REID MAYNE

THE YOUNG VOYAGEURS: BOY HUNTERS IN THE NORTH

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Содержание

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Chapter One. The Fur Countries

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

A vast journey it will be. It will cost us many thousand miles of travel. We shall find neither railway-train, nor steamboat, nor stage-coach, to carry us on our way. We shall not even have the help of a horse. For us no hotel shall spread its luxurious board; no road-side inn shall hang out its inviting sign and "clean beds;" no roof of any kind shall offer us its hospitable shelter.

Our table shall be a rock, a log, or the earth itself; our lodging a tent; and our bed the skin of a wild beast. Such are the best accommodations we can expect upon our journey. Are you still ready to undertake it? Does the prospect not deter you?

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

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

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

Will you believe me, when I tell you that all this immense tract is a wilderness – a howling wilderness, if you like a poetical name? It is even so. From north to south, from ocean to ocean, – throughout all that vast domain, there is neither town nor village – hardly anything that can be dignified with the name of "settlement." The only signs of civilisation to be seen are the "forts," or trading posts, of the Hudson's Bay Company; and

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

The physical aspect is, therefore, entirely wild. It is very different in different parts of the territory. One tract is peculiar. It has been long known as the "Barren Grounds." It is a tract of vast extent. It lies north-west from the shores of Hudson's Bay, extending nearly to the Mackenzie River. Its rocks are *primitive*. It is a land of hills and valleys, – of deep dark lakes and sharp-running streams. It is a woodless region. No timber is found there that deserves the name. No trees but glandular dwarf birches, willows, and black spruce, small and stunted. Even these only grow in isolated valleys. More generally the surface is covered with coarse sand – the *débris* of granite or quartz-rock – upon which no vegetable, save the lichen or the moss, can find life and nourishment. In one respect these "Barren Grounds" are unlike the deserts of Africa: they are well watered. In almost every valley there is a lake; and though many of these are landlocked, yet do they contain fish of several species. Sometimes these lakes communicate with each other by means of rapid and turbulent streams passing through narrow gorges;

and lines of those connected lakes form the great rivers of the district.

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

Yet these "Barren Grounds" have their denizens. Nature has formed animals that delight to dwell there, and that are never found in more fertile regions. Two ruminating creatures find sustenance upon the mosses and lichens that cover their cold rocks: they are the caribou (reindeer) and the musk-ox. These, in their turn, become the food and subsistence of preying creatures. The wolf, in all its varieties of grey, black, white, pied, and dusky, follows upon their trail. The "brown bear," – a large species, nearly resembling the "grizzly," – is found only in the Barren Grounds; and the great "Polar bear" comes within their borders, but the latter is a dweller upon their shores alone, and finds his food among the finny tribes of the seas that surround them. In marshy ponds, existing here and there, the musk-rat (*Fibre zibethieus*) builds his house, like that of his larger cousin, the beaver. Upon the water sedge he finds subsistence; but his natural enemy, the wolverene (*Gulo luscus*), skulks in the same neighbourhood. The "Polar hare" lives upon the leaves and twigs of the dwarf birch-tree; and this, transformed into its own white flesh, becomes the food of the Arctic fox. The herbage, sparse though it be, does not grow in vain. The seeds fall to

the earth, but they are not suffered to decay. They are gathered by the little lemmings and meadow-mice (*arvicolae*), who, in their turn, become the prey of two species of *mustelidae*, the ermine and vison weasels. Have the fish of the lakes no enemy? Yes – a terrible one in the Canada otter. The mink-weasel, too, pursues them; and in summer, the osprey, the great pelican, the cormorant, and the white-headed eagle.

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

Far different are the "wooded tracts" of the fur countries. These lie mostly in the southern and central regions of the Hudson's Bay territory. There are found the valuable beaver, and the wolverene that preys upon it. There dwells the American hare, with its enemy the Canada lynx. There are the squirrels, and the beautiful martens (sables) that hunt them from tree to tree. There are found the foxes of every variety, the red, the cross,

and the rare and highly-prized silver-fox (*Vulpes argentatus*), whose shining skin sells for its weight in gold! There, too, the black bear (*Ursus Americanus*) yields its fine coat to adorn the winter carriage, the holsters of the dragoon, and the shako of the grenadier. There the fur-bearing animals exist in greatest plenty, and many others whose skins are valuable in commerce, as the moose, the wapiti, and the wood-bison.

But there is also a "prairie" district in the fur countries. The great table prairies of North America, that slope eastward from the Rocky Mountains, also extend northward into the Hudson's Bay territory. They gradually grow narrower, however, as you proceed farther north, until, on reaching the latitude of the Great Slave Lake, they end altogether. This "prairie land" has its peculiar animals. Upon it roams the buffalo, the prong-horned antelope, and the mule-deer. There, too, may be seen the "barking-wolf" and the "swift fox." It is the favourite home of the marmots, and the gauffres or sand-rats; and there, too, the noblest of animals, the horse, runs wild. West of this prairie tract is a region of far different aspect, – the region of the Rocky Mountains. This stupendous chain, sometimes called the Andes of North America, continues throughout the fur countries from their southern limits to the shores of the Arctic Sea. Some of its peaks overlook the waters of that sea itself, towering up near the coast. Many of these, even in southern latitudes, carry the "eternal snow." This "mountain-chain" is, in places, of great breadth. Deep valleys lie in its embrace, many of which have

never been visited by man. Some are desolate and dreary; others are oases of vegetation, which fascinate the traveller whose fortune it has been, after toiling among naked rocks, to gaze upon their smiling fertility. These lovely wilds are the favourite home of many strange animals. The argali, or mountain-sheep, with his huge curving horns, is seen there; and the shaggy wild goat bounds along the steepest cliffs. The black bear wanders through the wooded ravines; and his fiercer congener, the "grizzly" – the most dreaded of all American animals – drags his huge body along the rocky declivities.

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

But it is not our intention at present to cross the Rocky Mountains. Our journey will lie altogether on the eastern side of that great chain. It will extend from the frontiers of civilisation

to the shores of the Arctic Sea. It is a long and perilous journey, boy reader; but as we have made up our minds to it, let us waste no more time in talking, but set forth at once. You are ready? Hurrah!

Chapter Two.
The Young Voyageurs

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

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

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

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

and it is a countenance that would strike you as more open and communicative. The eye is blue and mild, and the brow is marked by the paleness of study and habits of continued thought. These indications are no more than just, for the fair-haired youth *is* a student, and one of no ordinary attainments. Although only seventeen years of age, he is already well versed in the natural sciences; and many a graduate of Oxford or Cambridge would but ill compare with him. The former might excel in the knowledge – if we can dignify it by that name – of the laws of scansion, or in the composition of Greek idyls; but in all that constitutes *real* knowledge he would prove but an idle theorist, a dreamy imbecile, alongside our practical young scholar of the West.

