ROBERT MICHAEL BALLANTYNE

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Содержание

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Preface

In publishing the present work, the Author rests his hopes of its favourable reception chiefly upon the fact that its subject is comparatively new. Although touched upon by other writers in narratives of Arctic discovery, and in works of general information, the very nature of those publications prohibited a lengthened or minute description of that ***everyday life*** whose delineation is the chief aim of the following pages.

Preface to Fourth Edition

Since this book was written, very considerable changes have taken place in the affairs and management of the Hudson Bay Company. The original charter of the Company is now extinct. Red River Settlement has become a much more important colony than it was, and bids fair to become still more important—for railway communication will doubtless, ere long, connect it with Canada on the one hand and the Pacific seaboard on the other, while the presence of gold in the Saskatchewan and elsewhere has already made the country much more generally known than

it was when the Author sojourned there. Nevertheless, all these changes—actual and prospective—have only scratched the skirt of the vast wilderness occupied by the fur-traders; and as these still continue their work at the numerous and distant outposts in much the same style as in days of yore, it has been deemed advisable to reprint the book almost without alteration, but with a few corrections.

R.M. Ballantyne.

Chapter One.
Appointment to the service of the Hudson Bay Company—The "Prince Rupert"—The annual dinner of the "H.B.C."—Fellow-voyagers—Threatening weather —A squall—Island of Lewis

Reader,—I take for granted that you are tolerably well acquainted with the different modes of life and travelling peculiar to European nations. I also presume that you know something of the inhabitants of the East; and, it may be, a good deal of the Americans in general. But I suspect—at least I would fain hope—that you have only a vague and indefinite knowledge of life in those wild, uncivilised regions of the northern continent of America that surround the shores of Hudson Bay. I would fain hope this, I say, that I may have the satisfaction of giving you information on the subject, and of showing you that there is a body of civilised men who move, and breathe (pretty cool air, by the way!), and spend their lives in a quarter of the globe as totally different, in most respects, from the part you inhabit, as a beaver, roaming among the ponds and marshes of his native home, is

from that sagacious animal when converted into a fashionable hat.

About the middle of May eighteen hundred and forty-one, I was thrown into a state of ecstatic joy by the arrival of a letter appointing me to the enviable situation of apprentice clerk in the service of the Honourable Hudson Bay Company. To describe the immense extent to which I expanded, both mentally and bodily, upon the receipt of this letter, is impossible; it is sufficient to know that from that moment I fancied myself a complete man of business, and treated my old companions with the condescending suavity of one who knows that he is talking to his inferiors.

A few days after, however, my pride was brought very low indeed, as I lay tossing about in my berth on the tumbling waves of the German Ocean, eschewing breakfast as a dangerous meal, and looking upon dinner with a species of horror utterly incomprehensible by those who have not experienced an attack of sea-sickness. Miseries of this description, fortunately, do not last long. In a couple of days we got into the comparatively still water of the Thames; and I, with a host of pale-faced young ladies and cadaverous-looking young gentlemen, emerged for the first time from the interior of the ship, to behold the beauties and wonders of the great metropolis, as we glided slowly up the crowded river.

Leave-taking is a disagreeable subject either to reflect upon or to write about, so we will skip that part of the business and

proceed at once to Gravesend, where I stood (having parted from all my friends) on the deck of the good ship *Prince Rupert*, contemplating the boats and crowds of shipping that passed continually before me, and thinking how soon I was to leave the scenes to which I had been so long accustomed for a far-distant land. I was a boy, however; and this, I think, is equivalent to saying that I did not sorrow long. My future companion and fellow-clerk, Mr Wiseacre, was pacing the deck near me. This turned my thoughts into another channel, and set me speculating upon his probable temper, qualities, and age; whether or not he was strong enough to thrash me, and if we were likely to be good friends. The captain, too, was chatting and laughing with the doctor as carelessly as if he had not the great responsibility of taking a huge ship across a boundless waste of waters, and through fields and islands of ice, to a distant country some three thousand miles to the north-west of England. Thus encouraged, my spirits began to rise, and when the cry arose on deck that the steamer containing the committee of the Honourable Hudson Bay Company was in sight, I sprang up the companion-ladder in a state of mind, if not happy, at least as nearly so as under the circumstances could be expected.

Upon gaining the deck, I beheld a small steamboat passing close under our stern, filled with a number of elderly-looking gentlemen, who eyed us with a very critical expression of countenance. I had a pretty good guess who these gentlemen were; but had I been entirely ignorant, I should soon have been

enlightened by the remark of a sailor, who whispered to his comrade, "I say, Bill, them's the great guns!"

I suppose the fact of their being so had a sympathetic effect upon the guns of the Company's three ships—the *Prince Rupert, Prince Albert*, and *Prince of Wales*—for they all three fired a salute of blank cartridge at the steamer as she passed them in succession. The steamer then ranged alongside of us, and the elderly gentlemen came on board and shook hands with the captain and officers, smiling blandly as they observed the neat, trim appearance of the three fine vessels, which, with everything in readiness for setting sail on the following morning, strained at their cables, as if anxious to commence their struggle with the waves.

It is a custom of the directors of the Hudson Bay Company to give a public dinner annually to the officers of their ships upon the eve of their departure from Gravesend. Accordingly, one of the gentlemen of the committee, before leaving the vessel, invited the captain and officers to attend; and, to my astonishment and delight, also *begged me* to honour them with my company. I accepted the invitation with extreme politeness; and, from inability to express my joy in any other way, winked to my friend Wiseacre, with whom I had become, by this time, pretty familiar. He, being also invited, winked in return to me; and having disposed of this piece of juvenile freemasonry to our satisfaction, we assisted the crew in giving three hearty cheers, as the little steamer darted from the side and proceeded to the

shore.

The dinner, like all other public dinners, was as good and substantial as a lavish expenditure of cash could make it; but really my recollections of it are very indistinct. The ceaseless din of plates, glasses, knives, forks, and tongues was tremendous; and this, together with the novelty of the scene, the heat of the room, and excellence of the viands, tended to render me oblivious of much that took place. Almost all the faces present were strange to me. Who were, and who were not, the gentlemen of the committee, was to me matter of the most perfect indifference; and as no one took the trouble to address me in particular, I confined myself to the interesting occupation of trying to make sense of a conversation held by upwards of fifty pairs of lungs at one and the same time. Nothing intelligible, however, was to be heard, except when a sudden lull in the noise gave a bald-headed old gentleman near the head of the table an opportunity of drinking the health of a red-faced old gentleman near the foot, upon whom he bestowed an amount of flattery perfectly bewildering; and after making the unfortunate red-faced gentleman writhe for half an hour in a fever of modesty, sat down amid thunders of applause. Whether the applause, by the way, was intended for the speaker or the *speakee*, I do not know; but being quite indifferent, I clapped my hands with the rest. The red-faced gentleman, now purple with excitement, then rose, and during a solemn silence delivered himself of a speech, to the effect that the day then passing was certainly the happiest

in his mortal career, that he could not find words adequately to express the varied feelings which swelled his throbbing bosom, and that he felt quite faint with the mighty load of honour just thrown upon his delighted shoulders by his bald-headed friend. The red-faced gentleman then sat down to the national air of rat-tat-tat, played in full chorus with knives, forks, spoons, nut-crackers, and knuckles on the polished surface of the mahogany table.

We left the dinner-table at a late hour, and after I, in company with some other youngsters, had done as much mischief as we conveniently could without risking our detention by the strong arm of the law, we went down to the beach and embarked in a boat with the captain for the ship. How the sailors ever found her in the impenetrable darkness which prevailed all around is a mystery to me to this day. Find her, however, they did; and in half an hour I was in the land of Nod.

The sun was blazing high in the heavens next morning when I awoke, and gazed around for a few moments to discover where I was; but the rattling of ropes and blocks, the stamping of feet overhead, the shouts of gruff voices, and, above all, a certain strange and disagreeable motion in my dormitory, soon enlightened me on that point. We were going rapidly down the Thames with a fair breeze, and had actually set sail for the distant shores of Hudson Bay.

What took place during the next five or six days I know not. The demon of sea-sickness had completely prostrated my

faculties, bodily and mental. Some faint recollections I have of stormy weather, horrible noises, and hurried dinners; but the greater part of that period is a miserable blank in my memory. Towards the sixth day, however, the savoury flavour of a splendid salmon-trout floated past my dried-up nostrils like "Afric's spicy gale," and caused my collapsed stomach to yearn with strong emotion. The ship, too, was going more quietly through the water; and a broad stream of sunshine shot through the small window of my berth, penetrated my breast, and went down into the centre of my heart, filling it with a calm, complacent pleasure quite indescribable. Sounds, however, of an attack upon the trout roused me, and with a mighty effort I tumbled out of bed, donned my clothes, and seated myself for the first time at the cabin table.

Our party consisted of the captain; Mr Carles, a chief factor in the Company's service; the doctor; young Mr Wiseacre, aforementioned; the first and second mates; and myself. The captain was a thin, middle-sized, offhand man; thoroughly acquainted with his profession; good-humoured and gruff by turns; and he always spoke with the air of an oracle. Mr Carles was a mild, good-natured man, of about fifty-five, with a smooth, bald head, encircled by a growth of long, thin hair. He was stoutly built, and possessed of that truly amiable and captivating disposition which enters earnestly and kindly into the affairs of others, and totally repudiates self. From early manhood he had roughed life in the very roughest and wildest scenes of the wilderness, and was now returning to those scenes after a

short visit to his native land. The doctor was a nondescript; a compound of gravity, fun, seriousness, and humbug—the latter predominating. He had been everywhere (at least, so he said), had seen everything, knew everybody, and played the fiddle. It cannot be said, I fear, that he played it well; but, amid the various vicissitudes of his chequered life, the doctor had frequently found himself in company where his violin was almost idolised and himself deified; especially when the place chanced to be the American backwoods, where violins are scarce, the auditors semi-barbarous Highlanders, and the music Scotch reels. Mr Wiseacre was nothing! He never spoke except when compelled to do so; never read, and never cared for anything or anybody; wore very long hair, which almost hid his face, owing to a habit which he had of holding his head always down: and apparently lived but to eat, drink, and sleep. Sometimes, though very rarely, he became so far facetious as to indulge in a wink and a low giggle; but beyond this he seldom soared. The two mates were simply *mates*. Those who know the population of the sea will understand the description sufficiently; those who don't, will never, I fear, be made to understand by description. They worked the ship, hove the log, changed the watch, turned out and tumbled in, with the callous indifference and stern regularity of clock work; inhabited tarpaulin dreadnoughts and sou'-westers; came down to meals with modest diffidence, and walked the deck with bantam-cock-like assurance. Nevertheless, they were warm-hearted fellows, both of them, although the heat didn't often come to the surface.

The first mate was a *broad* Scotchman, in every sense of the term; the second was a burly little Englishman.

"How's the wind, Collins?" said the captain, as the second mate sat down at the dinner-table, and brushed the spray from his face with the back of his brown hand.

"Changed a point to the s'uthard o' sou'-west, sir," he answered, "and looks as if it would blow hard."

"Humph!" ejaculated the captain, while he proceeded to help the fish. "I hope it'll only keep quiet till we get into blue water, and then it may blow like blazes for all I care,—Take some trout, doctor? It's the last you'll put your teeth through for six weeks to come, *I* know; so make the most of it.—I wish I were only through the Pentland Firth, and scudding under full sail for the ice—I do." And the captain looked fiercely at the compass which hung over his head, as if he had said something worthy of being recorded in history, and began to eat.

After a pause of five minutes or so—during which time the knives and forks had been clattering pretty vigorously, and the trout had become a miserable skeleton—the captain resumed his discourse.

"I tell you what it is now, gentlemen; if there's not going to be a change of some sort or other, I'm no sailor."

"It does look very threatening," said Mr Carles, peering through the stern window. "I don't much like the look of these clouds behind us. Look there, doctor!" he continued, pointing towards the window. "What do you think of that?"

"Nothing!" replied the doctor, through a mouthful of duff and potatoes. "A squall, I fancy; wish it'd only wait till after dinner."

