

THE FUR COUNTRY

BY JULES VERNE.



THE FUR COUNTRY

BY

JULES VERNE

AUTHOR OF "THE ENGLISH AT THE NORTH POLE," "THE FIELD OF ICE,"
ETC. ETC.

TRANSLATED BY HENRY FRITH

Volume I

LONDON

GEORGE ROUTLEDGE AND SONS, LIMITED

BROADWAY, LUDGATE HILL

GLASGOW, MANCHESTER, AND NEW YORK

BY JULES VERNE.

The English at the North Pole.

The Field of Ice.

Five Weeks in a Balloon.

A Journey to the Centre of the Earth.

Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Sea.—
Part I.

Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Sea.—
Part II.

A Floating City, and The Blockade Runners.

A Voyage Round the World.—South America.

A Voyage Round the World.—Australia.

A Voyage Round the World.—New Zealand.

From the Earth to the Moon, and Round the
Moon.

Adventures of Three Englishmen and Three
Russians.

Round the World in Eighty Days.

The Fur Country.—Part I.

The Fur Country.—Part II.

CONTENTS.

CHAPTER	PAGE
I.—A SOIRÉE AT FORT RELIANCE	5
II.—THE HUDSON'S BAY FUR COMPANY	16
III.—THAWING A PHILOSOPHER	26
IV.—A FACTORY	36
V.—FROM FORT RELIANCE TO FORT ENTER- PRISE	45
VI.—A WAPITI DUEL	56
VII.—THE POLAR CIRCLE	69
VIII.—THE GREAT BEAR LAKE	81
IX.—A STORM ON THE LAKE	92
X.—RETROSPECTIVE	105
XI.—FOLLOWING THE COAST-LINE	115
XII.—THE MIDNIGHT SUN	125
XIII.—FORT HOPE	135

CHAPTER	PAGE
XIV.--EXCURSIONS	145
XV.--FIFTEEN MILES FROM CAPE BATHURST .	156
XVI.--TWO SHOTS	165
XVII.--THE APPROACH OF WINTER . . .	176
XVIII.--THE POLAR NIGHT	186
XIX.--VISITORS	198
XX.--THE MERCURY FREEZES	210
XXI.--THE GREAT POLAR BEARS	218
XXII.--FIVE MONTHS LONGER	231
XXIII.--THE ECLIPSE OF THE 18TH JULY, 1860 .	243

THE FUR COUNTRY.

CHAPTER I.

A SOIRÉE AT FORT RELIANCE.

ON the 17th March, 1859, Captain Craventy gave a party at Fort Reliance.

This must not be understood as a grand ball, or a magnificent gala or "rout," or even as a concert. Captain Craventy's reception was much more commonplace, but nevertheless he had done all in his power to make it a success.

Under the direction of Corporal Joliffe, the great lower room had been completely transformed. No doubt the wooden walls of the house were still visible, but four English ensigns, draped at each corner, and some arms borrowed from the fort, served to hide the nakedness of the reception-room. The long blackened beams in the ceiling were relieved by two lamps provided with their reflectors, which were suspended like chandeliers, and served to illumine the somewhat misty atmosphere. The windows were narrow, some of them being mere

loopholes, and the panes were quite encrusted with frost, defying the most curious eyes to penetrate it ; but they were tastefully draped with red cotton bunting in a way that challenged the admiration of all the guests. The floor, which was composed of heavy beams laid side by side, had been swept for the occasion by Corporal Joliffe. No chairs, sofas, or other furniture interfered with the free movement of the guests. Some wooden benches jutting from the walls, large blocks roughly hewn with the axe, two tables with crudely-made legs, composed the whole furniture of the room. But the partition-wall, in which was a narrow doorway leading to the next room, was ornamented in a really picturesque and elegant manner.

Furs, the like of which could not be found in Regent Street, or in the Nevskoi Perspective, were hung around with admirable taste. It appeared as if all the fauna of the Arctic Regions were here represented by their skins. The eye of the visitor passed from wolfs' skins, grizzly bears, polar bears, otters, wolverenes, beavers, musk-rats, ermines, and silver foxes. Above this arrangement was a device artistically picked out with cardboard ; it was the motto of the Hudson's Bay Company :

"PROPELLO CUTEM."

"Really, Joliffe," said Captain Craventy to his subordinate, "you have excelled yourself this evening."

"I think so, sir; I hope so," replied the Corporal; "but, to give everyone their due, I must confess that Mrs. Joliffe deserves great credit, for she has assisted me in everything."

"She is a clever woman, Corporal."

"There is not her equal in the world, sir."

In the centre of the room was an immense stove, half brick half earthenware, from which a great pipe ascended through the roof, and from which volumes of thick smoke poured forth. This stove roared and gleamed under the hands of a stoker, a soldier specially told off for the duty, who piled on the coals most liberally. Sometimes the back-draught would send a volume of smoke into the room, while the flames shot forth from the stove, and the whole place was enveloped in clouds of smoke which dimmed the brightness of the lamps considerably. But this trifling inconvenience did not affect the guests at Fort Reliance. The stove warmed them, and so cold was the weather that they did not think they paid too dearly for the warmth.

Had they listened they would have heard the storm raging outside. The snow fell thickly, and, almost ice already, increased the frost upon the window-panes. The bitter blast made its way through the crannies of the doors and windows, and occasionally asserted itself above other sounds. Then a dead silence followed, and it seemed as if nature were taking breath, when suddenly the hurricane roared with redoubled fury. One could

feel the house shake; the beams creaked and groaned in every direction; a stranger would have thought that the tempest must assuredly destroy the fort altogether, and carry away the planks of which it was composed.

But Captain Craveny's guests did not trouble themselves about the storm, and even had they been outside they would not have been any more alarmed than if they had been Mother Carey's chickens in a gale at sea.

Nevertheless, we must say something about these guests. There were about a hundred people of both sexes present, only two of whom—and they were women—did not belong to the usual circle of society at the fort, which was composed of Captain Craveny; his subaltern, Jasper Hobson; Sergeant Long; Corporal Joliffe; and sixty soldiers or *employés* of the Company. Some of these were married men—for instance, Corporal Joliffe, who had wed a clever bright Canadian; a Scotchman and his Scotch wife named MacNab; John Rae, who had married a native Indian;—but all of them, without distinction of rank, were entertained by Captain Craveny that evening.

It may as well be stated that it was not only the Company's staff that supplied the guests, for all the neighbouring forts within a circuit of a hundred miles had accepted the invitation. Several had come from Fort Providence, or Fort Resolution on the Slave Lake, and even from Fort Chippeway and Fort Liard, still more to the south. Such a rare and unexpected treat as this

was eagerly welcomed by these people, half exiled as they were in these inhospitable regions.

Even a few Indian chiefs had accepted the invitation. These aborigines were in constant communication with the factories, and furnished the greatest number of the furs in which the Company dealt. These Indians were chiefly of the Chippeway tribe, strong, vigorous men, clothed in furs and skins; their faces, painted half black and half red, reminded one something of the representatives of Mephistopheles in European dramas; their heads were adorned with eagles feathers, spread out like a fan, which shook with every movement of their black hair. These chiefs had not brought their wives with them, for the unhappy squaws are looked upon as little better than slaves.

Of such was the company to whom the Captain was doing the honours of the fort. There was no dancing because there was no music, but the refreshment counter made up for all deficiencies. An immense pyramidal pudding made by Mrs. Joliffe's fair hands rose in the centre of the table. It was made of flour, reindeer fat, and musk beef, and was wanting in eggs, milk, and lemon-peel, as recommended by cookery-books, but what it lacked in this respect it made up by its size. Mrs. Joliffe kept helping it liberally to all comers, but nevertheless it still held out. Besides this enormous pudding there were piles of sandwiches, in which ship-biscuit took the place of bread and butter, and the

European ham or beef was superseded by slices of corned beef. However, notwithstanding the hardness of the biscuit and the toughness of the beef, the sandwiches could not resist the sharp teeth of the Indians. There was plenty to drink in the shape of whisky and gin, not to mention an immense bowl of punch which brought the evening to a close, and of which the Indians talked for weeks afterwards.

Mr. and Mrs. Joliffe were complimented on all sides, and it was pleasant to see how actively, and with what good grace, they waited on everyone. Waited is scarcely the word, they anticipated the wishes of every guest; one had scarcely time to ask before his desires were gratified. To the sandwiches succeeded slices of the inexhaustible pudding, and it was followed by glasses of whisky and gin. But the guests were at length satisfied.

"No more, thank you, Mrs. Joliffe."

"You are really too good, Corporal, but I must ask for breathing-time."

"I assure you, Mrs. Joliffe, I can eat no more."

"I am entirely at your mercy now, Corporal."

"My dear madam, I assure you it is impossible."

Such were some of the replies made to the worthy couple; but as the Corporal and his wife persisted, the guests were obliged to give way, and so they continued to eat and drink. Voices became louder, soldiers and civilians got excited; now they spoke of the chase,

now again of trade. Numerous projects were formed for the coming season; all the animals in the district would not serve now to satisfy these daring hunters. Already bears, foxes, musk-oxen, polecats, etc. etc., had fallen victims to their prowess. Precious furs were already, in imagination, stored in the Company's magazines. This year enormous profits would be realised. And, while the liquor thus freely distributed inflamed the imagination of the Europeans, the Indians, too proud to exhibit admiration, too circumspect to make promises, let their associates ramble on while they themselves imbibed the fire-water in huge doses.

Captain Craventy himself was delighted with the hubbub, and pleased to see these poor people enjoy themselves once again. He was here, there, and everywhere amongst his guests, replying to all questions put to him respecting the fête by saying, "Ask Joliffe, ask Joliffe." So the people went and asked Joliffe, and received most polite answers in reply.

Amongst those attached for service to Fort Reliance we must notice particularly one or two individuals, for it was fated that they should shortly experience some very terrible adventures which no human foresight could have provided against. We must particularly name Lieutenant Hobson, Sergeant Long, Corporal Joliffe and his wife, and the two strange ladies in whose honour the party had been given.

Lieutenant Hobson was about forty years of age,

rather short and thin, and if he was not very muscular he compensated for the want by a strong moral force, which carried him through everything in face of all obstacles. He was a child of the Company. His father, Major Hobson, was a native of Dublin, but for many years previous to his death he and his wife had lived at Fort Assiniboine, where Jasper was born. There, at the foot of the Rocky Mountains, his boyhood and youth were passed. Strictly brought up, young Hobson became a man in self-possession while yet he was scarcely a boy in years. He was not only a hunter, but an intelligent and brave officer. In the engagements which the Company fought in Oregon against their rivals, Jasper distinguished himself greatly, and rapidly rose to the rank of lieutenant. In consequence of his acknowledged merit, he was nominated to command an expedition northwards to explore the Great Bear Lake, and to establish a fort on the farthest limit of the American continent. His departure was fixed to take place at the beginning of April.

If the Lieutenant presented the type of an accomplished officer, Sergeant Long, a man of fifty years of age, with a beard like cocoa-nut fibre, was the embodiment of a soldier. Naturally brave, obedient—never disputing an order, no matter how extraordinary it appeared to him, never arguing when told off for service—he was a machine in uniform, but a perfect machine: one that never wore out. Perhaps Sergeant Long may have been a little

severe with his men, but then he never spared himself. He never tolerated the least infraction of discipline; he punished for the slightest fault, because he never had been punished himself. He commanded because he was obliged to do so, but it gave him no pleasure. In a word he had been born to obey, and his annihilation of self suited his passive nature. This is the sort of stuff of which invincible armies are made. They are but arms worked by one head. This is the only really powerful organisation of force. Two types are known in mythology. Briareus had a hundred arms, the Hydra had a hundred heads, and, of the two, Briareus would have gained the victory if they had engaged each other.

We already know Corporal Joliffe. He was the working-bee of the party, and it was a pleasure to hear him humming. He was more fitted for major-domo than for a soldier, and he himself was aware of it, so he called himself the Corporal of Details, and in these details he would have lost himself hundreds of times but for his wife; so it happened that the Corporal obeyed his wife unconsciously, perhaps, but he nevertheless agreed, with that philosopher Sancho, that a woman's advice is of no great value, but a man must be a fool who does not pay attention to it.

We have already said that the "stranger" element was represented at the party by two ladies, each of whom was about forty years of age. One of them deserved a foremost place amongst celebrated travellers. The rival

of Pfeiffer, of the Tiunés, of the Haumaires, Pauline Barnett had been more than once honourably quoted in the Transactions of the Royal Geographical Society. She had followed the course of the Brahmapootra as far as the mountains of Thibet; she had crossed an unexplored portion of New Holland from Swan River to the Gulf of Carpentaria, and on every occasion displayed the qualities of a great traveller. She was tall, had been a widow for about fifteen years, and her taste for travelling was constantly leading her to explore unknown lands. Her head, encircled with long bands of hair already turning gray, betokened great energy. She was somewhat shortsighted and wore a double eye-glass. Her manner of walking was rather masculine, we must admit, and her whole appearance betokened less of grace than of moral force. She was an Englishwoman, born in Yorkshire, and possessed of some means, which she spent chiefly in travelling. She had now come out to Fort Reliance on a new expedition. Having already crossed the equator, no doubt she now wished to penetrate to the Arctic Circle. Her presence at the fort created quite a sensation. She had come provided with letters from the chairman of the Company to Captain Craventy, requesting him to do all in his power to forward the intentions of this celebrated traveller to reach the Polar Sea. A wonderful enterprise it was to follow in the steps of Hearne, Mackenzie, Rae, and Franklin. What fatigues, trials, and dangers, she would experience in her conflict with

the terrible forces of the Arctic Regions! How would she dare to attempt to penetrate a region where so many other explorers had lost their lives? But Pauline Barnett, member of the Royal Geographical Society, was no ordinary woman.

We may add that this lady was accompanied by an attendant named Madge, who was something more than a servant—a devoted, courageous friend, who lived but for her mistress. Madge was a Scotchwoman of the old type, whom a Caleb might have married without loss of position. She was some years older than her mistress, perhaps five years her senior, and was tall and strongly-built. They were on the most intimate terms. Pauline looked upon Madge as an elder sister, while Madge treated Pauline as a daughter. In fact, they could not possibly exist without each other.

It was really in honour of Pauline Barnett that Captain Craventy had given the party that evening, for that lady was to join Lieutenant Hobson's expedition to the north. It was in honour of Mrs. Barnett that the room resounded with those hearty cheers.

And if upon that memorable evening the stove consumed a hundredweight of coal, it is not to be wondered at, considering that the thermometer outside showed twenty degrees below zero (Fahrenheit), and that Fort Reliance is situated in 61 deg. 47 min. N. latitude, four degrees from the Polar Circle.

CHAPTER II.

THE HUDSON'S BAY FUR COMPANY.

"WHAT do you think of your Lieutenant, Captain Craventy?"

"I think he is an officer who will go as far as he can, Mrs. Barnett."

"What do you mean by that? Do you mean that he will go beyond the 24th parallel?"

Captain Craventy could not help smiling at Mrs. Pauline Barnett's question. They were talking near the stove, while the guests were moving about between the refreshment-tables.

"Madam," replied the Captain, "Jasper Hobson will do all that a man can do. The Company have charged him to explore their northern positions and to establish a post as nearly as possible to the American continent—and he will establish it."

"That is a tremendous responsibility for him," said the lady.

"No doubt it is; but Jasper has never yet been

frightened by any duty, no matter how severe it may have been."

"I can quite believe it," replied Mrs. Barnett, "and we shall now put him to the proof. But what interest can the Company have in making a fort on the shore of the Arctic Ocean?"

"A great interest, madam," replied the Captain; "I may say a very great interest, indeed. Before long, I expect, Russia will cede her American possessions to the United States. When this arrangement shall have been concluded, the Company will find their traffic with the Pacific very difficult, unless the North-West Passage be practicable. This will be decided by new attempts, for the Admiralty are going to send out an expedition to coast along the American continent, from Behring Straits to Coronation Gulf, on the eastern side of which the new fort will be established. Now, if this enterprise be successful, that point will become an important factory in which all the fur trade of the North will be centred; and while the transport of the skins is now very costly, and takes a considerable time to traverse the Indian territory, then the ships will be able to take them direct to the Pacific Ocean in a few days."

"That will be a very beneficial arrangement," replied Mrs. Barnett, "if the North-West Passage can be utilised; but you hinted just now at some other motive, I thought."

"The other interest," replied the Captain, "is, I may

say one of vital importance to the Company, whose origin I must beg your permission to explain. You will then be able to understand why this association, formerly so flourishing, is now in danger of extinction."

The Captain then proceeded to give Mrs. Barnett the following sketch of the celebrated Company.

We know that from the earliest times men clothed themselves with the skins of animals; the trade in furs, therefore, is of very ancient origin. The luxury in dress by degrees became so great that the Sumptuary Laws were at length enacted, which were particularly directed against furs.

In 1553, Russia founded several establishments in the northern steppes, and English companies quickly followed her example. It was through the Samoyeds that the trade in sable, ermine, and beaver was continued; but during Elizabeth's reign, the use of furs was prohibited to such an extent that this branch of commerce became paralysed.

On the 2nd May, 1670, the Company was accorded the privilege of trading in skins in Hudson's Bay. This society included a number of shareholders of high rank, such as the Duke of York, Lord Albemarle, and Lord Shaftesbury. The capital was then only £8,420. It had several rivals in private companies, particularly in French agents established in Canada, who made very daring, but profitable, expeditions into the interior. These intrepid hunters, known as trappers, compromised the Company

very seriously ; but the conquest of Canada altered the position of affairs. Three years after the capture of Quebec in 1766, the fur trade received a new impetus. The English traders became familiarised with the difficulties of the traffic ; they learned the customs of the country, the habits of the Indians, and their mode of exchange ; but still the Company's profits were *nil*. About 1784, however, some Montreal merchants associated themselves and founded the powerful North-West Company, which soon collected all the offshoots of the trade. In 1798 the business of this company had reached the enormous figure of £120,000 sterling, and the Hudson's Bay Company was once more shaken to its foundation.

We must confess that this North-West Company stuck at nothing where their interests were at stake. They imposed upon their own servants, they speculated on the misery of the Indians, whom they pillaged after they had made them intoxicated, thereby setting at defiance the Acts of Parliament which forbade the sale of alcoholic liquors on Indian territory ; and by these means the agents of the North-West Country realised enormous profits, notwithstanding the competition of American and Russian societies, which founded amongst others the American Fur Company, an association created in 1809, with a capital of 1,000,000 dollars, and which trafficked to the west of the Rocky Mountains.

But of all these societies the Hudson's Bay Company

was the most menaced when, in 1821, it absorbed its former rival, the North-West Company, and the amalgamation was known as the Hudson's Bay Fur Company.

At present this important association has but one rival, namely, the American Fur Company of St. Louis. The former possesses numerous establishments dispersed through a territory which extends over 3,700,000 square miles. The principal factories are situated on James Bay; at the mouth of the River Severn; in the south towards the frontiers of Upper Canada; on the Lakes Athapescow, Winnipeg, Superior, Methye, Buffalo; and near the rivers Colombia, Mackenzie, Saskatchewan, Assiniboine, etc. Fort York, which commands the course of the Nelson flowing into Hudson's Bay, is the headquarters of the country where the principal fur dépôt is established.

In 1842, the Company leased all the Russian establishments in North America at a rent of £40,000 per annum, so it is now working on its own account the immense tracts included between the Mississippi and the Pacific Ocean. It has despatched travellers in all directions. For instance, Hearn, in 1770, towards the Polar Sea, to the discovery of the Copper Mine River; Franklin, between 1819 and 1822 explored 5,550 miles of the American coast; Mackenzie, who, after the discovery of the river which bears his name, reached the shores of the Pacific at 52 deg. 24 min. N. In 1833-34, the Company forwarded to Europe a quantity of skins and furs, the

THE HUDSON'S BAY FUR COMPANY. 21

annexed details of which will give a very good idea of its extensive trade :

Beavers	1,074
Young beavers, etc.	92,288
Musk-rats	694,092
Badgers	1,069
Bears	7,451
Ermines	491
Martens	5,296
Foxes	9,937
Lynxes	14,255
Sables	64,490
Polecats	25,100
Otters	22,303
Racoons	713
Swans	7,918
Wolves	8,484
Wolverenes	1,571

Such a trade as this ought to bring in a large profit to the Company, but unfortunately the amounts had not been maintained, and for the last twenty years the trade had been decreasing.

The cause of this decline was explained by Captain Craveny to Mrs. Barnett, as follows :

"Up to the year 1837," he said, "one may say that the Company's business was flourishing. In that year, the number of skins exported amounted to 2,350,000; but since that it has been continually falling off, and the number is now reduced to one half."

"But to what cause do you attribute this decrease?" asked Mrs. Barnett.

"To the depopulation that the perseverance, and, I may add, the want of foresight, of the hunters has caused in the hunting-grounds. They killed and trapped without mercy. These massacres were made indiscriminately; the young ones and even females with young were not spared; the consequence is an inevitable scarceness in fur-producing animals. The otter has almost completely disappeared, and is only found now in the islands of the North Pacific. The beavers have taken refuge, in small detachments, on the banks of the most distant rivers; and so with other animals which have been obliged to flee before the invasion of trappers. The traps, which were formerly crowded with victims, are now empty; the price of skins is increasing, just when the demand for fur is becoming greater. So hunters are disgusted; and now only the bravest and most indefatigable advance to the confines of the American continent."

"I now understand," said Mrs. Barnett, "the importance which the Company attaches to the formation of a factory on the borders of the Arctic Ocean, as the animals have taken refuge so far north."

"Yes," replied the Captain, "and besides, the Company is obliged to push forward the centre of its operations in a more northerly direction, for two years

ago an English Act of Parliament considerably reduced its possessions."

"And what was the object of this reduction?" asked the lady.

"A political question of great importance which deeply affected the United States and Great Britain. In fact the mission of the Company was not exactly civilisation; on the contrary, in its own interests the Company is obliged to keep its hunting-ground in as wild a state as possible. Every attempt at cultivation which would drive the animals still farther away was steadily resisted. Its monopoly was consequently opposed to all agricultural progress. Any questions not actually referring to the Company were pitilessly put aside; and this absolute form of Government, in some respects immoral, provoked the measures taken by Parliament; and in 1857 a commission, nominated by the Secretary of State for the Colonies, decided that all land capable of cultivation should be annexed to Canada—such tracts, for instance, as the Red River territory, the districts of the Saskatchewan—and only left the portion of the Company's territory which could not be cultivated.

"The following year the Company lost the west slope of the Rocky Mountains which it derived direct from the Colonial Office, and was thus reduced to the jurisdiction of Hudson's Bay agents; and that is the reason why the Company, before giving up its fur traffic,

has determined to explore the as yet little known northern districts, and to find a north-west passage to the Pacific."

Mrs. Barnett could now understand the ulterior views of this celebrated Company. She was about to make one of a party to establish a new fort on the borders of the Polar Sea. Captain Craventy had put her *au courant* with the circumstances, and perhaps—for he was fond of talking—would have given her further details if an incident had not cut short his explanation.

Just then Corporal Joliffe came to announce that, with Mrs. Joliffe's assistance, he was about to mix a bowl of punch. This news was received with all the honour it deserved, and was loudly cheered. The punch-bowl, or rather basin, was filled with the precious spirit—it held no less than ten pints of rum; some lump-sugar was piled at the bottom by the fair hands of Mrs. Joliffe herself; on the top floated some slices of lemon already somewhat dry with age. Nothing was now requisite but to set it on fire, and the Corporal, with a lighted match in his hand, was awaiting the Captain's orders as if he were about to fire a mine.

"Go ahead, Joliffe," said Captain Craventy.

The light was applied, and the punch was burning in a moment amidst the applause of the guests.

Ten minutes afterwards the brimming glasses were passed from hand to hand in the crowd, and always found takers, like speculators on 'Change.

"Three cheers for Mrs. Barnett ! One cheer more for the Captain !"

In the midst of this festivity cries were heard from the outside, and silence at once fell upon the guests.

"Sergeant Long," said the Captain, "go and see what is the matter."

And the Sergeant, leaving his glass unfinished, left the room in obedience to the order.

CHAPTER III.

THAWING A PHILOSOPHER.

WHEN Sergeant Long reached the narrow passage leading to the outer door of the fort, the cries became much more audible; they were accompanied now by violent knocking at the postern-gate, which opened into the courtyard, surrounded by a palisade. The Sergeant thrust the door open. The ground was at least a foot deep in snow; he sank almost up to his knees in the white carpet, and, half blinded by the sleet, and chilled to the bone by the terrible cold, he crossed the court diagonally towards the postern-gate.

"Who the devil can be coming here such weather as this?" he muttered, as he removed the heavy bar from the gate. "None but Esquimaux would venture out at such a time."

"Open the door, open the door!" cried the person without.

"I *am* opening it," replied the Sergeant, who really appeared to be doing it a dozen times over.

At length the door was pulled back, and then the

Sergeant was almost upset in the snow by a sledge drawn by six dogs, which rushed past him like a flash of lightning. The Sergeant was very nearly crushed by the gate, but he picked himself up without a murmur, shut the door, and returned to the house at his usual rate—that is to say, at about seventy-five paces a minute.

But Captain Craventy, Lieutenant Hobson, and Corporal Joliffe were already at the door, notwithstanding the cold, and were gazing at the sledge, which, covered with snow, had drawn up before the house.

A man, completely wrapped up in furs, immediately descended from the sledge.

“Is this Fort Reliance?” he asked.

“It is,” replied the Captain.

“Is Captain Craventy here?”

“I am he; who are you?”

“A courier of the Company.”

“Are you alone?”

“No, I have a traveller with me.”

“A traveller! What has he come here for?”

“He has come to see the moon.”

At this reply, Captain Craventy began to think the man was a lunatic, which under the circumstances was not an extravagant supposition; but he had no time to go into the matter—the courier was dragging a helpless mass from the sledge. This looked like a bag covered with snow, and he was about to carry it into the house, when the Captain said:

"What have you got in that bag?"

"That is my traveller," replied the courier.

"Who is he?"

"Mr. Thomas Black, the astronomer."

"But he is frozen!"

"Well then, he must be thawed, that's all!"

So Thomas Black was carried into the dwelling-house by the Sergeant, the Corporal, and the courier, and was placed in a room on the first-floor, the temperature of which, thanks to a gleaming stove, was very pleasant. The inanimate philosopher was laid upon a bed. The Captain seized his hand.

It was literally frozen. The robes and mantles were unrolled from the body, and the form of a man about fifty years of age was revealed. He was short and stout, with grayish hair; his beard was untrimmed, his eyes were shut, and his mouth was as tightly closed as if his lips were glued together. He did not breathe, or if he did, the respiration was so slight that it would not have dimmed a mirror.

Joliffe undressed him, and turning him backwards and forwards, said:

"Now, sir, if you please, when do you intend to come to yourself?"

The new-comer, however, showed no signs of returning animation, and the Corporal could only think of one way to restore his normal heat, and that was by giving him a glass of the blazing punch.

But very fortunately for Thomas Black, the Lieutenant was seized with another idea.

"Snow!" he exclaimed. "Sergeant Long, bring me several handfuls of snow."

There was no want of snow in the court-yard of Fort Reliance.

While the Sergeant went to fetch it, Joliffe undressed the astronomer. The body of the unhappy man was covered with frost-bites, and there was no time to lose if they wished to restore circulation to the affected parts. This was what Jasper Hobson hoped to do by a vigorous application of snow. We know that this is the remedy usually employed in very cold countries to re-establish suspended circulation.

When Sergeant Long returned, Joliffe and he sham-pooed the new-comer in a manner he never had before experienced. It was not a gentle rubbing, but a most severe application : more like the rasping of a currycomb than the rubbing of human fingers.

During the operation the loquacious Corporal continued to apostrophise the still senseless traveller :

"Now, sir, come ; what do you mean by getting frozen in this manner ? Why will you be so obstinate ?"

It is very likely that Thomas Black had made up his mind to be obstinate, for quite half an hour elapsed before he gave any signs of returning animation. Indeed, the rubbers had begun to despair, and had just ceased their efforts, when the poor man sighed heavily.

"He is alive ! he is alive !" exclaimed Jasper Hobson.

And now, having warmed the exterior of his body, they thought that the interior should not be neglected, so Corporal Joliffe procured some punch. The traveller felt much revived after this ; the blood returned to his cheek, expression came to his eyes and words to his lips ; so Captain Craventy at last began to hope that Thomas Black was about to tell him how it came to pass that he had reached the fort in such a condition.

The Astronomer, now well wrapped up in blankets, raised himself on his elbow, and in a weak voice said :

"Is this Fort Reliance?"

"It is," replied the Captain.

"Captain Craventy?"

"I am he," replied the Captain, "and glad to welcome you. But may I ask what brings you to Fort Reliance?"

"To see the moon," replied the courier, who was evidently satisfied with his answer, as he made it now for the second time.

Besides, the reply appeared satisfactory to Thomas Black, who made a sign in the affirmative, and then he resumed :

"Is Lieutenant Hobson here?"

"I am here," replied the Lieutenant.

"You have not yet started, then?"

"Not yet," replied the Lieutenant.

"Well then," replied Thomas Black, "I have nothing to do but to thank you for your kindness and to go to sleep till to-morrow morning."

The Captain and his companions then retired, leaving the new-comer to go to sleep. Half an hour afterwards the party broke up, and the guests went home to their respective rooms which were either in the fort or in the houses under its protection.

Next day Thomas Black was better; his vigorous constitution had resisted a cold. Anyone else would probably have been frozen to death, but Black was not like other people.

Now let us see who this astronomer was, and whence he came, and why he had undertaken to cross the Company's territory at such a season of the year. What did the courier mean when he said that the traveller had come to see the moon? Could he not see the moon anywhere? And was it necessary that he should come to these hyperborean regions?

These were the questions which puzzled Captain Craventy; but on the following day, after an hour's conversation with his guest, he learnt all.

Thomas Black was an astronomer, attached to the Greenwich Observatory, so ably directed by Professor Airy. More an observer than a theorist, Thomas Black had devoted himself to his profession, and for twenty years had rendered great service to uranographical

science. In private life he was nobody; he only lived for astronomy, and passed his time in the sky, so to speak, not on the earth: a descendant of La Fontaine's savant who went down into a well. He could talk of nothing but of stars and constellations. He ought to have lived in a telescope. As an observer he had no rival in the world; he was indefatigable, and was capable of watching for whole months together for the appearance of a cosmical phenomenon. His speciality was meteors and falling stars, and his discoveries in this branch of meteorology deserved mention. Besides, when minute observations were desirable or precise measurements were expected, Thomas Black was selected, for his clearness of vision was very remarkable. The facility of observation is not given to everybody, and it will not be thought astonishing that the Greenwich astronomer had been chosen for the duty which we shall now proceed to describe.

We are aware that during a total eclipse of the sun, the moon is surrounded by a luminous corona. Now, what is the origin of this crown? Is it a real object or only the effect of the sun's rays? This is a question which scientific research has not been able to solve.

As long ago as 1706, astronomers had scientifically described this luminous crown—Lonville and Halley, during the eclipse of 1715, Maraldi in 1724, Antonio de Aloa in 1778. Nowditch and Terrer, in 1806, observed

this corona minutely, but their conclusions were so contradictory that no definite theory could be promulgated. Apropos of the total eclipse of 1842, savants of all nations—Airy, Arago, Peytal, Laugier, Mauris, Otto Struve, Petit Bailly, etc.—endeavoured to find a solution of the phenomenon; but however close the observations were, “the difference,” said Arago, “which we find between observations made of this same eclipse in different places have involved the question in such obscurity that it is not possible to arrive at any definite conclusion as to the cause of the phenomenon.”

Since that time other total eclipses have been studied, but with no new results.

Nevertheless this is a very important question, and ought to be solved at any cost; and now a new occasion presented itself. Another total eclipse of the sun—that is, total in the extreme North of America, Spain, and Africa—was to take place on the 18th July, 1860. It had been arranged amongst astronomers of the various nationalities, that observations were to be made simultaneously at various places. Thomas Black had been chosen to observe the eclipse in North America. He found himself therefore in much the same position as other English astronomers who had gone to Norway and Sweden on the occasion of the eclipse in 1851.

It may readily be imagined that Thomas Black was only too glad to seize the opportunity afforded him to study the luminous corona. He was also commissioned

to find out as far as possible the nature of the ruddy protuberances which appear at divers points on the contour of the terrestrial satellite. If the astronomer succeeded in establishing the question, he would be entitled to the congratulations of the scientific world.