The third and youngest of the party – taking them as they sit from stem to bow – differs in many respects from both those described. He has neither the gravity of the first, nor yet the intellectuality of the second. His face is round, and full, and ruddy. It is bright and smiling in its expression. His eye dances merrily in his head, and its glance falls upon everything. His lips are hardly ever at rest. They are either engaged in making words – for he talks almost incessantly – or else contracting and expanding with smiles and joyous laughter. His cap is jauntily set, and his fine brown curls, hanging against the rich roseate skin of his cheeks, give to his countenance an expression of extreme health and boyish beauty. His merry laugh and free air tell you he is not the boy for books. He is not much of a hunter neither. In

fact, he is not particularly given to anything – one of those easy natures who take the world as it comes, look upon the bright side of everything, without getting sufficiently interested to excel in anything.

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

"bowie" hanging over the left hip, completed his "arms and accoutrements."

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

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

Though very unlike one another, these three youths were brothers. I knew them well. I had seen them before – about two years before – and though each had grown several inches taller since that time, I had no difficulty in recognising them. Even though they were now two thousand miles from where I had formerly encountered them, I could not be mistaken as to

their identity. Beyond a doubt they were the same brave young adventurers whom I had met in the swamps of Louisiana, and whose exploits I had witnessed upon the prairies of Texas. They were the "Boy Hunters," – Basil, Lucien, François! I was right glad to renew acquaintance with them. Boy reader, do you share my joy?

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

All this is reversed on the Red River of the North. It is true that on its banks sugar is also produced; but it is no longer from a plant but a lordly tree – the great sugar-maple (*Acer saccharinum*). There is rice too, – vast fields of rice upon its marshy borders; but it is not the pearly grain of the South. It is the wild rice, "the water oats" (*Zizania aquatica*), the food of millions of winged creatures, and thousands of human beings as well. Here for three-fourths of the year the sun is feeble, and the aspect that of winter. For months the cold waters are bound up

in an icy embrace. The earth is covered with thick snow, over which rise the needle-leafed *coniferae*– the pines, the cedars, the spruce, and the hemlock. Very unlike each other are the countries watered by the two streams, the Red River of the South and its namesake of the North.

But whither go our Boy Hunters in their birch-bark canoe? The river upon which they are *voyaging* runs due northward into the great Lake Winnipeg. They are floating with its current, and consequently increasing the distance from their home. Whither go they?

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

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

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

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

The Boy Hunters – Basil, Lucien, François – became orphans. They knew of but *one* relation in the whole world, with whom their father had kept up any correspondence. This relation was an

uncle, and, strange as it may seem, a Scotchman – a Highlander, who had strayed to Corsica in early life, and had there married the Colonel's sister. That uncle had afterwards emigrated to Canada, and had become extensively engaged in the fur trade. He was now a superintendent or "factor" of the Hudson's Bay Company, stationed at one of their most remote posts near the shores of the Arctic Sea! There is a romance in the history of some men wilder than any fiction that could be imagined.

I have not yet answered the question as to where our Boy Hunters were journeying in their birch-bark canoe. By this time you will have divined the answer. Certainly, you will say, they were on their way to join their uncle in his remote home. For no other object could they be travelling through the wild regions of the Red River. That supposition is correct. To visit this Scotch uncle (they had not seen him for years) was the object of their long, toilsome, and perilous journey. After their father's death he had sent for them. He had heard of their exploits upon the prairies; and, being himself of an adventurous disposition, he was filled with admiration for his young kinsmen, and desired very much to have them come and live with him. Being now their guardian, he might command as much, but it needed not any exercise of authority on his part to induce all three of them to obey his summons. They had travelled through the mighty forests of the Mississippi, and upon the summer prairies of the South. These great features of the earth's surface were to them familiar things, and they were no longer curious about them.

But there remained a vast country which they longed eagerly to explore. They longed to look upon its shining lakes and crystal rivers; upon its snow-clad hills and ice-bound streams; upon its huge mammalia – its moose and its musk-oxen, its wapiti and its monster bears. This was the very country to which they were now invited by their kinsman, and cheerfully did they accept his invitation. Already had they made one-half the journey, though by far the easier half. They had travelled up the Mississippi, by steamboat as far as the mouth of the Saint Peter's. There they had commenced their canoe voyage – in other words became "voyageurs" – for such is the name given to those who travel by canoes through these wild territories. Their favourite horses and the mule "Jeannette" had been left behind. This was a necessity, as these creatures, however useful upon the dry prairies of the South, where there are few or no lakes, and where rivers only occur at long intervals, would be of little service to the traveller in the Northern regions. Here the route is crossed and intercepted by numerous rivers; and lakes of all sizes, with tracts of inundated marsh, succeed one another continually. Such, in fact, are the highways of the country, and the canoe the travelling carriage; so that a journey from one point of the Hudson's Bay territory to another is often a canoe voyage of thousands of miles – equal to a "trip" across the Atlantic!

Following the usual custom, therefore, our Boy Hunters had become voyageurs – "*Young Voyageurs*." They had navigated the Saint Peter's in safety, almost to its head-waters. These interlock

with the sources of the Red River. By a "portage" of a few miles they had crossed to the latter stream; and, having launched their canoe upon its waters, were now floating downward and northward with its current. But they had yet a long journey before them – nearly two thousand miles! Many a river to be "run," many a rapid to be "shot," many a lake to be crossed, and many a "portage" to be passed, ere they could reach the end of that great *voyage*.

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

Stay! We are to have another "*compagnon du voyage*." There is a fourth in the boat, a fourth "young voyageur." Who is he? In appearance he is as old as Basil, full as tall, and not unlike him in "build." But he is altogether of a different *colour*. He is fair-haired; but his hair (unlike that of Lucien, which is also light-coloured) is strong, crisp, and curly. It does not droop, but stands out over his cheeks in a profusion of handsome ringlets. His complexion is of that kind known as "fresh," and the weather, to which it has evidently been much exposed, has

bronzed and rather enriched the colour. The eyes are dark blue, and, strange to say, with *black* brows and lashes! This is not common, though sometimes observed; and, in the case of the youth we are describing, arose from a difference of complexion on the part of his parents. He looked through the eyes of his mother, while in other respects he was more like his father, who was fair-haired and of a "fresh" colour.

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

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

"the young voyageurs."

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

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

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

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

Chapter Three.
The Trumpeter Swan and the Bald Eagle

It was the spring season, though late. The snow had entirely disappeared from the hills, and the ice from the water, and the melting of both had swollen the river, and rendered its current more rapid than usual. Our young voyageurs needed not therefore to ply their oars, except now and then to guide the canoe; for these little vessels have no rudder, but are steered by the paddles. The skilful voyageurs can shoot them to any point they please, simply by their dexterous handling of the oars; and Basil, Lucien, and François, had had sufficient practice both with "skiffs" and "dugouts" to make good oarsmen of all three. They had made many a canoe trip upon the lower Mississippi and the bayous of Louisiana; besides their journey up the Saint Peter's had rendered them familiar with the management of their birchen craft. An occasional stroke of the paddle kept them in their course, and they floated on without effort. Norman – such was the name of their Canadian or Highland cousin – sat in the bow and directed their course. This is the post of honour in a canoe; and as he had more experience than any of them in this sort of navigation, he was allowed habitually to occupy this post. Lucien sat in the stern. He held in his hands