"It never does," said the captain. "I've been to sea these fifteen years, and I always find that squalls come on at breakfast or dinner, like an unwelcome visitor. They've got a thorough contempt for tea—seem to know it's but swipes, and not worth pitching into one's lap; but dinner's sure to bring 'em on, if they're in the neighbourhood, and make 'em bu'st their cheeks at you. Remember once, when I was cruising in the Mediterranean, in Lord P—'s yacht, we'd been stewing on deck under an awning the whole forenoon, scarce able to breathe, when the bell rang for dinner. Well, down we all tumbled—about ten ladies and fifteen gentlemen, or thereabouts—and seated ourselves round the table. There was no end of grub of every kind. Lord P— was eccentric in that way, and was always at some new dodge or other in the way of cookery. At this time he had invented a new dumpling. Its jacket was much the same as usual—inch-thick duff; but its contents were beyond anything I ever saw, except the maw of an old shark. Well, just as the steward took off the cover, *hiss–iss* went the wind overhead, and one of those horrible squalls that come rattling down without a moment's warning in those parts, struck the ship, and gave her a heel over that sent the salt-cellars chasing the tumblers like all-possessed; and the great dumpling gave a heavy lurch to leeward, rolled fairly over on its beam-ends, and began to course straight down the table quite sedate and quiet-like. Several dives were made at it by the gentlemen

as it passed, but they all missed; and finally, just as a youngster made a grab at it with both hands that bid fair to be successful, another howl of the squall changed its course, and sent it like a cannon-shot straight into the face of the steward, where it split its sides, and scattered its contents right and left. I don't know how it ended, for I bolted up the companion, and saw the squall splitting away to leeward, shrieking as it went, just as if it were rejoicing at the mischief it had done."

The laugh which greeted the captain's anecdote had scarce subsided when the tough sides of the good *Prince Rupert* gave a gentle creak, and the angle at which the active steward perambulated the cabin became absurdly acute.

Just then the doctor cast his eye up at the compass suspended above the captain's head. "Hallo!" said he—But before he could give utterance to the sentiments to which "hallo" was the preface, the hoarse voice of the first mate came rolling down the companion-hatch,—"A squall, sir! scoorin' doon like mad! Wund's veered richt roond to the nor'-east."

The captain and second mate sprang hastily to their feet and rushed upon deck, where the rest of us joined them as speedily as possible.

On gaining the quarter-deck, the scene that presented itself was truly grand. Thick black clouds rolled heavily overhead, and cast a gloom upon the sea which caused it to look like ink. Not a breath of wind swelled the sails, which the men were actively engaged in taking in. Far away on our weather-quarter the clouds

were thicker and darker; and just where they met the sea there was seen a bright streak of white, which rapidly grew broader and brighter, until we could perceive that it was the sea lashed into a seething foam by the gale which was sweeping over it.

"Mind your helm!" shouted the captain.

"Ay, ay, sir!" sang out the man at the wheel. And in another moment the squall burst upon us with all its fury, laying the huge vessel over on its side as if it had been a feather on the wave, and causing her to fly through the black water like a dolphin.

In a few minutes the first violence of the squall passed away, and was succeeded by a steady breeze, which bore us merrily along over the swelling billows.

"A stiff one, that," said the captain, turning to the doctor, who, with imperturbable nonchalance, was standing near him, holding on to a stanchion with one hand, while the other reposed in his breeches pocket.

"I hope it will last," replied the doctor. "If it does, we'll not be long of reaching the blue water you long so much for."

Young Wiseacre, who during the squall had been clutching the weather-shrouds with the tenacity of a drowning man, opened his eyes very wide on hearing this, to him, insane wish, and said to me in an undertone, "I say, do you think the doctor is quite right in his mind?"

"I have no doubt of it," replied I. "Why do you ask?"

"Because I heard him say to the captain he wished that this would last."

"Is that all?" said I, while a very vile spirit of vanity took possession of me, inducing me to speak in a tone which indicated a tranquillity of mind that I certainly did not enjoy. "Oh, this is nothing at all! I see you've never been on salt water before. Just wait a bit, old fellow!" And having given utterance to this somewhat dark and mysterious expression, I staggered across the deck, and amused myself in watching the thick volumes of spray that flew at every plunge from the sides of the bounding vessel.

The doctor's wish was granted. The breeze continued steady and strong, sending us through the Pentland Firth in grand style, and carrying us in a short time to the island of Lewis, where we hove-to for a pilot. After a little signalising we obtained one, who steered our good ship in safety through the narrow entrance to the bay of Stornoway into whose quiet waters we finally dropped our anchor.

Chapter Two.
Stornoway—The ball—At sea—Go out to tea on the Atlantic—Among the ice—Sighting land—A sleepy sight—York Factory and Bachelors' Hall

The harbour of Stornoway is surrounded by high hills, except at the entrance, where a passage—not more, I should think, than three hundred yards wide—admits vessels of any tonnage into its sheltering bosom. Stornoway, a pretty, modest-looking town, apparently pleased with its lot, and contented to be far away from the busy and bustling world, lies snugly at the bottom of the bay. Here we remained upwards of a week, engaging men for the wild Nor'-West, and cultivating the acquaintance of the people, who were extremely kind and very hospitable. Occasionally Wiseacre and I amused ourselves with fishing excursions to the middle of the bay in small boats; in which excursions we were usually accompanied by two or three very ragged little boys from the town. Our sport was generally good, and rendered extremely interesting by our uncertainty as to which of the monsters of the deep would first attack our hooks. Rock-codlings and flounders appeared the most voracious, and occasionally a skate or long-legged crab came struggling to the surface.

Just before leaving this peaceful little spot, our captain gave a grand ball on board, to which were invited the *élite* of Stornoway. Great preparations were made for the occasion. The quarter-deck was well washed and scrubbed; an awning was spread over it, which formed a capital ceiling; and representatives of almost every flag that waves formed the walls of the large and airy apartment. Oil lamps, placed upon the skylights, companion, and capstan, shed a mellow light upon the scene, the romantic effect of which was greatly heightened by a few flickering rays of the moon, which shot through various openings in the drapery, and disported playfully upon the deck. At an early and very unfashionable hour on the evening of the appointed night the guests arrived in detachments; and while the gentlemen scrambled up the side of the vessel, the ladies, amid a good deal of blushing and hesitation, were hoisted on board in a chair. Tea was served on deck; and after half an hour's laughing and chatting, during which time our violin-player was endeavouring to coax his first string to the proper pitch without breaking, the ball opened with a Scotch reel. Every one knows what Scotch reels are, but every one does not know how the belles of the Western Isles can dance them.

"Just look at that slip of thread-paper," said the doctor to the captain, pointing to a thin, flat young lady, still in her teens. "I've watched her from the first. She's been up at six successive rounds, flinging her shanks about worse than a teething baby; and she's up again for another, just as cool and serene as a night in the

latter end of October. I wonder what she's made of?"

"Leather, p'r'aps, or gutta-percha," suggested the captain, who had himself been "flinging his legs" about pretty violently during the previous half-hour. "I wish that she had been my partner instead of the heavy fair one that you see over there leaning against the mizzen belaying-pins."

"Which?" inquired the doctor. "The old lady with the stu'n-sails set on her shoulders?"

"No, no," replied the captain—"the *young* lady; fat—*very* fat—fair, and twenty, with the big blue eyes like signal-lamps on a locomotive. She twisted me round just as if I'd been a fathom of pump-water, shouting and laughing all the time in my face, like a sou'-west gale, and never looking a bit where she was going till she pitched head-foremost into the union-jack, carrying it and me along with her off the quarter-deck and half-way down the companion. It's a blessing she fell undermost, else I should have been spread all over the deck like a capsized pail of slops."

"Hallo!" exclaimed the doctor; "what's wrong with the old lady over there? She's making very uncommon faces."

"She's sea-sick, I do believe," cried the captain, rushing across the deck towards her.

And, without doubt, the old lady in question was showing symptoms of that terrible malady, although the bay was as smooth as a mill-pond, and the *Prince Rupert* reposed on its quiet bosom without the slightest perceptible motion. With impressive nautical politeness the captain handed her below, and in the

sudden sympathy of his heart proposed as a remedy a stiff glass of brandy and water.

"Or a pipe of cavendish," suggested the second mate, who met them on the ladder as they descended, and could not refrain from a facetious remark, even although he knew it would, as it did, call forth a thundering command from his superior to go on deck and mind his own business.

"Isn't it jolly," said a young Stornowite, coming up to Wiseacre, with a face blazing with glee—"isn't it jolly, Mr Wiseacre?"

"Oh, very!" replied Wiseacre, in a voice of such dismal melancholy that the young Stornowite's countenance instantly went out, and he wheeled suddenly round to light it again at the visage of some more sympathising companion.

Just at this point of the revelry the fiddler's first string, which had endured with a dogged tenacity that was wonderful even for catgut, gave way with a loud bang, causing an abrupt termination to the uproar, and producing a dead silence. A few minutes, however, soon rectified this mischance. The discordant tones of the violin, as the new string was tortured into tune, once more opened the safety-valve, and the ball began *de novo*.

Great was the fun, and numerous were the ludicrous incidents that happened during that eventful night; and loud were the noise and merriment of the dancers as they went with vigorous energy through the bewildering evolutions of country-dance and reel. Immense was the delight of the company when the funniest

old gentleman there volunteered a song; and ecstatic the joy when he followed it up by a speech upon every subject that an ordinary mind could possibly embrace in a quarter of an hour. But who can describe the scene that ensued when supper was reported ready in the cabin!—a cabin that was very small indeed, with a stair leading down to it so steep that those who were pretty high up could have easily stepped upon the shoulders of those who were near the foot; and the unpleasant idea was painfully suggested that if any one of the heavy ladies (there were several of them) was to slip her foot on commencing the descent, she would infallibly sweep them all down in a mass, and cram them into the cook's pantry, the door of which stood wickedly open at the foot of the stair, as if it anticipated some such catastrophe. Such pushing, squeezing, laughing, shrieking, and joking, in the vain attempt made to get upwards of thirty people crammed into a room of twelve feet by ten! Such droll and cutting remarks as were made when they were at last requested to sup in detachments! All this, however, was nothing to what ensued after supper, when the fiddler became more energetic, and the dancers more vigorous than ever. But enough. The first grey streaks of morning glimmered in the east ere the joyous party "tumbled down the sides" and departed to their homes.

There is a sweet yet melancholy pleasure, when far away from friends and home, in thinking over happy days gone by, and dwelling on the scenes and pleasures that have passed away, perhaps for ever. So I thought and felt as I recalled to mind the

fun and frolic of the Stornoway ball, and the graver mirth of the Gravesend dinner, until memory traced my course backward, step by step, to the peaceful time when I dwelt in Scotland, surrounded by the gentle inmates of my happy home. We had left the shores and the green water behind us, and were now ploughing through the blue waves of the wide Atlantic; and when I turned my straining eyes towards the faint blue line of the lessening hills, "a tear unbidden trembled" as the thought arose that I looked perhaps for the last time upon my dear native land.

The sea has ever been an inexhaustible subject for the pens of most classes of writers. The poet, the traveller, and the novelist has each devoted a portion of his time and talents to the mighty ocean; but that part of it which it has fallen to my lot to describe is very different from those portions about which poets have sung with rapture. Here, none of the many wonders of the tropical latitudes beguile the tedium of the voyage; no glittering dolphins force the winged inhabitants of the deep to seek shelter on the vessel's deck; no ravenous sharks follow in our wake to eat us if we chance to fall overboard, or amuse us by swallowing our baited hook; no passing vessel cheers us with the knowledge that there are others besides ourselves roaming over the interminable waste of waters. All was dreary and monotonous; the same unvarying expanse of sky and water met our gaze each morning as we ascended to the deck, to walk for half an hour before breakfast, except when the topsails of the other two vessels fluttered for a moment on the distant horizon. Occasionally we

approached closer to each other, and once or twice hailed with the trumpet; but these breaks in the solitude of our existence were few and far between.

Towards the end of July we approached Hudson Straits, having seen nothing on the way worth mentioning, except one whale, which passed close under the stern of the ship. This was a great novelty to me, being the first that I had ever seen, and it gave me something to talk of and think about for the next four days.

The ships now began to close in, as we neared the entrance of the straits, and we had the pleasure of sailing in company for a few days. The shores of the straits became visible occasionally, and soon we passed with perfect confidence and security among those narrow channels and mountains of ice that damped the ardour and retarded the progress of Hudson, Button, Gibbons, and other navigators in days of yore.

