ROBERT MICHAEL BALLANTYNE

THE DOG CRUSOE AND HIS MASTER

Robert Michael Ballantyne

The Dog Crusoe and his Master

Ballantyne R.

The Dog Crusoe and his Master / R. Ballantyne — «Public Domain»,

Содержание

R. M. Ballantyne
The Dog Crusoe and his Master

Chapter One.
The Backwoods Settlement—Crusoe's Parentage and Early History—The agonising pains and sorrows of his puppyhood, and other interesting matters

The dog Crusoe was once a pup. Now do not, courteous reader, toss your head contemptuously, and exclaim, "Of course he was; I could have told *you* that." You know very well that you have often seen a man above six feet high, broad and powerful as a lion, with a bronzed shaggy visage and the stern glance of an eagle, of whom you have said, or thought, or heard others say, "It is scarcely possible to believe that such a man was once a squalling baby." If you had seen our hero in all the strength and majesty of full-grown doghood, you would have experienced a vague sort of surprise had we told you—as we now repeat—that the dog Crusoe was once a pup—a soft, round, sprawling, squeaking pup, as fat as a tallow candle, and as blind as a bat.

But we draw particular attention to the fact of Crusoe's having once been a pup, because in connection with the days of his puppyhood there hangs a tale. This peculiar dog may thus be said to have had two tails—one in connection with his body, the other with his career. This tale, though short, is very harrowing, and, as it is intimately connected with Crusoe's subsequent history, we will relate it here. But before doing so we must beg our reader to accompany us beyond the civilised portions of the United States of America—beyond the frontier settlements of the "far west," into those wild prairies which are watered by the great Missouri river—the Father of Waters—and his numerous tributaries.

Here dwell the Pawnees, the Sioux, the Delawares, the Crows, the Blackfeet, and many other tribes of Red Indians, who are gradually retreating step by step towards the Rocky Mountains as the advancing white man cuts down their trees and ploughs up their prairies. Here, too, dwell the wild horse and the wild ass, the deer, the buffalo, and the badger; all, men and brutes alike, wild as the power of untamed and ungovernable passion can make them, and free as the wind that sweeps over their mighty plains.

There is a romantic and exquisitely beautiful spot on the banks of one of the tributaries above referred to—a long stretch of mingled woodland and meadow, with a magnificent lake lying like a gem in its green bosom—which goes by the name of the Mustang Valley. This remote vale, even at the present day, is but thinly peopled by white men, and is still a frontier settlement round which the wolf and the bear prowl curiously, and from which the startled deer bounds terrified away. At the period of which we write the valley had just been taken possession of by several families of squatters, who, tired of the turmoil and the squabbles of the then frontier settlements, had pushed boldly into the far west to seek a new home for themselves, where they could have "elbow room," regardless alike of the dangers they might encounter in unknown lands and of the Red-skins who dwelt there.

The squatters were well armed with axes, rifles, and ammunition. Most of the women were used to dangers and alarms, and placed implicit reliance in the power of their fathers, husbands, and brothers to protect them—and well they might, for a bolder set of stalwart men than these backwoodsmen never trod the wilderness. Each had been trained to the use of the rifle and the axe from infancy, and many of them had spent so much of their lives in the woods, that they were more than a match for the Indian in his own peculiar pursuits of hunting and war. When the squatters first issued from the woods bordering the valley, an immense herd of wild horses or mustangs were

browsing on the plain. These no sooner beheld the cavalcade of white men, than, uttering a wild neigh, they tossed their flowing manes in the breeze and dashed away like a whirlwind. This incident procured the valley its name.

The newcomers gave one satisfied glance at their future home, and then set to work to erect log huts forthwith. Soon the axe was heard ringing through the forests, and tree after tree fell to the ground, while the occasional sharp ring of a rifle told that the hunters were catering successfully for the camp. In course of time the Mustang Valley began to assume the aspect of a thriving settlement, with cottages and waving fields clustered together in the midst of it.

Of course the savages soon found it out, and paid it occasional visits. These dark-skinned tenants of the woods brought furs of wild animals with them, which they exchanged with the white men for knives, and beads, and baubles and trinkets of brass and tin. But they hated the "Pale-faces" with bitter hatred, because their encroachments had at this time materially curtailed the extent of their hunting grounds, and nothing but the numbers and known courage of the squatters prevented these savages from butchering and scalping them all.

The leader of this band of pioneers was a Major Hope, a gentleman whose love for nature in its wildest aspects determined him to exchange barrack life for a life in the woods. The major was a first-rate shot, a bold, fearless man, and an enthusiastic naturalist. He was past the prime of life, and, being a bachelor, was unencumbered with a family. His first act on reaching the site of the new settlement was to commence the erection of a block-house, to which the people might retire in case of a general attack by the Indians.

In this block-house Major Hope took up his abode as the guardian of the settlement,—and here the dog Crusoe was born; here he sprawled in the early morn of life; here he leaped, and yelped, and wagged his shaggy tail in the excessive glee of puppyhood, and from the wooden portals of this block-house he bounded forth to the chase in all the fire, and strength, and majesty of full-grown doghood.

Crusoe's father and mother were magnificent Newfoundlanders. There was no doubt as to their being of the genuine breed, for Major Hope had received them as a parting gift from a brother officer, who had brought them both from Newfoundland itself. The father's name was Crusoe; the mother's name was Fan. Why the father had been so called no one could tell. The man from whom Major Hope's friend had obtained the pair was a poor, illiterate fisherman, who had never heard of the celebrated "Robinson" in all his life. All he knew was that Fan had been named after his own wife. As for Crusoe, he had got him from a friend, who had got him from another friend, whose cousin had received him as a marriage gift from a friend of *his*; and that each had said to the other that the dog's name was "Crusoe," without reasons being asked or given on either side. On arriving at New York the major's friend, as we have said, made him a present of the dogs. Not being much of a dog fancier, he soon tired of old Crusoe, and gave him away to a gentleman, who took him down to Florida, and that was the end of him. He was never heard of more.

When Crusoe, junior, was born, he was born, of course, without a name. That was given to him afterwards in honour of his father. He was also born in company with a brother and two sisters, all of whom drowned themselves accidentally, in the first month of their existence, by falling into the river which flowed past the block-house,—a calamity which occurred, doubtless, in consequence of their having gone out without their mother's leave. Little Crusoe was with his brother and sisters at the time, and fell in along with them, but was saved from sharing their fate by his mother, who, seeing what had happened, dashed with an agonised howl into the water, and, seizing him in her mouth, brought him ashore in a half-drowned condition. She afterwards brought the others ashore one by one, but the poor little things were dead.

And now we come to the harrowing part of our tale, for the proper understanding of which the foregoing dissertation was needful.

One beautiful afternoon, in that charming season of the American year called the Indian summer, there came a family of Sioux Indians to the Mustang Valley, and pitched their tent close to

the block-house. A young hunter stood leaning against the gate-post of the palisades, watching the movements of the Indians, who, having just finished a long "palaver" or "talk" with Major Hope, were now in the act of preparing supper. A fire had been kindled on the green sward in front of the tent, and above it stood a tripod, from which depended a large tin camp-kettle. Over this hung an ill-favoured Indian woman, or squaw, who, besides attending to the contents of the pot, bestowed sundry cuffs and kicks upon her little child, which sat near to her playing with several Indian curs that gambolled round the fire. The master of the family and his two sons reclined on buffalo robes, smoking their stone pipes or calumets in silence. There was nothing peculiar in their appearance. Their faces were neither dignified nor coarse in expression, but wore an aspect of stupid apathy, which formed a striking contrast to the countenance of the young hunter, who seemed an amused spectator of their proceedings.

The youth referred to was very unlike, in many respects, to what we are accustomed to suppose a backwoods hunter should be. He did not possess that quiet gravity and staid demeanour which often characterise these men. True, he was tall and strongly made, but no one would have called him stalwart, and his frame indicated grace and agility rather than strength. But the point about him which rendered him different from his companions was his bounding, irrepressible flow of spirits, strangely coupled with an intense love of solitary wandering in the woods. None seemed so well fitted for social enjoyment as he; none laughed so heartily, or expressed such glee in his mischief-loving eye; yet for days together he went off alone into the forest, and wandered where his fancy led him, as grave and silent as an Indian warrior.

After all, there was nothing mysterious in this. The boy followed implicitly the dictates of nature within him. He was amiable, straightforward, sanguine, and intensely *earnest*. When he laughed he let it out, as sailors have it, "with a will." When there was good cause to be grave, no power on earth could make him smile. We have called him boy, but in truth he was about that uncertain period of life when a youth is said to be neither a man nor a boy. His face was good-looking (*every* earnest, candid face is) and masculine; his hair was reddish-brown, and his eye bright blue. He was costumed in the deerskin cap, leggings, moccasins, and leathern shirt common to the western hunter.

"You seem tickled wi' the Injuns, Dick Varley," said a man who at that moment issued from the block-house.

"That's just what I am, Joe Blunt," replied the youth, turning with a broad grin to his companion.

"Have a care, lad; do not laugh at 'em too much. They soon take offence; an' them Red-skins never forgive."

"But I'm only laughing at the baby," returned the youth, pointing to the child, which, with a mixture of boldness and timidity, was playing with a pup, wrinkling up its fat visage into a smile when its playmate rushed away in sport, and opening wide its jet-black eyes in grave anxiety as the pup returned at full gallop.

"It 'ud make an owl laugh," continued young Varley, "to see such a queer pictur' o' itself."

He paused suddenly, and a dark frown covered his face as he saw the Indian woman stoop quickly down, catch the pup by its hind-leg with one hand, seize a heavy piece of wood with the other, and strike it several violent blows on the throat. Without taking the trouble to kill the poor animal outright, the savage then held its still writhing body over the fire in order to singe off the hair before putting it into the pot to be cooked.

The cruel act drew young Varley's attention more closely to the pup, and it flashed across his mind that this could be no other than young Crusoe, which neither he nor his companion had before seen, although they had often heard others speak of and describe it.

Had the little creature been one of the unfortunate Indian curs, the two hunters would probably have turned from the sickening sight with disgust, feeling that, however much they might dislike such cruelty, it would be of no use attempting to interfere with Indian usages. But the instant the idea that

it was Crusoe occurred to Varley he uttered a yell of anger, and sprang towards the woman with a bound that caused the three Indians to leap to their feet and grasp their tomahawks.

Blunt did not move from the gate, but threw forward his rifle with a careless motion, but an expressive glance, that caused the Indians to resume their seats and pipes with an emphatic "Wah!" of disgust at having been startled out of their propriety by a trifle, while Dick Varley snatched poor Crusoe from his dangerous and painful position, scowled angrily in the woman's face, and, turning on his heel, walked up to the house, holding the pup tenderly in his arms.

Joe Blunt gazed after his friend with a grave, solemn expression of countenance till he disappeared; then he looked at the ground and shook his head.

Joe was one of the regular out-and-out backwoods hunters, both in appearance and in fact —broad, tall, massive, lion-like,—gifted with the hunting, stalking, running, and trail—following powers of the savage, and with a superabundance of the shooting and fighting powers, the daring and dash of the Anglo-Saxon. He was grave, too seldom smiled, and rarely laughed. His expression almost at all times was a compound of seriousness and good-humour. With the rifle he was a good, steady shot; but by no means a "crack" one. *His* ball never failed to *hit*, but it often failed to kill.

After meditating a few seconds, Joe Blunt again shook his head, and muttered to himself; "The boy's bold enough, but he's too reckless for a hunter. There was no need for that yell, now—none at all."

Having uttered this sagacious remark, he threw his rifle into the hollow of his left arm, turned round, and strode off with a long, slow step towards his own cottage.

Blunt was an American by birth, but of Irish extraction, and to an attentive ear there was a faint echo of the *brogue* in his tone, which seemed to have been handed down to him as a threadbare and almost worn-out heirloom.

Poor Crusoe was singed almost naked. His wretched tail seemed little better than a piece of wire filed off to a point, and he vented his misery in piteous squeaks as the sympathetic Varley confided him tenderly to the care of his mother. How Fan managed to cure him no one can tell, but cure him she did, for, in the course of a few weeks, Crusoe was as well, and sleek, and fat as ever.

