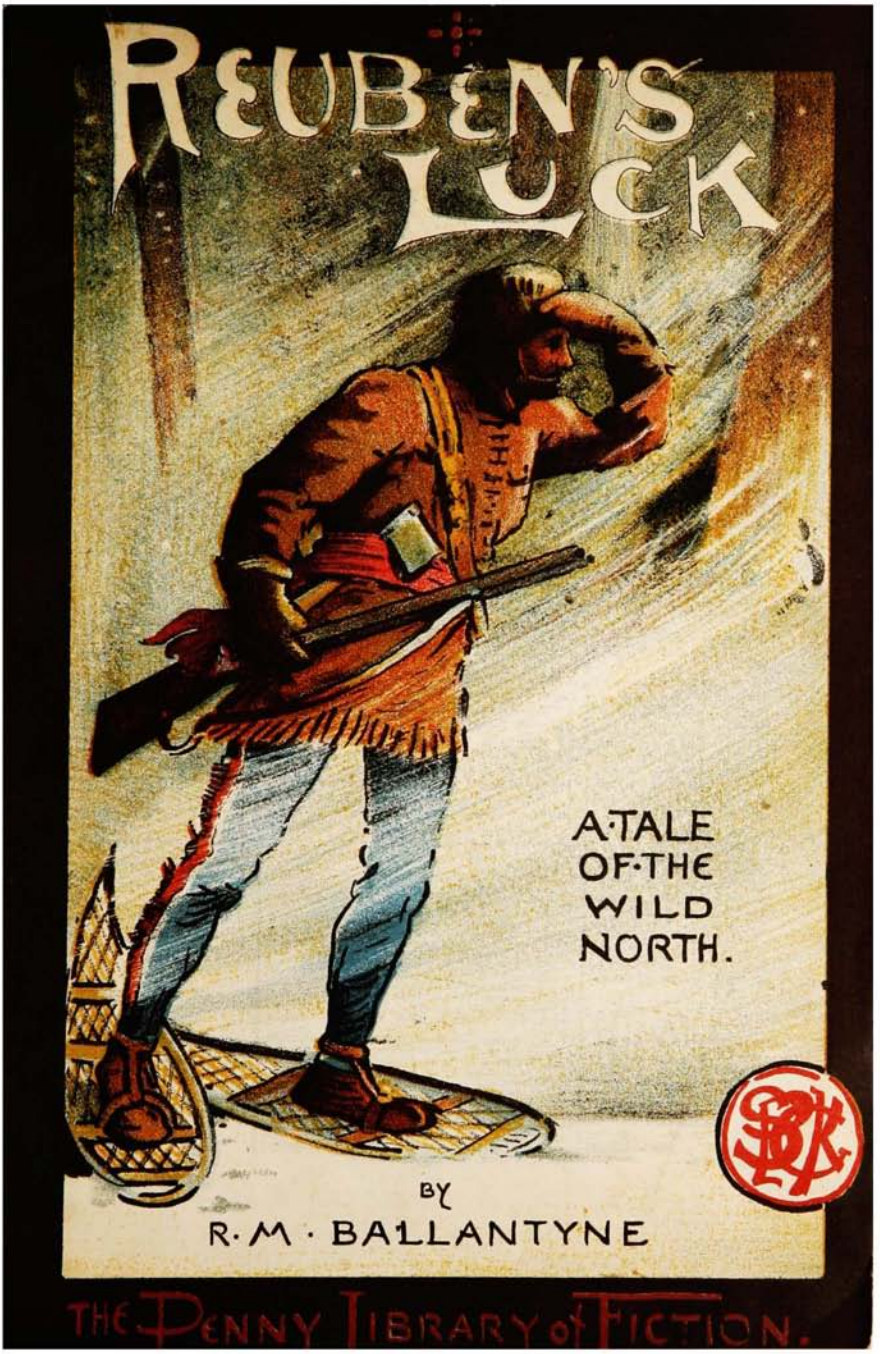
REUBEN'S LUCK



A TALE OF THE WILD NORTH.

BY

R. M. BALLANTYNE

THE PENNY LIBRARY OF FICTION.

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No. of District.	For this Competition the United Kingdom will be divided into 8 Districts as under:
1	IRELAND.
2	SCOTLAND.
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4	NORTHUMBERLAND, DURHAM, and YORKSHIRE.
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6	WALES, CHESHIRE, STAFFORDSHIRE, SHROPSHIRE, WORCESTERSHIRE, MONMOUTHSHIRE, and HEREFORDSHIRE.
7	NOTTINGHAMSHIRE, DERBYSHIRE, LINCOLNSHIRE, LEICESTERSHIRE, WARWICKSHIRE, RUTLANDSHIRE, NORFOLK, SUFFOLK, CAMBRIDGESHIRE, HUNTINGDONSHIRE, NORTHAMPTONSHIRE, BEDFORDSHIRE, and OXFORDSHIRE.
8	ESSEX, HERTFORDSHIRE, BUCKINGHAMSHIRE, BERKSHIRE, SUSSEX, HAMPSHIRE, WILTSHIRE, GLOUCESTERSHIRE, SOMERSETSHIRE, DORSETSHIRE, DEVONSHIRE, CORNWALL, ISLE OF WIGHT, and CHANNEL ISLANDS.

The Prizes will be awarded every month during 1894, in each of the 8 Districts, as under:—

	Value of Prizes given each month in each district. £	s.	d.	Total value of Prizes in all the 8 districts during 189 £	s.	d.
Every month, in each of the 8 districts, the 5 Competitors who send the largest number of Coupons from the district in which they reside, will each receive, at winner's option, a Lady's or Gent's "Premier" Safety Cycle, with Dunlop Pneumatic Tyres, value £20*	100	0	0	9600	0	0
The next 20 Competitors will each receive, at winner's option, a Lady's or Gent's "Waltham" Stem-Winding Silver Lever Watch, value £4 4s.	84	0	0	8064	0	0
The next 200 Competitors will each receive a Book, published at 5s.	50	0	0	4800	0	0
The next 300 Competitors will each receive a Book, published at 3s. 6d.	52	10	0	5040	0	0
The next 400 Competitors will each receive a Book, published at 2s. 6d.	50	0	0	4800	0	0
The next 500 Competitors will each receive a Book, published at 2s.	50	0	0	4800	0	0
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				41904	0	0

RULES.

I. **The Competitions** will Close the last day of each month. Coupons received too late for one month's competition will be put into the next.

II. Competitors who obtain wrappers from unsold soap in dealer's stock will be disqualified. Employees of Messrs. Lever Brothers, Limited, and their families, are debarred from competing.

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IV. Messrs. Lever Brothers Limited, will award the prizes fairly to the best of their ability and judgment, but it is understood that all who compete agree to accept the award of Messrs. Lever Brothers, Limited, as final.

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REUBEN'S LUCK.

A TALE OF THE WILD NORTH.

BY THE LATE

R. M. BALLANTYNE,

Author of "Blown to Bits," "Fighting the Flames," &c., &c.

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REUBEN'S LUCK.

CHAPTER I.

THE OUTPOST.

It was an unusually cold day—cold even for the Arctic regions. The spirits-of-wine thermometer had recorded 48° below zero on Fahrenheit's scale that morning at the outpost, about sunrise, and Raymond Smart's companion—his only companion—had filled a bullet mould with quicksilver, put it out in the snow for half-an-hour to freeze and brought it into the house a solid ball.

But neither Raymond Smart nor his assistant, Reuben Kraik, cared much about the intense cold. Indeed, they rather liked it, for it produced a calm day—intense frost and wind being seldom, if ever, associated together. Besides, Raymond and Reuben were both young, strong and energetic, so that extremes of any kind had but little effect on their minds or bodies, except in the way of bracing them up to endurance or to action.

"Where do you think of trying your luck to-day, Raymond?" asked Reuben, as he looked up from the fowling-piece he was cleaning, and regarded his companion who was arranging the thongs of a pair of five feet long Chipewyan snow-shoes.

"Up the river, I think. I've not been that way for a week or two. Will you go with me?"

"No; I'll go right back into the woods, as I did the last time."

"What! and lose yourself again?"

"I hope not, Raymond. But, you know, if a fellow doesn't practise, how is he ever to learn? My knowledge of woodcraft is but slight, truly, but if I tie myself to your coat-tails it will never become more extended. 'Never venture, never win,' you know. I'm resolved to become a regular Leather Stocking or Hawkeye by dint of sheer perseverance."

Raymond Smart applauded his friend's heroic state of mind. He laughed slightly, however, as he laid his hand on the latch of the door and paused while he looked back.

"Well, Mr. Hawkeye, I wish you good luck; but see that you don't forget your hatchet and firebag—as you did last time—else it may go hard with you."

He opened the door as he spoke, and in burst a cloud of cold atmosphere, which became visible, like a puff of

steam, for a moment, as it came in contact with the warm air of the room, but disappeared when the door was shut.

Reuben Kraik was a stalwart youth of twenty, who had recently joined the fur-traders of the "Great Lone Land," in North America, and had been sent to one of those solitary outposts which are sparsely scattered over that romantic but frost-bound region. His first year had been spent at a depôt, where his chief employment consisted in copying accounts and letters, so that on his arrival at Fort Hope, after a canoe voyage of two months through the wilderness, he found himself quite ignorant of what he termed woodcraft, except that part of it which is to be learned while passing up rivers and skirting lakes.

Fort Hope did not bear much resemblance to what is generally understood by the word fort. It consisted of six or eight log shanties built in the form of a square, and was surrounded by a wooden stockade about eight feet high. There was neither moat nor drawbridge, embrasure nor gun, to warn off besiegers and frown defiance, for the good reason that there was little or nothing to besiege, and no one to defy.