One day, during a dead calm, our ship and the *Prince of Wales* lay close to each other, rolling in the swell of the glassy ocean. There seemed to be no prospect of a breeze, so the captain ordered his gig to be launched, and invited the doctor, Mr Carles, and myself to go on board the *Prince of Wales* with him. We accepted his offer, and were soon alongside. Old Captain Ryle, a veteran in the Company's service, received us kindly, and insisted on our staying to tea. The passengers on board were—a chief factor, (*The chief factorship is the highest rank attainable in the service, the chief trader being next*) who had

been home on leave of absence, and was returning to end his days, perhaps, in the North-West; and Mr John Leagues, a young apprentice clerk, going, like myself, to try his fortune in Hudson Bay. He was a fine, candid young fellow, full of spirit, with a kind, engaging disposition. From the first moment I saw him I formed a friendship for him, which was destined to ripen into a lasting one many years after. I sighed on parting from him that evening, thinking that we should never meet again; but about six years from the time I bade him farewell in Hudson Straits, I again grasped his hand on the shores of the mighty St. Lawrence, and renewed a friendship which afforded me the greatest pleasure I enjoyed in the country, and which, I trust, neither time nor distance will ever lessen or destroy.

We spent the evening delightfully, the more so that we were not likely to have such an opportunity again, as the *Prince of Wales* would shortly part company from us, and direct her course to Moose Factory, in James Bay, while we should proceed across Hudson Bay to York Factory. We left the ship just as a few cats-paws on the surface of the water gave indications of a coming breeze.

Ice now began to surround us in all directions; and soon after this I saw, for the first time, that monster of the Polar Seas, an iceberg. It was a noble sight. We passed quite close, and had a fine opportunity of observing it. Though not so large as they are frequently seen, it was beautifully and fantastically formed. High peaks rose from it on various places, and down its sides

streams of water and miniature cataracts flowed in torrents. The whole mass was of a delicate greenish-white colour, and its lofty pinnacles sparkled in the moonbeams as it floated past, bending majestically in the swell of the ocean. About this time, too, we met numerous fields and floes of ice, to get through which we often experienced considerable difficulty.

My favourite amusement, as we thus threaded our way through the ice, was to ascend to the royal-yard, and there to sit and cogitate whilst gazing on the most beautiful and romantic scenes.

It is impossible to convey a correct idea of the beauty, the magnificence, of some of the scenes through which we passed. Sometimes thousands of the most grotesque, fanciful, and beautiful icebergs and icefields surrounded us on all sides, intersected by numerous serpentine canals, which glittered in the sun (for the weather was fine nearly all the time we were in the straits), like threads of silver twining round ruined palaces of crystal. The masses assumed every variety of form and size; and many of them bore such a striking resemblance to cathedrals, churches, columns, arches, and spires, that I could almost fancy we had been transported to one of the floating cities of Fairyland. The rapid motion, too, of our ship, in what appeared a dead calm, added much to the magical effect of the scene. A light but steady breeze urged her along with considerable velocity through a maze of ponds and canals, which, from the immense quantity of ice that surrounded them, were calm and unruffled as the surface of

a mill-pond.

Not a sound disturbed the delightful stillness of nature, save the gentle rippling of the vessel's bow as she sped on her way, or the occasional puffing of a lazy whale, awakened from a nap by our unceremonious intrusion on his domains. Now and then, however, my reveries were interrupted by the ship coming into sudden contact with huge lumps of ice. This happened occasionally when we arrived at the termination of one of those natural canals through which we passed, and found it necessary to force our way into the next. These concussions were occasionally very severe—so much so, at times, as to make the ship's bell ring; but we heeded this little, as the vessel was provided with huge blocks of timber on her bows, called ice-pieces, and was, besides, built expressly for sailing in the northern seas. It only became annoying at meal-times, when a spoonful of soup would sometimes make a little private excursion of its own over the shoulder of the owner instead of into his mouth.

As we proceeded, the ice became more closely packed, and at last compelled us to bore through it. The ship, however, was never altogether arrested, though often much retarded. I recollect, while thus surrounded, filling a bucket with water from a pool on the ice, to see whether it was fresh or not, as I had been rather sceptical upon this point. It was excellent, and might almost compete with the water from the famous spring of Crawley. In a few days we got out of the ice altogether; and in this, as the ships are frequently detained for weeks in the straits,

we considered ourselves very fortunate.

We all experienced at this time a severe disappointment in the non-appearance of the Esquimaux from the coast. The captain said they would be sure to come off to us, as they had always been in the habit of doing so, for the purpose of exchanging ivory and oil for saws, files, needles, etcetera, a large chestful of which is put on board annually for this purpose. The ivory usually procured from them is walrus tusks. These are not very large, and are of inferior quality.

As we approached the shores of the straits, we shortened sail and fired three or four guns, but no noisy "*chimo*" floated across the water in answer to our salute; still we lingered for a while, but, as there was no sign of the natives on shore, the captain concluded they had gone off to the interior, and he steered out to sea again. I was very much disappointed at this, as it was wholly unexpected, and Wiseacre and I had promised ourselves much pleasure in trading with them; for which purpose all the buttons of our old waistcoats had been amputated. It was useless, however, to repine, so I contented myself with the hope that they would yet visit us in some other part of the straits. We afterwards learned that our guns had attracted them to the coast in time to board the *Prince Albert* (which was out of sight astern), though too late for us.

The passage across Hudson Bay was stormy, but no one on board cared for this, all having become accustomed to rough weather. For my part, I had become quite a sailor, and could

ascend and descend easily to the truck without creeping through the *lubber's hole*. I shall not forget the first time I attempted this: our youngest apprentice had challenged me to try it, so up we went together—he on the fore and I on the main mast. The tops were gained easily, and we even made two or three steps up the top-mast shrouds with affected indifference; but, alas! our courage was failing—at least *mine* was—very fast. However, we gained the cross-trees pretty well, and then sat down for a little to recover breath. The topgallant-mast still reared its taper form high above me, and the worst was yet to come. The top-gallant shrouds had no ratlines on them, so I was obliged to *shin* up; and, as I worked myself up the two small ropes, the tenacity with which I grasped them was fearful. At last I reached the top, and with my feet on the small collar that fastens the ropes to the mast, and my arms circling the mast itself—for nothing but a bare pole, crossed by the royal-yard, now rose above me—I glanced upwards. After taking a long breath, and screwing up my courage, I slowly shinned up the slender pole, and, standing on the royal-yard, laid my hand upon the *truck*. After a time I became accustomed to it, and thought nothing of taking an airing on the royal-yard after breakfast.

About the 5th or 6th of August, the captain said we must be near the land. The deep-sea lead was rigged, and a sharp lookout kept, but no land appeared. At last, one fine day, while at the mast-head, I saw something like land on the horizon, and told them so on deck. They saw it too, but gave me no answer. Soon

a hurried order to "Dowse top-gallant-sails and reef top-sails" made me slide down rather hastily from my elevated position. I had scarcely gained the deck, when a squall, the severest we had yet encountered, struck the ship, laying her almost on her beam-ends; and the sea, which had been nearly calm a few minutes before, foamed and hissed like a seething caldron, and became white as snow. This, I believe, was what sailors call a *white squall*. It was as short as it was severe, and great was our relief when the ship regained her natural position in the water. Next day we saw land in earnest, and in the afternoon anchored in "Five Fathom Hole," after passing in safety a sandbar, which renders the entrance into this roadstead rather difficult.

Here, then, for the first time I beheld the shores of Hudson Bay; and truly their appearance was anything but prepossessing. Though only at the distance of two miles, so low and flat was the land, that it appeared ten miles off, and scarcely a tree was to be seen. We could just see the tops of one or two houses in York Factory, the principal depôt of the country, which was seven miles up the river at the mouth of which we lay. In a short time the sails of a small schooner came in sight, and in half an hour more the *Frances* (named after the amiable lady of the governor, Sir George Simpson) was riding alongside.

The skipper came on board, and immediately there commenced between him and the captain a sharp fire of questions and answers, which roused me from a slumber in which I had been indulging, and hurried me on deck. Here the face of

things had changed. The hatches were off, and bales of goods were scattered about in all directions. Another small schooner had arrived, and the process of discharging the vessel was going rapidly forward. A boat was then dispatched to the factory with the packet-box and letter-bag, and soon after the *Frances* stood in for the shore.

The *Prince Albert* had arrived almost at the same moment with the *Prince Rupert*, and was now visited by the second schooner, which soon returned to our ship to take the passengers on shore. The passengers who came out in the *Prince Albert* were on board —namely, the Reverend Mr Gowley, a clergyman of the Church of England, and his lady; and Mr Rob, a sort of catechist, or semi-clerical schoolmaster. They were missionaries bound for Red River Colony; and as I had some prospect of going there myself, I was delighted to have the probable chance of travelling with companions who, from the short survey I had of them while they conversed with the captain and Mr Carles, seemed good-natured and agreeable.

Mr Carles, Mr Wiseacre, and I now bade adieu to the good ship which had been our home for such a length of time (but I must say I did not regret the parting), and followed our baggage on board the schooner, expecting to reach the factory before dusk. "There's many a slip 'twixt the cup and the lip," is a proverb well authenticated and often quoted, and on the present occasion its truth was verified. We had not been long under weigh before the ebb tide began to run so strong against us as to preclude the

possibility of our reaching the shore that night. There was no help for it, however; so down went the anchor to the bottom, and down went I to the cabin.

Such a cabin! A good-sized trunk, with a small table in it, and the lid shut down, had about as much right to the name. It was awfully small—even *I* could not stand upright in it, though at the time I had scarcely attained to the altitude of five feet; yet here were we destined to pass the night—and a wretched night we did pass. We got over the first part tolerably, but as it grew late our eyes grew heavy. We yawned, fidgeted and made superhuman efforts to keep awake and seem happy; but it would not do. There were only two berths in the cabin; and, as so many gentlemen were present, Mrs Gowley would not get into either of them, but declared she would sit up all night. The gentlemen, on the other hand, could not be so ungallant as to go to sleep while the only lady present sat up. The case was desperate, and so I went off to the hold, intending to lie down on a bale, if I could find one. In my search I tumbled over something soft, which gave vent to a frightful howl, and proved to be no less a personage than Mr Wiseacre, who had anticipated me, and found a convenient place whereon to lie. My search, however, was less successful. Not a corner big enough for a cat to sleep in was to be found, all the goods having been flung hastily into the hold, so that it was a chaos of box corners, stove legs, edges of kegs and casks, which presented a surface that put to flight all hope of horizontal repose; so I was obliged to return to the cabin, where I found the

unhappy inmates winking and blinking at each other like owls in the sunshine.

"You had better make use of one of these berths, my young friend," said Mr Gowley, with a bland smile, as I entered; "you seem very much overcome with sleep, and *we* have resolved to sit up all night."

"Do get in," urged Mrs Gowley, who was a sweet, gentle creature, and seemed much too delicate and fragile to stand the rough life that was likely to be the lot of the wife of a missionary to the Red men of the Far North; "I do not intend to lie down to-night; and besides, it will soon be morning." A sweet but very sleepy smile flitted across her face as she spoke.

Of course, I protested against this with great vehemence, assuring them that I could not think of anything so ungallant, and that I meant to sit it out manfully with the rest. Mr Rob, who was a comical little Welshman, of about thirty years of age, with a sharp, snub nose, which was decorated with spectacles, sat huddled up in a corner, immersed in sleepiness to such an extent that he would not have smiled for worlds, and spent the weary hours in vain efforts to keep his head on his shoulders—an object, apparently, of some difficulty, seeing that it swayed backwards and forwards and round about like that of a Chinese mandarin! For a few minutes I sat gazing steadfastly at the revolving object before me, when my own head became similarly affected, and fell suddenly back against the bulk-head with a tremendous crash, wakening them all up, and causing Mr Rob to stare at me with an

expression of vacant gravity, mingled with surprise, which slowly and gradually faded away again as sleep reasserted its irresistible power.