Chapter Two.
A shooting match and its consequences —New friends introduced to the reader —Crusoe and his mother change masters

Shortly after the incident narrated in the last chapter, the squatters of the Mustang Valley lost their leader. Major Hope suddenly announced his intention of quitting the settlement, and returning to the civilised world. Private matters, he said, required his presence there—matters which he did not choose to speak of but which would prevent his returning again to reside among them. Go he must, and, being a man of determination, go he did; but before going he distributed all his goods and chattels among the settlers. He even gave away his rifle, and Fan, and Crusoe. These last, however, he resolved should go together; and as they were well worth having, he announced that he would give them to the best shot in the valley. He stipulated that the winner should escort him to the nearest settlement eastward, after which he might return with the rifle on his shoulder.

Accordingly, a long level piece of ground on the river's bank, with a perpendicular cliff at the end of it, was selected as the shooting ground, and, on the appointed day, at the appointed hour, the competitors began to assemble.

"Well, lad, first as usual," exclaimed Joe Blunt, as he reached the ground and found Dick Varley there before him.

"I've bin here more than an hour lookin' for a new kind o' flower that Jack Morgan told me he'd seen. And I've found it too. Look here; did you ever see one like it before?"

Blunt leaned his rifle against a tree, and carefully examined the flower.

"Why, yes, I've seed a-many o' them up about the Rocky Mountains, but never one here-away. It seems to have gone lost itself. The last I seed, if I remimber rightly, wos near the head-waters o' the Yellowstone River, it wos—jest where I shot a grizzly bar."

"Was that the bar that gave you the wipe on the cheek?" asked Varley, forgetting the flower in his interest about the bear.

"It was. I put six balls in that bar's carcase, and stuck my knife into its heart ten times afore it gave out; an' it nearly ripped the shirt off my back afore I was done with it."

"I would give my rifle to get a chance at a grizzly!" exclaimed Varley, with a sudden burst of enthusiasm.

"Whoever got it wouldn't have much to brag of," remarked a burly young backwoodsman, as he joined them.

His remark was true, for poor Dick's weapon was but a sorry affair. It missed fire, and it hung fire, and even when it did fire it remained a matter of doubt in its owner's mind whether the slight deviations from the direct line made by his bullets were the result of *his* or *its* bad shooting.

Further comment upon it was checked by the arrival of a dozen or more hunters on the scene of action. They were a sturdy set of bronzed, bold, fearless men, and one felt, on looking at them, that they would prove more than a match for several hundreds of Indians in open fight. A few minutes after, the major himself came on the ground with the prize rifle on his shoulder, and Fan and Crusoe at his heels—the latter tumbling, scrambling, and yelping after its mother, fat and clumsy, and happy as possible, having evidently quite forgotten that it had been nearly roasted alive only a few weeks before.

Immediately all eyes were on the rifle, and its merits were discussed with animation.

And well did it deserve discussion, for such a piece had never before been seen on the western frontier. It was shorter in the barrel and larger in the bore than the weapons chiefly in vogue at that

time, and, besides being of beautiful workmanship, was silver-mounted. But the grand peculiarity about it, and that which afterwards rendered it the mystery of mysteries to the savages, was, that it had two sets of locks—one percussion, the other flint—so that, when caps failed, by taking off the one set of locks and affixing the others, it was converted into a flint-rifle. The major, however, took care never to run short of caps, so that the flint locks were merely held as a reserve in case of need.

"Now, lads," cried Major Hope, stepping up to the point whence they were to shoot, "remember the terms. He who first drives the nail obtains the rifle, Fan, and her pup, and accompanies me to the nearest settlements. Each man shoots with his own gun, and draws lots for the chance."

"Agreed," cried the men.

"Well, then, wipe your guns and draw lots. Henri will fix the nail. Here it is."

The individual who stepped, or rather plunged forward to receive the nail was a rare and remarkable specimen of mankind. Like his comrades, he was half a farmer and half a hunter. Like them, too, he was clad in deerskin, and was tall and strong—nay, more, he was gigantic. But, unlike them, he was clumsy, awkward, loose-jointed, and a bad shot. Nevertheless Henri was an immense favourite in the settlement, for his good-humour knew no bounds. No one ever saw him frown. Even when fighting with the savages, as he was sometimes compelled to do in self-defence, he went at them with a sort of jovial rage that was almost laughable. Inconsiderate recklessness was one of his chief characteristics, so that his comrades were rather afraid of him on the war-trail or in the hunt, where caution, and frequently *soundless* motion, were essential to success or safety. But when Henri had a comrade at his side to check him he was safe enough, being humble-minded and obedient. Men used to say he must have been born under a lucky star, for, notwithstanding his natural inaptitude for all sorts of backwoods life, he managed to scramble through everything with safety, often with success, and sometimes with credit.

To see Henri stalk a deer was worth a long day's journey. Joe Blunt used to say he was "all jints together, from the top of his head to the sole of his moccasin." He threw his immense form into the most inconceivable contortions, and slowly wound his way, sometimes on hands and knees, sometimes flat, through bush and brake, as if there was not a bone in his body, and without the slightest noise. This sort of work was so much against his plunging nature, that he took long to learn it, but when, through hard practice and the loss of many a fine deer, he came at length to break himself in to it, he gradually progressed to perfection, and ultimately became the best stalker in the valley. This, and this alone, enabled him to procure game, for, being short-sighted, he could hit nothing beyond fifty yards, except a buffalo or a barn door.

Yet that same lithe body, which seemed as though totally unhinged, could no more be bent, when the muscles were strung, than an iron post. No one wrestled with Henri unless he wished to have his back broken. Few could equal and none could beat him at running or leaping except Dick Varley. When Henri ran a race even Joe Blunt laughed outright, for arms and legs went like independent flails. When he leaped, he hurled himself into space with a degree of violence that seemed to insure a somersault—yet he always came down with a crash on his feet. Plunging was Henri's forte. He generally lounged about the settlement, when unoccupied, with his hands behind his back, apparently in a reverie, and when called on to act, he seemed to fancy he must have lost time, and could only make up for it by *plunging*. This habit got him into many awkward scrapes, but his herculean power as often got him out of them. He was a French-Canadian, and a particularly bad speaker of the English language.

We offer no apology for this elaborate introduction of Henri, for he was as good-hearted a fellow as ever lived, and deserves special notice.

But to return. The sort of rifle practice called "driving the nail," by which this match was to be decided, was, and we believe still is, common among the hunters of the far west. It consisted in this,—an ordinary large-headed nail was driven a short way into a plank or a tree, and the hunters,

standing at a distance of fifty yards or so, fired at it until they succeeded in driving it home. On the present occasion the major resolved to test their shooting by making the distance seventy yards.

Some of the older men shook their heads.

"It's too far," said one; "ye might as well try to snuff the nose o' a mosquito."

"Jim Scraggs is the only man as'll hit that," said another.

The man referred to was a long, lank, lantern-jawed fellow with a cross-grained expression of countenance. He used the long, heavy, Kentucky rifle, which, from the ball being little larger than a pea, was called a pea-rifle. Jim was no favourite, and had been named Scraggs by his companions on account of his appearance.

In a few minutes the lots were drawn, and the shooting began. Each hunter wiped out the barrel of his piece with his ramrod as he stepped forward; then, placing a ball in the palm of his left hand, he drew the stopper of his powder-horn with his teeth, and poured out as much powder as sufficed to cover the bullet. This was the regular *measure* among them. Little time was lost in firing, for these men did not "hang" on their aim. The point of the rifle was slowly raised to the object, and, the instant the sight covered it, the ball sped to its mark. In a few minutes the nail was encircled by bullet-holes, scarcely two of which were more than an inch distant from the mark, and one—fired by Joe Blunt —entered the tree close beside it.

"Ah, Joe!" said the major, "I thought you would have carried off the prize."

"So did not I, sir," returned Blunt, with a shake of his head. "Had it a-bin a half-dollar at a hundred yards, I'd ha' done better, but I never *could* hit the nail. It's too small to *see*."

"That's cos ye've got no eyes," remarked Jim Scraggs, with a sneer, as he stepped forward.

All tongues were now hushed, for the expected champion was about to fire. The sharp crack of the rifle was followed by a shout, for Jim had hit the nail-head on the edge, and part of the bullet stuck to it.

"That wins if there's no better," said the major, scarce able to conceal his disappointment. "Who comes next?"

To this question Henri answered by stepping up to the line, straddling his legs, and executing preliminary movements with his rifle, that seemed to indicate an intention on his part to throw the weapon bodily at the mark. He was received with a shout of mingled laughter and applause. After gazing steadily at the mark for a few seconds, a broad grin overspread his countenance, and, looking round at his companions, he said—"Ha! mes boys, I cannot behold de nail at all!"

"Can ye 'behold' the *tree*?" shouted a voice, when the laugh that followed this announcement had somewhat abated.

"Oh! oui," replied Henri quite coolly; "I can see *him*, an' a goot small bit of de forest beyond."

"Fire at it, then. If ye hit the tree ye desarve the rifle—leastwise ye ought to get the pup."

Henri grinned again, and fired instantly, without taking aim.

The shot was followed by an exclamation of surprise, for the bullet was found close beside the nail!

"It's more be good luck than good shootin'," remarked Jim Scraggs.

"Possiblement," answered Henri modestly, as he retreated to the rear and wiped out his rifle; "mais I have kill most of my deer by dat same goot luck."

"Bravo! Henri," said Major Hope as he passed; "you *deserve* to win, anyhow. Who's next?"

"Dick Varley," cried several voices; "where's Varley? Come on, youngster, an' take yer shot."

The youth came forward with evident reluctance. "It's of no manner o' use," he whispered to Joe Blunt as he passed, "I can't depend on my old gun."

"Never give in," whispered Blunt encouragingly. Poor Varley's want of confidence in his rifle was merited, for, on pulling the trigger, the faithless lock missed fire.

"Lend him another gun," cried several voices. "'Gainst rules laid down by Major Hope," said Scraggs.

"Well, so it is; try again."

Varley did try again, and so successfully, too, that the ball hit the nail on the head, leaving a portion of the lead sticking to its edge.

Of course this was greeted with a cheer, and a loud dispute began as to which was the better shot of the two.

"There are others to shoot yet," cried the major. "Make way. Look out."

The men fell back, and the few hunters who had not yet fired took their shots, but without coming nearer the mark.

It was now agreed that Jim Scraggs and Dick Varley, being the two best shots, should try over again; and it was also agreed that Dick should have the use of Blunt's rifle. Lots were again drawn for the first shot, and it fell to Dick, who immediately stepped out, aimed somewhat hastily, and fired.

"Hit again!" shouted those who had run forward to examine the mark. "*Half* the bullet cut off by the nail-head!"

Some of the more enthusiastic of Dick's friends cheered lustily, but the most of the hunters were grave and silent, for they knew Jim's powers, and felt that he would certainly do his best. Jim now stepped up to the line, and, looking earnestly at the mark, threw forward his rifle.

At that moment our friend Crusoe—tired of tormenting his mother—waddled stupidly and innocently into the midst of the crowd of men, and, in so doing, received Henri's heel and the full weight of his elephantine body on its fore-paw. The horrible and electric yell that instantly issued from his agonised throat could only be compared, as Joe Blunt expressed it, "to the last dyin' screech o' a bustin' steam biler!" We cannot say that the effect was startling, for these backwoodsmen had been born and bred in the midst of alarms, and were so used to them that a "bustin' steam biler" itself, unless it had blown them fairly off their legs, would not have startled them. But the effect, such as it was, was sufficient to disconcert the aim of Jim Scraggs, who fired at the same instant, and missed the nail by a hair's-breadth.

Turning round in towering wrath, Scraggs aimed a kick at the poor pup, which, had it taken effect, would certainly have terminated the innocent existence of that remarkable dog on the spot, but quick as lightning Henri interposed the butt of his rifle, and Jim's shin met it with a violence that caused him to howl with rage and pain.

"Oh! pardon me, broder," cried Henri, shrinking back, with the drollest expression of mingled pity and glee.