a book and pencil; and as the canoe glided onward, he was noting down his memoranda. The trees upon the banks were in leaf – many of them in blossom – and as the little craft verged near the shore, his keen eye followed the configuration of the leaves, to discover any new species that might appear. There is a rich vegetation upon the banks of the Red River; but the *flora* is far different from that which appears upon the low *alluvion* of Louisiana. It is Northern, but not Arctic. Oaks, elms, and poplars, are seen mingling with birches, willows, and aspens. Several species of indigenous fruit trees were observed by Lucien, among which were crab-apple, raspberry, strawberry, and currant. There was also seen the fruit called by the voyageurs "le poire," but which in English phraseology is known as the "service-berry" (*Amelanchier ovalis*). It grows upon a small bush or shrub of six or eight feet high, with smooth pinnate leaves. These pretty red berries are much esteemed and eaten both by Indians and whites, who preserve them by drying, and cook them in various ways. There was still another bush that fixed the attention of our young botanist, as it appeared all along the banks, and was a *characteristic* of the vegetation of the country. It was not over eight feet in height, with spreading branches of a grey colour. Its leaves were three inches wide, and somewhat lobed liked those of the oak. Of course, at this early season, the fruit was not ripe upon it; but Lucien knew the fruit well. When ripe it resembles very much a red cherry, or, still more, a cranberry, having both the appearance and acrid taste of the

latter. Indeed, it is sometimes used as a substitute for cranberries in the making of pies and tarts; and in many parts it is called the "bush cranberry." The name, however, by which it is known among the Indians of Red River is "*anepeminan*," from "*nepen*," summer, and "*minan*" berry. This has been corrupted by the fur-traders and voyageurs into "Pembina;" hence, the name of a river which runs into the Red, and also he name of the celebrated but unsuccessful settlement of "Pembina," formed by Lord Selkirk many years ago. Both took their names from this berry that grows in abundance in the neighbourhood. The botanical appellation of this curious shrub is *Viburnum oxycoccos*; but there is another species of the viburnum, which is also styled "oxycoccos." The common "snowball bush" of our gardens is a plant of the same genus, and very like the "Pembina" both in leaf and flower. In fact, in a wild state they might be regarded as the same; but it is well-known that the flowers of the snowball are sterile, and do not produce the beautiful bright crimson berries of the "Pembina." Lucien lectured upon these points to his companions as they floated along. Norman listened with astonishment to his philosophic cousin, who, although he had never been in this region before, knew more of its plants and trees than he did himself. Basil also was interested in the explanations given by his brother. On the contrary, François, who cared but little for botanical studies, or studies of any sort, was occupied differently. He sat near the middle of the canoe, double-barrel in hand, eagerly watching for a shot. Many species of water-fowl were

upon the river, for it was now late in the spring, and the wild geese and ducks had all arrived, and were passing northward upon their annual migration. During the day François had got several shots, and had "bagged" three wild geese, all of different kinds, for there are many species of wild geese in America. He had also shot some ducks. But this did not satisfy him. There was a bird upon the river that could not be approached. No matter how the canoe was manoeuvred, this shy creature always took flight before François could get within range. For days he had been endeavouring to kill one. Even upon the Saint Peter's many of them had been seen, sometimes in pairs, at other times in small flocks of six or seven, but always shy and wary. The very difficulty of getting a shot at them, along with the splendid character of the birds themselves, had rendered François eager to obtain one. The bird itself was no other than the great wild swan – the king of aquatic birds.

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

As François spoke he pointed down-stream to a great white bird that was seen moving out from the bank. It was a swan, and one of the very largest kind – a "trumpeter" (*Cygnus buccinator*).

It had been feeding in a sedge of the wild rice (*Zizania aquatica*), and no doubt the sight of the canoe or the plash of

the guiding oar had disturbed, and given it the alarm. It shot out from the reeds with head erect and wings slightly raised, offering to the eyes of the voyageurs a spectacle of graceful and majestic bearing, that, among the feathered race at least, is quite inimitable.

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

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

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

out of reach of his pursuers.

It soon began to appear that he judged rightly; and the voyageurs, to their chagrin, saw that, instead of gaining upon him, as they had expected, every moment widened the distance between him and the canoe. The bird had an advantage over his pursuers. Three distinct powers propelled him, while they had only two to rely upon. He had the current in his favour – so had they. He had oars or paddles – his feet; they had oars as well. He "carried sail," while they spread not a "rag." The wind chanced to blow directly down-stream, and the broad wings of the bird, held out from his body, and half extended, caught the very pith of the breeze on their double concave surfaces, and carried him through the water with the velocity of an arrow. Do you think that he was not aware of this advantage when he started in the race? Do you suppose that these birds do not *think*? I for one am satisfied they do, and look upon every one who prates about the *instinct* of these creatures as a philosopher of a very old school indeed. Not only does the great swan think, but so does your parrot, and your piping bullfinch, and the little canary that hops on your thumb. All think, and *reason*, and *judge*. Should it ever be your fortune to witness the performance of those marvellous birds, exhibited by the graceful Mademoiselle Vandermeersch in the fashionable *salons* of Paris and London, you will agree with me in the belief that the smallest of them has a mind like yourself.

Most certainly the swan, which our voyageurs were pursuing, thought, and reasoned, and judged, and calculated his distance,

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

They would have given up the pursuit, had they not noticed that a few hundred yards farther down the river made a sharp turn to the right. The swan, on reaching this, would no longer have the wind in his favour. This inspired them with fresh hopes. They thought they would be able to overtake him after passing the bend, and then, either get a shot at him, or force him into the air. The latter was the more likely; and, although it would be no great gratification to see him fly off, yet they had become so interested in this singular chase that they desired to terminate it by putting the trumpeter to some trouble. They bent, therefore, with fresh energy to their oars, and pulled onward in the pursuit. First the swan, and after him the canoe, swung round the bend, and entered the new "reach" of the river. The voyageurs at once perceived that the bird now swam more slowly. He no longer "carried sail," as the wind was no longer in his favour. His wings lay closely folded to his body, and he moved only by the aid

of his webbed feet and the current, which last happened to be sluggish, as the river at this part spread over a wide expanse of level land. The canoe was evidently catching up, and each stroke was bringing the pursuers nearer to the pursued.

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

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

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

The trumpeter knew it as well as any of them, but on him

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

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

Presently the swan rose to the surface, but his head was hardly out of the water when the eagle once more uttered its wild note, and, half folding its wings, darted down from above. The swan seemed to have expected this, for before the eagle could reach the surface, he had gone under a second time, and the latter, though passing with the velocity of an arrow, plunged his talons in the water to no purpose. With a cry of disappointment the eagle mounted back into the air, and commenced wheeling in circles over the spot. It was now joined by its mate, and both kept round and round watching for the reappearance of their intended victim.

