all night, which would have been a dangerous matter, as the current at the place happened to be sharp and rapid.

They had been on the look-out for some time for a good camping-place, as it was their usual hour to stop. No opening, however, appeared for several miles. The banks on both sides were thickly-wooded to the river's edge, and the branches of the trees even drooped into the water. At length they came in sight of a natural raft that had been formed by driftwood in a bend of the stream; and as the logs lay thickly together, and even piled upon each other, it appeared an excellent place to encamp on. It was, at all events, better than to attempt to penetrate the thick jungles which met them everywhere else; and so the balza was directed towards the raft, and soon floated alongside it.

They had already got ashore on the raft, which was dry and firm, and would have served their purpose well enough; when, all at once, Guapo was heard uttering one of those exclamations, which showed that all was not right. The rest looked towards him for an explanation. He was standing by the edge of the floating timber, just where the balza touched it, with his arms stretched out in an attitude that betokened trouble. They all ran up. They saw what was the matter at a glance. Thousands of red ants were climbing from the raft to the balza! Thousands,—nay, it would be nearer the truth to say millions!

At one glance Don Pablo saw that it would be a terrible calamity, should these creatures gain a lodgment on the balza. Not only were they the dreaded stinging ants, but in a short time nothing on board would be left. In a few hours they would have eaten all his stores,—his bark, his vanilla, and his roots. Already quite a number had got upon the canoe, and were crossing it toward the body of the balza.

Without saying another word, he ordered all to get on board as quickly as possible, each taking some utensil that had already been carried on shore. He and Guapo flew to the poles; and, having hastily unfastened and drawn in the cable, they pushed the balza out into the stream. Then while Guapo managed the great oar, Don Pablo, assisted by Leon and by Doña Isidora, went to work with scoops and pails, dashing water upon the ants; until every one of them had disappeared, drowned in the canoe or washed off into the river. Fortunate for them, they had observed this strange enemy in time. Had they not done so—in other words, had they gone to sleep, leaving the balza where it was during the night—they would have awakened in the morning to find their stores completely destroyed, their labour of a year brought to nothing in the space of a single night. This is no uncommon occurrence to the merchant or the colonist of tropical America.

They had made a narrow escape, but a fortunate one. They were not without their troubles, however. No open ground could be found for miles below; and, as it was growing dark, they approached the thickly-wooded bank; and, after a good deal of scratching among the branches, at
286 length succeeded in making the cable fast to a tree. The balza then swung round, and floated at the end of the cable, half of it being buried under the long hanging branches.

They spent their night on board, for it was no use attempting to to get on shore through the underwood; and even if they had, they could not have encamped very comfortably in a thicket. On the other hand, the balza did not afford the best accommodation for sleeping. The little “toldo,” or cabin, was not large enough to swing a hammock in. It would only contain a few persons

seated close together; and it had been built more for the purpose of keeping the sun off during the hot hours of the day than for sleeping in. The rest of the balza was occupied with the freight; and this was so arranged with sloping sides, thatched with the bussu-leaves, that there was no level place where one could repose upon it. The night, therefore, was passed without very much sleep having been obtained by any one of the party. Of course, the moment the first streaks of day began to appear along the Eastern sky, they were all awake and ready to leave their disagreeable anchorage.

As they were making preparations to untie the cable, they noticed that just below where the balza lay, a horizontal limb stretched far out over the river. It was the lowermost limb of a large zamang-tree, that stood on the bank close to the edge of the water. It was not near the surface, but a good many feet above. Still it was not certain that it was high enough for the roof of the toldo to clear it. That was an important question; for although the current was not very rapid just there, it was sufficiently so to carry the balza under this branch before they could push it out into the stream. Once the cable was let go, they must inevitably pass under the limb of the zamang; and if that caught the toldo, it would sweep off the frail roof like so much spider's-web. This would be a serious damage; and one to be avoided, if possible.

Don Pablo and Guapo went to the end of the balza nearest the branch, and stood for some time surveying it. It was about eight or ten yards distant; but in the gray dawn they could not judge correctly of its height, and they waited till it grew a little clearer. At length they came to the conclusion that the branch was high enough. The long pendulous leaves—characteristic of this great *mimosa* and the drooping branchlets hung down much below the main shaft; but these, even if they touched the roof, would do no injury. It was, therefore, determined to let go the cable.

It was now clear day, for they had been delayed a good while; but at length all was ready, and Guapo untied the cable, and drew the end on board. The balza began to move; slowly at first, for the current under the bushes was very slight.

All at once the attention of the voyagers was called to the strange conduct of the pet monkey. That little creature was running to and fro, first upon the roof of the toldo, then down again, all the while uttering the most piercing shrieks as if something was biting off its tail! It was observed to look forward and upward toward the branch of the zamang, as if the object it dreaded was in that quarter. The eyes of all were suddenly bent in the same direction. What was their horror on beholding, stretched along the branch, the hideous body of an enormous serpent! Only part of it could be seen; the hinder half and the tail were hidden among the bromelias and vines that in
287 huge masses clustered around the trunk of the zamang, and the head was among the leaflets of the mimosa; but what they saw was enough to convince them that it was a snake of the largest size—the great "*water boa*"—the *anaconda*!

ADVENTURE WITH AN ANACONDA.

That part of the body in sight was full as thick as a man's thigh, and covered with black spots or blotches upon a ground of dingy yellow. It was seen to glisten as the animal moved, for the latter was in motion, crawling along the branch *outward*! The next moment its head appeared
288 under the pendulous leaves; and its long forking tongue, protruding several inches from its mouth, seemed to feel the air in front of it. This tongue kept playing backwards and forwards, and its viscid covering glittered under the sunbeam, adding to the hideous appearance of the monster.

To escape from passing within its reach would be impossible. The balza was gliding directly under it! It could launch itself aboard at will. It could seize upon any one of the party without coming from the branch. It could coil its body around them, and crush them with the constricting power of its muscles. It could do all this; for it had crushed before now the tapir, the roebuck, perhaps even the jaguar himself.

All on board the boat knew its dangerous power too well; and, of course, terror was visible in every countenance.

Don Pablo seized the axe, and Guapo laid hold of his *macheté*. Doña Isidora, Leon, and the little Leona, were standing—fortunately they were—by the door of the toldo; and, in obedience to the cries and hurried gestures of Don Pablo and the Indian, they rushed in and flung themselves down. They had scarcely disappeared inside, when the forward part of the balza upon which stood Don Pablo and Guapo, came close to the branch, and the head of the serpent was on a level with their own. Both aimed their blows almost at the same instant; but their footing was unsteady, the boa drew back at the moment, and both missed their aim. The next moment the current had carried them out of reach, and they had no opportunity of striking a second blow.

The moment they had passed the hideous head again dropped down, and hung directly over, as if waiting. It was a moment of intense anxiety to Don Pablo. His wife and children! Would it select one as its victim, and leave the others? or——

He had but little time for reflection. Already the head of the snake was within three feet of the toldo door. Its eyes were glaring—it was about to dart down.

“Oh, God, have mercy!” exclaimed Don Pablo, falling upon his knees. “Oh, God!”

At that moment a loud scream was heard. It came from the toldo; and, at the same instant, the saïmiri was seen leaping out from the door. Along with the rest, it had taken shelter within; but just as the head of the snake came in sight, a fresh panic seemed to seize upon it; and, as if under the influence of fascination, it leaped screaming in the direction of the terrible object. It was met half way. The wide jaws closed upon it, its shrieks were stifled, and the next moment its silken body, along with the head of the anaconda, disappeared among the leaves of the mimosa. Another moment passed, and the balza swept clear of the branch, and floated triumphantly into the open water.

Don Pablo sprang to his feet, ran into the toldo, and, after embracing his wife and children, knelt down and offered thanks to God for their almost miraculous deliverance.

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CHAPTER XLI.

A BATCH OF CURIOUS TREES.

289 Of course the escape from danger so imminent, after the first moments were over, produced a sort of reaction in the feelings of all and they were now rather joyous than otherwise. But with all there was a mixture of regret when they thought of the fate of little “titi.” It had been their only pet, and had grown to be such a favourite that its loss was now mourned by every one, and its absence caused them to feel as though one of the company had been left behind. Several times during that day poor “titi” was the subject of conversation; indeed, they could hardly talk about anything else. Little Leona was quite inconsolable; for the pretty creature had loved Leona, and used to perch on her shoulder by the hour, and draw her silken ringlets through its tiny hand, and place its dainty little nose against the rich velvet of her cheek, and play off all sorts of antics with her ears. Many an hour did “titi” and Leona spend together. No wonder that the creature was missed.

During the whole of that day they travelled through a country covered with dense forest. The river was a full half-mile wide, but sometimes there were islands, and then the current became narrowed on each side, so that in passing, the balza almost touched the trees on one side or the other. They saw many kinds of trees growing together, and rarely a large tract covered with any one species of timber, for this, as already remarked, is a peculiarity of the Amazon forest.

Many new and curious trees were noticed, of which Don Pablo gave short botanical descriptions to the others, partly to instruct them, and partly to while away the hours. Guapo, at the rudder, listened to these learned lectures, and sometimes added some information of his own about the properties of the trees, and the uses to which they were put by the Indians. This is what is termed the popular part of the science of botany, and, perhaps, it is more important than the mere classification of genera and species, which is usually all the information that you get from the learned and systematic botanists.

Among the trees passed to-day was one called the “volador.” This is a large forest tree, with lobed leaves, of a heart-shape. But it is the seeds which are curious, and which give to the tree the odd name of “volador,” or “flier.” These seeds have each a pair of membranaceous and striated wings, which, when the seeds fall, are turned to meet the air at an angle of 45°; and thus

a rotatory motion is produced, and the falling seeds turn round and round like little fly-wheels. It is altogether a curious sight when a large volador is shaken in calm weather, to see the hundreds of seeds whirling and wheeling towards the ground, which they take a considerable time in reaching. The volador is not confined to South America, I have seen it in Mexico, and other parts of North America.

Another singular tree noticed was a tree of the barberry family known among the Spanish-Americans as *barba de tigre*, or “tiger's beard.” This name it derives from the fact of its trunk—which is very large and high—being thickly set all over with sharp, branching thorns, that are fancied to resemble the whiskers of the jaguar, or South American “tiger.”

A third remarkable tree (or bush) observed was the *Bixa orellana*, which yields the well-known *arnatto* dye. This bush is ten or twelve feet in height, and its seeds grow in a burr-like pericarp. These seeds are covered with a reddish pulp, which produces the dye. The mode of making it is simple. The Indian women throw the seeds into a vessel of hot water, and stir them violently for
290 about an hour, until they have taken off the pulp. The water is then poured off, and the deposit, separated from the seeds, is mixed with oil of turtle-eggs, or crocodile fat, and kneaded into cakes of three or four ounces weight.

It is then “anoto,” sometimes written “arnatto,” sometimes “arnotto,” sometimes “onoto,” and sometimes “anato.” The first is the proper spelling. In Brazil it is called “urucu,” whence the French name “rocou;” and the Peruvians have still another designation for it, “achoté.” Of course each tribe of Indians calls it by a separate name. The botanic name, *Bixa*, is the ancient name by which it was known to the Indians of Hayti, for it is found in most parts of tropical America growing wild, although it is also cultivated. It is an article in great demand among all the Indians of South America, who use it for painting their bodies, and dyeing the cotton cloth of which they make their garments.

But these people are very skilful in drawing pigments from plants and trees of many kinds; in fact, their practical chemistry, so far as it relates to dyes and poisons, is quite surprising, and from time to time Guapo pointed out trees that were used by them, for such purposes.

One was a climbing plant, whose tendrils reached to the tops of the highest trees. It had beautiful violet-coloured flowers, an inch long, and Don Pablo saw that it was a species of *bignonia*. Guapo called it “chica.” When in fruit it carries a pod two feet in length, full of winged seeds. But Guapo said it was not from the seeds that the dye was obtained, but from the leaves, which turn red when macerated in water. The colouring matter comes out of the leaves in the form of a light powder, and is then shaped into cakes, which sell among the Indians for the value of a dollar each. This colour has a tinge of lake in it, and is prized even more highly than the anoto. Indeed, red dyes among all savage nations seem to hold a higher value than those of any other colour.

Another dye-tree was the “huitoc.” This one is a slender tree, about twenty feet high, with broad leaves shooting out from the stem, and nuts growing at their bases, after the manner of the bread-fruit. These nuts resemble black walnuts, and are of a russet colour outside; but the pulp inside, which produces the huitoc, is of a dark blue, or purple tint.

The “wild indigo tree,” was also seen growing in the woods, with a leaf narrow at the base, and broad at the extremity. With these and many other dyes the Indians of the Montaña paint their bodies in fantastic modes. So much are they addicted to these customs, that, among the Indians who labour at the missions, some have been known to work nearly a month to procure paint enough to give their body a single coat, and the missionaries have made a merchandise of this gigantic folly. But the paint is not always to be looked upon in the light of a mere folly, or vanity. Sometimes it is used to keep off the “zancudos,” or mosquitoes, so numerous and annoying in these regions.

Another singular tree was observed, which Guapo called the “marima,” or “shirt-tree.” The use of this he explained. The tree stands fifty or sixty feet high, with a diameter of from two to three. When they find them of this size, the Indians cut them down, and then separate the trunk into pieces of about three feet long. From these pieces they strip the bark, but without making any longitudinal incision, so that the piece of bark when taken off is a hollow cylinder. It is thin and
291 fibrous, of a red colour, and looks like a piece of coarsely-woven sack-cloth. With this the shirt is made, simply by cutting two holes in the sides to admit the arms, and the body being passed into it, it is worn in time of rain. Hence the saying of the old missionaries, that in the “forests of America garments were found ready-made on the trees.”

Many other trees were noticed valuable for their fruits, or leaves, or bark, or roots, or their wood. There was the well-known “seringa,” or India-rubber tree; the great courbaril, the “dragon's-blood” tree, not that celebrated tree of the East but one of a different genus from whose white bark flows a red blood-like juice.

They saw, also, a species of cinnamon-tree though not the cinnamon of commerce; the large tree that bears the Brazilian nut-meg (the Puxiri); and that one, also, a large forest tree, that bears the nuts known as “Tonka beans,” and which are used in the flavouring of snuff.

But of all the trees which our travellers saw on that day, none made such a impression upon them as the “juvia,” or Brazil-nut tree. This tree is not one with a thick trunk; in fact, the largest ones are not three feet in diameter, but it rises to a height of 120 feet. Its trunk is branchless for more than half that height, and the branches then spread out and droop, like the fronds of the

palm. They are naked near their bases, but loaded towards the top with tufts of silvery green leaves, each two feet in length. The tree does not blossom until its fifteenth year, and then it bears violet-coloured flowers; although there is another species, the “sapucaya,” which has yellow ones. But it is neither the trunk, nor the branches, nor the leaves, nor yet the flowers of this tree, that render it such an object of curiosity. It is the great woody and spherical pericarps that contain the nuts or fruits that are wonderful. These are often as large as the head of a child, and as hard as the shell of the cocoa-nut! Inside is found a large number—twenty or more—of those triangular-shaped nuts which you may buy at any Italian warehouse under the name of “Brazil-nuts.”

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CHAPTER XLII.

THE FOREST FESTIVAL.

In consequence of their having rested but poorly on the preceding night, it was determined that they should land at an early hour; and this they did, choosing an open place on the shore. It was a very pretty spot, and they could see that the woods in the background were comparatively open, as though there were some meadows or prairies between.

These openings, however, had been caused by fire. There had been a growth of cane. It had been burned off and as yet was not grown up again, though the young reeds were making their appearance like a field of green wheat. Some places, and especially near the river, the ground was still bare. This change in the landscape was quite agreeable to our travellers; so much so, that they resolved to exercise their limbs by taking a short stroll; and, having finished their late dinner they set out. They all went together, leaving the balza and camp to take care of themselves.

After walking a few hundred yards their ears were assailed by a confused noise, as if all the
292 animals in the forest had met and were holding a *conversazione*. Some low bushes prevented them from seeing what it meant, but on pushing their way through, they saw whence and from what sort of creatures the noise proceeded.

Standing out in the open ground was a large and tall juvia-tree. Its spreading branches were loaded with great globes as big as human heads—each one, of course, full of delicious nuts. These were now ripe, and some of them had already fallen to the ground.

Upon the ground an odd scene presented itself to the eyes of our travellers. Between birds and animals assembled there, there were not less than a dozen kinds, all as busy as they could be.

First, then, there were animals of the rodent kind. These were pacas, agoutis and capivaras. The pacas were creatures a little larger than hares, and not unlike them, except that their ears were shorter. They were whitish on the under parts, but above were of a dark brown colour, with rows of white spots along each side. They had whiskers like the cat, consisting of long white bristles; and their tails, like those of hares, were scarcely visible. The agoutis bore a considerable resemblance to the pacas. Like these, they are also rodent animals, but less in size; and instead of being spotted, they are of a nearly uniform dark colour mixed with reddish brown.

Both pacas and agoutis are found in most parts of tropical America. There are several species of each, and with the chinchillas and viscachas already described, they occupy the place in those regions that the hares and rabbits do in northern climates. Indeed, European settlers usually know them by the names of hare or rabbit, and hunt them in the same way. The flesh of most species is very good eating, and they are therefore much sought after both by the natives and colonists.

Along with these, near the juvia-tree, were several capivaras, already noticed. But still more singular creatures on the ground were the monkeys. Of these there were different kinds; but that which first drew the attention of our party was the great Capuchin monkey. This creature is not less than three feet in height and of a reddish maroon colour. Its body is entirely different from the “ateles” monkeys, being stouter and covered with a fuller coat of hair; and its tail is large and bushy, without any prehensile power. It is, in fact, less of a tree monkey than the *ateles*, although it also lives among the branches. The most striking peculiarities of the Capuchin are its head and face. In these it bears a stronger resemblance to the human being than any other monkey in America.

The top of its head is covered with a crop of coarse hair, that lies somewhat after the fashion of human hair; but, what most contributes to the human expression is a large full beard and whiskers reaching down to the breast, and arranged exactly after the fashion of the huge beards worn by Orientals and some Frenchmen. There were only two of these Capuchins on the ground —a male and female, for this species does not associate in bands. The female one was easily distinguished by her smaller size, and her beard was considerably less than that of the male. The beards seemed to be objects of special attention with both—especially the male, as every now and then he was observed to stroke it down with his hand, just as a dandy may be seen doing

with his moustache or his well-brushed whiskers.

Another peculiar habit of the Capuchins was noticed. There was a little pool of water close by.
293 Every now and then they ran to this pool and took a drink from it. But in drinking they did not apply their lips to the pool or lap like a dog. No; they lifted the water in the hollow of their hands —hence their specific name of *chiropotes*, or “hand-drinking monkeys.” They raised the water to their lips with great care, taking pains not to let a drop of it fall on their precious beards. From this habit of going so often to quench their thirst, the Capuchin monkeys have in some parts got the name of “hard-drinking monkeys.”

Apart from these was a troop of monkeys of a very different species. They were nearly of the same size, but more of the shape of the “ateles;” and their long tails, naked underneath and curling downward near the points, showed that, like them too, they possessed prehensile power in that member. Such was the fact, for they were “howling monkeys;” and some species of these can use the tail almost as adroitly as the “ateles” themselves. Those that our travellers saw were the “guaribas,” nearly black in colour, but with their hands covered with yellow hair, whence their name among the naturalists of “yellow-handed howler.”

They were seated in a ring when first observed, and one—apparently the chief of the band—was haranguing the rest; but so rapid were his articulations, and so changeable the tones of his voice, that any one would have thought the whole party were chattering together. This, in effect, did occur at intervals, and then you might have heard them to the distance of more than a mile. These creatures are enabled to produce this vast volume of voice in consequence of a hollow bony structure at the root of the tongue, which acts as a drum, and which gives them the appearance of a swelling, or goitre, in the throat. This is common to all the howling monkeys as well as the guaribas.

Besides the howlers there were other species—there were tamarins, and ouistitis, and the black coaitas of the genus “ateles,” all assembled around the juvia-tree. There were parrots, and macaws, and other nut-eating birds. High above in the air soared the great eagle watching his opportunity to swoop down on the pacas or agoutis, his natural prey. It was altogether a singular assemblage of wild animals—a zoological garden of the wilderness.

Our party, concealed by bushes, looked on for some time. They noticed that not one of all the living things was *under* the tree. On the contrary, they formed—monkeys, cavies, parrots, and all —a sort of ring around it, but at such a distance that none of the branches were above them! Why was this? Guapo knew the reason well, and before leaving their place of observation the others had an explanation of it.

While they stood gazing, one of the great globes was seen to fall from the tree above. The loud report as it struck the earth could have been heard a long way off. It caused the whole assemblage of living creatures to start. The macaws flapped their wings, the monkeys ran outward and then stopped, and a simultaneous cry from the voices of both birds and beasts echoed on all sides; and then there was a general chattering and screaming, as though the fall of the great pericarp had given pleasure to all parties.

It was very evident from this circumstance why both beasts and birds kept so far out from the tree. One of these fruits coming down like a nine-pound shot would have crushed any of them to
294 atoms. Indeed, so heavy are they, that one of them falling from a height of fifty or sixty feet will dash out the brains of a man; and the Indians who gather them go under the trees with great wooden helmets that cover both the head and shoulders! It would be no boy's play to “go a nutting” in a wood of juvia-trees.

But how did the monkeys and birds get at the nuts? Neither of these could break open the outer shell. This is full half an inch thick, and so hard that it can scarcely be cut with a saw. How could either monkeys or birds open it?—that was the question put to Guapo.

“Watch them,” said Guapo.

All kept their eyes bent attentively on what was going on; and to their astonishment they observed that neither the monkeys nor the birds had anything to do with the opening of the shells. That was entirely the work of the rodent animals, the pacas, cavies, and agoutis. These with their fine cutting teeth laid open the thick pericarps, and whenever one was seen to have succeeded, and the triangular nuts were scattered upon the ground, then there was a general rush, and macaws, parrots, and monkeys scrambled for a share.

The monkeys, however, did their part of the work. Whenever a fruit fell from the tree, one or two of them, deputed by the others, were seen to run in and roll it out, all the while exhibiting symptoms of great terror. They would then lift it in their hands, several of them together, and dash it repeatedly upon a stone. Sometimes, when the shell was not a strong one, they succeeded in breaking it in this way; but oftener they were not able, and then it was left to the rodent animals, who were watched at their operations, and usually robbed of the fruits of their labour. Such were the singular incidents witnessed at this festival of juvia-nuts.

But the scene was brought to a sudden termination. A cry was heard that rose far above all the other noises—a cry more terrible than the screams of the parrots, or the shrieks of the howling monkeys—it was the cry of the jaguar! It came from a piece of wood close to the juvia-trees, and the branches were heard to crackle as the dreaded utterer advanced.

In a moment the ground was cleared of every creature. Even the winged birds had flew up from the spot, and perched upon the branches; the cavies took to the water; the pacas and agouties to their burrows; and the monkeys to the tops of the adjacent trees; and nothing remained on the ground but the empty shells of the juvias.

Our party did not stay to notice the change. They, too, had been warned by the roar of the tiger, and hastily leaving the spot, returned to their place of encampment. On reaching it, they kindled a large circle of fire to keep them in safety during the night. They saw no more of the jaguar, although at intervals through the midnight hours, they were awakened by his loud and
295 savage cry, resounding through the openings of the forest.

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CHAPTER XLIII.

ACRES OF EGGS.

The next evening our travellers encamped on a sand-bar, or rather a great bank of sand, that ran for miles along one side of the river. Of course they had nothing to hang their hammocks to, but that was a matter of no importance, for the sand was dry and soft, and of itself would make a comfortable bed, as pleasant to sleep on as a hair-mattress. They only wanted wood enough to cook with, and to keep up their fire during the night—so as to frighten off the wild beasts.

This night they kept watch as usual, Leon taking the first turn. In fact, they found that they must do so every night—as in each of the camps where they had slept some danger had threatened; and they thought it would be imprudent for all to go to sleep at the same time. The heaviest part of the sentinel's duty fell to Guapo's share; but Guapo had long accustomed himself to go without sleep, and did not mind it; moreover Don Pablo took longer spells at the stern-oar during the day, and allowed Guapo many a “cat-nap.”

Leon seated himself upon a pile of sand that he had gathered up, and did his best to keep awake, but in about an hour after the rest were asleep he felt very drowsy—in fact, quite as much so as on the night of the adventure with the vampire. He used pretty much the same means to keep himself awake, but not with so good success, for on this occasion he fell into a nap that lasted nearly half-an-hour, and might have continued still longer, had he not slid down the sand-hill and tumbled over on his side. This awoke him; and feeling vexed with himself, he rubbed his eyes as if he was going to push them deeper into their sockets.

When this operation was finished, he looked about to see if any creature had ventured near. He first looked towards the woods—for of course that was the direction from which the tigers would come, and these were the only creatures he feared; but he had scarcely turned himself when he perceived a pair of eyes glancing at him from the other side of the fire. Close to them another pair, then another and another, until having looked on every side, he saw himself surrounded by a complete circle of glancing eyes! It is true they were small ones, and some of the heads which he could see by the blaze, were small—they were not jaguars, but they had an ugly look—they looked like the heads of serpents! Was it possible that an hundred serpents could have surrounded the camp?

Brought suddenly to his feet, Leon stood for some moments uncertain how to act. He fully believed they were snakes—anacondas, or water-snakes no doubt—that had just crept out of the river; and he felt that a movement on his part would bring on their united and simultaneous attack upon the sleeping party. Partly influenced by this fear, and again exhibiting that coolness and prudence which we have already noticed as a trait of his character, he remained for some moments silent and motionless.

Having already risen to his feet, his eyes were now above the level of the blaze, and, as they got the sleep well scared out of them, he could see things more distinctly. He now saw that the
296 snake-like heads were attached to large oval-shaped bodies, and that, besides the half hundred or so that had gathered around the fires, there were whole droves of the same upon the sandy beach beyond. The white surface was literally covered as far as he could see on all sides of him with black moving masses; and where the rays of the moon fell upon the beach, there was a broad belt that glistened and sparkled as though she shone upon pieces of glass kept constantly in motion!

A singular sight it was; and to Leon, who had never heard of such before, a most fearful one. For the life of him he could not make out what it all meant, or by what sort of odd creatures they were surrounded. He had but an indistinct view of them, but he could see that their bodies were not larger than those of a small sheep, and from the way in which they glistened under the moon he was sure they were water-animals, and had come out of the river!

He did not stay to speculate any longer upon them. He resolved to wake Guapo; but in doing so the whole party were aroused, and started to their feet in some alarm and confusion. The noise and movement had its effect on the nocturnal visitors; for before Leon could explain himself,

those immediately around the fires and for some distance beyond rushed to the edge, and were heard plunging by hundreds into the water.

Guapo's ear caught the sounds, and his eye now ranging along the sandy shore, took in at a glance the whole thing.

“Carapas,” he said laconically.

“Carapas?” inquired Leon.

“Oh!” said Don Pablo, who understood him. “Turtles is it?”

“Yes, master,” replied Guapo. “This is, I suppose, one of their great hatching-places. They are going to lay their eggs somewhere in the sand above. They do so every year.”

There was no danger from the turtles, as Guapo assured everybody, but the fright had chased away sleep, and they all lay awake for some time listening to Guapo's account of these singular creatures, which we shall translate into our own phraseology.

These large turtles, which in other parts of South America are called “arraus,” or simply “tortugas,” assemble every year in large armies, from all parts of the river. Each one of these armies chooses for itself a place to breed—some sandy island, or great sand-bank. This they approach very cautiously—lying near it for some days, and reconnoitring it with only their heads above the water. They then crawl ashore at night in vast multitudes—just as the party saw them—and each turtle, with the strong crooked claws of her hind feet, digs a hole for herself in the sand. These holes are three feet in diameter and two deep. In this she deposits her eggs—from seventy to one hundred and twenty of them—each egg being white, hard-shelled, and between the size of a pigeon's and pullet's. She then covers the whole with sand, levelling it over the top so that it may look like the rest of the surface, and so that the precious treasure may not be found by vultures, jaguars, and other predatory creatures. When this is done the labour of the turtle is at an end.

The great army again betakes itself to the water, and scatters in every direction. The sun acting upon the hot sand does the rest; and in less than six weeks the young turtles, about an inch in diameter, crawl out of the sand, and at once make for the water. They are afterwards seen
297 in pools and lakes, where the water is shallow, far from the place where they have been hatched; and it is well known that the first years of their life are not spent in the bed of the great river. How they find these pools, or whether the mothers distinguish their own young and conduct them thither, as the crocodiles and alligators do, is a mystery. With these last the thing is more easy, as the crocodile mothers deposit their eggs in separate places, and each returns for her young when they are hatched, calls them by her voice, and guides them to the pool where they are to remain until partly grown.

But among the thousands of little turtles hatched at one place and time, and that seek the water altogether, how would it be possible for the turtle mother to distinguish her own young? Yet an old female turtle is frequently seen swimming about with as many as a hundred little ones after her! Now are these her own, or are they a collection picked up out of the general progeny? That is an undetermined question. It would seem impossible that each turtle mother should know her own young, yet amidst this apparent confusion there may be some maternal instinct that guides her to distinguish her own offspring from all the rest. Who can say?

It is not often, however, that the turtle is permitted to have offspring at all. These creatures are annually robbed of their eggs in millions. They have many enemies, but man is the chief. When a turtle hatching place is discovered, the Indians assemble, and as soon as all the eggs have been deposited, they uncover and collect them. They eat them—but that is not the principal use to which they are put. It is for the making of oil, or “tortoise-butter,” they are collected.

The eggs are thrown into a large trough or canoe, where they are broken up with a wooden spade and stirred about for awhile. They then remain exposed to the sun, until the oily part collects on the surface, which is then skimmed off and well boiled. The “tortoise-butter” is now made, and after being poured into earthen jars or bottles, it is ready for market. The oil is clear, of a pale yellow colour, and some regard it as equal to the best olive oil, both for lamps and for cooking. Sometimes, however, it has a putrid smell, because many of the eggs are already half hatched before the gathering takes place.

What would be the result were these eggs not gathered by the Indians? Perhaps in the different rivers of South America more than an hundred millions of them are deposited every year! In the Orinoco alone, in three principal hatching places, it has been calculated that at least thirty three millions are annually destroyed for the making of tortoise-butter! Fancy, then, one hundred millions of animals, each of which grows to the weight of fifty or sixty pounds, being produced every year, and then the increase in production which these would make if left to themselves! Why the rivers would be crowded; and it would be true what old Father Gumilla once asserted, that “It would be as difficult to count the grains of sand on the shores of the Orinoco, as to count the immense number of tortoises that inhabit its margins and waters. Were it not for the vast consumption of tortoises and their eggs, the river, despite its great magnitude, would be unnavigable, for vessels would be impeded by the enormous multitude of the tortoises.”

298 But nature has provided against this “over-population” of the turtles by giving them a great many enemies. The jaguars, the ocelots, the crocodiles, the cranes, and the vultures, all prey

upon them; and, perhaps, if man were to leave them alone, the result would be, not such a great increase in the number of the turtles, but that the creatures who prey upon them would come in for a larger share.

The “carapa,” or arrau turtle, is, when full grown, forty or fifty pounds in weight. It is of a dark green colour above and orange beneath, with yellow feet. There are many other species of fresh-water turtles in the rivers of South America, but these breed separately, each female choosing her own place, and making her deposit alone. Indeed, some of the smaller species, as the “terekay,” are more esteemed both for their flesh and eggs; but as a large quantity of these eggs is never found together, they are not collected as an article of trade, but only to be roasted and eaten. The white does not coagulate in roasting or boiling, and only the yolk is eaten, but that is esteemed quite as palatable as the eggs of the common fowl.

The flesh of all kinds is eaten by the Indians, who fry it in pots, and then pour it with its own oil into other vessels and permit it to cool. When thus prepared, it will keep for a long time, and can be taken out when required for use.

Most of the above particulars were communicated by Guapo; and when he had finished talking, all the others went to sleep, leaving Guapo to his midnight vigil.

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CHAPTER XLIV.

A FIGHT BETWEEN TWO VERY SCALY CREATURES.

When they awoke in the morning they found Guapo busy over the fire. He had already been at the turtles' nests, and had collected a large basketful of the eggs, some of which he was cooking for breakfast. In addition to the eggs, moreover, half-a-dozen large turtles lay upon their backs close by. The flesh of these Guapo intended to scoop out and fry down, so as to be carried away as a sort of stock of preserved meat;—and a very excellent idea it was. He had caught them during his watch as they came out of the water.

All the turtles had gone off, although this is not always the case; for frequently numbers that have not finished covering their eggs during the night may be seen hard at work in the morning, and so intent on it, that they do not heed the presence of their worst enemies. These the Indians denominate “mad tortoises.”

This morning, however, no “mad tortoises” were to be seen; but when our travellers cast their eyes along the beach they saw quite a number that appeared to be turned upon their backs just like those that Guapo had capsized. They were at some distance from the camp, but curiosity prompted our travellers to walk along the beach and examine them. Sure enough there were nearly a dozen large tortoises regularly laid on their backs, and unable to stir; but, besides these, there were several tortoise-shells out of which the flesh had been freshly scooped, and these were as neatly cleaned out as if the work had been done by an anatomist. All this would have
299 been a mystery but for the experience of Guapo; but Guapo knew it was the jaguar that had turned the tortoises on their backs, and that had cleaned out and eaten the flesh from the empty shells!

Now, it is no easy thing for a man, provided with the necessary implements, to separate the flesh of a tortoise from its shell, and yet the jaguar, with his paw, can in a few minutes perform this operation most adroitly, as our travellers had full proof. All that they saw had been done that same night; and it gave them no very pleasant feeling to know that the jaguar had been at work so near them.

This animal, as Guapo said, in attacking the turtles, first turns them over, so as to prevent their escape—for the “carapas” are of those tortoises that once upon their backs on level ground cannot right themselves again. He then proceeds to tear out the flesh, and eats it at his leisure. Oftentimes he capsizes a far greater number than he can eat, and even returns to the spot to have a second meal of them; but frequently the Indians wandering along the river, find the tortoises he has turned over, and of course make an easy capture of them.

Guapo, upon this occasion, took advantage of the jaguar's skill, and carried to the camp all that the latter had left. It was Guapo's design to make a large quantity of “turtle sausage-meat,” so that they might have a supply for many days, as by this time even Guapo himself was getting tired of the horse-flesh “charqui.”

They were about returning to camp, when their attention was drawn to two dark objects upon the sand-beach a little farther on. These objects were in motion, and at first they believed they were a pair of “mad tortoises” that had not yet returned to the water, although they were close to its edge.

Led on by curiosity our party approached them, and saw that one only was a tortoise, and one of the largest kind, being nearly three feet in diameter. The other animal was a small caïman or alligator.

As our travellers drew near they saw that these two creatures were engaged in a fierce and deadly combat. Now, it is a curious fact that the larger alligators and crocodiles are among the most destructive enemies which the turtles have, eating thousands of the latter while they are still tiny little creatures and unable to defend themselves; and, on the other hand, that the turtles prey extensively on the young of both alligators and crocodiles, eating them whenever they can catch them! I say this is a curious fact in natural history, and it seems a sort of retaliatory principle established between these two kinds of reptiles, as if they ate one another's offspring *en revanche*.

There is no feeling of revenge, however, in the matter. It is merely an instinct of appetite by which both kinds will eat almost any small fry they come across. In fact, the alligators and crocodiles not only eat the young of the turtles, but their own young as well. That is, the *old males* do; and it has been stated, that the males of some species of tortoises have a similar unnatural appetite.

The turtle of which we are speaking is one of the most carnivorous of the whole race, and one of the fiercest in its nature too; so much so, that it has earned the name of the “fierce tortoise.” It will eat fish and small crustacea, and almost any living thing it finds in the water, which is not too large for it. It is extremely expert in catching its prey. It lies concealed at the bottom among the
300 roots of flags and nymphæ; and when any small fish chances to pass it, by means of its long neck darts out its head and seizes upon its unsuspecting victim. Once the bill of the “fierce turtle” has closed upon any object its hold is secure. You may cut its head off, but otherwise it cannot be forced to let go, until it has either captured its prey or taken the piece with it. It will “nip” a stout walking-cane between its mandibles, as if it was no more than a rush.

A very good story is told of a thief and a tortoise. The thief was prowling about the larder of an hotel in search of plunder, when he came upon a large market-basket filled with provisions. He immediately inserted his hand to secure the contents, when he felt himself suddenly seized by the fingers, and bitten so severely, that he was fain to draw back his hand in the most hasty manner possible. But along with the hand he drew out a “snapping” turtle. To get rid of the “ugly customer” was his next care; but, in spite of all his efforts, the turtle held on, determined to have the finger. The scuffle, and the shouts which pain compelled the thief to give utterance to, awoke the landlord and the rest of the household; and before the thief could disengage himself and escape, he was secured and given into custody.

Well, it was just a tortoise of this species, a “snapping turtle,” and one of the largest size, that our travellers now saw doing battle with the caïman. The caïman was not one of large size, else the turtle would have fled from it, not that even the largest caïmans are feared by the full-grown *carapas*. No; the strong plate-armour of the latter protects them both from the teeth and tail of this antagonist. The jaguar, with his pliable paws and sharp subtle claws, is to them a more dreaded assailant than the crocodile or caïman.

The one in question was some six or seven feet long, and altogether not much heavier than the turtle itself. It was not for the purpose of eating each other they fought. No—their strife was evidently on other grounds. No doubt the caïman had been attempting to plunder the new-laid eggs of the tortoise, and the latter had detected him in the act. At all events, the struggle must have been going on for some time, for the sand was torn up, and scored, in many places, by the sharp claws of both.

The battle appeared to be still at its height when our party arrived on the spot. Neither tortoise nor caïman paid any attention to their presence, but fought on pertinaciously. The aim of the caïman appeared to be to get the head of the tortoise in his mouth; but whenever he attempted this, the latter suddenly drew his head within the shell, and repeatedly disappointed him. The tortoise, on its part, rose at intervals upon its hind-feet, and making a dash forward, would dart forth its long neck, and clutch at the softer parts of its antagonist's body just under the throat. Several times it had succeeded in this manœuvre, and each time it had brought the piece with it, so that the caïman was already somewhat mangled. Another manœuvre of the tortoise was to seize the tail of its antagonist. Instinct seemed to teach it that this was a vulnerable part, and for the purpose of reaching the tail, it constantly kept crawling and edging round towards it.

Now, there is no movement so difficult for a reptile of the crocodile kind as to turn its body on dry land. The peculiar formation of the vertebræ, both of its neck and spine, renders this
301 movement difficult; and in “changing front,” the reptile is forced to describe a full circle with its unwieldy body—in fact to turn “all of a piece.” The tortoise, therefore, had the advantage, and, after several efforts, he at length succeeded in outflanking his antagonist, and getting right round to his rear. He lost no time, but, raising himself to his full height and making a dart forward, seized the tail and held on. He had caught by the very tip, and it was seen that his horny mandibles had taken a proper hold.

Now commenced a somewhat ludicrous scene. The caïman, though but a small one, with the immense muscular power which he possessed in his tail, if not able to detach his antagonist, was able to give him a sound shaking, and the turtle was seen vibrating from side to side, dragged along the sand. He held his broad yellow feet spread out on all sides, so as to preserve his equilibrium, for he well knew that to lose that would be to lose his life. Should he get turned on his back it would be all over with him; but he carefully guarded against such a fatal catastrope. Of course there were intervals when the caïman became tired, and remained still for a moment; and at each of these intervals the tortoise renewed his hold, and, in fact, as our party now perceived, was slowly, though surely, *eating the tail*!

When this had continued a short while, the great saurian seemed to despair. The pain, no doubt, caused him to weep “crocodile's tears,” though none were seen, but his eyes glared with a lurid light, and he began to look around for some means of escape from his painful position. His eye fell upon the water. That promised something, although he knew full well the turtle was as much at home there as he. At all events, his situation could not be a worse one, and with this, or some such reflection, he made a “dash” for the water. He was but a few feet from it, but it cost him a good deal of pulling and dragging, and clawing the sand, before he could get into it. In fact, the tortoise knew that its position could not be benefited by the change, and would have preferred fighting it out on dry land, and to do this he set *his* claws as firmly as possible, and pulled the tail in the opposite direction!

The strength of the caïman at length prevailed. He got his body into the water, and, with a few strokes of his webbed feet, jerked the turtle after, and both were now fairly launched. Once in the river, the caïman seemed to gain fresh vigour. His tail vibrated violently and rapidly, throwing the tortoise from side to side until the foam floated around them, and then both suddenly sank to the bottom.

Whether they continued “attached,” or became “separated” there, or whether the turtle killed the lizard, or the lizard the turtle, or “each did kill the other,” no one ever knew, as it is highly probable that no human eye ever saw either of them again.

At all events, no one of *our* party saw any more of them; and, having watched the surface for some time, they turned in their steps and walked back to the camp.

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CHAPTER XLV.

A PAIR OF VALIANT VULTURES.

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They had got into a part of the river that seemed to be a favourite resort with turtles and crocodiles, and creatures of that description. At different times they saw turtles of different kinds; among others, the “painted turtle,” a beautiful species that derives its name from the fine colouring of its shell, which appears as if it had been painted in enamel. Of crocodiles, too, they saw three or four distinct species, and not unfrequently, the largest of all, the great black crocodile (*Jacare nigra*). This was sometimes seen of the enormous length of over twenty feet! Terrible-looking as these crocodiles are, they are not masters of every creature upon the river. There are even birds that can sorely vex them, and compel them to take to the water to save themselves from a fearful calamity—blindness.

One day, while descending the river, our travellers were witness to an illustration of this.

They were passing a wide sand-bank that shelved back from the river, with a scarcely perceptible slope, when they saw, at a distance of about two hundred yards from the water's edge, a crocodile making for the river. He looked as though he had just awoke from his torpid sleep, for his body was caked all over with dry mud, and he seemed both hungry and thirsty. It was like enough he was coming from some inland pond, where the water had dried up, and he was now on his way to the river.

All at once two dark shadows were seen passing over the white surface of the sand-bank. In the heaven two large birds were wheeling about, crossing each other in their courses, and holding their long necks downwards, as if the crocodile was the object of their regard.

The latter, on seeing them, paused; and lowered his body into a squatted or crouching attitude, as if in the birds he recognised an enemy. And yet what could such a large creature fear from a pair of “king-vultures?” for king vultures they were, as was easily seen by their red-orange heads and cream-coloured plumage. What could a crocodile, full ten feet long, fear from these, even had they been eagles, or the great condor himself? No matter; he was evidently frightened at them; and each time that they drew near in their flight, he stopped and flattened his body against the sand, as if that might conceal him. As soon as they flew off again to a more distant point of their aërial circle, he would once more elevate himself on his arms, and make all haste toward the water.

He had got within about an hundred yards of the river, when the birds made a sudden turn in the sky, and swooping down, alighted upon the sand directly before the snout of the crocodile. The latter stopped again, and kept his eyes fixed upon them. They did not leave him long to rest; for one of them, making a few hops towards him, came so close, that it might have been supposed the crocodile could have seized it in his jaws. This, in fact, he attempted to do; but the wary bird threw up its broad wings, and flapped to one side out of his reach.

Meanwhile, the other had hopped close up to his opposite shoulder; and while the crocodile was engaged with the first one, this made a dash forward, aiming its great open beak at the eye of the reptile. The crocodile parried the thrust by a sudden turn of his head; but he had scarcely got round, when the second vulture, watching its opportunity, rushed forward at the other eye. It

must have succeeded in pecking it, for the great lizard roared out with the pain; and rushing
303 forward a bit, writhed and lashed the sand with his tail.

The vultures paid no attention to these demonstrations, but only kept out of the way of the teeth and claws of their antagonist; and then, when he became still again, both returned to the attack as before. One after the other was seen dashing repeatedly forward—using both legs and wings to effect their object, and each time darting out their great beaks towards the eyes of the reptile. The head of the latter kept continuously moving from side to side; but move where it would, the beaks of the vultures were ready to meet it, and to pierce into the sockets of those deep lurid eyes.

This terrible contest lasted all the time the balza was floating by. It was a slow current at this place, and our travellers were a long time in passing, so that they had a good opportunity of witnessing the strange spectacle. Long after they had glided past, they saw that the conflict continued. They could still perceive the black body of the reptile upon the white sand-bank, writhing and struggling, while the flapping wings of the vultures showed that they still kept up their terrible attack. But the head of the crocodile was no longer directed towards the water.

At the first onset the reptile had used every effort to retreat in that direction. He knew that his only safety lay in getting into the river, and sinking beyond the reach of his adversaries. At every interval between their assaults, he had been seen to crawl forward, stopping only when compelled to defend himself. Now, however, his head was seen turned from the water; sometimes he lay parallel with the stream; and sometimes he appeared to be heading back for the woods, while his struggles and contortions betrayed the agony he was undergoing. But his turning in this way was easily accounted for. He knew not in what direction lay the river. He could no longer see. His eyes were mutilated by the beaks of the birds. *He was blind!*

Guapo said the vultures would not leave him until they had made a meal of his eyes, and that was all they wanted. He would then remain on shore, perhaps without finding his way back to the water, and most likely be attacked by jaguars, or other preying creatures, who could conquer him the easier now that he was deprived of his sight!

As the balza glided on, Guapo told our travellers many strange stories of crocodiles. He stated, what is well known to be true, that in the rivers of South America many people are every year killed by these ravenous creatures; in fact, far more than have ever fallen victims to the salt-sea sharks. In some places they are much fiercer than in others; but this may arise from different species being the inhabitants of these different places. There is the true crocodile, with long sharp snout, and large external tusks; and the caïman, with a snout broader and more pike-shaped; and the former is a much more courageous and man-eating creature. Both are often found in the same river; but they do not associate together, but keep in distinct bands or societies; and they are often mistaken for each other.

This may account for the difference of opinion that exists in regard to the fierceness of these reptiles—many asserting that they are utterly harmless, and will not attack man under any circumstances; while others, who have witnessed their attacks, of course bearing testimony to
304 the contrary. There are many places in South America, where the natives will fearlessly enter a lake or river known to be full of crocodiles, and drive these creatures aside with a piece of a stick; but there are other districts where nothing will tempt an Indian to swim across a river infested with these reptiles. In the Amazon districts, in every Indian village, several people may be seen who have been maimed by crocodiles. No wonder that among author-travellers there should be such a difference of opinion.

Guapo stated, that when an Indian has been seized by a crocodile in its great jaws, he has only one chance of escape, and that is, by thrusting his fingers into the eyes of the reptile. This will invariably cause it to let go its hold, and generally frighten it, so as to enable the person to escape. It, of course, requires great presence of mind to effect this, as the person who has been seized will himself be in great pain from the tearing teeth of the monster, and, perhaps, will have been drawn under the water, before he can gather his senses. But it has often occurred that Indians, and even women, have escaped in this way.

The eyes of the crocodile are its most tender parts,—in fact, the only parts that can be made to feel pain. A crocodile may be disabled by cutting at the root of its tail, but it can only be frightened by an attack upon the eyes; and this appears to be a well-known fact, not only to the Indians, but to all its other enemies among the birds and quadrupeds.

The young crocodiles are often attacked, and have their eyes pecked out, by the small gallinazo or “zamuro” vultures just in the same way that we have seen one of a larger size become the victim of the more powerful king vultures.

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CHAPTER XLVI.

THE “GAPO.”

After many days of rafting our travellers arrived in a most singular country. They were now approaching the mighty Amazon, and the river upon which they had hitherto been travelling appeared to divide into many branches, where it formed *deltas* with the Amazon. Every day, and sometimes two or three times in the day, they passed places where the river forked, as though each branch passed round an island, but our travellers perceived that these branches did not meet again; and they conjectured that they all fell into the Amazon by separate embouchures. They were often puzzled to know which one to take, as the main river was not always broadest, and they might get into one that was not navigable below. A curious region it was through which they passed; for, in fact, they were now travelling in the country of the “Gapo.”

What is the “Gapo?” you will ask. The “Gapo,” then, is the name given to vast tracts of country upon the Amazon and some of its tributary streams, that are annually inundated, and remain under water for several months in the year. It extends for hundreds of miles along the Amazon itself, and up many of the rivers, its tributaries also, for hundreds of miles.

But the whole country does not become one clear sheet of water, as is the case with floods in other parts of the world. On the contrary, high as is the flood, the tree-tops and their branches
305 rise still higher, and we have in the “Gapo” the extraordinary spectacle of a flooded forest, thousands of square miles in extent!

In this forest the trees do not perish, but retain life and verdure. In fact, the trees of this part are peculiar, most of them differing in kind from the trees of any other region. There are species of palms growing in the “Gapo” that are found nowhere else; and there are animals and birds, too, that remain in this region during the whole season of flood. It has been further asserted that there are tribes of “Gapo” Indians, who live in the middle of the inundation, making their dwellings upon the trees, and who can pass from branch to branch and tree to tree almost as nimbly as monkeys.

This may or may not be true. It would not be a new thing, if true, for it is well known that the Guarano Indians, at the mouth of the Orinoco, dwell among the tops of the murichi palms during many months of the season of flood. These people build platforms on the palms, and upon these erect roofs, and sling their hammocks, and, with little fireplaces of mud, are enabled to cook their provisions upon them. But they have canoes, in which they are able to go from place to place, and capture fish, upon which they principally subsist. The murichi palm furnishes them with all the other necessaries of life.

This singular tree is one of the noblest of the palms. It rises to a height of more than one hundred feet, and grows in immense *palmares*, or palm-woods, often covering the bank of the river for miles. It is one of those called “fan-palm”—that is, the leaves, instead of being pinnate or feathery, have long naked stalks, at the end of which the leaflets spread out circularly, forming a shape like a fan. One of the murichi leaves is a grand sight. The leaf-stalk, or petiole, is a foot thick where it sprouts from the trunk; and before it reaches the leaflets it is a solid beam of ten or twelve feet long, while the circular fan or leaf itself is nine or ten in diameter! A single leaf of the murichi palm is a full load for a man.

With a score of such leaves,—shining and ever verdant as they are,—at the top of its column-like trunk, what a majestic tree is the murichi palm!

But it is not more beautiful than useful. Its leaves, fruit, and stem, are all put to some use in the domestic economy of the Indians. The leaf-stalk, when dried, is light and elastic, like the quill of a bird—owing to the thin, hard, outer covering and soft internal pith. Out of the outer rind, when split off, the Indian makes baskets and window-blinds. The pithy part is separated into laths, about half an inch thick, with which window-shutters, boxes, bird-cages, partitions, and even entire walls, are constructed.

The epidermis of the leaves furnishes the strings for hammocks and all kinds of cordage. From the fruits a favourite beverage is produced, and these fruits are also pleasant eating, somewhat resembling apples. They are in appearance like pine-cones, of a red colour outside and yellow pulp. The trunk itself furnishes a pith or marrow that can be used as sago; and out of the wood the Indian cuts his buoyant canoe! In short, there are tribes of Indians that not only live, in a literal sense, *on* the murichi palms, but that almost subsist on them.

Although the flood had, to a considerable extent, subsided, the river in most places was still beyond its banks; and this made it difficult for our travellers to find a place for their night-camps.
306 Several nights they were obliged to sleep, as they best could, on the balza,—the latter being secured to a tree. Sometimes, by pushing some distance up the mouth of an “igaripé,” or creek, they were able to find dry ground, on which to encamp. During their passage through this labyrinth of rivers, they travelled but very slowly, and their provisions were fast running out. There was no chance for increasing their stock, as they could not find either wild-hogs (peccaries) or capivaras. These creatures, although they can swim well enough, would only be found upon the banks of the river, when it returned within its proper channel.

Now and then Guapo brought down a parrot, a macaw, or an aracari, with his blow-gun; but these were only temporary supplies. They had often heard howling monkeys in the trees, but had not been able to see them; and none of the party would have refused to eat roast-monkey now, as they had all tried it and found it quite palatable. Guapo, blow-gun in hand, was continually peering up among the tree-tops in search of monkeys or other game. He was, at length, rewarded for his vigilance.

One night they had pushed the balza up an “igaripé” for a hundred yards or so, where a dry bank gave them an opportunity of landing. The creek itself was not much wider than the balza, and tall trees stood upon both banks. In one or two places the thorny “jacitara” palm—which is a sort of climbing plant, often hanging over the branches of other trees—nearly reached across the stream. These curious palms had even to be cautiously pushed to one side as the balza passed,—for the arrowy claws upon them, if once hooked into the clothes of passengers, would either have dragged the latter from off the raft, or have torn out the piece of cloth.

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CHAPTER XLVII.

THE ARAGUATOES.

Our party had passed several of these jacitaras, made the balza fast, landed, and were just cooking their scanty supper, when they heard a band of howling monkeys afar off in the woods. There was nothing unusual in this; for these creatures are heard at all times among the forests of the Amazon, especially at sunrise and before sunset, or whenever there is any appearance of the approach of a rain-storm.

Our travellers would not have noticed their voices on this occasion, but that they seemed to be approaching in that direction; and as they were coming along the bank of the main river, Guapo concluded that on arriving at the “igaripé” they would turn up it and pass near where the balza was, and thus he might have them within reach of his gravatána. It was certain they were coming down the river side—of course upon the tree-tops, and would, no doubt, turn up as Guapo expected, for the trees on the opposite side of the igaripé stood too far apart even for monkeys to spring across.

After waiting for half-an-hour or so, the hideous howling of the monkeys could be heard at no great distance, and they were taking the desired route. In fact, in a few minutes after, the troop appeared upon some tall trees that stood on the edge of the creek, not fifty yards from where the balza was moored. They were large animals, of that lanky and slender shape that characterises
307 the prehensile-tailed monkeys; but these were different from the *ateles* already mentioned. They were true howlers, as they had already proved by the cries they had been uttering for the half-hour past.

There are several species of howling monkeys, as we have already stated. Those that had arrived on the igaripé Guapo pronounced to be *araguatoes*. Their bodies are of a reddish-brown colour on the body and shoulders, lighter underneath, and their naked wrinkled faces are of a bluish black, and with very much of the expression of an old man. Their hair is full and bushy, and gives them some resemblance to a bear, whence their occasional name of “bear-ape,” and also their zoological designation, *Simia ursina*. The araguato is full three feet without the tail, and that powerful member is much longer.

When the band made its appearance on the igaripé, they were seen to come to a halt, all of them gathering into a great tree that stood by the water's edge. This tree rose higher than the rest, and the most of the monkeys having climbed among the top branches, were visible from the balza. There were about fifty in the troop, and one that seemed larger than any of the others appeared to act as leader. Many of them were females, and there were not a few that had young ones, which they carried upon their backs just as the Indian mothers and those of other savage nations carry their children.