Jim's discretion, on this occasion, was superior to his valour; he turned away with a coarse expression of anger and left the ground.

Meanwhile the major handed the silver rifle to young Varley. "It couldn't have fallen into better hands," he said. "You'll do it credit, lad, I know that full well, and let me assure you it will never play you false. Only keep it clean, don't overcharge it, aim true, and it will never miss the mark."

While the hunters crowded round Dick to congratulate him and examine the piece, he stood with a mingled feeling of bashfulness and delight at his unexpected good fortune. Recovering himself suddenly he seized his old rifle, and, dropping quietly to the outskirts of the crowd, while the men were still busy handling and discussing the merits of the prize, went up, unobserved, to a boy of about thirteen years of age, and touched him on the shoulder.

"Here, Marston, you know I often said ye should have the old rifle when I was rich enough to get a new one. Take it *now*, lad. It's come to ye sooner than either o' us expected."

"Dick," said the boy, grasping his friend's hand warmly, "yer true as heart of oak. It's good of 'ee, that's a fact."

"Not a bit, boy; it costs me nothin' to give away an old gun that I've no use for, an's worth little, but it makes me right glad to have the chance to do it."

Marston had longed for a rifle ever since he could walk, but his prospects of obtaining one were very poor indeed at that time, and it is a question whether he did not at that moment experience as much joy in handling the old piece as his friend felt in shouldering the prize.

A difficulty now occurred which had not before been thought of. This was no less than the absolute refusal of Dick Varley's canine property to follow him. Fan had no idea of changing masters without her consent being asked, or her inclination being consulted.

"You'll have to tie her up for a while, I fear," said the major.

"No fear," answered the youth. "Dog natur's like human natur'!"

Saying this he seized Crusoe by the neck, stuffed him comfortably into the bosom of his hunting shirt, and walked rapidly away with the prize rifle on his shoulder.

Fan had not bargained for this. She stood irresolute, gazing now to the right and now to the left, as the major retired in one direction and Dick with Crusoe in another. Suddenly Crusoe, who, although comfortable in body, was ill at ease in spirit, gave utterance to a melancholy howl. The mother's love instantly prevailed. For one moment she pricked up her ears at the sound, and then, lowering them, trotted quietly after her new master, and followed him to his cottage on the margin of the lake.

Chapter Three.
Speculative remarks with which the reader may or may not agree—An old woman—Hopes and wishes commingled with hard facts—The dog Crusoe's education begun

It is pleasant to look upon a serene, quiet, humble face. On such a face did Richard Varley look every night when he entered his mother's cottage. Mrs Varley was a widow, and she had followed the fortunes of her brother, Daniel Hood, ever since the death of her husband. Love for her only brother induced her to forsake the peaceful village of Maryland, and enter upon the wild life of a backwoods settlement. Dick's mother was thin, and old, and wrinkled, but her face was stamped with a species of beauty which *never* fades—the beauty of a loving look. Ah! the brow of snow and the peach-bloom cheek may snare the heart of man for a time, but the *loving look* alone can forge that adamantine chain that time, age, eternity, shall never break.

Mistake us not, reader, and bear with us if we attempt to analyse this look which characterised Mrs Varley. A rare diamond is worth stopping to glance at, even when one is in a hurry! The brightest jewel in the human heart is worth a thought or two! By a *loving look*, we do not mean a look of love bestowed on a beloved object. That is common enough, and thankful should we be that it is so common in a world that's over-full of hatred. Still less do we mean that smile and look of intense affection with which some people—good people too—greet friends and foe alike, and by which effort to work out their *beau idéal* of the expression of Christian love, they do signally damage their cause, by saddening the serious and repelling the gay. Much less do we mean that *perpetual* smile of good-will which argues more of personal comfort and self-love than anything else. No, the loving look we speak of is as often grave as gay. Its character depends very much on the face through which it beams. And it cannot be counterfeited. Its *ring* defies imitation. Like the clouded sun of April, it can pierce through tears of sorrow; like the noontide sun of summer, it can blaze in warm smiles; like the northern lights of winter, it can gleam in depths of woe—but it is always the same, modified, doubtless, and rendered more or less patent to others, according to the natural amiability of him or her who bestows it. No one can put it on. Still less can any one put it off. Its range is universal; it embraces all mankind, though, *of course*, it is intensified on a few favoured objects; its seat is in the depths of a renewed heart, and its foundation lies in love to God.

Young Varley's mother lived in a cottage which was of the smallest possible dimensions consistent with comfort. It was made of logs, as, indeed, were all the other cottages in the valley. The door was in the centre, and a passage from it to the back of the dwelling divided it into two rooms. One of these was subdivided by a thin partition, the inner room being Mrs Varley's bedroom, the outer Dick's. Daniel Hood's dormitory was a corner of the kitchen, which apartment served also as a parlour.

The rooms were lighted by two windows, one on each side of the door, which gave to the house the appearance of having a nose and two eyes. Houses of this kind have literally got a sort of *expression* on—if we may use the word—their countenances. *Square* windows give the appearance of easy-going placidity; *longish* ones, that of surprise. Mrs Varley's was a surprised cottage, and this was in keeping with the scene in which it stood, for the clear lake in front, studded with islands, and the distant hills beyond, composed a scene so surprisingly beautiful that it never failed to call forth an expression of astonished admiration from every new visitor to the Mustang Valley.

"My boy," exclaimed Mrs Varley, as her son entered the cottage with a bound, "why so hurried to-day? Deary me! where got you the grand gun?"

"Won it, mother!"

"Won it, my son?"

"Ay, won it, mother. Druve the nail *almost*, and would ha' druve it *altogether* had I bin more used to Joe Blunt's rifle."

Mrs Varley's heart beat high, and her face flushed with pride as she gazed at her son, who laid the rifle on the table for her inspection, while he rattled off an animated and somewhat disjointed account of the match.

"Deary me! now that was good; that was cliver. But what's that scraping at the door?"

"Oh! that's Fan; I forgot her. Here! here! Fan! Come in, good dog," he cried rising and opening the door.

Fan entered and stopped short, evidently uncomfortable.

"My boy, what do ye with the major's dog?"

"Won her too, mother!"

"Won her, my son?"

"Ay, won her, and the pup too; see, here it is!" and he plucked Crusoe from his bosom.

Crusoe, having found his position to be one of great comfort, had fallen into a profound slumber, and on being thus unceremoniously awakened, he gave forth a yelp of discontent that brought Fan in a state of frantic sympathy to his side.

"There you are, Fan, take it to a corner and make yourself at home. Ay, that's right, mother, give her somethin' to eat; she's hungry, I know by the look o' her eye."

"Deary me, Dick," said Mrs Varley, who now proceeded to spread the youth's mid-day meal before him, "did ye drive the nail three times?"

"No, only once, and that not parfetly. Brought 'em all down at one shot—rifle, Fan, an' pup!"

"Well, well, now that was cliver; but—" Here the old woman paused and looked grave.

"But what, mother?"

"You'll be wantin' to go off to the mountains now, I fear me, boy."

"Wantin' *now*!" exclaimed the youth earnestly; "I'm *always* wantin'. I've bin wantin' ever since I could walk; but I won't go till you let me, mother, that I won't!" And he struck the table with his fist so forcibly that the platters rung again.

"You're a good boy, Dick; but you're too young yit to ventur' among the Red-skins."

"An' yit, if I don't ventur' young, I'd better not ventur' at all. You know, mother dear, I don't want to leave you; but I was born to be a hunter, and everybody in them parts is a hunter, and I can't hunt in the kitchen you know, mother!"

At this point the conversation was interrupted by a sound that caused young Varley to spring up and seize his rifle, and Fan to show her teeth and growl.

"Hist! mother; that's like horses' hoofs," he whispered, opening the door and gazing intently in the direction whence the sound came.

Louder and louder it came, until an opening in the forest showed the advancing cavalcade to be a party of white men. In another moment they were in full view—a band of about thirty horsemen, clad in the leathern costume, and armed with the long rifle of the far west. Some wore portions of the gaudy Indian dress which gave to them a brilliant, dashing look. They came on straight for the block-house, and saluted the Varleys with a jovial cheer as they swept past at full speed. Dick returned the cheer with compound interest, and calling out, "They're trappers, mother, I'll be back in an hour," bounded off like a deer through the woods, taking a short cut in order to reach the block-house before them. He succeeded, for, just as he arrived at the house, the cavalcade wheeled round the bend in the river, dashed up the slope, and came to a sudden halt on the green. Vaulting from their foaming steeds they tied them to the stockades of the little fortress, which they entered in a body.

Hot haste was in every motion of these men. They were trappers, they said, on their way to the Rocky Mountains to hunt and trade furs. But one of their number had been treacherously murdered and scalped by a Pawnee chief, and they resolved to revenge his death by an attack on one of the

Pawnee villages. They would teach these "red reptiles" to respect white men, they would, come of it what might; and they had turned aside here to procure an additional supply of powder and lead.

In vain did the major endeavour to dissuade these reckless men from their purpose. They scoffed at the idea of returning good for evil, and insisted on being supplied. The log hut was a store as well as a place of defence, and as they offered to pay for it there was no refusing their request—at least so the major thought. The ammunition was therefore given to them, and in half an hour they were away again at full gallop over the plains on their mission of vengeance. "Vengeance is Mine, I will repay, saith the Lord." But these men knew not what God said, because they never read His Word, and did not own His sway.

Young Varley's enthusiasm was considerably damped when he learned the errand on which the trappers were bent. From that time forward he gave up all desire to visit the mountains in company with such men, but he still retained an intense longing to roam at large among their rocky fastnesses, and gallop out upon the wide prairies.

Meanwhile he dutifully tended his mother's cattle and sheep, and contented himself with an occasional deer-hunt in the neighbouring forests. He devoted himself also to the training of his dog Crusoe—an operation which at first cost him many a deep sigh.

Every one has heard of the sagacity and almost reasoning capabilities of the Newfoundland dog. Indeed, some have even gone the length of saying that what is called instinct in these animals is neither more nor less than reason. And, in truth, many of the noble, heroic, and sagacious deeds that have actually been performed by Newfoundland dogs incline us almost to believe that, like man, they are gifted with reasoning powers.

But every one does not know the trouble and patience that is required in order to get a juvenile dog to understand what its master means when he is endeavouring to instruct it.

Crusoe's first lesson was an interesting, but not a very successful one. We may remark here that Dick Varley had presented Fan to his mother to be her watch-dog, resolving to devote all his powers to the training of the pup. We may also remark, in reference to Crusoe's appearance (and we did not remark it sooner, chiefly because up to this period in his eventful history he was little better than a ball of fat and hair), that his coat was mingled jet-black and pure white, and remarkably glossy, curly, and thick.

A week after the shooting match Crusoe's education began. Having fed him for that period with his own hand, in order to gain his affection, Dick took him out one sunny forenoon to the margin of the lake to give him his first lesson.

And here again we must pause to remark that, although a dog's heart is generally gained in the first instance through his mouth, yet, after it is thoroughly gained, his affection is noble and disinterested. He can scarcely be driven from his master's side by blows, and even when thus harshly repelled is always ready, on the shortest notice and with the slightest encouragement, to make it up again.

Well, Dick Varley began by calling out, "Crusoe! Crusoe! come here, pup."

Of course Crusoe knew his name by this time, for it had been so often used as a prelude to his meals, that he naturally expected a feed whenever he heard it. This portal to his brain had already been open for some days; but all the other doors were fast locked, and it required a great deal of careful picking to open them.

"Now, Crusoe, come here."

Crusoe bounded clumsily to his master's side, cocked his ears, and wagged his tail—so far his education was perfect. We say he bounded *clumsily*, for it must be remembered that he was still a very young pup, with soft, flabby muscles.

"Now, I'm goin' to begin yer edication, pup; think o' that."

Whether Crusoe thought of that or not we cannot say, but he looked up in his master's face as he spoke, cocked his ears very high, and turned his head slowly to one side, until it could not turn any

further in that direction; then he turned it as much to the other side, whereat his master burst into an uncontrollable fit of laughter, and Crusoe immediately began barking vociferously.