Thomas Black therefore prepared to set out, and obtained letters of recommendation to the principal officers of the Hudson's Bay Company. Now an expedition was about to be sent by the Company to open a new factory in the farthest northern districts, and this was an opportunity not to be lost. So our astronomer set out, crossed the Atlantic, and from New York traversed the Red River settlement, went from fort to fort, by rapid sledge-travelling, under the guidance of a courier belonging to the Company, and notwithstanding the winter and all the dangers of travelling in arctic regions, he arrived at Fort Reliance on the 17th March, as already narrated.

Such was the explanation given by the astronomer to Captain Craventy, who immediately put himself at the disposal of Thomas Black.

"But, Mr. Black," he said, "how is it you have been in such a hurry to arrive since the eclipse will not take place till next year?"

"Well, Captain," replied the astronomer, "the fact is I heard that the Company was about to send out an expedition along the American coast as far as the 70th parallel, and I did not wish to lose the chance of accompanying it."

"Mr. Black," replied the Captain, "if my Lieutenant had gone I should have felt it my duty to have accompanied you myself to the shore of the Polar Sea."

And then the Captain again assured the astronomer that he might count upon him for assistance, and once more bade him welcome to Fort Reliance.

CHAPTER IV.

A FACTORY.

THE Slave Lake, one of the largest which one encounters in the region beyond the 61st parallel, is 250 miles long by 50 wide, and is situated at 61 deg. 25 min. N. and 114 deg. W. The whole country surrounding it slopes down to a common centre, a long depression which is occupied by the lake.

The position of the lake, in countries full of game, attracted the attention of the Company at a very early period. A number of rivers flow into it or take their rise from it, such as the Mackenzie, the Foin, and the Athabasca, etc. Several and important forts had been constructed on these rivers—Fort Providence on the north, Fort Resolution on the south. Fort Reliance occupies the extreme north-east of the lake, and is not more than 300 miles from the estuary of the Chesterfield, formed by the waters of Hudson's Bay.

The Slave Lake is covered with small islands, 200 or 300 feet high, composed of granite and gneiss. On the northern shore are thick woods, which shut

out the arid and frozen continent, which has not unnaturally received the name of the Cursed Land. On the other hand the southern shores, which are chiefly calcareous, are extremely flat. There are the limits of the great ruminants, the buffaloes or bisons of the polar district, the flesh of which almost exclusively supplies the food of the Canadian and native hunters.

The trees on the northern shore are grouped into magnificent forests, and one need not be astonished at meeting such fine vegetation in such a remote latitude, for, as a matter of fact, the Slave Lake is scarcely more north than parts of Norway and Sweden, say Stockholm or Christiania. Only we must remember that the isothermal lines or belts of heat, equally distributed, do not follow the terrestrial parallels, and therefore, though in the same latitude, America is incomparably colder than Europe. In April the streets of New York are covered with snow, nevertheless New York is much the same parallel as the Azores ; so the nature of a continent, its situation with respect to the ocean, even the conformation of its soil, all influence its climatic conditions.

Fort Reliance, in the summer, was surrounded by masses of verdure, which was most refreshing after the vigorous winter. There was no want of wood in the forest, which consisted almost exclusively of poplars, pines, and birch-trees. On the islands were magnificent willows. Game abounded in the brushwood, and even

in the bad season was plentiful. More to the southward were bisons, elk, and Canadian porcupines, the flesh of which is excellent. The lake abounds with fish ; the trout run to an enormous size, the weight often exceeding sixty pounds ; pike, a sort of char called blue-fish by the English, and countless legions of tittamegs swarmed in the lake ; so there was no question of food for the inhabitants of Fort Reliance. They were already provided by nature, and being likewise clothed with the skins of foxes, bears, martens, and other animals, they were enabled to bear the rigour of the climate.

The fort, properly so called, consisted of a wooden house, with a ground-floor, and a storey above which was used by the commandant and his officers. Around the house were situated the barracks, the Company's storehouses, and the business premises, in which exchanges were effected. A small chapel (which only wanted a clergyman) and a powder magazine completed the surroundings. The whole was enclosed by a paling twenty feet high, in the form of an immense parallelogram, which sustained four little bastions, one at each corner. Thus the fort was protected from a surprise, and the precautions taken were very necessary, at a time when the Indians, instead of being the purveyors of the Company, fought for their own independence ; and the precaution was equally desirable against the agents and soldiers of rival associations, who formerly disputed the possession of this rich fur country.

The Hudson's Bay Company included about a thousand men in its employment, and exercised supreme authority, even to the punishment by death. The superintendents of the factories at their pleasure regulated salaries and fixed the value of provisions and skins, and, thanks to this system of absolute power, it was not unusual for them to realise profits of over 300 per cent.

We shall see from the following table, which is extracted from the "Voyage of Captain Robert Lade," on what terms the exchange with Indians was worked, these Indians having since become the best hunters of the Company. The skin of a beaver was then the unit of currency. The Indians paid :

For a gun	10 skins.
Half-a-pound of powder	1 skin.
Four pounds of shot	1 „
A hatchet	1 „
Six knives	1 „
One pound of glass beads	1 „
A laced coat	6 skins.
A coat not laced	5 „
One laced dress (female)	6 „
One pound of tobacco	1 skin.
A keg of powder	1 „
A comb and looking-glass	2 skins.

But some years afterwards beaver skins became so scarce that the unit of currency was altered. It is now the bison robe which has taken its place. Whenever an Indian comes to a fort, the agents give him as many

pieces of stick as he brings skins, and he exchanges these pieces of wood, on the premises, for manufactured articles. On this system the Company, who fix the value of the object which they buy and sell, cannot fail to realise immense profits.

Such were the customs established at the various factories, and consequently at Fort Reliance. Mrs. Barnett was thus able to study them during her stay, which was prolonged till the 16th April. She and Lieutenant Hobson had long conversations together, planning their route, and both decided not to give way to any obstacle ; but Thomas Black never spoke, except on his own special mission. The question of the luminous corona and the red protuberance of the moon completely absorbed him. They felt that he had staked his life on the solution of the problem, and at length he made Mrs. Barnett as enthusiastic as himself. What a pity it was that they could not cross the Polar Circle, and that the 18th July, 1860, was so distant, particularly so to the impatient astronomer from Greenwich.

The preparations for their departure could not be commenced till the middle of March, and they occupied a month in completion. It was in fact a very heavy responsibility to organise such an undertaking. Everything must be carried — food, clothing, tools, arms, ammunition, and all.

The expedition commanded by Lieutenant Hobson was composed of one officer, two non-commissioned

officers, and ten privates, three of whom were married and brought their wives with them. The following is the list of men selected by Captain Craventy :

1. Lieutenant Jasper Hobson.	10. Private MacNab.
2. Sergeant Long.	11. " Sabine.
3. Corporal Joliffe.	12. " Hope.
4. Private Peterson.	13. " Kellet.
5. " Belcher.	14. Mrs. Rae.
6. " Rae.	15. " Joliffe.
7. " Marbre.	16. " MacNab.
8. " Garry.	17. " Barnett.
9. " Pond.	18. Madge.
	19. Thomas Black.

In all, nineteen people, who had to be transported several hundreds of miles across a desert and almost unknown country.

In anticipation of this expedition, the agents of the Company had collected at Fort Reliance all the necessary material. A dozen sledges, with their trains of dogs, had been prepared. These very primitive vehicles consisted of a number of light planks united by transverse beams ; a runner, formed of a piece of wood turned up at the end, was fastened underneath, which enabled the sledge to cut through the snow without sinking into it. Six dogs, harnessed in couples, drew the sledge ; they were very intelligent and very swift steeds, and, under the influence of the driver's whip, could make their fifteen miles an hour.

The wardrobe of the travellers consisted of reindeer skins doubly lined with thick fur. They all wore woollen vests to protect them from the frequent changes of temperature. Every one of the party, whether male or female, wore high boots of sealskin, which the natives excelled in making. These boots are absolutely water-proof, and adapt themselves readily to the feet. To these they could attach pine-wood snow-shoes, three or four feet long, by means of which they could traverse the softest snow and pass over ice like a skater. Fur caps and belts of deerskin completed the accoutrement.

Lieutenant Hobson had provided a sufficient armament—regulation muskets, supplied by the Company, pistols and sabres. They also carried hatchets, saws, adzes, and other tools, and everything necessary to establish a factory; amongst other things, a stove, a smelting-furnace, two air-pumps for ventilation, and a hallett-boat—a sort of india-rubber canoe, which they could inflate when required for use.

For provisions they could count upon the hunters with the detachment. Some of the soldiers were first-rate trappers, and there was no want of reindeer in the polar regions. Whole tribes of Indians or Esquimaux can obtain no other food than this, which is both abundant and palatable. Nevertheless, as delays and difficulties were to be expected, the party had laid in a stock of provisions, such as the flesh of the deer, the bison, and the elk, corned beef, and pemmican—an

Indian preparation, which contains great nourishment in a very small compass. It requires no cooking.

For liquors, Lieutenant Hobson had provided several casks of rum and whisky ; but he had made up his mind to economise these as much as possible, for in cold latitudes alcohol is very injurious to health. But the Company had also placed at his disposal a portable medicine-chest, which contained a quantity of limejuice, with lemons and other remedies indispensable to combat scorbutic affections, which are so terrible in those regions. All the men had been most carefully selected ; none were too fat nor too thin, and all were acclimatised, and could therefore more easily support the fatigue of such an expedition. Besides this, they were all courageous fellows, and to a man were volunteers ; they would be allowed double pay during their absence, should they succeed in establishing the settlement beyond the 70th parallel.

A special sledge had been provided for Mrs. Barnett and her faithful attendant Madge. The former did not wish to be treated differently from the other members of the expedition ; but Captain Craveny insisted on her being made more comfortable, and as in this he was only carrying out the wishes of the Company, she yielded.

Thomas Black took the same conveyance which had brought him to Fort Reliance. His astronomical instruments, which were very few—a telescope for his selenographic observations, a sextant to find the latitude, a chronometer to ascertain the longitude, a few maps and

a couple of books—that was all he stowed in his sledge besides his slender baggage, and he relied upon his faithful dogs to leave nothing behind him *en route*.

Of course the subsistence of the steeds had not been forgotten. There were in all seventy dogs—quite a herd to provide for—and the hunters were obliged to look after them. These intelligent and vigorous animals (the dogs) had been bought from the Chippeway Indians, who knew very well how to train them.

The organisation of the troop was most skilfully managed; Lieutenant Hobson had been most zealous in every particular. Proud of his mission and passionately fond of his work, he neglected nothing which could in any way tend to success. Corporal Joliffe, always ready for anything, exerted himself tremendously without corresponding results, but the presence of his wife made up for everything. Mrs. Barnett had taken a great fancy to the lively *Canadienne*.

It is scarcely necessary to say that Captain Craventy had forgotten nothing which was likely to ensure success. The instructions which he had received from the managers of the Company denoted the importance which they attached to the success of the expedition, and to the establishment of a new factory beyond the 70th parallel. We may, then, rest assured that everything possible had been done, but nature might nevertheless interpose obstacles which could not be overcome by the brave Lieutenant. Who could tell?

CHAPTER V.

FROM FORT RELIANCE TO FORT ENTERPRISE.

FINE weather came at last. The verdant carpet on the hills appeared here and there where the snow had begun to melt; a few swans, bald-headed eagles, and other migratory birds arrived from the south. The trees began to put forth buds, the pools formed here and there by the melting of the snow attracted red-headed ducks, of which there are so many species in North America. The guillemots, puffins, and eider-ducks went still farther north. Shrews hardly bigger than a nut ventured out of their holes and traced curious figures on the ground with their pointed tails. The fresh air was almost intoxicating, and the sun's rays had a most revivifying effect. Nature was waking from her long sleep after the terrible winter nights, and was smiling as she woke. The effect of the return of spring in the arctic regions is perhaps more impressive than in any other portion of the globe.

Nevertheless the thaw was not universal. The thermometer certainly indicated 41 deg. Fahrenheit, but still the nights were frosty and kept the snow hard,

which was favourable for sledging, a circumstance of which Jasper Hobson meant to take advantage

The lake was still frozen hard. The hunters from the fort during the past month had already made long excursions in search of game. Mrs. Barnett was never tired of admiring the skill with which these men used their snow-shoes, for they skimmed along almost as quickly as a horse can gallop ; and the lady, at Captain Craventy's suggestion, practised walking in snow-shoes, and very soon became an adept.

Several bands of Indians had lately arrived at the fort to exchange their spoils for manufactured articles. The season had not been good ; skins were scarce ; marten furs and polecats fetched a good price ; but beavers, otters, lynxes, ermines, and foxes were rare. The Company were therefore very wise in exploring new territory which had hitherto escaped the rapacity of the hunter.

On the morning of the 16th April, Lieutenant Hobson's party were ready to start. They had already determined their route across the known country extending between the Slave and Great Bear Lakes, the latter of which is situated beyond the Polar Circle. Jasper Hobson wished to reach Fort Confidence, established at the northern extremity of this lake. A station at which he was to re-victual was called Fort Enterprise, 200 miles to the north-west, on the borders of Snare Lake. By travelling fifteen miles a day, Jasper Hobson reckoned

on reaching Fort Enterprise at the beginning of May.

Leaving that place the detachment was to take the shortest route to the American coast at Cape Bathurst. It had been arranged that in a year Captain Craveny was to send a convoy to re-victual Cape Bathurst, and that the Lieutenant was to send a detachment to meet the convoy to guide it to the place at which the new fort would then, they hoped, be established. In this way the future of the factory was guaranteed against any untoward fate, and the Lieutenant and his companions—voluntary exiles—would still be enabled to keep up communication with their fellow-creatures.

On the morning of the 16th April the sledges, already harnessed, were only awaiting the travellers at the gate. Captain Craveny, having called together the men of the detachment, addressed them in a few kind words. He recommended them before everything to stand by each other in danger. He told them that obedience to orders was indispensable to the success of the enterprise, as well as self-denial and devotion. Three cheers greeted this speech, and then farewells were rapidly exchanged, and each one took his or her allotted place in the sledge.

Jasper Hobson and Sergeant Long took the lead, then Mrs. Barnett and Madge followed, Madge wielding the long Esquimaux whip very cleverly. Thomas Black and one of the soldiers, and Peterson the Canadian, came

third in rank. The other sledges, containing the soldiers and their wives, came after without particular order. Corporal and Mrs. Joliffe brought up the rear. According to Hobson's orders each driver was obliged to keep as much as possible the place allotted to him, and to maintain his relative distance ; so as not to cause any confusion ; as a collision between the sledges at full speed would probably have had a very disastrous result.

Having left Fort Reliance, Jasper Hobson steered directly north-west. The first thing to do was to cross the large river which connected the Slave Lake with Lake Wolmsley. But this watercourse was frozen hard and could not be distinguished from the snow-covered plains, which spread an unbroken carpet over the country, and the sledges drawn by their clever teams sped rapidly over the hard surface.

The weather was very fine, but still very cold. The sun, very little above the horizon, described a lengthened curve ; its rays, brilliantly reflected upon the snow, gave more light than heat. Fortunately there was no wind, and the cold was more bearable in consequence. Nevertheless the breeze, thanks to the pace with which they went through the air, would have been enough to chill the face of anybody not accustomed to travel in those regions.

"All goes well," said Hobson to the Sergeant, who sat beside him as motionless as if at "attention ;" "we are beginning well, the weather is fine, the temperature

not too cold, our sledges run like express trains, and if this fine weather last we shall get on swimmingly. What is your opinion, Sergeant?"

"I quite agree with you, sir," replied the Sergeant, who never on any account differed from his chief.

"You are as determined as I am, Sergeant, to push on as far north as possible," continued Jasper.

"If you command I will obey," replied the Sergeant; "that is quite enough for me."

"I know that, Sergeant," replied Hobson. "I know I have but to tell you to do a thing and it is done at once. I wish all the men understood as you do the importance of our mission and the necessity to devote themselves body and soul to the interest of the Company. Ah, Sergeant, I am sure if I give you an order impossible to execute——"

"There is no such thing," interrupted the Sergeant.

"What! suppose I ordered you to go to the North Pole?"

"Well, sir, I should go."

"And told you to come back again?" added Hobson, smiling.

"Then I should come back," replied Long simply.

During this colloquy Mrs. Barnett and Madge had also been enabled to exchange a few words, while the somewhat steep ascent retarded the pace of the dogs. These two brave women, well wrapped up in otter skins and white bear furs, looked in astonishment upon the

pale outlines of the glaciers which rose on the horizon. The detachment had already passed the hills which rise upon the northern banks of the Slave Lake, the summits of which were crowned with the grim skeletons of trees. As far as the eye could reach the plain stretched out before them unbroken. Some birds occasionally enlivened the solitude, and amongst them they remarked troops of swans which were passing northwards, the whiteness of their plumage vying with the snow, and they could only be distinguished when they rose above the level of the hills into the gray atmosphere, for when they flew near the ground the keenest vision could not distinguish them from it.

"What a wonderful country this is," said Mrs. Barnett, "and what a difference between these regions and the verdant plains of Australia. You remember, my good Madge, how we suffered from the heat in the Gulf of Carpentaria—you remember that cloudless sky and stifling heat?"

"My dear," replied Madge, "I haven't got your memory. I forget my impressions."

"What!" exclaimed Mrs. Barnett, "have you forgotten the tropical heat of Australia? Have you no recollection of the tortures we endured in the desert, and, short of water, when the sun scorched us to the bone, and when the night even brought us no relief?"

"No, Pauline," replied Madge, as she wrapped herself in her furs. "I do not recollect anything about it. And

how do you expect me to remember our sufferings from heat and thirst at such a time as this, of all others, when we are surrounded with ice, and when I have but to stretch out my arm to pick up a handful of snow? You talk of heat when we are freezing even beneath our furs. You remember the broiling sun when it cannot even melt the little icicles on our lips. No, my dear, don't tell me about the heat, don't tell me that I ever complained of being too hot, I won't believe it."

Mrs. Barnett could not help smiling.

"I suppose, my good Madge, that you are very cold?"

"I am very cold, but I do not dislike this temperature.

On the contrary, the climate appears to me very healthy, and I am certain I shall be quite well in this part of America. It is really a beautiful country!"

"Yes, it is a magnificent country, and we have not yet seen any of the wonders it contains. But wait until we reach the Polar Sea, wait till winter comes with its gigantic icebergs, its storms and tempests, its aurora borealis and magnificent constellations; wait till you have the nights six months long, and then you will understand how infinitely divine are the works of the Creator."

Mrs. Barnett, as she spoke, was evidently carried away by her imagination. In these deserted regions, in that implacable climate, she did not wish to see anything but the most magnificent phenomenon of nature; the traveller's instinct got the better of her reason. In these polar countries she only cared for the moving poetry of the

Sagas, and the songs which the bards sung in the days of Ossian. But Madge, who was more matter of fact, did not hide from herself the dangers or the sufferings to be risked by wintering at a distance of less than thirty degrees from the North Pole.

And indeed the most robust travellers had succumbed to the fatigues and privations, to the moral and physical torture of this terrible climate. It is true that Lieutenant Hobson's mission did not oblige him to press forward to the highest degree of latitude, he was not obliged to reach the pole, or to follow in the traces of Parry, Ross, M'Clure, of Kean or Morton. But as soon as he had crossed the Polar Circle the climate was not very different from that in districts much nearer the Pole. Jasper Hobson did not intend to go higher than the 70th parallel. That was all very well ; but we must not forget that Franklin and his unfortunate companions died from the effects of the cold before they had passed the 68th deg. N. latitude.

Mr. and Mrs. Joliffe in their sledge talked of very different things. Perhaps the Corporal had been drinking too often to the success of the expedition before he started, for, strange as it must appear, he was actually disputing with his little wife. Yes, he contradicted her ; a thing which never occurred under the most extraordinary circumstances.

"No, Mrs. Joliffe," said the Corporal, "you have nothing to fear. It is not more difficult to drive a sledge

than to drive a pony-carriage, and devil take me if I can't drive a team of dogs."

"I don't say that you cannot drive them," replied his wife. "I only ask you to moderate your pace. You see that we are now in the front of the whole caravan, and I hear Lieutenant Hobson calling out to you to go back to your place in the rear."

"Let him call then, Mrs. Joliffe; let him call;" and the Corporal, using his long whip, still further accelerated his pace.

"Take care, Joliffe," cried his wife. "Do not go so fast, we are going down a hill."

"Down hill, Mrs. Joliffe! do you call that down hill? Why it's up hill."

"I tell you we are descending."

"Well, I maintain we are going up. Look how the dogs are pulling."

In any case, no matter who was right or wrong, the dogs were getting wild; the descent was very steep indeed; the sledge flew along at a tremendous pace, and was already far in advance of the detachment. The Corporal and his wife were bumped about every minute; the jolts, arising from the inequality of the snow, became more and more frequent. The occupants of the sledge, first flung to the right, then to the left, knocked against each other and were terribly bruised. But the Corporal would not listen to his wife's advice, or to the shouts of the Lieutenant. The commander, understanding the danger

of the foolish course they were pursuing, pressed on in pursuit. The rest of the caravan followed as rapidly as they could.

But the Corporal got still more reckless, the pace seemed to intoxicate him ; he cried, and gesticulated, and flourished his long whip like an accomplished charioteer.

"A remarkable instrument this whip!" he exclaimed, "and how well the Esquimaux know how to use it!"

"But you are not an Esquimaux," replied his wife, as she tried, but in vain, to arrest the arm of the imprudent driver.

"I have heard it stated," said the Corporal, "that the Esquimaux can hit a dog in any part they please ; and that they can even, with the stiff thong, cut a piece from the ear of one of them, if they please. Now I will just try."

"Oh don't, don't, Joliffe !" screamed the little woman, frightened almost out of her wits.

"Don't you be afraid, Mrs. Joliffe ; don't you be afraid. I know what I am about. It seems to me that that dog on the right is doing wrong ; now I am just going to touch him up."

But evidently the Corporal was not yet enough of an Esquimaux, nor sufficiently familiar with the long whip—the lash of which was four feet longer than the sledge—for it flung itself out with a hiss, and, turning back very quickly, rolled itself round Master Joliffe's own

neck, and sent his fur cap flying into the air. There is no doubt that, but for the thick cap, he would have cut off one of his own ears instead of the dog's.

At this moment the pack leaped at one side, the sledge was upset, and the occupants flung out into the snow. Very fortunately it was so thick that they escaped unhurt; but what a come-down it was for the Corporal, how his wife looked at him, and how severely he got reprimanded by Lieutenant Hobson!

The sledge was put right again; but it was decided that the management of the sledge, equally with that of the household, was in future to be placed in Mrs. Joliffe's hands. The crest-fallen Corporal was obliged to give way, and the journey was immediately resumed.

During the next fifteen days nothing of importance occurred. The weather continued fine; the cold was not too great; and on the 1st May the detachment reached Fort Enterprise.

CHAPTER VI.

A WAPITI DUEL.

THE expedition had made 200 miles since its departure from Fort Reliance. The travellers, favoured by the long twilight, travelled night and day at full speed, and were quite overcome with fatigue when they reached the banks of Lake Snare, close to which Fort Enterprise is erected.

This fort had only been established a few years by the Company, and was in fact nothing more than a provision depôt of little importance. It served principally for the resting-place of the detachments which accompanied the convoys bringing the skins from the Great Bear Lake, which is situated nearly 300 miles to the north-west. The garrison consisted of about a dozen soldiers. The fort was only a wooden house enclosed by palisades, but, little comfortable as it was, Lieutenant Hobson and his party were glad to take refuge there and repose for two days from the fatigues of their journey.

The arctic spring was already diffusing its gentle

influence. The snow was melting by degrees, and the nights were no longer frosty. Some delicate mosses and grasses were cropping up here and there, and some small colourless flowers were peeping from between the stones. These manifestations of re-awakening nature after the long winter night were very refreshing to eyes saddened by the monotony of the snow, and were charmed by the appearance of these few specimens of the arctic flora.

Mrs. Barnett and Jasper Hobson took advantage of the halt to visit the shores of the lake. They were both very enthusiastic students of nature, so they went together across the ice-floe and amongst the rushing cascades which already were created by the rays of the sun. The surface of the lake was still solid, not a fissure indicated the approaching break-up. Some icebergs which had fallen down now dotted the surface of the ice in strange and picturesque forms, the beauty of which was increased by the refraction of the light. They looked almost as if a rainbow had fallen down and the fragments had crossed each other on the ice.

"This is a most beautiful sight, Mr. Hobson," exclaimed Mrs. Barnett. "The prismatic effects are infinitely diversified and changed with our every movement. Does it not seem as if we are looking through an immense kaleidoscope? But perhaps you are already tired of this sight which is so new to me?"

"No," replied the Lieutenant; "although I was born

on this continent and have lived here all my life, I am never weary of contemplating the beauties it presents. But if your enthusiasm is great now, when the sun is shining, that is to say, when the light has more or less modified the aspect of the country, what will you think when you are able to observe these regions in the midst of winter's grandeur? I confess, madam, that I think the sun, which is so precious in temperate regions, rather spoils my arctic continent for me."

"Really, Mr. Hobson," replied Mrs. Barnett, smiling, "I think that the sun is an excellent travelling companion, and I do not think that we ought to grumble at its warmth even in polar regions."

"I am one of these people," replied Hobson, "who think it better to visit Russia in the winter and the Sahara in the summer; you may then see each country under its most characteristic aspect. No, the sun is an orb for warm latitudes and hot countries. At thirty degrees from the pole it is out of place. The sky of this country is the pure cold sky of winter, sparkling with constellations and aurora borealis. It is the land of the night, not of the day, and you have still to enjoy the enchantments and wonders of the long polar night."

"Mr. Hobson, have you ever visited the temperate zones of Europe and America?" asked Mrs. Barnett.

"Yes, and I have admired them, as I think they deserve to be admired, but I have always returned more ardent and enthusiastic to my native land. I am a child

of the frost, and really there is no merit in my braving it. It has no injurious effect upon me, and, like the Esquimaux, I can live for a whole month in a snow hut."

"It is quite pleasant to hear you speak so cheerfully of your dread enemy, the cold. I hope to prove myself worthy of your companionship; even if you brave the polar frost, I trust that we shall endure them together."

"I hope so, indeed, madam, and I trust that all the rest, the soldiers and their wives, will show themselves as resolute as you are. In that case, with Heaven's assistance, we shall do much."

"But you cannot complain as yet," she replied. "We have not had a single accident. The weather has been most favourable, and everything has been propitious."

"No doubt, madam," he replied; "you are quite right; but this very same sun which you admire so much will soon increase our fatigue and put obstacles in our way."

"What do you mean, Mr. Hobson?" said Mrs. Barnett.

"I mean to say that the heat will before long have changed the nature of the country—that the melting ice will no longer present a favourable surface to the sledges. The ground would become rough and rugged, our dogs would be unable to travel fast as hitherto, the rivers and lakes will have begun to melt, and it will be necessary to find fords or to go round them. All

these changes caused by the sun's heat will entail upon us fatigue, delay, and dangers, the least of which will be the breaking of the snow beneath our feet or the fall of avalanches from the icebergs. Yes, that is what we shall have to thank the sun for, every day as he climbs higher up the horizon. Remember this, madam—of the four elements one only is necessary here, namely, the air: that is indispensable. The other three—earth, fire, and water—we can get on very well without. They are even contrary to nature in the polar regions.”

No doubt the Lieutenant was exaggerating. Mrs. Barnett could easily have refuted his arguments, but she liked to hear him express himself so ardently. The Lieutenant was passionately fond of the country, in which fate had cast the lady's life for the present, and his ardour was a guarantee that he would not shrink from any obstacle.

Nevertheless, Jasper Hobson was quite right when he said that the sun had difficulties in store for them. That was evident when, three days later—on the 4th May—they resumed their journey. The thermometer, even at the coldest part of the night, was always above 32 deg. A universal thaw had set in. The snow had begun to melt rapidly, the roughness of the ground caused the sledges to jolt continuously, and as a matter of course the travellers were much shaken. The dogs, in consequence of the bad holding-ground, were obliged

to moderate their pace, and the reins were accordingly once again placed in the unskilful hands of Corporal Joliffe now that there was no danger, for no cries nor any flourishing of the whip could increase the pace of the jaded packs.

Occasionally the travellers lightened the load by getting out and walking. This mode of progression suited the hunters very well, for they were now approaching the best game districts in British America. Mrs. Barnett and her faithful Madge took great interest in the chase, while Thomas Black, on the contrary, declared himself absolutely uninterested in any violent exercise. He had not come to this distant land with the idea of hunting polecats or ermine, but only to observe the moon at the precise moment when her disc should cover the sun; so when the orb of night rose above the horizon, the impatient astronomer could not take his eyes from her. This provoked the Lieutenant, who one day said to him :

"Well, Mr. Black, if by any improbable chance the moon should not come to time on the 18th July, 1860, it will be a bad look-out for you."

"Mr. Hobson," replied the astronomer gravely, "if the moon were to be so wanting in etiquette, I should institute proceedings against her."

The best hunters of the detachment were Marbre and Sabine, who were both past-masters in the art. They were almost unequalled, and the most skilful

Indians could not surpass them in quickness of vision or precision of aim. They were at once trappers and hunters. They were acquainted with all the nets and other artifices for taking sables, otters, wolves, bears, etc. No ruse was unknown to them; they were clever and intelligent; and Captain Craveny had wisely made choice of them for the expedition.

But while on this march, neither of these soldiers had any opportunity to set traps. They could not separate from the detachment more than an hour or two at a time at most, and they were obliged to content themselves with any game that came within shot. Still they were lucky enough to kill one of the great American ruminants, which are rarely met with in such high latitudes.

One day—namely, the 15th May—the two hunters, Lieutenant Hobson and Mrs. Barnett, went some miles towards the east, out of their direct route. Marbre and Sabine had obtained permission to follow up a fresh trail which they had struck, and not only had Hobson given them leave, but he and Mrs. Barnett had made up their minds to accompany them.

The tracks were evidently those of some large deer. there was no mistake on this point. The hunters were positive about it, and were able to name the species to which the animals belonged.

“The presence of these animals in this country seems to surprise you, Mr. Hobson,” said Mrs. Barnett.

"Well, the fact is," he replied, "that it is somewhat unusual to meet this species beyond the 57th deg. N. latitude. We generally find them to the south of the Slave Lake, where they live upon the young shoots of the willow and poplar, as well as on a species of wild rose of which they are very fond."

"I suppose, then, that they, as well as the fur animals, have been obliged to relinquish their more southern haunts, in consequence of the close pursuit of the hunters and trappers?"

"That is the only explanation that we can give of their presence here," replied the Lieutenant. "That is always supposing that my men have not been mistaken in the footprints."

"No, no, sir," replied Sabine. "Marbre and I are not mistaken. These are the tracks of deer which we call the red deer, but the natives know them as *wapiti*."

"That's a fact," added Marbre. "Old trappers like us are not easily deceived; besides, you can hear the peculiar whistling they make."

The party had by this time arrived at the base of a small hill, the slopes of which were almost denuded of snow, and so not difficult to mount. They hastened to the top, while the whistling noise noticed by Marbre became more audible; occasionally cries, which somewhat resembled the braying of an ass, were mingled with the other sound, and proved that the hunters had not been mistaken.

When the Lieutenant and his friends had reached the top of the hill, they gazed across the plain to the eastward. The undulating ground was still white with patches of snow, but the dazzling surface was here and there broken by the young shoots. Some shrubs stretched forth stunted branches, while huge icebergs stood out against the gray sky.

"Look, there are the wapiti!" cried Sabine and Marbre, simultaneously, as they pointed to a group of animals about a quarter of a mile away.

"But what are they about?" asked Mrs. Barnett.

"They are fighting, madam," replied Jasper Hobson.

"They always do so when the heat of the sun inflames them. This is another unfortunate result of the presence of the orb of day."