Flesh and blood could not stand this. I would have lain down on the table, but poor Mrs Gowley's head already covered the greater part of that; or on the floor, but, alas! it was too small. At last I began to reason thus with myself: "Here are two capital beds, with nobody in them; it is the height of folly to permit them to remain empty; but then, what a selfish-looking thing to leave Mrs Gowley sitting up! After all, she *won't* go to bed. Oh dear! what *is* to be done?" (Bang went the head again.) "You'd better turn in," said Mr Gowley. Again I protested that I could not think of it; but my eyes would not keep open to look him in the face. At last my scruples—I blush to say it—were overcome, and I allowed myself to be half forced into the berth; while Mr Rob, whose self-denial could endure no longer, took advantage of the confusion thus occasioned, and vanished into the other like a harlequin. Poor Mr and Mrs Gowley laid their innocent heads side by side upon the table, and snored in concert.

How long I slept I know not, but long before day a tremendous thumping awoke me, and after I had collected my faculties enough to understand it, I found that the schooner was grounding as the tide receded. "Oh!" thought I; and, being utterly incapable of thinking more, I fell back on the pillow again, sound asleep, and did not awake till long after daybreak.

Next morning was beautiful; but we were still aground, and,

from what the skipper said, there appeared to be no prospect of getting ashore till the afternoon. Our patience, however, was not tried so long; for, early in the day, a boat came off from the factory to take us ashore: but the missionaries preferred remaining in the schooner. Mr Carles, young Wiseacre, and I gladly availed ourselves of the opportunity, and were soon sailing with a fair breeze up Hayes River. We approached to within a few yards of the shore; and I formed, at first sight, a very poor opinion of the country which, two years later, I was destined to traverse full many a mile in search of the feathered inhabitants of the marshes.

The Point of Marsh, which was the first land we made, was quite low—only a few feet above the sea—and studded here and there with thick willows, but not a single tree. Long lank grass covered it in every place, affording ducks and geese shelter, in the autumn and spring. In the centre of it stood the ship-beacon—a tall, ungainly-looking pile, which rose upwards like a monster out of the water. Altogether, a more desolate prospect could not well be imagined.

The banks of Hayes River are formed of clay, and they improved a little in verdure as we ascended; but still, wherever the eye turned, the same universal flatness met the gaze. The river was here about two miles wide, and filled with shallows and sandbanks, which render the navigation difficult for vessels above fifty tons.

As we proceeded, a small bark canoe, with an Indian and his

wife in it, glided swiftly past us; and this was the first Indian, and the first of these slender craft, I had seen. Afterwards, I became more intimately acquainted with them than was altogether agreeable.

In a short time we reached the wooden wharf, which, owing to the smallness of everything else in the vicinity, had rather an imposing look, and projected a long way into the water; but our boat passed this and made for a small slip, on which two or three gentlemen waited to receive us.

My voyage was ended. The boat's keel grated harshly on the gravel; the next moment my feet once more pressed *terra firma*, and I stood at last on the shores of the New World, a stranger in a strange land.

I do not intend to give a minute description of York Factory here, as a full account of it will be found in a succeeding chapter, and shall, therefore, confine myself to a slight sketch of the establishment, and our proceedings there during a stay of about three weeks.

York Factory is the principal depôt of the Northern department, from whence all the supplies for the trade are issued, and where all the furs of the district are collected and shipped for England. As may be supposed, then, the establishment is a large one. There are always between thirty and forty men resident at the post, (*The word "*post*," used here and elsewhere throughout the book, signifies an establishment of any kind, small or great, and has no reference whatever to the "*post*" of epistolary*

notoriety.) summer and winter; generally four or five clerks, a postmaster, and a skipper for the small schooners. The whole is under the direction and superintendence of a chief factor, or chief trader.

As the winter is very long (nearly eight months), and the summer very short, all the transport of goods to, and returns from, the interior must necessarily be effected as quickly as possible. The consequence is, that great numbers of men and boats are constantly arriving from the inland posts, and departing again, during the summer; and as each brigade is commanded by a chief factor, trader, or clerk, there is a constant succession of new faces, which, after a long and dreary winter, during which the inhabitants never see a stranger, renders the summer at York Factory the most agreeable part of the year. The arrival of the ship from England, too, delights those inhabitants of the wilderness with letters from *home*, which can only be received twice a year—namely, at the time now alluded to, by the ship; and again in December, when letters and accounts are conveyed throughout the interior by means of sledges drawn by men.

The fort (as all establishments in the Indian country, whether small or great, are sometimes called) is a large square, I should think about six or seven acres, enclosed within high stockades, and planted on the banks of Hayes River, nearly five miles from its mouth. The houses are all of wood, and, of course, have no pretension to architectural beauty; but their clean, white appearance and regularity have a pleasing effect on the eye.

Before the front gate stand four large brass field-pieces; but these warlike instruments are only used for the purpose of saluting the ship with blank cartridge on her arrival and departure, the decayed state of the carriages rendering it dangerous to load the guns with a full charge.

The country, as I said before, is flat and swampy, and the only objects that rise very prominently above the rest, and catch the wandering eye, are a lofty "outlook," or scaffolding of wood, painted black, from which to watch for the arrival of the ship; and a flagstaff, from whose peak, on Sundays, the snowy folds of St. George's flag flutter in the breeze.

Such was York Factory in 1841; and as this description is sufficient to give a general idea of the place, I shall conclude it, and proceed with my narrative.

Mr Grave, the chief factor then in charge, received us very kindly, and introduced us to some of the gentlemen standing beside him on the wharf. Mr Carles, being also a chief factor, was taken by him to the *commissioned gentlemen's house*; while Wiseacre and I, being apprentice clerks, were shown the young gentlemen's house—or, as the young gentlemen themselves called it, Bachelors' Hall—and were told to make ourselves at home. To Bachelors' Hall, then, we proceeded, and introduced ourselves. The persons assembled there were—the accountant, five clerks, the postmaster, and one or two others. Some of them were smoking, and some talking; and a pretty considerable noise they made. Bachelors' Hall, indeed, was worthy of its name,

being a place that would have killed any woman, so full was it of smoke, noise, and confusion.

After having made ourselves acquainted with everybody, I thought it time to present a letter of introduction I had to Mrs Grave, the wife of the gentleman in charge, who received me very kindly. I was much indebted to this lady for supplying me with several pairs of moccasins for my further voyage, and much useful information, without which I should have been badly off indeed. Had it not been for her kindness, I should in all probability have been allowed to depart very ill provided for the journey to Red River, for which I was desired to hold myself in readiness. Young Wiseacre, on the other hand, learned that he was to remain at York Factory that winter, and was placed in the office the day after our arrival, where he commenced *work* for the first time. We had a long and sage conversation upon the subject the same evening, and I well remember congratulating him, with an extremely grave face, upon his having now begun to *do for himself*. Poor fellow! his subsequent travels in the country were long and perilous.

But let us pause here a while. The reader has been landed in a new country, and it may be well, before describing our voyage to Red River, to make him acquainted with the peculiarities of the service, and the people with whom he will in imagination have to associate.

Chapter Three.
Description of the Hudson Bay Company—Their forts and establishments—Food—Articles of trade and manner of trading

In the year 1669, a Company was formed in London, under the direction of Prince Rupert, for the purpose of prosecuting the fur-trade in the regions surrounding Hudson Bay. This Company obtained a charter from Charles the Second, granting to them and their successors, under the name of "The Governor and Company of Adventurers trading into Hudson's Bay," the sole right of trading in all the country watered by rivers flowing into Hudson Bay. The charter also authorised them to build and fit out men-of-war, establish forts, prevent any other company from carrying on trade with the natives in their territories, and required that they should do all in their power to promote Discovery.

Armed with these powers, then, the Hudson Bay Company established a fort near the head of James Bay. Soon afterwards, several others were built in different parts of the country; and before long the Company spread and grew wealthy, and eventually extended their trade far beyond the chartered limits.

With the internal economy of the Company under the

superintendence of Prince Rupert, however, I am not acquainted; but as it will be necessary to the reader's forming a correct idea of the peculiarities of the country and service, that he should know something of its character under the direction of Sir George Simpson, I shall give a brief outline of its arrangements.

Reader, you will materially assist me in my description if you will endeavour to draw the following landscape on the retina of your mind's eye.

Imagine an immense extent of country, many hundred miles broad and many hundred miles long, covered with dense forests, expanded lakes, broad rivers, wide prairies, swamps, and mighty mountains: and all in a state of primeval simplicity—undefaced by the axe of civilised man, and untenanted by aught save a few roving hordes of Red Indians and myriads of wild animals. Imagine amid this wilderness a number of small squares, each enclosing half a dozen wooden houses and about a dozen men, and between each of these establishments a space of forest varying from fifty to three hundred miles in length; and you will have a pretty correct idea of the Hudson Bay Company's territories, and of the number of and distance between their forts. The idea, however, may be still more correctly obtained by imagining populous Great Britain converted into a wilderness and planted in the middle of Rupert's Land. The Company, in that case, would build *three* forts in it—one at the Land's End, one in Wales, and one in the Highlands; so that in Britain there would be but three hamlets, with a population of some thirty

men, half a dozen women, and a few children! The Company's posts extend, with these intervals between, from the Atlantic to the Pacific Ocean, and from within the Arctic Circle to the northern boundaries of the United States.

Throughout this immense country there are probably not more ladies than would suffice to form half a dozen quadrilles; and these—poor banished creatures!—are chiefly the wives of the principal gentlemen connected with the fur-trade. The rest of the female population consists chiefly of half-breeds and Indians; the latter entirely devoid of education, and the former as much enlightened as can be expected from those whose life is spent in such a country. Even these are not very numerous; and yet without them the men would be in a sad condition, for they are the only tailors and washer-women in the country, and make all the mittens, moccasins, fur caps, deer-skin coats, etcetera, etcetera, worn in the land.

There are one or two favoured spots, however, into which a missionary or two have penetrated; and in Red River Settlement (the only colony in the Company's territories) there are several churches and clergymen, both Protestant and Roman Catholic.

The country is divided into four large departments: the Northern department, which includes all the establishments in the far north and frozen regions; the Southern department, including those to the south and east of this, the post at the head of James Bay, and along the shores of Lake Superior; the Montreal department, including the country in the

neighbourhood of Montreal, up the Ottawa River, and along the north shore of the Gulf of St. Lawrence and Esquimaux Bay; and the Columbia department, which comprehends an immense extent of country to the west of the Rocky Mountains, including the Oregon territory, which, although the Hudson Bay Company still trade in it, now belongs to the Americans.

These departments are divided into a number of districts, each under the direction of an influential officer; and these again are subdivided into numerous establishments, forts, posts, and outposts.

The name of *fort*, as already remarked, is given to all the posts in the country; but some of them certainly do not merit the name—indeed, few of them do. The only two in the country that are real, *bonâ fide* forts, are Fort Garry and the Stone Fort in the colony of Red River, which are surrounded by stone walls with bastions at the corners. The others are merely defended by wooden pickets or stockades; and a few, where the Indians are quiet and harmless, are entirely destitute of defence of any kind. Some of the chief posts have a complement of about thirty or forty men; but most of them have only ten, five, four, and even *two*, besides the gentleman in charge. As in most instances these posts are planted in a wilderness far from men, and the inhabitants have only the society of each other, some idea may be formed of the solitary life led by many of the Company's servants.

The following is a list of the forts in the four different

departments, as correctly given as possible; but, owing to the great number in the country, the constant abandoning of old and establishing of new forts, it is difficult to get at a perfectly correct knowledge of their number and names:—

Northern Department

York Fort (the depôt).
Churchill.
Severn.
Oxford House.
Trout Lake House.
Norway House.
Nelson River House.
Berens River House.
Red River Colony.
Fort Garry.
Stone Fort.
Manitoba House.
Fort Pelly.
Cumberland House.
Carlton House.
Fort Pitt.
Edmonton.
Rocky Mountain House.
Fort Aminaboine.
Jasper's House.
Henry's House.

Fort Chipewyan.
Fort Vermilion.
Fort Dunvegan.
Fort Simpson.
Fort Norman.
Fort Good Hope.
Fort Halkett.
Fort Resolution.
Peel's River.
Fort Alexander.
Rat Portage House.
Fort Frances.
Isle a là Crosse.

Southern Department

Moose Factory (the depôt).
Rupert's House.
Fort George.
Michiskau.
Albany.
Lac Seul
Kinogomousse.
Matawagamingue.
Kuckatoosh.
New Brunswick.
Abitibi.
Temiscamingue.