The Indians, who visited the place twice a year with their furs, were men of peace; and even if they had been otherwise inclined, they would have hesitated to assault and rob the store that supplied their few wants, for they knew well that such an act would put a stop to future supplies, and were too shrewd to fall into the error of killing the goose that lays the golden eggs. The only thing, in short, that might have suggested the idea of a fort was a flagstaff in the middle of the square, and, at its 'oot, a small ship's carronade, used at rare intervals for saluting purposes.

Raymond Smart, the commander-in-chief of the fort, was not a military man. His garrison—two Scotch Highlanders, three Canadian half-breeds, and two Indian women—were not soldiers. They knew nothing about attack or defence, siege or sally; but the women, Stareye and Readyhand, were adepts with the needle, and the men experts with the axe as well as with the smooth-bore shot-gun. Of sword practice and bayonet exercise they were densely ignorant. Artillery—except the carronade before mentioned—they had none. Of course cavalry was out of the question, for there were no roads in all the land, and the only four-legged creatures about the place were six splendid dogs, which resembled wolves so strongly in size and form that if one of them had been met with wandering in the woods alone, it might have run the risk of being shot by its own master. The only infantry worth mentioning consisted of two very small boys, who belonged to one of the Indian women. It seemed as if the chief delight of these cherubs was to indulge in continuous eating, when not asleep, or in miscellaneous mischief.

During the autumn of his arrival at Fort Hope, Raymond Smart, who was something of a disciplinarian, set his

new clerk to as much desk-work as it was possible to find or create at an outpost; but, in such a place, as it may be supposed, there was not much work for the pen. The letters written during the year and copied into a book had to be re-copied to be sent to head-quarters, along with the furs, by the spring brigade of boats. The same had to be done with the journal and thermometrical record, kept throughout the year, besides a few other little matters. At this work the chief found his lieutenant neat-handed and painstaking. Then, after winter had covered the ground with its cold, deep, mantle of snow, Raymond took his companion out into the forest, and taught him the mysteries of northern wood-craft. He did not, indeed, teach him how to walk on snowshoes, for the youth had already learned the rudiments of that not difficult art, but he increased his knowledge and the practice of it by leading him many a league over the frozen wilderness, in pursuit of ptarmigan and willow grouse. He taught him to trap Arctic foxes and wolves, and showed him how to encamp in the snow and make a comparatively warm bed in that uncongenial substance—if we may so speak of it.

Then Reuben became ambitious, and, with the self-confidence of youth, sallied forth alone on pretty long walks —extending to twenty, thirty, and even forty miles. While out on one of these walks he lost himself, and had nearly perished for want of the fire-bag, containing materials for striking a light, and the small hatchet which everyone carries, for the purpose of cutting firewood, in those Northern wilds, both of which requisites he had forgotten. Indeed Reuben had had a very narrow escape, and would probably have perished had not Raymond Smart, with Angus Cameron and John Mackay followed up his tracks vigorously and found him, in a state of considerable exhaustion, wandering straight away from the fort under the strong conviction that he was going towards it.

When Reuben Kraik went forth, on the intensely cold, calm and bright morning of which we now write, he felt that he had become much too old and experienced a back-woodsman to run any risk of losing himself a second time. As the burnt child dreads the fire and carefully avoids it, so, conversely, he had learned to dread the forgetting of his fire materials. Accordingly his fire-bag with flint, steel, and tinder, was hanging from the red-worsted sash that bound the leathern capote close to his manly bosom, while a small axe was stuck into the same belt behind him. To give an idea of his general appearance we may add that on his long legs he wore a pair of blue cloth leggings bound with red braid; on his curly, black head, was a martin skin cap, of the pork-pie pattern, with flaps over his ears to prevent those auricular excrescences from being frozen. Moccassins protected his feet, and a shot-pouch, and powder-horn were slung over his shoulder, on one of which rested a gun with a

pair of long Chipewyan snow-shoes hanging to them: for these latter would not be required while he walked over the hard-beaten tracks in the immediate neighbourhood of the fort.

As he passed the shanty inhabited by the men, he saw John Mackay busy cutting fire-wood. The Highlander raised himself.

"You'll be goin' to shoot, sir," he said.

"Just so, Mackay. By the way, if I don't return till late you need not be anxious. Tell Mr. Smart—for I forgot to mention it—that I shall go in the direction of Pinetree Bluff, and may not be back till after dark."

"I'll tell him; but don't be over venturesome, Muster Kraik. The cold will be harder than usual, an' the snow it iss deep, whatever. Moreover, there iss fery likely goin' to be more. If I wass you I would not go far."

"No fear," returned Reuben, lightly. "You know I've had lots of practice lately, and I feel as if I had now become a regular trapper or redskin. I can find my way through the forests anywhere."

"What you remark iss fery true, no doubt, Muster Kraik," said the Highlander, with an argumentative expression on his brow and in his tones, "but it iss not safe to trust to wan's feelin's, whatever, for they are sometimes misleadin'. It iss not what we feel, but what we know, that should guide us."

"According to that rule," returned Reuben, with a laugh, "you should not eat the next time you *feel* hungry. Isn't that so?"

"Not at all, Muster Kraik; you are wrong. It iss my stomik that cries out for food when it iss empty, an' when my stomik cries out I *feel* it, an' so I do come to *know* it. That iss the naitural arrangement, Muster Kraik, where the feelin's were appointed to lead to knowledge, but it iss not so with things ootside of you, for there can be no feelin's ootside of a man."

"Not so sure of that, Mackay. What would a schoolboy say to such a theory when he's being flogged outside?"

"Hoot! Muster Kraik, you are not fery logical to-day," retorted the Highlander, with what we may term a grave smile. "Do you not see that it iss the birch which is applied *oot*side, but the feelin' iss all *in*side?"

"Well, well, you may be right," returned Reuben laughing, "but it is too early in the day to finish the argument here. We must hold it over. Besides, my feelings tell me that if I don't keep moving I shall freeze—so good-bye for the present."

"Right, Muster Kraik. Your feelin's iss your true guide in that, whatever, for—"

He stopped, for Reuben was already through the fort gate and beyond the reach of argument.

Resuming his work with a pathetic "Weel, weel," Mackay continued to scatter chips of firewood around, while Reuben walked rapidly along the woodcutter's track. Then, putting on his snow-shoes, he left the track and

struck off over the deep snow into the primæval wilderness in the direction of Pinetree Bluff.

CHAPTER II.

A BRAVE STRUGGLE WITH THE ELEMENTS.

THERE was something wonderfully exhilarating in the cold of the bright winter day in that great wilderness, which extends north of the Canadas into the regions lying around the Pole. All the branches and spines of the trees were pure white, and the red sun shone aslant over the undulating snow far and wide, for the woods in the immediate neighbourhood of Fort Hope were not dense, and numerous openings allowed the sunshine to penetrate freely. Everything was rounded and softened as well as whitened by the all-prevalent and overwhelming carpet. Hillocks which in summer possessed distinct form and individuality, were rounded into undistinguishable similarity. Intricate networks of fallen trees and crushed interlacing boughs, were blotted completely out of visible existence, and accumulated masses of snow lay in somewhat threatening positions on many of the spreading pine branches.

After Reuben had passed a few miles onward, he came upon another part of the woodcutters' track which made a circuit at that place. It was beaten hard by the constant traffic of the dog-sledges, and ran for a mile or so parallel with his route. Taking off his snow-shoes and slinging them on his gun, he followed the track as far as it served him. Then he resumed the snow-shoes and struck off again over the deep snow. There were no roads or tracks of any kind beyond that point, indeed, no roads were needed, at least by pedestrians, for the formidable snow-shoe converts the whole wilderness into one vast road. Swamps, hillocks, hollows and tangled undergrowth that renders the region almost impassable in summer, were by that time smoothed over, and made comparatively level. As there had not been a fall of fresh snow for a couple of weeks, Reuben's shoes sank into it only a few inches, and walking was comparatively easy, especially so to a powerful young fellow in his twentieth year, in robust health, and possessed of unquenchable enthusiasm, with well developed muscles.

It would have been obvious to the meanest capacity, had there been any one there to observe, that Reuben Kraik was somewhat proud of his physical strength. The way in which he stepped out, and the free-and-easy manner in which he swung the snow-shoes forward and caused the dry-as-dust snow to fly on either side, bore unmistakable evidence of his immense supply of reserve power; and the reckless style in which he crashed through or trod down small obstacles in the shape of bushes, indicated with equal clearness the strength of his will, and his determination not to allow any terrestrial difficulty to interfere with his plans. Indeed. if truth

must be told, Reuben had set out that morning with the express though secret purpose of testing both his speed, and his power of endurance.

A week previously, his friend, Raymond Smart, had been away on a hunting expedition, accompanied by John Mackay. These two had been gone several days, and had encamped each night in the snow, as backwood hunters are wont to do. At their last encampment, having started before daylight, they had accidentally left behind one of their blankets. The distance from the encampment to the fort was known to be exactly twenty-two miles, so Reuben had determined to walk to the encampment and fetch home the blanket. Thus he would accomplish a walk of forty-four miles on snow-shoes, and, by presenting the blanket, convince his comrades that he had really done so.

During the first part of the journey all went well with him. The way to the encampment was not difficult to find, for the trees had been "blazed" all along the route. The sun shone cheerily all the morning, giving at least a semblance of warmth, although emitting none that was appreciable, and the countless jewels of the Arctic world glittered brightly in his ruddy beams.

Reuben's powers proved quite equal to the task he had set himself to perform. He walked with ease and great speed, and had left eighteen miles behind him before calling a halt for lunch.

The meal was not a sumptuous one. Neither was it eaten in luxurious circumstances. The youth's chair was a bank of snow. His plate was his knee, and his meal a "hunk" of pemican, eaten cold. Refreshed by it he set off at a brisk pace, for the brief rest that he had taken had been sufficient to cool even his young blood to the point of stagnation. But soon his abounding energy sent it again careering in his veins, and for a time he felt almost too warm, though his breath issued visibly from his lips like steam, and settled thickly on his breast in the form of hoar-frost.