"Come, come," said Dick, suddenly checking his mirth, "we mustn't play, pup, we must work."

Drawing a leathern mitten from his belt, the youth held it to Crusoe's nose, and then threw it a yard away, at the same time exclaiming in a loud, distinct tone, "*Fetch it*."

Crusoe entered at once into the spirit of this part of his training; he dashed gleefully at the mitten, and proceeded to worry it with intense gratification. As for "*Fetch it*," he neither understood the words nor cared a straw about them.

Dick Varley rose immediately, and rescuing the mitten, resumed his seat on a rock.

"Come here, Crusoe," he repeated.

"Oh! certainly, by all means," said Crusoe—no! he didn't exactly *say* it, but really he *looked* these words so evidently, that we think it right to let them stand as they are written. If he could have finished the sentence he would certainly have said, "Go on with that game over again, old boy; it's quite to my taste—the jolliest thing in life, I assure you!" At least, if we may not positively assert that he would have said that, no one else can absolutely affirm that he wouldn't.

Well, Dick Varley did do it over again, and Crusoe worried the mitten over again—utterly regardless of "*Fetch it*."

Then they did it again, and again, and again, but without the slightest apparent advancement in the path of canine knowledge,—and then they went home.

During all this trying operation Dick Varley never once betrayed the slightest feeling of irritability or impatience. He did not expect success at first; he was not, therefore, disappointed at failure.

Next day he had him out again—and the next—and the next—and the next again, with the like unfavourable result. In short, it seemed at last as if Crusoe's mind had been deeply imbued with the idea that he had been born expressly for the purpose of worrying that mitten, and he meant to fulfil his destiny to the letter.

Young Varley had taken several small pieces of meat in his pocket each day, with the intention of rewarding Crusoe when he should at length be prevailed on to fetch the mitten, but as Crusoe was not aware of the treat that awaited him, of course the mitten never was "fetched."

At last Dick Varley saw that this system would never do, so he changed his tactics, and the next morning gave Crusoe no breakfast, but took him out at the usual hour to go through his lesson. This new course of conduct seemed to perplex Crusoe not a little, for on his way down to the beach he paused frequently and looked back at the cottage, and then expressively up at his master's face. But the master was inexorable; he went on and Crusoe followed, for *true* love had now taken possession of the pup's young heart, and he preferred his master's company to food.

Varley now began by letting the learner smell a piece of meat which he eagerly sought to devour, but was prevented, to his immense disgust. Then the mitten was thrown as heretofore, and Crusoe made a few steps towards it, but being in no mood for play he turned back.

"*Fetch it*," said the teacher.

"I won't," replied the learner mutely, by means of that expressive sign—*not doing it*.

Hereupon Dick Varley rose, took up the mitten, and put it into the pup's mouth. Then, retiring a couple of yards, he held out the piece of meat and said, "*Fetch it*."

Crusoe instantly spat out the glove and bounded towards the meat—once more to be disappointed.

This was done a second time, and Crusoe came forward *with the mitten in his mouth*. It seemed as if it had been done accidentally, for he dropped it before coming quite up. If so it was a fortunate accident, for it served as the tiny fulcrum on which to place the point of that mighty lever which was destined ere long to raise him to the pinnacle of canine erudition. Dick Varley immediately lavished upon him the tenderest caresses and gave him a lump of meat. But he quickly tried it again lest he

should lose the lesson. The dog evidently felt that if he did not fetch that mitten he should have no meat or caresses. In order, however, to make sure that there was no mistake, Dick laid the mitten down beside the pup, instead of putting it into his mouth, and, retiring a few paces, cried, "*Fetch it*."

Crusoe looked uncertain for a moment, then he *picked up* the mitten and laid it at his master's feet. The lesson was learned at last! Dick Varley tumbled all the meat out of his pocket on the ground, and, while Crusoe made a hearty breakfast, he sat down on a rock and whistled with glee at having fairly picked the lock, and opened *another* door into one of the many chambers of his dog's intellect!

Chapter Four.
Our hero enlarged upon—Grumps

Two years passed away—the Mustang Valley settlement advanced prosperously, despite one or two attacks made upon it by the savages, who were, however, firmly repelled; Dick Varley had now become a man, and his pup Crusoe had become a full-grown dog. The "silver rifle," as Dick's weapon had come to be named, was well-known among the hunters and the Red-skins of the border-lands, and in Dick's hands its bullets were as deadly as its owner's eye was quick and true.

Crusoe's education, too, had been completed. Faithfully and patiently had his young master trained his mind, until he fitted him to be a meet companion in the hunt. To "carry" and "fetch" were now but trifling portions of the dog's accomplishments. He could dive a fathom deep in the lake and bring up any article that might have been dropped or thrown in. His swimming powers were marvellous, and so powerful were his muscles, that he seemed to spurn the water while passing through it, with his broad chest high out of the curling wave, at a speed that neither man nor beast could keep up with for a moment. His intellect now was sharp and quick as a needle; he never required a second bidding. When Dick went out hunting he used frequently to drop a mitten or a powder-horn unknown to the dog, and, after walking miles away from it, would stop short and look down into the mild, gentle face of his companion.

"Crusoe," he said, in the same quiet tones with which he would have addressed a human friend, "I've dropped my mitten, go fetch it, pup." Dick continued to call it "pup" from habit.

One glance of intelligence passed from Crusoe's eye, and in a moment he was away at full gallop; nor did he rest until the lost article was lying at his master's feet. Dick was loath to try how far back on his track Crusoe would run if desired. He had often gone back five and six miles at a stretch; but his powers did not stop here. He could carry articles back to the spot from which they had been taken and leave them there. He could head the game that his master was pursuing and turn it back; and he would guard any object he was desired to "watch" with unflinching constancy. But it would occupy too much space and time to enumerate all Crusoe's qualities and powers. His biography will unfold them.

In personal appearance he was majestic, having grown to an immense size even for a Newfoundland. Had his visage been at all wolfish in character, his aspect would have been terrible. But he possessed in an eminent degree that mild, humble expression of face peculiar to his race. When roused or excited, and especially when bounding through the forest with the chase in view, he was absolutely magnificent. At other times his gait was slow, and he seemed to prefer a *quiet* walk with Dick Varley to anything else under the sun. But when Dick was inclined to be boisterous Crusoe's tail and ears rose at a moment's notice, and he was ready for *anything*. Moreover, he obeyed commands instantly and implicitly. In this respect he put to shame most of the *boys* of the settlement, who were by no means famed for their habits of prompt obedience.

Crusoe's eye was constantly watching the face of his master. When Dick said "Go" he went, when he said "Come" he came. If he had been in the midst of an excited bound at the throat of a stag, and Dick had called out, "Down, Crusoe," he would have sunk to the earth like a stone. No doubt it took many months of training to bring the dog to this state of perfection; but Dick accomplished it by patience, perseverance, and *love*.

Besides all this, Crusoe could speak! He spoke by means of the dog's dumb alphabet in a way that defies description. He conversed, so to speak, with his extremities—his head and his tail. But his eyes, his soft brown eyes, were the chief medium of communication. If ever the language of the eyes was carried to perfection, it was exhibited in the person of Crusoe. But, indeed, it would be difficult to say which part of his expressive face expressed most. The cocked ears of expectation;

the drooped ears of sorrow; the bright, full eye of joy; the half-closed eye of contentment; and the frowning eye of indignation accompanied with a slight, a very slight, pucker of the nose and a gleam of dazzling ivory—ha! no enemy ever saw this last piece of canine language without a full appreciation of what it meant. Then as to the tail—the modulations of meaning in the varied wag of that expressive member! Oh! it's useless to attempt description. Mortal man cannot conceive of the delicate shades of sentiment expressible by a dog's tail, unless he has studied the subject—the wag, the waggle, the cock, the droop, the slope, the wriggle! Away with description—it is impotent and valueless here!

As we have said, Crusoe was meek and mild. He had been bitten, on the sly, by half the ill-natured curs in the settlement, and had only shown his teeth in return. He had no enmities—though several enemies—and he had a thousand friends, particularly among the ranks of the weak and the persecuted, whom he always protected and avenged when opportunity offered. A single instance of this kind will serve to show his character.

One day Dick and Crusoe were sitting on a rock beside the lake—the same identical rock near which, when a pup, the latter had received his first lesson. They were conversing as usual, for Dick had elicited such a fund of intelligence from the dog's mind, and had injected such wealth of wisdom into it, that he felt convinced it understood every word he said.

"This is capital weather, Crusoe; ain't it pup?"

Crusoe made a motion with his head which was quite as significant as a nod.

"Ha! my pup, I wish that you and I might go and have a slap at the grizzly bars and a look at the Rocky Mountains. Wouldn't it be nuts, pup?"

Crusoe looked dubious.

"What, you don't agree with me! Now, tell me, pup, wouldn't ye like to grip a bar?"

Still Crusoe looked dubious, but made a gentle motion with his tail, as though he would have said, "I've seen neither Rocky Mountains nor grizzly bars, and know nothin' about 'em, but I'm open to conviction."

"You're a brave pup," rejoined Dick, stroking the dog's huge head affectionately. "I wouldn't give you for ten times your weight in golden dollars—if there be sich things."

Crusoe made no reply whatever to this. He regarded it as a truism unworthy of notice; he evidently felt that a comparison between love and dollars was preposterous.

At this point in the conversation a little dog with a lame leg hobbled to the edge of the rocks in front of the spot where Dick was seated, and looked down into the water, which was deep there. Whether it did so for the purpose of admiring its very plain visage in the liquid mirror, or finding out what was going on among the fish, we cannot say, as it never told us; but at that moment a big, clumsy, savage-looking dog rushed out from the neighbouring thicket and began to worry it.

"Punish him, Crusoe," said Dick quickly.

Crusoe made one bound that a lion might have been proud of, and seizing the aggressor by the back, lifted him off his legs and held him, howling, in the air—at the same time casting a look towards his master for further instructions.

"Pitch him in," said Dick, making a sign with his hand.

Crusoe turned and quietly dropped the dog into the lake. Having regarded his struggles there for a few moments with grave severity of countenance, he walked slowly back and sat down beside his master.

The little dog made good its retreat as fast as three legs would carry it, and the surly dog, having swam ashore, retired sulkily, with his tail very much between his legs.

Little wonder, then, that Crusoe was beloved by great and small among the well-disposed of the canine tribes of the Mustang Valley.

But Crusoe was not a mere machine. When not actively engaged in Dick Varley's service, he busied himself with private little matters of his own. He undertook modest little excursions into the woods or along the margin of the lake, sometimes alone, but more frequently with a little friend whose

whole heart and being seemed to be swallowed up in admiration of his big companion. Whether Crusoe botanised or geologised on these excursions we will not venture to say. Assuredly he seemed as though he did both, for he poked his nose into every bush and tuft of moss, and turned over the stones, and dug holes in the ground—and, in short, if he did not understand these sciences, he behaved very much as if he did. Certainly he knew as much about them as many of the human species do.

In these walks he never took the slightest notice of Grumps (that was the little dog's name), but Grumps made up for this by taking excessive notice of *him*. When Crusoe stopped, Grumps stopped and sat down to look at him. When Crusoe trotted on, Grumps trotted on too. When Crusoe examined a bush Grumps sat down to watch him, and when he dug a hole Grumps looked into it to see what was there. Grumps never helped him; his sole delight was in looking on. They didn't converse much, these two dogs. To be in each other's company seemed to be happiness enough—at least Grumps thought so.

There was one point at which Grumps stopped short, however, and ceased to follow his friend; and that was when he rushed headlong into the lake and disported himself for an hour at a time in its cool waters. Crusoe was, both by nature and training, a splendid water-dog. Grumps, on the contrary, held water in abhorrence, so he sat on the shores of the lake disconsolate when his friend was bathing, and waited till he came out. The only time when Grumps was thoroughly nonplussed, was when Dick Varley's whistle sounded faintly in the far distance. Then Crusoe would prick up his ears, and stretch out at full gallop, clearing ditch, and fence, and brake with his strong elastic bound, and leaving Grumps to patter after him as fast as his four-inch legs would carry him. Poor Grumps usually arrived at the village, to find both dog and master gone, and would betake himself to his own dwelling, there to lie down and sleep, and dream, perchance, of rambles and gambols with his gigantic friend.

