REID MAYNE

THE BOY HUNTERS

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Chapter One.
The Home of the Hunter-Naturalist

Go with me to the great river Mississippi. It is the longest river in the world. A line that would measure it would just reach to the centre of the earth, – in other words, it is four thousand miles in length. Go with me to this majestic river.

I do not wish you to travel to its source; only as far up as Point Coupée, about three hundred miles from its mouth. There we shall stop for a while – a very short while – for we have a long journey to make. Our route lies to the far west – over the great prairies of Texas; and from Point Coupée we shall take our departure.

There is a village at Point Coupée – a quaint, old, French-looking village built of wood. In point of fact it *is* a French village; for it was one of the earliest settlements of that people, who, with the Spaniards, were the first colonists of Western America. Hence we find, to this day, French and Spanish people, with French and Spanish names and customs, all through the Mississippi valley and the regions that lie west of it.

We have not much to do with these things at present, and very little to say of Point Coupée, more than we have already said. Our subject is an odd-looking house that, many years ago, stood upon the western bank of the river, about a mile below the village. I say it stood there many years ago; but it is very likely that it is still standing, as it was a firm, well-built house, of hewn logs, carefully chinked, and plastered between the chinks with run-lime. It was roofed with cedar shingles that projected at the eaves, so as to cast off the rain, and keep the walls dry. It was what in that country is called a "double house," – that is, a large passage ran across the middle of it, through which you might have driven a wagon loaded with hay. This passage was roofed and ceiled, like the rest of the house, and floored with strong planks. The flooring, elevated a foot above the surface of the ground, projected several feet in front of the passage, where carved uprights of cedar-wood supported a light roof, forming a porch or verandah. Around these uprights, and upon the railing that shut in the verandah, clung vines, rose-bushes, and convolvulus plants, that at certain seasons of the year were clustered over with beautiful flowers.

The house faced the river, standing, as I have said, on its western bank – on the same side with Point Coupée. In front was a lawn, some two hundred yards in length, that stretched toward the river, and ended on the low bluff forming its bank. This lawn was enclosed by high rail-fences, and variegated with clumps of shrubbery and ornamental trees. Most of them were

indigenous to the country; but there were exotics as well. Among the trees you could not fail to notice the large-flowered magnolia (*Magnolia grandiflora*), the red mulberry (*Morus rubra*), the pale-green leaves of the catalpa, the tall tulip-tree (*liriodendron*), and the shining foliage of the orange.

In contrast with the brighter frondage of these were dark cone-shaped cedars, and spire-like forms of the yew. There were date-trees and weeping willows growing upon the river bank, and drooping gracefully over its current. Other plants and trees might be distinguished – the natives of a southern clime – such as the great Mexican aloe (*Agave Americana*), the bayonet blades of the yucca, and the fan-like leaves of the palmetto. Beautiful birds of many varieties might be seen among the copses, or moving over the grassy sward of the lawn.

In the great hall or passage, already mentioned, a singular picture presented itself. Along the walls, on both sides, were suspended various implements of the chase, such as rifles, shot guns, pouches, flasks, hunting-knives, and, in short, every species of trap, net, or implement, that could be devised for capturing the wild denizens of the earth, air, and water. Horns of the stag and elk were fastened to the hewn logs; and upon their branching antlers hung hair-bridles, and high-peaked saddles of the Mexican or Spanish fashion. In addition to these were skins of rare birds and quadrupeds, artistically preserved by stuffing, and placed on pedestals around the wooden walls. There were glass cases, too, containing moths, butterflies, and other insects,

impaled upon pins, and arranged in systematic order. In short, this hall resembled a little museum.

Were we to enter and examine the inside of the house, we should find three or four good-sized rooms, comfortably furnished, and all stocked with subjects of natural history, and implements of the chase. In one of the rooms we should see a barometer and thermometer hanging against the wall, an old clock over the mantel-piece, a sabre and pistols, and a book-case containing many choice and valuable books.

To the rear of the house we should find a small kitchen built of logs, and containing the usual culinary utensils. Still farther back we should meet with an enclosed yard, having a storehouse and stable at one end. In the stables we should find four horses, and several mules might be observed in the enclosure. A large reddish dog with long ears, and having the appearance of a hound, might be seen straying about the yard, and would not fail to attract our attention.

An observer, viewing this house from a distance, would take it for the residence of a wealthy planter; on a nearer inspection, however, it would not pass for that. There were no rows of negro cabins, no great sugar-mills, nor tobacco-warehouses, such as are always to be seen near the planter's dwelling. Nothing of the sort; nor was there any very large tract of cultivated land contiguous to the house. The dark cypress forest in the background cast its shadow almost up to the walls. Plainly it was not the dwelling of a planter. What then was it, and who were its inmates? It was the

home of a *Hunter-Naturalist*.

Chapter Two.
The Hunter-Naturalist and his Family

In 1815 was fought the famous battle of Waterloo, and in the same year Napoleon Bonaparte was exiled to the island-rock of Saint Helena. Many French officers, who had followed the fortunes of the great adventurer, at that time emigrated to America. Most of these, as was very natural, sought the French settlements on the Mississippi, and there made their homes for life. Among them was one named Landi, who had been a colonel of chasseurs in Napoleon's army. He was by birth a Corsican; and it was through his being a friend and early acquaintance of one of the Bonaparte family that he had been induced to become an officer in the French army – for in his youth he had been fonder of science than soldiering.

While campaigning in Spain, Landi had married a Basque lady, by whom he had three children, all sons. Their mother died before the battle of Waterloo was fought; so that when Landi emigrated to America his family consisted of his three sons alone.

He first went to Saint Louis, but after a while moved down the river to Point Coupée, in Louisiana, where he purchased the house we have just described, and made it his home.

Let me tell you that he was not in any circumstances of

necessity. Previous to his departure for America, he had sold his patrimonial estates in Corsica for a sum of money – enough to have enabled him to live without labour in any country, but particularly in that free land of cheap food and light taxation – the land of his adoption. He was, therefore, under no necessity of following any trade or profession in his new home – and he followed none. How then did he employ his time? I will tell you. He was an educated man. Previous to his entering the French army he had studied the natural sciences. He was a *naturalist*. A naturalist can find employment anywhere – can gather both instruction and amusement where others would die of *ennui* and idleness. Remember! there are "sermons in stones, and books in running brooks." He was not a closet naturalist either. Like the great Audubon he was fond of the outside world. He was fond of drawing his lessons from Nature herself. He combined a passion for the chase with his more delicate taste for scientific pursuits; and where could he have better placed himself to indulge in these than in the great region of the Mississippi valley, teeming with objects of interest both to the hunter and the naturalist? In my opinion, he made good choice of his home.

Well, between hunting, and fishing, and stuffing his birds, and preserving the skins of rare quadrupeds, and planting and pruning his trees, and teaching his boys, and training his dogs and horses, Landi was far from being idle. His boys, of course, assisted him in these occupations, as far as they were able. But he had another assistant – Hugot.

Who was Hugot? I shall describe Hugot for your benefit.

Hugot was a Frenchman – a very small Frenchman, indeed – not over five feet four inches in height. He was dapper and tidy – had a large aquiline nose, and, notwithstanding his limited stature, a pair of tremendous moustachios, that curved over his mouth so as almost to hide it. These gave him a somewhat fierce aspect, which, combined with his upright carriage, and brisk mechanical-like movements, told you at once what Hugot had been – a French soldier. He was, in fact, a *ci-devant* corporal of chasseurs. Landi had been his colonel. The rest you will easily guess. He had followed his old leader to America, and was now his man for everything. It was not often that you could see the naturalist without also seeing Hugot's great moustachios close by his elbow. It would have killed Hugot to have been separated for any length of time from his old colonel.

Of course Hugot accompanied his master in all his hunting expeditions. So, too, did the boys, as soon as they were able to sit upon a horse. On these occasions the house would be shut up, for there was no housekeeper nor any other domestic about the establishment. It would remain thus for days, sometimes for weeks together – for the naturalist with his party often made distant excursions into the surrounding forests. They would return laden with spoils – skins of birds and beasts, plants, and rare geological specimens. Then whole days would be spent in the arrangement of these new acquisitions. Thus did Landi and his family pass their time.

Hugot was cook, valet, groom, butler, and errand boy. I have already stated that no other domestic, male or female, lived in the house: Hugot, therefore, was chambermaid as well. His manifold occupations, however, were not so difficult to fulfil as might at first appear. The Colonel was a man of simple habits. He had learned these when a soldier, and he brought up his sons to live like himself. He ate plain food, drank only water, and slept upon a camp-bed with a buffalo-robe and a blanket. A laundress in Point Coupée kept the linen clean; and Hugot was not near so busy with house affairs as you might suppose. He made daily journeys to the village – to the market, and the post-office, from which he often brought letters, many of them with large seals, and the arms of a prince upon them! Sometimes, too, after a steamer had called at the landing, parcels arrived containing books – scientific books they were – or curious instruments. Notwithstanding all this, there was nothing mysterious about the life of the hunter-naturalist. He was no misanthrope. He often visited the village, and would gossip with old hunters and others who lived there. The villagers knew him as the "old Colonel," and respected him. They only wondered at his tastes as a naturalist, which to them seemed strange. They wondered, too, how he managed to keep house without a maid-servant. But the Colonel did not trouble his head about their conjectures. He only laughed at their curious inquiries, and remained on as good terms as ever. His boys, too, as they grew up became great favourites with all. They were the best shots of their age, could ride a horse with any, could swim

the Mississippi, paddle a canoe, fling a lasso, or spear a catfish, as though they had been full-grown men. They were, in fact, boy-men; and as such were regarded by the simple villagers, who instinctively felt the superiority which education and training had given to these youths over their own uneducated minds. The boys, notwithstanding these advantages, were affable with the villagers; hence the respect in which they were universally held.

None of his neighbours ever visited the Colonel, except on matters of business. Indeed he had no visitors of any sort, if we except one or two of his former military associates, who lived at New Orleans, and came up to his house about once a-year to talk over old times, and taste his venison. On such occasions "Napoleon le Grand" was of course the main subject of conversation. Like all old soldiers of the Empire, Landi worshipped Napoleon; but there was one of the Bonaparte family for whom the naturalist entertained a still higher feeling of regard, amounting in fact to sincere friendship. This was Charles Lucien, prince of Musignano.

Not all the Bonapartes have been bad. Some of the members of that remarkable family have given evidence to the world that they were the possessors of noble virtue. The quiet researches of the Prince of Musignano as a student of natural history, may be looked upon as so many conquests in the kingdom of Nature; and though they have been eclipsed by the more brilliant and sanguinary triumphs of the Emperor, yet do they far more entitle him to the gratitude and respect of men. He was the true hero of

the hunter-naturalist Landi.

For many years did Colonel Landi lead the life we have described. An event at length happened that was near proving fatal to him. He had been wounded in the leg during his campaigns in the Peninsula. A fall from his horse reopened this wound, and amputation became necessary. This saved his life, but he could no longer partake of the amusements of the chase, although still able to indulge in the more delicate pursuits of the naturalist. With his wooden leg he was able to hobble about the house and lawn, prune the trees, and attend to his pets that had grown to be quite numerous, while Hugot at all times followed him about like his shadow. The boys, however, went abroad on hunting expeditions, and collected specimens as formerly; and the life of all went on pretty much as usual.

Thus it was when I first became acquainted with the naturalist, his man Hugot, and his three sons – the *Boy Hunters*, the heroes of our little book.

Young reader, permit me to introduce you to a more intimate acquaintance with them. I fancy you will like them – all three – and be happy for some time in their society.

Chapter Three.
The Prince's Letter

It is a lovely morning in Spring as we approach their dwelling. We enter the lawn by a side-gate. We need not go into the house, for there is no one within doors. The weather is too fine for that, but they are all at home notwithstanding. They are in the lawn in front, and the verandah.

They are differently occupied. The Colonel himself is engaged feeding his pets. Hugot is helping him, and carries the basket containing their food.

You would call the Colonel a fine-looking man. His hair is as white as bleached flax. So, too, are his moustaches. He wears no beard. His face is cleanly shaved, showing a complexion bronzed and somewhat ruddy. The expression of his countenance is mild, though firm. He is much thinner than he has been in his time, on account of the amputation of his leg, which often produces this effect. His dress is simple. A jacket of yellow nankeen, a striped cotton shirt, with loose cottonade trousers of bright sky colour. A Panama hat, with very broad brim, shades his eyes from the sun, and his shirt is open at the throat, for the day is warm. Thus is the Colonel attired. Hugot is dressed after a somewhat similar fashion; but the material of his jacket and trousers is coarser, and his hat is of the common palmetto leaf.