Most of the little monkeys lay along the backs of their mothers, clasping them around the neck with their fore-arms, while their hind ones girdled the middle of the body. But it was in their tails the little fellows seemed to place most reliance. The top parts of these were firmly lapped around the thick base of the tails of the old ones, and thus not only secured their seat, but made it quite impossible for them to drop off. No force could have shaken them from this hold, without dragging out their tails or tearing their bodies to pieces, indeed, it was necessary they should be thus firmly seated, as the exertions of the mothers,—their quick motions and long springing leaps from tree to tree—would otherwise have been impossible.

On reaching the bank of the igaripé, the araguatoes were evidently at fault. Their intention had been to proceed down along the main river, and the creek now interfered. Its water lay directly across their course, and how were they to get over it? Swim it, you may, say. Ha! little do you know the dread these creatures have of water. Yes; strange to say, although many species of them pass their lives upon trees that overhang water, or even grow out of it, they are as much afraid of the water beneath them as if it were fire. A cat is not half so dainty about wetting her feet as some monkeys are; and besides a cat can swim, which the monkeys cannot—at best so badly that in a few minutes they would drown.

Strange, is it not, that among animals, those that approach nearest to man, like him are not gifted by nature with the power of swimming? It is evident, then, that that is an art left to be discovered by the intellect of man. To fall into the water would be a sad mishap for a monkey, not only on account of the ducking, but of the danger. There is not much likelihood of an araguato

falling in. Even though one branch may have broken and failed it, in the great concave sphere which it can so quickly trace around it by means of its five long members, it is sure of finding a second. No; the araguatoes might spend a life-time in the flooded forest without even wetting a
308 hair farther than what is wetted by the rain.

From their movements, it was evident the igaripé had puzzled them; and a consultation was called among the branches of the tall tree already mentioned. Upon one of the very highest sat the large old fellow who was evidently leader of the band. His harangue was loud and long, accompanied by many gestures of his hands, head, and tail. It was, no doubt, exceedingly eloquent. Similar speeches delivered by other old araguato chiefs, have been compared to the creaking of an ungreased bullock-cart, mingled with the rumbling of the wheels!

Our party thought the comparison a just one. The old chief finished at length. Up to this point not one of the others had said a word. They all sat silent, observing perfect decorum; indeed, much greater than is observed in the great British Parliament or the Congress of America. Occasionally one of the children might utter a slight squeak, or throw out its hand to catch a mosquito; but in such cases a slap from the paw of the mother, or a rough shaking, soon reduced it to quiet.

When the chief had ended speaking, however, no debate in either Congress or Parliament could have equalled the noise that then arose. Every araguato seemed to have something to say, and all spoke at the same time. If the speech of the old one was like the creaking of a bullock-cart, the voices of all combined might appropriately be compared to a whole string of these vehicles, with half the quantity of grease and a double allowance of wheels!

Once more the chief, by a sign, commanded silence, and the rest became mute and motionless as before.

This time the speech of the leader appeared to refer to the business in hand—in short, to the crossing of the igaripé. He was seen repeatedly pointing in that direction, as he spoke, and the rest followed his motions with their eyes.

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CHAPTER XLVIII.

BRIDGING AN IGARIPÉ.

The tree upon which the araguatoes were assembled stood near the edge of the water, but there was another still nearer. This was also a tall tree free of branches for a great way up. On the opposite bank of the igaripé was a very similar tree, and the long horizontal branches of the two were separated from each other by a space of about twenty feet. It was with these two trees that the attention of the araguatoes appeared to be occupied; and our travellers could tell by their looks and gestures that they were conversing about, and calculating, the distance between their upper branches. For what purpose?

Surely they do not expect to be able to make a crossing between them? No creature without wings could pass from one to the other! Such were the questions and doubts expressed by Leon, and indeed by all except Guapo, but Guapo had seen araguatoes before, and knew some of their tricks. Guapo, therefore, boldly pronounced that it was their intention to cross the igaripé by these two trees. He was about to explain the manner in which they would accomplish it, when the movement commenced, and rendered his explanation quite unnecessary.

At a commanding cry from the chief, several of the largest and strongest monkeys swung
309 themselves into the tree that stood on the edge of the water. Here, after a moment's reconnoissance, they were seen to get upon a horizontal limb—one that projected diagonally over the igaripé. There were no limbs immediately underneath it on the same side of the tree; and for this very reason had they selected it. Having advanced until they were near its top, the foremost of the monkeys let himself down upon his tail, and hung head downward. Another slipped down the body of the first, and clutched him around the neck and fore-arms with his strong tail, with his head down also. A third succeeded the second, and a fourth the third, and so on until a string of monkeys dangled from the limb.

A motion was now produced by the monkeys striking other branches with their feet, until the long string oscillated back and forwards like the pendulum of a clock. This oscillation was gradually increased, until the monkey at the lower end was swung up among the branches of the tree on the opposite side of the igaripé. After touching them once or twice, he discovered that he was within reach; and the next time when he had reached the highest point of the oscillating curve, he threw out his long thin fore-arms, and firmly clutching the branches, held fast.

The oscillation now ceased. The living chain stretched across the igaripé from tree to tree, and, curving slightly, hung like a suspension-bridge! A loud screaming, and gabbling, and chattering, and howling, proceeded from the band of araguatoes, who, up to this time, had watched the manœuvres of their comrades in silence—all except the old chief, who occasionally had given

directions both with voice and gestures. But the general gabble that succeeded was, no doubt, an expression of the satisfaction of all that the *bridge was built*.

The troop now proceeded to cross over, one or two old ones going first, perhaps to try the strength of the bridge. Then went the mothers carrying their young on their backs, and after them the rest of the band.

It was quite an amusing scene to witness, and the behaviour of the monkeys would have caused any one to laugh. Even Guapo could not restrain his mirth at seeing those who formed the bridge biting the others that passed over them, both on the legs and tails, until the latter screamed again!

The old chief stood at the near end and directed the crossing. Like a brave officer, he was the last to pass over. When all the others had preceded him, he crossed after, carrying himself in a stately and dignified manner. None dared to bite at *his* legs. They knew better than play off their tricks on *him*, and he crossed quietly and without any molestation.

Now the string still remained suspended between the trees. How were the monkeys that formed it to get themselves free again? Of course the one that had clutched the branch with his arms might easily let go, but that would bring them back to the same side from which they had started, and would separate them from the rest of the band. Those constituting the bridge would, therefore, be as far from crossing as ever!

There seemed to be a difficulty here—that is, to some of our travellers. To the monkeys themselves there was none. They knew well enough what they were about, and they would have
310 got over the apparent difficulty in the following manner:—The one at the tail end of the bridge would simply have let go his hold, and the whole string would then have swung over and hung from the tree on the opposite bank, into which they could have climbed at their leisure. I say they *would* have done so had nothing interfered to prevent them from completing the manœuvre. But an obstacle intervened which brought the affair to a very different termination.

Guapo had been seated along with the rest, gravatána in hand. He showed great forbearance in not having used the gravatána long before, for he was all the while quite within reach of the araguatoes; but this forbearance on his part was not of his own freewill. Don Pablo had, in fact, hindered him, in order that he and the others, should have an opportunity of witnessing the singular manœuvres of the monkeys. Before the scene was quite over, however, the Indian begged Don Pablo to let him shoot, reminding him how much they stood in need of a little “monkey-meat.” This had the effect Guapo desired; the consent was given, and the gravatána was pointed diagonally upwards. Once more Guapo's cheeks were distended—once more came the strong, quick puff—and away went the arrow. The next moment it was seen sticking in the neck of one of the monkeys.

Now, the one which Guapo had aimed at and hit was that which had grasped the tree on the opposite side with its arms. Why did he chose this more than any other? Was it because it was nearer, or more exposed to view? Neither of these was the reason. It was, that had he shot any of the others in the string—they being supported by their tails—it would not have fallen; the tail, as we have already seen, still retaining its prehensile power even to death. But that one which held on to the tree by its fore-arms would in a second or two be compelled from weakness to let go, and the whole chain would drop back on the near side of the igaripé. This was just what Guapo desired, and he waited for the result. It was necessary only to wait half-a-dozen seconds. The monkey was evidently growing weak under the influence of the *curare*, and was struggling to retain its hold. In a moment it must let go.

The araguato at the “tail-end” of the bridge, not knowing what had happened, and thinking all was right for swinging himself across, slipped his tail from the branch just at the very same instant that the wounded one let go, and the whole chain fell “souse” into the water! Then the screaming and howling from those on shore, the plunging and splashing of the monkeys in the stream, mingled with the shouts of Leon, Guapo, and the others, created a scene of noise and confusion that lasted for several minutes. In the midst of it, Guapo threw himself into the canoe, and with a single stroke of his paddle shot right down among the drowning monkeys. One or two escaped to the bank, and made off; several went to the bottom;, but three, including the wounded one, fell into the clutches of the hunter.

Of course roast-monkey was added to the supper; but none of the travellers slept very well after it, as the araguatoes, lamenting their lost companions, kept up a most dismal wailing
311 throughout the whole of the night.

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CHAPTER XLIX.

THE MANATI.

The araguatoes, with dried plantains and cassava, were the food of our travellers for several days after. On the evening of the third day they had a change. Guapo succeeded in capturing a very large turtle, which served for relish at several meals. His mode of taking the turtle was somewhat curious, and deserves to be described.

The balza had been brought to the bank, and they were just mooring it, when something out on the water attracted the attention of Leon and Leona. It was a small, darkish object, and would not have been observed but for the ripple that it made on the smooth surface of the river, and by this they could tell that it was in motion.

“A water-snake!” said Leon.

“Oh!” ejaculated the little Leona, “I hope not, brother Leon.”

“On second thoughts,” replied Leon, “I don't think it is a snake.”

Of course the object was a good distance off, else Leon and Leona would not have talked so coolly about it. But their words had reached the ear of Doña Isidora, and drawn her attention to what they were talking about.

“No; it is not a snake,” said she. “I fancy it is a turtle.”

Guapo up to this had been busy with Don Pablo in getting the balza made fast. The word “turtle,” however, caught his ear at once, and he looked up, and then out on the river in the direction where Leon and Leona were pointing. As soon as his eye rested upon the moving object he replied to the remark of Doña Isidora.

“Yes, my mistress,” said he, “it is a turtle, and a big one too. Please all keep quiet—I think I can get him.”

How Guapo was to get the turtle was a mystery to all. The latter was about thirty paces distant, but it would be difficult, if not impossible, to hit his small snout—the only part above water—with the arrow of the blow-gun. Moreover, they thought that the arrow would not penetrate the hard, bony substance, so as to stick there and infuse its poison into the wound.

These conjectures were true enough, but his gravatána was not the weapon which Guapo was about to use. He had other weapons as well—a fish-spear or harpoon, and a regular bow and arrows, which he had made during his leisure hours in the valley.

The latter was the weapon with which the tortoise was to be killed.

Taking the bow, and adjusting an arrow to the string, Guapo stepped forward to the water's edge. All watched him, uttering their hopes of his success. It was still not clear with them how the turtle was to be killed by an arrow shot from a bow any more than by one sent from a blow-gun. Would it not glance from the shell even should he succeed in hitting it under water! Surely it would!

As they stood whispering their conjectures to one another, they observed Guapo, to their great astonishment, *pointing his arrow upward*, and making as if he was going to discharge it in the air! This he, in fact, *did* do a moment after; and they would have been puzzled by his apparently
312 strange conduct, had they not observed, in the next instant, that the arrow, after flying high up, came down again head-foremost and stuck upright in the back of the turtle!

The turtle dived at once, and all of them expected to see the upright arrow carried under water. What was their surprise as well as chagrin to see that it had fallen out, and was floating on the surface! Of course the wound had only been a slight one, and the turtle would escape, and be none the worse for it.

But Guapo shared neither their surprise nor chagrin. Guapo felt sure that the turtle was his, and said nothing; but, jumping into the canoe, began to paddle himself out to where the creature had been last seen. What could he be after? thought they.

As they watched him, they saw that he made for the floating arrow. “Oh!” said they, “he is gone to recover it.”

That seemed probable enough, but, to their astonishment, as he approached the weapon it took a start, and ran away from him! Something below dragged it along the water. That was clear, and they began to comprehend the mystery. The *head* of the arrow was still sticking in the shell of the turtle. It was only the shaft that floated, and that was attached to the head by a string! The latter had been but loosely put on, so that the pressure of the water, as the turtle dived, should separate it from the shaft, leaving the shaft with its cord to act as a buoy, and discover the situation of the turtle.

Guapo, in his swift canoe, soon laid hold of the shaft, and after a little careful manœuvring, succeeded in landing his turtle high and dry upon the bank. A splendid prize it proved. It was a “jurara” tortoise—the “tataruga,” or great turtle of the Portuguese, and its shell was full three feet in diameter.

Guapo's mode of capturing the “jurara” is the same as that generally practised by the Indians of the Amazon, although strong nets and the hook are also used. The arrow is always discharged upwards, and the range calculated with such skill, that it falls vertically on the shell of the turtle,

and penetrates deep enough to stick, and detach itself from the shaft. This mode of shooting is necessary, else the jurara could not be killed by an arrow, because it never shows more than the tip of its snout above water, and any arrow hitting it in a direct course would glance harmlessly from its shell. A good bowman among the Indians will rarely miss shooting in this way,—long practice and native skill enabling him to guess within an inch of where his weapon will fall.

In the towns of the Lower Amazon, where turtles are brought to market, a small square hole may be observed in the shells of these creatures. That is the mark of the arrow-head.

Guapo lost no time in turning his turtle inside out, and converting part of it into a savoury supper, while the remainder was fried into sausage-meat, and put away for the following day.

But on that following day a much larger stock of sausage-meat was procured from a very different animal, and that was a “cow.”

“How?” you exclaim,—“a cow in the wild forests of the Amazon! Why, you have said that no cattle—either cows or horses—can exist there without man to protect them, else they would be devoured by pumas, jaguars, and bats. Perhaps they had arrived at some settlement where cows were kept?”

Not a bit of it; your conjecture, my young friend, is quite astray. There was not a civilised
313 settlement for many hundreds of miles from where Guapo got his cow—nor a cow neither, of the sort you are thinking of. But there are more kinds of cows than one; and, perhaps, you may have heard of a creature called the “fish-cow?” Well, that is the sort of cow I am speaking of. Some term it the “sea-cow,” but this is an improper name for it, since it also inhabits fresh-water rivers throughout all tropical America. It is known as the *Manati*, and the Portuguese call it “*peixe boi*,” which is only “fish-cow” done into Portuguese.

It is a curious creature the fish-cow, and I shall offer you a short description of it. It is usually about seven feet in length, and five round the thickest part of the body, which latter is quite smooth, and tapers off into a horizontal flat tail, semicircular in shape. There are no hind-limbs upon the animal, but just behind the head are two powerful fins of an oval shape. There is no neck to be perceived; and the head, which is not very large, terminates in a large mouth and fleshy lips, which are not unlike those of a cow: hence its name of “cow-fish.” There are stiff bristles on the upper lip, and a few thinly scattered hairs over the rest of the body. Behind the oval fins are two *mammæ*, or breasts, from which, when pressed, flows a stream of beautiful white milk. Both eyes and ears are very small in proportion to the size of the animal, but, nevertheless, it has full use of these organs, and is not easily approached by its enemy.

The colour of the skin is a dusky lead, with some flesh-coloured marks on the belly, and the skin itself is an inch thick at its thickest part, on the back. Beneath the skin is a layer of fat, of great, thickness, which makes excellent oil when boiled. As we have said, the manati has no appearance of hind-limbs. Its fore-limbs, however, are highly developed for a water animal. The bones in them correspond to those in the human arm, having five fingers with the joints distinct, yet so enclosed in an inflexible sheath that not a joint can be moved.

The cow-fish feeds on grass, coming in to the borders of the lakes and rivers to procure it. It can swim very rapidly by means of its flat tail and strong fins, and is not so easily captured as might be supposed. All the art of the hunter is required to effect its destruction. The harpoon is the weapon usually employed, though sometimes they are caught in strong nets stretched across the mouths of rivers or the narrow arms of lakes. The flesh of the manati is much esteemed, and tastes somewhat between beef and pork, altogether different from “fish.” Fried in its own oil, and poured into pots or jars, it can be preserved for many months.

As already stated, on the day after Guapo shot the turtle—in fact, the next morning—just as they were going to shove off, some of the party, in gazing from the edge of the balza, noticed a queer-looking animal in the clear water below. It was no other than a “fish-cow;” and, as they continued to examine it more attentively, they were astonished to observe that, with its short paddle-like limbs, it hugged two miniature models of itself close to its two breasts. These were the “calves” in the act of suckling, for such is the mode in which the manati nourishes her young.

All the others would have watched this spectacle for a while, interested in the maternal and
314 filial traits thus exhibited by a subaqueous creature, but while they stood looking into the water, something glanced before their eyes, and glided with a plunge to the bottom. It was the harpoon of Guapo.

Blood rose to the surface immediately, and there was a considerable splashing as the strong manati made its attempt to escape; but the head of the harpoon was deeply buried in its flesh, and, with the attached cord, Guapo soon hauled the animal ashore. It was as much as he and Don Pablo could do to drag it on dry land; but the knife soon took it to pieces; and then several hours were spent in making it fit for preservation. Its fat and flesh yielded enough to fill every spare vessel our travellers had got; and, when all were filled, the balza was pushed off, and they continued their voyage without any fear of short rations for some time to come.

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CHAPTER L.

After many days of difficult navigation the balza floated upon the broad and mighty Amazon, whose yellowish-olive flood flowed yet fifteen hundred miles farther to the Atlantic Ocean.

The current was in most places over four miles an hour, and the navigation smooth and easy—so that our travellers rarely made less than fifty miles a-day. There was considerable monotony in the landscape, on account of the absence of mountains, as the Amazon, through most of its course, runs through a level plain. The numerous bends and sudden windings of the stream, however, continually opening out into new and charming vistas, and the ever-changing variety of vegetation, formed sources of delight to the travellers.

Almost every day they passed the mouth of some tributary river—many of these appearing as large as the Amazon itself. Our travellers were struck with a peculiarity in relation to these rivers—that is, their variety of colour. Some were whitish, with a tinge of olive, like the Amazon itself; others were blue and transparent; while a third kind had waters as black as ink. Of the latter class is the great river of the Rio Negro—which by means of a tributary (the Cassiquiare) joins the Amazon with the Orinoco.

Indeed, the rivers of the Amazon valley have been classed into *white*, *blue*, and *black*. *Red* rivers, such as are common in the northern division of the American continent, do not exist in the valley of the Amazon.

There appears to be no other explanation for this difference in the colour of rivers, except by supposing that they take their hue from the nature of the soil through which these channels run.

But the *white* rivers, as the Amazon itself, do not appear to be of this hue merely because they are “muddy.” On the contrary, they derive their colour, or most of it, from some impalpable substance held in a state of irreducible solution. This is proved from the fact, that even when these waters enter a reservoir, and the earthy matter is allowed to settle, they still retain the same tinge of yellowish olive. There are some white rivers, as the Rio Branco, whose waters are almost as white as milk itself!

The *blue* rivers of the Amazon valley are those with clear transparent waters, and the courses
315 of these lie through rocky countries where there is little or no alluvium to render them turbid.

The *black* streams are the most remarkable of all. These, when deep, look like rivers of ink; and when the bottom can be seen, which is usually a sandy one, the sand has the appearance of gold. Even when lifted in a vessel, the water retains its inky tinge, and resembles that which may be found in the pools of peat-bogs. It is a general supposition in South America that the black-water rivers get their colour from the extract of sarsaparilla roots growing on their banks. It is possible the sarsaparilla roots may have something to do with it, in common with both the roots and leaves of many other vegetables. No other explanation has yet been found to account for the dark colour of these rivers, except the decay of vegetable substances carried in their current; and it is a fact that all the black-water streams run through the most thickly wooded regions.

A curious fact may be mentioned of the black rivers; that is, that mosquitoes—the plague of tropical America—are not found on their banks. This is not only a curious, but an important fact, and might be sufficient to determine any one on the choice of a settlement. You may deem a mosquito a very small thing, and its presence a trifling annoyance. Let me tell you that settlements have been broken up and deserted on account of the persecution experienced from these little insects! They are the real “wild beasts” of South America, far more to be dreaded than pumas, or crocodiles, or snakes, or even the fierce jaguar himself.

Day after day our travellers kept on their course, meeting with many incidents and adventures—too many to be recorded in this little volume. After passing the mouth of the Rio Negro, they began to get a peep now and then of high land, and even mountains, in the distance; for the valley of the Amazon, on approaching its mouth, assumes a different character from what it has farther up-stream. These mountains bend towards it both from the Brazilian country on the south, and from Guiana on the north, and these are often visible from the bosom of the stream itself.

It was about a month from their entering the main stream of the Amazon, and a little more than two from the first launching of their vessel, when the balza was brought alongside the wharf of Grand Para, and Don Pablo and his party stepped on shore at this Brazilian town. Here, of course, Don Pablo was a free man—free to go where he pleased—free to dispose of his cargo as he thought best. But he did *not* dispose of it at Grand Para.

A better plan presented itself. He was enabled to freight part of a vessel starting for New York, and thither he went, taking his family and cargo along with him. In New York he obtained a large price for his bark, roots, and beans; in fact, when all were disposed of, he found himself nearly twenty thousand dollars to the good. With this to live upon, he determined to remain in the great Republic of the North until such time as his own dear Peru might be freed from the Spanish oppressor.

Ten years was the period of his exile. At the end of that time the Spanish-American provinces struck almost simultaneously for liberty; and in the ten years' struggle that followed, not only Don Pablo, but Leon—now a young man—bore a conspicuous part. Both fought by the side of Bolivar at the great battle of Junin, which crowned the patriot army with victory.

316 At the close of the War of Independence, Don Pablo was a general of division, while Leon had reached the grade of a colonel. But as soon as the fighting was over, both resigned their military rank, as they were men who did not believe in soldiering as a *mere profession*. In fact, they regarded it as an unbecoming profession in time of peace, and in this view *I* quite agree with them.

Don Pablo returned to his studies; but Leon organised an expedition of *cascarilleros*, and returned to the Montaña, where for many years he employed himself in "bark-hunting." Through this he became one of the richest of Peruvian "ricos."

Guapo, who at this time did not look a year older than when first introduced, was as tough and sinewy as ever, and was at the head of the cascarilleros; and many a *coceada* did Guapo afterwards enjoy with his mountain friend the "vaquero" while passing backward and forward between Cuzco and the Montaña.

Doña Isidora lived for a long period an ornament to her sex, and the little Leona had *her* day as the "belle of Cuzco."

But Leon and Leona both got married at length; and were you to visit Cuzco at the present time, you might see several little Leons and Leonas, with round black eyes, and dark waving hair —all of them descendants from our family of—

"Forest Exiles."

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THE BUSH-BOYS,

OR

ADVENTURES IN THE WILDS OF SOUTHERN AFRICA.

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CHAPTER I.

THE BOERS.

Hendrik Von Bloom was a *boer*.

When I called Hendrik Von Bloom a boer, I did not mean him any disrespect. Quite the contrary.

All the same it may be well to explain that Mynheer Hendrik had not always been a boer. He could boast of a somewhat higher condition—that is, he could boast of a better education than the mere Cape farmer usually possesses, as well as some experience in wielding the sword. He was not a native of the colony, but of Holland; and he had found his way to the Cape, not as a poor adventurer seeking his fortune, but as an officer in a Dutch regiment then stationed there.

His soldier-service in the colony was not of long duration. A certain cherry-cheeked, flaxen-haired Gertrude—the daughter of a rich boer—had taken a liking to the young lieutenant; and he in his turn became vastly fond of her. The consequence was, that they got married. Gertrude's father dying shortly after, the large farm, with its full stock of horses, and Hottentots, broad-tailed sheep, and long-horned oxen, became hers. This was an inducement for her soldier-husband to lay down the sword and turn "vee-boer," or stock farmer, which he consequently did.

These incidents occurred many years previous to the English becoming masters of the Cape colony. When that event came to pass, Hendrik Von Bloom was already a man of influence in the colony and "field-cornet" of his district, which lay in the beautiful county of Graaf Reinet. He was then a widower, the father of a small family. The wife whom he had fondly loved,—the cherry-cheeked, flaxen-haired Gertrude—no longer lived.

History will tell you how the Dutch colonists, discontented with English rule, rebelled against it. The ex-lieutenant and field-cornet was one of the most prominent among these rebels. History will also tell you how the rebellion was put down; and how several of those compromised were brought to execution. Von Bloom escaped by flight; but his fine property in the Graaf Reinet was confiscated and given to another.

Many years after we find him living in a remote district beyond the great Orange River, leading the life of a "trek-boer,"—that is, a nomade farmer, who has no fixed or permanent abode, but moves with his flocks from place to place, wherever good pastures and water may tempt him.

From about this time dates my knowledge of the field-cornet and his family. Of his history previous to this I have stated all I know, but for a period of many years after I am more minutely
318 acquainted with it. Most of its details I received from the lips of his own son. I was greatly interested, and indeed instructed, by them. They were my first lessons in African zoology.

Believing, boy reader, that they might also instruct and interest you, I here lay them before you. You are not to regard them as merely fanciful. The descriptions of the wild creatures that play their parts in this little history, as well as the acts, habits, and instincts assigned to them, you may regard as true to Nature. Young Von Bloom was a student of Nature, and you may depend upon the fidelity of his descriptions.

Disgusted with politics, the field-cornet now dwelt on the remote frontier—in fact, beyond the frontier, for the nearest settlement was an hundred miles off. His “kraal” was in a district bordering the great Kalihari desert—the Saära of Southern Africa. The region around, for hundreds of miles, was uninhabited, for the thinly-scattered, half-human Bushmen who dwelt within its limits, hardly deserved the name of inhabitants any more than the wild beasts that howled around them.

I have said that Von Bloom now followed the occupation of a “trek-boer.” Farming in the Cape colony consists principally in the rearing of horses, cattle, sheep, and goats; and these animals form the wealth of the boer. But the stock of our field-cornet was now a very small one. The proscription had swept away all his wealth, and he had not been fortunate in his first essays as a nomade grazier. The emancipation law, passed by the British Government, extended not only to the Negroes of the West India Islands, but also to the Hottentots of the Cape; and the result of it was that the servants of Mynheer Von Bloom had deserted him. His cattle, no longer properly cared for, had strayed off. Some of them fell a prey to wild beasts—some died of the *murrain*. His horses, too, were decimated by that mysterious disease of Southern Africa, the “horse-sickness;” while his sheep and goats were continually being attacked and diminished in numbers by the earth-wolf, the wild hound, and the hyena. A series of losses had he suffered until his horses, oxen, sheep, and goats, scarce counted altogether an hundred head. A very small stock for a vee-boer, or South African grazier.

Withal our field-cornet was not unhappy. He looked around upon his three brave sons—Hans, Hendrik, and Jan. He looked upon his cherry-cheeked, flaxen-haired daughter, Gertrude, the very type and image of what her mother had been. From these he drew the hope of a happier future.

His two eldest boys were already helps to him in his daily occupations; the youngest would soon be so likewise. In Gertrude,—or “Trüey,” as she was endearingly styled,—he would soon have a capital housekeeper. He was not unhappy therefore; and if an occasional sigh escaped him, it was when the face of little Trüey recalled the memory of that Gertrude who was now in heaven.

But Hendrik Von Bloom was not the man to despair. Disappointments had not succeeded in causing his spirits to droop. He only applied himself more ardently to the task of once more building up his fortune.

For himself he had no ambition to be rich. He would have been contented with the simple life he was leading, and would have cared but little to increase his wealth. But other considerations
319 weighed upon his mind—the future of his little family. He could not suffer his children to grow up in the midst of the wild plains without education.

No; they must one day return to the abodes of men, to act their part in the drama of social and civilised life. This was his design.

But how was this design to be accomplished? Though his so called act of treason had been pardoned, and he was now free to return within the limits of the colony, he was ill prepared for such a purpose. His poor wasted stock would not suffice to set him up within the settlements. It would scarce keep him a month. To return would be to return a beggar!

Reflections of this kind sometimes gave him anxiety. But they also added energy to his disposition, and rendered him more eager to overcome the obstacles before him.

During the present year he had been very industrious. In order that his cattle should be provided for in the season of winter he had planted a large quantity of maize and buckwheat, and now the crops of both were in the most prosperous condition. His garden, too, smiled, and promised a profusion of fruits, and melons, and kitchen vegetables. In short, the little homestead where he had fixed himself for a time, was a miniature oäsis; and he rejoiced day after day, as his eyes rested upon the ripening aspect around him. Once more he began to dream of prosperity—once more to hope that his evil fortunes had come to an end.

Alas! It was a false hope. A series of trials yet awaited him—a series of misfortunes that deprived him of almost everything he possessed, and completely changed his mode of existence.

Perhaps these occurrences could hardly be termed misfortunes, since in the end they led to a happy result.

But you may judge for yourself, boy reader, after you have heard the “history and adventures” of the “trek-boer” and his family.

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CHAPTER II.

THE KRAAL.

The ex-field-cornet was seated in front of his *kraal*—for such is the name of a South African homestead. From his lips protruded a large pipe, with its huge bowl of *meerschaum*. Every boer is a smoker.

Notwithstanding the many losses and crosses of his past life, there was contentment in his eye. He was gratified by the prosperous appearance of his crops. The maize was now “in the milk,” and the ears, folded within the papyrus-like husks, looked full and large. It was delightful to hear the rustling of the long green blades, and see the bright golden tassels waving in the breeze. The heart of the farmer was glad as his eye glanced over his promising crop of “mealies.”

But there was another promising crop that still more gladdened his heart—his fine children. There they are—all around him.

Hans—the oldest—steady, sober Hans, at work in the well-stocked garden; while the diminutive but sprightly imp Jan, the youngest, is looking on, and occasionally helping his brother. Hendrik—the dashing Hendrik, with bright face and light curling hair—is busy among
320 the horses, in the “horse-kraal;” and Trüey—the beautiful, cherry-cheeked, flaxen-haired Trüey—is engaged with her pet—a fawn of the springbok gazelle—whose bright eyes rival her own in their expression of innocence and loveliness.

Yes, the heart of the field-cornet is glad as he glances from one to the other of these his children—and with reason. They are all fair to look upon,—all give promise of goodness. If their father feels an occasional pang, it is, as we have already said, when his eye rests upon the cherry-cheeked, flaxen-haired Gertrude.

But time has long since subdued that grief to a gentle melancholy. Its pang is short-lived, and the face of the field-cornet soon lightens up again as he looks around upon his dear children, so full of hope and promise.

Hans and Hendrik are already strong enough to assist him in his occupations,—in fact, with the exception of “Swartboy,” they are the only help he has.

Who is Swartboy?

Look into the horse-kraal, and you will there see Swartboy engaged, along with his young master Hendrik, in saddling a pair of horses. You may notice that Swartboy appears to be about thirty years old, and he is full that; but if you were to apply a measuring rule to him, you would find him not much over four feet in height! He is stoutly built, however, and would measure better in a horizontal direction. You may notice that he is of a yellow complexion, although his name might lead you to fancy he was black—for “Swartboy” means “black-boy.”

You may observe that his nose is flat and sunk below the level of his cheeks; that his cheeks are prominent, his lips very thick, his nostrils wide, his face beardless, and his head almost hairless—for the small kinky wool-knots thinly scattered over his skull can scarcely be designated hair. You may notice, moreover, that his head is monstrously large, with ears in proportion, and that the eyes are set obliquely, and have a Chinese expression. You may notice about Swartboy all those characteristics that distinguish the “Hottentots” of South Africa.

Yet Swartboy is not a Hottentot—though he is of the same race. He is a Bushman.

How came this wild Bushman into the service of the ex-field-cornet Von Bloom? About that there is a little romantic history. Thus:—

Among the savage tribes of Southern Africa there exists a very cruel custom,—that of abandoning their aged or infirm, and often their sick or wounded, to die in the desert. Children leave their parents behind them, and the wounded are often forsaken by their comrades with no other provision made for them beyond a day's food and a cup of water!

The Bushman Swartboy had been the victim of this custom. He had been upon a hunting excursion with some of his own kindred, and had been sadly mangled by a lion. His comrades, not expecting him to live, left him on the plain to die; and most certainly would he have perished had it not been for our field-cornet. The latter, as he was “trekking” over the plains, found the wounded Bushman, lifted him into his wagon, carried him on to his camp, dressed his wounds, and nursed him till he became well. That is how Swartboy came to be in the service of the field-cornet.

321 Though gratitude is not a characteristic of his race, Swartboy was not ungrateful. When all the other servants ran away, he remained faithful to his master; and since that time had been a most efficient and useful hand. In fact, he was now the only one left, with the exception of the girl, Totty—who was, of course, a Hottentot; and much about the same height, size, and colour, as Swartboy himself.

We have said that Swartboy and the young Hendrik were saddling a pair of horses. As soon as

they had finished that job, they mounted them, and riding out of the kraal, took their way straight across the plain. They were followed by a couple of strong, rough-looking dogs.

Their purpose was to drive home the oxen and the other horses that were feeding a good distance off. This they were in the habit of doing every evening at the same hour,—for in South Africa it is necessary to shut up all kinds of live stock at night, to protect them from beasts of prey. For this purpose are built several enclosures with high walls,—"kraals," as they are called,—a word of the same signification as the Spanish "corral," and I fancy introduced into Africa by the Portuguese—since it is not a native term.

These kraals are important structures about the homestead of a boer, almost as much so as his own dwelling-house, which of itself also bears the name of "kraal."

As young Hendrik and Swartboy rode off for the horses and cattle, Hans, leaving his work in the garden, proceeded to collect the sheep and drive them home. These browsed in a different direction; but, as they were near, he went afoot, taking little Jan along with him.

Trüey having tied her pet to a post, had gone inside the house to help Totty in preparing the supper. Thus the field-cornet was left to himself and his pipe, which he still continued to smoke.

He sat in perfect silence, though he could scarce restrain from giving expression to the satisfaction he felt at seeing his family thus industriously employed. Though pleased with all his children, it must be confessed he had some little partiality for the dashing Hendrik, who bore his own name, and who reminded him more of his own youth than any of the others. He was proud of Hendrik's gallant horsemanship, and his eyes followed him over the plain until the riders were nearly a mile off, and already mixing among the cattle.

At this moment an object came under the eyes of Von Bloom, that at once arrested his attention. It was a curious appearance along the lower part of the sky, in the direction in which Hendrik and Swartboy had gone, but apparently beyond them. It resembled a dun-coloured mist or smoke, as if the plain at a great distance was on fire!

Could that be so? Had some one fired the *karoo* bushes? Or was it a cloud of dust?

The wind was hardly strong enough to raise such a dust, and yet it had that appearance. Was it caused by animals? Might it not be the dust raised by a great herd of antelopes,—a migration of the springboks, for instance? It extended for miles along the horizon, but Von Bloom knew that these creatures often travel in flocks of greater extent than miles. Still he could not think it was that.

He continued to gaze at the strange phenomenon, endeavouring to account for it in various ways. It seemed to be rising higher against the blue sky—now resembling dust, now like the
322 smoke of a widely-spread conflagration, and now like a reddish cloud. It was in the west, and already the setting sun was obscured by it. It had passed over the sun's disc like a screen, and his light no longer fell upon the plain. Was it the forerunner of some terrible storm?—of an earthquake?

Such a thought crossed the mind of the field-cornet. It was not like an ordinary cloud,—it was not like a cloud of dust,—it was not like smoke. It was like nothing he had ever witnessed before. No wonder that he became anxious and apprehensive.

All at once the dark-red mass seemed to envelope the cattle upon the plain, and these could be seen running to and fro as if affrighted. Then the two riders disappeared under its dun shadow!

Von Bloom rose to his feet, now seriously alarmed. What could it mean?

The exclamation to which he gave utterance brought little Trüey and Totty from the house; and Hans with Jan had now got back with the sheep and goats. All saw the singular phenomenon, but none of them could tell what it was. All were in a state of alarm.

As they stood gazing, with hearts full of fear, the two riders appeared coming out of the cloud, and then they were seen to gallop forward over the plain in the direction of the house. They came on at full speed, but long before they had got near, the voice of Swartboy could be heard crying out,—

"Baas Von Bloom! *da springaans are comin'!—da springaan!—da springaan!*"

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CHAPTER III.

THE SPRING-HAAN.

"Ah *the springaan*!" cried Von Bloom, recognising the Dutch name for the far-famed migratory locust.

The mystery was explained. The singular cloud that was spreading itself over the plain was

neither more nor less than a flight of locusts!

It was a sight that none of them, except Swartboy, had ever witnessed before. His master had often seen locusts in small quantities, and of several species,—for there are many kinds of these singular insects in South Africa. But that which now appeared was a true migratory locust (*Gryllus devastatorius*); and upon one of its great migrations—an event of rarer occurrence than travellers would have you believe.

Swartboy knew them well; and, although he announced their approach in a state of great excitement, it was not the excitement of terror.

Quite the contrary. His great thick lips were compressed athwart his face in a grotesque expression of joy. The instincts of his wild race were busy within him. To them a flight of locusts is not an object of dread, but a source of rejoicing—their coming as welcome as a take of shrimps to a Leigh fisherman, or harvest to the husband-man.

The dogs, too, barked and howled with joy, and frisked about as if they were going out upon a
323 hunt. On perceiving the cloud, their instinct enabled them easily to recognise the locusts. They regarded them with feelings similar to those that stirred Swartboy—for both dogs and Bushmen eat the insects with avidity!

At the announcement that it was only locusts, all at once recovered from their alarm. Little Trüey and Jan laughed, clapped their hands, and waited with curiosity until they should come nearer. All had heard enough of locusts to know that they were only grasshoppers that neither bit nor stung any one, and therefore no one was afraid of them.

Even Von Bloom himself was at first very little concerned about them. After his feelings of apprehension, the announcement that it was a flight of locusts was a relief, and for a while he did not dwell upon the nature of such a phenomenon, but only regarded it with feelings of curiosity.

Of a sudden his thoughts took a new direction. His eye rested upon his fields of maize and buckwheat, upon his garden of melons, and fruits, and vegetables: a new alarm seized upon him; the memory of many stories which he had heard in relation to these destructive creatures rushed into his mind, and as the whole truth developed itself, he turned pale, and uttered new exclamations of alarm.

The children changed countenance as well. They saw that their father suffered; though they knew not why. They gathered inquiringly around him.

“Alas! alas! Lost! lost!” exclaimed he; “yes, all our crop—our labour of the year—gone, gone! O my dear children!”

“How lost, father?—how gone?” exclaimed several of them in a breath.

“See the springaan! they will eat up our crop—all—all!”

“'Tis true, indeed,” said Hans, who being a great student had often read accounts of the devastations committed by the locusts.

The joyous countenances of all once more wore a sad expression, and it was no longer with curiosity that they gazed upon the distant cloud, that so suddenly had clouded their joy.

Von Bloom had good cause for dread. Should the swarm come on, and settle upon his fields, farewell to his prospects of a harvest. They would strip the verdure from his whole farm in a twinkling. They would leave neither seed, nor leaf, nor stalk behind them.

All stood watching the flight with painful emotions. The swarm was still a full half-mile distant. They appeared to be coming no nearer,—good!

A ray of hope entered the mind of the field-cornet. He took off his broad felt hat, and held it up to the full stretch of his arm. The wind was blowing from the north, and the swarm was directly to the west of the kraal. The cloud of locusts had approached from the north, as they almost invariably do in the southern parts of Africa.

“Yes,” said Hendrik, who having been in their midst could tell what way they were drifting, “they came down upon us from a northerly direction. When we headed our horses homewards, we soon galloped out from them, and they did not appear to fly after us; I am sure they were passing southwards.”

Von Bloom entertained hopes that as none appeared due north of the kraal, the swarm might pass on without extending to the borders of his farm. He knew that they usually followed the
324 direction of the wind. Unless the wind changed they would not swerve from their course.

He continued to observe them anxiously. He saw that the selvedge of the cloud came no nearer. His hopes rose. His countenance grew brighter. The children noticed this and were glad, but said nothing. All stood silently watching.

An odd sight it was. There was not only the misty swarm of the insects to gaze upon. The air above them was filled with birds—strange birds and of many kinds. On slow, silent wing soared the brown “oricou,” the largest of Africa's vultures; and along with him the yellow “chasse fiente,” the vulture of Kolbé. There swept the bearded “lamvanger,” on broad extended wings. There shrieked the great “Caffre eagle,” and side by side with him the short-tailed and singular

“bateleur.” There, too were hawks of different sizes and colours, and kites cutting through the air, and crows and ravens, and many species of *insectivora*.

But far more numerous than all the rest could be seen the little *springhaan-vogel*, a speckled bird of nearly the size and form of a swallow. Myriads of these darkened the air above—hundreds of them continually shooting down among the insects, and soaring up again each with a victim in its beak. “Locust-vultures” are these creatures named, though not vultures in kind. They feed exclusively on these insects, and are never seen where the locusts are not. They follow them through all their migrations, building their nests, and rearing their young, in the midst of their prey!

It was, indeed, a curious sight to look upon, that swarm of winged insects, and their numerous and varied enemies; and all stood gazing upon it with feelings of wonder. Still the living cloud approached no nearer, and the hopes of Von Bloom continued to rise.

The swarm kept extending to the south—in fact, it now stretched along the whole western horizon; and all noticed that it was gradually getting lower down—that is, its top edge was sinking in the heavens. Were the locusts passing off to the west? No.

“Da am goin roost for da nacht—now we'll get 'em in bag-full,” said Swartboy, with a pleased look; for Swartboy was a regular locust-eater, as fond of them as either eagle or kite,—aye, as the “springhaan-vogel” itself.

It was as Swartboy had stated. The swarm was actually settling down on the plain.

“Can't fly without sun,” continued the Bushman. “Too cold now. Dey go dead till da mornin.”

And so it was. The sun had set. The cool breeze weakened the wings of the insect travellers; and they were compelled to make halt for the night upon the trees, bushes, and grass.

In a few minutes the dark mist that had hid the blue rim of the sky, was seen no more; but the distant plain looked as if a fire had swept over it. It was thickly covered with the bodies of the insects, that gave it a blackened appearance as far as the eye could reach.

The attendant birds, perceiving the approach of night, screamed for awhile, and then scattered away through the heavens. Some perched upon the rocks, while others went to roost among the low thickets of mimosa; and now for a short interval both earth and air were silent.

Von Bloom now bethought him of his cattle. Their forms were seen afar off in the midst of the
325 locust-covered plain.

“Let 'em feed um little while, baas,” suggested Swartboy.

“On what?” inquired his master. “Don't you see the grass is covered!”

“On de springhaan demself, baas,” replied the Bushman; “good for fatten big ox—better dan grass—ya, better dan *mealies*.”

But it was too late to leave the cattle longer out upon the plain. The lions would soon be abroad —the sooner because of the locusts, for the king of the beasts does not disdain to fill his royal stomach with these insects—when he can find them.

Von Bloom saw the necessity of bringing his cattle at once to their kraal.

A third horse was saddled, which the field-cornet himself mounted, and rode off, followed by Hendrik and Swartboy.

On approaching the locusts they beheld a singular sight. The ground was covered with these reddish-brown creatures, in some spots to the depth of several inches. What bushes there were were clustered with them,—all over the leaves and branches, as if swarms of bees had settled upon them. Not a leaf or blade of grass that was not covered with their bodies!

They moved not, but remained silent, as if torpid or asleep. The cold of the evening had deprived them of the power of flight.

What was strangest of all to the eyes of Von Bloom and Hendrik, was the conduct of their own horses and cattle. These were some distance out in the midst of the sleeping host; but instead of being alarmed at their odd situation, they were greedily gathering up the insects in mouthfuls, and crunching them as though they had been corn!

It was with some difficulty that they could be driven off; but the roar of a lion, that was just then heard over the plain, and the repeated application of Swartboy's *jambok*, rendered them more tractable, and at length they suffered themselves to be driven home, and lodged within their kraals.

Swartboy had provided himself with a bag, which he carried back full of locusts.

It was observed that in collecting the insects into the bag, he acted with some caution, handling them very gingerly, as if he was afraid of them. It was not them he feared, but snakes which, upon such occasions are very plenteous, and very much to be dreaded—as the Bushman from experience well knew.

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CHAPTER IV.

A TALK ABOUT LOCUSTS.

It was a night of anxiety in the kraal of the field-cornet. Should the wind veer round to the west, to a certainty the locusts would cover his land in the morning, and the result would be the total destruction of his crops. Perhaps worse than that. Perhaps the whole vegetation around—for fifty miles or more—might be destroyed; and then how would his cattle be fed? It would be no easy matter even to save their lives. They might perish before he could drive them to any other pasturage!

Such a thing was by no means uncommon or improbable. In the history of the Cape colony
326 many a boer had lost his flocks in this very way. No wonder there was anxiety that night in the kraal of the field-cornet.

At intervals Von Bloom went out to ascertain whether there was any change in the wind. Up to a late hour he could perceive none. A gentle breeze still blew from the north—from the great Kalihari desert—whence, no doubt, the locusts had come. The moon was bright, and her light gleamed over the host of insects that darkly covered the plain. The roar of the lion could be heard mingling with the shrill scream of the jackal and the maniac laugh of the hyena. All these beasts, and many more, were enjoying a plenteous repast.

Perceiving no change in the wind, Von Bloom became less uneasy, and they all conversed freely about the locusts. Swartboy took a leading part in this conversation, as he was better acquainted with the subject than any of them. It was far from being the first flight of locusts Swartboy had seen, and many a bushel of them had he eaten. It was natural to suppose, therefore, that he knew a good deal about them.

He knew not whence they came. That was a point about which Swartboy had never troubled himself. The learned Hans offered an explanation of their origin.

“They come from the desert,” said he. “The eggs from which they are produced, are deposited in the sands or dust; where they lie until rain falls, and causes the herbage to spring up. Then the locusts are hatched, and in their first stage are supported upon this herbage. When it becomes exhausted, they are compelled to go in search of food. Hence these 'migrations,' as they are called.”

This explanation seemed clear enough.

“Now I have heard,” said Hendrik, “of farmers kindling fires around their crops to keep off the locusts. I can't see how fires would keep them off—not even if a regular fence of fire were made all round a field. These creatures have wings, and could easily fly over the fires.”

“The fires,” replied Hans, “are kindled, in order that the smoke may prevent them from alighting; but the locusts to which these accounts usually refer are without wings, called *voetgangers* (foot-goers). They are, in fact, the *larvæ* of these locusts, before they have obtained their wings. These have also their migrations, that are often more destructive than those of the perfect insects, such as we see here. They proceed over the ground by crawling and leaping like grasshoppers; for, indeed, they are grasshoppers—a species of them. They keep on in one direction, as if they were guided by instinct to follow a particular course. Nothing can interrupt them in their onward march unless the sea or some broad and rapid river. Small streams they can swim across; and large ones, too, where they run sluggishly; walls and houses they can climb —even the chimneys—going straight over them; and the moment they have reached the other side of any obstacle, they continue straight onward in the old direction.

“In attempting to cross broad rapid rivers, they are drowned in countless myriads, and swept off to the sea. When it is only a small migration, the farmers sometimes keep them off by means of fires, as you have heard. On the contrary, when large numbers appear, even the fires are of no avail.”

327 “But how is that, brother?” inquired Hendrik. “I can understand how fires would stop the kind you speak of, since you say they are without wings. But since they are so, how do they get through the fires? Jump them?”

“No, not so,” replied Hans. “The fires are built too wide and large for that.”

“How then, brother?” asked Hendrik. “I'm puzzled.”

“So am I,” said little Jan.

“And I,” added Trüey.

“Well, then,” continued Hans, “millions of the insects crawl into the fires and put them out!”

“Ho!” cried all in astonishment. “How? Are they not burned?”

“Of course,” replied Hans. “They are scorched and killed—myriads of them quite burned up. But their bodies crowded thickly on the fires choke them out. The foremost ranks of the great

host thus become victims, and the others pass safely across upon the holocaust thus made. So you see, even fires cannot stop the course of the locusts when they are in great numbers.

“In many parts of Africa, where the natives cultivate the soil, as soon as they discover a migration of these insects, and perceive that they are heading in the direction of their fields and gardens, quite a panic is produced among them. They know that they will lose their crops to a certainty, and hence dread a visitation of locusts as they would an earthquake, or some other great calamity.”

“We can well understand their feelings upon such an occasion,” remarked Hendrik, with a significant look.

“The flying locusts,” continued Hans, “seem less to follow a particular direction than their larvæ. The former seem to be guided by the wind. Frequently this carries them all into the sea, where they perish in vast numbers. On some parts of the coast their dead bodies have been found washed back to land in quantities incredible. At one place the sea threw them upon the beach, until they lay piled up in a ridge four feet in height, and fifty miles in length! It has been asserted by several well-known travellers that the effluvium from this mass tainted the air to such an extent that it was perceived one hundred and fifty miles inland!”

“Heigh!” exclaimed little Jan. “I didn't think anybody had so good a nose.”

At little Jan's remark there was a general laugh. Von Bloom did not join in their merriment. He was in too serious a mood just then.

“Papa,” inquired little Trüey, perceiving that her father did not laugh, and thinking to draw him into the conversation,—“Papa! were these the kind of locusts eaten by John the Baptist when in the desert? His food, the Bible says, was 'locusts and wild honey.'”

“I believe these are the same,” replied the father.

“I think, papa,” modestly rejoined Hans, “they are not exactly the same, but a kindred species. The locust of Scripture was the true *Gryllus migratorius*, and different from those of South Africa, though very similar in its habits.” “But,” continued he, “some writers dispute that point altogether. The Abyssinians say that it was beans of the locust-tree, and not insects, that were the food of St. John.”

“What is your own opinion, Hans?” inquired Hendrik, who had a great belief in his brother's book-knowledge.

“Why, I think,” replied Hans, “there need be no question about it. It is only torturing the
328 meaning of a word to suppose that St. John ate the locust fruit, and not the insect. I am decidedly of opinion that the latter is meant in Scripture; and what makes me think so is, that these two kinds of food, 'locusts and wild honey,' are often coupled together, as forming at the present time the subsistence of many tribes who are denizens of the desert. Besides, we have good evidence that both were used as food by desert-dwelling people in the days of Scripture. It is, therefore, but natural to suppose that St. John, when in the desert, was forced to partake of this food; just as many a traveller of modern times has eaten of it when crossing the deserts that surround us here in South Africa.

“I have read a great many books about locusts,” continued Hans; “and now that the Bible has been mentioned, I must say for my part, I know no account given of these insects so truthful and beautiful as that in the Bible itself. Shall I read it, papa?”

“By all means, my boy,” said the field-cornet, rather pleased at the request which his son had made, and at the tenor of the conversation.

Little Trüey ran into the inner room and brought out an immense volume bound in gemsbok skin, with a couple of brass clasps upon it to keep it closed. This was the family Bible; and here let me observe, that a similar book may be found in the house of nearly every boer, for these Dutch colonists are a Protestant and Bible-loving people—so much so, that they think nothing of going a hundred miles, four times in the year, to attend the *nacht-maal*, or sacramental supper! What do you think of that?

Hans opened the volume, and turned at once to the book of the prophet Joel. From the readiness with which he found the passage, it was evident he was well acquainted with the book he held in his hands.

He read as follows:

> “A day of darkness and of gloominess, a day of clouds and of thick darkness, as the morning spread upon the mountains; a great people and a strong: there hath not been ever the like, neither shall be any more after it, even to the years of many generations. A fire devoureth before them, and behind them a flame burneth: the land is as the garden of Eden before them, and behind them a desolate wilderness; yea, and nothing shall escape them. The appearance of them is as the appearance of horses; and as horsemen, so shall they run. Like the noise of chariots on the tops of mountains shall they leap, like the noise of a flame of fire that devoureth the stubble, as a strong people set in battle array. The earth shall quake

> before them; the heavens shall tremble; the sun and the moon shall be dark, and the stars shall withdraw their shining. How do the beasts groan! the herds of cattle are perplexed, because they have no pasture; yea, the flocks of sheep are made desolate."

Even the rude Swartboy could perceive the poetic beauty of this description.

But Swartboy had much to say about the locusts, as well as the inspired Joel.

Thus spoke Swartboy:—

"Bushman no fear da springhaan. Bushman hab no garden—no maize—no buckwheat—no nothing for da springhaan to eat. Bushman eat locust himself—he grow fat on da locust. Ebery thing eat dem dar springhaan. Ebery thing grow fat in da locust season. Ho! den for dem
329 springhaan!"

These remarks of Swartboy were true enough. The locusts are eaten by almost every species of animal known in South Africa. Not only do the *carnivora* greedily devour them, but also animals and birds of the game kind—such as antelopes, partridges, guinea-fowls, bustards, and, strange to say, the giant of all—the huge elephant—will travel for miles to overtake a migration of locusts! Domestic fowls, sheep, horses, and dogs, devour them with equal greediness. Still another strange fact—the locusts eat one another! If any one of them gets hurt, so as to impede his progress, the others immediately turn upon him and eat him up!

The Bushmen and other native races of Africa submit the locusts to a process of cookery before eating them; and during the whole evening Swartboy had been engaged in preparing the bagful which he had collected. He "cooked" them thus:—

He first boiled, or rather steamed them, for only a small quantity of water was put into the pot. This process lasted two hours. They were then taken out, and allowed to dry; and after that shaken about in a pan, until all the legs and wings were broken off from the bodies. A winnowing process—Swartboy's thick lips acting as a fan—was next gone through; and the legs and wings were thus got rid of. The locusts were then ready for eating.

A little salt only was required to render them more palatable, when all present made trial of, and some of the children even liked them. By many, locusts prepared in this way are considered quite equal to shrimps!

Sometimes they are pounded when quite dry into a sort of meal, and with water added to them, are made into a kind of stirabout.

When well dried, they will keep for a long time; and they frequently form the only store of food which the poorer natives have to depend upon for a whole season.

Among many tribes—particularly among those who are not agricultural—the coming of the locusts is a source of rejoicing. These people turn out with sacks, and often with pack-oxen to collect and bring them to the villages; and on such occasions vast heaps of them are accumulated and stored, in the same way as grain!

Conversing of these things the night passed on until it was time for going to bed. The field-cornet went out once again to observe the wind; and then the door of the little kraal was closed, and the family retired to rest.

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CHAPTER V.

THE LOCUST-FLIGHT.

