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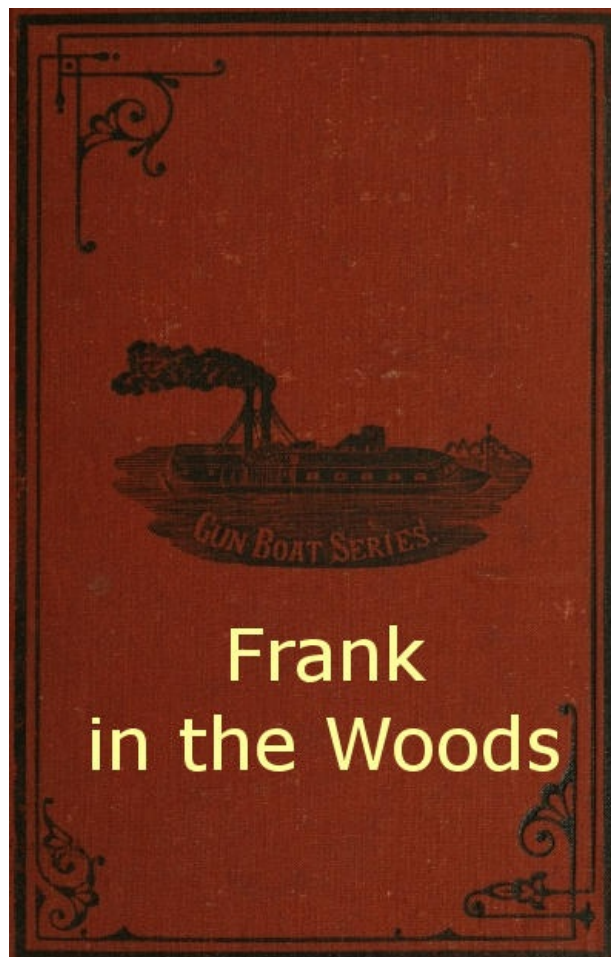
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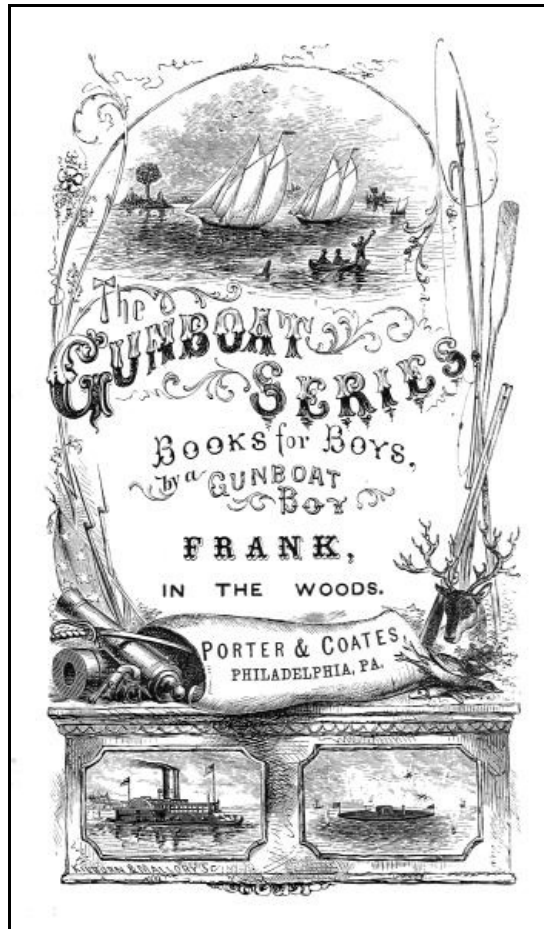
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Frank in the Woods



The GUNBOAT SERIES.
BOOKS for BOYS,
by a GUNBOAT BOY.

FRANK IN THE WOODS.

PORTER & COATES,
PHILADELPHIA, PA.

FRANK AND ARCHIE SERIES.

FRANK
IN THE WOODS.

BY
HARRY CASTLEMON,
AUTHOR OF "THE ROCKY MOUNTAIN SERIES," "THE GO-AHEAD
SERIES," ETC.



PHILADELPHIA:
PORTER & COATES.
CINCINNATI, O.:
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FRANK IN THE WOODS.

CHAPTER I. The Encampment.



UR scene opens in the swamp that stretches away for miles north of Lawrence.

It was a cold, dreary night. The wind moaned and whistled through the leafless branches of the trees, sending the snow in fitful gusts through every nook and corner of the forest. On the banks of a small lake, that lay hemmed in on all sides by tall trees, which bowed to every gust of the winter's storm, was an encampment. A rude hut—built, however, after the most approved hunter fashion, with its back to the wind, and its front open to a cheerful fire—stood in a little grove of evergreens, ready to receive beneath its friendly shelter four boys, whom you could easily recognize as our old friends of the sailing and fishing frolics described in "THE YOUNG NATURALIST." We left them, after a hard day's work at fox-hunting—Archie asleep on the bed, and Frank seated in his easy chair, reading one of his favorite authors; while George and Harry, who had a quarter of a mile to go before they reached home, were walking slowly along the road, so weary that they could scarcely drag one foot after the other. To enable the reader to understand how we come to find them here in the woods, twenty miles from any human habitation, we must conduct him back to Lawrence, and relate a few incidents with which he is not acquainted.

On the day following the one on which the foxhunt took place, the boys were too lame to tramp about, and they passed most of their time in the shop. Frank commenced to prepare the fox-skin for mounting in the museum, and Archie busied himself in putting his traps in working order. While thus engaged, Frank exclaimed:

"Archie, let's go and make Uncle Joe a visit. What do you say?"

"I should like to go very much," said Archie; "but you know it's a mean journey to make in winter. I don't like the idea of carrying my baggage on"—

"We need not carry any thing," interrupted Frank. "I have been thinking it all over, and I don't see why we can't do as the Canadian trappers do—drag our baggage after us on sleds."

The village boys had always been in the habit of visiting Uncle Joe in the summer; the journey could then be made with scarcely any inconvenience, for Glen's Creek ran within a few feet of the old hunter's cabin; but in winter the traveling was much more difficult, for the boys were obliged to carry their provisions, blankets, and other needful articles, on their backs. But Frank's plan obviated this difficulty. The creek was frozen over, and using it as a highway, they could accomplish the journey to Uncle Joe's almost as easily as with a boat.

"That's a first-rate idea," said Archie. "I wonder why we did not think of it before! Let us go right to work and make the sled."

"We had better wait until we find out whether mother will let us go or not," said Frank; "besides, we want Harry and George to go with us."

"I think Aunt Mary will give her consent," said Archie, laying aside his traps. "Let's go in and ask her."

The boys readily answered all Mrs. Nelson's objections—such as being lost in the woods and eaten up by bears—by assuring her that they were well acquainted with the road to Uncle Joe's, for they had traveled it

several times before; besides, they had a compass, and it was impossible to get lost; and, as to the bears, there were very few of them in the woods, and no bear that ever lived was a match for four boys, all good marksmen, armed with double-barrel shot-guns, and assisted by three good dogs. So Mrs. Nelson was obliged to consent, and the boys started off to see George and Harry. The latter easily obtained their parents' permission, and the boys adjourned to the kitchen to talk over their plans. It was decided that two sleds would carry all their baggage, and that every thing should be ready for the start early on Monday morning; it was then Friday. After making all their arrangements, Frank and his cousin returned home, and immediately commenced working on their sled. A stout hickory sapling, which they had used in stretching and curing the skin of the deer they killed in the lake, was sawed in twain for the runners, and bent into shape by steaming. The braces were then put in, and before dark the body of the sled was completed. It was light and very strong, and Archie dragged it about the shop in high glee.

"It's all done but the box," said he.

"We don't want any box," said his cousin. "It would only make the sled heavy, without doing any good. We will get an old quilt or blanket from mother, and that will do better than a box."

This article was soon obtained, and fastened to the sled in such a manner that it could be strapped around the baggage; and just as Hannah called them to supper, the sled was pronounced ready for the journey.

The next day Hannah was kept busy baking biscuit and other provisions sufficient to last until they reached Uncle Joe's; while the boys busied themselves in cleaning their guns, sharpening their knives and axes, and getting every thing ready for the start.

Time seemed to move on laggard wings, so impatient were they to be off; but Monday morning came at length, and the boys were stirring long before daylight. As soon as they had eaten breakfast, the sled was brought out of the shop, and their baggage—which consisted of a change of clothes, blankets, ammunition, axes, and provisions—was strapped on securely. Just as they completed their preparations, George and Harry came along. Bidding Mrs. Nelson and Julia good-by, they all started off; and, after a hard day's tramp, encamped at the place where we now find them.

After they had finished carrying their baggage into the hut, a lively scene was presented. Harry sat before the fire, cutting a pair of leggins out of a finely-dressed deer-skin, which he had spread on the floor of the hut; George was engaged in arranging their beds; Archie was in front of the hut, chopping the evening's supply of fire-wood; and Frank was superintending the cooking of their supper. The dogs lay stretched out on a blanket, enjoying a quiet nap.

"There," said Archie, at length, leaning on his ax, and surveying the pile of wood he had cut; "I guess that will last us through the night."

"Yes, that's a plenty," said Frank. "Come, boys, supper is ready!"

Archie accordingly entered the hut, and, after depositing his ax in a corner, picked out a warm place by the fire, and commenced helping himself to the eatables. The meal consisted of squirrels, which had been roasted on spits before the fire, coffee, and bread and butter. Their long tramp—they had made about twenty miles since morning—had sharpened their appetites, and the supper rapidly disappeared. But there was enough left for the dogs, and after they had been bountifully fed, and the supper dishes washed, the boys stretched themselves out on their blankets before the fire. Each seemed to be occupied with his own thoughts. The sifting of the snow over the roof of the hut, the crackling of the fire, and an occasional howl of a wolf, were the only sounds that broke the stillness. At length, Harry said:

"Now, boys, this is the kind of a life I enjoy. Doesn't it make a fellow feel comfortable, to lie here and listen to the storm, and know that he is securely sheltered? For my part, I don't see how a person can live cooped up in a city all his life."

"It is a difficult matter," answered Archie; "for I have tried it, and profess to know something about it. How many times I have sat in school, when I had a hard lesson to get, and looked out of the window, and wished that I was off in the woods somewhere!"

"Well, you're here at last," said George; "but the only way to pass a long winter evening is in listening to a good story. Come, Frank, give us one."

"Yes," chimed in Harry, "give us something exciting."

"A hunting adventure," said Archie, "or a fight with the Indians."

"O, you will hear plenty of such stories when we get to Uncle Joe's," said Frank. "But I will tell you of an adventure which happened to my uncle, who was a young lawyer at the time, settled in St. Louis;" and Frank, after rearranging his blanket commenced as follows:

CHAPTER II.

An Unpleasant Companion.

It was one bright evening, in the fall of 18—," said my uncle, "while I was traveling on horseback through the northern part of Missouri, that I reined up before a pleasant little tavern, where I purposed to stop for the night. The landlord, a bustling little Englishman, soon had supper ready for me, and as I had not eaten a mouthful since morning, I sat down to it with a most ravenous appetite, and ate until I began to feel ashamed of myself, and finally stopped, not because I was satisfied, but because I had eaten every thing on the table, and did not wish to call for more. As I was rising from the table, the hostler entered the room, and said:

"What be the matter with your 'orse, sir? He be so lame he can 'ardly walk?"



"The matter with my horse!' I repeated; 'there was nothing the matter with him when I gave him into your charge;' and, in no amiable mood, I started for the stable.

"My horse, which was the gift of a deceased friend, was one of the finest animals I ever saw. I had owned him for more than six years, during which he had been my almost constant companion; and as I had neither wife nor child to love, it is no wonder that my affections clustered around him. I found that he was indeed lame; one of his legs was swollen to twice its usual size, and it was with great difficulty that he could move. I was for some time entirely at a loss how to account for it, and felt very much like giving the hostler, who stood at a little distance, eyeing me as though he expected a kicking, a piece of my mind, when I happened to remember that, as I was that afternoon descending a steep hill, my horse had stepped upon a rolling stone, and almost thrown me from the saddle; and I noticed that he limped a little afterward; but I thought it was nothing serious, and had almost forgotten the circumstance. This I explained, in a few words, to the hostler, who drew a long breath, as if a mighty load had been removed from his breast. After rubbing the animal's leg with some liniment, which I had brought with me, I saw him plentifully fed and bedded down, and returned to the tavern. After spending an hour listening to the 'yarns' of the occupants of the bar-room, I went up to bed, and was soon fast asleep. Near the middle of the night, I was aroused by loud voices under my window; and, as soon as I was fairly awake, I found that something unusual was going on. The shrill, frightened voices of the females mingled with the hoarse ejaculations of the men, and every thing appeared to be in the greatest confusion. I sprang out of bed, and after hastily drawing on my clothes, ran down into the bar-room.

"What's the matter, landlord?' I inquired of my host, as he hurried by me, pale and almost breathless with excitement.

"Matter!' he repeated. 'Come and see. Giles Barlow has been around again, and there is one poor fellow less in the world, I'm afraid.'

"He led the way to a small bed-room, which opened off the bar-room, where I found several persons crowded around a bed, on which lay the form of a man, and a surgeon was engaged in bandaging an ugly-looking wound, which he had received in his breast. As soon as the operation was completed, he informed us, in reply to an inquiry of one of the bystanders, that the wound was dangerous, but that by careful nursing the man might recover; and ended by requesting us to leave the room, as much depended on his being kept quiet. We moved back into the bar-room, and I inquired of one of the men who Giles Barlow was.

"Why, don't you know?' he asked, in surprise. 'I thought everybody had heard of him! I guess you are a stranger in these parts, ain't you?'

"I replied in the affirmative.

"You must live a good piece from here,' said the man, 'or you would certainly have heard of Giles Barlow. He is a highwayman, that has been about here for almost ten years, murdering folks and stealing their money. He goes on the principle that "dead men tell no tales."

"Why haven't you arrested him before this time?' I inquired.

"O, yes,' answered the man, 'that's all easy enough to talk about. Haven't we tried that game? We've hunted him with rifles, and tracked him with blood-hounds, but you might as well try to catch a will-o'-the-wisp.'

"What sort of a looking man is he?' I asked.

"He's a small man,' answered my informant, 'and looks like a dried-up mullen-stalk. But, the Lord love you, he's quick as lightning, and he's got an eye that can look right through a common man. And such hair! It is long and curly, and looks like snakes stuck on his head. I've seen him once, and I never want to meet him alone in the woods, now, I tell you.'

"I felt some curiosity to know something more of this noted robber, but before I could ask another question the man had walked away, shrugging his shoulders, and joined a group of his companions, who stood in one corner of the room, talking over the matter.

"After the exciting scenes through which I had just passed, sleep was of course out of the question; and I stretched myself out on a bench by the fireplace, and waited impatiently for the morning. It came at length, and, as was my usual custom, I hurried out to the stable to look after my horse. I found him much better, but his leg was still swollen, and I knew that he would not be in good traveling condition for at least a week.

"Landlord,' I exclaimed, as I entered the bar-room, 'where can I hire a horse for two or three days? I must be in Bennington by day after to-morrow, and my horse is too lame to travel.'

"Well,' said the landlord, 'you are in a nice fix. I don't believe there is a horse about here you can get.'

"I must have one,' I answered, 'for I must be in Bennington as soon as possible.'

"Well, I'll see what I can do for you,' said the landlord, and, going to the door, he shouted to the hostler, who stood in the stable, rubbing down my horse, 'Tom, go over to Bill Parker's and see if you can get his mare. Tell him there's a gentleman here who wants to hire her for two or three days.'

"Tom started off immediately, but soon returned with the information that Mr. Parker had gone off into the country to buy cattle, and would not return in less than a week.

"What should I do? I had an important case to attend to in Bennington, and must be there in time. I was about making up my mind that I would start off on foot, when the landlord suddenly exclaimed:

"I'll tell you what you can do. This creek' (pointing to a wide, deep stream which flowed by a little distance from the tavern) 'runs within half a mile of where you want to go; and I guess you might hire Jim Hilton's boat.'

"Mr. Hilton's dwelling was pointed out to me, and, in a few moments, I found my man chopping wood in the yard. I made known my wants. After rolling his quid about in his mouth, he concluded to let me have the boat, or rather dugout, provided I would 'do the fair thing' by him. To this I readily agreed. After giving emphatic directions as to the treatment of my horse, I stepped into the canoe, and was soon out of sight of the tavern. I used my paddle with a will, and made good headway. When I became weary, I would cease paddling, and allow the canoe to glide along with the current, giving only an occasional stroke to direct its course.

"About noon, I began to grow hungry, and turned the canoe's head toward the shore, to eat my dinner and rest myself, for I had become very tired from the cramped position in which I was obliged to sit. In about an hour I made preparations to continue my journey, and was about pushing the canoe from the shore, when

a strong, cheery voice called out:

“Hallo, friend! whither bound?”

“I looked up, and saw a man, dressed in the garb of a hunter, standing on the bank above me, leaning on his rifle.

“I am going to Bennington,” I replied.

“Are you? That’s lucky. I am traveling in the same direction. Would you have any objections to good company?”

“No sir,” I replied. ‘Come on.’

“The hunter came down the bank; depositing his rifle and knapsack carefully in the bow of the canoe, he took up one of the paddles, and we pulled from the shore. As soon as we got out into the current, I turned, with some casual remark, to take a nearer look at my passenger. Merciful Heaven! how I started! He was a small man, considerably below the medium height, very slim, but well formed, and wiry as an eel, and the enormous muscles on his limbs showed plainly with every motion he made. But his eye! How it flashed! and when he turned it on me I felt as though he were reading my very thoughts. And then there were the long ‘snaky’ ringlets, which the man at the tavern had described to me. My companion was none other than Giles Barlow, the highwayman and murderer.

“You may be sure I was not very well pleased with this discovery, and the cold sweat started out from every pore of my body; still I did not feel afraid, for I was accustomed to scenes of danger, was well armed, and had the reputation of being a tough customer to handle. But the situation in which I was placed would have tried stronger nerves than mine. I thrust my hand into my pocket, and felt that my revolvers were safe. I concluded that, if the worst came to the worst, I could at least have two pulls at him before he could reach me; and, as I was a good shot, I had little fear of missing my mark.

“My companion was a very jolly fellow, and joked and laughed as though he felt extremely happy, and I, of course, joined with him, keeping a close watch on all his movements.

“The afternoon wore slowly away, and as it began to grow dark, I became doubly watchful, for I knew that if he intended to make an attempt upon my life, the time was approaching. About nine o’clock my companion suddenly said, as he wound up one of his stories:

“There’s no need of both of us sitting up. It’s a good forty miles to Bennington, and we shan’t reach it before morning.’

“Very well,” said I, ‘you may go to sleep first, and I will call you at midnight.’

“O, no,” said he, ‘I’m not in the least sleepy; I will steer the canoe, and you can lie down here in the bow, and sleep as long as you like.’

“Of course it would not answer for me to raise any objections to this, for I knew it would arouse his suspicions; so we changed places, and the highwayman took his seat in the stern of the canoe. After wrapping my cloak around me, and placing myself so that I could see every motion he made, I drew one of my revolvers, and waited impatiently to see what course things would take.

“For almost an hour my companion steered the boat very well, and I began to think that perhaps I had been mistaken in my man, when I saw him carefully draw in his paddle, muttering, as he did so:

“Ah, my chicken, you little thought that you had Giles Barlow for a passenger. I’ll just quietly douse your glim, and take what money and other little valuables you may have, to pay your traveling expenses to the other world.’

“As he spoke, he bent over and drew out of his knapsack a long, shining bowie-knife, and, after trying its edge with his thumb, rose slowly to his feet. In an instant, I threw aside my cloak, and, supporting myself on my elbow, I raised my revolver, and took a quick, steady aim at his breast. He uttered a cry of surprise, but without hesitating a moment, threw himself forward. But the sharp report of the revolver echoed through the woods, and the robber sank back into the canoe, dead.

“I arrived at Bennington the next morning about ten o’clock, and delivered the body to the authorities. The news spread like wildfire, for the name of Giles Barlow was as familiar as a household word.

“I prosecuted my case with success, and, in a week, returned to the place where I had left my horse. He had received excellent care, and was entirely cured of his lameness; but the landlord stubbornly refused any remuneration. He had heard of my exploit, and that was his way of showing his gratitude.”

CHAPTER III. An Indian Hunt.



HE next morning, a little after daylight, Frank awoke, and, raising himself on his elbow, he gazed about him. The storm had ceased, and the morning was clear and intensely cold. The fire, however, still burned brightly, for the boys had replenished it several times during the night. His companions, comfortably wrapped up in their thick blankets, were sleeping soundly; but Frank thought it was high time they were stirring, for they had a good twenty miles to travel that day; so, reaching over, he seized Archie by the shoulder and shook him. The long tramp of the previous day had wearied the boys considerably; but with several hearty shakes, Frank succeeded in getting them all on their feet; then, after washing his hands and face in the snow, he commenced to prepare their breakfast.

After a good deal of yawning and stretching, the others began to bestir themselves; and while Archie cut a supply of wood, with which to cook their breakfast, George and Harry busied themselves in packing their

baggage on the sleds. As soon as they had eaten breakfast, they put out the fire, and renewed their journey.

The traveling was much more difficult than it had been the day before, for the snow was piled on the ice in deep drifts, and it was dark before they reached Uncle Joe's cabin.

As they approached, they were welcomed by the old trapper's dogs, and Uncle Joe finally appeared at the door.

"Get out, you whelps!" he exclaimed. "Who's that a comin' there?" he continued, trying to peer through the darkness.

"Friends," answered Frank.

"Jeromagoot!" ejaculated the old man, who recognized Frank's voice. "What are you boys doin' out in these woods this time o' night? Come in—glad to see you any how," and Uncle Joe seized their hands as they came up, and shook them heartily. "What have you got on them sleds—your plunder?"

"Yes," answered Archie. "That's a new way we have got of carrying our baggage."

"Fetch it right into the house then, boys;" and, suiting the action to the word, Uncle Joe seized the sleds and pulled them into the cabin.

"Bars and buffalers!" exclaimed a voice, as the boys entered. "How de do youngsters?" and a tall, powerfully built man arose from his chair, and, striding across the floor, approached the boys. It was Dick Lewis—Uncle Joe's brother.

He was a fine specimen of a North American trapper; fully six feet in height, with a frame that seemed capable of enduring any amount of fatigue. Thirty years among savage beasts, and still more savage men, had brought him in contact with almost every variety of danger. He had hunted and trapped on every little stream between the Rio Grande and the Great Bear Lake; had taken more than one rough-and-tumble fight with Rocky Mountain grizzlies; was very expert with the rifle; could throw the tomahawk with all the skill of an Indian; and could lasso and ride the wildest horse that ever roamed the prairie.

He was a good-natured, jovial fellow, and when stretched out on his blanket before the cheerful camp-fire, no one delighted more to tell stories and crack jokes than he. He used to say that there was but one thing in the world he hated, and that was an Indian. And good cause had he for enmity; for, if the prairie and the deep, dark woods could speak, they could tell of many a deed of cruelty which he had seen practiced upon the unoffending trappers.

Dick had three times been bound to the stake, once when a mere boy, and had escaped by making use of his prodigious strength, and almost incredible swiftness of foot, which had won for him, from the Indians, the appellation of Big Thunder.

Of all the trappers, none was more active in punishing the Indians, or more hated and feared than he. One night, mounted on a powerful, well-trained mustang, he would appear, in spite of their vigilance, in their very midst, picking off their favorite chiefs, or "stampeding" their swiftest horses; and the next morning a warrior, seated at his solitary camp-fire, fifty miles away, would be startled by the crack of the rifle that was to start his spirit on its way to the happy hunting-grounds. He seemed to delight in danger, and being perfectly acquainted with the Indian mode of warfare, he eluded all the plans to capture him, with the same skill and cunning he would exhibit in laying his own. But he did not always escape unhurt, for many an ugly scar on his body bore evidence to the valor of his enemies, and the severity of the struggles in which he had engaged. He did not call Uncle Joe's his home. He had lived on the prairie, and among the mountains, from boyhood, and despising the ordinary modes of conveyance used by more enlightened men, he had traveled the entire distance, from the head-waters of the Missouri to his brother's cabin, on foot.

"How are you, youngsters? I say," he exclaimed, continuing his greeting, which we have so unceremoniously interrupted; and he seized Frank's hand, and gave it a gripe and a shake, which he felt for a quarter of an hour afterward.

"Draw a cheer up to the fire, young'uns," said Uncle Joe, "an' set down."

The boys were well acquainted with the trappers, and always made themselves quite at home with them; so, after brushing the snow from their feet, they pulled off their overcoats and seated themselves before the huge fireplace. The cabin—or, as Uncle Joe called it, "shantee"—was built in the most primitive style, having but one room and a "loft," to which access was obtained by a ladder. There were four beds in the room—rude-looking, indeed, but very clean, and abundantly supplied with quilts and blankets; while around on the walls hung the trappers' rifles, hunting-knives, and powder-horns. Three large dogs lay stretched out before the fireplace, and one of them, a huge, powerful animal, was the only companion Dick had had for three years. He was an ungainly looking animal, but his strength and courage had been severely tested in many a desperate encounter, and twice he had saved his master's life. No wonder, then, that he held a prominent place in the trapper's affections. The only other inmates of the cabin were the four hired men—tall, brawny fellows, who despised the city, with its "eternal jostlings and monotonous noises," but delighted in the freedom and solitude of the forest.

"Had any supper, youngsters?" inquired Uncle Joe, as the boys drew their chairs up to the fire. "No, I reckon not," he continued, without giving them time to reply. "Bob, just fetch out some grub. I'll bet the boys are as hungry as wolves, after their long tramp."

The boys did not raise any objections, for they *were* hungry, and they knew that the supper they would get would be worth having.

Bob, who was one of the hired men, began to bustle about, and, after hanging the tea-kettle over the fire, he drew out a pine table, and covered it with a snow-white cloth, and dishes which shone in the fire-light in a manner that would have delighted a New England housewife. Then came ham and eggs, which, with the coffee, were cooked in the fireplace, wheat-bread, honey, and fresh butter and milk. Although they were forty miles from any settlement or neighbor, in the midst of an almost unbroken forest, there was no danger but what they would fare well, for Uncle Joe was famous for good living.

The boys ate very heartily, and Uncle Joe sat by, smoking his pipe, and watching them with evident satisfaction. After supper, while they were engaged in unpacking their sleds, Dick's dog, which answered to the name of Useless, arose suddenly to his feet, looked toward the door for a moment, and uttered a dismal howl.

"Injuns ag'in, by all that's miserable," ejaculated Dick, removing his pipe from his mouth, and instinctively reaching toward his rifle, which hung on the wall above his head; but instantly recollecting

himself, he resumed his former position, while a dark scowl settled on his face. In a few moments, light steps sounded in the snow outside the cabin, and Useless bounded toward the door barking, and showing his teeth, with every demonstration of rage.

"Come back here, dog," said Dick; "I don't blame you, 'cause they are a mean, thievin' race. The animal understands their natur' as well as I do," he continued, as the dog reluctantly returned to his place. "Me an' him war brought up to hate Injuns, an' we believe in makin' war on 'em wherever we find 'em. It's a mighty wonder that they don't steal Joe out o' house an' home."

The country around Moosehead Lake was inhabited by the remnant of a once-powerful tribe, and the Indians, in going to and from the settlements to dispose of their furs, frequently made Uncle Joe's cabin a stopping-place. Dick was not at all pleased with this state of affairs; but, as he often remarked, he was not "boss of the shantee, and couldn't help himself."

The footsteps drew nearer, and finally the door opened softly, and two Indians entered.

"How are you, Jim," exclaimed Uncle Joe, shaking the outstretched hand of the foremost.