Look at Basil, the oldest of the boys. He is at work fixing some straps to a hunting-saddle, that lies on the grass beside him. Basil is exactly seventeen years of age. He is a fine-looking lad, though not what you might call handsome. His face has a courageous expression, and his form betokens strength. His hair is straight, and black as jet. He is more like an Italian than either of his brothers. He is, in fact, the son of his father – a true Corsican. Basil is a "mighty hunter." He is more fond of the chase than of aught else. He loves hunting for itself, and delights in its dangers. He has got beyond the age of bird-catching and squirrel shooting. His ambition is not now to be satisfied with anything less exciting than a panther, bear, or buffalo hunt.

How very unlike him is Lucien, the second in age! Unlike in almost everything. Lucien is delicately formed, with a light complexion and very fair hair. He is more like what his mother was, for she was fair-haired and *blonde*, as are many of her people – the Basques. Lucien is passionately fond of books and study. He is busy with a book just now in the verandah. He is a student of natural history in general, but botany and geology are his favourite sciences, and he has made considerable progress in both. He accompanies Basil on all hunting expeditions; but, in the midst of the most exciting chase, Lucien would leap down from his horse if a rare plant or flower, or an odd-looking rock, was to fall under his eye. Lucien talks but little – not half so much as most boys – but although habitually silent he possesses a rare good sense; and when he offers his advice upon any question, it

is usually received with respect by the others. Such is the secret influence of intellect and education.

Next and last, we have François, a quick-witted, curly-haired urchin – merry to madness – cheerful at all times – changeable in his tastes and likings – versatile in talents – in short, more of a Frenchman than any of them. François is a great bird-catcher. He is at this moment engaged in repairing his nets; and his double-barrel shot gun, which he has just finished cleaning, rests beside him. François is a favourite with everybody, but a great pest to Hugot, upon whom he plays numerous tricks.

While the naturalist and his family were thus engaged, a loud booming noise was heard at some distance off, down the river. It somewhat resembled the regular firing of great guns, though the explosions sounded softer and more hollow.

"A steamboat!" cried François, whose ear first caught the sounds.

"Yes," muttered Basil, "from New Orleans, I expect, and bound to Saint Louis."

"No, brother," said Lucien, quietly raising himself from his book. "She is an Ohio boat."

"How can you tell that, Luce?" inquired François.

"From the sound of her 'scape, of course. I can distinguish the boat. She is the 'Buck-eye' – mail-boat for Cincinnati."

In a short time the white cloud of steam was seen ascending over the trees; and then the huge vessel came "bulging" around a bend of the river, cleaving the brown current as she went. She

was soon opposite the lawn; and, sure enough, proved to be what Lucien had said she was – the mail-steamer "Buck-eye." This was a triumph for Lucien, although he bore it with characteristic modesty.

The boat had not passed many minutes, when the loud screeching of her steam was heard in the direction of Point Coupée. They could tell from this that she was putting in at the landing.

"Hugot!" cried the Colonel, "their may be something for us. Go and see."

Without waiting for further orders, Hugot started on his errand. He was a brisk walker, Hugot; and was back again in a trice. He brought with him a letter of goodly size and appearance.

"From Prince Lucien!" cried François, who was sure to have the first word in everything. "It is from the Prince, papa; I know the seal."

"Quiet, François! quiet!" said his father, reprovingly; at the same time hobbling into the verandah, and calling for his spectacles.

The letter was soon opened, and perused.

"Hugot!" cried the Colonel, after he had finished reading it.

Hugot made no reply, but threw himself in front of his master, with his hand raised to his eyebrows *à la militaire*.

"Hugot, you must go to Saint Louis."

"*Bien, mon Colonel*!"

"You must start by the first boat."

"*Très-bien, mon Colonel*!"

"You must procure for me the skin of a *white buffalo*."

"That will not be difficult, monsieur."

"More difficult than you imagine, I fear."

"With money, monsieur?"

"Ay, even with money, Hugot. Look you! It is a *skin* I want – not a robe – but a perfect skin with the head, feet, and all complete, and fit for stuffing."

"Ah! mon Colonel! that is different."

"Ah! you may say so. I fear it will be difficult, indeed," soliloquised the Colonel, with a thoughtful air. "I very much doubt whether we can get it at all; but it must be had, cost *what it may*– ay, *cost what it may*."

"I will do my best, Colonel."

"Try at every fur-store in Saint Louis, – inquire among the hunters and trappers – you know where to find them. If these fail you, put an advertisement in the newspapers – advertise both in English and French. Go to Monsieur Choteau – anywhere. Spare no expense, but get me the skin."

"*Restez tranquille, mon Colonel*; I shall do all that."

"Make ready, then, to start. There may be a steamer going up before night. Hush! I hear one this very moment. It may be a Saint Louis boat."

All stood for a moment silent and listening. The 'scape of another boat coming up the river could be heard plain enough.

"It is a Saint Louis boat," said Lucien. "It is the 'Belle of the

West.'"

Lucien, who had a quick talent in that way, could tell, by the sound of their steam-pipe, almost every boat that plied upon the Mississippi. In half-an-hour the steamer hove in sight, and it was seen that he had again guessed correctly. It was a Saint Louis boat, and the "Belle of the West," too!

Hugot had not many preparations to make; and before the boat had arrived opposite to the house, he had arranged everything – received some further instructions, with a purse of money, from his master – and was off to Point Coupée, to meet the steamer at the landing.

Chapter Four.
Going on a Great Hunt

It was full three weeks before Hugot returned. They were a long three weeks to the old Colonel, – who was troubled with apprehensions that Hugot would not succeed in his errand. He had written in reply to the letter of Prince Bonaparte. He had written promising to procure —*if possible*– a white buffalo-skin – for this was what the Prince's letter was about; – and not for half what he was worth would the Colonel have failed to accomplish this object. No wonder, then, he was impatient and uneasy during Hugot's absence.

Hugot returned at length, after night. The Colonel did not wait until he entered the house, but met him at the door, candle in hand. He need not have put any question, as Hugot's face answered that question before it was asked. The moment the light fell upon it, any one could have told that Hugot had come back *without the skin*. He looked quite crest-fallen; and his great moustachios appeared bleached and drooping.

"You have not got it?" interrogated the Colonel, in a faltering voice.

"No, Colonel," muttered Hugot, in reply.

"You tried everywhere?"

"Everywhere."

"You advertised in the papers?"

"In all the papers, monsieur."

"You offered a high price?"

"I did. It was to no purpose. I could not have procured a white buffalo's skin if I had offered ten times as much. I could not have got it for a thousand dollars."

"I would give five thousand!"

"It would have been all the same, monsieur. It is not to be had in Saint Louis."

"What says Monsieur Choteau?"

"That there is but little chance of finding what you want. A man, he says, may travel all over the prairies without meeting with a *white* buffalo. The Indians prize them beyond anything, and never let one escape when they chance to fall in with it. I found two or three among the fur packs of the traders; but they were not what you desire, monsieur. They were robes; and even for them a large sum was asked."

"They would be of no use. It is wanted for a different purpose – for a *great museum*. Ah! I fear I cannot obtain it. If not to be had in Saint Louis, where else?"

"Where else, papa?" interrupted François, who, with his brothers, had stood listening to the above dialogue. "Where else, but *on the prairies*?"

"On the prairies!" mechanically echoed his father.

"Yes, papa. Send Basil, and Lucien, and myself. We'll find you a white buffalo, I warrant you."

"Hurrah, François!" cried Basil; "you're right, brother. I was going to propose the same myself."

"No, no, my lads; you've heard what Monsieur Choteau says. You need not think of such a thing. It cannot be had. And I have written to the Prince, too. I have as good as promised him!"

As the old Colonel uttered these words, his countenance and gestures expressed disappointment and chagrin.

Lucien, who had observed this with a feeling of pain, now interposed.

"Papa," he said, "it is true that Monsieur Choteau has great experience in the fur-trade; but the facts do not correspond with what he has stated," – (Lucien, you will observe, was a keen reasoner). "Hugot has seen two or three of these skins in Saint Louis. Some one must have found the animals to which these belonged. Moreover, I have heard, as Monsieur Choteau asserts, that they are highly prized by the Indian chiefs, who wear them as robes; and that they are often seen among the tribes. This, then, proves that there *are* white buffaloes upon the prairies; and why should *we* not happen upon them as well as others? I say with François and Basil, let us go in search of them."

"Come in, my lads; come in!" said their father, evidently pleased, and to some extent comforted, with the proposal of his boys. "Come in to the house – we can talk over it better when we have had our suppers."

And so saying, the old Colonel hobbled back into the house followed by his three boys; while Hugot, looking very jaded and

feeling very hungry, brought up the rear.

During the supper, and after it, the subject was discussed in all its bearings. The father was more than half inclined to consent to the proposal of his sons from the first; while they, but particularly Basil and François, were enthusiastic in proving its practicability. I need hardly tell you the result. The Colonel at length gave his consent – the *expedition was agreed upon*.

The naturalist was greatly influenced by the desire he felt to gratify his friend the Prince. He was influenced, too, by another feeling. He felt secretly pleased at the bold and enterprising character thus exhibited in his children, and he was not the man to throw cold water upon any enterprise they might design. Indeed, he often boasted to his neighbours and friends how he had trained them up to be men, calling them his "boy-men," and his "*jeunes chasseurs*." And truly had he trained them to a complete self-reliance, as far as lay in his power. He 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. He 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 beds. He had taught them to live upon the simplest food; and the knowledge of practical botany which he had imparted to them – more particularly to Lucien – would enable them, in case of need, to draw sustenance from plants and trees, from roots and

fruits – to find resources where ignorant men might starve. They knew how to kindle a fire without either flint, steel, or detonating powder. They could discover their direction without a compass – from the rocks, and the trees, and the signs of the heavens; and, in addition to all, they had been taught, as far as was then known, the geography of that vast wilderness that stretched from their own home to the far shores of the Pacific Ocean.

The Colonel knew that he might safely trust them upon the prairies; and, in truth, it was with a feeling of pride, rather than anxiety, that he consented to the expedition. But there was still another motive that influenced him – perhaps the most powerful of all. He was inspired by the pride of the naturalist. He thought of the triumph he would obtain by sending such a rare contribution to the great museum of Europe. If ever, my young reader, you should become a naturalist, you will comprehend how strong this feeling may be; and with our hunter-naturalist it was so.

At first he proposed that Hugot should accompany them. This the boys would not hear of, and all three stoutly opposed it. They could not think of taking Hugot – their father would require Hugot at home – Hugot would be of no use to them, they said. They would do as well, if not better, without him.

The truth was, that these ambitious young hunters did not wish to be robbed of any part of the credit of their enterprise – which they knew would be the case if Hugot were to accompany them. Not that Hugot was by any means a noted hunter – quite the

contrary – nor a warrior neither, notwithstanding he had been a *chasseur à cheval*, and wore such fierce moustachios. All this his old Colonel knew very well; and therefore did not much insist upon sending Hugot with them.

Hugot's talents shone best in another sphere of action – in the *cuisine*. There Hugot was at home, for he could compound an omelette, fricassee a chicken, or dress a *canard aux olives*, with Monsieur Soyer himself. But Hugot – although for many years he had accompanied his old and young masters in the chase – had no taste whatever for hunting. He had a wholesome dread of bears and panthers, and as to Indians … Ha! *Indians*!

Now you will wonder, my young friend, when you come to think of these Indians – when you come to consider that fifty warlike nations of them live and roam over the prairies – many of them sworn foes to white men, killing the latter wherever they may meet them, as you would a mad dog or a poisonous spider, – I say, when you consider these things, you will wonder that this old French or Corsican father should consent to let his sons go upon so dangerous an expedition. It seems unnatural, does it not? In fact, quite improbable, when we come to reflect that the Colonel dearly loved his three sons, almost as dearly as his own life. And yet one would say, he could hardly have found a readier plan to get rid of them, than thus to send them forth among savages. Upon what, then, did he rely for their safety? On their age? No. He knew the Indians better than that. He knew very well that their age would not be cared for, should they chance to

fall in with any of the tribes hostile to the whites. It is true, that the savages might not scalp them on this account – being boys, – but they would be very certain to carry them into a captivity from which they might never return. Or did their father anticipate that the excursion should extend no farther than the country of some friendly tribe? He entertained no such idea. Had this been their plan, their errand would have been likely to prove fruitless. In a country of that sort they would have seen but little of the buffalo; for it is well-known that the buffaloes are only found in plenty upon those parts of the prairies termed "war grounds" – that is, where several tribes go to hunt, who are at war with each other. In fact, that is the reason why these animals are more numerous there than elsewhere, as the hunters are fewer, on account of the danger they incur of coming into collision with each other. In a territory which is exclusively in possession of any particular tribe, the buffaloes are soon killed or run off by incessant hunting. It is a fact, therefore, well-known among prairie-hunters, that wherever buffaloes are plenty there is plenty of danger as well, though the converse of this is not always true. On the neutral or "war grounds" of the Indians, you may meet with a friendly tribe one day, and on the next, or even within the next hour, you may fall in with a band of savages who will scalp you on sight.