Chapter Five.
A mission of peace—Unexpected joys—Dick and Crusoe set off for the land of the Red-skins, and meet with adventures by the way as a matter of course—Night in the wild woods

One day the inhabitants of Mustang Valley were thrown into considerable excitement by the arrival of an officer of the United States army and a small escort of cavalry. They went direct to the block-house, which, since Major Hope's departure, had become the residence of Joe Blunt—that worthy having, by general consent, been deemed the fittest man in the settlement to fill the major's place.

Soon it began to be noised abroad that the strangers had been sent by Government to endeavour to bring about, if possible, a more friendly state of feeling between the whites and the Indians, by means of presents, and promises, and fair speeches.

The party remained all night in the block-house, and ere long it was reported that Joe Blunt had been requested, and had consented, to be the leader and chief of a party of three men who should visit the neighbouring tribes of Indians, to the west and north of the valley, as Government agents. Joe's knowledge of two or three different Indian dialects, and his well-known sagacity, rendered him a most fitting messenger on such an errand. It was also whispered that Joe was to have the choosing of his comrades in this mission, and many were the opinions expressed and guesses made as to who would be chosen.

That same evening Dick Varley was sitting in his mother's kitchen cleaning his rifle; his mother was preparing supper and talking quietly about the obstinacy of a particular hen that had taken to laying her eggs in places where they could not be found; Fan was coiled up in a corner sound asleep, and Crusoe was sitting at one side of the fire looking on at things in general.

"I wonder," remarked Mrs Varley, as she spread the table with a pure white napkin; "I wonder what the sodgers are doin' wi' Joe Blunt."

As often happens when an individual is mentioned, the worthy referred to opened the door at that moment and stepped into the room.

"Good-e'en t'ye, dame," said the stout hunter, doffing his cap, and resting his rifle in a corner, while Dick rose and placed a chair for him.

"The same to you, Master Blunt," answered the widow; "you've jist comed in good time for a cut o' venison."

"Thanks, mistress, I s'pose we're beholden to the silver rifle for that."

"To the hand that aimed it, rather," suggested the widow.

"Nay, then, say raither to the dog that turned it," said Dick Varley. "But for Crusoe that buck would ha' bin couched in the woods this night."

"Oh! if it comes to that," retorted Joe, "I'd lay it to the door o' Fan, for if she'd niver bin born nother would Crusoe. But it's good an' tender meat, whativer ways ye got it. Howsiver, I've other things to talk about jist now. Them sodgers that are eatin' buffalo tongues up at the block-house as if they'd niver ate meat before, and didn't hope to eat agin for a twelve-month—"

"Ay, what o' them?" interrupted Mrs Varley; "I've bin wonderin' what was their errand."

"Of coorse ye wos, Dame Varley; and I've comed here a' purpis to tell ye. They want me to go to the Red-skins to make peace between them and us; and they've brought a lot o' goods to make them presents withal,—beads, an' knives, an' lookin'-glasses, an vermilion paint, an' sich-like, jist as much as'll be a light load for one horse—for, ye see, nothin' can be done wi' the Red-skins without gifts."

"'Tis a blessed mission," said the widow, "I wish it may succeed. D'ye think ye'll go?"

"Go? ay, that will I."

"I only wish they'd made the offer to me," said Dick with a sigh.

"An' so they do make the offer, lad. They've gin me leave to choose the two men I'm to take with me, and I've comed straight to ask *you*. Ay or no, for we must up an' away by break o' day to-morrow."

Mrs Varley started. "So soon?" she said, with a look of anxiety.

"Ay; the Pawnees are at the Yellow Creek jist at this time, but I've heer'd they're 'bout to break up camp an' away west; so we'll need to use haste."

"May I go, mother?" asked Dick, with a look of anxiety.

There was evidently a conflict in the widow's breast, but it quickly ceased.

"Yes, my boy," she said in her own low, quiet voice, "an' God go with ye. I knew the time must come soon, an' I thank Him that your first visit to the Red-skins will be on an errand o' peace. 'Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called the children of God.'"

Dick grasped his mother's hand and pressed it to his cheek in silence. At the same moment Crusoe, seeing that the deeper feelings of his master were touched, and deeming it his duty to sympathise, rose up and thrust his nose against him.

"Ah! pup," cried the young man hastily, "you must go too. Of course Crusoe goes, Joe Blunt?"

"Hum! I don't know that. There's no dependin' on a dog to keep his tongue quiet in times o' danger."

"Believe me," exclaimed Dick, flashing with enthusiasm, "Crusoe's more trustworthy than I am myself. If ye can trust the master yer safe to trust the pup."

"Well, lad, ye may be right. We'll take him."

"Thanks, Joe. And who else goes with us?"

"I've bin castin' that in my mind for some time, an' I've fixed to take Henri. He's not the safest man in the valley, but he's the truest, that's a fact. And now, younker, get yer horse an' rifle ready, and come to the block-house at daybreak to-morrow. Good luck to ye, mistress, till we meet agin."

Joe Blunt rose, and taking up his rifle,—without which he scarcely ever moved a foot from his own door,—left the cottage with rapid strides.

"My son," said Mrs Varley, kissing Dick's cheek as he resumed his seat, "put this in the little pocket I made for it in your hunting shirt."

She handed him a small pocket Bible.

"Dear mother," he said, as he placed the book carefully within the breast of his coat, "the Red-skin that takes that from me must take my scalp first. But don't fear for me. You've often said the Lord would protect me. So He will, mother, for sure it's an errand o' peace!"

"Ay, that's it, that's it," murmured the widow in a half-soliloquy.

Dick Varley spent that night in converse with his mother, and next morning at daybreak he was at the place of meeting mounted on his sturdy little horse, with the "silver rifle" on his shoulder, and Crusoe by his side.

"That's right, lad, that's right. Nothin' like keepin' yer time," said Joe, as he led out a pack-horse from the gate of the block-house, while his own charger was held ready saddled by a man named Daniel Brand, who had been appointed to the charge of the block-house in his absence.

"Where's Henri?—oh! here he comes," exclaimed Dick, as the hunter referred to came thundering up the slope at a charge, on a horse that resembled its rider in size, and not a little in clumsiness of appearance.

"Ah! mes boy. Him is a goot one to go," cried Henri, remarking Dick's smile as he pulled up. "No hoss on de plain can beat dis one, surement."

"Now then, Henri, lend a hand to fix this pack, we've no time to palaver."

By this time they were joined by several of the soldiers and a few hunters who had come to see them start.

"Remember, Joe," cried one, "if you don't come back in three months we'll all come out in a band to seek you."

"If we don't come back in less than that time, what's left o' us won't be worth seekin' for," said Joe, tightening the girth of his saddle.

"Put a bit in yer own mouth, Henri," cried another, as the Canadian arranged his steed's bridle; "ye'll need it more than yer horse when ye git 'mong the red reptiles."

"Vraiment, if mon mout' needs one bit yours will need one padlock."

"Now, lads, mount!" cried Joe Blunt as he vaulted into the saddle.

Dick Varley sprang lightly on his horse, and Henri made a rush at his steed and hurled his huge frame across its back with a violence that *ought* to have brought it to the ground; but the tall, raw-boned, broad-chested roan was accustomed to the eccentricities of its master, and stood the shock bravely. Being appointed to lead the pack-horse, Henri seized its halter; then the three cavaliers shook their reins, and, waving their hands to their comrades, they sprang into the woods at full gallop, and laid their course for the "far west."

For some time they galloped side by side in silence, each occupied with his own thoughts, Crusoe keeping close beside his master's horse. The two elder hunters evidently ruminated on the object of their mission and the prospects of success, for their countenances were grave and their eyes cast on the ground. Dick Varley, too, thought upon the Red-men, but his musings were deeply tinged with the bright hues of a *first* adventure. The mountains, the plains, the Indians, the bears, the buffaloes, and a thousand other objects, danced wildly before his mind's eye, and his blood careered through his veins and flushed his forehead as he thought of what he should see and do, and felt the elastic vigour of youth respond in sympathy to the light spring of his active little steed. He was a lover of nature, too, and his flashing eyes glanced observantly from side to side as they swept along,—sometimes through glades of forest trees; sometimes through belts of more open ground and shrubbery; anon by the margin of a stream, or along the shores of a little lake, and often over short stretches of flowering prairie-land,—while the firm, elastic turf sent up a muffled sound from the tramp of their mettlesome chargers. It was a scene of wild, luxuriant beauty, that might almost (one could fancy) have drawn involuntary homage to its bountiful Creator from the lips even of an infidel.

After a time Joe Blunt reined up, and they proceeded at an easy ambling pace. Joe and his friend Henri were so used to these beautiful scenes that they had long ceased to be *enthusiastically* affected by them, though they never ceased to delight in them.

"I hope," said Joe, "that them sodgers 'll go their ways soon. I've no notion o' them chaps when they're left at a place wi' nothin' to do but whittle sticks."

"Why, Joe!" exclaimed Dick Varley in a tone of surprise, "I thought you were admirin' the beautiful face o' nature all this time, and yer only thinkin' about the sodgers. Now, that's strange!"

"Not so strange after all, lad," answered Joe. "When a man's used to a thing he gits to admire an' enjoy it without speakin' much about it. But it *is* true, boy, that mankind gits in coorse o' time to think little o' the blissins he's used to."

"Oui, c'est *vrai*!" murmured Henri emphatically.

"Well, Joe Blunt, it may be so; but I'm thankful *I'm* not used to this sort o' thing yet," exclaimed Varley. "Let's have another gallop—so ho! come along, Crusoe!" shouted the youth, as he shook his reins, and flew over a long stretch of prairie on which at that moment they entered.

Joe smiled as he followed his enthusiastic companion, but after a short run he pulled up.

"Hold on, youngster," he cried, "ye must larn to do as yer bid, lad; it's trouble enough to be among wild Injuns and wild buffaloes, as I hope soon to be, without havin' wild comrades to look after."

Dick laughed and reined in his panting horse. "I'll be as obedient as Crusoe," he said, "and no one can beat him."

"Besides," continued Joe, "the horses won't travel far if we begin by runnin' all the wind out o' them."

"Wah!" exclaimed Henri, as the led horse became restive; "I think we must give to him de pack-hoss for to lead, eh!"

"Not a bad notion, Henri. We'll make that the penalty of runnin' off again; so look out, Master Dick."

"I'm down," replied Dick with a modest air, "obedient as a baby, and won't run off again—till—the next time. By the way, Joe, how many days' provisions did ye bring?"

"Two. That's 'nough to carry us to the Great Prairie, which is three weeks distant from this; our own good rifles must make up the difference, and keep us when we git there."

"And s'pose we neither find deer nor buffalo," suggested Dick.

"I s'pose we'll have to starve."

"Dat is cumfer'able to tink upon," remarked Henri.

"More comfortable to think o' than to undergo," said Dick, "but I s'pose there's little chance o' that."

"Well, not much," replied Joe Blunt, patting his horse's neck; "but d'ye see, lad, ye niver can count for sartin on anythin'. The deer and buffalo ought to be thick in them plains at this time—and when the buffalo *are* thick they covers the plains till ye can hardly see the end o' them; but, ye see, sometimes the rascally Red-skins takes it into their heads to burn the prairies, and sometimes ye find the place that should ha' bin black wi' buffalo, black as a coal wi' fire for miles an' miles on end. At other times the Red-skins go huntin' in 'ticlar places, and sweeps them clean o' every hoof that don't git away. Sometimes, too, the animals seems to take a scunner at a place and keeps out o' the way. But one way or another men gin'rally manage to scramble through."

"Look yonder, Joe," exclaimed Dick, pointing to the summit of a distant ridge, where a small black object was seen moving against the sky, "that's a deer, ain't it?"

Joe shaded his eyes with his hand and gazed earnestly at the object in question. "Yer right, boy; and by good luck we've got the wind of him. Cut in an' take your chance now. There's a long strip o' wood as'll let ye git close to him."