"How de do, brother," replied the Indian, in imperfect English; and this was all the greeting that passed between them. They deposited their rifles and packs carefully in one corner of the cabin, and then advanced to the fire, and seated themselves on the floor without saying a word. They were dressed in the regular Indian costume, with leggins, moccasins, and hunting-shirts of the finest deer-skin, gaudily ornamented, and wore knives in their belts. Such sights were not new to the boys, for Lawrence was a regular Indian trading-post. Frank thought that he had never seen such fine specimens of savages before. But different thoughts seemed to be passing through Dick's mind, for he twisted uneasily in his chair, and smoked and scowled more vigorously than ever. Useless seated himself by his master's side, and watched them as closely as a cat ever watched a mouse, now and then uttering a low, angry growl. Neither of the Indians took part in the conversation that followed, but, after emptying their pipes, they spread their blankets out on the floor, and were fast asleep in a few moments.

"I don't see what in tarnation you let them ar painted heathen camp in your shantee in this way for," said Dick, at length, addressing himself to his brother. "The woods are open, an' they won't ketch cold by sleepin' out-doors."

"O, I don't mind it," answered Uncle Joe. "Me an' the Injuns allers have been on good terms together."

"Wal, you'll wake up some mornin' an' find your shantee gone," said Dick, "unless it is fastened down tarnation tight. I hate the rascals wusser nor pisen, an' I allers ache to begin a knock-down-an'-drag-out fight with 'em whenever I see 'em. Now, Useless," he continued, turning to his dog, and speaking as though the animal could understand every word he said, "I'm goin' to bed, an' I want you to keep an eye on them fellers;" and Dick stretched his heavy frame out on one of the beds, while Useless crawled under the blankets, and lay down beside him. The others soon followed his example, and, in a few moments, nothing was heard in the cabin but the regular breathing of the sleepers.

The next morning the boys slept later than usual. When they awoke, they found Bob engaged in getting breakfast. The Indians had gone. According to their usual custom, they had resumed their journey at the first peep of day. Dick sat by the fire, engaged in looking over his "plunder," as he called it, to see if any thing had been stolen.

"Wal," said Uncle Joe, as they arose from the breakfast-table, "what do you youngsters kalkerlate to do first?"

"Let's go and set our traps for foxes," said Archie, who was particularly fond of hunting that kind of game, and had become quite proficient in the art.

"Wal," said Dick, "I'll go with you. I have some traps that need 'tendin' to;" and the trapper took down his long rifle and thrust his never-failing pipe into his pocket, and was ready for the start.

Archie began to overhaul his traps, which had been piled in one corner of the cabin. He looked them over and over several times, and finally inquired:

"Frank, do you know what has become of all my fox traps? Three of them are missing."

"They ought to be in that pile with the others," answered Frank.

"There are only two of them here," said Archie. "My best ones are gone; I'm afraid we have lost them. They must have got loose, and tumbled off the sled."

"No, I guess not," said his cousin; "they were all there last night, for I counted them."

"That ar is what comes of allowin' them Injuns to camp here," said Dick.

"Jeroomagoot!" ejaculated Uncle Joe. "You don't s'pose them Injuns stole the traps, do you?"

"Sartin, I do," answered Dick, dropping the butt of his rifle heavily to the floor. "I don't s'pose nothin' else."

"Wal, it's the first thing I ever had stole," said Uncle Joe.

"Thar's whar the traps have gone to, any how," said Dick. "Useless," he continued, turning to his dog, "you aint worth a pinch o' gunpowder. I told you to watch them fellers. I don't see how the rascals could do it, for if Useless had seed one of 'em prowlin' around, he would have muzzled him quicker nor lightnin'. If you want your traps, youngsters, you'll have to foller them Injuns. I'll go with you."

"Will you," exclaimed Archie. "Then, let's start right off."

"Wal, then," said the trapper, "pull off them overcoats, 'cause it 'ill be the hardest job you ever done to ketch them Injuns."

There was something novel and exciting in the idea of a chase after Indians. The boys had often read of such things, and now there was an opportunity for them to take part in one. They were soon ready for the chase. Shouldering their guns, they followed Dick from the cabin, and immediately set out on the trail of the Indians, which could be easily followed by the prints of their moccasins in the snow. All the dogs were left at home, except Useless; for he was the only one that understood "Injun hunting," and the others would only be in the way. The trail ran directly down to the creek, and as soon as they were fairly on the ice, the trapper broke into a "dog trot," and the boys followed close behind him, in Indian file. After going a little way, Frank said:

"Dick, I don't believe that both of those Indians went this way."

"Why not?" inquired the trapper.

"Because there is only a single track, such as one person would make."

"I guess you haven't hunted Injuns much," said Dick, with a laugh. "Don't you know that when they are travelin', the hindermost ones step exactly in the leader's tracks? If fifty Injuns had been along here, they would not have left a bigger trail nor those two have. But arter you have hunted and fit 'em as much as I have, you could tell by lookin' at a trail how many there was in the party. I hope you youngsters are good at runnin'."

"We should not care about running a race with you," answered George; "but if you will hold this gait, we will agree to keep up with you."

"O, you'll have to go faster nor this, if you want to ketch them Injuns," said Dick. "See here—here's where the rascals began to run."

"How can you tell?" inquired Archie.

"Why, easy enough. You see the tracks are further apart nor they wur a little piece back. Come, youngsters! let out a little."

The boys thought that Dick "let out" a good deal, for he almost redoubled his pace, and they concluded it was best to discontinue their talking; for they soon found that they had no breath to waste. After they had gone about two miles, the trail led them from the creek off into the woods; and, in a few moments, the trapper came to a stand-still on the bank of a small stream, where the trail abruptly ended.

"Where did they go to?" inquired Frank, after he had looked in vain for the trail. "They couldn't have jumped across the creek."

"No," answered the trapper, "that would be a better jump nor I ever saw made. We must go back."

"What for?" asked George.

"Why, the thieves knowed that we would foller 'em, an' they have doubled on their trail, just like a fox."

"The tracks all point the same way," said Frank, stooping down and examining the trail.

"In course they do," said Dick. "You don't s'pose you can tell by the looks of a red-skin's track which way he is goin', do you? I have knowed 'em to travel backward for more 'n a mile, to throw their enemies off the scent. But we hain't got no time to waste. Come on."

The boys followed the trapper back to the creek, and he immediately started off again at a rapid pace. There was not the least sign of a trail, and they were at a loss how to account for the trapper's reasons for following the creek, when he knew that the trail ran back into the woods. At length he said, by way of explanation:

"This is takin' a short cut on the Injuns. You see, they went back into the woods, an' doubled an' twisted about on their trail, an' when they think they have fooled us nicely, they will come back to the creek again."

The next two miles were passed over in silence. The boys could not have talked if they had wished to, for the rapid pace was telling on them severely, and they began to think that they had never known what running was. But the trapper did not seem to mind it in the least. His motions were easy and graceful, and he appeared to move along without making any exertion whatever. They ran until almost noon, without seeing any signs of the Indians, and the boys began to think that the trapper had been mistaken in his calculations. But their doubts were soon removed by the finding of the trail.

"Hurry on now, youngsters," exclaimed Dick; "but don't make too much noise, for the redskins aint far off."

And so it proved; for the next bend in the creek brought them in sight of the Indians, who were walking leisurely along, with their packs on their backs, thinking, no doubt, that they had effectually eluded pursuit. But they soon became aware of the approach of the hunters, and, without stopping to look back, they commenced running at the top of their speed.

"Bars an' buffalers!" exclaimed the trapper. "This is somethin' like ole times. Now, youngsters, I'll show you some runnin' as is runnin'. Come, Useless, show us what you're made of."

The dog seemed to understand him perfectly, and was off on the instant, and the trapper followed after him at a rate of speed which the boys had never expected to see accomplished by a human being. The creek, for almost a mile, was perfectly straight, and afforded them a fine view of the race, which was worth going miles to see. The Indians were no inferior runners; and, as they had nearly three hundred yards the start of Dick, the boys were doubtful as to the manner in which the chase would end. But the trapper had lost none of that lightness of foot which had rendered him so famous, both among friends and foes, and before they had gone half a mile, he was near enough to seize one of the Indians, while Useless pulled down the other as though he had been a deer.

The boys had been doing their best; but, of course, were left far behind; and when they came up they found the Indians standing as motionless as statues, apparently perfectly unconcerned, and the trapper and his dog were keeping guard over them.

"Now, little 'un," said Dick, addressing himself to Archie, and pointing to the packs which the Indians had thrown down, "look in them ar bundles an' see if you can find your traps."

Archie accordingly handed his gun to his cousin, and, kneeling down in the snow, opened one of the packs, when the first thing he discovered was his missing property. He arose slowly to his feet, and surveying the Indian to whom the pack belonged, with a comical expression on his face, said:

"You're a grand rascal. I've a good notion to take the ramrod out of my gun and give you a good trouncing."

The Indian was a man fully as large as Dick, very powerfully built, and muscular; while Archie was a little, "spindle-shanked" fellow, very small for his age, and looked as though he were in danger of being carried away by the first gust of wind that passed. The former, after regarding the diminutive hunter for a moment, with an expression of contempt, drew himself up to his full hight, and ejaculated:

"Ugh! me big Injun."

He, no doubt, considered it a gross insult that a person of Archie's proportions should talk of "trouncing" him.

"Wal," said the trapper, "we're done with you, you painted niggers; travel on about your business; but I wouldn't advise you to cross my trail, in these woods, this winter;" and Dick tapped his rifle in a very significant manner.

The savages raised their packs to their shoulders without making any reply, and walked off as though nothing had happened. As soon as they were out of sight, Archie packed up his traps, and the hunters turned

CHAPTER IV. THE "OLE SETTLER".



It was dark before they reached the cabin, but they found a good supper waiting for them. After they had eaten heartily, they drew their chairs up around the fireplace, and Uncle Joe inquired:

"Wal, youngsters, how do you like Injun-huntin'?"

"I don't believe we like it well enough to try it again," said Harry. "I never was so completely tired out in my life."

"O, that wasn't nothin' at all," said Dick. "Such Injun-huntin' as that we had to-day is fun. What would you have thought if we had follered them thieves for a week afore we found 'em?"

But, I must say, that you youngsters done very well. I'll own up, that when we started, I thought I would see what sort o' stuff you wur made of; an' I thought I'd stretch your legs for you in a way that would make you give in. But you fellers are purty good shakes at runnin', for boys of your age. But this reminds me o' a scrape I onct had near the Colorado River. Do yer see this? If you can ketch as many grizzly bars in your lifetime as this trap has, you are smarter nor I think you are. This is what I call the 'Ole Settler!'"

And, as the trapper spoke, he raised from the floor the object of his admiration, and held it up to the view of the boys. It was an ordinary bear-trap, with double springs, and huge jaws, which were armed with long, sharp teeth. It had received a thorough rubbing and greasing, and shone in the fire-light like silver; but, after all, there was nothing uncommon in its appearance. There were plenty of traps in the cabin that were quite as well made, and could, probably, do quite as much execution. In the trapper's mind, however, the "Ole Settler" was evidently associated with some exciting event.

"The reason why I call this trap the 'Ole Settler'" continued Dick, "is, 'cause it has been in the service so long. My gran'father bought it, when he war only a boy, of a Mexikin trader, an' he give two ten-dollar barskins for it. When he got too ole to trap, he give it to my father, an' he give it to me. It has been stole from me a good many times; but I allers made out to get it back agin. Onct a yaller-hided Mexikin Greaser bagged it, an' I didn't set eyes on it for more 'n a year; but I knowed it in a minit when I did see it; an', arter a little brush with the Greaser, I made him give it up. The last time I lost it war while I war trappin' in Utah. It war stole from me by a Blackfoot Injun; and the way it happened war this:

"I allers had the name of bein' able to bring into market jest as many an' jest as fine furs as any trapper in the mountains. But I had a good many good trappers to go agin, and arter awhile my huntin'-grounds begun to give out; so, one summer, I packed my plunder, an' moved to the west side of the mountains. I war right in the heart of the Pawnee region, the wust Injun country in the world; but I kalkerlated to get all my trappin' done arly in the spring, an' move out; 'cause as soon as the ice breaks up in the spring, the red-skins allers come round on a grand hunt, an' I didn't care to have the rascals near me. I never yet see the Injun that I war afeared of, but it's mighty onpleasant to have them around; they go screechin' through the woods, shootin' at a feller, when he can't see 'em, an' steal his traps an' other plunder in a mighty onfriendly way.

"Wal, in less than a week arter I got to my new quarters, I war settled. I had all my traps sot in the best places, an' had mighty good luck. The streams war full of beaver, otter, an' mink, an' I used to have a fight with the grizzlies in the mountains every day. In this way the winter passed; an' about the time that spring come, I had well-nigh trapped every thing in the valley. It war gettin' about time for the Injuns to come round on their reg'lar hunts; so one mornin', arter a good breakfast on buffaler hump, I started out an' begun to gather up my traps. A'most every one had some kind o' game in it, an' I soon got as big a load as I could wag under. So I started back for camp. I war goin' along mighty keerless like, an' wasn't thinkin' o' nothin', when all to onct I seed something that made me prick up my ears, an' step a little lighter. I see that something had been passin' through the bushes. You, in course, wouldn't have noticed it, but I knowed in a minit that an Injun had been along; an', arter lookin' around a little, I found his track. It wasn't a Pawnee; but, arter examin'in' the trail, I found that it war a Blackfoot. What one of them should be doin' so far from home I didn't know, but most likely he war layin' around for scalps.

"Wal, thinks I, 'Dick Lewis, you had better be lookin' out for them traps o' yourn;' so I hid my spelter in the bushes, an' started up toward the mountains. I had sot the Ole Settler the day before, to ketch a grizzly that had been botherin' me a good deal, an' I war afeared the Injun would come acrost it an' bag it. I saw plenty of Injun signs all the way, but the tracks had all been made by the same feller. I could see, by the way the rascal had moved, that he knowed I war in the valley; for he took mighty good care to cover up his trail as much as possible. Arter a few minits' walk, I come to the place where I had set the Ole Settler; but, just as I had expected, the trap war gone. The Blackfoot had been there afore me, an' I knowed that if I wanted my trap, I must look for it; an' I made up my mind that I did want it, an' that I would have it, if I had to foller the Injun clar to his home. So I started arter him, an', for a mile or so, the trail was toler'ble plain, an' I got along first-rate. I made up my mind that if the thief got away from me he would have to be smarter nor I thought he war. But, at last, I come to where he had tuk to a swamp, an' two or three times I come mighty nigh losin' the trail. The swamp war full o' logs, an' the Injun had walked on them, an', in course, he didn't leave no trail. I follered him more 'n a mile by the marks on the bushes, an' finally I couldn't see a single sign. There war the print of one of his moccasins in the mud as plain as daylight; an' there the trail ended. I couldn't tell which way the rascal had gone. I looked around, examin'in' every bush an' twig, but it war no use. Now, I s'pose you

think I war beat at the Injun's own game, don't you? Wal, I wasn't. In course, I couldn't find the trail in the swamp; but I knowed which way the Blackfoot war goin', an' if I crossed the swamp, I knowed that I would find it on the other side. So I started out, an' as it war gettin' late, I wanted to find the trail agin afore dark. I guess I made purty good time. I done my best, an' the way I got through that swamp war a thing to look at. The runnin' you see to-day wasn't a patchin' to the runnin' I done that night. But I tuk mighty good care to keep my ears open, an' to make no more noise than I could help; for, just as like as not, there war Injuns in the swamp, an' one of 'em might take it into his head to send a chunk of lead into me when I couldn't see him.

"About an hour afore dark, I reached the other side of the swamp; an' in less nor ten minits more I had found the trail, and wur follerin' it up as fast as my legs could carry me. But afore I had gone a mile it begun to grow dark. In course, I couldn't foller the trail no further; an' the only thing I could do, war to camp down where I war, an' wait for daylight. So, arter makin' my supper out o' parched corn, I picked out a nice place by the side of a log, and settled myself down to sleep.

"The next mornin', bright and arly, I war up, an' on the trail agin. I follered it all day, without onct stoppin' or losin' sight of it, an' about night it begun to grow fresher; but it came on dark agin, and I had to camp. Long about midnight I heerd a sort of rustlin' like in the bushes. I war wide awake in a minit; for a feller that lives in the woods larns to keep his ears about him. I lifted my head an' listened. Yes, thar war no mistake—I could hear something steppin' keerfully over the leaves, an' I thought it war comin' right toward me. At first I thought it war some wild varmint; but, as it come nigher, I found that it war a two-legged critter; so I cocked my rifle an' waited for the Injun—for I knowed by the step that it war a red-skin—to come in sight. The steps sounded nigher an' nigher, an' all to onct the bushes parted without any noise, an' out come the biggest Blackfoot that it ever war my luck to set eyes on. He didn't seem to know that me an' my rifle war around; if he had, I reckon it wouldn't have made him feel very pleasant; but he walked past, within ten foot of me, an' disappeared in the darkness.

"Now, perhaps you would like to know why I didn't up and shoot him. Wal, I'll tell you. That would have jest knocked the hul thing in the head, an' I should have had all my trouble for nothin'. I knowed that the Injun that stole my trap wasn't a great way off, and I knowed, too, that the feller that jest passed war a sort of friend of his'n, an' that they war goin' to meet somewhere in the woods close by. So I thought that perhaps, if I took matters easy, I could rub out both of the rascals.

"As soon as the Injun wur out o' hearin', I picked myself up, an' started along arter him, purty certain that before long I would come in sight of their camp-fire; an' I wasn't mistaken I hadn't gone half a mile afore I see a light shinin' through the trees; an' droppin' on all-fours, I begun to crawl along through the bushes, until I come to a place where I had a full view of the fire. As I had expected, there war two Injuns settin' by it. One of them—the one that had just passed me—war eaten' his supper, an' the other lay stretched out on his blanket, and war showin' his friend the trap he had stole from me; an' they war both laughin' over it, as though they thought it war a mighty good joke. This kinder riled me, an' I knowed that I could soon put an end to their skylarkin'. I might have shot one of them where he sot easy enough, but that wouldn't do, for the other would have escaped, an' I wanted to make sure of both of 'em. I wasn't fool enough to think of walkin' into their camp an' tacklin' both of 'em to onct; they would have made an end of me in the shake of a buck's tail. The only way I could work it war to get 'em apart, an' take 'em one at a time. So I dropped my rifle an' drew my knife, an' gave two loud yells, which war a signal to let the Injuns know that one of 'em war wanted. They both sprang to their feet an' listened for a moment, an' one of 'em—the one that had stole my trap—picked up his rifle and come toward me; an' the other went on eatin' his supper.

"I waited until the Injun had come within ten foot of me, then all to onct I stepped out from behind my tree an' stood before him. Bar an' buffaler! how the rascal started! He looked at me for a minit, as if to make sure that I war a human critter, an' then, givin' an unarthly yell, he dropped his rifle, an' made at me with his tomahawk. But I met him half way, an' ketchin' hold of the hand that held the tomahawk, I give him a stab with my knife that settled his business for him. He fell to the ground like a log, an' I had hardly time to grab my rifle afore I seed the big Injun comin' toward me. But he hadn't made more'n two steps, afore a chunk of lead brought him to the ground.

"I then walked up to the camp, and stretched myself out on one of the Injuns' blankets; and arter makin' a good supper on a piece of venison I found hung up on a tree close by, I covered myself up, an' in a few minits war fast asleep.

"The next mornin' I war up bright an' arly, an' pickin' up my trap, an' all the Injuns' plunder I wanted, I drew a bee-line for camp. In another day I had gathered up all the rest of my traps, without seein' any more Injun signs; but I knowed they would soon be around. As I didn't care about bein' in their company, an' as game war gettin' scarce, I tumbled all my spelter into my canoe, an' started down the river."

CHAPTER V.

The Fight in the Woods.



HE next morning, after breakfast, the trapper took down his long rifle, saying, as he did so:

"Now, youngsters, I'm goin' off into the woods, about twenty mile or so, to camp out for a week, an' see if I can't find some otter. If you want good sport, you had better go, too. The game is gettin' too scarce around here to suit me."

The boys readily agreed to this proposal, and began to talk of packing their sleds; but the trapper scouted the idea.

"You'll never larn to be what I call woodsmen," said he, "until you get rid of some of your city notions. You must larn to tote all your plunder on your backs. Just fill your possible-

sacks^[1] with coffee and bread; take plenty of powder an' shot, a change of clothes, an ax or

two, an' some blankets, and that's all you need."

[1] Haversack.

These simple preparations were soon completed, and, after bidding Uncle Joe good-by, they set out, accompanied by their dogs.

Dick carried the "Old Settler," and had his blanket strapped fast to his belt. Frank and George each carried an ax. Archie had several of his fox-traps, which he could not think of leaving behind; and Harry brought up the rear, carrying a large bundle of blankets. Besides these necessary articles, the boys carried their shot-guns, and the trapper his long rifle.

Dick led the way directly up the creek, following the same course they had taken the day before in pursuit of the Indians, for about ten miles, and then struck off into the woods. About noon they halted in a little grove of evergreens, and the trapper said:

"We'll camp here for awhile, youngsters, an' eat our dinner."

The boys were very glad to hear this; for, strong and active as they were, they found that they were no match for Dick in traveling. Archie and George leaned their guns up against a tree, took the axes, and commenced to clear away a place where they could build a fire.

"Now," said the trapper, turning to the others, "we'll leave them here to 'tend to the camp, an' make a good cup of coffee for us agin we come back, an' the rest of us will take a tramp through the woods, an' see what we can get for dinner. Take different directions now, so as to scare up more game."

The boys immediately set out as directed, each accompanied by his dog. Brave ran on ahead of his master, beating about through the bushes, but not a rabbit or squirrel showed himself. But Frank kept on, taking good care to remember the points of the compass, determined that he would not go back to the camp empty-handed. At length Brave's well-known bark caused him to start forward at a more rapid pace, and the next moment he heard some heavy animal crashing through the underbrush, just in advance of him, at a tremendous rate. The woods were so thick that Frank could not see the game, but the angry yelping of the dog told him that it was being closely pursued. Guided by the noise they made, he followed after them as fast as his legs could carry him, keeping a sharp look-out on all sides, for he did not know but that it might be a bear which the dog had started. He remembered his meeting with the wild-cat, but felt no fear now, for he had his trusty gun in his hand, heavily loaded with buck-shot, and knew, from experience, that, at short range, it was a very efficient weapon. His first care was to find the trail which the game had made, and, upon examination, he found that Brave had started, not a bear, but several moose. He knew their tracks in a moment, for he had often seen them in the woods; but he could not tell how many of them there were, for their trails crossed each other in every direction. He had never had the fortune to meet one of these animals, and his feelings were worked up to the highest pitch of excitement by the discovery. He started forward again at the top of his speed. The rapid pace of the game soon carried all sounds of the chase out of hearing; but Frank had no difficulty in following the trail. He had run nearly a mile, when the angry yelps of the dog sounded through the woods in fiercer and more abrupt echoes. Frank hurried forward, and soon came in sight of the game. The moose—a huge bull, with wide-spreading antlers—was standing at bay, and the dog was bounding around him, watching an opportunity to seize him, but was met at every point. Now and then the moose would lower his head, and rush upon his enemy, but the latter nimbly kept out of his way.

Frank did not pause long to witness the battle, but immediately ran forward, holding his gun in readiness for a shot. The moose, upon discovering him, suddenly wheeled, and started off at a rapid trot. The snow in that part of the woods was nearly three feet deep, and was covered with a crust strong enough to sustain the hunter and his dog, but the moose sank into it at every step, and his trail could be easily traced by the blood which was running from numerous wounds on his legs, made by the sharp crust. He ran heavily, and Frank, who was exerting himself to his utmost, had the satisfaction of finding that he was gaining on him. Brave easily kept pace with him and finally succeeded in bringing the moose at bay again. This was what Frank wanted. Just as the deer was about to make a charge upon the dog, he fired, and the huge animal tumbled to the ground. The young hunter ran forward, intending to give him the contents of the other barrel, but, before he could fire, the moose staggered to his feet, and disregarding the attacks of the dog, which were renewed with redoubled fierceness and vigor, rushed straight upon the hunter, and bore him to the ground.

In falling, Frank lost his gun. The enraged animal pressed upon the young hunter, burying his antlers in the snow on each side of him, holding him fast to the ground. Frank gave himself up for lost; but he determined that he would not yield his life without a struggle. He was unarmed, and the contest must be one of strength and endurance. Before the moose could draw back to make another charge upon him, Frank seized him by the antlers, and clung to them with all his strength. Brave seemed to understand the perilous situation in which his master was placed, and fought more furiously than ever. But the moose, although severely wounded by the teeth of the dog, did not appear to notice him in the least, but struggled desperately to free himself from the young hunter's grasp. Frank was dragged about through the snow, and pressed down into it, until his clothing was almost reduced to tatters; and he was severely wounded by the sharp crust and the hoofs of the enraged deer, which cut through his garments like a knife. It required all his strength to retain his hold. He did not seem to be in the least frightened; but the manner in which he clung to the moose, and cheered on the dog, showed that he well knew the danger of his situation. But he was growing weaker every moment, while the moose appeared to be growing proportionately stronger, and his struggles became more furious and determined. Frank knew that the animal would soon succeed in freeing himself, and then ——. It was a horrible thought!

At this moment he heard the noise of approaching feet on the crust, and a voice exclaimed, "Bars and buffaler! Hang on to the creetur jest a minute longer, youngster! Take 'em, dog! take 'em!" And the next instant a dark object bounded lightly over him, and commenced a furious battle with the moose. Benumbed and exhausted, Frank could hold out no longer. As the moose tore himself from his grasp, the young hunter saw him pulled to the ground by the trapper's dog, and then a mist gathered before his eyes, and he sank back on the snow insensible.



When his consciousness returned, he found himself in a rudely-constructed hut, lying in front of a blazing fire, and so tightly wrapped up in blankets that he could scarcely breathe. Dick sat in one corner of the hut, smoking his pipe, and gazing vacantly into the fire. Brave lay stretched out by his master's side, with his head resting on his shoulder, gazing into his face with every expression of concern. As soon as Frank opened his eyes, the faithful animal announced the fact by a joyful bark, which brought all the boys into the hut.

"How do you feel, Frank?" inquired Archie, whose pale face showed that he had more than a common interest in his cousin's well-being.

"O! I'm all right," answered Frank, in a weak voice. "But you've got me bundled up so tight I can hardly breathe. I wish you would take a dozen or two of these blankets off."

"No, you don't," said Dick, as the boys crowded up around Frank. "I believe I've got the bossin' of this yere job. Here," he continued, as he arose from his seat and approached his patient, "drink this;" and he raised Frank from his blankets with one hand, and, with the other, held to his lips a cup containing some of the most bitter stuff he had ever drank. The young hunter made wry faces over it, but succeeded in draining the cup. "Now," resumed Dick, "lay down agin an' go to sleep. Shut up! No back talk!" he continued, as Frank essayed to speak. "You musn't talk till I say you may;" and the rough but kind-hearted trapper laid him back on his bed, and, drawing the blankets more closely about him, left him to his meditations.

He soon fell off into a refreshing slumber; and when he awoke it was dark, and his companions were seated around the fire, eating their supper.

"Wal, youngster," said Dick, "how do you feel now?"

"O! I'm much better," answered Frank; "and hungry as blazes. Won't you give a fellow some thing to eat?"

"In course," said Dick; and he brought Frank some pieces of toast and a cup of coffee.

"I don't like your style of doctoring a bit," said Frank, as the trapper carefully removed the blankets with which his patient was enveloped. "The remedies you use are worse than the disease. You've kept me wrapped up so tight that I am sore all over."

"I shouldn't wonder," said the trapper, laughing heartily; "but that doesn't come of bein' wrapped up in the blankets. You war purty well chawed up when me an' Useless diskivered you."

Dick raised Frank to a sitting posture, and, in spite of his objections, once more drew the blankets about him, allowing him, however, the free use of his arms; and the young hunter soon discovered that he was not quite so well as he had imagined, for sharp pains shot through his body, and he was so weak he could scarcely sit up.