Now, the father of our three boy hunters knew all this, as well as I know it. How then are we to account for his apparently unnatural conduct, in permitting them to risk their lives in such an enterprise? It would be quite unaccountable indeed were it not

that there was a *mystery* connected with it, which I shall explain to you hereafter. All I can tell you now is, that when the three were mounted and about to start, the Colonel hobbled up; and, drawing from his pocket a small leathern bag or case ornamented with stained porcupine quills, he handed it to Basil, saying as he did so: "*Take good care of it, Basil—you know its use—never let it part from you—your lives may depend upon it. God be with you, my brave boys. Adieu*!" Basil took the case, passed the string over his shoulders, pushed the bag under the breast of his hunting-shirt, pressed his father's hand, and putting the spur to his horse rode briskly off. Lucien saluted his father with a kiss, waved his hand gracefully to Hugot, and followed. François remained a moment behind the rest – rode up to Hugot – caught hold of his great moustache, gave it a twitch that caused the *ex-chasseur* to grin again; and then, with a loud yell of laughter, wheeled his pony, and galloped after his brothers.

The Colonel and Hugot stood for some moments watching them. When the boy hunters had reached the edge of the woods, all three reined up, turned in their saddles, and, taking off their hats, uttered a parting cheer. The Colonel and Hugot cheered in return. When the noise had subsided, the voice of François was heard shouting back, —

"Fear not, papa! we'll bring you the *white buffalo*!"

Chapter Five.
The Camp of the Boy Hunters

Our young adventurers turned their faces westward, and were soon riding under the shadows of majestic woods. At this time there were few white settlements west of the Mississippi river. The small towns upon its banks, with here and there a settler's "clearing" or a squatter's cabin, were the only signs of civilisation to be met with. A single day's ride in a westerly direction would carry the traveller clear of all these, and launch him at once into the labyrinth of swamps and woods, that stretched away for hundreds of miles before him. It is true, there were some scattered settlements upon the bayous farther west, but most of the country between them was a wilderness.

In an hour or so our travellers had ridden clear of the settlements that surrounded Point Coupée, and were following the forest "trails," rarely travelled except by roving Indians, or the white hunters of the border country. The boys knew them well. They had often passed that way on former hunting expeditions.

I shall not detail too minutely the events that occurred along their line of march. This would tire you, and take up too much space. I shall take you at once to their first encampment, where they had halted for the night.

It was in a small glade or opening, such as are often met with

in the forests west of the Mississippi. There was about an acre of clear ground, covered with grass and flowers, among which helianthus and blue lupines were conspicuous. Tall trees grew all around; and you could tell from their leaves that these trees were of different kinds. You might have told that from their trunks as well, for these were unlike each other. Some were smooth, while upon others the bark was cracked, and crisped outward in large scales a foot or more in length. The beautiful tulip-tree (*liriodendron*) was easily distinguished by its straight column-like trunks, out of which are sawed those great planks of *white poplar* you may have seen, for that is the name by which it is known among carpenters and builders. The name of *tulip-tree* comes from its flowers, which in size and shape very much resemble tulips, and are of a greenish-yellow colour tinged with orange. It was the characteristic tree around the glade. There were many others, though; and most conspicuous, with its large wax-like leaves and blossoms, was the magnolia grandiflora. The lofty sugar-maple (*acer saccharinum*) was seen, and lower down the leafy buck-eye (*aesculus flava*) with its pretty orange-flowers, and the shell-bark hickory – the *juglans alba* of the botanists. Huge creeping plants stretched from tree to tree, or ran slanting upward; and on one side of the glade you might observe the thick cane-reeds (*arundo gigantea*), growing like tall grass. The forest on the other side was more open; no doubt, because some former fire had burned down the underwood in that direction. The fan-like leaves of palmettos and yuccas growing all around, gave a

southern and tropical aspect to the scene.

The young hunters had halted nearly two hours before sunset, in order to give time to prepare their night-camp. About half-an-hour after their halt, the little glade presented a picture somewhat as follows: – Near its edge stood a small canvas tent, like a white cone or pyramid. The fly, or opening, was thrown back, for the evening was fine, and there was no one inside. A little to one side of the tent lay three saddles upon the grass. They were of the Mexican fashion, with high pommel and cantle, a "horn" in front, with a staple and ring firmly fastened in the wood of the tree. There were several thongs of leather fastened to other rings behind the cantle; but the stirrups were steel ones, and not those clumsy blocks of wood which so much disfigure the Mexican saddle. Beside the saddles was an odd-looking object. It resembled a gigantic book, partly open, and set upon the opened edges. It was a *pack-saddle*, also of Mexican fashion, and in that country called an "alpareja." It had a strong leathern girth, with a breech-strap to keep it from running forward upon the shoulders of the animal that might wear it. At a short distance from the saddles, several blankets – red and green ones – with a bear-skin and a couple of buffalo-robes, were lying upon the grass; and on a branch overhead hung whips, bridles, water-gourds, and spurs. Against the trunk of a tulip-tree, that towered over the tent, rested three guns. Two of them were rifles, of which one was much longer than the other: the third piece was a double-barrelled shot gun. Bullet-pouches and powder-horns hung from the muzzles of

all three, their straps being suspended from the projecting ends of the rammers.

On the opposite or leeward side of the tent a fire was burning. It had not been long kindled, and crackled as it blazed. You could easily have told the strong red flame to be that of the shell-bark hickory – the best firewood – though dry sticks of some lighter wood had been used to kindle it. On each side of the fire a forked stick was stuck into the ground, with the forks at the top; and on these rested a fresh cut sapling, placed horizontally to serve as a crane. A two-gallon camp-kettle of sheet-iron was suspended upon it and over the fire, and the water in the kettle was just beginning to boil. Other utensils were strewed around. There was a frying-pan, some tin cups, several small packages containing flour, dried meat, and coffee; a coffee-pot of strong tin, a small spade, and a light axe, with its curved hickory shaft.

These were the inanimate objects of the picture. Now for the animate.

First, then, were our heroes, the three Boy Hunters – Basil, Lucien, François. Basil was engaged by the tent, driving in the pins; Lucien was attending to the fire which he has just kindled; while François was making the feathers fly out of a brace of wild pigeons he had shot on the way. No two of the three were dressed alike. Basil was all buckskin – except the cap, which was made from the skin of a raccoon, with the ringed-tail hanging over his shoulders like a drooping plume. He wore a hunting-shirt with fringed cape, handsomely ornamented with beads. A

belt fastened it around his waist, from which was suspended his hunting-knife and sheath, with a small holster, out of which peeped the shining butt of a pistol. He wore deerskin leggings fringed down the seams, and mocassins upon his feet. His dress was just that of a backwoods' hunter, except that his cotton under-garments looked finer and cleaner, and altogether his hunting-shirt was more tastefully embroidered than is common among professional hunters.

Lucien's dress was of a sky-blue colour. It consisted of a half-blouse, half-hunting-shirt, of strong cottonade, with trousers of the same material. He had laced buskins on his feet, and a broad-brimmed Panama hat on his head. Lucien's dress was somewhat more civilised in its appearance than that of his elder brother. Like him though he had a leather belt, with a sheath and knife on one side; and, instead of a pistol, a small tomahawk on the other. Not that Lucien had set out with the intention of tomahawking anybody. No; he carried his little hatchet for cracking rocks, not skulls. Lucien's was a geological tomahawk.

François was still in roundabout jacket with trousers. He wore leggings over his trousers, and mocassins upon his feet, with a cloth cap set jauntily over his luxuriant curls. He, too, was belted with hunting-knife and sheath, and a very small pistol hung upon his left thigh.

Out near the middle of the glade were three horses picketed on lasso-ropes, so that they might not interfere with each other whilst browsing. They were very different in appearance. One

was a large brown-black horse – a half-Arab – evidently endowed with great strength and spirit. That was Basil's horse, and deservedly a favourite. His name was "Black Hawk" – so called after the famous chief of the Sacs and Foxes, who was a friend of the old Colonel, and who had once entertained the latter when on a visit to these Indians. The second horse was a very plain one, a bay, of the kind known as "cot." He was a modest, sober animal, with nothing either of the hunter or warrior in his looks; but sleek withal, and in good condition, like a well-fed citizen. Hence his name, which was "Le Bourgeois." Of course he was ridden by the quiet Lucien. The third horse might have been termed a pony – if size be considered – as he was by far the smallest of the three. He was a horse, however, both in shape and character – one of that small but fiery breed taken by the Spanish conquerors to the New World, and now known throughout the western country as "mustangs." As I shall have reason to say more of these beautiful creatures by and by, I shall only state here, that the one in question was spotted like a pard, and answered to the name "Le Chat" (the cat) – particularly when François called him, for he was François' horse.

A little apart from the horses was another animal, of a dirty slate colour, with some white marks along the back and shoulders. That was a true-bred Mexican mule, wiry and wicked as any of its race. It was a she-mule, and was called Jeanette. Jeanette was tethered beyond kicking distance of the horses; for between her and the mustang there existed no friendly

feeling. Jeanette was the owner of the odd-looking saddle – the pack. Jeanette's duty was to carry the tent, the provisions, the implements, and utensils.

But one other living object might be noticed in the glade – the dog "Marengo." From his size and colour – which was 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 appearance, however; and told you that he was a hound. He was, in fact, a blood-hound, with the cross of a mastiff – a powerful animal. He was crouching near François, watching for the offal of the birds.

Now, young reader, you have before you a "night-camp" of the Boy hunters.

Chapter Six.
A Fox-Squirrel in a Fix

François soon finished dressing his pigeons, and plunged them into the boiling-water. A piece of dried meat was added, and then some salt and pepper, drawn from the store-bag, for it was the intention of François to make pigeon-soup. He next proceeded to beat up a little flour with water, in order to give consistency to the soup.

"What a pity," said he, "we have no vegetables!"

"Hold!" cried Lucien, who overheard him. "There appears to be a variety of green stuff in this neighbourhood. Let me see what can be done."

So saying, Lucien walked about the glade with his eyes bent upon the ground. He seemed to find nothing among the grass and herbs that would do; and presently he strayed off among trees, towards the banks of a little stream that ran close by. In a few minutes he was seen returning with both his hands full of vegetables. He made no remark, but flung them down before François. There were two species – one that resembled a small turnip, and, in fact, was the Indian turnip (*psoralea esculenta*), while the other was the wild onion found in many parts of America.

"Ha!" cried François, who at once recognised them, "what

luck! *pomme-blanche*, and wild onions too, as I live! Now I shall make a soup worth tasting."

And he proceeded with great glee to cut up the vegetables, and fling them into the steaming kettle.

In a short while the meat and pigeons were boiled, and the soup was ready. The kettle was taken from the crane; and the three brothers, seating themselves on the grass, filled their tin cups, and set to eating. They had brought a supply of hard bread to last for a few days. When that should give out, they would draw upon their bag of flour; and when this, too, should be exhausted, it was their intention to go without bread altogether, as they had often done on like excursions before.

While thus enjoying their pigeon-soup and picking the bones of the plump birds, the attention of all three was suddenly arrested by a movement near one side of the glade. They had just caught a glimpse of something that looked like a flash of yellow light shooting up in a straight direction from the ground.

All three guessed what it was – the lightning passage of a squirrel up the trunk of a tree; and there was the animal itself, clinging flat against the bark, having paused a moment – as is usual with squirrels – before making another rush upward.

"Oh!" cried Lucien, in a suppressed voice, "it is a fox-squirrel, and such a beauty! See! it is marked like a tortoise-shell cat! Papa would give twenty dollars for such a skin."

"He shall have it for far less," rejoined François, stealing towards his gun.

“Stop, François!” said Lucien. “Let Basil try it with his rifle – he is a surer shot than you.”