Before the sentence was well finished, Dick and Crusoe were off at full gallop. For a few hundred yards they coursed along the bottom of a hollow; then turning to the right they entered the strip of wood, and in a few minutes gained the edge of it. Here Dick dismounted.

"You can't help me here, Crusoe. Stay where you are, pup, and hold my horse."

Crusoe seized the end of the line, which was fastened to the horse's nose, in his mouth, and lay down on a hillock of moss, submissively placing his chin on his fore-paws, and watching his master as he stepped noiselessly through the wood. In a few minutes Dick emerged from among the trees, and, creeping from bush to bush, succeeded in getting to within six hundred yards of the deer, which was a beautiful little antelope. Beyond the bush behind which he now crouched all was bare open ground, without a shrub or hillock large enough to conceal the hunter. There was a slight undulation in the ground, however, which enabled him to advance about fifty yards further, by means of lying down quite flat and working himself forward like a serpent. Further than this he could not move without being seen by the antelope, which browsed on the ridge before him in fancied security. The distance was too great even for a long shot, but Dick knew of a weak point in this little creature's nature which enabled him to accomplish his purpose—a weak point which it shares in common with animals of a higher order,—namely, curiosity.

The little antelope of the North American prairies is intensely curious about everything that it does not quite understand, and will not rest satisfied until it has endeavoured to clear up the mystery. Availing himself of this propensity, Dick did what both Indians and hunters are accustomed to do on these occasions,—he put a piece of rag on the end of his ramrod, and, keeping his person concealed and perfectly still, waved this miniature flag in the air. The antelope noticed it at once, and, pricking

up its ears, began to advance, timidly and slowly, step by step, to see what remarkable phenomenon it could be. In a few seconds the flag was lowered, a sharp crack followed, and the antelope fell dead upon the plain.

"Ha, boy! that's a good supper, anyhow," cried Joe, as he galloped up and dismounted.

"Goot! dat is better nor dried meat," added Henri. "Give him to me; I will put him on my hoss, vich is strongar dan yourn. But ver is your hoss?"

"He'll be here in a minute," replied Dick, putting his fingers to his mouth and giving forth a shrill whistle.

The instant Crusoe heard the sound he made a savage and apparently uncalled-for dash at the horse's heels. This wild act, so contrary to the dog's gentle nature, was a mere piece of acting. He knew that the horse would not advance without getting a fright, so he gave him one in this way which sent him off at a gallop. Crusoe followed close at his heels, so as to bring the line alongside of the nag's body, and thereby prevent its getting entangled; but despite his best efforts the horse got on one side of a tree and he on the other, so he wisely let go his hold of the line, and waited till more open ground enabled him to catch it again. Then he hung heavily back, gradually checked the horse's speed, and finally trotted him up to his master's side.

"'Tis a cliver cur, good sooth," exclaimed Joe Blunt in surprise.

"Ah, Joe! you haven't seen much of Crusoe yet. He's as good as a man any day. I've done little else but train him for two years gone by, and he can do most anything but shoot—he can't handle the rifle nohow."

"Ha! then, I tink perhaps hims could if he wos try," said Henri, plunging on to his horse with a laugh, and arranging the carcase of the antelope across the pommel of his saddle.

Thus they hunted and galloped, and trotted and ambled on through wood and plain all day, until the sun began to descend below the tree-tops of the bluffs on the west—then Joe Blunt looked about him for a place on which to camp, and finally fixed on a spot under the shadow of a noble birch by the margin of a little stream. The carpet of grass on its banks was soft like green velvet, and the rippling waters of the brook were clear as crystal—very different from the muddy Missouri into which it flowed.

While Dick Varley felled and cut up firewood, Henri unpacked the horses and turned them loose to graze, and Joe kindled the fire and prepared venison steaks and hot tea for supper.

In excursions of this kind it is customary to "hobble" the horses; that is, to tie their fore-legs together, so that they cannot run either fast or far, but are free enough to amble about with a clumsy sort of hop in search of food. This is deemed a sufficient check on their tendency to roam, although some of the knowing horses sometimes learn to hop so fast with their hobbles as to give their owners much trouble to recapture them. But when out in the prairies where Indians are known or supposed to be in the neighbourhood, the horses are picketed by means of a pin or stake attached to the ends of their long laryats, as well as hobbled—for Indians deem it no disgrace to steal or tell lies, though they think it disgraceful to be found out in doing either. And so expert are these dark-skinned natives of the western prairies, that they will creep into the midst of an enemy's camp, cut the laryats and hobbles of several horses, spring suddenly on their backs, and gallop away.

They not only steal from white men, but tribes that are at enmity steal from each other, and the boldness with which they do this is most remarkable. When Indians are travelling in a country where enemies are prowling, they guard their camps at night with jealous care. The horses in particular are both hobbled and picketed, and sentries are posted all round the camp. Yet, in spite of these precautions, hostile Indians manage to elude the sentries, and creep into the camp. When a thief thus succeeds in effecting an entrance, his chief danger is past. He rises boldly to his feet, and, wrapping his blanket or buffalo robe round him, he walks up and down as if he were a member of the tribe. At the same time he dexterously cuts the laryats of such horses as he observes are not hobbled. He dare not stoop to cut the hobbles, as the action would be observed, and suspicion would be instantly

aroused. He then leaps on the best horse he can find, and uttering a terrific war-whoop darts away into the plains, driving the loosened horses before him.

No such dark thieves were supposed to be near the camp under the birch-tree, however, so Joe, and Dick, and Henri ate their supper in comfort, and let their horses browse at will on the rich pasturage.

A bright ruddy fire was soon kindled, which created, as it were, a little ball of light in the midst of surrounding darkness for the special use of our hardy hunters. Within this magic circle all was warm, comfortable, and cheery. Outside all was dark, and cold, and dreary by contrast.

When the substantial part of supper was disposed of, tea and pipes were introduced, and conversation began to flow. Then the three saddles were placed in a row; each hunter wrapped himself in his blanket, and, pillowing his head on his saddle, stretched his feet towards the fire and went to sleep, with his loaded rifle by his side and his hunting-knife handy in his belt. Crusoe mounted guard by stretching himself out *couchant* at Dick Varley's side. The faithful dog slept lightly and never moved all night, but had any one observed him closely he would have seen that every fitful flame that burst from the sinking fire, every unusual puff of wind, and every motion of the horses that fed or rested hard by, had the effect of revealing a speck of glittering white in Crusoe's watchful eye.

Chapter Six.
The great prairies of the "far west"—A remarkable colony discovered, and a miserable night endured

Of all the hours of the night or day the hour that succeeds the dawn is the purest, the most joyous and the best. At least so think we; and so think hundreds and thousands of the human family; and so thought Dick Varley, as he sprung suddenly into a sitting posture next morning, and threw his arms with an exulting feeling of delight round the neck of Crusoe, who instantly sat up to greet him.

This was an unusual piece of enthusiasm on the part of Dick, but the dog received it with marked satisfaction, rubbed his big hairy cheek against that of his young master, and arose from his sedentary position in order to afford free scope for the use of his tail.

"Ho! Joe Blunt! Henri! Up, boys, up! The sun will have the start o' us. I'll catch the nags."

So saying Dick bounded away into the woods with Crusoe gambolling joyously at his heels. Dick soon caught his own horse and Crusoe caught Joe's. Then the former mounted and quickly brought in the other two.

Returning to the camp he found everything packed and ready to strap on the back of the pack-horse.

"That's the way to do it, lad," cried Joe. "Here Henri, look alive and git yer beast ready. I do believe yer goin' to take another snooze!"

Henri was indeed, at that moment, indulging in a gigantic stretch and a cavernous yawn, but he finished both hastily, and rushed at his poor horse as if he intended to slay it on the spot. He only threw the saddle on its back, however, and then threw himself on the saddle.

"Now then, all ready?"

"Ay,—oui, yis!"

And away they went at full stretch again on their journey.

Thus day after day they travelled, and night after night they laid them down to sleep under the trees of the forest, until at length they reached the edge of the Great Prairie.

It was a great, a memorable day in the life of Dick Varley, that on which he first beheld the prairie,—the vast boundless prairie. He had heard of it, talked of it, dreamed about it, but he had never,—no, he had never realised it. 'Tis always thus. Our conceptions of things that we have not seen are almost invariably wrong. Dick's eyes glittered, and his heart swelled, and his cheeks flushed, and his breath came thick and quick.

"There it is," he gasped, as the great rolling plain broke suddenly on his enraptured gaze; "that's it—oh!—"

Dick uttered a yell that would have done credit to the fiercest chief of the Pawnees, and, being unable to utter another word, he swung his cap in the air and sprang like an arrow from a bow over the mighty ocean of grass. The sun had just risen to send a flood of golden glory over the scene; the horses were fresh, so the elder hunters, gladdened by the beauty of all around them, and inspired by the irresistible enthusiasm of their young companion, gave the reins to the horses and flew after him. It was a glorious gallop, that first headlong dash over the boundless prairie of the "far west!"

The prairies have often been compared, most justly, to the ocean. There is the same wide circle of space bounded on all sides by the horizon; there is the same swell, or undulation, or succession of long low unbroken waves that marks the ocean when it is calm; they are canopied by the same pure sky, and swept by the same untrammelled breezes. There are islands, too—clumps of trees and willow-bushes,—which rise out of this grassy ocean to break and relieve its uniformity; and these vary in size and numbers as do the isles of ocean—being numerous in some places, while in others

they are so scarce that the traveller does not meet one in a long day's journey. Thousands of beautiful flowers decked the green sward, and numbers of little birds hopped about among them.

"Now, lads," said Joe Blunt, reining up, "our troubles begin to-day."

"Our troubles! our joys, you mean!" exclaimed Dick Varley.

"P'raps I don't mean nothin' o' the sort," retorted Joe. "Man wos never intended to swaller his joys without a strong mixtur' o' troubles. I s'pose he couldn't stand 'em pure. Ye see we've got to the prairie now—"

"One blind hoss might see dat!" interrupted Henri.

"An' we may or may not diskiver buffalo. An' water's scarce, too, so we'll need to look out for it pretty sharp, I guess, else we'll lose our horses, in which case we may as well give out at once. Besides, there's rattlesnakes about in sandy places—we'll ha' to look out for them; an' there's badger holes—we'll need to look sharp for them lest the horses put their feet in 'em; an' there's Injuns, who'll look out pretty sharp for *us* if they once get wind that we're in them parts."

"Oui, yis, mes boys, and there's rain, and tunder, and lightin'," added Henri, pointing to a dark cloud which was seen rising on the horizon ahead of them.

"It'll be rain," remarked Joe, "but there's no thunder in the air jist now; we'll make for yonder clump o' bushes and lay by till it's past."

Turning a little to the right of the course they had been following, the hunters galloped along one of the hollows between the prairie waves before mentioned, in the direction of a clump of willows. Before reaching it however, they passed over a bleak and barren plain where there was neither flower nor bird. Here they were suddenly arrested by a most extraordinary sight—at least it was so to Dick Varley, who had never seen the like before. This was a colony of what Joe called "prairie-dogs." On first beholding them Crusoe uttered a sort of half growl, half bark of surprise, cocked his tail and ears, and instantly prepared to charge, but he glanced up at his master first for permission. Observing that his finger and his look commanded "silence" he dropped his tail at once and stepped to the rear. He did not, however, cease to regard the prairie-dogs with intense curiosity.

These remarkable little creatures have been egregiously misnamed by the hunters of the west, for they bear not the slightest resemblance to dogs, either in formation or habits. They are, in fact, the marmot, and in size are little larger than squirrels, which animals they resemble in some degree. They burrow under the light soil and throw it up in mounds like moles.

Thousands of them were running about among their dwellings when Dick first beheld them, but the moment they caught sight of the horsemen rising over the ridge, they set up a tremendous hubbub of consternation; each little beast instantly mounted guard on the top of his house and prepared, as it were, to "receive cavalry."