On the way he had set up several flocks of ptarmigan, but made no attempt to shoot them until he was close to the encampment. Then he bagged a brace for dinner. Shortly after noon he reached his goal, quite fresh, and confident in his ability to accomplish the return journey by seven o'clock that night, if not earlier. Of course he knew that it would be dark before he should arrive, but two considerations caused him to regard that with indifference. Towards the close of the day he would be travelling over more familiar ground, and he could get upon the woodcutters' track at the last few miles when light would be unnecessary. In the camp, a tin kettle and a mug had been hung on a tree, for the benefit of anyone who should find himself in that neighbourhood while out hunting. These he appropriated, and set about preparing for a good hour's rest and a warm meal. He also found the forgotten blanket, lying where it had been left, and covered

with a little mound of snow. Spreading a new layer of pine branches on the floor of the camp, he placed the blanket above them and sat down to strike a light. A fire was soon kindled and the kettle filled with clean snow. Ere long it became a bubbling tea-pot, for Reuben had taken care to put tea and sugar and bread in his wallet before starting. The lid of the kettle he converted into a frying-pan for the nonce, and soon it steamed with a savoury stew of pemican and bread crumbs.

With a beaming countenance Reuben sat rubbing his hands before the grateful blaze, as he watched these preparations. So engrossed was he that he did not observe the gradual overclouding of the sky and the disappearance of the sunbeams. It was not until he had got half-way through dinner, that a small snowflake alighting on his cheek awakened him to the fact that a change was taking place in the weather. He paused and looked up. The sky was no longer blue, indeed, it had become decidedly grey. There was also a good deal of motion in the tree-tops, suggestive of wind, but in his sheltered position he did not feel that.

"Humph!" he exclaimed after a brief glance, but, being still hungry and very easy-going by nature, he resumed his occupation without further comment.

Now, it must be told, that snow-storms in the far north, are sometimes sudden and often severe. Before our young hunter had concluded his meal, snow was falling steadily and in rather larger flakes than usual, indicating a slight rise in the temperature. The tree-tops, also, swaying about more violently, showed that the wind had increased, and occasional sighings of the same, as it swept over the forest, induced Reuben to hasten his operations.

After little more than an hour's rest he resumed his snow-shoes, hung up the kettle on a tree, strapped the lost blanket to his back, and set forth on the return journey like a giant refreshed. He had not walked far, however, when, coming to an open space, he discovered that something like a regular storm had set in. Not only was the snow falling thickly, but the wind was whirling it about in fitful gusts, as if undecided as to the direction in which it meant to blow.

Another "humph" was all that it elicited from the sturdy youth, but this was not an exclamation of contemptuous indifference, for he tightened his belt, compressed his lips, and, bending forward with an air of stern resolve, went over the snow at the rate of five miles an hour—if not more.

That there was good cause for speed became evident, for he found that the broad and deep track left by him on his outward journey was fast being obliterated. Still, it takes time to fill up a snow-shoe trail, and Reuben at first did not feel much concern. He was confident in his strength, and a good deal of daylight still remained to him.

With unabated speed he continued to advance for about two hours. Then he began to discover that there is some truth in the proverb, "It is the pace that kills."

"Take it easier, old boy," he remarked, in a cheery voice, as if to encourage himself and dissipate a slightly uncomfortable feeling which had begun to find lodgment in his breast, for snow was falling very thickly by that time, and twice he had been obliged to look steadily around him to make sure that he was really returning on the out-going track.

His uncertainty on this point deepened when he came suddenly to the margin of a frozen lakelet, which he had crossed on the outward march, for there the unimpeded gale was shrieking over the ice, carrying snow with it in vast blinding drifts, and all trace of his track was utterly lost at the margin.

"Now," said he, soliloquising to himself as he turned and looked carefully back on the track which he had left behind, "you've only got to draw a straight line from this point, and you can't fail to pick up the trail on the other side. But you'll have to make careful observation, and fix landmarks on both sides before starting."

He followed his own directions very carefully, and as the lake was not much more than a quarter-of-a-mile broad, felt pretty sure of success. His experience of Arctic travel, however, had not been sufficient to enable him to quite understand his difficulties and dangers. The moment he passed from the shelter of the woods, the snow-drift blinded him, and the intensely cold blast chilled him to the bone. He bent forward, nevertheless, and stepped out with vigorous determination. It was only a short half-mile after all. A quarter-of-an-hour would carry him over the lake, and, once in the shelter of the woods, all would be plain sailing.

But it was a bad quarter-of-an-hour—worse than he had been anticipating. The strength of the wind carried him out of his course considerably, in spite of his great physical strength and resolution. The fine, dust-like drift penetrated every crevice of his dress, flew up his nose, entered his mouth when he panted, and almost shut up his eyes, so that he could scarcely see the woods either behind or in front of him. Worst of all, he felt himself getting benumbed, in spite of his violent exertions, and, for the first time, he learned that a gale of wind with temperature far below zero is not to be faced with impunity even by an unusually strong young man.

Reuben was well aware of the danger of being overcome by intense cold, and something like a shock of alarm passed through him as he experienced a touch of that fatal drowsiness of which he had often heard and read. The effect, however, was to arouse him to increased exertion. He put on what sporting men term a spurt, and in a few minutes more reached the

opposite margin of the lake, where he was fairly driven into the woods by an eddying gust, and followed by a whirling snow-drift which circled viciously around him, as if anxious to swallow him up. Failing in this the gale and the drift went howling away together over the Arctic plains.

Under the shelter of a group of pines Reuben stopped to clear the snow from his eyes, and recover breath, as well as to take an observation of his landmarks, but the shore which he had just left had, by that time, been rendered invisible by the increasing drift, and the landmark on his own side was not to be seen. The track also, was nowhere to be found. Without a moment's hesitation he walked along the margin of the lake to windward, feeling sure that he must soon come across the track in that direction, but he failed. Then he turned and walked quickly in the opposite direction for upwards of a mile– still without success. He now felt that there was nothing to be done but to return to the spot which he had first reached on the margin of the lake, take another observation, calculate as nearly as he could the direction of the fort, and make straight for it at his best pace.

But the exertion which he had undergone, and the cold to which he had been exposed, had begun to tell upon him by that time, and the feeling that he was capable of exhaustion had a depressing effect on his spirits at first, but as the shelter of the woods and the rapid pace increased his circulation, and restored some of his caloric, his courage revived, and his confidence in his having hit the right course increased. After walking what appeared to him to be ten miles, if not more, this confidence diminished. Moreover, the increasing darkness told him that the brief Arctic day was almost over, and the clouded sky forbade the hope that the moon would be of any service. Anxiety naturally induced him to increase his speed, and for some time he advanced at a pace equal to that with which he had started.

Suddenly he came to the edge of a piece of exposed ground which he had not crossed in the outward journey.

"Strange," he muttered, as he stopped to consider, "I don't remember this bit. I must have been blown a good deal to the left by this gale. However, if so, I'll be sure to be pulled up by the woodcutters' track, and, luckily, if the worst comes to the worst, I have food and my firebag, as well as this blanket—I will encamp."

As he formed this resolution he went out on the open plain and began to cross. Again the bitter blast shrieked around, and the whirling drift assailed him. The plain was only a few hundred yards wide; he was soon across, but the brief exposure had again chilled him terribly, and he suddenly felt as if his strength were almost exhausted. The drowsiness which he had previously experienced, returned with overwhelming force, and it was only by the exercise of the most resolute determination that he resisted the intense desire to lie down

and sleep—if it should only be for five minutes.

But he knew well that those five minutes, if indulged in, would be the precursors of the final sleep of death. Then he thought of encamping for the night where he was, but the idea of failing in his purpose touched his pride; he thought, too, of how his comrades would laugh at him for attempting what was beyond his powers—no, he would push on, for surely he could not be far from the fort by this time.

Presently he came to another opening in the wood, across which the gale swept furiously. He shrank from facing it this time, and paused to consider.

"I've gone too far to the left now," he soliloquised; "must have missed the woodcutters' track after all. Been drifted up, I suppose. I'll bear away to the right a bit."

Carrying out this intention he walked briskly along, but in a dreamy state of mind which rather puzzled him. He awoke from it under the impression that he had now gone too far to the right, and abruptly altered his course. In a few minutes he came upon a group of trees which he had passed not half-an-hour before, and at last he was compelled to admit the fact that he was really *lost!*

Only those who have gone through the experience can understand the utterly bewildered state of mind that ensues when one is lost in an unknown wilderness. It is the same, indeed, even in a known wilderness if one should chance to get lost in an unfamiliar part of it. We have experienced this in the brick and mortar wilderness of London, when, having wandered into one of the side streets abutting on familiar Oxford Street, we have been completely lost, and forced humbly to ask our way back to the great thoroughfare, although within a couple of hundred yards of it. But we have also been lost for a brief space in the wilderness of the Great Lone Land, and can therefore speak from experience when we say that as regards the arts of the compass, Reuben Kraik's mind became a total blank. Up to the "lost" point he had definite, though it might be erroneous, ideas as to his whereabouts, and what he meant to do. But when the lost point was reached his mind was reduced to a state of hopeless bewilderment. Anyone of the compass points might be the right one, therefore which of them was he to choose!

In a sort of reckless indifference he chose none of them, but walked straight forward in the direction in which he happened to be facing. The folly of this course induced him to halt in a few minutes and look round. By that time night had fairly set in, but the moon, although completely hidden by the grey clouds, gave out a glimmer of light which enabled the lost youth to see the nearer objects. On the right hand, and left, as well as in rear, a few trees only were faintly visible, with a background of thick darkness which indicated the forest behind them. In front an open space appeared. Beyond these arose a long

mound or ridge of snow, on the upper edge of which the drift was still whirling somewhat wildly.