Again the swan came to the surface, but before either of the eagles could swoop upon him he had for the third time disappeared. The swan is but an indifferent diver; but under such circumstances he was likely to do his best at it. But what could it avail him? He must soon rise to the surface to take breath – each time at shorter intervals. He would soon become fatigued

and unable to dive with sufficient celerity, and then his cruel enemies would be down upon him with their terrible talons. Such is the usual result, unless the swan takes to the air, which he sometimes does. In the present case he had built his hopes upon a different means of escape. He contemplated being able to conceal himself in a heavy sedge of bulrushes (*Scirpus lacustris*) that grew along the edge of the river, and towards these he was evidently directing his course under the water. At each emersion he appeared some yards nearer them, until at length he rose within a few feet of their margin, and diving again was seen no more! He had crept in among the sedge, and no doubt was lying with only his head, or part of it, above the water, his body concealed by the broad leaves of the *nymphae*, while the head itself could not be distinguished among the white flowers that lay thickly along the surface. The eagles now wheeled over the sedge, flapping the tops of the bulrushes with their broad wings, and screaming with disappointed rage. Keen as were their eyes they could not discover the hiding-place of their victim. No doubt they would have searched for it a long while, but the canoe – which they now appeared to notice for the first time – had floated near; and, becoming aware of their own danger, both mounted into the air again, and with a farewell scream flew off, and alighted at some distance down the river.

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

The canoe was headed for the bulrushes near the point where

the trumpeter had been last seen; and a few strokes of the paddles brought the little craft with a whizzing sound among the sedge. But the culms of the rushes were so tall, and grew so closely together, that the canoemen, after entering, found to their chagrin they could not see six feet around them. They dared not stand up, for this is exceedingly dangerous in a birch canoe, where the greatest caution is necessary to keep the vessel from careening over. Moreover, the sedge was so thick, that it was with difficulty they could use their oars. They remained stationary for a time, surrounded by a wall of green bulrush. They soon perceived that that would never do, and resolved to push back into the open water. Meanwhile Marengo had been sent into the sedge, and was now heard plunging and sweltering about in search of the game. Marengo was not much of a water-dog by nature, but he had been trained to almost every kind of hunting, and his experience among the swamps of Louisiana had long since relieved him of all dread for the water. His masters therefore had no fear but that Marengo would "put up" the trumpeter.

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

after clearing the sedge, rose almost vertically into the air. These birds usually fly at a great elevation – sometimes entirely beyond the reach of sight. Unlike the wild geese and ducks, they never alight upon land, but always upon the bosom of the water. It was evidently the intention of this one to go far from the scene of his late dangers, perhaps to the great Lake Winnipeg itself. After attaining a height of several hundred yards, he flew forward in a horizontal course, and followed the direction of the stream. His flight was now regular, and his trumpet-note could be heard at intervals, as, with outstretched neck, he glided along the heavens. He seemed to feel the pleasant sensations that every creature has after an escape from danger, and no doubt he fancied himself secure. But in this fancy he deceived himself. Better for him had he risen a few hundred yards higher, or else had uttered his self-gratulation in a more subdued tone; for it was heard and answered, and that response was the maniac laugh of the white-headed eagle. At the same instant two of these birds – those already introduced – were seen mounting into the air. They did not fly up vertically, as the swan had done, but in spiral curves, wheeling and crossing each other as they ascended. They were making for a point that would intersect the flight of the swan should he keep on in his horizontal course. This, however, he did not do. With an eye as quick as theirs, he saw that he was "headed;" and, stretching his long neck upward, he again pursued an almost vertical line. But he had to carry thirty pounds of flesh and bones, while the largest of the eagles – the female bird –

with a still broader spread of wing, was a "light weight" of only seven. The result of this difference was soon apparent. Before the trumpeter had got two hundred yards higher, the female of the eagles was seen wheeling around him on the same level. The swan was now observed to double, fly downward, and then upward again, while his mournful note echoed back to the earth. But his efforts were in vain. After a series of contortions and manoeuvres, the eagle darted forward, with a quick toss threw herself back downward, and, striking upward, planted her talons in the under part of the wing of her victim. The lacerated shaft fell uselessly down; and the great white bird, no longer capable of flight, came whistling through the air. But it was not allowed to drop directly to the earth; it would have fallen on the bosom of the broad river, and that the eagles did not wish, as it would have given them some trouble to get the heavy carcass ashore. As soon as the male – who was lower in the air – saw that his partner had struck the bird, he discontinued his upward flight, and, poising himself on his spread tail, waited its descent. A single instant was sufficient. The white object passed him still fluttering; but the moment it was below his level he shot after it like an arrow, and, clutching it in his talons, with an outward stroke sent it whizzing in a diagonal direction. The next moment a crashing was heard among the twigs, and a dull sound announced that the swan had fallen upon the earth.

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

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

As it was just the hour for a "noon halt" and a luncheon, the swan was carried to the bank of the river, where a crackling fire was soon kindled to roast him; and while this operation was going on the "naturalist" was requested by his companions to give them an account of the "swans of America."

Chapter Four.
The Swans of America

"Very well, then," said Lucien, agreeing to the request. "I shall tell you all I know of the swans; and, indeed, that is not much, as the natural history of these birds in their wild state is but little understood. On account of their shy habits, there is not much opportunity of observing them; and as they annually migrate and breed in those desolate regions within the Arctic circle, where civilised men do not live, but little information has been collected about them. Some of the species, however, breed in the temperate zones, and the habits of these are better known.

"For a long time it was fancied there was but one species of swan. It is now known that there are several, distinguished from each other in form, colour, voice, and habits. 'White as a swan,' is a simile as old, perhaps; as language itself. This, I fancy, would sound strangely to the ears of a native Australian, who is accustomed to look upon swans as being of the very opposite colour, for the black swan is a native of that country.

"According to the naturalist Brehm, who has given much attention to this subject, there are four distinct species of swans in Europe. They are all white, though some of the species have a reddish orange tinge about the head and neck. Two of them are 'gibbous,' that is, with a knob or protuberance upon the

upper part of the bill. One of these Brehm terms the 'white-headed gibbous swan' (*Cygnus gibbus*). The other is the 'yellow-headed' (*Cygnus olor*); and this last also is known as the *mute* or *tame* swan, because it is that species most commonly seen in a tame state upon the ornamental lakes and ponds of England. The other two European species Brehm has designated 'singing swans,' as both of them utter a note that may be heard to a considerable distance.

"The black swan of Australia (*Cygnus niger*) has been naturalised in Europe, and breeds freely in England, where, from its great size and peculiar markings, it is one of the most ornamental of water-fowls. It is, moreover, a great tyrant, and will not permit other birds to approach its haunt, but drives them off, striking them furiously with its strong broad wings.

"Until a late period the swans of America were supposed to be all of one kind. This is not the case. There are now known to be three distinct species inhabiting the fur countries, and migrating annually to the South. That which is best known is the 'whistler,' or 'hooper' (*Cygnus Americanus*), because it is the species that abounds in the old States upon the Atlantic, and was therefore more observed by naturalists. It is believed to be identical with one of the European 'singing' swans (*Cygnus ferus*), but this is not certain; and for my part, I believe they are different, as the eggs of the American swan are greenish, while those of its European congener are brownish, with white blotches.