"I believe I had something of a fight with that moose, didn't I?" he inquired, as he broke off a piece of the toast.

"I believe you did, judging from the looks of your clothes," answered Harry, as he laid down his plate, and took from a peg in one corner of the hut all that remained of Frank's garments.

The coat and pants were torn almost into shreds, and covered with blood, and the sole of one of his boots had been pulled off by the sharp hoofs of the deer. Brave had also suffered severely, judging from the bloody bandages that he wore.

"It was a narrow escape, wasn't it?" said Frank, as he gazed in astonishment at his tattered garments.

"Yes, indeed," said Archie; "I shouldn't have cared about being in your boots just then. How you ever

made out to get out of those clothes alive, is more than I can tell."

"It war a careless trick," said Dick, "tacklin' that animal in that ar way. You ought to knowed better."

"Well, we got the moose, didn't we?" inquired Frank.

"Yes," answered George, chewing away at a large piece of meat; "and we are eating him up as fast as we can."

As soon as Frank had finished his toast and coffee, he was glad to lie down again, for he was still very weak from the loss of blood. The others, after putting away the supper-dishes, replenished the fire, and stretched themselves out on their blankets.

"How do you feel now, youngster?" asked the trapper, as he drew a brand from the fire and lit his pipe.

"O! I guess I shall get along."

"It's a'most time for you to take some more of your medicine."

"I don't care about taking any more of it," answered Frank. "It's the meanest stuff I ever tasted."

"It's Injun medicine," answered the trapper, as he sank back on his blanket, and puffed away vigorously at his pipe. "I remember," he continued, after a few moments' pause, "of doctorin' up my chum, Bill Lawson, an' that war the way me an' him come to get acquainted. But he war used to Injun doctorin', and didn't growl as much as you do. I've heered him tell of that scrape a hundred times; an' he used to tell it in this way:

"The way me an' Dick Lewis come to get together," he used to say, "war this. I war onct trappin' among the mountains on a little stream called Muddy Creek. It war about the wust bit of Injun country in the world; but they didn't bother me, an' I tuk mighty good care not to meddle with their corn an' beans, an' for a long time I had jest the best kind of luck in trappin'. Beaver were plenty as black flies in summer, an' the woods war chuck full o' otter, an' the mountains of grizzly bars an' black-tails, so I had plenty to do.

"I had made my camp in the woods, about a mile back from the creek where I war trappin', so as not to skeer away the game. Beaver is mighty skeery animals, an' don't like to have a feller trampin' around them all the while; and when a man sets a trap, he musn't go to it agin afore arly the next mornin', for if he does, the game soon gets mighty shy, an' the first thing the trapper knows, he'll have to hunt somewhere else for beaver. You see I knowed all this, an' so kept out of their way. I got along first-rate, until arly in the spring, jest as the ice begun to break up, an' hadn't seed nothin' of the Injuns. But one mornin', while I war on my way to 'tend to my traps, I seed the prints of some moccasins, where three or four fellers had crossed the creek. I knowed in a minit, from the looks of them, that they wasn't white fellers' tracks; so I begun to prick up my ears an' look around me a little. I examined the trail agin, an' I knowed there could be no mistake. The Comanches had been along there, sure. I begun beatin' keerfully around through the bushes, for I didn't know but that the tarnal red-skins war watchin' me all the time; when all to onct I come acrost another trail, which war as different from the first as a muskrat is different from a grizzly. It war a white feller's track. The tracks looked as though he had been crawlin' along on his hands an' knees, an' onct in awhile I could see the place where the butt of his rifle had trailed on the ground. I knowed in a minit that the white hunter, whoever he war, had been follerin' up the Injuns.

"Wal," thinks I, "Bill Lawson, you had better keep an eye out for them traps o' yourn." So I begun to draw a bee-line through the woods toward the place where I had sot one o' my traps, keepin' my gun ready to put a chunk of lead into the first thing in the shape of an Injun that I should see. But instead o' goin' up to my trap in the way I generally did, I went round so as to come up on the other side. Purty soon I begun to come near the place where the trap was sot; so I dropped down on all-fours, an' commenced to crawl through the thick brush. I knowed I should have to be mighty keerful, for an Injun has got ears like a painter, an' he allers keeps 'em open, too. Wal, purty soon I poked my head over a log, an' peeked through the bushes; an' what do you think I seed? There war my trap, with a big beaver in it, ketched fast by the hind leg; an' right behind some big trees that stood near the trap war three Injuns, listenin', an' watchin', an' waitin' for me to come an' get my game.

"That's the way you painted heathen watch for a white gentleman, is it," thinks I; "I'll fix some o' you." So I drew my knife an' tomahawk, an' laid them on the ground beside me, an' then, arter examinin' my rifle to see that it war all right, I drew a bead on the biggest Injun, an' fired. He rolled over, dead as a door nail, an' the others jumped up an' yelled like two screech owls. I didn't stop to ax no questions; but, throwin' away my rifle, I grabbed up my knife an' tomahawk, an' walked into 'em.

"They both fired as I came up—one missed, an' the other tuk me in the leg, an' kerflumux I come to the ground. The Injuns thought they had me now, sure, an' they came toward me, drawin' their knives an' yellin' like mad. But I war on my pins agin in less than no time; an', standin' as well as I could on my broken leg, I swung my tomahawk around my head, an' let fly at the nighest Injun. It tuk him plumb atween the eyes, an' I knowed that the work war done for him. But the next minit the other heathen clinched me, an', liftin' me off my legs, throwed me to the ground like a log. He had two legs to use, an' I had only one; there war where he had the advantage of me. But I had the use of my hands; an' I jest made up my mind that if he wanted my scalp he would have to work for it; so, quick as lightnin', I grabbed the hand that held the knife, an' give it a squeeze that actooally made the bones crack, an' the rascal give one yell, an' let go the weapon. Then, with the other hand, I ketched him by the scalp-lock, an' done my best to turn him, knowin' that if I could onct get on top of him, I would be all right; but I couldn't use my leg; so, thinks I, I'll hold him here awhile, an' I pulled his head down close to me. But I had bled so much that I begun to give out; an' the Injun, who hadn't made a move arter I got hold of his har, knowed that I war growin' weak, an' the first thing I knowed, he broke away from me, an' sprung to his feet. I tried to get up too, but the Injun grabbed up his knife, an' pinned me agin. I fit as well as I could, but the rascal knowed I couldn't do nothin'; and, placing one knee on my breast to hold me down, he put one hand to his mouth, an' give a loud yell.

"It war answered close by, an' somebody come out o' the bushes. At first I thought it war another Injun comin' up to help rub me out; but another look showed me that it war a white feller. He didn't stop to ax no questions, but made a dash at the Comanche, who got off me in a tarnal hurry, an' callin' out some name that showed that he knowed who the white feller war, he begun to make tracks; but he hadn't gone ten foot afore the trapper had him by the neck. The fight war mighty short, for the Comanche wasn't nowhere—the trapper handled him as though he had been a baby, an' in less than two minits he war a dead Injun."

"That's the way ole Bill used to tell his story," continued Dick; "an' he allers used to pint me out as the man that saved him. The white feller's trail that he seed by the creek war my own, an' I war follerin' up the

Comanches. Wal, I tuk the old man back to his camp, an', arter two months' doctorin', I got him all right agin. When he got well, he wouldn't let me leave him, nor I didn't want to, for he war jest the kind of a man I wanted for a chum. He hated an Injun as bad as I did, an' I used to like to listen to the stories he told of his fights with them. How do you come on now, youngster?"

"O! I feel pretty well," answered Frank, "only I'm a little weak."

"You can thank your lucky stars that you wasn't rubbed out altogether," said the trapper, as he approached the young hunter. "Me an' Useless got there jest in time. But you won't allers be so lucky."

After wrapping Frank up carefully in the blankets again, he knocked the ashes from his pipe, and sought his own couch.

CHAPTER VI.

The White Buck.



It was a week before Frank was able to travel, during which time George and Archie had been sent back to Uncle Joe's after supplies of bread, coffee, and salt. Early one morning they again set out, the trapper leading the way more slowly than at the former part of the journey, so as not to weary his young companion. They halted at noon for dinner, and about four o'clock in the afternoon they reached a dilapidated cabin.

"This yere is to be our camp for awhile," said Dick, throwing his rifle into the hollow of his arm. "I camped here last winter; but I see the shantee is well-nigh broke down. But we can soon set it to rights agin."

They leaned their guns against the logs of the cabin, and Archie and George cut down some saplings with which to repair the roof; while the others cleared out the old pine boughs that covered the floor, and erected a new crane over the fireplace, which was a hole about four feet in diameter and a foot and a half deep, that had been dug in the middle of the floor. An opening in the roof directly over this did duty both as chimney and window. Before dark the cabin was put in order again, and the hunters began to prepare their supper.

The next morning the trapper, after giving Frank emphatic directions to remain quiet during the day, set out, with Useless at his heels, to look for "otter signs." George and Archie followed him with their fox-traps; and Frank and Harry, being left to themselves, shouldered their guns, and strolled slowly through the woods, and amused themselves in shooting rabbits, which were very abundant. In a short time they had secured game enough for dinner, and were about to retrace their steps toward the cabin, when the dog, which was some distance in advance of them, suddenly stopped, and, after listening a moment, uttered a low whine, ran back to his master, and took refuge behind him.

"What's the matter with the dog, I wonder?" said Frank, patting the animal's head, and endeavoring to encourage him.

"I don't know," answered Harry, clutching his gun more firmly; "he must have seen or scented some wild animal. Perhaps it would be safer to go back a little way. I shouldn't like the idea of meeting a bear or panther;" and Harry began to retreat.

"Hold on," said Frank; "don't be in a hurry. If it is a panther, we are certainly a match for him. Our guns are loaded with buck-shot."

"I know it; but if I should see one of the 'varmint,' as Dick calls them, I should be so excited that I couldn't shoot at all. I think we had better"—

"Hush!" interrupted Frank. "Don't you hear something?"

The boys listened, and a faint cry, like the yelping of a pack of hounds, was borne to their ears.

"It can't be dogs," said Frank, "for if it was, Brave would not have been so frightened; besides, it does not sound exactly like them, and I know of no hunter in this part of the country that keeps hounds."

"I wonder if that is what Brave heard?" said Harry.

"It must be," replied Frank, watching the motions of his dog, which appeared to grow more excited as the sound came nearer. "I would like to know what it is."

"We shall soon find out, for it seems to be coming this way. Let's hide behind some of these trees."

The boys, accordingly, concealed themselves, and waited impatiently, with a great deal of anxiety, for the animals to come in sight. Louder and louder grew the noise, and Harry, turning to his companion, with blanched cheeks, exclaimed:

"It's the cry of a pack of wolves. Let's get away from here."

"O, no," said Frank. "They must be in pursuit of something. Let us wait and see what it is."

There was something appalling in the sound, which now began to echo loudly through the woods, and it was no wonder that Harry wished to retreat. Even Brave, although he was a very courageous dog, seemed struck with terror, and crept up behind his master, as if endeavoring to get out of sight. But Frank, with his usual recklessness, determined to stand his ground as long as possible.

The wolves seemed to be running directly toward them, and the boys held their guns to their shoulders, ready to shoot the first one that appeared. In a few moments there was a crashing in the bushes, and a white object was seen gliding among the trees, while behind him followed a pack of a dozen wolves. They ran with their ears laid close back to their heads, and their mouths open, displaying frightful rows of teeth. Frank gazed at them a moment, and then turned his attention to the game. Could he believe his eyes! It was a *white buck*. He was running at the top of his speed; but his tongue was hanging out of his mouth, and his legs were

horribly lacerated by the sharp crust, into which he sank at every step. He was evidently almost tired out, and the wolves were gaining on him rapidly. Frank had often heard of white deer, but had never seen one before, and he determined to take a hand in the affair, and, if possible, rescue the buck from his pursuers.

"Shoot the wolves, Harry," he exclaimed, "and save the deer. We want him ourselves."

"Don't shoot—don't," urged Harry. "The wolves will turn on us."

But it was too late. Frank's gun was at his shoulder in an instant, and the foremost of the pack leaped high in the air, and fell to the ground, dead. The others stopped and ravenously attacked their fallen comrade, and in a moment every vestige of him had disappeared. The white buck kept on his way, and soon disappeared from their sight.

"Shoot 'em, Harry," exclaimed Frank, excitedly, turning to his companion, who stood holding his gun in his hand, and gazing at the wolves as though he had suddenly been deprived of all action; "shoot 'em, and don't be standing there like a bump on a log. They'll pitch into us, sure, and the more we kill now, the less we shall have to deal with by-and-by."

This seemed to bring Harry back to his senses, and he hurriedly raised his gun to his shoulder and endeavored to cover one of the wolves with the sight. But he was trembling violently, and his gun swayed about like a leaf in a storm.

"Why don't you shoot?" exclaimed Frank.

Harry pressed the trigger, and the loud yell that followed showed that the shot had not been thrown away. One of the wolves was severely wounded. Maddened by the pain, he dashed toward the place where the boys were standing, followed by the whole pack.

"Take to a tree, quick!" exclaimed Frank, who began to be surprised at his own coolness; "it's our only chance. Be sure and keep a good hold of your gun." Suiting the action to the word, he swung himself into the lowest branches of a small pine that stood near, and, reaching down, seized Brave by his long hair and pulled him up after him. It was slow climbing among the thick branches, with a gun in one hand and a dog nearly as heavy as himself in the other; and he had scarcely ascended out of reach before the wolves were around the tree. Several of the pack leaped among the branches, and made desperate efforts to reach him, while their dismal howls made his blood run cold.

"Hold on, down there," muttered Frank. "Wait until I get Brave fixed, and then I'll soon be even with you."

After feeling in all his pockets, he found a stout strap, with which he tied his dog fast to the branches, so that he would not fall down among the wolves.

"I say, Frank, where are you?" shouted Harry, from his tree.

"Here I am," answered Frank. "Are you all right?"

"Yes; but I had a narrow escape, I tell you. The wolves pulled off one of my boots as I was climbing up this tree. You're always getting a fellow into some scrape or other, ain't you?"

"I don't call this much of a scrape," answered Frank. "We're safe, at any rate."

"I know it," replied Harry, who seemed to be regaining his courage. "But we may have to stay up here a week."

"No we won't—not if our ammunition holds out," answered Frank, pushing his gun through the branches of the tree. "I'm going to commence shooting them."

"That's a good plan; I did not think of that."

The report of Harry's gun followed his words, and feeling safe in his tree, he made a good shot, the largest of the wolves receiving the entire charge in his head. The boys continued to load and fire until the last wolf was killed, when they dropped down from the trees, and took a survey of their work. Nine wolves were lying dead on the snow, which was saturated with blood, and a tenth was endeavoring to crawl away on two legs. Brave immediately commenced a battle with him, but the wolf had plenty of fight left in him, and was killed only after a hard struggle.

"Now," said Frank, "let's follow up that white buck. I would give almost any thing to catch him alive. He is pretty well tired out, and can't run far."

"Lead on, then," said Harry; "but, if Dick was here, he would say it was no use. You know hunters are inclined to be superstitious about such things."

The boys had often heard extravagant stories told about the incredible speed and tenacity of life possessed by white deer, and had heard old hunters say that it was impossible to kill or capture them. But Frank was not superstitious. He could not see why a white deer should be so widely different from one of the ordinary color. At all events, he determined to make an attempt to capture the white buck—which would make a valuable addition to his museum. So, leaving the wolves where they had fallen, he led the way along the trail, which could be easily followed by the blood on the snow. They had run nearly a mile, when they discovered the white buck a short distance ahead of them, making his way slowly through the snow, and staggering as though he were scarcely able to keep his feet.

"There he is," exclaimed Frank, joyfully. "Catch him, Brave."

The dog was off in an instant, and although the buck made an effort to run, he was speedily overtaken, and pulled down without a show of resistance. The boys hurried forward to secure their captive, which struggled desperately as they approached. But at length Frank succeeded in fastening his belt around his neck. The buck staggered to his feet, and, after a few ineffectual attempts to escape, seemed to submit to his fate, and suffered himself to be led toward the cabin. He was one of the most noble specimens of the common deer that the boys had ever seen. He stood nearly five feet high at the shoulders, and his head was crowned with antlers, which Frank had learned, from experience, would prove no mean weapons in a fight. He was evidently an "old settler," and had seen some stirring times during his life, for his body was almost covered with scars. They reached the camp without any mishap, and Harry brought from the cabin a long rope with which the captive was fastened to a tree. After a short struggle, during which the boys received some pretty severe scratches from the buck's sharp hoofs, his legs were rudely bandaged, and he was left to himself.

After a hastily-eaten dinner, the boys returned to the scene of their late fight with the wolves, to procure some of the skins, which Frank wished to mount in his museum. They got back to the cabin just before dark, and found Dick leaning on his long rifle, and closely examining the buck. Useless was seated at his side, and near him lay three otter-skins, which they had captured during the day.

"See here, youngsters," exclaimed the trapper, as the boys came up, "what's all this yere?"

"O, that's our day's work," replied Frank.

"Give us your hands, youngsters," continued Dick. "Shoot me if you hain't done somethin' that I tried all last winter to do an' couldn't. If I shot at that buck onct, I shot at him twenty times. Do you see that scar on his flank? I made that. An' there's another on his neck. When I hit him there I thought I had him sure; for he war thrown in his tracks, an' when Useless come up to grab him, he war up an' off like a shot. If you war with some trappers I know, they would tell you to cut that rope an' let him get away from here as fast as he could travel. Some fellers think these yere white deer have got the Evil One in 'em."

"O, that's all nonsense," said Frank; "a white deer isn't a bit different from any other, only in the color."

"That's what I used to tell 'em," said Dick. "But this yere is my day's work," he added, lifting the otter-skins from the ground; "and a good one it is, too. But five mile back the woods are full of otter, an' a little further on is a beaver-dam—eight houses in it—forty beaver at the least kalkerlation."

As the trapper finished speaking, he shouldered his rifle and led the way into the cabin, where a fire was soon started, and some choice pieces of venison, which had been brought in by him were laid on the coals to broil. In a few moments, George and Archie entered, and the latter inquired:

"Who caught that white buck?"

Frank gave him the desired information, and also related their adventure with the wolves; when Archie continued:

"I'm glad you caught him, for you always wanted one for your museum. We came near catching a black fox for you."

"A black fox!" repeated the trapper.

"Yes; the largest one I ever saw," said George. "He's black as a coal—hasn't got a white hair on him, except the very tip of his tail."

"I know him," answered the trapper. "Him an' Useless had more'n one race last winter. You found his trail down by that little creek that runs through that deep hollow."

"Yes," answered Archie.

"An' lost it up here in the woods but two mile back."

"Yes," said Archie again.

"An' that's the way you'll keep doin' as often as you chase him. You can't ketch him. He's an ole one in these parts, an' I guess he'll stay here till he dies a nat'ral death."

"No, I'll be shot if he does," said Archie, decidedly, as he deposited his gun on a couple of pegs in one corner of the cabin, and began to divest himself of his overcoat. "I've got a dog that was never fooled yet. There was a fox that used to live on Reynard's Island, a short distance from Lawrence, and he had been chased by all the best dogs in the country; but the first time he got Sport on his trail, he was a gone sucker. I'm going to start out early to-morrow and try that black fox again, and if I don't catch him the first day, I'll try him the next, and keep it up till I do succeed. I don't mean to leave these woods without him."

"Then you'd better send home for plenty of grub," said the trapper, "for you'll have to stay here all winter."

"Supper's ready," said Frank; and this announcement cut short the conversation.

CHAPTER VII.

A Midnight Attack.



FTER supper, the hunters stretched themselves out on their blankets around the fire; but the usual evening conversation was omitted. Their day's work had fatigued them all, and soon their regular breathing told that sleep had overpowered them.

About midnight Frank, who slept away from the fire, and almost against the door, was aroused by a slight noise outside the cabin, like the stealthy tread of some animal in the snow. He had begun to acquire something of a hunter's habits, and the noise, slight as it was, aroused him in an instant. The dogs had also heard it, for they stood looking at the door, with every hair sticking toward their heads, but without uttering a sound. Frank reached for his gun, which hung on some pegs just above his head, and at that moment he heard a sound resembling the "wheeze" of a glandered horse.

"Bars and buffaler!" exclaimed Dick, suddenly arousing from a sound sleep, and drawing his long hunting-knife, which he always carried in his belt; "there's a painter around here somewhere—I'm sartin I heered the sniff of one."

"I heard something," replied Frank, "but I didn't know what it was."

By this time all the inmates of the cabin were aroused, and there was a hurried reaching for guns, and a putting on of fresh caps.

"Lend me your rifle, Dick," said Frank, "and I'll shoot him. I have never killed a panther."

"Wal, don't be keerless, like you generally are," said the trapper, handing him the weapon. "Be keerful to shoot right between his eyes. Hist—I'll be shot if the varmint ain't a pitchin' into the white buck—he are, that's sartin!"

As Dick spoke there was a violent rustling in the bushes, and a sound as of a heavy body falling on the snow. Then there was a slight struggle, and all was still again. Frank quickly threw open the door, and hunters and dogs all rushed out together. It was very dark; but Frank, who was in advance of his companions,

could just distinguish a black object crouching in the snow near the tree where the white buck had been fastened. In an instant his rifle was at his shoulder, and as the whip-like report resounded through the woods, the panther uttered a howl that sounded very much like the voice of a human being in distress, and, with one bound, disappeared in the bushes.

The quick-scented dogs found his trail in a twinkling. Guided by their barking, the hunters followed after them as rapidly as possible, in hopes that the dogs would soon overtake the panther and compel him to take to a tree. Running through a thick woods in a dark night is not a pleasant task; and the hunters made headway very slowly. But at length they came up with three of the dogs, which were standing at the foot of a large tree, barking furiously. Brave was nowhere to be seen.

"I shouldn't wonder if the varmint war up here," said the trapper, walking around the tree and peering upward into the darkness. "No he ain't, neither," he continued. "Useless, ye're fooled for onct in your life. You see, youngsters, where that big limb stretches out? Wal, the painter ran out on that, an' has got out of our way."

"I wonder where Brave is?" said Frank, anxiously.

"That ar is a hard thing to tell," answered the trapper. "The varmint may have chawed him up too, as well as the white buck."

"If he has," said Frank, bitterly, "I won't do any thing all the rest of my life but shoot panthers. Hold on! what's that?" he added, pointing through the trees.

"It looks mighty like somethin' comin' this way," said Dick. "Turn me into a mullen-stalk if I don't believe it's the painter! He's creepin' along a'most on his belly."

In an instant four guns were leveled at the approaching object, and the boys were about to fire, when the trapper, who had thrown himself almost flat on the snow, to obtain a better view of the animal, heard a suppressed whine. Springing to his feet, he knocked up the weapons, and quietly said,

"I guess I wouldn't shoot, boys. That's the dog comin back. I shouldn't wonder if he had been follerin' the painter all alone by himself."

The boys lowered their guns, and, in a few moments, to the infinite joy of Frank, Brave came up. He crawled slowly and with difficulty toward his master, and the hunters could see that he had been severely handled. He had several long, ugly wounds on his body, which were bleeding profusely.

"Wal, I'll be shot!" exclaimed the trapper, "if that ar fool of a dog didn't tackle the painter! He ought to knowed better. The varmint could chaw him up in two minits. Useless here wouldn't have thought o' doin' sich a thing. But it'll do no good for us to stay here, so we might as well travel back to the shantee. Ye're minus a white buck, Frank," he continued, as he led the way through the woods.

The young naturalist made no reply, for it was a severe blow to him. He had anticipated a great deal of pleasure in taming the white buck, and in showing him to his friends, and relating the circumstances of his capture. But the panther had put an end to these anticipations; and Frank determined, as long as he remained in the woods, to wage a merciless war against all his tribe.

A few moments' walk brought the hunters to the cabin, and they went at once to the place where they had left the white buck. The panther had torn an ugly-looking hole in his throat, and he was stone dead. It was evident, from the position in which he lay, that the panther had endeavored to drag him away, but was prevented by the rope and the timely interference of the hunters. As regrets were useless, Frank and his cousin carried the remains of the buck into the cabin. After fastening the door and replenishing the fire, the hunters again sought their blankets.

The next morning they were stirring long before daybreak, and Archie busied himself in removing the skin of the white buck, while his cousin, who was impatient to commence his war upon the panthers, was employed in cleaning his gun and sharpening his hunting-knife. Brave seemed to understand that something unusual was on hand. In spite of the rough treatment he had received the night before, he appeared to have plenty of spirit left in him still, and acted as though he were impatient to be off.

"Dick, will you lend me your trap?" inquired Frank, after he had finished his breakfast, and was preparing to set out.

"The 'Ole Settler' do you mean?" asked the trapper. "Sartin I will. Goin' to ketch the painter, ain't you?"

"Yes; I'm going to try. I must have at least three panther-skins to make up for the killing of the white buck. He was worth more to me than my entire museum."

"Wal," said Dick, as he handed Frank the trap, "if you can get him to stick his foot in the 'Ole Settler,' he's yourn, an' no mistake. That ar trap sticks tighter nor a brother when it gets a hold o' any thing. Now, be mighty keerful o' yourself."

"All right," answered Frank. "I'll have something to show you when I come back."

He set out, with Brave as his only companion. The trapper did not accompany him, for the reason that he had work of his own to attend to; and besides, although he was constantly scolding and finding fault with Frank for his "carelessness," he was proud of his courage, and admired the spirit that prompted this somewhat hazardous undertaking, and wished to allow him to reap all the honors himself. Archie and George did not go, for they were very anxious to visit their traps, and see whether there were any foxes in them. They did not like the idea of panther-hunting, and had tried every means in their power to induce Frank to abandon his project. Harry thought at first that he would be delighted to go, but, on reflection, he remembered his adventure with the wolves, and was fearful of another similar "scrape." So, as we have said, Frank started out alone, with nothing on which to depend except the faithful Brave, and his own courage and skill as a marksman. He was well enough acquainted with the woods, and the animals that inhabited them, to know that there was danger in the undertaking; but he thought only of the disappointment he had suffered in the death of the white buck, and the pleasure there would be in seeing the panther that had killed him stuffed and mounted in his museum.

He followed the same course the panther had taken the night before, until he reached the place where the animal had taken to the tree and escaped. Here the trail, of course, ended; but Brave had no difficulty in finding it again, and from this Frank concluded that he must have seen the panther jumping from tree to tree, and had followed him, until the latter, seeing that he was pursued by only one of his enemies, had descended to the ground and given battle, which had, of course, ended in Brave's defeat.

After a careful examination, Frank could discover but three foot-prints in the trail, which looked as

though some one had endeavored to obliterate it, by drawing a heavy stick over it. He could not account for this, but he knew, by the blood on the snow, that the panther had been severely wounded by the shot he had fired at him; so, without stopping to make any more observations, he ordered Brave to "Hunt 'em up."

The dog immediately set off on the trail, and Frank kept as close to him as possible. The panther had made good use of his time, for they followed the trail until almost four o'clock in the afternoon, without coming up with him. In the excitement of the chase, Frank had not thought of stopping to eat his dinner, and he was both tired and hungry. A few moments' rest, and a piece of the cold venison and bread, with which his haversack was well stored, he thought would enable him to follow the trail until dark. He began to look around to find a good place to build a fire, when a loud bark from Brave drove all such thoughts out of his mind, and he ran forward to the place where the dog was standing, and suddenly came in sight of the panther, which had killed a wild turkey, and was crouching at the foot of a tree, just ready to begin his meal.

One of his hind-legs was entirely useless, having been broken by the shot from the rifle; and that it was which had given that peculiar look to his trail. How he had managed to climb so many trees, and travel such a distance, with his leg in that condition, Frank could not imagine. But he was not allowed much time to make observations, for the panther crouched lower over his prey, and lashed his sides with his tail, as if about to spring toward him. He was within easy range, and Frank cocked both barrels of his gun, and slowly raised the weapon to his shoulder. His hand could not have been more steady if he had been aiming at a squirrel. He glanced along the clean, brown tubes for a moment, and fired both barrels in quick succession. The gun had been heavily loaded, in order to "make sure work" of the panther, and the immense recoil threw Frank flat on his back. When he recovered his feet, he saw the panther stretched out motionless on the ground. The buck-shot had done its work.

