DILLON WALLACE

GRIT A-PLENTY

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Wallace D.

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Содержание

Dillon Wallace
Grit A-Plenty: A Tale of the Labrador Wild

"If you and I—just you and I—
Should laugh instead of worry;
If we should grow—just you and I—
Kinder and sweeter hearted,
Perhaps in some near by and by
A good time might get started;
Then what a happy world 'twould be
For you and me—for you and me!"

FOREWORD

Tempting boys to be what they should be—giving them in wholesome form what they want—that is the purpose and power of Scouting. To help parents and leaders of youth secure *books boys like best* that are also best for boys, the Boy Scouts of America organized EVERY BOY'S LIBRARY. The books included, formerly sold at prices ranging from $1.50 to $2.00 but, by special arrangement with the several publishers interested, are now sold in the EVERY BOY'S LIBRARY Edition at $1.00 per volume.

The books of EVERY BOY'S LIBRARY were selected by the Library Commission of the Boy Scouts of America, consisting of George F. Bowerman, Librarian, Public Library of the District of Columbia; Harrison W. Craver, Director, Engineering Societies Library, New York City; Claude G. Leland, Superintendent, Bureau of Libraries, Board of Education, New York City; Edward F. Stevens, Librarian, Pratt Institute Free Library, Brooklyn, N. Y., and Franklin K, Mathiews, Chief Scout Librarian. Only such books were chosen by the Commission as proved to be, by *a nation wide canvas*, most in demand by the boys themselves. Their popularity is further attested by the fact that in the EVERY BOY'S LIBRARY Edition, more than a million and a quarter copies of these books have already been sold.

We know so well, are reminded so often of the worth of the good book and great, that too often we fail to observe or understand the influence for good of a boy's recreational reading. Such books may influence him for good or ill as profoundly as his play activities, of which they are a vital part. The needful thing is to find stories in which the heroes have the characteristics boys so much admire—unquenchable courage, immense resourcefulness, absolute fidelity, conspicuous greatness. We believe the books of EVERY BOY'S LIBRARY measurably well meet this challenge.

BOY SCOUTS OF AMERICA,
James E. West [Handwritten Signature]
Chief Scout Executive.

I
THE CABIN AT THE JUG

THE Jug, as Thomas Angus often remarked, was as snug and handy a place to live as ever a man could wish. Ten miles up the Bay was the trading post of the Hudson's Bay Company, and at Wolf Bight, twelve miles directly across the Bay from the Jug, the trading post of Trowbridge & Gray, and then only five miles to the eastward, at Break Cove, lived Doctor Joe.

"Neighbors right handy all around," declared Thomas, "and no chance of ever gettin' lonesome."

The Jug was a well sheltered bight on the north side of Eskimo Bay, and here, in the edge of the forest, stood Thomas' cabin.

Near by the cabin Roaring Brook rushed down through a gorge in a vast hurry to empty its sparkling waters into the bight; and behind the cabin, shrouded in silence and mystery, stretching away into unmeasured distances, lay the great unpeopled wilderness.

"Room enough," said Thomas, "for a man to stretch himself."

The Angus home was much like every other trapper's home in the Eskimo Bay country, though somewhat larger and more commodious, perhaps, than was usual. Thomas believed in "comfort, and plenty o' room to stretch, indoors as well as out," and this sentiment led him to make no stint of timber or labor when he builded.

"The timber is here for the takin', and right handy," said he, "and a bit more work don't matter."

The cabin was built of logs, and faced the south, with its entrance through an enclosed porch on the western gable. This porch served both as a protection from winter storms and as a store room. Here were kept dog harness, fish nets, and innumerable odds and ends incident to the life and occupation of a trapper and fisherman. And in one end of the porch, neatly piled in tiers, was an ever-ready supply of firewood.

A door from the porch led into a living room crudely and primitively furnished, but possessed of an indescribable atmosphere of cozy comfort. The uncarpeted floor, the home-made table, the chests which served both as storage places for clothing and as seats, the three crude but substantial home-made chairs, and the shelves for dishes, were scoured clean and white with sand and soap, for Margaret, through her Scotch ancestry, had inherited a penchant for cleanliness and neatness.

"I likes to keep the house tidy," she said to Doctor Joe once, when he complimented her. "'Tis a wonderful comfort to have un tidy and clean."

There were three windows, draped with snow-white muslin—an unusual luxury. Two of these windows looked to the southward to catch the sun with its cheer, and before them lay the wide vista of Eskimo Bay, and beyond the Bay the grim, snow-capped peaks of the Mealy Mountains. The other window was in the rear, but here the view was restricted by the forest, which sheltered the cabin from the frigid northern blasts of the sub-arctic winters.

A big box stove, which would accommodate great billets of wood, and crackled cheerily, and a bunk built against the wall like a ship's bunk, and which served Thomas as a bed, completed the furnishings.

Originally the cabin had contained no other rooms than the living room and the porch, but when the children came, and grew, Thomas, with his desire for "plenty o' room to stretch," erected an addition on the eastern end, which he partitioned into two sleeping compartments, one for Margaret and the other for the boys.

Mighty content were Thomas Angus and his family. A snug cabin, a neighbor "right handy," the trading posts near enough to visit now and again on business or on pleasure, and enough to eat —what more could be desired?

Thomas Angus was a good hunter, and provided well for his family, which in Labrador means that for the most part his catch of fur was good in winter, his fish nets yielded well in summer, and therefore his flour barrel was seldom empty.

Bread and pork, with no stint of tea, and a bit of molasses for sweetening, together with such game as he might kill, sat a table that to Thomas Angus and his family was bountiful and varied enough, if not luxurious. There were no potatoes or other vegetables, to be sure, for gardens do not thrive in this far northern land; but they did not mind that, for they had never eaten vegetables. We do not miss what we have never had, and the more we have the more we demand. And so it was that Thomas Angus and his family were happy and content enough with what to you and me would have been privation.

"'Tis a wonderful fine livin' we has here," said Thomas, "and we're thankful to th' Lard for providin' it."

Mrs. Angus had been dead these five years. Her grave, marked by a rude wooden slab, was in a little fenced-in clearing behind the house. Her death was the greatest sorrow that had ever visited the Anguses. Thomas dug the grave himself, as a last service to his wife, and when he and the neighbors lowered Mrs. Angus into her deep, cold bed, and covered her with frozen clods of earth, and he and the mourning children returned to the empty cabin, he comforted them with the philosophy of his simple Christian faith.

"'Tis the Lard's will," he said. "The work He had for Mother to do on earth was ended, and He called her away. 'Tis a bit hard on us that's left behind, and we'll be missin' her sore, but we'll bear un without complaint because 'tis the Lard's will. We mustn't forget—though we'll be like to forget sometimes—that Mother's still livin'. 'Twas only the body that she was through usin' that we buried out there. Who can know but she may be right with us now, though we can't see her? And maybe she's seein' us all the time, and knowin' all we does and talks about."

Margaret, then a little maid of twelve, took her mother's place as housekeeper, and bravely did her best to mother the boys. In these five years she had grown into a handsome, rosy-cheeked lass of seventeen, and as capable and fine a housekeeper as you could find on the whole Labrador.

David and Andy, too, had developed with the years from energetic small boys into broad-shouldered, bronze-faced, brawny lads. David, nearly sixteen, and Andy, fourteen, lent a hand at anything that was to be done indoors and out. They kept the water barrel filled from Roaring Brook, they helped cut the firewood and haul it with the dogs, and sawed and split it into proper size for the big box stove. In summer they did their part at the salmon and trout fishing and in winter they kept the house supplied with partridges and rabbits and other small game. In Labrador every one must do his part, and lads learn early to bear their share of the responsibilities of life, and so it was with David and Andy. And adventures, too, they had, for in that brave land adventures come often enough.

Jamie, the youngest of the family, was ten, and as cheerful and lusty and fine a little lad as ever lived. But Jamie's sight was failing.

"They's a smoke in the house," said Jamie when he awoke one morning.

"They's no smoke in the house," protested Andy.

"But I sees un! I sees un!" insisted Jamie.

"'Tis the sleep in your eyes yet," suggested David. "'Twill pass away when you wakes."

And so Jamie said no more, believing it was the sleep in his eyes, and he rubbed them to drive it away, and dressed, and looked out of the window toward the bay.

"They's a mist on the water," said Jamie.