"The 'hooper' is four and a half feet in length, though there are

males still larger, some of them measuring five feet. Its colour is white, except upon the head and back part of the neck, where there is a coppery tinge. The bill and feet are black. From the angle of the mouth to the eye there is a small naked 'cere,' of a bright yellow colour. These swans, like others of the genus, do not care much for the salt water. They are rarely seen upon the sea, except near its shores, where they may find the aquatic plants upon which they feed. Nor do they go out upon the large lakes. When found upon these, it is generally close in to the land. This is accounted for by the fact that the swans do not 'dive' for their food, but stretch down for it with their long necks, which Nature has peculiarly adapted to this very purpose. Their favourite food consists of the roots of aquatic plants, which are often farinaceous. As these grow best in the shallow small lakes and along the margins of rivers, such places are the usual resort of the swans. Although their diet is a vegetable one, it is not exclusively so, as they will eat frogs, worms, and small fish. Unlike the ducks and geese, they rarely feed upon land, but while floating upon the surface of the water. They walk but awkwardly on land, and are at home only on water or in the air. In the air they are quite at home, and fly so swiftly that it is no easy matter to shoot them, especially when going before the wind. At such times they are supposed to fly at the rate of one hundred miles an hour. When moulting, and unable to rise into the air, it is no easy matter to follow them even with a canoe. By means of their broad feet and strong wings, they can flutter so quickly over the

water, now and then diving, that the hunter cannot overtake them in his boat, but is obliged to use his gun in the pursuit.

"The 'hoopers' are migratory, – that is, they pass to the north every spring, and southward again in the autumn. Why they make these annual migrations, remains one of the mysteries of nature. Some believe they migrate to the north, because they there find those desolate uninhabited regions where they can bring forth their young in security. But this explanation cannot be the true one, as there are also uninhabited regions in the south, even under the equator, where they may be equally free from the presence of man. Another explanation might be offered. In hot and tropical countries most of the small lakes and swamps, where these birds love to dwell, dry up during the summer months: hence the necessity of a migration to colder and moister regions. But this would only hold good of the wading and water birds; it would not account for the migration of the many other birds of passage.

"A better explanation may be this: The north and the cold zones are the natural habitat of most migratory birds. It is there that they bring forth their young, and there they are at home. In tropical regions they are only sojourners for a season, forced thither, some of them, by a cold which they do not relish; but others, such as the water-fowl, by the frost, which, binding up the lakes, rivers, and swamps, hinders them from procuring their food. They are thus compelled to make an annual migration to the open waters of the South, but as soon as the ice has given way before the genial breath of spring, they all return rejoicing

to their favourite home in the North, when their season of love commences.

"The 'hoopers' follow this general law, and migrate to the northward every spring. They breed upon islets in the numerous lakes that stud the whole northern part of the American continent. Eminences in swamps are also chosen for breeding places, and the ends of promontories that jut out into the water. The spot selected is always such that the swan, when seated upon her nest, can have a view of the surrounding country, and detect any enemy long before it can approach her. The top of the dome-shaped dwellings of the musk-rat, or musquash (*Fibre zibethicus*), is often selected by the swan for her nest. These curious little houses are usually in the midst of impenetrable swamps: they are only occupied by their builders during the winter; and as they are deserted by them in early spring, they are therefore quite at the service of the swan for the 'balance of the season.' The bird makes a large cavity in the top, and lines it with such reeds and grass as may be found near the spot.

"The hooper lays from six to eight eggs, and sits upon them for a period of six weeks, when the cygnets come forth covered with a thick down of a bluish-grey colour. While sitting upon her eggs, the swan is exceedingly watchful and shy. She 'faces' towards the point whence she most apprehends danger. When the weather is severe, and the wind cold and keen, she changes into that position which is most comfortable. If her nest be upon a promontory instead of an island, she usually sits with her head

to the land, as she feels secure that no enemy will reach her from the waterside. From the land she has not only man to 'look out' for, but the wolverene (*Gulo luscus*), the lynx (*Felis Canadensis*), foxes, and wolves.

"The Indians often snare the swan upon her nest. Of course the snare – a running noose made from the intestines of the deer – is set in her absence. It is placed upon the side by which she enters, as these birds enter and leave the nest upon opposite sides. The snare must be arranged with great care, and with *clean hands*; and the Indians always take the precaution to wash their hands before setting it, else the swans, whose sense of smell is very acute, will perceive the presence of danger, and will not only keep away for a time, but sometimes desert the eggs altogether. There are many other birds that have a similar habit.

"So much for the 'hooper,'" continued Lucien; "now for the 'trumpeter.' This is the largest of the American swans, being found to measure seventy inches in length. Its specific name 'trumpeter' (Cygnus *buccinator*) is given to it on account of its note, which resembles the sound of a French horn, or trumpet, played at a distance. The bird is white, with black bill and feet, and has also a reddish orange or copper tinge upon the crown and neck; but it wants the yellow spot between the split of the mandibles and the eye. It is easily distinguished from the hooper, both by its louder note and larger body. Its habits, however, are very similar, except that it seems to be more gregarious, – small flocks of six or eight often appearing together, while the hooper

is seen only in pairs, and sometimes solitary. Another distinction is, that the trumpeter arrives much earlier in its migrations to the North, being the earliest bird that appears except the eagles. It breeds as far South as latitude 61 degrees, but most generally within the Arctic circle. Its nest is constructed similarly to those of the hooper, but its eggs are much larger, one of them being a meal for a moderate eater, without bread or any other addition. The trumpeter frequently arrives in the North before the lakes or rivers are thawed. It is then obliged to find sustenance at the rapids and waterfalls, where the Indians can approach under cover, and many are shot at such times by these people. At all other times, as you, François, have observed, it is a bird most difficult of approach; and the Indian hunters only attempt it when they have a long-range gun loaded with ball.

"The third species of American swans is that known as Bewick's swan (Cygnus *Bewickii*), called after the naturalist of that name. It is the smallest of the three, rarely measuring over fifty-two inches in length, and weighing only fourteen pounds, while the hooper is over twenty pounds in weight, and the trumpeter is often obtained of the enormous weight of thirty!

"Bewick's swan is also said to be identical with one of Brehm's singing swans. Its colour is almost similar to that of the hooper, and the two are often mistaken for each other. The size and the tail-feathers of all three of the American swans form a sufficiently specific distinction. In the trumpeter these are twenty-four in number, in the hooper twenty, while the small

species has only eighteen.

"Of the three, the last-mentioned is the latest on its annual journey, but it breeds farther North than either of the others. Its nest is found upon the islands of the Arctic Sea; it is usually built of peat-moss, and is of gigantic dimensions, being six feet long by five in width, and nearly two feet high. In the top of this pile is the nest itself, forming a large round cavity nearly two feet in diameter. The eggs are of a brownish white, with clouds of darker tint.

"I have remarked," continued Lucien, "a singularity in the geographical distribution of these three species. Upon the Pacific coast the smallest kind and the hooper only are met with, and the small ones outnumber the others in the ratio of five to one. In the interior parts of the continent only the hoopers and trumpeters appear; and the trumpeters are by far the most numerous, while upon the eastern coasts of America the hoopers are the sort best known.

"The swans are eagerly hunted both by the Indians and white hunters. Their skins, with the quills and down, form a source of profit to the natives of the fur countries, who dispose of them to the Hudson's Bay Company. In some years as many as ten thousand skins have been exported, and sold at the rate of six or seven shillings each. Most of the skins thus sold were those of the trumpeter swans, which are the most numerous.

"Now," said Lucien, in conclusion, "you know as much about the swans as I do; so I shall drop the subject, and recommend to

all of you a piece of roast swan, which is now just done to a turn, and which I doubt not will be found less dry than my lecture."