“Very well,” replied François; “but if he should miss, it’s no harm for me to be ready.”

Basil had already risen, and was silently making for the guns. On reaching them, he took the long rifle, and turned in the direction of the game. At the same moment François armed himself with his double-barrel.

The tree up which the squirrel had run was what is termed a “dead-wood.” It was a decaying tulip-tree – scathed by lightning or storm – and stood somewhat apart from the others, out in the open ground. There was little else standing but the naked trunks, which rose like a column to the height of sixty feet. The branches had all been swept away by the wind, with one exception; and this was a long limb that stretched diagonally upward from the top of the trunk. The limb, although crooked and forking in several places, was not very thick. It was without twigs or leaves, being of course, like the tree itself, dead.

Whilst Basil and François were preparing their guns, the squirrel had made a second rush to the top of this limb; where it sat itself down in a fork, and appeared to contemplate the setting sun. No better mark could have been desired for a shot, provided they could get near enough; and that they were likely to do, for the little animal did not appear to regard the presence either of them or their horses – thus showing that it had never been hunted. With its bushy tail erect, and spread like a fan, it sat upon its haunches,

appearing to enjoy the warm beams that came from the west.

The boys moved softly around the glade, Basil going foremost. When within range, as he thought, he raised his rifle, levelled it, and was about to pull trigger, when the squirrel, that up to this moment had not noticed him, gave a sudden start, dropped its tail, and ran down the limb as if terrified. It did not stop until it had reached the main trunk. There it halted, a foot or two from the head, and lay flat against the bark.

What could have alarmed it? Not the boys, for it had not minded them before; moreover, it still kept upon their side of the tree, offering as fair a mark as ever. Had it feared them it would, as all squirrels do, have hidden from them behind the trunk. But no, it was not afraid of them; for, as it lay horizontally along the bark, its head was turned upward, and showed, by a peculiar motion, that it dreaded some enemy from above. And this was the fact, for high up and directly over the tree, a large bird of prey was seen circling in the air.

"Hold!" whispered Lucien, laying his hand upon Basil's arm – "hold, brother! it is the red-tailed hawk. See, he is going to swoop down. Let us watch him."

Basil lowered his rifle, and all three stood waiting. A leafy branch was over their heads, so that the bird did not see them, or, intent upon striking his prey, did not care for their presence at the moment.

Lucien had scarcely spoken, when the hawk, that had hitherto been sailing with his broad wings expanded, suddenly narrowed

his tail, drew in his wings, and came down with a loud "whish–sh–sh!" He dropped almost perpendicularly, grazing the squirrel so closely, that all three looked for it in his talons as he flew off again. Not so, however. The squirrel had been upon his guard; and, as the hawk swooped down, had doubled around the tree with the quickness of a flash of lightning. By the guidance of his rudder-like tail the hawk soon turned, and flew round to that side of the tree on which the squirrel had now settled. A few strokes of his powerful wings soon enabled him to reach the proper elevation; and again he swooped downward at his intended victim. The squirrel avoided him as before, and came back on the other side of the trunk. Again the hawk doubled, rose, darted downward at his prey, missed it, and swept on. A fourth attempt met with like success, and the bird once more flew back into the air, but still kept circling over the tree.

"It's a wonder old foxy doesn't take to another tree," muttered François; "one with branches enough to shelter him, or to his own tree where his hole is. There he would be safe."

"That's exactly what he wishes to do," replied Lucien. "But see! his enemy is directly over him. There's no tree near enough, and if he attempted to run along the open ground, the hawk would be down upon him like a shot. You saw how suddenly he dropped before?"

This was, in fact, the situation in which the squirrel was. It was evident he regarded the trees at some distance with a wistful and anxious look; for, although he had succeeded so far in baffling

his enemy, he still appeared to suffer from suspense and fear.

As soon as the hawk had risen a dozen yards or so above the tree, he again commenced wheeling in circles, uttering a strange cry as he flew. It was not a scream – as is often heard with these birds – but a cry of different import, as if a call to some comrade. It was so in fact, for in a moment it was answered from a distant part of the woods; and the next moment, another hawk – red-tailed like himself, but much larger – was seen soaring upwards. This was evidently his mate – for the female of these birds is always much larger than the males. The two soon came together, and wheeled above the tree, crossing each other's orbit, and looking downward. The squirrel now appeared doubly terrified – for he well knew their intent. He began to run around the trunk, looking outward at intervals, as though he intended to leap off and take to the thick woods.

The hawks did not allow him long time to make up his mind. The smaller one swooped first, but missed the squirrel as before, driving him around the trunk. There the frightened creature had scarcely halted, when the great hen-hawk came at him with a whistling rush, and sent him back to the other side. The male bird had by this time turned and now darted with such suddenness and precision, that the squirrel, unable to pass round the tree again, sprang off into the air. Guided by his broad tail the hawk followed, and before the squirrel could reach the ground, the bird was seen to strike. Then with a loud scream he rose into the air, with the squirrel struggling in his talons.

His triumph was a short one. The crack of a shot gun was heard from behind, and both hawk and squirrel fell heavily to the earth. Another crack followed, almost instantaneously, and his mate, the great hen-hawk, came tumbling down with a broken wing, and fluttered over the grass, screaming like a cat. She was soon silenced by a stroke from the butt of François' gun – both barrels of which were now empty – for it was François that had done the business for the red-tails.

What was most singular of all, the squirrel was not killed either by the shot or the fall. On the contrary, as Lucien was deliberately stooping to pick it up – congratulating himself all the while upon his prize – it suddenly made a spring, shook itself clear of the claws of the dead hawk; and, streaking off into the woods, ran up a tall tree. All three followed as fast as they could run; but on reaching the tree – an oak five feet thick – they saw, to their mortification, the squirrel's hole about fifty feet from the ground, which, of course, brought that squirrel hunt to its termination.

Chapter Seven.
François gets an Ugly Fall

The next encampment of our hunters was upon the Bayou Crocodile. This, like all the bayous of Louisiana, is a sluggish stream, and here and there expands itself into large ponds or lakes. It is called Bayou Crocodile from the great number of alligators that infest its waters, though in this respect it differs but little from the other rivers of Louisiana.

The spot chosen for the camp was an open space upon the bank, at a point where the bayou widened into a small lake. The situation commanded a view of the shores of this lake all round – and a singular view that was. Giant trees rose over the water – live oaks and cypresses – and from their spreading branches the Spanish moss hung trailing down like long streamers of silver thread. This gave the upper part of the woods a somewhat hoary appearance, and would have rendered the scene rather a melancholy one, had it not been for the more brilliant foliage that relieved it. Here and there a green magnolia glistened in the sun, with its broad white flowers, each of them as large as a dining-plate. Underneath grew the thick cane (*arundo gigantea*), its tall pale-green reeds standing parallel to each other, and ending in lance-shaped blades, like stalks of giant wheat before its ears have shot. Over this again rose the grey limbs of the tupeloo-

tree (*nyssa aquatica*), with light leaves and thin foliage. The beautiful palmetto (*chamaerops*) lifted its fan-like branches, as if to screen the earth from the hot sun that poured down upon it, and here and there its singular shapes were shadowed in the water. From tree to tree huge parasites stretched like cables – vines, and lianas, and various species of convolvulus. Some of these were covered with thick foliage, while others exhibited a surface of splendid flowers. The scarlet cups of the trumpet-vine (*bignonia*), the white starlike blossoms of the cypress-creeper, and the pink flowers of the wild althea or cotton-rose (*hibiscus grandiflora*), all blended their colours, inviting the large painted butterflies and ruby-throated humming birds that played among their silken corollas. As if in contrast with these bright spots in the landscape, there were others that looked dark and gloomy. You could see through long vistas in the forest, where the trees grew out of green slimy water. Here there was no underwood, either of cane or palmettoes. The black trunks of the cypresses rose branchless for nearly an hundred feet, and from their spreading limbs drooped the grey weeping moss. Huge "knees" could be distinguished shooting up like cones or trees that had been broken off leaving their broken trunks in the ground. Sometimes a huge creeper, a foot or more in diameter, stretched across these gloomy aisles, as though a monster serpent were passing from tree to tree.

The lake was alive with alligators. These could be seen basking along the low banks, or crawling away into the dark and shadowy

swamp. Some were floating gently on the surface of the stream, their long crests and notched backs protruding above the water. When not in motion these hideous creatures resembled dead logs of wood; and most of them were lying quiet – partly from their natural disinclination to move about, and partly waiting for their prey. Those that basked upon the banks held their jaws expanded, that at intervals were heard to close with a loud snap. These were amusing themselves by catching the flies, that, attracted by the musky odour, flew around their hideous jaws, and lit upon their slimy tongues. Some were fishing in the stream, and at intervals the stroke of their tails upon the water could be heard at the distance of half a mile or more. Their croaking resounded through the woods somewhat like the noise made by bull-frogs, but loud and terrible as the bellowing of bulls. A horrid appearance they presented; but our hunters were accustomed to the sight, and had no fear of these animals.

There were other objects around the lake more pleasing to contemplate. On a distant point stood a troop of flamingoes, drawn up in order like a company of soldiers, their scarlet plumage shining in the sun. Near them was a flock of whooping-cranes – each as tall as a full-grown man – at intervals uttering their loud trumpet notes. The great egret, too, was there, with its snowy plumage and orange bill; the delicately-formed Louisiana heron, with droves of sand-hill cranes, appearing in the distance like flocks of white sheep.

Pelicans, with their pouched throats and scythe-like bills,

stood in melancholy attitudes, and beside them were the white and scarlet ibis, and the purple gallinule. Roseate spoonbills waded through the shallows, striking their odd-shaped beaks at the crabs and cray-fish; and upon projecting limbs of trees perched the black darter, his long snake-like neck stretched eagerly over the water. In the air a flock of buzzard vultures were wheeling lazily about, and a pair of ospreys hung over the lake, now and then swooping down upon their finny prey.

Such was the scene around the camp of the boy hunters, a scene often to be witnessed among the wilderness-swamps of Louisiana.

The tent was set near the bank of the bayou, where the ground was dry and high. The spot was open – only a few scattered palmettos growing over it – and the animals were picketed upon the grass near by. There was venison for supper. Basil's unerring rifle had brought down a doe, just as they were about to halt; and Basil was an accomplished butcher of such-like game. The doe was soon skinned, and the choice pieces cut out – enough to serve for supper and breakfast upon the following morning. The haunches were hung on a limb, to be carried along, as the next day's hunt might not turn out so successful. There was still enough left to make a splendid supper for Marengo, and that hungry animal took full advantage of the occasion. He knew that in an excursion like the present it was not every day that a fat doe turned up; or when it did, that such a portion of its carcass was likely to fall to his share.

It was still early, wanting full two hours of sunset, when the hunters finished their supper – dinner it should rather be called – as, with the exception of some dry mouthfuls at their noon halt, they had not eaten since breakfast.

When the meal was over, Basil again looked to repairing the harness of the mule – that had got out of order on the march – while Lucien drew out his note-book and pencil, and, sitting down upon a buffalo-robe, commenced entering his observations for the day. François having no employment, resolved upon creeping around the edge of the bayou, to have a shot at the flamingoes, if he should be lucky enough to get near them. This he knew would be no easy matter, but he had made up his mind to try it; and, having told his brothers of his intention, he shouldered his gun and went off.

He was soon out of sight, having passed into some thick timber that grew along the edge of the water, through which there was a plain trail made by deer and other wild animals. He kept along this trail, sheltering himself behind the trees, so that the flamingoes, that were several hundred yards farther down the bayou, might not see him as he approached.

He had not been out of sight more than five minutes, when Basil and Lucien were startled by the report of a gun, and then another following quickly after. They knew it was François' fowling-piece; but what had he fired at? It could not have been the flamingoes, as he had not had time to get within range of them. Besides, the birds, where they had been sitting on the far

shore, were visible from the camp; and all of them, affrighted by the reports, were now seen winging their way over the tops of the trees. No, it could not have been at the flamingoes François had fired. What then? This was the question which Basil and Lucien put to each other, not without some feelings of anxiety. Perhaps, thought they, François has sprung a deer, or trampled up a flock of turkeys? So the brothers were fain to conjecture; but their conjectures were soon ended by François himself, who was heard far off through the woods, shouting in a fearful manner.

Basil and Lucien seized their rifles, and ran forward to find him; but before they could reach the piece of timber, François was seen coming up the trail between the trees, and running as if for his life! In front of him an object appeared, like a dead log, lying directly across the path. It could not be that, for it was in motion. It was a living animal – an alligator!