CHAPTER VIII.

A Couple of New Pets.



FRANK was a big-feeling boy just then. He knew that he had done something that many an older person than himself would hesitate to undertake. He was fast becoming accustomed to scenes of excitement and danger, and he thought only of the feat he had accomplished, and not of the perilous position in which he had placed himself but a few moments before. What if his gun had missed fire, or he had only wounded the panther? How long could he and Brave have withstood his attacks? The panther would certainly have conquered them. And what could he have done if he had been disabled in the depths of those woods, so far from any human being? Such questions as these passed through the reckless young hunter's mind, but he dismissed them with the thought that the panther was dead, and that he had nothing to fear.

The animal was one of the largest of his kind, measuring, as near as Frank could judge, fully seven feet in length, including the tail. The rifleshot which had broken his leg had made an ugly-looking wound, and he had received both charges of buck-shot in his head; but the skin was not spoiled, and Frank's first thought was to take it off and cure it for stuffing.

Around the tree was a little space, which was clear of bushes, and was probably as good a camping-ground as he could find. So he placed his gun where he could put his hand upon it at a moment's warning, and removed his haversack, hanging it up on a small tree that stood near. He then unfastened his belt, and took from it his blanket and a small tin pail, which was to do duty as a coffee-pot. With the aid of his heavy hunting-knife, he soon erected a hut—rude-looking, indeed, but sufficiently strong and tight to protect him from the wind. Over the floor he spread hemlock branches to the depth of four or five inches, and the camp was finished. He then kindled a fire in front of the hut, and filled his pail with snow, and hung it on a crane to boil. In a little while the turkey, which the panther had killed, was dressed, and cooking as fast as a hot fire could make it. Before his supper was cooked, the panther was hauled into the cabin, and his skin taken off, and hung upon a frame to dry.

The turkey was equally divided between master and dog; and as neither had eaten any dinner, not a vestige of the fowl was left. While Frank was building his camp, he had heard a faint ripple, like the noise of a small water-fall; and he was somewhat surprised thereat, for the intensely cold weather had formed ice, even in the swiftest water, almost two feet in thickness. As soon as he had finished his supper, he started out to see what had occasioned the noise, taking the trap with him, intending to find a good place to set it. When he arrived at the stream, he found it had its source in a salt spring, or, as the hunters would call it, a "deer-lick." The snow on the banks was trodden as hard as a floor, and the paths that the animals had made, in going to and from the stream, ran up into the woods in all directions. These springs are favorite resorts of deer and other wild animals, which delight to taste their brackish waters; and it is a common way of killing deer, in places where they are scarce, to watch one of these "licks" during the night, and shoot the animals as they approach.

Frank walked up one of the paths that led to the spring, and began to make preparations to set his trap. It was just the place for it, as he would be certain to catch something before morning. He first dug a hole with his hunting-knife, directly in the middle of the path, and the next job was to set the trap. He knew how it ought to be done. But the powerful jaws of the "Ole Settler" had often resisted the efforts of a stronger person than himself. After half an hour's work, during which time the skirts of his coat had been cut almost entirely off by the long, sharp teeth, he succeeded in getting it set, and placed safely in the hole which he had

dug for its reception. Then, with his hunting-knife, he cut down a good-sized sapling that stood near, and to this he fastened one end of a short, heavy chain; the other end of the chain he fastened to the trap. After he had placed every thing to his satisfaction, he carefully covered the trap and chain with snow, removed all the twigs and leaves he had scattered about, and returned to his camp. He employed himself until dark in gathering his evening's supply of fire-wood, and then lay down on his bed of boughs, well satisfied with his day's work.

As it grew dark, it seemed to him that his camp became the center of attraction to every wild animal in the woods for a circle of ten miles around. The owl flew down around his fire, uttering his dismal scream; the barking of foxes was heard in all directions; and, now and then, a dark object would come out of the bushes, and gaze at him a moment with eyes that shone through the darkness like coals of fire, and then beat a hasty retreat. Once or twice he heard a sound that made him reach, rather hurriedly, for his gun—the same sound that the trapper, the night before, had pronounced the “sniff of a painter.”

Frank did not feel exactly safe in going to sleep, and sat for a long time with his gun in his hand. Several times he was half inclined to shoot at some of the animals that came around the camp; but he finally concluded to keep the peace as long as they would. In a few moments after he had made this resolution, he sank back on his blanket, and was soon fast asleep.

Near midnight he was awakened by a chorus of loud yells. Starting up, he found his camp surrounded by wolves. The fire had almost gone out, and the wolves appeared to be growing bolder by degrees, having already approached quite close to the cabin. Frank started to his feet and threw a firebrand among them, when they scattered in every direction, and were out of sight in a moment. He was not disturbed again, and when he awoke it was daylight. After putting a good supply of wood on the fire, and hanging his coffee-pot on the crane, he shouldered his gun, and started toward the place where the trap had been set, hoping to find something in it that would make a breakfast for him.

There *was* something in it, beyond a doubt, for both trap and clog were gone; and the way Brave growled and showed his teeth led him to believe that he had caught something besides a deer. The hole in which he had placed the trap was trodden down as though a flock of sheep had passed over it. It was a matter of some difficulty to follow the trail of the animal that had been caught in the trap, for he had moved directly up the path, and the only “sign” that Frank had to guide him was, now and then, a slight scraping in the snow, which he knew had been made by the clog, as the animal dragged it after him. He followed the trail in this manner for nearly half a mile, when it suddenly turned off into the woods, where he could follow it up considerably faster. Here he discovered that there was a bear in the trap, for the prints of his great feet were in the snow. His progress had evidently been retarded a good deal, for, at intervals along the trail, the broken bushes and trodden snow showed where the clog had caught and held him fast.

Brave led the way, but they had not gone far before he began to show signs of uneasiness. A little further on, he suddenly came to a halt, and stood gazing steadily before him, toward a thicket of bushes, that looked as though it would afford a splendid hiding-place for a wild animal.

Frank began to be excited now, and his hand was none of the steadiest as he cocked his gun and stooped down to caress his dog. He had faced the wounded panther without flinching, but he did not like the idea of attacking that bear in his den, for such it undoubtedly was, as under an immense pile of limbs and bushes Frank could see something dark, that looked like a cave.

Brave ran around the bushes, with every hair on his body sticking toward his head, and now and then making a dash at the den, as though challenging the bear to come out. But the cave was as silent as death. Frank could not see how he could attack the bear in there, and the question was, how to get him out into open ground, so that he could have a fair shot at him, and a good opportunity to retreat, if that shot should not prove fatal. After waiting nearly half an hour for the bear to come out and give them battle, Frank grew impatient, and determined to commence fight himself. Grasping his gun firmly in one hand, he set to work with his hunting-knife to cut a passage through the bushes, so that he could get a fair view of the mouth of the cave.

While thus employed, he heard a slight rustling of leaves in the den, accompanied by a low, wailing cry, and followed by a hoarse growl. He bravely stood his ground, holding his gun in readiness; but, as the bear did not come out, Frank went on with his work, more determined than ever to effect the destruction of the animal, for that wailing noise was the cry of a cub, which he was determined to have. He knew that this would be no boy's play, for, of course, the old bear must be killed before he could venture down into the cave. He was also well aware that she would fight for her young with a ferocity and stubbornness, against which only the most determined courage and a steady hand and quick eye could avail. He had heard Uncle Joe relate a story of a man, and one not wanting in courage either, who, upon discovering a couple of young bears playing together in the woods, had shouldered his rifle and made for home at the top of his speed. The least cry from one of those clumsy little fellows would have brought upon him an enemy that the bravest hunter would not care to encounter.

But Frank had great confidence in himself, and worked away industriously, now and then pausing to look down into the cave and listen. He had cut away most of the bushes before the opening, and as soon as he could get a good view of the interior, threw himself flat upon the snow and looked in. It was dark as midnight inside the cave, but he could see two fiery eyeballs glaring upon him through the darkness, which appeared to be approaching the opening. This afforded a fine mark, and one that he thought he could not possibly miss; so, throwing forward his gun, he took a steady aim, and fired.

The report was followed by a howl that made the cold sweat start from every pore of his body; but, without hesitating a moment, he discharged the other barrel, and then, springing to his feet, rapidly retreated, just as the enormous head and shoulders of the bear rose out of the opening. After running a little distance, and finding that he was not pursued, he turned and looked behind him, and saw the bear, in front of the cave, rolling over and over in the snow. The “Ole Settler” was fast to one of her hind-legs, and the clog had caught and was holding her fast.

Frank immediately commenced to reload his gun, keeping his eye on the bear, ready to retreat again if she should succeed in freeing herself. He hastily rammed down the charges, and poured a handful of buck-shot into each barrel, and then crawled toward the bear, which, almost beside herself with rage and pain, was tearing at her wounds, and pulling up all the bushes within her reach.

Frank felt comparatively safe now, knowing that the bear could not escape; and besides, if she should succeed in getting the clog loose, she could not overtake him, incumbered as she was with the heavy trap. He waited until a fair mark was presented, and then fired again. The wound was mortal. After a few struggles, the bear lay motionless on the snow.

The next work was to draw her away from the mouth of the cave and take off the trap. This was no easy task, for the animal was very heavy, and, as Dick had predicted, the "Ole Settler" "stuck tighter nor a brother." After much exertion, this was accomplished, and Frank was about to commence skinning the bear, when, all at once, the thought struck him, Where was the father of the family? This thought made him spring to his feet rather hurriedly, and cast anxious glances at the cave.

"The old fellow can't be in there," he soliloquized, "or he would certainly have come out before this time; but I'll just keep an eye open for him, and if he shows himself, and undertakes to interfere in this business, he'll get the worst of the bargain."

He was not disturbed, however. The old bear, if he was about, probably thought that his family was capable of taking care of itself and fighting its own battles.

As soon as he had taken off the bear's skin, he began to make preparations to enter the cave and bring out the cubs, which, all the while, had kept up an impatient cry. He first cut down a stout sapling, and, after he had lopped off all its branches, fastened his hunting-knife firmly to it. This he intended to use as a spear, in case he should be attacked while in the den. Grasping it in one hand, and his gun in the other, he crawled down into the cave. It was so dark that he could scarcely see his hand before him; but, after a few moments' search, he discovered the cubs, nicely covered up in a bed of leaves. There were two of them, and they were about the size of a cat. They fought and screamed furiously as Frank took them up, but he unceremoniously thrust them into the capacious pockets of his hunting-shirt, and crawled out of the cave.

When he reached his camp he found that the fire had gone out. It was soon rekindled, when, after wrapping the cubs up in his overcoat, and putting them carefully away in one corner of the tent, he sat down on his bed of boughs, and made a hearty breakfast on cold venison and bread. While he was eating, he began to think seriously of setting out for "home," as he called the encampment where he had left his companions. He had accomplished much more than he had expected he could during the two days that he had been in the woods, and now had about as much on hand as he could conveniently attend to. The skins of the panther and bear must be prepared for stuffing, which would require his close attention; the cubs, also, must be taken care of and watched, for they would escape, if left to themselves. If he was at home, they could be shut up in the cabin while he was off hunting, and he could have his cousin's assistance in curing the skins. So, after resting an hour, he pulled on his overcoat again, stowing the cubs away in his pockets, folded up his blanket, strapped it fast to his belt, shouldered his gun, and set out.

It was dark before he reached the cabin. His companions had just finished eating their supper, and had not expected his return that night.

"Why, Frank, how are you?" exclaimed Archie, springing to his feet and seizing his cousin's hand. "I'm glad to see you back safe. What kind of a time did you have?—rather lonesome, I guess. What have you got?" he continued, as one of the cubs, thinking that something unusual was going on, again set up a furious yelping.

"I've the skin of the panther that killed the white buck," answered Frank, "and also a bearskin, and two young cubs." As he spoke, he drew the cubs from his pocket.

"You keerless feller!" exclaimed Dick, who had not yet spoken; "I know'd you'd be in some scrape or other."

"So did I," chimed in Harry, "and that's the reason why I wouldn't go with him. It's a wonder you ain't all clawed to pieces."

"Hain't had any supper yet I reckon?" said the trapper. "Come an' set down here, an' tell us all about it."

Frank was quickly relieved of his gun and overcoat, while a plateful of venison, some bread and butter, and a cup of hot coffee were passed over to him. Stretching his feet out toward the fire, he related the details of his adventures, while the trapper sat by, smoking his pipe, apparently deeply interested in his story.

CHAPTER IX.

Close Quarters with a Grizzly.



AL," said Dick, as soon as Frank had finished his story, "that war about the keerlessest trick I ever hearn tell on. Here, in the woods, it's jest the same as it is in a city; let a boy have his own way, an' he'll make an eend of himself in a tarnal hurry. Don't you know that that bar could have chawed you up in a minit?"

"Yes," answered Frank, "I suppose she could; but I had to run the risk of that in order to get the cubs."

"Yes, that's another of your boy tricks," continued Dick, knocking the ashes from his pipe, "an' it 'minds me of some scrapes I had when I war a youngster. It war while my ole man war livin'. Him an' me were onct huntin' somewhar nigh the head-waters o' the Colorado River. I war about seventeen year ole, an' a purty good boy I war for my age, too. It tuk a smart, lively young Injun to take my measure on the ground, an' I used to think that what I didn't know about trappin', shootin', and fightin' grizzly bars, warn't wuth knowin'. I was allers gettin' into some scrape or another, an' sometimes I used to get pawed up purty badly, too; but as long as I could crawl round I war all right."

"I 'member onct that I had been over to a little creek about two mile from the camp, to 'tend to some traps I had sot for muskrats, an' as I war comin' home through the woods, I seed a young bar, jest about the size of them you brought home. He come out of the bushes, an' looked at me a minit, an' then jumped back agin. I thought he war a purty little feller, an' made up my mind that I would ketch him an' take him to camp with me. I had a kinder hankerin' arter pets, jest like you, Frank, an' I wanted to tame this young bar, an' I thought me an' him would have some tall fights when he growed up; so I put arter him, an' finally ketched the little feller, an' tuk him in my arms, an' started for camp. He hollered an' fit like the mischief; but I hung on to him, an' arter half an hour's walk reached home. My ole man warn't there; he had gone off to 'tend to his traps; but I didn't keer, for I war used to bein' alone in the woods. Arter feelin' in all my pockets, I found a long strip o' buckskin, an' I thought I would tie the little feller to a saplin' that stood close by the cabin; so I sot down on the ground an' war tyin' the string fast to his neck—he hollerin' an' fightin' all the while—when, all to onct, I heerd a loud growlin' and crashin' in the bushes behind me. I looked up, an' seed the ole bar a comin'. She had heered her baby squallin', an' was comin' arter him. I jumped up an' let the young bar fall, as though he had been a live coal. My gun war standin' agin a tree, close by, but I knowed I wouldn't have time to reach it, so I turned an' begun to go up the saplin'. You better believe I climbed *some*, an' I thought I war gettin' along mighty fast; but I warn't a minit too quick. I hadn't hardly got out of reach afore the bar made a grab at me, an' pulled off one of my moccasins. I war fairly treed; an' there I had to stay, too, 'cause the ole bar kept a close watch on me; but the tree war too small for her to climb, so I knowed I war safe. 'Bout an hour afore dark I heered the ole man a comin', an' the bar left off watchin' me, an' begun to get ready for him. So, I hollered to the ole man, an' he put a chunk o' lead into her. As soon as I see that she war done for, I slid down the saplin' as fast as I could to ketch the young bar; but the ole man, who knowed in a minit what I had been doin', give him a clip side the head with the butt of his rifle, that knocked the daylight out of him; an' then, bars an' buffaler, didn't he scold me for bein' so keerless; but, law sakes, it didn't do a bit o' good, for, in about three days arterward, I war in a wusser scrape nor that.

"Arter 'tendin' to my traps, as usual, I started out through the mountains, on a hunt. 'Bout noon I killed a big-horn, an' while I war cookin' my dinner, I happened to see, in a rocky place up the side o' the mountain, a small openin' 'bout large enough for a man to crawl into, an' I knowed it war a sort of cave. I didn't stop to think any more 'bout dinner jest then, but picked up my rifle an' started up the mountain. I wanted to see what kind of a place the cave war. When I got purty nigh to the openin' I seed a kind o' path runnin' up to it, an' I knowed the cave must be the home of some wild animal. This made me prick up my ears, an' be a little more keerful. I didn't like the idee of havin' a varmint jump down on me afore I knowed it. But I reached the mouth o' the cave without seein' any thing, and poked my head in, keepin' my gun ready to crack away at the first live thing I should set eyes on; but the cave war so dark that I couldn't see into it two foot; but I *heered* something, an' I scrambled up into the openin' an' listened. It war a faint moanin' kind of a noise—somethin' like the squall of a young kitten, an' I knowed in a minit what it war that made it; it war a young painter. Now, if I had knowed any thing, I would have climbed down out o' that place as fast as my legs would let me. But, no; I tuk it into my head all to onct that I must have them young painters. I wanted one of 'em to play with; an' without stoppin' to think, I begun to crawl down into the cave, an' along a narrer, crooked passage that must a been twenty yards long. One little feller kept up his cryin', an' it kept growin' louder an' louder, an' I knowed that he warn't a great way off. At last I come to a place where the cave seemed to widen into quite a large room, an' after a few minits' lookin'—or, I should say, feelin'—for the cave war as dark as a nigger's pocket—I found the young painters—three of 'em—in a nice bed of leaves made up in one corner. I didn't mind the hollerin' they made when I tuk hold of 'em, but chucked 'em all into my cap, an' started back. I had tuk good keer to 'member my bearin's, an' I knowed I should have no trouble in findin' my way out; so I crawled along keerless like, as usual, chucklin' over my good luck, an' thinkin' what nice pets I would make of the young painters, when all to onct I come within sight of the mouth o' the cave. Bars and buffaler! I would have give all the beaver-skins I ever expected to be wuth, if I had been safe out o' that cave. The ole painter was comin' in. She had smelt my tracks, an' I could see by the light that come in, in little streaks on each side of her, that every hair on her body war stickin' toward her head. She meant mischief. Any greenhorn could a told that I war in somethin' of a fix. I dropped the cubs, an' as I did so, they all set up a yell. The ole lady couldn't stand that, an' givin' a growl that made my blood run cold, she begun to get ready to spring at me. I used to think I war tall timber at rifle shootin', but, although the painter war not thirty feet from me, I war 'most afraid to risk the shot. But I knowed I didn't have much time to waste in sich thoughts, an' drawin' up my shootin' iron, I blazed away, expectin' to have the painter grab me the next minit. But when the smoke cleared away, I see the old lady stretched out, stone dead. I have been in tight places since then, in fights with varmints an' wild Injuns, an' many a time a single chunk o' lead has saved my scalp; but that war the best shot I ever made. It war a thing that many a Rocky Mountain trapper wouldn't keer to undertake. I like to hunt now as well as I ever did, an' expect to be in a good many rough-an'-tumble fights with Injuns an' grizzly bars, but I'd rather be excused from crawlin' down into a dark hole like that agin. But arter I had got out o' the cave, I didn't stop to think o' the danger I had been in; the cubs war mine, an' that's all I keered for."

Here the trapper paused, and thrusting his hand into the pocket of his hunting-shirt, he drew forth a clasp-knife and a plug of tobacco, and after cutting off a generous "chaw," as he called it, and stowing it away in his cheek, he continued:

"But 'bout the nighest I ever come to bein' rubbed out, war while I war trappin' on the Missouri River, with my chum, Bill Lawson—the poor fellow is gone now"—and here the trapper lowered his voice almost to a whisper, in reverence to the memory of his departed companion, and hastily drew his hand across his eyes—"an' I am left alone. It'll be lonesome on the prairy when I get back there, an' when I visit the places where me an' him used to camp an' trap together, I shall miss the ole man. He war one of the best trappers I ever come acrost. He war generally very good natered an' jolly; but he had strange ways with him sometimes, an' when he got one of his gloomy fits on him, there would be days when—although we ate at the same fire, an' p'rhaps slept under the same blanket—he wouldn't speak to me. I knowed something war troublin' him, an' it war a sorry sight for me to see that strong man weepin' like a child; but I trapped with him for better nor five years afore he told me his story. There would be weeks at a time when he would seem to forget his troubles, an' then it done me good to lay beside our camp-fire an' listen to his stories. He war a'most as big agin as I

am, an' strong as a hoss. He could pull up a saplin' that two common men couldn't budge; and he war as brave as he war strong—as brave as a man could be; he didn't seem to keer for any thing, for I never see him frightened in my life, an' I war with him for better nor twenty years. An' he war a great Injun fighter, too. It tuk a mighty lively red-skin, an' one that could pick up his feet in a tarnal hurry, to get away when ole Bill onct set eyes on his trail; for the way he could run war a caution to owls, an' if there war one of them varmints in the country for fifty miles round, ole Bill allers knowed it. He used to tell me that he could smell an Injun further than he could see him; an' I believe he could.

"But what I started to tell you 'bout war a little scrape we onct had with a grizzly. As I said, we war trappin' on the Missouri River, right among the mountains. One mornin', arter a good breakfast on buffaler hump, I war gettin' ready to start out to 'tend to my traps, when ole Bill said:

"Dick, I see some grizzly bar tracks down in the gully last night. Let's go an' hunt up the varmint. I would have follered him up last night, only it war too dark.'

"In course I agreed, an' we ketched our hosses, which we had picketed close by the cabin, an' started out—ole Bill leadin' the way.

"Huntin' a grizzly is fine sport sometimes; but if a feller is any way skeery, he had better not take a hand in it. Even the Injuns don't keer to meddle with the varmint, unless a dozen or two of 'em, well mounted an' armed, can ketch him out in clar open ground; an' even then they have to handle themselves round purty lively, for if the bar onct gets his claws on a hoss he has to go under. You couldn't hire a red-skin to go into the mountains alone an' hunt up a grizzly. The varmint allers lives in the thickest part of the woods; an' if you don't plug him through the brain at the first shot, or if your hoss gets tangled in the bushes, you're in a mighty onpleasant fix the first thing you know. But me an' Bill had hunted grizzlies plenty o' times, an' allers come out o' the fight right side up, an' we war used to the sport.

"Wal, as I was sayin', we started out toward the place where Bill had seed the trail o' the bar, an', arter four hours' hard ridin' over rocks an' fallen logs an' thick bushes, we come to the gully. It war 'bout a hundred feet deep an' a quarter of a mile broad, an' the banks on both sides war as steep as the roof o' this cabin, an' covered with bushes so thick that a hoss couldn't hardly work a way through 'em. It war a fine place for a bar, an' many a trapper wouldn't have liked the idea o' goin' down in there to hunt one up, an' I couldn't help sayin':

"Ugly place, ain't it?"

"Yes," answered ole Bill. 'But look over there,' an' he pinte acrost the gully to a sort o' clar spot, where there warn't no bushes, an' the timber didn't grow very thick. 'If the bar gets arter us,' he went on to say, 'we must run for that ar place; an' if we onct get him up there, he's ourn, sure.'

"Arter stoppin' a few minits to give our hosses a chance to rest, we took a look at our rifles, to see that they war all right, an' then begun to work our way down into the gully. It must have tuk us an hour to reach the bottom, for the brake war higher than our hosses' heads, an' it war hard work to get through it. We had sent out the dogs—we had two of the best bar dogs I ever happened to see—when we first started down, and jest as we reached the bottom of the gully, they give notice, by their howlin', that they had found the grizzly's trail. We rid up to the place as fast as we could, an' ole Bill jumped off his hoss an' examined the tracks. They war fresh. The bar had jest passed along, an' we knowed that he warn't far off.

"Hunt 'em up, dogs! hunt 'em up! Off with you!" shouted ole Bill; an' he jumped on to his hoss agin, and the dogs, understandin' what he meant, war out o' sight in no time. We follered them as fast as we could, an', purty quick, we heered a great crashin' in the brake, an' the dogs broke out into a reg'lar yelpin'. We knowed that they had started the bar, an' war arter him. In a few minits we come up with 'em, and see the bar settin' on his haunches. The dogs war jumpin' round him, now an' then takin' a grab at his hams, an' they kept the varmint spinnin' round as though he war sot on a pivot. Ole Bill drew his rifle up to his shoulder, an' sent an ounce-ball into the bar's hide, which brought him to the ground; but he war on his pins agin in less than no time, an', leaving the dogs, he took arter ole Bill, who made straight acrost the gully toward the clar spot he had spoken of. The dogs follered close at the bar's heels, onct in awhile makin' a grab at his back settlements, which seemed to bother him a good deal; but he didn't stop to fight 'em, cause he thought the ole trapper war bigger game. The bushes an' trees war so thick that for some time I couldn't get a chance to put in a shot. I didn't want to fire till I war sartin of killin' the bar, 'cause it war only throwin' away powder without doin' no good. So I cheered on the dogs, hopin' that they would bring the bar to a stand-still; an' I warn't mistakened, for they begun to pitch in so rough, that the varmint had to stop to keep 'em off. This war what I war waitin' for, an' I sent another chunk o' cold lead atween his ribs. But he didn't seem to mind it at all; an', arter beating off the dogs, he started agin for the trapper.

"Ole Bill had made mighty good use of his time, an' the way he stuck his heels into his hoss' sides war a thing to look at. He tried to load up his rifle, but the bushes war so thick that he had to lay close along his hoss, to keep from bein' swept off by them.

"I drawed up long enough to ram home a ball, an' then started on agin, an' when I come up with Bill, I found that he had got into a reg'lar laurel brake. The bushes war thicker than ever, an' as tough as green hickory, an' Bill's hoss couldn't hardly make no headway at all. But they didn't seem to bother the varmint any, for he tumbled along as though the bushes hadn't been more'n straws; an' he war gainin' on Bill.

"It war a fine sight to see the way the ole feller carried himself then. He held his knife in one hand, an' his clubbed rifle in the other, keepin' his eyes on the bar all the while, an' leavin' his hoss to pick out his own way. He didn't look the least bit skeery, but I knowed he war kalkerlatin' how many clips he could get at the bar afore the varmint could grab him. The dogs war bitin' at the bar's legs all the while, an' purty soon he had to stop agin to fight 'em off. He raised on his haunches, an' struck at the hounds, which war as spry as cats, an' had been in barfights often enough to know how to keep out of his reach.

"Now's your time, Dick," said ole Bill. 'Shoot close! My hoss ar purty nigh tuckered.'

"I war all ready, an' ridin' up purty close, so as to get in a good shot, I drawed a bead on him, an' fired, expectin' to bring him, sure. But a bush atween me an' him glanced the ball, so that I only made an ugly wound in his shoulder. He give an angry growl, an', beatin' off the dogs, he dropped on all-fours, an' made arter me.

"Now," thinks I, 'Dick Lewis, you're in a blamed ugly scrape;' and so I war. The bar warn't more'n twenty feet from me; and afore my hoss had made three jumps, the bar made a claw at him, an' pulled out half his

tail. The animal was doin' his best, but I see that it warn't healthy to stay on his back, an', as we passed under a tree, I grabbed hold of a limb jest above my head, an' swung myself clar off the saddle, jest in time to see the varmint put both paws on my hoss, an' pull him to the ground. But that war his last move, for ole Bill sent a bullet through his brain that throwed him dead in his tracks.

"I come down out of my tree, feelin' about as mean as any feller you ever see, for a man might as well be on the prairy without his head as without his hoss, an' mine war one of the best that ever wore a saddle. But the bar had done the work for him, an' no amount of grievin' could fetch me another; so I choked down my feelin's, an' begun to help ole Bill to take off the grizzly's hide. But there war plenty of Injuns about, an' it warn't long afore I had another hoss; an' 'bout a year arter that I ketched one for which many a trapper would have give all the beaver-skins he ever had. But that's another story."