The field-cornet slept but little. Anxiety kept him awake. He turned and tossed, and thought of the locusts. He napped at intervals, and dreamt about locusts, and crickets, and grasshoppers, and all manner of great long-legged, goggle-eyed insects. He was glad when the first ray of light penetrated through the little window of his chamber.

He sprang to his feet; and, scarce staying to dress himself, rushed out into the open air. It was still dark, but he did not require to see the wind. He did not need to toss a feather or hold up his
330 hat. The truth was too plain. A strong breeze was blowing—it was blowing *from the west*!

Half distracted, he ran farther out to assure himself. He ran until clear of the walls that enclosed the kraals and garden.

He halted and felt the air. Alas! his first impression was correct. The breeze blew directly from the west—directly from the locusts. He could perceive the effluvium borne from the hateful insects: there was no longer cause to doubt.

Groaning in spirit, Von Bloom returned to his house. He had no longer any hope of escaping the terrible visitation.

His first directions were to collect all the loose pieces of linen or clothing in the house, and pack them within the family chests. What! would the locusts be likely to eat them?

Indeed, yes—for these voracious creatures are not fastidious. No particular vegetable seems to be chosen by them. The leaves of the bitter tobacco plant appear to be as much to their liking as the sweet and succulent blades of maize! Pieces of linen, cotton, and even flannel, are devoured by them, as though they were the tender shoots of plants. Stones, iron, and hard wood, are about the only objects that escape their fierce masticators.

Von Bloom had heard this, Hans had read of it, and Swartboy confirmed it from his own experience.

Consequently, everything that was at all destructible was carefully stowed away; and then breakfast was cooked and eaten in silence.

There was a gloom over the faces of all, because he who was the head of all was silent and dejected. What a change within a few hours! But the evening before the field-cornet and his little family were in the full enjoyment of happiness.

There was still one hope, though a slight one. Might it yet rain? Or might the day turn out cold?

In either case Swartboy said the locusts could not take wing—for they cannot fly in cold or rainy weather. In the event of a cold or wet day they would have to remain as they were, and perhaps the wind might change round again before they resumed their flight. Oh, for a torrent of rain, or a cold cloudy day!

Vain wish! vain hope! In half-an-hour after the sun rose up in African splendour, and his hot rays, slanting down upon the sleeping host, warmed them into life and activity. They commenced to crawl, to hop about, and then, as if by one impulse, myriads rose into the air. The breeze impelled them in the direction in which it was blowing,—in the direction of the devoted maize fields.

In less than five minutes, from the time they had taken wing, they were over the kraal, and dropping in tens of thousands upon the surrounding fields. Slow was their flight, and gentle their descent, and to the eyes of those beneath they presented the appearance of a shower of *black* snow, falling in large feathery flakes. In a few moments the ground was completely covered, until every stalk of maize, every plant and bush, carried its hundreds. On the outer plains too, as far as eye could see, the pasture was strewed thickly; and as the great flight had now passed to the eastward of the house, the sun's disk was again hidden by them as if by an eclipse!

They seemed to move in a kind of *echelon*, the bands in the rear constantly flying to the front, and then halting to feed, until in turn these were headed by others that had advanced over them
331 in a similar manner.

The noise produced by their wings was not the least curious phenomenon; and resembled a steady breeze playing among the leaves of the forest, or the sound of a water-wheel.

For two hours this passage continued. During most of that time, Von Bloom and his people had remained within the house, with closed doors and windows. This they did to avoid the unpleasant shower, as the creatures impelled by the breeze, often strike the cheek so forcibly as to cause a feeling of pain. Moreover, they did not like treading upon the unwelcome intruders, and crushing them under their feet, which they must have done, had they moved about outside where the ground was thickly covered.

Many of the insects even crawled inside, through the chinks of the door and windows, and greedily devoured any vegetable substance which happened to be lying about the floor.

At the end of two hours Von Bloom looked forth. The thickest of the flight had passed. The sun was again shining; but upon what was he shining? No longer upon green fields and a flowery garden. No. Around the house, on every side, north, south, east, and west, the eye rested only on black desolation. Not a blade of grass, not a leaf could be seen—even the very bark was stripped from the trees, that now stood as if withered by the hand of God! Had fire swept the surface, it could not have left it more naked and desolate. There was no garden, there were no fields of maize or buckwheat, there was no longer a farm—the kraal stood in the midst of a desert!

Words cannot depict the emotions of the field-cornet at that moment. The pen cannot describe his painful feelings.

Such a change in two hours! He could scarce credit his senses—he could scarce believe in its reality. He knew that the locusts would eat up his maize, and his wheat, and the vegetables of his garden; but his fancy had fallen far short of the extreme desolation that had actually been produced. The whole landscape was metamorphosed—grass was out of the question—trees, whose delicate foliage had played in the soft breeze but two short hours before, now stood leafless, scathed by worse than winter. The very ground seemed altered in shape! He would not have known it as his own farm. Most certainly had the owner been absent during the period of the locust-flight, and approached without any information of what had been passing, he would not have recognised the place of his own habitation!

With the phlegm peculiar to his race, the field-cornet sat down, and remained for a long time

without speech or movement.

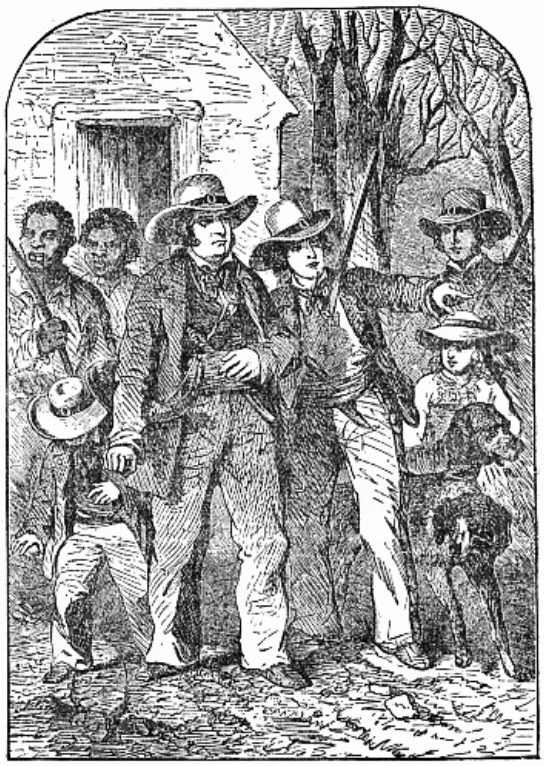
His children gathered near, and looked on—their young hearts painfully throbbing. They could not fully appreciate the difficult circumstances in which this occurrence had placed them; nor did their father himself at first. He thought only of the loss he had sustained, in the destruction of his fine crops; and this of itself, when we consider his isolated situation, and the hopelessness of restoring them, was enough to cause him very great chagrin.

“Gone! all gone!” he exclaimed, in a sorrowing voice. “Oh! Fortune—Fortune—again art thou cruel!”

“Papa! do not grieve,” said a soft voice; “we are all alive yet, we are here by your side;” and with the words a little white hand was laid upon his shoulder. It was the hand of the beautiful Trüey.

332 It seemed as if an angel had smiled upon him. He lifted the child in his arms, and in a paroxysm of fondness pressed her to his heart. That heart felt relieved.

“Bring me the Book,” said he, addressing one of the boys.



THE SHOWER OF LOCUSTS.

The Bible was brought—its massive covers were opened—a verse was chosen—and the song of praise rose up in the midst of the desert.

The Book was closed; and for some minutes all knelt in prayer.

333 When Von Bloom again stood upon his feet, and looked around him, the desert seemed once more to “rejoice and blossom as the rose.”

Upon the human heart such is the magic influence of resignation and humility.

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CHAPTER VI.

“INSPANN AND TREK!”

With all his confidence in the protection of a Supreme Being, Von Bloom knew that he was not to leave everything to the Divine hand. That was not the religion he had been taught; and he at once set about taking measures to extricate himself from the unpleasant position in which he was placed.

Unpleasant position! Ha! It was more than unpleasant, as the field-cornet began to perceive. It was a position of peril!

The more Von Bloom reflected, the more was he convinced of this. There they were, in the middle of a black naked plain, that without a green spot extended beyond the limits of vision. How much farther he could not guess; but he knew that the devastations of the migratory locust

sometimes cover an area of thousands of miles! It was certain that the one that had just swept past was on a very extensive scale.

It was evident he could no longer remain by his kraal. His horses, and cattle, and sheep, could not live without food; and should these perish, upon what were he and his family to subsist? He must leave the kraal. He must go in search of pasture, without loss of time,—at once. Already the animals, shut up beyond their usual hour, were uttering their varied cries, impatient to be let out. They would soon hunger; and it was hard to say when food could be procured for them.

There was no time to be lost. Every hour was of great importance,—even minutes must not be wasted in dubious hesitation.

The field-cornet spent but a few minutes in consideration. Whether should he mount one of his best horses, and ride off alone in search of pasture? or whether would it not be better to "inspann" his wagon, and take everything along with him at once?

He soon decided in favour of the latter course. In any case he would have been compelled to move from his present location,—to leave the kraal altogether.

He might as well take everything at once. Should he go out alone, it might cost him a long time to find grass and water—for both would be necessary—and, meantime, his stock would be suffering.

These and other considerations decided him at once to "inspann" and "trek" away, with his wagon, his horses, his cattle, his sheep, his "household goods," and his whole family circle.

"Inspann and trek!" was the command: and Swartboy, who was proud of the reputation he had earned as a wagon-driver, was now seen waving his bamboo whip like a great fishing-rod.

"Inspann and trek!" echoed Swartboy, tying upon his twenty-feet lash a new cracker, which he had twisted out of the skin of the hartebeest antelope.

"Inspann and trek!" he repeated, making his vast whip crack like a pistol; "yes, baas, I'll
334 inspann;" and, having satisfied himself that his "voor-slag" was properly adjusted, Swartboy rested the bamboo handle against the side of the house, and proceeded to the kraal to collect the yoke-oxen.

A large wagon, of a sort that is the pride and property of every Cape farmer, stood to one side of the house. It was a vehicle of the first class,—a regular "cap-tent" wagon,—that had been made for the field-cornet in his better days, and in which he had been used to drive his wife and children to the "nacht-maal," and upon *vrolykheids* (parties of pleasure). In those days a team of eight fine horses used to draw it along at a rattling rate. Alas! oxen had now to take their place; for Von Bloom had but five horses in his whole stud, and these were required for the saddle.

But the wagon was almost as good as ever it had been,—almost as good as when it used to be the envy of the field-cornet's neighbours, the boers of Graaf Reinet. Nothing was broken. Everything was in its place,—"voor-kist," and "achter-kist," and side-chests. There was the snow-white cap, with its "fore-clap" and "after-clap," and its inside pockets, all complete; and the wheels neatly carved, and the well-planed boxing and "disselboom," and the strong "trektow" of buffalo-hide. Nothing was wanting that ought to be found about a wagon. It was, in fact, the best part of the field-cornet's property that remained to him,—for it was equal in value to all the oxen, cattle, and sheep, upon his establishment.

While Swartboy, assisted by Hendrik, was catching up the twelve yoke-oxen, and attaching them to the disselboom and trektow of the wagon, the "baas" himself, aided by Hans, Totty, and also by Trüey and little Jan, was loading up the furniture and implements. This was not a difficult task. The *Penates* of the little kraal were not numerous, and were all soon packed either inside or around the roomy vehicle.

In about an hour's time the wagon was loaded up, the oxen were inspanned, the horses saddled, and everything was ready for "trekking."

And now arose the question, *whither*?

Up to this time Von Bloom had only thought of getting away from the spot—of escaping beyond the naked waste that surrounded him.

It now became necessary to determine the direction in which they were to travel—a most important consideration.

Important, indeed, as a little reflection showed. They might go in the direction in which the locusts had gone, or that in which they had come? On either route they might travel for scores of miles without meeting with a mouthful of grass for the hungry animals; and in such a case these would break down and perish.

Or the travellers might move in some other direction, and find grass, but not water. Without water, not only would they have to fear for the cattle, but for themselves—for their own lives. How important then it was, which way they turned their faces!

At first the field-cornet bethought him of heading towards the settlements. The nearest water in that direction was almost fifty miles off. It lay to the eastward of the kraal. The locusts had just gone that way. They would by this time have laid waste the whole country—perhaps to the water

or beyond it!

335 It would be a great risk going in that direction.

Northward lay the Kalihari desert. It would be hopeless to steer north. Von Bloom knew of no oäsis in the desert. Besides the locusts had come from the north. They were drifting southward when first seen; and from the time they had been observed passing in this last direction, they had no doubt ere this wasted the plains far to the south.

The thoughts of the field-cornet were now turned to the west. It is true the swarm had last approached from the west; but Von Bloom fancied that they had first come down from the north, and that the sudden veering round of the wind had caused them to change direction. He thought that by trekking westward he would soon get beyond the ground they had laid bare.

He knew something of the plains to the west—not much indeed, but he knew that at about forty miles distance there was a spring with good pasturage around it, upon whose water he could depend. He had once visited it, while on a search for some of his cattle, that had wandered thus far. Indeed, it then appeared to him a better situation for cattle than the one he held, and he had often thought of moving to it. Its great distance from any civilized settlement was the reason why he had not done so. Although he was already far beyond the frontier, he still kept up a sort of communication with the settlements, whereas at the more distant point such a communication would be extremely difficult.

Now that other considerations weighed with him, his thoughts once more returned to this spring; and after spending a few minutes more in earnest deliberation, he decided upon “trekking” westward.

Swartboy was ordered to head round, and strike to the west. The Bushman promptly leaped to his seat upon the voor-kist, cracked his mighty whip, straightened out his long team, and moved off over the plain.

Hans and Hendrik were already in their saddles; and having cleared the kraals of all their live stock, with the assistance of the dogs, drove the lowing and bleating animals before them.

Trüey and little Jan sat beside Swartboy on the fore-chest of the wagon; and the round full eyes of the pretty springbok could be seen peeping curiously out from under the cap-tent.

Casting a last look upon his desolate kraal, the field-cornet turned his horse's head, and rode after the wagon.

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CHAPTER VII.

WATER! WATER!

On moved the little caravan, but not in silence. Swartboy's voice and whip made an almost continual noise. The latter could be plainly heard more than a mile over the plain, like repeated discharges of a musket. Hendrik, too, did a good deal in the way of shouting; and even the usually quiet Hans was under the necessity of using his voice to urge the flock forward in the right direction.

Occasionally both the boys were called upon to give Swartboy a help with the leading oxen when those became obstinate or restive, and would turn out of the track. At such times either Hans or Hendrik would gallop up, set the heads of the animals right again, and ply the “jamboks”
336 upon their sides.

This “jambok” is a severe chastener to an obstinate ox. It is an elastic whip made of rhinoceros or hippopotamus skin,—hippopotamus is the best,—near six feet long, and tapering regularly from butt to tip.

Whenever the led oxen misbehaved, and Swartboy could not reach them with his long “voor-slag,” Hendrik was ever ready to tickle them with his tough jambok; and, by this means, frighten them into good behaviour. Indeed, one of the boys was obliged to be at their head nearly all the time.

A leader is used to accompany most teams of oxen in South Africa. But those of the field-cornet had been accustomed to draw the wagon without one, ever since the Hottentot servants ran away; and Swartboy had driven many miles with no other help than his long whip. But the strange look of everything, since the locusts passed, had made the oxen shy and wild; besides the insects had obliterated every track or path which oxen would have followed. The whole surface was alike,—there was neither trace nor mark. Even Von Bloom himself could with difficulty recognise the features of the country, and had to guide himself by the sun in the sky.

Hendrik stayed mostly by the head of the leading oxen. Hans had no difficulty in driving the flock when once fairly started. A sense of fear kept all together, and as there was no herbage

upon any side to tempt them to stray, they moved regularly on.

Von Bloom rode in front to guide the caravan. Neither he nor any of them had made any change in their costume, but travelled in their everyday dress. The field-cornet himself was habited after the manner of most boers, in wide leathern trousers, termed in that country “crackers;” a large roomy jacket of green cloth, with ample outside pockets; a fawn-skin waistcoat; a huge white felt hat, with the broadest of brims; and upon his feet a pair of brogans of African unstained leather, known among the boers as “feldt-schoenen” (country shoes). Over his saddle lay a “kaross,” or robe of leopard-skins, and upon his shoulder he carried his “roer”—a large smooth-bore gun, about six feet in length, with an old-fashioned flint-lock,—quite a load of itself.

This is the gun in which the boer puts all his trust; and although an American backwoodsman would at first sight be disposed to laugh at such a weapon, a little knowledge of the boer's country would change his opinion of the “roer.” His own weapon—the small-bore rifle, with a bullet less than a pea—would be almost useless among the large game that inhabits the country of the boer. Upon the “karoos” of Africa there are crack shots and sterling hunters, as well as in the backwoods or on the prairies of America.

Curving round under the field-cornet's left arm, and resting against his side, was an immense powder-horn—of such size as could only be produced upon the head of an African ox. It was from the country of the Bechuanas, though nearly all Cape oxen grow horns of vast dimensions. Of course it was used to carry the field-cornet's powder, and, if full, it must have contained half-a-dozen pounds at least! A leopard-skin pouch hanging under his right arm, a hunting-knife stuck in his waist-belt, and a large meerschaum pipe through the band of his hat, completed the equipments of the trek-boer, Von Bloom.

337 Hans and Hendrik were very similarly attired, armed, and equipped. Of course their trousers were of dressed sheep-skin, wide—like the trousers of all young boers—and they also wore jackets and “feldt-schoenen,” and broad-brimmed white hats. Hans carried a light fowling-piece, while Hendrik's gun was a stout rifle of the kind known as a “yäger” an excellent gun for large game. In this piece Hendrik had great pride, and had learnt to drive a nail with it at nearly a hundred paces. Hendrik was *par excellence* the marksman of the party. Each of the boys also carried a large crescent-shaped powder-horn, with a pouch for bullets; and over the saddle of each was strapped the robe or kaross, differing only from their father's in that his was of the rarer leopard-skin, while theirs were a commoner sort, one of antelope, and the other of jackal-skin.

Little Jan also wore wide trousers, jacket, “feldt-schoenen,” and broad-brimmed beaver,—in fact, Jan, although scarce a yard high, was, in point of costume, a type of his father,—a diminutive type of the boer. Trüey was habited in a skirt of blue woollen stuff, with a neat bodice elaborately stitched and embroidered after the Dutch fashion, and over her fair locks she wore a light sun-hat of straw with a ribbon and strings. Totty was very plainly attired in strong homespun, without any head-dress. As for Swartboy, a pair of old leathern “crackers” and a striped shirt were all the clothing he carried, beside his sheep-skin kaross. Such were the costumes of our travellers.

For full twenty miles the plain was wasted bare. Not a bite could the beasts obtain, and water there was none. The sun during the day shone brightly,—too brightly, for his beams were as hot as within the tropics. The travellers could scarce have borne them had it not been that a stiff breeze was blowing all day long. But this unfortunately blew directly in their faces, and the dry karoos are never without dust. The constant hopping of the locusts with their millions of tiny feet had loosened the crust of earth: and now the dust rose freely upon the wind. Clouds of it enveloped the little caravan, and rendered their forward movement both difficult and disagreeable. Long before night their clothes were covered, their mouths filled, and their eyes sore.

But all that was nothing. Long before night a far greater grievance was felt,—the want of water!

In their hurry to escape from the desolate scene at the kraal, Von Bloom had not thought of bringing a supply in the wagon—a sad oversight, in a country like South Africa, where springs are so rare, and running streams so uncertain. A sad oversight indeed, as they now learnt—for long before night they were all crying out for water—all were equally suffering from the pangs of thirst.

Von Bloom thirsted, but he did not think of himself, except that he suffered from self-accusation. He blamed himself for neglecting to bring a needful supply of water. He was the cause of the sufferings of all the rest. He felt sad and humbled on account of his thoughtless negligence.

He could promise them no relief—at least none until they should reach the spring. He knew of no water nearer.

It would be impossible to reach the spring that night. It was late when they started. Oxen travel slowly. Half the distance would be as much as they could make by sundown.

338 To reach the water they would have to travel all night; but they could not do that for many reasons. The oxen would require to rest—the more so that they were hungered; and now Von Bloom thought, when too late, of another neglect he had committed—that was, in not collecting,

during the flight of the locusts, a sufficient quantity of them to have given his cattle a feed.

This plan is often adopted under similar circumstances; but the field-cornet had not thought of it: and as but few locusts fell in the trails where the animals had been confined, they had therefore been without food since the previous day. The oxen in particular showed symptoms of weakness, and drew the wagon sluggishly; so that Swartboy's voice and long whip were kept in constant action.

But there were other reasons why they would have to halt when night came on. The field-cornet was not so sure of the direction. He would not be able to follow it by night, as there was not the semblance of a track to guide him. Besides it would be dangerous to travel by night, for then the nocturnal robber of Africa—the fierce lion—is abroad.

They would be under the necessity, therefore, of halting for the night, water or no water.

It wanted yet half-an-hour of sundown when Von Bloom had arrived at this decision. He only kept on a little farther in hopes of reaching a spot where there was grass. They were now more than twenty miles from their starting-point, and still the black “spoor” of the locusts covered the plain. Still no grass to be seen, still the bushes bare of their leaves, and barked!

The field-cornet began to think that he was trekking right in the way the locusts had come. Westward he was heading for certain; he knew that. But he was not yet certain that the flight had not advanced from the west instead of the north. If so, they might go for days before coming upon a patch of grass!

These thoughts troubled him, and with anxious eyes he swept the plain in front, as well as to the right and left.

A shout from the keen-eyed Bushman produced a joyful effect. He saw grass in front. He saw some bushes with leaves! They were still a mile off, but the oxen, as if the announcement had been understood by them, moved more briskly forward.

Another mile passed over, and they came upon grass, sure enough. It was a very scanty pasture, though—a few scattered blades growing over the reddish surface, but in no place a mouthful for an ox. There was just enough to tantalize the poor brutes without filling their stomachs. It assured Von Bloom, however, that they had now got beyond the track of the locusts; and he kept on a little farther in hopes that the pasture might get better.

It did not, however. The country through which they advanced was a wild, sterile plain—almost as destitute of vegetation as that over which they had hitherto been travelling. It no longer owed its nakedness to the locusts, but to the absence of water.

They had no more time to search for pasture. The sun was already below the horizon when they halted to “outspan.”

A “kraal” should have been built for the cattle, and another for the sheep and goats. There were bushes enough to have constructed them, but who of that tired party had the heart to cut them down and drag them to the spot?

339 It was labour enough—the slaughtering a sheep for supper, and collecting sufficient wood to cook it. No kraal was made. The horses were tied around the wagon. The oxen, cattle, and sheep and goats, were left free to go where they pleased. As there was no pasture near to tempt them, it was hoped that, after the fatigue of their long journey, they would not stray far from the camp-fire, which was kept burning throughout the night.

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CHAPTER VIII.

THE FATE OF THE HERD.

But they did stray.

When day broke, and the travellers looked around them, not a head of the oxen or cattle was to be seen. Yes, there was one, and one only—the milch-cow. Totty, after milking her on the previous night, had left her tied to a bush where she still remained. All the rest were gone, and the sheep and goats as well.

Whither had they strayed?

The horses were mounted, and search was made. The sheep and goats were found among some bushes not far off; but it soon appeared that the other animals had gone clean away.

Their spoor was traced for a mile or two. It led back on the very track they had come; and no doubt any longer existed that they had returned to the kraal.

To overtake them before reaching that point, would be difficult, if at all possible. Their tracks

showed that they had gone off early in the night, and had travelled at a rapid rate—so that by this time they had most likely arrived at their old home.

This was a sad discovery. To have followed them on the thirsting and hungry horses would have been a useless work; yet without the yoke-oxen how was the wagon to be taken forward to the spring?

It appeared to be a sad dilemma they were in; but after a short consultation the thoughtful Hans suggested a solution of it.

“Can we not attach the horses to the wagon?” inquired he. “The five could surely draw it on to the spring?”

“What! and leave the cattle behind?” said Hendrik. “If we do not go after them, they will be all lost, and then——”

“We could go for them afterwards,” replied Hans; “but it is not better first to push forward to the spring; and, after resting the horses a while, return then for the oxen? They will have reached the kraal by this time. There they will be sure of water anyhow, and that will keep them alive till we get there.”

The course suggested by Hans seemed feasible enough. At all events, it was the best plan they could pursue; so they at once set about putting it in execution. The horses were attached to the wagon in the best way they could think of. Fortunately some old horse-harness formed part of the contents of the vehicle, and these were brought out and fitted on, as well as could be done.

Two horses were made fast to the disselboom as “wheelers;” two others to the trektow cut to the proper length; and the fifth horse was placed in front as a leader.

When all was ready, Swartboy again mounted the voor-kist, gathered up his reins, cracked his
340 whip, and set his team in motion. To the delight of every one, the huge heavy-laden wagon moved off as freely as if a full team had been inspanned.

Von Bloom, Hendrik, and Hans, cheered as it passed them; and setting the milch-cow and the flock of sheep and goats in motion, moved briskly after. Little Jan and Trüey still rode in the wagon; but the others now travelled afoot, partly because they had the flock to drive, and partly that they might not increase the load upon the horses.

They all suffered greatly from thirst, but they would have suffered still more had it not been for that valuable creature that trotted along behind the wagon—the cow—“old Graaf,” as she was called. She had yielded several pints of milk, both the night before and that morning; and this well-timed supply had given considerable relief to the travellers.

The horses behaved beautifully. Notwithstanding that their harness was both incomplete and ill-fitted, they pulled the wagon along after them as if not a strap or buckle had been wanting. They appeared to know that their kind master was in a dilemma, and were determined to draw him out of it. Perhaps, too, they smelt the spring-water before them. At all events, before they had been many hours in harness, they were drawing the wagon through a pretty little valley covered with green, meadow-looking sward; and in five minutes more were standing halted near a cool crystal spring.

In a short time all had drunk heartily, and were refreshed. The horses were turned out upon the grass, and the other animals browsed over the meadow. A good fire was made near the spring, and a quarter of mutton cooked—upon which the travellers dined—and then all sat waiting for the horses to fill themselves.

The field-cornet, seated upon one of the wagon-chests, smoked his great pipe. He could have been contented, but for one thing—the absence of his cattle.

He had arrived at a beautiful pasture-ground—a sort of oäsis in the wild plains, where there were wood, water, and grass,—everything that the heart of a “vee-boer” could desire. It did not appear to be a large tract, but enough to have sustained many hundred head of cattle—enough for a very fine “stock farm.” It would have answered his purpose admirably; and had he succeeded in bringing on his oxen and cattle, he would at that moment have felt happy enough. But without them what availed the fine pasturage? What could he do there without them to stock it? They were his wealth—at least, he had hoped in time that their increase would become wealth. They were all of excellent breeds; and, with the exception of his twelve yoke-oxen, and one or two long-horned Bechuana bulls, all the others were fine young cows calculated soon to produce a large herd.

Of course his anxiety about these animals rendered it impossible for him to enjoy a moment's peace of mind, until he should start back in search of them. He had only taken out his pipe to pass the time, while the horses were gathering a bite of grass. As soon as their strength should be recruited a little, it was his design to take three of the strongest of them, and with Hendrik and Swartboy, ride back to the old kraal.

As soon, therefore, as the horses were ready for the road again, they were caught and saddled up; and Von Bloom, Hendrik, and Swartboy, mounted and set out, while Hans remained in charge
341 of the camp.

They rode at a brisk rate, determined to travel all night, and, if possible, reach the kraal before

morning. At the last point on the route where there was grass, they off-saddled, and allowed their horses to rest and refresh themselves. They had brought with them some slices of the roast mutton, and this time they had not forgotten to fill their gourd-canteens with water—so that they should not again suffer from thirst. After an hour's halt they continued their journey.

It was quite night when they arrived at the spot where the oxen had deserted them; but a clear moon was in the sky, and they were able to follow back the wheel-tracks of the wagon, that were quite conspicuous under the moonlight. Now and then to be satisfied, Von Bloom requested Swartboy to examine the spoor, and see whether the cattle had still kept the back-track. To answer this gave no great trouble to the Bushman. He would drop from his horse, and bending over the ground, would reply in an instant. In every case the answer was in the affirmative. The animals had certainly gone back to their old home.

Von Bloom believed they would be sure to find them there, but should they find them *alive*? That was the question that rendered him anxious.

The creatures could obtain water by the spring, but food—where? Not a bite would they find anywhere, and would not hunger have destroyed them all before this?

Day was breaking when they came in sight of the old homestead. It presented a very odd appearance. Not one of the three would have recognised it. After the invasion of the locusts it showed a very altered look, but now there was something else that added to the singularity of its appearance. A row of strange objects seemed to be placed upon the roof ridge, and along the walls of the kraals. What were these strange objects, for they certainly did not belong to the buildings? This question was put by Von Bloom, partly to himself, but loud enough for the others to hear him.

"*Da vogels*!" (the vultures), replied Swartboy.

Sure enough, it was a string of vultures that appeared along the walls.

The sight of these filthy birds was more than ominous. It filled Von Bloom with apprehension. What could they be doing there? There must be carrion near?

The party rode forward. The day was now up, and the vultures had grown busy. They flapped their shadowy wings, rose from the walls, and alighted at different points around the house.

"Surely there must be carrion," muttered Von Bloom.

There was carrion, and plenty of it. As the horsemen drew near the vultures rose into the air, and a score of half-devoured carcasses could be seen upon the ground. The long curving horns that appeared beside each carcass, rendered it easy to tell to what sort of animals they belonged. In the torn and mutilated fragments, Von Bloom recognised the remains of his lost herd!

Not one was left alive. There could be seen the remains of all of them, both cows and oxen, lying near the enclosures and on the adjacent plain—each where it had fallen.

But how had they fallen? That was the mystery.

Surely they could not have perished of hunger, and so suddenly? They could not have died of
342 thirst, for there was the spring bubbling up just beside where they lay? The vultures had not killed them! What then?

Von Bloom did not ask many questions. He was not left long in doubt. As he and his companions rode over the ground, the mystery was explained. The tracks of lions, hyenas, and jackals, made everything clear enough. A large troop of these animals had been upon the ground. The scarcity of game, caused by the migration of the locusts, had no doubt rendered them more than usually ravenous, and in consequence the cattle became their prey.

Where were they now? The morning light, and the sight of the house perhaps, had driven them off. But their spoor was quite fresh. They were near at hand, and would be certain to return again upon the following night.

Von Bloom felt a strong desire to be revenged upon the hideous brutes; and, under other circumstances, would have remained to get a shot at them. But just then that would have been both imprudent and unprofitable work. It would be as much as their horses could accomplish, to get back to camp that night; so, without even entering the old house, they watered their animals, refilled their calabashes at the spring, and with heavy hearts once more rode away from the kraal.

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CHAPTER IX.

A LION COUCHANT.

They had not proceeded an hundred steps when an object appeared before them that caused all three to draw bridle suddenly and simultaneously. That object was a lion!

He was couched upon the plain directly in the path they intended to take—the very same path by which they had come!

How was it they had not seen him before? He was under the lee of a low bush; but, thanks to the locusts, this bush was leafless, and its thin naked twigs formed no concealment for so large a creature as a lion. His tawny hide shone conspicuously through them.

The truth is, he had not been there when the horsemen passed towards the kraal. He had just fled from among the carcasses, on seeing them approach; and had skulked around the walls, and then run to their rear. He had executed this manœuvre to avoid an encounter—for a lion reasons as a man does, though not to the same extent. Seeing the horsemen come that way, his reasoning powers were strong enough to tell him that they were not likely to return by the same path. It was more natural they should continue on. A man, ignorant of all the preceding events connected with their journey, would have reasoned much in the same way. If you have been at all observant, you have seen other animals—such as dogs, deer, hares, or even birds—act just as the lion did on this occasion.

Beyond a doubt the intellectual process described passed through the mind of this lion; and he had skulked round to shun an encounter with the three travellers.

Now a lion will not always act so—though he will in five cases out of six, or oftener. Hence very erroneous views are held in relation to the courage of this animal. Some naturalists, led away by
343 what appears to be a feeling of envy or anger, accuse the lion of downright *cowardice*, denying him a single noble quality of all those that have from earliest times been ascribed to him! Others, on the contrary, assert that he knows no fear, either of man or beast; and these endow him with many virtues besides courage. Both parties back up their views, not by mere assertions, but by an ample narration of well-attested facts!

How is this? There is a dilemma here. Both cannot be right in their opinions? And yet, odd as it may appear to say so, both *are* right in a certain sense.

The fact is, some lions are cowardly while others are brave.

The truth of this might be shown by whole pages of facts, but in this little volume we have no room. I think, however, boy reader, I can satisfy you with an analogy.

Answer me—Do you know any species of animal, the individuals of which are exactly alike in character? Think over the dogs of your acquaintance! Are they alike, or anything near it? Are not some of them noble, generous, faithful, brave to the death? Are not others mean, sneaking, cowardly curs? So is it with lions. Now, you are satisfied that my statement about the lions may be true.

There are many causes to affect the courage and ferocity of the lion. His age—the state of his stomach—the season of the year—the hour of the day—but, above all, the sort of hunters that belong to the district he inhabits.

This last fact appears quite natural to those who believe in the intellect of animals, which of course *I* do. It is perfectly natural that the lion, as well as other animals, should soon learn the character of his enemy, and fear him or not, as the case may be. Is this not an old story with us? If I remember aright, we had a talk upon this subject when speaking of the crocodiles of America. We remarked that the alligator of the Mississippi rarely attacks man in modern times; but it has not been always so. The rifle of the alligator-leather hunter has tamed its ferocity. The very *same species* in South America eats Indians by scores every year; and the crocodile of Africa is dreaded in some parts even more than the lion!

It is asserted that the lions of the Cape are more cowardly in some districts than in others. They are less brave in those districts where they have been “jaged” by the courageous and stalwart boer with his long loud-cracking “roer.”

Beyond the frontier, where they have no enemy but the tiny arrow of the Bushman (who does not desire to kill them!) and the slender “assegai” of the Bechuana, the lion has little or no fear of man.

Whether the one, before the eyes of our party, was naturally a brave one, could not yet be told. He was one with a huge black mane, or “schwart-fore life,” as the boers term it; and these are esteemed the fiercest and most dangerous. The “yellow-maned,”—for there is considerable variety in the colour of the Cape lions—is regarded as possessing less courage; but there is some doubt about the truth of this. The young “black-manes” may often be mistaken for the true yellow variety, and their character ascribed to him to his prejudice,—for the swarthy colour of the mane only comes after the lion is many years of age.

Whether the “schwart-fore life” was a fierce and brave one, Von Bloom did not stay to think about. It was evident that the edge had been taken off the animal's appetite. It was evident he did
344 not meditate an attack; and that had the horsemen chosen to make a détour, and ride peacefully away, they might have continued their journey without ever seeing or hearing of him again.

But the field-cornet had no such intention. He had lost his precious oxen and cattle. *That* lion

had pulled down some of them, at least. The Dutch blood was up, and if the beast had been the strongest and fiercest of his tribe, he was bound to be brought out of that bush.

Ordering the others to remain where they were, Von Bloom advanced on horseback until within about fifty paces of where the lion lay. Here he drew up, coolly dismounted, passed the bridle over his arm, stuck his loading-rod into the ground, and knelt down behind it.

You will fancy he would have been safer to have kept his saddle, as the lion cannot overtake a horse. True; but the lion would have been safer too. It is no easy matter to fire correctly from any horse; but when the mark happens to be a grim lion, he is a well-trained steed that will stand sufficiently firm to admit of a true aim. A shot from the saddle under such circumstances is a mere chance shot; and the field-cornet was not in the mood to be satisfied with a chance shot. Laying his roer athwart the loading-rod, and holding the long barrel steady against it, he took deliberate aim through the ivory sights.

During all this time the lion had not stirred. The bush was between him and the hunter; but he could hardly have believed that it sufficed to conceal him. Far from it. His yellow flanks were distinctly visible through the thorny twigs, and his head could be seen with his muzzle and whiskers stained red with the blood of the oxen.

No—he did not believe himself hid. A slight growl, with one or two shakes of his tail, proved the contrary. He lay still, however, as lions usually do, until more nearly approached. The hunter, as already stated, was full fifty yards from him.

Excepting the motion of his tail, he made no other until Von Bloom pulled trigger; and then with a scream he sprang several feet into the air. The hunter had been afraid of the twigs causing his bullet to glance off; but it was plain it had told truly, for he saw the fur fly from the side of the lion where it struck him.

It was but a wound; and not deadly, as soon appeared.

With long bounds the angry brute came on—lashing his tail, and showing his fearful teeth. His mane, now on end, seemed to have doubled his size. He looked as large as a bull!

In a few seconds' time he had crossed the distance that separated him from the hunter, but the latter was gone far from that spot. The moment he had delivered his fire, he leaped upon his well-trained horse, and rode off towards the others.

All three were for a short while together—Hendrik holding his yäger cocked and ready, while Swartboy grasped his bow and arrows. But the lion dashed forward before either could fire; and they were obliged to spur and gallop out of his way.

Swartboy had ridden to one side, while Von Bloom and Hendrik took the other; and the game was now between the two parties—both of which had pulled up at some distance off.

The lion, after the failure of his charge, halted, and looked first at one, then at the other—as if uncertain which to pursue.

His appearance at this moment was terrible beyond expression. His whole fierce nature was roused. His mane stood erect—his tail lashed his flanks—his mouth, widely open, showed the
345 firm-set trenchant teeth—their white spikes contrasting with the red blood that clotted his cheeks and snout, while his angry roaring added horror to his appearance.

But none of the three were terrified out of their senses. Hendrik at this moment covered him with his rifle, took cool aim, and fired; while at the same instant Swartboy sent an arrow whistling through the air.

Both had aimed truly. Both bullet and arrow struck; and the shaft of the latter could be seen sticking in the lion's thigh.

The fierce brute that up to this time had exhibited the most determined courage, now seemed overcome with a sudden fear. Either the arrow or one of the bullets must have sickened him with the combat; for, dropping his mop-like tail to a level with the line of his back, he broke away; and, trotting sulkily forward, sprang in at the door of the kraal!

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CHAPTER X.

THE LION IN THE TRAP.

There was something singular in the lion seeking shelter in so unusual a place; but it showed his sagacity. There was no other cover within convenient distance, and to have reached any bush that would have afforded him concealment, since the passage of the locusts, would have been difficult. The mounted hunters could easily have overtaken him, had he attempted to run off. He was aware that the house was uninhabited. He had been prowling around it all the night—perhaps within it—and therefore knew what sort of a place it was.

The brute's instinct was correct. The walls of the house would protect him from the guns of his enemies at a distance; and for these to approach near would be his advantage and their danger.

An odd incident occurred as the lion entered the kraal. There was a large window in one end of the house. Of course it was not glazed—it never had been. A glass window is a rarity in these parts. A strong wooden shutter alone closed it. This was still hanging on its hinges, but in the hurried “flitting,” the window had been left open. The door also had been standing ajar. As the lion sprang in at the latter, a string of small foxy wolf-like creatures came pouring out through the former, and ran with all their might across the plain. They were jackals!

As it afterwards appeared, one of the oxen had either been chased into the house by lions or hyenas, and killed there. His carcass had been overlooked by the larger carnivora, and the cunning jackals had been making a quiet breakfast upon it, when so unceremoniously disturbed.

The entrance of their terrible king in such angry mood, by the door, caused the fox-wolves to beat a quick retreat by the window; and the appearance of the horsemen without had still further frightened these cowardly brutes, so that they ran away from the kraal at top speed, and never halted until they were out of sight!

The three hunters could not restrain a laugh; but their tone was suddenly changed by another incident that happened almost at the same moment.

346 Von Bloom had brought with him his two fine dogs, to assist in driving back the cattle.

During the short halt the party had made by the spring, these had fastened upon a half-eaten carcass behind the walls; and, being extremely hungry, had stuck to it, even after the horsemen had ridden off. Neither of the dogs had seen the lion, until the moment when the savage brute charged forward, and was making for the kraal. The shots, the growling of the lion, and the loud wings of the vultures as they flew off affrighted, told the dogs that something was going on in front, at which they ought to be present; and, forsaking their pleasant meal, both came bounding over the walls.

They reached the open space in front, just as the lion leaped into the door; and without hesitation the brave noble animals rushed on, and followed him inside the house.

For some moments there was heard a confused chorus of noises—the barking and worrying of the dogs, the growling and roaring of the lion. Then a dull sound followed as of some heavy object dashed against the wall. Then came a mournful howl—another, another—a noise like the crackling of bones—the “purr” of the great brute with its loud rough bass—and then a deep silence. The struggle was over. This was evident, as the dogs no longer gave tongue. Most likely they were killed.

The hunters remained watching the door with feelings of intense anxiety. The laugh had died upon their lips, as they listened to those hideous sounds, the signs of the fearful combat. They called their dogs by name. They hoped to see them issue forth, even if wounded. But no. The dogs came not forth—they never came forth—they were dead!

A long-continued silence followed the noise of the conflict. Von Bloom could no longer doubt that his favourite and only dogs had been killed.

Excited by this new misfortune he almost lost prudence. He was about to rush forward to the door, where he might deliver his fire close to the hated enemy, when a bright idea came into the brain of Swartboy; and the Bushman was heard calling out,—

“Baas! baas! we shut him up! we close da skellum up!”

There was good sense in this suggestion—there was plausibility in it. Von Bloom saw this; and, desisting from his previous intention, he determined to adopt Swartboy's plan.

But how was it to be executed? The door still hung upon its hinges, as also the window-shutter. If they could only get hold of these, and shut them fast, they would have the lion secure, and might destroy him at their leisure.

But how to shut either door or window in safety? That was the difficulty that now presented itself.

Should they approach either, the lion would be certain to see them from within; and, enraged as he now was, would be sure to spring upon them. Even if they approached on horseback to effect their purpose, they would not be much safer. The horses would not stand quiet while they stretched out to lay hold of latch or handle. All three of the animals were already dancing with excitement. They knew the lion was inside, an occasional growl announced his presence there—they would not approach either door or window with sufficient coolness; and their stamping and snorting would have the effect of bringing the angry beast out upon them.

347 It was clear, then, that to shut either door or window would be an operation of great danger. So long as the horsemen were in open ground, and at some distance from the lion, they had no cause to fear; but should they approach near and get entangled among the walls, some one of them would be most likely to fall a victim to the ferocious brute.

Low as may be the standard of a Bushman's intellect, there is a species peculiar to him in which he appears to excel. In all matters of hunter-craft, his intelligence, or instinct you might

almost call it, is quite a match for the more highly-developed mind of the Caucasian. This arises, no doubt, from the keen and frequent exercise of those particular faculties,—keen and frequent, because his very existence often depends on their successful employment.

Huge ill-shapen head that Swartboy carried on his shoulders, there was an ample stock of brains in it; and a life of keen endeavour to keep his stomach supplied had taught him their exercise. At that moment Swartboy's brains came to the relief of the party.

“Baas!” he said, endeavouring to restrain the impatience of his master, “vyacht um bige, mein baas! Leave it to da ole Bushy to close da door. He do it.”

“How?” inquired Von Bloom.

“Vyacht um bige, mein baas! no long to wait,—you see.”

All three had ridden up together within less than an hundred yards of the kraal. Von Bloom and Hendrik sat silent, and watched the proceedings of the Bushman.

The latter drew from his pocket a clue of small cord, and, having carefully uncoiled it, attached one end to an arrow. He then rode up to within thirty yards of the house, and dismounted—not directly opposite the entrance, but a little to one side—so that the face of the wooden door, which was fortunately but three-quarters open, was thus fair before him. Keeping the bridle over his arm, he now bent his bow, and sent the arrow into the woodwork of the door. There it was, sticking near the edge, and just under the latch!

As soon as Swartboy delivered the shaft, he had leaped back into his saddle—to be ready for retreat in case the lion should charge out. He still, however, kept hold of the string, one end of which was attached to the arrow.

The “thud” of the arrow, as it struck the door, had drawn the attention of the lion. Of course, none of them saw him, but his angry growl told them that it was so. He did not show himself, however, and was again silent.

Swartboy now drew the string taut,—first felt it with a steady pull; and then, satisfied of its strength, gave it a stronger jerk, and brought the door to. The latch acted beautifully, and the door remained shut even after the strain was taken off the cord.

To have opened the door now the lion must have had the sagacity to lift the latch, or else must have broken through the thick, strong planks—neither of which things was to be feared.

But the window still remained open, and through it the lion could easily leap out. Swartboy, of course, designed closing it in the same manner as he had done the door.

But now arose a particular danger. He had only one piece of cord. That was attached to the
348 arrow that still stuck fast. How was he to detach and get possession of it?

There appeared to be no other way but by going up to the door and cutting it from the shaft. In this lay the danger; for, should the lion perceive him and rush out by the window, it would be all over with the Bushman.

Like most of his race, Swartboy was more cunning than brave—though he was far from being a coward. Still he was by no means inclined at that moment to go up to the door of the kraal.

The angry growls from within would have made a stouter heart than Swartboy's quail with fear.

In this dilemma Hendrik came to his relief. Hendrik had conceived a way of getting possession of the string, without going near the door!

Calling to Swartboy to be on his guard, he rode within thirty yards of the entrance—but on the other side from where Swartboy was—and there halted. At the place there stood a post with several forks upon it, that had been used as a bridle-post.

Hendrik dismounted, hooked his rein over one of these forks; rested his yäger across another; and then, sighting the shaft of the arrow, pulled trigger. The rifle cracked, the broken stick was seen to fly out from the door, and the string was set free!

All were ready to gallop off; but the lion, although he growled fiercely on hearing the shot, still lay close.

Swartboy now drew in the string; and, having adjusted it to a fresh arrow, moved round so as to command a view of the window. In a few minutes the shaft had cut through the air and stuck deep into the yielding wood, and then the shutter swung round on its hinges, and was drawn close.

All three now dismounted, ran silently and rapidly up, and secured both door and shutter with strong rheins of raw hide.

“Hurrah! the lion was caged.”

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CHAPTER XI.

THE DEATH OF THE LION.

Yes, the fierce brute was fairly in the trap. The three hunters breathed freely.

But how was the affair to end? Both door and window-shutter fitted strongly and closely; and, although it was possible to glance through the chinks, nothing could be seen inside—since, both being shut, it was quite dark within.

Even could the lion have been seen, there was no hole through which to thrust the muzzle of a gun and fire at him. He was just as safe as his captors; and, so long as the door remained closed, they could do him no more harm than he could them.

They might leave him shut up, and let him starve. He could live for a while upon what the jackals had left, with the carcasses of the two dogs, but that would not sustain him long, and in the end he would have to give up and miserably perish. After all, this did not seem so certain to Von Bloom and his companions. Finding that he was caged in earnest, the brute might attack the door, and with his sharp claws and teeth manage to cut his way through.

But the angry field-cornet had not the slightest intention of leaving the lion such a chance. He
349 was determined to destroy the beast before leaving the ground; and he now set to thinking how this could be accomplished in the speediest and most effectual manner.

At first he thought of cutting a hole in the door with his knife, large enough to see through and admit the barrel of his roer. Should he not succeed in getting a view of the beast through that one, he would make another in the window-shutter. The two being on adjacent sides of the house, would give him the command of the whole interior—for the former dwelling of the field-cornet comprised only a single apartment. During his residence there, there had been two, thanks to a partition of zebra-skins; but these had been removed, and all was now in one room.

At first Von Bloom could think of no other plan to get at the enemy, and yet this one did not quite please him. It was safe enough, and, if carried out, could only end in the death of the lion.

A hole in both door and window-shutter would enable them to fire at the brute as many bullets as they pleased, while they would be quite secure from his attack. But the time that would be required to cut these holes—that was why the plan did not please the field-cornet. He and his party had no time to spare; their horses were weak with hunger, and a long journey lay before them ere a morsel could be obtained. No,—the time could not be spared for making a breach. Some more expeditious mode of attack must be devised.

“Father,” said Hendrik, “suppose we set the house on fire?”

Good. The suggestion was a good one. Von Bloom cast his eyes up to the roof—a sloping structure with long eaves. It consisted of heavy beams of dry wood with rafters and laths, and all covered over with a thatch of rushes, a foot in thickness. It would make a tremendous blaze, and the smoke would be likely enough to suffocate the lion even before the blaze could get at him.

The suggestion of Hendrik was adopted. They prepared to fire the house.

There was still a large quantity of rubbish,—the collected firewood which the locusts had not devoured. This would enable them to carry out their purpose; and all three immediately set about hauling it up, and piling it against the door.

One might almost have fancied that the lion had fathomed their design; for, although he had been for a long while quite silent, he now commenced a fresh spell of roaring. Perhaps the noise of the logs, striking against the door outside, had set him at it; and, finding himself thus shut up and baited, he had grown impatient. What he had sought as a shelter had been turned into a trap, and he was now anxious to get out of it.

This was evident by the demonstrations he began to make. They could hear him rushing about —passing from door to window—striking both with his huge paws, and causing them to shake upon their hinges—all the while uttering the most fiendish roars.

Though not without some apprehensions, the three continued their work. They had their horses at hand, ready to be mounted in case the lion might make his way through the fire. In fact, they intended to take to their saddles—as soon as the fire should be fairly under way—and watch the conflagration from a safe distance.

They had dragged up all the bush and dry wood, and had piled them in front of the door.
350 Swartboy had taken out his flint and steel, and was about to strike, when a loud scratching was heard from the inside, unlike anything that had yet reached their ears. It was the rattling of the lion's claws against the wall, but it had an odd sound as if the animal was struggling violently; at the same time his voice seemed hoarse and smothered, and appeared to come from a distance.

THE LION IN A FIX.

What was the brute doing?

351 They stood for a moment, looking anxiously in each other's faces.

The scratching continued—the hoarse growling at intervals—but this ended at length; and then came a snort, followed by a roar so loud and clear, that all three started in affright. They could not believe that walls were between them and their dangerous enemy!

Again echoed that horrid cry. Great Heaven! It proceeded no longer from the inside—it came from above them!

Was the lion upon the roof?

All three rushed backward a step or two, and looked up. A sight was before them that rendered them almost speechless with surprise and terror.

Above the funnel of the chimney appeared the head of the lion; his glaring yellow eyes and white teeth showing more fearful from contrast with the black soot that begrimed him. He was dragging his body up. One foot was already above the capstone; and with this and his teeth he was widening the aperture around him.

It was a terrible sight to behold—at least to those below.

As already stated they were alarmed; and would have taken to their horses, had they not perceived that the animal was stuck fast!

It was evident that this was the case, but it was equally evident that in a few moments he would succeed in clearing himself from the chimney. His teeth and claws were hard at work, and the stones and mortar were flying in all directions. The funnel would soon be down below his broad chest, and then——

Von Bloom did not stay to think what then. He and Hendrik, guns in hand, ran up near the bottom of the wall. The chimney was but a score of feet in height; the long roer was pointed upward, reaching nearly half that distance. The yäger was also aimed. Both cracked together. The lion's eyes suddenly closed, his head shook convulsively, his paw dropped loose over the capstone, his jaws fell open, and blood trickled down his tongue. In a few moments he was dead!

This was apparent to every one. But Swartboy was not satisfied, until he had discharged about a score of his arrows at the head of the animal, causing it to assume the appearance of a porcupine.

So tightly had the huge beast wedged himself, that even after death he still remained in his singular situation.

Under other circumstances he would have been dragged down for the sake of his skin. But there was no time to spare for skinning him; and without further delay, Von Bloom and his companions mounted their horses and rode off.

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CHAPTER XII.

THE TRAVELLERS BENIGHTED

Our travellers would have talked much about lions, but for the condition of their horses. This made them feel uneasy. With the exception of a few hours grazing, the poor brutes had been without food since the appearance of the locusts. Horses do not travel well upon soft grass, and of course they were now suffering severely.

It would be far in the night before the horsemen could reach the camp—although they were pushing on as fast as the horses could travel.

352 It was quite dark, when they arrived at the spot where they had halted the previous evening. In fact, it was very dark. Neither moon nor stars were to be seen in the sky; and thick black clouds covered the whole canopy of the heavens. It looked as though a rain-storm might be expected—still no rain had as yet fallen.

It was the intention of the travellers to halt at this place, and let their horses graze a while. With this view they all dismounted; but, after trying one or two places, they could find no grass!

This appeared strange, as they had certainly observed grass at that very spot the day before. Now there was none!

The horses put their noses to the ground, but raised them up again, snorting as they did so, and evidently disappointed. They were hungry enough to have eaten grass had there been any, for they eagerly snatched at the leaves of the bushes as they passed along!

Had the locusts been there also? No. The mimosa-bushes still retained their delicate foliage, which would not have been the case had the locusts visited the spot.

Our travellers were astonished that there was no grass. Surely there was some the day before? Had they got upon a new track?

The darkness prevented them from having a view of the ground; yet Von Bloom could not be mistaken about the route—having travelled it four times already. Though he could not see the surface, every now and again he caught a glimpse of some tree or bush, which he had marked in his former journeys, and these assured him they were still upon the right track.

Surprised at the absence of grass where they had so lately observed it, they would have examined the surface more carefully; but they were anxious to push on to the spring, and at length gave up the idea of halting. The water in their gourds had been used up long before this; and both they and their horses were once more suffering from thirst.

Besides, Von Bloom was not without some anxiety about the children at the wagon. He had been separated from them now a full day and a half, and many a change might take place—many a danger might arise in that time. In fact, he began to blame himself for having left them alone. It would have been better to have let his cattle perish. So thought he now. A presentiment that all was not right was gradually forming in his mind; and he grew more anxious to proceed as he reflected.

They rode on in silence. It was only on Hendrik expressing a doubt about the way, that the conversation recommenced. Swartboy also thought they were taking a wrong course.

At first Von Bloom assured them they were right; but after going a little farther, he admitted that he was in doubt; and then, after another half-mile's travelling, he declared that he had lost the track. He could no longer recognise any one of the marks or bearings he had taken.

The proper thing to be done under these circumstances was to leave the horses to themselves; and this all three well knew. But the animals were suffering the pangs of hunger, and when left to themselves, would not journey forward, but rushed up to the mimosa-bushes, and eagerly commenced devouring their leaves.

The consequence was, that their riders were obliged to keep them going with whip and spur;
353 and in that way there was no certainty of the horses taking the right direction.

After several hours' advancing, all the while in a state of suspense, and as yet no appearance of either wagon or camp-fire, the travellers resolved upon coming to a halt. It was of no use going forward. They believed they could not be far from the camp; but they were now as likely to be riding from as towards it; and they concluded at length, that it would be wiser to remain where they were until the day broke.