"I've had enough of open spaces," muttered Reuben, as he gazed at the snow mound. "I won't face that again. I'll encamp."

As he spoke he almost fell down, partly from exhaustion, but chiefly owing to that strange desire to lie down where he stood.

Drawing the hatchet which he carried in his belt, he attacked a small dead tree, and cut it down with as much violence as if it had been the author of all his troubles. This roused him up a little. Cutting the tree into lengths for the fire still further increased his warmth, and, as a consequence, his vigour. Then after that he cleared away the snow from a space of about ten feet in diameter, for a fire may not be kindled until the solid ground is reached. It was hard work, the snow being three or four feet deep, and a snow-shoe is not the most convenient of shovels. He accomplished it in time, however, though working in a sort of dreamy mechanical manner, and ever, as he busied himself in a languid way, spreading pine branches on the floor of his encampment and piling up the billets of firewood, the idea of having failed in his plan and being lost kept worrying his mind.

Then, somehow, the thought of having failed in his plan of life, and being lost in a more terrible sense, took possession of him. Reuben was what men styled a fine, good-hearted fellow, with no nonsense about him, but he made no pretensions to being religious. He had been too well trained to scoff at such an idea, but the notion of his being naturally a lost soul and standing in need of a Saviour had never been seriously entertained by him. It was only now, for the first time, when death, in the almost agreeable aspect of sleep, was softly but powerfully wrestling with him, that he began to think of the God who, although formally acknowledged, had never been really recognised as a factor in his life, and of Christ, by whose name he was called, and about whom he had never seriously troubled himself.

"Lost! — am I?" he muttered softly, as he put the light, which he had just kindled, to the pile of logs, and sat down on the blanket intending to open his wallet and take some food; but while he was in the very act of doing so, the strong will and the vigorous muscular power which had served him so well that day suddenly failed him. He sank down on the blanket with his feet towards the fire. He retained just sufficient sense to draw the blanket over him, and then, with a deep sigh, sank into blissful repose, while the camp fire began to gather force and send its bright sparks up into the cold wintry sky.

CHAPTER III.

A NIGHT IN THE SNOW.

It is probably needless to say that when night approached Raymond Smart began to feel a little anxious

about his young lieutenant, whom he knew to be rather too daring, self-reliant and ambitious, as well as inexperienced in Arctic travel.

About dusk he went over to the men's house, where, the day's work being over, preparations for supper were going on.

"Mr. Kraik is late of returning," he observed on entering. "What was it he said to you this morning, Mackay?"

"He said, sir, that he wass goin' in the direction of Pinetree Bluff. I will not remember the exact words, but that wass what he gafe me to understand."

"That was all—eh?"

"Weelt sir, not exactly all. We had a few words o' pheelosophical talk aboot feelin's an' knowledge, but that wass all he said aboot his expedeetion—except that we wass not to be anxious aboot him if he wass late."

"But I can't help being anxious about him, with such a gale blowing and he so inexperienced. Eat a good supper, lads, and be ready to start with me in an hour or so, if need be."

"The advice to take a goot supper wass uncalled for, whatever," observed Mackay, as the young chief of the fort went out.

"You are right, Shon Mactonal', whatever," said Angus Cameron.

The other men laughed and made curt rejoinders as they sat down to fried fish, stewed pemican, bread, salt butter and tea, to which they brought appetites sharpened by fresh air, hard work, and robust health.

An hour later, the two Highlanders and François, one of the half-breeds, led by Raymond Smart, went out carrying lanterns, food, and blankets, for they knew not where, or to what their search might lead them. The lanterns, however, were not needed, for by that time the snow had ceased falling, although the gale was still blowing, and the moon was beginning to send some of her light through the rapidly-thinning veil of clouds.

"If he made straight for the Pine Bluffs," said Raymond, in a low voice to Mackay, as they walked along the wood-cutters' track together, "he must have taken to his snow-shoes at the second bend."

"Fery true, sir, we wull be likely to find his track beginning there."

As was surmised, on reaching the second bend in the road, the diverging track, made by the lost man when he struck off into the deep snow, was found. It had not been quite obliterated by drift, because the density of the surrounding wood had partially protected it.

"Now, lads, we will start from this point as a centre," said the chief, "and radiate away each one on his own straight line like to spokes of a wheel. Thus we will be almost sure to hit on his return track wherever he may have wandered. I will follow his outgoing track, as he may have kept to it in returning and fallen in it if anything has happened to him. After you have gone in a straight line for an hour, each of you will make straight for Gordon's Gully. He must come

through that, anyhow, if he's on this side of the ridges. We will wait for each other there. I need not tell you to keep a bright look-out. Fire a single shot now and then, and let no one fire after another too quickly, for if Mr. Kraik replies he will be sure to do so at once, with probably a double shot from his double-barrel."

The party separated and Raymond Smart soon found himself alone, trudging along in his friend's track. He had little difficulty in following it up, for Reuben, as we have said, was guided by the blazed trees in the morning, and had gone straight to his goal. Besides, the youthful chief of Fort Hope was an expert backwoodsman and knew how to follow up a trail, even at night, when not too dark.

Anxiously he gazed at the snow on right and left as he went along, half-fearing at every step to come on his comrade's body, and listening eagerly for sounds from the other searchers. At last he heard a shot not far from him. He stopped and listened with breathless attention. There was no answering shot. Proceeding onwards he fired his own gun after a time and waited; but no response came. Then came two shots in quick succession, but as one was evidently far from the other they did not form the expected signal. At last Raymond reached Gordon's Gully—which was about six miles from the fort—and found that one of the men—a half-breed—had arrived there before him.

"You have found nothing, François?" said Raymond, interrogatively.

"Non, monsieur, no-ting."

As he spoke the moon burst through the clouds and lit up the cold, wintry scene. There was something ghastly and weird, in the wild, tangled, snow-smothered woods in the circumstances, which harmonized with Raymond's feelings and caused him involuntarily to shudder, for well he knew that if his young friend had fallen, from whatever cause, in such intense frost, there was little chance of his being found alive.

He was about to fire another shot when a shout was heard not far off. It was evidently the voice of Mackay.

"Hi! Hallo! come here!"

With rapid strides and beating hearts Raymond and the half-breed hastened towards the sound. They soon came up with the Highlander who was stooping over the snow, as if examining something intently!

"What is it, Mackay?"

"It iss a snow-shoe track, sir," replied the man, raising himself, "an' goin' to the fort. But you will be a better chudge than me, sir. Look!"

"Right, right. Now, John, we'll follow it up. Remain here, François. Send the other men after us as they come up, and follow yourself, when all are in."

Without a moment's delay, the two men went off on the track they had found—hopeful, yet very anxiously, for they half expected to come upon the prostrate form of poor Reuben at every step.

"You've got the kettle with you, John?"

"Oo ay, sir. I took goot care o' that."

"And the tea and bread?"

'Oo ay."

"I know it's his track from the shape of the snow-shoe," said Raymond, with the view of relieving his feelings by speech rather than giving information to his companion.

The track was sufficiently obvious to their practised eyes. They had no difficulty in following it up, and the longer they advanced on it the more were they surprised that it led them straight in the direction of the fort.

After they had advanced several miles, Mackay said, in his slow, nasal tone:

"It iss my opinion, sir, that we hev crossed each other, an' we wull find Muster Kraik at the fort before us wen we get back."

"God grant it may be so," said Raymond, feeling a sudden access of hope. "Yes, I see now, he appears to have scorned taking advantage of the woodcutters' track, and has made a straight march to the fort."

Again they pushed on in silence, much relieved, but not yet quite easy in their minds.

"Hullo! the track stops here," said Raymond, halting and bending down. "No—stay—it turns aside. He must have got confused at this point—poor fellow—and no wonder, for even now the drift is sweeping over that open space. But we are quite close to the fort now—surely he cannot have missed it in the dark!"

"Iss not that fire that I see before me?" said Mackay, looking intently at a part of the woods, whence veritable sparks of fire were seen rising into the frosty air.

"It is! Come along," cried Raymond, hastily, as he ran rather than walked towards the spot in question—though running in snow-shoes is neither easy nor safe.

"Why, it's a camp-fire," he muttered, in great surprise, as he drew nearer.

"It iss queer, whatever, that anywan should camp so close to the pickets," added Mackay.

A few minutes run brought them to the edge of an encampment, where a solitary figure was seen lying before a strong fire, which had evidently been burning for several hours, for the remains of thick logs lay at each end of it, while a mass of glowing charcoal was burning in the middle. So intense was the heat that the end of the sleeper's blanket next the fire was singed.

Hastily releasing his feet from his snow-shoes, Raymond leaped into the encampment, drew the blanket off the prostrate figure, and discovered his friend.

"Thank God!" he exclaimed, looking earnestly into Reuben's face, "he is only sleeping!"

"Are ye sure, Muster Smart?" asked Mackay, kneeling on the other side of Reuben.

"Quite sure. He is warm," said Raymond, putting his hand on the sleeper's brow.

And he was right. Happily, before falling into that lethargic slumber

from which men cannot awaken themselves, Reuben, as we have said, had managed to kindle his camp fire, which, blazing up into fierce activity, had not only singed his blankets but warmed his feet, so that the stagnating blood had resumed its flow; the blanket so fortunately, though hastily, drawn over him, had kept in the heat; and youth, with a strong constitution, had transformed the sleep of death into the slumbering of repose. But the poor fellow had been so thoroughly exhausted that it was a difficult matter to rouse him.

"Hallo!" he exclaimed, at last, as he sat up with a drowsy and almost idiotic stare. "What d'you want, eh? Is that you, Raymond?"

"Yes, Reuben; you'll be all right directly. Thank God we have found you in time! If the fire had gone out, it would have gone hard with you."