The most ludicrous thing about them was, that although the most timid and cowardly creatures in the world, they seemed the most impertinent things that ever lived! Knowing that their holes afforded them a perfectly safe retreat they sat close beside them, and as the hunters slowly approached, they elevated their heads, wagged their little tails, showed their teeth, and chattered at them like monkeys. The nearer they came the more angry and furious did the prairie-dogs become, until Dick Varley almost fell off his horse with suppressed laughter. They let the hunters come close up, waxing louder and louder in their wrath; but the instant a hand was raised to throw a stone or point a gun, a thousand little heads dived into a thousand holes, and a thousand little tails wriggled for an instant in the air—then, a dead silence reigned over the deserted scene.

"Bien, them's have dive into de bo'-els of de eart'," said Henri with a broad grin.

Presently a thousand noses appeared, and nervously disappeared like the wink of an eye. Then they appeared again, and a thousand pairs of eyes followed. Instantly, like Jack in the box, they were all on the top of their hillocks again, chattering and wagging their little tails as vigorously as ever. You could not say that you *saw* them jump out of their holes. Suddenly, as if by magic, they *were* out; then Dick tossed up his arms, and, suddenly, as if by magic, they were gone!

Their number was incredible, and their cities were full of riotous activity. What their occupations were the hunters could not ascertain, but it was perfectly evident that they visited a great deal and gossiped tremendously, for they ran about from house to house, and sat chatting in groups; but it was also observed that they never went far from their own houses. Each seemed to have a circle of acquaintance in the immediate neighbourhood of his own residence, to which in case of sudden danger he always fled.

But another thing about these prairie-dogs (perhaps, considering their size, we should call them prairie-doggies), another thing about them, we say, was that each doggie lived with an owl, or, more correctly, an owl lived with each doggie! This is such an extraordinary *fact*, that we could scarce hope that men would believe us, were our statement not supported by dozens of trustworthy travellers who have visited and written about these regions. The whole plain was covered with these owls. Each hole seemed to be the residence of an owl and a doggie, and these incongruous couples lived together apparently in perfect harmony.

We have not been able to ascertain from travellers *why* the owls have gone to live with these doggies, so we beg humbly to offer our own private opinion to the reader. We assume, then, that owls find it absolutely needful to have holes. Probably prairie-owls cannot dig holes for themselves. Having discovered, however, a race of little creatures that could, they very likely determined to take forcible possession of the holes made by them. Finding, no doubt, that, when they did so, the doggies were too timid to object, and discovering, moreover, that they were sweet, innocent little creatures, the owls resolved to take them into partnership, and so the thing was settled—that's how it came about, no doubt of it!

There is a report that rattlesnakes live in these holes also; but we cannot certify our reader of the truth of this,—still it is well to be acquainted with a report that is current among the men of the backwoods. If it be true, we are of opinion that the doggie's family is the most miscellaneous and remarkable on the face of—or, as Henri said, in the bo'-els—of the earth.

Dick and his friends were so deeply absorbed in watching these curious little creatures that they did not observe the rapid spread of the black clouds over the sky. *A* few heavy drops of rain now warned them to seek shelter, so wheeling round they dashed off at speed for the clump of willows, which they gained just as the rain began to descend in torrents.

"Now, lads, do it slick. Off packs and saddles," cried Joe Blunt, jumping from his horse. "I'll make a hut for ye, right off."

"A hut, Joe! what sort o' hut can ye make here?" inquired Dick.

"Ye'll see, boy, in a minute."

"Ach! lend me hand here, Dick; de bockle am tight as de hosse's own skin. Ah! dere all right."

"Hallo! what's this?" exclaimed Dick, as Crusoe advanced with something in his mouth. "I declare, it's a bird of some sort."

"A prairie-hen," remarked Joe, as Crusoe laid the bird at Dick's feet; "capital for supper."

"Ah! dat chien is superb! goot dog. Come here, I vill clap you."

But Crusoe refused to be caressed. Meanwhile, Joe and Dick formed a sort of beehive-looking hut by bending down the stems of a tall bush and thrusting their points into the ground. Over this they threw the largest buffalo robe, and placed another on the ground below it, on which they laid their packs of goods. These they further secured against wet by placing several robes over them and a skin of parchment. Then they sat down on this pile to rest and consider what should be done next.

"'Tis a bad look out," said Joe, shaking his head.

"I fear it is," replied Dick in a melancholy tone.

Henri said nothing, but he sighed deeply on looking up at the sky, which was now of a uniform watery grey, while black clouds drove athwart it. The rain was pouring in torrents, and the wind began to sweep it in broad sheets over the plains, and under their slight covering, so that in a short time they were wet to the skin. The horses stood meekly beside them, with their tails and heads equally

pendulous, and Crusoe sat before his master, looking at him with an expression that seemed to say, "Couldn't you put a stop to this if you were to try?"

"This'll never do. I'll try to git up a fire," said Dick, jumping up in desperation.

"Ye may save yerself the trouble," remarked Joe, drily—at least as drily as was possible in the circumstances.

However, Dick did try, but he failed signally. Everything was soaked and saturated. There were no large trees; most of the bushes were green, and the dead ones were soaked. The coverings were slobbery; the skins they sat on were slobbery; the earth itself was slobbery; so Dick threw his blanket (which was also slobbery) round his shoulders, and sat down beside his companions to grin and bear it. As for Joe and Henri, they were old hands, and accustomed to such circumstances. From the first they had resigned themselves to their fate, and wrapping their wet blankets round them sat down, side by side, wisely to endure the evils that they could not cure.

There is an old rhyme, by whom composed we know not—and it matters little—which runs thus—

"For every evil under the sun
There is a remedy—or there's none.
If there is—try and find it;
If there isn't—never mind it!"

There is deep wisdom here in small compass. The principle involved deserves to be heartily recommended. Dick never heard of the lines, but he knew the principle well; so he began to "never mind it," by sitting down beside his companions and whistling vociferously. As the wind rendered this a difficult feat he took to singing instead. After that he said, "Let's eat a bite, Joe, and then go to bed."

"Be all means," said Joe, who produced a mass of dried deer's meat from a wallet.

"It's cold grub," said Dick, "and tough."

But the hunters' teeth were sharp and strong, so they ate a hearty supper and washed it down with a drink of rain water collected from a pool on the top of their hut. They now tried to sleep, for the night was advancing, and it was so dark that they could scarce see their hands when held up before their faces. They sat back to back, and thus, in the form of a tripod, began to snooze. Joe's and Henri's seasoned frames would have remained stiff as posts till morning; but Dick's body was young and pliant, so he hadn't been asleep a few seconds when he fell forward into the mud and effectually awakened the others. Joe gave a grunt, and Henri exclaimed, "Hah!" but Dick was too sleepy and miserable to say anything. Crusoe, however, rose up to show his sympathy, and laid his wet head on his master's knee as he resumed his place. This catastrophe happened three times in the space of an hour, and by the third time they were all wakened up so thoroughly that they gave up the attempt to sleep, and amused each other by recounting their hunting experiences and telling stories. So engrossed did they become that day broke sooner than they had expected—and just in proportion as the grey light of dawn rose higher into the eastern sky did the spirits of these weary men rise within their soaking bodies.

Chapter Seven.
The "wallering" peculiarities of buffalo bulls—The first buffalo hunt and its consequences—Crusoe comes to the rescue—Pawnees discovered—A monster buffalo hunt—Joe acts the part of ambassador

Fortunately the day that succeeded the dreary night described in the last chapter was warm and magnificent. The sun rose in a blaze of splendour and filled the atmosphere with steam from the moist earth.

The unfortunates in the wet camp were not slow to avail themselves of his cheering rays. They hung up everything on the bushes to dry, and by dint of extreme patience and cutting out the comparatively dry hearts of several pieces of wood, they lighted a fire and boiled some rain water, which was soon converted into soup. This, and the exercise necessary for the performance of these several duties, warmed and partially dried them, so that when they once more mounted their steeds and rode away they were in a state of comparative comfort and in excellent spirits. The only annoyance was the clouds of mosquitoes and large flies that assailed men and horses whenever they checked their speed.

"I tell ye wot it is," said Joe Blunt, one fine morning about a week after they had begun to cross the prairie, "it's my 'pinion that we'll come on buffaloes soon. Them tracks are fresh, an' yonder's one o' their wallers that's bin used not long agone."

"I'll go have a look at it," cried Dick, trotting away as he spoke.

Everything in these vast prairies was new to Dick Varley, and he was kept in a constant state of excitement during the first week or two of his journey. It is true he was quite familiar with the names and habits of all the animals that dwelt there, for many a time and oft had he listened to the "yarns" of the hunters and trappers of the Mustang Valley, when they returned laden with rich furs from their periodical hunting expeditions. But this knowledge of his only served to whet his curiosity and his desire to *see* the denizens of the prairies with his own eyes, and now that his wish was accomplished, it greatly increased the pleasures of his journey.

Dick had just reached the "wallow" referred to by Joe Blunt, and had reined up his steed to observe it leisurely, when a faint hissing sound reached his ear. Looking quickly back he observed his two companions crouching on the necks of their horses, and slowly descending into a hollow of the prairie in front of them, as if they wished to bring the rising ground between them and some object in advance. Dick instantly followed their example and was soon at their heels.

"Ye needn't look at the waller," whispered Joe, "for a' t'other side o' the ridge there's a bull *wallerin'*."

"Ye don't mean it!" exclaimed Dick, as they all dismounted and picketed their horses to the plain.

"Oui," said Henri, tumbling off his horse, while a broad grin overspread his good-natured countenance; "it is one fact! One buffalo bull be wollerin' like a enormerous hog. Also, dere be t'ousands o' buffaloes farder on."

"Can ye trust yer dog keepin' back?" inquired Joe, with a dubious glance at Crusoe.

"Trust him! Ay, I wish I was as sure o' myself."

"Look to your primin', then, an' we'll have tongues and marrow-bones for supper to-night, I'se warrant. Hist! down on yer knees, and go softly. We might ha' run them down on horseback, but its bad to wind yer beasts on a trip like this, if ye can help it; an' it's about as easy to stalk them. Leastways, we'll try. Lift yer head slowly, Dick, an' don't show more nor the half o't above the ridge."

Dick elevated his head as directed, and the scene that met his view was indeed well calculated to send an electric shock to the heart of an ardent sportsman. The vast plain beyond was absolutely blackened with countless herds of buffaloes, which were browsing on the rich grass. They were still so far distant that their bellowing, and the trampling of their myriad hoofs, only reached the hunters like a faint murmur on the breeze. In the immediate foreground, however, there was a group of about half a dozen buffalo cows feeding quietly, and in the midst of them an enormous old bull was enjoying himself in his wallow. The animals, towards which our hunters now crept with murderous intent, are the fiercest and the most ponderous of the ruminating inhabitants of the western wilderness. The name of buffalo, however, is not correct. The animal is the *bison*, and bears no resemblance whatever to the buffalo proper; but as the hunters of the far west—and, indeed, travellers generally, have adopted the misnomer, we bow to the authority of custom and adopt it too.

Buffaloes roam in countless thousands all over the North American prairies, from the Hudson's Bay territories, north of Canada, to the shores of the Gulf of Mexico.

The advance of white men to the west has driven them to the prairies between the Missouri and the Rocky Mountains, and has somewhat diminished their numbers; but even thus diminished, they are still innumerable in the more distant plains. Their colour is dark brown, but it varies a good deal with the seasons. The hair or fur, from its great length in winter and spring and exposure to the weather, turns quite light; but when the winter coat is shed off the new growth is a beautiful dark brown, almost approaching to jet-black. In form the buffalo somewhat resembles the ox, but its head and shoulders are much larger, and are covered with a profusion of long shaggy hair, which adds greatly to the fierce aspect of the animal. It has a large hump on the shoulder, and its fore-quarters are much larger, in proportion, than the hindquarters. The horns are short and thick; the hoofs are cloven, and the tail is short, with a tuft of hair at the extremity.