From the spot on which they stood the party could easily distinguish the movements of the group of wapiti, which were very fine specimens of their species. These animals are known under various names, such as stags with rounded horns, American stags, roebucks, gray elks, and red elks. These graceful animals have slender limbs, their skin is of a somewhat reddish colour, which becomes darker as the season gets warmer. The males can be distinguished from the females by their white horns, which the latter do not possess. The wapiti was once very common in America, and the United States contained a great number, but the clearing of the forests obliged them to take refuge in the more peaceful

districts of Canada. But there they were not allowed to remain in peace ; they were disturbed, and migrated towards Hudson's Bay. In fact, although the wapiti is essentially an animal of the arctic regions, nevertheless, as the Lieutenant had stated, it seldom penetrates beyond 57 deg. N. latitude ; so it may be concluded that these specimens had fled before the Chippeway Indians, who pursue them mercilessly, and had endeavoured to find the security which was denied to them farther south.

Meanwhile the fight went on furiously ; the wapiti had not even perceived the hunters, though it is probable if they had they would not have ceased to struggle. Marbre and Sabine, who knew how blindly they engaged, could have advanced towards them fearlessly and got within range at their leisure, as Lieutenant Hobson actually suggested.

"I beg your pardon, sir," replied Marbre, "but we may spare our powder and ball. The beasts have declared 'war to the knife,' and we shall get there in plenty of time to secure the vanquished."

"Are wapiti valuable animals?" inquired Mrs. Barnett.

"Yes, madam," replied Jasper Hobson ; "their skin, which is less thin than that of the true elk, makes very valuable leather. It is rendered supple by rubbing it with the grease and brains of the animals, and neither damp nor dryness will hurt it--this is the reason why the Indians are so anxious to secure the wapiti."

"But is their flesh not good to eat?"

"Well, not very good. It is tough and not very palatable. The fat congeals the moment it is taken from the fire, and sticks to the teeth. The flesh is, therefore, not so highly valued as that of other deer. Nevertheless, for want of better food in time of scarcity, we eat it, and it keeps us alive as well as anything else."

Mrs. Barnett and Jasper Hobson continued talking for a few minutes longer, when suddenly the wapiti ceased fighting. Was it possible they had satisfied their anger, or had they perceived the hunters or scented danger? Whatever the reason, all, with the exception of two, fled away to the eastward at full speed. In a few moments they had disappeared, and the swiftest horse could not have overtaken them.

But two magnificent stags still remained on the field of battle. With heads down and locked antlers, with their legs stretched to their utmost tension, they swayed and butted like a pair of wrestlers; neither would let go, and they swung round and round on their fore-legs as if they were riveted together.

"How savage they are!" exclaimed Mrs. Barnett.

"Yes," replied the Lieutenant; "there are no more revengeful beasts than these wapiti. No doubt they are paying off some old score."

"But would not this be the time to approach them?" said Mrs. Barnett, "they are quite blinded with rage,"

"We have plenty of time, madam," replied Sabine ;
"they will not escape us now. If we were close beside
them, with our rifles at our shoulders and our fingers on
the triggers, they would not stir."

"Indeed !"

"It is quite true," said Hobson, who had been
attentively examining the combatants while the hunter
was speaking, "and whether we shoot them or whether
they are killed by the wolves, these wapiti will die,
sooner or later, on the spot they stand on at this
moment."

"I do not understand you," said Mrs. Barnett.

"Well, madam, if you will come nearer you will
see. You need not be afraid to approach them, for,
as our hunters say, they are quite incapable of flight."

So Mrs. Barnett, accompanied by the three men,
descended the hill. In a few minutes they had reached
the field of battle. The wapiti had scarcely moved.
They were pushing against each other with their heads
like two great rams, and seemed to be inextricably fixed
one to the other.

In fact, in the heat of the contest, the horns of the
wapiti had been so locked that they could not be disen-
gaged, and still less could they be broken. This is not
at all an uncommon occurrence, nor is it rarely that
antlers are found lying on the ground still locked
together, the former owners having died of hunger and
been eaten by the wild beasts.

A couple of bullets put an end to the struggle, and the hunters immediately set about skinning the deer, leaving their bleeding carcasses to be devoured by the wolves and the bears.

CHAPTER VII.

THE POLAR CIRCLE.

THE expedition continued to advance towards the north-west, but the dogs were greatly fatigued by drawing the sledges over the uneven ground. The brave animals were quiet enough now, although they had given their drivers a good deal of trouble when they started. They could not travel more than eight or nine miles a day, though Hobson hurried on the detachment as much as possible. He was very anxious to reach the Great Bear Lake, on the borders of which Fort Confidence is situated, for there he hoped to receive some important information. He wished to ascertain whether the Indians who frequented the north banks of the lake had been able to cross the neighbouring shores, and whether the Arctic Ocean was open at this time of the year. These were very important questions, and if answered in the affirmative would decide the fate of the new factory.

The country through which the little troop was now passing was most capriciously intersected by a number

of watercourses, the greater portion of which were tributaries of the two important rivers which flow northwards into the frozen ocean. That on the west is the Mackenzie; to the east is the Copper Mine River. Between these two principal arteries, lakes, lagoons, and numerous ponds are formed. Their surface, almost free from ice, would not sustain the sledges, which were therefore obliged to make considerable detours, which added greatly to the length of the journey. Lieutenant Hobson was quite right in saying that winter is the better season to travel in arctic regions, for they are much easier to traverse at that time, as Mrs. Barnett had reason to confess more than once.

This region included in the Cursed Land was absolute desert, as is almost all the northern territory of the American continent. It has been estimated that there is on the average one person for every ten square miles of territory. The inhabitants include, without counting the scattered tribes of natives, a few thousand agents or soldiers attached to the various fur companies. This population is generally massed in the more southerly districts and in the neighbourhood of the factories.

So no trace of human footstep crossed the route of the detachment. The only tracks visible were those of wild animals; occasionally a bear of the white or polar species was sighted, but the rarity of these animals astonished Mrs. Barnett, for she had fancied from the tales she had read of shipwrecked whalers and others, that these

formidable beasts are much more common, and attacked people almost daily. But she concluded that the strength of the detachment kept the bears at a distance.

"Wait until winter sets in, madam," said the Lieutenant, "wait till the winter makes them hungry, and then perhaps you will see more of them than you care about."

After a long and fatiguing journey, the little troop at length arrived at the limit of the Polar Circle on the 28th May. We know that this parallel of latitude, 23 deg. 27 min. 57 sec. from the North Pole, forms the mathematical limit of the sun's rays when it describes the arc in the opposite hemisphere. At this point the expedition entered the true arctic regions.

The latitude had been carefully ascertained by Thomas Black and Jasper Hobson, who handled the instruments with equal skill. Mrs. Barnett, who was present at the time, had the satisfaction to hear that she was about to cross the Arctic Circle, and she heard it with a pardonable pride.

"You have already passed the torrid zones in your previous voyages," said the Lieutenant, "and here you are to-day on the confines of the Arctic Circle. Very few explorers have ventured into such different zones; some have, so to speak, a speciality for warm climates, and Africa and Australia chiefly are the countries they prefer to investigate. Such men as Barth, Burton, Livingstone, Speke, Douglas, and Stuart, for instance,

Others, on the contrary, go into arctic regions which are still imperfectly known : men, I mean, like Mackenzie, Franklin, Penny, Kane, Parry, Rae, etc., whose traces we are now following up. I must congratulate you, Mrs. Barnett, upon being so cosmopolitan a traveller."

"I want to see, or at least try to see, everything, Mr. Hobson," she replied. "I believe the difficulties and perils are about equal in whatever country you encounter them. If in the arctic regions we have not to fear the fevers of hot climates, the unhealthiness of high temperature, and the cruelty of black races, no doubt cold is an equally formidable enemy. We meet wild animals in all latitudes, and the white bears, I expect, will give as good accounts of travellers as the tigers of Thibet or the lions of Africa. So in the polar regions there are similar dangers and obstacles to be met with as in the tropics, and there are in all regions districts which will long defy explorers."

"No doubt, madam," replied Hobson, "but I rather think that the arctic regions will hold out longest; in tropical climates the natives form the principal barriers, and I am aware how frequently travellers fall victims to African savages, who must sooner or later be reduced by a war of civilisation. But in arctic or antarctic countries, on the contrary, it is not the inhabitants but nature that opposes the insuperable barrier—it is the cruel cold that paralyses human energy."

"Then you think that the torrid zone will have

been quite opened up before the frigid zone is half explored?"

"Yes, madam," replied the Lieutenant; "and I base my opinion upon the following facts. The bravest arctic explorers—such as Parry, Penny, Franklin, etc.—never got beyond 83 deg. N., which is seven degrees from the Pole. On the other hand Australia has been many times crossed by the brave Stuart, and even Africa, with all its terrors, has been traversed by Livingstone from the Loanga Bay to the mouths of the Zambesi. We may therefore safely assume that tropical countries are more easy of access than the polar regions."

"Do you think that anyone will ever reach the Pole?" asked Mrs. Barnett.

"No doubt, madam," replied Jasper Hobson, "it will be reached by man, or by woman," he added smiling; "but at the same time I think that the means hitherto employed by navigators will have to be materially modified. People talk of an open sea which some explorers are said to have seen; but this sea, if it exist at all, is very difficult to reach, and no one can tell whether it extends to the Pole or not. I think myself that this open sea will give more trouble than felicity to explorers. For my own part I much prefer solid ground, whether it be rock or ice. Then by means of successive expeditions I would establish depôts of provisions and fuel nearer and nearer to the Pole; and in this way, with plenty of money, plenty of time, and perhaps with a sacrifice of

some human lives, the solution of the great scientific problem would be arrived at. In this way, I believe, I could reach this hitherto inaccessible point of the globe."

"I am quite of your opinion," replied Mrs. Barnett; "and if ever you do attempt it, I shall not be afraid to share your expedition and plant on the North Pole the Union Jack; but at present that is not our object."

"No, not at present," replied Jasper Hobson; "but as soon as the Company's plans are complete, when the new fort has been built at the extreme limit of the American continent, it may become the starting-point of every expedition to the north. Besides, if the fur-yielding animals are too closely hunted they will retire to the Pole, and we shall be obliged to follow them up."

"Unless expensive furs should go out of fashion," replied Mrs. Barnett.

"Oh!" exclaimed the Lieutenant, "there is no fear of that; there will always be some pretty women who will want sable muffs or ermine tippets, and then they must have them of course."

"I suppose so," replied the lady, laughing, "and it is not improbable that the real discoverer of the North Pole will be some trapper who has gone north in chase of a marten or a silver fox."

"That is my opinion too," replied Jasper Hobson; "it is human nature, and the greed of gain will always carry a man much farther and much more quickly than scientific discovery."

"What! is it you who are giving utterance to such sentiments—you of all people?"

"What am I but an *employé* of the Hudson's Bay Company? And for what other reason but that of gain does it risk its capital and its agents?"

"Mr. Hobson," replied Mrs. Barnett, "I think I know you well enough to say that, if need were, you would devote yourself body and soul to science, and if it were necessary in pure geographical interest for you to go to the Pole, I feel assured that you would not hesitate. But," she added, smiling, "this is a very important question, and its solution is still far distant. For our own part we have only just reached the Polar Circle, and I trust we shall cross it without very great difficulty."

"I am not certain about it," replied Hobson, who continued to observe the sky attentively; "the weather has been very threatening the last few days. Do you see that uniform gray tint in the sky? All those mists will soon resolve themselves into snow, and should the wind get up we shall have a tremendous storm. We must do all we can to reach the Great Bear Lake."

"Then," replied Mrs. Barnett, rising, "let us lose no time; give the signal for departure at once."

The Lieutenant needed no urging. Whether alone or accompanied by a few men as energetic as himself, he would have pressed on night and day without stopping, but he could not compel others to do as much as he himself would have done. He was obliged to consider

some individuals of the party if he did not spare himself, so that afternoon, as a matter of prudence, he had given his little party a few hours' rest, and now, towards three o'clock, they resumed their journey.

Jasper Hobson was not mistaken in his prophecy of a change of weather ; in fact it came almost immediately. During the whole day the mists continued to increase, and assumed a yellow and very threatening appearance. The Lieutenant was very restless, but he endeavoured to conceal his anxiety from the others, and while the dogs were with difficulty got ready to start he had a long conversation with Sergeant Long, who was also occupied in watching the symptoms of the coming storm.

Unfortunately the district in which the detachment then was, was very ill suited to sleighing. The ground was very rough, seamed with ravines, and covered with great blocks of granite. Sometimes they were obstructed by half-melted icebergs, which considerably retarded their progress and made it very difficult. The unfortunate dogs could not get on, and the whips of the drivers produced no effect.

So the Lieutenant and his men were frequently obliged to walk to ease the exhausted teams. Sometimes they had to push the sledges along, or even to carry them over the roughest portions of the ground. It will readily be understood what incessant fatigue every one of them underwent without complaint, all except Thomas Black, who was so absorbed with his

one idea that he never left his sledge, and indeed his stoutness precluded him from any severe exercise.

Since the Polar Circle had been crossed, the nature of the soil had altered. It was evident that some convulsion had scattered those enormous blocks, nevertheless there was more vegetation visible. Wherever there were sheltered spots, the sides of the hills were clothed with shrubs and trees. These were invariably of the same species—pines, firs, and willow; and this proved that even in the frigid zone there is a certain vegetable force. Hobson hoped to find these specimens of the arctic flora on the verge of the glacial sea. The trees would give him wood to build his fort and to warm its occupants. Everyone thought the same as they remarked the contrast which this comparatively fertile region presented to the long snow-covered plains extending between the Slave Lake and Fort Enterprise.

As night fell the yellow fog became thicker, the wind got up, large flakes of snow began to fall, and the ground was soon covered with a thick white carpet. In less than an hour it was a foot deep, and, as it did not solidify, it was with the greatest difficulty that the sledges could advance at all, for the curved "bows" stuck in the half-frozen mass and compelled frequent stoppages.

About eight o'clock in the evening the wind rose to a gale, and the snow, violently driven before it, sometimes dashed to the ground, sometimes hurried into the air, formed a sort of whirlwind. The dogs, completely

beaten back, were not able to struggle against the wind. The party was then in a narrow gorge between two high mountains of ice, across which the storm roared with tremendous force. Masses of ice, detached by the hurricane, fell into the pass and rendered progress very dangerous. It was like a small avalanche, and might at any time have engulfed the sledges and its occupants. Under such conditions it was impossible to proceed. Jasper Hobson no longer held out, and after consulting with Sergeant Long he gave the order to halt. But it was necessary to find shelter from the snowdrift which threatened them. That did not trouble men like Hobson and his companions, who, accustomed to arctic expeditions, knew very well what to do. This was not the first time by a good many that they had been caught in a storm many hundred miles from the Company's forts, without having an Esquimaux hut or even an Indian hovel to shelter them.

"To the icebergs!" cried Jasper Hobson.

Everyone understood him—he intended to hollow out snow-houses in those icy masses, or rather mere holes, in which each one could shelter himself from the storm.

Hatchets and knives were quickly in use against the friable masses of ice. Three-quarters of an hour later a number of dens had been scooped out, each large enough to hold two or three persons. The dogs had been unharnessed and left to their own devices.

They trusted to the sagacity of the animals to shelter themselves in the snow.

Before ten o'clock, every one of the party was sheltered in the snow-houses, in parties of two or three, with sympathetic companions. Mrs. Barnett, Madge, and the Lieutenant occupied one den; Thomas Black and Sergeant Long were huddled up in another; and so on. These retreats were perfectly warm, if not quite comfortable, and it is well known that Indians and Esquimaux have no other refuge in the bitterest cold. Jasper Hobson and his friends could now await the termination of the storm in safety, so long as they took care that the entrances to the dens were not filled up by the snow; so they took the precaution to clear it away every half-hour. During the hurricane, the Lieutenant and his soldiers could scarcely set foot out of doors. Very luckily everyone had sufficient provisions, and was able to support this beaver-like existence without suffering from cold or hunger.

For eight-and-forty hours the tempest raged continuously, and even increased. The wind roared through the narrow paths and cut off the tops of the icebergs. Loud cracks, repeated twenty times by the echo, told that the fall of avalanches was increasing. Jasper Hobson began to fear, and not without reason, that the route between the mountains would be blocked up. With these cracking noises mingled other roarings which the Lieutenant could not mistake, and he did not conceal

from the courageous Mrs. Barnett that bears were prowling in the pass ; but fortunately these terrible animals were too much occupied in looking after themselves to trouble their heads about the travellers. Their attention was not attracted either by the dogs or the sledges, which were hidden beneath the snow, and the bears passed on without taking any notice.

The night of the 25th May was still more terrible than its predecessor. The violence of the hurricane was such that the fall of all the icebergs appeared imminent ; in fact the travellers could feel the enormous masses shake, and thought a fearful death awaited them. The awful crackings of the ice and the oscillations of the mass gave warning that breaches had been made in them ; however, no tremendous accident occurred, the enormous masses resisted, and towards morning, by one of those phenomena so frequent in arctic regions, the violence of the tempest suddenly abated under the influence of the intense cold, and with the first streak of daylight an uninterrupted calm had supervened.

CHAPTER VIII

THE GREAT BEAR LAKE.

THERE was one fortunate circumstance at any rate. The sudden but not lasting cold which usually occurs on certain days in May—even in the temperate zone—was sufficient to freeze the thick layer of snow, and it became practicable for sledges, so Lieutenant Hobson resumed his journey as quickly as possible.

The direction of the route, however, was somewhat changed. Instead of going due north the expedition bore towards the west, following, so to speak, the curve of the polar circle. The Lieutenant was very anxious to reach Fort Confidence, at the northern extremity of the Great Bear Lake. These few cold days were therefore most favourable to his plans; he advanced quickly, no obstacles were encountered, and on the 30th May the troop arrived at the fort.

Forts Confidence and Good Hope, on the Mackenzie River, were the most advanced posts which the Hudson's Bay Company possessed at that time. The former, erected at the most northerly extremity of the

Great Bear Lake, was most important, and, across the ice in winter and the water in summer, it was in direct communication with Fort Franklin at the other extremity. Not to mention the daily exchanges which took place with the Indian trappers of the high latitudes, these factories—and particularly Fort Confidence—foraged the banks and waters of the Great Bear Lake. This lake is a regular Mediterranean Sea, extending over many degrees of latitude and longitude. It is very irregular in shape, being very narrowed in the centre by two promontories, while at the north it forms a large triangle. Its general form is somewhat that of an extended skin of one of the large ruminants, without the head.

Fort Confidence had been erected at what we may call a right paw of this skin, about two hundred miles from Coronation Gulf, one of the numerous estuaries which indent the northern coast of America. The fort was there built a little beyond the Arctic Circle, but still nearly three degrees from the 70th parallel, beyond which again the Company considered it absolutely necessary to found a new settlement.

In its entirety Fort Confidence resembled other more southern factories; it consisted of a house for the officers, barracks for the soldiers, storehouses for the skins and furs. All these buildings were surrounded by a palisade. The captain in command of the fort was then absent. He had gone eastward with some Indians and soldiers to find out some better hunting-grounds. The

past season had not been good. High-priced furs had not been forthcoming ; however, on the other hand, otter skins—thanks to the vicinity of the lake—had been very abundant ; but this stock had been sent to the southern factories, so that the store-houses of Fort Confidence were empty at that time.

In the absence of the commanding officer, a sergeant did the honours of the fort to the party. This non-commissioned officer was named Felton, and was the brother-in-law of Sergeant Long. He placed himself entirely at Lieutenant Hobson's disposal, and the Lieutenant, being anxious to give his party a rest, decided to remain two or three days at Fort Confidence. There was plenty of room, and the whole party, including the dogs, were soon comfortably settled. The best room in the principal house was naturally reserved for Mrs. Barnett, who was very much pleased with the polite attention of Sergeant Felton.

Jasper Hobson's first care had been to ask if any parties of Indians were then beating the shores of the Great Bear Lake.

The Sergeant replied in the affirmative, and said that they had received a signal from a party of Hare Indians, who had encamped on the opposite extremity of the lake.

"What distance is that from the fort?" asked Jasper Hobson.

"About thirty miles," replied Felton. "Do you wish to communicate with them?"

"Most decidedly," said Hobson. "They may be able to give me some most useful information about the territory bordering on the Polar Sea. If the report is favourable, I will build our new fort on that site."

"Well, sir, there is nothing easier than to go to the Hares' encampment," replied Felton.

"Along the shore, do you mean?"

"No, by water. The wind is favourable and the lake is free from ice. We can lend you a boat and a man, and in an hour or two you will reach the Indian encampment."

"Very well, Sergeant," said Hobson, "I will do that, and to-morrow morning, if it will suit——"

"Whenever you please, sir, we shall be ready," replied Felton.

The start was arranged to take place the next morning. When Mrs. Barnett heard of the undertaking she requested Hobson's permission to accompany him; a favour which we may be quite sure was at once conceded.

But there was something to be done before evening, nevertheless. Mrs. Barnett, Hobson, two or three soldiers, Madge, Mrs. MacNab, and Joliffe, under the guidance of Felton, explored the neighbouring shores of the lake. There was no want of verdure, for the hills, now free from snow, were crowned with a species of Scotch fir, about forty feet high, which supplied the garrison with all the fuel they required during the winter.

Their large trunks, clothed with flexible branches, presented a very characteristic appearance in the landscape, but their uniform height and regularity were somewhat monotonous. Between the groups of trees grew a sort of white weed, which smelt like wild thyme, and Sergeant Felton informed his guests that this herb was called the *incense plant*, because of its fragrance when burning.

About a hundred paces from the fort, the party reached a small natural harbour, surrounded by high granite rocks which quite sheltered it from the waves. In this port was anchored the whole fleet of Fort Confidence, the flotilla consisting of a single fishing-boat, the same which was to be used next day to take Jasper Hobson and Mrs. Barnett across the lake. From the point where they now stood a large extent of water could be seen, the irregular shores, the wooded banks, and the rippling water, upon which some icebergs were still sailing. To the south the lake extended as far as the eye could reach.

The whole view occupied by the clear surface of the Great Bear Lake, its pebbly shores, the slopes clothed with verdure, the tree-crowned hills, all presented the appearance of vegetable and animal life. Numerous varieties of ducks flew over the lake, quacking loudly; they were eider-ducks, whistling swans, harlequins, old women (those chattering birds which never shut their mouths), as well as some hundreds of puffins and guil-

mots, and darted about in every direction. Under cover of the trees were ospreys about two feet high, a species of eagle which build their nests in the forks of the trees. Sabine, the hunter, killed a couple of these birds, which measured six feet across their wings. There were also magnificent specimens of the fishing-eagle, which in the winter descend as far as the Gulf of Mexico, but in the summer visit the highest latitudes of North America.

But the most interesting incident of the walk was the capture of an otter, the skin of which was valued at several hundred roubles.

The skins of these valuable animals were formerly much sought after in China, but if they are not now so valued there they are still in great demand in Russia, where they command a ready sale at very high prices. So Russian merchants explore all the coasts of New Cornwall up to the Arctic Ocean, and in consequence the otter is becoming scarcer every day, and the hunters now are obliged to pursue them up to the shores of the Sea of Kamtchatka, and amongst the islands of the Behring Archipelago.

"But," added Sergeant Felton, after he had given these details to his guests, "the American otters are not to be despised by any means, and those which inhabit the Great Bear Lake are worth from 250 to 300 francs apiece."*

There were no doubt some magnificent otters in

* £10 to £12 sterling.

the lake, and one which the Sergeant himself killed was quite as valuable as any of the Kamtchatka species. This animal, which was two feet and a half long, had webbed feet, very short legs, and dark and silky fur on the upper part of its body, the lower part being gray.

"That was a good shot, Sergeant," replied Lieutenant Hobson, who was directing Mrs. Barnett's attention to the splendid fur of the animal.

"Ah sir," replied the Sergeant, "if we got a skin like that every day we should not complain, but we lose a lot of time tracking the animals, which are first-rate swimmers and divers. We scarcely ever hunt them except at night, for during the day they are very shy, and it is by no means an easy matter even for experienced hunters to discover their lairs."

"I suppose this species is also becoming scarcer?" said Mrs. Barnett.

"Yes, madam," replied the Sergeant; "and when these have disappeared the profits of the Company will begin to disappear also. All hunters are anxious for the furs, and the Americans particularly are running us very close. Did you meet any of the American agents on your way up, sir?" he added, turning to Lieutenant Hobson.

"No," replied Jasper; "do they come so high as this?"

"Oh dear yes," said the Sergeant; "and if you hear of their being in the neighbourhood you had better be careful."

"Why," said Mrs. Barnett; "are they highway robbers?"

"No," replied the Sergeant, "but they are very formidable rivals, and when game is scarce hunters often come to blows. I daresay that if the attempt of the Company is successful, and you are enabled to establish a fort on the extreme limit of the continent, the Yankees—confound them!—will do the same."

"Bah!" said the Lieutenant, "there is plenty of room for all. As far as we are concerned we had better make a beginning. We will go ahead as long as we have solid ground under our feet, and may Heaven protect us!"

After an excursion of three hours the party returned to Fort Confidence and did full justice to the excellent dinner prepared for them by the Sergeant. After some conversation they all retired and enjoyed an excellent night's rest.

Next day (the 31st May) Mrs. Barnett and Hobson were ready to start at 5 A.M. The Lieutenant had determined to devote the whole day to visiting the Indian encampment, and to procure as much information as possible. He suggested to Thomas Black that he should accompany him, but the astronomer preferred to remain where he was; he wanted to make some observations to determine exactly the latitude and longitude of Fort Confidence. Mrs. Barnett and Hobson therefore started together under the guidance of an old servant of the Company named Norman.

Sergeant Felton accompanied them to the shore of the lake, where Norman was in readiness. The little vessel was an undecked cutter but sixteen feet long, and could be easily managed by one man. The weather was fine and the breeze from the north-east was favourable for the transit. Sergeant Felton took leave of them, and apologised for not accompanying them, but he was unable to leave the fort in the absence of his chief; the grapnel was then pulled up and the boat sped rapidly across the lake.

The journey was a mere pleasure-trip. The old sailor, as taciturn as most of his class, sat silently steering. Mrs. Barnett and Hobson, seated opposite each other, admired the continually changing view which opened to their gaze. The boat skirted the northern shore of the lake for about three miles in a straight line; they were thus enabled to perceive the magnificent wooded hills which trended away towards the west. From this side the northern shores of the lake appeared perfectly flat, and the eye could travel a long distance to the horizon. The whole of this shore contrasts greatly with that which makes the acute angle, at the extremity of which rises Fort Confidence surrounded by its belt of pines. The passengers could still see the Company's flag floating from the summit of the keep. Towards the south and west the sun lit up the water with its dazzling rays, but what most particularly attracted the eye were the icebergs, which

appeared like blocks of molten silver, upon which it was impossible to gaze for any length of time, so resplendent were they. These floating mountains, now slowly dissolving, seemed to protest against this bright polar sun, which at present was not very powerful.

Mrs. Barnett and Lieutenant Hobson, as usual, talked about the surroundings — they enriched their memories and laid up a store of pleasant recollections while they proceeded.

They had started at six o'clock, and at nine they were close to their destination. Before ten o'clock Norman ran the boat aground on an old bank close to the Indian encampment.

The travellers immediately stepped ashore. Two or three Indians approached them, the chief amongst them; and this much-beplumed individual addressed them in tolerable English.

These Hare Indians, as well as the Copper and Beaver tribes, belong to the Chippeway race, and consequently differ little in their habits and manners from the rest. They are, besides, in constant communication with the forts, and have become anglicised as much as an Indian can be said so to become. They bring their spoils to exchange for necessaries of life, which for many years past they have not made for themselves. They are, so to speak, in the pay of the Company; they live by it; and it is not surprising

that they have lost all individuality. To find a nation upon which Europeans have not left their trade-mark we must go up to the Greenlanders and Esquimaux, who are all true children of the arctic regions.

Mrs. Barnett and her companion went up to the Indian camp, which was about half a mile from the shore. There they found about thirty men, women, and children, who lived by hunting and fishing. These Indians had only lately returned from the most northern districts, and gave Hobson some information—imperfect it is true—respecting the sea-coast about the 70th parallel. The Lieutenant was glad to learn that no European or American detachment had been seen on the confines of the Arctic Ocean, and that the sea was then open. About Cape Bathurst proper the Indians could tell him nothing. The chief told him that the region between the Great Bear Lake and Cape Bathurst was very difficult to traverse, being very hilly, and intersected by frequent rivers at that time of year. He advised the Lieutenant to descend the Copper Mine River from the north-east end of the lake so as to gain the coast by the shortest route. Having thus reached the Polar Sea, he could easily follow its margin, and could land at any point he chose.

Jasper Hobson thanked the chief, and having given him a few presents, left the encampment; then, after exploring the neighbourhood with Mrs. Barnett, they reached the boat about three o'clock in the afternoon.

CHAPTER IX.

A STORM ON THE LAKE.

THE old sailor was very anxious for the return of his passengers.

During the last hour the weather had changed, and the appearance of the sky was enough to make anyone anxious. The sun had become obscured by a thick mist, and looked like a white disc without heat or brilliancy. The wind had fallen, but the waves were breaking heavily from the south. These symptoms of a rapidly approaching change were developed with the speed usual to such elevated latitudes.

"We must be off, sir," said old Norman, looking at the fog overhead ; "we must start without losing a minute—the weather is very threatening."

"Well," replied Hobson, "I must say the weather has decidedly changed for the worse ; but we never noticed it, did we, madam ?"

"Are you afraid that there will be a storm ?" said the lady.

"Yes, madam," replied the old sailor ; "and the

Great Bear Lake is celebrated for its tempests, which rage as strongly as they do on the Atlantic. This sudden fog bodes no good. However, it is possible that the storm may not break for three or four hours, and by that time we shall be at Fort Confidence ; but let us start at once, for the boat might be dashed to pieces amongst the rocks here."

The Lieutenant could not argue the point with such an experienced hand as Norman, so he and Mrs. Barnett immediately went on board.

Just as they were shoving off the old man experienced a sort of presentiment, and muttered :

"It would be better to wait, perhaps."

These words did not escape Lieutenant Hobson, and he looked at the old sailor, who had already taken the tiller. Had he been alone he would not have hesitated, but the presence of Mrs. Barnett warned him to be prudent. She understood his hesitation, however, and said :

"Do not think about me, Mr. Hobson ; please act just as if I were not here. If this brave sailor thinks we ought to go, let us go at once."

"All right," replied Norman, as he let go the rope ; "we will return by the shortest route."

The boat ran across the lake, but for an hour made but little headway. The sail was scarcely distended by the changing wind, and flapped idly against the mast. The fog became more dense ; the boat already began to

feel the undulation of the water, for the lake was affected by the approaching hurricane before the atmosphere was disturbed. The passengers remained perfectly silent, while the old sailor, with bloodshot eyes, strove to pierce the thick mist. He was ready for any event, and held the sheet so that he might let go if the wind should strike the boat forcibly.

But the conflict had not yet commenced, and all would have gone well had the boat been able to proceed; but after an hour's sail they were only two miles distant from the Indian encampment. But now some fierce gusts came off the land and drove them across the lake, and the shore had become almost invisible in the mist. This was unfortunate, for if the wind came up from the north, the boat and its occupants might be driven right across the lake to an immense distance.

"We do not seem to be making any way," said the Lieutenant to old Norman.

"Scarcely any, sir," replied the sailor. "The wind doesn't hold; and, if it did, I am afraid it is from the wrong quarter; so," he added, extending his hand towards the south, "we may expect to see Fort Franklin before we reach Fort Confidence."

"Well," replied Mrs. Barnett cheerfully, "it will make our excursion more complete, that's all. This Great Bear Lake is certainly a magnificent sheet of water, and well worth crossing from north to south. I suppose, Norman, that we can get back from Fort Franklin?"

"Oh yes, madam, if we get there," replied the old man; "but these tempests sometimes last a fortnight, and, if our ill-luck carries us to the southern shore, I would not guarantee our return to Fort Confidence under a month."

"Let us take care, then, what we are about," replied the Lieutenant, "for such a delay as that would seriously retard our plans; so be as prudent as possible, my friend, and, if it be necessary, let us go back to the north shore as quickly as we can. I think Mrs. Barnett is equal to a walk of twenty or five-and-twenty miles."

"I wish we could regain the north shore," replied Norman. "I would return in a minute if it were possible; but you can see for yourself that the wind blows from that direction. All I can do is to steer north-east, and I think I can hold that course if the wind does not get up too much."