"Fire—had gone out?" returned the youth, slowly, as he looked round the camp. Then a gleam of intelligence shot from his eyes as memory suddenly resumed its office.

"Come—don't trouble yourself to think or speak, but rise and warm yourself," said Raymond, raising his friend with Mackay's aid, and holding him up before the fire.

"I'm not cold," returned Reuben, with a faint smile; "only a little queer, and—and—rather hungry. I hope we're not far from the fort now?"

"Not far. Indeed quite close," responded his friend, pointing to the mound of snow in front of them.

"Yes, that's the drift that floored me," said Reuben, with a deprecatory smile. "I was so dead beat that I couldn't face it."

"Don't you know what it is?" asked his friend, with an amused expression. "Look at that fringe on the top of it."

Reuben looked. The moonlight, which was clear by that time, revealed what had not been visible a few hours before.

"The stockade!" he exclaimed, with a gaze of astonishment.

"You are right, Muster Kraik," said Mackay. "If you had carried on for five meenits more you would have marched right into the fort, for the snow-druft has gone right up to the top o' the peckits—as you see."

"Quite true, Reuben," added Raymond, with a laugh. "If you had persevered a little longer, you might have spent the night on your own bed instead of the snow."

"I had perseverance enough, however," returned Reuben, in a somewhat piqued tone, "to walk to Pine Bluff and back."

"You don't mean to say you've been all the way to Pine Bluff in such a storm!" exclaimed Raymond in surprise.

"If you doubt me, there is proof," returned the youth, pointing to the ground. "There is the blanket that was forgotten and left by those who visited the Bluff last. I think you were one of the party, Mackay."

"Fery true, Muster Kraik. I will not be doubtin' that ye have been

there," said the Highlander, picking up the blanket with a grim smile, "but I do not think when we left it, that it had a hole in it big enough to shove wan's heed through, whatever."

"Never mind the blanket, Mackay," said Raymond. "Come now, are you fit to finish your journey? Five minutes more will do it, and we'll find something ready to appease your appetite on arriving. Here comes the rest of our party," he added, as the searchers made their appearance, expressing by word and look their satisfaction at the discovery of the lost man.

A few minutes more, and Reuben Kraik was seated in what was styled Bachelors' Hall, recruiting his body and spirits over an early breakfast—or a late supper—and discussing his experiences of a night in the snow.

CHAPTER IV.

REUBEN RECEIVES AN INCURABLE SHOCK, AND REDSKINS ARRIVE.

Towards the close of the year, there occurred an event in the career of our hero, Reuben Kraik, which completely revolutionised his sentiments as to the value and aims of life.

It was late in the afternoon that the event occurred. Reuben had been out with his gun, and was returning home with eight snow-white ptarmigan encircling his waist—their heads being tucked under his belt—when he was arrested on turning round the corner of the fort by an apparition which struck him both dumb and motionless! It was well calculated to do so, for the apparition was a lovely girl of eighteen, with a bright complexion, sunny hair, laughing eyes, and a round cherry-like mouth. She was robed in a fur-trimmed cloak, and wore a round fur cap with ear pieces, out of which her sweet, round face beamed like sunshine.

"Angels and ministers of grace defend us," thought Reuben, but he said nothing. He only stood and gazed like an incurable idiot. The apparition in fur smiled. Reuben tried to return the smile in kind, but could not. At last he stammered:—

"Are you—what—where in all the earth did you—I beg your pardon—*are* you human?"

"I hope you don't think me *in*-human," replied the apparition, breaking into a silvery laugh and displaying pearls and dimples which effectually completed the conquest that the lips, &c., had begun. It was a clear case of love at first sight. Reuben knew, felt, that his doom was fixed, and he wisely bowed to the inevitable. The shock of the discovery, however, coupled with the dimpling smile, restored his self-possession.

"Forgive me," he said, becoming once more sane in look and tone, "but you must be aware that in a wilderness nearly a thousand miles beyond the outskirts of civilisation, visitors like *you* are uncommon."

"Am I then so *very* awful?" asked the girl, with a look of innocence in her large blue eyes, in which, however, there was a perplexing twinkle.

"To people who believe in apparitions," responded Reuben, "you might indeed be exceedingly awful, but not so to me, for I am a sceptic as to ghosts, and believe you to be real flesh and blood—a fact that renders it all the more surprising that you are here, where, to the best of my belief, none but a few Indian squaws have hitherto existed since the days of Adam and Eve. May I venture to ask who you are, and which star you dropped from?"

"Did my father not write to Mr. Smart to say that we were coming?" asked the girl, with genuine surprise.

"If he did, Mr. Smart said nothing about it to me. He did indeed mention, in a casual way, that Mr. Peers, of Fort Dunregan, might possibly come over to spend the Christmas holidays with us, but he mentioned no one else —did not even hint at a young lady —are you, then, Richard Peers' daughter?"

"I am—his daughter Flora—his only child. Ah! I suppose Mr. Smart did not give me credit for courage to undertake a two hundred miles journey in a dog sledge, but he——"

A loud burst of laughter was heard at that moment, and Raymond Smart came out at the fort gate, talking to his friend Peers.

"Yes, I meant to give him a surprise," he said, "so I made no mention of Flo, for he has not an idea that there is a white girl within five hundred miles of us. So we——"

He stopped abruptly, for at that moment he perceived the youth and maiden standing where they had first met.

How much, if any, of the above speech had been heard by Reuben or Flora, Raymond could not guess, but the awkwardness of an explanation was prevented by John Mackay, who opportunely came round the end of the principal store with an expression of unwonted anxiety on his weather-beaten face.

"Angus hes just come in, sir," said he on coming up, "an' he says it iss his opinion that a party o' redskins iss comin' to the fort, and they are on the war-path, for they hev no weemen or children wi' them, an' no furs."

"Nonsense, man," said Raymond. "Who ever heard of Indians hereabouts on the war-path?"

"What you say iss fery true, Muster Smart, but it iss curious what strange things happen out o' the common, sometimes."

"Did Angus meet them, John?"

"No, Muster Smart, but Angus told me. 'Shon,' says he, 'François met one of oor own Indians who said he knew they was comin'.'"

"Humph! Somewhat vague. If they do come, however, they shall meet with a warm reception in the shape of a feast and perhaps a dance. That may tend to turn them out of the war-path, so you'd better go and practise the Highland fling, Mackay."

That afternoon, seated round the mess-room table, Raymond Smart, Richard Peers, his pretty daughter, and Reuben Kraik, discussed the subject of the Indians supposed to be on

the war-path, and Peers recounted the incidents of his two-hundred miles journey in a dog sledge, from Fort Dunregan. In the men's house John Mackay and Angus Cameron, with François, Baptiste and Louis, the three half-breeds, gave hospitable entertainment to the two Indians who had accompanied Mr. Peers on his journey. While François' Indian wife, Stareye, and her elder sister, Readyhand, kept the table well supplied with fried whitefish, pemican, and venison steak, Stareye's twin boys provided all that was needed in the way of noise. Both tables were supplied with similar viands, save that the chief's venison was a haunch, and had cranberry jam as a condiment. Tea was their only beverage. They were all teetotallers from necessity, no liquor of any kind being supplied at that time to the fur-traders.

The rooms in which this feasting was conducted were small and low-roofed. No carpets covered the floor, nor pictures the walls, which latter were of unpainted wood. Indeed, all the rooms in the fort—floors, walls and ceilings—were of the same material, yet they were wonderfully cosy, each with a fire of huge logs, whose blaze rendered the candles needless, while a genial warmth pervaded them, though it was not sufficient to melt the frost-flowers on the window-panes.

Our hero, Reuben, was not given to the dreaming mood, being much too healthy to think of wasting the night hours in that way. Nevertheless, he did dream that night. The subject eluded him frequently, but whenever he succeeded in grasping it, or reducing it to anything definite, it invariably took the form of an angel in fur.

Next day the band of Indians supposed to be on the war-path arrived at Fort Hope. Whatever their ultimate intentions were they walked in with the confidence of conquerors, and seated themselves on the floor round the walls of the hall or reception room. They formed a band of thirty about as ugly looking fellows as one could wish to avoid in the Wild North. All of them befeathered and painted more or less, but whether it was war-paint, Raymond, being unacquainted with the men and their habits, could not tell.

"They're no more on the war-path than I am," remarked Peers to his host, as they left the hall, after furnishing the visitors with a supply of tobacco and pipes. "But what they are after is more than I can guess. I won't ask them, however, till they seem anxious to tell. We must just let them smoke till they're inclined to be communicative."

Mr. Peers, an elderly fur-trader was a good linguist, and able to speak to the red men in their own tongue. He had been many years in charge of Fort Dunregan, and was Raymond's superior in the district. He had, during a trip to Canada, while on furlough, married a lady whose health was not sufficiently good to withstand long the rigour of an Arctic winter, and whose spirit sank beneath the terrible solitude to which she was condemned. Two years before our tale opens she

died, leaving one child—the fair Flora—to mourn her loss and look after her father. Mrs. Peers had trained and educated little Flo very carefully, both in secular and religious knowledge, and guarded her in every stage of life, so that, although the child knew nothing of civilised society, and had played only with Indian and half-breed children, she was quite a lady, like her mother, in sentiment and appearance.

Poor Flo longed sometimes to visit the lands of which she had read and heard so much, and to mingle with the society of people like her mother; but she longed mildly, as people do when they long for the unattainable.

Unlike her mother, Flo was healthy and strong. Her disposition was lively and her manner fascinating, because charmingly innocent. All the clerks and young fur-traders in the district were well aware of these facts. Most of them—if not the whole—were in love with her more or less, but not one had yet succeeded in touching Flo's heart.