Grand Lac.
Trout Lake.
Matarva.
Canasicomica.
Lacloche.
Sault de Ste. Maria.
Fort William.
Pic House.
Michipicoton.
Bachiwino.
Nepigon.
Washwonaby.
Pike Lake.
Temagamy.
Green Lake.
Missisague.

Montreal Department

Lachine (the depôt).
Rivière du Moine.
Lac des Allumettes.
Fort Coulonge.
Rivière Desert.
Lac des Sables.
Lake of Two Mountains.
Kikandatch.
Weymontachingue.

Rat River.
Ashabmoushwan.
Chicoutimie.
Lake St. John's.
Tadousac.
Isle Jérémie.
Port Neuf.
Goodbout.
Trinity River.
Seven Islands.
Mingan.
Nabisippi.
Natoequene.
Musquarro.
Fort Nasoopie.
Mainewan Lake.
Sandy Banks.
Gull Islands.
North-west River.
Rigolet.
Kiboksk.
Eyelick.

Columbia Department

Fort Vancouver (the depôt).
Fort George.
Nez Percé.

Ockanagan.
Colville.
Fort Hall.
Thompson's River.
Fort Langley.
Cootanies.
Flat-head Post.
Nisqually.
Alexandria.
Fort Chilcotin.
Fort James.
Fort Fluz Cuz.
Babine Lake.
And an agency in the Sandwich Islands.

There are seven different grades in the service. First, the labourer, who is ready to turn his hand to anything; to become a trapper, fisherman, or rough carpenter at the shortest notice. He is generally employed in cutting firewood for the consumption of the establishment at which he is stationed, shovelling snow from before the doors, mending all sorts of damages to all sorts of things, and, during the summer months, in transporting furs and goods between his post and the nearest depôt. Next in rank is the interpreter. He is, for the most part, an intelligent labourer, of pretty long standing in the service, who, having picked up a smattering of Indian, is consequently very useful in trading with the natives. After the interpreter comes the postmaster; usually a promoted labourer, who, for good behaviour or valuable services,

has been put upon a footing with the gentlemen of the service, in the same manner that a private soldier in the army is sometimes raised to the rank of a commissioned officer. At whatever station a postmaster may happen to be placed, he is generally the most useful and active man there. He is often placed in charge of one of the many small stations, or outposts, throughout the country. Next are the apprentice clerks—raw lads, who come out fresh from school, with their mouths agape at the wonders they behold in Hudson Bay. They generally, for the purpose of appearing manly, acquire all the bad habits of the country as quickly as possible, and are stuffed full of what they call fun, with a strong spice of mischief. They become more sensible and sedate before they get through the first five years of their apprenticeship, after which they attain to the rank of clerks. The clerk, after a number of years' service (averaging from thirteen to twenty), becomes a chief trader (or half-shareholder), and in a few years more he attains the highest rank to which any one can rise in the service, that of chief factor (or shareholder).

It is a strange fact that three-fourths of the Company's servants are Scotch Highlanders and Orkneymen. There are very few Irishmen, and still fewer English. A great number, however, are half-breeds and French Canadians, especially among the labourers and *voyageurs*.

From the great extent, and variety of feature, in the country occupied by the fur-traders, they subsist, as may be supposed, on widely different kinds of food. In the prairie, or plain countries,

animal food is chiefly used, as there thousands of deer and bisons wander about, while the woods are stocked with game and wild-fowl. In other places, however, where deer are scarce and game not so abundant, fish of various kinds are caught in the rivers and lakes; and in other parts of the country they live partly upon fish and partly upon animal food. Vegetables are very scarce in the more northern posts, owing to the severity of the winter, and consequent shortness of summer. As the Company's servants are liable, on the shortest notice, to be sent from one end of the continent to another, they are quite accustomed to change of diet; —one year rejoicing in buffalo-humps and marrow-bones, in the prairies of the Saskatchewan, and the next devouring hung white-fish and scarce venison, in the sterile regions of Mackenzie River, or varying the meal with a little of that delectable substance often spoken of by Franklin, Back, and Richardson as their only dish —namely, *tripe-de-roche*, a lichen or moss which grows on the most barren rocks, and is only used as food in the absence of all other provisions.

During the first years of the Company, they were much censured for not carrying out the provision contained in the royal charter, that they should prosecute Discovery as much as possible; and it was even alleged that they endeavoured to prevent adventurers, not connected with themselves, from advancing in their researches. There is every reason to believe, however, that this censure was undeserved. A new company, recently formed in a wild country, could not at first be expected to have time or

funds to advance the arduous and expensive cause of Discovery. With regard to their having impeded the attempts of others, it is doubtful whether any one in the service ever did so; but even had such been the case, the unauthorised and dishonourable conduct of one or two of their servants does not sanction the condemnation of the whole Company. Besides, the cause of Discovery was effectively advanced in former days by Herne, and in later years by Dease and Simpson, Dr Rae, and others; so that, whatever might have been the case at first, there can be no doubt that the Company have done much for the cause of late years.

The trade carried on by the Company is in peltries of all sorts, oil, dried and salted fish, feathers, quills, etcetera. A list of some of their principal articles of commerce is subjoined:—

Beaver-skins.
Bear-skins, Black.
Bear-skins, Brown.
Bear-skins, White or Polar.
Bear-skins, Grizzly.
Badger-skins.
Buffalo or Bison Robes[1].
Castorum, a substance procured from the body of the beaver.
Deer-skins, Rein.
Deer-skins, Red.

[1] The hide of the bison—or, as it is called by the fur-traders, the buffalo—when dressed on one side and the hair left on the other, is called a robe. Great numbers are sent to Canada, where they are used for sleigh wrappers in winter. In the Indian county they are often used instead of blankets.

Deer-skins, Moose or Elk.
Deer-skins, parchment.
Feathers of all kinds.
Fisher-skins.
Fox-skins, Black.
Fox-skins, Silver.
Fox-skins, Cross.
Fox-skins, Red.
Fox-skins, White.
Fox-skins, Blue.
Goose-skins.
Ivory (tusks of the Walrus).
Lynx-skins.
Marten-skins.
Musquash-skins.
Otter-skins.
Oil, Seal.
Oil, Whale.
Swan-skins.
Salmon, salted.
Seal-skins.
Wolf-skins
Wolverine-skins.

The most valuable of the furs mentioned in the above list is that of the *black fox*. This beautiful animal resembles in shape the common fox of England, but it is much larger, and jet-black, with the exception of one or two white hairs along the back-bone and

a pure white tuft on the end of the tail. A single skin sometimes brings from twenty-five to thirty guineas in the British market; but, unfortunately, they are very scarce. The *silver fox* differs from the black fox only in the number of white hairs with which its fur is sprinkled; and the more numerous the white hairs, the less valuable does it become. The *cross fox* is a cross between the black or silver and the red fox. The *red fox* bears a much inferior fur to the other kinds; yet it is a good article of trade, as this species is very numerous. These four kinds of foxes are sometimes produced in the same litter, the mother being a red fox. The *white fox* is of less value than the red, and is also very numerous, particularly on the shores of Hudson Bay. The variety termed the *blue fox* is neither numerous nor valuable. It is of a dirty bluish-grey colour, and seldom makes its appearance at the Company's posts.

Beaver, in days of yore, was the staple fur of the country; but, alas! the silk hat has given it its death-blow, and the star of the beaver has now probably set for ever—that is to say, with regard to men; probably the animals themselves fancy that their lucky star has just risen. The most profitable fur in the country is that of the marten. It somewhat resembles the Russian sable, and generally maintains a steady price. These animals, moreover, are very numerous throughout most part of the Company's territories, particularly in Mackenzie River, whence great numbers are annually sent to England.

All the above animals and a few others are caught in steel and

wooden traps by the natives; while deer, buffaloes, etcetera, are run down, shot, and snared in various ways, the details of which will be found in another part of this volume.

Trade is carried on with the natives by means of a standard valuation, called in some parts of the country a *castor*. This is to obviate the necessity of circulating money, of which there is little or none, excepting in the colony of Red River. Thus, an Indian arrives at a fort with a bundle of furs, with which he proceeds to the Indian trading-room. There the trader separates the furs into different lots, and, valuing each at the standard valuation, adds the amount together, and tells the Indian (who has looked on the while with great interest and anxiety) that he has got fifty or sixty casters; at the same time he hands the Indian fifty or sixty little bits of wood in lieu of cash, so that the latter may know, by returning these in payment of the goods for which he really exchanges his skins, how fast his funds decrease. The Indian then looks round upon the bales of cloth, powder-horns, guns, blankets, knives, etcetera, with which the shop is filled, and after a good while makes up his mind to have a small blanket. This being given him, the trader tells him that the price is six castors; the purchaser hands back six of his little bits of wood, and selects something else. In this way he goes on till all his wooden cash is expended; and then, packing up his goods, departs to show his treasures to his wife, and another Indian takes his place. The value of a castor is from one to two shillings. The natives generally visit the establishments of the Company twice a year—

once in October, when they bring in the produce of their autumn hunts; and again in March, when they come in with that of the great winter hunt.

The number of castors that an Indian makes in a winter hunt varies from fifty to two hundred, according to his perseverance and activity, and the part of the country in which he hunts. The largest amount I ever heard of was made by a man called Piaquata-Kiscum, who brought in furs on one occasion to the value of two hundred and sixty castors. The poor fellow was soon afterwards poisoned by his relatives, who were jealous of his superior abilities as a hunter, and envious of the favour shown him by the white men.

After the furs are collected in spring at all the different outposts, they are packed in conveniently-sized bales, and forwarded, by means of boats and canoes, to the three chief depôts on the sea-coast—namely, Fort Vancouver, at the mouth of the Columbia River, on the shores of the Pacific; York Fort, on the shores of Hudson Bay; and Moose Factory, on the shores of James Bay—whence they are transported in the Company's ships to England. The whole country in summer is, consequently, in commotion with the passing and repassing of brigades of boats laden with bales of merchandise and furs; the still waters of the lakes and rivers are rippled by the paddle and the oar; and the long-silent echoes which have slumbered in the icy embrace of a dreary winter, are now once more awakened by the merry voice and tuneful song of the hardy *voyageur*.

This slight sketch of the Hudson Bay Company and of the territories occupied by them may, for the present, serve to give some idea of the nature of the service and the appearance of the country. We shall now proceed to write of the Indiana inhabiting these wild regions.

(Doubtless the reader is aware that the chartered rights of the Hudson Bay Company now (1875) no longer exist; nevertheless their operations are still conducted in the same manner as of old, so that the above description is applicable in almost all respects to the greater part of the country at the present time.)

Chapter Four.
North Americas Indians—Their manners and customs—Costume, dwellings, Implements, etcetera.—A tale of murder and cannibalism—A night excursion with an Indian—A deer hunt

The aborigines of North America are divided into a great number of nations or tribes, differing not only in outward appearance but also in customs and modes of life, and in some instances entertaining for each other a bitter and implacable hatred.

To describe the leading peculiarities of some of these tribes, particularly those called Crees, will be my object in the present chapter.

Some of the tribes are known by the following names:– Crees, Seauteaux, Stone Indians, Sioux, Blackfeet, Chipewyans, Slave Indians, Crows, Flatheads, etcetera. Of these, the Crees are the quietest and most inoffensive; they inhabit the woody country surrounding Hudson Bay; dwell in tents; never go to war; and spend their time in trapping, shooting, and fishing. The

Seauteaux are similar to the Crees in many respects, and inhabit the country further in the interior. The Stone Indians, Sioux, Blackfeet, Slave Indians, Crows, and Flatheads inhabit the vast plains and forests in the interior of America, on the east and west of the Rocky Mountains, and live chiefly by the produce of the chase. Their country swarms with bisons, and varieties of deer, bears, etcetera, which they hunt, shoot, snare, and kill in various ways. Some of these tribes are well supplied with horses, with which they hunt the buffalo. This is a wild, inspiriting chase, and the natives are very fond of it. They use the gun a good deal, but prefer the bow and arrow (in the use of which they are very expert) for the chase, and reserve the gun for warfare,—many of them being constantly engaged in skirmishing with their enemies. As the Crees were the Indians with whom I had the most intercourse, I shall endeavour to describe my old friends more at length.