But about half-past four the storm broke; the loud whistling of the wind, which the state of the atmosphere prevented descending, was heard in the upper air—but not for long. The screams of the affrighted birds were audible through the fog, which suddenly dispersed and discovered low masses of cloud, torn in all sorts of shapes, and hurried rapidly towards the south. The fears of the old sailor were realised, the wind came from the north, and it would not be long before it would rise to a hurricane.

"Look out!" said Norman, as he put the boat before the wind.

Down came the squall. It caught the boat, and nearly upset it as it rose on the summit of a wave, and then the storm began with the fury of an ocean tempest. In such comparatively shallow water the waves appeared as if they rebounded from the bottom of the lake to an unusual height.

"Help, help!" cried the old sailor, as he endeavoured to furl the sail.

Jasper Hobson, and even Mrs. Barnett, tried to come to the old sailor's assistance, but unsuccessfully, as they were not acquainted with the management of the boat. Norman could not let go the tiller, and the halyards had caught in the pulley, so the sail could not be taken in. Every moment they thought the boat would capsize, and already the sea had begun to break over the thwarts. The sky got darker and darker; a cold rain, mingled with snow, fell in torrents, and the storm redoubled its fury, and the wind cut the tops of the waves like a knife.

"Cut it, cut it!" cried the old sailor, amidst the roar of the tempest.

Jasper Hobson, his cap taken off by the wind, and half-blinded by the spray, seized Norman's knife, and cut the halyard, which was stretched like a harp-string. But the wet rope no longer ran through the block, and the yard remained immovable. Norman was then of

opinion that they should scud before the wind to the southward, although with such a sea this course would be very dangerous, for the speed of the waves would considerably exceed that of the boat; but still he was obliged to do it, although they would probably land eventually very far on the southern shores of the lake.

Jasper Hobson and his courageous companions were quite aware of the danger in which they stood. They knew the boat could not long resist the buffeting of the waves, and that it must be either capsized or crushed. The lives of all were in the hands of God.

However, neither of them yielded to despair. Clinging to the seats, covered from head to foot with the spray; chilled with the rain and snow and the wind, they tried to penetrate the mist and fog. But they could see no trace of land; a cable's length from the boat clouds and water apparently mingled. The travellers looked at Norman, who, with teeth set and clasping the rudder with both hands, was doing all he could to keep the boat's head to windward.

But the violence of the storm became so great that he could no longer continue on this tack—the boat would quickly have been swamped. Some of the planks had already begun to give way; and when the boat fell into the trough of the sea they thought they should never be able to get up again.

"We must go about and run for it, whatever happens," said the old sailor,

I.

D

So, putting down the helm, he set the boat's head to the southward. The sail bellied out before the wind and carried the boat through the water at a tremendous pace ; but the enormous billows followed even more quickly, and threatened to break in over the stern every moment. Already the water was coming in, and had to be baled out without cessation, else the boat must have foundered. The farther they got away from shore the rougher the water became. There was no shelter of trees or hills to break the force of the hurricane. When the fog lifted occasionally, a glimpse might be caught of the enormous icebergs which were tumbling about like buoys upon the water, and, like the boat, were driven rapidly to the south.

It was half-past five o'clock. Neither Norman nor Hobson could estimate the distance they had run, nor had they any idea of the direction in which they were going. They had lost entire control of the boat, and were completely at the mercy of the tempest.

At that time an immense wave was perceived breaking about a hundred feet behind the boat. In front of it the undertow seemed to form a whirlpool, all the tiny surface-waves had been completely swept away by the wind, and in this moving gulf the water looked as black as night. The boat was caught in this abyss, and was swept down lower every moment. The enormous wave swept on, overtopping all the surrounding water. It was gaining upon the boat ! It threatened to crush it !

Norman turned and saw it approaching. Jasper Hobson and Mrs. Barnett also saw it, and with wide-open eyes awaited the shock which they could not escape.

It broke with a tremendous roar over the stern of the boat. There was a fearful shock. A loud cry escaped the Lieutenant and his companion as they were buried under the liquid mountain. They thought there was no hope from that moment. The boat struggled to the surface again, though three-parts full of water, but the old sailor was missing.

Jasper Hobson uttered a cry of despair. Mrs. Barnett turned towards him.

"Norman !" he cried, pointing to the vacant place.

"Poor man !" murmured Mrs. Barnett.

At the risk of their lives, she and Hobson stood up and looked around in every direction, but they could see nothing. Not a cry could be heard, nor could they perceive any form floating upon the water. The old sailor had met his death in the treacherous water.

Mrs. Barnett and Hobson sank back upon the thwarts. Now that they were left alone, they must provide for their own safety ; but neither of them knew how to manage a boat, and even under the circumstances an experienced sailor had scarcely been able to do so. The skiff was now the plaything of the waves, and was hurried along by the sail, for Jasper Hobson could do nothing to check its course.

It was a terrible situation for these unfortunate people

to be thus overtaken by a storm in a frail boat which they did not know how to manage.

"We are lost!" said the Lieutenant.

"No, Mr. Hobson," replied the courageous Mrs. Barnett; "let us help ourselves, and Heaven will help us."

Jasper Hobson now understood with what a courageous woman his destiny was linked.

The most important thing to do was to bale out the water which weighed down the boat. Should another wave strike them they would be swamped in a moment, without a chance of recovery. If they could manage to get rid of the water, the boat would rise more easily to the waves; so they set about the work as well as they could. This was no easy task, however, for the spray continually broke into the boat, and the scoop could not be put down for a moment. Mrs. Barnett undertook this part of the work, while the Lieutenant did all he could to keep the boat before the wind.

To add to their danger, the night, or rather what passes for night in those latitudes, for darkness does not last long at that time of year, fell upon them. The clouds mingled with the fog and came lower and lower, so that scarcely a ray of light could penetrate them.

They could not see two boats' length ahead, and had they come near a wandering iceberg the skiff would have been dashed to pieces. This was indeed a very likely

thing to happen, for the masses of ice travelled at such a rate that there was no possibility of avoiding them.

"You have no command over the boat, Mr. Hobson," said Mrs. Barnett during a short lull in the tempest.

"No, indeed," replied the Lieutenant, "and I beg you to prepare for the worst."

"I am ready," replied the courageous woman simply.

At this moment a loud tearing sound was heard; the sail, split by the wind, was carried away like a puff of smoke. The skiff continued its course for a few moments, it then fell into the trough of the sea, and was buffeted about like a log. The travellers now gave themselves up altogether for lost. They were terribly buffeted about, and were thrown from their seats wounded and bruised. There was not a rag of canvas left which they could spread; so the two unfortunate people in semi-darkness, drenched to the skin, hardly able to hear themselves speak, believed that every moment would be their last, and for nearly an hour they remained in this condition, commending themselves to Providence, who alone could save them.

How long they remained thus neither of them could have said, when suddenly they felt a violent shock.

The boat had run against an iceberg, a rugged slippery mass, to the sides of which it would be impossible to cling. At this sudden shock, which they were powerless to guard against, the boat was shattered and the water rushed over it in torrents.

"We are sinking, we are sinking!" cried Jasper Hobson.

The boat was settling down fast. The water had already reached to the thwarts.

"I am beside you, madam!" cried the Lieutenant.
"I will not leave you!"

"No," replied Mrs. Barnett, "try and save yourself; if not, we shall both perish. Leave me, leave me."

"Never!" cried Lieutenant Hobson.

Scarcely had he spoken when the boat, struck by another wave, turned over and sank.

The travellers were drawn beneath the waves by the suction of the boat, but in a few seconds they rose to the surface. Hobson swam strongly with one arm, and sustained his companion with the other. But it was evident that the struggle with the waves could not be of long duration, and that he must perish with her he wished to save.

Just then a peculiar sound attracted his attention. It was not the cry of a frightened bird; it was the sound of a human voice. Hobson, with a last effort, raised his head above the waves and gazed rapidly round.

But he could not see anything in the thick fog, yet the cries were still audible, and appeared to be coming nearer. Who would be bold enough to come to his assistance? But whoever they were, they would arrive too late. Embarrassed as he was with his clothes, the Lieutenant felt himself unable to sustain himself and his unhappy burden.

Then, with the instinct of despair, Hobson uttered a loud cry, but soon disappeared beneath the waves.

Yet he had not been mistaken. Three men on the lake had perceived the condition of the boat and had hurried to his assistance. These men, the only ones who had a chance of success under such circumstances, had put out in the only boats which could possibly have resisted such a storm.

They were Esquimaux, and their boats were the kayak, which is a long canoe turned up at each end. It is made of very light wood covered with sealskin, stitched with the sinews of the walrus. The upper part is completely covered with skins, except in the centre, where there is a small space left for the rower. In this the boatman takes his seat, and fastening a waterproof garment to the edge of the boat all round him, he is actually part of his canoe, into which not a drop of water can penetrate.

Thus the kayak, easily managed and very light, floats above the crests of the waves and can never founder. If by accident it should ever be overturned it can be righted in an instant by the blow of the paddle, so it can live where any other boat would unquestionably be destroyed.

The three Esquimaux, guided by the Lieutenant's despairing cry, arrived on the scene just in time. Jasper Hobson and Mrs. Barnett, half-drowned, were yet conscious of being grasped by powerful hands and drawn out

of the water; but in the obscurity they could not see who had rescued them.

One of the Esquimaux seized the Lieutenant and laid him across his kayak, another did the same for Mrs. Barnett, and then the three canoes, skilfully managed with the paddles, which are not less than six feet in length, advanced rapidly across the foaming waves.

Half-an-hour afterwards the two shipwrecked passengers were landed on a sandy beach three miles below Fort Confidence.

The old sailor was still missing.

CHAPTER X.

RETROSPECTIVE.

ABOUT ten o'clock that evening the travellers arrived at the fort. Everyone was delighted to see them, for they believed them to have been lost. But this joy soon gave way to grief when they learnt that poor old Norman had been drowned. This brave fellow had been loved by all, and he was deeply regretted. As for the brave and devoted Esquimaux, after they had received phlegmatically the grateful thanks of the shipwrecked pair, they would not even come up to the fort. It seemed to them that they had done the most natural thing in the world. These were by no means the first lives they had saved, and they immediately re-embarked upon the lake which they scoured night and day for otters and aquatic birds.

The next three days the party devoted to complete rest. The little troop made themselves comfortable, but the Lieutenant had made up his mind to leave on the morning of the 2nd, and, very fortunately, the weather was fine.

Sergeant Felton placed all the resources of the factory

at the disposal of the detachment. Some of the teams were replaced by fresh animals, and at the time fixed for departure the Lieutenant found the sledges drawn up in good order at the postern-gate.

Farewells were exchanged. Everyone thanked Sergeant Felton for his kind hospitality. Mrs. Barnett was by no means the least earnest in her gratitude. A vigorous shake of the hand exchanged between Sergeant Long and his brother-in-law brought the ceremony of leave-taking to a conclusion.

Every pair got into their own sledge as before, except that on this occasion Lieutenant Hobson and Mrs. Barnett travelled together, while Sergeant Long and Madge followed in the other sledge.

According to the advice given him by the Indian chief, Jasper Hobson determined to take the shortest route to the American coast, and go straight between Fort Confidence and the shore. Having consulted his rough map, he made up his mind to descend the valley of the Copper Mine River, which flows into Coronation Gulf.

Between Fort Confidence and the mouth of this river the distance is about a degree and a half; that is to say, between eighty-five and ninety miles. The gulf is bounded on the north by Cape Krusenstern, and from that cape the coast trends rapidly to the west until it reaches Cape Bathurst, which is above the 70th parallel.

Jasper Hobson changed the route which he had

hitherto been following, and went straight away to the east, so as to strike the river in a few hours. He reached it the next day, the 3rd June. The Copper Mine—whose rapid current was now free from ice—rolled through the large valley, which is watered by a number of smaller streams easily fordable. The sledges advanced rapidly, and while they proceeded Jasper Hobson related to his companion the history of the country through which they were passing. A sincere and intimate friendship—in consequence of the circumstances in which they were placed—had sprung up between the Lieutenant and Mrs. Barnett. She was only too glad to be taught, and was delighted to hear of former travellers.

Jasper Hobson, on the other hand, who knew North America by heart, was able to satisfy all her inquiries.

"About ninety years ago," he said, "all this country was unknown, and it is to the agents of the Hudson's Bay Company that we are indebted for its discovery. But, as often happens in scientific research, when looking for one thing they found another. Christopher Columbus, while looking for Asia, found America."

"And what were the Hudson's Bay Company looking for?" asked Mrs. Barnett. "The North-West Passage?"

"No," replied the Lieutenant. "A hundred years ago the Company had no interest in finding any new means of communication, for such would have been more valuable to its rivals than itself. It has even been stated that in 1741 a certain Christopher Middleton, who was

sent to explore these regions, was publicly accused of having received £5,000 from the Company to declare that no communication by sea existed or could exist between the two oceans."

"That was not much to the credit of the Company," replied Mrs. Barnett.

"I cannot defend it," replied Jasper Hobson; "indeed, Parliament severely censured it by voting, in 1746, a reward of £20,000 for the discovery of the passage in question. So in that year two brave explorers, William Moore and Francis Smith, succeeded in reaching Repulse Bay in the hope of winning the prize. But they failed, and after an absence of a year and a half they returned to England."

"But did not other explorers follow in their steps?" said Mrs. Barnett.

"No, madam; and for thirty years, notwithstanding the reward offered by Parliament, no attempt was made to explore this portion of the American continent—or rather this part of British America, for that is the name by which it is known—and it was not until 1769 that an agent of the Company followed in the footsteps of Moore and Smith."

"I suppose the Company had then repudiated its narrow-minded prejudices?"

"No, not yet. Samuel Hearne—for that was the name of this agent—only went to reconnoitre the situation of a copper mine which native miners had reported.

On the 6th November, 1769, this agent left Prince of Wales Fort, on the River Churchill, near the western side of Hudson's Bay. He advanced bravely in a north-westerly direction, but the cold was too intense, and, his provisions giving out, he returned to the fort. Fortunately he was not a man to be easily daunted, and on the 23rd February in the following year he made a second attempt, this time taking some Indians with him. He experienced some most terrible hardships on this journey. Game and fish, on which he had counted, often failed him, and it happened that for one week they had nothing to eat but wild fruit, some bits of old leather, and burnt bones. They were then forced to return without having obtained any result. But Hearne was not discouraged; he started a third time on the 7th December, 1770, and after a protracted struggle of nineteen months he discovered the Copper Mine River, on the 13th July, 1772, and followed it to its mouth, where he declared he saw the open sea. This was the first time that the north coast of America had been reached."

"But he had not discovered the North-West Passage between the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans?" said Mrs. Barnett.

"No, madam," replied the Lieutenant; "and what adventurous sailors have sought it since? Phipps in 1773, James Cook and Clarke in 1776 to 1779, Kotzebue in 1815 to 1818, Ross, Parry, Franklin, and many others have devoted themselves to this difficult task in vain.

It was reserved to a discoverer of our own days, the brave M'Clure, who was the only man who really passed from one ocean to the other across the Polar Sea."

"Indeed, that was a geographical victory upon which we English may justly pride ourselves. But did not the Hudson's Bay Company become less selfish and encourage some other explorer after Samuel Hearne?"

"Yes, madam; and it is owing to the Company that Captain Franklin was able to accomplish his voyage from 1819 to 1822 between Hearne's River and Cape Turnagain. This expedition underwent great sufferings. Many times did their provisions completely fail; two Canadians were murdered and eaten by their comrades. But, notwithstanding all his sufferings, Franklin was actually enabled to explore 5,550 miles of the previously unknown coast of North America."

"He was a man of rare energy," added Mrs. Barnett, "which no one can doubt when they remember that, notwithstanding all he had gone through, he started on another expedition to discover the North Pole."

"Yes," replied Jasper Hobson, "and the brave explorer met a cruel death in the very land he had himself discovered. But it has been proved beyond doubt that all his companions did not perish with him. Many of these unfortunate men may still be wandering in these icy solitudes. My blood runs cold when I think of it; and, madam," added the Lieutenant, with visible

emotion, "some day I will search these unknown solitudes where the catastrophe took place, and——"

"And that day," said Mrs. Barnett, as she pressed his hand, "I will accompany you. Yes, this idea has occurred to me as well as to you more than once, and my feelings are deeply moved when I think that our countrymen are awaiting our assistance."

"It will come too late for the greater number of the poor fellows, but some of them will be recovered, you may be sure."

"Heaven grant it, Mr. Hobson!" she replied. "And I may say that the Company's agents, living, as they do, close to the country to be explored, appear to me to be the fittest people to fulfil this duty."

"I am quite of your opinion, madam," replied the Lieutenant, "for these agents are more accustomed to the rigours of the arctic regions. They have often proved their capabilities under similar circumstances. They aided Captain Back, in 1834, in an expedition which resulted in the discovery of King William's Land, where Franklin was lost. Two of our men—the brave Dease and Simpson—whom the Governor of Hudson's Bay, in 1838, specially despatched to explore the borders of the Polar Sea, discovered Victoria Land. I think, therefore, that the final conquest of the arctic continent is reserved for our Company. Little by little our factories are advancing northwards, following the fur-bearing animals; and one day a fort will be erected at the very Pole itself,

on that mathematical point where all the meridians of the globe meet."

On this and on many subsequent occasions Jasper Hobson recounted his own adventures while in the Company's service, his disputes with the rival agents, and his attempts to explore new territories to the north and west. Mrs. Barnett, on her part, entertained him by relating her experiences in the tropics. She told him all she had done and all she hoped to do; so the Lieutenant and his companion sustained an agreeable conversation during the long journey.

All this time they were progressing rapidly northwards. The valley of the Copper Mine got wider as they neared the Arctic Ocean; the hills were lower, a few clumps of trees alone broke the monotony of these wild districts; occasional icebergs, drifting down the river, were still to be perceived, but they got less every day, and a canoe, or even a larger boat, could easily have navigated the stream, which was unimpeded by any bars or rocks. The Copper Mine River is deep and wide, and its clear waters, descending from the snow, run quickly down without forming any dangerous rapids. Its course is very winding at first, but as it descends it becomes less serpentine, and at last it flows along in a direct line for many miles. The banks are wide and flat, of a fine hard sand, clothed with a dry short herbage, very suitable for sledges, as they were perfectly smooth, and presented no obstacles to the dogs.

So the expedition travelled at a great pace, both night and day, if we may use the term; for the sun scarcely disappeared below the horizon, the night lasted only two hours, and the dawn, at this time of the year, almost immediately succeeds the sunset. The weather was fine, the sky was clear, although a little foggy on the horizon, and the party continued their journey under the most favourable conditions.

For two days they proceeded, without any difficulty, alongside the Copper Mine River. The neighbourhood was little frequented by fur-bearing animals, but there were thousands of birds. The absence of the former did not trouble the Lieutenant; for he argued that the hunting-grounds had been abandoned in consequence of the eagerness of the trappers, which was very probable, considering the numerous traces of camp-fires which were noticed. Jasper Hobson saw very clearly that he would have to push on farther north, and that only part of his mission would be accomplished when he reached the mouth of the river. He was therefore anxious to arrive there, and he pressed forward as quickly as possible.

Everybody shared his impatience, and all were anxious to reach the Arctic Ocean as quickly as possible. An indefinable attraction led them forward; the fascination of the unknown dazzled them; perhaps the true hardships awaited them on the much-desired shore, but that was no matter; they were equally anxious to meet

difficulty, and to march straight to their destination. The journey which they were now making was not one which directly interested them; on the shore of the Arctic Ocean their real work would commence. Each one already wished himself there.

At length, on the 5th of June, four days after Lieutenant Hobson quitted Fort Confidence, the river began to widen considerably. The western shore trended rapidly almost due north, while the eastern side was rounded off in a contrary direction as far as the eye could see.

Jasper Hobson immediately halted and pointed silently to the limitless ocean in front of him.

CHAPTER XL.

FOLLOWING THE COAST-LINE.

THE large estuary which the detachment had now reached, after six weeks' travelling, formed a trapezoidal hollow in the American continent. At the western angle was the mouth of the Copper Mine River, and on the east was a long deep bay, which is known as Bathurst Inlet. On this side the shore was very broken, with capes and promontories, and lost its outline in that confusion of straits and sounds and channels which gives to the maps of the polar regions such a curious aspect. On the left side of the river the coast turned to the north, and was terminated by Cape Krusenstern.

This estuary was known as Coronation Gulf, and the islands contained in it constitute the Duke of York Archipelago.

Jasper Hobson, after consulting with Sergeant Long, decided to give his party a day's rest at this place.

Now the exploration was really about to commence. The Company had instructed their agent to keep as far

as possible above the 70th parallel, and on the shores of the Polar Sea ; now, to carry out his orders, the Lieutenant was obliged to seek in the west a point sufficiently elevated on the American continent, for towards the east all the land so divided was really a part of arctic territory—except, perhaps, the district of Boothia, which is cut by the 70th parallel—but its geographical conformation is still very undecided.

Having ascertained the latitude and longitude, and his position on the map, Jasper Hobson perceived that he was still a hundred miles below the 70th deg. ; but beyond Cape Krusenstern, the coast, trending to the north-east, crosses the 70th parallel near the 130th meridian, exactly at the height of Cape Bathurst, which place Captain Craveny had named as a rendezvous. It was therefore necessary to reach that point, and, if the situation were suitable for a factory, to erect a fort there.

“ Then, Sergeant Long,” said the Lieutenant, as he showed the map to his assistant, “ there we shall be in the condition required by the Company. In that place the sea, opened for a greater part of the year, will admit of vessels from Behring Strait coming up to the fort to bring us provisions and to take away our exchanges.”

“ Without mentioning that while they are established there our men will be entitled to double pay,” said Sergeant Long.

“ Of course,” replied the Lieutenant ; “ and I daresay they will accept it without a murmur.”

"Well, sir, all we have to do now is to go ahead to Cape Bathurst," said the Sergeant.

But as a day of rest had been arranged they could not start until the next day, the 6th June.

The next portion of the journey would necessarily be very different from the preceding. The regulations as to the order of the sledges need not be maintained; they could all go as they pleased. They made very short journeys, and stopped at every turn of the coast; indeed, they often went on foot. The only rules enforced by Hobson were that nobody was to go more than three miles from the shore, and that the whole party was to assemble twice a day—at noon and in the evening; at night they encamped.

The weather was still very fine, and the temperature high. There were occasional snowstorms which came on suddenly, but they were not of long duration and the cold was not increased. All the coast between Cape Krusenstern and Cape Parry, which occupies a space of more than 250 miles, was examined most carefully between the 6th and 20th June. If the geographical survey left nothing to be desired—and in this Hobson was efficiently seconded by Thomas Black, who was able to rectify some errors in previous surveys—the special object of the expedition was none the less attended to, as directed by the Hudson's Bay Company.

Were the districts supplied with game? Could they count with certainty not only on food, but on furs?

Would the resources of the country by themselves be sufficient to provision a factory during the summer at least? These were the questions which Hobson had to solve. The following are the results of his observations :

Game, properly speaking, was not plentiful ; there was no want of birds of the duck species, but the rodents were insufficiently represented by a few polar hares, which were very difficult of approach. On the other hand, there were a good many bears : Marbre and Sabine had found fresh traces of them. Several had been seen and tracked, but they kept a long distance off. In any case, it was pretty certain that during the cold season these animals would come from the higher latitudes in large numbers.

"Now," said Corporal Joliffe, whom the question of provisions occupied incessantly, "when we have the bear in the larder he is by no means to be despised. But there is no doubt he is a very problematical kind of game, and we ought to be cautious, for there is the chance that the hunters may meet the very fate which they destine for the bear."

This was a very sage remark ; the bears were not to be depended on for reserve of meat. Fortunately, the district was frequented by herds of a much more useful animal, namely, the reindeer, which Corporal Joliffe was delighted to see abounded in that direction. Nature had bountifully provided for them the lichen, of which they are so fond, and which they dig so cleverly from

under the snow, and which constitutes their only food during the winter.

Jasper Hobson was not less pleased than the Corporal, for there was no mistaking the reindeer's footprints, which are like those of the camel. Herds of these animals, sometimes numbering several thousands, are frequently seen. Living, they are easily domesticated and very useful, as they supply excellent milk and can be used to draw sledges. Dead, they are not less serviceable. Their skin, which is very thick, is used for clothing; the hair makes excellent thread, their flesh is good to eat, and altogether they are the most useful animals in these latitudes. Their presence having been ascertained without doubt, encouraged Hobson in his idea of establishing a fort in that district.

He was none the less satisfied respecting the fur-yielding animals, which abounded in the neighbourhood hitherto undisturbed. There were no traces of man having ever penetrated so far, and the animals considered themselves secure. There were many traces of the beautiful blue and silver foxes, which are rapidly getting scarcer, the skin of which is worth its weight in gold. Sabine and MacNab might easily have bagged them; but the Lieutenant very wisely had forbidden all hunting of that kind, for he did not wish to alarm the animals before the winter, when their skins would be much more valuable. Besides, it was useless to overload the sledges. Sabine and MacNab quite understood his reasons, but their

fingers itched more than once when they came within shot of a sable or some valuable fox ; but Jasper Hobson would not tolerate any disobedience.

The skill of the hunters was therefore necessarily exercised upon polar bears, which occasionally showed themselves ; but as they were not very much pressed by hunger they quickly made off, and no serious engagement occurred. However, if the quadrupeds did not suffer, the birds paid for all—white-headed eagles, fishing-hawks (which build their nests in the dead trees and in the summer migrate to arctic regions), wild geese and ducks, eider-ducks, etc., whose number exceeded all calculation.

It can easily be understood that the hunters, who had been forbidden to shoot quadrupeds, revenged themselves on the feathered tribes. Many hundreds of birds were killed during the first fortnight, and were a welcome addition to the corned-beef and biscuit of the expedition.

There was evidently no want of animals in this territory. The Company could easily stock its magazines, and the office would not be empty of traders ; but these two facts would not by themselves secure the success of the factory. A fort could not be established in such a high latitude without a supply of fuel.

Fortunately the coast was wooded. Some of the woods might even be called forests, and in any case there were plenty of willows, poplars, and birch trees, as well as clumps of arbutus. At this time of year the trees

were all in full leaf, and their appearance surprised the travellers, accustomed as they were to the nakedness of the polar landscape. The ground at the foot of the hills was clothed with short grass, which the reindeer devoured greedily. So the Lieutenant could congratulate himself on the site he had chosen for the base of his operations.

It has been stated that animals were numerous, but of human beings there was not a trace. The party encountered neither Esquimaux nor Indians, and at this distance hunters might easily be overtaken by bad weather or by a return of winter, and cut off from all communication. But Hobson did not complain of the absence of human beings. He had not come to find rivals, he sought for an unoccupied country in which fur-bearing animals had sought an asylum, and in this he had all the sympathy of Mrs. Barnett, who was much interested in the success of the enterprise. She could not forget that she was the guest of the Company, and did all she could to forward the Lieutenant's projects.

The disappointment of Jasper Hobson may be imagined when, on the morning of the 20th June, he discovered traces of an encampment which had but lately been abandoned.

It had been formed at the end of a narrow bay, called Darnley Bay, of which Cape Parry forms the most westerly point. There they found, at the base of a little

hill, the pickets which had served to mark out the line of the camp and the heaps of charred embers.

All the party met at this encampment, and all perceived what disappointment Lieutenant Hobson felt.

"What an unfortunate thing," he said. "I would rather have met a whole family of polar bears."

"But the men who camped here, whoever they may be, must be already far away," said Mrs. Barnett; "and very probably they have gone to their usual hunting-grounds farther south."

"That depends," replied the Lieutenant. "If these are traces of Esquimaux they have probably gone farther north; if, on the contrary, they are Indians, they are most likely seeking new hunting-grounds as we are, which latter would be a very unfortunate thing for us."

"But," said Mrs. Barnett, "cannot we ascertain who these travellers are—whether they are Esquimaux or Indians at all? It appears to me that tribes so different in every respect would scarcely form a camp in the same way."

There was some reason in this remark, and it was possible that the mystery might be solved by a thorough examination of the ground.

So the party set to work, and examined every trace, every object which had been left behind, and every footprint, most carefully. They could not arrive at any conclusion. Some bones of animals told them nothing, and the Lieutenant, very much annoyed, was about to

give up the search in despair, when he was summoned by Mrs. Joliffe, who had wandered about a hundred paces to the left.

Some of the party immediately joined the young *Canadienne*, who was standing still attentively studying the ground.

"You are looking for some traces," she said, as the Lieutenant approached; "well, here they are;" and she pointed to a number of footprints plainly visible in the yielding soil.

This would prove something decisive, for the feet of the Indians and the Esquimaux differ as completely as their shoes.

But Jasper Hobson was more particularly struck by the curious arrangement of the footprints. They had evidently been made by the pressure of the human foot, and a foot wearing a boot or shoe; but the curious circumstance was, that the ball of the foot only had touched the ground—there were no marks of the heel; and besides, the footprints were singularly close together and crossing each other, but all in a very small space.

Jasper Hobson remarked upon the peculiarity, and gave it as his opinion that they were not the footprints of a person walking.

"Nor of a person jumping, for there is no impression of the heel," said Mrs. Barnett.

"No," replied Mrs. Joliffe, "they were made by a person dancing."

Mrs. Joliffe was right. On further examination it was evident that the traces were those of a dancer, but not one who danced heavily—rather of a light and graceful performer. But what could possess any individual, however cheerful he might be, to dance in this fashion, some degrees above the Polar Circle?

“He certainly could not have been an Esquimaux,” said the Lieutenant.

“Nor an Indian,” exclaimed Corporal Joliffe.

“No, he was a Frenchman,” said Long decidedly.

And they all agreed that no one but a Frenchman would have thought of dancing in such a place.

CHAPTER XII.

THE MIDNIGHT SUN.

SERGEANT LONG's observation was a mere guess. No doubt someone had been dancing, but there was no evidence to prove that the dancer was a Frenchman.

Nevertheless Jasper Hobson agreed with his subordinate, and none of the party were inclined to dispute his opinion. They all agreed that some travellers, and amongst them a disciple of Vestris, had lately encamped in that place.

This discovery naturally did not please Lieutenant Hobson, who was afraid that his expedition had been anticipated ; and although the project of the Company had been intended to be kept secret, it had nevertheless been divulged in some of the commercial centres of Canada or the United States.

The march was then resumed, but the Lieutenant was much preoccupied, though he would never think of returning now.

Mrs. Barnett took the opportunity to inquire whether

Frenchmen were frequently met with in such high latitudes.

"Yes," replied Jasper; "or if they are not exactly Frenchmen born they are almost the same — viz. Canadians who are descended from the former owners of Canada when that territory belonged to France. These Canadians are our most formidable rivals."

"I was under the impression," she returned, "that since the absorption of the north-west companies your association had no rivals at all on the American continent."

"Madam," replied Hobson, "if no important association exists except ours, which still traffics in skins and furs, there are some private and independent societies, chiefly American, who employ French agents or their descendants."

"Are these agents highly valued, then?"

"Certainly, madam, and with reason. During the ninety-four years that the French ruled in Canada their agents always proved themselves superior to ours. We must be just to everyone, even to our rivals."

"More especially to our rivals," said Mrs. Barnett.

"Yes, 'particularly to our rivals,' I should have said. At that time the French trappers were the hardiest of all. They lived for years amongst the Indian tribes, and sometimes married amongst them. The Indians called them 'wood-runners' or 'Canadian travellers,' and treated them with great friendliness. They were bold

and skilful men, very expert at navigating the rivers, very cheerful and merry, and easily adapted themselves to circumstances—very loyal, very gay, and ready to sing or dance on the slightest provocation.”

“Do you think that these travellers have only come so far as this to hunt?”

“I do not know for what other reason they could have come,” returned Hobson. “They must be seeking new hunting-grounds. But as we cannot stop them we must not delay to proceed ourselves, and thus meet them boldly.”

Lieutenant Hobson had made up his mind to endure what could not be cured, so he hurried on to reach the 70th parallel, in the hope that his unknown rivals would not follow him so far.

During the next few days the party descended about twenty miles to the southward, so as to turn Franklin Bay. The country was still verdant, birds and beasts were as numerous as ever, and most probably they would find the extreme north-west coast equally well supplied.

The sea extended as far as the eye could reach. The most recent maps show no land north of the American coast. The sea is open, and only icebergs have prevented explorers from reaching the Pole.

On the 4th July the detachment turned another bay called Washburn Bay, and reached the extreme point of a small lake hitherto little known; indeed, it

was rather a large pond than a lake. It was only two square miles in extent.