CHAPTER X. A Beaver Hunt.



HE next morning, as soon as they had eaten their breakfast, the trapper went to the door, and, after listening, and looking at the sky a few moments, said:

"Youngsters, if we intend to ketch any of them beaver, we had better do it to-day. We are goin' to have a storm as is a storm, an' afore two days the woods will be blocked up so that we can't do no huntin' at all."

Frank and George were eager to accompany the trapper, for beaver-hunting was something entirely new to them; but Archie and Harry concluded to make another attempt to capture the black fox; for the trapper's description of his swiftness and cunning had rendered him an object worthy of attention, and made the young hunters more anxious than ever to catch him.

Frank and George drew on their overcoats, strapped their blankets fast to their belts, and filled their haversacks. When all was ready, each shouldered his gun and an ax, and followed the trapper from the cabin. About noon they came to a halt on the banks of a large pond that lay hemmed in on all sides by the trees. Near the center of this pond were several objects of a conical shape, looking like drifts of snow. These were the beavers' houses.

The boys were entirely at a loss to conceive how they were to go to work to capture the beaver. If they began to cut through the houses, the animals would take the alarm in a moment, and dive under the ice, where they would be safe from all pursuit.

"I'll show you how it is done," said the trapper, who perceived that they did not understand it. "In the first place, take your axes and go and pound on every house you can see."

"Why, that will frighten out all the beaver," said Frank.

"That's jest what I want to do," said Dick; "but you must know that a beaver can't live under the ice any longer than me or you."

He then went on to explain that the banks on each side of the pond were supplied with "breathing-holes," which were dug into the bank, and extended upward above the level of the water, and that the beaver, when frightened out of their houses, would seek refuge in these holes, where they could be easily captured.

"But how do we know where these holes are?" asked George.

"Easy enough," answered Dick. "All you have got to do is to go along the bank an' strike the ice with an ax, an' you can tell by the sound where they are. But I fixed all that when I first diskivered this pond. I know jest where the holes are. Now, you go an' pound on them houses, an' drive out the beaver."

The boys accordingly laid down their guns, and commenced an attack on the dwellings of the beaver, when the animals at once plunged into the water under the ice. After every house had been visited, and the boys were satisfied that they had made noise sufficient to drive out all the beaver, they returned to the place where they had left the trapper, and found him engaged in cutting a hole in the ice close to the bank. As the boys came up, he directed one of them to fasten his hunting-knife to a long sapling for a spear, and the other to chop a hole in the bank directly opposite to the one he had cut in the ice.

By the time the spear was finished, an opening had been cut down into the "breathing-hole," and the hunters discovered three beaver crouching in the furthest corner. Useless thrust his head into the hole, and contented himself with barking at the game; but Brave squeezed himself down into the opening among the beavers, and attacked them furiously. The animals made a desperate resistance, and in a few moments Brave backed out of the hole, with his ears and nose bleeding from several wounds, which showed that the long teeth of the beaver had been used to a good advantage. Frank gazed in surprise at the dog's lacerated head, and exclaimed:

"There's something besides a beaver in there."

"No, I reckon not," replied the trapper. "Your dog is jest about as keerless as you be, an' hasn't got no more sense than to pitch into every wild varmint he comes acrost. You must understand that a beaver can get up a tarnal good fight if he onct makes up his mind to it. An' when you get one of 'em cornered up, it takes somethin' besides a 'coon dog to whip him."

Frank made no reply, and the trapper reached down with his long spear, when one after the other of the beavers were killed and pulled out on the bank. The attack on the houses was then renewed, to drive out any of the animals which might have returned. In the next breathing-hole two beavers were found, but only one was secured, the other making his escape by plunging back under the ice. While they were cutting into the

next hole, a large mink suddenly popped out from under the roots of a tree into which the trapper was chopping; and although George made a frantic blow at him with the handle of his ax, he succeeded in getting past him, and started across the pond toward the opposite shore. The boys immediately went in pursuit, George leading the way, and Frank following close behind him, brandishing his spear, and shouting to the dogs, which were close upon the mink's heels. The little animal made headway through the snow with a rapidity that was surprising; but the long bounds of the dogs were rapidly diminishing the distance between them, and when about half way across the pond, Useless overtook and seized him. The boys increased their speed, fearful that the dog might spoil the skin, which was one of the finest they had ever seen.

"Useless!" shouted George, "get out! Drop that"——

He did not finish the sentence; for suddenly there was a loud crack, and the ice opened beneath him, and he sank out of sight in the cold water. Frank, as we have said, was following close behind him, and at the rate of speed at which he was running, it was impossible to stop; and the trapper, who had been watching the race, and had witnessed the accident with an expression of great concern depicted on his weather-beaten countenance, expected to see Frank disappear also. But the young naturalist always had his wits about him, and summoning all his strength, he sprang into the air, and cleared the hole into which George had fallen, by an extraordinary leap, and landed on the firm ice on the opposite side. George rose almost instantly, for he was an expert swimmer; but his sudden immersion into the cold water seemed to have paralyzed his limbs, and rendered him incapable of action. Frank turned immediately and made a desperate clutch at George's long hair; but he was too late, for the unfortunate young hunter again sank slowly out of sight. Frank's mind was made up in an instant, and hastily pulling off his fur cap and comforter, he unbuckled his belt and began to divest himself of his overcoat.

"Take care now, youngster," exclaimed the trapper, who at this moment came up. "Don't let George get a hold of you, or you'll both go down together;" and Dick threw himself on his knees, and stretched his long arm out over the water ready to catch George if he should come up within his reach, while Frank stood upon the edge of the ice, ready to plunge into the water the moment his companion should rise again.

But his intentions were anticipated; for at this moment Brave came bounding to the spot, carrying the mink in his mouth. Understanding, in an instant, that something was wrong, he dropped his game and sprang into the water. At this moment George's head appeared at the surface, and the dog seized him, when, to the horror of the hunters, both disappeared together. But they arose a moment afterward, and Brave, holding the rescued hunter by the collar of his coat, swam toward his master, and George was drawn out on the ice, in a state of insensibility.

"Here! here!" exclaimed Dick, running around to the place where Frank was kneeling, holding George in his arms; "give him to me, an' you run back an' get the axes."

The trapper raised his young companion in his arms as easily as though he had been an infant, and started toward the bank at the top of his speed; while Frank, after pulling Brave out of the water, ran back after the axes, as Dick had directed. When he again found the trapper, he was on the bank, kneeling beside George, and engaged in chafing his hands and temples.

"Now, youngster!" he exclaimed, hurriedly, "if you ever worked in your life, work now. Build a fire and throw up a shantee. We must get his wet clothes off him to onct."

Frank, as may be supposed, worked with a will, knowing that the life of his companion depended on his exertions. In a short time a roaring fire was started, and a rude shelter erected, when George's wet and frozen clothes were pulled off and hung up to dry, and he was warmly wrapped up in blankets. The rubbing was continued a few moments longer, when they had the satisfaction of seeing him open his eyes and gaze about him. Dick now left the hut. In a short time he returned, with a bunch of herbs in his hand, and soon afterward a cup of strong, nauseating tea was pressed to George's lips, and he was compelled to swallow the whole of it. He was then enveloped in more blankets, and ordered to "go to sleep."

While Frank and the trapper were seated beside the fire, talking over the accident, they heard the noise of approaching footsteps on the crust, and presently Archie and Harry hurried up to the hut.

"What's the matter with George?" inquired the latter, hurriedly, for he saw that Dick and Frank were the only ones at the fire.

"O, he got a duckin' in the pond, that's all," replied the trapper. "Don't be alarmed. He's sleepin' nicely now."

"We thought somebody was drowned, sure," said Archie, "for we saw the hole in the ice, and your guns and overcoats scattered about, as though they had been thrown down in a great hurry."

In about an hour George awoke, and, of course, was immediately assailed with innumerable questions. Among others, his brother asked him why he didn't swim when he fell into the water.

"Why didn't I swim!" repeated George; "I couldn't move. It seemed as though every drop of blood in my body was frozen solid as soon as I touched the water. But where's the black fox you were going to bring back with you? Did you catch him?"

Archie replied in the negative; and then went on to tell how they had found the trail in the gully, followed it for a mile, then suddenly lost it again, all efforts to recover it proving unsuccessful.

About the middle of the afternoon, George, declaring that he was able to travel, was allowed to put on his clothes, and the hunters shouldered their guns and started for home.

The sight of their snug little cabin was a pleasant thing to the eyes of the trappers that evening, for the day's hunt had been a hard as well as a profitable one. A fire was quickly started, and, while their supper was cooking, George changed his wet clothes; and a strong cup of coffee, as the trapper remarked, "set *him* all right again." After supper, how soft and comfortable their blankets felt! They lay for a long time in silence, watching the sparks as they arose slowly toward the opening in the roof that served as a chimney, and listening to the whistling of the wind and the sifting of the snow against the walls of the cabin; for the storm that the trapper had predicted had already set in.

CHAPTER XI.

Breaking up a Moose-Pen.



On awaking the next morning, they found that the cabin was almost covered with snow, and the woods were filled with drifts, that rendered it impossible for them to resume their hunting. The two days that followed were passed in-doors, curing the skins of the animals they had taken, and listening to the trapper's stories.

On the third day, a heavy thaw set in, and at night the wind changed around to the north, and covered the snow with a crust that would easily bear a man. Early the next morning the hunters set out. George and Frank accompanied the trapper, to assist in breaking up a moose-pen, which the latter had discovered a few days previous to the storm, and Archie and Harry determined to again attempt the capture of the black fox.

The trapper led his young companions through the woods, and across the pond where George had met with his accident. About a mile further on, he came to a halt, and said, almost in a whisper:

"Now, youngsters, we are a'most to the moose-pen. You stay here, George; an' remember, don't go to movin' up on the game till you hear me shoot."

"I don't see any moose," said George.

"In course you don't," said the trapper. "But they are in the woods here, an' me and Frank will go an' surround them. It'll take mighty keerful steppin', though," he continued, turning to Frank, "for moose have got an ear like an Injun's. Be keerful now how you walk." So saying, the trapper shouldered his heavy rifle, and moved off through the woods, accompanied by Frank. About half a mile further on, the latter was stationed on the banks of a deep ravine; and Dick, after repeating his instructions, continued on alone.

The stalwart form of the trapper had scarcely disappeared, when Frank heard a noise in the bushes, and presently a large moose appeared, leisurely wading through the deep snow, and cropping the branches as he approached. As if by instinct, Frank's gun was leveled; but remembering the trapper's instructions, the weapon was lowered, and the young hunter stepped back into the bushes, and watched the motions of the animal. He was a noble fellow—very much like the one with which Frank had engaged in that desperate struggle in the woods—with antlers fully four feet in length. The animal appeared totally unconscious of danger, and, after browsing about among the bushes for a few moments, walked back into the woods again, but almost instantly reappeared, and made for the ravine at the top of his speed. At this moment, the well-known report of the trapper's rifle echoed through the woods. It was followed by a crashing in the crust, and presently another moose appeared, and, like the former, ran toward the ravine. A short distance behind him came the trapper, holding his rifle in one hand and his huge hunting-knife in the other, and rapidly gaining on the deer, which sank through the crust into the deep snow at every step. Frank and Brave immediately joined in the pursuit, and the moose had not run far before he was overtaken and seized by the dog. Frank, remembering his first experience in moose-hunting, halted at a safe distance, and was about to "make sure work" of the game, when the trapper darted past him, exclaiming:

"Don't shoot, youngster. That's a young moose; an' if you can ketch him, he'll be worth more nor all the stuffed critters you've got at home."

Here was an opportunity which, to Frank, was too good to be lost. Hastily dropping his gun, and producing a piece of rope from the pocket of his overcoat, he ran up to the game, and, after a brief struggle, succeeded in fastening it around his neck. The dog was then ordered to let go his hold, when the moose instantly sprang to his feet and started to run. Frank was thrown flat in the snow, but he clung to the rope with all his strength. After a short time the young moose, wearied with his useless efforts to escape, ceased his struggles, and his captors led, or rather pulled, him along through the woods toward the place where the game had first been started.

"Now," said the trapper, "you've got a pet that is worth something. He's jest the thing you want. You won't have to drag your sleds home now."

"Why not?" inquired Frank.

"Cause this yere moose can pull you four fellers further in one day than you can travel in two. I knowed a trader at Fort Laramie that had one o' them critters, and he used to hitch him up to a sled, an' think nothin' o' travelin' sixty miles a day."

While they were talking, George came up, and, after the hunters had collected their game, Dick led the way toward home, while Frank brought up the rear, leading the young moose.

Meanwhile, Archie and Harry were in hot pursuit of the black fox. They found the trail, as before, in the gully, and Sport started off on it, and met with no difficulty until they arrived on the banks of a small stream that ran a short distance from the cabin. Here the trail came to an abrupt termination, and all efforts to recover it were unavailing. This was the identical spot where they had lost it before. For almost an hour they continued, but without any success; and Harry exclaimed, as he dropped the butt of his gun to the ground, and leaned upon the muzzle with rather a dejected air:

"It's no use. We're fooled again. That fox has got his regular run-ways, and we might as well call off the dogs, and go home."

"Not yet," said Archie; "I can't give up in this way; neither do I believe that any fox that ever lived can fool Sport. Hunt 'em up! hunt 'em up!" he continued, waving his hand to the dog, which was running about, tearing the bushes with his teeth, and whining, as if he, too, felt the disgrace of being so easily defeated. The obedient animal sprang upon the trail and followed it to its termination, and then commenced circling around through the bushes again; and Archie walked across the stream and examined the banks for the twentieth time, but no signs of a trail could be found.

At length, Harry suddenly exclaimed:

"Look here, Archie; here's where the rascal went to;" and he pointed to a small tree that had been

partially uprooted by the wind, and leaned over until its top reached within ten feet of the ground.

"You see," Harry went on to say, "that the tops of all the other trees are almost loaded down with snow, but this one hasn't got a bit on it. The fox must have shaken it off when he jumped up there."

Archie, who was ready to catch at any thing that looked like encouragement, hurriedly recrossed the stream, and, after examining the top of the tree, climbed up on it, when he discovered the tracks of the fox in the snow that had fallen on the trunk. He descended to the ground, and the boys ran along up the stream, carefully examining every log and stick that was large enough for a fox to walk upon, and finally, to their joy, discovered the trail, which ran back toward the gully from which it had started.

The dogs immediately set off upon it, and the boys, who had learned considerable of the "lay of the land," struck off through the woods, in an almost contrary direction to the one the dogs were pursuing, toward a ridge that lay about three miles distant.

Archie led the way at a rapid pace, now and then looking over his shoulder, and exclaiming, "Hurry up, Harry." Half an hour's run brought them to the ridge, and their feelings were worked up to the highest pitch of excitement, when they discovered that the fox had not yet passed.

"We're all right now," said Archie, joyfully; "that black fox is ours."

"Yes," said Harry, "provided this is his runway."

"O, don't begin to throw cold water on our expectations," said Archie. "It'll be too bad if——. There they come, now; get out of sight, quick."

As Archie spoke, a long, drawn-out bay came faintly to their ears, and the dogs appeared to be coming up the ridge. The young hunters hastily concealed themselves, and Archie had just cocked his gun, when the black fox broke from the bushes, and, as if suspicious of danger ahead, turned off down the ridge. It was a long shot, but Archie, without a moment's hesitation, raised his gun to his shoulder and fired.

"I told you he was ours," he shouted, as the smoke cleared away, and the black fox was seen struggling in the snow. A blow on the head with a stick stilled him, and the boys, after examining their prize, which was the finest of his species they had ever seen, started down the ridge to meet the dogs, and soon arrived at the cabin with their prize, and were delighted to find how successful their comrades had been in capturing the moose.

Frank and Archie immediately set to work to break the young moose to harness. He proved very tractable, and soon learned to draw the boys in a sled, over the ice, with all the regularity of a well-broken horse, more than compensating them for all the care they had bestowed upon him.

CHAPTER XII.

The Moose Shows his Qualities



SEVERE storm having set in, rendering hunting or trapping impossible, the hunters passed a few succeeding days in-doors, and busied themselves in making a sled and harness for the moose, which, since his capture, had received a large share of Frank's attention. He had been hitched to a sled regularly every day, and had been trained until he had learned to obey almost as well as a horse. He was very much afraid of a whip, and his only fault was a desire to get over the ground as fast as possible. Sometimes, when fairly started, it was a difficult task to restrain him. But the boys, far from considering this a failing, looked upon it as a quality worth cultivating; and their horned horse was always allowed to show off his speed to the very best advantage.

One morning, after the weather became settled, Archie proposed taking a ride up the creek, to which the others readily agreed. The moose was brought from the barn, and after considerable trouble—for the new harness had been made too small—he was finally hitched to the sled. It was their intention to camp in the woods and eat their dinner. After providing the necessary articles, an ax, plenty of ammunition, a supply of coffee, salt, and pepper, a camp-kettle and frying-pan, they sprang into the sled, and waving their hands to Uncle Joe and the trapper, who stood in the door, watching their departure, they shouted to their horned horse, which set off up the creek at a rapid pace.

"Let him out now!" shouted Frank to his cousin, who was driving. "Let him out. We've got all day before us, and let us see how fast he can go."

Archie pulled his cap down over his ears, and commenced shouting to the moose, which almost redoubled his pace, and whirled them over the snow at a rate the boys had never seen equaled by a living animal. His gait was an awkward, shambling trot; and as the boys watched his movements, they could not help laughing outright, whereupon the dogs joined in the chorus, yelping and barking furiously. This frightened the moose, which uttered a loud snort, and throwing back his head, ran faster than ever; and Archie, who began to fear that he was running away with them, pulled and jerked at the lines, but all to no purpose; the moose ran faster and faster, and the boys, who did not pause to consider the danger they might be in, laughed and shouted until they were hoarse. At length Frank exclaimed:

"You had better check him up a little. The first thing you know, the concern will run away with us."

"I believe that is what the rascal is trying to do now," answered Archie, pulling with all his strength at the reins. "He has got a mouth like iron."

"Well, let him go then, until he gets tired," said George; "he can't run this way all day, and besides, if we are obliged to spend a night in the woods, it will be no new thing to us. Get up there! Hi! hi!"

Archie, finding that it was impossible to stop the "concern," as Frank had called it, turned his entire

attention to keeping him in the creek, in which he succeeded very well, until, as they came suddenly around a bend, they discovered before them a huge log, lying across the ice. To avoid it was impossible, for the log reached entirely across the creek.

"Stop him! stop him!" shouted Harry. "If he hits that log he'll break the sled all to smash. Stop him, I tell you!"

"I can't," replied Archie, pulling at the reins.

"Let him go, then," said Frank. "Lay on the whip, and perhaps he will carry us, sled and all, clean over the log."

This was a desperate measure; but before Archie had time to act upon the suggestion, or the others to oppose it, they reached the log. The moose cleared it without the least exertion, but the next moment there was a loud crash, and Frank, who had seated himself on the bottom of the sled, and was holding on with both hands, suddenly arose in the air like a rocket, and pitching clear over his cousin, turned a complete somersault, and landed on the crust with such force, that it broke beneath his weight, and he sank out of sight in the snow. The next moment he felt a heavy weight upon him, and heard a smothered laugh, which he knew was uttered by Archie. The latter regained his feet in an instant, and making a blind clutch at his cousin—for his face was so completely covered up with snow that he could not see—inquired, as he helped him to his feet:

"Who's this?"

"It is I," answered Frank. "But where is the moose?"

"Gone off to the woods, I suppose," answered Archie. "It's just our luck. Eh! what? No, he hasn't—he's here, safe."

He had succeeded in clearing his eyes of the snow, and saw the moose struggling desperately to free himself from the sled, which had caught against the log, and was holding him fast. Frank and his cousin at once sprang to secure him, and, while the former lifted the sled over the log, Archie seized the lines, and, in order to render escape impossible, made them fast to a tree. By this time George and Harry had come up, and at once commenced searching about in the snow for their weapons, and the others busied themselves in repairing the runners of the sled, both of which were broken. In a short time every thing was ready for the start. George volunteered to act as driver, provided the dogs could be kept quiet, and, after a few objections from Harry, who "didn't like the idea of riding after that moose," they again set out. Fortunately no one was injured in the least—not even frightened—the only damage sustained by the establishment being the breaking of the runners. Boy-like, they gave not one thought to the danger they had been in, but amused themselves in laughing at the comical figures they must have cut, as they all "pitched head-over-heels out of the sled together." The dogs, however, did not seem to regard it in the light of an amusing adventure, for they could not be induced to enter the sled again. They ran along behind it, keeping at a respectful distance, and the moment the sled stopped, and their masters began trying to coax them in, they would retreat precipitately.

The moose now seemed to have become quieted. Whether it was for the reason that the dogs were kept still, and there was less noise behind him, or that he had been fatigued by his sharp run, the boys were unable to decide. He trotted along at an easy gait, but still going as fast as they wished to travel, until Harry announced "that it was half past eleven o'clock, and high time that they were looking up a place to eat their dinner." A suitable spot for an encampment was soon selected, and, after the moose had been unharnessed and fastened to a tree, Frank and Harry set out to procure something for dinner, leaving the others to attend to the duties of the camp.

The Newfoundlander, which accompanied the hunters, was sent on ahead to start up any game that might be in his way. After he had led them about a mile from the camp, his loud barking announced that he had discovered something. The boys hurried forward, and found the dog seated on his haunches at the foot of a tall hemlock, barking furiously at something which had taken refuge among the branches.

"It's a bear," exclaimed Harry, as soon as he could obtain a view of the animal.

"Yes, so I see," answered Frank, coolly pouring a handful of buck-shot into each barrel of his gun. "We'll soon bring him down from there. You be ready to finish him, in case I should miss."

"Shoot close, then," answered Harry; "for if you only wound him, he will prove a very unpleasant fellow to have about."

Frank, in reply, raised his gun to his shoulder, and a loud report echoed through the woods, followed by a savage growl. The shot was not fatal, for, when the smoke cleared away, they discovered the bear clinging to the tree, apparently none the worse for an ugly-looking wound in his shoulder.

"Shoot me if the rascal isn't coming down!" exclaimed Harry. "Try the other barrel, Frank, quickly."

It was as Harry had said. The bear was beginning to descend the tree, and his whole appearance indicated that he meant fight. Frank was a good deal surprised at this, for he had great confidence in his double-barrel, and in his skill as a marksman, and had been sanguine of either killing or disabling him at the first shot; but the celerity of the animal's movements proved that his wound did not trouble him in the least. It was evident that their situation would soon be any thing but a pleasant one, unless the other barrel should prove fatal. Frank could not pause long to debate upon the question, for the bear was every moment nearing the ground, now and then turning toward his enemies, and displaying a frightful array of teeth, as if warning them that it was his intention to take ample revenge on them. Again he raised his gun to his shoulder, his nerves as steady as if he were about to shoot at a squirrel, and carefully sighting the head of their shaggy enemy, pulled the trigger. The bear uttered another of his terrific growls, and after trying in vain to retain his hold upon the tree, fell to the ground. Brave was upon him in an instant, but the bear, easily eluding him, raised on his haunches, and seized the dog in his paws. One smothered howl came from Brave's throat, and Frank, clubbing his gun, was rushing forward to the rescue of the Newfoundlander, whose death now seemed inevitable, when another charge of buck-shot, from Harry's gun, rattled into the bear's head, and again brought him to the ground. Brave was released from his dangerous situation, and the moment he regained his feet he attacked the bear with redoubled fury; but the animal easily beat him off, and rushed, with open mouth, upon Frank.

"Run! run!" shouted Harry; "the rascal isn't hurt a bit."

But with Frank, retreat was impossible; the bear was close upon him, and he would have been overtaken in an instant. Bravely standing his ground, he struck the animal a powerful blow, which staggered him for an

instant; but, before he had time to repeat it, his gun went flying out of his hands, and he was stretched, stunned and bleeding, on the snow. The bear, no doubt, considered him disposed of, for he kept on after Harry, who, being unable to fire for fear of wounding either Frank or the dog, had been compelled to witness the struggle, without having the power of lending any assistance.

The bear had struck Frank a severe blow, which, for a few seconds, rendered him incapable of action; but as soon as he had recovered, he ran for his gun, and while he was ramming home the charge, he saw Harry's coat-tails disappearing in a thicket of bushes, and the bear, seated on his haunches, engaged in fighting the dog, which, having experienced some pretty rough handling, had learned to keep out of reach of the dangerous claws.

As soon as Frank had loaded his gun, he hurried forward to put an end to the fight, when a sheet of flame shot out from the bushes, and the bear ceased his fighting, and lay motionless on the snow. A moment afterward Harry appeared, and, upon seeing Frank, exclaimed:

"I've finished the job for him! But he gave you fits, didn't he? Your face is all bloody. I guess he made your head ache!"

"I guess he did, too," replied Frank. "I tell you, he hit me an awful crack. I had as soon be struck with a sledge-hammer."

Fortunately, there were no bones broken. After Frank's wounded head had been bandaged with his handkerchief, the boys proceeded to remove the skin of the bear, which was the largest of his species they had ever seen. Selecting some of the choice parts of the meat, they then started toward the camp.

Their appearance relieved the anxiety the others had begun to feel at their prolonged absence. The story of their adventure afforded abundant material for conversation while they were eating their dinner, which Frank, who had experienced no serious inconvenience from the blow he had received, speedily served up; and many were the speculations in regard to the lecture they would be certain to receive from the trapper, for their "keerlessness."

It was nearly four o'clock in the afternoon before the boys started for Uncle Joe's cabin. As it promised to be a fine, moonlight night, they were in no hurry. Allowing the moose to trot along at an easy gait, they sat in the bottom of the sled, enveloped in furs, amusing themselves in shouting and singing, when Archie suddenly exclaimed:

"Look there, boys! Now, see me make that varmint jump."

The boys looked in the direction indicated, and saw a large, gaunt wolf standing on the bank of the creek, regarding them attentively, and seeming to be not the least concerned about their approach. As Archie spoke, he raised his gun; but the wolf, as if guessing his intention, suddenly turned, and disappeared in the bushes.

"Boys," said Frank, "that little circumstance has set me to thinking. Supposing that a pack of those fellows should get after us to-night, wouldn't we be in a fix?"

"That's so," answered the others, in a breath, their cheeks blanching at the very thought.

"I never thought of that," said Archie. "Hurry up, Harry. Lay on the goad, and let's get home as soon as possible."

The joking and laughing instantly ceased, and the boys bent suspicious glances on the woods, on each bank of the creek, over which darkness was fast settling, and their hands trembled as they reached for their guns, and placed them where they could be found at a moment's warning.

Harry urged on the moose, intent on reaching the tree where the accident had happened in the morning, if possible, before dark. That passed, they would feel comparatively safe; for if the wolves should overtake them before they reached the tree, escape would be impossible. The moose shuffled over the snow at a rapid rate, as if he, too, knew that they were in danger; but Harry kept him completely under his control, and in less than half an hour the tree was in sight. After considerable exertion, the sled was lifted over the obstruction, and as the boys resumed their seats, they felt relieved to know that the worst part of the ride had been accomplished; but they had not gone far when, faintly, to their ears came the sound for which they had been waiting and listening—the mournful howl of a wolf. The moose heard it too, for, with a bound like a rocket, he set off on that break-neck pace that had so amused the boys in the morning. But it was far from a laughing matter now. The moose was not running from a harmless noise behind him, but from a danger that threatened them as well.

Presently the dreadful sound was repeated from another part of the woods, still distant, but nearer than before. The boys had often heard the same sound, when seated around their blazing camp-fire, and had smiled to think what a momentary horror would seize upon them as the sound first came pealing from the depths of the woods. But they had no camp-fire to protect them now; nothing but the speed of their horned horse and their own bravery could save them.