They all dismounted therefore, and fastened their horses to the bushes—so that the animals could browse upon the leaves till morning—which could not now be very far off. They rolled themselves up in their karosses, and lay down upon the earth.

Hendrik and Swartboy were soon asleep. Von Bloom would have slept too, for he was tired enough; but the heart of the father was too full of anxiety to allow repose to his eyes, and he lay awake watching for the dawn.

It came at length, and at the first light his eyes swept the surface of the surrounding country. The party had by chance halted on an eminence that commanded a good view for miles on each side, but the field-cornet had not glanced half around the circle, when an object came before his eyes that brought gladness to his heart. It was the white tent of the wagon!

The joyful exclamation he uttered awoke the sleepers, who immediately sprang to their feet; and all three stood gazing at the welcome sight.

As they continued to gaze, their joy gradually gave place to feelings of surprise. Was it their wagon, after all?

It certainly looked like theirs; but it was a full half-mile off, and at such a distance one wagon would look just like another. But what led them to doubt its being theirs? It was the appearance of the place in which they saw it. Surely it was not the same place in which they had outspanned!

Theirs had been left in an oblong valley between two gentle ridges—in such a valley was this one standing. Near a pool formed by a spring—here, too, was the same, for they could perceive the water shining. But in all other respects the situation was different. The surface of the valley in which their wagon had been left was covered, both sides and bottom, with a verdant carpet of grass; whereas the one now before their eyes was brown and bare! Not a blade of grass was to be seen—the trees seeming to be the only things that had any verdure. Even the low bushes appeared to be destitute of leaves! The scene had no resemblance whatever to that where they had outspanned. It must be the camp of some other travellers, thought they.

They had fully arrived at this conclusion, when Swartboy, whose eyes had been rolling about everywhere, now rested upon the ground at his feet. After a moment's observation—which the increasing light now enabled him to make—he turned suddenly to the others, and directed their attention to the surface of the plain. This they saw was covered with tracks, as if a thousand hoofs had passed over it. In fact, it presented the appearance of a vast sheep-pen; so vast, that as far as their sight extended, they beheld the same tracked and trampled appearance!

What could this mean? Hendrik did not know. Von Bloom was in doubt. Swartboy could tell at
354 the first glance. It was no new sight to him.

“All right, baas,” he said, looking up in his master's face. “Da's da ole wagon!—da same spring an vley—da same place—dar hab been um trek-boken!”

“A trek-boken!” cried Von Bloom and Hendrik, in a breath.

“Ya, baas—a mighty big one too; das da spoor of dem antelope—See!”

Von Bloom now comprehended all. The bareness of the country, the absence of the leaves on the lower bushes, the millions of small hoof-tracks, all were now explained. A migration of the springbok antelope, a “trek-boken,” had swept over the spot. That it was that had caused such a mighty change. The wagon they saw was theirs, after all.

They lost no time, but, catching their horses, bridled them, and rode rapidly down the hill.

Though somewhat relieved at seeing the wagon, Von Bloom was still apprehensive.

As they approached, they perceived the two horses standing beside it, and tied to the wheels, the cow also was there—but neither goats nor sheep were in the neighbourhood.

There was a fire burning in the rear of the hind-wheels, and a dark mass underneath the wagon, but no human form could be observed.

The hearts of the horsemen beat loudly as they advanced. Their eyes were bent earnestly upon the wagon. They felt keen anxiety.

They had got within three hundred yards, and still no one stirred—no human form made its appearance. Von Bloom and Hendrik now suffered intensely.

At this moment the two horses by the wagon neighed loudly; the dark mass under the wagon moved, rolled outward, rose up, and stood erect. Totty was recognised!

And now the “after-clap” of the wagon was hurriedly drawn aside, and three young faces were seen peeping forth.

A shout of joy burst from the horsemen, and the next moment little Jan and Trüey leaped out from the cap-tent into the arms of their father—while the mutual congratulations of Hans and Hendrik, Swartboy and Totty, produced for some moments a scene of joyful confusion quite indescribable.

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CHAPTER XIII.

THE TREK-BOKEN.

Those who remained by the camp had had their adventures too; and their tale was by no means a merry one, for it disclosed the unpleasant fact, that the sheep and goats were all lost. The flock had been carried off, in a most singular manner; and there was but little hope of their ever being seen again.

Hans began his tale:—

“Nothing unusual occurred on the day you left us. I was busy all the afternoon in cutting 'wait-a-bit' thorns for a kraal. Totty helped me to drag them up, while Jan and Trüey looked after the flock. The animals did not stray out of the valley here, as the grass was good, and they had had enough of trotting lately.

“Well—Totty and I got the kraal, as you see, all ready. So, when night came, we drove the flock
355 in; and, after milking the cow and getting our supper, we all went to bed. We were precious tired, and all of us slept soundly throughout the night without being disturbed. Both jackals and hyenas came around, but we knew they would not break into that kraal.”

Hans pointed to the circular enclosure of thorn-bushes, that had been well constructed.

He then proceeded with his narration:—

“In the morning we found everything right. Totty again milked the cow; and we had breakfast. The flock was let out upon the grass, and so were the cow and the two horses.

“Just about mid-day I began to think what we were to have for dinner, for the breakfast had cleared up everything. I did not like to kill another sheep, if it could be helped. So bidding Jan and Trüey stay close by the wagon, and leaving Totty to look after the flock, I took my gun and started off in search of game. I took no horse, for I thought I saw springboks out on the plain; and I would stalk them better afoot.

“Sure enough, there were springboks. When I got out of the valley here, and had a better view, I saw what astonished me, I can assure you.

“I could scarce credit my eyes. The whole plain, towards the west, appeared to be one vast crowd of animals; and by their bright yellow sides, and the snow-white hair on their rumps, I knew they were springboks. They were all in motion, some browsing along, while hundreds of them were constantly bounding up into the air full ten feet high, and leaping on top of each other. I assure you all it was one of the strangest sights I ever beheld, and one of the pleasantest too; for I knew that the creatures that covered the plain, instead of being fierce wild beasts, were nothing but graceful and beautiful little gazelles.

“My first thought was to get near them, and have a shot; and I was about to start off over the plain, when I perceived that the antelopes were coming towards me. I saw that they were approaching with considerable rapidity; and if I only remained where I was, they would save me the trouble of stalking in upon them. I lay down behind a bush and waited.

“I had not very long to wait. In less than a quarter of an hour the foremost of the herd drew near, and in five minutes more a score of them were within shot.

“I did not fire for some time. I knew they would come still nearer; and I lay watching the motions of those pretty creatures. I took notice of their light handsome forms, their smooth slender limbs, their cinnamon-coloured backs, and white bellies, with the band of chestnut along each side. I looked at the lyre-shaped horns of the bucks, and above all, at the singular flaps on their croup, that unfolded each time that they leaped up, displaying a profusion of long silky hair, as white as snow itself.

“All these points I noticed, and at length, tired of admiring them, I singled out a fine-looking doe—for I was thinking of my dinner, and knew that doe-venison was the most palatable.

“After aiming carefully, I fired. The doe fell, but, to my astonishment, and others did not fly off. A few of the foremost only galloped back a bit, or bounded up into the air; but they again set to
356 browsing quite unconcerned, and the main body advanced as before!

“I loaded as quickly as I could, and brought down another,—this time a buck—but as before without frightening the rest!

“I proceeded to load for the third time; but, before I had finished, the front ranks had passed on both sides of me, and I found myself in the midst of the herd!

“I saw no need for covering myself any longer behind the bush, but rose to my knees, and, firing at the nearest, brought it down also. Its comrades did not pause, but ran over its body in thousands!

“I loaded again, and stood right up on my feet.

“Now for the first time it occurred to me to reflect on the strange conduct of the springboks; for, instead of making off at my appearance, they only bounded a little to one side, and then kept on their course. They seemed possessed by some species of infatuation. I remembered hearing that such was their way when upon one of their migrations, or “trek-bokens.” This, then, thought I, must be a “trek-boken.”

“I was soon convinced of this, for the herd every moment grew thicker and thicker around me,

until at length they became so crowded, that I began to feel very singularly situated. Not that I was afraid of the creatures, as they made no demonstration of using their horns upon me. On the contrary, they did all they could to get out of my way. But the nearest only were alarmed; and, as my presence in no way terrified those that were an hundred yards off, the latter made no attempt to give ground. Of course the nearest ones could only get a few paces from me, by pushing the others closer, or springing up over their backs—so that with the ones thus constantly bounding up into the air there was all the time a ring around me two deep!

“I cannot describe the strange feelings I had in this unusual situation, or how long I might have kept my place. Perhaps I might have loaded and fired away for some time, but just at the moment the sheep came into my mind.

“They'll be carried away, thought I. I had heard that such a thing was common enough.

“I saw that the antelopes were heading towards the valley—the foremost were already into it, and would soon be on the spot, where I had just seen our little flock feeding!

“In hopes of yet heading the springboks, and driving the sheep into the kraal, before the former crowded on them, I started towards the valley. But, to my chagrin, I could get no faster than the herd was going!

“As I approached the creatures, to make my way through their mass, they leaped about and sprang over one another, but could not for their lives open a way for me as fast as I wanted one. I was so near some of them that I could have knocked them down with my gun!

“I commenced hallooing, and, brandishing the gun about, I was making a lane more rapidly, when I perceived in front what appeared to be a large open space. I pushed forward for this, but the nearer I came to its border the more densely I found the creatures packed. I could only see that it was an open space by leaping up. I did not know what was causing it. I did not stay to reflect. I only wished to get forward as rapidly as possible, thinking about our flock.

“I continued to clear my way, and at length found myself in the position I had coveted; while
357 the lane I had made, in getting there, closed instantaneously behind me. I was about to rush on and take advantage of the bit of clear ground, when, what should I see in the centre, and directly before me, but a great yellow lion!

“That accounted for the break in the herd. Had I known what had been causing it, I should have fought my way in any other direction but that; but there was I, out in the open ground, the lion not ten paces from me, and a fence of springboks two deep around both of us!

“I need not say I was frightened, and badly too. I did not for some moments know how to act. My gun was still loaded—for, after thinking of saving our little flock, I did not care to empty it at the antelopes. I could get one, thought I, at any time when I had secured the sheep in the kraal. The piece, therefore, was loaded and with bullets.

“Should I take aim at the lion, and fire? I asked myself this question, and was just on the point of deciding in the affirmative, when I reflected that it would be imprudent. I observed that the lion, whose back was turned to me, had either not seen, or as yet took no notice of me. Should I only wound him—and from the position he was in I was not likely to do more,—how then? I would most likely be torn to pieces.

“These were my reflections, all of which scarce occupied a second of time. I was about to “back out” or back in among the springboks, and make my way in some other direction, and had even got near the edge, when, in looking over my shoulder, I saw the lion suddenly halt and turn round. I halted too, knowing that to be the safest plan; and, as I did so, I glanced back at the lion's eyes.

“To my relief, I saw they were not upon me. He seemed to have taken some fancy in his head. His appetite, perhaps, had returned; for the next moment he ran a few yards, and then, rising with a terrific bound, launched himself far into the herd, and came down right upon the back of one of the antelopes! The others sprang right and left, and a new space was soon opened around him.

“He was now nearer than ever to where I stood, and I could see him distinctly crouched over his victim. His claws held its quivering body, and his long teeth grasped the poor creature by the neck. But, with the exception of his tail, he was making not the slightest motion, and that vibrated gently from side to side, just as a kitten that had caught a tiny mouse. I could see, too, that his eyes were close shut, as though he were asleep!

“Now I had heard that under such circumstances the lion may be approached without much danger. Not that I wished to go any nearer—for I was near enough for my gun—but it was this recollection, I believe, that put me in the notion of firing. At all events, something whispered me I would succeed, and I could not resist trying.

“The broad blind jaw of the brute was fair before me. I took aim, and pulled trigger; but, instead of waiting to see the effect of my shot, I ran right off in an opposite direction.

“I did not halt till I had put several acres of antelopes between myself and the place where I had last stood; and then I made the best of my way to the wagon.

“Long before I had reached it, I could see that Jan, and Trüey, and Totty, were safe under the

tent. That gave me pleasure, but I also saw that the sheep and goats had got mixed up with the
358 springboks, and were moving off with them as if they belonged to the same species! I fear they are all lost."

"And the lion?" inquired Hendrik.

"Yonder he lies!" answered Hans, modestly pointing to a yellow mass out upon the plain, over which the vultures were already beginning to hover. "Yonder he lies, you could hardly have done it better yourself, brother Hendrik."

As Hans said this, he smiled in such a manner as to show, that he had no idea of making a boast of his achievements.

Hendrik was loud in acknowledging that it was a most splendid feat, and also in regretting that he had not been on the ground to witness the wonderful migration of the springboks.

But there was no time for much idle talk. Von Bloom and his party were in a very unpleasant situation. His flocks were all gone. The cow and horses alone remained; and for these not a blade of grass had been left by the antelopes. Upon what were they to be fed?

To follow the spoor of the migratory springboks with the hope of recovering their flock would be quite useless. Swartboy assured them of this. The poor animals might be carried hundreds of miles before they could separate themselves from the great herd, or bring their involuntary journey to an end!

The horses could travel but little farther. There was nought to feed them on but the leaves of the mimosas, and this was but poor food for hungry horses. It would be fortunate if they could be kept alive until they should reach some pasture; and where now was pasture to be found? Locusts and antelopes between them seemed to have turned all Africa into a desert!

The field-cornet soon formed his resolution. He would remain there for the night, and early on the morrow set out in search of some other spring.

Fortunately Hans had not neglected to secure a brace of the springboks; and their fat venison now came into general use. A roast of that, and a drink of cool water from the spring, soon refreshed the three wearied travellers.

The horses were let loose among the mimosa-trees, and allowed to shift for themselves; and although under ordinary circumstances they would have "turned up their noses" at such food as mimosa-leaves, they now turned them up in a different sense, and cleared the thorny branches like so many giraffes.

Some naturalist as the "Buffon" school has stated that neither wolf, fox, hyena, nor jackal, will eat the carcass of a lion,—that their fear of the royal despot continues even after his death.

The field-cornet and his family had proof of the want of truth in this assertion. Before many hours both jackals and hyenas attacked the carcass of the king of beasts, and in a very short while there was not a morsel of him there but his bones. Even his tawny skin was swallowed by these ravenous creatures, and many of the bones broken by the strong jaws of the hyenas. The respect which these brutes entertain for the lion ends with his life. When dead, he is eaten by
359 them with as much audacity as if he were the meanest of animals.

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CHAPTER XIV.

SPOORING FOR A SPRING.

Von Bloom was in the saddle at an early hour. Swartboy accompanied him, while all the others remained by the wagon to await his return. They took with them the two horses that had remained by the wagon, as these were fresher than the others.

They rode nearly due westward. They were induced to take this direction by observing that the springboks had come from the north. By heading westward they believed they would sooner get beyond the wasted territory.

To their great satisfaction an hour's travelling carried them clear of the track of the antelope migration! and although they found no water, there was excellent grass.

The field-cornet now sent Swartboy back for the other horses and the cow, pointing out a place where he should bring them to graze, while he himself continued on in search of water.

After travelling some miles farther, Von Bloom perceived to the north of him a long line of cliff rising directly up from the plain, and running westward as far as he could see. Thinking that water would be more likely to be found near these cliffs, he turned his horse's head towards them. As he approached nearer to their base, he was charmed with the beautiful scenery that began to open before his eyes. He passed through grassy plains of different sizes, separated from

each other by copses of the delicate-leaved mimosa; some of these forming large thickets, while others consisted of only a few low bushes. Towering high over the mimosas, grew many trees of gigantic size, and of a species Von Bloom had never seen before. They stood thinly upon the ground; but each, with its vast leafy head, seemed a little forest of itself.

The whole country around had a soft park-like appearance, which contrasted well with the dark cliff that rose beyond—the latter stepping up from the plain by a precipice of several hundred feet in height, and seemingly as vertical as the walls of a house.

The fine landscape was gratifying to the eyes of the traveller—such a fine country in the midst of so much barrenness; for he knew that most of the surrounding region was little better than a wild karoo. The whole of it to the north for hundreds of miles was a famous desert—the desert of Kalihari—and these cliffs were a part of its southern border. The “vee-boer” would have been rejoiced at such a sight under other circumstances. But what to him now were all these fine pastures—now that he was no longer able to stock them?

Notwithstanding the beauty of the scene, his reflections were painful.

But he did not give way to despair. His present troubles were sufficiently grievous to prevent him from dwelling much on the future. His first care was to find a place where his horses might be recruited; for without them he could no longer move anywhere—without them he would be helpless indeed.

Water was the desired object. If water could not be found, all this beautiful park through which he was passing would be as valueless to him as the brown desert.

360 Surely so lovely a landscape could not exist without that most essential element!

So thought the field-cornet; and at the turning of every new grove his eyes wandered over the ground in search of it.

“Ho!” he joyfully exclaimed as a covey of large Namaqua partridges whirred up from his path. “A good sign that: they are seldom far from water.”

Shortly after, he saw a flock of beautiful pintados, or guinea-hens, running into a copse. This was a still further proof that water was nigh. But surest of all, on the top of a tall *cameel-doorn* tree, he next observed the brilliant plumage of a parrot.

“Now,” muttered he to himself, “I must be very near to some spring or pool.”

He rode cheerfully forward: and after a little while arrived upon the crest of an elevated ridge. Here he halted to observe the flight of the birds.

Presently he noticed a covey of partridges flying in a westerly direction, and shortly after, another covey going the same way. Both appeared to alight near a gigantic tree that grew in the plain, about five hundred yards from the bottom of the cliffs. This tree stood apart from any of the others, and was by far the largest Von Bloom had yet seen.

As he remained gazing at its wonderful dimensions, he observed several pairs of parrots alighting upon it. These after chattering a while among its branches, flew down upon the plain not far from its base.

“Surely,” thought Von Bloom, “there must be water there. I shall ride forward and see.”

But his horse had scarcely waited for him to form this design. The animal had been already dragging upon the bridle; and as soon as his head was turned in the direction of the tree, he started forward with outstretched neck, snorting as he rushed along.

The rider, trusting to the instinct of his horse, surrendered up the bridle; and in less than five minutes both horse and rider were drinking from the sweet water of a crystal fountain that gushed out within a dozen yards of the tree.

The field-cornet would now have hastened back to the wagon: but he thought that by allowing his horse to browse an hour or so upon the grass, he would make the return-journey with more spirit, and in quite as good time. He, therefore, took off the bridle, gave the animal his liberty, while he stretched himself under the shade of the great tree.

As he lay, he could not help admiring the wonderful production of nature that towered majestically above him. It was one of the largest trees he had ever beheld. It was of the kind known as the “nwana” tree, a species of *ficus*, with large sycamore-shaped leaves that grew thickly over its magnificent head. Its trunk was full twenty feet in diameter, rising to more than that height without a branch, and then spreading off into numerous limbs that stretched far out in a horizontal direction. Through the thick foliage Von Bloom could perceive shining egg-shaped fruits as large as cocoa-nuts; and upon these the parrots and several other kinds of birds appeared to be feeding.

Other trees of the same species stood out upon the plain at long distances apart; and though they were all taller than the surrounding timber, none were so large or conspicuous as the one
361 that grew by the spring.

The field-cornet, as he enjoyed the cool shade which its umbrageous frondage afforded, could not help thinking what an admirable spot it would be to build a kraal. The inmates of a dwelling

placed beneath its friendly shelter, need never dread the fierce rays of the African sun; even the rain could scarce penetrate its leafy canopy. In fact, its dense foliage almost constituted a roof of itself.

Had his cattle still remained to him, no doubt the vee-boer would have resolved at once to make this spot his future home. But, tempting as it was, what now could he do in such a place? To him it would be only a wilderness. There was no species of industry he could follow in such a remote quarter. True, he might sustain himself and his family by hunting. He saw that game was plenteous all around. But that would be but a sorry existence, with no promise for the future. What would his children do hereafter? Were they to grow up with no other end than to become poor hunters—no better than the wild Bushmen? No! no! no! To make a home there would be out of the question. A few days to recruit his wearied horses, and then he would make a struggle and trek back to the settlements.

But what after he had got back? He knew not what then. His future was gloomy and uncertain.

After indulging in such reflections for an hour or more, he bethought him that it was time to return to the camp; and having caught and bridled his horse, he mounted and set forth.

The animal, refreshed by the sweet grass and cool water, carried him briskly along; and in less than two hours he came up with Swartboy and Hendrik where they were pasturing the horses.

These were taken back to the wagon and harnessed in; and then the great vehicle once more “treked” across the plains.

Before the sun had set, the long white cap-tent was gleaming under the leafy screen of the gigantic “nwana.”

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CHAPTER XV.

THE TERRIBLE TSETSE.

The verdant carpet that stretched away around them—the green leaves upon the trees—the flowers by the fountain—the crystal water in its bed—the black bold rocks towering up at a distance—all combined to make a lovely picture. The eyes of the wayfarers were glad as they beheld it; and while the wagon was outspanning, every one gave utterance to their delightful emotions.

The place seemed to please every one. Hans loved its quiet and sylvan beauty. It was just such a place as he would choose to ramble in, book in hand, and dream away many a pleasant hour. Hendrik liked it much, because he had already observed what he termed “extensive spoor” about the spot: in other words, he had noticed the tracks of many of Africa's largest wild animals.

Little Trüey was delighted to see so many beautiful flowers. There were bright scarlet geraniums, and starlike sweet-scented jessamines, and the gorgeous belladonna lily, with its large blossoms of rose-colour and white; and there were not only plants in flower, but bushes, and even trees, covered with gaudy and sweetly-perfumed blossoms. There was the “sugar-bush,”
362 the most beautiful of its family, with its large cup-shaped corollas of pink, white, and green; and there, too, was the “silver-tree” whose soft silvery leaves playing in the breeze, looked like a huge mass of silken flowers; and there were the mimosas covered with blossoms of golden yellow that filled the air with their strong and agreeable perfume.

Rare forms of vegetation were around or near at hand: the arborescent aloes, with their tall flower-spikes of coral red, and euphorbias of many shapes; and *zamia*, with its palm-like fronds; and the soft-leaved *Strelitzia reginæ*. All these were observed in the neighbourhood of this new-discovered fountain.

But what received little Trüey's admiration more than any other was the beautiful blue water-lily, which is certainly one of the loveliest of Africa's flowers. Close by the spring, but a little farther in the direction of the plain, was a vley, or pool—in fact, it might have been termed a small lake—and upon the quiet bosom of its water the sky-blue corollas lay sleeping in all their gorgeous beauty.

Trüey, leading her little pet on a string, had gone down on the bank to look at them. She thought she could never cease gazing at such pretty things.

“I hope papa will stay here a long time,” she said to her companion, little Jan.

“And I hope so too. Oh! Trüey, what a fine tree yon is! Look! nuts as big as my head, I declare. Bless me, sis! how are we to knock some of them down?”

And so the children conversed, both delighted with the new scenes around them.

Although all the young people were inclined to be happy, yet they were checked in their expression of it, by observing that there was a cloud on the brow of their father. He had seated

himself under the great tree, but his eyes were upon the ground, as though he were busy with painful reflections. All of them noticed this.

His reflections were, indeed, painful—they could not well have been otherwise. There was but one course left for him—to return to the settlements, and begin life anew. But how to begin it? What could he do? His property all gone, he could only serve some of his richer neighbours; and for one accustomed all his life to independence, this would be hard indeed.

He looked towards his five horses, now eagerly cropping the luxuriant grass that grew under the shadow of the cliffs. When would they be ready to trek back again? In three or four days he might start. Fine animals, most of them were—they would carry the wagon lightly enough.

So ran the reflections of the field-cornet. He little thought at the moment that those horses would never draw wagon more, nor any other vehicle. He little thought that those five noble brutes were doomed!

Yet so it was. In less than a week from that time, the jackals and hyenas were quarrelling over their bones. Even at that very moment while he watched them browsing, the poison was entering their veins, and their death-wounds were being inflicted. Alas! alas! another blow awaited Von Bloom.

The field-cornet had noticed, now and again, that the horses seemed uneasy as they fed. At
363 times they started suddenly, whisked their long tails, and rubbed their heads against the bushes.

“Some fly is troubling them,” thought he, and had no more uneasiness about the matter.

It was just that—just a fly that was troubling them. Had Von Bloom known what that fly was, he would have felt a very different concern about his horses. Had he known the nature of that little fly, he would have rushed up with all his boys, caught the horses in the greatest hurry, and led them far away from those dark cliffs. But he knew not the “tsetse” fly.

It still wanted some minutes of sunset, and the horses were permitted to browse freely, but Von Bloom observed that they were every moment getting more excited—now striking their hoofs upon the turf,—now running a length or two—and at intervals snorting angrily. At the distance they were off—a quarter of a mile or so—Von Bloom could see nothing of what was disturbing them; but their odd behaviour at length induced him to walk up to where they were. Hans and Hendrik went along with him.

When they arrived near the spot, they were astonished at what they then beheld. Each horse seemed to be encompassed by a swarm of bees!

They saw, however, they were not bees, but insects somewhat smaller, of a brown colour, resembling gad-flies, and exceedingly active in their flight. Thousands of them hovered above each horse, and hundreds could be seen lighting upon the heads, necks, bodies, and legs of the animals,—in fact, all over them. They were evidently either biting or stinging them. No wonder the poor brutes were annoyed.

Von Bloom suggested that they should drive the horses farther out into the plain, where these flies did not seem to haunt. He was only concerned about the annoyance which the horses received from them. Hendrik also pitied their sufferings; but Hans, alone of all the three, guessed at the truth. He had read of a fatal insect that frequented some districts in the interior of South Africa, and the first sight of these flies aroused his suspicions that it might be they.

He communicated his thoughts to the others, who at once shared his alarm.

“Call Swartboy hither!” said Von Bloom.

The Bushman was called, and soon made his appearance, coming up from the spring. He had for the last hour been engaged in unpacking the wagon, and had taken no notice of the horses or the interest they were exciting.

As soon, however, as he got near, and saw the winged swarm whirring around the horses, his small eyes opened to their widest extent, his thick lips fell, and his whole face yielded itself to an expression of amazement and alarm.

“What is it, Swart?” inquired his master.

“Mein baas! mein baas! der duyvel um da—dar skellum is da 'tsetse!'”

“And what if it be the tsetse?”

“Mein Gott!—all dead—dead—ebery horse!”

Swartboy then proceeded to explain, with a loud and continuous “clicking,” that the fly which they saw was fatal in its bite, that the horses would surely die—sooner or later, according to the
364 number of stings they had already received; but, from the swarm of insects around them, the Bushman had no doubt they had been badly stung, and a single week would see all five of the horses dead.

“Wait, mein baas—morrow show.”

And to-morrow did show; for before twelve o'clock on the next day, the horses were swollen all over their bodies and about their heads. Their eyes were quite closed up; they refused any longer

to eat, but staggered blindly among the luxuriant grass, every now and then expressing the pain they felt by a low melancholy whimpering. It was plain to every one they were going to die.

Von Bloom tried bleeding, and various other remedies; but to no purpose. There is no cure for the bite of the tsetse fly!

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CHAPTER XVI.

THE LONG-HORNED RHINOCEROS.

Great, indeed, was now the affliction of the field-cornet. Fortune seemed to be adverse in everything. Step by step he had been sinking for years, every year becoming poorer in worldly wealth. He had now reached the lowest point—poverty itself. He owned nothing whatever. His horses might be regarded as dead. The cow had escaped from the tsetse by avoiding the cliffs, and keeping out upon the plain; and this animal now constituted his whole live stock,—his whole property! True, he still had his fine wagon; but of what use would that be without either oxen or horses? a wagon without a team! Better a team without a wagon.

What could he do? How was he to escape from the position he was placed in? To say the least, it was an awkward one—nearly two hundred miles from any civilised settlement, and no means of getting there,—no means except by walking; and how were his children to walk two hundred miles? Impossible!

Across desert tracts, exposed not only to terrible fatigue, but to hunger, thirst, and fierce carnivorous animals. It appeared impossible that they could accomplish such a task.

And what else was there to be done? asked the field-cornet of himself. Were they to remain there all their lives, subsisting precariously on game and roots? Were his children to become “Bush-boys,”—himself a Bushman?

With these reflections passing through his mind, no wonder that Von Bloom felt deeply afflicted.

“Merciful Heaven!” he exclaimed, as he sat with his head between his hands, “what will become of me and mine?”

Poor Von Bloom! he had reached the lowest point of his fortunes.

He had, in reality, reached the lowest point; for on that very day,—even within that very hour—an incident occurred, that not only gave relief to his afflicted spirit, but that promised to lay the foundation of future wealth and prosperity. In one hour from that time the prospects of the field-cornet had undergone a complete change,—in one hour from that time he was a happy man, and all around him were as happy as he!

You are impatient to hear how this change was effected? What little fairy had sprung out of the spring, or come down from the cliffs, to befriend the good field-cornet in his hour of misery? You
365 are impatient to hear! Then you shall hear.

The sun was just going down. They were all seated under the great tree, and near a fire, upon which they had cooked their supper. There was no talking, no cheerful conversation,—for the children saw that their father was in trouble, and that kept them silent. Not a word passed between them, or only an occasional whisper.

It was at this moment that Von Bloom gave utterance to his sad thoughts in words as above.

As if seeking for an answer, his eyes were raised to heaven, and then wandered around the plain. All at once they became fixed upon a singular object, that appeared at some distance off, and was just emerging from the bushes.

It was an animal of some kind, and from its vast size Von Bloom and the others at first took it to be an elephant. None of them, except Swartboy, were accustomed to elephants in their wild state,—for, although these animals once inhabited the most southerly portion of Africa, they have long since deserted the settled districts, and are now only to be found far beyond the frontier of the colony. But they knew that there were elephants in these parts—as they had already observed their tracks—and all now supposed the huge creature that was approaching must be one.

Not all, Swartboy was an exception. As soon as his eyes fell upon the animal he cried out,—

“Chukuroo—a chukuroo!”

“A rhinoster, is it?” said Von Bloom, knowing that “chuckuroo” was the native name for the rhinoceros, or “rhinoster,” as he called it in Dutch.

“Ya, baas,” replied Swartboy; “and one o' da big karles—da, 'kobaoba,' da long-horn white rhinoster.”

What Swartboy meant by this was that the animal in question was a large species of rhinoceros, known among the natives as the “kobaoba.”

Now I dare say, young reader, you have been all your life under the impression that there was but one species of rhinoceros in the world—that is *the* rhinoceros. Is it not so? Yes.

Well, permit me to inform you, that you have been under a wrong impression. There are quite a number of distinct species of this very singular animal. At least eight distinct kinds I know of; and I do not hesitate to say that when the central parts of Africa have been fully explored, as well as South Asia and the Asiatic islands, nearly half as many more will be found to exist.

In South Africa four distinct species are well known; one in North Africa differs from all these; while the large Indian rhinoceros bears but slight resemblance to any of them. A distinct species from any is the rhinoceros of Sumatra, an inhabitant of that island; and still another is the Java rhinoceros, found in the island of Java. Thus we have no less than eight kinds, all specifically differing from one another.

The natives of South Africa are acquainted with four distinct species of rhinoceros, to which they give distinct names; and it may be remarked that this observation of species by native hunters is far more to be depended upon than the speculations of mere closet-naturalists, who draw their deductions from a tubercle, or the tooth, or a stuffed skin. Gordon Cumming, for
366 example, the most distinguished of all African hunters has done more to increase the knowledge of African zoology than a whole college full of “speculating” *savans*.

This same Gordon Cumming has written a most interesting account of his hunting experiences, tells you that there are four kinds of rhinoceros in Southern Africa; and no man is likely to know better than he.

These four kinds are known among the natives as the “borele,” the “keitloa,” the “muchocho,” and “kobaoba.” The two first are “black rhinoceroses,”—that is, the general colour of their skin is dark—while the “muchocho” and “kobaoba” are white varieties, having the skin of a dingy whitish hue. The black rhinoceroses are much smaller—scarce half the size of the others, and they differ from them in the length and set of their horns, as well as in other particulars.

In the form and length of their neck, the set of their ears, and other respects, the black rhinoceroses differ materially from the white ones. In fact, their habits are quite unlike. The former feed chiefly on the leaves and twigs of thorns, such as the *Acacia horrida*, or “wait-a-bits,” while the latter live upon grass. The former are of fiercer disposition—will attack man or any other animal on sight; and even sometimes seem to grow angry with the bushes, charging upon them and breaking them to pieces!

The white rhinoceroses, although fierce enough when wounded or provoked, are usually of pacific disposition, and will permit the hunter to pass without molestation.

These become very fat, and make excellent eating. The flesh of no African animal is esteemed superior to the calf of the white rhinoceros, whereas the black varieties never grow fat, and their flesh is tough and unpalatable.

The hide is also used for different purposes, among others for making the whips known as “jamboks,” though hippopotamus-hide is superior.

The skin of the African rhinoceros, as already stated, is without the plaits, folds, and scutellæ, that characterise its Asiatic congener, yet it is far from being a soft one. It is so thick and difficult to pierce, that a bullet of ordinary lead will sometimes flatten upon it. To ensure its penetrating, the lead must be hardened with solder.

The rhinoceros, though not a water animal, like the hippopotamus, is nevertheless fond of that element, and is rarely found at a great distance from it. All four kinds love to lie and wallow in mud, just as hogs in a summer's day; and they are usually seen coated all over with this substance. During the day they may be observed lying down or standing under the shade of some thick mimosa-tree, either asleep or in a state of easy indolence; and it is during the night that they wander about in search of food and water.

If approached from the lee side they can easily be got at, as their small sparkling eyes do not serve them well. On the contrary, if the hunter go to windward, they will scent him at a great distance, as their sense of smell is most acute. If their eyes were only as keen as their nostrils, it would be a dangerous game to attack them, for they can run with sufficient rapidity to overtake a horse in the first charge.

In charging and running, the black variety far excels the white. They are easily avoided, however, by the hunter springing quickly to one side, and letting them rush blindly on.

367 The black rhinoceros is about six feet high at the shoulder, and full thirteen in length; while the white kinds are far larger. The white rhinoceros is full seven feet high, and fourteen in length!

No wonder that an animal of these extraordinary dimensions was at first sight taken for the elephant. In fact, the kobaoba rhinoceros is the quadruped next to the elephant in size; and with his great muzzle—full eighteen inches broad—his long clumsy head, his vast ponderous body, this animal impresses one with an idea of strength and massive grandeur as great, and some say

greater than the elephant himself. He looks, indeed, like a caricature of the elephant. It was not such a bad mistake, then, when our people by the wagon took the “kobaoba” for the “mighty elephant.”

Swartboy, however, set them all right by declaring that the animal they saw was the white rhinoceros.

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CHAPTER XVII.

A HEAVY COMBAT.

When they first saw the kobaoba, he was, as stated, just coming out of the thicket. Without halting, he headed in the direction of the vley already mentioned; and kept on towards it, his object evidently being to reach the water.

This little lake, of course, owed its existence to the spring—though it was full two hundred yards from the latter—and about the same from the great tree. It was nearly circular in shape, and about one hundred yards in diameter, so that its superficial area would thus be a little over two English acres. It merited, then, the name of “lake;” and by that name the young people already called it.

On its upper side—that in the direction of the spring—its shore was high, and in one or two places rocky, and these rocks ran back to the spring along the channel of a little rivulet. On the west or outer side of the lake the land lay lower, and the water at one or two points lipped up nearly to the level of the plain. For this reason it was, that upon that side, the bank was paddled all over with tracks of animals that had been to drink. Hendrik the hunter had observed among them the footprints of many kinds he knew nothing about.

It was for the lower end of the lake the kobaoba was making—no doubt with him an old and favourite drinking place.

There was a point where the water was easier of access than elsewhere—a little to one side of where the wash or waste-stream of the lake ran out. It was a sort of cove with bright sandy beach, and approachable from the plain by a miniature gorge, hollowed out, no doubt, by the long usage of those animals who came to drink at the vley. By entering this cove, the tallest animals might get deep water and good bottom, so that they could drink without much straining or stooping. The kobaoba came on in a direct line for the lake; and as he drew near, they could see him heading for the gorge that led into the little cove. It proved he had been there before.

Next moment he passed through the gap, and stood knee-deep in the water.

After swallowing several copious draughts—now sneezing, and then wheezing—he plunged his broad snout, horn and all, into the water, tossed it till it foamed, and then lying down in it,
368 commenced wallowing like a hog.

The place was shallow, and most of his huge body was above the surface—though there was deep enough water in the lake to have given him a bath had he desired it.

The first thought of Von Bloom, as well as of Hendrik, was how to “circumvent” the rhinoceros, and of course destroy him. Not that they simply wished his destruction; but Swartboy had already represented what fine food the species was, and there was no stock of provision in camp. Hendrik had another object in wishing the death of the creature. He wanted a new loading-rod for his rifle; and he had gazed covetously at the kobaoba's long horn.

But it was easier to desire the death of the rhinoceros than to accomplish it. They had no horses—at least, none that could be mounted—and to attack the animal on foot, would be a game as dangerous as idle. He would be like enough to impale one of them on his great spike, or else trample them brutally under his huge feet. If he did not do one or the other, he would easily make his escape—as any kind of rhinoceros can outrun a man.

How were they to manage him then?

Perhaps they might get near—fire at him from an ambush, and with a lucky shot stretch him out. A single bullet sometimes kills the rhinoceros—but only when correctly placed, so as to penetrate the heart, or some other of the “vitals.”

This was, probably, the best plan. They might easily get near enough. There was some bush cover close to the spot. It was probable the old kobaoba would not perceive them, if they approached from leeward, particularly as he seemed in the full tide of enjoyment at that moment.

They were about to attempt the approach, and had got to their feet for that purpose, when a sudden fit seemed to have attacked Swartboy. The latter commenced jumping over the ground, at the same time muttering in a low voice,—

“Da klow! da klow!”

A stranger would have fancied Swartboy in a fit, but Von Bloom knew that by “Da klow! da klow!” the Bushman meant “The elephant! the elephant!” and therefore looked in the direction in which Swartboy was pointing.

Sure enough, upon the western plain, looming up against the yellow sky, was a dark mass, that upon examination presented the outlines of an elephant. Its rounded back was easily distinguished over the low bushes; and its broad hanging ears were moving as it marched. All saw at a glance that it was coming towards the lake, and almost in the same track that the rhinoceros had taken.

Of course this new apparition quite disarranged the plans of the hunters. At sight of the mighty elephant, they scarce any longer gave a thought to the kobaoba. Not that they had formed any very great hopes of being able to kill the gigantic animal, yet some such thought was running through their minds. They had determined to try, at all events.

Before they could agree upon any plan, however, the elephant had got up to the edge of the lake. Though moving only at a slow walk, with his immense strides he soon measured off a large quantity of ground, and advanced much more rapidly than one would have supposed. The hunters had scarce time to exchange thoughts, before the huge creature was up within a few yards of the
369 water.

Here he halted, pointed his proboscis in different directions, stood quite silent, and seemed to listen.

There was no noise to disturb him—even the kobaoba for the moment was quiet.

After standing a minute or so, the huge creature moved forward again, and entered the gorge already described.

They at the camp had now a full view of him, at less than three hundred yards distant. An immense mass he seemed. His body quite filled the gorge from side to side, and his long yellow tusks projecting more than two yards from his jaws, curved gracefully upward. He was an “old bull,” as Swartboy whispered.

Up to this time the rhinoceros had not had the slightest intimation of the elephant's approach; for the tread of the latter—big beast as he is—is as silent as a cat's. It is true that a loud rumbling noise like distant thunder proceeded from his inside as he moved along; but the kobaoba was in too high a caper just then to have heard or noticed any sound that was not very near and distinct.

The huge body of the elephant coming suddenly into “his sunshine,” and flinging its dark shadow over the vley, was distinct enough, and caused the kobaoba to get to his feet with an agility quite surprising for a creature of his build.

At the same time a noise, something between a grunt and a whistle escaped him, as the water was ejected from his nostrils.

The elephant also uttered his peculiar salute, in a trumpet note, that echoed from the cliffs; and halted in his tracks as soon as he saw the rhinoceros.

No doubt both were surprised at the rencontre; as both stood for some seconds eyeing each other with apparent astonishment.

This, however, soon gave place to a different feeling. Symptoms of anger began to show themselves. It was evident that bad blood was brewing between them.

There was, in fact, a little dilemma. The elephant could not get comfortably at the water unless the rhinoceros left the cove; and the rhinoceros could not well get out of the cove, so long as the elephant blocked up the gorge with his immense thick limbs.

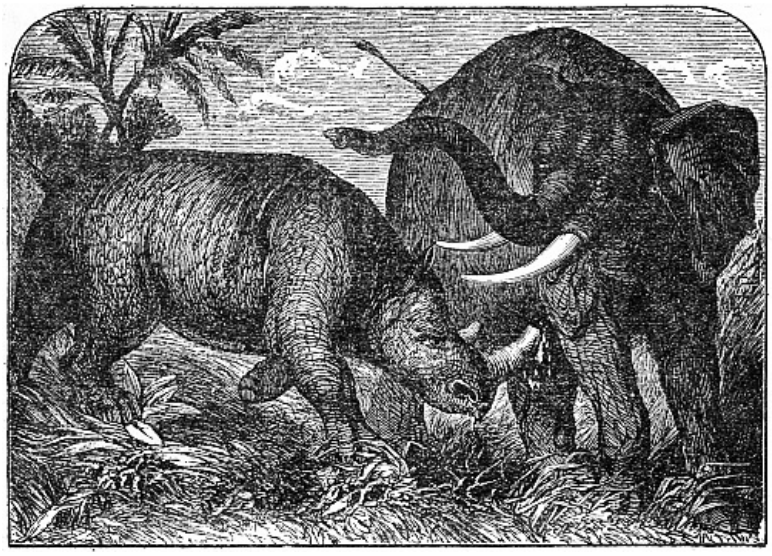
It is true, the kobaoba might have sneaked through among the other's legs, or he might have swum off and landed at some other point, and in either way have left the coast clear.

But of all animals in the world a rhinoceros is, perhaps, the most unaccommodating. He is, also, one of the most fearless, dreading neither man nor beast—not even the boasted lion, whom he often chases like a cat. Hence the old kobaoba had no intention of yielding ground to the elephant; and from his attitude, it was plain that he neither intended to sneak off under the other's belly, nor swim a single stroke for him. No—not a stroke.

It remained to be seen how the point of honour was to be decided. The attitude of affairs had become so interesting, that every one by the camp was gazing with fixed eyes upon the two great bulls—for the rhinoceros was also a “bull” and of the largest size known of his kind.

For several minutes they stood eyeing each other. The elephant, although much the larger, knew his antagonist well. He had met his “sort” before, and knew better than to despise his powers. Perhaps, ere now, he had had a touch of that long spit-like excrescence that stood out
370 from the kobaoba's snout.

At all events, he did not rush upon his adversary at once—as he would have done on some poor antelope that might have crossed him in the same way.



A DEADLY ENCOUNTER.

His patience, however, became exhausted. His ancient dignity was insulted—his rule disputed—he wished to have his bath and his drink—he could bear the insolence of the rhinoceros no longer.

With a bellow that made the rocks ring again, he charged forward; placed his tusks firmly under the shoulder of his adversary,—gave a mighty “lift,” and turned the rhinoceros over in the
371 water!

For a moment the latter plunged, and blowed, and snorted, his head half under water; but in a second's time he was on his feet again, and charging in turn. The spectators could see that he aimed right at the elephant's ribs with his horn, and that the latter did all he could to keep head towards him.

Again the elephant flung the kobaoba, and again the latter rose and charged madly upon his huge antagonist; and so both fought until the water around them was white with foam.

The contest was carried on in the water, until the elephant, seeming to think his adversary had an advantage there, backed himself into the gorge, and stood waiting with his head towards the lake. In this position the sides of the gorge did not protect him, as perhaps he fancied. They were too low, and his broad flanks rose far above them. They only kept him from turning round, and this interfered with the freedom of his movements.

It could scarce have been design in the rhinoceros to act as he now did, though it appeared so to those who were watching. As the elephant took up his position in the gorge, the kobaoba clambered out upon the bank; and then, wheeling suddenly, with head to the ground and long horn projected horizontally, the latter rushed upon his antagonist and struck him right among the ribs. The spectators saw that the horn penetrated, and the loud scream that came from the elephant, with the quick motions of his trunk and tail, told plainly that he had received a severe wound. Instead of standing any longer in the gorge he rushed forward, and did not stop until he was knee-deep in the lake. Drawing the water up into his trunk, he raised it on high, and pointing it backwards, he discharged large volumes over his body, and upon the spot where he had received the thrust of the kobaoba's horn.

He then ran out of the lake, and charged about in search of the rhinoceros; but long-horn was no longer to be found!

Having escaped from the cove without compromising his dignity, and perhaps believing that he had gained the victory, the rhinoceros, as soon as he delivered the thrust, had galloped off and disappeared among the bushes.

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CHAPTER XVIII.

THE DEATH OF THE ELEPHANT.

The battle between these two large quadrupeds did not continue for more than ten minutes. During that time the hunters made no advance towards attacking either of them—so much absorbed were they in watching the novel contest. It was only after the rhinoceros had retreated, and the elephant returned to the water, that they once more began to deliberate on some plan of assaulting this mightiest of African animals. Hans now laid hold of his gun and joined them.

The elephant, after looking about for his enemy, had got back, and was standing knee-deep in the lake. He appeared restless and highly excited. His tail was continually in motion, and at intervals he uttered a piercing melancholy scream—far different to the usual trumpet-like bellow of his voice. He lifted his huge limbs, and then plunged them back again to the bottom, until the
372 foam gathered upon the water with his continued churning.

But the oddest of his actions was the manner in which he employed his long tubular trunk. With this he sucked up vast volumes of water, and then pointing it backwards ejected the fluid over his back and shoulders, as if from an immense syringe. This shower-bath he kept repeating time after time, though it was evident he was not at his ease.

They all knew he was angry. Swartboy said it would be exceedingly dangerous to be seen by him at that moment, without having a horse to gallop out of his way. On this account every one of them had concealed themselves behind the trunk of the nwana-tree, Von Bloom peeping past one side, and Hendrik the other, in order to watch his movements.

Notwithstanding the danger, they at length resolved to attack him. They believed that if they did not do so soon, he would walk off, and leave them supperless—for they had hoped to sup upon a slice of his trunk. Time, therefore, had grown precious, and they resolved to attack him without further ado.

They intended to creep as near as was safe. All three would fire together, and then lie close in the bushes until they saw the effect of their shots.

Without farther parley, Von Bloom, Hans, and Hendrik, leaving the tree, crept through the bushes towards the western end of the lake. It was not a continuous thicket, but only an assemblage of copses and clumps, so that they required to steal very cautiously from one to the other. Von Bloom led the way, while the boys kept in his tracks, following him closely.

After some five minutes spent in this way, they got under cover of a little clump near the water's edge, and near enough to the gigantic game. Upon their hands and knees they now approached the verge of the underwood; and, having parted the leaves, looked through. The mighty quadruped was right under their eyes, within twenty yards of them!

He was still busy plunging about, and blowing volumes of water over his body. He gave no sign that he had any suspicion of their presence. They could take time, therefore, in choosing a part of his huge body at which to aim their pieces.

When first seen from their new position, he was standing stern towards them. Von Bloom did not think it a good time to fire, as they could not give him a deadly wound in that situation. They waited, therefore, until he might turn his side, before they should deliver their volley. They kept their eyes all the while steadily fixed on him.

He ceased at length to “churn” with his feet, and no longer raised water in his trunk; and now the hunters perceived that the lake was red for a space around him! It was his blood that had reddened it.

They no longer doubted that he had been wounded by the rhinoceros; but whether the wound was a bad one they could not tell. It was in his side, and as yet they could only see his broad stern from the position in which he still continued to stand. But they waited with confidence—as they knew that in turning to get out of the water, he would have to present his side towards them.

For several minutes he kept the same position; but they noticed that his tail no longer switched
373 about, and that his attitude was loose and drooping. Now and then he turned his proboscis to the spot where he had received the thrust of the kobaoba's horn. It was evident that the wound was distressing him, and this became more apparent by the loud painful breathing the creature uttered through his trunk.

The three began to grow impatient. Hendrik asked leave to creep round to another point, and give him a shot that would turn him round.

Just at that moment the elephant made a motion, as though he was about to come out of the water.

He had got fairly round—his head and fore-part were over dry land—the three guns were pointed—the eyes of the three hunters were about to glance through the sights of their pieces, when all at once he was seen to rock and stagger,—and then roll over! With a loud plash, his vast body subsided into the water, sending great waves to every corner of the lake.

The hunters uncocked their guns, and, springing from their ambush, rushed forward to the bank. They saw at a glance that the elephant was dead. They saw the wound upon his side,—the hole made by the horn of the rhinoceros. It was not very large, but the terrible weapon had penetrated far into his body, into his very vitals. No wonder, then, at the result it had produced—the death of the mightiest of quadrupeds.

As soon as it became known that the elephant was dead, everybody was seen rushing forward to the spot. Little Trüey and Jan were called from their hiding-place—for they had both been hidden in the wagon—and Totty, too, went down with the rest. Swartboy was one of the first upon the spot, carrying an axe and a large knife—for Swartboy had designs upon the carcass—while Hans and Hendrik both threw off their jackets to assist in the butchering operations.

And what during this time was Von Bloom about? Ha! That is a more important question than you think for. That was an important hour—the hour of a great crisis in the life of the field-cornet.

He was standing with folded arms on the bank of the lake, directly over the spot where the elephant had fallen. He appeared to be wrapt in silent meditation, his eyes bent upon the huge carcass of the animal. No, not on the carcass. A close observer would have perceived that his eyes did not wander over that mountain of thick skin and flesh, but were resting upon a particular spot.

Was it the wound in the animal's side? And was Von Bloom meditating how the thrust had caused the death of such a huge creature?

Neither one nor the other. His thoughts were upon a very different theme from either.

The elephant had fallen so that his head was clear of the water, and rested upon a little bank of sand; along which, his soft and limber trunk lay extended to its full length. Curving like a pair of gigantic scimeters from its base, were the yellow enamelled tusks; those ivory arms that for years,—aye centuries, perhaps,—had served him to root up the trees of the forest, and rout his antagonists in many a dread encounter. Precious and beautiful trophies were they, but alas! their
374 world-wide fame had cost no less than life to many thousands of his race.

Shining in all their magnificence lay these mated crescents, gently curved and softly rounded. It was upon these that the eyes of the field-cornet were bent!

Aye, and bent too with an eagerness unusual in his glance. His lips were compressed, his chest was visibly heaving. Oh! there was a world of thoughts passing through the mind of Von Bloom at that moment.

Were they painful thoughts? The expression of his face told the contrary. The cloud that all that day sat perched upon his brow had vanished. Not a trace of it remained, but in its place could be seen the lines of hope and joy, and these feelings at length found expression in words.

“It is the hand of Heaven!” he exclaimed aloud. “A fortune—a fortune!”

“What is it, papa?” inquired little Trüey, who was near him; “what were you speaking about, dear papa?”

And then all the others gathered around him, noticing his excited manner, and pleased at seeing him look so happy.

“What is it, papa?” asked all together, while Swartboy and Totty stood eager as the rest to hear the answer.

In the pleasant excitement of his thoughts, the fond father could no longer conceal from his children the secret of his new-born happiness. He would gratify them by disclosing it.

Pointing to the long crescents he said,—

“You see those beautiful tusks?”

Yes, of course, they all did.

“Well, do you know their value?”

No. They knew they were worth something. They knew that it was from elephants' tusks that ivory was obtained, or, more properly, that elephants' tusks were ivory itself; and that it was used in the manufacture of hundreds of articles. In fact, little Trüey had a beautiful fan made out of it, which had been her mother's; and Jan had a knife with an ivory handle. Ivory was a very beautiful material, and cost very dear, they knew. All this they knew, but the value of the two tusks they could not guess at. They said so.

“Well, my children,” said Von Bloom, “as near as I can estimate them, they are worth twenty pounds each of English money.”

“Oh! oh! Such a grand sum!” cried all in a breath.

“Yes,” continued the field-cornet; “I should think each tusk is one hundred pounds in weight, and as ivory at present sells for four shillings and sixpence the pound weight, these two would yield between forty and fifty pounds of sterling money.”

“Why, it would buy a full span of best oxen!” cried Hans.

“Four good horses!” said Hendrik.

“A whole flock of sheep!” added little Jan.

“But whom can we sell them to?” asked Hendrik, after a pause. “We are away from the settlements. Who is to give us either oxen, or horses, or sheep, for them? It would not be worth while to carry two tusks all the way——”

“Not two, Hendrik,” said his father interrupting him; “but twenty it might,—aye, twice twenty, or three times that number. Now, do you understand what makes me so gay?”

“Oh!” exclaimed Hendrik, as well as the others, who now began to perceive what their father

375 was so joyed about, “you think we can obtain more tusks in these parts?”

“Precisely so. I think there are many elephants here. I feel certain of it from the quantity of their spoor I have already noticed. We have our guns, and fortunately, plenty of ammunition. We are all pretty fair shots—why can we not obtain more of these valuable trophies?”

“But we shall,” continued Von Bloom. “I know we shall, because I recognise the hand of God in sending us this wealth in the midst of our misery—after we had lost everything. More will come by the guiding of the same hand. So be of good cheer, my children! We shall not want—we shall yet have plenty—we may be rich!”

It was not that any of those young creatures cared much about being rich, but because they saw their father so happy, that they broke out into something more than a murmur of applause. It was, in fact, a cheer, in which both Totty and Swartboy joined. It rang over the little lake, and caused the birds about settling to roost to wonder what was going on. There was no happier group in all Africa than stood at that moment upon the shore of that lonely little vley.

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CHAPTER XIX.

TURNED HUNTERS.

The field-cornet, then, had resolved upon turning hunter by profession—a hunter of elephants; and it was a pleasant reflection to think, that this occupation promised, not only exciting sport, but great profit. He knew that it was not so easy a matter to succeed in killing such large and valuable game as elephants. He did not suppose that in a few weeks or months he would obtain any great quantities of their ivory spoils; but he had made up his mind to spend even years in the pursuit. For years he should lead the life of a Bushman—for years his sons would be “Bush-boys,” and he hoped that in time his patience and toil would be amply rewarded.

That night around the camp-fire all were very happy and very merry. The elephant had been left where he lay, to be cut up on the morrow. Only his trunk had been taken off—part of which was cooked for supper.

Although all the flesh of the elephant is eatable, the trunk is esteemed one of the delicate bits. It tastes not unlike ox-tongue; and all of them liked it exceedingly. To Swartboy, who had made many a meal upon “de ole klow,” it was a highly-relished feast.