The sledges travelled easily. The appearance of the country was very favourable to the establishment of a factory. A fort at Cape Bathurst, having the lagoon in the rear, and the Behring Strait—which is always free from ice for four or five months in the year—in front, would be in an excellent situation.

On the 5th of July, about 3 P.M., the detachment halted at the extreme point of Cape Bathurst. It was now necessary to ascertain the exact position of the Cape, which the maps placed above the 70th parallel. But the survey had never yet been accurately made, so Hobson decided to wait and take the bearings.

"Why should we not remain here?" asked Corporal Joliffe. "This is a very pleasant situation."

"It will be still more pleasant if you receive double pay for stopping here, my friend," replied the Lieutenant.

"Not a doubt of it, sir; and besides, we must obey orders, you know."

"Then have patience till to-morrow; and if, as I suppose, this Cape Bathurst is really situated beyond the 70th parallel, we will encamp here."

The situation was favourable. There was plenty of wood close by for the construction of the fort, and for fuel when constructed. The Lieutenant made a reconnaissance to the end of the promontory, and found that the coast-line curved considerably towards the west, and

a series of large icebergs bounded the view. The waters of the small lake were quite sweet, with no taint of saltiness, as might have been anticipated from its proximity to the sea. But in any case there was plenty of palatable water close at hand, for a clear stream ran towards the ocean a few hundred yards to the south-east. The inlet where the stream emptied itself was protected by a sort of "bar" of sand and earth, and formed a natural harbour in which two or three ships could ride safely at anchor. Jasper Hobson, out of politeness, called this little harbour Port Barnett, a compliment which was highly appreciated by the fair traveller.

If they erected the fort behind the cape the chief buildings would be quite sheltered from the north winds. The height of the cape would protect them from the drifts which, like avalanches, sometimes bury houses completely. The space between the foot of the promontory and the shore of the lagoon was sufficient to hold all the buildings necessary. There was even room for a palisade as well, a purely defensive work, but, in the event of the appearance of rival traders, one which would be very useful. So Jasper Hobson, without any present intention of constructing such an establishment, was glad to perceive that there was every facility for so doing.

The weather was very fine and quite warm. Not a cloud was to be seen : but the clear blue of the sky in more temperate zones was not to be expected. During the summer a light mist is usually visible ; but during the

winter, when the icebergs were fixed and the roaring north wind was sweeping pitilessly through the icy mountains, what would Cape Bathurst look like ! But none of the party thought of that, for the weather was superb and the sea sparkled merrily in the sunshine.

A temporary encampment was formed with the sledges on the banks of the lagoon. Towards evening Mrs. Barnett, Jasper Hobson, Thomas Black, and Sergeant Long explored the neighbourhood, which appeared very suitable to their requirements. Hobson was very anxious for daylight, so that he might take the necessary observations and find out whether the place fulfilled the conditions required by the Company.

"Well, Lieutenant," said the astronomer, "this is really a charming spot ; I could not have believed that such a pleasant country lay beyond the Arctic Circle."

"Ah, Mr. Black, the most beautiful districts in the world are up here ; I am all impatience to ascertain our position."

"Particularly the latitude," replied the astronomer, who could not get the eclipse out of his head ; "and I fancy our brave companions are not less anxious than yourself. Double pay beyond the 70th parallel !"

"But do you not take an interest—a purely scientific interest, of course—in this question, Mr. Black ?" said Mrs. Barnett.

"Certainly, madam ; certainly I do ; but not an overpowering interest. According to our calculations,

which are exact, the eclipse, which I am commissioned to observe, will only be observed in totality by a person placed beyond the 70th parallel. So I am equally impatient with the Lieutenant to determine the position of Cape Bathurst."

"But I was under the impression that this eclipse will not take place until the 18th July?"

"Yes, madam, the 18th July, 1860."

"And we are now only at the 5th July, 1859, so the phenomenon will not be visible for more than a year."

"Quite so, madam," replied the astronomer; "but if I had not started till next year I might have been too late."

"You are quite right, Mr. Black, to have a year in advance," replied Jasper Hobson, "as now you are certain not to miss the eclipse, for I must confess that our journey hither has been accomplished under the most exceptionably favourable conditions. To tell you the truth, I did not expect to get here till the middle of August, and if the eclipse was expected this month instead of this time next year, you might have been too late; and besides, we do not know even now whether we are beyond the 70th parallel."

"My dear sir, I do not in the least regret the journey I have taken in your company, and I will wait patiently till my eclipse next year. It is well worth waiting for."

A little after noon the next day (the 6th July) Jasper Hobson and Thomas Black prepared to take the exact

bearings of Cape Bathurst. The sun shone clearly enough for them to ascertain the latitude and longitude. Besides, at this time of the year they all but reached its maximum elevation, and this fact would render the work of the observers more easy.

The Lieutenant and his companion had already ascertained the longitude of the place ; but it was concerning the latitude that Hobson was anxious, for the meridian of Cape Bathurst was no matter if it were not situated beyond the 70th parallel. Mid-day approached ; till the men of the expedition surrounded the observers and impatiently awaited the result of the observations. In fact the question now was whether they had come to the end of their journey or not.

Now perhaps in the latter case no good result would have followed ; in fact, according to the maps, which were imperfect, it must be confessed that the coast to the west of Cape Bathurst curved below the 70th parallel, and did not again pass it till it ran into Russian America, where the English had no right to establish themselves ; so it was not without reason that Hobson had directed his steps to Cape Bathurst, which is the only one that extends beyond the 70th parallel on the whole coast-line of British America. It now remained to be proved whether the position it occupied on the map was correct. This was the important question that Hobson and Black had now to decide.

The sun at that moment was approaching its culmi-

nating point. The astronomers directed the telescope of their sextant upon it. By means of inclined mirrors on the instrument, the sun is made apparently to go back upon the horizon, and the moment that it appears to touch it with its lower edge is the precise second when it is at the highest point of the diurnal arc, and consequently the exact moment it would pass the meridian ; that is to say, it would be noon at the place where the observers were.

Everyone looked on in a most profound silence.

"Noon !" cried Hobson.

"Noon !" repeated Thomas Black at the same moment.

The telescopes were immediately lowered. The Lieutenant and his companion read off the value of the angles they had obtained, and immediately noted them down.

Some minutes after Lieutenant Hobson rose, and addressing his companions, said :

"My friends, from this day, the 6th July, in the name of the Hudson's Bay Company, I promise you double pay !"

"Three cheers for the Company !" cried the men.

So Cape Bathurst was actually situated above the 70th parallel.

We annex the exact figures, which may some day be important :

Longitude, 127 deg. 36 min. 12 sec. W. of the

meridian of Greenwich. Latitude, 70 deg. 44 min. 37 sec. N.

The same evening these hardy pioneers, encamped so far from all human habitation, and more than 800 miles from Fort Reliance, perceived with astonishment the glowing sun touch the border of the western horizon without dipping its burning disc beneath it.

The midnight sun was now for the first time shining before their eyes.

CHAPTER XIII.

FORT HOPE.

THE position of the fort was irrevocably fixed. No other place would suit so well as the level ground behind Cape Bathurst on the eastern side of the lagoon, and Jasper Hobson resolved to commence the construction of the principal dwelling-house immediately; in the meantime everyone had to shift for himself, and the sledges were ingeniously utilised so as to form a provisional encampment.

Besides, thanks to the skilfulness of his men, the Lieutenant expected to have the dwelling-house ready in a month. This house was to be made sufficiently large to accommodate the whole of the detachment; afterwards, before the winter set in, if there was time, they would build the barracks for the soldiers and the store-houses for the merchandise; but Jasper Hobson did not expect to get these finished before the end of September. Now after the month of September the nights get very long, and the bad weather would prevent the execution of any work.

Of the ten soldiers who had been chosen by Captain Craventy, two were more particularly hunters ; the other eight used a hatchet with as much skill as a rifle—like sailors, they were good at almost anything. But just now they were more particularly useful as workmen, since the great object in view was to build a fort while there was no enemy against which to defend themselves. Peterson, Belcher, Rae, Garry, Pond, Hope, and Kellet were a body of skilful and zealous carpenters, and were overlooked by MacNab, a Scotchman from Stirling, who was very skilful in the construction of houses and also of ships. There was no want of tools of all sorts ; one of the men, Rae, was a very clever smith, and by means of a small portable forge he was able to make all the nails, bolts, etc., which were required in carpentry. It is true there was no mason amongst them, but as all the buildings were made of wood, there was no necessity for his services. Fortunately there was no want of trees in the neighbourhood, though there was not a rock nor a stone of any kind—there was nothing but sand on the earth. The sea-shore was covered by thousands of shells, which had been broken by the waves and mingled with marine plants or zoophytes, such as star-fish or sea-urchins ; but, as the Lieutenant remarked to Mrs. Barnett, there was not a single stone or flint to be seen. The cape was only formed by the accumulation of soft earths which a few plants kept together by their roots.

That same afternoon Hobson and MacNab, the

carpenter, set off to choose the site of the dwelling-house at the foot of Cape Bathurst. From that point the view extended over the lagoon and the land to the west for ten or twelve miles ; on the right, about four miles distant or less, were immense icebergs half shrouded in mists ; on the left were immense plains which, during the winter, it would be impossible to distinguish from the frozen water.

This place having been fixed upon, the two men traced with a string the outline of the house. This formed an oblong, sixty feet by thirty. The façade of the house would therefore be sixty feet long and have four openings, namely, a door and three windows on the side of the promontory, and four windows on the side of the lagoon. The door, instead of being at the back, was made at the left corner, so as to render the house more comfortable, as by such an arrangement the air could not penetrate to the innermost rooms.

The first compartment was to be an ante-chamber, protected from the weather by a double door ; the second compartment was to be used as a kitchen, so that no dampness could penetrate to the sitting-rooms ; the third compartment was an immense hall, in which the meals were to be eaten in common ; the fourth compartment was like the cabin of a ship, and divided into many small rooms. Such was the simple plan of the house arranged by the Lieutenant and his master-carpenter.

The soldiers were to occupy the great hall provision-

ally, and at the end of this compartment camp-beds were put up for their accommodation ; the other members of the party were to sleep in the cabins of the fourth compartment. This was pretty close packing, but under the circumstances it could not be helped, and so soon as the barracks were built the whole of the house would be appropriated to the occupants of the fourth compartment. Then, perhaps, this compartment might be divided into three chambers and all the other cabins destroyed, for a rule which travellers in arctic regions should never forget is, to beware of corners. They are nothing but receptacles for ice ; partitions prevent proper ventilation, and the dampness of the air, transformed to snow, renders these rooms uninhabitable, and they become hot-beds of fever and sickness.

For this reason explorers who make up their minds to winter in icy regions arrange the interior of their ship as a common sleeping-room for officers and men ; but Jasper Hobson could not so arrange, for obvious reasons.

It will be perceived there was only a ground-floor in this new habitation, above which would rise a large and very sloping roof, so that the water might run away more easily. The snow, however, would lie, and then the house would be hermetically sealed, and the temperature remain equal all through the winter. Snow is a very bad conductor of heat, which it will not permit to enter a house ; but on the other hand, and what is more im-

portant in arctic regions, it prevents the heat from getting out.

The carpenter had designed two chimneys, one from the kitchen, the other from the stove in the large room, which stove was at the same time to heat the cabins in the fourth compartment. From an architectural point of view this may not have been elegant; but it would make the house more comfortable, which, after all, was the chief point. Indeed, under such conditions as they must expect to exist in winter, the whole appearance of the house would present a strange and dismal aspect which an artist would not easily forget.

The plan of the house having been arranged, it was only necessary to act upon it. This was the business of Mr. MacNab and his assistants; while they worked, the hunters would prepare subsistence for all, so there was no want of employment for everybody.

MacNab had first to choose proper wood for the construction of the house. He selected a tree somewhat similar to the Scotch fir, of medium height and well adapted to the various uses to which it would be applied. It must be understood that in such a house as they purposed to construct, only the most elementary knowledge of building was necessary, and MacNab was therefore able to proceed very quickly, without in any way compromising the solidity of the house.

MacNab chose the straightest trees. About one hundred of these he cut down, but neither squared them

nor took off the bark. They thus formed a number of timbers about twenty feet long. This operation occupied but a few days, and the timber was dragged down by the dogs to the site chosen for the house.

This place had been carefully levelled, and the soil, which was a mixture of fine earth and sand, had been beaten to render it firmer. The short grass and thin shrubs which had grown there were burnt, and the ashes spread upon the ground, so as to prevent the damp from entering the house. Thus a dry foundation had been secured.

This first portion of the work having been finished, beams were fixed at each corner of the proposed building, so as to form the outline of the house. These posts were sunk some feet deep, after the ends had been hardened in the fire. The posts were hollowed out at the sides so as to receive the transverse beams of the wall, between which the openings for the windows and doors had been provided, and were joined together at the top by horizontal beams; and thus the whole building was consolidated. These horizontal beams supported the roof, which overhung like the roof of a chalet; over this the joists of the ceiling were laid, and on the ashes were placed the supports for the floor.

Of course the planks of the walls were only laid ~~side~~ by side; but, to make certain that they should not separate, Rae, the smith, connected them with strong bolts at intervals, but even these did not bring them so

close as was desirable. MacNab therefore was obliged to calk them, as they do the planks of a ship's deck, only, instead of tow, he used dry moss, which was found in abundance in the neighbourhood. This moss was forced into the spaces between the planks by the calking-irons and hammers, and filled up with tar, which was obtained from the pine-trees. By this means the walls were rendered impenetrable both to the cold and the rain.

The door and the windows were very roughly but very well constructed; the latter had very small panes made of isinglass, which was the only material they could procure for the purpose. This was of the less consequence as, in the summer, the windows were sure to be always open, and during the winter there was no light which they could admit, even if it were not necessary to shut and bolt the windows against the raging of the tempest.

In the interior of the house the arrangements were progressing rapidly. Double doors between the compartments prevented draughts and too sudden changes of temperature. Besides, the air-pumps, which they had brought from Fort Reliance, were fixed so that they could supply fresh air to the house when the weather was too cold to have the doors or windows open. One of these pumps was to eject the impure air, the other to supply the fresh. Lieutenant Hobson had given his whole attention to this, and no doubt his arrangement would be of the greatest service.

A large iron furnace was the great feature of the kitchen. This furnace had been brought up in pieces from Fort Reliance, and the smith put it together very easily. But the chimneys took much time and ingenuity to fix. They could not construct them of wood, and, after many attempts, Jasper Hobson decided to use some other material, but as no species of stone was to be found at Cape Bathurst, the difficulty appeared insurmountable.

But if there were no stone there were plenty of shells, and the Lieutenant suggested they should make the chimneys of them.

"Of shells?" exclaimed the carpenter.

"Yes," replied Hobson; "but of shells reduced to lime, with which we can make a sort of bricks and use them as such."

"Let us go and get the shells," replied the carpenter.

Lieutenant Hobson's idea was a good one, and immediately acted upon. As we have said, there were millions of shells upon the sea-shore similar to those which compose the lowest strata of the tertiary formation. MacNab collected many tons of them, and a sort of limekiln was constructed to decompose the carbonate, which enters largely into the composition of these shells. They thus obtained the lime they required.

This operation lasted about twelve hours, and the result, though not first-rate, answered its purpose satisfactorily, and when made into bricks served for the construction of the chimneys. In a few days, therefore,

two conical chimneys were raised above the roof of a solidity sufficient to resist the attacks of the expected storms.

Mrs. Barnett congratulated the Lieutenant and MacNab on their success.

"I hope they will not smoke," she said, laughing.

"No doubt they will smoke, madam," replied Hobson philosophically; "all chimneys smoke."

The whole of their great work was completed in a month. The 6th August was fixed for the inauguration of the house; but while the carpenters were working so hard, Sergeant Long, Corporal Joliffe, and the hunters, led by Jasper Hobson, were exploring the neighbourhood of Cape Bathurst, and ascertained that game of all kinds was abundant. Their mode of hunting had not yet been organised, for the trappers wished first to explore the country a little farther; nevertheless they managed to take a few couples of reindeer, with the view to domesticate them for the sake of their young and their milk. The animals were kept in a paddock, about fifty paces from the house. Mrs. Rae, who was an Indian, undertook the charge of them, and she was well fitted for the duty.

To Mrs. Barnett and Madge were entrusted the arrangement of the interior of the house, and before long the influence of their intelligence and good taste made itself felt in a multitude of ways.

After having explored the country for several miles round, the Lieutenant came to the conclusion that they

were on a vast promontory of about 1,500 square miles in extent. An isthmus about four miles wide united it to the American continent, and extended from Washburn Bay on the east to a corresponding slope on the other side. Mr. Hobson called this promontory Victoria.

The Lieutenant now proceeded to ascertain the resources of the lagoon and the neighbouring sea. On this point he was quite satisfied. In the former was abundance of trout, jack, and other fresh-water fish. The little river supplied salmon, whitebait, and smelt. The sea at that point appeared to be less productive than the lake, but they frequently saw enormous grampuses, whales, and cachalots, which no doubt were escaping from the Behring Strait fishermen. But there were no means of capturing these mammals unless one were stranded on the coast. As for the western side of the river, it was at that time frequented by numerous families of seals; but Hobson would not permit his companions to kill them for the sake of sport. Later on they would be able to judge how to use them to the best advantage.

On the 6th August the colonists took possession of their new house, and after much consultation they determined to bestow upon it the name of Fort Hope, which was now the most advanced station of the Company on the American continent.

If it is not now to be found on the maps of the arctic regions, it is because a terrible future awaited it to the detriment of modern cartography.

CHAPTER XIV.

EXCURSIONS.

THE furnishing arrangements of the new house proceeded rapidly. The camp-bed, set up in the great hall, was soon ready for its occupants. MacNab, the carpenter, had made an enormous table with massive legs which would bear almost any weight. Around this were fixed solid benches, scarcely worthy of the name of "movables," as they were rather fixtures. Some lighter seats and some large presses completed the furniture of the room.

The farther room was as quickly prepared. It was divided into six sleeping compartments, separated by thick partitions, the end ones only being lighted by the windows at the front and back of the house. A bed and a table composed the whole furniture of each compartment. Mrs. Barnett and Madge occupied the cabin overlooking the lake. Hobson offered the corresponding room at the back of the house to Thomas Black, who immediately took possession of it. Jasper Hobson himself, pending the final arrangement of his men,

occupied a small cell adjoining the dining-hall, and which was only lighted by a bull's-eye window in the partition. Mrs. Joliffe, Mrs. MacNab, and Mrs. Rae, with their husbands, occupied the other rooms. These worthy couples all agreed so well that it would have been almost "cruelty to animals" to have separated them. Besides, a new arrival, in the person of an infantile MacNab, was expected, and Mrs. Barnett's services as godmother had already been requested, and accepted with much pleasure.

The sledges had been emptied entirely, and the bedding divided amongst the various rooms. In the garret, to which access was gained by means of a ladder from the entrance-hall, all the tools, provisions, and ammunition which were not immediately required were placed. Winter clothing, boots or caps, furs and skins, were stowed away in enormous presses to keep them dry.

Having seen these preliminary arrangements completed, the Lieutenant proceeded to provide for the warming of the mansion. There was plenty of fuel on the neighbouring hills, and a great quantity was laid in in anticipation of the rigorous winter, during which it would be quite impossible to collect combustibles. A large supply of oil was also collected from the seals which swarmed upon the shore. Condensers were also fitted in the house, under Hobson's superintendence, with a view to collect the moisture, and so arranged that the ice which would form therein could be immediately taken away.

This question of warming the house occupied the attention of the Lieutenant continually, and in reply to Mrs. Barnett he would explain that, as a native of the polar regions, he had had considerable experience in such matters, and had read many books upon the subject, besides :

"It is impossible to take too many precautions," he said, "when we are preparing to encounter an arctic winter; one little thing forgotten might endanger the safety of the whole party."

"I can quite understand it," replied Mrs. Barnett, "and I already perceive that the cold will be a remorseless enemy. But the food question is not less important."

"No doubt, and I have determined to live on what we can procure as far as possible, without diminishing our stores. So in a day or two, when we are a little more settled, we will have a general hunting expedition for that purpose. There will be plenty of time to think about the fur question afterwards, for as yet the animals have not got their winter clothing on, and the skins are not now within twenty-five per cent. of their proper value. No, we must first provision the fort. The reindeer, elk, and wapiti, if any have ventured so far, are the only game we can take at present. And it is no light undertaking to supply twenty human beings and sixty dogs with food; that is the reason I am so preoccupied at present."

The Lieutenant was a person of methodical habits, and if his companions seconded him earnestly there would be no doubt of his success.

The weather continued generally favourable. The snowfall was not expected for about five weeks. When the principal dwelling-house had been finished, Jasper Hobson told the carpenters to build an enormous kennel for the dogs. This dogs' house was erected at the foot of the promontory, up against the slope, and about forty paces from the mansion. The barracks for the accommodation of the men were planned upon the ground opposite the kennels, on the left; the magazines and powder stores were to occupy the front of the *enceinte*.

This enclosure Hobson determined to complete before the winter set in. A firm palisade was erected, to protect the party from the encroachments of wild animals as well as against the natives—Indians or others—who might present themselves. The Lieutenant had not forgotten the traces of outrage committed on the coast-line, though miles distant from Fort Hope. He knew the violence of the nomad tribes, and thought it better to "shut the stable-door *before* the horse was stolen," and protect himself from all chance of attack. The line of circumvallation was traced all around the fort, and at the two foremost angles, which commanded the lake, Master MacNab was instructed to build two "guard-houses," for the accommodation of the pickets or advanced sentries.

If all worked hard—and indeed they *did* work hard—

it was supposed that all these arrangements would be finished before winter set in.

Meanwhile Jasper Hobson organised many hunting-parties, and for a few days the intended chase of the seals was postponed. He was more desirous to procure animal food which might be stored in the fort for the subsistence of the party during the winter.

So, from the 8th August, Sabine and Marbre, sometimes together, sometimes accompanied by the Lieutenant and Sergeant Long, who had much experience, beat the neighbouring country for many miles round. Very frequently the indefatigable Mrs. Barnett would accompany them, and as she handled a rifle as cleverly as the best, she was never behindhand.

During the month of August these expeditions were very successful, and the storehouses were filling visibly. It need scarcely be said that the hunters left no means untried to secure their prey, particularly the reindeer, which are very timid. With what patience the hunters would work round to leeward of the herds, lest their keen sense of smell might discover the party! Sometimes they attracted a victim by moving a pair of antlers above the bushes, and the reindeer—or rather the *cariboo*, as the Indians call them—deceived by this appearance of the horns, would approach within shot.

But very often a little bird—well known to Sabine and Marbre—a sort of owl about the size of a pigeon, would betray the retreat of the cariboo. This bird

attracted the attention of the hunters by a cry somewhat resembling the wail of an infant. The bird is known amongst the Indians as the *monitor*.

About fifty cariboo were killed. The flesh, cut into long strips, amounted to a very considerable supply of food, and the hides were kept for shoe-leather after being tanned.

But the cariboo did not supply the only nourishment. There were polar hares, which bred very fast in those latitudes. They did not appear to be so timid as their European cousins, and permitted themselves to be killed without an attempt to escape. These rodents have long ears, brown eyes, and white fur, something like swan's-down. They weigh about twelve pounds, and their flesh is very excellent eating. These animals were prepared by hundreds, and smoked, not to mention those which were made into pies by the clever Mrs. Joliffe.

But while thus providing for the future, the present was by no means neglected. Besides the polar hares, which were frequently sent to table, the hunters did not disdain venison occasionally.

Mrs. Joliffe was able to dish them up in every variety, and she surpassed herself, to the great delight of the Corporal, who praised her incessantly. Aquatic birds also varied the daily bill of fare, not to mention the ducks which abounded on the lake. They were able to take certain birds which congregated in the marshes. These belonged to the partridge family; so when Mrs. Barnett asked

Sabine what the names were, he replied that the Indians called them *willow-fowl*, but they are nothing more or less than the European black-cock. In fact they might have been called white partridges with long black feathers in the tail; they were very good eating, and only wanted cooking before a quick fire.

In addition to these different sorts of game, they procured plenty from the lake and river. No one knew better how to fish than the calm and patient Sergeant Long, and his skill was equal to his patience, although he had a near rival in Madge, Mrs. Barnett's companion. For hours these two disciples of Isaac Walton would remain seated side by side, rod in hand, taking their fish but not uttering a word, and day by day they returned with some magnificent salmon.

During these excursions, which were continued daily during the month of August, these hunters had some severe encounters with wild animals. It was not without anxiety that Jasper Hobson noticed that bears were numerous in the neighbourhood. Scarcely a day passed without one or two of these formidable creatures being reported, and many times they were shot at. Sometimes they turned out to be brown bears, which are very common in the Cursed Land. Sometimes a representative of the white-bear family would appear, which the increasing cold had, no doubt, brought down to Cape Bathurst; and in fact one may notice, in all books of exploration, that the greatest danger to which fisher-

men and explorers are exposed arises from these animals.

Marbre and Sabine also noticed many packs of wolves, which invariably retired at their approach. The hunters could hear the sound of their baying, particularly when they were tracking a reindeer or a wapiti. These wolves were of the great gray species, about three feet high, with very long tails. The fur becomes quite white during the winter. They abound in this region where food is plentiful, and they live in holes, like foxes in the woods. At this time of year they run away from the hunters, but in the winter, when they are hungry, their numbers would make them very formidable enemies ; and since their dens were so near they never left the neighbourhood at any time of the year.

One day the huntsmen returned to the fort bringing with them a hideous creature which none of the party, not even Thomas Black, had ever seen. This animal was something like the American glutton, a horrible carnivorous animal, with very short legs and tremendous claws, and, like all animals of the feline race, very supple in its movements.

"What can that horrible beast be?" asked Mrs. Barnett.

"Madam," replied Sabine, who was always rather dogmatic in his answers, "a Scotchman would call it a *quick-hatch* ; an Indian, an *okelcoo-haw-gew* ; a Canadian would call it a *carcajou*."

"What do you call it?" she inquired.

"A wolverene," replied Sabine, who was much pleased with the manner in which he had rounded his answer.

In fact "wolverene" was its proper name. It is a nocturnal animal, and lives in hollow trees or caves. It destroys beavers, musk-rats, and other rodents; it is a declared enemy of the foxes and wolves, with which it will often dispute a prey. It is a very knowing animal, of great muscular power, and a very fine sense of smell. It is met with in the highest latitudes. Its short fur becomes almost black during the winter, and figures largely in the exports of the Hudson's Bay Company.

During their excursions the hunters had paid as much attention to the flora as to the fauna, but the vegetables were necessarily less varied than the animals, as they had no shelter from bad weather. The pine and fir were abundant, and Jasper Hobson also remarked some *tacamahacs*, a sort of poplar. It grows to a great height, and puts forth yellow leaves which in the autumn turn green; but these were rare.

Certain black fir-trees succeeded better in sheltered places; they noticed the latter with satisfaction, for the young shoots of this tree are highly esteemed in North America, as from them the beverage known as spruce-beer is manufactured. Hobson caused a quantity of these small branches to be collected and placed in the cellars of Fort Hope. There were other trees, such as

the dwarf birch and the cedar, which supplied excellent fuel.

But of any vegetables which could fairly be used for food there was a great scarcity. Mrs. Joliffe, who was much interested in this branch of botany, could only find two specimens fit for cooking. One of these was difficult to distinguish because its leaves fall off in the flowering season, but it was pronounced to be a leek, and yielded a quantity of onions about the size of an egg, which proved useful.

The other plant is known in North America as the Labrador tea-plant, and grew in great abundance on the banks of the lagoon amongst the willow-trunks ; it is a favourite food of the polar hares. This plant, steeped in boiling water to which a few drops of spirit have been added, makes excellent tea, and served to economise the supply of the Chinese article which had been brought from Fort Reliance.

In view of the scarcity of vegetables, Jasper Hobson had provided himself with a quantity of seeds, which he intended to sow at the proper time. These were principally sorrel and scurvy-grass, the antiscorbutic properties of which are invaluable in those latitudes, and he hoped, by choosing a well-sheltered spot, that the seeds would grow up the following season.

Besides these the medicine-chest contained other antiscorbutics. The Company had furnished them with lemons and casks of limejuice without which no polar

expedition could possibly make way ; but it was very necessary to economise this reserve, for continuous bad weather might seriously compromise all communication between Fort Hope and the southern stations.

CHAPTER XV.

FIFTEEN MILES FROM CAPE BATHURST.

SEPTEMBER had come ; in three weeks at least the winter season would commence, when the necessary works would be interrupted ; it was therefore obligatory to use all diligence. Fortunately the new buildings had been very quickly built, and the carpenters had performed prodigies of activity. The kennels were nearly finished, and the palisade round the fort was also near completion. There was nothing more to do than to erect the postern which would give access to the inner court. This formed a sort of half-moon, and was fenced with tall and pointed stakes about fifteen feet high. But with a view to complete the system of fortification, it was necessary to take possession of Cape Bathurst, which commanded the fort ; so it will be seen that Hobson favoured the system of detached forts and unbroken enclosures—an improvement on Vauban's and Cormontaigne's systems. But in the meantime the palisade was sufficient to protect the fort from all likely attacks.

FIFTEEN MILES FROM CAPE BATHURST. 157

On the 4th September, Hobson decided to go in chase of the seals and other amphibious animals on the shore, as he wanted to obtain a supply of oil and other material for lighting during the winter.

The seals were most plentiful at a spot about fifteen miles off, and Hobson asked Mrs. Barnett to accompany the expedition. She accepted the invitation, not because the proposed butchery had any attraction for her, but because she wished to see the country and satisfy her curiosity concerning it.

Sergeant Long, with Peterson, Hope, and Kellet, made up the party.

They started at eight o'clock in the morning. Two sledges, drawn by six dogs each, accompanied them in order to bring back the spoil.

In these sledges the party now set out. The weather was fine, but the low-lying fogs veiled the sun, and gave it a yellowish tinge. The orb was now beginning to disappear for some hours during the night.

The coast to the east of Cape Bathurst was quite flat, and rose very slightly above the level of the sea. Now this disappearance of the sun attracted Hobson's attention, and this is why :

The tides are very high in the polar seas, or at least are reported to be so by many explorers. Parry, Franklin, the Rosses, M'Clure, M'Clintock, and others have noticed the rise of the tide to be twenty-five feet above the usual level. If this observation be correct

—and there is no reason to question its truth—how was it that the sea did not come over Cape Bathurst at high tide, since there was nothing whatever to oppose its advance? It was evident that this submersion had not taken place.

Jasper Hobson could not help remarking upon this fact; and his companion replied that she supposed, notwithstanding all statements to the contrary, that there could be no tide in the Arctic Ocean.

“Quite the contrary,” replied Hobson. “All explorers agree in stating that the ebb and flow are most distinctly marked in these seas; they cannot all have been mistaken.”

“Well, then,” replied Mrs. Barnett, “will you be good enough to explain to me why the land is not submerged, as it is not ten feet above low-water mark?”

“That is just what puzzles me,” replied Hobson. “I cannot explain the fact. I have been observing the tides, during the month we have been here, and, as a rule, they have not varied twelve inches. I am positive that, even at the equinox, they will not rise or fall more than a foot and a half at Cape Bathurst. At any rate we must wait and see.”

“But there must be a reason; everything in the world is capable of explanation.”

“Well, it may be caused by one of two things: either all the Arctic explorers have been mistaken, which I cannot admit, or there is really no tide on this

part of the American coast; as occurs in the Mediterranean and other seas, the entrance to which is through very narrow straits."

"Suppose we adopt your latter hypothesis?" said Mrs. Barnett.

"It must be so, I suppose," replied the Lieutenant; "and yet I am not satisfied. I am quite sure there must be some explanation of the phenomenon."

At nine o'clock the sledges, having crossed a flat and sandy shore, arrived at the bay frequented by the seals. The dogs were left behind, so as not to frighten the animals.

This part of the coast was very different from that in the neighbourhood of Cape Bathurst. Here it was rugged and broken, displaying fantastic forms, the effects of volcanic action, which, and not water, had evidently produced it. Stone, which is wanting at Cape Bathurst—a peculiarity not less remarkable than the absence of the ocean tides—was present here in large erratic blocks deeply embedded in the ground. On all sides were black sand and lava, sprinkled with pebbles of felspar, which demonstrated that the coast was formed of crystalline strata. On the surface glittered numerous Labradorites of various tints, with pumice-stones and obsidian. In the rear rose cliffs 200 feet above the level of the sea.