"They's no mist," denied Andy. "'Tis fine and clear, and the sun shines wonderful bright."

"I sees the sunshine, but 'tis not bright. They's a mist," Jamie insisted.

And the mist had remained, and thickened gradually with the passing weeks. It was in the beginning of July when the mist had first appeared before Jamie's eyes, and before the month was ended he complained that he could no longer see the Mealy Mountains across the bay, with their

glistening white snow-capped peaks. And this was too bad, for Jamie loved the mountains rising so brave and changeless like a row of great rugged giants guarding and holding the world firm beyond the restless waters of the bay. Jamie always felt that he could depend upon the mountains, and he had a fancy, when of evenings the setting sun tipped their white summits with its last glow, that it was a bit of the dazzling light of heaven breaking through the sky when God reached down to kiss the world good night.

And it had been many days now since Jamie had seen his loved mountains. Even the point, at the entrance to the bight, had become veiled in haze and seemed to have moved far out into the bay, as it used to do when the fog hung low on murky days, and Jamie's sight was as keen as David's and Andy's.

In the beginning Thomas gave little heed to Jamie's complaints of the mist, for he was busy then at his fishing.

"'Tis a bit of a strain," said he, "and 'twill soon pass away. A bit of the burn and glare of the spring sun upon the snow, left in the eyes to shade un. 'Twill soon pass away."

One day in late August, when Doctor Joe was over at The Jug, as he often was, he heard Jamie complain of the mist, and Doctor Joe asked Jamie many questions, and looked long and hard into Jamie's eyes, and when he was going, and Thomas walked down to the beach to help him launch his boat, he told Thomas that the mist would not clear up of itself.

"And is it a sickness, then, and a bad un?" asked Thomas, aroused to great concern, for he had vast faith in Doctor Joe's opinion.

"I can't say yet for a certainty how bad it is, but 'tis a sickness, and may grow worse, if it's the kind of sickness I take it to be," said Doctor Joe. "Don't worry about it yet, Thomas. I'll be up again soon and look into the eyes again, and see how they're doing."

"Can't you mend un?" asked Thomas anxiously.

"We'll see. We'll see what we can do," and Doctor Joe's voice was hearty and reassuring, as he launched his boat and pulled away down the bight.

Thomas Angus and Doctor Joe were great friends. Margaret and the boys called Doctor Joe "Uncle," and they were as fond of him as they could have been had he really been their uncle; and he, on his part, was mightily fond of them. He had come to the Bay three years before Mrs. Angus died, and had now lived at Break Cove and on the coast for eight years.

It was on a blustery July evening that they had first seen him, driving up the bay in an old open boat with a ragged leg-o-mutton sail. Thomas hailed him and he turned in at The Jug in response to Thomas's invitation to spend the night, for a Labradorman will never permit a stranger to pass his home without a hail and an invitation, and a cheering welcome, warmed with a cup of tea and a snack.

Doctor Joe was a nervous man, with the appearance of one who had been ill. His hand was unsteady, with a tremor—unlike the steady, strong hand of the Labradorman. Thomas saw at once that he was no Labradorman. Any one could have seen that with half an eye. His speech and manner, too, were not of the coast, his skin had not the deep bronze tan of the people, and his dress was not the dress of the native.

But Thomas liked the stranger, and urged him to "'bide for a time at The Jug," and for several days he remained as Thomas's guest, asking many questions about the country and manner of life of the folk who lived there, and of the methods of trapping and hunting, and bartering fur and fish.

He introduced himself to Thomas as Joseph Carver, and explained that he had come from the South as a passenger on the mail boat, which he had left at Fort Pelican, eighty miles down the bay, and her nearest port of call. And at length he announced that he had decided to settle here and build a cabin, and turn hunter and trapper, and make The Labrador his home.

"'Twill be a strange life for you," said Thomas.

"Yes," said Doctor Joe, "a strange life."

Then Doctor Joe turned his attention to the selection of a suitable place to build his cabin, and cruising along the shore one day fell upon Break Cove, which he liked immensely, and here he declared his home should be. Thomas, after the manner of the country, and because he was glad to have so near a neighbor, turned to and helped Doctor Joe, and presently they had as snug a little cabin built and furnished as a man could wish for, and here Doctor Joe began his new life in a new land.

He was a mystery to the Bay folk at first, coming as he had, and a mystery to Thomas, too. Sometimes he seemed as gay and happy as ever a man could be, but there were days when he was silent and grave and troubled, like a man with a great load of sorrow upon his soul.

There was one autumn evening, a fortnight after Doctor Joe had established himself in the new cabin, when Thomas, who had been down the bay hunting geese, ran his boat into Break Cove to pay his neighbor a call, and to leave with him one of the fine fat geese he had shot. The candle was lighted and the cabin door stood open. As Thomas approached with the goose he saw Doctor Joe, a wild, hunted look upon his face, pacing up and down the room, and Thomas heard him exclaim:

"I can't endure it! I cannot, cannot endure it! Another month and I'd be safe! But I can't hold out! I must give up! Oh, God, have mercy on me!"

Thomas withdrew silently. He had never seen Doctor Joe, or any one else for that matter, act so strangely. His kindly heart was troubled. Then light broke. His neighbor was ill and in pain, or was troubled, and he must help him. He turned back to the cabin door, and called out cheerily:

"Evenin', Sir!"

Doctor Joe ceased his pacing, as he beheld Thomas in the open doorway.

"Good evening," he greeted, sitting limply down, and wiping perspiration from his forehead with a handkerchief. And within himself Thomas marveled that Doctor Joe should be so warm, for the air was chill enough, and the fire in the box stove had been neglected and was none too good. "Come in, Thomas."

"I was passin'," said Thomas, coming within, "and I thought I'd stop for a bit t' smoke a pipe with you. But you're ailin', sir?"

"No—yes—just a little out of sorts," admitted Doctor Joe. "But I'm glad to see you, neighbor! I'm glad you came! I thank God you came!" he added fervently. "Perhaps I was lonely. I know that I need your company, Thomas."

"There's a goose I brought you, sir," and Thomas laid the game upon the table, "but 'twill not be right for you to 'bide here alone, ailin' as you are. Come along to The Jug and 'bide a day or two with us, till you feels mended, *what*ever."

"Thank you, Thomas, you're a good friend and neighbor," assented Doctor Joe, with evident relief. "I'll go with you. The pull over in your boat will do me good, and I need your company."

"And bring your cures so you'll have un to take, an' you needs un," suggested Thomas solicitously, as Doctor Joe arose and took his adiky from a peg.

"Your company will be the best remedy, Thomas," remarked Doctor Joe, drawing the adiky over his head. "There are some disorders medicine will not cure—only change and good comradeship, and sweet, sympathetic friendship, such as you are giving me."

"You're always welcome at The Jug, *what*ever!" Thomas assured heartily, though he did not in the least understand the import of what Doctor Joe had said.

But as the weeks passed, and the cold of the long winter settled upon the land, Doctor Joe adapted himself to the life of the Bay, and entered heartily into his business of trapper, and soon it was discovered that he was a jolly neighbor, and the Bay folk as well as Thomas accepted him as one of them, and forgot the mystery, and were ever ready to lend him a hand, and give him hints that helped him vastly in learning his new trade, for he was clumsy enough at setting traps at first.

In return Doctor Joe was always on hand with a well-filled medicine case when he heard that any one was sick, and he displayed wonderful skill. He had supplied himself with medicines, he explained, because they were always handy, where there was no doctor to call. And when Bill Campbell's boy

laid the calf of his leg open with an ax, and Doctor Joe sewed it up, and bound it, as the folk had never seen a wound bound before, it was agreed he was the cleverest man in that line on the whole coast.

Then it was that they had begun to call him “Doctor Joe,” and he had accepted the new name as a compliment, and with rare good nature, and soon he was “Doctor Joe” to every one, and a welcome visitor wherever he went.

II
THE THICKENING MIST

A FORTNIGHT passed, after the evening when Doctor Joe had spoken to Thomas of the mist in Jamie's eyes, before he appeared again at The Jug. It was early morning, and the family were at breakfast when he breezed in, without knocking—for in that country folk do not knock as they enter, and every one is welcome at all times.

"Well! Well!" he exclaimed. "Just in time, and I'm as hungry as an old grampus. What is it? Fried whitefish! Margaret, you must have expected me and read my mind, for I'd rather have fried whitefish for breakfast, the way you cook them, than anything else I can think of!"