They had plenty of fine milk, too. The cow, now upon the best of pasture, doubled her yield; and the quantity of this, the most delicious of all drinks, was sufficient to give every one a large allowance.

While enjoying their new-fashioned dish of roast elephant-trunk, the conversation naturally turned upon these animals.

Everybody knows the appearance of the elephant, therefore a description of him is quite superfluous. But everybody does not know that there are two distinct kinds of this gigantic quadruped—the African and Asiatic.

Until a late period they were thought to be of the same species. Now they are acknowledged to be, not only distinct, but very different in many respects. The Asiatic, or, as it is more frequently called, the “Indian” elephant is the larger of the two; but it is possible that domestication may
376 have produced a larger kind, as is the rule with many animals. The African species exists only in a wild state; and it would appear that individuals of this kind have been measured having the dimensions of the largest of the wild Asiatic elephants.

The most remarkable points of difference between the two are found in the ears and tusks. The ears of the African elephant are of enormous proportions, meeting each other above the shoulders, and hanging down below the breast. Those of the Indian elephant are scarce one-third the size. In his grand tusks the former has far the advantage—these in some individuals weighing nearly two hundred pounds each—while the tusks of the latter rarely reach the weight of one hundred. To this, however, there are some exceptions. Of course a two hundred pound tusk is one of the very largest, and far above the average even of African elephants. In this species the females are also provided with tusks—though not of such size as in the males—whereas the female of the Indian elephant has either no tusks at all, or they are so small as to be scarcely perceptible outside the skin of the lips.

In Africa the elephant exists only in a state of nature. None of the nations upon this little-known continent tame or train him to any purpose. He is only prized among them for his precious teeth, and his flesh as well. Some have asserted that this species is more fierce than its Indian congener, and could not be domesticated. This is altogether a mistake. The reason why the African elephant is not trained, is simply that none of the modern nations of Africa have yet reached a high enough point of civilisation to avail themselves of the services of this valuable

animal.

The African elephant may be domesticated and trained to the “howdah,” or castle, as easily as his Indian cousin. The trial has been made; but that it can be done no better proof is required than that at one period it was done, and upon a large scale. The elephants of the Carthaginian army were of this species.

The African elephant at present inhabits the central and southern parts of Africa. Abyssinia on the east, and Senegal on the west, are his northern limits, and but a few years ago he roamed southward to the very Cape of Good Hope. The activity of the Dutch ivory-hunters, with their enormous long guns, has driven him from that quarter; and he is no longer to be found to the south of the Orange River.

Swartboy spoke of a variety well known among the Hottentot hunters as the “koes-cops.” This kind, he said, differed from the ordinary ones by its altogether wanting the tusks, and being of a far more vicious disposition. Its encounter is more dreaded; but as it possesses no trophies to make it worth the trouble and danger of killing, the hunters usually give it a wide berth.

Such was the conversation that night around the camp-fire. Much of the information here given was furnished by Hans, who of course had gathered it from books; but the Bushman contributed his quota—perhaps of a far more reliable character.

All were destined ere long to make practical acquaintance with the haunts and habits of this
377 huge quadruped, that to them had now become the most interesting of all the animal creation.

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CHAPTER XX.

JERKING AN ELEPHANT.

Next day was one of severe, but joyful labour. It was spent in “curing” the elephant, not in a medical sense, but in the language of the provision-store.

Although not equal to either beef or mutton, or even pork, the flesh of the elephant is sufficiently palatable to be eaten. There is no reason why it should not be, for the animal is a clean feeder, and lives altogether on vegetable substances—the leaves and tender shoots of trees, with several species of bulbous roots, which he well knows how to extract from the ground with his tusks and trunk. It does not follow from this that his beef should be well tasted—since we see that the hog, one of the most unclean of feeders, yields most delicious “pork;” while another of the same family (*pachydermata*) that subsists only on sweet succulent roots, produces a flesh both insipid and bitter. I allude to the South American tapir. The quality of the food, therefore, is no criterion of the quality of the flesh.

It is true that the beef of the elephant was not what Von Bloom and most of his family would have chosen for their regular diet. Had they been sure of procuring a supply of antelope-venison, the great carcass might have gone, not to the “dogs,” but to their kindred the hyenas. But they were not sure of getting even a single antelope, and therefore decided upon “curing” the elephant. It would be a safe stock to have on hand, and need not interfere with their eating venison, or any other dainty that might turn up.

The first thing done was to cut out the tusks. This proved a tough job, and occupied full two hours. Fortunately there was a good axe on hand. But for this and Swartboy's knowledge, double the time might have been wasted in the operation.

The ivory having been extracted and put away in a safe place, the “cutting up” then commenced in earnest. Von Bloom and Swartboy were the “baas-butchers,” while Hans and Hendrik played the part of “swabs.” As the carcass lay half under water, they would have had some difficulty in dealing with the under part. But this they did not design to touch. The upper half would be amply sufficient to provision them a long while; and so they set about removing the skin from that side that was uppermost.

The rough thick outer coat they removed in broad sheets cut into sections; and then they peeled off several coats of an under skin, of tough and pliant nature. Had they needed water-vessels, Swartboy would have saved this for making them—as it is used for such purposes by the Bushmen and other natives. But they had vessels enough in the wagon, and this skin was thrown away.

They had now reached the pure flesh, which they separated in large sheets from the ribs; and then the ribs were cut out, one by one, with the axe. This trouble they would not have taken—as they did not want the ribs—but they cut them away for another reason, namely, to enable them to get at the valuable fat, which lies in enormous quantities around the intestines. Of course for all cooking purposes, the fat would be to them invaluable, and indeed almost necessary to render the flesh itself eatable.

378 It is no easy matter to get at the fat in the inside of an elephant, as the whole of the intestines

have first to be removed. But Swartboy was not to be deterred by a little trouble; so climbing into the interior of the huge carcass, he commenced cutting and delving, and every now and then passing a multitude of “inwards” out to the others, who carried them off out of the way.

After a long spell of this work, the fat was secured, and carefully packed in a piece of clean under-skin; and then the “butchering” was finished.

Of course the four feet, which along with the trunk are considered the “tit-bits,” had already been separated at the fetlock joint; and stood out upon the bank, for the future consideration of Swartboy.

The next thing to be done was to “cure” the meat. They had a stock of salt—that precious, though, as lately discovered, not indispensable article. But the quantity—stowed away in a dry corner of the wagon—was small, and would have gone but a short way in curing an elephant.

They had no idea of using it for such a purpose. Flesh can be preserved without salt; and not only Swartboy, but Von Bloom himself, knew how to preserve it. In all countries where salt is scarce, the process of “jerking” meat is well understood, and consists simply in cutting it into thin strips and hanging it out in the sun. A few days of bright warm sunshine will “jerk” it sufficiently; and meat thus dried will keep good for months. A slow fire will answer the purpose nearly as well; and in the absence of sunshine, the fire is often resorted to.

Sun-dried meat in South Africa is called “biltongue.” The Spaniards of Mexico name it “tasajo,” while those of Peru style it “charqui.” In English it is “jerked” meat.

Several hours were spent in cutting the elephant-beef into strips, and then a number of forked poles were set up, others were laid horizontally over the forks, and upon these the meat was suspended, and hung down in numberless festoons.

Before the sun went down, the neighbourhood of the camp presented a rare appearance. It looked somewhat like the enclosure of a yarn-bleacher, except that the hanging strips, instead of being white, were of a beautiful clear ruby colour.

But the work was not yet completed. The feet remained to be “preserved,” and the mode of curing these was entirely different. That was a secret known only by Swartboy, and in the execution of it the Bushman played first fiddle, with the important air of a *chef de cuisine*.

He proceeded as follows:—

He first dug a hole in the ground, about two feet deep, and a little more in diameter—just large enough to admit one of the feet, which was nearly two feet diameter at the base. The earth which came out of this hole Swartboy placed in the form of a loose embankment around the edge.

By his direction the boys had already collected upon the spot a large quantity of dried branches and logs. These Swartboy now built over the hole, into a pyramid of ten feet high, and then set the pile on fire. He next proceeded to make three other pits precisely similar, and built over each a fire like the first, until four large fires were burning upon the ground.

379 The fires being now fairly under way, he could only wait until each had burned down. This would carry the process into the night, and so it turned out; but Swartboy had a foresight of this. He knew he would get through with the more important portion of his work before bedtime.

When the first fire had burned quite to red cinders, Swartboy's hardest turn of duty began. With a shovel he lifted the cinders out of the hole, until it was empty; but he was more than an hour in performing this apparently simple labour. The difficulty arose from the intense heat he had to encounter, which drove him back after every few moments' work; so that he was compelled to retreat at intervals in order to cool himself.

The “baas,” as well as Hendrik and Hans, took turns with him, until all four were perspiring as if they had been shut up for half-an-hour in a baker's oven.

When the hole was thoroughly scooped clean of coals, Swartboy, assisted by Von Bloom, lifted one of the huge feet; and, carrying it as near as they dare go on account of the scorching heat, they heaved it in upon its base.

The sandy earth which had been originally removed, and which was now as hot as molten lead, was pushed over, and around the foot; and then the cinders were raked on top, and over that another huge fire was kindled.

The same process was gone through with the other three feet, and all four were to be left in the “oven” until the fires should be burned down, when they would be found sufficiently “baked.”

Swartboy would then rake off the cinders, take out the feet with a sharp wooden spit, beat them well to get rid of the dust, scrape the sand clear, then pare off the outside skin, when they would be ready either to be eaten or would keep for a long time.

Swartboy would do all this as soon as the four huge bonfires should burn down.

But that would not be before the morning; so all of them, fatigued by the extraordinary exertions of the day, finished their suppers of broiled trunk, and went to rest under the protecting shadow of the nwana.

CHAPTER XXI.

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THE HIDEOUS HYENA.

Fatigued as they were, they would soon have fallen asleep. But they were not permitted to do so. As they lay with closed eyes in that half-dreamy state that precedes sleep, they were suddenly startled by strange voices near the camp.

These voices were uttered in peals of loud laughter; and no one, unacquainted with them, would have pronounced them to be anything else than the voices of human beings. They exactly resembled the strong treble produced by the laugh of a maniac negro. It seemed as if some Bedlam of negroes had been let loose, and were approaching the spot.

I say approaching, because each moment the sounds grew clearer and louder; and it was evident that whatever gave utterance to them was coming nearer to the camp.

380 That there was more than one creature was evident—aye, and it was equally evident that there was more than one kind of creature; for so varied were the voices, it would have puzzled a ventriloquist to have given imitations of them all. There was howling, and whining, and grunting, and growling, and low melancholy moaning as of some one in pain, and hissing, and chattering, and short, sharp intonations, as if it were the barking of dogs, and then a moment or two of deep silence, and again that chorus of human-like laughter, that in point of horror and hideous suggestions surpassed all the other sounds.

You will suppose that such a wild concert must have put the camp in a state of great alarm. Not a bit of it. Nobody was frightened in the least—not even innocent little Trüey, nor the diminutive Jan.

Had they been strangers to these sounds, no doubt they would have been more than frightened. They would have been terrified by them; for they were calculated to produce such an effect upon any one to whose ears they were new.

But Von Bloom and his family had lived too long upon the wild karoo to be ignorant of those voices. In the howling, and chattering, and yelping, they heard but the cries of the jackal; and they well knew the maniac laugh of the hideous hyena.

Instead of being alarmed, and springing from their beds, they lay still and listened—not dreading any attack from the noisy creatures.

Von Bloom and the children slept in the wagon; Swartboy and Totty upon the ground—but these lay close to the fires, and therefore did not fear wild beasts of any kind.

But the hyenas and jackals upon this occasion appeared to be both numerous and bold. In a few minutes after they were first heard, their cries rose around the camp on all sides, so near and so loud as to be positively disagreeable—even without considering the nature of the brutes that uttered them.

At last they came so close, that it was impossible to look in any direction without seeing a pair of green or red eyes gleaming under the light of the fires! White teeth, too, could be observed, as the hyenas opened their jaws, to give utterance to their harsh laughter.

With such a sight before their eyes, and such sounds ringing in their ears, neither Von Bloom nor any of his people—tired as they were—could go to sleep. Indeed, not only was sleep out of the question, but, worse than that, all—the field-cornet himself not excepted—began to experience some feelings of apprehension, if not actual alarm.

They had never beheld a troop of hyenas so numerous and fierce. There could not be less than two dozen of them around the camp, with twice that number of jackals.

Von Bloom knew that although, under ordinary circumstances, the hyena is not a dangerous animal, yet there are places and times when he will attack human beings. Swartboy knew this well, and Hans, too, from having read of it. No wonder, then, that some apprehension was felt by all of them.

The hyenas now behaved with such boldness, and appeared so ravenous, that sleep was out of the question. Some demonstration must be made to drive the brutes away from the camp.

Von Bloom, Hans, and Hendrik, laid hold of their guns, and got out of the wagon, while Swartboy armed himself with his bow and arrows. All four stood close by the trunk of the nwana,
381 on the other side from that where the fires were. In this place they were in the shadow, where they could best observe anything that should come under the light of the fires without being themselves seen. Their position was well chosen.

They had scarcely fixed themselves in it, when they perceived a great piece of neglect they had been guilty of. Now, for the first time it occurred to them what had brought the hyenas around them in such numbers. Beyond a doubt it was the flesh of the elephant,—the *biltongue*.

That was what the beasts were after; and all now saw that a mistake had been committed in

hanging the meat too low. The hyenas might easily get at it.

This was soon made manifest; for, even at the moment while they stood watching the red festoons, plainly visible under the light of Swartboy's fires, a shaggy spotted brute rushed forward, reared up on his hind-legs, seized one of the pieces, dragged it down from the pole, and then ran off with it into the darkness.

A rushing sound could be heard as the others joined him to get a share of his plunder; and, no doubt, in less than half a minute the morsel was consumed; for, at the end of that time, glancing eyes and gleaming teeth showed that the whole troop was back again and ready to make a fresh seizure.

None of the hunters had fired, as the nimbleness with which the brutes moved about rendered it difficult to take aim at any one of them; and all knew that powder and lead were too precious to be wasted on a “flying shot.”

Emboldened by their success, the hyenas had now drawn nearer, and in a moment more would have made a general charge upon the scaffolds of flesh, and, no doubt, would have succeeded in carrying off a large quantity of it. But just then it occurred to Von Bloom that it would be best to lay aside their guns and remedy the mistake they had made, by putting the biltongue out of reach. If they did not do so, they would either have to remain awake all night and guard it, or else lose every string of it.

How was it to be put out of reach?

At first they thought of collecting it into a heap and stowing it away in the wagon. That would not only be an unpleasant job, but it would interfere with their sleeping quarters.

An alternative, however, presented itself. They saw that if the scaffolds were only high enough, the meat might be easily hung so as to be out of reach of the hyenas. The only question was, how to place the cross-poles a little higher. In the darkness they could not obtain a new set of uprights, and therein lay the difficulty. How were they to get over it?

Hans had the credit of suggesting a way; and that was to take out some of the uprights, splice them to the others, with the forked ends uppermost, and then rest the horizontal poles on the upper forks. That would give a scaffold tall enough to hang the meat beyond the reach of either jackals or hyenas.

Hans' suggestion was at once adopted. Half of the uprights were taken up and spliced against the others so as to raise their forks full twelve feet in the air; and then the cross-poles were rested over their tops. By standing upon one of the wagon-chests, Von Bloom was able to fling the
382 strips of meat over the horizontal poles, and in such a manner that it hung only a few inches down, and was now quite beyond the reach of the ravenous brutes.

When the business was finished, the party resumed their station under the shadow of the tree, intending to watch for a while, and see how the wolfish intruders would act.

They had not long to watch. In less than five minutes the troop approached the biltongue, howling, and gibbering, as before; only this time uttering peculiar cries, as if to express disappointment. They saw at a glance that the tempting festoons were no longer within their reach.

They were not going to leave the ground, however, without assuring themselves of this fact; and several of the largest approached boldly under the scaffolds, and commenced leaping up to try the height.

After several attempts, springing each time as high as they were able, they appeared to grow discouraged; and no doubt would in time have imitated the fox with the grapes, and gone quietly away. But Von Bloom, indignant at being roused after such a fashion, from his pleasant rest, was determined to take some revenge upon his tormentors; so he whispered the word to the others, and a volley was delivered from behind the tree.

The unexpected discharge caused a quick scattering of both hyenas and jackals, and the pattering of their numerous feet could be heard as they ran off. When the ground under the scaffold was examined, two of the larger of these ravenous quadrupeds, and one of the smaller, were found to have bitten the dust.

Swartboy had discharged his arrow along with the guns, and it was he that had slain the jackal, for the poisoned shaft was seen sticking between the animal's ribs.

The guns were again loaded, the party took their stations as before; but, although they waited another half-hour, neither hyena nor jackal made their appearance.

They had not gone far away, however, as their wild music testified; but the reason they did not return was, that they had now discovered the half carcass of the elephant that lay in the lake, and upon that they were making their supper. Their plunging in the water could be distinctly heard from the camp, and during the whole night they quarrelled and growled, and laughed and yelled, as they gorged themselves on their ample prey.

Of course Von Bloom and his people did not sit up all night to listen to this medley of noises. As soon as they perceived that the brutes were not likely to come any more near the camp, they laid

aside their weapons, returned to their respective sleeping-places, and were all soon buried in the sweet slumber that follows a day of healthy exercise.

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CHAPTER XXII.

STALKING THE OUREBI.

Next morning the hyenas and jackals had disappeared from the scene, and, to the surprise of all, not a particle of flesh was left upon the bones of the elephant. There lay the huge
383 skeleton picked clean, the bones even polished white by the rough tongues of the hyenas. Nay, still stranger to relate, two of the horses—these poor brutes had been long since left to themselves,—had been pulled down during the night, and their skeletons lay at a short distance from the camp as cleanly picked as that of the elephant!

All this was evidence of the great number of ravenous creatures that must have their home in that quarter,—evidence, too, that game animals abounded, for where these are not numerous the beasts of prey cannot exist. Indeed, from the quantity of tracks that were seen upon the shores of the vley, it was evident that animals of various kinds had drunk there during the night. There was the round solid hoof of the quagga, and his near congener the dauw; and there was the neat hoofprint of the gemsbok, and the larger track of the eland; and among these Von Bloom did not fail to notice the spoor of the dreaded lion. Although they had not heard his roaring that night, they had no doubt that there were plenty of his kind in that part of the country. The presence of his favourite prey,—the quaggas, the gemsboks, and the elands,—were sure indications that the king of beasts was not far off.

Not much work was done that day. The heavy labour of curing the biltongue, that had occupied them the whole of the preceding day, and their disturbed rest, had rendered them all listless; and neither Von Bloom nor the others had any inclination for work. So they moved around the camp and did very little.

Swartboy took his elephant's feet from the oven, and cleaned them; and also let down the biltongue and arranged it so as to be better exposed to the sun. Von Bloom himself shot the three remaining horses, having driven them to a good distance from the camp. He did this to put an end to the suffering of the poor brutes,—for it was plain to every one that they could survive but a day or two longer; and to send a bullet through the heart of each was an act of mercy to them.

Out of all the live stock of the field-cornet, the cow alone remained, and she was now tended with the greatest care. Without the precious milk, which she yielded in such quantity, their diet would have been savage enough; and they fully appreciated the service she rendered them. Each day she was driven out to the best pasture, and at night shut up in a safe kraal of wait-a-bit thorns, that had been built for her at a little distance from the tree. These thorns had been placed in such a manner that their shanks all radiated inward, while the bushy tops were turned out, forming a *chevaux-de-frise*, that scarce any animal would have attempted to get through. Such a fence will turn even the lion, unless when he has been rendered fierce and reckless by provocation.

Of course a gap had been left for the cow to pass in and out, and this was closed by one immense bush, which served all the purpose of a gate. Such was the kraal of “old Graaf.” Besides the cow, the only living thing that remained in camp was Trüey's little pet, the fawn of the gazelle.

But on that very day another pet was added, a dear little creature, not less beautiful than the springbok, and of still more diminutive proportions. That was the fawn of an “ourebi,”—one of the elegant little antelopes that are found in such variety over the plains and in the “bush” of Southern Africa.

384 It was to Hendrik they were indebted not only for this pet, but for a dinner of delicate venison, which they had that day eaten, and which all of them, except Swartboy, preferred to elephant beef. Hendrik had procured the venison by a shot from his rifle, and in the following manner.

About mid-day he went out—having fancied that upon a large grassy meadow near the camp he saw some animal. After walking about half-a-mile, and keeping among bushes, around the edge of the meadow, he got near enough to be sure that it was an animal he had observed,—for he now saw two in the place he had marked.

They were of a kind he had not met with before. They were very small creatures,—smaller even than springboks,—but, from their general form and appearance, Hendrik knew they were either antelopes or deer; and, as Hans had told him there were no deer in Southern Africa, he concluded they must be some species of antelope. They were a buck and doe,—this he knew because one of them only carried horns. The buck was under two feet in height, of slender make, and pale tawny colour. He was white-bellied, with white arches above the eyes, and some long white hair under the throat. Below his knees were yellowish tufts of long hair; and his horns—

instead of being lyrate, like those of the springbok—rose nearly vertical to the height of four inches. They were black in colour, round-shaped, and slightly ringed. The doe was without horns, and was a much smaller animal than her mate.

From all these marks Hendrik thought the little antelopes were “ourebis;” and such they were.

He continued to stalk in upon them, until he was as close as he could get. But he was still more than two hundred yards from them, and of course far from being within shooting distance with his small rifle.

A thick *jong dora* bush concealed him, but he dared not go farther else the game would have taken the alarm. He could perceive that they were shy creatures.

Every now and again the buck would raise his graceful neck to its full stretch, utter a slight bleating call, and look suspiciously around him. From these symptoms Hendrik drew the inference that it was shy game, and would not be easily approached.

He lay for a moment, thinking what he should do. He was to leeward of the game, as he had purposely gone there; but after a while, to his chagrin, he saw that they were feeding up the wind, and of course widening the distance between them and himself.

It occurred to Hendrik that it might be their habit to browse up the wind, as springboks and some other species do. If so, he might as well give it up, or else make a long circuit and head them. To do this would be a work of labour and of time, and a very uncertain stalk it would be in the end. After all his long tramping, and creeping, and crouching, the game would be like enough to scent him before they came within shot—for it is for this very reason that their instinct teaches them to browse against, and not with the wind.

As the plain was large, and the cover very distant, Hendrik was discouraged and gave up the design he had half formed of trying to head them.

He was about to rise to his feet, and return home, when it occurred to him that perhaps he might find a decoy available. He knew there were several species of antelopes, with whom
385 curiosity was stronger than fear. He had often lured the springbok within reach. Why would not these obey the same impulse?

He determined to make trial. At the worst he could only fail, and he had no chance of getting a shot otherwise.

Without losing a moment he thrust his hand into his pocket. He should have found there a large red handkerchief, which he had more than once used for a similar purpose. To his chagrin it was not there!

He dived into both pockets of his jacket, then into his wide trousers, then under the breast of his waistcoat. No. The handkerchief was not to be found. Alas! it had been left in the wagon! It was very annoying.

What else could he make use of? Take off his jacket and hold it up? It was not gay enough in colour. It would not do.

Should he raise his hat upon the end of his gun? That might be better, but still it would look too much like the human form, and Hendrik knew that all animals feared that.

A happy thought at length occurred to him. He had heard, that with the curious antelopes, strange forms or movements attract almost as much as glaring colours. He remembered a trick that was said to be practised with success by the hunters. It was easy enough, and consisted merely in the hunter standing upon his hands and head, and kicking his heels in the air!

Now Hendrik happened to be one of those very boys who had often practised this little bit of gymnastics for amusement and he could stand upon his head like an acrobat.

Without losing a moment he placed his rifle upon the ground, between his hands, and hoisting his feet into the air, commenced kicking them about, clinking them together, and crossing them in the most fantastic manner.

He had placed himself so that his face was turned towards the animals, while he stood upon his head. Of course he could not see them while in this position, as the grass was a foot high; but, at intervals, he permitted his feet to descend to the earth; and then, by looking between his legs, he could tell how the ruse was succeeding.

It did succeed. The buck, on first perceiving the strange object, uttered a sharp whistle, and darted off with the swiftness of a bird—for the “ourebi” is one of the swiftest of African antelopes. The doe followed, though not so fast, and soon fell into the rear.

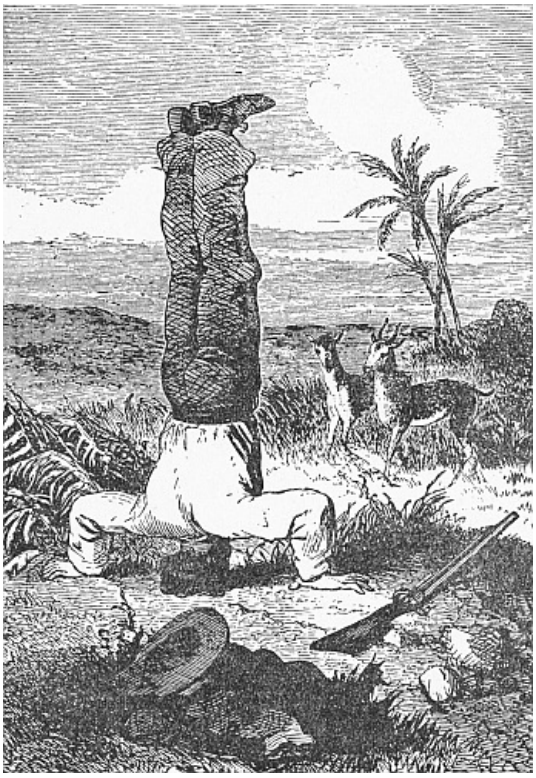
The buck, perceiving this, suddenly halted—as if ashamed of his want of gallantry—wheeled round, and galloped back, until he was once more between the doe and the odd thing that had alarmed him.

What could this odd thing be? he now seemed to inquire of himself. It was not a lion, nor a leopard, nor a hyena, nor yet a jackal. It was neither fox, nor fennec, nor earth-wolf, nor wild hound, nor any of his well-known enemies. It was not a Bushman neither, for they are not double-headed as it appeared. What could it be? It had kept its place—it had not pursued him. Perhaps it

was not at all dangerous. No doubt it was harmless enough.

So reasoned the ourebi. His curiosity overcame his fear. He would go a little nearer. He would have a better view of the thing before he took to flight. No matter what it was, it could do no hurt at that distance; and as to overtaking him, pah! there wasn't a creature, biped or quadruped in all
386 Africa that he could not fling dust in the face of.

So he went a little nearer, and then a little nearer still, and continued to advance by successive runs, now this way and now that way, zigzagging over the plain, until he was within less than a hundred paces of the odd object that at first sight had so terrified him.



HENDRIK DECOYING THE OUREBIS.

His companion, the doe, kept close after him; and seemed quite as curious as himself—her large shining eyes opened to their full extent, as she stopped to gaze at intervals.

387 Sometimes the two met each other in their course; and halted a moment, as though they held consultation in whispers; and asked each other if they had yet made out the character of the stranger.

It was evident, however, that neither had done so—as they still continued to approach it with looks and gestures of inquiry and wonder.

At length the odd object disappeared for a moment under the grass; and then reappeared—but this time in an altered form. Something about it glanced brightly under the sun, and this glancing quite fascinated the buck, so that he could not stir from the spot, but stood eyeing it steadily.

Fatal fascination! It was his last gaze. A bright flash shot up—something struck him through the heart, and he saw the shining object no more!

The doe bounded forward to where her mate had fallen, and stood bleating over him. She knew not the cause of his sudden death, but she saw that he was dead. The wound in his side—the stream of red blood—were under her eyes. She had never witnessed death in that form before, but she knew her lover was dead. His silence—his form stretched along the grass motionless and limber—his glassy eyes—all told her he had ceased to live.

She would have fled, but she could not leave him—she could not bear to part even from his lifeless form. She would remain a while, and mourn over him.

Her widowhood was a short one. Again flashed the priming,—again cracked the shining tube—and the sorrowing doe fell over upon the body of her mate.

The young hunter rose to his feet, and ran forward. He did not, according to usual custom, stop to load before approaching his quarry. The plain was perfectly level, and he saw no other animal upon it. What was his surprise on reaching the antelopes, to perceive that there was a third one of the party still alive!

Yes, a little fawn, not taller than a rabbit, was bounding about through the grass, running around the prostrate body of its mother, and uttering its tiny bleat.

Hendrik was surprised, because he had not observed this creature before; but, indeed, he had not seen much of the antelopes until the moment of taking aim, and the grass had concealed the tiny young one.

Hunter as Hendrik was, he could not help feeling strongly as he regarded the *tableau* before him. But he felt that he had not wantonly destroyed these creatures for mere amusement, and that satisfied his conscience.

The little fawn would make a famous pet for Jan, who had often wished for one, to be equal with his sister. It could be fed upon the cow's milk, and, though it had lost both father and mother, Hendrik resolved that it should be carefully brought up. He had no difficulty in capturing it, as it refused to leave the spot where its mother lay, and Hendrik soon held the gentle creature in his arms.

He then tied the buck and doe together; and, having fastened a strong cord round the horns of the latter, he set off dragging the two antelopes behind him.

As these lay upon the ground, heads foremost, they were drawn with the grain of the hair, which made it much easier; and as there was nothing but grass sward to be passed over, the
388 young hunter succeeded in taking the whole of his game to camp without any great difficulty.

The joy of all was great, at seeing such a fine lot of venison, but Jan's rejoicing was greater than all; and he no longer envied Trüey the possession of her little gazelle.

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CHAPTER XXIII.

LITTLE JAN'S ADVENTURE.

It would have been better that Jan had never seen the little “ourebi,”—better both for Jan and the antelope, for that night the innocent creature was the cause of a terrible panic in the camp.

They had all gone to sleep as on the previous night,—Von Bloom and the four children in the wagon, while the Bushman and Totty slept upon the grass. The latter lay under the wagon; but Swartboy had kindled a large fire a little distance from it, and beside this had stretched himself, rolled up in his sheep-skin kaross.

They had all gone to sleep without being disturbed by the hyenas. This was easily accounted for. The three horses that had been shot that day occupied the attention of these gentry, for their hideous voices could be heard off in the direction where the carcasses lay. Having enough to give them a supper, they found no occasion to risk themselves in the neighbourhood of the camp, where they had experienced such a hostile reception on the previous night. So reasoned Von Bloom, as he turned over and fell asleep.

He did not reason correctly, however. It was true that the hyenas were just then making a meal upon the horses; but it was a mistake to suppose that that would satisfy these ravenous brutes, who never seem to have enough. Long before morning, had Von Bloom been awake he would have heard the maniac laugh closer to the camp, and might have seen the green eyes of the hyena glancing under the expiring blaze of Swartboy's camp-fire.

Indeed, he had heard the beasts once that he awoke; but, knowing that the biltongue had been this night placed out of their reach, and thinking that there was nothing to which they could do any harm, he gave no heed to their noisy demonstrations, and went to sleep again.

He was awakened, however, by a shrill squeak, as of some animal in the agonies of death; and then there was a second squeak, that seemed to be suddenly interrupted by the stifling of the creature's utterance!

In these cries Von Bloom, as well as the others—who were now also awake—recognised the bleat of the ourebi, for they had heard it several times during the afternoon.

“The hyenas are killing it!” thought they. But they had not time to say so, before another and far different cry reached their ears, and caused them all to start as if a bomb-shell had burst under the wagon. That cry was the voice of Jan, and sounded in the same direction whence came the scream of the stifled antelope!

“O heaven! what could it mean?”

The child's voice first reached them in a sudden screech—then there was a confused noise resembling a scuffle—and Jan was again heard crying aloud for help, while at the same time his
389 voice was interrupted, and each call appeared to come from a greater distance! Something or somebody was carrying him off!

This idea occurred to Von Bloom, Hans, and Hendrik, at the same instant. Of course it filled them with consternation; and, as they were scarce yet awake, they knew not what to do.

The cries of Jan, however, soon brought them to their senses; and to run towards the direction whence these came was the first thought of all.

To grope for their guns would waste time, and all three leaped out of the wagon without them.

Totty was upon her feet and jabbering, but she knew no more than they what had happened.

They did not stop long to question her. The voice of Swartboy, uttered in loud barks and clicks, summoned them elsewhere; and they now beheld a red flaming brand rushing through the darkness, which no doubt was carried in the hands of that worthy.

They started off in the direction of the blazing torch, and ran as fast as they could. They still heard the Bushman's voice, and to their dismay beyond it the screams of little Jan.

Of course they could not tell what was causing all this. They only pressed on with fearful apprehensions.

When they had got within some fifty paces of the torch, they perceived it suddenly descend, then raised again, and brought down, in a rapid and violent manner! They could hear the voice of the Bushman barking and clicking louder than ever, as though he was engaged in chastising some creature.

But Jan's voice they no longer heard—he was screaming no more—was he dead?

With terrible forebodings they rushed on.

When they arrived upon the spot, a singular picture presented itself to their eyes. Jan lay upon the ground, close in by the roots of some bushes which he was holding tightly in his grasp. From one of his wrists extended a stout thong, or *rheim*, which passed through among the bushes to the distance of several feet; and, fast to its other end, was the ourebi fawn, dead, and terribly mangled! Over the spot stood Swartboy with his burning tree, which blazed all the brighter that he had just been using it over the back of a ravenous hyena. The latter was not in sight. It had long since skulked off, but no one thought of pursuit, as all were too anxious about Jan.

No time was lost in lifting the child to his feet. The eyes of all ran eagerly over him to see where he was wounded; and an exclamation of joy soon broke forth when they saw that, except the scratches of the thorns, and the deep track of a cord upon his wrist, nothing in the shape of a wound could be discovered upon his diminutive body. He had now come to himself, and assured them all that he was not hurt a bit. Hurrah! Jan was safe!

It now fell to Jan's lot to explain all this mysterious business.

He had been lying in the wagon along with the rest, but not like them asleep. No. He could not sleep a wink for thinking on his new pet, which, for want of room in the wagon, had been left below tied to one of the wheels.

Jan had taken it into his head that he would like to have another look at the ourebi before going to sleep. So, without saying a word to any one, he crept out of the cap-tent, and descended
390 to where the antelope was tied. He unloosed it gently, and then led it forward to the light of the fire, where he sat down to admire the creature.

After gazing upon it for some time with delight, he thought that Swartboy could not do otherwise than share his feelings; and without more ado, he shook the Bushman awake.

The latter had no great stomach for being roused out of sleep to look at an animal, hundreds of which he had eaten in his time. But Jan and Swartboy were sworn friends, and the Bushman was not angry. He, therefore, indulged his young master in the fancy he had taken; and the two sat for a while conversing about the pet.

At length Swartboy proposed sleep. Jan would agree to this only upon the terms that Swartboy would allow him to sleep alongside of him. He would bring his blanket from the wagon, and would not trouble Swartboy by requiring part of the latter's kaross.

Swartboy objected at first; but Jan urged that he had felt cold in the wagon, and that was partly why he had come down to the fire. All this was sheer cunning in the little imp. But Swartboy could not refuse him anything, and at length consented. He could see no harm in it, as there were no signs of rain.

Jan then returned to the wagon, climbed noiselessly up, drew out his own blankets, and brought them to the fire. He then wrapped himself up, and lay down alongside of Swartboy, with the ourebi standing near, and in such a situation that he could still have his eyes upon it, even when lying. To secure it from wandering, he had fastened a strong rheim around its neck, the other end of which he had looped tightly upon his own wrist.

He lay for some time contemplating his beautiful pet. But sleep at length overcame him, and the image of the ourebi melted before his eyes.

Beyond this Jan could tell little of what happened to him. He was awakened by a sudden jerking at his wrist, and hearing the antelope scream. But he had not quite opened his eyes, before he felt himself dragged violently over the ground.

He thought at first it was Swartboy playing some trick upon him; but as he passed the fire, he saw by its light that it was a huge black animal that had seized the ourebi, and was dragging both him and it along.

Of course he then began to scream for help, and caught at everything he could to keep himself from being carried away. But he could lay hold of nothing, until he found himself among thick bushes, and these he seized and held with all his might.

He could not have held out long against the strength of the hyena; but it was just at that moment that Swartboy came up with his fire-brand, and beat off the ravisher with a shower of blows.

When they got back to the light of the fire they found that Jan was all right. But the poor ourebi—it had been sadly mauled, and was now of no more value than a dead rat.

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CHAPTER XXIV.

A HOUSE AMONG THE TREE-TOPS.

391 Von Bloom now reflected that the hyenas were likely to prove a great pest to him. No meat, nor anything, would be safe from them—even his very children would be in danger, if left alone in the camp; and no doubt he would often be compelled to leave them, as he would require the older ones upon his hunting excursions.

There were other animals to be dreaded still more than the hyenas. Even during that night they had heard the roaring of lions down by the vley; and when it was morning, the spoor showed that several of these animals had drunk at the water.

How could he leave little Trüey—his dear little Trüey—or Jan, who was not a bit bigger—how could he leave them in an open camp while such monsters were roving about? He could not think of doing so.

He reflected what course he should pursue. At first he thought of putting up a house. That would necessarily be a work of time. There was no good building material convenient. A stone house would cost a great deal of labour—as the stones would have to be carried nearly a mile, and in their hands too. That would never do, as Von Bloom might only remain a short while at that place. He might not find many elephants there, and of course would be under the necessity of going elsewhere.

Why not build a log-house? you will say. That would not be so much of a job, as part of the country was well wooded, and they had an axe.

True, part of the country was wooded, but in a particular manner. With the exception of the nwana-trees, that stood at long distances apart—and regularly, as if they had been planted—there was nothing that deserved the name of timber. All the rest was mere “bush,”—a thorny jungle of mimosas, euphorbias, arborescent aloes, strelitzias, and the horrid zamia plants, beautiful enough to the eye, but of no utility whatever in the building of a house. The nwanas, of course, were too large for house-logs. To have felled one of them would have been a task equal almost to the building of a house; and to have made planks of them would have required a steam saw-mill. A log-house was not to be thought of either.

Now a frail structure of poles and thatch would not have given sufficient security. An angry rhinoceros, or elephant, would level such a house to the ground in a few moments.

Suppose, too, that there were man-eaters in the neighbourhood. Swartboy believed that there were, and that that region was notorious for them. As it was not far from Swartboy's native country, Von Bloom, who had reason to believe what the Bushman told him, was inclined to credit this. What protection would a frail house afford against the man-eater? Not much, indeed.

Von Bloom was puzzled and perplexed. He could not commence his hunting excursions until this question was settled. Some place must be prepared, where the children would be safe during his absence.

While revolving the subject in his mind, he happened to cast his eyes upward among the branches of the nwana-tree. All at once his attention became fixed upon those huge limbs, for they had awakened within him a strange memory. He remembered having heard that, in some parts of the country, and perhaps not very far from where he then was, the natives live in trees. That sometimes a whole tribe, of fifty or more, make their home in a single tree; and do so to
392 secure themselves against savage beasts, and sometimes equally savage men. That they build their houses upon platforms, which they erect upon the horizontal branches; and that they ascend by means of ladders, which are drawn up after them at night when they go to rest.

All this Von Bloom had heard, and all of it is positively true. Of course the reflection occurred to him, why could he not do the same? Why could he not build a house in the gigantic nwana? That would give him all the security he desired. There they could all sleep with perfect confidence of safety. There, on going out to hunt, he could leave the children, with the certainty of finding them on his return. An admirable idea!—how about its practicability?

He began to consider this. If he only had planks to make a staging or platform, the rest would be easy. Any slight roof would be sufficient up there. The leaves almost formed a roof. But the flooring—this was the difficulty. Where were planks to be got? Nowhere, in that neighbourhood.

His eye, at that moment, chanced to fall upon the wagon. Ha! there were planks there. But to break up his beautiful wagon? No—no—no! Such a thing was not to be thought of. But stay! there was no need to break it up—no need to knock out a single nail. It would serve every purpose without breaking a splinter off it. The fine vehicle was made to take to pieces, and put up again at will.

He could take it to pieces. The broad bottom alone should remain whole. That of itself would be the platform. Hurrah!

The field-cornet, excited with the development of this fine plan, now communicated it to the others. All agreed that it was just the thing; and as the day was before them, they made no more ado, but set about carrying out the design.

A ladder thirty feet long had first to be constructed. This occupied a good while; but at length a stout rough article was knocked up, which served the purpose admirably. It gave them access to the lowermost limb; and from this they could construct steps to all the others.

Von Bloom ascended, and after careful examination chose the site of the platform. This was to rest upon two strong horizontal limbs of equal height, and diverging very gradually from each other. The quantity of thick branches in the great tree afforded him a choice.

The wagon was now taken to pieces—a work of only a few minutes—and the first thing hauled up was the bottom. This was no slight performance, and required all the strength of the camp. Strong “rheims” were attached to one end, and these were passed over a limb of the tree, still higher up than those on which the staging was to rest. One stood above to guide the huge piece of plankwork, while all the rest exerted their strength upon the ropes below. Even little Jan pulled with all his might—though a single pound avoirdupois weight would have been about the measure of his strength.

The piece was hoisted up, until it rested beautifully upon the supporting limbs; and then a cheer rose from below, and was answered by Swartboy among the branches.

The heaviest part of the work was over. The boxing of the wagon was passed up, piece by piece, and set in its place just as before. Some branches were lopped off to make room for the
393 cap-tent; and then it was also hauled up, and mounted.

By the time the sun set, everything was in its place; and the aërial house was ready for sleeping in. In fact, that very night they slept in it, or, as Hans jocularly termed it, they all went to “roost.”

But they did not consider their new habitation quite complete as yet. Next day they continued to labour upon it. By means of long poles they extended their platform from the wagon quite up to the trunk of the tree, so as to give them a broad terrace to move about upon.

The poles were fast wattled together by rods of the beautiful weeping-willow (*Salix Babylonica*), which is a native of these parts, and several trees of which grew by the side of the vley. Upon the top of all, they laid a thick coating of clay, obtained from the edge of the lake; so that, if need be, they could actually kindle a fire, and cook their suppers in the tree.

To make a still finer flooring, they procured a quantity of the material of which the ant-hills are composed; which, being of a glutinous nature, makes a mortar almost as binding as Roman cement.

After the main building had been finished off, Swartboy erected a platform for himself, and one for Totty in another part of the ample nwana. Above each of these platforms he had constructed a roof or screen, to shelter their occupants from rain or dew.

There was something odd in the appearance of these two screens, each of which was about the size of an ordinary umbrella. Their oddity consisted in the fact that they were ears of the elephant!

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CHAPTER XXV.

THE BATTLE OF THE WILD PEACOCKS.

There was no longer anything to hinder the field-cornet from commencing the real business of his new life, viz., the hunting of the elephant. He resolved, therefore, to begin at once; for until he should succeed in “bagging” a few of these giant animals, he was not easy in his mind. He might not be able to kill a single one; and then what would become of all his grand hopes and calculations? They would end in disappointment, and he should find himself in as bad a

condition as ever.

Indeed worse: for to fail in any undertaking is not only to lose time, but energy of mind. Success begets genius, courage, and self-reliance—all of which contribute to new successes; while failure intimidates and leads to despair. In a psychological point of view it is a dangerous thing to fail in any undertaking; and, therefore, before undertaking anything, one should be well assured of its being possible and practicable.

Now Von Bloom was not sure that the great design he had formed was practicable. But in this case, he had no choice. No other means of livelihood was open to him just then; and he had resolved to make trial of this. He had faith in his calculations, and he had also good reason to hope he would succeed; but the thing was yet untried. No wonder he was in haste to begin the business—in haste to know what were his chances of success.

By early day, therefore, he was up and out. Hendrik and Swartboy only accompanied him, for
394 he could not yet bring himself to leave the children with no other protection than Totty—almost as much a child as themselves. Hans, therefore, remained by the camp.

At first the hunters followed the little rivulet that ran from the spring and vley. They did so, because in this direction there was more “bush;” and they knew that elephants would be more likely to be found in woods than in open places. Indeed, it was only near the banks of the stream that any great quantity of wood was to be seen. A broad belt of jungle extended upon each side of it. After that, there were straggling groves and clumps; and then came the open plains, almost treeless, though covered with a rich carpet of grass for some distance farther. To this succeeded the wild karoo, stretching eastward and westward beyond the reach of vision. Along the north, as already mentioned, trended the line of “bluffs”; and beyond these there was nothing but the parched and waterless desert. To the south there lay the only thing that could be called “woods;” and although such a low jungle could lay no claim to the title of “forest,” it was, nevertheless, a likely enough haunt for elephants.

The trees consisted chiefly of mimosas—of several species, upon the leaves, roots, and tender shoots of which the great ruminant loves to browse. There were some “cameel-doorn” trees, with their shady umbrella-like tops. But above all rose the massive heads of the nwanas, giving a peculiar character to the landscape.

The hunters noticed, as they went on, that the channel of the rivulet became wider and larger, and that at times—no doubt after great rains—a large quantity of water must have run in its bed, forming a considerable river. But as the channel grew larger, the reverse was the case with the quantity of running water. The farther down they proceeded this became less and less; until, at the distance of a mile from camp, the current ceased altogether.

For half-a-mile farther on they found water in stagnant pools, but none running. The wide, dry channel, however, continued on as before; and the “bush” extended on both sides without interruption, so thick that they could only make way by keeping in the channel itself.

As they walked along, several kinds of small game were started. Hendrik would gladly have taken a shot at some of these, but his father would not permit him to fire just then. It might frighten away the great “game” they were in search of, and which they might fall in with at any moment. On their return Hendrik might do his best; and then the field-cornet intended to assist him in procuring an antelope, as there was no fresh venison in the camp. This, however, was a consideration of secondary importance, and the first thing to be done was to try and get a pair of tusks.

There was no objection to Swartboy using his bow, as that silent weapon would cause no alarm. Swartboy had been taken along to carry the axe and other implements as well as to assist in the hunt. Of course he had brought his bow and quiver with him; and he was constantly on the watch for something at which to let fly one of his little poisoned arrows.

He found a mark at length worthy of his attention. On crossing the plain to avoid a large bend in the channel, they came upon a glade or opening of considerable size, and in the middle of this glade a huge bird appeared standing erect.

“An ostrich!” exclaimed Hendrik.

395 “No,” replied Swartboy; “um ar da pauw.”

“Yes,” said Von Bloom, confirming Swartboy's statement, “it is the pauw.”

Now a “pauw” in the Dutch language is a “peacock.” But there are no peacocks in Africa. The peacock in its wild state inhabits only Southern Asia and the islands of the Indian Archipelago. The bird they saw, then, could not be a peacock.

Neither was it one. And yet it bore some resemblance to a peacock, with its long heavy tail and wings speckled and ocellated in a very striking manner, and something like the “marbled” feathers that adorn the peacock's back. It had none of the brilliant colours, however, of that proudest of birds, though it was quite as stately, and much larger and taller. In fact, its great height and erect attitude was why Hendrik at first glance had taken it for an ostrich. It was neither peacock nor ostrich, but belonging to a different genus from either—to the genus *Otis* or bustard. It was the great bustard of South Africa—the *Otis kori*—called “pauw” by the Dutch colonists, on account of its ocellated plumage and other points of resemblance to the Indian

peacock.

Now Swartboy, as well as Von Bloom, knew that the pauw was one of the most delicious of fowls for the table. But they knew at the same time that it was one of the shyest of birds,—so shy that it is very difficult to get even a long shot at one. How, then, was it to be approached within range of the Bushman's arrow? That was the point to be considered.

Where it stood, it was full two hundred yards from them; and had it perceived them, it would soon have widened that distance, by running off two hundred more. I say running off, for birds of the bustard family rarely take to wing, but use their long legs to escape from an enemy. On this account they are often hunted by dogs, and caught after a severe chase. Although but poor flyers, they are splendid runners,—swift almost as the ostrich itself.

The pauw, however, had not observed the hunters as yet. They had caught a glimpse of it, before appearing out of the bushes, and had halted as soon as they saw it.

How was Swartboy to approach it? It was two hundred yards from any cover, and the ground was as clean as a new-raked meadow. True, the plain was not a large one. Indeed, Swartboy was rather surprised to see a pauw upon so small a one, for these birds frequent only the wide open karoos, where they can sight their enemy at a great distance. The glade was not large, but, after watching the bustard for some minutes, the hunters saw that it was resolved to keep near the centre, and showed no disposition to feed in the direction of the thicket on either side.

Any one but a Bushman would have despaired of getting a shot at this kori; but Swartboy did not despair.

Begging the others to remain quiet, he crept forward to the edge of the jungle, and placed himself behind a thick leafy bush. He then commenced uttering a call, exactly similar to that made by the male of the kori when challenging an adversary to combat.

Like the grouse, the bustard is polygamous, and of course terribly jealous and pugnacious, at certain seasons of the year. Swartboy knew that it was just then the “fighting season” among the pauws, and hoped by imitating their challenge to draw the bird—a cock he saw it was—within
396 reach of his arrow.

As soon as the kori heard the call, he raised himself to his full height, spread his immense tail, dropped his wings until the primary feathers trailed along the grass, and replied to the challenge.

But what now astonished Swartboy was, that instead of one answer to his call, he fancied he heard two, simultaneously uttered!

It proved to be no fancy, for before he could repeat the decoy the bird again gave out its note of defiance, and was answered by a similar call from another quarter!

Swartboy looked in the direction whence came the latter; and there sure enough, was a second kori, that seemed to have dropped from the region of the clouds, or, more likely, had run out from the shelter of the bushes. At all events, it was a good way towards the centre of the plain, before the hunter had observed it.

The two were now in full view of each other; and by their movements any one might see that a combat was certain to come off.

Sure of this, Swartboy did not call again; but remained silent behind his bush.

After a good while spent in strutting, and wheeling round and round, and putting themselves in the most threatening attitudes, and uttering the most insulting expressions, the two koris became sufficiently provoked to begin the battle. They “clinched” in gallant style, using all three weapons,—wings, beak, and feet. Now they struck each other with their wings, now pecked with their bills; and at intervals, when a good opportunity offered, gave each other a smart kick—which, with their long muscular legs, they were enabled to deliver with considerable force.

Swartboy knew that when they were well into the fight, he might stalk in upon them unobserved; so he waited patiently, till the proper moment should arrive.

In a few seconds it became evident, he would not have to move from his ambush; for the birds were fighting towards him. He adjusted his arrow to the string, and waited.

In five minutes the birds were fighting within thirty yards of the spot where the Bushman lay. The twang of a bowstring might have been heard by one of the koris, had he been listening. The other could not possibly have heard it; for before the sound could have reached him, a poisoned arrow was sticking through his ears. The barb had passed through, and the shaft remained in his head, piercing it crosswise!

Of course the bird dropped dead upon the grass, less astonished than his antagonist.

The latter at first imagined he had done it, and began to strut very triumphantly around his fallen foe.

But his eye now fell upon the arrow sticking through the head of the latter. He knew nothing about that. He had not done that! What the deuce——

Perhaps if he had been allowed another moment's reflection, he would have taken to his heels;

but before he could make up his mind about the matter, there was another “twang” of the bowstring another arrow whistled through the air, and another kori lay stretched upon the grass!

Swartboy now rushed forward, and took possession of the game; which proved to be a pair of
397 young cocks, in prime condition for roasting.

Having hung the birds over a high branch, so as to secure them from jackals and hyenas, the hunters continued on; and shortly after, having re-entered the channel of the stream, continued to follow it downward.

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CHAPTER XXVI.

UPON THE SPOOR.

They had not gone above an hundred yards farther, when they came to one of the pools, already spoken of. It was a tolerably large one; and the mud around its edges bore the hoof-prints of numerous animals. This the hunters saw from a distance, but on reaching the spot, Swartboy, a little in the advance, turned suddenly round, and, with rolling orbs and quivering lips, clicked out the words,—

“Mein baas! mein baas! da klow! spoor ob da groot olifant!”

There was no danger of mistaking the spoor of the elephant for that of any other creature. There, sure enough, were the great round tracks—full twenty-four inches in length, and nearly as wide—deeply imprinted in the mud by the enormous weight of the animal's body. Each formed an immense hole, large enough to have set a gate-post in.

The hunters contemplated the spoor with emotions of pleasure—the more so that the tracks had been recently made. This was evident. The displaced mud had not yet crusted, but looked damp and fresh. It had been stirred within the hour.

Only one elephant had visited the pool that night. There were many old tracks, but only one fresh spoor,—and that of an old and very large bull.

Of course the tracks told this much. To make a spoor twenty-four inches long, requires the animal to be a very large one; and to be very large, he should be a bull, and an old one too.

Well, the older and larger the better, provided his tusks have not been broken by some accident. When that happens they are never recovered again. The elephant does cast his tusks, but only in the juvenile state, when they are not bigger than lobster's claws; and the pair that succeeds these is permanent, and has to last him for life—perhaps for centuries—for no one can tell how long the mighty elephant roams over this sublunary planet.

When the tusks get broken—a not uncommon thing—he must remain toothless or “tuskless” for the rest of his life. Although the elephant may consider the loss of his huge tusks a great calamity, were he only a little wiser, he would break them off against the first tree. It would, in all probability, be the means of prolonging his life; for the hunter would not then consider him worth the ammunition it usually takes to kill him.

After a short consultation among the hunters, Swartboy started off upon the spoor, followed by Von Bloom and Hendrik. It led straight out from the channel, and across the jungle.

Usually the bushes mark the course of an elephant, where these are of the sort he feeds upon. In this case he had not fed; but the Bushman, who could follow spoor with a hound, had no difficulty in keeping on the track, as fast as the three were able to travel.

398 They emerged into open glades; and, after passing through several of these, came upon a large ant-hill that stood in the middle of one of the openings. The elephant had passed close to the ant-hill—he had stopped there awhile—stay, he must have lain down.

Von Bloom did not know that elephants were in the habit of lying down. He had always heard it said that they slept standing. Swartboy knew better than that. He said that they sometimes slept standing, but oftener lay down, especially in districts where they were not much hunted. Swartboy considered it a good sign that this one had lain down. He reasoned from it that the elephants had not been disturbed in that neighbourhood, and would be the more easily approached and killed. They would be less likely to make off from that part of the country, until they—the hunters—had had a “good pull” out of them.

This last consideration was one of great importance. In a district where elephants have been much hunted, and have learnt what the crack of a gun signifies, a single day's chase will often set them travelling; and they will not bring up again, until they have gone far beyond the reach of the hunters. Not only the particular individuals that have been chased act in this way; but all the others,—as though warned by their companions,—until not an elephant remains in the district. This migratory habit is one of the chief difficulties which the elephant-hunter must needs

encounter; and, when it occurs, he has no other resource but to change his “sphere of action.”