The personal appearance of the men of this tribe is not bad. Although they have not the bold, daring carriage of the wilder tribes, yet they have active-looking figures, intelligent countenances, and a peculiar brightness in their dark eyes, which, from a constant habit of looking around them while travelling through the woods, are seldom for a moment at rest. Their jet-black hair generally hangs in straight matted locks over their shoulders, sometimes ornamented with beads and pieces of metal, and occasionally with a few partridge feathers; but they seldom wear a hat or cap of any kind, except in winter,

when they make clumsy imitations of foraging-caps with furs —preferring, if the weather be warm, to go about without any head-dress at all; or, if it be cold, using the large hood of their capotes as a covering. They are thin, wiry men, not generally very muscular in their proportions, but yet capable of enduring great fatigue. Their average height is about five feet five inches; and one rarely meets with individuals varying much from this average, nor with deformed people, among them. The step of a Cree Indian is much longer than that of a European; owing, probably, to his being so much accustomed to walking through swamps and forests, where it is necessary to take long strides. This peculiarity becomes apparent when an Indian arrives at a fort, and walks along the hard ground inside the walls with the trader, whose short, bustling, active step contrasts oddly with the long, solemn, ostrich-like stride of the savage; which, however appropriate in the woods, is certainly strange and ungraceful on a good road.

The summer dress of the Indian is almost entirely provided for him by the Hudson Bay Company. It consists chiefly of a blue or grey cloth, or else a blanket capote reaching below the knee, made much too loose for the figure, and strapped round the waist with a scarlet or crimson worsted belt. A very coarse blue striped cotton shirt is all the underclothing they wear, holding trousers to be quite superfluous; in lieu of which they make leggins of various kinds of cloth, which reach from a few inches above the knee down to the ankle. These leggins are sometimes very

tastefully decorated with bead-work, particularly those of the women, and are provided with flaps or wings on either side.

The costume, however, is slightly varied in winter. The blanket or cloth capote is then laid aside for one of smoked red-deer skin, which has very much the appearance of chamois leather. This is lined with flannel, or some other thick, warm substance, and edged with fur (more for ornament, however, than warmth) of different kinds. Fingerless mittens, with a place for the thumb, are also adopted; and shoes or moccasins of the same soft material. The moccasins are very beautiful, fitting the feet as tightly as a glove, and are tastefully ornamented with dyed porcupine quills and silk thread of various colours, at which work the women are particularly *au fait*. As the leather of the moccasin is very thin[2], blanket and flannel socks are worn underneath—one, two, or even four pairs, according to the degree of cold; and in proportion as these socks are increased in number, the moccasin, of course, loses its elegant appearance.

The Indian women are not so good-looking as the men. They have an awkward, slouching gait, and a downcast look—arising, probably, from the rude treatment they experience from their husbands; for the North American Indians, like all other savages, make complete drudges of their women, obliging them to do all the laborious and dirty work, while they reserve the pleasures

[2] Many people at home have asked me how such *thin things* can keep out the wet of the snow. The reader must bear in mind that the snow, for nearly seven months, is not even *damp* for five minutes, so constant is the frost. When it becomes wet in spring, Europeans adopt ordinary English shoes, and Indians do not mind the wet.

of the chase for themselves. Their features are sometimes good; but I never saw a really pretty woman among the Crees. Their colour, as well as that of the men, is a dingy brown, which, together with their extreme filthiness, renders them anything but attractive. They are, however, quiet, sweet-tempered, and inoffensive creatures, destitute as well of artificial manners as of *stays*. Their dress is a gown, made without sleeves, and very scanty in the skirt, of coarse blue or green cloth; it reaches down to a little under the knee, below which their limbs are cased in leggins beautifully ornamented. Their whole costume, however, like that of the men, is almost always hid from sight by a thick blanket, without which the Indian seldom ventures abroad. The women usually make the top of the blanket answer the purpose of a head-dress; but when they wish to appear very much to advantage, they put on a cap. It is a square piece of blue cloth, profusely decorated with different-coloured beads, and merely sewed up at the top. They wear their hair in long straggling locks, which have not the slightest tendency to curl, and occasionally in queues or pigtails behind; but in this respect, as in every other, they are very careless of their personal appearance.

These primitive children of the forest live in tents of deerskin or bark; and sometimes, where skins are scarce, of branches of trees. They are conically shaped, and are constructed thus:– The Indian with his family (probably two wives and three or four children) arrives in his bark canoe at a pretty level spot, sheltered from the north wind, and conveniently situated on the banks of

a small stream, where the fish are plentiful, and pine branches (or brush), for the floor of the tent, abundant. Here he runs his canoe ashore, and carries his goods and chattels up the bank. His first business is to cut a number of long poles, and tie three of them at the top, spreading them out in the form of a tripod. He then piles all the other poles round these, at half a foot distance from each other, and thus encloses a circle of between fifteen and twenty feet in diameter. Over the poles (if he is a good hunter, and has plenty of deer-skins) he spreads the skin tent, leaving an opening at the top for the egress of the smoke. If the tent be a birch-bark one, he has it in separate rolls, which are spread over the poles till the whole is covered. A small opening is left facing the river or lake, which serves for a doorway; and this is covered with an old blanket, a piece of deer-skin, or, in some instances, by bison-skin or buffalo robe. The floor is covered with a layer of small pine branches, which serve for carpet and mattress; and in the centre is placed the wood fire, which, when blazing brightly, gives a warmth and comfort to the slight habitation that could scarcely be believed. Here the Indian spends a few days or weeks, according to the amount of game in the vicinity, and then removes to some other place, carrying with him the covering of the tent, but leaving the poles standing, as they would be cumbrous to carry in his small canoe, and thousands may be had at every place where he may wish to land.

The Indian canoe is an exceedingly light and graceful little craft, and well adapted for travelling in through a wild country,

where the rivers are obstructed by long rapids, waterfalls, and shallows. It is so light that one man can easily carry it on his shoulders over the land, when a waterfall obstructs his progress; and as it only sinks about four or six inches in the water, few places are too shallow to float it. The birch bark of which it is made is about a quarter of an inch thick; and the inside is lined with extremely thin flakes of wood, over which a number of light timbers are driven, to give strength and tightness to the machine. In this frail bark, which measures from twelve, fifteen, thirty, to forty feet long, and from two to four feet broad in the middle, a whole Indian family of eight or ten souls will travel hundreds of miles, over rivers and lakes innumerable; now floating swiftly down a foaming rapid, and anon gliding over the surface of a quiet lake, or *making a portage* overland when a rapid is too dangerous to descend; and, while the elders of the family assist in carrying the canoe, the youngsters run about plucking berries, and the shaggy little curs (one or two of which are possessed by every Indian family) search for food, or bask in the sun at the foot of the baby's cradle, which stands bolt upright against a tree, while the child gazes upon all these operations with serene indifference.

Not less elegant and useful than the canoe is the snowshoe, without which the Indian would be badly off indeed. It is not, as many suppose, used as a kind of *skate*, with which to *slide* over the snow, but as a machine to prevent, by its size and breadth, the wearer from sinking into the snow; which is so deep that,

without the assistance of the snowshoe, no one could walk a quarter of a mile through the woods in winter without being utterly exhausted.

It is formed of two thin pieces of light wood, tied at both ends, and spread out near the middle, thus making a kind of long oval, the interior of which is filled up with network of deer-skin threads. Strength is given to the frame by placing wooden bars across; and it is fastened *loosely* to the foot by a slight line going over the toe. In case, however, it may be supposed that by a shoe I mean an article something the size of a man's foot, it may be as well to state that snow-shoes measure from *four* to *six feet* long, and from thirteen to twenty inches wide. Notwithstanding their great size, the extreme lightness of their materials prevents them being cumbrous; and, after a little practice, a traveller forgets that he has them on, if the weather be good for such walking. Frosty weather is the best for snow-shoe travelling, as the snow is fine and dust-like, and falls through the net-work. If the weather be warm, the wet snow renders the shoe heavy, and the lines soon begin to gall the feet. On these shoes an Indian will travel between twenty and thirty miles a day; and they often accomplish from thirty to forty when hard pressed.

The food of the Indian varies according to circumstances. Sometimes he luxuriates on deer, partridges, and fat beaver; whilst at others he is obliged to live almost entirely on fish, and not unfrequently on *tripe-de-roche*. This substance, however, does no more than retard his ultimate destruction by starvation;

and unless he meets with something more nourishing, it cannot prevent it. When starving, the Indian will not hesitate to appease the cravings of hunger by resorting to cannibalism; and there were some old dames with whom I was myself acquainted, who had at different periods eaten several of their children. Indeed, some of them, it was said, had also eaten their husbands!

The following anecdote, related to me by my friend Carles, who spent many years of his life among the North American Indians, depicts one of the worst of these cases of cannibalism.

It was in the spring of 18 hundred and something that Mr Carles stood in the Indian Hall of one of the far-distant posts in Athabasca, conversing with a party of Chipewyan Indians, who had just arrived with furs from their winter hunting-grounds. The large fires of wood, sparkling and blazing cheerfully up the wide chimney, cast a bright light round the room, and shone upon the dusky countenances of the Chipewyans, as they sat gravely on the floor, smoking their spwagans in silence. A dark shade lowered upon every face, as if thoughts of an unpleasant nature disturbed their minds; and so it was. A deed of the most revolting description had been perpetrated by an Indian of the Cree tribe, and they were about to relate the story to Mr Carles.

After a short silence, an old Indian removed his pipe, and, looking round upon the others, as if to ask their consent to his becoming spokesman, related the particulars of the story, the substance of which I now give.

Towards the middle of winter, Wisagun, a Cree Indian,

removed his encampment to another part of the country, as game was scarce in the place where he had been residing. His family consisted of a wife, a son of eight or nine years of age, and two or three children, besides several of his relations; in all, ten souls, including himself. In a few days they arrived at their new encamping ground, after having suffered a great deal of misery by the way from starvation. They were all much exhausted and worn out, but hoped, having heard of buffaloes in the vicinity, that their sufferings would soon be relieved.

Here they remained several days without finding any game, and were reduced to the necessity of devouring their moccasins and leathern coats, rendered eatable by being singed over the fire. Soon this wretched resource was also gone, and they were reduced to the greatest extremity, when a herd of buffaloes was descried far away in the prairie, on the edge of which they were encamped. All were instantly on the *qui vive*. Guns were loaded, snow-shoes put on, and in ten minutes the males of the hungry party set off after the herd, leaving Wisagun's wife and children with another girl in the tent. It was not long, however, before the famished party began to grow tired. Some of the weakest dropped behind; while Wisagun, with his son Natappe, gave up the chase, and returned to the encampment. They soon arrived at it, and Wisagun, peeping in between the chinks of the tent to see what the women were doing, saw his wife engaged in cutting up one of her own children, preparatory to cooking it. In a transport of passion, the Indian rushed forward and stabbed

her, and also the other woman; and then, fearing the wrath of the other Indians, he fled to the woods. It may be conceived what were the feelings of the remainder of the party when they returned and found their relatives murdered. They were so much exhausted, however, by previous suffering, that they could only sit down and gaze on the mutilated bodies in despair. During the night, Wisagun and Natappe returned stealthily to the tent, and, under cover of the darkness, murdered the whole party as they lay asleep. Soon after this the two Indians were met by another party of savages, in *good condition*, although, from the scarcity of game, the others were starving. The former accounted for this, however, by saying that they had fallen in with a deer not long ago; but that, before this had happened, all the rest of the family had died of starvation.

It was the party who had met the two Indians wandering in the plains that now sat round the fire relating the story to Mr Carles.

The tale was still telling when the hall door slowly opened, and Wisagun, gaunt and cadaverous, the very impersonation of famine, slunk into the room, along with Natappe, and seated himself in a corner near the fire. Mr Carles soon obtained from his own lips confirmation of the horrible deed, which he excused by saying that *most* of his relations had died before he ate them.