Of course she was aware of this state of things, and pitied those who laid siege to her, but what could she do? Reuben, she perceived, had joined the besieging army. But, for the first time in her life, the feeling of pity did not arise! What could be the meaning of this? It was something quite new. Was she becoming absolutely callous?

While the Indians, supposed to be on the warpath, were solemnly smoking their pipes of peace in the hall, Flo was seated in her bedroom, trying to analyse her feelings. She failed, but Reuben Kraik analysed them for her. The very next day, while taking a solitary walk on the woodcutters' track, he met Flo walking towards him. Neither had thought of meeting the other, yet the meeting was not accidental, for there was no other walk about the place than that of the woodcutters. The meeting was therefore inevitable.

Flo's heart distinctly fluttered when she suddenly looked up and found herself face to face with our hero. Reuben's heart leaped as it had leaped at their first meeting. He tried to say something about the weather, but broke down. She attempted something on the same lines, with equal want of success. Reuben was reckless, as we have seen; also impulsive and resolute.

"Flora Peers," he said abruptly, in a soft but decided manner.

"Well?" she replied, trembling, for not one of the besieging army had ever addressed her in that style before.

"I have lived a good many years now, and have wandered far and wide over a considerable part of this world, but never—no, never in all my life, have I seen any girl approaching to within a thousand miles of you in lovable—adorable—"

He sought to grasp her hand, but she snatched it away, and with a face of crimson, turned round and ran—fairly ran—back to the fort.

Of course Reuben did not follow her. He stood leaning on his gun, gazing at

her retreating figure in quiet but intense admiration.

The ice was fairly broken, but the water was by no means reached, for Flora thereafter avoided the youth with the utmost care. At dinner, indeed, when she sat opposite to him, there was no escaping his eyes; but as she kept her own fixed on the table, except when spoken to, no appreciable damage was done. After dinner, one day, the following conversation took place between Richard Peers and Raymond Smart over a pipe.

"I fear, sir—at least, I suspect," said the latter, "that your pretty little daughter has made a conquest of poor Reuben Kraik."

"Very likely," replied Peers, with a pleased smile, "it's not an uncommon thing with her."

"But don't you think that Reuben, who is a fine, strapping fellow, may possibly make some impression upon Flo, which would be rather awkward, you know, seeing that he is very young, and only at the commencement of his career."

"Not the least fear of that," returned Peers, with a confident nod. "Dozens of young fellows as good-looking as Reuben have made a dead set at the poor girl, but without any effect. Flo's little heart seems to be impregnable. I'm not afraid of Reuben—let him try his best."

"H'm! you may be right," rejoined Raymond, sending a ring of smoke to the ceiling, "but Reuben possesses great attractive power, as well as unusual determination. However, if you see no cause for caution it is not my part to alarm you. By the way, have you yet found out what our Indian chief, Lightfoot, and his band are after?"

"Not yet. Lightfoot puzzles me. I've been used to screwing news out of redskins for many years, but never found one so mysterious or hard to pump as this. Only one thing have I discovered, namely, that they are going to the mission settlement on Clearwater Lake. I got that from his brother, Blacknose, who seems inclined to be more communicative than the chief, but what their object is in travelling such a distance I cannot guess."

"Perhaps a feast may open their hearts and loosen their tongues," said Raymond. "I have ordered my cook, François, with his subordinates, Stareye and Readyhand, to prepare such a blow-out for them as will awaken feelings of brotherhood if they at all resemble ordinary savages. I have several little treats for them—such as cranberry jam to their venison, and a few cakes of gingerbread, as well as several bottles of sweets, which were sent to me in last outfit, besides tea *ad libitum*, well sweetened with molasses—for I have run rather short of sugar."

Raymond's account of his delicacies was cut short by the entrance of Reuben.

"Lightfoot has made a proposal," he said to his chief, "which I think is wise as well as considerate. He says that, as his party is large, and their feeding powers are enormous, he and his braves will go a-hunting to-morrow to help the feast."

"Good. Let them do so by all means. They won't find deer in the neighbourhood just now, but there are thousands of ptarmigan, and these are very good to eat, though somewhat mahogany-like in texture—but the digestion of most redskins is equal to mahogany."

"Ay, or to oak or ironwood, I verily believe," remarked Peers with a laugh and a yawn, as he rose and knocked

the ashes out of his pipe. Thereafter he retired to rest beneath several four-point Makinaw blankets and a buffalo robe, which effectually guarded him from the frost which froze the water-jug in his bedroom well-nigh solid, and coated the window-panes with hoar-frost fully half an inch thick before morning.

CHAPTER V.

A HOLIDAY TERMINATED BY A FEAST AND A WILD ALARM.

In honour of the Christmas season, and of the numerous guests who had so unexpectedly made their appearance at Fort Hope, Raymond proclaimed a holiday on the day of the feast, and, in order to give some semblance of reality to it, instituted a series of games. As these were to come off at noon, he sent the Indians away early in the morning on their hunt after ptarmigan. Those sons of the forest were, however, so anxious to witness the amusements of the pale-faces that they all returned to the fort some time before noon, each man with a circlet of snow-white birds ornamenting his waist.

But their chief, Lightfoot, did not accompany them. That sedate savage had something weighty on his mind, and was closeted with the commandant of the fort for a considerable part of the morning.

"You'll never guess what Lightfoot is troubled about," said Raymond to Peers, who was having a pipe with Reuben in Bachelors' Hall, when he entered.

"I never guessed a riddle in all my life, and am too old now to try," said Peers.

"It is not war, but theology that takes him to the mission settlement," rejoined Raymond, with a perplexed smile.

Peers removed his pipe to whistle a note of astonishment, opened his eyes very wide, and then removed his pipe.

"Yes," continued Raymond, "for upwards of an hour and a half have I been subjected to a close catechising by that sedate savage, and, do you know, I was not aware until now how shamefully ignorant I am as to the details of the Christian religion. Some of his questions completely floored me. Are you well up in the subject, Peers?"

"Well, I freely confess that I am not," replied the fur-trader, with a deprecatory air, "but perhaps our young friend, Reuben, may be."

"I grieve to say that I am no wiser than yourselves," said Reuben. "My dear mother, it is true, taught me the catechism, but I learned it like a parrot, and had no more idea of its meaning in some parts than the man in the moon. She also taught me, however, to respect and believe in the Christian religion as exemplified by herself, but that will not go far to fit me for expounding theology to a redskin."

"Is he very much set on finding out all about it?" asked Peers.

"Very. If he were not he would scarcely have started on a journey of several hundred miles with no other end in view. He is evidently a profound thinker—one of those men who want to know everything, and to prove everything, and who will take nothing for granted. 'My white brother,' he said to me, 'my reason tells me that this Great Manitow must be perfectly good and perfectly wise. It is the fancy of a child to think of pleasing Him with gifts, when the world is His own, or with self-punishment which cannot mend the

past. The red man thinks it is right to kill his enemies and to steal from them, but Lightfoot's enemies are the children of Manitow not less than himself. It cannot be right to kill, and to steal from, the children of the same father. I am not satisfied with the religion of my fathers; I wish to hear about the religion of the white man.'"

"A very perplexing character to deal with," remarked Peers, as he rolled a volume of smoke from his mouth. "I suppose you couldn't give him much light?"

"Very little, indeed; so little that he is evidently much disappointed, and tells me that he and his braves will start for Clearwater Lake by the first streak of day to-morrow."

"That must not be. I'll tell you what," said Peers, with the air of a man who has been struck by an idea, "I'll set my little Flo at him. My dear wife used to teach her out of the Bible to such an extent that I've often been taken aback by the occasional displays of her knowledge. And, after all, the Bible must be about the best class-book on theology."

"Ay," remarked Reuben, in an absent manner, "and I think that a good, pretty young girl must be about the best of theological teachers!"

A burst of laughter from his companions caused Reuben to blush and smile as Peers rose to go in search of his daughter.

"Set her to work at once," said Raymond, "for in little more than an hour we must begin the sports; and we shall want Flo to grace the scene with her presence and deliver the prizes."

Flo was somewhat alarmed, and not a little amused at the duty which was required of her, but, as her father said, she manfully undertook the task, and was soon closeted with the inquiring redskin.

Meanwhile, preparations for the games were completed. These were to consist of running, leaping, putting the stone, throwing the hammer, shooting at a mark, and tobogganing down the sloping banks of the river—the flat, frozen surface of which, with its marble-like covering of wind-beaten snow, formed the arena.

Never having seen anything of the kind before, the Indians assembled with their customary sedate gravity of demeanour and aspect, and did not at first condescend to take part in the games, though their glittering dark eyes and occasional "hos" and "hows!" and guttural sounds, showed that they were deeply interested.

John Mackay, in virtue of his superior knowledge and strength, was director of the games and chief performer.

"Noo, Muster Smart," he said, when Flo and her red pupil appeared on the scene, "we wull begin wi' puttin' the stane, for Angus is coot at that."

Angus accordingly balanced a heavy stone in one hand, and, with a mysterious hop and heave that seems to be the birthright of Scotch Highlanders, sent it hurling through the air a distance of several yards.

"Very goot, Angus, but I wull beat that," said Mackay, taking up the stone. And he did beat it, by a foot, amid the applause of the white men and the silence of the red. Next heave, however, Angus passed him by at least eight inches; then Mackay went beyond the score by four inches. Then François and his brother half-breeds were induced to try a throw, but, owing to want of knack, they fell far behind.

"Wull not you try, Muster Kraik?"

said Mackay, offering the stone to our hero, who, however, never having acquired the art of stone-throwing, did not feel inclined to display his incapacity before the fair Flora. Nevertheless he took the stone, and, to his own great surprise sent it full ten inches beyond the furthest mark. His triumph however was short-lived, for Angus, being thus put on his mettle, made a heave that sent the stone two feet beyond the mark of Reuben, and as no one else could go near him he was declared victor.