"Then I'm glad I cooked un," laughed Margaret. "But you likes most anything we *ever* has."

"That's true, because you cook everything so well," complimented Doctor Joe, seating himself by Jamie. "I'm not much of a cook myself, you know."

"You're a rare fine cook, now, *I* thinks," broke in David. "I always likes your cookin' when I eats un."

"Anybody's cooking is good to a husky, healthy lad like you," laughed Doctor Joe.

"We're wonderful glad t' see you, Doctor Joe," said Thomas. "I've been wonderin', now, why you didn't come over this fortnight. The boys pulled over to Break Cove yesterday lookin' for you, fearin' you might be ailin'."

"And didn't find me!" exclaimed Doctor Joe, helping himself liberally to fish. "Well, the day after I was here I left for Fort Pelican to meet the mail boat and get some medicines that I thought I might need in the winter from the mail boat doctor, and to mail an important letter. How have you all been?"

"Not so bad—except Jamie," said Thomas. "His eyes are growin' mistier."

"Eh!" ejaculated Doctor Joe, looking down at Jamie. "Mistier, are they? That's what I'm here about—mostly—to see what we can do about that mist. We'll have a look at the eyes pretty soon, Jamie."

"I'm thinkin' *'tis* truly a mist fallin' thick, and holdin' thick all the time," declared Jamie.

"We'll see about that! We'll see!" said Doctor Joe.

And after breakfast he again looked carefully into Jamie's eyes, and again asked Jamie many, many questions, and then walked out with Thomas where they could talk alone.

"And what you think'n *now* of Jamie's eyes?" asked Thomas anxiously.

"'Tis a strange disease, and a serious one," said Doctor Joe. "Inside everybody's eyes there's a fluid forms. When the eyes are healthy the fluid keeps working away naturally through small outlets. If the outlets for the fluid get stopped, there's no way for it to escape, and it fills up inside until it presses on the eyes, and the sight begins to fail, and after a time if the fluid is not let out the eyes go blind. There's only one way to cure the complaint, and that is by a difficult and delicate operation for the purposes of opening the passages and drawing the fluid out and relieving the pressure."

"Do you mean—cuttin' the eyes open?" asked Thomas in dismay.

"Yes," said Doctor Joe, "and the cutting has to be done just right, or it fails. I once knew a surgeon who sometimes succeeded in performing the operation successfully, but he was in New York—a long, long way from here. The letter I posted the other day in Fort Pelican was for this doctor. I wrote to ask if he is still in New York, and if he is there if he will operate on Jamie's eye if we take the lad to him."

"Suppose, now, he'll do the cuttin', how can we ever get Jamie to he?" asked Thomas.

"I'll take him on the mail boat. We can't get away this fall, though, for it isn't likely I'll get an answer before the Christmas mail, after the boat has made her last fall trip. But," continued Doctor

Joe, “I hope Jamie’s eyes will not be too misty by spring. If he loses his sight before spring there’ll be no use operating, for then the sight can’t be brought back.”

“And if—if the doctor cuts un—and he fails—what’ll happen to Jamie then?” asked Thomas fearfully.

“He’ll be blind,” said Doctor Joe. “But if the doctor doesn’t do the cutting Jamie will *surely* go blind. This is the only chance to save his sight.”

“An’ supposin’,” asked Thomas, “you gets no answer from the great doctor, will Jamie have to go blind all his life?”

“Let us hope he’s there—let us pray he is,” said Doctor Joe.

“But suppose—suppose he’ll not be there. Be there no one else?” Thomas insisted.

“I—don’t know,” admitted Doctor Joe. “I don’t know. Once I knew another surgeon—a young man—who performed such operations, but he went wrong and lost his skill and had to stop operating. I’d not like to trust Jamie with him. But we’ll hope the great doctor is in New York.”

They stood in silence for a little.

“Poor little lad! Poor little lad!” sighed Thomas, finally.

“‘Tis hard,” sympathized Doctor Joe, who was fond of Jamie. “And there’s another thing, Thomas,” he continued. “You and I must catch more fur this year than we ever caught before, for there’s the mail boat and another steamer to pay the passage on, and they charge a good deal. Trowbridge & Gray pay good prices for fur, and pay cash. Let us hope one of us will catch a silver fox. We’ll need it. I’ll put in all I earn to help save Jamie’s sight.”

“Aye,” said Thomas, “We’ll do our best, and—Doctor Joe—I’m wonderful thankful to you.”

“Thomas, I owe it to you to do everything I can for Jamie, even if I didn’t want to do it so much for Jamie’s own sake,” and Doctor Joe’s voice was strangely husky. “You’ve helped cure me of a dreadful disease—I hope I’m cured—I pray God that I am—but I still need your help and friendship to make me strong.”

“Me—cure you of something?” asked Thomas, mystified. “I was never givin’ *you* medicine, or curin’ *you* of any ailment!”

“Yes—the best kind of medicine—your friendship—when I came here, and ever since. Some day I’ll tell you about it, but not now—not yet, Thomas Angus. Now we must think of Jamie, and do our best.”

“Aye, and do our best,” said Thomas.

Thomas Angus had always done his best with cheerful heroism, and how he hoped now to improve upon the best is hard to guess. Down on The Labrador every man must do his best all of the time if he would keep the flour barrel filled and run no debt with traders. In that stern land there can be no idling or wasting of time, and men work as though it were a joy, and the folk endure hardships without ever knowing they are hardships, and are happy, too, withal. Life there is grim and real.

Every boy and every girl, too, learns early to do his or her part, and accept what comes without complaint.

Young lad though he was, Jamie heard Doctor Joe’s verdict bravely, and accepted his affliction as one of the ups and downs of life. Until now he had been hoping each night when he went to sleep that when he opened his eyes in the morning he would find that the mist had lifted while he slept. Now this hope was gone. But there was still the hope that some day the great doctor to whom Doctor Joe had written, would cut the mist away, and hope is a wonderful thing for the building of courage.

“Keep your grit, lad,” said Thomas. “Doctor Joe says you’ll find th’ mist gettin’ thicker and th’ world growin’ darker for a time, and I’m thinkin’ you’ll need grit a plenty. Grit’s a great thing t’ have—a stout heart like a man’s, now, and plenty o’ grit, is a wonderful help.”

“I’ll keep my grit, *what*ever,” declared Jamie, “an’ I’ll keep my heart stout, like a man’s.”

“That’s fine now! I’m proud o’ my fine, brave lad!” encouraged Thomas. “I’ll be bound Doctor Joe’ll find a way sooner or later, by hook or by crook, t’ lift th’ mist.”

The fishing season was at an end, and Thomas and the boys had made a good catch. They had nearly enough salmon and trout salted in barrels to pay for their winter's supply of flour and pork, in barter, at the post. This had never happened before, but this year there had been an uncommon run of salmon.

"We'll load un in th' boat and take un to the post tomorrow," said Thomas, as they sat at tea on the evening when the last barrel was headed. "'Tis a clever catch, and we has un when we needs un th' most."

"And I hopes," said David, dipping a spoonful of molasses into his tea, "'Twill be a fine year for fur, and us and Doctor Joe'll sure get th' fur t' pay for Jamie goin' for th' cure."

"Pop'll get th' fur—Pop and Uncle Joe," broke in Andy. "*Pop's* a wonderful hunter."

"We'll get un if 'tis t' be got," declared Thomas. "Oh, aye, we'll get un."

"There comes Doctor Joe," Andy announced, as Doctor Joe, walking up from the landing place, passed the window, singing in a rich tenor voice:

"The worst of my foes are worries and woes,
And all about troubles that never come true.
And all about troubles that never come true.
The worst of my foes are worries and woes,
And all about troubles that never come true."

"I wonder, now," said Thomas, "if 'taint true—that song Doctor Joe is singin'."

Just then the door opened and in walked Doctor Joe himself.

"Always just in time!" he exclaimed.

"Set in! Set in!" said Thomas heartily, visibly cheered by Doctor Joe's coming.

"That I will," accepted Doctor Joe. "I was lonely at Break Cove alone, and I pulled over in the skiff for a chat, and to spend the night—and to have a look at Jamie's eyes."