In a few days after this, the party of Indians took their departure from the house, to proceed to their village in the forest; and shortly after Wisagun and Natappe also left, to rejoin their tribe. The news of their deeds, however, had preceded them, so

they were received very coldly; and soon after Wisagun pitched his tent, the other Indians removed, with one accord, to another place, as though it were impossible to live happily under the shadow of the same trees. This exasperated Wisagun so much that he packed up his tent and goods, launched his canoe, and then, before starting, went up to the village, and told them it was true he had killed all his relatives; and that he was a conjurer, and had both power and inclination to conjure them to death too. He then strode down to the banks of the river, and, embarking with his son, shot out into the stream. The unhappy man had acted rashly in his wrath. There is nothing more dangerous than to threaten to kill a savage, as he will certainly endeavour to kill the person who threatens him, in order to render the execution of his purpose impossible. Wisagun and his son had no sooner departed than two men coolly took up their guns, entered a canoe, and followed them. Upon arriving at a secluded spot, one of them raised his gun and fired at Wisagun, who fell over the side of the canoe, and sank to rise no more. With the rapidity of thought, Natappe seized his father's gun, sprang ashore, and bounded up the bank; a shot was fired which went through the fleshy part of his arm, and the next moment he was behind a tree. Here he called out to the Indians, who were reloading their guns, not to kill him, and he would tell them all. After a little consideration, they agreed to spare him; he embarked with them, and was taken afterwards to the fort, where he remained many years in the Company's service.

Although instances of cannibalism are not unusual among the Indian tribes, they do not resort to it from choice, but only when urged by the irrepressible cravings of hunger.

All the Indian tribes are fond of spirits; and in former times, when the distribution of rum to the natives was found necessary to compete with other companies, the use of the "fire-water" was carried to a fearful extent. Since Sir George Simpson became governor, however, the distribution of spirits has been almost entirely given up; and this has proved a most beneficial measure for the poor Indians.

Tobacco also is consumed by them in great quantities; indeed, the pipe is seldom out of the Indian's mouth. If he is not hunting, sleeping, or eating, he is sure to be smoking. A peculiar kind of shrub is much used by them, mixed with tobacco—partly for the purpose of making it go far, and partly because they can smoke more of it at a time with impunity.

The Indian is generally very lazy, but can endure, when requisite, great fatigue and much privation. He can go longer without eating than a European, and, from the frequent fasts he has to sustain, he becomes accustomed, without injury, to eat more at a meal than would kill a white man. The Indian children exhibit this power in a very extraordinary degree, looking sometimes wretchedly thin and miserable, and an hour or two afterwards waddling about with their little stomachs swollen almost to bursting!

When an Indian wants a wife, he goes to the *fair* one's

father, and asks his consent. This being obtained, he informs the young lady of the circumstance, and then returns to his wigwam, whither the bride follows him, and installs herself as mistress of the house without further ceremony. Generally speaking, Indians content themselves with one wife, but it is looked upon as neither unusual nor improper to take two, or even three wives. The great point to settle is the husband's ability to support them. Thus, a bad hunter can only afford one wife, whilst a good one may have three or four.

If an old man or woman of the tribe becomes infirm, and unable to proceed with the rest when travelling, he or she, as the case may be, is left behind in a small tent made of willows, in which are placed a little firewood, some provisions, and a vessel of water. Here the unhappy wretch remains in solitude till the fuel and provisions are exhausted, and then dies. Should the tribe be in their encampment when an Indian dies, the deceased is buried, sometimes in the ground, and sometimes in a rough wooden coffin raised a few feet above it. They do not now bury guns, knives, etcetera, with their dead, as they once did, probably owing to their intercourse with white men.

The Supreme Being among the Indians is called Manitou; but He can scarcely be said to be worshipped by them, and the few ideas they have of His attributes are imperfect and erroneous. Indeed, no religious rites exist among them, unless the unmeaning mummery of the medicine tent can be looked upon as such. Of late years, however, missionaries, both of the Church

of England and the Wesleyans, have exerted themselves to spread the Christian religion among these tribes, than whom few savages can be more unenlightened or morally degraded; and there is reason to believe that the light of the gospel is now beginning to shine upon them with beneficial influence.

There is no music in the soul of a Cree, and the only time they attempt it is when gambling—of which they are passionately fond—when they sing a kind of monotonous chant, accompanied with a noisy rattling on a tin kettle. The celebrated war-dance is now no longer in existence among this tribe. They have wisely renounced both war and its horrors long ago. Among the wilder inhabitants of the prairies, however, it is still in vogue, with all the dismal accompaniments of killing, scalping, roasting, and torturing that distinguished American warfare a hundred years ago.

The different methods by which the Indian succeeds in snaring and trapping animals are numerous. A good idea of these may be had by following an Indian in his rounds.

Suppose yourself, gentle reader, standing at the gate of one of the forts in Hudson Bay, watching a savage arranging his snow-shoes, preparatory to entering the gloomy forest. Let us walk with this Indian on a visit to his traps.

The night is very dark, as the moon is hid by thick clouds, yet it occasionally breaks out sufficiently to illumine our path to Stemaw's wigwam, and to throw the shadows of the neighbouring trees upon the pale snow, which *crunches* under our feet as we

advance, owing to the intense cold. No wind breaks the stillness of the night, or shakes the lumps of snow off the branches of the neighbouring pines or willows; and nothing is heard save the occasional crackling of the trees as the severe frost acts upon their branches. The tent, at which we soon arrive, is pitched at the foot of an immense tree, which stands in a little hollow where the willows and pines are luxuriant enough to afford a shelter from the north wind. Just in front, a small path leads to the river, of which an extensive view is had through the opening, showing the long fantastic shadows of huge blocks and mounds of ice cast upon the white snow by the flickering moonlight. A huge chasm, filled with fallen trees and mounds of snow, yawns on the left of the tent; and the ruddy sparks of fire which issue from a hole in its top throw this and the surrounding forest into deeper gloom. The effect of this wintry scene upon the mind is melancholy in the extreme—causing it to speed across the bleak and frozen plains, and visit again the warm fireside and happy faces in a far-distant home; and yet there is a strange romantic attraction in the wild woods that gradually brings it back again, and makes us impatient to begin our walk with the Indian. Suddenly the deer-skin robe that covers the aperture of the wigwam is raised, and a bright stream of warm light gushes out, tipping the dark-green points of the opposite trees, and mingling strangely with the paler light of the moon—and Stemaw stands erect in front of his solitary home, to gaze a few moments on the sky and judge of the weather, as he intends to take a long walk before

laying his head upon his capote for the night. He is in the usual costume of the Cree Indians: a large leathern coat, very much overlapped in front, and fastened round his waist with a scarlet belt, protects his body from the cold. A small rat-skin cap covers his head, and his legs are cased in the ordinary blue cloth leggins. Large moccasins, with two or three pair of blanket socks, clothe his feet; and fingerless mittens, made of deer-skin, complete his costume. After a few minutes passed in contemplation of the heavens, the Indian prepares himself for the walk. First he sticks a small axe in his belt, serving as a counterpoise to a large hunting-knife and fire-bag which depend from the other side. He then slips his feet through the lines of his snow-shoes, and throws the line of a small hand-sledge over his shoulder. The hand-sledge is a thin, flat slip or plank of wood, from five to six feet long by one foot broad, and is turned up at one end. It is extremely light, and Indians invariably use it when visiting their traps, for the purpose of dragging home the animals or game they may have caught. Having attached this sledge to his back, he stoops to receive his gun from his faithful *squaw*[3], who has been watching his operations through a hole in the tent; and throwing it on his shoulder, strides off, without uttering a word, across the moonlit space in front of the tent, turns into a narrow track that leads down the dark ravine, and disappears in the shades of the forest. Soon he reaches the termination of the track (made for

[3] *Squeiaw* is the Indian for a woman. *Squaw* is the English corruption of the word, and is used to signify a wife.

the purpose of reaching some good dry trees for firewood), and stepping into the deep snow with the long, regular, firm tread of one accustomed to snow-shoe walking, he winds his way rapidly through the thick stems of the surrounding trees, and turns aside the smaller branches of the bushes.

The forest is now almost dark, the foliage overhead having become so dense that the moon only penetrates through it in a few places, causing the spots on which it falls to shine with a strange phosphoric light, and rendering the surrounding masses darker by contrast. The faint outline, of an old snowshoe track, at first discernible, is now quite invisible; but still Stemaw moves forward with rapid, noiseless step, as sure of his way as if a broad beaten track lay before him. In this manner he moves on for nearly two miles, sometimes stooping to examine closely the newly-made track of some wild animal, and occasionally giving a glance at the sky through the openings in the leafy canopy above him, when a faint sound in the bushes ahead brings him to a full stop. He listens attentively, and a noise, like the rattling of a chain, is heard proceeding from the recesses of a dark, wild-looking hollow a few paces in front. Another moment, and the rattle is again distinctly heard; a slight smile of satisfaction crosses Stemaw's dark visage, for one of his traps is set in that place, and he knows that something is caught. Quickly descending the slope, he enters the bushes whence the sound proceeds, and pauses when within a yard or two of his trap, to peer through the gloom. A cloud passes off the moon, and a faint

ray reveals, it may be, a beautiful black fox caught in the snare. A slight blow on the snout from Stemaw's axe-handle kills the unfortunate animal; in ten minutes more it is tied to his sledge, the trap is reset and again covered over with snow, so that it is almost impossible to tell that anything is there; and the Indian pursues his way.

The steel-trap used by the Indians is almost similar to the ordinary rat-trap of England, with this difference, that it is a little larger, is destitute of teeth, and has two springs in place of one. A chain is attached to one spring for the purpose of fixing a weight to the trap, so that the animal caught may not be able to drag it far from the place where it was set. The track in the snow enables the hunter to find his trap again. It is generally set so that the jaws, when spread out flat, are exactly on a level with the snow. The chain and weight are both hid, and a thin layer of snow spread on top of the trap. The bait (which generally consists of chips of a frozen partridge, rabbit, or fish) is then scattered around in every direction; and, with the exception of this, nothing distinguishes the spot. Foxes, beavers, wolves, lynx, and other animals are caught in this way, sometimes by a fore leg, sometimes by a hind leg, and sometimes by two legs at once, and occasionally by the nose. Of all these ways the Indians prefer catching by two legs, as there is then not the slightest possibility of the animal escaping. When foxes are caught by one leg, they often *eat it off* close to the trap, and escape on the other three. I have frequently seen this happen; and I once saw a fox caught

which had evidently escaped in this way, as one of its legs was gone, and the stump healed up and covered again with hair. When they are caught by the nose they are almost sure to escape, unless taken out of the trap very soon after being caught, as their snouts are so sharp or wedge-like that they can pull them from between the jaws of the trap without much difficulty.

Having now described the way of using this machine, we will rejoin Stemaw, whom we left on his way to the next trap. There he goes, moving swiftly over the snow mile after mile, as if he could not feel fatigue, turning aside now and then to visit a trap, and giving a short grunt when nothing is in it, or killing the animal when caught, and tying it on the sledge. Towards midnight, however, he begins to walk more cautiously, examines the priming of his gun, and moves the axe in his belt, as if he expected to meet some enemy suddenly. The fact is, that close to where he now stands are two traps which he set in the morning close to each other for the purpose of catching one of the formidable coast wolves. These animals are so sagacious that they will scrape all round a trap, let it be ever so well set, and after eating all the bait, walk away unhurt. Indians consequently endeavour in every possible way to catch them—and, among others, by setting *two* traps close together; so that, while the wolf scrapes at one, he may perhaps put his foot in the other. It is in this way that Stemaw's traps are set, and he now proceeds cautiously towards them, his gun in the hollow of his left arm. Slowly he advances, peering through the bushes, but nothing

is visible; suddenly a branch crashes under his snow-shoe, and with a savage growl a large wolf bounds towards him, landing almost at his feet. A single glance, however, shows the Indian that both traps are on his legs, and that the chains prevent his further advance. He places his gun against a tree, draws his axe from the belt, and advances to kill the animal. It is an undertaking, however, of some difficulty. The fierce brute, which is larger than a Newfoundland dog, strains every nerve and sinew to break its chains; while its eyes glisten in the uncertain light, and foam curls from its blood-red mouth. Now it retreats as the Indian advances, grinning horribly as it goes; and anon, as the chains check its further retreat, it springs with fearful growl towards Stemaw, who slightly wounds it with his axe, as he jumps backward just in time to save himself from the infuriated animal, which catches in its fangs the flap of his leggin, and tears it from his limb. Again Stemaw advances, and the wolf retreats and again springs on him, but without success. At last, as the wolf glances for a moment to one side—apparently to see if there is no way of escape—quick as lightning the axe descends with stunning violence on its head; another blow follows; and in five minutes more Stemaw heaves the huge brute across his shoulders, and carries it to his sledge.