On the other hand, where elephants have remained for a long time undisturbed, the report of a gun does not terrify them; and they will bear a good deal of hunting before “showing their heels” and leaving the place.

Swartboy, therefore, rejoiced on perceiving that the old bull had lain down. The Bushman drew a world of conclusions from that circumstance.

That the elephant had been lying was clear enough. The abrasion upon the stiff mud of the ant-heap showed where his back had rested,—the mark of his body was visible in the dust, and a groove-like furrow in the turf had been made by his huge tusk. A huge one it must have been, as the impression of it testified to the keen eyes of the Bushman.

Swartboy stated some curious facts about the great quadruped,—at least, what he alleged to be facts. They were,—that the elephant never attempts to lie down without having something to lean his shoulders against,—a rock, an ant-hill, or a tree; that he does this to prevent himself rolling over on his back,—that when he does by accident get into that position he has great difficulty in rising again, and is almost as helpless as a turtle; and, lastly, that he often sleeps standing beside a tree with the whole weight of his body leaning against the trunk!

Swartboy did not think that he leans against the trunk when first taking up his position; but that he seeks the tree for the shade it affords, and as sleep overcomes him he inclines towards it, finding that it steadies and rests him!

The Bushman stated, moreover, that some elephants have their favourite trees, to which they return again and again to take a nap during the hot mid-day hours,—for that is their time of
399 repose. At night they do not sleep. On the contrary, the hours of night are spent in ranging about, on journeys to the distant watering-places, and in feeding; though in remote and quiet districts they also feed by day—so that it is probable that most of their nocturnal activity is the result of their dread of their watchful enemy, man.

Swartboy communicated these facts, as the hunters all together followed upon the spoor.

The traces of the elephant were now of a different character, from what they had been before arriving at the ant-hill. He had been browsing as he went. His nap had brought a return of appetite; and the wait-a-bit thorns showed the marks of his prehensile trunk. Here and there branches were broken off, stripped clean of their leaves, and the ligneous parts left upon the ground. In several places whole trees were torn up by their roots, and those, too, of considerable size. This the elephant sometimes does to get at their foliage, which upon such trees grows beyond the reach of his proboscis. By prostrating them of course he gets their whole frondage within easy distance of his elastic nose, and can strip it off at pleasure.

At times, however, he tears up a tree to make a meal of its roots—as there are several species with sweet juicy roots, of which the elephant is extremely fond. These he drags out of the ground with his trunk, having first loosened them with his tusks, used as crowbars. At times he fails to effect his purpose; and it is only when the ground is loose or wet, as after great rains, that he can uproot the larger kinds of mimosas. Sometimes he is capricious; and, after drawing a tree from the ground, he carries it many yards along with him, flings it to the ground, root upwards, and then leaves it, after taking a single mouthful. Destructive to the forest is the passage of a troop of elephants!

Small trees he can tear up with his trunk alone, but to the larger ones he applies the more powerful leverage of his tusks. These he inserts under the roots, imbedded as they usually are in loose sandy earth, and then, with a quick jerk, he tosses roots, trunk, and branches, high into the air,—a wonderful exhibition of gigantic power.

The hunters saw all these proofs of it, as they followed the spoor. The traces of the elephant's strength were visible all along the route.

It was enough to beget fear and awe, and none of them were free from such feelings. With so much disposition to commit havoc and ruin in his moments of quietude, what would such a creature be in the hour of excitement and anger? No wonder there was fear in the hearts of the hunters, unpractised as some of them were.

Still another consideration had its effect upon their minds, particularly on that of the Bushman. There was every reason to believe that the animal was a “rover,”—what among Indian hunters is termed a “rogue.” Elephants of this kind are far more dangerous to approach than their fellows. In fact, under ordinary circumstances, there is no more danger in passing through a herd of elephants than there would be in going among a drove of tame oxen. It is only when the elephant has been attacked or wounded, that he becomes a dangerous enemy.

With regard to the “rover” or “rogue,” the case is quite different. He is habitually vicious; and will assail either man or any other animal on sight, and without the slightest provocation. He
400 seems to take a pleasure in destruction, and woe to the creature who crosses his path and is not of lighter heels than himself!

The rover leads a solitary life, rambling alone through the forest, and never associating with others of his kind. He appears to be a sort of outlaw from his tribe, banished for bad temper or some other fault, to become more fierce and wicked in his outlawry.

There were good reasons for fearing that the elephant they were spooring was a “rover.” His being alone was of itself a suspicious circumstance, as elephants usually go, from two to twenty, or even fifty, in a herd. The traces of ruin he had left behind him, his immense spoor, all seemed to mark him out as one of these fierce creatures. That such existed in that district they already had evidence. Swartboy alleged that the one killed by the rhinoceros was of this class, else he would not have attacked the latter as he had done. There was a good deal of probability in this belief of the Bushman.

Under these impressions, then, it is less to be wondered, that our hunters felt some apprehensions of danger from the game they were pursuing.

The spoor grew fresher and fresher. The hunters saw trees turned bottom upward, the roots exhibiting the marks of the elephant's teeth, and still wet with the saliva from his vast mouth. They saw broken branches of the mimosa giving out their odour, that had not had time to waste itself. They concluded the game could not be distant.

They rounded a point of timber—the Bushman being a little in the advance.

Suddenly Swartboy stopped and fell back a pace. He turned his face upon his companions. His eyes rolled faster than ever; but, although his lips appeared to move, and his tongue to wag, he was too excited to give utterance to a word. A volley of clicks and hisses came forth, but nothing articulate.

The others, however, did not require any words to tell them what was meant. They knew that Swartboy intended to whisper that he had seen “da oliphant;” so both peeped silently around the bush, and with their own eyes looked upon the mighty quadruped.

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CHAPTER XXVII.

A ROGUE ELEPHANT.

The elephant was standing in a grove of *mokhala* trees. These, unlike the humbler mimosas, have tall naked stems, with heads of thick foliage, in form resembling an umbrella or parasol. Their pinnate leaves of delicate green are the favourite food of the giraffe, hence their botanical appellation of *Acacia giraffæ*; and hence also their common name among the Dutch hunters of “cameel-doorns” (camel-thorns).

The tall giraffe, with his prehensile lip, raised nearly twenty feet in the air, can browse upon these trees without difficulty. Not so the elephant, whose trunk cannot reach so high; and the latter would often have to imitate the fox in the fable, were he not possessed of a means whereby he can bring the tempting morsel within reach—that is, simply by breaking down the tree. This
401 his vast strength enables him to do, unless when the trunk happens to be one of the largest of its kind.

When the eyes of our hunters first rested upon the elephant, he was standing by the head of a prostrate mokhala, which he had just broken off near the root. He was tearing away at the leaves, and filling his capacious stomach.

As soon as Swartboy recovered the control over his tongue, he ejaculated in a hurried whisper:—

“Pas op! (take care!) baas Bloom,—hab good care—don't go near um—he da skellum ole klow. My footy! he wicked!—I know de ole bull duyvel.”

By this volley of queer phrases, Swartboy meant to caution his master against rashly approaching the elephant, as he knew him to be one of the wicked sort—in short, a “rogue.”

How Swartboy knew this would appear a mystery, as there were no particular marks about the animal to distinguish him from others of his kind. But the Bushman, with his practised eye, saw something in the general physiognomy of the elephant—just as one may distinguish a fierce and dangerous bull from those of milder disposition, or a bad from a virtuous man, by some expression that one cannot define.

Von Bloom himself, and even Hendrik, saw that the elephant had a fierce and ruffian look.

They did not stand in need of Swartboy's advice to act with caution.

They remained for some minutes, gazing through the bushes at the huge quadruped. The more they gazed, the more they became resolved to make an attack upon him. The sight of his long tusks was too tempting to Von Bloom, to admit for a moment the thought of letting him escape without a fight. A couple of bullets he should have into him, at all events; and if opportunity offered, a good many more, should these not be sufficient. Von Bloom would not relinquish those fine tusks without a struggle.

He at once set about considering the safest mode of attack; but was not allowed time to mature

any plan. The elephant appeared to be restless, and was evidently about to move forward. He might be off in a moment, and carry them after him for miles, or, perhaps, in the thick cover of wait-a-bits get lost to them altogether.

These conjectures caused Von Bloom to decide at once upon beginning the attack, and without any other plan than to stalk in as near as would be safe, and deliver his fire. He had heard that a single bullet in the forehead would kill any elephant; and if he could only get in such a position as to have a fair shot at the animal's front, he believed he was marksman enough to plant his bullet in the right place.

He was mistaken as to killing an elephant with a shot in the forehead. That is a notion of gentlemen who have hunted the elephant in their closets—though other closet gentlemen—the anatomists—to whom give all due credit—have shown the thing to be impossible, from the peculiar structure of the elephant's skull and the position of his brain.

Von Bloom at the time was under this wrong impression, and therefore committed a grand mistake. Instead of seeking a side shot, which he could have obtained with far less trouble—he
402 decided on creeping round in front of the elephant, and firing right in the animal's face.

Leaving Hendrik and Swartboy to attack him from behind, he took a circuit under cover of the bushes; and at length arrived in the path the elephant was most likely to take.

He had scarcely gained his position, when he saw the huge animal coming towards him with silent and majestic tread; and although the elephant only walked, half-a-dozen of his gigantic strides brought him close up to the ambushed hunter. As yet the creature uttered no cry; but as he moved, Von Bloom could hear a rumbling gurgling sound, as of water dashing to and fro in his capacious stomach!

Von Bloom had taken up his position behind the trunk of a large tree. The elephant had not yet seen him, and, perhaps, would have passed on without knowing that he was there, had the hunter permitted him. The latter even thought of such a thing, for although a man of courage, the sight of the great forest giant caused him for a moment to quail.

But, again, the curving ivory gleamed in his eyes—again he remembered the object that had brought him into that situation; he thought of his fallen fortunes—of his resolve to retrieve them —of his children's welfare.

These thoughts resolved him. His long roer was laid over a knot in the trunk—its muzzle pointed at the forehead of the advancing elephant—his eye gleamed through the sights—the loud detonation followed—and a cloud of smoke for a moment hid everything from his view.

He could hear a hoarse, bellowing, trumpet-like sound—he could hear the crashing of branches and the gurgling of water; and, when, the smoke cleared away, to his chagrin he saw that the elephant was still upon his feet, and evidently not injured in the least!

The shot had struck the animal exactly where the hunter had aimed it; but, instead of inflicting a mortal wound, it had only excited the creature to extreme rage. He was now charging about striking the trees with his tusks, tearing branches off, and tossing them aloft with his trunk—though all the while evidently in ignorance of what had tickled him so impertinently upon the forehead!

Fortunately for Von Bloom, a good thick tree sheltered him from the view of the elephant. Had the enraged animal caught sight of him at that moment, it would have been all up with him; but the hunter knew this, and had the coolness to remain close and quiet.

Not so with Swartboy. When the elephant moved forward, he and Hendrik had crept after through the grove of mokhalas. They had even followed him across the open ground into the bush, where Von Bloom awaited him. On hearing the shot, and seeing that the elephant was still unhurt, Swartboy's courage gave way; and leaving Hendrik, he ran back towards the mokhala grove, shouting as he went.

His cries reached the ears of the elephant, that at once rushed off in the direction in which he heard them. In a moment he emerged from the bush, and, seeing Swartboy upon the open ground, charged furiously after the flying Bushman. Hendrik—who had stood his ground, and in the shelter of the bushes was not perceived—delivered his shot as the animal passed him. His ball
403 told upon the shoulder, but it only served to increase the elephant's fury. Without stopping, he rushed on after Swartboy, believing, no doubt, that the poor Bushman was the cause of the hurts he was receiving, and the nature of which he but ill understood.

It was but a few moments, from the firing of the first shot, until things took this turn. Swartboy was hardly clear of the bushes before the elephant emerged also; and as the former struck out for the mokhala trees, he was scarce six steps ahead of his pursuer.

Swartboy's object was to get to the grove, in the midst of which were several trees of large size. One of these he proposed climbing—as that seemed his only chance for safety.

He had not got half over the open ground, when he perceived he would be too late. He heard the heavy rush of the huge monster behind him—he heard his loud and vengeful bellowing—he fancied he felt his hot breath. There was still a good distance to be run. The climbing of the tree, beyond the reach of the elephant's trunk, would occupy time. There was no hope of escaping to

the tree.

These reflections occurred almost instantaneously. In ten seconds Swartboy arrived at the conclusion, that running to the tree would not save him; and all at once he stopped in his career, wheeled round, and faced the elephant!

Not that he had formed any plan of saving himself in that way. It was not bravery, but only despair, that caused him to turn upon his pursuer. He knew that, by running on, he would surely be overtaken. It could be no worse if he faced round; and, perhaps, he might avoid the fatal charge by some dexterous manœuvre.

The Bushman was now right in the middle of the open ground; the elephant rushing straight towards him.

The former had no weapon to oppose to his gigantic pursuer. He had thrown away his bow—his axe too—to run the more nimbly. But neither would have been of any avail against such an antagonist. He carried nothing but his sheep-skin kaross. That had encumbered him in his flight; but he had held on to it for a purpose.

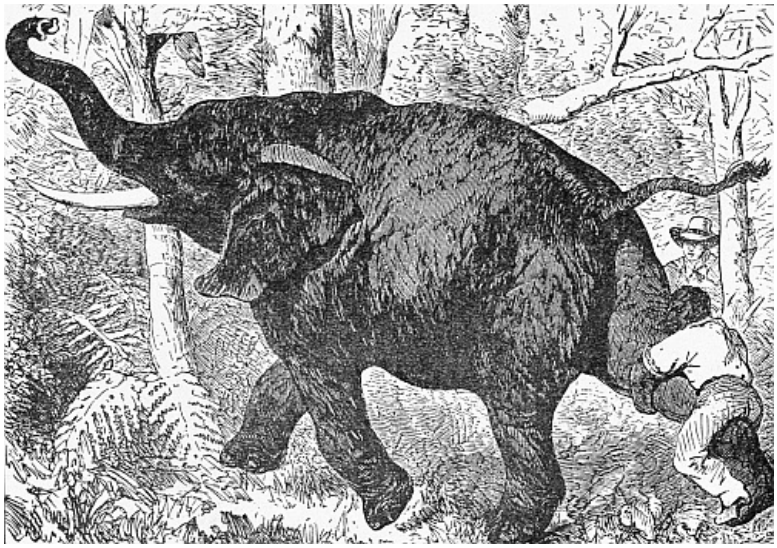
His purpose was soon displayed.

He stood until the extended trunk was within three feet of his face; and then, flinging his kaross so that it should fall over the long cylinder, he sprang nimbly to one side, and started to run back.

He would, no doubt, have succeeded in passing to the elephant's rear, and thus have escaped; but as the kaross fell upon the great trunk it was seized in the latter, and swept suddenly around. Unfortunately Swartboy's legs had not yet cleared the circle—the kaross lapped around them—and the Bushman was thrown sprawling upon the plain.

In a moment the active Swartboy recovered his feet, and was about to make off in a new direction. But the elephant, having discovered the deception of the kaross, had dropped it, and turned suddenly after him. Swartboy had hardly made three steps, when the long ivory curve was inserted between his legs from behind; and the next moment his body was pitched high into the air.

Von Bloom and Hendrik, who had just then reached the edge of the glade, saw him go up; but to their astonishment he did not come to the ground again! Had he fallen back upon the elephant's tusks? and was he held there by the trunk? No. They saw the animal's head. The Bushman was not there, nor upon his back, nor anywhere to be seen. In fact, the elephant
404 seemed as much astonished as they at the sudden disappearance of his victim! The huge beast was turning his eyes in every direction, as if searching for the object of his fury!



SWARTBOY IN A PREDICAMENT.

Where could Swartboy have gone? Where? At this moment the elephant gave a loud roar, and was seen rushing to a tree, which he now caught in his trunk, and shook violently. Von Bloom and Hendrik looked up towards its top, expecting to see Swartboy there. Sure enough he was there, perched among the leaves and branches where he had been projected! Terror was depicted in his
405 countenance, for he felt that he was not safe in his position. But he had scarce time to give utterance to his fears; for the next moment the tree gave way with a crash, and fell to the ground, bringing the Bushman down among its branches.

It happened that the tree, dragged down by the elephant's trunk, fell towards the animal. Swartboy even touched the elephant's body in his descent, and slipped down over his hind-quarters. The branches had broken the fall, and the Bushman was still unhurt, but he felt that he was now quite at the mercy of his antagonist. He saw no chance of escape by flight. He was lost!

Just at that moment an idea entered his mind—a sort of despairing instinct—and springing at one of the hind-legs of the quadruped, he slung his arms around it, and held fast! He at the same time planted his naked feet upon the sabots of those of the animal; so that, by means of this

support, he was enabled to keep his hold, let the animal move as it would!

The huge mammoth, unable to shake him off, unable to get at him with his trunk—and, above all, surprised and terrified by this novel mode of attack—uttered a shrill scream, and with tail erect and trunk high in air, dashed off into the jungle!

Swartboy held on to the leg until fairly within the bushes; and then, watching his opportunity, he slipped gently off. As soon as he touched *terra firma* again, he rose to his feet, and ran with all his might in an opposite direction.

He need not have run a single step; for the elephant, as much frightened as he, kept on through the jungle, laying waste the trees and branches in his onward course. The huge quadruped did not stop, till he had put many miles between himself and the scene of his disagreeable adventure!

Von Bloom and Hendrik had by this time reloaded, and were advancing to Swartboy's rescue; but they were met right in the teeth by the swift-flying Bushman, as he returned from his miraculous escape.

The hunters, who were now warmed to their work, proposed to follow up the spoor; but Swartboy, who had enough of that “old rogue,” declared that there would be not the slightest chance of again coming up with him without horses or dogs; and as they had neither, spooring him any farther would be quite useless.

Von Bloom saw that there was truth in the remark, and now more than ever did he regret the loss of his horses. The elephant, though easily overtaken on horseback, or with dogs to bring him to bay, can as easily escape from a hunter on foot; and once he has made up his mind to flight, it is quite a lost labour to follow him farther.

It was now too late in the day to seek for other elephants; and with a feeling of disappointment, the hunters gave up the chase, and turned their steps in the direction of the camp.

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CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE MISSING HUNTER, AND THE WILDEBEESTS.

A well-known proverb says that “misfortunes seldom come single.”

On nearing the camp, the hunters could perceive that all was not right there. They saw
406 Totty with Trüey and Jan standing by the head of the ladder; but there was something in their manner that told that all was not right. Where was Hans?

As soon as the hunters came in sight, Jan and Trüey ran down the rounds, and out to meet them. There was that in their glances that bespoke ill tidings, and their words soon confirmed this conjecture.

Hans was not there—he had gone away hours ago—they knew not where, they feared something had happened to him,—they feared he was lost!

“But what took him away from the camp?” asked Von Bloom, surprised and troubled at the news.

That, and only that could they answer. A number of odd-looking animals—very odd-looking, the children said,—had come to the vley to drink. Hans had taken his gun and followed them in a great hurry, telling Trüey and Jan to keep in the tree, and not come down until he returned. He would be gone only a very little while, and they needn't fear.

This was all they knew. They could not even tell what direction he had taken. He went by the lower end of the vley; but soon the bushes hid him from their view, and they saw no more of him.

“At what time was it?”

It was many hours ago,—in the morning in fact,—not long after the hunters themselves had started. When he did not return the children grew uneasy; but they thought he had fallen in with papa and Hendrik, and was helping them to hunt; and that was the reason why he stayed so long.

“Had they heard any report of a gun?”

No—they had listened for that, but heard none. The animals had gone away before Hans could get his gun ready; and they supposed he had to follow some distance, before he could overtake them—that might be the reason they had heard no shot.

“What sort of animals were they?”

They had all seen them plain enough, as they drank. They had never seen any of the kind before. They were large animals of a yellow-brown colour, with shaggy manes, and long tufts of

hair growing out of their breasts, and hanging down between their fore-legs. They were as big as ponies, said Jan, and very like ponies. They curvetted and capered about just as ponies do sometimes. Trüey thought that they looked more like lions!

“Lions!” ejaculated her father and Hendrik, with an accent that betokened alarm.

Indeed, they reminded her of lions, Trüey again affirmed, and Totty said the same.

“How many were there of them?”

“Oh! a great drove, not less than fifty.” They could not have counted them, as they were constantly in motion, galloping from place to place, and butting each other with their horns.

“Ha! they had horns then?” interrogated Von Bloom, relieved by this announcement.

Certainly they had horns, replied all three.

They had seen the horns, sharp-pointed ones, which first came down, and then turned upwards in front of the animals' faces. They had manes too, Jan affirmed; and thick necks that curved like that of a beautiful horse; and tufts of hair like brushes upon their noses; and nice round bodies
407 like ponies, and long white tails that reached near the ground, just like the tails of ponies, and finely-shaped limbs as ponies have.

“I tell you,” continued Jan, with emphasis, “if it hadn't been for their horns and the brushes of long hair upon their breasts and noses, I'd have taken them for ponies before anything. They galloped about just like ponies when playing, and ran with their heads down, curving their necks and tossing their manes,—aye, and snorting too, as I've heard ponies; but sometimes they bellowed more like bulls; and, I confess, they looked a good deal like bulls about the head; besides I noticed they had hoofs split like cattle. Oh! I had a good look at them while Hans was loading his gun. They stayed by the water till he was nearly ready; and when they galloped off, they went in a long string one behind the other with the largest one in front, and another large one in the rear.”

“Wildebeests!” exclaimed Hendrik.

“Gnoos!” cried Swartboy.

“Yes, they must have been wildebeests,” said Von Bloom; “Jan's description corresponds exactly to them.”

This was quite true. Jan had correctly given many of the characteristic points of that, perhaps, the most singular of all ruminant animals, the wildebeest or gnoo (*Catoblepas gnoo*). The brush-like tuft over the muzzle, the long hair between the fore-legs, the horns curving down over the face, and then sweeping abruptly upward, the thick curving neck, the rounded, compact, horse-shaped body, the long whitish tail, and full flowing mane—all were descriptive of the gnoo.

Even Trüey had not made such an unpardonable mistake. The gnoos, and particularly the old bulls, bear a very striking resemblance to the lion, so much so that the sharpest hunters at a distance can scarce tell one from the other.

Jan, however, had observed them better than Trüey; and had they been nearer, he might have further noticed that the creatures had red fiery eyes and a fierce look; that their heads and horns were not unlike those of the African buffalo; that their limbs resembled those of the stag, while the rest corresponded well enough to his “pony.” He might have observed, moreover, that the males were larger than the females, and of a deeper brown. Had there been any “calves” with the herd, he would have seen that these were still lighter-coloured—in fact, of a white or cream colour.

The gnoos that had been seen were the common kind called by the Dutch colonists “wildebeests” or wild-oxen, and by the Hottentots “gnoo” or “gnu,” from a hollow moaning sound to which these creatures sometimes give utterance, and which is represented by the word “gnoo-o-oo.”

They roam in vast flocks upon the wild karoos of South Africa: are inoffensive animals, except when wounded: and then the old bulls are exceedingly dangerous, and will attack the hunter both with horns and hoof. They can run with great swiftness, though they scarce ever go clear off, but, keeping at a wary distance, circle around the hunter, curvetting in all directions, menacing with their heads lowered to the ground, kicking up the dust with their heels, and bellowing like bulls, or indeed like lions—for their “rout” bears a resemblance to the lion's roar.

408 The old bulls stand sentry while the herd is feeding, and protect it both in front and rear. When running off they usually go in single file, as Jan had represented.

Old bulls hang between the rear of the herd and the hunter: and these caper back and forward, butting each other with their horns, and often fighting apparently in serious earnest! Before the hunter comes within range, however, they drop their conflict and gallop out of his way. Nothing can exceed the capricious antics which these animals indulge in, while trooping over the plain.

There is a second species of the same genus common in South Africa, and a third inhabits still farther to the north; but of the last very little is known. Both species are larger than the wildebeest, individuals of either being nearly five feet in height, while the common gnoo is scarce four.

The three kinds are quite distinct, and never herd together, though each of them is often found in company with other animals. All three are peculiar to the continent of Africa, and are not found elsewhere.

The “brindled gnoo” is the other species that inhabits the South of Africa. It is known among the hunters and colonists as “blauw wildebeest” (blue wild-ox). It is of a bluish colour—hence the name, and “brindled,” or striped along the sides. Its habits are very similar to those of the common gnoo, but it is altogether a heavier and duller animal, and still more eccentric and ungainly in its form.

The third species is the “ko-koon” of the natives. It approaches nearer to the brindled gnoo in form and habits; but as it is not found except in the more central and less-travelled portions of Africa, less is known about it than either of the others. It is, however, of the same kind; and the three species, differing widely from any other animals known, are entitled to form a distinct and separate genus.

They have hitherto generally been classed with the antelopes, though for what reason it is hard to tell. They have far less affinity with the antelope than with the ox; and the everyday observations of the hunter and frontier boer have guided them to a similar conclusion—as their name for these animals (wild-oxen) would imply. Observation of this class is usually worth far more than the “speculations” of the closet-naturalist.

The gnoo has long been the favourite food of the frontier farmer and hunter. Its beef is well flavoured, and the veal of a gnoo-calf is quite a delicacy. The hide is manufactured into harness and straps of different sorts; and the long silky tail is an article of commerce. Around every frontier farm-house large piles of gnoo and springbok horns may be seen—the remains of animals that have been captured in the chase.

“Jaging de wildebeest” (hunting the gnoo) is a favourite pastime of the young boers. Large herds of these animals are sometimes driven into valleys, where they are hemmed in, and shot down at will. They can also be lured within range, by exhibiting a red handkerchief or any piece of red cloth—to which colour they have a strong aversion. They may be tamed and domesticated easily enough; but they are not favourite pets with the farmer, who dreads their communicating to his cattle a fatal skin-disease to which the gnoos are subject, and which carries off thousands of them every year.

Of course Von Bloom and his companions did not stay to talk over these points. They were too
409 anxious about the fate of the missing Hans, to think of anything else.

They were about to start out in search of him, when just at that moment my gentleman was seen coming around the end of the lake, trudging very slowly along, under the weight of some large and heavy object, that he carried upon his shoulders.

A shout of joy was raised, and in a few moments Hans stood in their midst.

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CHAPTER XXIX.

THE ANT-EATER OF AFRICA.

Hans was saluted by a volley of questions, “Where have you been? What detained you? What has happened to you? You're all safe and sound? Not hurt, I hope?” These and a few others were asked in a breath.

“I'm sound as a bell,” said Hans; “and for the rest of your inquiries I'll answer them all as soon as Swartboy has skinned this 'aard-vark,' and Totty has cooked a piece of it for supper; but I'm too hungry to talk now, so pray excuse me.”

As Hans gave this reply, he cast from his shoulders an animal nearly as big as a sheep, covered with long bristly hair of a reddish-grey colour, and having a huge tail, thick at the root, and tapering like a carrot; a snout nearly a foot long, but quite slender and naked; a very small mouth; erect pointed ears resembling a pair of horns; a low flattish body; short muscular legs; and claws of immense length, especially on the fore-feet, where, instead of spreading out, they were doubled back like shut fists, or the fore hands of a monkey. Altogether a very odd animal was that which Hans had styled an “aard-vark,” and which he desired should be cooked for supper.

“Well, my boy,” replied Von Bloom, “we'll excuse you, the more so that we are all of us about as hungry as yourself, I fancy. But I think we may as well leave the 'aard-vark' for to-morrow's dinner. We've a couple of peacocks here, and Totty will get one of them ready sooner than the aard-vark.”

“As for that,” rejoined Hans, “I don't care which. I'm just in the condition to eat anything—even a steak of tough old quagga, if I had it; but I think it would be no harm if Swartboy—that is, if you're not too tired, old Swart—would just peel the skin off this gentleman.”

“Hans pointed to the 'aard-vark.'”

“And dress him so that he don't spoil,” he continued; “for you know, Swartboy, that he's a tit-bit—a regular *bonne bouche*—and it would be a pity to let him go to waste in this hot weather. An aard-vark's not to be bagged every day.”

“You spreichen true, Mynheer Hans,—Swartboy know all dat. Him skin and dress da goup.”

And, so saying, Swartboy out knife, and set to work upon the carcass.

Now this singular-looking animal which Hans called an “aard-vark,” and Swartboy a “goup,” was neither more or less than the African ant-eater.

Although the colonists term it “aard-vark,” which is the Dutch for “ground-hog,” the animal has but little in common with the hog kind. It certainly bears some resemblance to a pig about the
410 snout and cheeks; and that, with its bristly hair and burrowing habits, has no doubt given rise to the mistaken name. The “ground” part of the title is from the fact that it is a burrowing animal,—indeed, one of the best “terriers” in the world. It can make its way under ground, faster than the spade can follow it, and faster than any badger. In size, habits, and the form of many parts of its body, it bears a striking resemblance to its South American cousin the “tamanoir,” which of late years has become so famous as almost to usurp the title of “ant-eater.”

But the “aard-vark” is just as good an ant-eater as he,—can “crack” as thick-walled a house, can rake up and devour as many termites as any “ant-bear” in the length and breadth of the Amazon Valley. He has got, moreover, as “tall” a tail as the tamanoir, very nearly as long a snout, a mouth equally small, and a tongue as extensive and extensile. In claws he can compare with his American cousin any day, and can walk just as awkwardly upon the sides of his fore-paws with “toes turned in.”

Why, then, may I ask, do we hear so much talk of the “tamanoir,” while not a word is said of the “aard-vark?” Every museum and menagerie is bragging about having a specimen of the former, while not one cares to acknowledge their possession of the latter! Why this envious distinction? I say it's all Barnum. It's because the “aard-vark's” a Dutchman—a Cape boer—and the boers have been much bullied of late. That's the reason why zoologists and showmen have treated my thick-tailed boy so shabbily. But it shan't be so any longer; I stand up for the aard-vark; and, although the tamanoir has been specially called *Myrmecophaga*, or ant-eater, I say that the *Orycteropus* is as good an ant-eater as he.

He can break through ant-hills quite as big and bigger—some of them twenty feet high—he can project as long and as gluey a tongue—twenty inches long—he can play it as nimbly and “lick up” as many white ants, as any tamanoir. He can grow as fat too, and weigh as heavy, and, what is greatly to his credit, he can provide you with a most delicate roast when you choose to kill and eat him. It is true he tastes slightly of formid acid, but that is just the flavour that epicures admire. And when you come to speak of “hams,”—ah! try his! Cure them well and properly, and eat one, and you will never again talk of “Spanish” or “Westphalian.”

Hans knew the taste of those hams—well he did, and so too Swartboy; and it was not against his inclination, but *con amore*, that the latter set about butchering the “goup.”

Swartboy knew how precious a morsel he held between his fingers,—precious, not only on account of its intrinsic goodness, but from its rarity; for although the aard-vark is a common animal in South Africa, and in some districts even numerous, it is not every day the hunter can lay his hands upon one. On the contrary, the creature is most difficult to capture; though not to kill, for a blow on the snout will do that.

But just as he is easily killed when you catch him, in the same proportion is he hard to catch. He is shy and wary, scarce ever comes out of his burrow but at night; and even then skulks so silently along, and watches around him so sharply, that no enemy can approach without his knowing it. His eyes are very small, and, like most nocturnal animals, he sees but indifferently;
411 but in the two senses of smell and hearing he is one of the sharpest. His long erect ears enable him to catch every sound that may be made in his neighbourhood, however slight.

The “aard-vark” is not the only ant-eating quadruped of South Africa. There is another four-footed creature as fond of white ants as he; but this is an animal of very different appearance. It is a creature without hair; but instead, its body is covered all over with a regular coat of scales, each as large as a half-crown piece. These scales slightly overlie each other, and can be raised on end at the will of the animal. In form it resembles a large lizard, or a small crocodile, more than an ordinary quadruped, but its habits are almost exactly like those of the aard-vark. It burrows, digs open the ant-hills by night, projects a long viscous tongue among the insects, and devours them with avidity.

When suddenly overtaken, and out of reach of its underground retreat, it “clews” up like the hedgehog, and some species of the South American armadillos—to which last animal it bears a considerable resemblance on account of its scaly coat of mail.

This ant-eater is known as the “pangolin,” or “manis,” but there are several species of “pangolin” not African. Some are met with in Southern Asia and the Indian islands. That which is found in South Africa is known among naturalists as the “long-tailed” or “Tem-minck” pangolin (*Manis Temminckii*).

Totty soon produced a roasted “peacock,” or rather a hastily-broiled bustard. But, although, perhaps, not cooked “to a turn,” it was sufficiently well done to satisfy the stomachs for which it was intended. They were all too hungry to be fastidious, and, without a word of criticism, they got through their dinner.

Hans then commenced relating the history of his day's adventure.

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CHAPTER XXX.

HANS CHASED BY THE WILDEBEEST.

“Well,” began Hans, “you had not been gone more than an hour, when a herd of wildebeests was seen approaching the vley. They came on in single file; but they had broken rank, and were splashing about in the water, before I thought of molesting them in any way.”

Of course I knew what they were, and that they were proper game; but I was so interested in watching their ludicrous gambols, that I did not think about my gun, until the whole herd had nearly finished drinking. Then I remembered that we were living on dry biltongue, and would be nothing the worse of a change. I noticed, moreover, that in the herd of gnoos there were some young ones—which I was able to tell from their being smaller than the rest, and also by their lighter colour. I knew that the flesh of these is most excellent eating, and therefore made up my mind we should all dine upon it.

I rushed up the ladder for my gun; and then discovered how imprudent I had been in not loading it at the time you all went away. I had not thought of any sudden emergency,—but that was very foolish, for how knew I what might happen in a single hour or minute even?

I loaded the piece in a grand hurry, for I saw the wildebeests leaving the water; and, as soon as the bullet was rammed home, I ran down the ladder. Before I had reached the bottom, I saw that
412 I had forgotten to bring either powder-horn or pouch. I was in too hot a haste to go back for them, for I saw the last of the wildebeests moving off, and I fancied I might be too late. But I had no intention of going any great distance in pursuit. A single shot at them was all I wanted, and that in the gun would do.

I hastened after the game, keeping as well as I could under cover. I found, after a little time, that I need not have been so cautious. The wildebeests, instead of being shy—as I had seen them in our old neighbourhood—appeared to have very little fear of me. This was especially the case with the old bulls, who capered and careered about within an hundred yards' distance, and sometimes permitted me to approach even nearer. It was plain they had never been hunted.

Once or twice I was within range of a pair of old bulls, who seemed to act as a rearguard. But I did not want to shoot one of them. I knew their flesh would turn out tough. I wished to get something more tender. I wished to send a bullet into a heifer, or one of the young bulls whose horns had not yet begun to curve. Of these I saw several in the herd.

Tame as the animals were, I could not manage to get near enough to any of these. The old bulls at the head always led them beyond my range; and the two that brought up the rear, seemed to drive them forward as I advanced upon them.

Well, in this way they beguiled me along for more than a mile; and the excitement of the chase made me quite forget how wrong it was of me to go so far from the camp. But thinking about the meat, and still hopeful of getting a shot, I kept on.

At length the hunt led me into ground where there was no longer any bush; but there was good cover, notwithstanding, in the ant-hills, that, like great tents, stood at equal distances from each other scattered over the plain. These were very large—some of them more than twelve feet high—and differing from the dome-shaped kind so common everywhere. They were of the shape of large cones, or rounded pyramids, with a number of smaller cones rising around their bases, and clustering like turrets along their sides. I knew they were the hills of a species of white ant called by entomologists *Termes bellicosus*.

There were other hills, of cylinder shape and rounded tops, that stood only about a yard high; looking like rolls of unbleached linen set upright—each with an inverted basin upon its end. These were the homes of a very different species, the *Termes mordax* of the entomologists; though still another species of *Termes* build their nests in the same form.

I did not stop then to examine these curious structures. I only speak of them now, to give you an idea of the sort of place it was, so that you may understand what followed.

What with the cone-shaped hills and the cylinders, the plain was pretty well covered. One or the other was met with every two hundred yards; and I fancied with these for a shelter I should have but little difficulty in getting within shot of the gnoos.

I made a circuit to head them, and crept up behind a large cone-shaped hill, near which the thick of the drove was feeding. When I peeped through the turrets, to my chagrin, I saw that the cows and younger ones had been drawn off beyond reach, and the two old bulls were, as before,
413 capering between me and the herd.

I repeated the manœuvre, and stalked in behind another large cone, close to which the beasts were feeding. When I raised myself for a shot, I was again disappointed. The herd had moved off as before, and the brace of bulls still kept guard in the rear.

I began to feel provoked. The conduct of the bulls annoyed me exceedingly, and I really fancied that they knew it. Their manœuvres were of the oddest kind, and some of them appeared to be made for the purpose of mocking me. At times they would charge up very close—their heads set in a menacing attitude; and I must confess that with their black shaggy fronts, their sharp horns, and glaring red eyes, they looked anything but pleasant neighbours.

I got so provoked with them at last, that I resolved they should bother me no longer. If they would not permit me to shoot one of the others, I was determined they themselves should not escape scot-free, but should pay dearly for their temerity and insolence. I resolved to put a bullet through one of them, at least.

Just as I was about raising my gun to fire, I perceived that they had placed themselves in attitude for a new fight. This they did by dropping on their knees, and sliding forward until their heads came in contact. They would then spring up, make a sudden bound forward, as if to get uppermost, and trample one another with their hoofs. Failing in this, both would rush past, until they were several yards apart; then wheel round, drop once more to their knees, and advance as before.

Hitherto I had looked upon these conflicts as merely playful; and so I fancy most of them were. But this time the bulls seemed to be in earnest. The loud cracking of their helmet-covered foreheads against each other, their fierce snorting and bellowing, and, above all, their angry manner, convinced me that they had really quarrelled, and were serious about it.

One of them, at length, seemed to be getting knocked over repeatedly. Every time he had partially risen to his feet, and before he could quite recover them, his antagonist rushed upon him, and butted him back upon his side.

Seeing them so earnestly engaged, I thought I might as well make a sure shot of it, by going a little nearer; so I stepped from behind the ant-hill, and walked towards the combatants. Neither took any notice of my approach—the one because he had enough to do to guard himself from the terrible blows, and the other because he was so occupied in delivering them.

When within twenty paces I levelled my gun. I chose the bull who appeared victor, partly as a punishment for his want of feeling in striking a fallen antagonist, but, perhaps, more because his broadside was towards me, and presented a fairer mark.

I fired.

The smoke hid both for a moment. When it cleared off, I saw the bull that had been conquered still down in a kneeling attitude, but, to my great surprise, the one at which I had aimed was upon his feet, apparently as brisk and sound as ever! I knew I had hit him somewhere—as I heard the 'thud' of the bullet on his fat body—but it was plain I had not crippled him.

I was not allowed time for reflection as to where I had wounded him. Not an instant indeed, for the moment the smoke cleared away, instead of the bulls clearing off also, I saw the one I had
414 shot at fling up his tail, lower his shaggy front, and charge right towards me!

His fierce eyes glanced with a revengeful look, and his roar was enough to have terrified one more courageous than I. I assure you I was less frightened the other day when I encountered the lion.

I did not know what to do for some moments. I thought of setting myself in an attitude of defence, and involuntarily had turned my gun which was now empty—intending to use it as a club. But I saw at once, that the slight blow I could deliver would not stop the onset of such a strong fierce animal, and that he would butt me over, and gore me, to a certainty.

I turned my eyes to see what hope there lay in flight. Fortunately they fell upon an ant-hill—the one I had just emerged from. I saw at a glance, that by climbing it I would be out of reach of the fierce wildebeest. Would I have time to get to it before he could overtake me?

I ran like a frightened fox. You, Hendrik, can beat me running upon ordinary occasions. I don't think you could have got quicker to that ant-hill than I did.

I was not a second too soon. As I clutched at the little turrets, and drew myself up, I could hear the rattle of the wildebeest's hoofs behind me, and I fancied I felt his hot breath upon my heels.

But I reached the top cone in safety; and then turned and looked down at my pursuer. I saw that he could not follow me any farther. Sharp as his horns were, I saw that I was safe out of their reach.

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CHAPTER XXXI.

BESIEGED BY THE BULL.

"Well," continued Hans, after a pause, "I began to congratulate myself on my fortunate escape; for I was convinced that but for the ant-hill I would have been trampled and gored to death. The bull was one of the largest and fiercest of his kind, and a very old one too, as I could tell by the bases of his thick black horns nearly meeting over his forehead, as well as by his dark colour. I had plenty of time to note these things. I felt that I was now safe—that the wildebeest could not get near me; and I sat perched upon the top of the central cone, watching his movements with perfect coolness."

It is true he did everything to reach my position. A dozen times he charged up the hill, and more than once effected a lodgment among the tops of the lower turrets, but the main one was too steep for him. No wonder! It had tried my own powers to scale it.

At times he came so close to me in his desperate efforts, that I could have touched his horns with the muzzle of my gun; and I had prepared to give him a blow whenever I could get a good chance. I never saw a creature behave so fiercely. The fact was, that I had hit him with my bullet,—the wound was there along his jaw, and bleeding freely. The pain of it maddened him; but that was not the only cause of his fury, as I afterwards discovered.

Well. After several unsuccessful attempts to scale the cone, he varied his tactics, and commenced butting the ant-heap as though he would bring it down. He repeatedly backed, and
415 then charged forward upon it with all his might; and, to say the truth, it looked for some time as though he would succeed.

Several of the lesser cones were knocked over by his powerful blows; and the hard tough clay yielded before his sharp horns, used by him as inverted pick-axes. In several places I could see that he had laid open the chambers of the insects, or rather the ways and galleries that are placed in the outer crust of the hill.

With all this I felt no fear. I was under the belief that he would soon exhaust his rage and go away; and then I could descend without danger. But after watching him a good long spell, I was not a little astonished to observe that, instead of cooling down, he seemed to grow more furious than ever. I had taken out my handkerchief to wipe the perspiration off my face. It was as hot as an oven where I sat. Not a breath of air was stirring, and the rays of the sun, glaring right down and then reflecting up again from the white clay, brought the perspiration out of me in streams. Every minute I was obliged to rub my eyes clear of it with the handkerchief.

Now, before passing the kerchief over my face, I always shook it open; and each time I did so, I noticed that the rage of the wildebeest seemed to be redoubled! In fact, at such times he would leave off goring the heap, and make a fresh attempt to rush up at me, roaring his loudest as he charged against the steep wall!

I was puzzled at this, as well as astonished. What could there be in my wiping my face to provoke the wildebeest anew? And yet such was clearly the case. Every time I did so, he appeared to swell with a fresh burst of passion!

The explanation came at length. I saw that it was not the wiping off the perspiration that provoked him. It was the shaking out of my handkerchief. This was, as you know, of a bright scarlet colour. I thought of this, and then, for the first time, remembered having heard that anything scarlet has a most powerful effect upon the wildebeest, and excites him to a rage resembling madness.

I did not wish to keep up his fury. I crumpled up the handkerchief and buried it in my pocket—preferring to endure the perspiration rather than remain there any longer. By hiding the scarlet, I conceived a hope he would the sooner cool down, and go away.

But I had raised a devil in him too fierce to be so easily laid. He showed no signs of cooling down. On the contrary, he continued to charge, butt, and bellow, as vengefully as ever—though the scarlet was no longer before his eyes.

I began to feel really annoyed. I had no idea the gnoo was so implacable in his rage. The bull evidently felt pain from his wound. I could perceive that he moaned it. He knew well enough it was I who had given him this pain.

He appeared determined not to let me escape retribution. He showed no signs of an intention to leave the place; but laboured away with hoof and horns, as if he would demolish the mound.

I was growing very tired of my situation. Though not afraid that the bull could reach me, I was troubled by the thought of being so long absent from our camp. I knew I should have been there. I thought of my little sister and brother. Some misfortune might befall them. I was very sad about that, though up to that time I had little or no fears for myself. I was still in hopes the wildebeest
416 would tire out and leave me, and then I could soon run home.

I say, up to that time I had no very serious fears for myself—excepting the moment or two

when the bull was chasing me to the hill; but that little fright was soon over.

But now appeared a new object of dread—another enemy, as terrible as the enraged bull—that almost caused me to spring down upon the horns of the latter in my first moments of alarm!

I have said that the wildebeest had broken down several of the lesser turrets—the outworks of the ant-hill—and had laid open the hollow spaces within. He had not penetrated to the main dome, but only the winding galleries and passages that perforate the outer walls.

I noticed, that, as soon as these were broken open, a number of ants had rushed out from each. Indeed, I had observed many of the creatures crawling outside the hill, when I first approached it, and had wondered at this—as I knew that they usually keep under ground when going and coming from their nests. I had observed all this, without taking note of it at the time—being too intent in my stalk to think of anything else. For the last half-hour I was too busy watching the manœuvres of the wildebeest bull, to take my gaze off him for a moment.

Something in motion directly under me at length caught my eye, and I looked down to see what it was. The first glance caused me to jump to my feet; and, as I have already said, very nearly impelled me to leap down upon the horns of the bull!

Swarming all over the hill, already clustering upon my shoes, and crawling still higher, were the crowds of angry ants. Every hole that the bull had made was yielding out its throng of spiteful insects; and all appeared moving towards me!

Small as the creatures were, I fancied I saw design in their movements. They seemed all actuated with the same feeling—the same impulse—that of attacking me. I could not be mistaken in their intent. They moved all together, as if guided and led by intelligent beings; and they advanced towards the spot on which I stood.

I saw, too, that they were the soldiers. I knew these from the workers, by their larger heads and long horny mandibles. I knew they could bite fiercely and painfully.

The thought filled me with horror. I confess it, I never was so horrified before. My late encounter with the lion was nothing to compare with it.

My first impression was that I would be destroyed by the termites. I had heard of such things—I remembered that I had. It was that, no doubt, that frightened me so badly, I had heard of men in their sleep being attacked by the white ants, and bitten to death. Such memories came crowding upon me at the moment, until I felt certain, that if I did not soon escape from that spot, the ants would sting me to death and eat me up!

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CHAPTER XXXII.

A HELPLESS BEAST.

"What was to be done?" continued Hans. "How was I to avoid both enemies? If I leaped down, the wildebeest would kill me to a certainty. He was still there, with his fierce eye bent upon me continually. If I remained where I was, I would soon be covered with the swarming hideous insects, and eaten up like an old rag."

HANS BESIEGED BY A WILDEBEEST.

Already I felt their terrible teeth. Those that had first crawled to my feet I had endeavoured to brush off; but some had got upon my ankles, and were biting me through my thick woollen socks! My clothes would be no protection.

418 I had mounted to the highest part of the cone, and was standing upon its apex. It was so sharp I could scarcely balance myself, but the painful stings of the insects caused me to dance upon it like a mountebank.

But what signified those that had already stung my ankle, to the numbers that were likely soon to pierce me with their venomous darts? Already these were swarming up the last terrace. They would soon cover the apex of the cone upon which I was standing. They would crawl up my limbs in myriads—they would——

I could reflect no longer on what they would do. I preferred taking my chance with the wildebeest. I would leap down. Perhaps some lucky accident might aid me. I would battle with the gnoo, using my gun. Perhaps I might succeed in escaping to some other hill. Perhaps——

I was actually on the spring to leap down, when a new thought came into my mind; and I wondered I had been so silly as not to think of it before. What was to hinder me from keeping off the termites? They had no wings—the soldiers have none—nor the workers neither, for that matter. They could not fly upon me. They could only crawl up the cone. With my jacket I could brush them back. Certainly I could—why did I not think of it before?

I was not long in taking off my jacket. I laid aside my useless gun, dropping it upon one of the lower terraces. I caught the jacket by the collar; and, using it as a duster, I cleared the sides of the cone in a few moments, having sent thousands of the termites tumbling headlong below.

Pshaw! how simply the thing was done! why had I not done it before? It cost scarcely an effort to brush the myriads away, and a slight effort would keep them off as long as I pleased.

The only annoyance I felt now was from the few that had got under my trousers, and that still continued to bite me; but these I would get rid of in time.

Well—I remained on the apex, now bending down to beat back the soldiers that still swarmed upward, and then occupying myself in trying to get rid of the few that crawled upon me. I felt no longer any uneasiness on the score of the insects—though I was not a bit better off as regarded the bull, who still kept guard below. I fancied, however, that he now showed symptoms of weariness, and would soon raise the siege; and this prospect made me feel more cheerful.

A sudden change came over me. A new thrill of terror awaited me.

While jumping about upon the top of the cone, my footing suddenly gave way—the baked clay broke with a dead crash, and I sank through the roof. My feet shot down into the hollow dome—till I thought I must have crushed the great queen in her chamber—and I stood buried to the neck.

I was surprised, and a little terrified, not by the shock I had experienced in the sudden descent. That was natural enough, and a few moments would have restored my equanimity; but it was something else that frightened me. It was something that moved under my feet as they 'touched bottom,'—something that moved and heaved under them, and then passed quickly away,

letting me still farther down!

What could it be? Was it the great swarm of living ants that I pressed upon? I did not think it
419 was. It did not feel like them. It seemed to be something bulky and strong, for it held up my whole weight for a moment or two, before it slipped from under me.

Whatever it was, it frightened me very considerably; and I did not leave my feet in its company for five seconds time. No: the hottest furnace would scarce have scorched them during the time they remained inside the dark dome. In five seconds they were on the walls again—on the broken edges, where I had mounted up, and where I now stood quite speechless with surprise!

What next? I could keep the ants off no longer. I gazed down the dark cavity; they were swarming up that way in thick crowds. I could brush them down no more.

My eyes at this moment chanced to wander to the bull. He was standing at three or four paces distance from the base of the hill. He was standing sideways with his head turned to it, and regarding it with a wild look. His attitude was entirely changed, and so, I thought, was the expression of his eye. He looked as if he had just run off to his new position, and was ready to make a second start. He looked as if something had also terrified him!

Something evidently had; for, in another moment, he uttered a sharp rout, galloped several paces farther out, wheeled again, halted, and stood gazing as before!

What could it mean? Was it the breaking through of the roof and my sudden descent that had frightened him?

At first I thought so, but I observed that he did not look upward to the top. His gaze seemed bent on some object near the base of the hill—though from where I stood I could see nothing there to frighten him.

I had not time to reflect what it could be, before the bull uttered a fresh snort; and, raising its tail high into the air, struck off at full gallop over the plain!

Rejoiced at seeing this, I thought no more of what had relieved me of his company. It must have been my curious fall, I concluded; but no matter now that the brute was gone. So seizing hold of my gun, I prepared to descend from the elevated position of which I was thoroughly tired.

Just as I had got half down the side, I chanced to look below; and there was the object that terrified the old bull. No wonder. It might have terrified anything,—the odd-looking creature that it was. From out a hole in the clay wall protruded a long naked cylindrical snout, mounted by a pair of ears nearly as long as itself, that stood erect like the horns of a steinbuck, and gave to the animal that bore them a wild and vicious look. It would have badly frightened me, had I not known what it was; but I recognised it at once as one of the most inoffensive creatures in the world—the 'aard-vark.'

His appearance accounted for the retreat of the bull, and also explained why the ants had been crawling about on my first reaching their hill.

Without saying a word, or making the slightest noise, I clubbed my gun; and, bending downward, struck the protruded snout a blow with the butt. It was a most wicked blow; and, considering the service the creature had just done me in frightening off the wildebeest, a most ungrateful return. But I was not master of my feelings at the moment. I did not reflect—only that
420 I liked aard-vark flesh—and the blow was given.

Poor fellow! It did the job for him. With scarce a kick he dropped dead in the opening he had scraped with his own claws.

Well—my day's adventures were not yet ended. They seemed as though they were never to end. I had got the aard-vark over my shoulders, and was about heading homeward, when, to my astonishment, I observed that the bull-gnoo—not the one that had besieged me, but his late antagonist—was still out upon the plain where I had last seen him! I observed, moreover, that he was still in a sort of half-lying, half-kneeling attitude, with his head close to the ground!

His odd movements seemed stranger than anything else. I fancied he had been badly hurt by the other, and was not able to get away.

At first I was cautious about going near him—remembering my late narrow escape—and I thought of giving him a wide berth, and leaving him alone. Even though wounded, he might be strong enough to charge upon me; and my empty gun, as I had already proved, would be but a poor weapon with which to defend myself.

I hesitated about going near him; but curiosity grew strong within me, as I watched his queer manœuvres; until at length I walked up within a dozen yards of where he was kneeling.

Fancy my surprise on discovering the cause of his oblique movements. No hurt had he received of any kind—not even a scratch; but for all that, he was as completely crippled as if he had lost his best pair of legs.

In a very singular manner was he rendered thus helpless. In his struggle with the other bull, one of his fore-legs had, somehow or other, got passed over his horn; and there it stuck—not only depriving him of the use of the limb itself, but holding his head so close to the ground that he was quite unable to stir from the spot!

At first I designed helping him out of his difficulty, and letting him go. On second thoughts, I remembered the story of the husband-man and the frozen snake, which quite changed my intention.

I next thought of killing him for venison; but having no bullet, I did not like to beat him to death with my gun. Besides the aard-vark was my load to camp, and I knew that the jackals would eat the bull up before we could go back for him. I thought it probable he would be safer left as he was—as these ravenous brutes, seeing him alive, might not so readily approach him.

So I left him with his “head under his arm,” in hopes that we may find him there to-morrow.

So ended Hans's narrative of his day's adventures.

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CHAPTER XXXIII.

THE ELEPHANT'S SLEEPING-ROOM.

The field-cornet was far from satisfied with his day's work. His first attempt at elephant-hunting had proved a failure. Might it not be always so?

Notwithstanding the interest with which he listened to Hans's narrative of the day's adventures, he felt uneasy in his mind when he reflected upon his own.

The elephant had escaped so easily. Their bullets seemed to have injured him not the least.
421 They had only served to render him furious, and dangerous. Though both had hit him in places where their wounds should have been mortal, no such effect was produced. The elephant seemed to go off as unscathed, as if they had fired only boiled peas at him!

Would it be always so?

True, they had given him but two shots. Two, if well directed, may bring down a cow-elephant and sometimes a bull, but oftener it requires ten times two before a strong old bull can be made to “bite the dust.”

But would any elephant wait until they could load and fire a sufficient number of shots?

That was an undecided point with our tyro elephant-hunters. If not, then they would be helpless indeed. It would be a tedious business spooring the game afoot, after it had once been fired upon. In such cases the elephant usually travels many miles before halting again; and only mounted men can with any facility overtake him.