Jasper Hobson resolved to climb these cliffs so as to obtain a view of the eastern portion of the district. He had plenty of time, as the hour appointed for the attack

of the seals had not come, and but few of the animals were visible, for it was better to attack them after their mid-day sleep. The Lieutenant, however, discovered that the animals he sought were not the true seal, but walrus and morse, or sea-cows, as they are sometimes called, which are known by their long upper canine teeth.

The hunters, following the curve of the little bay, which they called Morse Bay, advanced in the direction of the cliffs. Peterson, Hope, and Kellet remained on a little promontory to watch the morse, while Mrs. Barnett, Hobson, and the Sergeant climbed to the top of the cliff. They arranged a signal of recall with their friends, so that they might return when the seals had assembled.

They reached the summit in about a quarter of an hour, and had a most extensive view. At their feet the sea stretched forth to the northern horizon ; not a single object, not even an iceberg, was visible ; and it looked as if it were easily navigable as far as Behring Strait. During the summer the Company's ships could reach Cape Bathurst by the North-West Passage.

On the western side they could perceive, about ten miles off, a chain of igneous hills with rounded tops and jagged outlines, as if some shaking hand had traced their form upon the horizon. Jasper Hobson having observed them attentively, turned his eyes in the opposite direction.

In the east there was a long strip of coast, apparently quite level, as far as Cape Bathurst. Had he possessed a

good telescope, Hobson would have been able to perceive Fort Hope, and even the thread of blue smoke which was no doubt issuing from Mrs. Joliffe's kitchen chimney.

Behind them the land presented itself under two different aspects. To the south-east was a vast plain many square miles in extent, while in the other direction, from Morse Bay to the volcanic mountains, the country showed traces of terrible convulsions, which clearly indicated its volcanic origin. The Lieutenant could not fail to remark the contrast, which appeared to him extraordinary.

"Do you think, sir," said Sergeant Long, "that those mountains yonder are volcanoes?"

"I have no doubt about it," replied Hobson. "All this pumice-stone, obsidian, and other pebbles, have been thrown here by them, and a few miles farther on we should find ourselves in the midst of lava and cinders."

"Do you think that those volcanoes are still in activity?" asked the Sergeant.

"I cannot answer that question."

"But there is no smoke visible."

"That is no reason. Your pipe is not always in your mouth, is it?"

"No, sir."

"Well, the volcanoes are not always smoking either."

"I understand so far," replied the Sergeant; "but I cannot comprehend how it is that there are volcanoes at all in polar countries."

"They are not very numerous," said Mrs. Barnett.

"No," replied the Lieutenant; "but we might count up several, nevertheless. They are to be found in the Isle of Jan Mayen, in the Aleutian Islands, in Kamtchatka, in Russian America, in Iceland, in Terra del Fuego, and other southern countries. Volcanoes are only chimneys from the great interior furnaces of the earth, and I think the Creator has placed them where they are most necessary."

"No doubt," replied the Sergeant; "but up in the snow here at the Pole——"

"Well, Sergeant, why not at the Pole as well as the Equator? I should say they were even more necessary in cold climates."

"Why so?" exclaimed the Sergeant, who was much surprised.

"Because if these safety-valves are opened by the pressure of interior gases, they will escape where the crust is thinnest. Now, as the earth is flattened at the poles, it is only natural that—— But there is Kellet making signals," he exclaimed. "Let us go. Will you come with us, Mrs. Barnett?"

"I will remain here," she replied. "I do not like to see the poor animals slaughtered."

"I can quite understand your feelings, madam," replied Hobson, "and if you will rejoin us in an hour we will return to the fort."

So Mrs. Barnett remained on the cliffs enjoying the

view. Hobson and his attendant reached the shore in a quarter of an hour. The morse had assembled in great numbers—there were at least a hundred. Some were hobbling about upon their clumsy-looking feet, but the greater number were asleep, surrounded by their families. One or two of the biggest males were posted as sentinels.

The hunters were obliged to exercise the greatest caution, and to take advantage of every shelter and cover, so as to gain a position from which they could cut off the animals' retreat to the sea. On land they are clumsy and maladroit, but in the water they are extremely active; being splendid swimmers, their movements are swift and graceful, and when aroused they are dangerous to attack in boats, which they will follow and upset.

However, the sentinels took alarm—they scented the danger. They raised their heads and looked; but before they had time to warn the herd, Hobson and Kellet on one side, the Sergeant, Peterson, and Hope on the other, rushed out and succeeded in despatching five morse; the remainder escaped into the sea.

This was an easy victory. The victims were very large and the ivory of their tusks, though somewhat rough, was of the first quality; and, what the Lieutenant appreciated still more, was the quantity of oil they would furnish. The bodies were immediately placed upon the sledges, and the dogs harnessed to their heavy loads.

It was now one o'clock, and Mrs. Barnett having rejoined the party, they all set out on foot for Fort Hope.

They had but ten miles to go, and in a direct line. The proverb says, "It is a long lane that has no turning;" and the proverb is right.

In order to beguile the tediousness of the way the hunters related their experiences. Mrs. Barnett frequently joined in the conversation, and profited by the special knowledge of her companions. Nevertheless the journey appeared very long, and it was with difficulty that the dogs could draw the sledges; on snow they could have got over the distance in two hours.

More than once Hobson ordered a halt, in order to rest the exhausted teams.

"I wish," said Sergeant Long, "that these morse would settle a little nearer our fort."

"They would not be able to find a suitable spot," replied the Lieutenant, shaking his head.

"Why not?" asked Mrs. Barnett with surprise.

"Because they only frequent a gently sloping shore, upon which they can easily climb up from the sea."

"Well, but the shore of the cape?"

"The shore there rises perpendicularly," replied Hobson, "there is no slope whatever, and it is a singular feature of the country; so if we wish to fish there our lines ought to be at least three hundred fathoms long. I do not know why the coast is so different, but I think that in the course of ages some violent volcanic action separated a portion of the continent and cast it on the borders of the Polar Sea."

CHAPTER XVI.

TWO SHOTS !

THE first half of September passed away. If Fort Hope had been situated at the Pole—that is to say, twenty degrees farther north—on the 21st of the month the polar night would have set in ; but at the 70th parallel the sun would not disappear for another month. But the temperature had become very much colder. During the night the thermometer fell to 31 deg. Fahrenheit (one degree below zero centigrade). Thin ice formed in places, but was melted by the sun during the day.

Some snowstorms, or rather sleet-storms, fell, and everything indicated the approach of winter.

But the inhabitants of the factory could await its coming without fear ; there was provision sufficient for the time ; there was a good supply of venison and twenty-nine morse had been killed. MacNab had found time to build a stable for the domesticated reindeer, and, behind the house, an immense shed for the fuel. Winter—that is to say, night, snow, ice, and cold—might now come if it pleased ; the detachment was prepared to receive it.

Now, having provided for all the wants of his party, Jasper Hobson thought of the interests of the Company. The animals had by this time assumed their winter clothing, and had therefore become valuable. The opportunity was favourable for shooting them (when the snow had fallen they intended to set traps), and Hobson now organised hunting-parties.

In these high latitudes one could not count upon Indians, who generally furnished furs to the Company. Hobson, Marbre, and Sabine, with two or three of their companions, therefore went out to hunt for their employers.

A family of beavers had been noticed on the affluent of a little river about six miles to the south of the fort, and in that direction Hobson proceeded.

Formerly the beaver fur was worth 400 francs a kilogramme, for it was used for making hats ; but if the use of the animal has diminished, the fur still commands a high price in consequence of its scarcity, for the beavers have been nearly exterminated.

The hunters reached the river, and Hobson pointed out to Mrs. Barnett the ingenious manner in which the beavers constructed their dwellings. There were about one hundred of them living together in pairs in the neighbourhood of the stream, but they had already commenced building for the winter, and were working very hard.

Across the rapid stream, which was so deep that it

never froze, even in the coldest winters, the beavers had constructed a dam, which was placed convexly towards the current, and consisted of upright stakes interlaced with flexible branches, the whole being fixed or cemented together with the clayey mud of the river, which the beavers had previously trodden under foot ; then, with the assistance of their tails, which are long, flat, and oval they plastered this mortar all over the woodwork of the dam.

"This dam, madam," said Hobson, "is intended to preserve a constant depth of water, so as to permit the engineers of the tribe to erect their round huts, the tops of which you can now see. These are very solidly built, the walls being two feet thick. There is no entry, except by a narrow hole under water, so the beavers have to dive when they want to go home ; but this arrangement tends to the security of the family. If you were to examine one of the huts, you would find it composed of two stages—the lower is used as a store-house, the upper as a dwelling-place for the owner and his family."

"But I do not perceive any beavers," said Mrs. Barnett ; "have they abandoned their work ?"

"No," replied Hobson, "but just now they are all resting or asleep, as they only work at night, and we wish to surprise them in their holes."

The capture of the beavers was not a difficult matter. About one hundred were taken in the course of an hour, and amongst them were some of black fur, which

is extremely valuable. The fur of the others was long and silky, but of a reddish hue mixed with maroon, and beneath this was a fine hair of a silver-gray colour. The hunters returned to the fort much pleased with their spoils. The skins were stored and registered as "parchments" or "young beavers," according to price.

During the month of September and into the middle of October these expeditions were continued with most favourable results.

A few badgers were also captured for the sake of their skins, which serve as garniture for the collars of draught-horses, and the hair for making brushes. These carnivora—for they are really little bears—belong to the species which is peculiar to North America.

Other and almost as industrious specimens of the beaver family were esteemed very highly at the factory. These were musk-rats, which are about a foot long. The fur is very valuable. They were taken in their burrows without any trouble, for they multiply with extreme rapidity.

Some lynxes were also shot. These animals are very agile, and are formidable even to the reindeer; but neither Marbre nor Sabine were unaccustomed to the chase, and they killed about sixty of them, as well as some wolverenes.

The ermines very seldom appeared. These animals belong to the marten tribe, like the polecat, and had not yet assumed their beautiful white winter fur; so Jasper

Hobson told his people to spare them for the present, and "let them ripen," as Sabine said, during the winter. The polecats, however, which are unpleasant animals to hunt, in consequence of their disagreeable smell, were taken in large numbers, either by tracking them to their lairs in the trees or by shooting them as they glided amongst the branches.

The martens, properly so called, were specially hunted, their fur being highly esteemed, although it is inferior to the sable; but the latter did not frequent that neighbourhood, and it is in Siberia that it is chiefly procured. Nevertheless they succeeded in obtaining some other species of marten, such as weasels and the pine-marten or Canadian marten. These martens and weasels, during the month of September, supplied but a small number of furs, as the animals are very active and difficult to take. They are enabled to wriggle themselves through the smallest apertures, almost like worms, so that they escape the hunters, but in the winter they are easily trapped. Marbre and Sabine only waited for a favourable moment to set their traps, when there would be no want of weasels or martens in the Company's stores.

To wind up the enumeration of the furs taken by the party at Fort Hope, we have only to mention the blue and silver foxes, which are most highly valued in the Russian and English markets.

The blue fox comes first, and is known as the *isatis*. This pretty animal has a black muzzle, but the fur is

almost blue ; it is a whitish brown, and the beauty of its fur consists in its thickness, length, and softness. The blue fox is undoubtedly the king of fur-bearing animals, and is worth six times the price of any other. A cloak belonging to the Emperor of Russia, made throughout of fur from the neck of the blue fox, was exhibited in London in 1851, and valued at £3,400 sterling.

Several of these foxes were seen in the neighbourhood of Cape Bathurst, but the hunters could not get near them ; they succeeded in killing a dozen of the silver foxes, the fur of which is a glossy black, dotted with white. Though not so valuable, it still fetches a high price in Russian and English markets.

One of the silver foxes was a magnificent animal, even larger than the common fox, and as the circumstances connected with his death deserve to be related, we will annex them, for they justified Hobson in having taken certain precautions.

On the morning of the 24th September, Mrs. Barnett, the Lieutenant, Sergeant Long, Marbre, and Sabine, went in two sledges to Morse Bay. Some fox-tracks had been noticed the evening before, and the hunters succeeded in striking the trail amongst the rocks. In a couple of hours they succeeded in bringing down their prey.

Two or three others were subsequently sighted, so the party divided, Marbre and Sabine going in one direction, while the others endeavoured to cut off the retreat of a fine specimen which was hiding amongst the rocks.

It was very necessary to use great caution, for the cunning animal took care not to expose itself to a bullet.

The pursuit continued for half an hour without result, but the animal at last, surrounded on three sides, with the sea in the front, made up its mind to escape, and with a prodigious bound it leaped over the rock. But Hobson was equal to the occasion, and as the animal passed like a shadow, he fired and hit it.

At the same moment another shot was heard, and a second bullet struck the animal dead.

"Hurrah!" cried Jasper Hobson, "he is mine!"

"And mine," replied a stranger, who placed his foot upon the fox just as the Lieutenant was about to seize it.

Jasper Hobson drew back, greatly astonished. He thought that the second shot had been fired by the Sergeant, and he found himself in the presence of a strange hunter, whose gun was still smoking.

The rivals stood gazing at each other.

Mrs. Barnett and her companion now came up, and they were soon joined by Marbre and Sabine. At the same time, about a dozen men approached from the other side, and, joining the strangers, raised their hats politely to the lady.

The leader of the new-comers was a tall man, a perfect type of the Canadian trapper, whose presence Jasper Hobson so particularly objected to. The Canadian wore the traditional costume of the American romancists—a blanket arranged as a *capote*, a striped cotton shirt, wide

cloth trousers, leather gaiters, moccasins of deerskin, and a checked woollen scarf around his waist; in the last was suspended a knife, tobacco-pouch, pipe, and some camping utensils. In a word, he looked half savage and half civilised. Four of his companions were attired like himself; the other eight, who served as escort, were Chippeway Indians.

Hobson was not mistaken—the man was a Frenchman, or at least descended from the French Canadians, and perhaps an agent of the American company charged with the duty of observing the establishment of the new fort.

“This fox belongs to me,” said the Lieutenant after a short silence, during which the men looked into the whites of each other’s eyes

“It belongs to you if you killed it,” replied the other in good English, but with a slight foreign accent.

“You are mistaken,” replied Hobson quickly; “whether you killed it or not, the animal belongs to me.”

This reply was received with a disdainful smile, so indicative of the pretensions put forth by the Hudson’s Bay Company.

“So,” replied the unknown stranger, playing with his gun, “you think the Hudson’s Bay Company is mistress of all this part of North America, do you?”

“Most decidedly,” replied Hobson; “and if you belong to an American company, as I suppose——”

"To the Fur Company of Saint Louis," replied the trapper, bowing.

"I think," continued the Lieutenant, "that you will find it very difficult to show me the grant which gives you any privileges here."

"Grants—privileges!" exclaimed the Canadian disdainfully; "these are old European terms, and do not sound well in America."

"But you are not in America, you are on English territory," replied Hobson proudly.

"Sir," replied the trapper warmly; "this is not the time for any discussion. We know the sort of pretensions made to these hunting-grounds by England in general, and by the Hudson's Bay Company in particular; but I believe sooner or later America will extend from the Straits of Magellan to the North Pole."

"I do not believe it," replied Jasper Hobson dryly.

"In any case," said the Canadian, "we can afford to leave this international question for the present. Whatever pretensions the Company may have, it is evident that in these high latitudes, and particularly on the coast, that territory should belong to whoever occupies it. You have established a factory at Cape Bathurst: very well, we will not hunt upon your grounds, and on your part you must respect ours, when the Fur Company of St. Louis shall have established their fort on a point on the northern shore of America."

The Lieutenant was by no means satisfied with such

a prospect, for he knew that in a not distant future the Hudson's Bay Company would have powerful rivals who would not respect their rights, and bloodshed was by no means impossible. But he was quite aware, nevertheless, that this was not the time to discuss a question of privilege, and he was not displeased when the trapper, who was very polite, changed the ground of argument.

"As for this particular business," said the Canadian, "it is of very little importance, and may be settled according to hunters' law. Your gun and mine are of different calibre, so the bullets will be easily recognised. Let the fox belong to him who actually killed it."

This was only fair, and could be immediately decided. So the body of the fox was examined; he had received two bullets, one in the side, the other had reached the heart; the latter was from the Canadian's rifle.

"The animal is yours, sir," said Hobson, endeavouring to conceal his chagrin at seeing the beautiful trophy pass into the stranger's hands.

The trapper took the fox, and just when they all thought he was going to throw it over his shoulder and carry it away, he turned to Mrs. Barnett and said :

"Ladies are very fond of beautiful furs; if they knew what it cost the hunters to obtain them, perhaps they would not be so anxious for them; but they are very fond of them at any rate. Permit me therefore, madam, to offer you this as a souvenir of our meeting."

Mrs. Barnett hesitated to accept it; but the Canadian

offered it with such courtesy and kindness that she felt it would wound him to refuse it. She therefore took it and thanked him.

He bowed to her, saluted the other members of the party, and, followed by his friends, quickly disappeared behind the rocks.

The Lieutenant and his party returned to the fort. Hobson was very silent and thoughtful. He was now obliged to recognise a rival ; and this meeting with the Canadian trapper promised to lead to many difficulties in the future.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE APPROACH OF WINTER.

ON the 21st September the sun was passing through the equinox ; night and day were of equal length, and these successive returns of light and darkness were delightful to the inhabitants of the fort. They could sleep better in the dark ; and as a matter of fact the eye is much more refreshed in the darkness than in the long daylight.

During the equinox, as we know, the tides are higher, for the influence of the sun and moon together is brought to bear, and increases the force of the flux and reflux. It became necessary, therefore, to make some observations as to its effect on the coast at Cape Bathurst. Jasper Hobson had made some marks, a sort of "maregraph," by which he hoped to estimate the displacement between high and low water. This point was settled ; and he maintained, notwithstanding all reports of travellers to the contrary, that in that portion of the Polar Sea there was scarcely any tide at all.

"There is something unnatural here," exclaimed Hobson. Indeed, he did not know what to think about it, and he sought vainly for a long time for some explanation of the phenomenon.

On the 29th September the temperature suddenly changed. The thermometer fell to 41 deg. Fahrenheit (five degrees above zero centigrade). The sky became overcast and threatened rain. Winter was approaching.

Mrs. Joliffe occupied herself before the arrival of the snow by sowing seeds of scurvy-grass and sorrel, in the hope that they would be protected even by the snow, and sprout in the spring. She had prepared the ground in anticipation.

Jasper Hobson was not desirous to wait the arrival of the great cold before adopting his winter clothing. So he at once issued it to the men, and they were all soon invested with linen vests, capotes of deer-skin, seal-skin breeches, fur caps, and waterproof boots. The rooms were equally well defended against the weather. The wooden walls were hung with tapestry of skins to protect them from the formation of ice within, and Rae set up his condensers to collect the vapour suspended in the air, which condensers were to be emptied twice a week.

The stove was regulated according to the external temperature, and the heat was arranged to be fixed at 50 deg. Fahrenheit. Besides, the house would soon be quite covered with snow, which would prevent the escape of internal heat. So by these means they hoped

to contend against their enemies, damp and frost, successfully.

On the 2nd October the thermometer dropped still more, and the first snow fell. There was no wind to speak of, and consequently no snowdrifts, but one thick white carpet covered the ground. The waters of the lake and the sea, which were not yet frozen, stood out in clear contrast to the snowy ground; but on the northern horizon they could see the first icebergs rising in relief against the misty sky. The ocean had not yet been blocked up, but nature was collecting her forces with a view to form an impenetrable barrier.

Meantime the young ice was beginning to solidify the sea and the lagoon. The latter was frozen first. Here and there white patches appeared on the surface, precursors of the frost which the calm atmosphere favoured; and after one night, while the thermometer showed 15 deg. Fahrenheit, the surface of the lake was as smooth as the most fastidious skaters of the Serpentine could desire. Far away on the horizon the sky assumed that peculiar look called *blink* by whalers, which is produced by the reflection of the ice; and the sea then became gradually frozen over.

A vast ice-field was formed by degrees; but it did not present the mirror-like surface of the lake, as the movements of the waves broke the ice into fantastic and distorted forms. Here and there large pieces floated about, united to others like themselves. This appearance

is called "drift-ice," and the protuberances produced by the pressure of these floating pieces are known as "hummocks."

In a few days the appearance of the neighbourhood of Cape Bathurst was completely altered. Mrs. Barnett was delighted, and would have gone through any fatigue or annoyance for the sake of witnessing such a novel spectacle. She could imagine nothing more sublime than this storming of the northern regions by winter. None of the sights which she was accustomed to notice could now be distinguished; the whole country was metamorphosed and a new tract springing into being. Details disappeared, only outlines were visible; one transformation succeeded another with the rapidity of a pantomime. The ocean was no longer visible, and the land was covered with a dazzling carpet; no more forests, but a collection of gaunt skeletons covered with hoarfrost. The sun no longer appeared; nothing but a pale disc could be perceived through the fog; and instead of the clear line of the horizon there was a barricade of rugged icebergs, forming an impenetrable barrier to the audacious explorers of the polar regions.

We can imagine the discussion and conversation to which this state of things gave rise. Thomas Black alone appeared to be indifferent to the beauty of the spectacle; but that was only to be expected of an astronomer who had but one idea, namely, contemplation of the heavenly bodies; for now the fogs and

clouds hid all the stars and made him furious. Hobson endeavoured to console him by promising him clear, beautiful, frosty nights, most favourable for astronomical observations, for the aurora borealis, lunar haloes, and other phenomena worthy even of *his* attention.

Meantime the temperature was not too cold, for there was no wind, and it is the cold wind which makes the winter most severe. Hunting was still carried on ; new stores of furs and provisions were brought home ; partridges and ptarmigans, on their way to more temperate regions, were shot in great numbers ; as well as polar hares, which had now put on their winter dress. About one hundred of these rodents were easily taken, and swelled the reserve of provisions in the fort.

There were also immense flocks of whistling swans—one of the most beautiful species in North America. They are magnificent birds, four or five feet long, with white feathers tending towards a coppery fringe at the head and neck. They were seeking a more hospitable zone, and they flew at a tremendous pace ; several couples of them, however, were killed. There were other swans called “trumpeters,” about the same size, but neither Marbre nor Sabine were fortunate enough to shoot any of them. They, however, saluted them with a loud “*Au revoir !*” for they knew that in the spring they would be more easily taken. The skin, feathers, and down are most highly valued by both hunters and Indians ; and in favourable years tens of

thousands of these birds have been exported at a price of ten shillings each.

During these excursions, which only lasted a few hours, as they were often interrupted by bad weather, the hunters occasionally met packs of wolves who were bold enough to come close to the factory. They were evidently attracted by the smell from the kitchen of the fort, for their scent is very keen. During the night they howled terribly. They are not individually dangerous, but when numbers of them collect they are very formidable, and the hunters were therefore obliged to go forth well armed.

But besides these visitors the bears also became aggressive—one or more were visible every day—and at night they came close up to the palisade. Some were wounded, but got away, tracking the snow with their blood; but till the 10th October none of them had left their valuable fur behind as a trophy. Hobson would not permit his men to attack them, as he thought it better to remain on the defensive, and very likely before long the bears, impelled by hunger, might even attack the fort; then the inhabitants could protect themselves and supply the larder at the same time.

For some days the weather was dry and cold, and the snow was firm and favourable to pedestrians, so many excursions were made to the southward. The Lieutenant was very anxious to ascertain whether the agents of the St. Louis Company had left the neigh

bourhood, but no traces of them could be obtained. It was possible that they had gone still farther south for the winter.

But the fine weather did not last, and the first week in November the wind veered to the south and brought on some heavy snow-storms, though the temperature was warmer. The ground was soon covered many feet deep in snow, which it was necessary to clear away every day, and to construct paths to the sheds, the stables, and the kennels. Excursions became less frequent, for it was impossible to proceed without snow-shoes.

When snow is hard it will of course support man, but when it becomes soft one is apt to sink up to the knee in it. Under these circumstances the Indians use snow-shoes.

Hobson and his companions were quite accustomed to the snow-shoes, and could proceed almost as quickly as a skater on ice. Mrs. Barnett even was no stranger to their use, and soon became proficient. Excursions were made both on the ice and on the snow. They could even traverse the surface of the ocean, which was frozen to the depth of many feet, but progress was very fatiguing as the ice-fields were very rugged and uneven, and the hummocks and lumps of ice had to be avoided. Farther out icebergs formed an impassable barrier, 500 feet in height, which presented a magnificent sight. They appeared like the white ruins of a town, and again like some volcanic territory torn by earthquakes. Here was

a chain of mountains like the Alps frozen together, the crevasses, hillocks, and valleys all mingled together. A few birds, such as petrels, guillemots, and puffins, enlivened the solitude and uttered piercing cries. Enormous white bears appeared at intervals amongst the hummocks, and scarcely distinguishable from them. In truth there was no want of new sensations for all the travellers, and very different experiences from those of tropical countries, wherein Mrs. Barnett and Madge had hitherto travelled.

The excursions on the frozen ocean were soon relinquished in consequence of their severity; and besides, the sudden fall of the thermometer almost precluded walking exercise, for little exertion soon put one out of breath. The eyes were affected by the intense glare, which is often the cause of snow-blindness amongst the Esquimaux. By a singular phenomenon caused by the refraction of the rays of light, the distances, the depths and thickness of objects, appeared different from what they were. If there were five or six feet to jump across between two blocks of ice the distance appeared only about two feet, and in consequence the explorers had many falls.

On the 14th October the thermometer marked 3 deg. Fahrenheit below zero, which is a very severe temperature, particularly with a strong north wind. The air seemed to be full of needles, and those who ventured out were threatened with frostbite, that is to say, instant

taneous freezing if the circulation of the blood cannot be restored by rubbing the frozen parts with snow. Many of the inhabitants of the fort were frostbitten, but by timely friction they escaped all ill effects.

Of course all manual labour had become out of the question ; besides, the days were extremely short. The sun was only above the horizon for a few hours, but the twilight continued for a long time. Winter had set in in earnest. Nearly all the birds had disappeared, a few couples of quails alone remained, a species called by the Indians *winter-birds*, because they remain in the arctic regions till the polar night sets in ; but even they take their departure then.

Lieutenant Hobson, therefore, was anxious to finish the setting of the traps and snares which he had arranged to be fixed during the winter. These traps consisted of rough planks supported upon three pieces of wood, so that the least touch would cause them to fall. This, on a large scale, is very like the common trap set in fields by bird-catchers. The extremity of the horizontal beam was baited with a piece of venison, and any medium-sized animal, such as a fox or marten, which attempted to take the bait, was instantly crushed. These were the sort of traps which the famous hunters of whom Cooper has so picturesquely written used to spread, and about thirty of the snares were now established round Fort Hope, and visited at frequent intervals.

On the 12th November the little colony was increased

by a new member. Mrs. MacNab presented her husband with a fine boy, of whom he was very proud. Mrs. Barnett was godmother, and the child was named Michael Hope. The christening was carried out with much solemnity, and quite a fête was held in honour of the little fellow who had made his appearance beyond the 70th deg. N. latitude.

A few days afterwards, on the 20th November, the sun disappeared below the horizon, not to rise again for two months.

The polar night had commenced.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE POLAR NIGHT.

A VIOLENT tempest ushered in the long polar night. The cold was rather less severe, but the air was extremely damp. Notwithstanding all their preparations the dampness penetrated the house, and the condensers yielded several pounds of ice every morning.

Outside the house the snow drifted about like a water-spout. The flakes fell almost horizontally. Jasper Hobson forbade the opening of the door, for had he permitted it the passages would speedily have been filled with snow ; so the explorers were virtually prisoners.

The windows were hermetically closed ; the lamps were kept lighted all through this long dreary night.

But if darkness was supreme, silence had departed. The wind roared continuously between the cliff and the house, which trembled and threatened to fall every hour. It was extremely fortunate that the snow had been so built up as to deflect the force of the wind, and MacNab only trembled for the chimneys. However, they, as well as the other parts of the mansion, remained secure,

although they had to be cleansed from the accumulation of snow at intervals. In the midst of the tempest loud reports were frequently heard. These were occasioned by the fall of icebergs out at sea. The echoes took up the roar and rolled it from peak to peak like thunder. The earth shook as these immense masses tumbled, and none but firm nerves could bear to live amid such terrible phenomena. Lieutenant Hobson and his mates were accustomed to them, and Mrs. Barnett and her attendant were becoming inured to them by degrees, and besides, they had already had some experience of tempests in other climates. But at Cape Bathurst the circumstances were aggravated by the darkness and prevailing snow. The wind, if it did not demolish objects, smothered them in snow, and twelve hours after the beginning of the storm, the house and its surroundings would have all disappeared beneath the drift.

During their enforced imprisonment, the inhabitants of the fort amused themselves as they best could. They were in perfect accord, and if they were shut up they did not disagree on any point ; the majority were accustomed to this mode of life, and Mrs. Barnett was not surprised to see the men accommodate themselves to circumstances so readily.

Work, reading, and various games occupied them. Their work consisted in mending their clothes, rubbing up their weapons, repairing their boots, and the writing up of a journal of their lives by Lieutenant Hobson, with

meteorological observations. Besides these employments the house had to be kept clean and dry, the skins and furs to be examined; the stoves and fires required watching, and no damp was permitted to accumulate in the corners. Everyone had a task allotted to him, according to the regulations posted up in the great hall; without being too much occupied, everyone had something to do. All this time Thomas Black kept screwing and unscrewing his instruments, correcting his calculations, and, shut up in his cabin, he continually grunted against the tempest, which prevented him from making observations. The three married women had plenty to do: Mrs. MacNab was fully occupied with her baby; while Mrs. Joliffe and Mrs. Rae, closely attended by the Corporal, presided over the culinary department.

Recreation was taken at certain intervals, and they rested all day Sunday, when reading was the chief feature. The Bible and some books of travel composed their whole library, but they were sufficient for them. Mrs. Barnett usually read aloud, greatly to the delight of her audience. The Bible narratives as well as those of travellers received a great charm when read by her, for she had a beautiful voice, and her actions were particularly expressive. An imaginary hero seemed to live before them. Thus all the party were happy and contented when she took up her book. She was the life of the community, ready to advise or suggest, and at all times willing to do anything for anybody. She possessed

all the tact and grace of woman united to the energy of man, which gave her the foremost place in the estimation of the soldiers, who would have laid down their lives for her if necessary. She never hid herself in her cabin, but mingled freely with her companions, working and reading with them, and provoking conversation by her questions and appreciation. Thus they worked, talked, and as a matter of course kept in good health. Good-humour and good health triumphed over the weariness of their enforced imprisonment.

Meanwhile the storm continued. For three days the party had all been confined to the house, and the drifts were hurrying past as thickly as before. Hobson began to grow anxious. He was very urgent to obtain fresher air, and the lamps were already burning dimly in the vitiated atmosphere. It was then discovered that the air-pumps would not work, for the pipes were frozen, as they were not intended for use when the house was buried in snow. It was necessary to take counsel as to what should be done. The Lieutenant and Sergeant Long therefore talked matters over, and it was decided that one of the windows at the end of the corridor, which was less exposed to the wind, should be opened.

This was by no means easy. It was not difficult to open the window from the inside, but the shutter, blocked by the snow, resisted all efforts. They had to take it off its hinges, and cut away the snow, which

was at least ten feet thick, with pickaxes and shovels ; they then obtained access to the outer air.

Jasper Hobson, the Sergeant, Mrs. Barnett, and a few soldiers crept through this cutting, but not without difficulty, in consequence of the storm. When they got outside, the scene presented to their gaze was remarkable. It was noon, and only a few rays glittered on the southern horizon. The cold was not so great as might have been expected, being only fifteen degrees above zero, but the snowdrifts were hurried along with tremendous force, and the whole party would have been thrown to the ground had they not been supported by the snow, which reached to their waists. They could not speak, and could not face the snow. In less than half an hour they were obliged to give up their promenade. Everything was white around them, and covered with snow, and if it had not been for the blue smoke from the house they could have believed themselves miles from human habitation. They quickly returned indoors, but Mrs. Barnett had managed to take in the surroundings of this desolate scene. She went back again impressed by the grandeur of an arctic snow-storm, which she would never forget.