It was one, too, of the largest dimensions – nearly twenty feet in length, and lay right across the path. Basil and Lucien saw it the moment they got opposite the opening. They saw, too, it was not that which was putting François to his speed, for he was running directly upon it. Something behind him occupied all his thoughts, and he did not see the alligator at all; for, although his brothers shouted to warn him, he ran on; and, stumbling over the hideous body of the reptile, fell flat upon his face – his gun pitching forward out of his hands as he fell. He was not hurt, however, but, scrambling to his feet again, continued his race, shouting, as he emerged half breathless out of the bushes, “A

bear! a bear!”

Basil and Lucien, making ready their pieces, looked along the trail. There, sure enough, was a bear coming up as fast as he could gallop. It was at him François had fired. The small shot had only served to irritate him; and, seeing such a puny antagonist as François, he had given chase.

At first they all thought of taking to their heels, and seeking safety by mounting their horses; but the bear had got too near, and one or other might be caught before they could reach the horses and loose them. They resolved, therefore, to make a stand. Basil, who had been at the killing of a black bear before now, was not so much afraid of the encounter; so he and Lucien held their rifles in readiness to give Bruin a warm reception.

The latter came lumbering on, until he had reached the place where the alligator lay. The reptile had turned itself half round, and was now standing on its short legs, lengthwise along the path, puffing like a pair of blacksmith’s bellows. The bear, intent upon his pursuit of François, did not see it until he had stumbled right upon its body; and then, uttering a loud snort, he leaped to one side. This gave the alligator the very opportunity he would have sought; and the next moment his powerful tail was lashed with such force against the bear, that the ribs of the latter were heard to crack under the blow.

The bear – who would otherwise have left the alligator to himself – became so infuriated at this unprovoked assault, that he turned and sprang upon his new enemy, seizing him round

the body in a firm hug. Both struggled over the ground, the one growling and snorting, while the other uttered a sound like the routing of a bull.

How long the conflict would have lasted, and which would have proved victor had they been left to themselves, is not known; for Basil and Lucien both fired, wounding the bear. This caused him to relax his hug, and he now seemed anxious to get off; but the reptile had seized one of his feet in his powerful jaws and thus held him fast, all the while crawling and dragging him down to the water. The bear was evidently aware of the intention of his antagonist, and uttered loud and pitiful moanings, at times screaming like a hog under the knife of the butcher. It was all to no purpose. His unrelenting enemy gained the bank; and dragging him along, plunged into the deep water. Both went down together – completely disappearing from the eyes of the spectators – and although the boys watched for nearly an hour, neither beast nor reptile were seen to rise again to the surface. The bear no doubt had been drowned at once, and the alligator, after having suffocated him, had hidden his carcass in the mud, or dragged it along the bottom to some other part of the bayou – there to make a meal of it at his leisure.

Chapter Eight.
About Alligators

The boys now returned to their tent, impressed with curious feelings by the scene they had just witnessed. They lay down upon the grass, and entered into a conversation, of which bears and alligators formed the subjects. The latter, however, with their singular and revolting habits, came in for the greater share of their talk. Many odd stories in relation to them were known to all, even to the little François; and Basil being an old hunter among the swamps and bayous, was acquainted with many of the habits of these animals. But Basil was not much of an observer; and he had only noticed such peculiarities as, from time to time, were forced upon his attention by the incidents of the chase. Lucien, however, had more closely observed their habits, and had also studied them from books. He was, therefore, well acquainted with all that is known to the naturalist concerning these animals; and at the request of his brothers he consented to while away the twilight hours, by imparting to them such information about them as he himself possessed.

"The alligator," began he, "belongs to the order *Sauria*, or lizards. This order is again divided into several families, one of which is termed *Crocodilida*, or crocodiles; and the family of crocodiles is subdivided into three genera, each of which has

several species."

"How many species in all?" demanded Basil.

"There are not more than a dozen varieties of the whole crocodile family – at least, there are not more known to naturalists."

"Then I was thinking why there should be all this division and subdivision into orders, families, genera, and species, for a dozen varieties of the same animal, and these all so like each other in shape and habits – are they not so?"

"They are," answered Lucien, "very similar in their characteristics."

"Then, why so much classing of them? It appears to me to be quite useless."

"The object of this classing is to make the study of their natural history more easy and simple. But you are right, brother, in the present case; it appears quite useless, and only renders the thing more complex, and obscure. Where there are many varieties or species of a family or order of animals, and where these species differ widely from each other in appearance and habits, then such minute classifications become necessary to assist one's memory; but I say again, brother, you are quite right as to the present case. There is no need for the numerous divisions and subdivisions which have been made of the crocodile family."

"Who made them, then?" asked François.

"Who!" exclaimed Lucien, with some warmth; "who but

closet-naturalists, old mummy-hunters of museums! Bah! it makes one angry."

As Lucien said this, his usually mild countenance exhibited an expression of mingled indignation and contempt.

"What is there in it to make one angry?" inquired Basil, looking up at his brother with some astonishment.

"Why, to think," answered Lucien, "that these same closet-naturalists should have built themselves up great names by sitting in their easy chairs measuring, and adding up, and classing into dry catalogues, objects which they knew very little about; and that little they obtained from the observations of others – true naturalists – men like the great Wilson – men who toiled, and travelled, and exposed themselves to countless dangers and fatigues for the purpose of collecting and observing; and then for these men to have the fruits of their labours filched from them, and descanted upon in dry arithmetical terms by these same catalogue-makers. – Bah!"

"Stay, brother; Wilson was not robbed of the fruits of his labours! He became famous."

"Yes, and he died from the struggles and hardships that made him so. It reminds me of the fabled song of the swan, brother. He told his beautiful tale, and died. Ah! Poor Wilson, he was a *true* naturalist."

"His name will live for ever."

"Ay, that it will, when many of the *philosophic* naturalists, now so much talked of, shall be forgotten, or only remembered to have

their quaint theories laughed at, and their fabulous descriptions turned into ridicule. Fortunately for Wilson, he was too poor and too humble to attract their patronage until his book was published. Fortunately for him he knew no great Linneus or Count Buffon, else the vast stores which he had been at so much pains to collect would have been given to the world under another name. Look at Bartram."

"Bartram!" exclaimed François; "why, I never heard the name, Luce."

"Nor I," added Basil.

"There it is, you see. Few know his name; and yet this same John Bartram, a farmer of Pennsylvania, who lived an hundred years ago, did more to spread, not only a knowledge of American plants, but the plants themselves, than any one who has lived since. Most of the great gardens of England – Kew among the rest – are indebted to this indefatigable botanist for their American flora; and there were few of the naturalists of that time – Linneus not excepted – that were not largely indebted to him for their facts and their fame. They took his plants and specimens – collected by arduous, toilsome, and perilous journeyings – they put names to them – noble and kingly names – for king-sycophants most of them were, these same naturalists – they *described* them as *they* call it – such descriptions, indeed! and then adopted them as their own discoveries. And what did they give John Bartram in return for all his trouble? Why, the English king gave him 50 pounds to enable him to travel over thousands of miles of wilderness in

search of rare plants, many of which on reaching England were worth hundreds of pounds each! This was all the poor botanist had for enriching the gardens of Kew, and sending over the first magnolias and tulip-trees that ever blossomed in England! What did the scientific naturalists do for him? They stole his histories and descriptions, and published them under their own names. Now, brothers, what think you of it? Is it not enough to spoil one's temper when one reflects upon such injustice?"

Both Basil and François signified their assent.

"It is to such men as Hearne, and Bartram, and Wilson, that we are indebted for all we know of natural history – at least, all that is worth knowing. What to us is the dry knowledge of scientific classifications? For my part, I believe that the authors of them have obscured rather than simplified the knowledge of natural history. Take an example. There is one before our eyes. You see those long streamers hanging down from the live oaks?"

"Yes, yes," replied François; "the Spanish moss."

"Yes, Spanish moss, as we call it here, or *old-man's-beard* moss, as they name it in other parts. It is no moss, however, but a regular flowering plant, although a strange one. Now, according to these philosophic naturalists, that long, stringy, silvery creeper, that looks very like an old man's beard, is of the same family of plants as the pineapple!"

"Ha! ha! ha!" roared François; "Spanish moss the same as a pineapple plant! Why, they are no more like than my hat is to the steeple of a church."

"They are unlike," continued Lucien, "in every respect – in appearance, in properties, and uses; and yet, were you to consult the dry books of the closet-naturalists, you would learn that this Spanish moss (*Tillandsia*) was of a certain family of plants, and a few particulars of that sort, and that is all you would learn about it. Now what is the value of such a knowledge? What is it to compare with a knowledge of the appearance, the structure, and character of the plant – of its properties and the ends for which nature designed it – of its uses to the birds and beasts around – of its uses to man – how it makes his mattress to sleep on, stuffs his sofas, and saddles, and chairs equal to the best horse-hair, and would even feed his horse in case of a pinch? In my opinion, these are the facts worth knowing; and who are the men who publish such facts to the world? Not your closet-naturalists, I fancy."

"True, very true, brother; but let us not vex ourselves about such things; go on, and tell us what you know of the crocodiles."

"Well, then," said Lucien, returning to his natural tone and manner, "as I have already said, the crocodiles are divided into three genera —*crocodiles*, *gavials*, and *alligators*. It is Baron Cuvier who has made this distinction; and he rests it more upon the shape of the head and the set of the teeth, than upon any real difference in the appearance or habits of these animals. The crocodiles have long, pointed, narrow snouts, and a large tooth in each side of the lower jaw, which, when the mouth shuts, passes into a groove in the upper. 'These are the *true* crocodiles,' says Monsieur Cuvier. The gavials have also long, pointed, narrow,

roundish snouts, but their teeth are nearly equal-sized and even. The alligators, on the contrary, have broad pike-shaped noses, with teeth very unequal, and one large one on each side of the lower jaw, that, when the mouth shuts, passes – not into a groove as with the crocodile – but, into a hole or socket in the upper jaw. These are Monsieur Cuvier's distinctions; which he takes a world of pains to point out and prove. He might, in my opinion, have spared himself the trouble, as there are so few varieties of the animal in existence, that they might have been treated of with greater simplicity as so many species of the genus 'crocodile.'

"Of the true crocodiles there are five species known. Four of these are found in the rivers of Africa, while the fifth is an inhabitant of the West Indies and South America. The gavial is found in Asia – particularly in the Ganges and other Indian rivers, and is the crocodile of those parts. The alligator belongs to America, where it is distributed extensively both in North and South America. In the Spanish parts it is called 'caïman,' and there are two species well-known, viz the spectacled caïman of Guiana, and the alligator of the Mississippi. No doubt, when the great rivers of South America have been properly explored, it will come to light, that there are other varieties than these. I have heard of a species that inhabits the Lake Valencia in Venezuela, and which differs from both the American species mentioned. It is smaller than either, and is much sought after by the Indians for its flesh, which these people eat, and of which they are particularly fond. It is probable, too, that new species

of crocodiles may yet be found in Africa and the islands of the Indian Ocean.

"Now I think it is a well-ascertained fact, that all these varieties of the crocodile family have pretty much the same habits, – differing only where such difference might be expected by reason of climate, food, or other circumstances. What I shall tell you of the alligator, then, will apply in a general way to all his scaly cousins. You know his colour, – dusky-brown above, and dirty yellowish-white underneath. You know that he is covered all over with scales, and you see that on his back these scales rise into protuberances like little pyramids, and that a row of them along the upper edge of his tail give it a notched, saw-like appearance. You notice that the tail is flattened vertically, and not like the tail of the beaver, which is compressed horizontally. You observe that the legs are short and very muscular – that there are five toes on the fore-feet, slightly webbed or palmated, and four on the hind-feet much longer and much more webbed. You notice that his head is somewhat like that of a pike, that the nostrils are near the end of the snout, the eyes prominent, and the opening of the ears just behind them. His eyes have dark pupils, with a lemon-coloured iris; and the pupils are not round, as in the eye of a man, but of an oval shape, something like those of a goat.

"All these things you may observe by looking at an alligator. But there are some things about the structure of the animal which are peculiar, and which may not strike you so readily. You observe that his jaws open far back – even beyond the ears –

where they are hinged or articulated into each other. Now this is a peculiar formation, and the effect is, that when the alligator opens his mouth, his neck becomes somewhat bent upwards, giving him the appearance of having moved the upper instead of the under jaw."

"Why I have often heard that that was so," remarked François.