Chapter Five.
A Swan-Hunt by Torchlight

A few days brought our travellers to the settlement of Red River, where they made but a very short stay; and, having procured a few articles which they stood in need of, they resumed their journey, and floated on towards Lake Winnipeg. The swans were seen in greater numbers than ever. They were not less shy however, and François, as before, in vain tried to get a shot at one. He was very desirous of bringing down one of these noble birds, partly because the taste he had had of their flesh had given him a liking for it; and partly because their shyness had greatly tantalised him. One is always more eager to kill shy game, both on account of the rarity of the thing, and the credit one gets for his expertness. But the voyageurs had now got within less than twenty miles of Lake Winnipeg, and François had not as yet shot a single swan. It was not at all likely the eagles would help him to another. So there would be no more roast swan for supper.

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

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

"I do," replied François, – "I do; and if you can tell me how to accomplish that business, I'll make you a present of this

knife." Here François held up a very handsome clasp-knife that he carried in his pouch.

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

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

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

"Oh! I have no objection," said Lucien.

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

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

"Is it necessary the night should be a dark one?" asked

François.

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

"Oh! certainly – let us land," replied all three at once.

The canoe was now turned to the shore; and when it had arrived within a few feet of the land it was brought to a stop. Its keel was not allowed to touch the bottom of the river, as that would have injured the little craft. The greatest precaution is always observed both in landing and embarking these vessels. The voyageurs first get out and wade to the shore, one or two remaining to hold the canoe in its place. The cargo, whatever it be, is then taken out and landed; and after that the canoe itself is lifted out of the water, and carried ashore, where it is set, bottom upward, to dry. The birch-bark canoe is so frail a structure, that, were it brought rudely in contact either with the bottom or the bank, it would be very much damaged, or might go to pieces altogether. Hence the care with which it is handled. It is dangerous, also, to stand upright in it, as it is so "crank" that it would easily turn over, and spill both canoemen and cargo into the water. The voyageurs, therefore, when once they have got in, remain seated during the whole passage, shifting about as little as they can help. When landed for the night, the canoe is always taken out of the water as described. The bark is of a somewhat

spongy nature; and if left in the water for a length of time, would become soaked and heavy, and would not run so well. When kept all night, bottom upward, it drips and becomes dryer and lighter. In the morning, at the commencement of the day's journey, it sits higher upon the water than in the afternoon and evening, and is at that time more easily paddled along.

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

Norman proceeded as follows: —

He walked off into the woods, accompanied by François. After going about an hundred yards or so, he stopped at the foot of a certain tree. The tree was a birch – easily distinguished by its smooth, silvery bark. By means of his sharp hunting-knife he "girdled" this tree near the ground, and then higher up, so that the length between the two "girdlings," or circular cuttings, was about four feet. He then made a longitudinal incision by drawing the point of his knife from one circle to the other. This done he inserted the blade under the bark, and peeled it off, as he would have taken the skin from a buffalo. The tree was a foot in diameter, consequently the bark, when stripped off and spread

flat, was about three feet in width; for you must remember that the circumference of a circle or a cylinder is always about three times the length of its diameter, and therefore a tree is three times as much "*round*" as it is "*through*."

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

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

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

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

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

All four now sat down to supper, which consisted of dry meat, with biscuits and coffee; and, as their appetites were sharpened

by their water journey, they made a hearty meal of it.

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

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

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

Next came Basil with his rifle. He sat near François, just by the middle of the little vessel. Lucien, who was altogether a man

of peace principles, and but little of a shot compared with either of his brothers, handled the oar – not to propel the canoe, but merely to guide it. In this way the party floated on in silence.

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

The advantage of the plan which Norman had adopted was at once apparent to all. Ahead of the canoe the whole river was plainly seen for a distance of several hundred yards. No object larger than a cork could have floated on its surface, without being visible to those in the vessel – much less the great white body of a trumpeter swan. Astern of the canoe, on the other hand, all was pitchy darkness, and any one looking at the vessel from a position ahead could have seen nothing but the bright torch and the black uniform surface behind it. As I have already stated, the concave side of the bark was towards the blaze, and the pan containing the torch being placed close in to the screen, none of the light could possibly fall upon the forms of those within the canoe. They were therefore invisible to any creature from the front, while they themselves could see everything before them.

Two questions yet remained unanswered. First, – would our hunters find any swans on the river? Second, – if they should, would these birds allow themselves to be approached near enough to be shot at? The first question Norman, of course, could not answer. That was a matter beyond his knowledge or control. The swans might or might not appear, but it was to be hoped they would. It was likely enough. Many had been seen on the preceding day, and why not then? To the second question, the young Canadian gave a definite reply. He assured his cousins that, if met with, the birds would be easily approached in this manner; he had often hunted them so. They would either keep their place, and remain until the light came very near them, or they would move towards it (as he had many times known them to do), attracted by curiosity and the novelty of the spectacle. He had hunted deer in the same manner; he had shot, he said, hundreds of these animals upon the banks of rivers, where they had come down to the water to drink, and stood gazing at the light.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

It soon ended, however, as matters now became serious: they were already within less than two hundred yards of the game, and the greatest caution had to be observed. The gunners had arranged the order of fire: Basil was to shoot first, taking steady

aim with his rifle at any one of the birds; while François should fire as soon as he heard the report of his brother's gun, taking the remaining swans upon the wing, with one or both barrels, as he best might.

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

Chapter Six.
“Cast Away.”

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

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

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

A short distance below the place where they had shot the last swan, as they were rounding a bend in the river, a loud rushing sounded in their ears; similar to that produced by a cascade or

waterfall. On first hearing it, they were startled and somewhat alarmed. It might be a "fall," thought they. Norman could not tell: he had never travelled this route; he did not know whether there were falls in the Red River or not, but he believed not. In his voyage to the South, he had travelled by another route; that was, up the Winnipeg River, and through Rainy Lake and the Lake of the Woods to Lake Superior. This is the usual and well-known track followed by the *employés* of the Hudson's Bay Company; and Norman had travelled it.

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

Their conjecture proved to be correct. As they approached nearer, they perceived that the noise appeared every moment more and more to their right; and presently they saw, below them, a rapid current sweeping into the Red River from the right bank. This was easily distinguished by the white froth and bubbles that were carried along upon its surface, and which had evidently been produced by some fall over which the water had lately passed. The hunters now rowed fearlessly forward, and in a few moments

came opposite the *débouchure* of the tributary stream, when a considerable cascade appeared to their view, not thirty yards from the Red River itself. The water foamed and dashed over a series of steps, and then swept rapidly on, in a frothy current. They had entered this current, and were now carried along with increased velocity, so that the oarsmen suspended operations, and drew their paddles within the canoe.

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

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

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

Basil and Norman fired first, and simultaneously; but the

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

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

The voice of Norman was heard exclaiming, "Hold with your oars! – the rapids! – the rapids!" At the same time he himself was seen rising up and stretching forward for an oar. All was now consternation; and the movements of the party naturally consequent upon such a sudden panic shook the little craft until her gunwales lipped the water. At the same time she had swung round, until the light again showed the stream ahead, and a horrid sight it was. Far as the eye could see was a reach of foaming rapids. Dark points of rocks, and huge black boulders, thickly scattered in the channel, jutted above the surface; and around

and against these, the water frothed and hissed furiously. There was no cataract, it is true – there is none such in Red River – but for all purposes of destruction the rapids before them were equally dangerous and terrible to the eyes of our voyageurs. They no longer thought of the swans. The dead were permitted to float down unheeded, the wounded to make its escape. Their only thought was to stop the canoe before it should be carried upon the rapids.