It is scarcely possible to conceive a wilder or more ferocious and terrible monster than a buffalo bull. He often grows to the enormous weight of two thousand pounds. His lion-like mane falls in shaggy confusion quite over his head and shoulders, down to the ground. When he is wounded he becomes imbued with the spirit of a tiger; he stamps, bellows, roars, and foams forth his rage with glaring eyes and steaming nostrils; and charges furiously at man and horse with utter recklessness. Fortunately, however, he is not naturally pugnacious, and can be easily thrown into a sudden panic. Moreover, the peculiar position of his eye renders this creature not so terrible as he would otherwise be to the hunter. Owing to the stiff structure of the neck, and the sunken, downward-looking eyeball, the buffalo cannot, without an effort, see beyond the direct line of vision presented to the habitual carriage of his head. When, therefore, he is wounded, and charges, he does so in a straight line, so that his pursuer can leap easily out of his way. The pace of the buffalo is clumsy, and *apparently* slow, yet, when chased, he dashes away over the plains in blind blundering terror, at a rate that leaves all but good horses far behind. He cannot keep the pace up, however, and is usually soon overtaken. Were the buffalo capable of the same alert and agile motions of head and eye peculiar to the deer or wild horse, in addition to his "bovine rage," he would be the most formidable brute on earth. There is no object, perhaps, so terrible as the headlong advance of a herd of these animals when thoroughly aroused by terror. They care not for their necks. All danger in front is forgotten, or not seen, in the terror of that from which they fly. No thundering cataract is more tremendously irresistible than the black bellowing torrent which sometimes pours through the narrow defiles of the Rocky Mountains, or sweeps like a roaring flood over the trembling plains.

The wallowing, to which we have referred, is a luxury usually indulged in during the hot months of summer, when the buffaloes are tormented by flies, and heat, and drought. At this season they seek the low grounds in the prairies where there is a little stagnant water lying amongst the grass, and the ground underneath, being saturated, is soft. The leader of the herd, a shaggy old bull, usually takes upon himself to prepare the wallow.

It was a rugged monster of the largest size that did so on the present occasion, to the intense delight of Dick Varley, who begged Joe to lie still and watch the operation before trying to shoot one of the buffalo cows. Joe consented with a nod, and the four spectators—for Crusoe was as much taken up with the proceedings as any of them—crouched in the grass, and looked on.

Coming up to the swampy spot the old bull gave a grunt of satisfaction, and, going down on one knee, plunged his short thick horns into the mud, tore it up, and cast it aside. Having repeated this several times he plunged his head in, and brought it forth saturated with dirty water, and bedaubed with lumps of mud, through which his fierce eyes gazed, with a ludicrous expression of astonishment, straight in the direction of the hunters, as if he meant to say, "I've done it that time, and no mistake!" The other buffaloes seemed to think so too, for they came up and looked, on with an expression that seemed to say, "Well done, old fellow; try that again!"

The old fellow did try it again, and again, and again, plunging, and ramming, and tearing up the earth, until he formed an excavation large enough to contain his huge body. In this bath he laid himself comfortably down, and began to roll and wallow about until he mixed up a trough full of thin soft mud, which completely covered him. When he came out of the hole there was scarcely an atom of his former self visible!

The coat of mud thus put on by bulls is usually permitted by them to dry, and is not finally got rid of until long after, when oft-repeated rollings on the grass and washings by rain at length clear it away.

When the old bull vacated this delectable bath, another bull, scarcely, if at all, less ferocious-looking, stepped forward to take his turn, but he was interrupted by a volley from the hunters, which scattered the animals right and left, and sent the mighty herds in the distance flying over the prairie in wild terror. The very turmoil of their own mad flight added to their panic, and the continuous thunder of their hoofs was heard until the last of them disappeared on the horizon. The family party which had been fired at, however, did not escape so well. Joe's rifle wounded a fat young cow, and Dick Varley brought it down. Henri had done his best, but, as the animals were too far distant for his limited vision, he missed the cow he fired at and hit the young bull whose bath had been interrupted. The others scattered and fled.

"Well done, Dick," exclaimed Joe Blunt, as they all ran up to the cow that had fallen. "Your first shot at the buffalo was a good 'un. Come now an I'll show ye how to cut it up an' carry off the titbits."

"Ah! mon dear ole bull," exclaimed Henri, gazing after the animal which he had wounded, and which was now limping slowly away. "You is not worth goin' after. Varewell,—adieu."

"He'll be tough enough, I warrant," said Joe, "an' we've more meat here nor we can lift."

"But wouldn't it be as well to put the poor brute out o' pain?" suggested Dick.

"Oh, he'll die soon enough," replied Joe, tucking up his sleeves and drawing his long hunting-knife.

Dick, however, was not satisfied with this way of looking at it. Saying that he would be back in a few minutes he re-loaded his rifle, and calling Crusoe to his side, walked quickly after the wounded bull, which was now hid from view in a hollow of the plain.

In a few minutes he came in sight of it, and ran forward with his rifle in readiness.

"Down, Crusoe," he whispered; "wait for me here."

Crusoe crouched in the grass instantly, and Dick advanced. As he came on, the bull observed him, and turned round bellowing with rage and pain to receive him. The aspect of the brute on a near view was so terrible, that Dick involuntarily stopped too, and gazed with a mingled feeling of wonder and awe, while it bristled with passion, and blood-streaked foam dropped from its open jaws, and its eyes glared furiously. Seeing that Dick did not advance, the bull charged him with a terrific roar; but the youth had firm nerves, and although the rush of such a savage creature at full speed was calculated to try the courage of any man, especially one who had never seen a buffalo bull before, Dick did not lose presence of mind. He remembered the many stories he had listened to of this very thing that was

now happening, so, crushing down his excitement as well as he could, he cocked his rifle and awaited the charge. He knew that it was of no use to fire at the head of the advancing foe, as the thickness of the skull, together with the matted hair on the forehead, rendered it impervious to a bullet.

When the bull was within a yard of him he leaped lightly to one side and it passed. Just as it did so, Dick aimed at its heart and fired, but his knowledge of the creature's anatomy was not yet correct. The ball entered the shoulder too high, and the bull, checking himself as well as he could in his headlong rush, turned round and made at Dick again.

The failure coupled with the excitement proved too much for Dick; he could not resist discharging his second barrel at the brute's head as it came on. He might as well have fired at a brick wall; it shook its shaggy front, and with a hideous bellow thundered forward. Again Dick sprang to one side, but in doing so a tuft of grass or a stone caught his foot, and he fell heavily to the ground.

Up to this point Crusoe's admirable training had nailed him to the spot where he had been left, although the twitching of every fibre in his body and a low continuous whine showed how gladly he would have hailed permission to join in the combat; but the instant he saw his master down and the buffalo turning to charge again, he sprang forward with a roar that would have done credit to his bovine enemy, and seized him by the nose. So vigorous was the rush that he well-nigh pulled the bull down on its side. One toss of its head, however, sent Crusoe high into the air, but it accomplished this feat at the expense of its nose, which was torn and lacerated by the dog's teeth.

Scarcely had Crusoe touched the ground, which he did with a sounding thump, than he sprang up and flew at his adversary again. This time, however, he adopted the plan of barking furiously and biting by rapid yet terrible snaps as he found opportunity, thus keeping the bull entirely engrossed, and affording Dick an opportunity of re-loading his rifle, which he was not slow to do. Dick then stepped close up, and, while the two combatants were roaring in each other's face; he shot the buffalo through the heart. It fell to the earth with a deep groan.

Crusoe's rage instantly vanished on beholding this, and he seemed to be filled with tumultuous joy at his master's escape, for he gambolled round him, and whined and fawned upon him in a manner that could not be misunderstood.

"Good dog; thank'ee, my pup," said Dick, patting Crusoe's head as he stooped to brush the dust from his leggings; "I don't know what would ha' become o' me but for your help, Crusoe."

Crusoe turned his head a little to one side, wagged his tail, and looked at Dick with an expression that said quite plainly, "I'd die for you, I would—not once, or twice, but ten times, fifty times if need be—and that not merely to save your life, but even to please you."

There is no doubt whatever that Crusoe felt something of this sort. The love of a Newfoundland dog to its master is beyond calculation or expression. He who once gains such love carries the dog's life in his hand. But let him who reads note well, and remember, that there is only one coin that can purchase such love, and that is *kindness*; the coin, too, must be genuine. Kindness merely *expressed* will not do, it must be *felt*.

"Hallo! boy, ye've bin i' the wars!" exclaimed Joe, raising himself from his task as Dick and Crusoe returned.

"You look more like it than I do," retorted Dick, laughing.

This was true, for cutting up a buffalo carcase with no other instrument than a large knife is no easy matter. Yet western hunters and Indians can do it without cleaver or saw, in a way that would surprise a civilised butcher not a little. Joe was covered with blood up to the elbows. His hair, happening to have a knack of getting into his eyes, had been so often brushed off with bloody hands, that his whole visage was speckled with gore, and his dress was by no means immaculate.

While Dick related his adventure, or *mis-adventure* with the bull, Joe and Henri completed the cutting out of the most delicate portions of the buffalo, namely, the hump on its shoulder—which is a choice piece, much finer than the best beef—and the tongue, and a few other parts. The tongues of buffaloes are superior to those of domestic cattle. When all was ready the meat was slung across

the back of the pack-horse, and the party, remounting their horses, continued their journey, having first cleansed themselves as well as they could in the rather dirty waters of an old wallow.

"See," said Henri, turning to Dick and pointing to a circular spot of green as they rode along, "that is one old *dry* waller."

"Ay," remarked Joe, "after the waller dries, it becomes a ring o' greener grass than the rest o' the plain, as ye see. 'Tis said the first hunters used to wonder greatly at these myster'ous circles, and they invented all sorts o' stories to account for 'em. Some said they wos fairy-rings, but at last they comed to know they wos nothin' more nor less than places where buffaloes wos used to waller in. It's often seemed to me that if we knowed the *raisons* o' things we wouldn't be so much puzzled wi' them as we are."

The truth of this last remark was so self-evident and incontrovertible that it elicited no reply, and the three friends rode on for a considerable time in silence.

It was now past noon, and they were thinking of calling a halt for a short rest to the horses and a pipe to themselves, when Joe was heard to give vent to one of those peculiar hisses that always accompanied either a surprise or a caution. In the present case it indicated both.

"What now, Joe?"

"Injuns!" ejaculated Joe.

"Eh! fat you say? ou is de?"

Crusoe at this moment uttered a low growl. Ever since the day he had been partially roasted he had maintained a rooted antipathy to Red-men. Joe immediately dismounted, and placing his ear to the ground listened intently. It is a curious fact that by placing the ear close to the ground sounds can be heard distinctly which could not be heard at all if the listener were to maintain an erect position.

"They're arter the buffalo," said Joe, rising, "an' I think it's likely they're a band o' Pawnees. Listen an' ye'll hear their shouts quite plain."

Dick and Henri immediately lay down and placed their ears to the ground.

"Now, me hear noting," said Henri, jumping up, "but me ear is like me eyes; ver' short-sighted."

"I do hear something," said Dick as he got up, "but the beating o' my own heart makes row enough to spoil my hearin'."

Joe Blunt smiled. "Ah! lad, yer young an' yer blood's too hot yet, but bide a bit; you'll cool down soon. I wos like you once. Now, lads, what think ye we should do?"

"You know best, Joe."

"Oui, nodoubtedly."

"Then wot I advise is that we gallop to the broken sand hillocks ye see yonder, get behind them an' take a peep at the Red-skins. If they are Pawnees we'll go up to them at once; if not, we'll hold a council o' war on the spot."

Having arranged this they mounted and hastened towards the hillocks in question, which they reached after ten minutes' gallop, at full stretch. The sandy mounds afforded them concealment, and enabled them to watch the proceedings of the savages in the plain below. The scene was the most curious and exciting that can be conceived. The centre of the plain before them was crowded with hundreds of buffaloes, which were dashing about in the most frantic state of alarm. To whatever point they galloped they were met by yelling savages on horseback, who could not have been fewer in numbers than a thousand—all being armed with lance, bow, and quiver, and mounted on active little horses. The Indians had completely surrounded the herd of buffaloes, and were now advancing steadily towards them, gradually narrowing the circle, and, whenever the terrified animals endeavoured to break through the line, they rushed to that particular spot in a body, and scared them back again into the centre.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.