"Many have thought so, and said so, since the time of Herodotus, who first propagated this absurd idea. It is not the fact, however. It is the lower jaw that moves, as in other vertebrated animals; but the appearance I have described leads to the mistake that has been made by careless observers. There is another point worth speaking of. The opening of the alligator's ear is guarded by a pair of lips, which he closes the moment he goes under water. His nostrils, too, are protected by valves, which he can also close at will. There is also a peculiarity about his vertebrae. These are so jointed to each other, that he cannot turn without describing a circle with his body. He can move his head but slightly to one side or the other; and this is a fortunate circumstance, if not for him, at least for his enemies. Were he able to turn short round, or twist himself about, as serpents do, he would be a most dangerous creature to encounter. As it is, the great length of his body, combined with the shortness of his legs and the impossibility of his getting round quickly, renders him an easy antagonist on land, provided you keep out of reach of his great jaws, and beyond the sweep of his powerful tail. This last is his true weapon of offence or defence; and as *it* is not restrained

by any vertebrae, he can use it with such effect as to knock the breath out of a man with one single flap. Many of the habits of the alligator are known to you. How the female lays eggs as big as those of a goose, and buries them in the sand, where they are hatched by the heat of the sun. Sometimes she cannot find a sandbank to suit her purpose. She then raises a circular platform of mud mixed with grass and sticks. Upon this she deposits a layer of eggs, and covers them over with several inches of mud and grass. She then lays a fresh tier of eggs, covering these also with mud, and so on until she has laid her whole hatching, which often amounts to nearly two hundred eggs, of a dirty greenish-white colour. In the end she covers all up with mud, plastering it with her tail until it assumes the appearance of a mud oven or beaver-house. All these pains she takes to protect her eggs from raccoons and turtles, as well as vultures and other birds, that are very fond of them. She haunts near the spot while the eggs are hatching, so as to keep off these enemies. When the young are out, her first care is to get them to the water out of the way of such dangers. This seems to be their first instinct, too; for no sooner are they free from the shell than they are seen scuttling off in that direction, or following their mother, many of them having climbed upon her back and shoulders."

"But, brother," interrupted François, "is it true that the old males eat their own young?"

"Horrible though it be, it is perfectly true, François. I myself have seen it."

“And I,” said Basil, “several times.”

“The first care of the mother is to get them to the water, where she can better conceal them from their unnatural parent; but, notwithstanding all her precautions, many of them fall victims, both to the old alligators, and the larger tortoises, and birds. As soon as the young ones have learned a little sense, if I may so speak, they elude their monster fathers and uncles, as they are nimbler in their movements, and can keep out of reach of their great jaws and tails. I have often seen the small alligators riding upon the backs of the larger ones, knowing that the latter could not reach them in that situation.”

“They appear to eat anything that comes in their way,” remarked François.

“They are not very particular as to that. Fish is their favourite food, I believe, but they will eat any land animal they can kill; and it is believed they prefer it in a state of putrefaction. That is a doubtful point. They have been known to kill large animals in the water, and leave them at the bottom for several days; but this may have happened because they were not hungry at the time, and were merely keeping them until they should get an appetite. The process of digestion with them, as with all reptiles, is very slow; hence they do not require such quantities of food as the warm-blooded animals – mammals and birds. For instance, they bury themselves in the mud, and lie asleep during the whole winter without any food.”

“You say fish is their favourite food, Luce,” said Basil; “now

I think they are fonder of dogs than anything else. I have often known them to come where they had heard the yelping of a dog as if for the purpose of devouring it. I have seen one seize a large dog that was swimming across the Bayou Boeuf, and drag him under, as quick as a trout would have taken a fly. The dog was never seen again."

"It is very true," replied Lucien, "that they will eat dogs, as they will any other animals; but their being particularly fond of them is a point about which naturalists differ. It is true they will approach the spot where they hear the yelping of a dog; but some say that this is because it so much resembles the whining of their own young, and that it is these they are in search of."

"But I have seen both the males and females make towards the dog."

"Just so. The males went to devour the young, as they thought, and the females followed to protect them. Great battles are often fought between the males and females on this account."

"But how is it, Luce," inquired François, "how is it they can catch fish that appear so much swifter than themselves?"

"Very few kinds of fish are swifter. The alligator, by means of his webbed feet, and particularly his flat tail – which acts on the principle of a stern-oar to a boat, and a rudder as well – can pass through the water as swiftly as most of the finny tribe. It is not by hunting it down, however, but by stratagem, that the alligator secures a fish for his maw."

"By what stratagem?"

"You have often noticed them floating on the surface of the water, bent into a sort of semicircular shape, and without moving either body or limb?"

"Yes – yes; I have noticed it many a time."

"Well, if you could have looked under the water then, you would have seen a fish somewhere upon the convex side of the semicircle. The fish would be at rest – no doubt, watching the surface for his own prey: such flies or beetles as might come along. Thus occupied, he does not heed the great dusky mass that is gliding slowly towards him, and which presents no threatening appearance – for the head of the alligator is at this time turned away from his intended victim. Although apparently asleep, the alligator knows what he is about well enough. He floats silently on, until he has got the fish within sweep of his great tail, that is all the while bent like a bow; and then, taking sure aim, he strikes the unconscious prey a 'slap' that kills it at once – sometimes throwing it directly into his jaws, and sometimes flinging it several feet out of the water!

"When on land the alligator strikes his prey in a similar manner. As he gives the blow, his head turns so as to meet the tail half-way – the whole body thus forming a semicircle. Should the prey not be killed by the blow of the tail, it is flung right into the jaws of the monster, where it is sure to be despatched in a trice."

"But, brother," inquired Basil, "why do the alligators eat stones and such substances? I have seen one that was opened, and his stomach was nearly quarter full of stones as big as my fist, and

pieces of sticks and glass. They looked as if they had been there a long time, for the sharp edges were worn off. This I never could understand."

"No wonder, for wiser naturalists than we do not know the reason of this. Some think it is upon the same principle, and for the same reason, that birds and other creatures swallow gravel and earth – to assist the process of digestion. Others have affirmed that it is for the purpose of distending the stomach, so as to enable the reptile to bear his long fast while torpid during the winter. This latter reason I look upon as very absurd, and worthy only of the fabulous Buffon. For my part, I believe that the rubbish usually found in the alligator's stomach is collected there by accident – swallowed, from time to time, by mistake, or along with his prey; for his organs of taste are far from being delicate, and he will devour anything that is flung into the water, even a glass bottle. These substances, of course, remain in his stomach – perhaps accumulating there during his whole lifetime – and as, like most reptiles, his stomach being very strong, they do him little, if any, injury. We must not judge of an alligator's stomach as we would that of a human being; nor, indeed, of any of his organs. If our brain is seriously injured, we die; but an alligator's brain may be altogether removed, even in the most violent manner, and the animal will crawl off and live for days after. Instances have been known of alligators having had their brains blown out by a shot, and yet for hours after they would give battle to any one who might approach them. Their brain, like

that of all reptiles, is exceedingly small – proving them lower in the scale of intelligence than birds and mammals."

"But, Lucien, you tell us that the habits of the crocodile family are alike, or nearly so: how comes it that the African crocodiles are so much more fierce, as we have heard, often attacking and devouring the natives of Senegal and the Upper Nile? Our alligators are not so. It is true they sometimes bite the legs of our negroes; and we have heard also of some boys who have been killed by them; but this was when through negligence they came in the animals' way. They do not attack one if they are left alone. We, for instance, are not a bit afraid to approach them with only a stick in our hands."

"That is, because we feel certain they are too clumsy on land to get at us, as we can easily leap out of the reach of their tails and jaws. How would you like to swim across that bayou at this moment? I dare say you would not venture it."

"Not a bit of it – you are right there."

"And if you did, you would, in all probability, be attacked before you could reach the opposite shore. But our alligators are not now what they were an hundred years ago. We know, from the best authority, that they were then much more fierce and dangerous, and often attacked men without provocation. They have grown afraid of *us*, because they know that we are dangerous to them; and they can easily distinguish our upright form and shape from those of other animals. Look how they have been hunted by men during the mania for alligator-leather, and

see how many of them are still killed for their oil and tails. It is quite natural, then, they should fear us; and you may notice they are much more timid near the plantations and settlements than in the wilder parts. I have no doubt – and I have so heard it – that there are places in the great swamps where they are still dangerous to approach. Those who assert that the African crocodiles are more fierce, do not draw their conclusions from facts. The caïmans of South America – and these are alligators – are quite as fierce as the crocodiles. I have read many accounts of their attacking the natives of Guiana and Brazil, and devouring them, too. Much of this is fabulous, no doubt; but there are some stories of the kind well authenticated, and I have heard one which I am certain is true. I shall relate it, if you desire, though it is a very horrible and very melancholy tale, and I could well wish it had not been true."

"Oh! tell it – tell it us," cried François. "We can bear the narrative; neither Basil nor I have weak nerves. Have we, Basil?"

"No," replied Basil. "I guess we can stand it, Frank. Go on, Luce."

"Very well, then," said Lucien, "I shall give it, as it is not long, and is therefore not likely to weary you."

Chapter Nine.
The Indian Mother and Caïman

"There is, perhaps, no part of America where the alligators grow to a greater size, and are more fierce in their nature, than upon the Magdalena, and other great rivers that run into it. These rivers flow through a low country within the tropics; their climate is of the hottest kind, and consequently most suitable to the development of the great reptiles. The indolent character of the natives, too – half-Indian, half-Spanish – prevents them from attacking and destroying these creatures with that energy that is exhibited by the inhabitants of our own country. The consequence is, that the animals in their turn are less afraid of man, and often make him their prey. The alligators of the Magdalena – or 'caïmans,' as they are there called – frequently destroy natives, who by any unlucky accident may have fallen into the waters frequented by them. Not unfrequently the boatmen (*bogadores*) who navigate the river Magdalena in their *bogas*, or flat boats, drop overboard, and become the prey of the caïmans, as sailors on the ocean do of sharks. These boatmen sometimes carry rifles, for the purpose of shooting the caïmans; yet there are but few destroyed in this way, as the bogadores are too much occupied in navigating their crafts; and, moreover, it is a very difficult thing to kill an alligator by a shot. You can only do

it by sending the bullet into his eye, as the rest of his body is impervious even to a musket-ball. Of course, to hit one in the eye requires a sure aim, and a good opportunity when the animal is lying still upon the bank or on the water. When out of the water a caïman may be shot in the soft elastic skin behind the fore-shoulder; but this is a very uncertain method of killing one; and several shots fired into his body at this part will often fail to prove fatal. Sometimes the natives of the Magdalena catch the caïmans with lassos; and after dragging them upon the bank, despatch them with axes and spears. Notwithstanding this, the caïmans swarm upon these rivers, and are seldom molested by the inhabitants, except at intervals when some horrid tragedy happens – when some unfortunate victim has been snatched off by them, torn in pieces, and devoured. When this occurs, the people, sympathising with the distress of their neighbour, awake from their habitual apathy, collect together, and destroy great numbers of these hideous reptiles. The story I have promised you illustrates an affair of this kind.

“A *vaquero* (cattle-herd) lived upon the Magdalena, some miles above the city of New Carthagena. His palm-thatched *rancho*, or cottage, stood at a little distance from the bank of the river, at a point where it was much infested by caïmans – as the country around was wild and thinly settled. The vaquero had a wife and one child, a daughter – who was about six or seven years old; and being a pretty little girl, and the only one, she was of course very dear to both the parents.

"The vaquero was often absent from home – his business with his cattle carrying him to a great distance into the woods. But his wife thought nothing of being thus left alone. She was an Indian woman, and used to dangers, such as would terrify the females that live in great cities.

"One day when her husband was absent as usual, looking after his cattle, this woman took some clothes to the river bank for the purpose of washing them. The river was the only water near the rancho; and by thus carrying the clothes to it, she saved herself the trouble of fetching the water a good way; besides, there was a broad, smooth stone by the bank, where she was accustomed to beat out her linen. Her little daughter accompanied her, carrying one of the bundles.