It was always a treat to have Doctor Joe with them for a night. When he and Thomas lighted their pipes in the evening, and the big box stove was crackling cheerily, he thrilled them with stories of other and far-off lands. Thomas was no less interested than Margaret and the boys in his wonderful tales of the great outside world, and of the great city in which he had once lived—of the mighty buildings that towered high, high up into the skies—of the rushing railway trains—and their wonderful speed—of people so numerous that they crowded one another on the streets, and where you might meet thousands and thousands of people and never know one by name, and where half a hundred families might live in a single house.

"I'd like wonderful well t' have a look at un," said Thomas, "but I wouldn't want t' have t' stay long in *such* a place. There wouldn't be room t' stretch."

"No," agreed Doctor Joe, "you wouldn't care to stay there."

"And how's th' huntin'?" asked David. "Seems like there wouldn't be game enough for 'em all t' hunt, and I'm wonderin', now, how they gets their meat."

Then Doctor Joe had to tell them about cattle and sheep, the great stock ranges and stock yards, and how the animals were butchered and the meat sold.

"I wouldn't want t' eat th' meat of animals I raised up like that," declared Margaret. "'Tis wonderful hard and cruel t' tie un up like that and kill un. They don't have a chance t' get away, like th' deer has here."

"But there are plenty of people there," said Doctor Joe, "who eat the meat every day without giving a thought to that, but who think it very cruel to hunt and kill deer and other wild animals."

"But th' deer and wild game has a chance t' get away and save themselves," insisted Margaret. "The poor cows and sheep don't have a chance at all. There must be wonderful strange folk in th' world t' think 'tis wrong t' hunt deer."

"I'm thinkin'," suggested Thomas, "that th' Lard puts cows and sheep in th' world for people t' kill and t' eat when they needs un. 'Tis right for th' folk there t' kill th' cows and sheep t' get meat. 'Tis right for us here t' kill deer and such game as we can, t' eat. We couldn't live without un. 'Tis th' different ways th' Lard has of givin' them meat an' givin' us meat."

"That's sound reasoning," observed Doctor Joe.

And so they talked until bedtime, and then, at Thomas's request Doctor Joe read aloud from the scriptures, and Thomas offered an evening prayer, for on The Labrador, where there are no churches, but where folk live near to God, their Christian faith is great, and they do not forget to give thanks for their blessings, and to worship Him.

Then Doctor Joe spread his blankets upon the floor, for in that country visitors and travelers carry their beds with them, and there is welcome and room enough for all in every house.

"I'll stay and help you load your fish," suggested Doctor Joe, when they had eaten breakfast the following morning. "You've two good, stout helpers, but an extra one, I take it, won't be in the way."

"'Twill be a great help," said Thomas. "The boys finds th' barrels heavy liftin', and an extra hand would help us wonderful much."

"And get un done quicker," suggested David, "and then we'll get away to th' post on this tide."

"All right," said Doctor Joe, "let's go to it."

Below the house Thomas had built of stones and logs a short jetty, which served as a wharf for loading and unloading his big boat. The barrels of fish were rolled down to the jetty, and the boat brought alongside.

"Now," said Thomas, "'twill be easy work. Davy and Andy can roll the barrels to us, Doctor Joe, whilst you and I lifts un down into the boat and stows un. They're a bit heavy, but we can manage without troubling with a rope t' lower un down, and 'twill save time."

"All right," agreed Doctor Joe. "Let them come, boys."

"Aye," laughed Davy, "we'll let un come fast as ever you and Pop can lift un."

And so they were doing well enough, and making quick work of it, until the last barrel came, and the boat was so crowded with cargo that the standing room for Thomas and Doctor Joe was narrow and cramped.

"Have you a good footing there?" asked Doctor Joe, when the barrel was balanced on the end of the jetty and they were ready for the lift.

"'Tis all right," said Thomas, "let her come."

And then Thomas slipped, and though Doctor Joe did his best to prevent it, the barrel crashed down upon Thomas's leg, and when Doctor Joe and David lifted it and released him, Thomas discovered that he could not stand upon the leg.

"She'll soon be all right," said Thomas. "She's just numbed a bit with the weight."

"Let me feel of it," suggested Doctor Joe, proceeding to examine the leg.

"Aye, feel of un, and rub th' numbness out," said Thomas.

"Too bad! Too bad!" exclaimed Doctor Joe, presently. "The leg is broken."

And so indeed it proved.

Doctor Joe and the boys carried Thomas to the house and laid him in his bunk. Then Doctor Joe cut some sticks of proper length and size and wrapped them with pieces of old blanket, and with David's[Pg 31]

[Pg 32] help set the leg and deftly bound the splints into place with bandages which Margaret had quickly prepared under his direction as he worked.

"There you are," he said, finally, standing up and surveying his work. "Does it feel comfortable, Tom?"

"Not so bad," answered Thomas. "Will th' lashin's hold, now?"

"I'll warrant that!" assured Doctor Joe.

"And is she like t' be straight and stout again when she heals?" asked Thomas anxiously.

"Straight and stout as ever she was," promised Doctor Joe, "but you'll have to lie still for a month or six weeks, and then you'll be on crutches for a time. I'll look after you, Tom."

"And I can't go to my trappin' grounds, then, before th' New Year, *what*ever?" Thomas asked anxiously.

"No—not before the New Year—whatever—nor after the New Year—not this winter—I'm afraid," said Dr. Joe, reluctantly.

A shadow passed over Thomas's face, but he said nothing.

"I'm sorry," sympathized Doctor Joe.

"'Twere a blessin' you were here t' mend un," said Tom.

"Yes," agreed Doctor Joe, "it was well I was here to set it."

"I wouldn't mind so much if 'tweren't for Jamie," continued Thomas. "How, now, can we ever get th' money t' pay th' lad's way t' have th' great doctor cure him?"

But this was a question Doctor Joe could not answer, and he was sorely troubled.

"Pop," said Jamie, who had come close to his father's bed, "we'll keep our grit, both of us, now."

"Aye, lad, we'll keep our grit, you and me," and there was a choke in Thomas's voice as he reached for Jamie's hand, which Jamie gave him after passing it before his eyes in a vain effort to brush the mist away, which was a habit with him of late.

III
DOCTOR JOE

DOCTOR Joe's usually jovial face had suddenly become drawn and tired. He had not answered Thomas's question, "How, now, can we ever get th' money t' pay th' lad's way t' have th' great doctor cure him?" How, indeed, could they get the necessary money? What could they do to save Jamie's eyes without money? And he was thinking of the years before he came to The Labrador—of what he had once been—of the years that he had spent on The Labrador as a hunter and fisherman. Had his life been wasted? he asked himself.

"We're in a tight pinch, but hard luck is bound to come now and again," said Thomas, at length, startling Doctor Joe out of his reveries, "and we'll try not to worry about un. If 'tweren't for Jamie's eyes needin' t' be cured 'twouldn't be so bad."

"No, if 'tweren't for Jamie's eyes it wouldn't be so bad. If 'tweren't for Jamie's eyes," said Doctor Joe.

And then he turned and went out of doors and down to the beach, and for a little while paced up and down, with his head bent in thought.

There is no regret in life so bitter as regret for indiscretions that have ruined a career and ended life's hopes and ambitions. The world is a desolate place indeed for a man to live in when he has no ambition and no goal of attainment. He is simply existing—a clog in the moving throng of doers. The man who does not go forward must of necessity go backward. There is no room in the hustle and bustle and jostle along the trail of life for one to stand still.

Now, as Doctor Joe paced the beach, he was thinking of these things and looking in retrospection upon his own life. What a wreck he had made of it! Once he had all but gained his life's ambition, and a noble ambition it was. Through years of toil and tireless effort he had ascended the ladder of attainment. He had reached a high place in the world. In those days he was strong and able and self-reliant. The top round of the high ladder which he had climbed so tediously was within his grasp. Then came a day when he lost his balance and slipped and fell to the very bottom. In an hour all that he had worked for and hoped for and won was lost, and with it his courage and ambition.

Doctor Joe, contemplating his past and reviewing the train of circumstances which had ended his career, showered upon himself bitter denunciation and condemnation. He had indulged in appetites which had seemed innocent and harmless enough at first, but which had gradually and insidiously wormed their way into his soul until they had gained possession of him and had become his master. Then they had mercilessly ruined him and wrecked his life. Even the little fortune he had accumulated was lost. If he had only clung to that, at least, he would now be in position to meet the expense of Jamie's necessary surgical operation.