How Von Bloom sighed when he thought of his poor horses! Now more than ever did he feel the want of them—now more than ever did he regret their loss.

But he had heard that the elephant does not always make off when attacked. The old bull had shown no intention of retreating, after receiving their shots. It was the odd conduct of Swartboy that had put him to flight. But for that, he would no doubt have kept the ground, until they had given him another volley, and perhaps his death-wound.

The field-cornet drew consolation from this last reflection. Perhaps their next encounter would have a different ending. Perhaps a pair of tusks would reward them.

The hope of such a result, as well as the anxiety about it, determined Von Bloom to lose no time in making a fresh trial. Next morning, therefore, before the sun was up, the hunters were once more upon the trail of their giant game.

One precaution they had taken, which they had not thought of before. All of them had heard that an ordinary leaden bullet will not penetrate the tough thick skin of the great “pachyderm.” Perhaps this had been the cause of their failure on the preceding day. If so they had provided against the recurrence of failure from such a cause. They had moulded a new set of balls of harder material,—solder it should have been, but they had none. They chanced, however, to be in possession of what served the purpose equally well—the old “plate” that had often graced the field-cornet's table in his better byegone days of the Graaf Reinet. This consisted of candlesticks, and snuffer-trays, and dish-covers, and cruet-stands, and a variety of articles of the real “Dutch metal.”

Some of these were condemned to the alembic of the melting-pan; and, mixed with the common lead, produced a set of balls hard enough for the hide of the rhinoceros itself—so that this day the hunters had no fears of failure upon the score of soft bullets.

They went in the same direction as upon the preceding day, towards the forest or “bush,” as they termed it.

They had not proceeded a mile when they came upon the spoor of elephants nearly fresh. It passed through the very thickest of the thorny jungle—where no creature but an elephant, a
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rhinoceros, or a man with an axe, could have made way. A family must have passed, consisting of a male, a female or two, and several young ones of different ages. They had marched in single file, as elephants usually do; and had made a regular lane several feet wide, which was quite clear of bushes, and trampled by their immense footsteps. The old bull, Swartboy said, had gone in advance, and had cleared the way of all obstructions, by means of his trunk and tusks. This had evidently been the case, for the hunters observed huge branches broken off, or still hanging and turned to one side, out of the way—just as if the hand of man had done it.

Swartboy further affirmed, that such elephant-roads usually led to water; and by the very easiest and shortest routes—as if they had been planned and laid open by the skill of an engineer—showing the rare instinct or sagacity of these animals.

The hunters, therefore, expected soon to arrive at some watering-place; but it was equally probable the spoor might be leading them from the water.

They had not followed it more than a quarter of a mile, when they came upon another road of a similar kind, that crossed the one they were spooring upon. This had also been made by a number of elephants—a family most likely—and the tracks upon it were as recent as those they had been following.

They hesitated for a moment which to take; but at length concluded upon keeping straight on; and so they moved forward as before.

To their great disappointment the trail at last led out into more open ground, where the elephants had scattered about; and after following the tracks of one, and then another without success, they got bewildered, and lost the spoor altogether.

While casting about to find it in a place where the bush was thin and straggling, Swartboy suddenly ran off to one side, calling to the others to follow him. Von Bloom and Hendrik went after to see what the Bushman was about. They thought he had seen an elephant, and both, considerably excited, had already pulled the covers off their guns.

There was no elephant, however. When they came up with Swartboy, he was standing under a tree, and pointing to the ground at its bottom.

The hunters looked down. They saw that the ground upon one side of the tree was trampled, as though horses or some other animals had been tied there for a long time, and had worn off the turf, and worked it into dust with their hoofs. The bark of the tree—a full-topped shady acacia—for some distance up was worn smooth upon one side, just as though cattle had used it for a rubbing-post.

“What has done it?” asked the field-cornet and Hendrik in a breath.

“Da olifant's slapen-boom” (the elephant's sleeping-tree), replied Swartboy.

No further explanation was necessary. The hunters remembered what they had been told about a curious habit which the elephant has—of leaning against a tree while asleep. This, then, was one of the sleeping-trees of these animals.

But of what use to them, farther than to gratify a little curiosity? The elephant was not there.

423 “Da ole karl come again,” said Swartboy.

“Ha! you think so, Swart?” inquired Von Bloom.

“Ya, baas, lookee da! spoor fresh—da groot olifant hab slap here yesterday.”

“What then? you think we should lie in wait, and shoot him when he returns.”

“No, baas, better dan shoot, we make him bed—den wait see um lie down.”

Swartboy grinned a laugh as he gave this piece of advice.

“Make his bed! what do you mean?” inquired his master.

“I tell you, baas, we get da oliphant sure, if you leave da job to ole Swart. I gib you de plan for take him, no waste powder, no waste bullet.”

The Bushman proceeded to communicate his plan, to which his master—remembering their failure of yesterday—readily gave his consent.

Fortunately they had all the implements that would be necessary for carrying it out,—a sharp axe, a strong rope or “rheim” of raw-hide, and their knives—and they set about the business without loss of time.

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CHAPTER XXXIV.

MAKING THE ELEPHANT'S BED.

To the hunters time was a consideration. If the elephant should return that day it would be just before the hottest hours of noon. They had, therefore, scarce an hour left to prepare for him—to “make his bed,” as Swartboy had jocosely termed it. So they went to work with alacrity, the Bushman acting as director-general, while the other two received their orders from him with the utmost obedience.

The first work which Swartboy assigned to them was to cut and prepare three stakes of hard wood. They were to be each about three feet long, as thick as a man's arm, and pointed at one end.

These were soon procured. The iron-wood which grew in abundance in the neighbourhood, furnished the very material; and after three pieces of sufficient length had been cut down with the axe, they were reduced to the proper size, and pointed by the knives of the hunters.

Meanwhile Swartboy had not been idle. First, with his knife he had cut a large section of bark from the elephant's tree, upon the side against which the animal had been in the habit of leaning, and about three feet from the ground. Then with the axe he made a deep notch, where the bark had been removed—in fact, such a notch as would have caused the tree to fall had it been left to itself. But it was not, for before advancing so far in his work, Swartboy had taken measures to prevent that. He had stayed the tree by fastening the rheim to its upper branches on the opposite side, and then carrying the rope to the limbs of another tree that stood out in that direction.

Thus adjusted, the elephant's tree was only kept from falling by the rheim-stay; and a slight push, in the direction of the latter, would have thrown it over.

Swartboy now replaced the section of bark, which he had preserved; and after carefully collecting the chips, no one, without close examination, could have told that the tree had ever felt the edge of an axe.

424 Another operation yet remained to be performed—that was the planting of the stakes, already prepared by Von Bloom and Hendrik. To set these firmly, deep holes had to be made. But Swartboy was just the man to make a hole; and in less than ten minutes he had sunk three, each over a foot deep, and not a half-inch wider than the thickness of the stakes!

You may be curious to know how he accomplished this. You would have dug a hole with a spade, and necessarily as wide as the spade itself. But Swartboy had no spade, and would not have used it if there had been one—since it would have made the holes too large for his purpose.

Swartboy sunk his holes by “crowing”—which process he performed by means of a small pointed stick. With this he first loosened the earth in a circle of the proper size. He then took out the detached mould, flung it away, and used the point of the “crowing stick” as before. Another clearing out of mould, another application of the stick; and so on, till the narrow hole was deemed of sufficient depth. That was how Swartboy “crowed” the holes.

They were sunk in a kind of triangle near the bottom of the tree, but on the side opposite to that where the elephant would stand, should he occupy his old ground.

In each hole Swartboy now set a stake, thick end down and point upwards; some small pebbles, and a little mould worked in at the sides, wedged them as firmly as if they had grown there.

The stakes were now daubed over with soft earth, to conceal the white colour of the wood; the remaining chips were picked up, and all traces of the work completely obliterated. This done the hunters withdrew from the spot.

They did not go far; but choosing a large bushy tree to leeward, all three climbed up into it, and sat concealed among its branches.

The field-cornet held his long “roer” in readiness, and so did Hendrik his rifle. In case the ingenious trap of Swartboy should fail, they intended to use their guns, but not otherwise.

It was now quite noon, and the day had turned out one of the hottest. But for the shade afforded by the leaves, they would have felt it very distressing. Swartboy prognosticated favourably from this. The great heat would be more likely than anything else to send the elephant to his favourite sleeping-place under the cool shady cover of the cameel-doorn.

It was now quite noon. He could not be long in coming, thought they.

Sure enough he came, and soon, too.

They had not been twenty minutes on their perch, when they heard a strange, rumbling noise, which they knew proceeded from the stomach of an elephant. The next moment they saw one emerge from the jungle, and walk, with sweeping step, straight up to the tree. He seemed to have no suspicion of any danger; but placed himself at once alongside the trunk of the acacia—in the very position and on the side Swartboy had said he would take. From his spoor the Bushman knew he had been in the habit of so standing.

His head was turned from the hunters, but not so much as to prevent them from seeing a pair of splendid tusks,—six feet long at the least.

While gazing in admiration at these rich trophies, they saw the animal point his proboscis
425 upward, and discharge a vast shower of water into the leaves, which afterwards fell dripping in bright globules over his body!

Swartboy said that he drew the water from his stomach. Although closet-naturalists deny this, it must have been so; for shortly after, he repeated the act again and again—the quantity of water at each discharge being as great as before. It was plain that his trunk, large as it was, could not have contained it all.

He seemed to enjoy this “shower-bath;” and the hunters did not wonder at it, for they themselves, suffering at the time from heat and thirst, would have relished something of a similar kind. As the crystal drops fell back from the acacia leaves, the huge animal was heard to utter a low grunt expressive of gratification. The hunters hoped that this was the prelude to his sleep, and watched him with intense earnestness.

It proved to be so.

As they sat gazing, they noticed that his head sunk a little, his ears ceased their flapping, his tail hung motionless, and his trunk, now twined around his tusks, remained at rest.

They gaze intently. Now they see his body droop a little to one side—now it touches the tree—there is heard a loud crack, followed by a confused crashing of branches—and the huge dark body of the elephant sinks upon its side.

At the same instant a terrible scream drowns all other sounds, causing the forest to echo, and the very leaves to quake. Then follows a confused roaring, mingled with the noise of cracking branches, and the struggles of the mighty brute where he lies kicking his giant limbs along the earth, in the agonies of death!

The hunters remain in the tree. They see that the elephant is down—that he is impaled. There will be no need for their puny weapons. Their game has already received the death-wound.

The struggle is of short duration. The painful breathing that precedes death is heard issuing from the long proboscis; and then follows a deep ominous silence.

The hunters leap down, and approach the prostrate body. They see that it still lies upon the terrible *chevaux de frisé*, where it had fallen. The stakes have done their work most effectively. The elephant breathes no more. He is dead!

It was the work of an hour to cut out those splendid tusks. But our hunters thought nothing of that; and they were only the more pleased to find each of them a heavy load—as much as a man could carry!

Von Bloom shouldered one, Swartboy the other, while Hendrik loaded himself with the guns and implements; and all three, leaving the carcass of the dead elephant behind them, returned triumphantly to camp.

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CHAPTER XXXV.

THE WILD ASSES OF AFRICA.

Notwithstanding the success of the day's hunt, the mind of Von Bloom was not at rest. They had “bagged” their game, it was true, but in what manner? Their success was a mere
426 accident, and gave them no earnest of what might be expected in the future. They might go long before finding another “sleeping-tree” of the elephants, and repeating their easy capture.

Such were the not very pleasant reflections of the field-cornet, on the evening after returning from their successful hunt.

But still less pleasant were they, two weeks later, at the retrospect of many an unsuccessful chase from which they had returned—when, after twelve days spent in “jaging” the elephant, they had added only a single pair of tusks to the collection, and these the tusks of a cow elephant, scarce two feet in length, and of little value!

The reflection was not the less painful, that nearly every day they had fallen in with elephants, and had obtained a shot or two at these animals. That did not mend the matter a bit. On the contrary, it taught the hunter how easily they could run away from him, as they invariably did. It taught him how small his chances were of capturing such game, so long as he could only follow it afoot.

The hunter on foot stands but a poor chance with the elephant. Stalking in upon one is easy enough, and perhaps obtaining a single shot; but when the animal trots off through the thick jungle, it is tedious work following him. He may go miles before halting, and even if the hunter should overtake him, it may be only to deliver a second shot, and see the game once more disappear into the bushes—perhaps to be spoored no farther.

Now the mounted hunter has this advantage. His horse can overtake the elephant; and it is a peculiarity of this animal, that the moment he finds that his enemy, whatever it be, can do that thing, he disdains to run any farther, but at once stands to bay; and the hunter may then deliver as many shots as he pleases.

Herein lies the great advantage of the hunter on horseback. Another advantage is the security the horse affords, enabling his rider to avoid the charges of the angry elephant.

No wonder Von Bloom sighed for a horse. No wonder he felt grieved at the want of this noble companion, that would have aided him so much in the chase.

He grieved all the more, now that he had become acquainted with the district, and had found it so full of elephants. Troops of an hundred had been seen; and these far from being shy, or disposed to make off after a shot or two. Perhaps they had never heard the report of a gun before that of his own long roer pealed in their huge ears.

With a horse the field-cornet believed he could have killed many, and obtained much valuable ivory. Without one, his chances of carrying out his design were poor indeed. His hopes were likely to end in disappointment.

He felt this keenly. The bright prospects he had so ardently indulged in, became clouded over; and fears for the future once more harassed him. He would only waste his time in this wilderness. His children would live without books, without education, without society. Were he to be suddenly called away, what would become of them? His pretty Gertrude would be no better off than a little savage—his sons would become not in sport, as he was wont to call them, but in reality a trio of “Bush-boys.”

Once more these thoughts filled the heart of the father with pain. Oh! what would he not have
427 given at that moment for a pair of horses, of any sort whatever?

The field-cornet, while making these reflections, was seated in the great nwana-tree, upon the platform, that had been built on the side towards the lake, and from which a full view could be obtained of the water. From this point a fine view could also be obtained of the country which lay to the eastward of the lake. At some distance off it was wooded, but near the vley a grassy plain lay spread before the eye like a green meadow.

The eyes of the hunter were turned outward on this plain, and just then his glance fell upon a troop of animals crossing the open ground, and advancing towards the vley.

They were large animals—nearly of the shape and size of small horses—and travelling in single file; as they were, the troop at a distance presented something of the appearance of a “cafila,” or caravan. There were in all about fifty individuals in the line; and they marched along with a steady sober pace, as if under the guidance and direction of some wise leader. How very different from the capricious and eccentric movements of the gnoos!

Individually they bore some resemblance to these last-named animals. In the shape of their bodies and tails, in their general ground colour, and in the “brindled” or tiger-like stripes that could be perceived upon their cheeks, neck, and shoulders. These stripes were exactly of the same form as those upon a zebra; but far less distinct, and not extending to the body or limbs, as is the case with the true zebra. In general colour, and in some other respects, the animals reminded one of the ass; but their heads, necks, and the upper part of their bodies, were of darker hue, slightly tinged with reddish brown. In fact, the new-comers had points of resemblance to all four—horse, ass, gnoo, and zebra—and yet they were distinct from any. To the zebra they bore the greatest resemblance—for they were in reality a species of zebra—they were quaggas.

Modern naturalists have divided the *Equidæ*, or horse family, into two genera—the horse and the ass—the principal points of distinction being, that animals of the horse kind have long flowing manes, full tails, and warty callosities on both hind and fore limbs; while asses, on the contrary, have short, meagre, and upright manes, tails slender and furnished only with long hairs at the extremity, and their hind limbs wanting the callosities. These, however, are found on the fore-legs as upon horses.

Although there are many varieties of the horse genus—scores of them, widely differing from each other—they can all be easily recognised by these characteristic marks, from the “Suffolk Punch,” the great London drayhorse, down to his diminutive little cousin the “Shetland Pony.”

The varieties of the ass are nearly as numerous, though this fact is not generally known.

First, we have the common ass, the type of the genus; and of this there are many breeds in different countries, some nearly as elegant and as highly prized as horses. Next there is the “onagra,” “koulan,” or “wild ass,” supposed to be the origin of the common kind. This is a native of Asia, though it is also found in the north-eastern parts of Africa. There is also the “dziggetai,” or “great wild ass,” of Central and Southern Asia, and another smaller species the “ghur” found in Persia. Again, there is the “kiang” met with in Ladakh, and the “yo-totze,” an inhabitant of
428 Chinese Tartary.

All these are Asiatic species, found in a wild state, and differing from one another in colour, size, form, and even in habits. Many of them are of elegant form, and swift as the swiftest horses.

In this little book we cannot afford room for a description of each, but must confine our remarks to what is more properly our subject—the wild asses of Africa. Of these there are six or seven kinds—perhaps more.

First, there is the “wild ass,” which, as already stated, extends from Asia into the north-eastern parts of Africa, contiguous to the former continent.

Next there is the “koomrah,” of which very little is known, except that it inhabits the forests of Northern Africa, and is solitary in its habits, unlike most of the other species. The koomrah has been described as a “wild horse,” but, most probably, it belongs to the genus *asinus*.

Now there are four other species of “wild asses” in Africa—wild horses some call them—and a fifth reported by travellers, but as yet undetermined. These species bear such a resemblance to one another in their form, the peculiar markings of their bodies, size, and general habits, that they may be classed together under the title of the zebra family. First, there is the true zebra, perhaps the most beautiful of all quadrupeds, and of which no description need be given. Second, the “dauw,” or “Burchell's zebra,” as it is more frequently called. Third, the “congo dauw,” closely resembling the dauw. Fourth, the “quagga”; and fifth, the undetermined species known as the “white zebra,” so called from its pale yellow, or Isabella colour.

These five species evidently have a close affinity with each other—all of them being more or less marked with the peculiar transversal bands or “stripes,” which are the well-known characteristics of the zebra. Even the quagga is so banded upon the head and upper parts of its body.

The zebra proper is “striped” from the tip of the nose to its very hoofs, and the bands are of a uniform black, while the ground colour is nearly white, or white tinged with a pale yellow. The “dauws,” on the other hand, are not banded upon the legs; the rays are not so dark or well defined, and the ground colour is not so pure or clean-looking. For the rest, all these three species are much alike; and it is more than probable that either “Burchell's” or the “congo dauw” was the species to which the name of “zebra” was first applied; for that which is now called the “true zebra” inhabits those parts of Africa where it was less likely to have been the first observed of the genus. At all events, the “congo dauw” is the “hippotigris,” or tiger-horse, of the Romans; and this we infer from its inhabiting a more northerly part of Africa than the others, all of which belong to the southern half of that continent. The habitat of the zebra is said to extend as far north as Abyssinia; but, perhaps, the “congo dauw,” which certainly inhabits Abyssinia, has been mistaken for the true zebra.

Of the four species in South Africa, the zebra is a mountain animal, and dwells among the cliffs, while the dauw and quagga rove over the plains and wild karoo deserts. In similar situations to these has the “white zebra” been observed—though only by the traveller Le Vaillant
429 —and hence the doubt about its existence as a distinct species.

None of the kinds associate together, though each herds with other animals! The quagga keeps company with the gnoo, the “dauw” with the “brindled gnoo,” while the tall ostrich stalks in the midst of the herds of both!

There is much difference in the nature and disposition of the different species. The mountain zebra is very shy and wild; the dauw is almost untameable; while the quagga is of a timid docile nature, and may be trained to harness with as much facility as a horse.

The reason why this has not been done, is simply because the farmers of South Africa have horses in plenty, and do not stand in need of the quagga, either for saddle or harness.

But though Von Bloom the farmer had never thought of “breaking in” a quagga, Von Bloom the hunter now did.

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CHAPTER XXXVI.

PLANNING THE CAPTURE OF THE QUAGGAS.

Up to this time the field-cornet had scarce deigned to notice the quaggas. He knew what they were, and had often seen a drove of them—perhaps the same one—approach the vley and drink. Neither he nor any of his people had molested them, though they might have killed many. They knew that the yellow oily flesh of these animals was not fit for food, and is only eaten by the hungry natives—that their hides, although sometimes used for grain-sacks and other common purposes, are of very little value. For these reasons, they had suffered them to come and go quietly. They did not wish to waste powder and lead upon them; neither did they desire wantonly to destroy such harmless creatures.

Every evening, therefore, the quaggas had drunk at the vley and gone off again, without exciting the slightest interest.

Not so upon this occasion. A grand design now occupied the mind of Von Bloom. The troop of

quaggas became suddenly invested with as much interest as if it had been a herd of elephants; and the field-cornet had started to his feet, and stood gazing upon them—his eyes sparkling with pleasure and admiration.

He admired their prettily-striped heads, their plump well-turned bodies, their light elegant limbs; in short, he admired everything about them, size, colour, and proportions. Never before had quaggas appeared so beautiful in the eyes of the vee-boer.

But why this new-born admiration for the despised quaggas?—for despised they are by the Cape farmer, who shoots them only to feed his Hottentot servants. Why had they so suddenly become such favourites with the field-cornet? That you will understand by knowing the reflections that were just then passing through his mind.

They were as follows:—

Might not a number of these animals be caught and broken in?—Why not? Might they not be trained to the saddle?—Why not? Might they not serve him for hunting the elephant just as well as horses?—Why not?

Von Bloom asked these three questions of himself. Half a minute served to answer them all in the affirmative. There was neither impossibility nor improbability in any of the three propositions.
430 It was clear that the thing could be done, and without difficulty.

A new hope sprang up in the heart of the field-cornet. Once more his countenance became radiant with joy.

He communicated his thoughts both to the Bushman and “Bush-boys”—all of whom highly approved of the idea, and only wondered that none of them had thought of it before.

And now the question arose as to how the quaggas were to be captured. This was the first point to be settled; and the four—Von Bloom himself, Hans, Hendrik, and Swartboy,—sat deliberately down to concoct some plan of effecting this object.

Of course they could do nothing just then, and the drove that had come to drink was allowed to depart peacefully. The hunters knew they would return on the morrow about the same hour; and it was towards their return that the thoughts of all were bent.

Hendrik advised “creasing,” which means sending a bullet through the upper part of the neck near the withers, and by this means a quagga can be knocked over and captured. The shot, if properly directed, does not kill the animal. It soon recovers, and may be easily “broken,” though its spirit is generally broken at the same time. It is never “itself again.” Hendrik understood the mode of “creasing.” He had seen it practised by the boer-hunters. He knew the spot where the bullet should hit. He believed he could do it easily enough.

Hans considered the “creasing” too cruel a mode. They might kill many quaggas before obtaining one that was hit in the proper place. Besides there would be a waste of powder and bullets—a thing to be considered. Why could they not snare the animals? He had heard of nooses being set for animals as large as the quaggas, and of many being caught in that manner.

Hendrik did not think the idea of snaring a good one. They might get one in that way—the foremost of the drove; but all the others, seeing the leader caught, would gallop off and return no more to the vley; and where would they set their snare for a second? It might be a long time before they should find another watering-place of these animals; whereas they might stalk and crease them upon the plains at any time.

Swartboy now put in his plan. It was the pit-fall. That was the way by which Bushmen most generally caught large animals, and Swartboy perfectly understood how to construct a pit for quaggas.

Hendrik saw objections to this, very similar to those he had urged against the snare. The foremost of the quaggas might be caught, but the others would not be fools enough to walk into the pit—after their leader had fallen in and laid the trap open. They, of course, would gallop off, and never come back that way again.

If it could be done at night, Hendrik admitted, the thing might be different. In the darkness several might rush in before catching the alarm. But no—the quaggas had always come to drink in day-time—one only could be trapped, and then the others alarmed would keep away.

There would have been reason in what Hendrik said, but for a remarkable fact which the field-cornet himself had observed when the quaggas came to the lake to drink. It was that the animals had invariably entered the water at one point, and gone out at another. It was of course a mere accident that they did so, and owing to the nature of the ground; but such was the case, and Von
431 Bloom had observed it on several occasions. They were accustomed to enter by the gorge, already described; and, after drinking, wade along the shallow edge for some yards, and then pass out by another break in the bank.

The knowledge of this fact was of the utmost importance, and all saw that at once. A pit-fall dug upon the path by which the animals entered the lake, would no doubt operate as Hendrik said—one might be caught, and all the rest frightened off. But a similar trap placed upon the trail that led outward, would bring about a very different result. Once the quaggas had finished drinking, and just at the moment they were heading out of the water, the hunters could show

themselves upon the opposite side, set the troop in quick motion, and gallop them into the trap. By this means not only one, but a whole pit-full might be captured at once!

All this appeared so feasible that not another suggestion was offered—the plan of the pit-fall was at once, and unanimously adopted.

It remained only to dig the pit, cover it properly, and then wait the result.

During all the time their capture was being planned, the herd of quaggas had remained in sight, disporting themselves upon the open plain. It was a tantalizing sight to Hendrik, who would have liked much to have shown his marksman skill by “creasing” one. But the young hunter saw that it would be imprudent to fire at them there, as it would prevent them from returning to the vley; so he restrained himself, and along with the others remained watching the quaggas—all regarding them with a degree of interest which they had never before felt in looking at a drove of these animals.

The quaggas saw nothing of them, although quite near to the great nwana-tree. They—the hunters—were up among the branches, where the animals did not think of looking, and there was nothing around the bottom of the tree to cause them alarm. The wagon-wheels had long ago been disposed of in the bush, partly to shelter them from the sun, and partly because game animals frequently came within shot of the tree, and were thus obtained without any trouble. There were scarce any traces upon the ground that would have betrayed the existence of a “camp” in the tree; and a person might have passed very near without noticing the odd aërial dwelling of the hunter family.

All this was design upon the part of the field-cornet. As yet he knew little of the country around. He did not know but that it might contain worse enemies than either hyenas or lions.

While they sat watching the manœuvres of the quaggas, a movement was made by one of these creatures more singular than any that had yet been witnessed.

The animal in question was browsing quietly along, and at length approached a small clump of bushes that stood out in the open ground. When close to the copse it was observed to make a sudden spring forward; and almost at the same instant, a shaggy creature leaped out of the bushes, and ran off. This last was no other than the ugly “striped” hyena. Instead of turning upon the quagga and showing fight, as one might have supposed so strong and fierce a brute would have done, the hyena uttered a howl of alarm, and ran off as fast as its legs would carry it.

432 They did not carry it far. It was evidently making for a larger tract of bush that grew near; but before it had got half-way across the open ground, the quagga came up behind, and uttering his shrill “couaag,” reared forward, and dropped with his fore-hoofs upon the hyena's back. At the same instant the neck of the carnivorous animal was clutched by the teeth of the ruminant and held as fast, as if grasped by a vice.

THE QUAGGA AND THE HYENA.

All looked to see the hyena free itself and run off again. They looked in vain. It never ran
433 another yard. It never came alive out of the clutch of those terrible teeth.

The quagga still held his struggling victim with firm hold—trampling it with his hoofs, and shaking it in his strong jaws, until in a few minutes the screams of the hyena ceased, and his mangled carcass lay motionless upon the plain!

One would think that this incident might have been enough to warn our hunters to be cautious in their dealings with the quagga. Such a sharp biter would be no pleasant horse to “bit and bridle.”

But all knew the antipathy that exists between the wild horse and the hyena; and that the quagga, though roused to fury at the sight of one of these animals, is very different in its behaviour towards man. So strong, in fact, is this antipathy, and so complete is the mastery of the ruminant over the carnivorous animal, that the frontier farmers often take advantage of these peculiar facts, and keep the hyenas from their cattle by bringing up with the herd a number of quaggas, who act as its guards and protectors!

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CHAPTER XXXVII.

THE PIT-TRAP.

While they were watching the movements of the quaggas, Von Bloom rose suddenly to his feet. All turned their eyes upon him as he did so. They saw by his manner that he was about to propose something. What could it be?

The thought had just occurred to him that they should at once set about digging the pit.

It was near sunset—wanting only half-an-hour of it; and one would suppose he would have done better to leave the work till next morning. But no. There was a good reason why they should set about it at once; and that was, that they might not be able to complete it in time if they did not do part of it that night.

It would be no slight undertaking to dig a pit of proper size, for they would require one that would at least hold half-a-dozen quaggas at a time. Then there was the carrying away the earth that should come out of it, the cutting the poles and branches to cover it, and the placing of these in a proper manner.

To do all these things would take up a great deal of time; and they must be all done against the return of the quaggas, else the whole scheme would be a failure. Should the animals arrive upon the ground before the pit was covered in and all traces of the work removed, they would make off without entering the water, and perhaps never visit that vley again.

Such were the conjectures of the field-cornet. Hans, Hendrik, and Swartboy, acknowledged their justice. All saw the necessity of going to work at once, and to work they all went.

Fortunately among the “implements,” were two good spades, a shovel, and a pick-axe, and all of them could be busy at the same time. There were baskets in which the dirt could be carried off, and thrown into the deep channel close by, where it would not be seen. This was also a fortunate circumstance; for to have carried the stuff any great distance, would have made the job still heavier, and more difficult to execute in proper time.

Having marked the outlines of the pit, they went to work with spade, shovel, and pick. The
434 ground proved tolerably loose, and the pick was but little needed. The field-cornet himself handled one of the spades Hendrik the other, while Swartboy acted as shoveller, and filled the baskets as fast as Hans and Totty, assisted by Trüey and little Jan, could empty them. These last carried a small basket of their own, and contributed very materially to the progress of the work, by lightening the labours of Hans and Totty.

And so the work went merrily on until midnight, and even after that hour, under the light of a full moon; by which time the diggers were buried to their necks.

But they were now fatigued. They knew they could easily complete the pit next day; and so they laid down their implements, and after performing their ablutions in the crystal water of the stream, retired to their sleeping-quarters in the tree.

By early dawn they were at it again, busy as bees; and the pit progressed so rapidly that before they stopped to take breakfast, Von Bloom could scarce see out of it standing on his toes, and the crown of Swartboy's woolly head was nearly two feet below the surface. A little more digging would do.

After breakfast they went to work as briskly as ever; and laboured away until they considered that the hole was sunk to a sufficient depth. It would have taken a springbok to have leaped out of it; and no quagga could possibly have cleared itself from such a pit.

Poles and bushes were now cut; and the pit was neatly covered with these, and strewed over, as well as a large tract of the adjoining ground, with rushes and grass. The most sagacious animal would have been deceived by the appearance; even a fox could not have discovered the trap before tumbling into it.

They had completed the work before going to dinner,—which, consequently, fell late on that

day—so nothing more remained to be done but to dine, and await the coming of the quaggas.

At dinner they were all very merry, notwithstanding the immense fatigue they had gone through. The prospect of capturing the quaggas was very exciting, and kept the party in high spirits.

Each offered a prognostication as to the result. Some said they would trap three quaggas at the least; while others were more sanguine, and believed they might take twice that number. Jan did not see why the pit should not be full; and Hendrik thought this probable enough—considering the way they intended to drive the quaggas into it.

It certainly seemed so. The pit had been made of sufficient width to preclude the possibility of the animals leaping over it, while it was dug lengthwise across the path, so that they could not miss it. The lay of the ground would guide them directly into it.

It is true that, were they to be left to themselves, and permitted to follow their usual method of marching—that is, in single file—only one, the leader, might be caught. The rest, seeing him fall in, would be sure to wheel round, and gallop off in a different direction.

But it was not the intention of the hunters to leave things thus. They had planned a way by which the quaggas, at a certain moment, would be thrown into a complete panic, and thus forced pell-mell upon the pit. In this lay their hopes of securing a large number of the animals.

Four was as many as were wanted. One for each of the hunters. Four would do; but of course it
435 mattered not how many more got into the pit. The more the better, as a large number would give them the advantage of “pick and choose.”

Dinner over, the hunters set about preparing for the reception of their expected visitors. As already stated, the dinner had been later than usual; and it was now near the hour when the quaggas might be looked for.

In order to be in time, each took his station. Hans, Hendrik, and Swartboy, placed themselves in ambush around the lake—at intervals from one another; but the lower end, where the animals usually approached and went out, was left quite open. Von Bloom remained on the platform in the tree, so as to mark the approach of the quaggas, and give warning by a signal to the other three. The positions taken by these were such, that they could guide the herd in the direction of the pit, by merely coming out of the bushes where they lay concealed. In order that they should show themselves simultaneously, and at the proper moment, they were to wait for a signal from the tree. This was to be the firing of the great “roer,” loaded blank. Hans and Hendrik were also to fire blank shots on discovering themselves, and by this means the desired panic would be produced.

The whole scheme was well contrived, and succeeded admirably. The herd appeared filing over the plain, just as on the preceding days. Von Bloom announced their approach to the three in ambush, by repeating in a subdued tone the words,—

“Quaggas are coming!”

The unsuspecting animals filed through the gorge, scattered about in the water, drank their fill, and then commenced retiring by the path on which lay the trap.

The leader having climbed the bank, and seeing the fresh grass and rushes strewed upon the path, uttered a snorting bark, and seemed half inclined to wheel round. But just at that moment boomed the loud detonation of the roer; and, then, like lesser echoes, the reports of the smaller guns on the right and left, while Swartboy shouted at the top pitch of his voice, from another quarter.

A look back showed the quaggas that they were well-nigh surrounded by strange enemies. But one course appeared open to them—the way they were wont to go; and barking with affright, the whole drove dashed up the bank, and crowded on towards the pit.

Then was heard a confused noise—the cracking of the poles—the trampling of many hoofs—the dull sounds of heavy bodies falling together, and mingling in a continuous struggle—and the wild snorting, as the creatures hurried forward in affright. Some were seen springing high in the air, as if to overleap the pit. Others poised themselves on their hind hoofs, and wheeling round, ran back into the lake. Some dashed off through the bushes, and escaped in that way; but the great body of the drove came running back, and plunging through the water, made off by the gorge through which they had come. In a few minutes not one was in sight.

The boys thought they had all escaped; but Von Bloom, from his more elevated position in the tree, could perceive the snouts of several protruding above the edge of the pit.

On arriving at the spot, to their great satisfaction the hunters discovered no less than eight full-grown quaggas in the trap—just twice the number required to mount the party.

436 In less than two weeks from that time, four of the quaggas were broken to the saddle, and perfectly obedient to the bit. Of course there was a good deal of kicking, and plunging, and flinging, and many hard gallops, and some ugly falls, before it came to this; but both the Bushman Swartboy and the Bush-boy Hendrik were expert in the *manège* of horses, and soon tamed the quaggas to a proper degree of docility.

Upon the very first occasion when these animals were used in the hunt of the elephant, they rendered the very service expected of them. The elephant, as usual, bolted after receiving the first shot; but the hunters on “quagga-back” were enabled to keep him in sight, and follow rapidly upon his heels. As soon as the elephant discovered that, run as he would, his pursuers had the power of overtaking him, he disdained to fly farther, and stood to bay; thus giving them the opportunity of delivering shot after shot, until a mortal wound brought his huge body to the earth.

Von Bloom was delighted. His hopes were high, his benignant star was once more in the ascendant.

He would yet accomplish his design. He would yet be rich. A few years, would enable him to build up his fortune—to construct a pyramid of ivory!

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CHAPTER XXXVIII.

DRIVING IN THE ELAND.

Of all the family Hendrik was the hunter *par excellence*. It was he who habitually stored the larder; and upon days when they were not engaged in the chase of the elephant, Hendrik would be abroad alone in pursuit of antelopes, and other creatures, that furnished their usual subsistence. Hendrik kept the table well supplied.

Antelopes are the principal game of South Africa—for Africa is the country of the antelope above all others. You may be surprised to hear that there are seventy different species of antelopes over all the earth—that more than fifty of these are African, and that thirty at least belong to South Africa—that is, the portion of the continent lying between the Cape of Good Hope and the Tropic of Capricorn.

It would require the space of a whole book, therefore, to give a fair account—a monograph—of the antelopes alone; and I cannot afford that space here. At present I can only say that Africa is the great antelope country, although many fine species exist also in Asia—that in America there is but one kind, the prong-horn, with which you are already well acquainted—and that in Europe there are two, though one of these, the well-known “chamois,” is as much goat as antelope.

I shall farther remark, that the seventy species of animals, by naturalists classed as antelopes, differ widely from one another in form, size, colour, pelage, habits; in short, in so many respects, that their classification under the name of Antelope is very arbitrary indeed. Some approximate closely to the goat tribe; others are more like deer; some resemble oxen; others are closely allied to the buffalo; while a few species possess many of the characteristics of wild sheep!

As a general thing, however, they are more like to deer than any other animals; and many species of them are, in common parlance, called deer. Indeed, many antelopes are more like to certain species of deer than to others of their own kind. The chief distinction noted between them and the deer is, that the antelopes have horny horns, that are persistent or permanent, while those of the deer are osseous or bony, and are annually cast.

Like the deer the different species of antelopes possess very different habits. Some frequent the wide open plains; some the deep forest; some wander by the shady banks of streams; while others love to dwell upon the rocky steep, or the dry ravines of the mountains. Some browse upon the grass; while others, goat-like, prefer the leaves and tender twigs of trees. In fact, so different are these creatures in habits, that whatever be the natural character of a district of country, it will be found the favourite home of one or more species. Even the very desert has its antelopes, that prefer the parched and waterless plain to the most fertile and verdant valley.

Of all antelopes the “eland,” or “caana” is the largest. It measures full seventeen hands at the shoulder—being thus equal in height to a very large horse. A large eland weighs one thousand pounds. It is a heavily formed animal, and an indifferent runner, as a mounted hunter can gallop up to one without effort. Its general proportions are not unlike those of a common ox, but its horns are straight and rise vertically from the crown, diverging only slightly from one another. These are two feet in length, and marked by a ridge that passes spirally around them nearly to the tips. The horns of the female are longer than those of the male.

The eyes of the eland, like those of most antelopes, are large, bright, and melting, without any expression of fierceness; and the animal, though so very large and strong, is of the most innocuous disposition—showing fight only when driven to desperation.

The general colour of this antelope is dun, with a rufous tinge. Sometimes ashy grey touched with ochre is the prevailing hue.

The eland is one of those antelopes that appear to be independent of water. It is met with upon the desert plains, far from either spring or stream; and it even seems to prefer such situations—perhaps from the greater security it finds there—though it is also a denizen of the fertile and

wooded districts. It is gregarious, the sexes herding separately, and in groups of from ten to a hundred individuals.

The flesh of the eland is highly esteemed, and does not yield in delicacy to that of any of the antelope, deer, or bovine tribes. It has been compared to tender beef with a game flavour; and the muscles of the thighs when cured and dried produce a *bonne bouche*, known under the odd appellation of “thigh-tongues.”

Of course the eland affording such excellent meat, and in so large a quantity, is zealously hunted for his spoils. Being only a poor runner and always very fat, the hunt is usually a short one; and ends in the eland being shot down, skinned, and cut up. There is no great excitement about this chase, except that it is not every day an eland can be started. The ease with which they can be captured, as well as the value of their venison, has led to the thinning off of these antelopes; and it is only in remote districts where a herd of them can be found.

438 Now since their arrival, no elands had been seen, though now and then their spoor was observed; and Hendrik, for several reasons, was very desirous of getting one. He had never shot an eland in his life—that was one reason—and another was, that he wished to procure a supply of the fine venison which lies in such quantities over the ribs of these animals.

It was, therefore, with great delight, that Hendrik one morning received the report that a herd of elands had been seen upon the upper plain, and not far off. Swartboy, who had been upon the cliffs, brought this report to camp.

Without losing any more time than sufficed to get the direction from Swartboy, Hendrik mounted his quagga, shouldered his rifle, and rode off in search of the herd.

Not far from the camp there was an easy pass, leading up the cliff to the plain above. It was a sort of gorge or ravine; and from the numerous tracks of animals in its bottom, it was evidently much used as a road from the upper plain to that in which were the spring and stream. Certain animals, such as the zebras and quaggas, and others that frequent the dry desert plains from preference, were in the habit of coming by this path when they required water.

Up the gorge rode Hendrik; and no sooner had he arrived at its top, than he discovered the herd of elands—seven old bulls—about a mile off upon the upper plain.

There was not cover enough to have sheltered a fox. The only growth near the spot where the elands were, consisted of straggling aloe plants, euphorbias, with some stunted bushes, and tufts of dry grass, characteristic of the desert. There was no clump large enough to have sheltered a hunter from the eye of his game; and Hendrik at once came to the conclusion, that the elands could not be “stalked” in the situation they then occupied.

Now, though Hendrik had never hunted this antelope, he was well acquainted with its habits, and knew how it ought to be chased. He knew that it was a bad runner; that any old horse could bring up with it; and that his quagga—the fastest of the four that had been tamed—could do the same.

It was only a question of “start,” therefore. Could he get near enough the bulls to have a fair start, he would run one of them down to a certainty. The result might be different should the elands take the alarm at a long distance off, and scour away over the plain.

To get within fair starting distance, that was the point to be attempted.

But Hendrik was a wary hunter, and soon accomplished this. Instead of riding direct for the elands, he made a grand circuit—until he had got the herd between him and the cliff—and then, heading his quagga for them, he rode quietly forward.

He did not sit erect in the saddle, but held himself bent down, until his breast almost touched the withers of the quagga. This he did to deceive the elands, who would otherwise have recognised him as an enemy. In such a fashion they could not make out what kind of creature was coming towards them; but stood for a long while gazing at Hendrik and his quagga with feelings of curiosity, and of course some little alarm.

They, however, permitted the hunter to get within five hundred yards distance—near enough
439 for him—before they broke off in their heavy lumbering gallop.

Hendrik now rose in his saddle, put spurs to his quagga, and followed the herd at full speed.

As he had designed, so it came to pass. The elands ran straight in the direction of the cliff—not where the pass was, but where there was none—and, on reaching the precipice, were of course forced to turn into a new direction, transverse to their former one. This gave Hendrik the advantage, who, heading his quagga diagonally, was soon upon the heels of the herd.

It was Hendrik's intention to single out one of the bulls, and run him down—leaving the others to gallop off wherever they wished.

His intention was carried out; for shortly after, the fattest of the bulls shot to one side, as if to escape in that way, while the rest ran on.

The bull was not so cunning as he thought himself. Hendrik's eye was upon him; and in a moment the quagga was turned upon his track.

Another burst carried both game and pursuer nearly a mile across the plain. The eland had turned from a rufous dun colour to that of a leaden blue; the saliva fell from his lips in long streamers, foam dappled his broad chest, the tears rolled out of his big eyes, and his gallop became changed to a weary trot. He was evidently “blown.”

In a few minutes more the quagga was close upon his heels; and then the huge antelope, seeing that farther running could not serve him, halted in despair, and faced round towards his pursuer.

Now Hendrik had his loaded rifle in his hand, and you expect to hear that he instantly raised it to his shoulder, took aim, fired, and brought down the eland.

I must disappoint you, then, by telling you that he did no such thing.

Hendrik was a real hunter—neither rash nor wasteful of his resources. He knew a better plan than to kill the eland upon the spot. He knew that the animal was now quite in his power; and that he could drive him wherever he pleased, just like a tame ox. To have killed the creature on the spot would have been a waste of powder and shot. More than that, it would have rendered necessary all the trouble of transporting its flesh to camp—a double journey at least—and with the risk of the hyenas eating up most of it in his absence. Whereas he could save all this trouble by driving the eland to camp; and this was his design.

Without firing a shot, therefore, he galloped on past the blown bull, headed him, turned him round, and then drove him before him in the direction of the cliff.

The bull could make neither resistance nor opposition. Now and again he would turn and trot off in a contrary direction; but he was easily headed again, and at length forced forward to the top of the pass.

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CHAPTER XXXIX.

A WILD RIDE ON QUAGGA-BACK.

Hendrik was congratulating himself on his success. He anticipated some pleasure in the surprise he was about to create at camp, when he should march in with the eland—for he had no doubt that he would succeed in doing so.

Indeed, there appeared no reason to doubt it. The bull had already entered the gorge, and was moving down it, while Hendrik and his quagga were hurrying forward to follow.

The hunter had arrived within a few yards of the top, when a loud trampling noise sounded in his ears, as if a band of heavy-footed animals were coming up the gorge.

He spurred his quagga forward, in order to reach the edge, and get a view down the ravine. Before he was able to do so, he was surprised to see the eland gallop up again, and try to pass him upon the plain. It had evidently received fresh alarm, from something in the gorge; and preferred facing its old enemy to encountering the new.

Hendrik did not give his attention to the eland. He could ride it down at any time. He was more anxious first to know what had given it the start backward; so he continued to press forward to the head of the ravine.

He might have thought of lions, and acted with greater prudence; but the trampling of hoofs which still echoed up the pass told him that lions were not the cause of the eland's alarm.

He at length reached a point where he could see down the declivity. He had not far to look—for already the animals that were making the noise were close up to him; and he perceived they were nothing more than a troop of quaggas.

He was not over-pleased at this interruption to his drive; and the less did he like it, that the intruders were quaggas—ill-conditioned brutes that they were! Had they been game animals, he would have shot one; but the only motive that would have induced him to shoot one of the quaggas would have been a feeling of anger—for, at that moment, he was really angry at them.

Without knowing it, poor brutes! they had likely given him cause for a good deal of trouble: for it would cost him a good deal, before he could head the eland again, and get it back into the pass. No wonder, then, he was vexed a little.

But his vexation was not so grievous as to cause him to fire upon the approaching herd; and, turning aside, he rode after the eland.

He had hardly left the spot, when the quaggas came out of the pass, following each other to the number of forty or fifty. Each, as he saw the mounted hunter, started with affright, and bolted off, until the whole drove stretched out in a long line over the plain, snorting and uttering their loud “coua-a-g” as they ran.

Hendrik would hardly have regarded this movement under ordinary circumstances. He had often seen herds of quaggas, and was in no way curious about them. But his attention was drawn to this herd, from his noticing, as they passed him, that four of them had their tails docked short; and from this circumstance, he recognised them as the four that had been caught in the pit-trap and afterwards set free. Swartboy, for some purpose of his own, had cut off the hair before letting them go.

Hendrik had no doubt it was they, and that the herd was the same that used to frequent the vley, but that on account of the ill-treatment they had met with, had never since shown themselves in the neighbourhood.

Now these circumstances coming into Hendrik's mind at the moment, led him to regard the
441 quaggas with a certain feeling of curiosity. The sudden fright which the animals took on seeing him, and the comic appearance of the four with the stumped tails, rather inclined Hendrik towards merriment, and he laughed as he galloped along.

As the quaggas went off in the same direction which the eland had taken, of course Hendrik's road and theirs lay so far together; and on galloped he at their heels. He was curious to try the point—much disputed in regard to horses—how far a mounted quagga would be able to cope with an unmounted one. He was curious moreover, to find out whether his own quagga was quite equal to any of its old companions. So on swept the chase, the eland leading, the quaggas after, and Hendrik bringing up the rear.

Hendrik had no need to ply the spur. His gallant steed flew like the wind. He seemed to feel that his character was staked upon the race. He gained upon the drove at every spring.

The heavy-going eland was soon overtaken, and as it trotted to one side, was passed. It halted, but the quaggas kept on.

Not only the drove kept on, but Hendrik's quagga following close at their heels; and in less than five minutes they had left the eland a full mile in their rear, and were still scouring onward over the wide plain.

What was Hendrik about? Was he going to forsake the eland, and let it escape? Had he grown so interested in the race? Was he jealous about his quagga's speed, and determined it should beat all the others?

So it would have appeared to any one witnessing the race from a distance. But one who could have had a nearer view of it, would have given a different explanation of Hendrik's conduct.

The fact was, that as soon as the eland halted, Hendrik intended to halt also; and for that purpose pulled strongly upon his bridle. But, to his astonishment, he found that his quagga did not share his intention. Instead of obeying the bit, the animal caught the steel in his teeth, and laying his ears back, galloped straight on!

Hendrik then endeavoured to turn the quagga to one side, and for this purpose wrenched his right rein; but with such fierceness, that the old bit-ring gave way—the bit slipped through the animal's jaws—the head-stall came off with the jerk—and the quagga was completely unbridled!

Of course the animal was now free to go just as he liked; and it was plain that he liked to go with his old comrades. His old comrades he well knew them to be, as his snorting and occasional neigh of recognition testified.

At first Hendrik was disposed to look upon the breaking of his bit as only a slight misfortune. For a boy he was one of the best riders in South Africa, and needed no rein to steady him. He could keep his seat without one. The quagga would soon stop, and he could then repair the bit, and re-adjust the bridle which he still held in his hands. Such were his reflections at first.

But their spirit began to alter, when he found that the quagga, instead of lessening his pace, kept on as hard as ever, and the herd still ran wildly before him without showing the slightest signs of coming to a halt.

In fact, the quaggas were running through fear. They saw the mounted hunter behind them in
442 hot pursuit; and although their old comrade knew who they were, how were they to tell what he was, with such a tall hunch upon his back? No quagga he, but some terrible monster, they imagined, thirsting for their lives, and eager to devour one and all of them!

No wonder they showed their heels in the best style they knew how; and so well did they show them, that Hendrik's quagga—notwithstanding his keen desire to get forward among them, and explain away the awkward business upon his back—was not able to come an inch closer.

He did not lose ground, however. His eagerness to regain his old associates—to partake once more of their wild freedom—for he was desperately tired of civilised society, and sick of elephant-hunting—all these ideas crowded into his mind at the moment, and nerved him to the utmost exertion. Could he only get up into the body of the crowd—for the herd now ran in a crowd—a few whimpers would suffice to explain—they would come to a halt at once,—they would gather around him, and assist both with hoofs and teeth to get “shed” of the ugly two-legged thing that clung so tightly to his dorsal vertebræ.

It was “no go,” however. Although he was so close to their heels, that they flung dust in his face, and small pebbles in the face of his rider, to the no slight inconvenience of the latter;

although he “whighered” whenever he could spare breath, and uttered his “couag,—couag!” in reality calling them by name, it was “no go.” They would not stay. They would not hear.

And what did Hendrik during all this time? Nothing—he could do nothing. He could not stay the impetuous flight of his steed. He dared not dismount. He would have been hurled among sharp rocks, had he attempted such a thing. His neck would have been broken. He could do nothing—nothing but keep his seat.

What thought he? At first, not much. At first he regarded the adventure lightly. When he was about completing his third mile, he began to deem it more serious; and as he entered upon the fifth, he became convinced that he was neither more nor less than in a very awkward scrape.

But the fifth mile was left behind, and then a sixth, and a seventh; and still the quaggas galloped wildly on—the drove actuated by the fear of losing their liberty, and their old comrade by the desire of regaining his.

Hendrik now felt real uneasiness. Where were they going? Where was the brute carrying him? Perhaps off to the desert, where he might be lost and perish of hunger or thirst! Already he was many miles from the cliffs, and he could no longer tell their direction. Even had he halted then and there, he could not tell which way to turn himself. He would be lost!

He grew more than anxious. He became frightened in earnest.

What was he to do? Leap down, and risk his neck in the fall? He would lose his quagga and his saddle as well—he regarded the eland as already lost—he would have to walk back to camp, and get laughed at on his return.

No matter for all that; his life was in danger if he kept on. The quaggas might gallop twenty,—aye, fifty miles before halting. They showed no symptoms of being blown—no signs of giving out.
443 He must fling himself to the ground, and let quagga and saddle go.

He had formed this resolution, and was actually about to put it in practice. He was just considering how he might best escape an ugly fall—looking for a soft spot—when, all at once, a grand idea rushed into his mind.

HENDRICK BLINDING THE QUAGGA.

He remembered that in taming this same quagga and breaking him to the saddle, he had been vastly aided by a very simple contrivance—that was a “blind.” The blind was nothing more than a piece of soft leather tied over the animal's eyes; but so complete had been its effect, that it had
444 transformed the quagga at once from a kicking screaming creature into a docile animal.

Hendrik now thought of the blind.

True, he had none. Was there nothing about him that would serve as one? His handkerchief? No, it would be too thin. Hurrah! His jacket would do!

His rifle was in the way. It must be got rid of. It must be dropped to the ground. He could return for it.

It was let down as gently as possible, and soon left far behind.

In a twinkling Hendrik stripped off his jacket. How was it to be arranged so as to blind the quagga? It would not do to drop it.

A moment's consideration served the ready boy to mature his plan. After a moment he bent down, passed a sleeve upon each side under the quagga's throat, and then knotted them together. The jacket thus rested over the animal's mane, with the collar near its withers, and the peak or skirt upon the small of its neck.

Hendrik next leaned as far forward as he could, and with his extended arms pushed the jacket up the animal's neck, until the skirt passed over its ears, and fell down it front of its face.

It was with some difficulty that the rider, bent down as he was, could retain his seat; for as soon as the thick flap of cloth came down over the eyes of the quagga, the latter halted as if he had been shot dead in his tracks. He did not fall, however, but only stood still, quivering with terror. His gallop was at an end!

Hendrik leaped to the ground. He was no longer afraid that the quagga, blinded as he now was, would make any attempt to get off; nor did he.

In a few minutes the broken bit-ring was replaced by a strong rheim of raw leather; the bit inserted between the quagga's teeth, the head-stall safely buckled, and Hendrik once more in the saddle, with his jacket upon his back.

The quagga felt that he was conquered. His old associates were no longer in sight to tempt him from his allegiance; and with these considerations, aided by a slight dose of bit and spur, he turned his head, and moved sullenly upon the back track.

Hendrik knew nothing about the route he should take. He followed back the spoor of the quaggas to the place where he had dropped his gun, which after riding a mile or two he recovered.

As there was no sun in the sky, nor other object to guide him, he thought he could not do better than trace back the spoor; and although it led him by many a devious route, and he saw nothing more of his eland, before night he reached the pass in the cliff, and was soon after sitting under the shadow of the nwana-tree, regaling a most interested audience with the narrative of his day's adventures.

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CHAPTER XL.

THE GUN-TRAP.

It was about this time that the field-cornet and his people were very much annoyed by beasts of prey. The savoury smell which their camp daily sent forth, as well as the remains of antelopes, killed for their venison, attracted these visitors. Hyenas and jackals were constantly skulking in the neighbourhood, and at night came around the great nwana-tree in scores, keeping up their horrid chorus for hours together. It is true that nobody feared these
445 animals, as the children at night were safe in their aërial home, where the hyenas could not get at them. But for all that, the presence of the brutes was very offensive, as not a bit of meat—not a hide, nor rheim, nor any article of leather—could be left below without their getting their teeth upon it, and chewing it up. Quarters of venison they had frequently stolen, and they had eaten up the leathern part of Swartboy's saddle, and rendered it quite useless for a while. In short, so great a pest had the hyenas grown to be, that it became necessary to adopt some mode of destroying them.

It was not easy to get a shot at them. During the day they were wary, and either hid themselves in caves of the cliff or in the burrows of the ant-eater. At night they were bold enough, and came into the very camp; but then the darkness hindered a good aim, and the hunters knew too well the value of powder and lead to waste it on a chance shot, though now and then, when provoked by the brutes, they ventured one.