The atmosphere of the house had been renewed in a few minutes ; Hobson and his companions quickly returned, and the window was shut, but every day after that they opened the shutters for ventilation ; so the week passed. Fortunately the animals had plenty of food, and

there was no need to visit them. For eight days the party remained in the house, which was a long time for men accustomed to the open air. It must be confessed that under these circumstances reading lost its charm, and cribbage became monotonous. They went to bed every night hoping to find that the storm had abated by morning, but in vain. The snow fell as fast as ever, the wind roared, and icebergs tumbled over each other with a noise like thunder, and, so far from abating, the storm seemed to increase.

On the 28th November, however, the aneroid barometer showed symptoms of an improvement in the weather. At the same time the thermometer, which was placed outside, fell to four degrees below zero. These were signs that could not be mistaken, and the next day the universal silence of nature told them that the storm had ceased.

Everyone was now anxious to get out, for the imprisonment had been very irksome, but they could not open the door, so they were obliged to get through the window and clear away the snow. This time it was no soft mass they had to cut away, but solid ice, which had to be removed with pickaxes.

It took about half an hour to clear the doorway, and then everybody, except Mrs. MacNab, who was not well enough to go out, hurried into the courtyard.

The cold was very great, but the wind having subsided it was more bearable. However, it was necessary

to take precautions when coming from heated rooms into the cold air, for there was a difference of fifty-four degrees in the temperature.

It was eight o'clock in the morning. The stars were most brilliant, and the polar star was particularly bright. The eye seemed to take in millions of stars at once, but as the number of visible stars is not more than 5,000, that was impossible. Thomas Black was delighted, he had nothing but praise for the firmament, which was not veiled by vapours or shaded by a single cloud. He had never seen such a lovely sky.

While the astronomer was thus in ecstasies, perfectly oblivious of mundane affairs, his companions had wandered away from him as far as the *enceinte*. The snow was very hard, and so slippery that they frequently tumbled, but no serious injuries supervened.

It is needless to say that the courtyard of the fort was quite filled up. The roof of the house only was visible, the top of which had been kept smooth by the action of the wind. Only the top of the palisade could be seen, and the laziest of wild animals could have climbed over. But what was to be done? They could only think of cutting out ten feet or so of snow, so that the ditch and counter-scarp thus formed outside might protect the palisade. But the winter was only beginning, and the snow-storm might fill up the ditch again in a few hours.

While the Lieutenant was examining his defences, which could no more protect the house than a single ray

of sunshine could melt the snow, Mrs. Joliffe cried out :

“ But our dogs and the reindeer ! ”

It was indeed time to think about the poor animals ; the kennel and stable were much lower than the house, and were most likely entirely covered, and the animals suffocated. The party hurried in various directions, some to the kennel, some to the stable, but were delighted to find that the wall of ice which connected the house with the cliff had in a great measure protected the buildings. They found all the animals quite well, and when the kennels were opened the dogs rushed out barking joyously.

After an hour's walk, all the party were very glad to return to the stove in the large room, and indeed there was nothing to do outside. The traps were buried deeply in snow, and could not be visited, so they went home, shut the windows, and sat down to dinner.

The conversation naturally turned upon the sudden cold and severe frost. It was an unfortunate circumstance that the snow had been frozen so hard, as it might have compromised the safety of the fort.

“ But, Mr. Hobson,” said Mrs. Barnett, “ shall we not have a day or two's thaw which will get rid of this ice ? ”

“ No,” replied the Lieutenant, “ a thaw at this time of the year is not probable. In fact, I rather think that the cold will increase. It is rather unfortunate we did not clear away the snow when it was soft.”

"Do you really think it will become colder?"

"Most decidedly, madam. Four degrees below zero is nothing in this latitude."

"But what must it be up at the Pole?" asked Mrs. Barnett.

"It does not follow that the Pole is the coldest part of the globe," replied Hobson. "Most navigators agree in saying that the sea is open there. It appears from observations that the coldest place in the world is on the shore of North Georgia, 95 deg. longitude and 78 deg. latitude, where the thermometer marks two degrees below zero all the year round on an average. It is therefore known as the 'Pole of Cold.'"

"But, Mr. Hobson, we are more than eight degrees from that place."

"Well, I do not consider we shall suffer so much as if we were in North Georgia. I only mentioned the 'Pole of Cold,' in order that you might not confound it with the Pole properly so called when speaking of lowness of temperature; but extreme cold has been experienced in other parts of the globe, although it has not been lasting."

"What parts do you mean, Mr. Hobson? I am very much interested in this question."

"If my memory serves me," replied the Lieutenant, "the thermometer at Melville Island has marked sixty-one degrees below zero, and at Port Felix, sixty-five degrees."

"But those places are much to the north of this?"

"No doubt, madam; but within certain limits latitude goes for nothing. Various atmospheric combinations will produce intense cold, and I remember, in 1845—— By-the-bye, Sergeant Long, were you not at Fort Reliance then?"

"Yes, sir," replied Long.

"Well then, was not the cold extraordinary in the January of that year?"

"Yes," replied the Sergeant. "I remember the thermometer marked seventy degrees below zero."

"What!" exclaimed Mrs. Barnett. "Seventy degrees at Fort Reliance, on the Slave Lake?"

"Yes," replied the Lieutenant, "and that was only in 65 deg. N. latitude, on the same parallel as that of Christiania or St. Petersburg."

"Then, Mr. Hobson, we may make up our minds for the worst?"

"Yes, indeed, when we winter in arctic countries."

During the 29th and 30th November there was no diminution of the cold, and enormous fires had to be kept up to prevent the moisture freezing in the corners of the room; but there was plenty of fuel, and they did not spare it, so they managed to keep up an average temperature of 52 deg. Fahrenheit.

Notwithstanding the lowness of the temperature, Thomas Black, attracted by the clearness of the sky, wished to make observations. But he was obliged to

relinquish the attempt, his instruments burned his hands. Burned is the only word which we can use to express the feeling produced by the touch of metal exposed to such intense cold; and besides, the sensation is that of scorching. Whether heat is violently introduced into the flesh by a burning mass, or withdrawn suddenly from the body, the effect is physically the same. The worthy professor discovered this to his cost—the cost of the skin of his fingers. Under these circumstances he suspended his observations.

But the sky did all it could to make up the loss by exhibiting its most beautiful auroras and other celestial fireworks.

A lunar halo surrounded the moon, and formed a white circle with a pale red tint about it. This meteor was forty-five degrees in diameter, and was caused by the diffraction of the moon's rays through the minute ice-particles in the atmosphere. The Queen of Night shone brilliantly from the centre of the crown, which was similar to the oft-described lunar rainbow.

Subsequently the aurora borealis, describing an arc of more than a hundred degrees, was displayed above the northern horizon. The summit of the bow was placed in the magnetic meridian, and, as is sometimes the case, the rays were all the colours of the rainbow, red prevailing. In places the stars appeared to be suffused with blood, and the rays darted, oscillating, even to the zenith, and overcame the brilliant moonlight itself.

It is impossible to give any adequate description of this magnificent display, which, after lasting for about half an hour, suddenly disappeared, as if it had been "turned out" by some invisible hand.

It was quite time it had ended, for Thomas Black had been nearly congealed as he stood watching it. Five minutes more and he would have been frozen in his boots.

CHAPTER XIX.

VISITORS.

ON the 2nd December the cold diminished. The aurora and the halo indicated a certain amount of vapour in the atmosphere, and the thermometer rose accordingly to fifteen degrees above zero, while the barometer fell a little.

Though this amount of cold would have appeared very severe to an inhabitant of a temperate climate, the party were enabled to support it easily; besides, there was no wind. Hobson having noticed that the snow was becoming softer, set his men to clear away the upper layers from the *enceinte*. This task was completed by MacNab and his mates in a few days. After this the traps were searched for, uncovered, and re-set. The numerous footprints of furred game in the neighbourhood showed there were plenty of animals which would, in all probability, be soon attracted by the bait and the snares.

Following the advice of Marbre, a reindeer-trap was made in the Esquimaux fashion. This was a large trench

about twelve feet deep, and a plank was balanced see-saw fashion across it. A bunch of herbs was placed at one end, and any animal attempting to eat it would be thrown into the ditch, and quite unable to get out again. By making this plank self-acting, it re-set itself for another victim. The only difficulty they had to contend against was the hardness of the ground, and the workmen were much surprised when, having dug out about five feet of earthen sand, they came down to a very thick bed of snow, as hard as a rock.

"It seems to me," said the Lieutenant, "that this part of the coast must have been thoroughly frozen, year after year, for a long period. The sand and earth have thus by degrees covered the ice, which probably rests upon granite."

"Well," replied the hunter, "our deer-trap will not be the worse for that. On the contrary, the reindeer will not be able to climb the icy wall."

Marbre was right, and the event justified him.

On the 5th September he and Sabine were going towards the deer-trap, when they heard loud growls rising from the ground. They stopped.

"That is not a reindeer," said Marbre; "I think I know what animal we have caught."

"A bear?" asked Sabine.

"Yes," replied his friend, as his eyes gleamed with satisfaction.

"Well," replied Sabine, "we shall not lose by the

exchange ; bear's flesh is better than reindeer's, and we get the skin besides. Come along."

The men were armed of course. They loaded their rifles with ball, and hurried towards the trap. The plank was in its place, but the bait had disappeared. Marbre and Sabine looked down into the hole. The growling increased, and there, in a corner of the pit, they saw a mass of white fur with glittering eyes. The sides of the pit were scored with the marks of claws, and if they had not been of ice the animal would surely have escaped. As it was, he had merely enlarged his prison.

Under these circumstances the capture was easy ; a couple of bullets settled the matter ; and then the hunters returned to the fort for assistance to pull out their prize. Ten of their companions, supplied with ropes, returned with them, and after great exertions the carcase was drawn up. The bear was of enormous size, quite six feet high, and weighed at least 600 pounds. Its flattened head, long neck, and short curved claws, white skin, and muzzle showed that it belonged to the sub-family of white bears. All parts fit for food were handed to Mrs. Joliffe and served up as a *plat de résistance*.

During the following week the traps were in full swing. About twenty martens in all their beautiful winter clothing were taken, but only two or three foxes. These cunning animals were quite aware of the trap laid for them, and by scraping up the snow they managed to run

off with the bait. For this manœuvre Sabine was very angry with them, and stigmatised them as a "mean lot," unworthy of the name of honest foxes.

About the 10th December the wind veered to the south-west, and some fine snow fell, but not a great quantity. It immediately froze, and the wind being high the cold was very much felt. So our explorers returned to the house again to their domestic employments. As a matter of precaution Hobson distributed lemonjuice and limejuice to his party, in order to guard against scorbutic attacks, which are the result of continued damp cold. Thanks to the precautions taken, none of the party suffered from this disease.

The polar night was now extremely dark. The winter solstice was approaching, and then the sun would be at its lowest point below the horizon. A sort of twilight appeared to touch the northern horizon at midnight, but scarcely dispersed the shadows. An impression of sadness had fallen upon the earth thus enveloped in darkness on all sides.

Some days were passed indoors. Hobson was more easy respecting the attacks of wild beasts since he had cleared away the snow, but ominous and unmistakable growlings were heard.

There was no chance of any visit from the Canadians; nevertheless an incident occurred which proved that, even in the depth of winter, the solitudes are not entirely deserted. Some human beings still remained on the coast

hunting the morse, and camping under the snow. They appeared to be Esquimaux—or “raw-flesh eaters” as they are called—who seldom come farther south than the Great Slave Lake.

On the morning of the 14th December—or rather nine hours before noon—Sergeant Long came in and reported that, unless his eyes had deceived him, he had noticed a wandering tribe encamped about four miles off, near a small promontory, which he indicated.

“What do you think they are?” asked Hobson.

“They must be men or morse,” replied the Sergeant; “there is no medium.”

The Sergeant would have been astonished if he had been told that naturalists do admit the medium which he would not recognise. Some more or less humorous savants have classed the Esquimaux as the connecting link.

Some of the party immediately set forth to ascertain the fact, and, well wrapped up in furs and well armed, they proceeded along the coast.

The last quarter of the moon threw a feeble light across the mist. After an hour's walking the Lieutenant began to think that the Sergeant had made a mistake. That what he had seen were morse, which had meantime returned to sea through their holes in the ice.

But Sergeant Long pointed out a gray curl of smoke, about a hundred paces off, and said quietly :

“Look there, the morse are smoking !”

At that moment some living creatures came out of the hut. They were Esquimaux, but whether men or women nobody but a native could tell, for they were all dressed exactly alike. They might easily have been taken for seals, or other amphibious creatures.

There were six of them—four grown up and two children ; broad-shouldered, but short, with flat noses, thick lips, large mouths, long black hair, but no beard or whiskers. They were dressed in walrus-skins : hoods, boots, and mittens, all alike. They were half savage, and gazed at the Europeans in silence.

“ I suppose none of us know Esquimaux ? ” said Hobson to his companions.

Nobody knew the language ; but everybody started when a voice cried in English :

“ Welcome, welcome ! ”

This was an Esquimaux, a woman, as they learnt afterwards, who advanced to Mrs. Barnett, and held out her hand. The lady was much surprised, but replied in a few words, which were at once understood, and the whole family were invited to the fort.

The Esquimaux looked at each other, and after some hesitation complied. When they arrived at the palisade the native woman cried out :

“ House, house, snow-house ! ”

She asked if the habitation really was a snow-house ; and that is not surprising, as it was almost buried in snow. They told her it was made of wood. She

interpreted this intelligence to her companions, who signified their approbation. The whole party then entered the house by the postern.

Then, when they removed their hoods, the sexes could be distinguished. There were two men, between forty and fifty years of age, whose sharp teeth and projecting cheek-bones gave them something the appearance of wild animals. Two young women, whose hair was adorned with the teeth and claws of polar bears, and two children, about five or six years old, who stared about them wonderingly, made up the party.

"One generally supposes that the Esquimaux are hungry," said Hobson. "I think a morsel of venison would not hurt them."

So Joliffe brought out some reindeer flesh, which the poor Esquimaux devoured ravenously. But the young woman who had spoken English behaved with more propriety, and kept her eyes fixed upon Mrs. Barnett and the other women of the fort. Then noticing Mrs. MacNab's little baby, she rose, and, running up to it, caressed it very tenderly.

This young woman appeared to be, if not superior, at any rate more civilised than her companions, and this was particularly remarked when, suddenly attacked by a fit of coughing, she put her hand before her mouth as Europeans usually do.

This gesture escaped nobody. Mrs. Barnett talked with the Esquimaux woman, and using the simplest

English she could muster learnt that the girl had been in service for a year with the Danish Governor of Upper Nawik, whose wife was an Englishwoman, but she had left Greenland to follow her family on the hunting-ground. The two men were her brothers, the other woman was married to one of them and was the mother of the two children. They were all returning from Melbourne Island, which is on the east coast of British America, and were bound for Point Barrow, in Russian America, where their tribe lived, and they had been much astonished to find a factory at Cape Bathurst. The men shook their heads when they spoke of it, but Hobson could not ascertain from them whether they did not approve of the construction of the fort, or whether they considered the place badly chosen.

The young Esquimaux girl was called Kalumah, and she appeared to have taken a great fancy to Mrs. Barnett. Nevertheless she did not at all regret having left her situation in the governor's family, for she was very much attached to her relations.

After having partaken of some refreshment the Esquimaux took their leave, but before saying good-bye the young girl invited Mrs. Barnett to pay them a visit at their snow hut, which that lady promised to do if the weather permitted. The next day Mrs. Barnett, accompanied by Madge, Lieutenant Hobson, and a few soldiers well armed—not because of the Esquimaux, but for fear of bears—set out for Cape Esquimaux,

as they had named the spot where those people were encamped.

Kalumah ran out to meet her new friend, and introduced her to the hut with a self-satisfied air. This hut was nothing more or less than a great cone of snow with a hole in the roof through which the smoke escaped. These huts, which are very quickly made, the Esquimaux call *igloo*; they are wonderfully suited to the climate, and the inhabitants are enabled to support, without fire, forty-two degrees of cold below zero. During the summer the Esquimaux camp in reindeer-skin and seal-skin tents, which they call *tupic*.

To get into the hut was not a very easy matter; there was but one entrance, which was close to the ground, through which it was necessary to crawl on hands and knees for a distance of three or four feet, for the walls are always as thick at least. But Mrs. Barnett did not hesitate. Followed by Madge she bravely penetrated the tunnel, but Hobson and his men dispensed with the ceremony.

Mrs. Barnett soon found out that it was not so difficult to get into the hut as to remain in it when you had got there. The atmosphere, heated by a fire on which bones of morse were burning, and impregnated with the smell of lamp-oil, greasy clothes, and the flesh of the amphibious animals which form the chief food of the Esquimaux, was by no means inviting. Madge could not remain. Mrs. Barnett, with superhuman

courage, and anxious not to offend the young native, stayed for quite five minutes, which seemed to her five centuries. The two children and their mother were at home, but the men had gone morse-hunting some miles away.

When Mrs. Barnett had got outside, the Lieutenant asked her what she thought of the Esquimaux houses.

"There seems to be a slight want of ventilation," she replied, as the colour returned to her white cheeks.

For eight days this interesting family party remained in the same place. For twelve hours out of the twenty-four the men hunted morse. They displayed a patience in this pursuit which was wonderful. They would watch the animals until they came up to breathe through the holes in the ice. When the morse appeared, a cord with a running noose was thrown round its body, and then, not without difficulty, the animal is hauled on to the ice and killed with hatchets. It is really more like fishing than hunting. The great treat on these occasions is to drink the warm blood of the animal, a luxury in which the Esquimaux indulge to excess.

Kalumah came to the fort the same day notwithstanding the severity of the weather. She took great pleasure in going through the rooms, watching the women sewing, or superintending Mrs. Joliffe's cooking. She inquired the English name of everything, and talked or hours with Mrs. Barnett, if we can call it talking when every word had to be considered most carefully on

both sides. When Mrs. Barnett read aloud Kalumah listened attentively, although she probably understood nothing about it.

She also sang songs in a sweet voice, and songs of a peculiar rhythm—a sort of cold, melancholy, frosty ditties. Mrs. Barnett took the trouble to translate one of these curious specimens of Greenland sagas which was set to a sad air with long pauses, which gave it a most peculiar effect. The following is a translation of the song copied from Mrs. Barnett's album :

THE GREENLANDER'S SONG.

The sky is dark,
The sun is gone,
My trembling heart
Will still ache on.
The infant smiles whene'er I sing,
Though round his heart the ice-drops cling.

My darling sleep,
My love will cheer,
Though sorest frost
May still be near.
Alas ! by tears I cannot part
The icicles around thy heart.

The morn for thee
Will yet arise
When thou wilt meet
My longing eyes.
The sun will fall with tender ray
And melt the frost for aye away.

On the 20th December the Esquimaux took leave of

the people in Fort Hope. Kalumah was much attached to Mrs. Barnett, who would have kept her, but the young girl would not leave her family. She promised to return to the fort the following summer.

The parting was tender. Kalumah presented Mrs. Barnett with a small copper ring, and received a necklace of black beads in return, which she at once put on. Hobsón would not permit the Esquimaux to depart without a good stock of provisions, which they packed in their sledge, and after a few words of thanks from Kalumah, the whole family set out in a westerly direction, and quickly disappeared in the mist that lay along the sea-shore.

CHAPTER XX.

THE MERCURY FREEZES.

THE dry calm weather still favoured the hunters, but they did not go far away from the house. Indeed, the abundance of game rendered it unnecessary for them to go far afield. Hobson congratulated himself on having chosen such an excellent situation for the fort. A number of fur animals of different kinds were trapped, and Sabine and Marbre shot a number of polar hares and about twenty half-famished wolves. The latter had become very aggressive, and, surrounding the fort, filled the air with their growling. Amongst the ice-hummocks large bears were frequently perceived, the approach of which were most carefully reported.

On the 25th December they were obliged to give up all excursions. The wind went round to the north, and the cold became intense. It was quite impossible to remain out of doors without getting frost-bitten. The thermometer fell to eighteen degrees below zero, and the wind roared like a volley of grape-shot. Before

this, however, Hobson had taken care to supply the animals with food for some weeks. Christmas Day, so dear to English people, was celebrated with all religious observances. The inhabitants of the fort returned thanks to Providence for their protection, and the soldiers, having a holiday for Christmas, sat down to dinner with the others, and two enormous puddings figured on the board. In the evening a flaming bowl of punch was placed on the table, the lamps were put out, and the room, lighted by the flames of the spirit, assumed a fantastic appearance. The soldiers' faces lighted up in every sense, and their good spirits were not appreciably lessened after they had partaken of the punch.

Then the flame died out as it licked the dark sides of the national pudding.

But an unexpected phenomenon occurred. Although the lamps had not been re-lighted the room was not in darkness. A bright light penetrated the windows; the gleam must have been overcome by the light of the lamps.

All at table started to their feet, and gazed at each other in astonishment.

"It is a fire!" someone exclaimed.

But unless the house was burning there could be no fire at Cape Bathurst.

The Lieutenant rushed to the window, and immediately perceived the cause of the fire: it was a volcanic eruption.

Yes, beyond Morse Bay the whole horizon was in flames; the tops of the burning hills could not be perceived, but the fan-like flame shot up to a great height and illuminated the country with an unearthly glare.

"That is much more grand than an aurora borealis," exclaimed Mrs. Barnett.

But to this statement Thomas Black strongly objected. The idea of a terrestrial phenomenon being grander than a meteor? But no one argued the point, for all were in a hurry to go out, notwithstanding the cold, to witness this most wonderful spectacle. If the ears and mouths of the whole party had not been wrapped up in thick fur, they would have heard the loud reports which accompanied the eruption; but wrapped up as they were they could neither hear nor speak—they were content to watch. But such a scene as that was sufficiently imposing, and one never to be forgotten.

Between the darkness of the sky and the white expanse of snow, the effects produced by the lurid flames were something that no pen could depict. The reverberation extended up to the zenith, quenching even the light of the stars. The snowy ground gave back the golden tints, while the hummocks and the icebergs in the far distance reflected the divers colours like so many golden mirrors. The rays of light were deflected from the ice at all angles, and the whole scene was like a fairy spectacle, got up expressly for this occasion only.

But the excessive cold obliged the spectators to go indoors, and more than one nose paid dearly for the enjoyment the eyes had experienced.

The intensity of the cold increased during the next few days. The thermometer was no longer of any use for taking the temperature, and an alcoholic thermometer was taken into use. On the night of the 28th December it fell to thirty-two degrees below zero.

The stoves were stuffed with fuel, but the temperature could not be kept up above twenty degrees. The bed-chambers were very cold, and no heat could be felt ten feet from the stove; the best place was of course given up to the little baby, and those who came to the fire in turn rocked its cradle. It was quite impossible to open either door or window, for the vapour in the rooms would then have immediately been converted into snow as the breath of the men had already been in the corridor. Frequent detonations were heard, which surprised those unaccustomed to the phenomena of these climates; these noises were caused by the cracking of the trunks of trees of which the walls were composed. The supply of liquors (brandy and gin) in the garret were brought down, as the alcohol was freezing; the spruce-beer they had made burst its barrels as it froze; all solid bodies, as if they were petrified, resisted the heat; the wood burnt with great difficulty, and they had to pour morse-oil upon it to quicken its combustion. It was very fortunate that the chimneys drew so well, otherwise the

smell would have been very unpleasant ; as it was, the air outside was vitiated by the foetid fumes.

Everyone was much afflicted by thirst ; to relieve it they were obliged to thaw frozen liquids at the fire, for in the form of ice they would have been unwholesome to take. Another symptom, against which Hobson warned his companions, was extreme drowsiness, which some of them could not overcome. Mrs. Barnett, always brave, by her advice, conversation, and movement, kept herself and others awake. She often read aloud, or sang to them English songs, in which she induced them to join whether they would or not, and roused up the sleepy ones. Thus the long days passed while the cold increased, and on the 31st December the mercury was completely frozen, for the temperature was forty-four degrees below zero.

On the 1st January, 1860, Lieutenant Hobson wished Mrs. Barnett a "happy new year," and congratulated her on the manner in which she sustained the miseries of the winter. Similar compliments were paid to the astronomer, who only cared to enter the year 1860 because the famous eclipse was to take place in it. Good wishes were exchanged by all the members of the colony, whose health fortunately continued excellent. Any symptoms of scurvy had been promptly checked by the administration of limejuice.

But it is no use to hallo till one clears the wood ; the winter had still three months to run, and though the

sun would of course appear at the right moment, still they could not flatter themselves till the cold had reached its lowest point, as February is generally the coldest month in those regions. At any rate there was no diminution of the cold at the beginning of the new year, and on the 6th January the alcohol thermometer outside the passage-window was sixty-six degrees below zero. A few degrees more and the lowest temperature of Fort Reliance, in 1835, would be reached, or even passed.

This continued increase of cold rendered Hobson more and more uneasy. He began to think that the animals would have to go farther south, which would of course spoil his hunting in the spring. Besides, he often heard subterranean grumbings, which were connected with the eruption, and it was evident some formidable convulsion was going on beneath them. The neighbourhood of an active volcano might endanger the safety of the fort ; but whatever apprehensions he felt he kept them to himself.

Of course nobody went out of doors ; the dogs and reindeer had been provided for, and were accustomed besides to a long fasting in the winter. Indeed it was hard enough to live in an atmosphere in which oil and wood were continually burning, without going out of doors to be frozen ; but notwithstanding all their care damp crept in, and ice formed every day in the rooms. The condensers were choked, and one even burst from the pressure of ice.

Under these circumstances the fuel was used unsparingly ; but notwithstanding this the temperature was sometimes as low as fifteen degrees. The men on watch had to keep the fire up, but one day Sergeant Long said to the Lieutenant :

"We shall soon be out of wood, sir."

"Out of wood ?" exclaimed Hobson.

"I should say," replied the Sergeant, "that our supply in the house is failing, and we must soon renew it. Now, if we go out in this cold, we shall assuredly be frozen to death."

"I see," said the Lieutenant ; "we have made a mistake ; we ought to have built our wood-shed up against the house and communicating with it, but it is too late now. However, what is done can't be helped. Now tell me, Long, how long will the wood last ?"

"Two or three days more," replied the Sergeant.

"Perhaps by that time the cold may have diminished, and we shall be able to get out."

"I am afraid not, sir," replied the Sergeant, shaking his head. "The sky is quite clear, and the wind is in the north. I expect we shall have this weather for another fortnight, till the new moon comes."

"Well then," replied the Lieutenant, "we cannot die of cold, and when we must go out——"

"We will brave the cold," replied Sergeant Long.

Hobson shook his subordinate by the hand. He knew he could count upon his devotion.

Perhaps you **may** think that Sergeant Long and Hobson were **exaggerating** when they expected a sudden cold to cause death ; but they had lived for many years in the arctic regions, and knew the consequences of such exposure. They had seen strong men fall upon the ice, and had seen them taken up again half suffocated from sudden cold. Incredible as these facts may appear, they are nevertheless true, and of frequent occurrence amongst travellers. William Moor and Smith, in their journey across the coast of Hudson's Bay in 1746, relate several accidents of this kind, and some of their companions were actually struck dead by cold. It is almost certain death to brave a temperature in which mercury freezes, an intensity of cold which cannot be measured.

Such was the disquieting state of affairs when an accident occurred which tended to aggravate the sufferings of the inhabitants.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE GREAT POLAR BEARS.

THE window opening from the end of the corridor was the only one through which the inhabitants of the fort could look out ; but before it could be made available they were obliged to wash the panes with boiling water, in consequence of the thick formation of ice. This washing was repeated during the day, and then the state of the surrounding country and the appearance of the heavens were most carefully observed.

On the 6th January, about eleven in the forenoon, Kellet, who was on the look-out, called the Sergeant, and pointed out to him some large bodies moving about in the snow.

Sergeant Long approached the window, and said :

“ Those are bears ! ”

There were half-a-dozen of them. These animals had succeeded in climbing over the palings, and, attracted by the smoke, were advancing to the house.

As soon as Hobson had been informed of the approach of these formidable beasts, he gave orders to have the window barricaded. This was the only unprotected place in the house, and when it was fastened it appeared impossible for the bears to come inside. The window was accordingly barred and firmly fastened by MacNab. A small hole for observation of the animals' movements was left.

"Now," said the master-carpenter, "these fellows cannot enter without our leave, and we have time to hold a council of war."

"Well, Mr. Hobson," said Mrs. Barnett, "nothing is wanting up here: We have experienced cold, now the bears have come upon us."

"Not after the cold, but with it, which is a more serious matter," replied Hobson, "and with such cold to boot that we cannot get outside. I really do not know how we are to get rid of the brutes."

"Oh, they will get tired," she replied, "and go away of their own accord."

Hobson shook his head. "You do not know these animals," he replied; "they are probably starving, and will not leave unless forced to do so."

"Are you anxious about it, then?"

"Well, I am and I am not," replied Hobson. "I do not see how the bears can get in; but, on the other hand, I do not see how we can get out if we want to."

Hobson turned to the window as he spoke. Mrs.

Barnett joined the other women and listened to what the Sergeant, as a man of experience, had to say about the bears. Sergeant Long had often encountered the animals even in a more southern land, where they are not so dangerous, but here the men were blocked up in the house, and cold prevented any sortie by the garrison.

All day the bears were closely watched. Occasionally one of them would put his head close to the window and growl. Hobson and the Sergeant took counsel together, and made up their minds that if the bears did not go soon they would pierce a few loopholes and shoot them. But this was kept as a last resource, for the air was too cold to permit of such measures being taken. Even the oil was frozen so hard that it had to be cut with hatchets before it could be used.

The day passed without incident. The bears continued to prowl about but made no attack. The watch was kept all night, and about four o'clock in the morning the bears appeared to have left the enclosure—at any rate they could not be seen. But at seven o'clock Marbre reported the animals were walking about on the roof.

Hobson, the Sergeant, MacNab, and a few soldiers, seizing their arms, rushed up the ladder to the loft; but the cold was so intense up there that after a few moments they were quite unable to hold their muskets, and their breath was frozen and floated about like snow.

Marbre was quite right. The bears were on the roof, and their growls could be heard. Sometimes their claws

came through the ice and the lathes, and the men were afraid that the brutes would be strong enough to tear away the beams.

The Lieutenant and his men could not endure the cold, and they returned in a half-fainting condition to report as hopefully as they could.

"There is no doubt," said Hobson, "that the bears are on the roof, though we need not fear for ourselves, for they cannot reach our rooms, but they may force their way into the loft where the Company's furs are deposited. It is our duty to preserve these furs uninjured, and I ask you to assist in placing them in safety."

Everybody immediately set to work, and by relieving each other they managed to store all the furs in the great hall in the course of an hour.

Meantime the bears endeavoured to get through the roof, and in places their paws came through. MacNab was in a terrible state of anxiety; he had not anticipated such a weight on the rafters, and feared they would give way altogether. So the day passed; but no entrance was made by the bears. Nevertheless a formidable enemy—namely, the cold—came into the rooms by degrees; the fires burnt low, the reserve of fuel was almost exhausted. Before twelve o'clock the last log would be burnt and the fires must go out.

This meant death in its most fearful form from cold. Already the poor creatures were huddled round the stove, getting more and more chilled, but they did not

complain—the women bore up heroically. Mrs. MacNab convulsively pressed her little baby to her frozen body. Some of the soldiers slept, or rather lay in a sort of torpor, for it could scarcely be called sleep.

At three o'clock in the morning Hobson found the thermometer, which was hanging ten feet from the stove, marked 4 deg. Fahrenheit below zero.

The Lieutenant passed his hand over his face and looked at his companions without speaking. They were all motionless and silent. His breath rose about him like a white cloud.

As he stood thus a hand was placed upon his shoulder. He turned and beheld Mrs. Barnett.

"We must do something," said this energetic woman. "We cannot die without a struggle!"

"Yes," replied the Lieutenant, rousing himself, "something must be done, and that's a fact."

He called Long, MacNab, and Rae the blacksmith, who were the bravest men of the party. As a first step they washed the window-glass and consulted the thermometer which was hanging outside.

"Seventy-two degrees!" exclaimed Hobson. "We must do one of two things. We must either risk our lives to obtain fuel, or burn everything combustible in the house. This is a last alternative, for the cold may continue for some time. There is no sign of change in the weather."

"Let us go out for the fuel," said Long, "and take the risk."

All agreed with this suggestion, and immediately set to work to carry it out.