As the men warmed to the work the excitement increased. Even the Indians began to forget their dignity a little, though they still declined to take part.

At throwing the hammer the two Highlanders again excelled the others, but here Reuben's strength came into play, and he beat them at last by a magnificent throw, which called forth exclamations of surprise even from the Indians. Blacknose, their lieutenant, who was unusually humorous for a red man, became so interested that he at last condescended to try a throw. Advancing with solemn dignity he gripped the hammer and swung it twice round his head in a slow funereal manner. Then he made a swing of such sudden violence that the hammer slipped from his grasp and went like a cannon shot straight in amongst his comrades, who skipped, leaped, ducked, plunged, and fell out of its way with the agility of baboons.

"Wow!" exclaimed the two Highlanders in consternation, but no evil resulted, save that Blacknose had sat down on the snow unwillingly and with a sudden shock.

The victory did not, however, remain with the white men, for, when it came to running, two of the braves far outstripped all competitors. At the long leap François was best, but at the high jump Reuben was again successful, which called forth from Mackay the remark:

"Ay, you chump weel. You have goot arms an' legs—whatever!"

When it came to shooting, the red men again came to the front, so that when Flora was called on at last to deliver the prizes—consisting of three ornamented powder-horns, two pairs of bead-worked moccassins and several scarlet belts—the distribution among the races was pretty equal.

By that time much of the reserve of the Indians had been dissipated, so that when it came to tobogganing wildly down the river banks, they joined in the sport, their abortive efforts to do it in a dignified manner adding greatly to the amusement of their white friends. When the short-lived day was gone the appetites of the party may be better imagined than described, but the preparations of Stareye and Readyhand to appease them were on a proportionate scale.

During the progress of the games, Raymond and his lieutenant had gone to the fort occasionally to have an eye on the preparations. On one of these occasions they met.

"Raymond," said his friend, abruptly, "were you ever in love?"

"Never," replied his chief, taking the question as seriously as it was put.

"I'm glad of that," responded Reuben, with a sigh of relief, "for that assures me that you are not in love with Flora Peers."

"I certainly am not," returned Raymond, with a laugh. "But why do you ask?"

"Because *I* am in love with her—hopelessly, enthusiastically so! and if you had been, I should have had to stand aside, for you have a prior claim, having known her before I did—don't

you see—and nothing would have induced me to interfere, unless, of course, Flora preferred me, in which case duty would have obliged me—don't you know? Ah! you may laugh, my boy, but neither laughter nor frowns will affect me. I am proud of loving a good, lovable girl, and if she comes to love me with a thousandth part of the intensity of my feelings towards her, and is willing, nothing under the sun, moon, or stars will prevent me from marrying her!"

"You are emphatic, Reuben, and I heartily sympathise with you in your feelings, for there is nothing selfish, but all that is noble in the love of a good man for a good girl. But I am sorry for you, nevertheless, because a man of your age, at the beginning of his career, and without money, has hardly a right to think of marriage so soon. Besides, she and her father return to their post in a few weeks, and you will have to remain here, to be ready to go to headquarters with the spring brigade, in a diametrically opposite direction from Fort Dunregan."

"Is there no chance of our sending a packet or something to Dunregan, with which I could go on snow-shoes?"

"None whatever. My good fellow, you'll have to grin and bear it, for the thing is impossible."

The word "impossible" rang in the poor youth's ears during the remainder of that evening, and the more he thought over the subject and of the various possibilities open to him, the more was it borne in upon him that his prospects were uncommonly dark.

Supper-time at last arrived. It was the great event of the day to the red men. We are not sure that it was not the same to their white brothers.

Raymond, who was eccentric in many of his doings, had resolved to conduct the meal very much like an in-door picnic. The guests were made to sit cross-legged on the floor all round the walls of Bachelors' Hall, and the viands were brought in and served round by François and his female subalterns. At the head of the hall, opposite the door, Raymond seated himself, with Flora, and her father and Mackay on his right. Reuben, Angus Cameron, and the other men on his left. The Indians continued the line on either side, and when all were seated the circle was nearly complete.

We will not tantalise the reader by describing the feast. Let it suffice to say it was eaten in comparative silence, though the sound of mastication, the smacking of lips, and sundry emphatic exclamations indicated the entire satisfaction of the feasters. Especially was this the case when four enormous plum-puddings were brought on the scene. The astonished savages had by that time consumed about as much as they could hold, but the unknown delicacy called for renewed efforts, which were attended with entire success. When all were sipping their tea, Raymond got up and made an appropriate speech, conveying his satisfaction at having so many guests around him, and expressing a hope that his red brothers would not only enjoy themselves but in the end succeed in obtaining the information of which their chief was in search.

Then Lightfoot uprose, with the solemn dignity peculiar to his race and station—having first deposited his tea-cup carefully on the floor, and laid the tomahawk-pipe he had been smoking beside it. Drawing himself up to his full height he looked slowly round

the circle and delivered himself as follows:—

"The white chief and his friends have been very kind to Lightfoot and his braves. Our memories are strong; we will not forget. Waugh!"

He looked round with dignity as if to note the effect of his oratory thus far.

"When Lightfoot started on his journey to Clear Lake," resumed the chief, "his mind was perplexed, his heart was heavy. His squaws and braves saw that there was a cloud over his eyes which the sun could not sweep away. They grieved for him, but that could do no good. Then they said, go to the palefaces, and their medicine-men will cure him. Lightfoot took the advice of his people. He has found the pale-faces, but he has not yet found the cure. Still his eyes have been partly opened. Some of the mists have been cleared away. Waugh!"

Again the chief paused, and a volley of "ho! hos!" testified to the satisfaction of his braves.

"How would you translate 'Waugh'?" asked Reuben of Angus in a whisper.

"'Put that in your pipe an' smoke it,'" replied Angus, "seems to me a fery coot translation—whatever."

"But," continued the chief, with an emphasis that was meant to draw particular attention; "but Lightfoot has made a discovery. He has found that the squaws of the pale-faces are wiser than their chiefs and braves; that the squaws have the brains, while the men have only the muscles and the bones. Waugh!"

This unexpected and altogether astounding statement so took the braves as well as the pale-faces by surprise, that they were temporarily bereft of the power to exclaim "ho!" or anything else. An appalling silence prevailed, while the chief looked slowly and sternly round, and eyes—in some cases mouths—were opened to an extent that must have been seen to be believed. Blacknose in particular, who sat beside his brother, looked up at him with an expression of solemn astonishment that almost upset Flo Peers's gravity. She tried to look superhumanly meek in consequence, but with only moderate success.

The silence was still unbroken; the Indian chief was still glowering under the influence of thoughts almost too big for utterance, and the company was listening, with bated breath and eager expectation, for what was yet to come, when a series of the most appalling yells burst upon them like a shock of electricity; the hall door flew open, and François's twin boys sprang in, with incomprehensible howlings issuing from their throats, and wild terror in their glaring eyes!

CHAPTER VI.

A TREMENDOUS FIGHT, WITH A SUDDEN BUT HAPPY CONCLUSION.

It needed no explanation to reveal the cause of the urchins' alarm. The open door told only too plainly that the men's houses were on fire!

The abject terror of the twins was of itself evidence that they had been the cause of the catastrophe, but no one thought of, or cared for that, at the moment. With a war-whoop that would have made hearts quail in other circumstances, the Indians scurried out of the hall and across the yard to attack the flames. Not less prompt were the white men; but Raymond saw from the first that the buildings already on fire were doomed.

"Impossible to save them," he said

to Reuben, as they ran. "We must try to save the big store. Get blankets out of it, shove them in the water-barrel in the kitchen, and spread them on the roof! Gather all our men, Mackay, and heap snow on the wall next the fire. Angus, fetch water from the hole—get as many Indians as you can to help. Off with you! This way, Peers. Help me to manage these red maniacs. Keep inside, Flo. You can do nothing."

But Raymond did Flo injustice, and she did not recognise his right to command *her!* Seizing a large broom made of willows, she went out and stationed herself to leeward of the blazing houses, and whenever she saw a flake of fire or mass of flying charcoal settle on a spot where it might prove dangerous, she went quietly up to it, and belaboured it into extinction.

Meanwhile, the Indians did their best to aid their friends, according to their light, and performed prodigies of valour. They rushed into the burning houses, brought out chairs, pots, and pans, and other trifling articles, clambered on the burning roofs, hurled masses of snow into the fire, and danced wildly in and out, apparently regardless of falling beams, and as indifferent to the flames as if they had been salamanders or veritable demons.

In the midst of the hubbub Reuben had occasion to pass between the store and the burning buildings. He saw Flora laying about her with the big broom, apparently ignorant of the fact that a large mass of blazing woodwork behind her was swaying to its fall. With a roar that a lion might have been proud of, our hero rushed at her, seized the terrified girl in his arms, and dragged her violently aside. Not an instant too soon, for the mass fell hissing on the snow amid a shower of sparks and steam that almost blinded them both. The escape was by a hairsbreadth, for a beam almost tore the arm off Reuben's coat as it fell. The youth did not hesitate. Lifting the half-stunned girl in his arms, he bore her to Bachelors' Hall, and set her down on a chair.

"Not hurt?" he asked with intense anxiety, and still keeping his arms round her lest she should fall.

"Not in the least," she said, with a face so flushed that it would have been sheer hypocrisy to doubt her. "Go—go, quick! They need you!"

Reuben was off in a moment, but no exertion that he or his friends could make availed to save the store, one end of which contained all the goods for trade during the next year, while in the other end were all the furs traded during the year that was past. A breeze kept blowing the heat and flames and burning masses steadily upon it, until it at last caught fire at the trade-goods' end. Still they fought on, white men and red together, until it became dangerous to remain near it, owing to the gunpowder. The magazine, indeed, was not in the store, but a new barrel had been placed there that very day. Being warned of this the Indians retired to the Bachelors' Hall, and Raymond at last withdrew his exhausted men to the same place, where they had not long to await the end.