"On reaching the spot, the woman filled her vessels with water, and commenced her work; while the child, having nothing else to occupy her, began to gather some ripe guavas, plucking them from a tree that grew out from the bank, and hung somewhat over the river. While the Indian mother was thus engaged, she was startled by a wild scream and a plunge, that were heard almost together; and, on looking round, she saw her child just sinking in the water. At the same time, she beheld a hideous object – a huge caïman – making for the spot! Filled with horror, the woman dropped her linen, and rushed out upon the bank. She did not hesitate a moment, but plunged into the river, which buried her to the neck. At that moment the child rose again to the surface. The mother seized her by the arms;

and was about raising her out of the water, when the caïman swept forward open-mouthed, caught the limbs of the little girl, and with one crunch of his powerful jaws severed them from the body! The little girl screamed again; but it was her last scream. When the mother struggled to the shore, and laid the mutilated body upon the bank, the child had ceased to breathe.

"For some moments sat the wretched mother, gazing upon the still quivering remains. At intervals, she stooped down and kissed the pale, withering lips. She did not weep. I have said she was an Indian. They do not act as whites do; but, anyhow, her anguish was too keen to allow her tears to flow. She did not scream or call for help. It could be of no use now. It was too late. She knew there was no one near – no one within miles of her. When she raised her eyes from the mangled corpse, it was only to rest them upon the black water, and there, under the shadow of the guava bushes, swam the hideous reptile, to and fro. He had swallowed the morsel, and was eagerly watching for more.

"The countenance of the woman betrayed a mingled expression of agony and vengeance. All at once a thought seemed to strike her – a sudden resolve. She rose; and, casting a look first at the dead body, and then upon the caïman, hurried off to the house. In a few minutes she came back, bringing with her a long spear. It was the hunting-spear of her husband – often used by him in his encounters with the Brazilian tiger, and other fierce creatures of the forest. She brought also several other articles – a lasso, some cords of the *pita*, and a couple of knives.

"On arriving at the bank, she looked anxiously over. The caïman was still there; and she turned, and stood for a moment as if considering what to do. Her mind was soon made up; and, bending forward, she thrust the spear lengthwise through what remained of her child's body! It was a fearful act, but the feeling of revenge was strong within her. She next caught the blade of the spear – now red with blood – and placing the knives lengthwise – so that they might serve as barbs – tied them firmly upon it with the *pita* cord. Close up to these she pushed the mangled body, and then looped the lasso tightly to the shaft of the spear. The other end she made fast to the trunk of a guava tree – for she well knew that her own strength would avail but little against such a monster as the caïman.

"When all was ready she poised the shaft, and flung spear, body, and all, into the water. Then taking the rope in her hand, she crouched behind the bushes to await the result.

"She had not long to wait. The reptile, thirsting for more blood, saw the tempting morsel; and, darting forward, seized it in his huge jaws, crushing it in the act. The woman remained motionless, biding her time.

"The caïmans do not masticate their food. Their teeth are not formed for that. They are only made for seizing; and the tongue – which they cannot extend forward – only serves to assist them in swallowing. In a few moments the body had disappeared down the capacious throat of the monster. Seeing this, the woman suddenly sprang to her feet, and dragged violently upon the rope,

and the next moment a wild scream announced that she had succeeded in her intentions. The barbed blades had taken hold, and the caïman was secured!

"Finding himself thus caught, the huge reptile dived to the bottom, then rose again, bellowing loudly, and lashing the water into foam, the blood all the while running from his jaws and nostrils. At intervals, he would rush from point to point – until suddenly checked by the strong raw-hide lasso – making the tree shake with his great strength; and this he did for a long while. His struggles at length grew fainter, and more feeble, and he lay motionless in the water. Throughout all this scene the mother sat upon the bank of the river, at times in deep silence and dejected, while at intervals her face would light up with a vengeful expression as she cast her eyes upon the monster that had robbed her of her child.

"At length the gallop of a horse roused her from her reverie. She looked around. It was her husband!

"The melancholy tale was soon told; and shortly after was carried to those that dwelt nearest them. The grief was general; and the sympathy that followed caused a general rising throughout the neighbourhood; and for several days afterwards a war of extermination was waged against the caïmans.

"This, brothers," said Lucien, "is a true narrative; and, in fact, it is only a year or two since the painful incident occurred."

"And a painful incident it was," cried Basil, with some excitement. "Thunder! it makes one hate those monsters so I feel

like having a shot at one this very moment; besides I want a tooth for a powder-charger;" and as he said this, he took up his rifle, and stepped out to the water's edge. None of the alligators appeared to be within range at the moment, though dozens of them were seen moving about on the bayou.

"Hold, brother!" shouted François. "Have patience a little, and I'll bring them near enough. Place yourself in ambush, while I call them."

Now one of François' accomplishments was an unusual talent for mimicry. He could imitate everything, from the crowing of a cock to the bellowing of a bull, and so naturally as to deceive even the animals themselves. Running down towards the bank, he crouched behind some yucca-bushes, and commenced whining and barking like a young puppy. Basil also concealed himself among the bushes.

In a few seconds, several alligators were seen swimming over the bayou, coming from all sides at once. They were not long in reaching the bank where François lay concealed, and foremost of all a large male, throwing up his snout, crawled out of the water. He was calculating, no doubt, on making a meal of something; but was doomed to disappointment, and worse than that, for the sharp crack of Basil's rifle rang upon the air, and the hideous reptile rolled over in the mud; and, after sprawling about for a while, lay motionless. He was quite dead, as the well-aimed rifle had sent a bullet right into his eye.

Basil and François now showed themselves – as they did not

care to waste their ammunition by shooting any more – and the rest of the alligators, seeing them, swam off faster than they had come. By the aid of Lucien's hatchet, the largest teeth were knocked out of the jaws of the one that had been killed; and the horrid carcass was left where it lay, to feed the wolves and vultures, or anything else that chose to make a meal of it.

After cooking a pot of coffee and a venison-steak for supper, our adventurers spread their buffalo-robes within the tent, and went to rest for the night.

Next morning they were astir by daybreak; and after breakfasting heartily, they saddled their horses, and resumed their journey.

Chapter Ten.
The Food of the Silkworm

After leaving Bayou Crocodile, our young hunters travelled due west, over the prairies of Opelousas. They did not expect to fall in with buffalo on these great meadows. No. The bison had long since forsaken the pastures of Opelousas, and gone far westward. In his place thousands of long horned cattle roamed over these plains; but these, although wild enough, belonged to owners, and were all marked and tended by mounted herdsmen. There were white settlements upon the prairies of Opelousas, but our adventurers did not go out of their way to visit them. Their purpose was to get far beyond; and they did not wish to lose time.

They crossed numerous bayous and rivers, generally running southward into the Mexican Gulf. The shallow ones they forded, while those that were too deep for fording, they swam over upon their horses. They thought nothing of that – for their horses, as well as the mule Jeanette and the dog Marengo, were all trained to swim like fishes.

After many days' travel they reached the banks of the river Sabine, which divides Louisiana from Texas, then a part of the Mexican territory. The face of the country was here very different from most of that they had passed over. It was more hilly and upland; and the vegetation had altogether changed.

The great dark cypress had disappeared, and pines were more abundant. The forests were lighter and more open.

There was a freshet in the Sabine; but they swam across it, as they had done other rivers, and halted to encamp upon its western bank. It was still only a little after noon, but as they had wet their baggage in crossing, they resolved to remain by the river for the rest of the day. They made their camp in an open space in the midst of a grove of low trees. There were many open spaces, for the trees stood wide apart, and the grove looked very much like a deserted orchard. Here and there a tall magnolia raised its cone-shaped summit high above the rest, and a huge trunk of one of these, without leaves or branches, appeared at some distance, standing like an old ruined tower.

The ground was covered with flowers of many kinds. There were blue lupins and golden helianthi. There were malvas and purple monardas, and flowers of the cotton-rose, five inches in diameter. There were blossoms of vines, and creeping plants, that twined around the trees, or stretched in festoons from one to another – the cane-vine with its white clusters, and the raccoon grape, whose sweet odours perfumed the air; but by far the most showy were the large blossoms of the bignonia, that covered the festoons with their trumpet-shaped corollas, exhibiting broad surfaces of bright scarlet.

In the midst of these flowers our hunters pitched camp, picketing their animals, and putting up their tent as usual.

The sun was shining brightly, and they proceeded to spread

their wet robes and blankets.

"It strikes me," said Lucien, after they had completed their arrangements for camping, "that we have halted on the site of an old Indian town."

"Why do you think so?" asked Basil.

"Why, I notice these heaps of rubbish here that are covered with weeds and briars. They are Indian graves, or piles of decayed logs where houses once stood. I can tell from the trees, too. Look around! do you see anything peculiar in these trees?"

"Nothing," replied Basil and François together. "Nothing, except that they are mostly small and low."

"Do you not observe anything odd in their species?"

"No," said Basil. "I think I have seen them all before. There are mulberry-trees, and black walnuts, and Chicasaw plums, and pawpaws, and Osage orange, and shell-bark hickories, and pecans, and honey-locusts. I see no others except vines, and those great magnolias. I have seen all these trees before."

"Yes," returned Lucien, "but have you ever observed them all growing together in this way?"

"Ah! that is a different affair: I believe not."

"Because it is from that fact," continued Lucien, "that I am led to believe this spot was once the seat of an Indian settlement. These trees, or others that produced them, have been planted here, and by the Indians."

"But, brother Luce," interposed François, "I never heard that the Indians of these parts made such settlements as this must have

been. These low woods extend down the river for miles. They must have had a large tract under cultivation."

"I think," replied Lucien, "the Indians who at present inhabit this region never planted these trees. It is more likely a settlement of the ancient nation of the Natchez."

"The Natchez! Why, that is the name of a town on the Mississippi, but I did not know there were Indians of that name."

"Neither are there now; but there once was a very extensive tribe so called who occupied the whole territory of Louisiana. It is said that, like the Mexicans and Peruvians, they had made some progress in civilisation, and knew how to weave cloth and cultivate the soil. They are now an extinct race."

"How came that about?"

"No one can tell. Some of the old Spanish authors say that they were destroyed by Indians from South America. This story, however, is very absurd – as is, indeed, most of what has been written by these same old Spanish authors, whose books read more like the productions of children than of reasoning men. It is far more likely that the Natchez were conquered by the Creeks and Chicasaws, who came from the south-west of their country; and that the remnant of their tribe became blended with and lost among the conquerors. In my opinion, this is how they have come to be extinct. Why, then, should not this be one of their ancient settlements, and these trees the remains of their orchards, cultivated by them for their fruits and other uses?"

"But *we* make but little use of such trees," remarked François.

"What's that you say?" exclaimed Basil. "You, François, who every year eat such quantities of shell-bark nuts, and pecans, and red mulberries, too! – you who suck persimmons like a 'possum! – no use, eh?"

"Well, that's true enough," rejoined François, "but still we do not cultivate these trees for their fruits – we find them in the woods, growing naturally."

"Because," interrupted Lucien, "we have the advantage of the Indians. We understand commerce, and get other and better sorts of fruits from all parts of the world. We have cereals, too, such as wheat and rice, and many kinds which they had not; we can therefore do without these trees. With the Indians it was different. It is true they had the Indian corn or maize-plant (*Zea maïz*), but, like other people, they were fond of variety; and these trees afforded them that. The Indian nations who lived within the tropics had variety enough. In fact, no people without commerce could have been better off in regard to fruit-bearing plants and trees than the Aztecs, and other tribes of the South. The Natchez, however, and those in the temperate zone, had their trees and plants as well – such as those we see before us – and from these they drew both necessary food, and luxurious fruits and beverages. Indeed the early colonists did the same; and many settlers in remote places make use to this day of these spontaneous productions of Nature."

"Would it not be interesting, Basil," said François, appealing to his elder brother, "if Lucien would give a botanical description

of all these trees, and tell us their uses? He knows all that."

"Yes," replied Basil, "I should like to hear it."

"That I shall do with pleasure," said Lucien. "Not, however, a *botanical* description, according to the sense of the Linnean school, as that would weary you soon enough, without adding much to your stock of information. I shall only state what I know of their properties and uses; and I may remark that there is not a tree or plant that is not intended for some use in the economy of Nature. If botanists had spent their time in trying to discover these uses, instead of wasting it in idle classifications, mankind would have been more enriched by their labours.

"Let us begin, then, with the mulberry-tree, as there are many of them growing around. Were I to tell you all about this valuable tree, I should occupy a day or more. I shall only state those facts about it that are most interesting.

"The mulberry-trees form the genus *morus*– for this was the name by which they were known to the ancient Greeks. Of this genus there are several well-known species. No doubt there may be other species growing in wild countries, and yet unknown or undescribed by botanists; and this remark applies as well to other trees, for every day we hear of new varieties being discovered by enterprising explorers.