But some way must be thought of to thin the numbers of these animals, or get rid of them altogether. This was the opinion of everybody.

Two or three kinds of traps were tried, but without much success. A pit they could leap out of, and from a noose they could free themselves by cutting the rope by their sharp teeth!

At length the field-cornet resorted to a plan—much practised by the boers of Southern Africa for ridding their farms of these and similar “vermin.” It was the “gun-trap.”

Now there are several ways of constructing a gun-trap. Of course a gun is the principal part of the mechanism, and the trigger pulled by a string is the main point of the contrivance. In some countries the bait is tied to the string, and the animal on seizing the bait tightens the string, draws the trigger, and shoots itself. In this way, however, there is always some uncertainty as to the result. The animal may not place its body in the proper position with regard to the muzzle, and may either escape the shot altogether, or may be only “creased,” and of course get off.

The mode of setting the “gun-trap” in South Africa is a superior plan; and the creature that is so unfortunate as to draw the trigger rarely escapes, but is either killed upon the spot, or so badly wounded as to prevent its getting away.

Von Bloom constructed his trap after the approved fashion, as follows:—Near the camp he selected a spot where three saplings or young trees grew, standing in a line, and about a yard between each two of them. Had he not found these trees so disposed, stakes firmly driven into the ground would have answered his purpose equally well.

Thorn-bushes were now cut, and a kraal built in the usual manner—that is with the tops of the bushes turned outwards. The size of the kraal was a matter of no consequence; and, of course, to save labour, a small one was constructed.

One point, however, was observed in making the kraal. Its door of opening was placed so that two of the three saplings stood like posts, one on each side of it; and an animal going into the enclosure must needs pass these two trees.

Now for the part the gun had to play.

446 The weapon was placed in a horizontal position against two of the saplings,—that is, the stock against the one outside the kraal, and the barrel against one of the door-posts, and there firmly lashed. In this position the muzzle was close to the edge of the entrance, and pointing directly to the sapling on the opposite side. It was at such a height as to have ranged with the heart of a hyena standing in the opening.

The next move was to adjust the string. Already a piece of stick, several inches in length, had been fixed to the small of the stock, and, of course, behind the trigger. This was fastened transversely, but not so as to preclude all motion. A certain looseness in its adjustment gave it the freedom required to be worked as a lever—for that was its design.

To each end of this little stick was fastened a string. One of these strings was attached to the trigger; the other, after being carried through the thimbles of the ramrod, traversed across the entrance of the kraal, and was knotted upon the opposite side to the sapling that stood there. This string followed the horizontal direction of the barrel, and was just “taut;” so that any farther strain upon it would act upon the little lever, and by that means pull the trigger; and then of course “bang” would go the roer.

When this string was adjusted, and the gun loaded and cocked, the trap was set.

Nothing remained to be done but bait it. This was not a difficult task. It consisted simply in placing a piece of meat or carcass within the enclosure, and there leaving it to attract the prowling beasts to the spot.

When the gun had been set, Swartboy carried up the bait—the offal of an antelope killed that day—and flung it into the kraal; and then the party went quietly to their beds, without thinking more of the matter.

They had not slept a wink, however, before they were startled by the loud “crack” of the roer, followed by a short stifled cry that told them the gun-trap had done its work.

A torch was procured, and the four hunters proceeded to the spot. There they found the dead body of a huge “tiger-wolf” lying doubled up in the entrance, and right under the muzzle of the gun. He had not gone a step after receiving the shot—in fact, had hardly kicked before dying—as the bullet, wad, and all, had gone quite through his ribs and entered his heart, after making a large ugly hole in his side. Of course he must have been within a few inches of the muzzle, when his breast, pressing against the string, caused the gun to go off.

Having again loaded the roer, the hunters returned to their beds. One might suppose they would have dragged the suicidal hyena away from the spot, lest his carcass should serve as a warning to his comrades, and keep them away from the trap. But Swartboy knew better than that. Instead of being scared by the dead body of one of their kind, the hyenas only regard it as proper prey, and will devour it as they would the remains of a tender antelope!

Knowing this, Swartboy did not take the dead hyena away, but only drew it within the kraal to serve as a farther inducement for the others to attempt an entrance there.

Before morning they were once more awakened by the “bang” of the great gun. This time they
447 lay still; but when day broke they visited their trap, and found that a second hyena had too rashly pressed his bosom against the fatal string.

Night after night they continued their warfare against the hyenas, changing the trap-kraal to different localities in the surrounding neighbourhood.

At length these creatures were nearly exterminated, or, at all events, became so rare and shy, that their presence by the camp was no longer an annoyance one way or the other.

About this time, however, there appeared another set of visitors, whose presence was far more to be dreaded, and whose destruction the hunters were more anxious to accomplish. That was a family of lions.

The spoor of these had been often seen in the neighbourhood; but it was some time before they began to frequent the camp. However, about the time the hyenas had been fairly got rid of, the lions took their place, and came every night, roaring about the camp in a most terrific manner. Dreadful as these sounds were, the people were not so much afraid of them as one might imagine. They well knew that the lions could not get at them in the tree. Had it been leopards they might have felt less secure, as the latter are true tree-climbers; but they had seen no leopards in that country, and did not think of them.

They were not altogether without fear of the lions, however. They were annoyed, moreover, that they could not with safety descend from the tree after nightfall, but were every night

besieged from sunset till morning. Besides, although the cow and the quaggas were shut in strong kraals, they dreaded each night that the lions would make a seizure of one or other of these animals; and the loss of any one of them, but especially their valuable friend “old Graaf,” would have been a very serious misfortune.

It was resolved, therefore, to try the gun-trap upon the lions, as it had succeeded so well with the hyenas.

There was no difference in the construction or contrivance of the trap. The gun only had to be placed upon a higher level, so that its muzzle might be opposite the lion's heart, and the proper range was easily obtained. The bait, however, was not carcass, but an animal freshly killed; and for this purpose an antelope was procured.

The result was as desired. On the first night the old male lion “breasted” the fatal string and bit the dust. Next night the lioness was destroyed in a similar way: and shortly after a full-grown young male.

The trap then lay idle for a while; but about a week after a half-grown “cub” was shot near the camp by Hendrik, no doubt the last of that family, as no lions were seen for a long time after.

A great enemy to night plunderers was that same gun-trap.

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CHAPTER XLI.

THE WEAVER-BIRDS.

Now that the beasts of prey had been destroyed, or driven from about the camp, there was no longer any danger in that quarter, and the children could be left by themselves. Totty of course always stayed with them; while the four hunters went forth upon the chase of the
448 elephant—each mounted upon his quagga.

They had done so many a time, and as no harm had happened to the children in their absence, such a course became habitual with them. Jan and Trüey were cautioned not to stray far from the nwana, and always to climb to the tree, should they perceive any animal that might be dangerous. Before the destruction of the hyenas and lions, they had been used to remain altogether in the tree, while the hunters were absent. But this had been quite an imprisonment to them; and now that the danger was not considered much, they were allowed to come down and play upon the grassy plain, or wander along the shore of the little lake.

On one occasion when the hunters were abroad, Trüey had strayed down to the edge of the water. She was alone, if we except the company of the gazelle, which followed at her heels wherever she went. This pretty creature had grown to full size, and had turned out a great beauty, with large round eyes that had a lovely melting expression, like the eyes of Trüey herself.

Well, as I have said, Trüey was alone. Jan was busy near the bottom of the tree, working a new rod into his bird-cage, and Totty was out upon the plain herding “old Graaf”—so Trüey and the pet springbok went strolling along by themselves.

Now Trüey had not gone down to the water without an object. She had one. She had gone to give her pet a drink, and collect some blue lilies for a bouquet. All this she had done, and still continued to walk along the shore.

On one side of the lake, and that the farthest from the nwana-tree, a low spit of land projected into the water. It had once been but a sand-bar, but grass had grown upon it, until a green turf was formed. There was not over a square perch of it altogether, but it was not square in shape. On the contrary, it was of oval form, and much narrower nearest the land, where it formed a neck, or isthmus, not more than three feet in width. It was, in short, a miniature peninsula, which by a very little work with the spade could have been converted into a miniature island—had that been desired.

Now there is nothing very remarkable about a little peninsula projecting into a lake. In nearly every lake such a thing may be seen. But about this one there was something remarkable.

Upon its extreme end grew a tree of singular form and foliage. It was not a large tree, and its branches drooped downwards until their tips almost touched the water. The pendulous boughs, and long lanceolate silvery leaves, rendered it easy to tell what sort of tree it was. It was the weeping or Babylonian willow—so called, because it was upon trees of this species that the captive Jews hung their harps when they “sat and wept by the streams of Babel.” This beautiful tree casts its waving shadow over the streams of South Africa, as well as those of Assyria; and often is the eye of the traveller gladdened by the sight of its silvery leaves, as he beholds them—sure indications of water—shining afar over the parched and thirsty desert. If a Christian, he fails not to remember that highly poetical passage of sacred writing, that speaks of the willow of Babylon.

Now the one which grew upon the little peninsula had all these points of interest for little Trüey—but it had others as well. Upon its branches that overhung the water a very singular
449 appearance presented itself. Upon these was suspended—one upon the end of each branch—a number of odd shaped objects, that hung drooping down until their lower ends nearly rested upon the surface of the water. These objects, as stated, were of a peculiar shape. At the upper ends—where they were attached to the branches—they were globe-shaped, but the lower part consisted of a long cylinder of much smaller diameter, and at the bottom of this cylinder was the entrance. They bore some resemblance to salad-oil bottles inverted, with their necks considerably lengthened; or they might be compared to the glass retorts seen in the laboratory of the chemist.

They were each twelve or fifteen inches in length, and of a greenish colour—nearly as green as the leaves of the tree itself. Were they its fruit?

No. The weeping willow bears no fruit of that size. They were not fruit. They were nests of birds!

Yes; they were the nests of a colony of harmless finches of the genus *Ploceus*,—better known to you under the appellation of “weaver-birds.”

I am sure you have heard of weaver-birds before this; and you know that these creatures are so called on account of the skill which they exhibit in the construction of their nests. They do not build nests, as other birds, but actually weave them, in a most ingenious manner.

You are not to suppose that there is but one species of weaver-bird—one kind alone that forms these curious nests. In Africa—which is the principal home of these birds—there are many different kinds, forming different genera, whose hard names I shall not trouble you with. Each of these different kinds builds a nest of peculiar shape, and each chooses a material different from the others. Some, as the *Ploceus icterocephalus*, make their nests of a kidney shape, with the entrance upon the sides, and the latter not circular, but like an arched doorway. Others of the genus *Plocepasser* weave their nests in such a manner, that the thick ends of the stalks stick out all around the outside, giving them the appearance of suspended hedgehogs; while the birds of another genus closely allied to the latter, construct their nests of slender twigs, leaving the ends of these to project in a similar manner. The “social grosbeak” fabricates a republic of nests in one clump, and all under one roof. The entrances are in the under-surface of this mass, which, occupying the whole top of a tree, has the appearance of a haystack, or a dense piece of thatch.

All these weaver-birds, though of different genera, bear a considerable resemblance to each other in their habits. They are usually granivorous, though some are insectivorous; and one species, the “red-billed weaver bird” is a parasite of the wild buffaloes.

It is a mistake to suppose that weaver-birds are only found in Africa and the Old World, as stated in the works of many naturalists. In tropical America, birds of this character are found in many species of the genera *Cassicus* and *Icterus*, who weave pensile nests of a similar kind upon the trees of the Amazon and Orinoco. But the true weaver-birds—that is to say, those which are considered the type of the class,—are those of the genus *Ploceus*; and it was a species of this genus that had hung their pendulous habitations upon the weeping willow. They were of the
450 species known as the “pensile weaver-bird.”

There were full twenty of their nests in all, shaped as already described, and of green colour—for the tough “Bushman's grass,” out of which they had been woven, had not yet lost its verdant hue, nor would it for a long time. Being of this colour, they actually looked like something that grew upon the tree,—like great pear-shaped fruits. No doubt from this source have been derived the tales of ancient travellers, who represented that in Africa were trees with fruits upon them, which, upon being broken open, disclosed to view either living birds or their eggs! Now the sight of the weaver-birds, and their nests, was nothing new to Trüey. It was some time since the colony had established itself upon the willow-tree, and she and they had grown well acquainted. She had often visited the birds, had collected seeds, and carried them down to the tree; and there was not one of the whole colony that would not have perched upon her wrist or her pretty white shoulders, or hopped about over her fair locks, without fear. It was nothing unusual to her to see the pretty creatures playing about the branches, or entering the long vertical tunnels that led upward to their nests—nothing unusual for Trüey to listen for hours to their sweet twittering, or watch their love-gambols around the borders of the vley.

She was not thinking of them at the moment, but of something else, perhaps of the blue water-lilies—perhaps of the springbok—but certainly not of them, as she tripped gaily along the edge of the lake.

Her attention, however, was suddenly attracted to the birds.

All at once, and without any apparent cause, they commenced screaming and fluttering around the tree, their cries and gestures betokening a high state of excitement or alarm.

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CHAPTER XLII.

"What can be the matter with my pretty birds?" asked Trüey of herself. "Something wrong surely! I see no hawk. Perhaps they are fighting among themselves. I shall go round and see. I shall soon pacify them."

And so saying she mended her pace; and passing round the end of the lake, walked out upon the peninsula until she stood under the willow.

There was no underwood. The tree stood alone upon the very end of the spit of land, and Trüey went close in to its trunk. Here she stopped and looked up among the branches, to ascertain what was causing so much excitement among the birds.

As she approached, several of the little creatures had flown towards her, and alighted upon her arms and shoulders; but not as was their wont when desiring to be fed. They appeared to be in a state of alarm, and had come to her for protection.

Some enemy certainly must be near, thought Trüey, though she could see none.

She looked around and above. There were no hawks in the air, nor on the neighbouring trees,—no birds of prey of any kind. Had there been one in the willow, she could easily have seen it, as
451 the foliage was light and thin; besides a hawk would not have remained in the tree with her standing so near. What, then, caused the trouble among the birds? what was still causing it—for they were as noisy and terrified as ever? Ha! At last the enemy appears—at last Trüey's eyes have fallen upon the monster who has disturbed the peaceful colony of weavers, and roused them to such a pitch of excitement.

Slowly gliding along a horizontal branch, grasping the limb in its many spiral folds, appeared the body of a large serpent. Its scales glittered as it moved, and it was the shining of these that had caught Trüey's eyes, and directed them upon the hideous reptile.

When she first saw it, it was gliding spirally along one of the horizontal branches of the willow, and coming, as it were, from the nests of the birds. Her eyes, however, had scarce rested upon it, before its long slippery body passed from the branch, and the next moment it was crawling head-foremost down the main trunk of the tree.

Trüey had scarce time to start back, before its head was opposite the spot where she had stood. No doubt, had she kept her place she would have been bitten by the serpent at once; for the reptile, on reaching that point, detached its head from the tree, spread its jaws wide open, projected its forked tongue, and hissed horribly. It was evidently enraged—partly because it had failed in its plundering intentions, not having been able to reach the nests of the birds,—and partly that the latter had repeatedly struck it with their beaks—no doubt causing it considerable pain. It was further provoked by the arrival of Trüey, in whom it recognised the rescuer of its intended victims.

Whatever were its thoughts at that moment, it was evidently in a rage—as the motion of its head and the flashing of its eyes testified; and it would have sprung upon any creature that had unfortunately come its way.

Trüey, however, had no intention of getting in its way if she could avoid it. It might be a harmless serpent for all she knew; but a snake, nearly six feet in length, whether it be harmless or venomous, is a terrible object to be near; and Trüey had instinctively glided to one side, and stood off from it as far as the water would allow her.

She would have run back over the narrow isthmus; but something told her that the snake was about to take that direction, and might overtake her; and this thought induced her to pass to one side of the peninsula, in hopes the reptile would follow the path that led out to the mainland.

Having got close to the water's edge, she stood gazing upon the hideous form, and trembled as she gazed.

Had Trüey known the character of that reptile, she would have trembled all the more. She saw before her one of the most venomous of serpents, the black naja, or "spitting-snake"—the cobra of Africa—far more dangerous than its congener the *cobra de capello* of India, because far more active in its movements, and equally fatal in its bite.

Trüey knew not this. She only knew that there was a great ugly snake, nearly twice her own length, with a large open mouth, and glistening tongue, apparently ready to eat her up. That was fearful enough for her, poor thing! and she gazed and trembled, and trembled and gazed again.

Angry as the cobra appeared, it did not turn aside to attack her. Neither did it remain by the
452 tree. After uttering its long loud hiss, it descended to the ground, and glided rapidly off.

It made directly for the isthmus, as if intending to pass it, and retreat to some bushes that grew at a distance off on the mainland.

Trüey was in hopes that such was its design, and was just beginning to feel safe again, when, all at once, the snake coiled itself upon the narrow neck of land, as if it intended to stay there.

It had executed this manœuvre so suddenly, and so apparently without premeditation, that

Trüey looked to discover the cause. The moment before, it was gliding along in rapid retreat, its glistening form stretched to its full length along the earth. The next instant it had assumed the appearance of a coiled cable, over the edge of which projected its fierce head, with the scaly skin of its neck broadly extended, into that hood-like form which characterises the cobra.

Trüey, we have said, looked for the cause of this sudden change in the tactics of the reptile. She learnt it at the first glance.

There stretched a piece of smooth sloping ground from the edge of the lake back into the plain. By this the little peninsula was approached. As she glanced outward, she saw the springbok advancing down this slope. It was the approach of the antelope that had interrupted the retreat of the serpent!

Trüey, on first discovering the snake, had uttered a cry of alarm. This cry had summoned her pet—that had lingered behind browsing upon the grass—and it was now bounding forward, with its white tail erect, and its large brown eyes glistening with an expression of inquiry.

It saw its mistress out upon the peninsula. Had she called it? Why had she uttered that strange cry? They were not sounds of joyful import it had heard. Was anything amiss? Yonder she stood. It would gallop to her and see what was wanted; and with such thoughts passing through its brain, the bright little creature bounded down the bank towards the edge of the lake.

Trüey trembled for her pet. Another spring, and it would be upon the lurking serpent—another ——“Ha! it is safe!”

These words escaped from the lips of the young girl, as she saw the springbok rise high in the air, and leap far and clear over the coiled reptile. The antelope had observed the snake in time, and saved itself by one of those tremendous bounds, such as only a springbok can make. The fond creature, having passed the danger, now ran on to its mistress, and stood with its big shining eyes bent upon her inquiringly.

But the cry that Trüey had uttered had summoned another individual. To her horror, she now saw little Jan running down the slope, and coming directly upon the path where the cobra lay coiled!

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CHAPTER XLIII.

THE SERPENT-EATER.

Jan's danger was imminent. He was rushing impetuously forward upon the coiled serpent. He knew not that it was before him. No warning would reach him in time to stay his haste. In another moment he would be on the narrow path, and then no power could save him from the deadly bite. It would be impossible for him to leap aside or over the reptile, as the antelope had done; for even then Trüey had noticed that the cobra had darted its long neck several feet upwards. It would be certain to reach little Jan, perhaps coil itself around him. Jan would be lost.

For some moments Trüey was speechless. Terror had robbed her of the power of speech. She could only scream, and fling her arms wildly about.

But these demonstrations, instead of warning Jan of the danger, only rendered it the more certain. He connected the cries which Trüey now uttered with that which had first summoned him. She was in some trouble—he knew not what; but as she continued to scream, he believed that something had attacked her. A snake he thought it might be; but whatever it was, his first impulse was to hurry up to her rescue. He could do no good until close to her; and, therefore, he did not think of halting until he should reach the spot where she stood.

Her screams, therefore, and the wild gestures that accompanied them, only caused him to run the faster; and as his eyes were bent anxiously on Trüey, there was not the slightest hope that he would perceive the serpent until he had either trodden upon it, or felt its fatal bite.

Trüey uttered one last cry of warning, pronouncing at the same time the words:—

“O, brother! back! The snake! the snake!”

The words were uttered in vain. Jan heard them, but did not comprehend their meaning. He heard the word “snake.” He was expecting as much. It had attacked Trüey; and although he did not see it, it was no doubt wound about her body. He hurried on.

Already he was within six paces of the dread reptile, that had erected its long spread neck to receive him. Another moment, and its envenomed fangs would pierce deep into his flesh.

With a despairing scream Trüey rushed forward. She hoped to attract the monster upon herself. She would risk her own life to save that of her brother!

She had got within six feet of the threatening reptile. Jan was about the same distance from it

on the opposite side. They were equally in peril; and one or the other—perhaps both—would have fallen a sacrifice to the deadly cobra; but at that moment their saviour was nigh. A dark shadow passed under their eyes—in their ears was a rushing sound like the “whish” of a falling body—and at the same instant a large bird darted down between them!

It did not stay to alight. For a moment its strong broad wings agitated the air in their faces; but the next moment the bird made a sudden effort, and rose vertically upwards.

Trüey's eyes fell upon the ground. The cobra was no longer there.

With an exclamation of joy she sprang forward, and, throwing her arms around Jan, cried out,—

“We are saved, brother!—we are saved!”

Jan was somewhat bewildered. As yet he had seen no snake. He had seen the bird dart down between them; but so adroitly had it seized the cobra and carried it off, that Jan, looking only at Trüey, had not perceived the serpent in its beak. He was bewildered and terrified, for he still fancied that Trüey was in danger.

When he heard her exclaim, “We are saved!” he was bewildered all the more.

“But the snake!” he cried out. “Where is the snake?”

As he put these questions, he kept examining Trüey from head to foot, as if expecting to see a
454 reptile twined around some part of her body.

“The snake, Jan! Did you not see it? It was just there, at our feet; but now—see! yonder it is. The secretary has got it. See! They are fighting! Good bird! I hope it will punish the villain for trying to rob my pretty weavers. That's it, good bird! Give it to him! See, Jan! What a fight!”

“Oh, ah!” said Jan, now comprehending the situation. “Oh, ah! Sure enough, yonder is a snake, and a wopper, too. Ne'er fear, Trüey! Trust my secretary. He'll give the rascal a taste of his claws. There's a lick well put in! Another touch like that, and there won't be much life left in the scaly villain. There again,—wop!”

With these and similar exclamations the two children stood watching the fierce conflict that raged between the bird and the reptile.

Now this bird was a very peculiar one—so much so, that in all the world there is no other of the same kind. In form it resembled a crane, having very long legs, and being about the height and size of a crane. Its head and beak, however, were more like those of an eagle or vulture. It had well-developed wings, armed with spurs, and a very long tail, with the two middle feathers longer than the rest. Its general colour was bluish grey, with a white throat and breast, and a reddish tinge upon the wing-feathers. But, perhaps, the most remarkable thing about the bird was its “crest.” This consisted of a number of long, blackish plumes growing out of its occiput, and extending down the back of its neck nearly to the shoulders. These gave the bird a very peculiar appearance; and the fancied resemblance to a secretary of the olden time with his long quill behind his ear—before steel pens came into fashion—is the reason why the bird has received the very inappropriate name of the “Secretary-bird.”

It is more properly named the “serpent-eater,” and naturalists have given it the title *Gypogeranus*, or “crane-vulture.” It is sometimes also called “the messenger,” from the staid solemn manner of its walk, as it stalks over the plain.

Of all its names that of “serpent-eater” is the best adapted to the character of the bird. It is true there are other birds that kill and eat serpents,—as the “guaco” bird of South America, and many hawks and kites,—but the secretary is the only winged creature that makes reptiles of this class exclusively its prey, and carries on a constant war against them. It is not strictly correct to say that it feeds exclusively upon snakes. It will also eat lizards, tortoises, and even locusts; but snakes are certainly its favourite food, and to obtain these it risks its life in many a deadly encounter with those of a very large kind.

The serpent-eater is an African bird, and is not peculiar to South Africa alone, as it is found in the Gambia country. It is also a native of the Philippine Isles. There is some doubt whether the species of the Philippine Isles is identical with that of Africa. A difference is noted in the plumage, though very slight. The disposition of the crest-plumes differs in the two, and the tail-feathers are differently arranged. In the African species the two middle ones are the longest, while in the serpent-eater of the Philippines it is the two outside feathers that project—giving the bird the appearance of having a “fork” or “swallow” tail. Some points of distinction have also been observed between the South African bird and that of the Gambia.

455 The serpent-eater is, however, a very unique bird; and naturalists, failing to class it with either hawks, eagles, vultures, gallinæ, or cranes, have elevated it, so as to form a distinct tribe, family, genus, and species, of itself.

In South Africa it frequents the great plains and dry karoos, stalking about in search of its prey. It is not gregarious, but lives solitary or in pairs, making its nest in trees,—usually those of a thick thorny species, which renders the nest most difficult of approach. The whole edifice is about three feet in diameter, and resembles the nests of the tree-building eagles. It is usually lined with feathers and down, and two or three eggs are the number deposited for a single

hatching.

The serpent-eater is an excellent runner, and spends more time on foot than on the wing. It is a shy wary bird, yet, notwithstanding, it is most easily domesticated; and it is not uncommon to see them about the houses of the Cape farmers, where they are kept as pets, on account of their usefulness in destroying snakes, lizards, and other vermin. They have been long ago introduced into the French West India Islands, and naturalised there—in order that they should make war upon the dangerous “yellow serpent,” the plague of the plantations in those parts.

Now the bird which had so opportunely appeared between Jan and Trüey, and had no doubt saved one or the other, or both, from the deadly bite of the *spuugh-slang*, was a serpent-eater,—one that had been tamed, and that made its home among the branches of the great nwana-tree. The hunters had found it upon the plain, wounded by some animal,—perhaps a very large snake,—and had brought it home as a curiosity. In time it quite recovered from its wounds; but the kindness it had received, during the period when it was an invalid, was not thrown away upon it. When it recovered the use of its wings, it refused to leave the society of its protectors, but remained habitually in the camp—although it made frequent excursions into the surrounding plains in search of its favourite food. It always, however, returned at night, and roosted among the branches of the great nwana-tree. Of course it was Jan's pet, and Jan was very good to it; but it now repaid all his kindness in saving him from the fangs of the deadly cobra.

The children, having recovered from their alarm, stood watching the singular conflict between serpent and serpent-eater.

On first seizing the reptile, the bird had caught it by the neck in its beak. It might not have accomplished this so readily, had not the attention of the snake been occupied by the children, thus throwing it off its guard.

Having succeeded in seizing the reptile, the bird rose nearly in a vertical direction to a height of many yards, and then opening his beak permitted the serpent to fall to the ground. His object was to stun the latter by the fall; and the more effectually to do this, he would have carried the cobra still higher, had not the latter prevented it by attempting to coil itself around his wings.

Upon letting fall his prey the serpent-eater did not remain in the air. On the contrary, he darted after the falling reptile, and the moment the latter touched the ground, and before it could put itself in an attitude of defence, the bird “pounced” upon it with spread foot, striking it a violent blow near the neck. The snake was still but slightly damaged, and throwing itself into a
456 coil stood upon its defence. Its mouth was open to its widest extent, its tongue protruded, its fangs were erect, and its eyes flashing with rage and poison. A terrible antagonist it appeared, and for a moment the secretary seemed to think so, as he stood on the ground confronting it.

But the bird soon began to advance upon it for a renewal of the attack, though this advance was made in a cautious manner. With the pinions of one of his strong wings spread broadly out for a shield, he approached the reptile sideways, and, when near enough, suddenly wheeled, turning upon his leg as on a pivot, and struck sharply out with his other wing. The blow was delivered with good effect. It reached the head of the snake, and seemed to stun it. Its neck dropped, the coils became loosened. Before it could recover itself it was once more in the beak of the serpent-eater, and trailing through the air.

This time the bird rose to a much greater height than before—as he was not hampered by the writhing of the serpent—and as before suffered the reptile to fall, and then darted suddenly after.

When the snake came to the ground a second time it lay for a moment stretched at full length, as if stunned or dead. It was not dead, however, and would once more have coiled itself; but, before it could do so, the bird had repeatedly pounced upon its neck with his spread and horny feet; and at length, watching his opportunity when the head of the serpent lay flat, he struck a blow with his sharp beak so violent, that it split the skull of the reptile in twain! Life was now extinct, and the hideous form, extended to its full length, lay lithe and motionless upon the grass.

Jan and Trüey clapped their hands, and uttered exclamations of joy.

The serpent-eater took no heed of their demonstrations, but, approaching the dead cobra, bent over it, and coolly set about making his dinner.

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CHAPTER XLIV.

TOTTY AND THE CHACMAS.

Von Bloom and his family had now been months without bread. They were not without a substitute, however, as various roots and nuts supplied them with a change of food. Of the latter, they had the ground or pig-nut, which grows in all parts of Southern Africa, and which forms a staple food of the native inhabitants. For vegetables they had the bulbs of many species of *Ixias* and *Mesembryanthemums*, among others the “Hottentot fig.” They had the

“Caffir bread”—the inside pith of the stems of a species of *Zamia*; and the “Caffir chestnut,” the fruit of the *Brabeium stellatum*; and last, not least, the enormous roots of the “elephant's foot.” They had wild onions and garlic too; and in the white flower-tops of a beautiful floating plant, they found a substitute for asparagus.

All these roots and fruits were to be obtained in the neighbourhood, and no man knew better how to find them, and “crow” them up when found, than did Swartboy the Bushman. Well might he, for in Swartboy's early days he had often been compelled to subsist for weeks, and even months, on roots alone!

457 But although they could procure a constant supply of these natural productions, they considered them but a poor substitute for bread; and all of them longed to eat once more what is usually termed the “staff of life”—though in South Africa, where so many people live exclusively upon the flesh of animals, bread is hardly entitled to that appellation.

Bread they were likely to have, and soon. When treking from the old kraal, they had brought with them a small bag of maize. It was the last of their previous year's stock; and there was not in all over a bushel of it. But that was enough for seed, and would produce many bushels if properly planted, and carefully tended.

This had been done shortly after their arrival at their present home. A fertile spot of ground had been selected, only a few hundred yards from the nwana-tree. It had been turned up with the spade, for want of a plough, and the seeds planted at proper distances.

Many an hour had been given to the weeding and hoeing of it, and around every plant a little hill of soft mould had been raised, to nourish the roots, and protect them from the heat of the sun. The plants were even watered now and then.

Partly on account of this attention, and partly from the richness of the virgin soil, a splendid growth was the result; and the stalks stood full twelve feet high, with ears nearly a foot long. They had almost ripened; and the field-cornet intended in about a week or ten days to gather in the crop.

Both he and all his people were anticipating pleasant feasts of maize-bread, and “hominy,” with “mash and milk,” and various other dishes, that with Totty's skill could be manufactured out of the Indian corn.

About this time an incident occurred that nearly deprived them, not only of their whole plot of maize-plants, but also of their valuable housekeeper, Totty. It was as follows:—

Totty was on the platform in the great nwana-tree, which commanded a view of the corn-patch, and also of the plain beyond, as far as the bottom of the cliffs. She was busied about “house” affairs, when her attention was called off, by some singular noises that came from that direction. She parted the branches and looked through. A singular scene was before her eyes—a spectacle of no common kind.

A body of odd-looking animals, to the number of two hundred or more, was coming from the direction of the cliffs. They were creatures of ungainly forms—in make and size not unlike large ill-shaped dogs—and of a greenish-brown colour. Their faces and ears only were black, and these were naked, while their bodies were covered with harsh coarse hair. They had long tails, which some of them carried high in the air, and flourished about in a very eccentric manner.

Totty was by no means alarmed. She knew what sort of animals they were. She knew they were baboons. They were of the species known as the “pig-faced” baboon or “chacma” (*Cynocephalus porcarius*), which is found in nearly every part of South Africa where there are high cliffs with caves and crevices—the favourite dwelling-places of the baboon.

Of all the monkey tribe the baboons, or dog-headed monkeys (*cynocephali*), are the most disgusting in form and features. Who does not feel disgust when regarding the hideous mandrill —the drill—the hamadryas—or even the chacma? And all these are baboons. The baboons are
458 peculiar to Africa, and there are six well-known species of them:—the common baboon of North Africa, the “papion” of the south and western coast, the “hamadryas or tartarin” of Abyssinia, the “mandrill” and “drill” of Guinea, and the “chacma” of the Cape Colony.

The habits of these animals are as disgusting as their appearance. They may be tamed, and made “pets” of; but dangerous pets they are, as they will, upon, the slightest provocation, bite the hand that feeds them.

Their great strength of body and jaw, and their long canine teeth, give them a dangerous power, which they often make use of. No dog is a match for one, and the hyena and leopard often come off second best in an encounter with a baboon.

They are not carnivorous, however, and only tear their enemy to pieces without eating it. Their food consists of fruits and bulbous roots, which they well understand to dig out of the ground with the sharp nails of their hands.

Although they will not attack man if left alone, they become dangerous assailants when hunted and brought to bay.

Many odd stories are told of the chacma baboon among the settlers of Southern Africa, such as their robbing the traveller of his food, and then going off to some distance, and mocking him,

while they devour it. The natives also say that they sometimes use a stick in walking, “crowing” for roots, and in self-defence. Also, when a young one has succeeded in finding a choice root, and is observed by an older and stronger one, that the latter takes it away; but, should the young one have already swallowed it, then the bully picks him up, turns him head downward, and shakes him until he is forced to “disgorge!” Many such tales are current in the country of the boers, and they are not all without foundation, for these animals most certainly possess the power of reflection in a high degree.

Totty from her perch saw enough to convince her of this, had she been herself inclined to philosophise. But she was not. She was only a little curious about the manœuvres of the animals, and she called Trüey and little Jan up into the tree, in order that they might share the spectacle with her. All the others were off hunting.

Jan was delighted, and ran up the ladder at once. So did Trüey and all three stood watching the odd movements of the four-handed creatures.

They perceived that the troop was actually marching in order; not in line, but with some understood arrangement. There were scouts upon the wings, and leaders in front. These were baboons of greater age and size than the others. There were calls and signals, and the change of accent and tone would have convinced any one that a regular conversation was going on. The females and younger ones marched in the middle for better security. The mothers carried their infants upon their backs, or over their shoulders. Now a mother would stop to suckle her little offspring—dressing its hair at the same time—and then gallop forward to make up for the loss. Now one would be seen beating her child, that had in some way given offence. Now two young females would quarrel, from jealousy or some other cause, and then a terrible chattering would ensue, to be silenced by the loud threatening bark of one of the chiefs!

Thus proceeded they across the plain, chattering, and screaming, and barking, as only
459 monkeys can.

What were they after?

That question was answered very soon. Trüey and Jan, and Totty saw, to their dismay, that the baboons were not out upon an idle errand. They were after the maize-plants!

TOTTY IN TROUBLE.

In a few minutes most of the troop had entered the corn-field, and were hidden from view by the tall stems and broad leaves of the plants. A few only could be seen,—large old fellows, that
460 stationed themselves outside as sentinels, and were keeping up a constant interchange of signals. The main body was already stripping the plants of their precious fruit.

But a singular appearance presented itself beyond the corn-field, where a line of baboons, stationed at equal distance from one another, extended away to the very bottom of the cliff. These had been left by a regular manœuvre,—a deployment—as the troop traversed the plain in coming to the field. For what purpose?

That was soon apparent. In less than two minutes after the crowd disappeared under the shelter of the maize-plants, the long heads in their husks were seen showering out towards the line, as if flung by the hand of man! Those placed at the near end of the line immediately took them up, pitched them to the next, and these to the next, and so on, until, in a very short while from the time a head was plucked from the stalk, it was delivered to the storehouse of the

baboons far off among the cliffs!

Had this work gone on much longer the field-cornet would have had but a poor gathering in harvest time. The baboons thought the corn ripe enough, and would soon have made a crop of it, but at this moment their operations were interrupted.

Totty knew but little of the danger she underwent, when she ran forth with nothing but that long broom-handle to drive off a troop of chacmas. She only thought of the loss her kind master was sustaining; and down the ladder she hurried, and ran straight out to the corn-field.

Several sentinels met her by its edge, grinned, chattered, screamed, barked, and showed their long canine teeth; but they only received a blow over their ugly snouts from the broom-handle. Their cries summoned the others; and in a few moments the poor Hottentot was standing in the midst of an angry circle of chacmas, that were only prevented from springing in upon her by the expert manner in which she continued to ply the broom-stick.

But this slight weapon would not have served much longer, and Totty's fate—that of being torn to pieces—would soon have been sealed, had not four horsemen, or rather “quagga-men,” at that moment galloped up to her rescue.

These were the hunters returning from the chase; and a volley from their guns at once scattered the ugly chacmas, and sent them howling back to their caves.

After that the field-cornet looked well to his maize, until it was ready for gathering; when it was all brought home, and deposited in safety out of the reach of either birds, reptiles, quadrupeds, or *quadrumana*.

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CHAPTER XLV.

THE WILD HOUNDS AND THE HARTEBEEST.

Since the taming of the quaggas the hunting had been attended with tolerable success. Not a week passed without adding a pair of tusks—sometimes two or three pairs—to the collection, which now began to assume the form of a little pyramid of ivory standing near the bottom of the nwana.

Von Bloom, however, was not quite satisfied with his progress. He thought they might do far
461 better if they had only a few dogs.

Though the quaggas were of great service to them, and with these they were often able to overtake the elephant, yet they as often lost their great game, and it is more easy to do so than most persons imagine.

But with dogs to join in the hunt, the result would be quite different. It is true these animals cannot pull down an elephant, nor do him the slightest injury; but they can follow him whithersoever he may go, and by their barking bring him to a stand.

Another valuable service which the dogs perform, is in drawing the attention of the elephant away from the hunters. The huge quadruped when enraged is, as we have already seen, exceedingly dangerous. On such occasions he will charge upon the noisy dogs, mistaking them for his real assailants. This, of course, gives the hunter a good opportunity of delivering his fire, and avoiding the deadly encounter of the elephant.

Now in several elephant-hunts which they had lately made, our hunters had run some very narrow risks. Their quaggas were neither so manageable nor so quick in their movements as horses would have been, and this rendered the hazard still greater. Some of them might one day fall a victim. So feared Von Bloom; and he would gladly have given for a number of dogs an elephant's tusk a-piece—even though they were the most worthless of curs. Indeed, their quality is but of slight importance. Any dogs that can trace the elephant and pester him with their barking would do.

Von Bloom even thought of taming some hyenas, and training them to the hunt. This idea was by no means quixotic. The hyena is often used for such a purpose, and performs even better than many kinds of dogs.

One day Von Bloom was pondering over this subject. He was seated on a little platform that had been constructed very high up—near the top of the nwana-tree—from which a view could be had of the whole country around. It was a favourite resort of the field-cornet—his smoking-room, in fact—where he went every evening to enjoy a quiet pull out of his great meerschaum. His face was turned upon the plain that stretched from the border of the *bosch* as far as the eye could reach.

While quietly puffing away, his attention was attracted by some animals standing at a distance off upon the plain. The brilliant colour of their bodies had caught his eye.

They were of a lively sienna colour over the back and sides, and white underneath, with a list of black upon the outside of the legs, and some black stripes upon the face, as regularly defined as if laid on by the brush of a painter. They had horns of very irregular shape, roughly knotted—each curved into something of the shape of a reaping-hook, and rising directly from the top of one of the straightest and longest heads ever carried by an animal. These animals were far from being gracefully formed. They had drooping hind-quarters like the giraffe, though in a much less degree, shoulders greatly elevated, and long narrow heads. For the rest their forms were bony and angular. Each stood five feet high, from the fore-hoof to the shoulder, and full nine feet in length.

They were antelopes of course—that species known among Cape colonists as the “hartebeest.”
462 There were in all about fifty of them in the herd.

When first observed by Von Bloom, they were quietly browsing upon the plain. The next moment, however, they were seen to run to and fro, as if suddenly alarmed by the approach of an enemy.

And an enemy there certainly was; for in a moment more the herd had taken to flight; and Von Bloom now saw that they were followed by a pack of hounds! I say a “pack of hounds,” for the creatures in the distance exactly resembled hounds more than anything in the world. Nay, more than resembled, for it actually was a pack of hounds—of wild hounds!

Of course Von Bloom knew what they were. He knew they were the “wilde-honden,” very absurdly named by sapient naturalists *Hyena venatica* or “hunting hyena,” and by others, with equal absurdity the “hunting dog.” I pronounce these names “absurd,” first because the animal in question bears no more resemblance to a hyena than it does to a hedgehog; and, secondly, because “hunting dog” is a very ridiculous appellation, since any dog may merit a similar title.

Now I would ask, why could these naturalists not let the nomenclature of the boers alone? If a better name than “wilde-honden” (wild hounds) can be given to these animals, I should like to hear it. Why, it is the very perfection of a name, and exactly expresses the character of the animal to which they apply it—that character, which coming under their everyday observation, suggested the name.

It is quite a libel to call this beautiful creature a hyena. He has neither the ugly form, the harsh pelage, the dull colour, nor the filthy habits of one. Call him a “wolf,” or “wild dog,” if you please, but he is at the same time the handsomest wolf or wild dog in creation. But we shall name him, as the boers have done, a “wild hound.” That is his true title, let naturalists class him as they may.

His size, shape, his smooth clean coat, as well as his colour, approximate him more to the hound than to any other animal. In the last—which is a ground of “tan” blotched and mottled with large spots of black and grey—he bears a striking resemblance to the common hound; and the superior size of his ears would seem to assimilate him still more to this animal. The ears, however, as in all the wild species of *Canis*, are of course not hanging, but erect.

His habits, however, crown the resemblance. In his natural state the wild hound never prowls alone; but boldly runs down his game, following it in large organised packs, just as hounds do; and in his hunting he exhibits as much skill as if he had Tom Moody riding at his heels, to guide with whip and horn.

It was the field-cornet's good fortune to witness an exhibition of this skill.

The hounds had come unexpectedly upon the hartebeest herd; and almost at the first dash, one of the antelopes became separated from the rest, and ran in an opposite direction. This was just what the cunning dogs wanted; and the whole pack, instead of following the herd, turned after the single one, and ran “tail on end.”

Now this hartebeest, although an ill-shaped antelope, is one of the very swiftest of the tribe; and the wild hound does not capture it without a severe chase. In fact, he could not capture it at all, if speed were the only point between the two animals. But it is not. The hartebeest has a
463 weakness in its character, opposite to which the wild hound possesses a cunning.

The former when chased, although it runs in a straight line, does not keep long in a direct course. Now and then it diverges to one side or the other, led perhaps by the form of the ground, or some other circumstance. In this habit lies its weakness. The wild hound is well aware of it, and takes advantage of it by a manœuvre, which certainly savours strongly of reflection on his part.

Our field-cornet had a proof of this as he watched the chase. His elevated position gave him a view of the whole ground, and he could note every movement both of pursuer and pursued.

On breaking off, the hartebeest ran in a right line, and the hounds followed straight after. They had not gone far, however, when Von Bloom perceived that one hound was forging ahead of the rest, and running much faster than any of them. He might have been a swifter dog than the others, but the hunter did not think it was that. He appeared rather to be running harder that they, as if sent forward to push the hartebeest, while the rest saved their wind.

This proved to be really the case; for the dog, by a desperate effort, having gained upon the antelope, caused the latter to turn slightly from it original course; and the pack, perceiving this, changed their direction at the same time, and held along a diagonal line, as if to head the game.

By this means they avoided the détour which both the antelope and their companion had made.

The hartebeest was now running upon a new line; and as before, one of the hounds was soon seen to head the pack, and press forward at the top of his speed. The one that first led, as soon as the antelope turned from its original course, fell back, rejoined the pack, and was now lagging among the hindmost! His “turn” of duty was over.

Again the hartebeest verged from its course. Again the pack ran obliquely, and made a second “cut” upon him—again a fresh dog took the lead, and on swept the chase as before—the wild hounds uttering their yelping notes as they ran.

Several times was this manœuvre executed by the cunning dogs—until the desired result was accomplished, and the antelope was completely “blown.”

Then, as if they felt that it was in their power, and that further strategy was not needed, the whole pack rushed forward simultaneously, and closed rapidly upon the game.

The hartebeest made one last despairing effort to escape, but, finding that speed would no longer avail, the creature wheeled suddenly round, and placed itself in an attitude of defiance—the foam falling from its lips, while its red eyes sparkled like coals of fire.

In another moment the dogs were around it.

“What a splendid pack!” exclaimed Von Bloom. “Oh! that I had such an one!

“Ha!” he continued, as a new thought struck him, “and why not, just such an one?—why not?”

Now the train of reflections that passed through the mind of the field-cornet was as follows:—

That the wild hounds might be tamed, and trained to hunting,—easiest of all, to the chase of the elephant. He knew that this could be done, for boer-hunters had often done it. True, the dogs must be taken young, but where were young ones to be obtained? It is not so easy to capture the pups of the wild hound. Until they are able to run well, their mothers do not permit them to stray
464 far from the caves in which they are littered; and these are usually crevices among rocks quite inaccessible to man. How could he obtain a set of them? He had already formed such an intention. Where could be their breeding place?

His reflections were interrupted at this point, by very singular behaviour on the part of the wild hounds, and which gave him a new idea of their intelligence that quite electrified him.

When the hartebeest stood to bay, and the hounds came up, Von Bloom very naturally expected to see the latter run in upon their game, and at once pull it to the ground. This he knew was their usual habit. What was his astonishment at seeing the whole pack standing off to one side, as if they intended to leave the antelope alone! Some of them even lay down to rest themselves, while the others stood with open jaws and lolling tongues, but without showing any signs that they intended further to molest the panting quarry!

The field-cornet could observe the situation well, for the antelope was on his side—that is, towards the cliffs—while the dogs were farther out upon the plain. Another circumstance that astonished him was, that the dogs, after running up and around the hartebeest, had actually drawn off to their present position!

What could it mean? Were they afraid of its ugly horns? Were they resting themselves before they should make their bloody onslaught!

The hunter kept his gaze intently fixed upon the interesting group.

After a while the antelope, having recovered its wind a little, and seeing the pack so distant, made a fresh start.

This time it ran in a side direction, apparently with the intention of gaining a hill that lay in that way, and up the sides of which it no doubt calculated upon gaining some advantage. But the creature had hardly stretched itself, when the hounds struck out after it; and in five hundred yards running, once more brought it to a stand. Again the pack took station at a distance, and the hartebeest stood upon the plain alone!

Once more it essayed to escape, and started off with all the speed that was left in its legs—the hounds as before trooping after.

This time the antelope headed in a new direction, making for a point in the cliffs; and as the chase now passed very near to the nwana-tree, everybody had a fine view of it.

The hartebeest seemed to be going faster than ever, or, at all events, the dogs did not now appear to gain upon it; and the field-cornet, as well as all the young people, were in hopes the poor creature would escape from its tireless pursuers.

They watched the chase, until they could just see the bright body of the hartebeest afar off, appearing like a yellow spot upon the face of the rocks, but the dogs were no longer visible. Then the yellow spot suddenly disappeared like the going out of a candle, and they could see it no more.

No doubt the antelope was pulled down!

A strange suspicion entered the mind of Von Bloom, and, calling upon them to saddle the quaggas, he, with Hans and Hendrik, rode off towards the place where the hartebeests had been last seen.

They approached the ground with caution; and under the shelter of some bushes were enabled
465 to get within two hundred yards of the spot without being observed. A singular spectacle rewarded their pains.

Within a dozen yards of the cliff lay the body of the hartebeest, where it had been “pulled down” by the dogs. It was already half eaten, not by the hounds that had hunted it, but by their puppies of all ages, that to the number of more than threescore were now standing around the carcass, tugging away at its flesh and snarling at one another! Some of the grown dogs that had taken part in the chase could be seen lying upon the ground, still panting after their hard run; but most of them had disappeared, no doubt into the numerous small caves and crevices that opened along the bottom of the cliffs.

There was no room left to doubt the singular fact—that the wild hounds had regularly driven the hartebeest up to their breeding-place to feed their young, and that they had abstained from killing it out upon the plain to save themselves the labour of dragging it from a distance!

Indeed these animals—unlike the *Felidæ*—have not the power of transporting a large mass to any considerable distance; hence the wonderful instinct which led them to guide the antelope to the very spot where its flesh was wanted!

That they were in the constant practice of this singular habit was attested, by the numerous bones and horns of large antelopes of different kinds, that lay strewed around the place.

Von Bloom had his eye upon the young puppies, and all three made a rush towards them. But it was to no purpose. Cunning as their fathers and mothers, the little fellows forsook their meal at first sight of the intruders, and darted off into their caves!

But they were not cunning enough to escape the snares, which were laid for them every day for a week after; and, before the end of that time, more than a dozen of them were safely domiciled in a little kennel built especially for their use, under the shadow of the great nwana-tree.

In less that six months from that time, several of them were in the field, and trained to the chase of the elephant, which duty they performed with all the courage and skill that could have been shown by hounds of the purest breed!

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CHAPTER XLVI.

CONCLUSION.

For several years Von Bloom led the life of an elephant-hunter. For several years the great nwana-tree was his home, and his only companions his children and domestics. But, perhaps, these were not the least happy years of his existence, since, during all the time both he and his family had enjoyed the most estimable of earthly blessings,—health.

He had not allowed his children to grow up without instruction. He had not permitted them to lapse into the character of mere “Bush-boys.” He had taught them many things from the book of nature,—many arts that can be acquired as well on the karoo as in the college. He had taught them to love God, and to love one another. He had planted in their minds the seeds of the
466 virtuous principles,—honour and morality,—without which all education is worthless. He had imbued them with habits of industry and self-reliance, and had initiated them into many of the accomplishments of civilised life—so that upon their return to society they might be quite equal to its claims. Upon the whole, those years of the exile's life, spent in his wilderness home, formed no blank in his existence. He might look back upon them with feelings of satisfaction and pleasure.

Man, however, is formed for society. The human heart, properly organised, seeks communion with the human heart; and the mind, especially when refined and polished by education, loves the intercourse of social life, and, when deprived of it, will always yearn to obtain it.

So was it with the field-cornet. He desired to return once more within the pale of civilised society. He desired once more to revisit the scenes where he had so long dwelt in peaceful happiness; he desired once more to establish himself among his friends and acquaintances of former days, in the picturesque district in the Graaf Reinet. Indeed, to have remained any longer in his wilderness home could have served no purpose. It is true he had grown very much attached to his wild hunter-life, but it was no longer likely to be profitable. The elephants had completely forsaken the neighbourhood of the camp, and not one was to be found within twenty miles of the spot. They had become well-acquainted with the report of the long roer, and knew the dangerous character of that weapon; they had learnt that of all their enemies man was the one to be

especially dreaded and shunned; and they had grown so shy of his presence, that the hunters frequently passed whole weeks without setting their eyes upon a single elephant.

But this was no longer an object of solicitude with Von Bloom. Other considerations now occupied his mind, and he did not care much if he should never spoor another of these huge quadrupeds. To return to the Graaf Reinet, and settle there, was now the ultimatum of his wishes.

The time had at length arrived when he would be able to carry out that design; and nothing seemed any longer to stand in the way of its full and complete accomplishment.

The proscription against him had been long since taken off. A general amnesty had been passed by the government, and he had been pardoned among the rest.

It is true his property was not restored to him; but that mattered little now. He had created a new property, as was testified by the vast pyramid of ivory that stood under the shadow of the great nwana-tree!

Nothing remained but to transport this shining pile to a market, and a splendid fortune would be the result.

And Von Bloom's ingenuity found the means for bringing it to market.

About this time there was dug another huge pit-trap near the pass in the cliffs, in which many quaggas were trapped; and then, there were stirring scenes, while these wild creatures were being broken to harness, and trained to “trek” in a wagon.

They were trained, however, after a good deal of trouble—the old wheels, still in prime condition, serving as the “break;” and then the body of the wagon was let down from the tree,
467 and once more renewed its acquaintance with its old companions the wheels; and the cap-tent spread its protecting shadow over all; and the white and yellow crescents were stowed; and the quaggas were “inspanned;” and Swartboy, mounting the “voor-kist,” once more cracked his long bamboo whip; and the wheels, well oiled with elephants' grease, again whirled gaily along!

How surprised were the good people of Graaf Beinet, when one morning a cap-tent wagon, drawn by twelve quaggas, and followed by four riders mounted upon animals of the same kind, pulled up in the public square of their little town! How astonished they were on seeing that this wagon was “chuck” full of elephants' teeth, all except a little corner occupied by a beautiful girl with cherry cheeks and fair flaxen hair; and how joyed were they, in fine, on learning that the owner of both the ivory and the beautiful girl was no other than their old friend, and much-esteemed fellow-citizen, the field-cornet, Von Bloom!

A warm welcome met the elephant-hunter in the square of Graaf Reinet, and, what was also of some importance, a ready market for his ivory.

It chanced just at that time that ivory was selling at a very high rate. Some article—I do not remember what—the principal part of which required to be constructed of pure ivory, had come into fashion and general use in European countries, and the consequence was an increased demand for this valuable commodity. It was a fortunate circumstance for the returned hunter, who was at once enabled to dispose of his stock, not only for ready money, but at such a fine price as to yield him nearly twice the amount he had calculated on receiving!

He had not brought it all with him, as there was more than would have loaded any one wagon. A second load had remained, hidden near the nwana-tree, and this required a journey to be made for it.

It was made in due time, and the remainder arrived safely at Graaf Reinet, and was there delivered to the ivory-dealers, who had already purchased it.

The result was a splendid fortune in ready money. The field-cornet was once more a rich man!

For the present we can follow his history no farther than to say, that the proceeds of his great hunt enabled him to buy back his old estate, and to stock it in splendid style, with the best breeds of horses, horned cattle, and sheep; that he rose rapidly in wealth and worldly esteem; that the government gave him its confidence; and, having first restored him to his old office of field-cornet, soon afterwards promoted him to that of “landdrost,” or chief magistrate of the district.

Hans returned to his college studies; while the dashing Hendrik was enabled to enter the profession for which he was most fit, and the very one that fitted him, by obtaining a cornetcy in the “Cape Mounted Rifles.”

Little Jan was packed off to school to study grammar and geography; while the beautiful Trüey remained at home to grace the mansion of her honoured father, and look after his household affairs.

Totty still ruled the kitchen; and, of course, Swartboy was the important man about the house, and for many a long year after cracked his great whip, and flourished his jambok among the long-
468 horned oxen of the wealthy landdrost.

But enough for the present,—enough of adventure for one year. Let us hope, boy readers, that before you and I have circled once more around the sun, we shall make a fresh trip to the land of the boers, and again encounter the worthy Von Bloom, his Bushman, and—

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The End.

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