In a few moments, another and another joined in the hideous chorus, each nearer and more fearfully distinct than the others. The wolves were closing in behind them from all sides; but with their usual cowardice, were delaying the attack, until a sufficient force could be collected to render an easy victory certain. Up to this time not a wolf had been seen, save the one that Archie had first discovered; but in a few moments they could be heard dashing through the bushes on either side of the creek, and, soon after, the boldest began to show themselves on the ice behind them.

To describe the thoughts that ran with lightning speed through the minds of the terrified boys were impossible. In spite of the piercing cold, so intense were their feelings of horror, that they were covered with perspiration, and every thing they had done in their lives—minute incidents, long since forgotten—seemed spread out before their eyes like a panorama. Rapidly ran the terrified moose; but nearer and nearer came their dreadful pursuers, each moment increasing in numbers, and growing more bold. The moment was fast approaching when they would make the attack.

"Let us commence the fight, boys," said Frank, in as firm a voice as he could command. "We must kill as many of them as we can, before they close on us. George, take Harry's gun. Archie, you and I will fire first. Remember now, no putting two charges into one wolf. Harry, keep on the ice. Ready—now!"



The guns cracked in rapid succession, and the howls which followed proved that the ammunition had not been thrown away. The wolves sprang upon their wounded comrades and commenced to devour them, and George seized the opportunity to put in two excellent shots. During the delay thus occasioned, short as it was, the wolves were left far behind, and the boys had ample opportunity to load their guns. Harry, although generally very timid, when he found himself placed in danger, was the most cool and collected one of the party; and it was well that it was so, for it required all his presence of mind and power of muscle to keep the moose on the ice. He was struggling desperately, first to relieve himself of the weight of the sled, and, failing in this, he would make frantic endeavors to turn into the woods. If any part of the harness should break, they would be left at the mercy of their pursuers.

Again and again did the fierce animals overtake them, and as often were some of their number stretched on the snow. At length, a loud hurrah from Harry announced that they were nearing home; and a few moments afterward, just as the wolves were closing around them again, the sled entered Uncle Joe's "clearing." The noise of purling waters to the desert-worn pilgrim never sounded sweeter than did the sharp crack of rifles and the familiar voices of the trapper and his brother, to the ears of the rescued boys. The inmates of the cabin had heard the noise of the pursuit, and had rushed out to their assistance.

The moose was speedily unhitched from the sled, and after the boys had closed and fastened the doors of the cabin, they began to breathe more freely.

CHAPTER XIII.

The Black Mustang.



UPPER over, the hunters drew their chairs around the fireplace, and Dick, after filling his pipe, and drawing a few puffs by way of inspiration, said:

"I believe I onct told you 'bout havin' my hoss pulled out from under me by a grizzly bar, didn't I? Wal, I told you, too, that I ketched another, an' I had a job to do it, too—to ketch the one I wanted; an' the time you've had tryin' to ketch that black fox reminds me of it. You know, I s'pose, that large droves of wild hosses roam all over the prairy, an' them droves ar allers led by some splendid animal—allers a stallion—one that has got the legs to go like lightnin', an' the wind to keep it up. An' he's allers the cock o' the walk, too—the best fighter in the drove; an' when he moves round, it would make you laugh to see the other hosses get out of his way. He holds his place until he dies, unless some other hoss comes along an' wallops him. Then he takes his place with the common fags o' the drove, an' the new one is king till he gets licked, an' so on. It ar a mighty hard thing to capture one o' them leaders. You can ketch one o' the others easy enough, but when it comes to lassoin' the 'king,' it's a thing that few trappers can do. Jest arter my scrape with the grizzly bar, Bill Lawson an' me fell in with a lot o' fellers that war goin' to spend a season on the Saskatchewan, an' they wanted me an' Bill to join 'em; so I bought me a hoss of an ole Injun for a couple o' plugs o' tobacker—reg'lar

Jeems River it war, too—an' we started out. My new hoss was 'bout as ugly a lookin' thing as I ever happened to set eyes on. He war big as all out-doors, an' you could see every bone in his body. An' he war ugly actin', too; an' if a feller come within reach of his heels, the way he would kick war a caution to Injuns. But I hadn't been on the road more'n a day afore I diskivered that he could travel like a streak o' greased lightnin'. That war jest the kind of a hoss I wanted, an' I didn't care 'bout his ugly looks arter that.

"For more'n three year, me an' Bill had been keepin' an eye on a hoss that we wanted to ketch. He war the leader of a large drove. He war a sort o' iron-gray color, with a thick, archin' neck—a purty feller; an' the way he could climb over the prairy was a caution to cats. We warn't the only ones arter him, either, for a'most every trapper in the country had seed him, an' had more'n one chase arter him. But, bars and buffaler! It war no use 't all, for he could run away from the fastest hosses, an' not half try; an' many a poor feller, who straddled a hoss that every body thought couldn't be tuckered out, had left his animal dead on the prairy, an' found his way back to his camp on foot. We war in hopes that we should see him, for we war travelin' right through his country; an' I knowed that if we did find him, I would stand as good a chance o' ketchin' him as any one, for my ugly-lookin' hoss was the best traveler in the crowd.

"One night we camped on a little stream, called Bloody Creek. We called it so from a fight that a party of us fellers had there with the Injuns. About an hour arter supper, while we war all settin' round the fire, smokin' an' tellin' stories, ole Bob Kelly—the oldest an' best trapper in the country—started up off his blanket, an', cockin' his ear for a moment, said, 'Somebody's comin', boys.' An', sure 'nough, in a few minits up walked a stranger.

"It ar a mighty uncommon thing to meet a teetotal stranger on the prairy, an' a man don't know whether he is a friend or foe; but we war mighty glad to see him, and crowded round him, askin' all sorts o' questions; an' one took his rifle, an' another pulled off his powder-horn an' bullet-pouch, an' a big feller dragged him to the fire, where we could all get a good look at him, an' made him drink a big cup o' coffee.

"'Whar do you hail from, stranger?' inquired ole Bob Kelly, who allers took them matters into his own hands, an' we little fellers had to set round an' listen.

"'I b'long anywhere night ketches me,' answered the stranger. 'I'm an ole trapper in these yere parts.'

"'Whar's your hoss?' asked ole Bob.

"'I left him dead on the prairy—dead as a herrin'. I rid him a leetle too hard, I reckon. I war chasin' up the black mustang.'

"If I should live to be a hundred year older 'n I'm now, an' should live among the Blackfoot Injuns the hull time, I shouldn't expect to hear another sich a yell as 'em trappers give when the stranger mentioned the black mustang. They crowded round him like a flock o' sheep, all askin' him questions; an' he tried to answer 'em all to onct; an' sich a row as there war round that camp-fire for a few minits! It war wusser nor any Injun war-dance I ever seed. Now, me an' Bill hadn't never seed the black mustang, nor heerd o' him afore, 'cause we hadn't trapped in that part o' the country for a'most three year, but we knowed in a minit that it must be the leader o' some drove. But Bill had lived among the Injuns so much that he had got kinder used to their ways, an' he didn't like to see them trappers carryin' on so, an' actin' like a parcel o' young'uns jest turned loose from school; so, as soon as he could make himself heered, he yelled:

"'What in tarnation's the matter with you fellers? As soon as you git through hollerin', me an' Dick would like to know what all this yere fuss is about.'

"'Why, the black mustang has been within ten mile of this yere camp to-night,' said one of the trappers.

"'Wal, an' what o' that?' said Bill. 'Ar the black mustang any better hoss than the gray king?'

"'They all set up another yell at this, an' one of 'em said:

"'Why, the gray ain't nothin' 'long side o' the black mustang. He could run away from him in less'n two minits. I guess you hain't hearn tell of him, have you?'

"'In course I hain't,' said Bill.

"'Then you ain't no great shakes of a trapper,' said another.

"Now, the rascal knowed that war a lie, for there warn't no trapper in the country that could lay over Bill, 'cept ole Bob Kelly, an' every one said as how he war the best trapper agoin'; an' the way Bill eyed the feller, made him kinder keeful of his we'pons for a day or two arterward.

"Arter talking a little while, we found out the black mustang war the leader o' the largest drove on the prairy. He had been round for 'bout a year, an' every trapper in that part of the country had had a chase arter him; but it war like chasin' the wind; an' besides this, he could run all day, an' be jest as fresh at night as when he started in the mornin'.

"'Wal,' thinks I, 'Dick, here's a good chance for you to try your hoss's travelin' qualities;' an' I made up my mind that I would start off an' foller the black mustang till I ketched him, if it tuk me my lifetime.

"The next mornin', arter breakfast, one o' the trappers proposed that we should spend three or four days in huntin' up the mustang, an', in course, we all agreed to it. The stranger wanted to go, too, but we had no hoss to give him; so, arter biddin' us all good-by, he shouldered his rifle an' started out alone acrost the prairy. Wal, we spent a week tryin' to find that hoss, but didn't even get a sight at him; so one mornin' ole Bob Kelly concluded that we had better make another strike for the Saskatchewan. We packed up an' got all ready to start, when I tuk them a good deal by surprise by tellin' 'em that I war goin' to stay an' hunt up the black mustang. How they all laughed at me!

"'Laugh away, boys,' says I, as I got on to my hoss. 'I'll see you on the Saskatchewan in a month or so, an' I'll either bring the mustang with me, or he'll be a dead hoss. If I can't ketch him, I can shoot him, you know; an' I won't see you agin till I do one or the other. Good-by, fellers.' An' I turned my hoss an' rode away from the camp.

"Wal, I rode all over them prairies for a'most six weeks, without seein' the sign of a hoss; an' one arternoon I stopped on the top of a high swell to take my reckonin'. I found myself on the east side o' the Black Hills, an' I knowed that my first job was to get on the *other* side; the mustang had prob'ly struck off toward the mountains. So I began to look around for a good place to get over. The hills rose from the prairy reg'lar bluff-like—sometimes a hundred feet high, an' so steep that a sheep couldn't climb up 'em. Jest as it begun to grow dark, I come to a deep ravine, that seemed to run up into the hills a good way; an' the bottom of this yere ravine was as hard an' smooth as a floor, an' looked as if it had been traveled over a good deal. But I war kinder tired with my day's tramp, an' didn't notice it much, for I thought it war nothin' more'n a

buffaler road; so I picked out a good place an' camped for the night.

"Arly the next mornin' I set out agin; but as soon as I got on the road I knowed that no buffaler had made them tracks; they war mustangs, an' there war the prints of their hoofs in the dust, plain as a bar's ears. When I come to examine the signs, I found, as nigh as I could kalkerlate, that there war about three hundred hosses in the drove, an' I knowed, from the looks of the tracks, that they had been along lately; so I pushed ahead as fast as my hoss could carry me, an' that wasn't slow, I tell you. I rid him all day at a tearin' rate, an' at dark he seemed as willin' to go as when I started out. This put me in high spirits, an' I made up my mind that if me and my hoss ever got arter that black mustang, he would have to pick up his feet mighty lively to get away from us. The next day, about noon, I war riding along at a thumpin' rate, when all to onct I come to a place where the ravine opened into a small prairy, and scattered all over it war the wild hosses, feedin' away as peaceably as if no one had ever thought of disturbin' them there. I pulled up so quick that it a'most brought my hoss on his haunches; but the mustangs had seed me, an' the way they snorted an' galloped about war a purty thing to look at. I drewed off into the bushes as quick as I could, an' gathered up my lasso, which I allers carried at my saddle-bow, an' then looked toward the drove agin. The first hoss I seed was the black mustang. He war runnin' about, tossin' his head an' snortin' as though he didn't hardly understand the matter. He war the purtiest hoss I ever sot eyes on; but I couldn't stop to examine his pints then. Then I tuk a look round the prairy, an' saw that the hills rose on all sides of it; there was but one way the hosses could get out, an' that war through the ravine. I war in luck for onct in my life. Now, you boys, if you had been there, would, most like, run out into the prairy to onct, an' tried to ketch him, but that would have been a reg'lar boy trick, and would have spiled it all. I knowed that I had the black hoss surrounded, but if I begun to race him round that prairy, he would dodge me, an' be off down the ravine like a shot; so I kept still in the bushes; an' my hoss knowed his own bisness, and stood as though he war made of rock.

"Purty soon the hosses begun to get over their skeer an' commenced comin' toward me—the black hoss leadin' the way. He would come a few steps, an' then stop an' paw the ground, an' then come a little nearer, an' so on, till he come within 'bout half a lasso-throw, when, all of a sudden, I give my hoss the word, an' he jumped out o' them bushes like a streak o' lightnin'. It would have made you laugh to see the way them hosses put off; the black hoss, seemed to me, war on wings; but he hadn't made three jumps afore my lasso war around his neck. *The black mustang war mine!*

"In about three weeks I reached the Saskatchewan, an' if you could have heard the yell them trappers give when I rode up to the camp on the mustang, it would have done your heart good. I had kept my promise."

CHAPTER XIV.

A Brush with the Greasers.



DICK replenished his pipe and prepared to rest, after his tale was completed, when Frank suddenly inquired:

"Dick, how came that scar on your face?"

The "scar" Frank had reference to, was an ugly-looking wen, extending entirely across the trapper's face, and completely "spilin' his good looks," as he sometimes used to remark.

"That war done in a fight with some tarnal Greasers," answered Dick. "I come mighty nigh havin' my neck stretched that night, an' the way it happened war this:"

After a few whiffs at his pipe, he continued:

"When our government war settlin' our little dispute with the Mexikin Greasers, I, like a good many other trappers, thought that I should like to take a hand in the muss. I hate a Greaser wusser nor I do an Injun. So, arter a little talk, me an' Bill jined a company o' Rangers that war raised by an ole trapper we used to call Cap'n Steele. A'most every man in the company war a trapper or hunter, for the cap'n wouldn't take only them as could show the claws o' three or four grizzlies they had rubbed out, an' as many Injun scalps.

"Wal, when we got together, I reckon we war about the roughest lookin' set o' men you ever see. Each one dressed as suited him best, an' all armed with rifles, tomahawks, an' huntin'-knives. But our looks didn't seem to set ole Gen'ral Taylor agin us, for when we rode up to his camp, an' our cap'n had told him what we war, an' what we could do, he seemed mighty glad to see us; and we war sent to onct to the quarter-master, an' detailed to take care o' his cattle an' hosses, fight guerrillas, an' carry letters from one place to another. We knowed the country purty well, for there were few of us that hadn't traveled over it more'n onct in our lives; but whenever we war sent off anywhere we used to have a Mexikin guide, who showed us the short cuts through the mountains.

"Wal, just arter the battle o' Monterey, our company war cut up into little squads, an' scattered all over the country; some went with the gen'ral, an' some war put in Cap'n Morgan's company, an' sent scoutin' around, an' four of us war left at Monterey with the quarter-master.

"One day ole Bill come to me an' said:

"Dick, the kurnel wants to see you. I guess he's got some business for you to 'tend to.'

"I went up to the head-quarters, an' the kurnel told me that he had some very important letters which he wanted to send to Major Davis, who was then stationed at a little town called Alamo, an' as I had the finest hoss in the town, he thought it best to send me. Alamo war on the other side o' the mountains, an' about a hundred an' fifty miles off. As the kurnel had said, I had the best hoss in the hull camp, an', in course, it

wouldn't have been no trouble to have gone there if the country had been clear—the ride wasn't nothin'; but the Mexikins war comin' down toward Monterey, an' the kurnel thought that they war goin' to try to take the city from us agin. I knowed there war danger in it, but I didn't mind that. I war used to it, an' if I got into a scrape, it wouldn't be the first one I war in; so I started off arter my hoss, an' in a few minits I war ready an' waitin' at the kurnel's door for the letters. Purty soon he come out an' give 'em to me, sayin':

"Now, Dick, be mighty keerful of 'em, 'cause there's some news in 'em that I shouldn't like to have the Mexikins get hold of. This man, ' pintin' to a Greaser that stood a little behind me, holdin' his hoss, 'will be your guide. He knows all about the mountains.' Then, movin' up a little closer to me, he whispered: 'He'll bear watchin', I think; I don't know much about him, but he is the only man I have got to send with you, an' them letters must be in Major Davis's hands by to-morrow night.'

"All right, kurnel,' I answered; 'I'll look out for him. I never see a Greaser yet that could pull the wool over my eyes. I'll give the letters to Major Davis afore this time to-morrow. Good by.' An' me an' the guide rid off.

"As soon as I had got out of the city, I turned to have a look at my guide, an' I thought, as the kurnel had said, that he would bear watchin'. He war the most villainous lookin' Mexikin I ever sot eyes on. He war a young feller, not more'n twenty-two or twenty-three year old; but he had an eye that looked like an eagle's, an' it wasn't still a minit. He war dressed in a reg'lar Greaser's rig, with a slouch hat, short jacket, all covered with gold lace, an' pantaloons, wide at the bottom, an' open on the side as far as his knees. He had a splendid hoss, an' war armed with a carbine, short saber, an' a lasso; an' I knowed that if me an' him got into a muss, that lasso would bother me more'n his sword or shootin'-iron. The Greasers, as a gen'ral thing, ain't no great shakes at shootin', an' in a rough-an'-tumble fight they ain't nowhere; but them ar raw-hide lassoes ar the meanest things in the world to fight; they'll have one of 'em around your neck afore you know it. I had a little experience in that line afore I got back. Arter we had got outside o' the pickets a little way, he turned in his saddle, an' tried to commence a talk with me in Spanish; but I made him believe that I couldn't understand a word he said. I thought that if I should tell him that I couldn't talk his lingo, it would make him a little keerless; an' so it did.

"We rid all day as fast as our hosses could travel, an' afore dark we got acrost the mountains, an' stopped afore a little house, where the guide said would be a good place to pass the night. I didn't much like the idee; had rather camp right down in the woods; but, in course, that would only put him on the look-out, an' I knowed that the best way to do war to act as though I thought every thing war all right. A man come to the gate as we rid up, an', as soon as he see my guide, he touched his hat to him in reg'lar soldier style. The guide answered the salute, an' asked the man, in Spanish:

"Are you alone, José?"

"Yes, gen'ral,' answered the man. Then making a slight motion toward me, which, I made believe I didn't notice, he asked:

"But the American?"

"O, he can't understand Spanish,' said my rascally guide. 'No fear of him; he thinks it's all right. Did you receive my letter?"

"Yes, gen'ral,' answered the man, touching his hat agin.

"Don't make so many motions, you fool,' said my guide; 'the American is not blind. You got my letter all right, you say? Then Bastian, with five hundred men, will be here at midnight?"

"Yes, gen'ral.'

"The guide seemed satisfied, for he got off his hoss, an' motioned me, with a good many smiles an' grimaces, to do the same. I could see that I war in a purty tight place, an' I had a good notion to draw one o' my six-shooters an' kill both o' the rascals where they stood. But, thinks I, there may be more of these yere yaller-bellies around here somewhere, an' besides, if I wait, I may get a chance to capture the gen'ral, for my guide war none other than Gen'ral Cortinas, an' one o' the best officers the Mexikins had. He had bothered us more'n their hull army, an' the kurnel had offered to give a thousand dollars for him alive, or five hundred for his scalp. I didn't care a snap for the money, 'cause it warn't no use to me on the prairy; all I wanted war a good Kentucky rifle, plenty o' powder an' lead, an' a good hoss, an' I war satisfied. But I wanted to capture that gen'ral, an' take him into camp, for he war a nuisance. In battle he never showed no quarter, an' if he tuk any prisoners, it war only that he might let his men try their hands at shootin'. He seemed to understand fightin' better nor the rest o' the Mexikins, an' it showed that he war a brave feller when he would come right into camp, with sich a price sot on his head.

"I warn't long in makin' up my mind what I ought to do, an' I got down off my hoss, as though there warn't a Greaser within a hundred miles o' me; but, instead o' givin the hoss into charge o' the man, I hit him a cut with my whip that sent him flyin' up the road. I knowed that he wouldn't be far off when I wanted him, an' I knowed, too, that my saddle an' pistols war safe, 'cause nobody couldn't ketch him besides me. Arter goin' a little way up the road, he turned an' looked back, an' then jumped over a hedge into a field, an' begun to eat. I could see that the Mexikins didn't like it a bit, for they looked at each other an' scowled, an' José said:

"Carrajo! do you s'pose the American suspects any thing, gen'ral?"

"It don't make no difference whether he does or not, said my guide, turnin' on his heel, an' motionin' me to follow him to the house; 'he's in our power, an' don't leave this place alive.'

"Now, you wouldn't have called that very pleasant news, I take it. Wal, it did make me feel rather onpleasant; but I didn't exactly believe what the ole rascal had said about my not goin' away alive. Thinks I, shootin' is a game two can play at, an' as long as you don't bring them tarnal lassoes round, I'm all right. I had never seed a six-shooter afore I went into the army, but I had l'arnt to use 'em a'most as well as I could my rifle. I found that they war mighty handy things in a fight. I had four of 'em, two in my huntin'-shirt, and two had gone off with my hoss; an' I knowed that when the time come I could get up a nice little fight for the Greasers.

"There war only two women in the house, an' they seemed mighty glad to see him, an' sot out a cheer for him; but they scowled at me, an' left me to stand up. But that didn't trouble me none, for I helped myself to a seat, an' listened to what my guide war sayin' to 'em. He war mighty perlite, an' talked an' laughed, an' told the women as how he war goin' to rub me out as soon as his men come; an' then he war goin' to pitch into

Cap'n Morgan, who war out scoutin' with his company, an' had camped a little piece back in the mountains.

"It war the kurnel's order that I should see him as we passed through the mountains, an' send him to Monterey to onct, afore the Mexikins could ketch him. But my rascally guide had heered the order, an' had led me out o' my way, so that I shouldn't see him. I listened with both my ears, an' arter I had heered all the rascal's plans, which were purty nicely laid out for a boy, I made up my mind that he would be a leetle disappointed when he tried to ketch Cap'n Morgan.

"In a little while the man that had tuk charge o' the gen'ral's hoss come in, an' I soon found out that he war the man that war expected to do the business of cuttin' my throat. But the gen'ral told him not to try it till midnight, when he would have plenty of men to back him up. This showed me that, brave as the young Greaser war when leadin' his men, he didn't like the idee o' pitchin' into an American single-handed. I guess he knowed by my looks that I could do some purty good fightin'.

"Arter eatin' a hearty supper, an' smokin' a cigar with the gen'ral, I wrapped myself up in my blanket, which I had tuk from my saddle afore lettin' my hoss go, an' laid myself away in one corner of the room. The Mexikins didn't like this, an' one o' the women made me understand by signs that there war a bed for me up stairs. But I thought that my chances for escape would be much better where I war; so I motioned her to go away, an' pretended to go to sleep. The gen'ral an' his man had a long talk about it, an' I expected every minit to hear him tell the feller to shoot me. If he had, it would have been the signal for his own death, for I had both my revolvers under my blanket. But no sich order war given, an' finally the gen'ral, arter tellin' the man to keep a good watch on me, went into another room an' went to bed, an' his man stretched himself out on his cloak, right afore the door.

"Wal, I waited about two hours for him to go to sleep, an' then made up my mind that I might as well be travelin'. So I throwed off my blanket an' war risin' to my feet, when 'bang' went the feller's pistol, an' the bullet whizzed by my head an' went into the wall. I warn't more'n ten feet from him, an' I'll be blamed if he didn't miss me. The next minit I had him by the throat, an' a blow from the butt of one o' my six-shooters done the work for him. I dragged him away from the door, jumped down the steps, an' made tracks through the garden.

"The night war purty dark, but I knowed which way to go to get out o' the yard, which war surrounded by a palin' eight foot high. You'd better believe I run *some*; but I hadn't gone twenty yards from the house afore I run slap agin somebody. I thought at first that it war the gen'ral, an' I muzzled him. '*Carrajo!* what does this mean?' said the Mexikin, in Spanish. As soon as I heered his voice, I knowed that he warn't the feller I wanted; most likely he war one o' the men the gen'ral had been expectin'; so I give him a settler with my knife, an' tuk to my heels agin.

"The pistol that the Mexikin had fired in the house had set the women a goin'; an', when I reached the fence, I heered 'em yellin' an' wailin' over the feller I had knocked down. I didn't stop to listen to 'em, but jumped over into the field where my hoss war, an' commenced whistlin' for him. I thought he war a long while a coming an' I ran along whistlin', an' wonderin' where he had gone to. Purty soon I heered his whinny, an' see him comin' toward me like mad; an' right behind him war three or four Mexikins, with their lassoes all ready to ketch him. But my hoss war leavin' 'em behind fast; for the way he could climb over the ground when he onct made up his mind to run, war a caution to them Greasers. He come right up to me, an' in a minit I war on his back.

"I now felt safe. The first thing I did war to pull out my huntin'-knife an' fasten it to my wrist with a piece o' buckskin; then, drawin' one o' my revolvers, I turned in my saddle, an' thought I would stir up the Greasers a little, when all to onct somethin' struck me in the face like a club, an' I war lifted from my saddle clean as a whistle, and the next minit I war bumpin' an' draggin' over the ground in a mighty onpleasant kind of a way. One o' the Greasers had slipped his lasso over me, an' war pullin' me along as fast as his hoss could travel. I fell right flat on my face, an' every step the Greaser's hoss tuk plowed my nose in the ground, an' my eyes war so full o' dirt an' blood that I could scarcely see.

"But I war not quite so fast as the Greaser had thought for. The lasso hadn't gone down round my neck, but had ketched jest above my chin. I hadn't never been in sich a mighty onpleasant fix afore, but I warn't long in gettin' my wits about me. Reachin' up with my huntin'-knife, I made a slash at the lasso, an' the next minit wor standin' on my feet agin. I had hung onto my revolver, an', drawin' a bead on the Greaser that had ketched me, I tumbled him from his saddle in a twinkin'. My hoss hadn't run an inch arter I war pulled off his back, an' I war soon in the saddle agin.

"I knowed I war safe now, for, as I galloped over the field, I see the Greasers travelin' down the road as though Gen'ral Taylor's army war arter 'em. They war three to my one, but didn't think themselves a match for a single American."

CHAPTER XV.

Caught at Last.

UT that isn't all the story," said the trapper, again filling his pipe. "As soon as the Greasers had got out o' sight, I galloped back toward the road an' tuk the back track, intendin' to find Cap'n Morgan, an' tell him that the Mexikins were kalkerlatin' on ketchin' him, an' then go on with my dispatches.

"I had paid purty good attention to what the gen'ral had told the women, an' I knowed exactly what road to take to find the cap'n's camp; an' you'd better believe I rid *some*. Purty soon some one yelled out:

"Who goes there?"



"'Friend!' I shouted, 'an' I want to see Cap'n Morgan to onct. I've got some news for him.'

"You'd better believe the ole cap'n opened his eyes when I told him my story; an' arter furnishin' me with a fresh hoss—the best one in the camp—he set to work gettin' ready for the Greasers. I didn't much like the idee o' startin' out agin, for I didn't know the short cuts through the country as well as I ought to, an' the cap'n had no guide to send with me. But I knowed that them letters must be in Alamo by night, an' I shouldn't ever be able to look ole Bill Lawson in the face agin if I didn't obey my orders; so, arter biddin' the boys good-by, an' wishin' 'em good luck in fightin' the Mexikins, I set out.

"I did plenty of doublin' an' twistin' to get clear o' the Greasers, for I met 'em about half way atween the mountains an' the house where we had stopped, goin' up to ketch the cap'n. They war in high spirits, but when they come down agin, about two hours arterward, they were runnin' like white-heads, an' the Texas boys were close at their heels.

"I war used to hard work, but when I got off my hoss that night in Alamo, I war about as tired a man as you ever see. Two days arterward I war back in Monterey agin. Ole Bill didn't know me, for my face war purty well cut up. I told him the story of the Mexikin gen'ral, an' arter talkin' the matter over, me an' him concluded we would capture that Greaser, an' started up to head-quarters to have a talk with the kurnel about it.

"'You can't do it, boys,' says he. 'If Cortinas war an Injun, you would be jist the fellers to do it; but you don't know enough about soldierin'. Howsomever, you can try.'