"First, then, comes the white mulberry (*Morus alia*). It is the most important species yet known. This you will readily admit when I tell you that from it comes all our silk – spun out of it by the silkworm (*Bombyx mori*). It is called white mulberry on

account of the colour of its fruit, which, however, is not always white, but sometimes of a purple or black colour. Now it would be difficult to give an exact description of a white mulberry-tree; for, like the apple and pear trees, there are many varieties of it produced from the same seeds, and also by difference of soil and climate. It is a small tree, however, rarely growing over forty feet high, with thick leaves and numerous branches. The leaves are the most important part of it – for it is upon these the silkworms feed, spinning their fine threads out of the milky juice, which in its properties resembles the juice of the caoutchouc tree. It is true that the silkworm will feed upon the other species of mulberries, and also upon slippery elms, figs, lettuce, beets, endive, and many kinds of leaves besides; but the silk made from all these is of an inferior quality; and even the varieties of the white mulberry itself produce different qualities of this beautiful material.

"This tree has other uses. Its wood is compact and heavy, weighing forty-four pounds to the cubic foot. In France it is much used in turnery; and wine-casks are made from it, as it gives to white wines an agreeable flavour of violets. Vine-props and fences are made from its branches; and out of its bark – by a process which I have not time to describe – a cloth can be manufactured almost as fine as silk itself. The fruit of the white mulberry – where it grows in warm climates – is very good to eat, and makes an excellent syrup.

"The white mulberry, it is supposed, first came from China, where it is still found growing wild; and the Chinese first

cultivated it for feeding silkworms as early as 2700 years before the Christian era. The tree is now found in every civilised country, growing either as an ornament of the shrubbery, or for the manufacture of silk.

"The next species is the black mulberry (*Morus nigra*), so called on account of the colour of its fruit, which is of a dark purple, nearly black. This kind came originally from Persia, but is now, like the white mulberry, found in all civilised countries. It is cultivated more for ornament and shade than for feeding silkworms; though it is put to this use in some parts, especially in cold climates, where the other species does not thrive. They are easily distinguished from each other – the bark of the black being much rougher and darker. The wood of the latter is not so firm nor heavy as the white, but it is also durable, and is used in England for hoops, wheels, and ribs of small vessels. In Spain, Italy, and Persia, they prefer the leaves of the black for feeding the silkworm. They are also eaten by cattle, sheep, and goats. The roots when prepared are used as a vermifuge. The fruit has a pleasant aromatic taste; and is eaten both raw and in preserves, or mixed with cider makes an agreeable drink. The Greeks distil a clear weak brandy out of them; and in France they make a wine from these mulberries – which must be drunk while it is new, as it soon turns to vinegar. This fruit is good for fevers and rheumatisms; and it is much sought after by birds and all kinds of poultry, who devour it greedily.

"So much for the white and black mulberry-tree. We now

come to the third species, the red (*Morus rubra*).

"That is the red before your face," continued Lucien, pointing to the trees, which he had already designated. "It is so called from the fruit, which, as you know, are of a dark red colour, and resemble red raspberries more than anything in the world. Some of these trees, you see, are nearly seventy feet in height, though it usually does not reach so high. You notice the leaves. The are heart-shaped, many of them ten inches long, and nearly as broad as long. They are dark green and rough, and for feeding the silkworm quite useless where the white mulberry grows. They form a delightful shade, however; and this is one of the uses of this beautiful tree. The fruit, too, is, in my opinion – and I think François will agree with me – quite equal to the best raspberries. As for the wood, it is much used in the dockyards of the Southern states. It is of a pale lemon colour; and is considered more durable for trenails than any other – that of the locust excepted.

"The red mulberry, like the white and black species, runs into several varieties, differing considerably from each other.

"There is still a fourth species of this genus, called the paper mulberry (*Morus papyrifera*). This, however, has been separated by botanists into another genus; but it is worth a word here, as it is a very curious and valuable tree, or, rather, a large shrub, for it does not grow so tall as either of the other three. It is a native of China, Japan, and the islands of the Pacific Ocean; but, like the others, it is cultivated for ornament both in Europe and America. Its fruit, which is of a scarlet colour, is globe-shaped, and not

oblong, as that of the true mulberries; and this is one reason why it has been separated into a genus by itself. Its leaves are of no use for silk-making, but they make excellent food for cattle; and as the tree grows rapidly, and carries such large bunches of leaves, some people have said that it would yield better than grass, and should be cultivated for pasture. I do not know whether this has been tried yet. The most interesting part of the paper mulberry is its bark, which is used in the manufacture of paper both in China and Japan. The beautiful India paper used for engravings is made from it, and so, too, is the fine white cloth worn by the natives of the Society Islands, and which so much astonished Europeans when they first saw it. It would be interesting to detail the process of manufacturing this cloth as well as the paper, but it would take up too much of our time at present.

"There is another genus of trees which resembles the mulberries very much. They are valuable for their wood, which produces a fine yellow dye, known by the name of 'fustic-wood.' The tree that produces the best of this dye is the *Morus tinctoria*, and grows in the West Indies and tropical America; but there is a species found in the southern United States, of an inferior kind, which produces the 'bastard fustic' of commerce.

"So much, then, for the mulberry-tree; but I fear, brothers, I have left but little time to describe the others."

"Oh! plenty of time," said Basil; "we have nothing else to do. We are better learning from you than rambling idly about; and upon my word, Luce, you make me begin to take an interest in

botany."

"Well, I am glad of that," rejoined Lucien, "for I hold it to be a science productive of much good, not only on account of its utility in the arts and manufactures, but to the mind of the student himself; for, in my belief, it has a refining influence."

And Lucien was about to continue his description of the trees, when a series of incidents occurred which put an end to the conversation, at least upon that subject.

These incidents are recorded in the chapter which follows.

Chapter Eleven.
The Chain of Destruction

Directly in front of the tent, and at no great distance from it, a thick network of vines stretched between two trees. These trees were large tupelos, and the vines, clinging from trunk to trunk and to one another, formed an impenetrable screen with their dark green leaves. Over the leaves grew flowers, so thickly as almost to hide them – the whole surface shining as if a bright carpet had been spread from tree to tree and hung down between them. The flowers were of different colours. Some were white and starlike, but the greater number were the large scarlet cups of the trumpet-vine (*bignonia*).

François, although listening to his brother, had for some time kept his eyes in that direction, as if admiring the flowers. All at once, interrupting the conversation, he exclaimed, —

"*Voilà*! look yonder – humming-birds!"

Now the sight of humming-birds is not so common in America as travellers would have you believe. Even in Mexico, where the species are numerous, you will not see them every day. Indeed, you may not notice them at all, unless you are specially looking for them. They are such small creatures, and fly so nimbly – darting from flower to flower and tree to tree – that you may pass along without observing them, or perhaps mistake them for

bees. In the United States, however, where only one species has yet been noticed, the sight is a rare one, and generally interesting to those who witness it. Hence François' exclamation was one of surprise and pleasure.

"Where are they?" inquired Lucien, starting up in an interested manner.

"Yonder," replied François, "by the trumpet flowers. I see several, I think."

"Softly, brothers," said Lucien; "approach them gently, so as not to fright them off – I wish to make some observations upon them."

As Lucien said this, he walked cautiously forward, followed by Basil and François.

"Ah!" exclaimed Lucien, as they drew near, "I see one now. It is the ruby-throat (*Trochilus colubris*). He is feeding on the bignonias. They are fonder of them than any other blossoms. See! he has gone up into the funnel of the flower. Ha! he is out again. Listen to his whirring wings, like the hum of a great bee. It is from that he takes his name of 'humming-bird.' See his throat, how it glitters – just like a ruby!"

"Another!" cried François; "look above! It is not near so pretty as the first. Is it a different species?"

"No," replied Lucien, "it is the female of the same; but its colour is not so bright, and you may notice that it wants the ruby-throat."

"I see no others," said François, after a pause.

“I think there are but the two,” remarked Lucien, “a male and female. It is their breeding season. No doubt their nest is near.”

“Shall we try to catch them?” inquired François.

“That we could not do, unless we had a net.”

“I can shoot them with small shot.”

“No, no,” said Lucien, “the smallest would tear them to pieces. They are sometimes shot with poppy-seeds, and sometimes with water. But never mind, I would rather observe them a bit as they are. I want to satisfy myself upon a point. You may look for the nest, as you have good eyes. You will find it near – in some naked fork, but not among the twigs or leaves.”

Basil and François set about looking for the nest, while Lucien continued to watch the evolutions of the tiny little creatures. The “point” upon which our young naturalist wished to be satisfied was, whether the humming-birds eat insects as well as honey – a point which has been debated among ornithologists.

As he stood watching them a large humble-bee (*Apis bombylicus*) came whizzing along, and settled in one of the flowers. Its feet had scarcely touched the bright petals, when the male ruby-throat darted towards it, and attacked it like a little fury. Both came out of the flower together, carrying on their miniature battle as they flew; but, after a short contest, the bee turned tail, and flew off with an angry-like buzz, – no doubt, occasioned by the plying of his wings more rapidly in flight.

A shout from François now told that the nest was discovered. There it was, in the fork of a low branch, but without eggs as

yet – else the birds would not both have been abroad. The nest was examined by all three, though they did not disturb it from its position. It was built of fine threads of Spanish moss (*Tillandsia*), with which it was tied to the branch; and it was lined inside with the silken down of the anemone. It was a semi-sphere, open at the top, and but one inch in diameter. In fact, so small was the whole structure, that any one but the sharp-eyed, bird-catching, nest-seeking François, would have taken it for a knob on the bark of the tree.

All three now returned to watch the manoeuvres of the birds, that, not having seen them by the nest, still continued playing among the flowers. The boys stole as near as possible, keeping behind a large bunch of hanging vines. Lucien was nearest, and his face was within a few feet of the little creatures, so that he could observe every motion they made. He was soon gratified with a sight that determined his "point" for him. A swarm of small blue-winged flies attracted his attention. They were among the blossoms, sometimes resting upon them, and sometimes flitting about from one to another. He saw the birds several times dash at them with open bills, and pick them from their perch; so the question was decided – the humming-birds were insect-eaters.

After a while the female flew off to her nest, leaving the male still among the flowers.

The curiosity of the boys was now satisfied, and they were about to return to the tent, when Lucien suddenly made a motion,

whispering the others to remain silent. François first caught sight of the object which had caused this behaviour on the part of his brother, and then Basil saw it. A hideous object it was!

Crouching among the leaves, now crawling sideways, now making short springs, and then hiding itself, went a fearful-looking creature. It was about the size of one of the birds, but far different in appearance. Its body consisted of two pieces, joined about the middle, and covered all over with a reddish-brown wool or hair, that stood upright like bristles. It had ten limbs – long, crooked, and covered with hair, like the body – two curved claw-like antennae or feelers in front, and two horns projecting behind, so that, but for the sharp fiery eyes of the creature, it would have been difficult to tell its head from its hinder part. Its rusty colour, its ill-shaped body, and hairy legs, combined with the piercing look from its eyes, gave it a most vicious appearance, such as belongs, less or more, to all of its race – for it was of the race *aranea*, or spiders.

"The *leaping tarantula*!" whispered Lucien to his brothers. "See," he continued, "it is after the ruby-throat!"

This was evident. Step by step, and leap after leap, it was approaching the cluster of blossoms where the humming-bird was at the moment engaged. Its eyes were bent eagerly upon the latter; and whenever it flew up from the flowers and whirred idly about, the tarantula squatted itself closely, hiding behind the leaves or shanks of the vines. On the other hand, when the bird settled a moment and appeared busily feeding, the skulking

creature would advance a stage nearer, either by a quick run or a leap, when it would again conceal itself and await a fresh opportunity. As the bird flitted about a good deal, the spider had frequently to change its direction in following. The former after one of its short flights, settled into a pet-flower directly in front of where the latter lay crouching. It did not enter the cup of the flower, but remained at the mouth – poised upon its whirring wings – while with its long prehensile tongue it drew out the honey. It had scarcely been a moment in this position, when the tarantula sprang forward and clutched it round the body with his antennae. The bird, with a wild chirrup, like that of a distressed cricket, flew outward and upwards. Its wings were still free, and all expected it would carry off the spider that was now seen clinging around it. Not so, however. On getting a few feet from the flower its flight appeared to be suddenly checked; and, although it still kept in the air, flying first one way and then another, it was evident that something restrained it from getting clear off. On looking more attentively a fine silk-like line was seen stretching from the trees to the fluttering creature. It was the thread of the spider, and this it was that prevented his victim from carrying him into the air.

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