The shed in which the wood was stored was about fifty paces from the house, on the left. It was arranged that one man should run thither, carrying one cord about his body and another in his hand, the end of the latter being held by his companions. When he reached the shed he was to load a sledge with fuel, and then, by means of the ropes, he and his companions would draw it backwards and forwards till they had a sufficient supply. A shaking of the rope was to be the signal that the sledge was full or empty respectively.

This was a clever notion, but there were two objections to carrying it out. It was possible that the door of the shed might be blocked by ice and be very difficult to open, and besides, the bears might come down from the roof and interfere. These were the risks.

Sergeant Long first, then MacNab and Rae, volunteered to go across the court; but the Sergeant insisted on going, as the other two were married men. The Lieutenant also wished to go, but Mrs. Barnett reminded him that he was the head of the expedition, and had no right to expose himself unnecessarily; so she said, "Let Sergeant Long go."

Hobson perceived that his position imposed certain

duties upon him, and, called upon by his companions to decide, he voted for the Sergeant.

The other inhabitants of the fort, asleep or half-torpid with cold, knew nothing of what was going on. Two long ropes were provided ; one the Sergeant twined round his body, the other was tied to his belt, to which hung a tinder-box and loaded revolver. He swallowed half a glass of rum before he started, to drink success to his expedition.

Hobson, Rae, and MacNab went with him through the kitchen, where was no longer any fire, and so into the corridor. Then Rae ascended the ladder to the loft, and perceived the bears were still on the roof. This was the time for action.

The first door was opened, and Hobson and his companions, notwithstanding the thick furs they wore, were chilled to the bone ; but when the door opening into the court was thrown back they recoiled, half-suffocated. Instantly the damp vapour held in suspension in the corridor was condensed into fine snow, which covered the floor and the walls.

The weather was perfectly dry, and the stars shone with wonderful brilliancy.

Sergeant Long, without waiting a moment, rushed into the darkness, dragging his ropes behind him. The outer door was then closed, and Hobson and the others retired to the corridor and shut the inner door. Then they waited. If Long did not return in a few moments

they would conclude he had succeeded, and was loading the sledge ; but ten minutes would suffice for this, if he was able to get in.

Hobson and MacNab returned to the end of the corridor, while Rae went to watch the bears. It was so dark outside that they were in hopes the Sergeant would not be perceived by the animals.

In about ten minutes the three men went back to their position between the doors, in readiness for the signal.

Five minutes more passed ; the cord did not move ! Their anxiety may be imagined. The Sergeant had now been gone a quarter of an hour, and had had plenty of time to load the sledge, but no signal came.

They waited a few minutes more ; then, taking hold of the cord, he signed to his companions to assist him in pulling. If the sledge was not ready the Sergeant could easily stop it.

They pulled vigorously. A heavy object glided over the ground, and in a few moments was dragged to the outer door.

It was the body of the Sergeant, with a rope round its waist. The unfortunate man had never reached the shed, he had succumbed to the cold. After twenty minutes' exposure to such weather they could scarcely hope to recover him.

With a cry of despair his companions lifted him from the ground and carried him inside the house. But just

as the Lieutenant was shutting the outer door something pushed violently against it, and a horrible growling was heard.

"Help, help!" cried Hobson.

MacNab and Rae rushed to his assistance. Mrs. Barnett, however, was quicker, and pushed with all her strength against the door. But the enormous beast outside was too much for them, and in a few minutes would have forced its way in if Mrs. Barnett had not snatched a pistol from Hobson's belt, and, quietly waiting till the bear had thrust its open mouth inside the door, she discharged it down its throat.

The bear fell back mortally wounded, and the door was shut and barricaded.

The poor Sergeant was immediately carried to the stove in the great hall, but the fire was dying out. How could they reanimate him without warmth?

"I will go," said Rae the smith, "and bring in the wood, or——"

"Yes, Rae," said a voice beside him; "we will go together!"

The speaker was Mrs. Barnett.

"No, my friends, no," said Hobson; "you shall not die by cold, nor by the attacks of bears. Let us burn everything combustible in the house, and leave the issue to God."

Then all the poor half-frozen wretches set to work with hatchets like madmen. The benches, the tables,

the partitions were cut up and thrust into the furnaces. In a short time the stoves were burning brightly with the well-oiled fuel.

The temperature rose twelve degrees, and every care was lavished on the Sergeant. He was rubbed with hot rum, and by degrees the circulation was restored. The horrible white patches on his body disappeared at last; but he had suffered cruelly, and it was many hours before he was able to speak. He was placed in a warm bed, and Mrs. Barnett and Madge watched by him till morning.

Meanwhile Hobson, MacNab, and Rae took counsel as to the best means of escape from the awkward position in which they were placed. It was evident that the new supply of fuel would be exhausted in a day or two, and then what would become of them if the cold continued? The new moon had appeared eight-and-forty hours before, but there was no change in the weather. The barometer was still up to "very dry," and there was not a cloud to be seen. There was no sign of the cold abating, and what was to be done? Was it practicable to get to the wood-shed now the bears were aroused, or should they fight these terrible animals in the open? No; that would be foolhardiness, and might risk the lives of all.

However, the temperature in the house was now supportable. Mrs. Joliffe sent them up a breakfast of hot meats and tea. Hot punch was served out, and

even Sergeant Long was able to take some; the heat had reanimated them all, and they only awaited Hobson's orders to attack the bears. But the Lieutenant thought the odds too great, and would not risk the encounter. So things were very quiet till about 3 P.M., when a great noise was heard on the roof of the house.

"There they are!" cried two or three soldiers, as they armed themselves with hatchets and pistols.

It was evident that the bears had torn out the rafters and got into the loft.

"Let no one stir!" cried Hobson. "Rae, the trap."

The smith rushed down the corridor, mounted the ladder and shut the trap-door.

A great noise of tearing and growling was heard overhead. It was a question whether things were altered for the better or not, and the inhabitants took counsel on the point. The greater part thought the situation had improved; for if the bears had all entered the loft, as was probable, it was more easy to attack them in a narrow space without having to fight in such extreme cold, which would paralyse all their efforts. There was no doubt that the encounter was full of danger, but success was now by no means impossible.

Should they, then, remain where they were, or attack their invaders? In the latter case only one soldier could go through the trap at a time, and Hobson hesitated to give the order. Acting on the advice of the Sergeant and others, whose bravery no one could doubt, he

resolved to wait. Perhaps something would turn up. It was almost impossible for the bears to get through the ceiling as they had through the outer roof.

So the day passed, and at night no one could sleep in consequence of the noise made by the enraged animals.

At nine o'clock the next morning the situation became more complicated, and Hobson was obliged to take active measures.

We know that the stove-pipes passed through the loft to the open air. These pipes were only made of imperfectly cemented bricks, not intended to resist lateral pressure. Now it happened that some of the bears scratched at this masonry, while others, to warm themselves, leant against the pipes ; the consequence was, the flues refused to draw.

This appeared to be an irreparable evil, and less energetic men would have despaired. But worse remained behind. As the fire got low, a black, acrid, nauseous smoke, produced by the burning of the wood and oil, filled the house. The tubes were knocked to pieces, and in a few moments the smoke became so thick that the lamps were extinguished. Hobson now perceived that all must quit the house if they did not wish to be suffocated. But if they left the house they would probably be frozen to death. At this juncture the women became very frightened, and some screams were heard,

"My lads," exclaimed the Lieutenant, as he seized a hatchet, "we must attack the bears !"

It was their last chance ; the animals must be exterminated. All the men without exception rushed down the corridor, and, headed by Hobson, mounted the ladder. The trap-door was thrown back, a volley was immediately fired into the thick clouds of smoke. Cries and groans were heard on both sides, and blood flowed freely. The battle was fought in thick darkness.

But at the moment the fight was most desperate a peculiar rumbling sound was heard. This was succeeded by some violent shocks of earthquake. The house rocked as if it would tear itself from its foundation. The beams of the walls separated, and through the openings Jasper Hobson and his terrified companions perceived the bears, as frightened as they were themselves, rushing away, howling through the darkness.

CHAPTER XXII.

FIVE MONTHS LONGER.

A VIOLENT earthquake had occurred. Certainly such phenomena were by no means unfrequent in such a volcanic country.

Jasper Hobson quite appreciated the danger and was very anxious for the results. An opening in the ground might swallow his house and its inhabitants. But there were no more shocks. The earthquake was rather a rebound than a direct upheaval of the ground, and the house leant over and the walls gaped ; then the earth settled down again.

It had become necessary to do something at once. The house, although damaged, was not uninhabitable. The openings in the walls were quickly repaired. The flues were made as serviceable as possible.

The soldiers who had been wounded by the bears were then attended to. The wounds were not serious, however.

Two terribly long days were passed by the unhappy

creatures in the fort. During this time the woodwork was burnt. MacNab and his assistants repaired the house as well as they could. The piles, which had been firmly driven into the ground, had not given way; but the earthquake had caused a decided sinking of the ground, and the safety of the whole fort was threatened. Hobson was very anxious to ascertain the extent of this subsidence, but the extreme cold prevented anyone from leaving the house.

However, there were signs of a change in the weather. The stars were not so brilliant, and on the 11th January the glass fell a little. Vapours formed in the air, and their condensation would warm it.

On the 12th January the wind veered to the south-west, and snow began to fall. The thermometer outside rose at once to fifteen degrees above zero. To the inhabitants of the fort this was almost spring-time.

The same day, at eleven o'clock, they all went out of doors. They appeared like so many prisoners suddenly set free; but they were forbidden to go without the limits of the fort for fear of accidents.

At this time of year the sun had not appeared, but it had approached near enough to the horizon to cause a long twilight. Objects could be distinctly perceived two miles off. Hobson's first care was to find out in what way the earthquake had altered the natural features of the country.

And he found that changes had been made. The

promontory of Cape Bathurst had been broken off, and large pieces thrown down upon the sea-shore. It also appeared as if the whole of the cape was leaning over the lake, and thus displacing the plateau on which the fort was built. The ground on the west had sunk, while that on the east had been raised. The consequence of this movement would probably be very serious, for as soon as the thaw set in, the waters of the lake would probably be displaced, and the ground to the west would be inundated. The stream would find another channel, and the harbour at the mouth would no longer exist. The hills on the east side also appeared to be less high than before, but the cliffs on the west side were too far off for their exact condition to be estimated. In fact the effects of the earthquake may be described as follows : in a space of four or five miles the ground, formerly horizontal, was now sloping from east to west.

"Well, Mr. Hobson," said Mrs. Barnett, laughing, "you were kind enough to call the river and the harbour after me, but now there is neither Pauline River nor Fort Barnett. I think I have been very ill-used."

"At any rate," replied the Lieutenant, "if the river has gone, the lake remains, and, if you will permit me, I will call it Lake Barnett. I think it will remain faithful to you."

As soon as Mr. and Mrs. Joliffe came out of the house, one ran to the kennels, and the other to the reindeer stable. The dogs did not appear to have

suffered by their long confinement, for they rushed out and gambolled about the court. One reindeer had died, but the others, though very thin, seemed to be quite well.

"Well, madam," said the Lieutenant to Mrs. Barnett, "we have got through better than I expected."

"I never despaired," she replied; "you and your men are not the sort of people to be overcome by the miseries of an arctic winter."

"Since I have been in these regions," replied Hobson, "I never experienced such cold before, and, to tell you the truth, I believe, had it lasted a few days longer, we should all have been lost."

"Then the earthquake came just in time, not only to scare away the bears, but to drive away the cold."

"That is very likely," replied the Lieutenant, "all natural phenomena influence each other more or less, but I confess the volcanic nature of the country makes me uneasy. I am sorry we have built our house so near an active volcano; if the lava cannot reach us the earthquakes can, as you may see by the condition of our house at present."

"That can be repaired, Mr. Hobson, as soon as the fine weather sets in, and you can profit by your experience to make it more solid."

"No doubt, madam; but in the meantime I am afraid we shall not be very comfortable."

"For my own part," she replied, "I am too old a

traveller to care about it. I shall fancy myself in the cabin of a ship, and as there will be no pitching or tossing, I shall not be afraid of sea-sickness."

"Oh, madam," replied Hobson, "we all know how courageous you are. Your wonderful energy and good-humour have contributed more than you imagine to keep up our spirits, and in my own name and that of my companions I thank you."

"Now, Mr. Hobson, you are exaggerating."

"No, indeed, I am not; anyone would tell you the same thing; but allow me to ask you a question. You know that, in June, Captain Craventy is going to send us a convoy with food, which will take back our furs to Fort Reliance. Most probably our friend Black will return with them after the eclipse. Do you intend to go back with him?"

"Do you want to send me back?" she asked, smiling.

"Oh, madam!"

"Well then," she replied, extending her hand to him, "I must ask your permission to spend another winter here; probably next year one of the Company's ships will come round to Cape Bathurst. If so, I should like to go back through Behring Strait, as I came here overland."

The Lieutenant was delighted to hear this, for he highly appreciated his companion. A great bond of sympathy united him and Mrs. Barnett, and both of them would have regretted the separation. Who could tell

what might yet be in reserve for the expedition, and the example of these two people might be very beneficial.

On the 20th January the sun reappeared for the first time, and the polar night was over. Though the orb remained but a few moments above the horizon it was greeted with three cheers by the colonists. From this time the days would get longer and longer.

But up to the 15th March the weather was very unsettled. On the fine days the cold was so great that they could not venture out, and in bad weather the snow-storms kept them indoors. It was only at certain intervals that they could perform any outdoor work, but no long excursions could be attempted. But after all there was no necessity to go far afield, for the traps were in full activity. At the end of the winter the take of martens, foxes, ermines, and other animals had been very large, and the trappers had plenty to do in the immediate neighbourhood. In the month of March one single excursion was made to Morse Bay, and it was then ascertained that the earthquake had considerably lowered the cliffs, while the mountains beyond looked more threatening than ever.

About the 20th March the hunters perceived the first swans approaching from the south. Some snow-buntings and winter-hawks also made their appearance, but the ground was still deep in snow, and the sun's rays had yet no effect upon the thick ice of lake and sea.

The break-up of the ice did not begin till early in April—it then burst with tremendous noise, like the discharge of heavy guns. Sudden changes also took place in the icebergs, more than one of which tumbled over with a fearful crash, and greatly hastened the breaking-up of the ice-fields.

At this time the mean temperature was thirty-two degrees above zero, so the upper ice quickly dissolved, and the icebergs drifted away until they were lost in the fogs on the horizon. By the 15th April the sea was free, and a ship coming from the Pacific by Behring Strait might have reached Cape Bathurst by the American coast.

Lake Barnett was not behindhand in getting rid of its icy cuirass, greatly to the delight of thousands of ducks and other aquatic birds which frequented its shores. But as Hobson had foreseen, the level of the lake had been altered by the slope caused by the earthquake. The portion of the shore which extended in front of the fort had increased very much, and Jasper Hobson estimated that the waters had receded 500 paces. Of course, the water on the western side had increased, and would inundate the country unless some natural barrier prevented it.

It was very fortunate that the slope was not in the opposite direction; if so, the fort would have been inundated.

The little river ran dry very soon after the surface

had thawed; so abrupt was the slope from north to south that it appeared as if the waters had run back to their source.

"There," said Hobson to the Sergeant, "we have now to erase a river from the map. If we only had that stream to depend upon for our drinking-water we should be in a very awkward position. Fortunately, Lake Barnett still remains, and I do not suppose we shall drink it quite dry just yet."

"Yes," replied the Sergeant, "we have the lake, but do you think its waters are still sweet?"

Hobson looked fixedly at his subordinate and frowned. It had not occurred to him before that the earthquake might have opened a communication between the sea and the lake; if so, the evil was beyond remedy, and the factory would have to be abandoned.

They ran quickly down to the lake and tasted the water. It was still sweet.

The snow had partly disappeared by the beginning of May, and patches of verdure began to be visible under the influence of the sun's rays. Some mosses and grasses timidly pushed up their heads, while the seeds which Mr. Joliffe had sowed also began to sprout, for the thick snow had protected them through the winter. But it was now necessary to keep the birds off. This important task devolved upon the Corporal, who acquitted himself with all the seriousness of a scarecrow in a kitchen-garden.

The long days had now set in, and hunting was resumed. Hobson was very anxious to lay in a stock of furs for the men who were expected from Fort Reliance in a week or two, so they commenced their campaign vigorously. But they had not to take long or fatiguing excursions, as the game was so extremely plentiful, and martens, reindeer, hares, caribos, foxes, and ermines passed close in front of them.

There was some regret expressed that no traces could be found of the bears; not only had they themselves fled, but they had taken all their relatives with them. Perhaps the earthquake had completely frightened them, for those animals are very nervous, if one may apply such a term to them.

The month of May was very wet. Snow and rain alternated throughout. The mean temperature was only forty-one degrees above zero; fogs were frequent, and sometimes so very thick that it would have been imprudent to go far from home. Peterson and Kellet on one occasion were absent for eight-and-forty hours, and caused their companions the greatest anxiety. They took a wrong turn, which they did not at first find out, and they wandered away southwards when they thought they were close to Morse Bay. They were very much exhausted from want of food when they returned.

June came, and fine warm weather with it. The colonists now left off their winter clothing and set about repairing the fort. Hobson also gave orders for the

construction of an immense store-house at the south angle of the court--the neighbourhood was so full of game that it justified the erection of this new building. The reserve of furs was very large, and it was necessary to have some place to store them safely.

The detachment from Fort Reliance was now expected every day ; many things were still wanting at the new factory. Stores were running short. If the detachment had quitted Fort Reliance at the beginning of May, it ought to reach Cape Bathurst by the middle of June. It may be remembered that that was the rendezvous fixed upon, and as Hobson had built his house upon the cape itself the agents could scarcely fail to find him.

So from the 15th June an anxious watch was kept. The English flag waved from the top of the cliff, and could be seen for a long distance. They expected the convoy to approach by the same route which the Lieutenant had followed, namely, along the coast from Coronation Gulf to Cape Bathurst. This was the safest, if not the shortest route, and at that time of year the sea-shore could easily be skirted.

However, when the month of June had passed and the convoy had not arrived, Hobson began to get uneasy, particularly as fogs now enveloped the landscape. He was afraid that the agents had lost their way, and the fogs would impede them considerably.

Hobson often took counsel with his friends. The

astronomer did not hide his apprehensions, for he had made up his mind to return with a party as soon as he had seen the eclipse. Now if the detachment did not come he would have to face the cheerful prospects of another winter in those latitudes. He confided his fears to Hobson, who hardly knew what reply to make to him.

On the 4th July, as there were no tidings of the convoy, some of the men went out to explore, but returned without having discovered any traces of them.

It was now evident that either the men had not started at all, or they had lost their way. Unfortunately the latter hypothesis was only too probable. Hobson was certain Captain Craventy would send off the convoy as agreed.

It may easily be imagined how anxious the Lieutenant had become. The summer was gradually passing away. In two months more the Arctic winter, with all its north wind, snow-storms, and long nights, would again be upon them.

But Hobson was not a man to remain in a state of uncertainty; he must do something; and after consultation with his companions, the following was agreed upon:

It was now the 5th July; in another fortnight, that is on the 18th, the solar eclipse was to take place. After that Thomas Black wished to leave Fort Hope. It was therefore decided that if the convoy had not arrived by the 18th some of the men should take sledges

and set off for the Slave Lake. They would take with them some of the most valuable furs, and in about six weeks—that is to say, at the end of August—if the weather continued fine, they would reach Fort Reliance.

This point settled, Thomas Black became once more absorbed in the total eclipse of the sun.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE ECLIPSE OF THE 18TH JULY, 1860.

ALL this time the fog continued, the sun shone through the mists, and the astronomer began to be afraid that the eclipse would not be visible. At times the fog was so thick that the top of the cape could not be seen from the courtyard.

Lieutenant Hobson grew more and more uneasy. He had no longer any doubt that the convoy had lost its way, and vague apprehensions and presentiments weighed upon his mind. This man, usually so energetic, was afraid to think of the future, though he could not explain why. Everything apparently was reassuring. Notwithstanding the severity of the winter, all his companions had enjoyed excellent health. There had been no disagreements, and everyone had worked hard. They had plenty of game and furs, and the Company could not be but satisfied with the results. Even supposing that the supplies did not come, there was plenty of food in the neighbourhood, and no fear of a second winter need

be entertained. Why, then, was Lieutenant Hobson so uneasy ?

More than once he and Mrs. Barnett had talked on the subject. She sought to raise his spirits, and brought forward the reasons quoted above. One day, while walking with him, she pleaded with more than usual insistence in favour of Cape Bathurst and the factory which had been founded with so much trouble.

"You are quite right, madam," replied Hobson ; "but I cannot help my presentiments. Yet I am no visionary. More than twenty times in my life I have been in very critical situations, but have never felt anxious. I am now uneasy for the first time. If I had to face some actual danger, I should not care ; but this vague peril of which I have a presentiment——"

"But what danger," asked Mrs. Barnett, "do you fear—men, animals, or nature ?"

"Certainly not animals," replied the Lieutenant—"they fear us ; nor do I care about other men. There are only Esquimaux in these districts, for Indians rarely come so far."

"And I may add that the Canadians, whom you rather dreaded last season, have not appeared this summer."

"And I am sorry for it, madam."

"Do you mean to say you regret the enemies of your Company ?"

"Madam," he replied, "I am glad, and yet I am

sorry. That you will perhaps think difficult of explanation ; but you know the convoy from Fort Reliance has not yet arrived, nor have the agents of the Fur Company put in an appearance. Not a single Esquimaux has visited this part of the coast during the summer."

"Well, what do you deduce from all this?" asked Mrs. Barnett.

"That it is not so *easy* as they expected, to come to Cape Bathurst and to Fort Hope."

Mrs. Barnett looked at the Lieutenant. He had a very careworn expression, and she had not overlooked his peculiar emphasis on the word *easy*.

"Well, then," she said, "as you fear neither men nor animals, you are afraid of the elements, I presume?"

"Madam," replied Hobson, "I do not know if my spirit is broken or whether I am blinded by presentiments, but it appears to me that there is something very strange about this country. If I had been better acquainted with it, I do not think I should have settled here. I have already pointed out to you certain peculiarities which appear to me inexplicable, such as the total absence of stones and the clean-cut line of the coast. The primitive formation of this part of the continent is not clear to me. I know very well that the neighbourhood of the volcano would give rise to certain phenomena. You remember what we said about the tides?"

"Yes, quite well."

"According to observations made in these latitudes, the sea ought to have risen fifteen or twenty feet, but it has scarcely risen twelve inches."

"No doubt," replied Mrs. Barnett ; "but you have explained the effect by the peculiar formation of the land, the narrowness of the straits——"

"I have only attempted to explain it," replied Hobson ; "but the day before yesterday I noticed a still more extraordinary phenomenon, which I cannot explain, and I doubt if a philosopher would be able to do so."

Mrs. Barnett looked at him, and said, "What has happened ?"

"Well, you know the day before yesterday the moon was full, and the tide ought to have been very high ; but it did not even rise a foot higher than usual, for in fact it did not rise at all."

"Perhaps you might have been mistaken."

"No, I am not mistaken ; I looked at it particularly. There was positively no tide whatever on the coast."

"And to what conclusion have you come, Mr. Hobson ?"

"I conclude that here the laws of nature are changed, or that this is a very peculiar situation ; but as a matter of fact I can explain nothing, and I am very uneasy."

Mrs. Barnett did not pursue the subject farther. The absence of tide was as unaccountable as the absence of the sun would be ; perhaps the earthquake had altered the conformation of the coast ; but this hypothesis could

not be supported by any careful observer of terrestrial phenomena.

It was impossible to suppose that the Lieutenant had been mistaken, for that very same day—the 6th July—he and Mrs. Barnett ascertained by marks made on the beach that there was absolutely no tide.

This curious fact was kept secret, for the Lieutenant did not wish to alarm his men, but he often went up to the summit of the cape to make observations of the ocean, which was now free, and stretched out as far as the eye could reach.

During July the chase of furred animals was given up, for they had lost their fine winter clothing. The colonists only hunted game for food, such as cariboes and polar hares, which curiously enough increased and multiplied close to the fort, and took no notice of the guns.

On the 15th July things were in the same state. There was no news from Fort Reliance, and Hobson resolved to carry out his project of sending to Captain Craventy, as the captain had not sent to him.

Sergeant Long was naturally chosen to lead the expedition, but he did not wish to leave the Lieutenant; he argued that he must be away for a long time, for he could not return to the fort before the following summer, and so would be obliged to pass the winter at Fort Reliance. This would entail an absence of at least eight months. Either MacNab or Rae might have

taken the Sergeant's place, but they were both married men, and one being the carpenter, and the other the blacksmith of the expedition, they could not be spared from the fort.

It was for the above reasons that the Lieutenant chose Sergeant Long, who obeyed as in duty bound. The four soldiers chosen to accompany him were Belcher, Pond, Peterson, and Kellet, who were soon ready to start.

Four sledges and teams of dogs were placed at their disposal, and they were to take with them a large quantity of furs. The 19th July, the morning after the eclipse, was the day fixed for the start. Thomas Black of course went with the expedition. He and his precious instruments had a sledge placed at their disposal.

It must be confessed that the worthy savant was very unhappy during the few days preceding the eclipse. The intermittence of good and bad weather, the continual fogs, and the heavily rain-laden atmosphere and changeable winds worried him tremendously. He could neither eat nor sleep, and if, while the eclipse lasted, the sun and moon should both be enshrouded in mists, and it should turn out that his journey had been fruitless, what a disappointment it would be! All that fatigue, all those dangers incurred, and with no result after all!

"Fancy having come so far to see the moon, and then not to see it after all!" he would exclaim piteously.

But this he would not acknowledge. Every evening he would mount to the summit of the cape, and watch the sky. He had not even the consolation of seeing the moon, for it being three days before a "new moon," she was accompanying the sun round the earth, and consequently her light was dimmed in his.

Thomas Black would often pour his troubles into the sympathising ears of Mrs. Barnett. She felt very sorry for him, and one day she raised his spirits by telling him that the barometer was rising, while she also reminded him that they were then in the fine season.

"The fine season!" exclaimed Black, shrugging his shoulders, "how can you talk of a fine season in such a country as this?"

"But, after all, Mr. Black, supposing by some accident that you fail to observe this eclipse, there will be some others, I suppose—it will not be the last one in the century, surely?"

"No," replied the astronomer, "there will be five more total eclipses of the sun before the year 1900. One on the 31st December, 1861, will be total for the Atlantic, the Mediterranean, and the Desert of Sahara; the second, on the 22nd December, 1870, for the Azores, the South of Spain, Algeria, Sicily, and Turkey; a third, on the 19th August, 1887, for the north-east of Germany, South Russia, and Central Asia; a fourth, on the 9th August, 1896, in Greenland, Lapland, and Siberia; and lastly, on the 20th May, 1900, a fifth,

which will be total for the United States, Spain, Algeria, and Egypt."

"Well, then, Mr. Black, if you miss the eclipse of July, 1860, you may console yourself with that of the 31st December, 1861. It is only seventeen months to wait."

"I shall have to wait twenty-six years to console myself, not only seventeen months."

"Why so?"

"Because the eclipse of the 9th August, 1896, will be the only one total for these high latitudes, such as Lapland, Siberia, or Greenland."

"But why is it particularly necessary to make the observation so far north?" asked Mrs. Barnett.

"Why?" exclaimed Black. "It is of the highest importance to science. Eclipses have very rarely been observed in polar regions, where the sun, being but little above the horizon, looks so much larger. The moon also apparently increases in size, so the luminous corona and protuberances can be more easily examined; and that is the reason, madam, why I have come so far to see the eclipse. These conditions will not again occur till 1896, and I may not be alive then."

Of course no answer could be made to such an argument, and Thomas Black continued very unhappy: for the weather threatened to become worse.

The 16th was a very fine day, but the 17th, on the contrary, was cloudy and foggy. Thomas Black began

to despair and got really ill. The feverish condition in which he had lately been living threatened to result in serious illness. In vain Mrs. Barnett and Hobson tried to calm him, while the soldiers could not understand why on earth he worried himself so much about the moon.

At length the 18th July, the important day, arrived. The eclipse was to last 4 min. 37 sec., that is, from 43 min. 15 sec. past eleven, till 47 min. 57 sec. past eleven.

"After all, what is it I want?" cried the astronomer, almost tearing his hair. "I only ask for one little bit of clear blue sky where the eclipse is to take place, and only for four minutes. After that it may snow and thunder, and do all kinds of mischief, and I shall care no more for it than a snail would for a chronometer."

Thomas Black had some reason after all for his alarm; it appeared likely that any observation would be impossible. At daybreak the horizon was covered with mist, heavy clouds came up from the south, just in the spot where the eclipse was expected; but perhaps the patron saint of astronomers would have pity on Black, for about eight o'clock the wind got up from the north and cleared the sky.

A cry of gratitude and thankfulness went up from the astronomer's heart. The sky was now clear; the sun was shining brightly, and the moon which was to obscure it had not yet appeared,

The astronomer immediately took his instruments up to the top of the promontory, and having laid them towards the southern horizon, he waited. He had recovered his usual serenity, for what was there to fear?—nothing, unless the sky were to fall. At nine o'clock there was not a cloud in the sky. The conditions could never be more favourable.

Hobson and all his companions, male and female, climbed to the top of Cape Bathurst to assist in the operations. The sun rose slowly, describing an extended arc above the southern plane. No one said a word—they awaited the eclipse in solemn expectation.

About half-past nine the eclipse commenced. The disc of the moon encroached on that of the sun, but the former was not to cover the sun completely till forty-three minutes past eleven. That was the time fixed by astronomers for the totality, and we know that no mistake can possibly creep into those marvellous calculations, controlled by all the observatories of the world.

Thomas Black had brought with him a number of darkened glasses, so that all could watch the phenomenon comfortably.

The brown disc of the moon advanced slowly. Terrestrial objects had assumed an orange tint. The atmosphere in the zenith had changed colour. At a quarter-past ten half the sun was obscured. Some of the dogs which were at liberty became very uneasy and

howled dismally. The water-fowl remained on shore, calling each other to rest and seeking their sleeping-places. The mothers called the chickens under their wings. All animals thought night had come, and sought sleep. At eleven o'clock two-thirds of the sun was covered; objects then took a reddish tint, a sort of gloomy twilight reigned, and this would soon be succeeded by total darkness. Some of the planets, Mercury and Venus, appeared, and some of the constellations. Darkness became more intense every moment.

Thomas Black, with his eye fixed to the glass of his instrument, was intently watching the eclipse. At forty-three minutes past eleven the two discs ought to be one in front of the other.

"Eleven forty-three!" cried Hobson, who was watching his chronometer.

Thomas Black remained motionless. Half a minute elapsed. He then rose, his eyes opened to their fullest extent; he then stooped to the telescope once more, and in half a minute jumped up excitedly, exclaiming:

"It is going, it is going! The moon is disappearing!"

And in fact the disc of the moon was actually gliding away from the sun without having entirely concealed it. Only about two-thirds of the orb had been covered.

The astronomer was perfectly stupefied. The four

minutes had passed. Light was returning, the luminous corona had not been visible.

"What can be the matter?" asked Jasper Hobson.

"The matter?" exclaimed the astronomer. "Why, the eclipse is not complete. It is not total for this part of the globe—do you understand me?—not total!"

"Then your almanacks must be wrong."

"Wrong! Tell that to the marines, Mr. Hobson."

"Well, then——" Hobson's face clouded as he stopped.

"Then," replied Black, "we are not on the 70th parallel."

"What do you mean?" cried Mrs. Barnett.

"We shall soon know," said the astronomer, whose eyes flashed with anger and disappointment. "The sun will soon pass the meridian. Give me my sextant—quick, quick!"

One of the soldiers ran to the house and brought back the instrument.

Thomas Black then made his observation, and put down his calculations in his note-book.

"How was Cape Bathurst situated when we took the latitude last year?" he asked.

"It was 70 deg. 44 min. 37 sec.," Hobson replied.

"Well, sir, it is now 73 deg. 7 min. 20 sec. You see we are not under the 70th parallel after all."

"Or, rather, we are no longer there," muttered Jasper Hobson.

THE ECLIPSE OF THE 18TH JULY, 1860. 255

A sudden revelation seemed to have come upon his mind. All the phenomena hitherto so unexplicable were now accounted for.

Cape Bathurst, since the arrival of the expedition, had drifted three degrees farther north !

END OF VOL. I.