"Oh God!" he moaned. "This boy's future and happiness are in my hands! What can I do? What can the impotent wreck that I am, do?"

What, indeed, could Doctor Joe do? He was so indifferent a trapper that his earnings barely served to supply him with the ordinary comforts and necessities of life. The journey to New York would be an expensive one, and there appeared to him no other way by which Jamie's sight could be saved.

Through the mist of departed years Doctor Joe turned back in fancy to his own boyhood home. He saw his father's house, where he had grown to young manhood, and had planned the great things he was to do in the world. That was when life and the world with all their possibilities lay before him. Now they were behind him. There were no hopes or prospects for the future beyond a hand-to-mouth living from day to day, with a gray shadow upon the past.

He saw the path leading up from the village street to the door of his father's cottage, and the green, well-kept lawn on either side, and his mother's flower beds which she loved so well and nurtured with her own dear hands. He was there again in fancy. An odor of roses and sweet peas and honeysuckles came to his nostrils. He could see the fat, saucy robins hopping about upon the grass. And there was his mother at the door! How gentle and loving she always was. How she used to tuck him into bed and kiss him good night, when he was little. What plans she built for him, and how she always told him that he must be a generous and noble man when he grew up.

And then he passed on to the years when he helped his father, after school hours, in the little store around the corner, and the terrible day when his father died quickly, to be soon followed by his mother. How desolate the world seemed then! What a lonely struggle lay before him!

And when his father's estate was settled, and the store and the home were sold, and he left the village, he had barely enough money in his pocket to meet his first year's expenses at college. But he had vowed to make his way, as his mother had wished, and also to be her ideal of a man.

The years that followed were years of struggle, for it was not easy with bare hands to finish his education. But in those days he had brains and hope and courage, and the basic tenacity that will not surrender. And he was inspired in those early years by a profound belief that his mother was near him. He could not see her, but her spirit walked with him and watched over him. It gave him courage to feel her near him, and kept him straight when he was tempted to do wrong, for he would permit himself then to do nothing of which his mother would disapprove.

But somehow, later on in life, he had drifted away from her. He did not think of her so often, and with passing years her memory dimmed, and sometimes he forgot to be true to himself and to her ideals.

Doctor Joe's thoughts dwelt for a time on the thing which had caused his downfall. What a friend it had seemed at first, but how, when it gained possession of him it tortured and finally ruined him. And here he was now—just a bit of human driftwood, cast up by the tide of events upon a far shore.

"Well," said Doctor Joe, finally, lifting his head and looking about him, "there's one consolation. Driftwood in this land may be used as firewood, to help warm freezing fingers. It's a better fate than falling into a city sewer, or being cast upon a city's garbage heap."

And so Doctor Joe recalled himself to the present, and its necessities and obligations. What could he do? There was Thomas up in the cabin lying helpless with a broken leg, and Jamie going blind.

"If I were only the man I once was! If I were only the man I should be!" he mused. "Then I might help them. But I'm a pretty useless stick here, or anywhere. I've lost courage and ability. I'm not even an ordinary trapper."

It was a hard problem to solve. The breaking of Thomas's leg would not ordinarily have been so serious a matter. But Jamie's eyes were at stake. If Jamie were to go to New York to be operated upon there must be money. If Thomas could not hunt, where possibly could the money be had?

"Well," said he finally, "I don't see any way just at present, but there's no use worrying. If I worry they'll all worry, and it will do them no good. I'll do my level best, and put a cheerful face on things, and keep smiling. That seems to be all there is to do just now."

With this decision Doctor Joe turned sharply upon his heel and strode briskly back to the cabin, singing as he went and as he entered:

"Old Worry's my foe, and he always brings woe,
And he follows about wherever I go.
He's always on hand, and he makes the world blue,
And all about troubles that never come true.

"The worst of my foes are worries and woes,

And all about troubles that never come true—
And all about troubles that never come true.
The worst of my foes are worries and woes,
And all about troubles that never come true.

"I'll put them behind me and be a real man,
And I'll smile and be cheerful, as any one can;
For it's foolish to fret, and worry, and stew,
And all about troubles that never come true."

"I likes that song," said Thomas as Doctor Joe came in. "It kind of makes me feel better."

"There is something cheering about it," agreed Doctor Joe, "and the best of it is, it's true that the most of the things we worry about never happen."

"I think you're right about that," said Thomas.

"And now," continued Doctor Joe, "I've decided to stop here and look after you and things generally, while David and Andy take the fish to the post, if Margaret won't find me in the way," and Doctor Joe turned to Margaret.

"Oh, sir, you're *never* in the way!" Margaret protested. "'Tis wonderful kind of you to stop with us. 'Tis fine of you!"

"'Tis that," agreed Thomas heartily.

"Then I'll stay," said Doctor Joe, "until the lads get back. Unless there's a contrary wind tomorrow they'll be back tomorrow evening, and I can go home then, and make things snug for winter over at Break Cove. Then I'll come back here now and again and spend Saturdays with you if you like."

"Will you, now? Will you do that?" asked Thomas eagerly.

"Yes," assured Doctor Joe, "you're likely to get contrary, and if I'm around I'll make you behave and do as you're told."

"I'm thinkin' 'twill get tiresome layin' here, and," grinned Thomas, "I'm like t' get cross and want t' get up and stretch, and if I does—if I does, Doctor Joe, you're like t' have *your* hands full o' business if you tries t' stop me."

"I'll take care of you!" laughed Doctor Joe. "Just let's agree, if things get tedious, we'll keep cheerful and not let anything we can't help worry us."

"Aye," said Thomas, "we'll agree to that, though I'm not doubtin' 'twill be a bit hard now and again to be cheery with a broken leg all lashed up like mine is, and me on my back."

And so it was agreed that they were to look misfortune squarely in the face, as brave men should, without flinching. And need enough they were to have, in the months to come, for all the courage and fortitude they possessed.

IV
INDIAN JAKE, THE HALF BREED

AS soon as ever Margaret could get them a cup of tea and a snack to eat, David and Andy were to be off upon their voyage to the post. They were good boatmen and sailors, both of them, for down on The Labrador every lad learns the art of sailing early. Often enough they had made the journey to the post in the small boat. But now they were to be entrusted with the big boat, and with the season's catch of fish as cargo, and they were to purchase the winter's supplies for the house. This was an important mission indeed.

David, as skipper of the big boat, and Andy as crew, therefore felt a vast deal of responsibility, when Thomas called them to his bedside and gave David the final instructions. They were to bring back with them flour, pork, tea and molasses for the house, and woolen duffle, kersey and moleskin cloth for clothing, besides many little odds and ends to be purchased at the store. Then there were verbal messages to be delivered to Mr. MacCreary, the factor, and to Zeke Hodge, the post servant.

"And tell Mr. MacCreary I may be askin' he for more debt than I been askin' for many a year," added Thomas with a tinge of regret, for it had been his pride to avoid debt. "But tell he I'll pay un. I'll pay un all when my leg is mended and I gets about again."

"I'll tell he, sir," said David.

"'Twouldn't be so bad, now, if you had two more years on your shoulders, Davy, lad," Thomas continued, a little wistfully. "You could tend my trail then, and we might get th' money t' send Jamie for the cure."

"I'm 'most sixteen!" David boasted. "I could tend un now. I *knows* I could, an' you'd let me try un."

"You're too young yet, lad," Thomas objected. "You're too young to be alone up there in th' bush, I couldn't rest easy with you up there alone."

"I could try un, *what*ever," persisted David, eagerly.

"I'm not sayin' you couldn't tend th' traps, lad," assured Thomas, with pride. "You'd tend un, and not slight un. But a lad o' your age is too young t' be reasonable always. You'd take risks on nasty days, and run dangers. No," he added decidedly, "I couldn't think o' lettin' you go alone. If anything were to happen to you I never could rest easy again."

David was plainly disappointed, for he felt the reliance and self-confidence of youth, and the romance and adventure of a winter's isolation on the far-off trail appealed to him. And in his heart perhaps he resented what he deemed his father's lack of confidence in him as a woodsman. It is the way of boys the world over to place their judgment sometimes above that of their elders.