"The next mornin', when me an' Bill rid up to the kurnel's head-quarters to bid him good-by, you wouldn't a knowed us. We had pulled off our huntin'-shirts an' leggins, an' war dressed in reg'lar Mexikin style. We left our rifles behind, an' tuk carbines in their place. We didn't like to do this; but if we had carried our long shootin'-irons into a Mexikin camp, any one would a knowed what we war. We had our six-shooters and huntin'-knives stowed away in our jackets.

"'Good-by, kurnel,' said Bill, shakin' the ole soldier's hand. 'We'll ketch that Greaser, or you'll never see us agin.'

"'Do your best, boys,' said the kurnel. 'Bring back the Greaser, an' the thousand dollars are yourn.'

"We follered the same path that the gen'ral had led me—takin' keer not to ride too fast, 'cause we didn't know what we might have for our hosses to do—an' afore dark we come to the house where me an' my guide had stopped, an' knocked at the gate. When it war opened we could see that the place war full o' Greasers; but that didn't trouble us any, for we knowed that we should have to go into their camp if we wanted to ketch the gen'ral. We told the Greaser that come to the gate, that we were Mexikin soldiers, an' wanted to stay there all night, an' he war as perlite as we could wish—asked us to walk in, an' sent a man to take keer of our hosses.

"This war the first time we had met a soldier in our new rig, an' we were a little afeered that he might diskiver who we were; but we could both talk Spanish as well as he could, an' the rascal didn't suspect us.

"We asked to see the commandin' officer, an' when we found him we reported to him as scouts belongin' to Gen'ral Santa Anna's head-quarters, an' that we had come with very important news for Gen'ral Cortinas. What that news was we didn't know ourselves; but we knowed that we could get up a purty good story when the time come.

"'All right,' said the Greaser cap'n. 'I'm goin' up to Gen'ral Cortinas' camp to-morrow, an' you can ride right up with me.'

"We touched our hats to him an' left the room. I hated mighty bad to salute that dirty Greaser jist as I would my kurnel. I had rather put a bullet in his yaller hide; but we war in for it, an' we knowed that the hull thing depended on our behavin' ourselves properly. As we passed out o' the house we met the women, an' I begun to shake in my boots agin, 'cause I knowed them women had sharp eyes, an' I war afeered it war all up with us. But they didn't suspect nothin', an' I knowed that we war safe; 'cause if they couldn't see through the game we war playin', nobody could.

"Wal, we went out into the yard an' eat supper, an' lay down around the fire with them ar dirty Mexikins, an' listened to their insultin' talk agin the Americans, an', in course, jined in with 'em. They thought me an' ole Bill war lucky dogs in bein' with a great gen'ral like Santa Anna; but I couldn't see what there war great in a man who, with an army o' fifty thousand men, would run from six thousand. But we told 'em a good many things about the gen'ral that I guess they never heered afore, an' we hadn't heered of 'em neither; but they believed every thing we said war gospel truth, an' we made our kalkerlations that in less nor a month the American army would all be prisoners.

"The next mornin' we made an 'arly start, an' that arternoon drew up in the Mexikin camp. It war a purty sight, I tell you—nothin' to be seen but white tents as far as our eyes could reach. There warn't less nor a hundred thousand men in that ar camp, an' I begun to feel rather shaky when I thought of our small army at Monterey. While me an' Bill war lookin' about, a spruce little Greaser come up, an' said that Gen'ral Cortinas war waitin' to see us. We found the rascal in a large tent, with a sentry afore the door, an' when I sot eyes on him, my fingers ached to ketch him by the throat. He looked jist as he did when me an' him set out from Monterey together, only he had on a blue uniform.

"'Wal, boys,' said he, smilin' an' motionin' us to set down, 'I understand that you're from Gen'ral Santa Anna, an' have news for me.'

"'Yes, gen'ral,' said ole Bill, takin' off his slouch-hat, an' scratchin' his head as if thinkin' what to say. 'We've got news for you. If you want to ketch Cap'n Morgan an' his band o' cutthroats, I'll tell you jist how you can do it.'

"'How can it be done, my good feller,' said the gen'ral, rubbin' his hands. 'I thought I should capture him the other night, but he had too many men for me.'

"'Wal,' said ole Bill, 'me an' this feller here'—pintin' to me—'war in Monterey yesterday, an' heered an order read to Cap'n Morgan to march out o' the city at midnight, an' jine Cap'n Davis at Alamo. Now, if you want to ketch him, all you have got to do is to take fifty men, an' wait for him in the mountains. He has got jist twenty-eight men in his company.'

"'I'll do it,' said the Greaser. 'But I'll take a hundred men, to make sure of him. Which road is he going to

take?'

"That's what we can't tell exactly," said ole Bill. 'But me an' this feller thought that we would come an' tell you, so that you could have every thing ready, an' then go back and find out all their plans.'

"Very well," said the Greaser; an', arter writin' somethin' on a piece o' paper, he handed it to ole Bill, sayin': 'Here's a pass for you an' your friend to go in an' out o' the lines whenever you please. Now, you go back to Monterey, an' find out all Cap'n Morgan's plans, an' I'll go out with a hundred men an' ketch him.'

"This war exactly what me an' Bill wanted. We were afeered at first that he would send some one else instead o' goin' himself; but now we knowed that we war all right; the gen'ral war ourn, an' no mistake.

"As soon as we got out o' sight o' the camp, we made good time, an' afore midnight we war in the kurnel's head-quarters. As soon as he heered our story, he sent for one o' his officers, an' told him to march 'arly the next evenin' with eighty men, an' draw up an ambush, in a deep gorge, through which ran the road that led to Alamo. An' he ordered Cap'n Morgan, who had reached Monterey the day afore, to be ready to march through that gorge at midnight.

"Arter me an' Bill had rested a little while, we set out on fresh hosses, an', in a few hours, were back in the Mexikin camp agin. That arternoon we rid out, side by side, with Gen'ral Cortinas, an' about ten o'clock in the evenin' we reached the gorge. Every thing war as silent as death; but I knowed that eighty Western rifles war stowed away among the trees, on each side o' the road, an' behind 'em war sturdy hunters an' trappers, achin' to send a bullet in among us.

"Arter the gen'ral had fixed his men to suit him, we drew back into the bushes, an' waited for Cap'n Morgan to come up. Jest a little afore midnight we heered a faint tramp, an' in a few minits the rangers swept down into the gorge. For a minit nothin' war heered but the noise o' their hosses' hoofs on the road. It war a fine sight to see them brave men ridin' right down into that ambush, knowin', as they did, that death war on each side o' them. Nigher an' nigher they come; an' the gen'ral war about to give the order to fire, when, all to onct, a yell like an Injun's burst from among the trees, an' the reports of eighty rifles echoed through the mountains. You never seed a more astonished Greaser nor that Gen'ral Cortinas war about that time.

"'Carrajo,' he yelled, 'you have betrayed me.'

"Shouldn't wonder if we had, you tarnal yaller-hided scoundrel," said ole Bill; an' afore the Greaser could make a move, we had him by the arms, an' two six-shooters were lookin' him in the face. His cowardly men didn't fire a shot, but throwed down their guns, an' run in every direction. But our boys closed up about 'em, an' out o' them ar hundred men that come out to ketch Cap'n Morgan, not half a dozen escaped. The only prisoner we tuk back to Monterey war the gen'ral."

After Dick had got through his tale, the hunters held a consultation over the state of their larder. As their coffee, bread, and other supplies were exhausted, and they did not like the idea of living on venison and water, they concluded to break up camp. The next morning they packed their baggage into the sled, and, taking a last look at the place where they had spent so many happy hours, set out for Uncle Joe's cabin, which they reached a little before dark.

CHAPTER XVI.

The Lost Wagon-Train.



UNCLE Joe met them at the door, and, while they were relieving themselves of their overcoats and weapons, asked innumerable questions about their sojourn in the woods. Dick took the part of spokesman, and described, in his rude, trapper's style, the scenes through which they had passed, dwelling with a good deal of emphasis on the "keerlessness" displayed by the Young Naturalist in attacking the moose, and in starting off alone to fight the panther. The trapper tried hard to suppress the feelings of pride which he really felt, and favored the young hunter with a look that was intended to be severe, but which was, in fact, a mingling of joy and satisfaction.

Frank bore the scolding which Uncle Joe administered with a very good grace, for he knew that he deserved it.

"I'd like to take the youngster out on the prairie," said Dick, seating himself before the fire, and producing his never-failing pipe. "I'll bet that, arter he had follered me and Useless a year or two, he wouldn't be in no great hurry to pitch into every wild varmint he come acrost."

Frank made no reply, but taking the cubs from the pockets of his overcoat, allowed them to run about the cabin—a proceeding which the dogs, especially Brave, regarded with suspicion, and which they could not be persuaded to permit, until they had received several hearty kicks and cuffs from their masters.

"You can't blame the critters," said the trapper, puffing away at his pipe. "It's their natur', an' I sometimes think that them dogs have a deal more sense than their human masters, an'"—

"Supper's ready," interrupted Bob, the cook and man-of-all-work, and this announcement put an end to all further conversation on the subject.

The boys were highly delighted to find themselves seated at a well-filled table once more, and Uncle Joe's good things rapidly disappeared before their attacks. It made no difference to the trapper, however. With him a few weeks "roughing it" in the woods was, of course, no novelty. A log for a table, and a piece of clean bark for a plate, answered his purpose as well as all the improvements of civilization, which those who have been brought up in the settlements regard as necessary to their very existence.

After supper, they drew their chairs in front of the fire, and Uncle Joe and his brother solaced themselves

with their pipes, while Bob busied himself in clearing away the table and washing the dishes.

"This Bill Lawson," said the trapper, after taking a few puffs at his pipe, to make sure that it was well lighted, "used to take it into his head onct in awhile to act as guide for fellers as wanted to go to Californy. He knowed every inch of the country from St. Joseph to the mines, for he had been over the ground more'n you ever traveled through these yere woods, an' he was called as good a guide as ever tuk charge of a wagon-train. In course, I allers went with him on these trips, as a sort o' pack-hoss an' hunter, cause ole Bill couldn't think o' goin' anywhere without me; an' I have often thought that the reason why he made them trips as guide, was jest to get a good look at the folks; it reminded him o' the time when he had parents, an' brothers an' sisters. He never laughed an' joked round the camp-fires, as he used to do when me and him war off alone in the mountains. He hardly ever said a word to any body besides me, an' allers appeared to be sorrowful. This give him the name of 'Moody Bill,' by which he was knowed all through the country. Every trader on the prairy war acquainted with him, an' he allers tuk out a big train. I never knowed him to lose but one, an' he lost himself with it. The way it happened war this:

"One night, arter we had got about a week's journey west of Fort Laramie, we stopped in a little oak opening, where we made our camp. It war right in the heart o' the wust Injun country I ever see, an' near a place where me an' ole Bill had often *cached* our furs an' other fixins, an' which we used as a kind o' camp when we war in that part o' the country trappin' beaver an' fightin' Injuns. It war a cave in the side of a mountain, an' the way we had it fixed nobody besides ourselves couldn't find it. We never went in or come out of it until arter dark, 'cause the Comanches were a'most allers huntin' 'bout the mountains, an' we didn't want em to break up our harborin' place. We had made up our minds that, arter we had seed our train safe through, we would come back to our 'bar's hole,' as we called it, an' spend a month or so in fightin' the Comanches an' skrimmagin' with the grizzlies in the mountains.

"Wal, as I war sayin' we made our camp, an' while I war dressin' a buck I had shot, ole Bill, as usual, leaned on his rifle, an' watched the emigrants unpack their mules an' wagons, an' make their preparations for the night. Arter supper he smoked a pipe, an' then rolled himself up in his blanket an' said—"Dick, you know this place, but you ain't no trapper;" an', without sayin' any more, he lay down and went to sleep, leavin' me to station the guards, an' see that every thing went on right durin' the night.

"I knowed well enough what ole Bill meant when he said, 'Dick, you ain't no trapper.' He had seed Injun sign durin' the day, an' war pokin' fun at me, cause I hadn't seed it too. I don't know, to this day, how it war that I had missed it, for I had kept a good look-out, an' I had allers thought that I war 'bout as good an Injun hunter as any feller in them diggins, (allers exceptin' ole Bill and Bob Kelly;) but the way the ole man spoke tuk me down a peg or two, an' made me feel wusser nor you youngsters do when you get trounced at school for missin' your lessons.

"Wal, as soon as it come dark, I put out the guards, an' then shouldered my rifle, an' started out to see if I could find any sign o' them Injuns that ole Bill had diskivered. It war as purty a night as you ever see. The moon shone out bright an' clear, an', savin' the cry of a whippoorwill, that come from a gully 'bout a quarter of a mile from the camp, an' the barkin' o' the prairy wolves, every thing war as still as death. You youngsters would have laughed at the idea o' goin' out to hunt Injuns on such a night; but I knowed that there must be somethin' in the wind, for ole Bill never got fooled about sich things. Here in the settlements he wouldn't have knowed enough to earn his salt; but out on the prairy he knowed all about things.

"Wal, I walked all round the camp, an' back to the place where I had started from, an' not a bit of Injun sign did I see. There war a high hill jest on the other side of the gully, an' I knowed that if there war any Injuns about, an' they should take it into their heads to pounce down upon us, they would jest show themselves in that direction; so I sot down on the prairy, outside o' the wagons, which war drawn up as a sort o' breastwork round the camp, and begun to listen. I didn't hear nothin', however, until a'most midnight, and then, jest arter I had changed the guards, an' was goin' back to my place, I heered somethin' that made me prick up my ears. It war the hootin' of an owl, an' it seemed to come from the hill.

"Now, you youngsters would'n't have seed any thing strange in that; but a man who has spent his life among wild Injuns and varmints can tell the difference atween a sound when it comes from an owl's throat, and when it comes from a Comanche's; an' I to onct made up my mind that it war a signal. Presently from the gully come the song of a whippoorwill. It didn't sound exactly like the notes I had heered come from that same gully but a few minits afore, an' I knowed that it war another signal. When the whippoorwill had got through, I heered the barkin' of a prairy wolf further up the gully to the right o' the camp; an' all to onct the wolves, which had been barkin' an' quarrelin' round the wagons, set up a howl, an' scampered away out o' sight. This would have been as good a sign as I wanted that there war Injuns about, even if I hadn't knowed it afore; so I sot still on the ground to see what would be the next move.

"In a few minits I heered a rustlin' like in the grass a little to one side of me. I listened, an' could tell by the sound that there was somebody in there, crawlin' along on his hands an' knees. Nearer an' nearer it come, an' when it got purty clost to me it stopped, an' I seed an' Injun's head come up over the top o' the grass, an' I could see that the rascal war eyein' me purty sharp. I sot mighty still, noddin' my head a leetle as if I war fallin' asleep, keepin' an' eye on the ole feller all the time to see that he didn't come none of his Injun tricks on me, and finally give a leetle snore, which seemed to satisfy the painted heathen, for I heered his 'ugh!' as he crawled along by me into camp.

"What made you do that?" interrupted Archie, excitedly. "Why didn't you muzzle him?"

"That the way you youngsters, what don't know nothin' about fightin' Injuns, would have done," answered the trapper, with a laugh, "an' you would have had your har raised for your trouble. But, you see, I knowed that he had friends not a great way off, an' that the fust motion I made to grab the rascal, I would have an arrer slipped into me as easy as fallin' off a log. But I didn't like to have the varlet behind me; so, as soon as I knowed that he had had time to get into the camp, I commenced noddin' agin, an' finally fell back on the ground, ker-chunk.

"I guess them Injuns that were layin' round in the grass laughed *some* when they see how quick I picked up my pins. I got up as though I expected to see a hull tribe of Comanches clost on to me, looked all round, an', arter stretchin' my arms as though I had enjoyed a good sleep, I started along toward the place where one o' the guards war standin'. I walked up clost to him, an' whispered:

"Don't act as though you thought that any thing was wrong, but keep your eyes on the grass. There's

Injuns about.'

"The chap turned a leetle pale when he heered this; but although he was as green as a punkin, as far as Injun fightin' war consarned, he seemed to have the real grit in him, for he nodded in a way that showed that he understood what I meant. I then dropped down on all-fours, an' commenced crawlin' into the camp to find the Injun. The fires had burned low, an' the moon had gone down, but still there war light enough for me to see the rascal crawlin' along on the ground, an' making toward one of the wagons. When he reached it, he raised to his feet, an', arter casting his eyes about the camp, to make sure that no one seed him, he lifted up the canvas an' looked in. Now war my time. Droppin' my rifle, I sprung to my feet, an' started for the varlet; but jest as I war goin' to grab him, one o' the women in the wagon, who happened to be awake, set up a screechin'. The Injun dropped like a flash o' lightnin', an', dodgin' the grab I made at him, started for the other side o' the camp, jumpin' over the fellers that were layin' round as easy as if he had wings. I war clost arter him, but the cuss run like a streak; an' finding that I war not likely to ketch him afore he got out into the prairy, I jumped back for my rifle an' tuk a flyin' shot at him, jest as he war divin' under a wagon. I don't very often throw away a chunk o' lead, an', judgin' by the way he yelled, I didn't waste one that time. He dropped like a log, but war on his feet agin in a minit, an', without waitin' to ax no questions, set up the war-whoop. I tell you, youngsters, the sound o' that same war-whoop war no new thing to me. I've heered it often—sometimes in the dead o' night, when I didn't know that there war any danger about, an' it has rung in my ears when I've been runnin' for my life, with a dozen o' the yellin' varlets clost to my heels; but I never before, nor since, felt my courage give way as it did on that night. Scarcely a man in the hull wagon-train, exceptin' me an ole Bill, had ever drawn a bead on an Injun, an' I war a'most sartin that I should have a runnin' fight with the rascals afore mornin'.

"The whoop war answered from all round the camp, an' the way the bullets an' arrers come into them ar wagons warn't a funny thing to look at. My shot had 'wakened a'most every one in[Pg camp, but there warn't much sleepin' done arter the Injuns give that yell. Men, women, an' children poured out o' the wagons, an' run about, gettin' in everybody's way; an' sich a muss as war kicked up in that ar camp I never heered afore. There war about seventy men in the train, an' they war all good marksmen, but there war scarcely a dozen that thought o' their rifles. They kept callin' on me an' ole Bill to save 'em, an' never onct thought o' pickin' up their we'pons an' fightin' to save themselves; an', in spite of all we could do, them ar cowardly sneaks would get behind the women an' children for protection. It war enough to frighten any one; an' although that ar warn't the fust muss o' the kind I had been in, I felt my ole 'coon-skin cap raise on my head when I thought what a slaughter there would be when them Comanches onct got inside o' the camp. There war only a few of us to fight 'em, an' we did the best we could, sendin' back their yells, an' bringin' the death-screech from some unlucky rascal at every shot. But the Injuns warn't long in findin' out how the land lay, an', risin' round us like a cloud, they come pourin' into camp."

CHAPTER XVII.

The Struggle in the Cave.



AN ole Bill warn't hired to run away, an' we wouldn't need to have done it if them ar cowards had stood up to the mark like men; but when I seed them Injuns comin', I knowed that the game war up—it warn't no use to fight longer. I jest ketched a glimpse of ole Bill makin' for his hoss, an' I did the same, 'cause I knowed that he would stay as long as there war any chance o' beatin' back the Injuns.

"To jump on my hoss, an' cut the lasso with which he war picketed, warn't the work of a minit, an' then, clubbin' my rifle, I laid about me right an' left, an' my hoss, knowin' as well as I did what war the matter, carried me safely out o' the camp.

"As I rode out on to the prairy, the Injuns started up on all sides o' me, but my hoss soon carried me out o' their reach. As soon as I thought I war safe, I hauled up to load my rifle, an' wait for ole Bill. I felt a leetle oneasy about him, 'cause, if the Comanches should onct get a good sight at him, they would be sartin to know who he war, an' wouldn't spare no pains to ketch him; an' if they succeeded, he couldn't expect nothin' but the stake.

"Wal, arter I had loaded up my rifle, an' scraped some bullets, I started back toward the camp, to see if I could find any thing o' Bill; an' jest at that minit I heered a yell that made my blood run cold. By the glare o' the camp-fires, which the Comanches had started agin, I seed the cause of the yell, for there war ole Bill on foot, an' makin' tracks for the gully, with a dozen yellin' varlets clost at his heels. In course I couldn't help the old man any; an', besides, I knowed that they would take him alive at any risk, an' that, if I kept out o' the scrape, I might have a chance to save him. Wal, jest at the edge o' the gully he war ketched, an' arter a hard tussle—for the ole man warn't one of them kind that gives up without a fight—he war bound hand an' foot, an' carried back to the camp.

"In course the news spread among the Comanches like lightnin', an' it had the effect o' stoppin' the slaughterin' that war goin' on, for the Injuns all wanted to have a look at the man who had sent so many o' their best warriors to the happy huntin'-grounds.

"Finally, some o' the varlets yelled out my name—the rest took it up, an' clouds of the warriors went scourin' through the camp an' over the prairy to find me; 'cause they knowed that whenever the ole man war to be found, I warn't a great way off. It begun to get mighty onhealthy for me in them diggins, so I turned my hoss, an' made tracks acrost the prairy. I rid *some*, now, I reckon, an', in a short time, war out o' hearin' o'

the yells o' the savages.

"As soon as I thought I war safe, I camped down on the prairy, an', with my hoss for a sentinel, slept soundly until mornin'. I then started for the camp, or, rather, the place where the camp had been, for when I got there, I found nothin' but its ruins. The Injuns had burned every thing they did not want or could not carry away, an' made off with their prisoners. Their trail war plain enough, an' I to onct commenced follerin' it up, determined that I would either save ole Bill or die with him; an', on the fourth day, durin' which time I had lived on some parched corn I happened to have in the pockets o' my huntin'-shirt, an' war in constant danger of being ketched by stragglers, I seed the Injuns enter their camp. In course there war a big rejoicin' over the prisoners an' plunder they had brought in, an' it war kept up until long arter dark.

"The camp, which numbered 'bout fifty lodges, war pitched in a small prairy, surrounded on three sides by the woods. The nearest I could get to it without bein' diskivered war half a mile; an' here I tied my hoss in the edge o' the woods, an' lay down to sleep.

"Arly the next mornin' I war aroused by a yellin' and the noise o' drums, an' found the hull camp in motion. Near the middle o' the village war a small clear spot, where the prisoners war stationed. They war not bound, but a single glance at a dozen armed warriors, who stood at a little distance, showed that escape warn't a thing to be thought of. All except two o' the prisoners sot on the ground, with their heads on their hands, as if they wished to shut out all sights an' sounds o' what war going on around 'em. The two who were standin' seemed to take matters more easy. They stood leanin' against a post with their arms folded, an' watched the motions o' the Injuns as though they war used to sich sights. One o' these I picked out as ole Bill, but, in course, I couldn't tell sartin which one war him, it war so far off.

"A little way from the prisoners were the principal chiefs o' the tribe, holdin' a palaver regardin' what should be done, an' a little further off stood the rest o' the tribe—men, women, an' children—waitin' the word to begin their horrid work.

"It war nigh noon afore the council broke up; then one o' the chiefs commenced shoutin' some orders, an' one o' the prisoners was led out o' the camp by two Injuns, while the rest o' the varlets set up a yell, an' armin' themselves with whatever they could lay their hands on, commenced formin' themselves in two lines; the prisoner, whoever he was, must run the gauntlet. While the savages war fixin' themselves, the white chap stood between the Injuns who had led him out, watchin' what war goin' on, an' I could easy tell what he war thinkin' of, 'cause I had been in sich scrapes myself. I knowed that, as he looked through them long lines o' screechin' Injuns, an' seed the tomahawks, clubs, knives, an' whips, all ready to give him a cut as he passed, he thought of every thing he had done durin' his life. But he warn't given much time for thinkin', for, purty quick, the chief set up a yell to let the prisoner know that the time had come. The chap didn't hesitate a minit, but jumped from the place where he war standin', like a streak o' lightnin'. I see him disappear atween the lines, and made up my mind that that chap war a goner, when, all to onct, out he come, all right, and made toward the place where I war standin'. I guess them Injuns never see any thing done quite so purty afore, an' I knowed well enough now who the fellow war, 'cause there warn't but one man livin' that could come through them lines in that way, an' that war Bill Lawson. In course, the hull tribe, yellin' an' screechin' like a pack o' wolves, war arter him in less nor the shake of a buck's tail, and tomahawks, bullets, an' arrers whizzed by the prisoner in a mighty onpleasant kind o' way; but Bill kept jumpin' from one side to the other in a way that made him a mighty onhandy mark to shoot at, an' the way he did climb over that prairy was somethin' for owls to look at. But, fast as he run, I could see that there war one Injun gainin' on him, an' I made up my mind that if the ole man could hold out long enough to fetch him within pluggin' distance o' my shootin'-iron, I would put an end to his jumpin' for awhile. Nearer an' nearer they come, the Injun all the while gainin' purty fast, an' when they got within 'bout forty rod o' me, I could see that the varlet war gettin' ready to throw his tomahawk. I watched him until he raised his arm, an' sent a bullet plumb atween his eyes. The next minit the ole man jumped into the bushes.

"There warn't no time for talkin' or sayin' how de do?' for the rest o' the Injuns war comin' up, an' we must put a good stretch o' prairy atween us an' them afore we war safe.

"Bill, says I, there's my hoss. I'm younger nor you be, so jump on him, and be off in a hurry; I'll meet you at the ole bar's hole, Good-by.'

"I didn't wait to give the ole man a chance to say a word, 'cause I knowed that he didn't like to take that hoss; but I made off through the bushes. Ole Bill seed that I war gone, an' jumpin' on the hoss, he rode out on the prairy in plain sight, to get the Comanches to foller him, which some of 'em did; but the ole braves, who had heered my shot, an', in course, knowed that there war more'n one feller 'bout, couldn't be fooled easy, an' thinkin' they could ketch a man on foot sooner nor a man on hossback, they kept on arter me. But I war fresh for a long run—a week's travelin' acrost the prairy on foot warn't no new thing for me—an' as I never see the Injun yet that could beat me in a fair race, I felt safe, an' knowed that I should come out all right. I didn't waste time in tryin' to throw 'em off my trail, but kept straight ahead at a steady pace, an' whenever an Injun come in sight, me an' my rifle settled things with him in a tarnal hurry. This made 'em kind o' keerful, an' afore sundown I war out o' hearin' o' their yells, an' a greenhorn wouldn't have thought that there war an Injun in them woods. But I war too ole a coon to believe that they had give up the chase, an' it warn't until the next mornin' that I camped to take a leetle sleep, an' eat a squirrel I had shot.

"Wal, I traveled for 'bout ten days, durin' which time I didn't see a bit o' Injun sign, an' finally found myself gettin' purty nigh the ole bar's hole. As soon as I come to the woods that run down from the mountain, I tuk to a creek that run clost by the cave, an' walked along in the water, all the while keepin' a good look-out for Injun sign an' for ole Bill. Arter I had gone 'bout a mile, I come to the mouth o' the cave. It war a hole jest large enough for a man to squeeze himself through, an' so covered up with bushes that a feller might hunt a week without findin' it. The cave itself war 'bout as large as this yere cabin; an' right acrost from the entrance war a passage which led up to the top o' the hill. Me an' ole Bill had made this ourselves, so that, in case our harborin' place should be diskivered, we would have a chance for escape.

"When I come to the cave it war purty dark; so, arter listenin' awhile for signs of Injuns, if there war any around, I crawled along into the hole, which war, in course, as dark as pitch, an' commenced fumblin' around for a torch that I had left stuck into the wall o' the cave, all ready to be lighted. Arter searchin' 'bout for a long time I found it—not where I had left it, but lyin' on the ground in the middle o' the cave. This seemed suspicious, an' I begun to be afraid that something war wrong. I hadn't seed no Injun sign near the cave,

neither had I seed any thing of ole Bill, an' I knowed that that torch couldn't get moved clear acrost that cave without somebody had been foolin' with it. I reckon my hand war none o' the steadiest, as I lifted the torch an' commenced feelin' in my possible-sack for my flint an' steel, thinkin' that as soon as I could strike a light, I would jest examine into things a leetle.