This, however, has turned out a more exhausting business than Stemaw expected; so he determines to encamp and rest for a few hours. Selecting a large pine, whose spreading branches cover a patch of ground free from underwood, he scrapes away the snow

with his snow-shoe. Silently but busily he labours for a quarter of an hour; and then, having cleared a space seven or eight feet in diameter, and nearly four feet deep, he cuts down a number of small branches, which he strews at the bottom of the hollow, till all the snow is covered. This done, he fells two or three of the nearest trees, cuts them up into lengths of about five feet long, and piles them at the root of the tree. A light is soon applied to the pile, and up glances the ruddy flame, crackling among the branches overhead, and sending thousands of bright sparks into the air. No one who has not seen it can have the least idea of the change that takes place in the appearance of the woods at night when a large fire is suddenly lighted. Before, all was cold, silent, chilling, gloomy, and desolate, and the pale snow looked unearthly in the dark. Now, a bright ruddy glow falls upon the thick stems of the trees, and penetrates through the branches overhead, tipping those nearest the fire with a ruby tinge, the mere sight of which warms one. The white snow changes to a beautiful pink, whilst the stems of the trees, bright and clearly visible near at hand, become more and more indistinct in the distance, till they are lost in the black background. The darkness, however, need not be seen from the encampment; for, when the Indian lies down, he will be surrounded by the snow walls, which sparkle in the firelight as if set with diamonds. These do not melt, as might be expected. The frost is much too intense for that, and nothing melts except the snow quite close to the fire. Stemaw has now concluded his arrangements: a small piece of dried deer's

meat warms before the blaze; and, meanwhile, he spreads his green blanket on the ground, and fills a stone calumet (or pipe with a wooden stem) with tobacco, mixed with a kind of weed prepared by himself. The white smoke from this soon mingles with the thicker volumes from the fire, which curl up through the branches into the sky, now shrouding him in their wreaths, and then, as the bright flame obtains the mastery, leaving his dark face and coal-black eyes shining in the warm light. No one enjoys a pipe more than an Indian; and Stemaw's tranquil visage, wreathed in tobacco smoke, as he reclines at full length under the spreading branches of the pine, and allows the white vapour to pass slowly out of his mouth *and nose*, certainly gives one an excellent idea of savage enjoyment.

Leaving him here, then, to solace himself with a pipe preparatory to resting his wearied limbs for the night, we will change the hour, and conduct the reader to a different scene.

It is now day. The upper edge of the sun has just risen, red and frosty-looking, in the east, and countless myriads of icy particles glitter on every tree and bush in its red rays; while the white tops of the snow-drifts, which dot the surface of the small lake at which we have just arrived, are tipped with the same rosy hue. The lake is of considerable breadth, and the woods on its opposite shore are barely visible. An unbroken coat of pure white snow covers its entire surface, whilst here and there a small islet, covered with luxuriant evergreens, attracts the eye, and breaks the sameness of the scene. At the extreme left of the lake, where

the points of a few bulrushes and sedgy plants appear above the snow, are seen a number of small earthy mounds, in the immediate vicinity of which the trees and bushes are cut and barked in many places, while some of them are nearly cut down. This is a colony of beavers. In the warm months of summer and autumn, this spot is a lively, stirring place, as the beavers are then employed *nibbling* down trees and bushes, for the purpose of repairing their dams, and supplying their storehouses with food. The bark of willows is their chief food, and all the bushes in the vicinity are more or less cut through by these persevering little animals. Their dams, however (which are made for the purpose of securing to themselves a constant sufficiency of water), are made with large trees; and stumps will be found, if you choose to look for them, as thick as a man's leg, which the beavers have entirely nibbled through, and dragged by their united efforts many yards from where they grew.

Now, however, no sign of animal life is to be seen, as the beavers keep within doors all winter; yet I venture to state that there are many now asleep under the snow before us. It is not, reader, merely for the purpose of showing you the outside of a beaver-lodge that I have brought you such a distance from human habitations. Be patient, and you shall soon see more. Do you observe that small black speck moving over the white surface of the lake, far away on the horizon? It looks like a crow, but the forward motion is much too steady and constant for that. As it approaches, it assumes the form of a man; and at last the figure

of Stemaw, dragging his empty sleigh behind him (for he has left his wolf and foxes in the last night's encampment, to be taken up when returning home), becomes clearly distinguishable through the dreamy haze of the cold wintry morning. He arrives at the beaver-lodges, and, I warrant, will soon play havoc among the inmates.

His first proceeding is to cut down several stakes, which he points at the ends. These are driven, after he has cut away a good deal of ice from around the beaver-lodge, into the ground between it and the shore. This is to prevent the beaver from running along the passage they always have from their lodges to the shore, where their storehouse is kept, which would make it necessary to excavate the whole passage. The beaver, if there are any, being thus imprisoned in the lodge, the hunter next stakes up the opening into the storehouse on shore, and so imprisons those that may have fled there for shelter on hearing the noise of his axe at the other house. Things being thus arranged to his entire satisfaction, he takes an instrument called an ice-chisel —which is a bit of steel about a foot long by one inch broad, fastened to the end of a stout pole—wherewith he proceeds to dig through the lodge. This is by no means an easy operation; and although he covers the snow around him with great quantities of frozen mud and sticks, yet his work is not half finished. At last, however, the interior of the hut is laid bare; and the Indian, stooping down, gives a great pull, when out comes a large, fat, sleepy beaver, which he flings sprawling on the snow.

Being thus unceremoniously awakened from its winter nap, the shivering animal looks languidly around, and even goes the length of grinning at Stemaw, by way of showing its teeth, for which it is rewarded with a blow on the head from the pole of the ice-chisel, which puts an end to it. In this way several more are killed, and packed on the sleigh. Stemaw then turns his face towards his encampment, where he collects the game left there; and away he goes at a tremendous pace, dashing the snow in clouds from his snow-shoes, as he hurries over the trackless wilderness to his forest home.

Near his tent, he makes a détour to visit a marten trap; where, however, he finds nothing. This trap is of the simplest construction, being composed of two logs, the one of which is supported over the other by means of a small stick, in such a manner that when the marten creeps between the two and pulls the bait, the support is removed, and the upper log falls on and crushes it to death.

In half an hour the Indian arrives at his tent, where the dark eyes of his wife are seen gazing through a chink in the covering, with an expression that denotes immense joy at the prospect of gorging for many days on fat beaver, and having wherewithal to purchase beads and a variety of ornaments from the white men, upon the occasion of her husband and herself visiting the posts of the fur-traders in the following spring.

But some of the tribes have a more sociable as well as a more productive way of conducting business, at least as regards

venison; for they catch the deer in a "pound."

"Their mode of accomplishing this is to select a well-frequented deer-path, and enclose with a strong fence of twisted trees and brushwood a space about a mile in circumference, and sometimes more. The entrance of the pound is not larger than a common gate, and its inside is crowded with innumerable small hedges, in the openings of which are fixed snares of strong well-twisted thongs. One end is generally fastened to a growing tree; and as all the wood and jungle within the enclosure is left standing, its interior forms a complete labyrinth. On each side of the door a line of small trees, stuck up in the snow fifteen or twenty yards apart, form two sides of an acute angle, widening gradually from the entrance, from which they sometimes extend two or three miles. Between these rows of brushwood runs the path frequented by the deer. When all things are prepared, the Indians take their station on some eminence commanding a prospect of this path, and the moment any deer are seen going that way, the whole encampment—men, women, and children—steal under cover of the woods till they get behind them. They then show themselves in the open ground, and, drawing up in the form of a crescent, advance with shouts. The deer finding themselves pursued, and at the same time imagining the rows of brushy poles to be people stationed to prevent their passing on either side, run straight forward till they get into the pound. The Indians instantly close in, block up the entrance, and whilst the women and children run round the outside to prevent them from

breaking or leaping the fence, the men enter with their spears and bows, and speedily dispatch such as are caught in the snares or are running loose."

"McLean, a gentleman who spent twenty-five years in the Hudson Bay territories, assures us that on one occasion he and a party of men entrapped and slaughtered in this way a herd of three hundred deer in two hours."

I must crave the reader's pardon for this long digression, and beg him to recollect that at the end of the second chapter I left myself awaiting orders to depart for Red River, to which settlement we will now proceed.

Chapter Five.
Voyage from York Factory to Red River—Voyage begun—Our manner of travelling—Encamping in the woods—Portaging and shooting wildfowl—Whisky-jacks —A storm—Lake Winnipeg— Arrival at Red River Settlement

Somewhere about the beginning of September, Mr Carles, Mr and Mrs Gowley, Mr Rob, and myself set out with the *Portage La Loche* brigade, for the distant colony of Red River. The Portage la Loche brigade usually numbers six or seven boats, adapted for inland travelling where the navigation is obstructed by rapids, waterfalls, and cataracts, to surmount which, boats and cargo are carried overland by the crews. These carrying places are called *portages*; and between York Factory and Red River there are upwards of thirty-six, of various lengths. Besides these, there are innumerable rapids, up which the boats have to be pushed inch by inch with poles, for miles together; so that we had to look forward to a long and tedious voyage.

The brigade with which we left York Factory usually leaves Red River about the end of May, and proceeds to Norway House, where it receives Athabasca and Mackenzie River outfits. It then sets out for the interior; and upon arriving at Portage la Loche, the different boats land their cargoes, while the Mackenzie River boats, which came to meet them, exchange their furs for the outfits. The brigade then begins to retrace its way, and returns to Norway House, whence it proceeds to York Factory, where it arrives about the commencement of September, lands the furs, and receives part of the Red River outfit, with which it sets out for that place as soon as possible.

With this brigade, then, we started from York Factory, with a cheering song from the men in full chorus. They were in good spirits, being about to finish the long voyage, and return to their families at Red River, after an absence of nearly five months, during which time they had encountered and overcome difficulties that would have cooled the most sanguine temperament; but these hardy Canadians and half-breeds are accustomed to such voyages from the age of fifteen or sixteen, and think no more of them than other men do of ordinary work.

Mr Carles and I travelled together in the guide's boat; Mr and Mrs Gowley in another; and Mr Rob in a third by himself. We took the lead, and the others followed as they best could. Such was the order of march in which we commenced the ascent of Hayes River.

It may not be uninteresting here to describe the *matériel* of

our voyage.

Our boat, which was the counterpart of the rest, was long, broad, and shallow, capable of carrying forty hundredweight, and nine men, besides three or four passengers, with provisions for themselves and the crew. It did not, I suppose, draw more than three feet of water when loaded, perhaps less, and was, moreover, very light for its size. The cargo consisted of bales, being the goods intended for the Red River sale-room and trading-shop. A rude mast and tattered sail lay along the seats, ready for use, should a favourable breeze spring up; but this seldom occurred, the oars being our chief dependence during the greater part of the voyage.

The provisions of the men consisted of pemmican and flour; while the passengers revelled in the enjoyment of a ham, several cured buffalo-tongues, tea, sugar, butter, and biscuit, and a little brandy and wine, wherewith to warm us in cold weather, and to cheer the crew with a dram after a day of unusual exertion. All our provisions were snugly packed in a case and basket, made expressly for the purpose.

Pemmican being a kind of food with which people in the civilised world are not generally acquainted, I may as well describe it here.

It is made by the buffalo-hunters of the Red River, Swan River, and Saskatchewan prairies; more particularly by those of Red River, where many of the colonists spend a great part of the year in pursuit of the buffalo. They make it thus: Having shot a

buffalo (or bison), they cut off lumps of his flesh, and slitting it up into flakes or layers, hang it up in the sun to dry. In this state it is often made up into packs, and sent about the country to be consumed as dried meat; but when *pemmican* is wanted, it has to go through another process. When dry, the meat is pounded between two stones till it is broken into small pieces; these are put into a bag made of the animal's hide, with the hair on the outside, and well mixed with melted grease; the top of the bag is then sewn up, and the pemmican allowed to cool. In this state it may be eaten uncooked; but the *voyageurs*

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.