The two lads ate their snack and drank their tea hurriedly, for the day was none too long, and then, with Doctor Joe to accompany them to the jetty and see them off with a cheery farewell, they loosed the boat from her moorings and David, with a long sculling oar, worked her down through The Jug and beyond the Point, where her sails caught the wind. Then David put away the sculling oar, shipped the rudder, and took the tiller, and turning to Andy he said:

"Since Pop broke his leg I been thinking' wonderful hard, Andy."

"What you been thinkin', Davy?" asked Andy.

"I been thinkin' I've got t' hunt now, *what*ever," announced David. "I'm goin' t' ask Pop again t' let me hunt his trail this winter. He were sayin' I can't, but somebody *must* hunt un, and I'm th' only one t' do it. We got t' have fur t' pay for th' cure o' Jamie's eyes, and Pop can't hunt, and they's no way t' get un if I don't hunt. If we don't get un, Jimmie'll go blind, and we *must* get un, *what*ever. You'll have t' do my work about home and hunt th' meat and feed th' dogs, and get th' wood."

"Pop won't let you go t' Seal Lake alone!" exclaimed Andy, startled by David's apparent revolt against his father's decision. "He said you couldn't!"

"Yes he will. You'll see," declared David. "I has a plan, an' Pop'll let me go, I'm thinkin', when he hears un. And 'tis th' only chance t' save Jamie from goin' blind. I can't make th' hunt Pop would, but I'll do my best, and anyway I'm 'most a man. I'll soon be sixteen!"

David, standing in the stern of the boat, drew himself to his full height and squared his shoulders, and indeed he was a stalwart lad, and Andy was proud of his big brother.

"You *is* fine and strong!" said Andy in admiration.

"Aye, that I be," admitted David with no little pride, "and you're fine and strong, too, for your age. You can handle th' dogs and 'tend th' traps about home, and look after things whilst I'm away, and we'll show Pop and Doctor Joe what *we* can do."

"And Pop lets you go!" said Andy. "But I'm wonderful afraid, now, he won't let you go."

"But I has a plan. *You'll* see," said David with assurance.

"What's your plan, now?" asked Andy.

"'Tis a plan come t' me while Doctor Joe were settin' Pop's leg," said David, "but I weren't tellin' he about un when he speaks of my goin'. I wanted t' find out first. Indian Jake is back in th' Bay, and he's wantin' a place t' hunt on shares because he can't buy his own traps. He's been away two years, and th' Company won't let he have traps on debt because he's owin' so much there already that he didn't pay before he goes away. Trowbridge & Gray won't let he have traps because he took his fur away two years ago when he were owin' so much, and didn't try t' clear up any of his debt. Pop's got plenty o' traps, and my plan is t' have Indian Jake hunt along o' me on shares."

"It seems like cheatin' for Indian Jake t' take his fur away when he were owin' a debt t' th' Company," suggested Andy.

"'Tweren't honest," agreed David, "but he's sayin' now if he has a chance he'll pay his debt. It seems hard for he not t' have a chance, and by huntin' on shares along o' me 'twill give he a chance, and 'twill help us. Pop will have a third o' Indian Jake's hunt, and he's 'most as good a hunter as Pop. Then I'll have some one t' hunt with, and I'll be safe, and Pop won't mind my goin'. All o' my hunt and a third o' Indian Jake's, I'm thinkin', would be 'most as much as Pop's would ha' been if he hadn't broke his leg. Then Pop and Doctor Joe will sure have th' money t' pay for fixin' Jamie's eyes."

"Oh, I *hopes* he'll let you go!" exclaimed Andy. "Th' plan *is* fine!"

David's plan was an ambitious one. Thomas had stated that he would be quite too young for another two years to endure the hardship and danger and isolation of the winter fur trails. But if he could arrange for Indian Jake to accompany him, his father might consent. Jamie's eyes were at stake, and that was the vital thing. David felt that no sacrifice or risk was too great if they could save Jamie from blindness, and he hoped that his father would, after consideration, take the same view.

It is rare that even an old, experienced trapper, enters the far Labrador wilderness without a companion, though Thomas, who knew no danger where he himself was concerned, had usually hunted alone. It is the custom of trappers to work in pairs, with a central meeting point where at stated intervals, sometimes once a fortnight and sometimes at the end of each week, they may enjoy each other's society for a day or two, and, if necessary, lend each other assistance.

David was aware, however, that at this late season the trappers had already gone to their trails, or had already completed their arrangements for the winter. Therefore he had decided upon making a bargain, if possible with Indian Jake, the only hunter in the Bay, so far as he knew, who had no trail to hunt. It was only under these circumstances that he suggested the half breed as his hunting companion, for he was a man whom no one trusted. This general lack of confidence in Indian Jake might lead his father to refuse to grant his request, but he was determined to do his utmost to induce him to grant it.

Hugely interested, and more or less excited with their project, the boys talked and schemed, until at length the line of whitewashed buildings of the Hudson's Bay Company's post came into view.

"There's the Post!" exclaimed David. "I hope Indian Jake is stoppin' there yet."

"'Twill be fine, now, if he is, and if he'll go, and Pop lets he have th' trail t' hunt along with you. The Indian tents are all gone," said Andy, indicating a long stretch of beach to the eastward of the post which had been occupied by Indian camps during the summer.

"Yes," said David, "they mostly goes th' middle of August t' hunt deer before th' fur hunt begins. We won't see them again till the break-up next spring, *what*ever."

They were silent for a little, and then David, pointing to the rolling wilderness to the westward remarked:

"It looks fine t' me out there! And think o' th' martens and foxes and lynx! It's full o' fur, Andy, waitin' t' be trapped, and if Pop lets me go, I can trap *some* of un, *what*ever!"

"There's Indian Jake! See him? The lanky one!" exclaimed Andy, as the boat drew near the wharf and four men came out of one of the buildings and down the wharf to meet them.

"Sure 'tis he! And there's Uncle Ben Rudder and Hiram Muggs, along with Zeke Hodge! They must be gettin' their winter outfit. I'm wonderful glad Indian Jake's here!" exclaimed David.

Zeke Hodge, the Company's servant, with the assistance of the three, quickly unloaded the boat.

"Where's your pop? Makin' ready for th' winter huntin'?" asked Zeke, as the boys came ashore after discharging the cargo and making the boat fast.

"He broke his leg this mornin' whilst we were loadin' th' boat," said David. "Doctor Joe was there and fixed un, but Pop won't be out o' bed for five or six weeks, *what*ever, and won't be strong to go t' th' huntin' th' whole winter."

"Good gracious! Good gracious! Dear eyes!" exclaimed Uncle Ben Rudder, a grizzled, stockily-built old trapper of sixty years or thereabouts. "Broke his leg! Tom Angus went, now, and broke his leg, did you say?"

"Aye, Uncle Ben, broke un clear off, but she's fixed good and proper, and Doctor Joe says she'll heal fine," David explained.

Zeke, and Hiram Muggs and Indian Jake all declared it was "too bad, and a sore misfortune, just at th' beginnin' o' th' huntin' season," and Uncle Ben exclaimed:

"Tom Angus broke his leg! Dear eyes! But Doctor Joe'll fix un! Good gracious, yes! He'll fix un! He's a wonderful man, now, is Doctor Joe!"

"Too bad he can't hunt," remarked Indian Jake. "His trail up on Seal Lake is one o' th' best in th' country. Too bad t' let it stand idle."

"Hum-m-m!" grunted Uncle Ben.

"'Tis a fine trail," agreed David, "and Pop makes fine hunts on it."

"He might let some one hunt it on shares?" suggested Indian Jake.

"Tom Angus won't need much help in decidin' whether he wants his trail hunted on shares or no," Uncle Ben broke in with some asperity. "Tom Angus is a great man t' decide for himself what he's wantin', and what he's not wantin'. Good gracious! Tom Angus can decide for himself!"

With this outburst Uncle Ben followed Zeke and Hiram into Zeke's cabin, in response to Zeke's suggestion that "supper was 'most ready and they might as well go in," but Indian Jake tarried behind with David and Andy.

Indian Jake, the half-breed, was not a native of the Bay. He had appeared here first some five years before, coming from "somewhere south," and after trapping in the vicinity for three seasons, disappeared. During this time, as David had explained to Andy, he had contracted a debt, and when he left he took with him furs which should rightfully have been used in discharging it. Now after two years he had returned, to remain permanently, as he stated, in the Bay.

He was a tall, muscular fellow, with the dark red skin, straight black hair and swinging stride of the Indian. A pair of keen, restless black eyes and a beaked nose, suggested the hawk. His features, however, were not those of an Indian, and plainly indicated a mixed ancestry.