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

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

For some moments the vessel, pressed by the current against the rock, remained motionless, but her sides were stove in, and the water was rushing through. The quick eye of Basil – cool in all crises of extreme danger – perceived this at a glance. He saw

that the canoe was a wreck, and nothing remained but to save themselves as they best might. Dropping the oar, and seizing his rifle, he called to his companions to leap to the rock: and all together immediately sprang over the gunwale. The dog Marengo followed after.

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

Chapter Seven.
A Bridge of Buckskin

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

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

swans they had killed, and they heard only the roaring of the water, that sounded in their ears with a hoarse and melancholy wail.

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

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

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

pass the night.

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

Another fact worth remembering is, that upon the eastern or Atlantic coast of the American Continent it is much colder in the same latitude than on the western or Pacific side. The Pacific "sea-board" in its climate is more like the western edge of the old continent. This would seem to indicate that the climate of a coast country is much influenced by the side upon which the ocean lies, whether east or west. This in reality is the case, for you may observe on your map that the western coasts of both

the "old world" and the "new" are somewhat similarly placed in regard to their oceans, and hence the similarity of their climates.

There are many other causes connected with this; such as the direction of winds, and the different effects produced by them on the atmosphere when they have passed over water or over land. It was, and is still by many people believed, that the winds are produced by the air becoming heated in a particular place, and then ascending, and leaving a "vacuum" into which the colder air rushes from all sides around. This "rushing," it was supposed, made the wind. To some extent this theory is true, but there are several other causes that operate in producing wind. Electricity – an agent hitherto but little known, but one of the most important elements of our Earth – has much to do with the winds; and the revolution of the Earth on its own axis has also an influence upon them. Indeed it is to be wondered at, that mankind should have so long remained satisfied with the very unsatisfactory theory of the *heated air*. But it is not to be wondered at either, when we consider how little mankind has had to do with these things – when we consider that as yet nearly every country upon the face of the globe is despotic; that the whole time of the great body of the people is occupied in a struggle for life – occupied in toiling for a few, who by the most cunning devices rob them of the fruits of their toils – rob them so skilfully that the poor blinded masses have grown to consider eternal toil as the *natural state of man*– nay more, are ready to persecute him who would elevate them, and worship him who would sink them deeper in

baseness and bondage; – when we reflect on this almost hopeless darkness of soul that has marked the history of the past, and is too much the character of the present, we need not wonder that so few have had either leisure or inclination to yield themselves to the acquirement or prosecution of scientific knowledge. "The winds have blown where they listed, and we have heard the sound thereof," but men absorbed in the hard struggle of life have found but little time to inquire "whence they come or whither they go."

The people of the United States are yet but partially free. They still inherit, from customs and prejudices, the fruits of an ancestral oppression, and a bondage of centuries of duration. But even their *partial* freedom has already shown its good effects. At this moment knowledge is progressing faster among these people than any other on the face of the earth. Meteorology begins to assume the palpable shape of an exact science. The winds are being traced in their currents, and followed through all their windings, by Maury and other men of talent; and if you live twenty years longer (and I hope you may live three times as many years), you will no doubt be able to tell "whence the wind cometh and whither it goeth."

Well, we began this politico-scientific discussion by observing that it was very cold in the latitude of Lake Winnipeg, even in late spring. Only at night though; the days are sometimes so hot there that you might fancy yourself in the tropics. These extremes are characteristic of the climate of all American countries, and particularly those that lie at a distance from the sea-coast.

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

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

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

From the rock to the right bank was about an hundred yards' distance. Here and there, at irregular intervals, sharp, jagged

stones rose above the surface, some of them projecting three feet or more out of the water, and looking *very* much like upright tombstones. Lucien had noticed these, and expressed the opinion that if they only had a rope, they might fling it over one of these stones, and then, holding it fast at the other end, might pass by that means from one to the other.

The suggestion was a good one, but where was the rope to come from? All their ropes and cords – lassoes and all – had been swept away in the wreck. Not a string remained, except those that fastened their horns, flasks, and other accoutrements; and these were only small thongs, and would be of no use for such a purpose. It would require a rope strong enough to carry the weight of a man impelled by a rapid current – in fact, a weight equal to that of several men. They all set to thinking how this was to be obtained. Each looked at the other, and scanned the straps and thongs that were around their bodies. They were satisfied at a glance that these would not be sufficient to make such a rope as was wanted. They did not give up the hope of being able to obtain one. They were all of them accustomed to resort to strange expedients, and a sufficiently strange one now suggested itself. Basil and Norman seemed to have thought of it at the same time, for both at once unbuckled their straps, and commenced pulling off their buckskin hunting-shirts. The others said nothing, as they knew well what they were going to do with them – they knew they intended cutting them into strips, and then twisting a rope out of them.

All four set to work together. Lucien and François held the shirts taut, while Basil and Norman handled the knives, and in a few minutes the rock was covered with strips of buckskin about two inches wide, by a yard or so in length. These were next joined and plaited together in such a manner that a rope was formed nearly forty feet long. An eye was made at one end, and through this the other end was reeved – so that a running noose was obtained, in the same manner as the Mexicans and Indians make their lassoes. The rope was now ready for use, and Basil was the very hand to use it; for Basil knew how to fling a lasso as well as either Mexican or Indian. He had practised it often, and had lassoed many a long-horned bull upon the prairies of Opelousas and the Attakapas. To Basil, therefore, the rope was given. He placed himself on the highest part of the rock, having first coiled the new-made lasso, and hung the coil lightly over his left arm. He then took the noose-end in his right hand, and commenced winding it around his head. His companions had laid themselves flat, so as not to be in the way of the noose as it circled about. After a few turns the rope was launched forth, and a loud "hurrah!" from François announced that the throw was successful. It was so in fact, as the noose was seen settling smoothly over the jutting-stone, taking full hold upon it. A pull from Basil fixed it; and in a few minutes it was made quite fast, without the slightest danger of its slipping off. The other end was then carried round a projecting point of the rock on which they stood, and knotted firmly, so that the rope was quite taut, and

stretched in a nearly horizontal direction, about a foot above the surface of the water.

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

Basil passed over first. He was the oldest, and, as he asserted, it was but right he should run the risk in testing the new-fashioned bridge, of which he was the architect. It worked admirably, and sustained the weight of his body, with the whole force of the current acting upon it. Of course he was swept far down, and the rope was stretched to its full tension, but he succeeded in handing himself along, until he was able to touch the second rock, and clamber upon it in safety. During the passage across he was watched by his companions with emotions of no ordinary character, but as soon as he had reached the opposite end of the rope all three uttered a loud and simultaneous cheer. Lucien passed over next, and after him François. Notwithstanding his danger, François laughed loudly all the time he was in the water, while his brothers were not without some fears for his safety. Marengo was next attached to the rope, and pulled safely over.