First the roof of the men's houses fell in. Being made entirely of wood, it sent up a cloud of sparks that no pyrotechnic display could equal. This was followed by the collapse of one end of the store-room. Next moment a jet of flame, as if from the crater of a volcano, shot upwards. The shock,

as of an earthquake, succeeded, accompanied by a crashing roar, and, amid black smoke, charred beams, general wreck and splinters, all the wealth of the Fort Hope was blown in a mass of indistinguishable ruin into the air, and the inhabitants were thus left almost without food or shelter, two hundred miles from the nearest station, in the depth of an Arctic winter, with the thermometer many degrees below zero.

The opinion of the whole party may be pretty well gathered from the brief conversation held by the two Highlanders shortly after the explosion.

"It is a fery bad chob, Angus Cameron," remarked his countryman.

"Yes, Shon Mackay, it iss—whatever!"

So bad a job was it, that it was impossible as well as useless to spend the remainder of the winter at the ruined fort, and its chief finally decided to accompany his friend, Richard Peers, to Fort Dunregan, and spend the remainder of the winter there. Fortunately, enough of provisions, &c., had been rescued from the flames to enable the whole party to undertake the journey on full allowance. And the decision of Lightfoot made things much easier for them than would otherwise have been the case, for that chief, entertaining the belief that the young pale-face squaw knew quite enough about Christianity to solve all his difficulties, resolved to give up the long journey to Clearwater Lake, and to accompany the party to Fort Dunregan.

This he ultimately did, and as his braves drew the sledges of the pale-faces, and hunted for them all the way, the journey was more of a long pleasure trip than anything else.

Need we say that Reuben made the most of his opportunities? We think not.

Need we add that he did not fail to twit his friend Raymond about the possibility of going to Dunregan after all? We suspect not.

Need we insinuate that sweet Flo Peers was (with the exception of Reuben) the happiest member of the party? We hope not. Of course she did not betray the state of her feelings, oh dear no! she was much too innocent a plant of the northern wilderness to do that. But she looked blooming and beaming at all times, despite the cold, and had a way of pretending, occasionally, not to see or hear her lover, and that was enough for Reuben. He understood it!

As a matter of course little could be done in the way of re-establishing Fort Hope during that winter. It was arranged that when genial spring came to break up the ice on lake and river; to sweep away the snowy mantle of winter; to set the waters rushing, warbling, tinkling; to bring back the migratory flocks, and to fill the woods and swamps with wild-bird melody—that then Raymond Smart and Reuben Kraik should return with their men to the scene of the great conflagration and rebuild the fort, start fisheries, send out hunters, and, with a partial outfit of what could be spared from Fort Dunregan, continue the trade with the northern Indians.

Meanwhile there were several months of winter yet to run, with forced inaction, as far as Fort Hope was concerned. There was plenty of work, however, at Dunregan to keep active spirits in employment. Indeed, it holds true of active spirits in every position of life, that there is plenty of work for them to do, for, in cases where work is not laid to their hands, they will infallibly make work for

themselves. At Dunregan, when there was not much work to be done, the active spirits had always the resource of the chase to fall back upon, for the establishment was considerable, and appetites were strong. Somehow or other there are few sick folk, as a rule, at backwoods establishments, which is fortunate, for there are no doctors there. Possibly there may be some connection here—who knows!

Reuben being, we need scarcely say, one of the active spirits, had his hands full, for, besides his share of the ordinary duties of the place, he had resting on him the particular and delicate duties consequent upon his determination to win Flora Peers. Reuben had now a fixed, a noble aim in life—an object worth living for—namely, to gladden the heart of another human being. To effect his purpose he took the somewhat peculiar course of devoting himself to business. He was full of romance and sentiment, but he did not set about the winning of Miss Flo like a sentimental noodle. He knew that without means and position his case was hopeless. He was aware that means and position were only accorded by the fur trade—or any other trade—to men who made themselves useful and worthy. He therefore devoted himself heart and soul to the thorough mastery of every detail of every possible subject connected with his calling in life. Of course he did not neglect Flo. He treated her with the profoundest respect and consideration, but he did not again mention the subject of love, nor did he in any degree act the part of a devoted noodle. Perhaps poor Flo sometimes wished that he did. It is possible that she might almost, unknown to herself, have wished for another fire, in order that Reuben might take her in his arms and rescue her! We cannot tell. We only know that she dreamed not infrequently or unnaturally of the fire at Fort Hope!

One consequence of our hero's resolute conduct was that everybody liked him, "He was so kind and obliging, and so useful." Another was, that Richard Peers found his services to be invaluable, and his character to be "most dependable." When spring came and the first trumpet notes of wild geese gladdened the dwellers in Dunregan with the prospect of fresh meat, Mr. Peers found that he could not well get on without Reuben.

"Raymond," said he, one morning after breakfast, "I fear that I shall be obliged to give you a disappointment. I cannot let you take young Kraik back to Fort Hope. I find him too useful here, and mean to keep him permanently. Won't Sommerville do as well?"

"Not nearly as well," replied Raymond, with a rather complex smile, for he was unquestionably disappointed. "However, Sommerville is a good fellow, and I daresay will do very well. Anyhow, I shall have to submit to the inevitable."

Both gentlemen looked sharply at each other as the latter said this, and both laughed.

"Well, well, Raymond," said Peers, "you may take with you any of my people that you think most suitable, but Reuben must remain here. Send him to me. I wish to sound him on the point."

"The boss wants to speak with you," said Raymond, when he had found Reuben.

"You speak in an aggrieved tone, Raymond, I hope nothing has gone wrong."

"Oh, no—nothing. Only he's going to treat you ill. He seems to

think you are not fit to go back with me to Fort Hope! You'd better go to him at once. He's in the messroom. You know he is impatient and irascible."

"Very odd," remarked Reuben, as he hurried away, with anxiety written on his countenance and uncomfortable forebodings in his heart.

"Would you like to remain permanently with me at Fort Dunregan, Mr. Kraik?" asked Peers, when the youth entered.

The question was so different from what Reuben had expected that he could scarcely find words to reply.

"Need I say to you, sir," he replied at last, "that nothing—no appointment whatever—could be more to my taste?"

The old fur-trader laughed, and Reuben felt rather confused, for there seemed to be meaning in the laugh.

"Well, my young friend, it is settled. Go and let Mr. Sommerville know that he will have to take your place at Fort Hope."

On his way he had to pass through an outer hall which Flora chanced to enter at the moment.

"Oh! Miss Flora," exclaimed Reuben, approaching her with a glow of enthusiasm on his countenance, and a peculiar decision of manner which caused the maiden's face to turn pale, and then to flush, "your father tells me that I am to remain here instead of going to Fort Hope."

Poor Flo scarce knew how to receive this announcement.

"Well," she said, hesitatingly, "are—are you pleased?"

"Pleased? No!" he replied vehemently, "but I shall be glad—glad—unspeakably glad, if *you*, Flo—"

He finished the sentence by grasping one of her hands, and passing his right arm round her waist, he drew her to his breast. Flo did not resist. At that moment an envious blast of wind shut the door in the passage with the report of a cannon shot, and scattered those young people promptly in opposite directions.

The opportunity was brief, but it sufficed. It was the beginning of the end!

Meanwhile the chief, Lightfoot, finally gave up the idea of visiting the Clear Lake Mission in search of theological information. His mind, he said, had been cleared up. The Great Manitow had given him wisdom through the mouth of the pale-face squaw, whom he would know in future by the name of Clearbrain.

"But, how do you know that Clearbrain, as you call her, is right?" asked Peers, during the last interview he had with the chief, when the latter was about to return to his northern home.

The red chief pondered for a few moments, with his eyes fixed upon the ground; then he looked up calmly in the fur-trader's face.

"How does my white father know that the sun shines?" he asked, pointing to the heavens. "Does he require to reason out that point? Does he require a long palaver to convince him of that truth? How does my white father know when he is hungry? Must some one talk to him to prove it? Must the scalping-knife be used to open his stomach and show that it is empty? How does my white father know that he loves Clearbrain? Has not Manitow given him understanding with regard to these things? Is Manitow like a foolish man to make machines that will not work? Many mysteries there are which Manitow has not revealed. In regard to these both the red man and the pale-face

must bow the head and wait. But many things Manitow has made plain. Out of the eyes of Clearbrain there shines *truth*. Lightfoot *knows* it. He sees it. He does not reason about it. From her lips drop wisdom. Lightfoot reasons upon that, because speech may be turned inside out, like the skin of the marten or the fox, to see what it is worth. The speech of many men —red-face and pale-face—is worth little or nothing. If you try to turn it inside out it tears, like a bad skin. It is without meaning. Confusion! Clearbrain's speech is good. It will not tear when turned. She gives reasons. When she cannot give reasons she is dumb and looks up, and waits. Waugh!"

The chief paused at this point, but as the fur-trader saw that there was more coming he did not interrupt him.

"Clearbrain had much to say," he resumed, again looking earnestly into the white man's face; "and some of it was not easy to understand, but Clearbrain makes her words change, and they become more simple. All great things are simple! As the lake reflects the sky, so simple words reflect the truth. After Clearbrain had said much she began to bind it up and make a small package of it. Then she pressed it more and more so that the eyes of the chief began to grasp it and to see it more plainly. Then she boiled it down, so as to obtain all the good that was in it. At last she looked at Lightfoot with tears in her truth-telling eyes, and said, 'Let the chief remember but two sentences and they will guide him aright through all the turnings, and troubles, and darkness of life; they were spoken by Manitow, the Saviour of the world—I am the way and the truth and the life. And—Whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them.'"

With this compressed form of gospel truth, Lightfoot and his men departed to their wigwams in the wild north.

THE END.

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Pears'
soap