"I'd like t' hunt your father's trail on shares," suggested Indian Jake, when he was alone with David and Andy.

"Pop's got two trails up at Seal Lake," said David. "I knows his old trail, and I were thinkin' t' hunt she myself if Pop lets me, and I'm not doubtin' he would if some one were along with me huntin' th' new trail. He's got all th' traps for th' new trail. I were goin' t' ask you t' speak to he about un, Jake."

"I'd like t' hunt with ye, Davy. I think we'd get along fine," said Indian Jake, smiling down ingratiatingly at David, and Indian Jake had a bland and pleasant smile when he chose, in spite of his beaked nose and hawk's eyes.

And so it came about that Indian Jake went to The Jug the next day with David and Andy. And because there was such urgent need of money, and also because David pleaded so hard, and Indian Jake was so good a trapper—for no one doubted his ability—it was decided that not only David, but Andy also, should go with Indian Jake to Seal Lake for the winter, as we shall presently see.

The boys were pleased beyond measure, for now each felt he was in truth to take a man's place and do his part in earnest, and they were quite sure that the problem of getting the money to pay the expense of curing Jamie's eyes was solved. And perhaps, too, they were pleased with the promise of adventure, for every red-blooded boy loves adventure; and to be buried in the depths of the great wilderness for many months, with no other companion than Indian Jake, was adventure in itself. And, indeed, there was to be plenty of it for both of them, and of hardships, too.

"Then you'll be goin' home with Andy and me tomorrow to ask Pop?" inquired David expectantly.

"Yes," said Indian Jake, with undoubted satisfaction. "I'll go back with you."

David could scarce suppress his excitement, but neither he nor Andy nor Indian Jake himself thought best to refer to the arrangement when, a moment later, they followed the others into Zeke Hodge's cabin. Tea was ready, and they drew up to the table with Zeke and Hiram and Uncle Ben.

In the center of the clean-scoured, uncovered table was a big, steaming dish of stewed porcupine and doughboys, and at either end a plate piled high with huge slices of bread, and when Zeke had asked the blessing, Mrs. Hodge and Kate, her fifteen-year-old daughter, poured tea and otherwise served the men while they ate.

"Porcupine! Dear eyes! Porcupine!" exclaimed Uncle Ben, helping himself generously. "Where'd ye get un, Zeke? They're wonderful scarce these days. *Wonderful* scarce! I ain't seen one since last spring."

"Right back here in th' green-woods," said Zeke. "I heard th' dogs yelpin' this mornin'; and I goes t' see what 'tis all about. There sat th' porcupine hunched up, and th' old dogs in a circle around he, doin' th' yelpin', and two of th' young dogs pawin' at their noses and whinin', with their mouths full o' quills."

"Huh-huh," chuckled Uncle Ben. "Th' old uns knew enough t' keep away from danger. They'd been there theirselves, or seen them that had, and th' young dogs had t' get hurt t' learn enough t' leave dangerous things alone."

"It took me an hour t' pull th' quills out o' their noses and mouths with a pair of pincers," said Zeke. "They'll know enough t' give porcupines room after this."

"Some folks is like porcupines," observed Uncle Ben, glancing at Indian Jake, who seemed quite unconscious of the thrust. "It's best not t' have any dealin's with un."

David and Andy were too full of their plans, and too hungry, and well occupied with the toothsome dish, to heed Uncle Ben's suggestion. And though many times that evening, while the men sat smoking their pipes and talking about this and that, Uncle Ben made blunt and cutting remarks that were aimed at Indian Jake's character and honesty, the half-breed kept his temper and silence, with a remarkable display of self-control. Once or twice, to be sure, a sneering smile stole upon his face. It might have been that he held the esteem of the others in fine contempt, or possibly he awaited a better opportunity for accounting and revenge.

But so far as David and Andy were concerned, they were thinking only of Indian Jake's ability as a trapper, and were quite transported by the belief that they had already solved the problems of the future. With Indian Jake's help they were well satisfied the money would be earned to pay for Jamie's cure. It only remained to gain their father's consent to David's plan. They were optimists. They believed that what they wished to be, would be, if they did their best to make their wishes realized. Only experience can teach that the best laid plans sometimes fail.

V
UNCLE BEN GIVES WARNING

IN the beginning Thomas had a decided feeling of uncertainty concerning Indian Jake, because of Indian Jake's record of two years before. The debt that he had left unpaid was for provisions and clothing which had been advanced him by the Hudson's Bay Company that he might subsist during the hunting season, and with the understanding that he would pay the indebtedness by trading in at the Company's store the furs he trapped.

It was a debt of honor, thought Thomas and the other Bay folk, and the furs, to their way of thinking, belonged rightfully to the Company; and therefore, in taking them away with him, Indian Jake had actually been guilty of dishonesty. Indian Jake agreed with Thomas, who stated his opinion plainly to the half-breed.

"I know the furs were the Company's," said Indian Jake, "but I had reasons for goin'. Now I've come back t' straighten up what I owe. All I want is a chance, and I can't pay what I owe if nobody gives me the chance, and down t' th' tradin' posts they won't trust me, and nobody else wants to, unless you do."

"Well," said Thomas, after a little consideration, "I'll do it. 'Tis a fine place for fur where I traps, and you'll make a fine hunt.

"But you'll be huntin' one trail, and if I let Davy go he'll be huntin' another, and Davy'll only see you once a week, *what*ever. 'Twill be a wonderful lonely time for Davy between times alone, and he might have a mishap, for 'tisn't natural for a young lad t' be over careful. I'm not thinkin' I'll let he go, Jake. You'll have t' hunt alone. Davy's too young yet for th' work."

"It's all the same t' me," said Indian Jake, "huntin' alone or with company."

"Oh, but, Pop," pleaded David in deep disappointment. "I'll be wonderful careful. I'll 'bide in th' tilts when th' weather's too nasty t' be out. I *wants* t' go. I'll get *some* fur, *what*ever, and we needs un all to pay for th' cure t' Jamie's eyes."

Jamie's eyes! Thomas looked at Jamie, who was standing at the window, vainly trying to peer through the ever-present mist, and as he saw Jamie raise his hand to brush the mist away a great lump came into his throat.

"Davy," said he, after a little silence, "you're a brave lad, and careful, but 'tis a wonderful lonely place up there, trampin' th' trails. The storms come sudden and awful sometimes, and it takes a man's strength to face un. 'Tis frostier there, too, than here. There's none o' th' comfort o' th' home you've always been used to. I'd never rest easy if I let you go and you never came back."

"But," insisted David, "I'll be careful and come back—and Jamie mustn't be let t' go blind. 'Twould be worse for he than bein' dead. *Let* me go, Pop!"

"I'll think about un—I'll think about un," said Thomas, and he closed his eyes to think.

At the end of ten minutes, when Thomas opened his eyes again, he had decided, and turning to Indian Jake, he said:

"I'm thinkin', now, I'll let Davy go, and I'll let Andy go along t' keep Davy company and help he. The two will be company for each other, and doin' th' work together they'll get over th' trail faster than ever Davy could alone, and if they's a mishap, one can help the other. But you'll have t' keep an eye to un, Jake!"

"It's all the same to me, whether one or both of 'em go," said Indian Jake. "I'll keep an eye on 'em, so they won't get in trouble."

"Thank you, Pop! I'll be wonderful careful," said David, with vast relief and satisfaction.

"Are you meanin' *I'm* t' go t' th' trails, too?" asked Andy, who had been standing with David and Indian Jake by the bedside.

"Aye, Andy, lad," said Thomas, "you'll go along and help Davy."

"Oh—Pop!" exclaimed Andy, which was all his emotions and excitement would permit him to say.

"Is you glad, now?" asked Thomas with a smile, for he knew very well how glad Andy was. It is the greatest wish of every lad on The Labrador to go to the trails and hunt, as his father does, and eagerly he waits for the time when he may go. It is a brave life, that, living in the midst of the great wilderness, surrounded by its ever-present mysteries, and what boy is there who does not wish to do brave deeds? 'Tis a man's work, following the trails, and the trapper plays a man's game, and what boy does not wish to play a man's game?

"Oh, I'm *wonderful* glad!" exclaimed Andy.

"'Twill be fine t' have Andy along!" broke in David, "and we'll hunt fine together."