Norman was the last to cross upon the buckskin bridge, but, like the others, he landed in safety; and the four, with the dog, now stood upon the little isolated boulder, where there was just

room enough to give them all a footing.

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

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

"It cannot be done," said one. "Impossible," rejoined another. "We must make a second rope. François's shirt still remains, and our leggings – we can use them."

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

"Stop!"

"Well, what is it, brother?" asked Lucien.

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

"How do you mean to do it, brother?"

"Sit close, all of you. Give me room – you shall see presently."

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

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

A moment more and the crack of his rifle was heard. At the same instant the dust rose up from the point at which he had

aimed, and several small fragments flew off into the water. Again was heard François's "hurrah," for François, as well as the others, had seen that the rope had been hit at the right place, and now exhibited a mangled appearance.

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

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

station. Here, however, their labour ended. They found that from this point to the shore the river was shallow, and fordable; and, leaving the rope where it was, all four took the water, and waded safely to the bank.

Chapter Eight.
Decoying the "Goats."

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

After reaching the shore, their first thoughts were about procuring something to eat. They had now been a long time without food, and all four were hungry enough. As if by one impulse, all cast their eyes around, and looked upward among the branches of the tree's, to see if any animal could be discovered that might serve them for a meal. Bird or quadruped, it mattered not, so that it was large enough to give the four a breakfast. But neither one nor the other was to be seen, although the woods

around had a promising appearance. The trees were large, and as there was much underwood, consisting of berry-bushes and plants with edible roots, our voyageurs did not doubt that there would be found game in abundance. It was agreed, then, that Lucien and François should remain on the spot and kindle a fire, while Basil and Norman went off in search of something to be cooked upon it.

In less than an hour the latter returned, carrying an animal upon his shoulders, which both the boys recognised as an old acquaintance, – the prong-horned antelope (*Antilope furcifer*), so called from the single fork or prong upon its horns. Norman called it "a goat," and stated that this was its name among the fur-traders, while the Canadian voyageurs give it the title of "cabree." Lucien, however, knew the animal well. He knew it was not of the goat kind, but a true antelope, and the only animal of that genus found in North America. Its habitat is the prairie country, and at the present time it is not found farther east than the prairies extend, nor farther north either, as it is not a creature that can bear extreme cold. In early times, however – that is, nearly two centuries ago – it must have ranged nearly to the Atlantic shores, as Father Hennepin in his Travels speaks of "goats" being killed in the neighbourhood of Niagara, meaning no other than the prong-horned antelopes. The true wild goat of America is a very different animal, and is only found in the remote regions of the Rocky Mountains.

What Norman had shot, then, was an antelope; and the reason

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

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

While skinning the antelope for breakfast, Norman amused his companions by relating how he had killed it. He said that he had got near enough to shoot it by practising a “dodge.” After

travelling through the woods for some half-mile or so, he had come out into a country of "openings," and saw that there was a large prairie beyond. He saw that the woods extended no farther than about a mile from the banks of the river, and that the whole country beyond was without timber, except in scattered clumps. This is, in fact, true of the Red River country, particularly of its western part, from which the great prairies stretch westward, even to the "foot-hills" (*piedmont*) of the Rocky Mountains. Well, then, after arriving at the openings, Norman espied a small herd of antelopes, about ten or a dozen in all. He would rather they had been something else, as elk or deer; for, like the Indians, he did not much relish the "goat's" meat. He was too hungry, however, to be nice, and so he set about trying to get within shot of the herd. There was no cover, and he knew he could not approach near enough without using some stratagem. He therefore laid himself flat upon his back, and raised his heels as high as he could into the air. These he kicked about in such a manner, as soon to attract the attention of the antelopes, that, curious to make out what it was, commenced running round and round in circles, of which Norman himself was the centre. The circles gradually became smaller and smaller, until the hunter saw that his game was within range; when, slyly rolling himself round on one shoulder, he took aim at a buck, and fired. The buck fell, and the rest of the herd bounded off like the wind. Norman feeling hungry himself, and knowing that his companions were suffering from the same cause, lost no time in looking for other

game; but shouldering the "goat," carried it into camp.

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

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

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

This question the three began to ask one another. They began to grow uneasy about their absent companion; and as the hours

passed on without his appearing, their uneasiness increased to serious alarm. They at length resolved to go in search of him. They took different directions, so that there would be a better chance of finding him. Norman struck out into the woods, while Lucien and François, followed by the dog Marengo, kept down the bank – thinking that if Basil had got lost, he would make for the river to guide him, as night approached. All were to return to the camp at nightfall whether successful or not.

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

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

It was near midnight, and they were sitting silently around the

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

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

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

"Hilloa!" shouted the three by the fire.

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

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

Basil's request was instantly complied with. The fire was raked

up, spits were speedily procured, a tongue and one of the grouse were roasted; and although Lucien, François, and Norman, had already supped on the "goat's meat," they set to upon the new viands with fresh appetites. Basil was hungrier than any, for he had been all the while fasting. It was not because he was without meat, but because he knew that his comrades would be uneasy about him, and he would not stop to cook it. Of meat he had enough, since he had slain the two buffaloes to which the tongues had belonged; and these same buffaloes, he now informed them, had been the cause of his long absence.

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

Chapter Nine.
A "Partridge Dance."

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

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

birds began to stretch up their necks, and then all rose together to their feet, and commenced running round the ring as before. I knew they were performing what is called the 'Partridge Dance;' and as I had never witnessed it I held back awhile, and looked on. Even hungry as I was, and as I knew all of you to be, so odd were the movements of these creatures, that I could not resist watching them a while, before I sent my unwelcome messenger into their 'ballroom.' Now and then an old cock would separate from the pack, and running out to some distance, would leap upon a rock that was there; then, after dropping his wings, flirting with his spread tail, erecting the ruff upon his neck, and throwing back his head, he would swell and strut upon the rock, exhibiting himself like a diminutive turkey-cock. After manoeuvring in this way for a few moments, he would commence flapping his wings in short quick strokes, which grew more rapid as he proceeded, until a 'booming' sound was produced, more like the rumble of distant thunder than anything I can think of.

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

"I could have watched their manoeuvres much longer," continued Basil, "but hunger got the better of me, and I made ready to fire. Those that were 'dancing' moved so quickly round the ring that I could not sight one of them. If I had had a shot-gun, I might have covered several, but with the rifle I could not

hope for more than a single bird; so, wanting to make sure of that, I waited until an old cock mounted the rock, and got to 'drumming.' Then I sighted him, and sent my bullet through his crop. I heard the loud whirr of the pack as they rose up from the ring; and, marking them, I saw that they all alighted only a couple of hundred yards off, upon a large spruce-tree. Hoping they would sit there until I could get another shot, I loaded as quickly as possible, and stepped forward. The course I took brought me past the one I had killed, which I picked up, and thrust hastily into my bag. Beyond this I had to pass over some logs that lay along the ground, with level spaces between them. What was my surprise in getting among these, to see two of the cocks down upon the grass, and righting so desperately that they took no notice of my approach! At first I threw up my rifle, intending to fire, but seeing that the birds were within a few feet of me, I thought they might let me lay hold of them, which they, in fact, did; for the next moment I had 'grabbed' both of them, and cooled their bellicose spirits by wringing their heads off.

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

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

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.