"Wal, I hadn't made more 'n one blow at my flint, when the cave echoed with the war-whoop, an' the next minit I found myself lyin' flat on my back, with a big Comanche on top o' me.

"When I first heered the yell, I thought the cave war full of Injuns, an' I'll allow it made me feel a heap easier when I found that the feller that clinched me war alone, for I knowed that if any one Injun could master my scalp, he must be a tarnal sight smarter nor any red-skin I had ever met; an', without waitin' to ask no questions, I made a grab at the varmint, an', by good luck, ketched the hand that held his knife; an' then commenced one o' the liveliest little fights I war ever in.

"The Injun war mighty strong, an' as wiry as an eel, an', although I could keep him from usin' his knife, I could not get him off me, neither could I get my left arm free, which, in fallin', he had pinned to my side; but I kept thrashin' about in a way that made it mighty onhandy for him to hold me. But findin' that I could do nothin' in that way, I all to onct let go the hand that held the knife, an' give him a clip 'side the head that would have knocked down a buck. It kinder staggered his daylight some, I reckon', for I made out to get my arm free, an', ketchin' the varlet by the scalp-lock, I had him on his back in a minit. He yelled an' kicked wusser nor I I did when he had me down, an' slashed right an' left with his scalpin'-knife; but it didn't take long to settle matters, an' all fears that our harborin' place had been broke up war put at rest by the death o' the Comanche."

CHAPTER XVIII.

End of the Trapper and Black Mustang.



MY first job, arter I war sartin that the Comanche war done for, war to light the torch an' examine the cave. First makin' sure that thar war no more Injuns about, I crawled along up the passage that led to the top o' the hill, where I found that the log which covered the hole had been moved, an' I knowed in a minit that that war the place where the Comanche had come in. I didn't care 'bout showin' myself much, 'cause I didn't know how many more o' the savages there might be about; so I pulled the log over the hole agin' an' crawled back into the cave. I stuck my torch in the ground, an' arter movin' the Comanche up in one corner out of the way, I pulled over a pile of hemlock-boughs, that had many a time served me an' ole Bill for a bed, an' found a kag o' spruce beer, an' enough jerked meat to last a month. Me an' Bill allers took good keer to leave plenty o' provender at the cave when we left, so that if we should get hard pressed by the Injuns, or game should get scarce, we would know where to go to find good livin'. As I hadn't had a good meal since we lost the train, I eat a heap o' that jerked meat, an' then lay down to sleep, hopin' that when I woke I should find ole Bill with me. I warn't much anxious about him, 'cause I knowed he war on as good a hoss as ever tracked a prairy, an' war too ole in Injun fightin' to be ketched easy; an' I went to sleep, sartin that he would turn up all right afore daylight.

"Wal, I slept like a top until 'arly the next mornin', but didn't see nothin' of ole Bill. Arter a breakfast on jerked meat an' spruce beer, I smoked a pipe, an' crawled up the passage to the top o' the hill, pushed off the log, an' settled down to listen. For two days, I kept watch at that hole, listenin' an' peepin', but there war no signs of ole Bill. On the second arternoon, I heered the tramp of a hoss in the creek, an' a'most at the same minit a big Comanche poked his head over the bushes not ten foot from where I war, an' looked toward the place where the sound come from. How the rascal got there without seein' me, I didn't stop to think; but, risin' to my feet, I chucked my tomahawk at him, an' there war one Injun less in them woods. Nigher and nigher come the trampin' o' the hoss, an' I war sartin it war ole Bill; so when he got within yellin' distance, I give the gobble of a turkey, jest to let him know that there war danger ahead. The ole man heered it, for the trampin' o' the hoss stopped, an', for a minit, the woods war as still as death; but all to onct I heered the crack of a rifle, follered by the death-screech of a Comanche, an' then the clatter of hoofs an' a loud laugh told me that the ole man war retreatin'. I knowed there warn't no use o' watchin' any more, so I pulled the log over the hole agin, crawled back into the cave, an' went to sleep. It war night when I woke, an' takin' my rifle, I crawled out into the gully an' lay down in the shade o' the bushes. I lay there till near midnight without hearin' any thing, an' had a'most made up my mind that ole Bill warn't comin', when the low hootin' of an owl come echain' down the gully. I answered it, an', in a few minits, up come Bill an' crawled into the cave.

"Here I am," said he, "an' I had mighty hard work to get here, too—the timmer's chuck full o' the outlyin' varlets."

"Where's my hoss?" I asked.

"He's down in the bushes, all right side up with keer, an' hid away where the rascals will have to hunt a long time to find him. He's worth his weight in beaver-skins, that hoss is.

"Ole Bill eat his supper in silence; but, arter fillin' his pipe, said:

"Dick, them 'ar Comanches have got my hoss, an' I'm goin' back arter it."

"Now a feller would think that, arter what Bill had gone through, he wouldn't be in no hurry about goin' back among the Injuns agin. But sich scrapes warn't no new thing to him; an' when he said 'Go,' in course I warn't goin' to stay behind. So, arter takin' another smoke, the ole man tuk the knife and tomahawk o' the Injun I had killed in the cave, an' led the way out into the gully. As he had said, the timmer was full of Injuns,

an', as we crawled along on our hands an' knees, we could hear 'em talkin' to each other all around us. But we got past 'em all right, an' as soon as we got out o' the gully, the ole man rose to his feet and said:

"That hoss knows that there's somethin' wrong; he hasn't moved an inch; he knows a'most as much as a human man, he does; an' pullin' aside the branches of a thicket of scrub pines, I see my hoss standin' as quiet an' still as could be, jest as Bill had left him. He seemed mighty glad to see me agin, an' rubbed his head agin my shoulder, as I fastened on the saddle an' jumped on his back.

"It war a good two weeks' work to get back to that camp, for the prairy an' woods war full o' Comanches huntin' around for Bill, an' sometimes we had to go miles round to get out o' their way.

"When we reached the camp, we found it nearly deserted by the braves; still, there war enough left to ketch me an' ole Bill, if we should be diskivered. Wal, we lay round in the woods until dark, but not a glimp could we get o' the ole man's mustang. The critter might be in the camp, but more 'n likely as not he war carryin' a Comanche on his back, an' scourin' the prairy in search o' Bill.

"As soon as it war fairly dark, the ole man stuck out his hand, and said:

"Dick, I'm goin' now. Good-by."

"I never before felt so bad at partin' from him. Somehow I knowed that somethin' mighty onpleasant war goin' to happen; but it warn't no use to try to keep him from goin'; so I bid him good-by, an' he commenced crawlin' through the grass toward the camp. I watched him as long as he war in sight, an' then settled back agin a tree, an' waited to see what would turn up. For two hours I sot there listenin', an' thinkin' of all the fights me an' ole Bill had been in, an' wonderin' when the time would come when we must part—not as we had now, for a little while, but forever—when all to onct I heered the barkin' of a dog in the camp. In course the hull village war aroused to onct, an' a loud yell told me that ole Bill had been diskivered. The yell was follered by the crack of a rifle, an' the ole man come gallopin' out o' the camp on his own hoss, shoutin':

"Come on now, Dick, I'm even with the rascals. There's one less Comanche in the world."

"The Injuns were clost on to Bill's trail, an' come pourin' out o' the camp on foot an' on hossback; an', seem' one big feller far ahead of the others, I hauled up for a minit, sent him from his saddle, an' then, jumpin' on my hoss, started arter the ole man. In course the yellin' hounds war soon left behind, 'cause there warn't no hosses on them prairies that could hold a candle to ourn; an' we war beginnin' to grow jolly over our good luck, when, the fust thing we knowed, crack went a couple o' rifles, an' Bill threwed his arms above his head an' fell from his saddle.

"We had run chuck into a party o' Comanches who had been out huntin' the ole man, an' had give up the chase, an' were 'turnin' to camp. The minit ole Bill fell I war by his side, an', while I war liftin' him from the ground, the rascals charged toward us with loud yells, sartin that they had now got both of us in their power.

"Dick," said the ole man, a'most in a whisper, "I've sent a good many o' them screechin' imps out o' the world, an' it's my turn to go now. They have finished me at last. You can't help me—so save yourself; but remember that every Comanche that crosses your trail falls, to pay for this. Leave me."

"Bill, me an' you have been together too long for that. When I leave you it'll be arter this, said I, an', liftin' him in my arms, I got him on my hoss, an' started off agin. The way that little mustang got over the ground carried us ahead of all except two o' the Comanches, who kept bangin' away at us as fast as they could load their rifles. If I hadn't had ole Bill in my arms I would have put an eend to their shootin' an' yellin' in a tarnal hurry.

"It war no light load that hoss had to carry, an' I knowed that we must come to closer quarters soon, 'cause he couldn't stand that gait long. But he carried us five mile 'bout as quick as I ever traveled, an' then, all to onct, commenced to run slow. He war givin' out fast. The yellin' varlets kept comin' nearer an' nearer, an' I had only one chance for life, an' a poor one at that. I would stick to the hoss as long as he could step, an' then try it on foot. So I turned toward a strip o' woods which lay 'bout a mile off, but he hadn't made a dozen jumps when one o' the pursuin' Injuns sent a ball through his head, an' we all come to the ground together.

"The minit I touched the prairy I dropped ole Bill an', at the crack o' my rifle, one o' the Injuns fell; the other then commenced circlin' round me, 'fraid to come to clost quarters. But I kept my eye on him, an' jest as he war goin' to fire, I dropped behind my hoss, and kept dodgin' 'bout till I got my rifle loaded, and then I settled matters to onct. I war safe—but ole Bill war dead. I tuk him up in my arms agin, and carried him into the woods, where I rolled a log from its place, an' arter scoopin' out some o' the ground, I put him in, an' pulled the log back over him. It war the best I could do for him, an' arter swearin' above his grave that a Comanche should fall for every har on his head, I shouldered my rifle, an', jest as the sun war risin', struck out acrost the prairy, which I knowed I must now tread alone.

"Is it a wonder, then, that I hate an Injun? The bones of many a brave that lay scattered 'bout the prairy can tell how well I have kept my oath. Of all the Injuns that have crossed my trail since ole Bill's death, the three that camped in this shantee that night ar the only ones that ever escaped. I am not done with 'em yet; an' when I go back to the prairy, the Comanches will have further cause to remember the night that see the eend of ole Bill Lawson an' the Black Mustang."

CHAPTER XIX.

The Indians Again.



HE next morning the boys were up before the sun, and after a hearty breakfast, set out to spend the day in the woods; Frank and Harry, bending their steps toward the creek that ran through the woods, about a mile from the cabin, to set their traps for minks, while Archie and George started toward a ridge—the well-known “fox run-way” as it was called—to engage in their favorite sport. The trapper and Uncle Joe set off in an opposite direction, to cut down a bee-tree, which the latter had discovered a few days before.

When Frank and Harry arrived at the creek, the latter said:

“Now I want to understand something about this business, before we commence operations. We’re after minks, and nothing else; and I don’t want you to endanger a fellow’s life by getting him into any more wolf scrapes, or any thing of that kind.”

“All right,” answered Frank, with a laugh. “I’ll not get you into any scrape to-day.”

This satisfied Harry, and he was ready to begin the hunt. They found plenty of mink tracks on the bank of the creek. After eating their dinner, they commenced following up some of them, and, before night, succeeded, with Brave’s assistance, in capturing two large minks, after which they returned to the cabin, well satisfied with their day’s work.

They found Uncle Joe and his brother seated at the supper-table, and a large plate full of honey, which was rapidly disappearing before their attacks, proved that they also had been successful. Archie and George came in shortly after dark, tired and hungry. A fox-skin, which the former threw down in the corner, bore testimony to the fact that Sport was losing none of those hunting qualities of which his young master so often boasted. The day’s hunt had been successful on all hands; and the boys being pretty well tired out, the trapper’s stories were omitted, and all the inmates of the cabin sought their couches at an early hour.

The next morning the boys were “fresh and fierce” for the woods again, and once more started out in their respective directions, leaving Uncle Joe and the trapper seated before the fire, solacing themselves with their pipes. Frank and Harry, as usual, went together; the latter, as on the previous morning, exacting a promise that Frank would not get him into any “scrapes,” to which the latter, as before, readily agreed, little dreaming what was to happen before night.

A few moments’ walk brought them to the place at which they had set their first trap, in a hollow stump, where they had noticed a multitude of “mink signs,” as the trapper would have called them, and as Harry bent down and looked into the stump, Frank exclaimed:

“Look at these tracks; somebody besides ourselves has been here.”

“Yes, some other hunters, I suppose,” answered Harry, peering into the stump. “I hope they were gentlemen enough not to interfere with our arrangements here. But where’s that trap gone to?”

“These tracks were not made by white persons,” said Frank, bending over and examining them, “for the hunters in this part of the country all wear boots. These fellows wore moccasins, and the tracks all toe in.”

“Indians, as sure as I’m alive!” ejaculated Harry; “and, shoot me, if our trap isn’t gone.” And thrusting his arm into the stump, he commenced feeling around for the article in question, but it could not be found.

“Yes, sir,” he continued, rising to his feet, “it is gone, and no mistake. Feel in there.”

Frank accordingly got down on his knees and made an examination of the stump; but the trap, beyond a doubt, had been carried off.

“Now, that is provoking!” he exclaimed.

“There was a mink in the trap, too,” continued Harry, pointing to some bits of fur that lay scattered about over the snow. “I wish the rascals that took it had it crammed down their throats.”

“It does no good to scold, Harry,” said Frank, “for that won’t mend the matter. But let us go around and visit the other traps; perhaps they have carried off all of them.”

The boys accordingly went around to every place where they had left their traps, but not one of them could be found.

“Now, there’s thirteen dollars gone to the dogs,” said Harry, angrily; “for every one of those traps was worth a dollar, at least. I wish Dick was here. We would follow up the scoundrels and recover our property. What shall we do?”

“Let’s follow them up, any how,” replied Frank. “Perhaps we can catch them—the trail seems plain enough. How many of them do you suppose there were?”

“There were two Indians and as many dogs,” answered Harry. “Here’s a track made by a fellow that must have had a foot as big as all out-doors; and here’s another, of very respectable size.”

The boys commenced measuring the tracks, and found, as Harry had said, that there were but two different sizes. As soon as this had been determined, Frank exclaimed:

“Well, we mustn’t waste any more time. Let’s start after the rascals; and if we catch them, we’ll make them give up those traps or fight.”

Harry shrugged his shoulders, and answered:

“If you are going in for a fight, just count me out, will you? One of those Indians must be a strapping big fellow, judging by the size of his feet; and the other, although he may be a smaller man, would probably prove a tough customer. If Dick was here, I wouldn’t mind it. Let us go after him.”

“O no,” answered the reckless Frank. “I guess we and our double-barrel shot-guns, with Brave’s assistance, can recover those traps. If we can’t catch the thieves, we’ll make the trail, at any rate.”

Harry made no reply, but ran along after Frank, who commenced following up the trail of the Indians, which, as no care had been taken to conceal it, was very plain. As on the former occasion, it appeared as if the tracks had been made by one person; but, on closer examination, Frank discovered that the larger savage had taken the lead, and that his companion had stepped exactly in his tracks. The trail ran directly away from Uncle Joe’s cabin, and then turned abruptly and ran parallel with a ridge for the same distance; and here the boys came to a place where there was a confused mingling of tracks, conspicuous among which were some made by boots. There were also the tracks of two more dogs, and several drops of blood on the snow.

“The thieves have received reinforcements here,” said Harry. “A couple of white hunters, or else two more Indians, with boots on.”

“Yes, it looks like it,” answered Frank. “And they must have killed some game, for here’s blood on the snow.”

“I guess we’ve gone about far enough,” said Harry. “Four men and four dogs are more than a match for

us.”

“No matter; I’m going to see the end of it now. You won’t leave me to go on alone!”

“O no. If you are bound to go on, I shall stick to you.”

Frank immediately set off on the trail, which turned suddenly to the left, and led toward a ravine. After running a short distance, he said:

“These last fellows that joined them are not Indians, Harry, because they didn’t step in each other’s tracks.”

The trail led directly through the gully, and up the other side; and while the boys were climbing up the bank, they heard the angry barking of dogs, followed by the report of a gun, and a yell that made their blood run cold. Harry immediately drew back, but Frank kept on; and when he reached the top of the bank, he saw a sight that filled him with horror, and which disturbed his sleep for many a night afterward.

But let us now return to Archie and George, whom we left starting out with their hounds.

When they reached the bottom, through which the creek ran, they found Sport standing over a fox-trail; and, at his master’s command, he at once set off upon it, followed by Lightfoot, while the boys struck off through the woods toward a ridge which they knew the fox would be certain to follow. They reached it just as the hounds passed; and were about to start off again, when they were startled by the crack of two rifles in rapid succession, accompanied by a howl of anguish. The baying of the hound ceased, and, the next moment, Lightfoot came running back, and took refuge behind his master.

“What’s the matter, I wonder?” inquired Archie, in alarm.

“Somebody has shot Sport,” answered George, as the howls of pain continued to come from the part of the woods where the shots had been heard.

“Sport shot!” repeated Archie, indignantly. “I won’t stand that, you know. Come on; let’s see who it was.”

As the boys commenced running up the ridge, the howls ceased, and Archie began to be afraid that his hound had been killed; but, in a few moments, he saw Sport coming toward him. He bore an ugly-looking wound on his back, which had been made by a bullet; and although it had at first disabled him, he was fast recovering his strength and ferocity, and answered his master’s caresses by showing his teeth, and giving vent to angry growls.

“I’m going to find out who that was,” said Archie. “Hunt ’em up, Sport! hunt ’em up, sir!”

The hound was off on the instant, and led the way to the place where he had been shot, which was marked by a little pool of blood on the snow, and here he turned off to the left of the ridge and ran down into a gully. Instead of baying as when on the trail of a fox, he ran in silence, and the boys soon lost sight of him; but just as they reached the bottom of the gully, they heard his bark, followed by a yell, and a crashing in the bushes, as if a severe struggle was going on; and when they gained the top of the bank, they found Sport resolutely defending himself against two Indians and their dogs. The latter—large, shaggy animals, of the wolf species—had closed with the hound, which would undoubtedly have proved more than a match for both of them, had not the Indians (who could not use their rifles for fear of wounding their own dogs) attacked him with clubs. But Sport was valiantly holding his own against their combined assaults, now and then seizing one of the dogs in his powerful jaws, and giving him a tremendous shaking, and then turning fiercely upon one of the Indians, who found it necessary to retreat, in order to save himself.

The boys comprehended the state of affairs at a glance. Running fearlessly up to the place where the fight was going on, Archie placed the muzzle of his gun against the head of one of the dogs, and killed him on the spot, exclaiming:

“Turn about is fair play, you know. I’ll teach you to shoot my hound when he isn’t bothering you.”

The large Indian immediately ceased his attacks upon Sport, and, turning upon Archie with a yell, threw his brawny arms about him, and hurled him to the ground. But Archie still retained his presence of mind, and, while struggling with his assailant, shouted to his companion:

“Shoot the other dog! shoot the other dog!”

George had just time to act upon this suggestion, when the smaller savage closed with him. Of course the boys, although they fought desperately, were speedily overpowered by the athletic Indians, who at once commenced beating them most unmercifully with their clubs. Archie, especially, was being punished most severely, when the hound, finding himself at liberty, sprang upon the Indian, and pulled him to the ground. Archie was on his feet in an instant; and, cheering on the dog, was about to spring to George’s assistance, when he noticed that his late assailant was in a most dangerous situation, the long teeth of the hound being fastened in his throat; and although he struggled desperately, he could not release himself. Archie at once hurried to his relief, and endeavored to choke off the hound, while the smaller Indian continued to shower his blows upon George, who received them without giving vent to a single cry of pain.

Such was the scene presented to Frank’s gaze as he came up out of the gully. Of course he was entirely ignorant of the cause of the trouble, but, seeing George’s situation, he at once ran to his assistance. The Indian, seeing him approach, uttered a yell, and, springing to his feet, was about to “make himself scarce,” when the sight of Frank’s double-barrel, which the latter aimed straight at his head, brought him to a standstill. By this time, Archie, with Harry’s aid, had succeeded in releasing the Indian, but it required their utmost strength to prevent the hound from renewing his attacks.

The savage, however, had not fared so badly as they had at first supposed; for, although during the last few moments of the struggle he had lain so still that Archie began to fear that he was dead, the moment he was released he sprang to his feet, and, uttering the usual “ugh,” was about to retreat, when he also was brought to a halt by Frank’s double-barrel.

The circumstances which had brought the boys together in so singular a manner were speedily explained, after which Frank commenced an examination of the “possible-sacks” that the Indians carried slung over their shoulders, which resulted in the recovery of the missing traps.

“Now, what shall we do with these rascals?” he inquired.

“They’re the same ones that camped in the cabin that night,” answered Archie; “and this is the second time they have been guilty of stealing traps, and I say let’s take ’em prisoners, and let Dick pass judgment upon them.”

This plan was hailed with delight by the others; and the savages, who, during the conversation, had stood with their arms folded, as if they were in no wise concerned in what was going on, were at once relieved of

their knives and hatchets, and, in obedience to Archie's order, fell in behind Frank, who led the way toward the cabin. George and Harry followed close after them, carrying the weapons that had been taken from the prisoners, and ready to resist the first attempt that should be made at escape, while Archie brought up the rear, struggling hard to restrain the hound, which, every moment, renewed his endeavors to reach the Indians. In this order they marched through the woods, and, just before dark, reached the cabin. Frank entered first, standing with his gun at a shoulder-arms until the prisoners had passed him and the rest of the boys had entered and closed the door.

"Eh! what?" ejaculated the trapper, who had watched these movements in surprise. "What did you youngsters fetch them ar tarnal varlets back here for?"

The affair was soon explained, and Uncle Joe and the trapper rolled up their eyes in astonishment. At length the latter said:

"They stole your traps, did they, an' shot the hound, an' you follered 'em up an' ketched 'em, did you?"

"Yes," answered Archie, "and they mauled George and me with clubs; and we have brought them here to know what to do with them."

"Wal, I never *did* see sich keerless fellers as you youngsters be," said Dick. "You get wusser every day. Why didn't you come arter me?"

"We should have lost too much time. Besides, we wanted to catch them ourselves."

"Wal, 'cordin' to prairy law," continued the trapper, "there oughter be short work made of 'em; but what's law on the prairy won't do in the settlements. Pitch 'em out-doors, and don't never bring no more Injuns here."

"Shall we give them their guns?" asked Frank.

"No; don't give 'em nothin'. Open that door."

Frank did as the trapper ordered, and the latter walked up to the large Indian, and, seizing him around the body, lifted him from his feet, and threw him headlong into a deep snow-drift outside of the cabin. A smothered "ugh" broke from his lips as he sank out of sight. After considerable struggling, he reappeared, completely covered with snow, looking very unlike the sedate Indian that had stood in the cabin but a moment before, and started, at the top of his speed, for the woods. As soon as he had disappeared in the darkness, the trapper seized the smaller Indian, and served him in the same manner; then, without waiting to see what became of him, closed the door, and returned to his seat in front of the fire.

CHAPTER XX.

The Journey Homeward.



EXT morning, as soon as they had finished their breakfast, in accordance with the promise they had made their parents before starting, that they would be at home before the holidays, the boys began to make preparations to leave the woods. The sled was brought around to the door, and, while George and Harry were engaged in loading it, Frank and his cousin went to the barn to harness the young moose, which had become very tractable, and would trot off with a load as well as a horse. Their traps and guns, together with the furs they had taken, were stowed carefully away in the bottom of the sled; then came the cubs, and the skins of the moose, bear, white buck, and panther, and the whole was crowned by the huge antlers of the moose, to give it, as Harry said, "an imposing appearance."

After the moose had been hitched to the sled, and all was ready for the start, the boys turned to shake hands with Uncle Joe and the trapper. Dick seemed to regret their parting very much. After drawing his coat-sleeve across his eyes, he seized Frank's hand, and said:

"Good-by, youngster! We have had some good times in these yere woods this winter. I'm sorry that the partin' time has come, for I hate to have you leave us. You are a gritty feller—jest sich a one as I like to see; an' I have tuk to you jest the same as poor ole Bill Lawson onct tuk to me. As soon as spring opens I shall start agin for the prairy. The woods here are too small for me. We prob'ly shall never meet agin, but I hope you won't forget your ole friend, Dick Lewis. Good-by! an' may your trail never be as rugged an' rough as mine has been."

"I shall never forget you, Dick," replied Frank, as he returned the trapper's hearty grasp. "You saved my life."

At length the farewells had all been said, and the boys got into the sled. Frank took up the reins, and the moose broke into a rapid trot, that soon carried them out of sight of the cabin.

There was no danger that the boys would soon forget the wild scenes through which they had passed during their short sojourn in the woods. Each had something to remind him of some exciting hunt which he had gone through. Frank thought of his desperate struggle with the buck, during which he had received scars that would go with him through life. Harry remembered his adventure with the wolves. George shivered as he thought of his cold bath in the pond. And Archie, in imagination, was again in pursuit of the black fox.

"Well," said the latter, at length, "we've had some fine times since we traveled over this road."

"Yes," said George, "and I should like to go through them again—ducking and all."

"I had rather be excused," said Frank.

"So had I," chimed in Harry.

"I shouldn't like the idea of going through the fight with that moose again," continued Frank.

"Nor I shouldn't like to meet those wolves again, and have them pull off my boots as I was climbing up a

tree," said Harry.

"I wonder what the folks will think, when they see us coming home in this rig?" said Archie.

That question was answered when, about an hour before dark, they turned up off the creek into the road, in full view of the cottage.

They were first discovered by Aunt Hannah, who, after shading her eyes with her hand, and gazing at them a few moments, ran into the house. A moment afterward the whole family appeared at the door.

"There's my folks!" exclaimed Archie. "I thought they would be here to spend the holidays. Show them what we can do, Frank."

His cousin accordingly put the moose through his best paces, and in a few moments they whirled through the gate, and drew up before the door.

"Well, boys, I'm glad to see you all back safe," said Mr. Winters, as soon as the greeting was over. "It's a wonder that Archie didn't shoot some of you—he's so careless with his gun."

"O no, father," replied the boy, "I've got over that. I always hold my gun muzzle down, as you told me."

The boys began to unload the sled, and one after another of the articles were taken out and laid on the portico. Finally, Harry drew out the panther's skin.

"A panther!" exclaimed Mr. Winters. "Where did you buy that skin?"

"Buy it!" repeated Archie. "We didn't buy it. Frank killed the panther that once wore this skin; with a shot-gun, too; and that isn't all he killed, either. Look here!" and he threw out the bear and moose-skins, and finally the cubs. "He had a nice time killing that moose," Archie went on to say, "and he came near being"—

Here he was interrupted by a look from his cousin. He was about to say, "and came near being killed himself;" but finished his sentence by saying, "He came near killing the moose at the first shot, but didn't quite."

Mr. Winters had seen the glances that the boys exchanged, and knew that it meant something more than they were willing to reveal; but he made no remark. After the things had all been taken out, with the exception of those that belonged to George and Harry, and the cubs had been taken into the kitchen and delivered into Aunt Hannah's especial charge, the boys got into the sled again and started for Mr. Butler's.

Their appearance in the village created a great commotion. After driving around to the post-office for the mail, as well as to show off the qualities of their horned horse, they started home again.

That evening was passed in a pleasant manner, in the recital of the boys' adventures in the woods, which also formed the topic of conversation for many days. In spite of the emphatic instructions Frank had given his companions "not to say a word about his fight with the moose," it gradually "leaked out somewhere," as Archie expressed it, and Frank became a hero in his own family, and in the village.

Here we will leave them, only to introduce them again in other and more stirring scenes on the Western Prairies.

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