"We'll hunt un the best ever we can," asserted Andy.

And thus it had been decided, and the plan seemed a good one to Doctor Joe, for it was the only solution of the problem of how to get the money that would be so necessary the following summer.

Nevertheless, neither Doctor Joe nor Thomas could quite rid himself of a feeling of anxiety and uncertainty as to the wisdom of permitting the boys to enter the wilderness with Indian Jake. They could not forget his record, in spite of his fair promises, and try as they would they could not feel complete confidence in him.

The days that followed were busy ones at The Jug. It was the middle of the first week in September, and Indian Jake was eager to be away to the trapping grounds the following Monday, for it would be a three weeks' journey, and with the coming of October the lakes might be expected to freeze at any time. They would travel by boat and therefore it was essential that they arrive at their destination on Seal Lake before the freeze-up came.

And so there was great hustle and bustle, assembling the outfit and getting all in readiness. And Margaret, too, was no less busy than the others, working early and late preparing the warm clothing that the boys would need.

Each was to be supplied with two adikys, one of heavy kersey cloth and one of moleskin. The latter, with its close-woven, smooth surface, would be an excellent protection from the wind, and snow would not readily cling to it, and it was made large enough to wear over the former. Both garments were fitted with hoods, and the hood on the kersey adiky was trimmed with fur around the face to add to its warmth and comfort. These garments were to be drawn on over the head like a sweater, but were loose and roomy. There were no buttons, and no openings where snow could sift in, and a drawstring around the face permitted them to be adjusted snugly to the cheeks, though there was no attempt to have them cover nose or mouth, for were that done the moisture from the breath would freeze upon the face and cause painful frostbite.

Then in each outfit there were a half dozen pairs of slippers, or socks, made of heavy woolen blanket duffle, to wear inside the buckskin moccasins, and two pairs of mittens of the same material to wear inside buckskin mittens, and each had a pair of moleskin cloth leggins.

Some of these things the boys already possessed, as they did round, peakless muskrat skin caps that could be drawn down over the ears and worn inside the adiky hood, but Margaret went carefully over all, to be quite sure everything was in the best of order.

Other clothing and equipment consisted of moleskin trousers, several pairs of buckskin moccasins for winter wear, and kneehigh sealskin boots for the milder weather of autumn and spring; buckskin mittens, underwear, heavy outer shirts, ordinary knit socks, a sleeping bag for each lined with Hudson's Bay Company blankets, cooking utensils, axes, files for sharpening axes, and a mending kit containing needles and thread for making repairs. And each was supplied with a 44-40 carbine, and a quantity of ammunition. These were their especial pride. David had been presented with his rifle the previous winter by Thomas, and Andy was to have an old one which his father had used before he purchased one of a later model.

Indian Jake assembled the general camp equipment and the provisions, the latter consisting chiefly of flour, pork, tea, a small keg of molasses, and salt, packing everything into snug, convenient packages, that could be handled easily.

Jamie was vastly interested in the preparations. He did little things to help the boys, and Indian Jake permitted him to hold open the mouths of the bags as he packed them, to Jamie's delight, and made the lad feel that he was really of much assistance, and the two became the best of friends.

Doctor Joe had gone home to Break Cove on the evening that the boys had returned from the post with Indian Jake, and was not expected back until Sunday. They were surprised, therefore, to see his boat coming up the bight on Saturday morning, and astonished when Doctor Joe announced upon his arrival that he had decided not to go to his old trapping grounds that winter.

"I've been thinking matters over," he explained, "and if you'll let me, I'll make The Jug my home this winter. I'll hunt up here, Thomas, where you used to hunt before you took the Seal Lake trail, when the children were small, and you had to be home o' nights. My old trail is pretty well hunted out, anyhow, and I'll do better here where there hasn't been any trapping since you quit."

"'Tis wonderful good of you," said Thomas.

"I know well enough," continued Doctor Joe, "that unless you're watched pretty closely, and I see you every day you'll be trying to use that leg some day before you should, and perhaps break it again. With this arrangement I'll be here every night and keep track of you, and look after Jamie's eyes, if they need it. Once a week isn't often enough. I can feed the dogs, too, and do the other rough work that's too hard for Margaret, and that she shouldn't try to do."

"I were thinkin' o' Margaret feedin' th' dogs," said Thomas, "and I don't like to have her do it. They knows a lass can't master un, and they'd be like t' turn on her some time."

And thus it was arranged, to the vast satisfaction of Thomas and Margaret, as well as Doctor Joe, that The Jug was to be his home while the boys were away. And Jamie was mightily pleased, for Doctor Joe would be jolly company of evenings, singing in his fine voice, as no other in the Bay could sing, and telling him stories such as no one else could tell.

Everything was in readiness on Saturday night, in order that Sunday might be observed as a day of rest. Thomas would permit no work to be done about his home on Sunday that could as well be done another day. Like most of the Bay folk, his faith was simple and literal.

"'Tis wrong t' work and 'tis wrong t' shoot on a Sunday," said he, "and anything that 'tis wrong t' do brings bad luck in th' end if you does un. 'Tis goin' contrary t' th' Almighty."

And so the day was spent in quietude and rest indoors, which pleased Jamie greatly, for he was no less excited than David and Andy, and he was glad to have them near. They had suddenly become heroes in his sight, and indeed they *were* heroes, aye, and soldiers, too, going into the deep wilderness to battle with death-dealing blizzards and bitter, changeless cold for the sake of those they loved.

"And you and Andy makes a good hunt, and gets th' fur t' pay for havin' th' mist took out o' my eyes," said Jamie, passing his hand before his eyes in a pitiful little attempt to brush the mist away that he might see David's features more plainly, "and th' great doctor cures un, *I'll* go to Seal Lake some time and hunt, too."

"We'll do our best, now," assured David, "an' *we'll* get th' fur, never fear."

"That we will," said Andy, squaring his shoulders.

"Pop says you'll have t' keep plenty o' grit," warned Jamie.

"We'll keep plenty o' grit," said Andy.

"And a stout heart, like a man's," added Jamie.

"And we'll keep our hearts stout like a man's," said Andy proudly.

It was to be a long time before the family should be together again, and Margaret had the dinner table set close to Thomas's bunk. Doctor Joe had shot a great fat goose the day before—the first of the season—and Margaret cooked it for their Sunday dinner. Then there was bread and tea, and a fine big tart of bake-apple berries. And a cozy feast they had, with the fire in the big stove crackling

merrily, for it was raw and cold outside. And though Thomas must needs lie flat upon his back he enjoyed the feast as well as any of them, for Margaret attended to that, in her gentle, thoughtful way.

When dinner was cleared away Doctor Joe told them stories, and at Margaret's request sang for them, and when he sang some hymns they all joined with him—even Thomas, with a great bellowing voice. It was a day to be remembered, and David and Andy were to think of it often in the months to come, as they wearily tramped silent white trails, or sat of evenings in lonely tilts.

It was after candlelight, and they were at tea, that evening, when suddenly the door opened and in walked Uncle Ben Rudder and Hiram Muggs. Uncle Ben led Hiram directly to Thomas's bed, and Thomas greeted them warmly.

"Good gracious! Good gracious!" exclaimed Uncle Ben. "To think, now, that Thomas Angus went and broke his leg! Dear eyes!"

"'Twas a sorry mishap," sympathized Hiram, a wiry, active little man of few words.

"Aye," agreed Thomas, "but it might ha' been worse. I were thinkin' how hard 'twould ha' been when the children were little, or a season when th' fishin' were poor, and I were in debt with nothin' ahead for th' winter."

"H-m-m-m," grunted Uncle Ben. "I suppose nothin's so bad it couldn't be worse, but bad's bad enough for all that. Good gracious, yes!"

"Well," said Thomas, "we have t' take things as they come, good or bad, and th' best way, t' my thinkin', is t' take un without complaint. But set in now, and have tea."

When tea was cleared away, and Indian Jake and Hiram and Doctor Joe were smoking their pipes comfortably at the other end of the room, Uncle Ben seated himself by Thomas's bed and asked:

"How about th' huntin', Tom? I says to myself, when Davy tells me you broke your leg, 'Tom'll need some one, now, t' hunt his trail on shares. Good gracious, yes!' and so I speaks t' Hiram, and Hiram says he'll hunt un, and here Hiram is, ready t' go."

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.